

## **E.M. Chapman's Contribution towards Female Education in the South Lushai Hills**

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### **Abstract**

*When dealing with the educational developments and growth among the Mizos during the colonial times, the agency of the students and the complexities of the relationship between the teachers, students and the society are areas either ignored or inadequately addressed. In the case of the history of female education in particular, the empowering and liberating aspects of education dominated the discourse. However, one could not deny that such progress never happened in vacuum and there always were individuals on which lay the responsibility of framing and developing knowledge that were taught in schools and new knowledge systems were not necessarily received with positive reception but with caution and suspect. There were frictions among the educators, conflicts and confrontations with the students and the society. There is also the question of the nature of interaction between formal knowledge taught in schools, the teachers who taught it and the female students who attended the schools.*

*Due to dearth of materials, there are limitations in capturing the complexity of relationships in the educational venture and those that are available in the official archives tend to have been sanitised and sifted many times already, hence may not paint a clear picture. But, this does not make them wholly redundant nor contain materials worthy of being reread and used for understanding and reconstruction of the times and issues in question. Examining such layered and often problematic engagements is attempted through the personal and official letters written by E.M. Chapman, Mizo students, Mizo church leaders (predominantly men) and Serkawn Mission Station Reports. This article is descriptive in nature in order to reconstruct the early days of female schooling and it attempts to examine the kind of knowledge that got formalised in schools for girls, how a new idea of Mizo womanhood was created through it and the response from the society. The article is divided into four parts: Tracing the Background, Schooling Lushai Girls, Conflicting Interests and Conclusion.*

**Keywords:** Missionary, Female Education, Curriculum, Practical, Antagonism

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### ***Tracing the Background***

Education was a novel concept for the Mizos when the British missionaries formalised it at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The colonial government's seats, both at Aijal in the North Lushai Hills and Lungleh in the South Lushai Hills acted as mission stations for the Calvinistic Methodist Society and Baptist Mission Society of London respectively, though the Baptists' station was a little further out of town in Serkawn. An independent mission agency, the Lakher Pioneer Mission also had their centre at Serkawr which was further south of Lungleh from 1907.<sup>1</sup> Politico-administrative centres, therefore, became hubs of religious and educational activities. This led to the growth of these small colonial towns in new dimensions and reinforced their influence and power over the people. Though there were schools in the Lushai Hills prior to the coming of both mission agencies, they catered primarily to the needs of children of the soldiers serving under the colonial government with Bengali as the medium of instruction.<sup>2</sup> The idea of using alphabets for reading and writing was far removed from Mizo traditional form of learning and knowledge system. The daily life in the villages and the surrounding forests with its inhabitants were what they desired to master, understand and engage with. With their economic activities and their *life world*<sup>3</sup> deeply embedded in the forests around their villages, the learning of alphabets, writing and reading seemed completely irrelevant and futile. It was remarkable that the Lushais could spare

their children to learn reading, writing and knowledge, based on western scientific system in the schools when their usefulness at home and in the jungle was manifold and the new knowledge's ability to change their future was incomprehensible at that stage or it might have been undesirable. It was in this environment that the Welsh Calvinistic and the Baptist missions took up the task of educating the Lushais.

When education was first introduced by the pioneer missionaries Rev. J.H. Lorrain and Rev. F.W. Savidge of the Arthington Mission in their makeshift school in Aizawl, no female students were enrolled. However, in a letter written by Rev. D.E. Jones of the Welsh Calvinistic Mission stationed in Aijal to Rev. Josiah Thomas in January 1900, which was few years after the pioneer missionaries left the Lushai Hills, he mentioned that there were 50 students both boys and girls enrolled in the mission day school in Aijal. And these students attended classes sporadically for parts of the year and about half a dozen were regular.<sup>4</sup> This suggested that education was open for both boys and girls from its earliest days and though some Mizo parents were willing to send their daughters to school, the enrolment rates of the succeeding years showed a marked increase only in boys while the girls' enrolment rate was far behind the boys. Boys' education was growing rapidly, in both the North and South Lushai Hills. In the South Lushai Hills especially, the missionaries drew their inspiration from the British Public School systems in order to create a modern Mizo gentleman. However, girls

were not given formal training or education apart from basic reading writing and life skills until Serkawn Girls' School was opened in 1921.

