

Spread of Hindi and Nepali-Medium Education in Dooars: A Study

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Abstract: *The establishment and spread of Hindi and Nepali-medium education in the Dooars region is intrinsically linked to the history of its tea plantations. Colonial-era recruitment brought migrant laborers from central and eastern India, creating a complex linguistic landscape. While a local dialect, Sadri, was initially common, a form of Hindi gradually emerged as the lingua franca for commerce and communication. This linguistic shift was institutionalized through the founding of Hindi-medium primary schools within the tea gardens from the mid-20th century onward, providing crucial educational access for laborers' children. Simultaneously, a smaller number of Nepali-medium schools were established to serve that community. Case studies of specific schools highlight their role and show promising enrollment from female and tribal students. Despite these developments, significant challenges persist. These include the official neglect of the Sadri language, a shortage of teachers—particularly in science—and the closure of tea gardens, which disrupts education. Although the recent founding of a Hindi-medium government college marks a step forward, the educational landscape for plantation communities remains hampered by linguistic complexities and infrastructural deficits, necessitating more inclusive policies.*

Key Words: Dooars, Tea Plantations, Hindi-medium education, Nepali-medium education, Migrant Laborers, Linguistic Landscape, Sadri Language, Tribal Communities.

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Research Methodology

This study employs a historical and qualitative research methodology. Primary data include oral interviews with teachers and stakeholders, while secondary data have been collected from books, journals, school magazines, government reports, census materials, and educational records. The study examines the development of Hindi- and Nepali-medium education in the Dooars region within the broader context of tea plantation society, migration, and linguistic change.

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the historical spread of Hindi- and Nepali-medium education in Dooars.
- To examine the relationship between tea plantation labour migration and educational development.
- To analyse the role of schools in promoting linguistic and social mobility.
- To identify major challenges faced by plantation communities in accessing education.

Research Questions

1. How did labour migration contribute to the growth of Hindi- and Nepali-medium education?
2. What role did educational institutions play in plantation society?
3. What challenges continue to affect educational access and language policy in the region?

Scope and Limitations

The study focuses primarily on the Dooars region and selected schools discussed in available sources. Limitations include uneven availability of statistical data and dependence on institutional records and interviews.

1

The entire Dooars region is blanketed with tea gardens, home to diverse communities working in the plantations. Before examining the spread of Hindi-speaking populations, it is essential to first address the historical influx of migrant labourers into these estates.

The recruitment of tea workers from Bihar, Odisha, and Madhya Pradesh began alongside the establishment of the earliest tea gardens in Dooars, notably with Mr. Bruham's Gazoldoba Tea Garden. Many accounts suggest that local reluctance toward strenuous labour prompted plantation owners to source workers from outside Bengal through agency houses¹. This indicates that external labour was deliberately introduced to compensate for the extra workload, not merely to expand the workforce, but to sustain the industry's demanding operations.

Tea cultivation started in Jalpaiguri by 1874-75 A.D. By the following year, 1876-77 A.D., 22 areas were leased from the British Government. It must be mentioned that labourers had to be imported from outside for tea cultivation. Meanwhile, before the arrival of the British Government, various communities lived here, such as the Rabha, Garo, Toto, Dhimal, Tharu, Bhutia, Nepali, etc. In the initial phase, labourers were recruited from all these communities.

But problems arose elsewhere. In this connection, it must also be noted that the Dooars region suffered from severe outbreaks of Blackwater fever and malaria during this period, compounding the challenges faced by both local and migrant labourers. The incidence of various diseases is again associated with this. Naturally, the Nepali warriors could not adapt to the unhealthy environment here. Naturally, the method of bringing in new workers was preferred. Dr. Samir Chakrabarty, an eminent researcher of Dooars tea gardens, has studied this area for a long time. The perspectives he found through his research can be summarized as follows:

Firstly: English capitalists were reluctant to invest, as the indigo cultivation introduced by the English colonists was not profitable later on.

