

IN SEARCH OF A 'NEW HOME': ANGLO-INDIANS IN THE DARJEELING HILLS, 1900-1947

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Abstract:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, most Anglo-Indian, being a Kolkata based community in Bengal, started to move out of the city in search of new employment opportunities. Some of their destinations were the newly established tea gardens of Darjeeling hills and Assam. Mostly they were appointed as managers in the tea estates. The Anglo-Indian community, not being accepted by both the British or Indian society, started to reimagine their identity while settling down in the hills. However, education of their children was turned into a severe problem for them. Some of the Christian missions came forward and opened boarding schools cum 'home' for the Anglo-Indian children in the Darjeeling hills. Later these mission schools also became a shelter for the orphan Anglo-Indian children of Kolkata and played an important role in their identity formation. The paper highlights whether these initiatives could able to give a new future to the Anglo-Indian community and if the Anglo-Indian community could able to accept Darjeeling Hills as their 'new home'. Further, the paper also discusses other nuances, like how did the indigenous people of the hills and the British Raj look at this identity formation, and what kind of new developments started in the hills with the coming of the Anglo-Indians. The paper is based on the archival sources, like newspapers, education, finance and home department report, missionary documents and memoirs.

Keywords: Anglo-Indian, Darjeeling, British Raj, Education, Missionary

The Anglo-Indian group started to appear in the social scenario of Bengal from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. Being 'a mixed racial community', they faced problems socially and economically. The Indian society ostracised these group of people socially and, the British Government in India 'forced the status of being "native Indian" upon the community'². This community, despite the negligence, able to grow in numbers, wealth and power with the help of Christian missionaries' philanthropy, private schooling and knowledge of English in the early nineteenth century.³ Christian missionaries took help of this community to preach

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Christianity, which made the condition more complicated. The East-India company put the restrictions on the activities of the missionaries and as well as on this community. Despite this, the community could succeed in finding jobs in the offices of the East-India company due to their knowledge of English. Soon this picture changed from 1840 due to the company's new education policy which allowed Indians to enter in the company's service. The Anglo-Indian society, therefore, lost the opportunity to work in the company offices but managed to survive getting jobs in new emerging service sectors, like railways, telegraph and customs. The shift in the occupation had affected the group financially, and soon this group of people started to identify as 'white poor' by the colonial government. This deviation in the job status forced the Anglo-Indian community to migrate to the suburbs, like Darjeeling, Assam and other parts of Bengal. This dislocation from the Kolkata brought several problems to this community. Among them, educating the toddlers was severe. Railways schools were established to address the issue, but those were inadequate in number. Besides, good numbers of Europeans moved to the Assam and Darjeeling hills with the spreads of the tea plantation. Union of these Europeans with local people and tea garden's labourers gave birth to the first generation of the Anglo-Indian community in the area. The local people and the European planters ostracised new-born community. Thus, they suffered due to poverty, lack of education and identity. Despite this suffering, soon the Darjeeling hills became a shelter for the Anglo-Indian people where they could be able to find a home to nurture their souls.

The paper, while bringing all these issues under speculation, discusses how the Darjeeling hills became a home for the Anglo-Indian community and if the Anglo-Indian Community could be able to accept Darjeeling Hills as their 'new home'. Besides, the paper tries to find out how did the indigenous people of the hills and the British Raj look at this identity formation in the Darjeeling hills, and if any new developments started in the hills with the coming of the Anglo-Indians. The paper has been divided into two parts to discuss all these nuances. The first part focuses on the process of building up the connection between the Anglo-Indian community with the Darjeeling hills and the second half of the paper highlights the interaction between the Anglo-Indians with the local people and European society.

I

The connection between the Anglo-Indian communities with the Darjeeling hills was built up through education, migration, and tea plantation. Until 1858's the British government turned a blind eye to the condition of the Anglo-Indian Community. After 1858, the colonial government considered educating the domiciled community as their moral obligation.⁴ Thus, the British government formulated an official educational plan for the Anglo-Indian and European children through Canning's Minute in 1860.⁵ Some schools were open for these two particular communities while following the Canning's Minute. Besides, the growing poverty among the Anglo-Indian community became a point of humiliation for the British

Colonial government. Thus, the government took punitive and reformatory measures to shield the empire from this humiliation. On the one hand, the passing of the European Vagrancy Act XXI of 1869 was one of such punitive measure taken to restrict the movement of these 'white poor' and vagabonds in the public domain. On the other hand, the government took some reformatory stands to rescue these poor people, especially children and young people. These initiatives were providing education and employment.⁶ Therefore, the colonial government planned to establish schools for the Anglo-Indians. It was Lord Lytton who started this initiative, and it was carried out by other viceroys as well. The revenue department resolution of 31st August 1881 depicts;

