

## Tracing the Roots of Missionary Education in Darjeeling Hills

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*This is a brief historical narrative on the Christian missionary education in India, particularly in Darjeeling hills. The article examines whether missionary education was an agent of enlightenment, emancipation or as an instrument of colonial conquest. The history of colonial/missionary education has been examined in the light of Gramscian concept of 'cultural hegemony' and Althusser's concept of 'ideological state apparatus', highlighting the strategies of the colonial governance. Darjeeling, a colonial enclave, more like a private domain to the ruling race then, turned out to be a hunting ground for the missionary, 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.*

**Keywords:** Education, Colonialism, Cultural hegemony, Ideological state apparatus, Christian Missionary.

### ***Introduction***

The Western education in India and in Darjeeling hills came as a part of missionary activity and as a part of Western governmentality. The missionary activities in nineteenth-century colonial India had spread along with the consolidation of British Empire. 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 agenda. In a sense, it was the Christian missionary organizations which took initiatives in meeting primary educational needs of the native people.

### ***History of modern education in India***

Before exploring the missionary education system it is important

to throw some light on the history of how and when the missionary education had started, for what purpose and who were the beneficiaries. One has to dig into the history of modern education in India to search answers for these questions.

After a few decades of its rule the East India Company felt shaken by the continued resistance by the Indian rulers, although weak and uncoordinated. So it took steps to transform its nature from trading organization to a territorial power; it wanted to be more strategic in order to consolidate its power. As Panikkar has said: 'Colonialism thus sought to project the image not of a brutal destroyer of indigenous culture, but of its preserver and benefactor' (Panikkar, 2007: 10). The British undertook the 'civilizing mission' where they had created a belief among the 'natives' that they would improve their moral and material conditions. The mission of emancipating the 'natives' from their own miserable condition through colonial outlook was considered sufficient rationalization for their conquest in the Indian sub-condition (Panikkar, 2007).

It was for this agenda that the Charter Act of 1813 was introduced and the missionaries were given a freehand in introducing Western education in India. At the initial phase the task of spreading education was assigned to the zealous Evangelicals as a part of their moral obligation and political credence (Laird, 1987). The important to recall here that, in England, 'In former times education was, for the most part, of the church, by the church, and for the church, and it was only as the advantage, or the necessity, of extending it to laity for the purpose of conforming and expanding the influences and authority of the church, was realized, that knowledge was more generally imparted' (Basu, 1934: 195-196). At the time of introduction of East India Company's Charter of 1813, education in England was very much under the control of the missionary church. Hence the framers of the Charter could not think of imparting education in India without the help of missionaries. In this way the colonizers introduced a system of education in India with the veiled strategy of initiating a process of political socialization. Macaulay, one of the Governor-Generals of India, in his Minutes (1835) had written: 'we must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions, whom we govern; to form a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, words,

and intellect' (Basu, 1934: 87).

What we can observe here is that the idea of cultural assimilation occupied the center stage of colonial governmentality and education was taken to be an effective organ of the state apparatuses, to make political action more effective in terms of the ruling class interest and as a means to legitimation of its rule. This can best be explained by Louis Althusser's concept of 'ideological state apparatus'. According to him education has a tremendous power; it is where ideologies are generated which ultimately act as a facilitator for the reproduction of production relations (see, Strongman, 2007). So introducing English medium schools at that time was to 'aim at turning (...) the thought and the feeling and fancy of the subjugated people into English channels, to feed and augment English interest, and to direct the ideas and sympathies of the natives towards their present rulers' (Basu, 1934: 52) who were also then owners of the forces of production (like land and capital) and trade (and labour, to an extent). This conforms to the idea of Marx who has said: 'the ruling ideas of each age have been ideas of its ruling class' (Subramanian, 2009: 30). What we can observe here is that 'With the shaping of the ideological apparatuses of the state in the early part of the nineteenth century, the cultural consequences of domination had begun to be experienced. At the same time a large number of voluntary organizations, either independent or set up by the state, had come into being, which became conduits for the dissemination of Western liberal values' (Panikkar, 2007: 8-9). At that point in colonial time the most important task of the state was to raise the larger mass of people to a particular cultural and moral level which would match up to the needs of the productive forces for growth and the interest of the ruling class in power.