Secondly: When the potential for profit in tea cultivation became strong, wealthy Englishmen started planting tea plantations.²

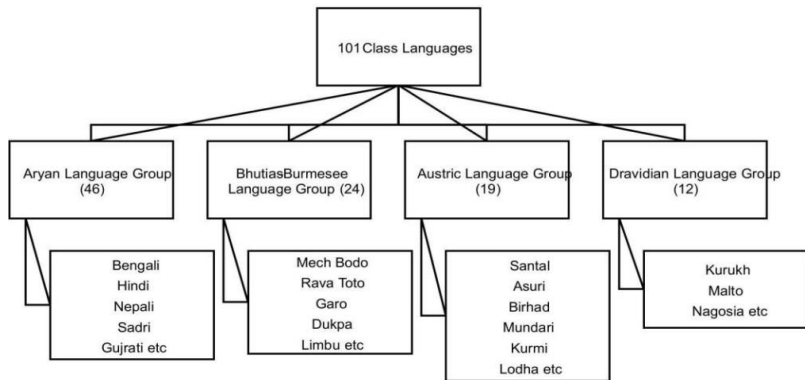
Based on this demand, the field of labour arrival was prepared in 1874. When the tea industry was founded in Dooars, the British employed labourers to set up the industry by recruiting from Manbhum (Purulia), Singhbhum, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, and the Chotonagpur Santal Pargana.³ That is, the British started bringing the workforce to this country for their own interests. Naturally, the arrival of workers from other states became increasingly apparent; they eventually settled here permanently.

2

Meanwhile, a manager-owner group of intellectuals, like the “Babu” (the owner- manager of the tea garden), appeared following the formation of the tea gardens. Along with this came small businessmen, moneylenders, contractors, and people from other livelihoods. During British rule, the tea garden became a meeting place for a diverse group of people, due to which the population increased and the language and culture also changed. It should be noted that there was an influx of populations using the four major language groups of India. These are:

1. Aryan language group
2. Tibeto-Burman language group
3. Austric language group
4. Dravidian language group ⁴

Naturally, 151 dialects of the population came into being. As a result, a new situation arose in the field of linguistics.⁵ Meanwhile, a review of the population structure of North Bengal shows that people of Aryan, Dravidian, Austric, and Mongoloid language groups have lived here since ancient times. Additionally, many Bengali families from Bangladesh and Assam started living here permanently to counter threats.⁶



Statistics show that Hindi is prevalent among the Aryan language group.

Additionally, the language used in conversation among the tribals of the district has not yet normalized. If statistics can be presented in this regard, then the usage of the language been among the tribals is very much like this⁷ :

Census Year	1 st Language	2 nd Language	3 rd Language	4 th Language	5 th Language
1961	(Bengali) 6,38,090	(Kurukh) 1,61,330	(Nepalese) 1,06,308	(Hindi) 79,614	(Sadri) 76,610
1971	(Bengali) 10,54,255	(Hindi) 1,62,199	(Kurukh) 1,44,780	(Nepalese) 1,28,765	-
1991	(Bengali) 19,03,012	(Sadri) 3,22,873	(Nepalese) 1,79,864	(Kurukh) 1,01,205	(Hindi) 92,773

The above statistics are quite random. In the years in which the census was taken, different languages were ranked first and second in each year. If the Hindi language is considered in this case, it will be seen that Hindi was originally the fourth language. Later censuses show that Hindi is emerging as a second language. But in 1991, the reckoning seemed to change dramatically as Hindi became the fifth language. Naturally, a situation arises where a language once considered the second most used moved to the fifth place. In this case, the situation may arise whether this position has been shown somewhat intentionally; the matter is somewhat controversial.

At this point, it is necessary to discuss the spread of the Hindi language and its use. In this context, it may be argued that groups of multilingual people—including Bengali, Gujarati, Rajasthani, Haryanvi, Bihari, and Odia—came here to various municipal and non-municipal areas or business centers. In the northern part of the district, these groups focused on the money- lending and timber businesses after settling down in the tea gardens. Although each group had its own mother tongue, they started using a form of Hindi.

3

The Hindi language later became the primary language of communication and was introduced in the tea plantations and forest centers. Thus, it is clear that the business groups coming from outside were not interested in imposing their own specific languages. Instead, an initiative was taken to use the Hindi language in a fluent manner. It is noticeable that Hindi was introduced loosely rather than as “pure” Hindi. Naturally, there is a growing tendency to apply this “hindi language” among the population here.

