

CONCLUSION

That brings us to the end of our enquiry into the state of education in Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar. The journey has been a fascinating one; it has extended our frontiers of knowledge and revealed phenomena that had hitherto remained unexplored. It has provided us with some insights into the characteristic features of a particular region and its effects on the development of education which is only one phase of the general social set up.

The three regions no doubt shared much in common but they had areas of difference too. Thus, the pattern of educational development that emerged in the 19th century, as a result of the efforts made at various levels in these three regions, differed from one another.

Dense forest, vast stretches of uninhabitable tracts, innumerable rivers cutting across the landscape, scattered hamlets of the Lepchas in the mountains and the Mech, Toto, Rajbansis in the terai were all that one could find in the two districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling before their liason with the British Government. The years 1835 and 1869 were important for these two districts, for their growth and development are to be traced from this time. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri had certain features which were exclusive of the two features that are not to be found in any other parts of Bengal. Here the development of the tea industry was an important factor in building up the racial composition of the population here. An enormous influx in the population took place from Nepal and the neighbouring districts of Bengal. Two large immigrations took place, the Nepalese who flocked from Nepal in large numbers to work as labourers in the tea gardens and the tribals from Chhotanagpur in the Terai. The result was a mixed population of Lepchas,

Bhutias, Nepalese, Tibetans, Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, Bengali and others from different Indian States. Coochbehar, being a princely State with an age old tradition was different from the other two regions. Though education was no exotic element in the ruling family of Coochbehar, no indigenous system of education existed here. We are not aware of any effort of State patronage to enlighten the masses prior to the sixties of the nineteenth century.

In Darjeeling the efforts to educate the mass were conducted from three levels, by the Christian missionaries, by the Government and lastly, in a very limited way, by private individuals. Darjeeling, with its immigrant labourers from Nepal in tea-plantations and the simple, primitive Lepchas inhabiting the mountain tracks, offered a virgin soil for the Christian missionary activities. In fact with full Government support the Church of Scotland became the sole agent for spreading elementary education among the people. The main objective of the Christian missionaries was no doubt proselytization, they made no pretensions about it. But as a means to that end they became the pioneers, as elsewhere in Bengal, of education in the hills. In that process text books were compiled, technical education was introduced and schools for girls and for training teachers were established. The hitherto neglected women, for instance, by receiving training at the lace making school at Kalimpong found a social and economic footing. The missionaries could claim for themselves the credit of developing the Nepali and the Lepcha languages. It was at their initiative that for the first time Nepali text and grammar books were published from the press

that was mainly devoted to the work of printing and publishing translations of Christian literature. Apart from proselytisation there was another motive too, behind the establishment of a vernacular system of education and the development of the vernacular language. What the missionaries wanted, and ultimately succeeded in doing, was to establish an identity of the hill people and to instill in them an awareness of their culture as distinct from the mainstream culture and thereby develop in them a sense of dependence on the missionaries. This policy of the Christian missionaries had the sanction of the Government and seemed to be a part of its imperial policy.

The Christian missionaries had taken a positive stride towards the aim of educating the mass no doubt but much remained yet to be accomplished. The extent to which they were successful may be gathered from the figures supplied by the Mission News of March 1936.¹ In Kalimpong there were 16,000 children of school going age. Of these only 2,328 attended schools. Even taking into account another 800 children who were catered by the Roman Catholic Mission, more than 1,300 children were left without education whatsoever, most of them without any hope for it. In fact, of the 12,000 Christians of local origin in the district of Darjeeling, there were few who were educated beyond the primary standard.²

The Government however was not slow in realizing the political importance of inducting the Bhutia and Lepcha youth to English education. It was essential that the hill people be educated and introduced to the general pattern of English education

1. Mission News, March 1936, Vol. LIV No. 1. P 3

2. Dash Op.Cit. P 279.

that had been introduced in the rest of the country. This was necessary to consolidate their position and for integrating these tracts within the framework of British India. The strategic frontier position of Darjeeling was given its due importance. The Government efforts to encourage education resulted in the establishment of the Bhutia school which was later amalgamated with the Government aided Anglo-vernacular school. The Bengal Government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century felt it imperative that the tea-gardeners ought to provide some impetus for primary education for the coolie children, who were without any education. This was the result of the pressure created at the upper level to make an enquiry into the condition of education of the tea-garden labourers. The managers of the tea plantations were finally induced to establish primary schools for the children of tea plantation labourers in their respective gardens.

