

Vol. 3, No. 2, Oct.- Dec., 2016

ISSN- 2349-6274

# ADROITIC

An International Refereed Research Journal

Listed and Indexed with ISSN Directory, Paris



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## A History of the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission in Sikkim



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**Abstract:** *Sikkim constitutes the western most part of the eastern Himalayas. Sikkim, a small Indian state merged with India as the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Union on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1975. From 1642 to 1975, she was a landlocked Himalayan kingdom under the control of the Chogyals belonging to the Namgyal dynasty of Tibet. Before the coming of the missionaries in Sikkim, there was informal education system. It was based on experience and passed down from generation to generation. They started monastic education in the Buddhist monasteries. Every community in Sikkim had their faith healers or shamans in Sikkim. The common people used to go to the priests of local faith who used to heal the diseases cause by evil spirits. However, with the coming of the Christian missionaries in Sikkim brought a change in the existing educational setting by sowing the first seeds of western education and western medicine. It was not an easy task, they faced a lot of objections from the Durbar administration. Ministry through education and health facilities became the most effective means of evangelizing people for the missionaries. This paper focuses on the contribution of the Christian Missionaries in the field of education with special reference to the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission in Sikkim.*

**Introduction:** There are different views on missionary expansion in India. Many view that the European missionaries were able to carry out their work in India due to colonial monetarism and the evangelical political activism. They are sometimes regarded as the agents of colonial expansion. Rudolf (2007) argues that “not all missionaries were collaborators but by and large people found it difficult to distinguish the ‘white man who ruled’ from the ‘white man who preached’”<sup>i</sup> Many have argued that the intent of the missionaries is to propagate the gospel through means of various social services, like medical services and education; yet, there are opinions that “the missionary intensions might have been good but it directly or indirectly contributed towards the colonial establishment.”<sup>ii</sup>

It is argued that, in Sikkim, some of the important works related to modern education took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> & early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The role of Christian missionaries/missions is of great importance. This paper focuses on the contribution of the Scottish Foreign Mission towards education in Sikkim.

**History of Schooling in Sikkim:** Sikkim a landlocked erstwhile Himalayan kingdom, ruled by the Chogyals of Namgyal dynasty (1642-1975) merged with India as the 22<sup>nd</sup> state of the Union on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1975. Education is the prime requirement of human beings as compared to other essential amenities of life. It will always be the motivating force to lead human kind towards the development. The notion of education has been widened now that it encompasses every field of human activity indicating it by different names at different places.<sup>iii</sup> Sikkim underwent a lot of changes in the educational system. In the beginning, there was informal education system where knowledge was much based on experiences passed down from generation to generation.<sup>iv</sup> Many languages used in social communication lacked their own script. A few scripts like the Lepcha, Tibetan, Bhutia and Devnagari were in use, but needless to say, those scripts were learnt by the elites, ruling class, priests or monks, while, “the common mass remained unlettered.”<sup>v</sup>

It may be noted that the immigration of Tibetans started during early 17<sup>th</sup> century and the idea of Tibetan form of Buddhism, commonly known as Lamaism, was imported under the patronage of Lama Lhatsun Chhenpo. “By mid of 17<sup>th</sup> century the religious based Buddhist monastic education was started in many Tibetan/Buddhist Monasteries”<sup>vi</sup> across the state. It is said that this system was good for those preparing for the priesthood under the control of high lamas in the monastic order.<sup>vii</sup>

Like the Tibetan Lamas, the Nepali priest or *Pujaris* also brought along, their distinct rituals and culture. They started temple based learning *pathsalas* where Sanskrit *granthas* were taught especially to the Brahmin caste of Hindu community. One of the old schools where Sanskrit was taught was Samdong School in East Sikkim.<sup>viii</sup>

The modern formal education in Sikkim was however started by the Christian missionaries. The first mission to have arrived in Darjeeling was the Start Mission, led by William Start, in 1841 AD, 6 years after the Darjeeling area was ceded to British administration by the Maharaja of Sikkim. After Start, Scottish Mission, led by Macfarlane made inroads to Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Initially, this missions established schools and hospitals in