Due to the use of the Hindi language, 153 primary schools were founded in the tea gardens within a short period. With the foundation of these primary schools, Hindi became the medium of instruction. Meanwhile, the Sadri language had been prevalent among the people in the tea plantations for a long time. Due to the spread of the Hindi language, the Sadri language is gradually being affected. It is noticeable that there is a growing tendency to use an “impure” Hindi in communication⁸ as one of the primary mediums of interaction.

Hindi became increasingly popular in the Dooars and the tea garden region. Additionally, several schools were founded based on the spread of the Hindi language. It is worth reiterating that Santal, Oraon, Munda, and multiple other communities live among the tea plantation workers in the Jalpaiguri district. These communities came from Chotonagpur or Chhattisgarh, though none of them originally spoke Hindi. But when their children go to school, they study through the Hindi medium up until the secondary level.⁹ Thus, it is necessary to discuss the schools that started to develop around the Hindi language as it began to spread.

4

Before discussing the schools, it is important to note that the plantation owners did not originally give much thought to educating the children of laboring families. However, it is not the case that no initiatives were taken at all; in some instances, initiatives were taken by the tea garden owners themselves. From the post-independence phase, the situation started to change slightly. It is noticeable that initiatives were taken to spread education among the “working class” families, which remains a source of hope.¹⁰

A list of all the schools in which the Hindi language is used as a medium is provided below.¹¹

Sl. No	Name of The Schools & Aid	Medium	No. of Present Teachers
1.	Changmari tea estate Higher Secondary School, Changmari	Hindi	19
2.	Nagrakata Hindi Madhyamik	Hindi	12
3.	Adarsha Vidyamandir, Banarhat	Hindi	14
4.	St. Capitanio Girls High School	Hindi	12
5.	Jalpaiguri Hindi Jr High School	Hindi	6
6.	Meteli Rastrabhasa Junior High School	Hindi	6
7.	Pushpika Girls Jr High School	Hindi	6

8.	Saili Jr High School	Hindi	6
9.	Jalpaiguri Marwari Hindi Balika Vidyalaya	Hindi	6
10.	Lal Bahadur Shastri Hindi Jr High School	Hindi	6
11.	Alipurduar Hindi Madhyamik	Hindi	12
12.	Kalchini Hindi High School	Hindi	12
13.	Nirmala Girls High School	Hindi	12
14.	Ramjhora Bazar Hindi Jr High School	Hindi	6
15.	Lankapara Bazar Jr High School	Hindi	7
16.	Jaigaon Hindi Jr High School	Hindi	6
17.	Alipurduar Adarsha Hindi Junior School	Hindi	6
18.	Birpara St Maria Gorethi Jr High School	Hindi	6

(Source: Status Paper on Education & Health Office of the District Magistrate & Collector, Jalpaiguri. 1990)

Apart from the aforementioned schools, several Hindi-medium schools have been founded in the Mal and Dhupguri Blocks of the district. The schools that were developed include Mayasaili Tea Garden Junior High School, Ambari Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, Chamurchi Bazar Hindi Junior High School, Gayerkata Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, Banarhat Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, Laxmipara Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, Red Bank Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, and Palashbari Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School, among others. All of these schools serve as beacons for the spread of education in remote areas such as tea gardens.

Thus, it appears that the need for Hindi-medium education has become increasingly important. Over time, several junior schools were founded to cater specifically to the requirements of Hindi-speaking and Hindi-learning populations. Undoubtedly, the role of these schools is significant.

5

However, besides this, it is necessary to mention another development. Not only were Hindi-medium schools established in the Dooars region, but Nepali-medium schools were also developed. As noted at the outset of this discussion, Nepali is one of the primary languages within the Aryan language group. Additionally, many indigenous people of the district adopted Nepali as their third language. It is important to note that while a large portion of the population in the hilly areas of Darjeeling is Nepali, the plains are inhabited by a mix of Nepali, Santali, Munda, Oraon, and other communities.

