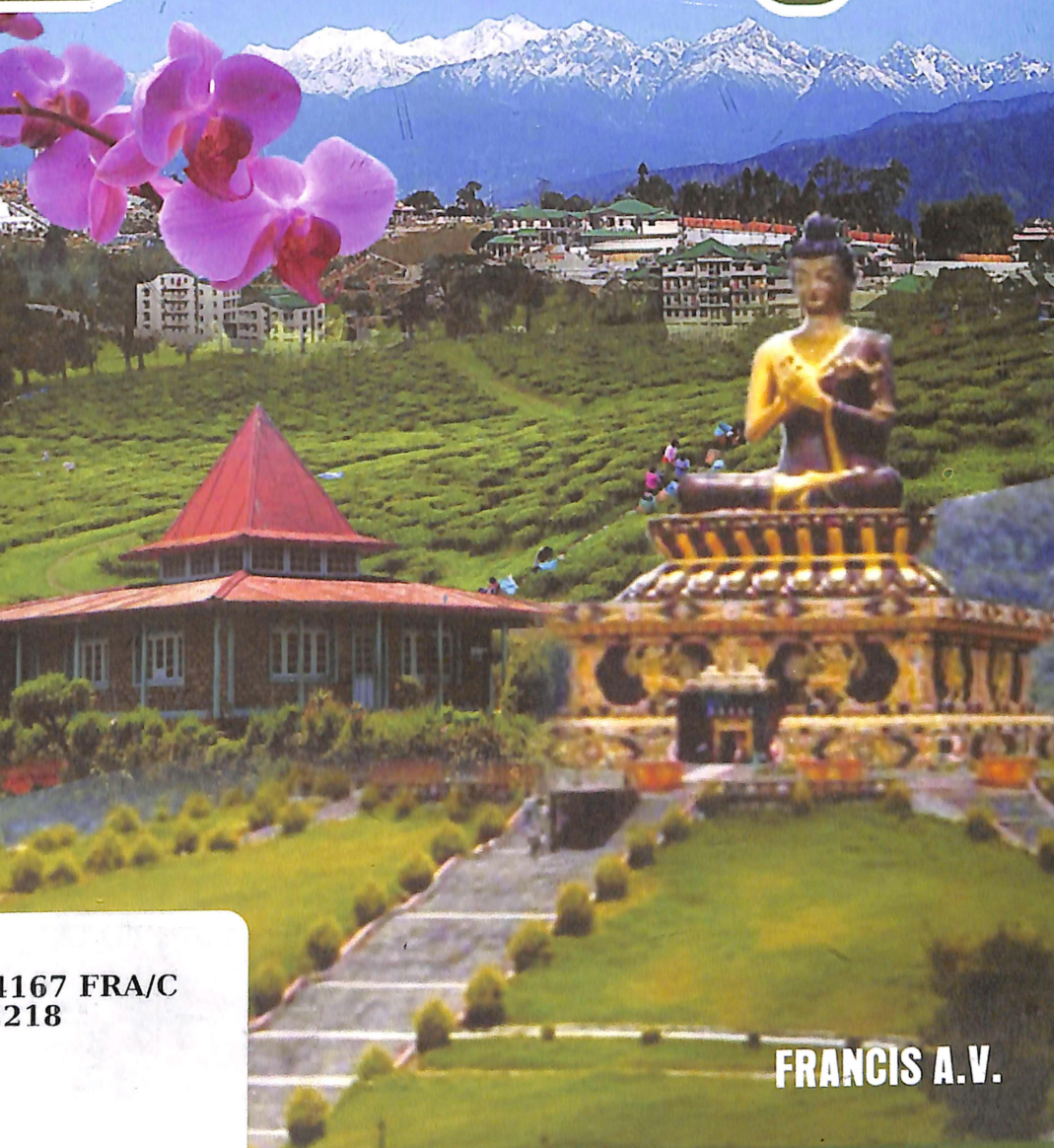


Catholic Educators in Sikkim Himalayas



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CHAPTER - 1

Introduction

Sikkim, the 22nd State of the Republic of India with three international borders (Bhutan, Nepal and China) and one national border (Darjeeling district of Bengal) has its own unique features with reference to education, society, economy, polity, religion, culture and environment. Education plays an important part in the state of Sikkim where the state government is willing to educate every Sikkimese, free of cost, till Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D). The Catholic Educators collaborate with the Government of Sikkim for quality education for the people of Sikkim.

Early Education in Sikkim

Early education in Sikkim was incidental and informal. It was in the form of folklore and traditions. Sikkim was thinly populated and people depended on forest resources and engaged in agriculture just for their sustenance. Transfer of knowledge was orally from generation to generation.