Darjeeling and Kalimpong and later moved towards Sikkim with the help of some of the students studied in the mission schools there. Though these missionaries had to wait for quite some time to get permission from the Durbar administration in Sikkim, yet their entry brought about a significant transformation in the existing educational scenario, "sowing the first seeds of modern education."<sup>xix</sup>

The formal schools, training schools, printing press and evangelical work went together. The Minutes of the Scottish Mission Council dated 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> June 1924 clearly specified 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.<sup>x</sup>

William Macfarlane of Church of Scotland Mission came to Darjeeling and started working with the Lepchas and Nepalis in June 1870.<sup>xi</sup> He was an ardent preacher and was determined that a mission in Darjeeling would help him to carry the Light to the great kingdoms like Nepal, *Sikkim* and *Butan*.<sup>xii</sup> With the establishment of churches in these areas, Sunday school, church service and preaching were accelerated.<sup>xiii</sup> Local leaders and catechists were imparted education, through whom works in different places began and carried further. In 1873 the mission started two normal schools to train the Lepcha and Nepali teachers for the district schools. Macfarlane gave importance to education to begin with. In this regard, Dick B. Dewan has said "Rev. W. Macfarlane, due to whose assiduous labour of disseminating the holy gospel and the western knowledge among the sleepy hill people of Darjeeling and Sikkim made them wake up from their deep slumber, was the pioneer missionary to devise a broad scheme of education for this hill region."<sup>xiv</sup>

Macfarlane went to Sikkim in 1872-73 and wanted to start modern schools in different parts of the state but during that time they were not allowed to reside in the country of Sikkim. The Scottish missionaries had zeal to work in Sikkim even before the extension of the British administrative control over it. In fact, Scottish missionaries like A. Turnbull and W.S. Sutherland made several visits to Sikkim in the 1880s, but were not granted permission to reside there. From 1880, Sutherland made annual trips to Tumlong, the then capital to get permission from the Maharaja of Sikkim for missionaries to settle in his kingdom.<sup>xv</sup> But permission was finally granted following J.C. White's appointment as the British Political officer in 1889. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission was "firmly established"<sup>xvi</sup> in Sikkim. Their work in the field of education acted as counter to the monastic education.<sup>xvii</sup>

During the time when the European missionaries were not allowed to stay in Sikkim, MacFarlane used the Lepcha converts from Kalimpong for preaching and teaching among their fellow tribesmen in Sikkim. Sources reveal that by 1886 there were 26 Christians in Sikkim, and by 1888 their numbers doubled.<sup>xviii</sup> It reflects that along with the establishment of schools, religious conversion also took place. The first mission school in Sikkim was started by Sutherland who had distinguished educational gifts and was genius in developing new methods of teaching in the training school. It was started in Daramdin near Phambong (West Sikkim) in November 1880 with the help of Gambu Lepcha, a Christian teacher and a native. The school was an old bamboo hut which housed both the school and the church and the entire expense for the construction was borne by Gambu's family and the Christian teachers without mission's help.<sup>xix</sup>

By the end of 1890, seven schools were opened in South and West Sikkim and one at Singtam in East Sikkim. Out of these schools, three were located in Western Sikkim at Chakhung, Soreng and Mangbo and other three at Kitam, Sadam and Namthang in South. The responsibility to run these newly established schools were given to the Lepcha and Nepali teachers trained in Kalimpong.<sup>xx</sup> It is believed that during 1875, some landlords of Sikkim had started schools on their own resources and premises which also were later handed over to the missionaries.<sup>xxi</sup> Beside the 3RS, subjects like Geography, History, English, Hindi, Science and Tibetan were taught in these mission schools.<sup>xxii</sup> During 1885-1890s more schools were opened and the number of teachers also doubled. In Sikkim more than a dozen schools were opened by the Scottish Mission by 1900. The government report records the following 14 Scottish Mission schools established in different locations of Sikkim by 1901.

