

A Study on the Initiatives Taken for the Introduction of Modern Education in Sikkim in the Early 20th Century

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Abstract

The establishment of British administration in Sikkim brought about changes in different spheres of administration. For smooth functioning of colonial administration in Sikkim and its Indo-Tibetan trade, administrative infrastructure was gradually being developed. A need was also felt for the introduction of modern education in the country. Therefore, from the beginning of the 20th century gradual steps were taken for the establishment of modern educational institutions in Sikkim.

Keywords: Colonial administration, Indo-Tibetan Trade, Modern Education

Prior to the introduction of modern education, Sikkim had its own traditional Lamaistic system of education. This system of education dealt with religious teaching and learning which was intended to prepare monks for the religious order. In Sikkim, as in Tibet, the priests were made and not born. It was after severe tests in religious education in Buddhist scriptures that a young seeker of knowledge was admitted into the order of monastic instruction. Students often had to go to Tibet for higher order of the monastic training. The system of religious education in Sikkim continues till date (Kharel.S,2006).

Sikkim was a British Protectorate from 1817 until 1947. In 1889 British administration was extended to Sikkim and a British Political Agency was created to run the administration. John Claude White was appointed as the first political officer. He began his administration with the help of a council.

Immediately after the beginning of British administration, a thought was given for imparting modern education to the Sikkimese. The credit for initiating modern system of instruction goes to John Claude White, the first British political officer. The system of education established in Sikkim was similar to the system of education in British India (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013).

For the British, the need for imparting modern education was to create a group of loyalists who would support their administration. It was also felt that English education will minimise the interest in monastic education which in turn would help in minimising Tibetan influence in Sikkim. They therefore aimed at educating the royal princes and children of the elitist section which as a result would be effective in supporting British administration in Sikkim. The beginning in this direction was seen when J.C.White sent a batch of students consisting of eighteen boys belonging to the family of Lamas and Kazis (Bhutia landlords) to Darjeeling for education. (Kharel.S,2006).

As in the case of India, the British were hesitant to spend on education from the Imperial treasury. It was therefore proposed by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal that the expenditure incurred for education should be met from the revenue of Sikkim State. The utilitarian argument thus found its place in the decision to establish English education in Sikkim (Kharel.S,2006).

In May 1895, the Government of Bengal requested the Director of Public Instruction to act upon the suggestion put forward by the political officer for establishing a boarding house at Gangtok for the education of the sons of Lamas and Kazis. In November 1895, the Governor of Bengal sanctioned the construction of a school at Gangtok along with a boarding house for twenty students and quarters for two masters at an aggregate cost of Rs.656. Its annual cost of expenditure was estimated at Rs. 3,500 which included the cost for the maintenance of the school, the boarding house and salary of two teachers (Kharel.S,2006). The charges of expenditure were to be met from Sikkim's revenue (Judicial File, 1896). The Government's sanction made in 1895 however took almost ten years to materialise. The school saw its beginning in 1906 and was named 'Bhutia Boarding School' (Administration Report, 1906-07). Its location was at the present day Baluakhani area in Gangtok. The Bhutia Boarding School began functioning on the standard of Middle English school for boys (Kharel.S, 2006)

In 1907 a Nepali Boarding school for boys was also established in Gangtok near the present day Lal Market area (Kharel.S,2006). The total number of students and boarders in both these schools of Gangtok in 1908 is presented in the following table:

Table: I

Number of boys in Bhutia and Nepali Boarding School in 1908:

Schools	Total Roll	Boarders
Bhutia Boarding School	47 boys	27 (24 students were financially supported by the Government)
Nepali Boarding School	58	5

Source: Administration Report of the State of Sikkim for the year 1907-08

The subjects taught in both the schools were: English, Arithmetic, Tibetan and Hindi. The Government encouraged children to participate in physical drill, gymnastics and other sports (Administration Report,1907-08). The products from these schools were sent to Government High School at Darjeeling for further education with financial support from the Government. The new system of education was imparted according to the curriculum followed in the neighbouring state of Bengal. From 1915 onward Sanskrit was also taught to the senior boys in the Nepali Boarding School (Administration Report, 1914-15). After 1918, the curriculum was reshaped. In Bhutia Boarding School the new curriculum included English, mathematics, Tibetan vernacular, history, geography, gymnastics and physical drill. Similarly, English, mathematics, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tibetan primer, history, geography, gymnastics and physical drill were taught in the Nepali Boarding School (Administration Report, 1919-20).

