

Vol. 4, No. 1, July- Sept., 2017

ISSN- 2349-6274

ADROITIC

An International Refereed Research Journal

Listed and Indexed with ISSN Directory, Paris



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Women Education and Mary Scott in Sikkim (1923-1939)



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Abstract: *Women in Sikkim could see the light of modern education only after the coming of the Scottish Missionaries particularly Mary Scott. Prior to the coming of the Christian Missionaries the women folk in Sikkim were closely related to the household work. Mary Scott, the only female missionary took the first initiative to educate them in the formal schooling system. Her close relationship with the King (Chogyal) made the path clear in relation to reside in Gangtok proper and to establish the first women School in Gangtok. Her contribution in lifting the status of female in a society and making them aware of their capabilities is immense. This paper throws light in the growth and development of a history of women education in Sikkim with special reference to Mary Scott.*

Key Words: Sikkim, Women education and Scottish Missionary.

The intent of the missionaries is to sow the seed of the gospel¹; to respect the most important commandment that we find in the Bible i.e. to reach to the unreached. The Christian missionaries not only propagated the teachings of Jesus Christ but also carried out an extensive network of social services in the field of education and health care which brought in a new way of life among the people. Education is regarded as an important variable of social transformation. The Christian missionaries have done pioneering work in the field of education.

Sikkim became a part of India on 26th April 1975 and has a long history of educational system. The entry of the Christian missionaries/missions in the then kingdom of Sikkim during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought a change in the educational set up, "sowing the first seeds of modern education."² Though they had to face many difficulties to reach their goal yet they were successful. At the time of their coming, throughout the kingdom, the Buddhist monastic institution and the *pathshalas* were prevalent.³ The ruling class as well as the priests or monks were the privileged lot to be educated in these institutions whereas the common masses were deprived of it.⁴ This paper deals with the contribution of Mary Scott, the first female Scottish missionary with special reference to girl's education in Sikkim.

The Charter Act of 1813 and 1833 gave a positive sign for the missionaries to come and work in India. This development further facilitated the Scottish Mission led by Macfarlane (1872-73) to move towards Sikkim after establishing its work in Darjeeling and Kalimpong. But they had to wait for quite some time to get permission from the Durbar administration of the Chogyals to work in Sikkim. Before the establishment of the British control over Sikkim the Scottish missionaries had a vision to work in Sikkim even before the extension of the British administrative control over it. From 1880, Sutherland, another Scottish Missionary, made annual trips to Tumlong, the then capital, to get permission from the Maharaja of Sikkim for missionaries to settle in his kingdom.⁵ But permission was finally granted after J.C. White's appointment as the British Political officer in 1889 in Sikkim. Their work in the field of education acted as counter to the monastic education.⁶ For the missionaries, ministry through education became the most effective means of evangelizing people.⁷

Women Education in Sikkim:

Women education is another significant contribution of the Christian Community. The 1823 instruction of the Scottish Church to its missionaries is the first known document, specific about women which directed the missionaries to pay attention to the education of girls.⁸ The schools, training schools, printing press and evangelical work went together. The Minutes of Scottish Mission Council: Eastern Himalayan Mission dated 5th and 6th June 1924, held at Kalimpong clearly specify their Educational policy as follows:

*Education is recognized as a valuable Missionary method; the policy of the mission is to provide primary education for boys and girls as widely as possible throughout the district, with the addition of secondary and higher education at a few centrally situated places, the need of the Indian Christian Community being always kept in the forefront, and the Christian religion being taught in all mission educational institutions.*⁹

Regarding female education it says: *All female education should wherever possible be under the superintendence of Women missionaries...*¹⁰

As stated above the missionaries were not allowed to stay in Gangtok, the state capital, due to many reasons, the presence of the royals and other influential Buddhist Bhutia Kazis being the main. The only missionary who resided in Gangtok from 1923 to 1939 was Mary Scott. She became the first female Scottish missionary and the new head of the Sikkim Mission who shifted their mission centre to Gangtok from Temi.

Church of Scotland minutes of the Foreign Mission Committee noted that she was allowed to reside in Gangtok partly on the basis of her being a female and not ordained. Her royal background¹¹ and her good relation with the Chogyals¹² are also the factors for the same.

