

## Early Educational experiences in Shillong

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The first British Political Head Quarters was located at Nongkhlaw<sup>1</sup>. The Head Quarters was then shifted to Cherrapunjee for strategic reasons. The land there was acquired from the Syiem of Cherra. In 1854, the Khasi Hills were placed under an Assistant Commissioner for civil functions. The government ordered the shifting of the district Head quarters from Cherrapunjee to the valley of Yeodo for administrative and strategic reasons. The offices of the Deputy Commissioner were transferred to Yeodo in 1864-1866. It took the name of Shillong after the sacred peak. Shillong was born on 28 April 1866<sup>2</sup>.

Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionership in 1874. The first Chief Commissioner Col. R.H. Keatinge assumed his office on 7 February 1874<sup>3</sup>. The office of the erstwhile Commissioner at Guwahati was designated as the Secretariat<sup>4</sup>. The Assam Secretariat was at Guwahati for about 40 days after which it was shifted to Shillong, the new capital of the province of Assam on 20 March 1874<sup>5</sup>. Soon after the shifting of capital to Shillong, Col. Keatinge conducted enquiries with a view to ascertaining what the number of European and Eurasian children was likely to be in 1880<sup>6</sup>. He found that there would probably be some 600 such children in Assam in 1880. There were children of tea planters and government employees. At that time, European and Eurasian children as a rule were sent to schools in England or Calcutta. For the illegitimate children, whom their European fathers would not recognise, an asylum was found in Calcutta orphanages.

The Policy of Laisser faire of classical liberalism which was the guiding principle of British capitalism did not find suitable to take initiative in later part of nineteenth century for establishment of schools for European children in Assam. Col. Keatinge found no ground for the

direct interference of government in the matter of even elementary education for their own children in Assam on the ground that Assam Government had not heard any complaints that Calcutta scholastic institutions could not accommodate European and Eurasian children of Assam who could not be sent to be brought up in England.

Col. Keatinge, however was in favour of establishment of a school for European and Eurasian children at Shillong because of excellent climate of the place. For this reason he was prepared to do everything possible for the establishment of such a school at Shillong, although the government was not in favour for direct intervention in educational field. There were indications of private initiative for such a school at Shillong at that time and government was prepared to encourage, and assist such a venture of private initiative.

The status of education in the last half of nineteenth century Assam was not a happy one. The population of Assam in 1874 was only 40 lakhs, which in 1892 was about 55 lakhs. The total population of Assam proper 5 districts was about 2 million only. The number of schools and scholars in 1874 were 1,068 and 28,657 respectively and the corresponding figures in 1890-91 were 2356 and 73,095. The number of graduates in 1874 was 2 while the same in 1892 was 32.

In 1866, a second grade college, then called a High school was established at Guwahati. In the first year one student passed the first examination in Arts (F.A.); in the second year the number rose to four, in the third year, three were successful, in the fourth year the number dwindled to one. After that not a single student could pass. Col. Keatinge, the first Chief Commissioner of Assam abolished the high school in 1876 which was necessitated apparently by financial exigencies.

In compliance with the instruction of Government of India Home Department (Education) No. 8 dated 8 October 1881, Simla, a day school was

opened for European and Eurasian children on 1 February 1882 at Gauhati with 13 students and was placed under a Local Committee. The cost was estimated at Rs.1100/- per annum, the receipts were estimated at Rs. 300/-, the balance being defrayed from Provincial funds. The Head Mistress of the Guwahati school took in a few boarders in addition to the day schools. The school remained at work until February 1886 when it was closed.

In pursuance of the same policy of providing elementary education to European and Eurasian children, on 1 March 1881, the European and Eurasian Girls Boarding and Day School was opened at Shillong and placed under the management of a committee consisting of the Chaplain of Shillong as Secretary and other members sanctioned by Government.

The European and Eurasian Girls' Boarding and Day school continued to work until 30 November 1887, when the school closed for long winter holidays<sup>12</sup>. The average attendance for the year 1887-88 was only 8, with an average monthly roll number of 9; considering the work it was doing, it was not considered justified the expenditure on it. A private school to cater the European and Eurasian children got started during this time. The government decided to close down the school and give a grant to the private school, which was accordingly done from 1 March 1888. The private school was, however allowed the use of European Govt. Girls school building. It should be mentioned that the Shillong European and Eurasian Girls' school from 1881 to 1887 was maintained by the receipt from fees and grants from Diocesan Board of Education, the balance being met from Provincial Funds, so that for that period, it was practically a government institution.

From 1 March 1881 to 1 March 1883, the school was a co-educational one; then until December 1886, it was a purely girls' school. From that time on the closing of Shillong Boys' School, it became a co-educational school, admitting besides girls, boys upto the age of 11 years.

