

# Celebrating His Glorious Design

William Carey College Jubilee Lecture  
1954-2004

**“William Carey and Serampore College”**  
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**Dr. Lalchungnunga**  
**Principal, Serampore College**

## *Introduction*

The township of Serampore, an anglicized name for Srirampur (village of Sri Ram) is situated on the west bank of the river Ganges (Ganga), fifteen miles north-west-north of Kolkata (Calcutta), in the state of West Bengal, India. The Danes acquired the area from a local land-owner on September 6, 1755, called it Serampore Estate and paid an annual rent of Rs. 160.<sup>1</sup> The Danes called it Fredericksnagore, after King Frederick of Denmark, and it was one among the cluster of European settlements which formed the nerve center of European trade and commerce along both sides of the banks of river Ganges. While the English East India Company had not allowed any missionary activities within the area of their control, King Frederick and the Governor of Serampore, Col. Olaf Bie, were supportive of Christian missionary work, thus making it possible for the missionaries of the English Baptist Missionary Society (i.e., BMS) to launch their mission program, which brought Carey to Serampore on January 10, 1800, from Mudnabatty, where he had been engaging himself in an indigo factory and mission work.<sup>2</sup>

The British East India Company (i.e., EIC) had established itself in India for trade and commerce. According to Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi, the British temper toward India at that time was shaped by three interests: (1) the *Directors* of EIC who were interested only in trade and commerce, (2) the *Imperialists* who wanted to conquer India and build an empire, (3) the *Orientalists* who wanted to respect and romanticize the customs and wisdom of the natives.<sup>3</sup> There was also the *fourth force*, which was in a minority, with a missionary vision, which argued for reform of Indian society with maximum possible British involvement in India in the mutual interest of both England and India.<sup>4</sup> William Carey belonged to this minority group, and he saw Indian society as one in need of reforms. It is possible that he had such a view of Indian society as a result of his sense of the biblical obligation of the church and every Christian that the good news was to be shared with all humankind. This view was in contrast to the other views, that Indian society did not need reforms, and that Indians could not be reformed. Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi ascribe the beginning of the modernization of India to the *power of two pens*,<sup>5</sup> referring to Carey's *Enquiry* written in 1791 and published in 1792, and to Charles Grant's *Observations* written in 1792 and published in 1797.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, *William Carey and Serampore*, 2nd ed. (Serampore: Published by the Author, 2004), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>E. L. Wenger, "The Serampore Mission and its Founders," in *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the Transformation of a Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.:Crossway Books, 1999), p. 72ff.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 74ff.

<sup>6</sup>William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligation of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792); the full title of Charles Grant's work was "Observations on the State of Society among Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain particularly with Respect to Morals and on the Means of Improving It," 1792; Mss. Eur. E. 93; British Library, Asia, Pacific, and Africa Collection, India Office Records.

In Section Five of the *Enquiry*, Carey wrote about the duty of Christians and the means to be used in carrying out the mission, which serves as the basis for your College's Jubilee Celebration theme. He emphasized the need of fervent prayer and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the calls and opportunities for mission, the possible strength of concerted efforts by forming denominational/inter-denominational society, the care that needed to be taken in the selection of missionaries, and the need of mobilization of resources by developing a healthy practice of saving and giving. Having thus charted out his vision of world mission and after many trying circumstances and dropping his earlier intention of going to Tahiti, Carey and his family came to India and landed at Calcutta on November 11, 1793, to put into practice what he had said.

Carey had urged the church and his fellow pastors in 1792 to “*expect great things from God and attempt great things for God*” in the course of his sermon at the Nottingham Conference. Following is a short account of one of his attempts of great things for God, the Serampore College. I will here present the highlights of Carey's place in the life and work of Serampore College.

### *The Mission*

Carey was deeply convinced that the church has a mandate and obligation to *make disciples, baptize and teach* all nations on the basis of Jesus' commission as found in Matthew 28:18-20. Mrs. E. L. Wenger sums up the mission of William Carey thus,

To William Carey must be accorded the honour of first arousing the Western Church to this ideal of universal brotherhood, and to the responsibility of the Church to share with others the treasure of its faith. . . . His conviction grew that it was the duty of the Church to take seriously Christ's command to go 'into all the world and preach the gospel', and he began to press for the formation of a society to further this aim.<sup>7</sup>

### *The College*

It is not possible to know at what point of time Carey and his colleagues Joshua Marshman and William Ward started conceiving the idea of founding an institution of higher learning. John Clark Marshman observed, thus,