#### Name of the Schools.

- Temi School, South Sikkim
- Pakyong School, East Sikkim
- Rhenock School, East Sikkim
- Kamlet School, South Sikkim
- Chidam School (now Sadam), South Sikkim
- Vok School, South Sikkim
- Soreyong School (now Soreng), West Sikkim

- Chakhung School, West Sikkim
- Chambong School (now Chumbung), West Sikkim
- Dentam School, West Sikkim
- Lace School of Vok, South Sikkim
- Paljor Namgyal Girls School (PNGS), Gangtok, East Sikkim
- Namthang School, South Sikkim
- Singtham School (now Singtam), East Sikkim

(Source: *Administrative Report of the Government of Sikkim, 1901.*)

J. Macara was the first Scottish missionary to have settled inside Sikkim with the aim of evangelization through various means including education. He resided in Chidam from 1893 to 1898. Macara was succeeded by W.G. Mackean. He was the second missionary resided there for four years from 1902-1905. Under his supervision, the converted Christian Lepchas of Namthang first built separate buildings for schooling and the church service in 1902. Mackean left for Kalimpong in 1905 but again came to Sikkim in 1910 and stayed till 1920. He built a new mission centre in Temi, South Sikkim. There they started weaving schools and raised poultry which in turn helped the natives to supplement their food and income. It is recorded in the Mission News, November 1907 that the Maharaja openly recognized the Mission's work in the school and appealed for even more to be opened. It is interesting to note that many teachers were also appointed as catechists and the vice-versa.

A few statistics: The table below (Table 1) shows the number of state run schools, mission schools and other schools funded by different institutions, established during 1910-11. It also provides the enrolment details and state expenditure/contribution during 1910-11. The table below clearly shows that the maximum numbers of schools then were under the Scottish Mission. The state's contribution towards education also seems to be satisfactory as there was increase in the number of schools directly administered by the government during 1920s and also gave minimal grant in aid to some of the mission schools within the state.

**Table-1 Schools, Enrolment and Funding by the State during 1910-11**

Description of Schools	No. of Schools	No. of pupils	State expenditure/ Contributions
<b>State run Schools</b>			
a. Bhutia Boarding School	1	42	4,055
b. Nepali Boarding School	1	55	2,121
<b>Scottish Mission Schools</b>			
a. Lace schools	3	415	1,000
b. Day Schools	12		
c. Night Schools	12		
<b>Scandinavian alliance mission schools</b>			
a. Day Schools	NA	NA	436
b. Night Schools	NA	NA	
<b>All Schools</b>	<b>29°</b>	<b>512°</b>	<b>7,612</b>

Source: *Administrative Report 1910-11.*

It may be noted that out of twenty five primary schools in 1913-14, 14 schools i.e 56% were run by the missions, whereas, 6 were run by the landlords, 3 by the state and 2 by the Scandinavian Alliance Mission.<sup>xiii</sup> The Administrative Report of Sikkim shows that by 1920-21 total numbers of schools owned by the state increased to 7 and the primary school run by the mission was 13.

Mackean left Sikkim in 1920 after serving ten years in the second term of his stay. His stay was marked by the engagement on schools as well as small churches.<sup>xiv</sup> These works were later supplemented by medical work. The local people were trained to work in schools and medical centers. During the later half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century many dedicated teachers from Sikkim greatly contributed towards imparting education. Their names are as follows:

- Gambu Lepcha in Phambong, West Sikkim
- Apun Luksom in Singtam, East Sikkim
- Karthik Singh Rai in Chidam (now Sadam), South Sikkim
- Dorji in Chidam (now Sadam), South Sikkim
- Parbal Singh Rai in Chidam (now Sadam), South Sikkim
- Dachek Lepcha in Soreng, West Sikkim
- Adyat Lepcha (Elatji Matiyas) in Chidam (now Sadam), South Sikkim
- Sonam Tarbo Lepcha in Vok, South Sikkim

- LalSingh Limbu in Saryong (now Soreng), West Sikkim.