On the representation of the Committee of the Shillong Girls School, that there was a need of a separate school for European and Eurasian boys in Shillong, the Chief Commissioner sanctioned the starting of a boarding school for them at Shillong which was accordingly opened on 1st March 1883 with 11 boys. This school worked until December 1886<sup>13</sup>. From January 1887, the Shillong Girls School again became a co-educational school, admitting girls upto the age of 16 and boys upto 11 year of age. To compensate for the closing of the boys school, all deserving boys, over 11 years and under 15 years of age whose names were then on the school roll, were granted scholarships of Rs. 15/- a month, tenable for 3 years at an approved hill school. Two annual scholarship of the same value were founded, tenable under the same conditions for European and Eurasian boys above 11 and under 15 years of age, being sons of indigent parents living in Assam. They were sent to Darjeeling or Kurseong or other similar school. Only 8 boys were on the rolls when Shillong Boys School was closed down. Of them 4 were children of Rev. J. Jones of Jowai who intended to taking them to England.

On the eve of great earthquake of 12 June 1887, one Miss Blake was running a purely adventure school. The school earlier was run by one Miss Jones for European and Eurasian children. Miss Blake paid Rs. 500/- only to Miss Jones for the good will of the school. Apparently, Miss Blake's school was not eligible for Government grant in aid. The Government was really the proprietor of this school, the building, furniture etc. being the government property and Miss Blake had no claim to them.

In 1896, the only school for European and Eurasian children in Assam was the Shillong Mixed School run by Miss Blake. She received a grant-in-aid of Rs. 140/- a month and was allowed to use the government school building with its furniture at a monthly rent of Rs. 50/- only. The school aimed at teaching upto the Entrance

students of the Calcutta University. But in 1896, the most advanced students, 3 in number, were only just commencing the first standard of the middle stage education. There were in 1896, 24 names on the rolls-16 girls and 8 boys. Only 6 of them were boarders. The charge of the boarders was without extra Rs.40/- a month and that for day scholars from Rs. 5/- to Rs.10/-. The charges for boarders was beyond the means of the poorer classes of European and Eurasians, so that the school did not meet the requirements of the poorer classes outside Shillong, but it fairly met that of the residents of Shillong. The school demanded monthly extra Rs. 8/- for music, Rs.5/- for drawing, Rs.8/- for painting and Rs. 5/- for dancing. There was an annual fee of Rs. 20/- for medical expenses and Rs.14<sup>5</sup>/- for supplying stationery for the whole term.

The educational arrangements in Shillong were suited to respectable middle class European and Eurasians only and they did not meet the requirements of the poorer classes of those of Assam such as Railway Traffic Inspector on Rs. 175/-, Station Master, Telegraph Master on Rs. 100-200/- a month<sup>15</sup>. The European population in Assam on the eve of the great earthquake was probably not less than 2,500. There was a necessity of two good schools - one for boys and one for girls located in Shillong. But the school at Shillong catered the needs of middle class Europeans and did not meet the requirements of poorer class of European and Eurasians of Assam. It did not supply an existing want. Rev.W.A.Hamilton, Chaplain, who was the Secretary of European and Eurasian School, Shillong resigned on 11 January 1887<sup>16</sup> and Mr. J.Wilson, Inspector of Schools, was appointed as Secretary to the School Committee by the Chief Commissioner<sup>17</sup>. It became for all practical purpose a government school.

The European and Eurasian Girls Boarding and Day School at Shillong which was opened in 1881 as an aided institution and which was co-educational one as a mixed aided school continued to work on this basis until 30 November 1887

when in consequence of the small attendance of pupils and as a private school for Europeans and Eurasian boys and girls had in the meanwhile been started in Shillong, it was decided by the government to close the aided school and to give instead a grant in aid to the proprietress of the private school allowing her to use of the government buildings in which the former aided school had been held and its furniture etc. at a rent. This arrangement came into force from 1 March 1888. The school building had been totally wrecked by the earth quake of 12 June 1897 and the school was closed.

Before the earthquake, the government had recognised the inadequacy of the provision in Shillong for education of European and Eurasian children. The Chief Commissioner in principle decided that there should be two good schools at Shillong, one for boys and one for girls, which scholarships provided by the government. But the calamity of the earthquake compelled the government to postpone all such schemes for European and Eurasian children's education at Shillong. The Chief Commissioner, Henry Cotton planned to restore the existing co-educational school at Shillong to the position it held before the earthquake<sup>18</sup>. But the old mixed school was not designed to meet the needs of poor classes of European and Eurasian children of Assam.

But the circumstances have somewhat changed for the Lady Superintendent of the old Mixed School, Miss Blake had expressed her desire to give up her private undertaking and there was little prospect of a school for European and Eurasian children being successfully conducted under private management at Shillong. This compelled the government to decide to erect a building on the old site near Laban and furniture and fittings restored at government cost. The Chief Commissioner ordered that the school be re-opened as a government institution under direct<sup>19</sup> supervision of the Director of Public Instruction.