### ***Schooling Lushai Girls***

E.M.Chapman was a trained teacher from Catford, UK and was stationed in the South Lushai Hills, supported by the Baptist Mission Society of London. She started girls' school at Serkawn in 1921 and remained there till 1952 when she went back to England. Prior to the setting up of girls' school by Chapman, education was open to the girls along with the boys at mission school in Serkawn. Experiment with girls' boarding was quite a failure when Rev. J.H. Lorrain introduced it during Rev. F.W. Savidge's absence on a furlough.<sup>5</sup> Girls were too useful at home and it was therefore difficult for their parents to let them go off to school. But the wives of the missionaries took some girls and women under their care and taught them basic reading, writing and hygiene and very few girls attended regular school. Rev. F.W. Savidge in 1907 reported that Mrs. Lorrain did a sewing class for them but made sure they were not taught to be unfit for a place where they had to go back.<sup>6</sup> They were most cautious in their instructions to women for fear of ruffling feathers or creating conflict in the society. The mission was not keen on changing the traditional status and role of women at the cost of their own work of proselytization. So, there was always a question of not tilting the balance while introducing modernity through education and

the mission was more vigilant about girls' education than the boys. The boys were meticulously trained under the supervision of Rev. F.W. Savidge along the ideals of the British public school system with the likes of Rugby, Winchester and Charter House schools even at the time when the whole idea of modern schooling was still a concept completely alien to the Lushai epistemology.

The very few girls who attended regular school with the boys performed equally well. According to the 1910 Serkawn Mission Station Report, no girls were on the roll due to the dismantling of hostel while the boys remained.<sup>7</sup> In the 1913 tour report of the South Lushai Hills, Herbert Anderson, the BMS Indian Secretary argued that there had been too much focus with boys education as compared to the girls and this, if not rectified soon would create more problem in the future. Therefore, he wanted to push girls' education rigorously.<sup>8</sup> All this happened under the shadow of poverty and food scarcity due to enormous increase in rats that ate off all food crops resulting in famine. This greatly affected regular schooling and student enrolment. There was even a time in 1912 when the mission school had to be shifted to Demagiri where rice supply was easier to get.<sup>9</sup> By the year 1913, three girl boarders had come back to school and studied along with 57 boys and there was a general growth in awareness of the importance of education and the number of girl boarders doubled in the following year. However, in all these years, girls'

education was at the fringe and Mrs. Lorrain and Mrs. Savidge continued to teach sewing and reading to some girls and women living near the mission station.<sup>10</sup>

When Chapman arrived at Serkawn in 1919, it was the backwardness of female education that grabbed her attention. She toured the villages extensively in an attempt to understand the position of Mizo women in the society. When the idea of opening a separate formal school for girls came up, Chapman was extremely picky in identifying how and what should be taught to the girls. In her letter to Ms. Lockhart at the Baptist Mission Headquarters in London on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 1920, she wrote about her plan to start a boarding school, a day school and kindergarten in Serkawn mission station, which would run only for seven to eight months so that the girls get to help their families during the busiest season.

She highlighted that education should not make the girls unfit for strenuous work in the jungle. She was prepared to give a good deal of time to practical work like gardening, handwork, cookery, weaving and washing. With this understanding, she worked on developing a course that would attract girls from the villages and would equip them to their village life.<sup>11</sup> They were taught life skills extensively and also book knowledge as was required for qualifying exams. Their course included arithmetic and accounts, reading, writing, history, geography, English, hygiene, physiology, composition, dictation, recitation, general knowledge, religious instruction, weav-

ing (including all processes in preparation from seeds and some dyeing), needle work including simple cut out, basket work in bamboo and cane, simple pottery using local clay, baby welfare, infant care, first aid, home care including invalid cookery, knitting, crochet work with home-grown cotton. Bamboo implements were made by the girls themselves, gardening where they experimented with new seeds and plants, farm-work like care and breeding of cows, goats, pigs, fowl, duck, pigeons, household management including cookery, laundry, clay modelling, maps, drawing, painting, crayon work and inset filling, singing, tonic sol-fa, drama, drill, games and simple dances.

