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The Impact of Christianity in the Development of Biomedicine and English Education in Bhutan

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I. Introduction

During the colonial period European missionaries had opportunities to established English education and biomedicine services in the neighboring states of Sikkim, Darjeeling and as far as Tibet. But in Bhutan, it was introduced a century later, mainly because of two reasons. Firstly the county was closed to the foreign influence particularly the missionaries. Secondly, since it was not economically benefited for British India. Moreover, due to financial restrictions in the country, and without help from British India development in the field of biomedicine and English education was very difficult. But the European missionaries took the challenge, gave much time and interest to help Bhutanese ruling elites.[1]

British India's political officers begun to visit Bhutan from the year 1905 for the diplomatic reasons. Since 1910 Bhutan's foreign affairs were formally bound with British India control but did not involved in the internal affairs and British India paid 100,000 subsidies for the annexed Duars. Sikkim was Political center and door-way particularly to Tibet. At the same socio-economic developments were also done by the British in states of Sikkim and Darjeeling. And English education and public health centers were established by the European missionaries. But Bhutan remained unexplored and socio-economic developments were not started till 1961. However, during the colonial period, basic English education and biomedicine was introduced by the western missionaries in Bhutan.

II. Introduction of Biomedicine in Bhutan

One of the ancient names of Bhutan is known *Lhomong Menjong,* the southern valley of medicinal herbs. The Bhutanese used varieties of medical herbs in the ancient times and some people were sent to Tibet to learn medicine. From 1905, every British India political officer visiting Bhutan was accompanied by a medical officer to ensure his health, who was members of the Indian Medical Service (IMS). "When they accompanied the political officers on tours, they set up medical camps en route, treating all comers."[2] Both the King and the people were benefited and pleased for their biomedicine services which prevented various kinds of deadly diseases. "The biomedicine helped for the elimination of smallpox, polio, and leprosy, and the great reductions in numbers of those suffering conditions such as goiter, TB, and pneumonia that the local medicines could not cure."[3]

The first political officer to visit King Ugyen Wangchuk was John Claude White in 1905, who felt the need of biomedicine services in Bhutan. In the following year his medical assistance vaccinated over 800 people for smallpox and other common diseases in the country, which cost the life of many people.[4] Throughout the colonial period, IMS officers who were Christian missionaries continued to visit the country for the medical missions along with political officers in Sikkim and treated various kinds of deadly diseases.

The only non-IMS medical officer to visit Bhutan was a female Doctor, Cousins with Nurse Brodie in 1919, during the Cholera outbreak in Bhutan.[5] Realizing the importance, King Ugyen Wangchuk had great interest to establish biomedical services in the country. But he "could not effort western doctors and only the medical practitioners likely to volunteer their services for any extended periods in the country were missionary doctors."[6] Medical officer M.R. Sinclair, who came to Bhutan accompanied with Lt. Colonel J.L.R. Weir in January 1931, found different kinds of deadly diseases in Bhutan and the doctors gave free biomedical services.[7]

The first Civil Surgeon visiting Bhutan and Tibet without any political officers was Captain W.H.D. Staunton, in 1941 in a purely medical capacity.[8] However, the biomedicine clinic was not established in Bhutan like in Tibet, Sikkim and Darjeeling by any visiting medical officers during the colonial period. The biomedical practice in Bhutan was introduced by IMS physicians, who were Christian missionaries and Bhutanese were also benefited through their

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[1] Taee, *The Patient Multiple,* 12.

[2] McKay, "British-Indian Medical", 3.
[3] Wangchuk, "Traditional Medicine in Bhutan," 11.
[4] McKay, *The Footprints Remain,* 176.
[5] McKay, "British Indian Meidcal", 7.
[6] McKay, "British-Indian Meidcal", 7.
[7] McKay, *The Footprints Remain,* 178.
[8] Ibid., 181.

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dispensaries in Kalimpong and around the Bhutanese frontier.[9]

With the help of Dr. Craig, a leprosy specialist from Edinburgh who was in Kalimpong, the first leprosy hospital was established in1964 at Gidagom, Thimphu,[10] until then Kalimpong was only the hospital to seek treatment by the Bhutanese. Others were established eastern Bhutan in 1974 at Mongar, at Lhuntshi in 1977 and in 1981 at Yebilepcha in Zhemgang.[11] Before that half of the leprosy patients in Kalimpong were from Bhutan. The royal families were also benefited and many Bhutanese youths were trained under Dr. Craig.