Introduction of monastic education in Sikkim

The history of formal education in Sikkim begins with the advent of Buddhism. The earliest event related to Buddhism in Sikkim is the sojourn of the Buddhist saint Guru Padma Sambhava in Sikkim in the 8th century A.D. According to tradition, the Guru blessed the land and foretold that some time in the future Sikkim would be the land of Buddhism. Alok K. Shrivastava in his *Surajkund: The Sikkim Story* writes “Guru Padmasambhava or Guru Rimpoche, a renowned Buddhist Tantric monk from Nalanda is reported to have visited Sikkim after spreading Buddhism in Tibet” (Shrivastava 2002:25)¹. The prophecy of Guru Padma Sambhava was fulfilled in 1642 A.D with the coronation of Phuntsog Namgyal as the first king of Sikkim. After the establishment of monarchy, monasteries were

established in Sikkim and Buddhism was made the religion of the Kingdom. In order to train the young boys into monkhood monastic schools were established. The common people did not benefit from it. G Sharma in his *A Short History of Sikkim* writes "The monasteries were not only places of worship: they became the educational centres" (Sharma 1993:69)². Mahajan Baldev confirms monastic education as early form of formal education "Education in Sikkim was monastic in nature: schools in the monasteries imparted religious education and prepared the monks for priesthood" (Baldev: 1999:64)³. The Durbar encouraged monastic form of Tibetan Buddhist education in Sikkim. But the people realized that the educational system of the missionaries helped them because of the academic and vocational dimension of the European model of education which made them earn livelihood.

Introduction of Western education by the missionaries

Eastern Himalayan Mission⁴ under the Church of Scotland entered Sikkim towards the end of 19th century. In West Sikkim, according to W. Macfarlane, at the end of the year 1888, there were two schools, one at Chakung and the other at Soreng. By the end of 1889, there were six schools. Gambo Lepcha after his retirement from these schools as sub-inspector, started a school at Fambong. He had also established a night school at Sanchabarey. In South Sikkim after receiving official permission from the King of Sikkim, Sutherland, the missionary in-charge for Sikkim selected Sadam in South Sikkim. The foundation stone for the missionary bungalow was laid in the presence of R. Kilgour, then in charge of Universities Mission. Kilgour and Macara resided here. In the year 1889, Mr John Claude White⁵ was appointed the Political officer in Sikkim. Mackean wrote to Political Officer on 18.09.1901 for some land for their missionary work. The Sikkim Durbar leased 10 acres of land to the missionaries at Timi. The missionaries established carpet weaving centre, school and dispensary here. In East Sikkim, in 1924 Mary Scott who had worked in other parts of Sikkim and friendly with the Political Officer and Royal Family opened a school for girls in Gangtok. The students of this school passed matriculation in 1945.

It was raised to the status of a Higher Secondary school in 1961. Apart from teaching various academic subjects, sewing and knitting were also introduced. Dick B Dewan writes about the early educational activities of the Scottish missionaries in the following words “Mr. Macfarlane had explored South Sikkim and encouraged friends to become involved in helping this little state. In 1883 the Scottish Universities Mission Association decided to support work here, and in 1886 people from Sikkim itself, who had come under the influence of the church in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, and who were eager to help their own people, started the work of teaching and preaching along with other friends who had volunteered from these neighboring areas. By 1900 fifteen of them were at work in Sikkim, of whom eleven were teachers. The Church of Scotland Women’s Guild undertook in the mid-1890s to support the education of women and girls in the Eastern Himalayan area” (Dewan 2012:175)⁶. The missionaries of Scandinavian Alliance Mission⁷ (SAM) established mission stations in Mangan, Lachung and Lachen in North Sikkim. They established weaving schools for women. They also encouraged people to cultivate vegetables in their garden. Francis A.V in his *Christianity in the Himalayan State of Sikkim* describes the arrival of the Scandinavian missionaries in the following words “On 4th November 1892 John F. Frederickson, F. Gustafson and A.E Shoberg departed from Ghoom for Sikkim. After a long travel reaching the Jelep la, they went to Gangtok and met J.C White for permission to settle down. Since the British Political officer had no authority to grant a residential permit for a missionary, he promised them that he would forward the petition to the Sikkim State Council. Meanwhile, during Shoberg’s exploration in North Sikkim, he chanced upon the Queen of Sikkim. As a result of their meeting the Queen ordered that a permit be issued to him” (Francis A.V 2008:111)⁸.