One can also fall back on Antonio Gramsci to understand the role of education in modern statecraft. He argued that education cannot be properly appreciated unless one locates it in terms of its functionality in establishing and maintaining ruling class 'hegemony'. He has written in his Prison Notebook that 'every relationship of hegemony is necessarily an educative relationship'; he saw school as an active source of political hegemony. Through such institutions ruling class ideology was instilled into the thought process of the subject to win their consent for the need of economic

base (Buttigieg, 2002). So they actually constructed a system of domination in India where persuasion rather than coercion was used unlike in the case of Africa and South America where method of cultural eviction by demolition was adopted (Mackenzie, 1993). We can also say that the moral and intellectual manipulation rather than force was used by the ruling classes to establish hegemony in the backdrop of the colonial rule India. One must not forget to mention here that defying the colonial objective Western education opened up wisdom and enlightenment in many directions as it also lit up anti-hegemonic and anti-colonial ideology and struggle for independence. It helped creation of an ambience where Indian collective mind could enter into a dialogue with global (especially Western) wisdom.

#### *History of missionary education in Darjeeling hills*

Unable to cope with the unwelcome Indian hot summer the British established a chain of hill stations in India and built sanatorium, schools, hotels and clubs for the exclusive use of their own race. In the due course the hill station started serving the needs of European business executives working in private industrial and business houses, and also the Christian missionaries (Ramachandran, 1976: 59-69). The reason for which this hill stations continued to be the place of attraction for the Europeans was because of their image of aloofness. The creation of these enclaves had a major role to play for the presence of British in India. It maintained a perfect balance between the public and the private spheres where a sense of community was sustained. It was due to this and many more other reasons that these hilly terrains were outnumbered by women and children in contrast with the demographic pattern of the European population in the plains. Thus schools and clubs were built to cater to the needs of the European population who preferred to live in the hill stations (Kennedy, 1996).

Against this historical backdrop the Christian missionary and their educational activities had started in the Darjeeling hills. 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 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). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century few such schools came up in the hills, namely, St. Paul's School (Church of England) in 1864 and St. Joseph's College (Roman Catholic) in 1888, both for the boys. 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 nineteenth 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, Terai, Bengal Duars, and Sikkim and also to neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan. He had a mission to integrate the natives into

Western civilization en route Christianity and Western education. He opened vernacular schools in many places in the hilly terrain. He also established a normal school to train Nepali and Lepcha teachers who would teach in schools in an around the district; they were given free lesson of Bible as a part of their course work. He took initiative in producing several Christian literatures in Nepali and Lepcha languages. In 1892, another mission, namely, the Scandinavian Alliance Mission (SAM) appeared in Darjeeling. The European missionary groups came to this region also because they wanted to enter Tibet. Several of their attempts to enter Tibet failed and they finally settled down in Ghoom establishing a headquarters there, which was several miles away from the main town of Darjeeling. Following an agreement with the Scottish Mission this group confined their activities among the Bhutias and Tibetians. Some other small groups of independent missionaries also stepped into the hills but they had a limited and short-lived influence compared to that of the Eastern Himalayan Mission (Perry, 1997; O'Malley, 1999). One can notice a common form in the modus operandi of these missionary groups and that is to set up a church alongside every school which is a clear indication that the spread of Western education in an area where illiteracy was universal such means were used to convert the natives of the region into Christianity. As Dewas has observed: '... ever since the advent of the missionaries, they had chosen the pen rather than sword in proselytizing and in disseminating education' (Dewan, 1991:104-105). 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.

By the year 1905 many schools were established separately for the European and native inhabitants of the hills by the two leading missionary groups. The Roman Catholic mission gradually came out of its shell and started extending its services to the 'native' people, although for its missionary cause. The delay of Catholic mission in opening up its activities among the natives was that the district administration was apprehensive of conflict between the two groups had they been allowed to work in the same region and among the same communities. In the initial phase the Roman Catholic mission had its activities limited only in Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-divisions while the Scotland mission worked only

in and around Kalimpong sub-division (except for the Roman Catholic station at Pedong for the Bhutan mission). Such division of space for two missions gradually waned and they started entering into each other's zones (Dewan, 1991). In the assessment of Basu 'In the days when the East India Company was unwilling to accept a direct responsibility for the education of the Indian people, the Christian missions came forward and established some earliest modern schools and colleges' (Basu, 1974: 3). With whatever motives the missionaries had come to India, of philanthropic and proselytizing or political (colonial) nature the Darjeeling hills and its naïve 'native' population provided a highly fertile, hitherto unexplored 'happy hunting' ground.

### *Conclusion*

The history of missionary education in India is heavily grounded in the imperial rule for nearly two centuries. The British Raj purposefully allowed missionary activities in India as a part of its colonizing agenda masked in a mission for civilizing the 'uncivilized'. Decoding the 'civilizing mission' one can say that it was in reality a mission of the colonial power to create a hegemonic culture by spreading Western education and spreading Christian ideals and thus produce some faithful collaborators of colonial rule.

In the same way, 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 it motivated by philanthropic ideal to serving the native people 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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