During this period most of the mission works were concentrated in south and west Sikkim since the missionaries were not allowed to station in the capital Gangtok in east and also in a few areas in North Sikkim. It may be noted that the Scandinavian Alliance Mission was also working in Sikkim but the Scottish Mission was more influential. As such, in 1923 the Scandinavian Alliance Mission handed over their school at Song (now Sang) to the Scottish Mission. They accepted it with compensation for the property which opened the way for the long desired, clear territorial division of Sikkim between them and Scandinavian Alliance Mission.<sup>xv</sup>

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 was the first female Scottish missionary who got permission to stay in Gangtok. 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<sup>xvi</sup> was opened. Nothing was done for the commoners' children. But things changed after the arrival of Mary Scot in Gangtok. 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<sup>xvii</sup> with an aim to educate and uplift the deprived women, particularly, youngsters. This was the only female school in Sikkim for many decades. Scott gave much importance in sending the teachers for training. From 1930 provisions for scholarships were made to many locals 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.<sup>xviii</sup> Perry writes "Scott's emphasis was not on education for its own sake, but on education which would be used to contribute to the development of Sikkim."<sup>xix</sup>

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 the departure of Mrs. Rachel Fairservice, this school was continuously 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. The formal modern schools and western model of education started by the Scottish missionaries later got the support of the Sikkim government, which also reveals the state's desire to propagate it. The administrative reports of the Government of Sikkim indicate that nearly half of the expenditure for these schools was borne by the state which shows the positive attitude of the Government towards the education for masses and the missionaries as well. Table-2 below shows the education budget and grant-in-aid provided to the mission schools by the government of Sikkim from 1905-06 to 1937-38.

Table-2 Education budget including Grant in Aid to the mission schools (in thousands)

Year	Amount	Year	Amount
1905-06	2429	1924-25	13873
1906-07	5096	1925-26	20758
1907-08	6648	1926-27	23002
1908-09	7800	1927-28	26381
1909-10	7350	1928-29	27600
1910-11	7350	1929-30	27832
1911-12	8310	1930-31	27655
1912-13	8770	1931-32	27772
1913-14	8770	1932-33	27688
1914-15	8845	1933-34	28523
1915-16	9420	1934-35	30137
1916-17	7995	1935-36	28800
1917-18	8381	1936-37	29200
1918-19	9115	1937-38	30600
1919-20	11272		
1920-21	7432		
1921-22	7432		
1922-23	9430		
1923-24	NA		

Note: Record not available from 1938 to 1947.

Source: *Annual Administration Reports of the Government of Sikkim, 1905-1938*

The Scottish Mission did a pioneering work towards education and health service 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 15 were of Scottish mission which suggests that almost 43% of schools in Sikkim were run by them.

Table-3 below provides the names of the schools run by these four different organizations.

**Table-3 Schools run by different organizations during 1947**

Government maintained Schools	Scottish Mission Schools	Scandinavian Mission Schools	Schools run by the Landlords
Sir Tashi Namgyal High School	Temi primary School	Weaving School, lachung	Kaluk Primary School
Enchey monastery School	Pakyong Primary School	Song Primary School	Heegaon Primary School, Lachen
Village School, Lachen	Soreng primary school	Rinzing primary school	Chakung Primary School
Village School, Lachung	Rhenock primary school		Timbur bung primary School
School of Industry, Gangtok	Kamlet primary school		Mangalbare Primary School
	Sadam primary school		Mangsari Primary School
	Sosing primary school		Geyzing Primary School
	Chakung primary school		Dodak Primary School
	Namchi primary school		Rongli Primary School
	Vok primary school		Samdong Primary School
	Phambong primary school		Rhenock Primary School
	Dentam primary school		Sumbuk Primary School
	P N Girls High school		
	Wok Lace school		
	Namthang primary school		

Source: Administration Report of the Government of Sikkim

**Conclusion:** The Missionaries entered into the educational scenario of Sikkim through the converts who were educated in mission schools in Kalimpong and Darjeeling. Schools established by the Kazis or Durbar was basically meant for the elites, whereas, the main intent of the missionary schools were to teach the destitute. Perhaps this also fulfilled their object of bringing the people into Christian fold. Having said so, we must appreciate many of these missionaries for their selfless service. Many locals were employed by them in these schools, dispensaries and in other activities and many more got employment as they imparted skill based education such as weaving, lace making, gardening, carpentry etc. The contribution of Scot towards the upliftment of women is laudable. It is seen that the Scottish Missionaries always encouraged self support. Their contribution in the field of education in Sikkim is immense. However, the success of Scottish Mission regarding formal education in Sikkim lies in the native workers/teacher's dedication and sacrifice. Today as most of the schools are run by the state, we fondly remember those early missionaries and local heroes who could realize that education is the light indeed.

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