The presence of Munda and Oraon groups in the plains has created a unique linguistic landscape. Although there is a preponderance of Santal, Munda, and Nepali laborers living in the Jalpaiguri tea plantations, the mother tongue of those who migrated from Chotanagpur was not Hindi; they use the Sadri language in their daily lives. However, an important shift

occurs when the children of these workers enter school: they begin using the Hindi language. They study through the Hindi medium up to the secondary level.

Another critical point is that these students eventually had to go back to Bihar for their graduation studies.¹² The primary reason is that, until recently, colleges or universities in this region did not offer Hindi-medium higher education.

In terms of Nepali-medium education, Samsing Higher Secondary School was developed with a focus on the Nepali language. This school is located in the Matiali Block of the district. In this context, it should be noted that many Nepali-medium schools founded in the neighboring districts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong have since transitioned into English-medium schools. Samsing Higher Secondary School remains significant as it continues to provide education through the Nepali language. I have provided a statistic regarding this below.¹³

	Caste	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Boys & Girls	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G	B/G
	GENAREL	6.5	7.5	8.10	2.4	9.5	5.9	4.6	8.6
	SC	10.9	12.13	15.13	15.8	28.22	13.15	12.7	14.1
									0
	ST	31.24	22.25	27.22	16.17	32.38	16.16	15.1	18.1
								5	9
	OBC	18.25	22.27	28.33	27.25	35.29	36.33	38.3	27.3
								7	3
	Total	65.63	63.70	78.78	60.54	104.94	70.73	69.6	67.6
								5	8
	Class Total	128	133	156	114	198	143	134	135

(Source: Saomavi Magazine, Samsing Higher Secondary School, 2022)

At the same time, a list of how many candidates passed the secondary examination was also provided.¹⁴

Madhyamik Exam 2019			
Number of Student Appeared			
Social Category	Boys	Girls	Total
GENERAL	0	0	0
SC	12	21	33
ST	18	19	37
OBC	58	62	120
Total	88	102	190

(Source: Saomavi Magazine, Samsing Higher Secondary School, 2022)

Madhyamik Exam 2019			
Number of Student Passed			
Social Category	Boys	Girls	Total
GENERAL	0	0	0
SC	11	15	26
ST	12	17	29
OBC	56	52	108
Total	84	79	163

(Source: Saomavi Magazine, Samsing Higher Secondary School, 2022)

The statistics obtained show the number of students admitted from Class I to XII and the number of students who sit for the Secondary examination. These statistics are very promising, showing that a significant number of female students are engaging in higher education. Founded in 1966, the school is successfully conducting its activities through co- education.

6

Let us look again at Hindi schooling. One gets an idea of how many schools were founded in the Dooars and various tea plantation areas, as well as the number of teachers working there. Among them, Nagrakata Hindi Medium School is the oldest school in the block. By 1985, the school had grown to about 2,800 students; basically, all students from economically backward backgrounds are admitted here.¹⁵ A co-educational system was observed to be present, although a pre-primary section is not visible.

Additionally, Banarhat Adarsha Vidyamandir (Hindi Medium), located in the Dhupguri Block, was founded in 1959. It offers classes from V to XII and was built with approximately 18 classrooms.¹⁶ Now, let us look at Pushpita Girls' High School. Located in the Mal Sub-division of Jalpaiguri district, this school was founded in 1973. The student-teacher ratio here is 106:1. The statistics obtained show that the school currently has 1,802 students from VI to XII being taught here.¹⁷

Santali Tea Garden Hindi Junior High School was founded in 2010 to spread the Hindi language in the Kalchini Block of Alipurduar district. This school is newly built and is running with six classrooms.¹⁸ Another significant institution is Nirmala Girls' High School, built in 1957, which currently has 694 students. The school is located in the Alipurduar II Block.¹⁹

Alipurduar district, meanwhile, emerged as a new district separated from Jalpaiguri. Most of its Hindi-medium schools were founded in the 1980s, including Adarsha Hindi High School, Kalchini Hindi High School, Hasimara Hindi High School, Ramjhora Hindi High School, Birpara Mahabir Hindi High School, and Hatipota Hindi Workers High School in the Kumargram tea plantation area. Among them, Kalchini Hindi High School was founded in 1964 with the help of the Dima Tea Garden authorities. It is also known as "Fagua School," as Fagua Sardar played a significant role in building the institution.²⁰

Along with these, Birpara Nepali High School was founded in the late '90s in Birpara. Another school was founded in the Nepali medium in 2012 at Buxa Fort, a remote area.²¹ The number of Nepali-medium schools seems relatively low compared to the number of Hindi-medium schools founded in different regions of the Dooars.

