

Female Education in Mizoram

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In an early stage of the mission work in Mizoram, female education was regarded as being of little or no value compared to the work which the girls could have done at home in helping their parents. "Who would work if the girls were sent to school?" was always their question¹. Some were willing to part with their boys, but not with their girls. When the Missionaries asked the parents to send their girls to school; the answer would be, "she is too useful at home. Take my boy"².

According to the statistics available on female education in Mizoram in 1899, out of 56 pupils in the only school at Aizwal there were 6 girls in the rolls³. Even parents of these six girls could not spare them on all working days to attend classes as they had to spend more time working in the jhum or helping at home.

In 1901 the number of girls increased to 20 out of a total of 180 students. Two of the girls attended their classes regularly and made satisfactory progress. These two girls, Nui and Sarii, also showed their interest in the religious teachings imparted to them and desired to become Christians. A year later (1902) two slave girls Hnuziki and Pawngi, about 14 years of age, fled from the household of the Zote Chief, and went to Rowland's Station at Aizwal⁴. Ziki an *Inpuichhung Bawi*, was therefore, redeemed on payment of Rs.40/- by Rowlands. Pawngi, a *Chensen Bawi*, was made a free woman as the Government did not recognise the chief's claim to her under the circumstances⁵. Both of them attended the school and were supported by Rowlands.

In that year, two families were converted at Lungmawi Village. In one family consisting of a mother, six daughters and one son. Two of the daughters Chhingi and tlawmi, who had shown special devotion to the faith, were able to read through the teaching of Rev. Rowlands during

his short stay in their village⁶. They were, however, prohibited by their brother from the reading of the Gospel. He even persecuted them, and even threatened their lives. But they continued, Reading the gospel. "Let him take my life first", said the younger of the two, "We have to die only once". A great change soon came over to the brother, and himself was later converted⁷.

Nui was the most advanced among the girls., With her friend, Saii, she sat in the first Lower Primary Examination held on 25th June 1903⁸. Out of the total 19 candidates passed, Nui stood fifth by securing 398 $\frac{1}{2}$ marks, and Saii seventh with 385 $\frac{1}{2}$ marks out of 500. Nui and Saii were the first to obtain Government Scholarships of Rs. 3/- monthly and joined the Upper Primary next year¹⁰.

First School for Girls

During 1902-03, three temporary Girls' School were opened one at Hriangmual, another at Thakthing and third at Rahsi Veng. These schools were run by Nui, Saii and Pawngi respectively. Nui and Saii had 7 girls each and Pawngi had 6 girls on the rolls. The three attended the Aizwal Mission School during the day time, and took their own classes after their return to the village¹¹.

Soon after her marriage in December 1903 with the Rev. D.E. Jones, Mrs. K.E. Jones who had already been working at Sylhet for 7 years, started her work among the Mizo women and in 1904 she opened the first regular Girl's School with 12 girls at Aizwal. The existing mission school was then converted to a Boys' School¹². Besides the usual course in the school, she convened women's meetings where she taught sewing, knitting, simple medication, sanitation and child care¹³. She ran the mission girls' school alone until 2 Mizo girls joined her in 1909.

Lady Missionaries

Rev. D.E. Jones, Honorary Inspector of schools in the North took personal interest in giving education to more chief's daughters, as they

were allowed to rule over their villages when they become widows or separated from their husbands¹⁴.

The prejudice existing among the Mizos against girls' education had to a great extent declined by this time and the Mission Girls' school had been put on a sound footing. Knowing her limit, and also having an extra duty of a house-wife, Mrs. Jones in 1912, applied to the Welsh Mission authorities for a lady teacher from home to take charge of the girls' education. Accordingly, the Directors in Liverpool appointed Miss Francis, B.A. for this purpose in 1913. But before she sailed, word reached the Directors that the Govt. did not approve of the fast growth of education of girls in Mizoram and consequently Miss Francis did not come¹⁴.

Mr. J. Hezlett, who was the Superintendent of Lushai Hills from 1913 to 1917 was highly pleased at the work of Mrs. Jones and felt pity at the decision of the Govt. To him female Education was the urgent need of the Mizos. In his letter to the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Districts, in 1916, he pointed out emphatically the importance of starting female education on the right lines. He further stated that female education in Mizoram was not yet seriously taken into consideration¹⁵.