“the Government is forced to admit the necessity of separate schools for European children during the age when their habits and principles are in the process of formation.”⁷

After that, two kinds of schools were opened to educate the Anglo-Indian community; i.e., government-aided European school and private schools opened in plains and the in the hills and Railway schools at several urban and suburban areas. These schools started to work with the fundamental principles like keeping the Christian character and European tone in the view.⁸ Following this, numbers of schools were built up, and some of them were built on the hills of Darjeeling. The first government school for Anglo-Indians and Europeans established in 1856. The government also established some other schools for the Anglo-Indians in Kurseong. Among these schools, the Victorian Boys School and Dow Hill Girls' School were founded by Sir Ashley Eden. The government maintained both of the schools were providing education to the children of its servant, who otherwise might not be able to afford their offspring the benefit of a hill climate. Thereafter, missionary schools were opened by Scottish missionaries, and these schools attracted many European boys and girls from the plains and tea garden areas. Later these schools opened its door for the subaltern.⁹ Rev. Abraham John Graham was the pioneer in the process of opening the door of the schools to the subalterns.

Rev. John Graham came to Darjeeling hills in the year 1887 and soon his wife Katherine McConachie also joined him. Both of them started preaching and philanthropic work in the area. Besides, they used to teach slum children and healing the local people. Along with the development of reading and writing skills, the female students were given lessons 'in knitting, sewing, conduct, and cooking'¹⁰. It shows that the missionaries were giving importance to domestic skills along with spreading literacy and numeracy. Later, Graham Homes also followed the practice of assigning several domestic duties to the pupils. Jane McCabe argues that Graham Homes justified the reason for using child labour as 'a method of preparing the students for colonial life' and bring to an end of any lingering "native" tendency.¹¹ Katherine McConachie opened a girls' school at Kalimpong in 1890,

which provided training on handicraft to its students. The school also offered handicraft training on carpentry and rug making to the local Lepcha, Bhutia and Tibetan men as well.

The Scottish mission of Kalimpong, however, identified the government's initiatives as inadequate to improve the life of 'white poor', especially the orphan Anglo-Indian children of the tea gardens. Thus, John Graham planned to open a home for the domiciled European and Anglo-Indian. Main intentions for the establishment of St. Andrew Colonial Home were, first, to train this particular community for migration at the other European colonies. Second, Graham found the climate and surrounding of Kalimpong suitable for the mental and physical development of Anglo-Indian and domicile Europeans' children. Alison Blunt argues that Graham had chosen Kalimpong to keep the Anglo-Indian children away from any injurious native influence and wanted to train them in thoroughly home lives.¹² The training of the Anglo-Indian children started in the Graham Colonial Homes while following these agendas.

It has been mentioned that this Homes gave proper training to Anglo-Indian so they could migrate to other British colonies. Thus, the curriculum and teaching methods at Graham's Homes also prepared accordingly. Students were, therefore, given lessons on agriculture and carpentry along with traditional education under strict discipline. Jane McCabe identified the strict discipline at Homes as a battle against 'Indian sloth'.¹³ Rev. Graham took initiatives and visited New Zealand to help the Anglo-Indian children in smooth migration to New Zealand. The first batch of Anglo-Indian Student migrated to New Zealand in 1908 and settled in South Island. Next year Rev. Graham visited New Zealand to check the progress of the Homes' student and to establish a Presbyterian connection. Jane McCabe argues that sixty-two graduates were migrated to New Zealand from Graham Colonial Home in between 1908 to 1921 and settled in South Island and the lower North Island. Most of these Anglo-Indians were employed as the labourer in the southern farms.¹⁴ These settlers did not forget their life in Kalimpong. Most often, these migrated Anglo-Indians, later in their life, recalled boredom and drama of the Graham's Homes' life. Every one of them talked about the majestic view of the Himalayas.¹⁵ However, they hardly mentioned their life beyond Graham's Homes. These reflect that John Graham nurtured these Anglo-Indians children intending to erase their memories associated with Indian society and he succeeded in that.