All these were taught in practical with minimum theory. Moral education and hygiene was also part of the series of talk done by the boarders. The school worked partly on Dalton plan and project system. Project system was practised during the fine weather where they did lots of farm and outside activities and Dalton plan during the rainy season. The school had four colours: dark blue, white, light blue and gold standing for truth, purity, things celestial and glory yet to be revealed and the school motto was *little children, let us not love in word but in deed and truth*. And the motto of the juniors and senior houses are: *The pure in heart shall see God and Love rejoiceth in the truth*. The girls attended school for varying times and however long or short they may be, they all had some experience with little children, household management, farm and

elements of reading, writing and arithmetic. Old girls' association was important in influencing village life too. Chapman reiterated that the girls worked much in open air so that they were not spoiled for ordinary village life. Camps were organised every year touring the villages, which provided an opportunity for social service. A student- teachers' course was also conducted and it included evangelist training, village preaching and religious instructions in schools and worship.<sup>12</sup> It was an extensive and meticulously designed curriculum that resulted from long and arduous planning and it encompassed all sphere of a Lushai girls' life.

With new fervour and hope, Chapman devoted herself to the opening of girls' day and boarding school, which the pioneer missionaries had given up earlier. In her letter written on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1921, she mentioned that there were thirty to forty girls on the roll, where twelve girls were boarders.<sup>13</sup> This was quite a jump from the previous year when only 7 girls finished school. In 1922, the number increased to 28 scholars and 29 boarders.<sup>14</sup> In 1923, there were 19 schools for boys in the whole of South Lushai Hills, which increased to 24 in the following year. 3 girls read in Boys' School in the villages and Serkawn Girls' was the only girls' school in the South Lushai with 30 boarders and 31 day scholars while the Boys' School in Serkawn alone had 150 boys on the roll.<sup>15</sup> It was only in 1940 that the old girls in Changpui and Sangau villages opened two private girls' school.<sup>16</sup> The 1925 BMS re-

port indicates that there had been a complete change in the attitude towards female education as a whole and this could be credited to the first four years of effective teaching of Chapman and M. Clark at Serkawn Girls' and the kind of girls they produced<sup>17</sup>. But this did not mean that there was a mass acceptance of female education. If we look at the general attitudes in the villages further away from Serkawn, Ms. Bowser, a mission secretary of the BMS in-charge of lady missionaries while touring South Lushai Hills in 1928 noted that there was a general lack of desire for knowledge especially among the girls.<sup>18</sup> This was no surprise as the Mizo economy was embedded in the jungles where they worked and getting a white-collar job even for educated men was not guaranteed. For the girls this could be considered a lesser issue because the goal of their education was different from those of the boys. From its very inception, the female education focused much more on practical components with intensive trainings in developing skills, which Chapman hoped would be extremely useful when they went back to their families.

Serkawn Girls' school and boarding was set up in the model of a home for the students and motherless babies. The school was often referred to as a household and a family unit. Chapman and M. Clark identified strongly with the Lushais in the way they conducted their daily lives to the point of being criticised by their colleagues. Their house was referred to as hostel unlike other missionary houses that

were called sahib's house. Dining together with the local girls was what they practised on a daily basis and Chapman claimed to set a standard for Lushai home life.<sup>19</sup> She stressed on identifying herself with the Lushais and the hostel became a model Mizo Christian household.

While visiting Serkawn Girls' School in 1939, G.A. Small, Director of Public Instructions, Assam wrote in his report that it was one of the best mission schools in India. He commented, 'I have heard a lot about it but not even half was told.'<sup>20</sup> He was particularly impressed with the handwriting and general neatness and that the course was sensible, useful and gave practical lessons. He anticipated from the curriculum that a large portion of the time was spent on religious instruction and bible teaching but he was proved wrong and the Old Testament was taught only in higher classes.<sup>21</sup> The school revived Mizo traditional weaving and many new beautiful designs have originated from the school. With the scant resources and the conservative attitude of the Mizos towards educating their daughters, one could imagine the task involved in lifting the school to such a position. The school remained a point of reference or a model for other schools to come in the later years. But what is more relevant and significant in terms of social change is the way Serkawn model of girls' education constructed a new idea of an ideal Mizo Christian womanhood.<sup>22</sup> This understanding and expectation of a new womanhood percolated into the society through the girls educated at Serkawn Girls' School where they

were trained to take on new values and ideas, some of which were in conflict with the traditional understanding and yet was espoused by Chapman and her colleagues to what they felt was best suited to the needs of the Lushai girls to live happily in their natural surroundings.