Since the very beginning, a liberal policy was followed towards education and therefore the Government encouraged grant of special concessions to the students. Around this period, the political officer encouraged the prince, Sidkeong Tulku, an extra-ordinary man with high intelligence and a forceful personality, to complete his education in England. Sidkeong Tulku was the son of Thudop Namgyal, the ninth consecrated ruler of Sikkim. The political officer felt that, the prince with a forceful personality, if educated in England will bring reforms in many fields in his own country. Sidkeong Tulku, along with three Kazi boys viz. Nari Kazi, grandson of Khangsa Dewan, Dowgay Kazi, son of Biksithan Kazi and Kalzang, the grandson of Tatung Kazi of Samdong accompanied by J.C.White were sent to England in

September 1906 to complete their education (Kharel.S,2006). In England the prince, Sidkeong Tulku was admitted in Pembroke College in January, 1907. During two years of his stay in England, Sidkeong Tulku distinguished himself in the corporate life of the University. On his return to Sikkim in 1908, he was appointed as Vice-President of the State Council and given the charge of Forests, Monasteries and Education departments. Thus, from this time onward we find that Sidkeong Tulku with his reformatory ideas expanded the system of modern education in the state. He made the beginning by supervising the administration of the Bhutia and Nepali Boarding schools (Administration Report, 1908-09).

As per the Administration Report of 1910-11, the scholars in these schools were making fair progress and their conduct was reported to be good. The importance of these schools and the need to educate young boys was increasingly felt by the Kazis and Thikadars (contractors). Therefore, from this period onwards the number of students comprising of the sons and relatives of the Kazis and Thikadars attending schools gradually increased (Kharel.S,2006).

To expand the facility of modern education to the general public, prince Sidkeong Tulku decided in a Council meeting in 1910 to establish schools in Namchi, Rhenock and Pathing (Administration Report, 1909-10). Thus Government schools were opened in these places which began functioning in 1912. In 1913 one more village school was opened at Duga in east Sikkim. The Council also decided that all the landlords should send at least half the number of their sons for English education to Schools (Administration Report, 1913-14). In 1914, teaching of Lepcha language was also introduced in the Government Schools of Sikkim. To encourage female education, a school for Kazis' daughters was opened at Gangtok under the initiative of Sidkeong Tulku in 1913. The subjects taught in this school were Tibetan, Hindi, and knitting. By 1918 subjects like spinning and lace making were also introduced. The beginning in this school was made by enrollment of five girls in 1913 which rose to thirteen in 1915. Female education was later given a new shape by the Scottish Mission with the opening of a full-fledged girl's schools in 1923 at Gangtok known as Paljor Namgyal Girls' school. The school was established under the initiative of Mary Scott of the Scottish Mission (Kharel.S,2006).

It is worth mentioning that Christian missionaries had been making initiatives to open schools in Sikkim since the time of the establishment of British administration. With the support of J.C White, the Scandinavian mission representative, Mathilda Johanson opened the first weaving school at Lachung in 1889. They started another weaving school at Lachen. Apart from the weaving schools, the Scandinavian mission had earlier started a school at Phambong in 1881 with the help of one Gombu Lepcha who was a Christian convert. He was appointed as the teacher in the same school. There were seven mission schools established by the Christian missionaries between 1899 and 1890. Out of seven schools, three were located in west Sikkim at Chakhung, Soreong and Mangbo, three in Central and South Sikkim at Kitam, Chidam (Sadam) and Namthang and one in Singtam in east Sikkim (Gazetteer, 2013). With the passage of time there were several Christian mission schools in Sikkim.