The missionaries of the Church of Scotland Missionary Society who entered Sikkim from Darjeeling and Kalimpong, established schools including vocational stream and dispensaries in West, South and East districts of Sikkim. They were pioneers in vocational and women

education in Sikkim. The missionaries of Scandinavian Alliance Mission commonly known as Finnish missionaries did commendable works in the area of cultivating apples and marketing them in Darjeeling, setting up formal and vocational schools and training the local people in carpet weaving and horticulture. The Scottish and Finnish missionaries had prepared the people of Sikkim for the educational activities of the Catholic educationists. The Catholic missionaries⁹ entered Sikkim in 1951 as educators and their schools in all the four districts educate students in the current trends and practices of education so that the students are able to face the world of competitions.

Background of the entry of the Catholic Missionaries in Sikkim

The vicariate of Patna¹⁰ had been detached from that of Tibet-Hindustan¹¹ on February 7th, 1845. Its first Bishop, Dr Hartman was appointed on 30th September 1845 and consecrated at Agra on 15th March 1846. In the Brief¹² of February 1846, territory assigned to his vicariate was: "The Kingdom of Nepal, the Great Province of Behar and the small one, called Sikkim"¹³. This was the first mention of the state of Sikkim in the Catholic Church ecclesiastical circle for their work.

Fr Hosten states "on 26th May, 1856 Fathers Louis Bernard and Augustus Desgodins¹⁴ of the Foreign Missions of Paris, arrived at Darjeeling from Calcutta, after about a month's journey. They hoped that Tibet would be more accessible through Sikkim. The first care of these two missionaries was to pay their respects to the English authorities of Darjeeling and visit the other European residents with the exception of a solitary Frenchman, all were extremely kind, and during eight months, the two fathers moved freely among them. We must mention in particular Brian Houghton Hodgson, who had been during¹⁵ years of resident of the East India Company at the court of Nepal, and was still keeping up relations with Tibet. Their intercourse with him was not only an agreeable diversion, but an excellent means of collecting information regarding Tibet and the neighbouring

countries. They could satisfy themselves, too, that the English officials were not opposed to their project of entering Tibet via Sikkim but they entertained little hope of their success. It was necessary to deal directly with the Raja of Sikkim, who at the time was on unfriendly terms with British Government. Only in the beginning of 1857 was an answer at last received from the Raja's Prime Minister. The letter, though polite and accompanied by a present, was in the negative. The missionaries were looked upon as English spies and forbidden to enter (Hosten Papers: Darjeeling 1846-1888)¹⁵. In 1885, Fr Martin Hervagault and Fr Louis Claude Saleur made a tour in eastern most part of the East district, Rhenock¹⁶.

In 1888 Fr Hervagault and Fr Saleur were sent to Gnathang and Yatung as chaplains for the Irish Catholic soldiers. In May 1929, Fr Jules Douenel was appointed Apostolic Prefect of the Prefecture of Sikkim. Kalimpong mission was also placed under the Apostolic Prefect. In 1933 the King had sent his daughter along with a few relatives to St Joseph's Convent, Kalimpong for studies. At that time there was an attempt to enter Sikkim and establish a mission. But it was unsuccessful. In 1937, Bishop Eric Benjamin,¹⁷ Fr Joseph Kunnath¹⁸ and Fr Brahier¹⁹ made a tour in East Sikkim. It is mentioned in Sikkim Gazetteer that "In the 1940s Reverend Mgr. A. Gianora, C.R., D.D., had approached the Durbar for permission to start a school in Namchi. But the State council had, in a letter dated 17th December, requested them to open an agricultural and industrial school in Sikkim. Though the Catholic fathers did evince an interest and submit a proposal draft of the same, nothing concrete materialized then" (Gazetteer of Sikkim 2013:220). By the year 1945, a few graduate Catholics from Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong were employed in the government schools as teachers and government offices. These Catholics were the first Catholic missionaries. In 1951 Fr A. Gianora²⁰ the Prefect Apostolic of Sikkim and Kalimpong missioned Fr Leonard Molomo²¹ to Sikkim. Now Bishop Stephen Lepcha²² looks after the spiritual needs of the Catholics of Sikkim. The book unfolds the educational endeavours of the Catholic educationists in Sikkim.