For several years they had been desirous of establishing an institution in which a higher and more complete education should be given to native students, more especially to those of Christian parentage, and in which native preachers and schoolmasters, whose defects had long been severely felt, should be sufficiently trained up. They now determined to concentrate their exertions on the formation of a college which should supply these

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<sup>7</sup>E. L. Wenger, “The Serampore Mission and Its Founders,” in *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 1.

wants, and consolidate their plans for the spiritual and intellectual improvement of the country.<sup>8</sup>

By 1818, the Serampore Mission had established a hundred schools where the medium of instruction was the native language. The Serampore missionaries had been isolated from the BMS, “owing to their differences with the society at home, which had deprived them of the sympathies of their missionary brethren in India” which, however, “did not produce any relaxation of labour” on their part.<sup>9</sup> By then, “The effect of Lord Hastings’s liberal views was felt through every vein of society, and associations for the improvement of the natives were springing up in every direction, and were supported in a spirit of unexampled liberality.”<sup>10</sup> They were convinced that “the work of preparing as large a body as possible of Christian natives of India for the work of Christian pastors and Itinerants is of immense importance. English missionaries will never be able to instruct the whole of India,” and “The sum required for the support of a European family would be sufficient to meet the wants of twenty native labourers, who . . . might itinerate through a large district and fill it with Scripture knowledge.”<sup>11</sup> The church in India should be a church by Indians and for Indians.

At that time, the desire for higher education and the thirst for knowledge of English and the wider world were felt very much among the natives. They published the first Prospectus of the College, drawn up by Marshman, on July 15, 1818, in which they clearly spelled out the College’s purpose to instruct India’s youth in Eastern Literature, Sanskrit, European Science, and the Christian gospel and scriptures. “‘If ever,’ said the Prospectus, ‘the Gospel stands in India, it must be by native opposed to native in demonstrating its excellence above all other systems.’”<sup>12</sup> The College was also meant to be a handmaid of evangelization, “‘pre-eminently a divinity school, where Christian youth of personal piety and aptitude for the work of an evangelist should go through a complete course of instruction in Christian theology,’” and to “be open to all without distinction of caste and creed, ‘with the understanding that the instruction be divested of everything of sectarian character.’”<sup>13</sup>

From these original objectives of Serampore College we may observe that what Carey and his colleagues wanted to achieve through the college was making the native itinerants and pastors to be intellectually equipped, academically proficient, and spiritually prepared to present the message of the Gospel in an indisputably convincing manner to the natives, irrespective of caste

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<sup>8</sup>John Clark Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward Embracing History of the Serampore Mission*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1859), p.168.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>D. A. Christadoss, “The Story of Serampore College, 1818-1929,” in *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup>Marshman, *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman, and Ward Embracing History of the Serampore Mission*, vol. 2, p.169.

<sup>13</sup>Christadoss, “The Story of Serampore College, 1818-1929,” p. 21.

and culture. By having the College open to all irrespective of caste and creed, it may be that they wanted the Christian students to have an opportunity to interact with the native students of other faiths on a daily basis and learn by such experience. The curriculum included Sanskrit, Arabic, European Science, history, and philosophy. English was a required subject. The native language was the medium of instruction. The Christian students had to learn Christian theology, Greek and Hebrew. The College was to include normal school to train the teachers. From 37 students in the first year (1818) of which 19 were Christians, the College has grown so much in enrolments, and now there are 2400 students in the Arts, Science and Commerce streams, which are affiliated to the University of Calcutta since 1857, and 120 residential theology students. Till the 1950s there were students who came from other parts of India and beyond, even in the Arts and Science streams. Now, the students of Arts, Science and Commerce are from the local area and theology students come from all over India. In September last year, the College was given an “A” Grade Accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, and it is now one of the six selected colleges in West Bengal recommended by the University of Calcutta for the status of *College with Potential for Excellence*.

### ***The Royal Charter***

The King of Denmark Frederick VI incorporated the College with a Charter on February 23, 1827. The powers and privileges granted by this Charter placed Serampore College on the same level as the other two Danish Universities at Copenhagen and Kiel respectively. The Charter contains the following clauses:

And We further appoint, grant and declare that the said William Carey, Joshua Marshman and John Clark Marshman, the members of the first Council, and their successors for ever shall have the power of conferring upon the students of the said College, native Christians as well as others, degrees of rank and honour according to their proficiency in as ample a manner as any other such College.<sup>14</sup>

All the rights and immunities granted by the Charter were upheld when on October 16, 1845, the ownership of Serampore was transferred by a Treaty from Denmark to Britain. The provisions of the Charter could not be used in Carey’s life time on account of economic depression. Its use was considered by Carey and his colleagues as postponed, rather than abandoned. The non-implementation of the Charter, the inadequacy of staff from the university standpoint, and the affiliation of the Arts-Science department to Calcutta University in 1857, caused the existence of the Charter to be forgotten and the use of the Charter became a dead issue. There even was a proposal to close down the College. Dr. E. B. Underhill, the Honorary Secretary of BMS and Mr. Summers, the Principal, saved the College from being closed down in 1892. George Howells was so keen to revive the Charter. He consulted the best legal experts of the day who affirmed that the Charter remained completely valid.<sup>15</sup> The BMS and the Council accepted the

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<sup>14</sup>Section 7, Charter of Incorporation, Serampore College, in *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 118.