However, the name of Jalpaiguri Marwari Balika Vidyalaya must be mentioned among the Hindi-medium schools in the city. The school was founded in 1968. Initially sanctioned up to Class VIII, it was later extended to Class X in 1987 and Class XII in 2011. Although the school is in the heart of the city, students from outside the city and remote areas have enrolled here. Meanwhile, the lack of Hindi-medium schools in the city means that many young female students face considerable difficulties. However, despite these challenges, the teachers are quite dedicated. A statistical breakdown of the teaching staff and the students who have been successful in their overall initiatives is provided.²²

Madhyamik Students		
Year	No. of Students Appear	No. of Students Passed
2018	56	53
2019	82	75
Higher Secondary Students		
Year	No. of Students Appear	No. of Students Passed
2018	72	68
2019	54	49

(Source: Oral interview. Rima Tewari, Marwari Balika Vidyalaya Age 41, Date- 21-06-2023)

From the above statistics, it is evident that most female students have managed to pass their Secondary and Higher Secondary examinations due to the dedicated efforts of their teachers.

7

Along with the spread of Hindi-medium education, several Nepali-medium schools were founded in the region. These institutions also warrant discussion. Among the schools founded as Nepali primary schools, Sankar Nepali High School, established in the Madhu Tea Estate, deserves special mention. Suryanarayan Das and Babulal Chettri played significant roles in the foundation of this school, acquiring land and collecting funds through their personal initiatives. It is worth noting that while the school was founded on January 25, 1974, it did not receive official approval until several years later, in 1980.

Currently, a co-educational system is prevalent in the school, with approximately 1,200 boys and girls enrolled. Of these 1,200 students, 650 are girls, which indicates progress in overall female education. However, the number of teachers remains comparatively insufficient. Furthermore, there is a shortage of science teachers relative to the students' requirements; consequently, many students are deprived of the opportunity to pursue higher education in scientific fields.²³

In addition to schools, there have been initiatives to establish Hindi-medium colleges to expand higher education. However, according to surveys, it has been found that only 24% of tea laborers in the Dooars area have received a primary education. Naturally, this implies that 76% of tea laborers remain illiterate, or their education is practically limited to signing their names.²⁴

It is undeniable that the children of tea plantation families face numerous obstacles in accessing education. The situation is further complicated by the economic instability of the region; for instance, the Red Bank and Dharanipur tea gardens have been completely closed since 2013, and the Carron Tea Garden has been closed since 2016. These closures are reflected in the figures obtained regarding educational disruption.²⁵

Year	Name of The Tea Garden	Willing Candidates in M.P
2016	Dharanipur tea garden	28
2016	Red Bank	25

(Source: Subrata Barui, *Uttarbanger Itihas o Samaj*, 2021)

Although the figures mentioned above are low, it is true that a portion of the population has attained some level of education. In certain cases, government grants and conservation measures have been adopted to support this progress. Banarhat Kartik Oraon Hindi Government College was founded in 2014 with the aim of expanding higher education. Importantly, it is the first Hindi-medium government college in West Bengal where both Science and Arts subjects are taught together. Undoubtedly, this higher education institute plays a significant role in the expansion of academic opportunities in the region.

However, several questions remain as junior schools, high schools, and colleges develop. Even though more than 75 years of Independence have passed, no permanent solution has been established regarding the linguistic medium for plantation settlers. It is noted that 76.31% of the people in the tea gardens speak the Sadri language, yet it has not yet received official recognition. In many cases, students must learn three to four different languages; as a result, their own native language is often neglected.²⁶

In this regard, it is time for tea workers to address their language, education, and culture alongside their livelihood concerns. If educational institutions appoint teachers fluent in the languages that are popular as mediums of communication, only then can the community become truly educationally oriented.

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