

ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ENHANCING SOCIAL CHANGES IN DARJEELING DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

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Abstract: Education has played a vital role in bringing desired changes in the society of Darjeeling hills. The main purpose of the study is why the Christian missionaries during the mid-19th century spread western education and how it brought a change in the society. When the missionaries came to Darjeeling how was the reaction of the people and their approach towards the western education. When the British took over Darjeeling Hills popular education was practically unknown. It was the missionaries who took the initiative of opening schools in different parts of Darjeeling district. Education which plays a very important role in moulding the character of an individual and a source from which one gets information and knowledge has brought a tremendous change in the society of Darjeeling during the colonial period.

Keywords: Darjeeling, Missionaries, Education, Social change.

Education has undoubtedly been the means of enabling the individual to move up in the society and to cause social mobility. Education moulds the total way of life of a society. The people who provide education are directing social force and social forces are always directed by some group of people. In a democratic society education is a means to bring changes in society. In order to bring in social changes, the people in the hill areas of Darjeeling had played an active role in accepting indigenous and western education.

This paper will highlight some important points in connection with the role of education in Darjeeling Himalayan region of India.

1. To observe the characteristics of social and cultural features of the region.
2. To highlight indigenous form of formal education before the influence of Christian missionaries.
3. Beginning of Christian educational institution and visible changes in the society.
4. The role of socio cultural educational forces active behind the progress of education.

The district of Darjeeling lies in the northernmost part of West Bengal in India. Bounded in the north by Sikkim and Bhutan on the east and Nepal on the west the district was a part of the dominance of the Rajah of Sikkim. In 1706 Kalimpong (the present district of Kalimpong, on the east of Teesta) was taken from the Rajah of Sikkim by the Bhutanese. Prior to the year 1816, the whole of the territory known as the British Sikkim was won over and conquered by the Nepalese from the Sikkimese. By the treaty signed between the British and Nepal at Sugauli at the of 1816 the former ceded a four thousand square miles of territory to the latter, which in turn by the treaty signed at Titalia in 1817 the handed over the same to the Rajah of Sikkim (Dozey, 1922).

The district was included to Rajshahi division until October 1905 when as a result of the partition of Bengal it was transferred to the Bhagalpur division. With the re arrangement of the provinces it was transferred to the Rajshahi division again in March 1912 (AJ Dash,).

Later in 1828, when GA Lloyd and JW Grant found their way into the west of Darjeeling were very much impressed with the possibilities of the station of a sanatorium. Lloyd was deputed to start to negotiation with the Rajah of Sikkim for a cession of the hill either for an equivalent in money or land. This transfer was successfully accomplished on February 1, 1835. Sikkim putti, the aged Rajah unconditionally handed over a strip of hill territory 24 miles long and about 5-6 miles wide, covering approximately 138 square miles in area, which included the villages of Darjeeling and Kurseong for the establishment of a sanatorium for the invalid servants of the East India company.

The year 1866 may thus be taken as making an epoch in the history of Darjeeling. Peace was established within its borders and hence forward the march of progress.

Ever since the British occupied the hill tracts of Darjeeling District there stood the Europeans at one end and of the scale of civilization and at the other remnants of races who were no doubt "semi barbarous" as Lloyd had remarked (Bailey, 1838).

The early native settlers became much refined when they came in contact with British Government officials, missionaries, philanthropists, traders and social workers. Before that it is said that they lived a semi nomadic life.

EDUCATION OF EARLY NATIVE SETTLERS

The early education that prevailed in the native societies of the hill region of Darjeeling was very simple in nature and practical in character.

Even if the hill people were ignorant the formal organized institutions like schools, the nature and environment around them played a role of teacher for them. The aboriginal tribes were very familiar with the nature, its surroundings and provisions. Each tribe had its own religion, faith, own traditional culture and age old socio economic activities. As such their life in the case of each was itself a valuable education.

The religious institution played a vital role in moulding the life of hill people. The incidental and non formal education played the effective role before the British occupation of Darjeeling hills.

The formal education system was started by the Christian missionaries and particularly those of the Church of Scotland mission in 1869.

Indigenous Education:

Right from the ancient times education was not exotic in India. In Brahmanic education the Maths and Tols formed the centers of learning and the Buddhists education and learning centered on monasteries and Viharas.

With the advent of medieval period another system of education called Muslim education found its way into the country. Their education and learning were carried through Maktabas and Madrasahs.