In the past years, the Shillong School got benefits of the Hill Schools Nomination Endowment Fund from which grants of Rs. 10/- a month were given by Diocesan Board of Education, Calcutta, towards the school fees of children of European and Eurasian when parents were unable to meet fully expenses themselves. Diocesan Board decided to continue this practice when Shillong School was revived under government management<sup>20</sup>.

At this stage, different Christian Missions wanted to share in running this school. There was no other school in Assam by the end of nineteenth century specially managed for the education of European and Eurasian children. It is curious that no mission had for its object, the improvement morally and intellectually of the poorer European and Eurasian. No people in Assam were so much in need of educational help and guidance as poorer European and Eurasians<sup>21</sup>. Rev.J.C.Evans and Rev. R.Jones of Welsh Mission by their letter of 12 July 1898 wanted the right of appointing teachers, subject to the approval of government, young ladies of culture and high christian character who would thus be in a position to bring Christian influence to bear upon the children. Rev.Father Angelus M.Muenzloher SDS, Administrator, Apostolic of the Roman Catholic Mission, Assam by his letter No.38 of 9 March 1898 to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner requested government to give him some grant for opening at Shillong a school for European and Eurasian children. His idea was to open two schools - one for boys to be called St. Thomas and another for Girls, St., Anne's Convent. Although many schools managed by the missionary bodies were aided by Bengal Government at that time, but no school so managed then was wholly maintained by the Government<sup>22</sup>. The Assam Government rightly decided that it had no wish to make the school in any sense whatever a proselytising agency. It remained firm to its earlier decision to run the school after re-erection of the building on the old site near Laban as a government insitution<sup>23</sup>.

In 1896, there was no European school for boys in Assam. There were perhaps scarcely sufficient boys of poorer class of European and Eurasians to form a school except perhaps at Dibrugarh<sup>24</sup>. There was a fairly large number of European children in Assam, many of them were then sent to schools in the hills in other parts of India or England. The school at Shillong was intended for the respectable middle class and did not meet the requirements of the poorer classes of Assam whose claims<sup>25</sup> remained unattended at the turn of the century.

Shillong Government School for European and Eurasian children was opened on 6 August 1900 as a primary school under the superintendence of Miss Hughes. Owing, however to the want of provision in the rules for education of the poorer classes of European children from outlying districts whose parents were unable to pay the boarding charges of Rs.35/- per month, the school had been practically carried on as a day school and the attendance of the school was very small<sup>26</sup>.

### Notes & References

1. Major White, **Memoir of the Late David Scott.**
2. Letter No.180 dated 25 April 1888 from Col. Henry Hopkinson to Bengal Government.
3. Assam Records, File No. 6201/2G of 1874.
4. File No. 82J of 1880 - Assam Secretariat.
5. Notification No. 49 of 20 March 1874, File No. 23 AG of 1874.
6. Proceeding of the Chief Commissioner, Assam, Home Department June 1875. Letter No. 1949 dated 7 June 1875.
8. Letter No.511 P.S./52 48G dt. 3 July 1894 (issue date 24 July) 1894 from officiating Secretary to Chief Commissioner to the Commissioner of Assam Valley districts.
9. Letter from Secretary, Jorhat Sarvjanic Sabha to Secretary to Chief Commissioner, Assam dated 14 December 1892.
10. Government House Council Meeting at Dacca on 5 April 1911, Fin.A May 1911.

11. Home Department, Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, September, 1897.
12. Letter No.6947 dated 24 August 1896 from D.P.I. to Government.
13. Resolution of the Government No.439 dt. 21 January 1887.
14. Shillong School Prospectus -Administrative Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, Sep 1897.
15. Letter No. 185 P.I. - **6885G** dated 28 Septr.- 1897 from Assam to **India Government**.
16. File No. 60G 1887.
17. Letter No. 5241 **dated** 2 September 1887.
18. Letter No. 185 P.I/**68885G** dated 28 September 1897.
19. Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner in General Department No.35 76G **dated** 6 May 1898
20. Letter No.356 Sch. dated darjeeling 11 August 1899 from Revd. Arthuer E.Stone, Officiating Archeacon to Officiating D.P.I., Assam, W. Booth, D.Sc.
21. Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, November 1898 Home A November 1898 No. 136-183.
22. **Letter** No.2295 dt. Calcutta 6 May 1898 from **Dr. C.A.Martin, LL.D.,D.P.I.** Bengal to **Dr.W. Booth, Sc.D.** officiating D.P.I., Assam.
23. Government order No. 146 P.I.-6206G dt. 16 August 1898.
24. Letter No.6947 dt. 24 August 1896 from J.Wilson D.P.I. Assam to Government of Assam.
25. Letter No.185 P.I.-6885 dt. Septr.1897 from E.A.Gait, officiating Secretary to Chief Commissioner, Assam to Secretary, Home,India.
26. Home Department Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner, September 1902. Letter No.147 P.I./4702G dt.13 June 1902 from officiating Secretary to Chief Commissioner to the officiating D.P.I., Assam.