References and End Notes

- 1 Alok K Shrivastava (2002) *Surajkund: The Sikkim Story*. New Delhi: South Asia Foundation, p 25.
- 2 Sharma, R (1983) *Images of Sikkim the land, people and Culture*. Gangtok: Government of Sikkim p 69.
- 3 Baldev Mahajan (1995) *Educational Administration in Sikkim*. National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration. New Delhi, p 64.
- 4 Eastern Himalayan Mission: The missionaries of the Church of Scotland had established their mission in Darjeeling and later in Kalimpong. Their mission was known as Eastern Himalayan Mission. They entered Sikkim from Darjeeling and Kalimpong towards the end of 19th century.
- 5 John Claude White was born in India and educated in Bonn and at Coopers Hill College of Engineering. He was appointed the Political Officer in June 1889 and was bestowed with the responsibility of a de facto ruler after Sikkim-Tibet war in 1888. He was instrumental in initiating a series of revenue raising measures to make the Kingdom financially sound. He sent Sikkimese youth including the Prince to British India and abroad for Education. He also introduced allopathic medicine in Sikkim. He got retired in 1908. His Memoirs 'Sikkim and Bhutan' was published in 1909. The political office, built in 1890, is the present Raj Bhawan. White Memorial Hall was built in 1932 in his memory.
- 6 Dick B Dewan (2012) *Education in Sikkim An Historical Retrospect Pre-Merger and Post-Merger Period*: Society for the Procurement & Sales of Books. p175
- 7 Scandinavian Alliance Mission: The members of Scandinavian Alliance Mission had established their Mission in Ghoom. Their main intention was to go to Tibet. Therefore, they chose North Sikkim as their mission field.

- 8 Francis A.V (2008) *Christianity in the Himalayan State of Sikkim* in Maitreyee Choudhury. Himalayan Studies in India: A Mittal Publication: p111
- 9 Catholic Missionaries/Educators: The Fathers, Sisters and Brothers who belong to Roman Catholic Church are referred to as Catholic Educators.
- 10 Vicariate of Patna is a territorial jurisdiction of the Bishop of Patna. In 1846, Sikkim was placed under Anastasius Hartmann, a Swiss Capuchin, Bishop of Patna.
- 11 Tibet- Hindustan mission was a territory assigned to the Catholic Missionaries in 18th century. The missionaries made many attempts to enter Lhasa.
- 12 Brief is a short and formal document from the Pope.
- 13 Hosten H: (1931) Darjeeling 1846-1888.
- 14 Louis Bernard and Augustus Desgodins who belong to Missions Etrangeres De Paris explored routes to enter Lhasa through Sikkim and Nepal towards the end of 19th century.
- 15 Hosten H (1931) Darjeeling 1846-1888.
- 16 Rhenock which means black hill is mentioned in the letters of French Missionaries. St Joseph's School of the Roman Catholic Diocese is situated here.
- 17 Bishop Eric Benjamin Moktan was born on May 13th, 1920 at Kurseong. He was appointed Bishop of Darjeeling diocese on 9th August 1962. He encouraged Fathers, Sisters and Brothers to establish schools in Sikkim. He was the spiritual leader of the diocese until his death on 12th May 1994.
- 18 Fr Joseph Kunnath worked at St Xavier's School Pakyong and St Thomas School, Gangtok. He was instrumental in establishing schools at Namchi, Malbassey, Geyzing and Gangtok. He was a mediator between the Government of

- Sikkim and the Bishop of Darjeeling in establishing schools in Sikkim. He is buried in St Thomas School campus, Gangtok.
- 19 Fr Jean Marie Brahier, was a Swiss national who had Indian citizenship and worked in the Darjeeling hills and Sikkim. He established Gaucharan and Martham mission in Sikkim. He was an expert in Co-operative development and Management. His co-operative Societies helped the poor. He died on 27th October 1993.
 - 20 Fr Aurelio Gianora arrived in Kalimpong in 1934 and was appointed the Prefect Apostolic of Kalimpong-Sikkim. He stayed at Kalimpong and missioned Fr Leonard Molomo to establish a school in Sikkim. He handed over the Prefecture Apostolic of Sikkim to Bishop Eric Benjamin in 1962. He stayed at Cluny Villa Maria during his retirement stage as spiritual guide to Cluny novices. He died on 31.12.1995.
 - 21 Leonard Molomo was the first Catholic priest to enter Sikkim in 1951 and establish the first Catholic School in 1952.
 - 22 Bishop Stephen Lepcha was born on 22nd December 1952 at Suruk. He completed his primary school at Suruk Dong School. He completed his secondary school at St George's Pedong and Senior Secondary from St Robert's, Darjeeling. After his formation, he was ordained on 15th December 1982 at St Maurice Church, Suruk. He was consecrated as Bishop on 8th December 1997 at St Joseph's school ground, Darjeeling. He is the spiritual leader of all the Catholics living in three hill sub-divisions Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong, the state of Sikkim and the country of Bhutan.