Instances of individual efforts to encourage education were not many in the district of Darjeeling. The jotedars in the terai region of the district often came forward to further the cause of education. Not only primary schools but middle class English school, like the one at Bagdogra, were financially supported by these land holders. In this school at Bagdogra, even the insignificant fee of one anna was not paid by the students. Thus the jotedar, Sambhu Nath, was made responsible for the entire expenses incurred.³

Darjeeling also became the centre for European education.

3. Report on Public Instruction 1870-71, P 84.

A number of missionary schools were established to provide education for European and Anglo-Indian children. The missionary efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, unlike the Presbyterian Church, was connected with the establishment of schools for Europeans. Loreto Convent and St. Joseph's School became the nucleus round which the Catholic community grew.⁴ The missionary efforts of the Roman Catholic were also directed towards advancing into Tibet. With that object in view a station was opened at Pedong, Kalimpong in 1883. But the plan failed and they had to remain satisfied with the work of converting the Nepalese.

The Government too established a school for the European and Eurasian children. This educational development, as pointed out by Dash, was a part of the programme to develop Darjeeling as a hill resort and a sanatorium for Europeans. In addition to general education the schools for Europeans provided facilities for technical education. The Victoria School at Kurseong gave the lead followed by the Coethais. In both these institutions, which were affiliated to Sibpur Engineering College, Calcutta, instruction was imparted in carpentry, mechanical, electrical and mining engineering. The entire curriculum followed the old and beaten track quite ignoring the fact that there was a dearth of printers in the country. Had the authorities been practical and more alive to the realities of the situation, it would have immensely benefitted the European and Eurasian students for, the Government annually imported a batch of qualified printers.

4. Dash, Op.cit. P 276.

Jalpaiguri's condition was hardly any better when looked at from the point of view of education. A district of very recent origin, it was populated mainly by tribals like Toto, Mech and Rajbansis. Immigrants from the neighbouring districts of Jalpaiguri gradually added to the swelling population. Here too primary education was left to non Government agencies, Government help coming in the form of limited financial aid. In the field of secondary education Jalpaiguri, like Darjeeling, received Government support. With a population consisting mainly of the agricultural and labouring classes educational progress was slow. Moreover, the greater bulk of this population being Muslims, who were generally more backward than the Hindus, education could not be expected to flourish here. According to the report given by Gruning there were in 1907-08 13 schools for every 100 square miles and one school for every 1929 of the population. Only 10.1% of the total population of school going age were at school.⁵

The impact of the Christian missionaries in Jalpaiguri was less evident than at Darjeeling. The Rajbansis with a stronger religious and cultural tradition were less prone to Christianity than the Lepchas.

Coochbehar being a native state had a different political and administrative set up. It no doubt had a cultural tradition but educationally the Rajbansis of Coochbehar trailed far behind the people of Bengal. However once the process of education was introduced in the State, Coochbehar began to make rapid progress. There was no dearth of fund. The entire educational programme from the primary to the university level, was financed mostly by

5. Gruning, Op.cit. P 139.

the State and partially by local contributors. The proportion of local contribution to the total expenditure was not unsatisfactory. Though there were no wealthy zamindars who subscribed to bring themselves into notice, the resident jotedars and cultivators had no small a share in the development of education in the State. The Superintendent, Kasikanto Mukherjee, an officer of long experience in the educational department observed in 1876 that "in no part of Bengal do people similarly circumstanced pay so largely ~~pay so largely~~ for education.⁶"

On the whole the period under study in these three regions of north Bengal was educationally backward, intellectually barren and socially ignored. Of the several impediments that stood in the way of building up a stable educated society in these northern regions of Bengal there were on the one hand, the lack of individual patronage to encourage it (Coochbehar was the exception) and the absence of a socially conscious middle class on the other. Private liberality was a notable feature in fostering education in Bengal; munificent donations by eminent personalities, so common in Bengal, was almost unknown in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. The social structure of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Coochbehar was a major contributory factor too. In Bengal the caste structure was a determining factor in the promotion of education, particularly English education. The tradition as well as occupation of the three upper castes, Brahmins, Kayasthas and Vaidyas demanded some measure of education. It was the upper and middle classes who reaped the full advantage of English education and became the intermediaries between the British administrators and the masses.