However, the new amendment to New Zealand's Immigration Act pulverized the Anglo-Indians' dreams of settling into the British land. The act declared that a migrant should not be native of any other colonies and they could only enter the country under a permit system. The Act says:

'...it is hereby enacted that no person other than a person of British birth and percentage shall (excepted as by this Act is specially provided)

enter into New Zealand unless he is in possession of a permit to enter in the form and to the effect provided by regulations under this Act.”¹⁶

The act further says:

“A person shall not deemed to be of British birth and percentage by reason that he or his parents or either of them is a naturalized British subject, or by reason that he is an aboriginal Native of the descendant of an aboriginal Native of any dominion other than the Dominion of New Zealand or of any Dominion of New Zealand or of any colony or other possession or of any protectorate of His Majesty.”¹⁷

Rev. Graham was critical about this stand of the New Zealand Government and proposed that the act should be modified while allowing people ‘not less than 50 per cent of European blood’ and allowed the Homes’ graduate to migrate. Thus, a new Homes emigration scheme had been introduced, and under this scheme, fifty-four new graduates migrated to New Zealand in between 1923 to 1929. The great depression decreased the migration in 1929, and gradually, the migration stopped after 1930 due to the strong implication of the Immigration Restriction Act. Rev. Graham wrote a letter to the Customs Department while asking to give work and residence permits to the Anglo-Indian graduates of the Homes. However, that letter hardly impacted New Zealand’s immigration policy. In this situation, the Homes once again turned its eye to educating the Anglo-Indian and keeping students aloof from the on-going national movement. During the Second World War, many graduates of the Home joined the British Army. Besides, many of the students went to teachers’ training institutes at Kalimpong and Kurseong. John Graham also searched for other alternative placement in India for the Homes’ Anglo-Indian students. Some of the boys of Graham’s Homes won scholarships to universities, and the majority found jobs in the army, engineering, railways, mining and business. Unlike men, most of the St. Andrew Colonial Homes’ girls found difficulties in getting placements in India. Some of the Homes’ educated women went into nursing or took the teaching profession and clerical jobs or got married.¹⁸ After the abandonment of the New Zealand dream, John Graham aimed to build enclaves of Kalimpong’s Anglo-Indians graduates in different parts of India, especially in places with the Anglo-Indian connection. These places were Calcutta, Dhanbad, Jamshedpur Asansol and the northern provinces of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.¹⁹ In the later phase, some of Graham’s homes Anglo-Indians migrated to England or Australia with the change in Australian immigration policy.²⁰

II

Local people of hills and Europeans' responses towards the Anglo-Indians of Darjeeling were bit different from the plains of Bengal. Rev. Graham had chosen Kalimpong for the colonial home because of its climate and the openness of the Local People. Because the migrated Nepalese of the area were 'free from the institution of caste, in having no powerful priesthood, and in being far less bound by religion'.²¹ Tea Planters had also extended financial support to the Graham Homes, and many of them had sent their children to the Homes. These local approaches towards the Anglo-Indians of the area were quite helpful.

It has already mentioned that the British government took an interest in Anglo-Indian education from 1860 and established several missionary schools in the hills. These schools received government financial help. Darjeeling hills' Anglo-Indian schools were not out of that. Colonial Government agreed to provide financial assistance to these schools on the condition, i.e., 15 per cent of the student in the government-aided schools should be non-European. Thus, this became a point of disagreement between the government and school authority. The authority argued that the existed numbers of schools were already insufficient for the Anglo-Indians and Europeans; therefore, the government rule would once again deprive the Anglo-Indians community of education. Besides, they also argued that the non-European parents might question the Christian tone of the school which may destroy the aim of the school, i.e., preparing the loyal citizens while following the truth of Christianity. Colonial Government called several meetings to resolve the issue but failed. Ultimately, the government discontinued the grants of Anglo-Indian and European missionary schools. After that, these schools sustained with the grant given by the private enterprises and individual philanthropy.

In this condition, the government started 'boarding grants' for the poor and orphan Anglo-Indian students. The government agenda of starting this grant was to help the Anglo-Indian community and Anglo-Indian and European school indirectly. The government said that students with 'boarding grants' should send to boarding schools and orphanages. Besides, the government also relaxed its rules for the Anglo-Indian Schools. For instance, the All-Indian European School Code of 1905, however, prescribed a maximum of 15% for the total number of Indians in any European School, but this restriction has either been relaxed or abrogated in most provinces.²² Therefore, these Anglo-Indian boarding schools in the Darjeeling hills got government grants. In 1924, therefore, the Kalimpong Homes got a grant of Sixty thousand from the Bengal legislature.