Education in the middle age, both in Europe and in India was in the hands of religious leaders, the church, the Mollahs and Pandits. At the time of East India Company's charter of 1813, education in England was still under the control of the church. Hence the framers of the charter could not think of imparting education to Indians without ecclesiastical agency.

Monastic education imparted in Buddhists monasteries was the only system of indigenous formal

education prevalent in the hill region of Darjeeling district at the time of advent of the Europeans here. The other institutions like pathshalas and makhtabs cropped up only after the decisions of the East India Company to develop Darjeeling as a hill resort which gave an opportunity to neighbouring people to migrate and settle here. Buddhism, thus in the form of Lamaism was popular among the masses (Dewan, 1991).

Ever since the company and later the crown Government took up the responsibility of education in India, the indigenous system of education was pushed back. By the charter act of 1833 all the missionaries were allowed to enter India and spread their religious ideas. In order to run the administration in India it became necessary for the company and later the crown to impart the western education among the natives.

Educational Institutions:

The real purpose of starting educational intuitions was to educate the Europeans children as Darjeeling was set up as sanatorium for the Europeans. The aim of the Europeans and the Anglo Indians were to impart that type of education and upbringing to which the parents had been accustomed in the native country. At two schools were started to meet their needs during the period 1835 to 1866. These two schools are: Loreto convent for girls and St Paul's for boys. These two schools are delivering their continuous service even today while the former has benefitted the native children too.

The first attempt of the missionary effort by the Catholics in Kalimpong was made in 1883 when a station was opened at a small village at Pedong. It was founded by Father Desgodines after having failed in his several attempts to enter Tibet, the forbidden land, from other places.

In this manner Pedong was made the headquarter of the Roman Catholic mission to western Tibet. Pedong is the last outpost of the West Bengal administration and adjoins Rishi Khola (Rishi River) which is a boundary between West Bengal and Sikkim. Father Desgodines built a small hut at Pedong where he learned Tibetan language. He even opened a Bhutia school for the local boys wherein the medium of instruction was Tibetan. Pedong was then a place mostly inhabited by Bhutias and Lepchas Tibetan language was taught in that school in absence of established scripts of Bhutanese and Lepcha language. It was only after Tibetan expedition of 1888-89 that the Nepalis swarmed into this locality and they gradually became the dominant race. At this point the missionaries thought of an urgent necessity of translating the Bible into Nepali language. A well known missionary of this locality named father Douenel put all his effort in learning Nepali and brought out a complete text "Purano Ani Naya Dharma Shastra Ka Katha Paharey Kurama" i.e. "The old and new testament in the spoken language of Nepalis." Nepali language was then introduced as a subject of study along with Tibetan. Later on Hindi was adopted as the medium of instruction in the school. At this point the school was renamed as St George's School, Pedong.

With the opening of St George's school in Pedong by the Roman Catholic missionaries there was a socio economic change in the locality. The children started going to formal schools for learning and instruction.

Within just a few closing decades of 19th century, the hill region of Darjeeling district had achieved a significant progress in the field of elementary education.

The remarkable progress achieved in the field of education of Darjeeling district and its hill region in the post- independence era is due to the fact that the past few decades have witnessed a movement of

immense educational expansion and democratization of educational opportunities. The policies, plans and programmes at all levels of education have undergone a democratic orientation. After independence many changes were brought in education system like the launching of specific schemes, provision of wide educational facilities for all, especially for the weaker section of the population. All these changes in the education system had brought a remarkable progress in the Darjeeling hills. Education today, has everywhere received the most needed attention with the government taking interest. This hill region has no doubt acquired a sound education base by now.

Conclusion:

The hill region of Darjeeling in the state of West Bengal has its own peculiar historical background. It was particularly its cool climate that allured the British officials and early visitors to this part of the sub- Himalayas. The British officials acquired this region from the Raja of Sikkim in 1835 and made it a safe home for several ethnic races of the aborigines like the Lepchas and Bhutias. Everything was new to this ethnic race when they had to live under the alien rule. They were bound to live their life which was very much different than before. It is said by the early visitors that they were primitive and a semi-barbarous people. They had to be brought under the fold of civilization. It was certainly the education brought and spread by the British officials and the Christian missionaries that played a vital role in transforming them gradually from a primitive stage to a much better status of civilization.

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