6. Annual General Administration Report, Coochbehar State 1876-77, P 63.

The socio economic set up of these North Bengal regions precluded the growth of a conscious middle class. The majority of the people here were without any education and without any motivation for achieving anything beyond the bare necessity of life. Uneducated and unambitious they had little access to the liberal education or high cultural life. Their interests in life and topics of conversation were confined to the prospects of the crops, the markets, the daily meal, the mahajan's interest, the zamindar's rent, their cattle and marriages of their children. They little cared to know of what went on outside their villeg-
es and did not trouble themselves with any Government measure with which they were not directly concerned. The poverty of the people was another cause that hindered the spread of education. Instances were not lacking when schools had to be closed down due to lack of fund and the inability to pay even a nominal school fee by the students.

There was another very important element that ^{can} hardly be ignored. The use of English as the medium of instruction, the inability of the Government to develop the vernaculars, the Government's programme of education that divided the educational structure into primary, secondary and university with its various ramification like lower primary, upper primary, middle vernacular middle English schools, only helped to widen the gulf between the intelligentsia of the country and ~~from~~ the masses. British education policy was oriented to the needs of the higher castes and classes. This type of education had little coherence with and thereby little suited to the village life of Bengal. The village

boys who were inducted to ^{this} type of education failed to develop a correct outlook. The result was that the educated village youth with a smattering of English and ill digested knowledge of history or geography refused to go back to till the soil or continue the traditional profession of his ancestors. They preferred some alternative employment. For them education and manual work were so incompatible with one another that they would rather idle than take to agriculture. Education was utilized to help the development of the techniques of cultivation or increase non agricultural production. Unfortunately it provided a means for escaping from all this. Such an unimaginative, unfruitful educational programme had a little appeal to the masses of these regions. The British system of education, with the specific object of creating a loyal class of people that would remain ever loyal to the British administrators, could make no headway among the villagers, who were the real producers of wealth but did not figure much in the British plan of education. A deep & gulf separated the English educated "bhadraloks" and the rest.

The education that was introduced was neither natural nor a spontaneous expression of national life. The British administrators imposed a system of education that was alien to the country's tradition. Adam's conviction of the need of developing the indige- schools and thereby affording the most likely means of raising the character of the people had fallen on deaf ears. A balanced well knit system of education integrating the best of East and West, reflecting the objectives and purpose of a nation and broadening the horizon of the people did not emerge. This however could hardly be expected from a foreign ruler. Hence the alienation of the masses to the new system of education that the British

inaugurated in the country. The backward northern regions of Bengal failed to respond to this pattern.

There were certain other factors too. The notoriously bad climate of north Bengal failed to attract good teachers to this region. Dearth of teachers was a chronic problem here. Trained teachers from other places refused to come here. Even if they did come they left the place at the earliest opportunity. As a result almost any one who offered was welcome. The low calibre of teaching accounted for, ^{and} added to the low standard of education. Even as late as 1898-99 the Inspector of Schools of Rajshahi Circle in his report complained about this problem. Again, funds were limited; pupils were few. Consequently the fees and other customary gifts to the gurus were small. Competent teachers were little attracted by the small emoluments. Besides, the number of inspecting officers in north Bengal was far below than what was considered essential for good administration, viz. 1 to every 50 schools.⁷

In respect to higher education this tract was considerably behind central and Eastern Bengal.⁸ The demand for it was almost nil. Hence the absence of any collegiate institutions in these places. The college departments of St. Paul's School and St. Joseph's at Darjeeling were conducted almost exclusively for the benefits of European and Eurasian pupils. The first institution for higher education for the people in general appeared in the eighties of the 19th century in the princely State of Cooh-behar, the result, not of any Government effort, but the

7. Proceedings A, General Dept. June 1876, Letter No 3074, June 10 1876.

8. Rep. on Adm. of Bengal 1874-75 P 454.

munificence of the maharaja.

The backwardness of these regions was reflected too in the absence of public libraries, which definitely serve as an index to the academic interest and educational advancement of a particular region. The lack of public awareness was to be seen in the absence of a healthy press. Except for "Darjeeling News", an English paper mainly devoted to the interest of tea planting and missionary publications there was nothing in this respect either in Darjeeling or Jalpaiguri. Coochbehar however had its own press.

Thus these three northern regions remained detached from the main currents of events that were taking place in the rest of Bengal. Despite the educational efforts of nearly half a century how far had the original inhabitants of the regions, the Koch, Rajbansis, the Mech, Totos, Lepchas and Bhutias benefitted? A very few indeed. Even in 1910-11 only 25% of the students of the Jenkins' happened to be the natives of Coochbehar. A little more care and insight, a little more understanding of the problems of these northern regions of Bengal could have yielded better results.