After 1947, the Government of India decided to continue the special grants to the European and Anglo-Indian students for the next ten years. At the same time, the Government of India asked the schools to full fill the fifteen per cent of the seats with non-European students to avail the gran. Besides, the government also declared:

‘...in accordance with the article 377 of the constitution, the grant to the Anglo-Indian Institutions during every succeeding period of three years after the commencement of the constitution may be reduced by 10 per cent of the grant for the immediately preceding period of three years.’²³

The Graham Homes got this grant since 1947- 48. While reporting about this financial assistance, the Ministry of Education said:

‘The first and second cuts on the grants given to this institution were due during 1953-54. After taking into account the second cut due on the grant to this institution during 1957-58. For the year 1957-58 a budget provision of Rs. 8,100 has been made for the grant-in-aid to this institution.’²⁴

Despite all these initiatives, the Anglo-Indian community in the Darjeeling hills moved out from 1960 onwards. Many Anglo-Indians argued that the reason for migration was losing jobs due to the government’s fund cut for the hills’ schools and the community’s incompetency in Hindi. However, another reason for this migration may be the existed sense of being ostracised by both Indian and European society among the Anglo-Indian community which was further nurtured by the Christian missionaries, especially by Rev. Graham. The aim of Graham Homes’ was to prepare the pupil mentally for migration. Unlike other Anglo-Indian boarding schools, St. Andrew’s Colonial Homes or Graham Colonial Homes trained boys to work at the school’s farms in preparation for their emigration from India to Australia or New Zealand. The governors of the school believed there was no place for their wards in India. Besides, assigning child labour for several duties at Graham Homes and not appointing any local labour indicates that the Homes did not encourage any direct interaction between the Homes’ students and locals.²⁵

Conclusion:

The Anglo-Indians’ search for a ‘home’ in the Darjeeling hills was a successful attempt from 1860 to 1929. During this period, the Darjeeling hills turned into a home for them as they found a safe shelter in the Anglo-Indian boarding schools. These schools provided a chance of isolating themselves from rigid Indian society and preparing themselves to enter into a European world while acquiring education and dreaming of migrating to Australia and New Zealand. This sense of security started to disappear from the life of Darjeeling hills’ Anglo-Indians with the passing of strict New Zealand’s immigration act and crushed their dream of migration from the Darjeeling Hills to New Zealand. Anxiety among the community increased when the British government identified them Indian and left India. After independence, the Government of India extended support to the Anglo-Indian schools. Despite this, the community felt more insecure with the cutting down of financial assistance and

imposition of the studying of Hindi along with local languages in the Anglo-Indian schools. As a result, many Anglo-Indians migrated from Darjeeling. This migration indicates that the search for 'home' by the Anglo-Indian community of Graham's homes was an endless journey because of their identity problem and mental disassociation with India and the Indian culture. Even the placement of Graham's Homes' wards in different parts of India after 1930 failed to provide them with a sense of belongingness in India. However, several schools were established in the Darjeeling hills for the improvement of the Anglo-Indian from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Therefore, the area turned into a schooling hub of Bengal.

¹Sen, 2017, p.2.

²*Ibid.*

³Grievances of the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Community in India, Case no: 27397 of 1925, Pro. Nos. 1-4 and appendix, Defense Department, Branch: B, 1925, Indian National Archives, p.5.

⁴Chhabra, 2015, p. 315.

⁵Sharma, 2017, P.43.

⁶Grievances of the Anglo-Indian and Domiciled European Community in India, Case no: 27397 of 1925, Pro. Nos. 1-4 and appendix, Defense Department, Branch: B, 1925, Indian National Archives, p.3.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Sharma, 2017, p. 39.

⁹*Ibid*, p. 36

¹⁰McCabe, 2014, p.73

¹¹Blunt, 2005, p.115.

¹²McCabe, *Ibid.*

¹³McCabe, 2014, p. 31.

¹⁴*Ibid*, p.85

¹⁵Immigration Restriction Amendment, 1920, No. 23, p.79, http://www.nzlii.org/nz/legis/hist_act/iraa192011gv1920n23429/

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷McCabe, 2014, p. 226

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p.228.

¹⁹*ibid*, p. 220.

²⁰Sharma, p. 31.

²¹Review of the growth of Education in British India, Auxiliary Committee of the Indian Statutory Commission, Government of India Press, 1929, p. 240.

²²Dr. Grahams Homes Kalimpong Grant in Aid Rs. 8100/- for 1957-58, Department: Ministry of Education, Branch: 5, 1958.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴McCabe, 2017, p. 53