

A Glimpse of Christian Educational Institutions in Darjeeling and English Language

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Abstract

English language has always accompanied education in Darjeeling. The Scottish Church Missionaries and the Roman Catholics have successfully remained the pioneers of education in Darjeeling. The contribution made by these missionaries in the field of education is immense and they have always given importance to impart education through English language. In the history of education in Darjeeling hills, English language has paved its way through much difficulty. Darjeeling is a place with multitudes of culture, language and religion. The problem of communication has been sort out by Nepali language; making it a lingua franca of the region. However, in terms of Education, English language has always remained fundamental and significant and substantiate.

Keywords: English Language, Darjeeling, Education, Christian Missionaries

The end of colonialism did not however signal the end of its consequences. The popular and much celebrated belief in India was that with the tricolor replacing the Union Jack, a new phase of history had entirely, and definitely, replaced the old. This was of course, the case politically; but in the field of culture and ideas, history does not unfold in watertight compartments. The legacies of the past have an incredibly powerful momentum; they persist in hundred ways, affecting our language, beliefs, behavior, self esteem, creative expression, politics and everyday interactions. The British coming to India not only tried to create a cultural hegemony but they also had an upper hand in language.

The British must have been a little relieved of their "White man's burden", on leaving a language behind. The post-colonial trauma would not be directly proportional to the English language given by the colonizers; rather it has heightened and glorified itself to such an extent that it is now acting as a lingua franca, at least for the elite and the educated class in the Indian sub-continent. The popularity of English language in India has grown over the years and has its own history. England after the Norman Conquest in 1066 had a similar phenomenon where French and Latin were considered to be a language of the elite class. "...French remained the language of ordinary intercourse among the upper classes in England."¹ Likewise, English when introduced in India came as a dominant language. But, this language did not, forcefully enter the native's lingua franca. It was involved in a slow, strategic and yet natural process. One of the strategies includes education. The natives had to lessen the burden of the British, so they had to be educated. Education, on the other hand, had to be accompanied by English language as it was a language of the superior.

¹ Albert C Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of English Language*, 5th Edition, Routledge, London, 2002, p.114.

Therefore, the broader objective of this article is to understand and trace the role and function of English language in Education of Darjeeling Hills. It also intends to show the problems faced by educational institutions regarding the medium of instruction and how English language has survived and managed to find a place and a role in imparting education. In the first place, it seeks to give an overall account of British's influence in Indian culture and the role of language that smoothed the process. In the second place, it deals with the role of Christian missionaries in being the vanguard of educationists in the Darjeeling hills. It also explores how English language survived in the hills with prominence and retaining its importance along with the increasing role of regional and national languages in the Christian educational institutions.

Tulsi Ram in his essay, *English and Imperial Expansion* writes: "Imperialism has various faces, political, economic and colonial, each responding to the light of the situation. It fights on many fronts and uses different weapons including language and education, the only criterion being which front is the most strategic and which weapon will strike home."² The coming of English language and its wide dissemination in India can be considered as a strategic-natural process. The epigrammatic construction and connotation of this process however, being answered by History. English in India owes its origin to the Imperialistic strategy of the British, vis-à-vis the history of education in India. English language has gained prominence through its promotion by various education commissions and committees of educationists and planners. English language is also equated with learning and knowledge of English is very often equated with excellence in education.

The British government was not only draining the wealth of India and challenging its economy but it was also trying to equate education with civilization. However, education was accompanied by English language and Christianity. Tulsi Ram in *English and Imperial Expansion* rightly observes: "Macaulay was more than clear in his mind about the efficacy and power of English language in the service of British rule through an imperceptible conversion of the mind and culture of an elite class which would be created by English education."³ The Indian response to it was highly anticipated but it was only to the relevance of British interest. English language was thought, among some sections, to be an effective instrument in popularizing Christianity and the Indian consolidation with the British Empire. The Education system that was to flourish in India came largely through Christian missionaries and English language remained a successful medium to impart education given especially the linguistic diversity in the country. "The missionaries were the pioneers of English education in India. The standard they set for English was sufficiently high even then. English literature found a place in curriculum".⁴

² S.R Gupta and Kapil Kapoor (ed.), *English in India*, Academic Foundation, Delhi, 1991, p. 28.

