

Book Reviews

***Change and Continuity: English Studies in Loreto College 1912-2012*, by Aditi Das Gupta, Sonada/Siliguri, Salesian College Publication, 2015, vi + 170 pages, ₹ 350.00, ISBN: 978-93-82216-10-0.**

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Aditi Das Gupta's *Change and Continuity: English Studies in Loreto College 1912-2012* is a must read for not only all the alumnae of the different Loreto Colleges of India, especially those belonging to its English departments, but also for all who are desirous of learning how education in English changed the way women viewed themselves in pre and post independence India, and the contribution of Catholic missionary educational institutions towards imagining and realizing the 'New Woman' of India. The book was conceived out of a study made by the author, a professor of English in Loreto College Kolkata, on the occasion of its centenary year. As English was the first Honours subject introduced in the college, English studies dates back to the very inception of the institution. The greatest challenge faced during the aforementioned study was the lack of documented evidence available on the history of the institution. The author reminds us time and again in the book that the data presented in it has been gleaned from personal interviews with old alumnae, sisters (nuns), teachers and staff associated with the institution(s), archived registers and record books, and the Palm Leaves, a common magazine of all Loreto institutions of India available in the college library and with past pupils. From these sources the author chronologically narrates and reconstructs the history of the English Studies in the institution, from its beginning as a school, as a means of propagating the English culture and Christian morals through literary education to the Anglo-European girls domiciled in pre-independence Calcutta. Its growth into a college, and the development of the college as well as its successfully upholding the aim with which it had taken upon itself the task of acculturation of not only Anglo-Indian women but also the general Indian female populace, secular in nature but Christian and English in spirit, in independent India.

However, the book is not just the history of the existing Department of English of the college, its development, research and scholarship, publications, accolades and its successful and illustrious alumnae; it is much more than that. It acquaints us with some of the methods used by the nuns in realizing their aim of educating Anglo-Indian women into proper Christian and English ladies in a changing political and social background of British India, and also with the present challenges in imparting education in English (Language) and of English (Literature). It reminds us of how well one can learn about a

people by knowing its literature and its arts, given the college's long standing tradition of music, dramatics, Western and Eastern Cultural associations and persistence on reading facilitated by a very well stocked and resourceful library. It raises the question whether change should be adopted readily or continuity of old ways maintained to be able to lead the young into becoming the future of a dynamic as well as stratified nation like our own. Or whether the nuns running this institution successfully for over a hundred years should now turn away towards their other - changing goals, those more pressing in nature and more relevant at this hour and time, like educating the poor and training them in vocational courses to make them job ready, self-sufficient and enabling them to live with dignity in a class and caste based society like ours? These are some of the activities the Loreto sisters have engaged themselves in over the last century in India. Therefore, the study offers insights into the continued decisions over the decades that kept the department relevant in reaching out to new generations of students.

The author was inspired to write this history by her "mother's razor sharp memory" of her own college days, who along with her aunt were both pupils of the college; as well as the "dearth of research on and historiography of women's higher education" in our part of the country. She rightly points out that the "preoccupation of the historians is with the Bengali male intelligentsia", and their general tendency is neglecting the other segments of the society outside the Bengalis. How western education for women of India changed their outlook, goals and sense of self, where women are successfully managing both home and careers now, and the contribution of education imparted by missionary institutions like these towards achieving that selfhood is not a very hot topic of study. The author also points out that while the making of the Bengali *Bhadralok* or gentleman as a specie apart among all colonial subjects is of especial historical and cultural importance, the making of his counterpart, the Bengali *Bhadramahila* or lady is still not of much importance.

These questions pique my interest and remind me to stopping and spend a moment to thank the same education and the institution for playing a big part in making me into a thinking and feeling human being, as and where I am in life now. As an alumna of the college and department in question and a student of the author, reading this book was of particular joy; familiarizing myself with the rich legacy of which I am a minuscule part, filled me with awe and pride. The book also comes with a photo gallery which I am sure will make any alumna nostalgic! Nonetheless, I would reiterate that this book will also be of interest for anyone outside of the Loreto family as well, whether one is interested in or else even unaware of the significant role played by Christian missionary institutions in the growth and development of new India. Christian missionaries have contributed much in extending culture and education as well as medical care to those who are less fortunate or at a disadvantage. They have not only groomed their students to become sensitive and charitable young men and women but they also extended service to the poor and the weak in the remotest parts of the country. Social historians and feminists alike will find the making of the *Bhadramahila* or 'Lady' in this part of the erstwhile

British Empire by teaching her about a culture through drama, music, art and literature, as chronicled in this book, of great interest. This book urges us to contemplate over the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the running a successful institution, in the process of making the academic map of India, especially through higher education for women, empowering them. Any feminist, academician, historian, patriot or student would find reading this book as time well spent. It will also make one wonder about the history of one's own institution, and take active interest in learning about it and chronicling it.