Supporting the application of Mrs. Jones for a lady missionary, the Inspector of Schools, Surma Valley and Hills District, Mr. F.B. Wilkins, wrote to the D.P.I. Assam, in 1915, thus: "The Authorities of the Welsh Missionary might be given to understand that the sending of a lady to Aizwal for this school would be welcomed"¹⁶. In his inspection report Wilkins noted that he was very impressed by the performance of the Mission Girls' School, Aizwal, and remarked that the school did an excellent work¹⁷. As a result of these exertions the Government finally granted, in 1916, the permission for entry of lady missionaries into Mizoram.¹⁸

The first batch came to Mizoram in 1919. They were Miss Edith M. Chapman of Catford, a trained teacher, and Miss Oliver E. Dicks of Chaltenham, a trained Nurse and Midwife¹⁹. Three years later Miss A. Catherine Mostoyn Lewis came to Aizwal in November 1922²⁰. These were the people

that brought a real change with women in the Mizo society.

Curriculum

The first experience of the lady missionaries was that the menfolk did not want to have their girls educated for, they said, the women and the girls were destined to do the household work. "Who would do it if they were educated?" was the argument of menfolk. They also argued that women had no mind and they could not learn anything, so it was no use trying to bother about their education. Besides, no young man would marry an educated girl. The educated women and the girls should be left alone. Some of the menfolk boldly told the lady missionaries that no one had asked for women missionaries, and no one wanted them. There would never be a girls' school in their country²¹.

To the missionaries and the Government the object of female education should be to enable them to perform their domestic duties more efficiently, with greater comfort to their families and to themselves, and at the same time to give them a broader outlook in life so that they might lead a happier and more useful lives²². To them education which would make the girls unfit for their domestic duties or give them a distaste for such duties must be avoided at all costs. Therefore the missionaries introduced cooking, embroidery, sewing, spinning, knitting, child care, needle-work, simple hygiene and sanitation, in addition to learning to read and write. The Government bought a loom for the Mizo girls and taught them its use. They sent two girls to the Kalimpong Industrial School to learn embroidery and weaving²³.

Real Change

The condition began to change when the students of the mission Girls school learned everything that girls in the villages required to do. The Mizos now understood the benefits

of girls education. Those youngmen who resented the idea of girls' education at the beginning now began to show distinct preference to educated girls over the uneducated ones for matrimonial purpose also. Because girls were more useful in their homes and villages than they were without education. The villagers realised that these missionaries had come for their welfare. The barriers were soon broken.

In the south, Thangchhumi and Lalsiami could help the lady missionaries in teaching and nursing works respectively since 1921. In 1925 Miss Chapman took a five year old girl Lalziki with her on forlough to London and educated her. Lalziki became the pride of her people in future.

In the North. Chawngthuami, Rosiami and Kaithuami passed the M.E. Examination in 1920. The first two joined the High School at Shillong, the third one Kaithuami and her friend Tlawmkungi were sent to have training in nursing. Kaithuami successfully completed her general nursing course in 1926. She was in great demand at Aizwal and the surrounding areas, and the people were very grateful to the mission for allowing them to have a trained nurse²⁴. The old ideas that "educated women used their knowledge just for writing and sending love letters, " or that' When the girls got married their parents did not benefit anything inspite of their expenditure", were fast vanishing.

Today women preach in the church like men and contest in the election of the Legislative Assembly and even hold the post of Cabinet Minister. Their role in the general economy in terms of employment and business in the present Mizo society is indispensable. The most significant change brought by education in Mizo society is, perhaps, the change it gave to her women. From their traditional restricted lives Mizo women are now liberated and enjoy equal status with their menfolk in all respects.

Notes & References

1. Chapman & Clark, **Mizo Miracle**, Christian Literature Service, Madras, 1968, pp.13-14.
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3. **Statistics of Aizwal District** ; Welsh Foreign Mission Report of 1899
4. Ibid, 1901-02
5. Rowlands, **Report of 1902**
6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. **mizo leh vai chanchin Lehkhabu**, September 1903, pp 1-2
10. Ibid, January 1904
11. Ibid
12. **Lalhmuka, Zoram Zirna lam chhinchhiahna**
13. **V. Hawla Zoram Hmarchan Zosapte chanchin** p. 27
14. D.E. Jones, **Report, 1909**, p.22
15. Ibid, 1914 pp 1-2
16. Ar No 203G, 12 May 1916, Letter from J. Hezlett, Superintendent of Lushai Hill to the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill Districts, Silchar.
17. AR No. 648-D, Letter from the Inspector of schools, Surma Valley and Hill Districts, Silchar to the D.P.I., Assam, Shillong, 10.12.1915
18. Ibid
19. AR No. 472, Letter from Mr. Cuningham, M.A., D.P.I., to the Inspector of schools Surma Valley.
20. **G.M.S. Report of 1919-20** Welsh Foreign Mission Report 1922
21. Chapman & Clark, **Mizo Miracle** p.5
22. AR No. 203G Education, 1916
23. AR No. 203G Letter from Superintendent of Lushai Hills to the Commissioner, Surma Valley and Hill District, Silchar 12 May 1916.
24. Welsh Foreign Mission Report of 1926.