<sup>15</sup>W. Stewart, “The Serampore Charter,” *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 45.

idea of reviving the Charter and appointed Howells Principal, and the Charter was revived under his active leadership. The higher theological department was opened in October, 1910, and the first three graduates, who were members of the Congregational, the Presbyterian and the Syrian Orthodox Churches respectively, were conferred the Bachelor of Divinity degree on December 14, 1915, at an Assembly presided over by His Excellency Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal. Since then, Serampore College continues to impart theological education through the campus at Serampore and the more than fifty seminaries affiliated to the Senate of Serampore College. At the Convocation for this year held on February 12, a thousand graduates were conferred various degrees by the Council of Serampore College, including doctorate (earned and honorary), master's, bachelor's and diplomas on the basis of various courses of theological study. The Senate, the Board and the Council of Serampore College in their meetings held before the day of Convocation adopted a new Constitution without affecting the provisions of the Act of Serampore College, 1918, by which major changes were effected in the Serampore theological education system. The salient features of the changes are: decentralization of responsibilities, wider and closer participation of the churches in theological education, increased representation of women in the system, larger scope for curriculum revision to address new issues and the current needs of the churches. A resolution was also taken to approach the Government of India to have Serampore College re-included in the list of Indian universities as was the case for some time before the 1960s.

### *The Significance of Carey's Thoughts in the Life and Work of Serampore College*

Carey did not have any formal education beyond the age of twelve, but proved his worth academically by sheer efforts of self-education. The EIC officials did not recognize him at first, but later had to seek his help in teaching languages to the young officers of the company. He was made professor in the Fort William College. His contributions to the Serampore College were immense. He sacrificed nearly all of his earnings to the building and work of the College and other activities of the Serampore Mission. He was its first Principal and Master of its Council. He was a Lecturer of Divinity, Botany and Zoology subjects.<sup>16</sup>

The policy of imparting education in the language of the people (vernacular), adopted and practiced by Carey and his colleagues, was one of the major factors for the development of the Indian mind, in contrast to the EIC's practice of teaching in English "to prepare its army of hirelings. The efforts of the East India Company would never have produced a Tagore; the missionary effort did."<sup>17</sup> The popular saying, "What Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow," was true of Bengal of those years. Vishal and Ruth Mangalwadi eloquently argue that it was Carey's policy of having the natives educated in the native language that helped in developing Indian nationalism. The missionaries'

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<sup>16</sup>Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham: New Hope, 1991; reprint ed., Christian History Institute, 1998), p. 148.

<sup>17</sup>Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey*, p. 94.

efforts began to succeed after they persuaded Michael Madhusudan Dutt—an upper-caste convert—to write his poetry in Bengali and not only in English. It was Dutt’s poetry that triggered what is often called the ‘Bengali Renaissance’ or the Bengali Nationalism. It produced Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, and finally Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>18</sup>

Carey planned that the native people, educated in their language, would complete a translation of the Bible in a vernacular, and then go on to translate educational books in the same language. However, this process was very slow during his lifetime as “Neither the Indian elite nor the East India Company provided Carey with either resources or work partners who shared his vision.”<sup>19</sup>

Another reason for Carey’s policy of education in vernacular was that by the integration of useful knowledge with common language, the natives would be “helped to communicate the new learning in their normal social intercourse and to become conscious of the value of learning for the development of their environment.”<sup>20</sup>

The significance of Carey’s insistence that education in Sanskrit language should be imparted was that the common people would then have an access to the sacred writings and thus discover for themselves the validity or invalidity of the various religious and social beliefs, practices and rituals, which only the high caste Brahmins had the authority and right of interpretation. The significance of this education was seen in the instance of the campaign and its ultimate success against the practices of widow-burning, child-sacrifice, burying leprosy patients alive, in which campaign, Carey could work together with the enlightened Hindu reformers such as Raja Ram Mohun Roy.