On January 5th she came along with Rev. Dr. J.A. Graham and Mrs Graham to India. She was an Honorary missionary without salary throughout her long service, raising money herself for her many projects, mostly by selling her own paintings.¹³ She was a good administrator. She was also seen as a friend of the nation of Sikkim, not only of the Christians. "In the capital Gangtok, she was all the time under the eyes of the authorities, of the rulers and officials and high lamas, she had to walk with great circumspection. Her advice to a young missionary was: Never keep a diary. I don't. And don't write letters home about your work and about people"¹⁴

Scott's stress was not on education for its own sake but on education which would be used to contribute to the development of Sikkim. Prior to the coming of Scott very little attention was paid in the field of education for girls by the Government of Sikkim. For the first time in a council meeting held on August 1, 1912, Chogyal Sidkeong Tulku spoke on the need of female education in Sikkim. As a result a school for the education of the daughters of the King and the Kazis was opened. The school ran with an enrollment of five girls with Tibetan, Hindi and Knitting in the curriculum. Nothing was done for the commoners' children. But things changed after the arrival of Mary Scot in Gangtok. From her arrival in Gangtok Miss Scott was determined to do something for the girls and women here. She started an industrial school for girls in part of her house, a part not required for prayer meetings or housing beggars, or lepers or for looking after sick people. Her own skills in sewing and embroidery were most useful in teaching the girls. Paljor Namgyal Girls' High School: Golden Jubilee, Gangtok. n.d.1973 mentions that Scott initially simply had a private English class for two girls.¹⁵ Then the Chogyal noted her interest and offered to allow the classes to be held in the palace compound. By October of 1923 she was given the permission to open a girl's school in Gangtok, which she started in a large room of her rented quarters at Mazong Khoti. During her stay she committed herself to the upliftment of women and children. In 1923 Scot established the first girl's school in Sikkim, presently known as Paljor Namgyal Girls School (PNGS)¹⁶ with an aim to educate and uplift the deprived women, particularly, youngsters. This was the only female educational institution in the state for many decades.

The PNG school was at first established in the present compound of Tashi Namgyal Academy and shifted to Mazong Kothi later in 1931, which was built with the assistance of Miss Scott with the motto *Love, Service and Joy*. The State Government also provided grant in aid for the school.¹⁷ In the beginning, it was a middle class school upto class VI. But, later, after seeing the dedication, determination and excellent work done by Scot, it was upgraded with the assistance rendered by the Government of Sikkim and the Church. The support of the Sikkim government also reveals the state's desire to propagate the women's education. The first matriculation class passed the examination with four students in 1945 and the school continued to grow.¹⁸ Later special classes for girls were extended to other places such as Chekung (Chyakhung), Vok, Rhenock and Pakyong, where both the 3R's and practical skills such as sewing, knitting and weaving were taught. The industrial classes in gardening, carpentry and crafts such as basket weaving etc were also introduced in all the schools run by the Mission during late 1930's.¹⁹

She had difficulty in finding staff. In order to improve the teaching - learning in schools Scott gave much importance in sending Christian girls to Kalimpong for training as teachers and nurses. From 1930 provisions for scholarships were made to many local teachers to get trained in SUMI, Kalimpong with the condition that after completing the training programme s/he would go to wherever sent within the kingdom of Sikkim.²⁰

She retired from her work and left Gangtok in 1939 which brought an end to a strong missionary influence over Sikkim and its education. She supervised the school till her retirement after which Mrs. Rachel Fairservice was made the in charge of the School. In 1945, PNGS was recognized as a High School by Calcutta University. After Mrs. Rachel Fairservice left, this school was run by headmistresses from the Church of Scotland including Miss Shirrass (1945-47), Miss Grace M. Patterson (1948-58), Miss Martha Hamilton (1958-66) and Miss Isobel Ritchie.

Mary Scott was well known and loved by all. It would not have been possible for her to do things without the support of the Durbar and the officials. She left the memory of a committed woman whose priority was to serve her master and her neighbours, whoever they were. In acknowledgment of her service as a missionary in Sikkim, the University of St. Andrews awarded on her the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1937 and she was the first women missionary to be conferred.

Mary Scott looked over all the administrative work be in the field of education, health and the church during her stay in Sikkim. The Scottish Mission accelerated their work till the first half of the 20th century in Sikkim. They actively involved themselves in catering education to the needy till India's independence. As per the administrative Report of Sikkim there were 35 schools in 1947 of which 5 were government schools, 15 Scottish mission schools: 1 being the only girls school PNGS, 3 Scandinavian mission schools and 12 Landlords

funded schools. This suggests that even in 1947 almost 43% of schools in Sikkim were run by the Scottish mission.

Conclusion:

The contribution of Mary Scot towards the upliftment of women and the society is immense and laudable. Such services still continue in the hills through various Christian organizations as Awasty (2004) rightly pointed out that the "only truly social welfare agency operating in the area is the church."²¹ One cannot deny the commitment and personal sacrifice of Mary Scott in establishing the first girl's school where many got opportunity to get formal education then. Schools established by the Kazis or Durbar or the then Government was basically meant for the elites, whereas, the main intent of the missionary schools were to teach the destitute. Perhaps this could also fulfill their object of bringing the people into Christian fold. Today as most of the schools are run by the state, we fondly remember those early missionaries like Mary Scott who realize that the education is the light indeed. The earlier missionaries like Mary Scott gave importance to the understanding of Christian anthropology. At present even in the schools established by the missionaries, education has become so costly that the poor cannot even think of quality education.

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