We therefore understand that other than the already existing monastic system of education, the beginning of the 20th century saw the establishment of modern system of education in Sikkim. The response from the people towards English education was tremendous. The Kazis and Thikadars were compelled by rule to send their sons to schools. It is also evident that female education was initiated by Sidkeong Tulku (Kharel.S,2006).

A system of 'surety bond' was introduced by the state council in 1915. Under this system, students sponsored by the government for pursuing higher studies outside the state had to return back to the country after completion of their selected course of studies and work for the Government. Financial help was also provided to those boys interested to pursue learning on Buddhist literature and scripture. Students were sent to the neighbouring countries for such courses. In 1915 free boarders were sent to Chorpung in Tibet and Ceylon for learning Buddhist scriptures in Pali. We therefore find that other than encouraging the expansion of modern system of education the Government also tried to revive the learning of Buddhism in the state of Sikkim. Primary education in the schools under the Government was free but a very modest scale of fee was charged from the third standard (Kharel.S,2006).

In 1920 Tashi Namgyal, the then ruler reorganised the department of education and placed it under a Director. It is pertinent to mention here that under Tashi Namgyal, Sikkim witnessed a slow yet definite process of transfer of the administrative powers

from the British political office to the Maharaja in Council. The ruler appointed one Barmiak Kusho as the 'Director of Education' who was assisted by a 'Board of Education'. Other than supervising different educational institutions of the state, the 'Board' used to assist the Judicial Secretary by giving advice on all important questions relating to educational and ecclesiastical matters (Administration Report, 1919-20).

Till 1925 there were fourteen schools established by the Thikadars in different villages of Sikkim with financial aid given by of the people. Kripasalyan Rai in his writing states that Phak Tshering, the elder brother of Kazi Lendup Dorjee, the first Chief Minister of Sikkim, offered immense help towards education in Sikkim. He financially helped Primary Schools at Kaluk, Heegaon, Timberbung, Manglabare, Sosing and Namchi. He also established a hostel in Darjeeling to accommodate the Sikkimese students from Sumin, Ralang, Song, Sosing, Gayzing and Chakhung (Rai Kripasalyan, 'Ankur', no.25, West Sikkim).

In 1925, the two important Government schools of Gangtok viz, the Bhutia Boarding School and the Nepali Boarding School were amalgamated into a new institution. The institution came to be known as Tashi Namgyal High School. The first Head Master of the school was Mr. C.E. Dudley, a capable European educationist and a graduate of Dublin University on a salary of Rs.400 per month (Synopsis of the principal events of Sikkim State, 1922, Judicial Department). Dudley was also appointed as the superintendent of public instruction in the State. The school followed the Bengal Educational Code and curriculum. The educational standard of the school was up to matriculation level and it was affiliated to the Calcutta University in the year 1930. In 1931, the first batch of students of the Tashi Namgyal High School appeared for their matriculation examination. The school was under direct management of the Durbar. By 1926 the strength of the staff of the school was raised from 11 to 15. In 1926 there were 209 boys (including day boys) on the rolls, of which 40 were free boarders. In pursuance of the rules of the Bengal Educational Code, a school management committee was formed to especially supervise the general working of the school which had emerged as the premier institution of Sikkim (Kharel.S,2006).

From the above discussion, it is understood that by 1930s Sikkim could boast of having a good system of modern education. The British initiative in this direction resulted to the birth of modern education in Sikkim. Female education also was given importance with the establishment of a school for Kazis' daughters in 1913. The initiative of the Scottish Mission for female education led to the establishment of

Paljor Namgyal Girls' School. The Missionaries were in fact instrumental in the introduction of female education in Sikkim. The Church of Scottish Mission and the Scandinavian Alliance Missions worked actively in the field of spreading modern education throughout Sikkim. The thikadars and the kazis with the support from the common people were also instrumental in the growth of modern education in Sikkim during its initial stage.

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