In addition to those Bhutanese who were introduced to biomedicine through Western education, many received biomedical treatment at the mission hospitals in Kalimpong. While many visited the small Scottish mission dispensary established early in the 20th century just across the border at Toedey.[12] Although from 1933 biomedical dispensary was began at Haa by some educated persons and elites resided there, only from 1950s proper indigenous biomedical development began in Bhutan.

III. Introduction of English Education in Bhutan

The introduction of English education in Bhutan became the key for modernization. By the establishment of English education, the King Ugyen Wangchuck had the vision to indigenize biomedicine and other socio-economic development of the country. Because of the financial restrictions, the missionaries helped to established English schools. The main instrumental were Reverend W.S. Sunderland of the Church of Scotland Mission in Kalimpong and Canadian Father William Mackey.[13] The first English school was established in 1914 with 28 students in Haa dzongkhag of western Bhutan with two teachers sent from SUMI (Scottish Universities Mission Institution).[14] Again in 1915, another school at Bhumthang was started in the first King's palace, especially for the Crown Prince and for the children of people serving in the royal court.[15] For the first four years, during the winter season students were taken to Kalimpong for special classes, and then later continued their higher studies.[16] More teachers were sent to Bhutan in 1918, "Kiran Kumar Sarkar, R.S. Karthak, S. Sitling, H. Pradhan and Joseph Stein."[17]

The Bhutanese students continued attending SUMI till 1970s for higher education since in Bhutan there were only some primary level schools. The first matriculation standard was completed in 1921 by Bhutanese students, and by 1924 university standards.[18] It was from this group that the first Bhutanese biomedical practitioners emerged.

Rev. Dr. W.S. Sunderland, the second principal of SUMI visited Bhutan in October 1917 to inspect the schools. Dr. Graham a famous medical missionary also visited Bhutan in 1921 and 1927.[19] He is also one of contributors' for the emergence of first indigenous biomedical practitioners with the introduction of English education. The Europeans did not convert people to Christianity but helped for the development of health and education system in the country. So, they became close friends and advisors of the kings. Dr. Albert Craig was also personal friend and physician of the king.

Moreover, in 1963 Father William Mackey a Canadian Jesuit living in Darjeeling was invited by the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk to establish English school in eastern Bhutan at Trashigang and later it was developed to famously known as Sherubtse College.[20] He became special education advisor, modernize the education system and he is acknowledged as the Father of Modern Education in Bhutan. Father Mackey was granted citizenship and remained till his death in Bhutan but he also did not convert people to Christianity.[21] By 1961 there were 11 schools, 90 teachers and 400 students in Bhutan.[22]

IV. Conclusion

The British India did not provide funds for the establishment of biomedicine dispensary and western education in Bhutan. So, it was mostly through the support of missionaries and at the interest of Bhutanese ruling elites, foundation was laid for both English education and biomedicine during the colonial period. The second King despite extreme financial restrictions continued to encourage Bhutanese students for English education and further medical education in Indian universities. The first contribution in the field of education was from Scottish Universities Mission Institution or SUMI in Kalimpong. "The contribution SUMI has rendered to the development of Bhutan is in fact immense and laudable."[23]

Modernization of Bhutan begins from the time of third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, who is acknowledged as the Father of Modern Bhutan. He launched the first Five Year Plan from 1961, for the socio-economic

[9] Ibid., 184.
[10] Perry, *Nepali Around the World,* 145.
[11] Ibid., 146.
[12] Lepcha, *SUMITE,* "Healing is Possible," 87.
[13] Schuelka, *Education in Bhutan,* 58.
[14] Rai, *SUMITE,* "The Advent of Bhutanese," 43.
[15] ,*Handbook of Asian Education,* 445.
[16] Rai, *SUMITE,* "The Advent of Bhutanese," 43.
[17] Chhetri, *SUMITE,* "Educational Mission," 57.
[18] Chhetri, *SUMITE,* "Education Mission" 55.
[19] Ibid., 58.
[20] Yong et al., *Handbook of Asian Education*, 445.
[21] Tshering, "A Christian in Bhutan."
[22] Schuelka, *Education in Bhutan,* 58.
[23] Rai, *SUMITE,* "The Advent of Bhutanese," 47.

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development. Bhutan continued to seek foreign help for the development of modern education and health services, because of the contributions done during the preceding years. Many Bhutanese have accepted Christianity during their study in Kalimpong and Darjeeling and became pioneers to share gospel even working as civil servants. Although Christian evangelism was not encouraged, Bhutan continued to invite Christian doctors and teachers even after the 1950s.

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