³ Ibid, p.35.

⁴ S. Kudchedkar (ed.), *English Language Teaching in India*, Orient Longman Private Limited, Chennai, 2002, p.42.

Education in Darjeeling and the Role of Christian Institutions

Darjeeling, the northern district of West Bengal, is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas. Most parts of Darjeeling, once under the dominion of the Chogyal of Sikkim, came within the annexation attempts by Nepal which had successfully captured some areas. The British too got engaged in the tussle for the annexation of Darjeeling after the Anglo-Gorkha war in 1814, with the Gorkhas of Nepal. Subsequently, the Gorkhas were defeated and the Treaty of Seogulie, in 1816, was signed. The Nepalese ceded 7000 square miles of territory to the British. Only a part of the region ceded from Nepal was returned to Sikkim by the Treaty of Titalia, in 1817, and it was taken back by the British for the purpose of building a sanatorium, in 1835. The remaining parts of Darjeeling and its adjoining areas were taken by the British by means of annexation. In 1706, Kalimpong was taken by Bhutan from Sikkim which it retained till 1865, thereafter, with the Treaty of Sinchula Bhutan ceded to the British a part of Doars and Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling, which is presently being considered for a new district by the government of West Bengal.

The inhabitants of Darjeeling were, by the end of the 19th century chiefly Nepali speaking people, with the amalgamation of different race, ethnicity and caste. Nepali as a language grew to be a linking medium of expression between different cultures and ethnic groups in Darjeeling. From the kind of society that Darjeeling became, "it can readily be understood that several languages and dialects" though current when it was secured by the British to accommodate settlers of different racial origin, "the majority of the inhabitants in the hills spoke Nepali". The use of "Nepali spread gradually and the other people of the district had to rely upon it more for use outside the family."⁵ Therefore, Nepali can also be considered a lingua franca in Darjeeling.

The progress of a culture and a race is very much indebted to education. Education is an integral part in the development of the human mind and civilization. Earlier, education in Darjeeling was very much compartmentalized on the basis of religion. Education was limited to monastic education for Buddhists, Pathsala and Tol education for Hindus, and Maktab for Muslims. However, apart from these indigenous forms of education Christian missionaries played an important role in educating the Darjeeling hills. The Charter Act of 1813 made sure that the East India Company was to take responsibility for the education of the Indians followed by the admission of the Christian missionaries to educate and illuminate the eastern minds and soul by the Charter Act of 1833. Furthermore, the Woods Despatch of 1854 made it clear that it was the responsibility of the British government for education in Darjeeling.

The efforts of the government for education in Darjeeling resulted in the establishment of Darjeeling government school on 20th September, 1856. However, the natives of

⁵ Dick. B Dewan, *Education in the Darjeeling Hills an Historical Survey: 1835-1985*, New Delhi, Indus publishing company, 1991, p. 34.

Darjeeling were not too keen to pursue education as every youth and even children were a source of income to a family. Education was set aside as every child was a member of a production process in the family. The Church of Scotland Missionary Society and the Roman Catholic Mission played a major role in reversing this situation and in providing education to the masses of Darjeeling.

W. Macfarlane, a Scottish Church missionary took seriously the mission of educating the people of Darjeeling. He laid the foundation for primary education. The language he used to instruct was Hindi as there were few or rather no text books available in Nepali. However, English was also equally given importance as even Darjeeling school was an English school at its inception. Arithmetic and English were two major subjects taught as lessons in this school: "the boys of the first class read Murray Spelling and Reader no. 1. In arithmetic they got as far as simple division."⁶ W. Macfarlane was soon assisted by two other missionaries – W.S. Sutherland and Rev. Archibald Turnbull who took charge of education in Kalimpong and Darjeeling respectively. The Scottish Missionaries served very well in educating the people of Darjeeling. Two other important educational institutions opened by them were Scottish Universities' Mission Institute, better known as SUMI in Kalimpong and Girls Boarding School in Darjeeling.