The other significant influence of Carey which is still clearly visible is the openness of the College to all, which openness is also reflected in the original statutes and regulations drawn up by Carey. The students, teachers and other staff come from all sections, castes and denominations. Even though Catholics are not admitted in the theology department, help is often sought from the neighbouring Catholic institution to teach some courses on a temporary basis, and staff seminars are held among theological seminaries in and around Kolkata.

Carey and his co-founders of the College did not spell out too many things in details concerning doctrines, yet they gave one clause in the statutes which they held as something vital. Carey put it this way, “As the founders of the College deem the belief of Christ’s Divinity and Atonement essential to vital Christianity, the promotion of which is the grand object of this Institution, no

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<sup>18</sup>Mangalwadi, *The Legacy of William Carey*, p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>George Thomas, *Christian Indians and Indian Nationalism* (Frankfurt), pp. 25-26, as quoted in T. Ambrose Jeyasekaran, in “William Carey’s Educational Contributions,” in *Carey’s Obligations and India’s Renaissance*, ed. J. T. K. Daniel and R. E. Hedlund (Serampore: Council of Serampore College, 1993), p. 223.

one shall be eligible to the College Council or to any Professorship who is known to oppose these doctrines.”<sup>21</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Carey’s policy of imparting education in the vernacular has far-reaching impact. It raised the Bengali language from being just a colloquial language to the status of the language of the learned. It paved the way for Bengali Renaissance which gave an impetus to the Indian national movement. This fact would stand out to prove that Carey’s method of mission by education helped the natives to organize themselves socially and politically. The success in the intellectual and academic awakenings in the secular world, however, has not been matched by the spiritual success. Christianity in Bengal and the rest of India continues to be a religion of numerically an insignificant minority. The church in Bengal is very weak. The College has not effectively played its role as a handmaid of evangelization. While leadership in many of the mainline churches is in the hands of Serampore graduates, who do quite well as pastors and administrators, the record of church growth in India does not seem to have a co-relation with the impact of Serampore College. This aspect of the original vision and mission of Carey needs to be fully recaptured. India has been benefited intellectually and politically by Carey’s policy of education, but India is yet to be more blessed spiritually as Carey wanted it to be.

The advancement of the Bengali language has political consequences in the areas adjacent to Bengal and even within West Bengal, where tensions arise as the other linguistic communities feel insecure. Carey may not have had these in mind when he encouraged the development of Bengali, because he wanted other languages also to be developed equally and the Scripture translated into all Indian languages. The Bengali speaking people themselves now begin to realize that over-emphasis on the importance of Bengali language with a negligence toward learning English has serious disadvantages in the changing national and global scenarios. They are now encouraging the teaching of the English language to equip the younger generations for the competitive job market.

Carey’s contributions are many, of which *social reforms*, *Bible translation*, and *education* are considered to be the three main pillars of his mission. It is important that Serampore College, which remains as the most prominent visible legacy of Carey’s life and work, rediscover, recapture, revitalize, and reinterpret Carey’s original vision and mission, in the changed contexts of the present India and the world. The College should welcome the goodwill, support, and guidance from all who share the ever relevant vision and mission of William Carey. Partnership among institutions which bear the name and imprint of William Carey all over the world will strengthen the pursuit of the cause for which Carey strived throughout his life.

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<sup>21</sup>“Statutes and Regulations of the Serampore College, June 12th, 1833,” Clause 11, in *The Story of Serampore and Its College* (Serampore: The Council of Serampore College, 1961), p. 121.

***William Carey College Jubilee Lecturer  
Dr. Lalchungnunga***



Dr. Lalchungnunga (Dr. Lal for short), is Principal of Serampore College, Serampore, India, He is a native of Mizoram (Land of the Mizo) a predominantly Christian state in northeast India. An ordained minister in the Mizoram Presbyterian Church, Lalchungnunga holds the following degrees: B.A., M.A., Gauhati University; M.Phil., Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; Ph.D., North Eastern Hill University; and B.D., Serampore College. Apart from the Serampore divinity degree, Dr. Lal's degrees are in the field of political science. He has published one book, *Mizoram: Politics of Regionalism and National Integration* (1994), and has written a few papers for seminars.

Prior to becoming the Principal of Serampore College in 1999, he was a missionary in Delhi, 1991-1998. He is a member of the National Executive Board, All India Association of Christian Higher Education, and a member of the Evangelical Teachers Fellowship of India. He is married to Lalhliri, and they have three children, Emmanuel, Elizabeth, and Michael. Of importance to Dr. Lal is the fact that his name, Lalchungnunga, means "God is Lord above all kings."

Dr. Lalchungnunga's visit and lecture is the first such appearance by any Serampore College Principal to William Carey College, a fitting highlight for William Carey College's Jubilee Celebration.