The arrival of Roman Catholic mission was another notable step towards opening up avenues of education to the people of Darjeeling. The first attempt was made by the Catholics at Kalimpong in 1883 to establish them. Later, St. George's School at Pedong was established and St. Alphonsus School in Kurseong was also established as an institution for primary education.

Initially, the Roman Catholic Mission was only involved in the establishment of European model schools for the Europeans and the government servants who could not send their children back home to England and felt the need of educational institutions. Keeping this in mind, European schools were established in Darjeeling for the education of the European children and the Anglo-Indians. Loreto Convent for Girls was founded in 1846, St. Paul's School in 1863 and, Victoria Boys School in 1879. Other such important institutions were St. Joseph's School and College in Northpoint, Darjeeling, and St. Helen's Convent in Kurseong and, St. Joseph's School in Kalimpong. The missionary education started in the 19th century, by the Scottish Church Missionary and was followed by the Roman Catholic Mission a decade later. By the year 1942 there were many educational institutions established by the Roman Catholic Mission for the people of Darjeeling. The following table (Source: Dick B Dewan (2008:170)) shows the number of Catholic schools in Darjeeling by 1942. Table 1. Catholic Schools for Indians in Darjeeling and Kurseong(1942)

⁶ Ibid, p. 84.

Table 1. Catholic Schools for Indians in Darjeeling and Kurseong(1942)

Place, Name and Degree of the School		Number of Pupils	Number of Teachers	Year when started
1. Darjeeling, St. Robert's	M.A.	800	13	
2. Darjeeling, St. Thomas's	M.A.	110	13	
3. Singamardhi, St. Michael's	G.A.	40	3	1900
4. Singamardhi, St. Thomas's	U.P.	35	2	1904
5. Rajbari	G.A.	40	1	1900
Total for Darjeeling		1090	36	
6. Kurseong, St. Alphonsus'	U.P.	260	13	1904
7. Kurseong, St. Joseph's	N.S.S.	260	13	1906
8. Kurseong, St. Mary's	U.P.	96	8	1909
9. Nigaitore	L.P.	26	1	1911
10. Arungpore	L.P.	84	1	1911
11. Chitab, St. John	L.P.	12	1	1917
12. Dimeson, St. Francis X	U.P.	94	9	1921
13. Gayabari, St. Patrick's	L.P.	20	1	1921
14. Thakuria, St. Joseph's	U.P.	94	2	1921
15. Chubbhari, St. Michael	L.P.	20	1	1924
16. Mandharia, St. Peter	L.P.	26	1	1925
17. Manjan, St. John Br.	L.P.	22	2	1927
18. Striker	L.P.	21	2	1930
19. Mohammadi	L.P.	13	1	1941
Total for Kurseong		986	48	

The Christian missionaries also pioneered in education at the college level. In 1933 an Intermediate College of Arts, the Scottish Universities' Mission College was established in Kalimpong. However, this college did not survive for a long period of time. Some of the schools for Anglo-Indians and European community like St. Paul's, St. Joseph's, St. Helen's and Victoria boys school were running college classes since pre-independence. Salesian College was established in the year 1938 in Gorabari near Sonada. Likewise, other colleges like St. Joseph's College, Loreto College (now Southfield College) were also established in Darjeeling and are still functional today and have contributed a lot in the field of higher education. The medium of instruction in colleges has been English and it still remains.

English Language and the Christian Educational Institutions

W. Macfarlane was compelled to use Hindi as a language medium to instruct, as it was the only perfect substitute for their native lingua franca, Nepali. The education being imparted therefore was having a language barrier as it was a compulsion to choose Hindi as a medium of instruction. The compulsion was due to the unavailability of Nepali

text books. The impact of education would be more if it were to be taught in Nepali. So, a lot of effort was put in to translate and create text books in Nepali. Ganga Prasad Pradhan, Parasmani Pradhan and a literary organization (Nepali Sahitya Sammelan) played a major role in supplying text books in Nepali. Parasmani Pradhan even wrote and published Nepali Grammar in 1920. The Calcutta University included Nepali in their list of vernacular language and students could now even write their Matric (today's equivalent to Madhyamik Pariksha) examination in Nepali. However, due to some circumstances the Governor in council sent a committee of thirteen members to find out whether Nepali language was to be introduced as a medium of instruction in schools. This committee agreed upon a meeting that Nepali can be the medium of instruction in primary levels but not in High School. "The meeting held that the present system, by which English was the medium of instruction from the fourth class in high school, was generally satisfactory. There was no chance of this language being used as a common medium in classes lower than fourth."⁷ Though people wanted Hindi to be substituted by Nepali as a medium of instruction; English remained firmly rooted in the Education system of Darjeeling.

The spread of English language in India can be considered a strategic involvement of the British Empire. In Darjeeling the indigenous forms of Education were soon overshadowed by the new educational institutions set up by the Christian missionaries. The medium of instruction however remained a deep problem. The Christian Educational institutions for the native pupils used Hindi as a medium. Hindi was quite easy to understand for the people of Darjeeling as it resembled their own Nepali language. However, the Educational institutions opened up for the European children and Anglo Indians, used English as a medium of instruction. Unconsciously enough, difference was also being created among the natives and the foreigners through language as well as education. "The education system, working through pathsalas and makhtabs, regarded school education as an extension of primary socialization and built a hierarchy of linguistic skills the colonial rulers proposed monistic solutions to the Indian education system by creating an opposition between English and the vernacular languages."⁸ The European model schools established by Christian missionaries had a superior attitude and were far more ahead in education as they had staff and masters from Cambridge and Oxford. Therefore, English as their language was also very often considered a superior language.

The Christian missionaries with much effort and hardships were successful in establishing educational institutions in Darjeeling but the language barrier was always an issue. Macfarlane when first arrived in Darjeeling from Gaya, had a compulsion to teach in Hindi. It was much later during the 1920's Nepali text books started appearing in the horizons and very soon Nepali was also accepted as a medium of instruction.

⁷ Ibid, p. 188.

⁸ Agnihotri, K.R and Khanna, L.A (ed.), *Problematizing English in India*, New Delhi, Sage publications India Pvt Ltd, 1997, p. 32.

However, English language was officially to remain as the medium of instruction above Eighth standard in High School. "Macaulay's decision to ignore the Indian languages was a turning point in the Indian education system."⁹ Today, English language has a dominant role in the Education system of Darjeeling. The Missionary Schools opened up for natives are all English medium schools. The students from these schools write their board exams in English. However, English is not given too much importance in many of these schools, making English a little uncommon among the students. On the other hand, all the missionary schools which were once established and opened for the Europeans are now open to all and they still follow their legacy of imparting education through English.

Conclusion

English language has always accompanied education in India. In Darjeeling the education brought by different Christian missionaries was also not free from English language and literature. The missionaries were the pioneers of English education in India. The standard they set for English was sufficiently high even then.

English language, still retained as a medium of communication, might have a colonial hangover but today Indians have very well absorbed, accepted and utilized it. Language, when freed from politics, is harmless and becomes just another beautifully arranged code of expressions. English has now become one of the most important languages in the world. English has also helped people to understand western civilization much better. In Darjeeling, English is one of the readily accepted languages and has sustained itself to be one of the frequently used languages. English is also a bridge between the local tour operators and the tourists visiting Darjeeling. English has supported and succeeded to remain one of the important languages for tourism in Darjeeling. The usage of English is so common that the local signboards for restaurants and shops are mostly in English.

In educational institutions, English is continually given prime importance as a subject of learning, as well as, a medium of instruction. English has usually become equivalent to education in Darjeeling to such an extent that, during the 90's English nursery rhymes learnt by children were considered to be one of the achievements for the children as well as the family. Children would be repeatedly asked to recite the rhymes on any occasions and especially in front of guests visiting a family. Therefore, people in Darjeeling have been equating English with education and a language of the elite classes with the offer of social mobility for everyone.. The demand for English medium schools in Darjeeling has increased and is still one of the important needs. The Christian Educational Institutions in Darjeeling having always given importance to English language as a medium of instruction in educational institutions have not only captured the aspirations of the people but also placed them in a position to avail of the global openings in the job market.

⁹ Ibid, p. 33.