Realising the shortcomings of the model of life at Serkawn that was far removed from the reality of the village life and attempting to make girls' education relevant to the real needs and culture of the Mizos, she went on to start an experiment school at Darzo and moved out from Serkawn on the 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1935. She was convinced that this move had helped in eradicating antipathy between Lushais, Pawis and Fanais, which was a real problem at Serkawn School.<sup>23</sup> She had always wanted girls' schools in villages and not in Serkawn alone. While she experimented at Darzo, to keep in touch with village life, she insisted on living as the villagers lived and sharing in the life of the village so that the girls would grow up mixing with the normal village life and not chiefly a community on their own. They husked their own rice and collected it from the jhum and shared all the hardships of village life. Her fear was to create a class of woman who felt alienated from their own culture and their homes. Bell Hooks in her Centre/ Margin theory looks at the consolidation of power and knowledge in the centre and it is the responsibility of the centre to move out into the margins.<sup>24</sup> There was a literal geographical shift and extension of a learning space from the centre into the margins at Darzo with

Chapman's experimentation. There was also a paradigm shift in contemporary understanding of Mizo girls' education with the fusion of knowledge based on western rational thinking and traditional practices. However, the shift from the centre to the margin is always a radical act and it is never without opposition. The margin does not always wholly appreciate the shift either. The case of shifting to Darzo was not all a smooth sail for Chapman and her girls. It was not a shift that could be sustained for long due to various reasons, but mainly for lack of resources. With all the development and progress made in girls' education under the aegis of the colonial authorities and the mission agency, it is important to ask how Mizo society responded to it.

### ***Conflicting Interest***

The relationship between the girl students, the society and Chapman was not always easy and cordial. There were conflicts and disagreements at different levels on various instances that hinged on two things: Chapman, being a woman in-charge of education and differences in the perception of education; the Mizos strongly desired a book base knowledge, which they hoped would land their children salaried jobs in the colonial government set up. In a strongly patriarchal society where women's voices were either silenced or reduced to remain in the periphery, to have a woman missionary dictating the future of their children was problematic. This was also a result of fear of realignment of gender roles and reallocation of power in the society.

In 1929, Chapman was in-charge of education for the whole of South Lushai Hills and this seem to have fired up the discontent among the Lushais, which in 1930 saw a violent manifestation. It was a year of great famine and there was a general sense of anger, discontentment and rebellious spirit. The problem moved in two strands: firstly, it was a personal antagonism towards Chapman who they claimed was too much of a disciplinarian. They believed that she stood in the way of opening higher education for the Mizos. They blamed her for their children's inability to get jobs in the government. There was a clash of opinion between Chapman and the Mizos as to educational ideals. They attacked the girls' school curriculum, which focused on the practical side of learning and they wanted more book knowledge as the boys' school and that was the very thing that Chapman and mission education did not want for fear of creating educated women without having the skills to run a household. Later on, Ms. Oliver, a missionary nurse in Lunglei, in her letter to Ms. Bowser also stated that some Lushai men were unable to reconcile with Ms. Chapman as they blamed her for their sons' inability to continue higher education or get jobs which they hoped they could have if it were not for her and that they would have been more Europeanised.<sup>25</sup> The greatest opposition came mostly from sections of the early-educated Christian men.

Secondly, they did not like the fact that a lady missionary was in-charge of education when the Lushai men themselves

felt capable of managing the education system. Letters of complaints were sent to Baptist Mission Headquarters in England and Chapman and Clark were threatened and demanded that they go back. School hostel that was also a home to Chapman and Clark was stoned at night and threat letter was sent to them. Reflecting on this situation, Chapman wrote about her conversation with a Christian chief of Zotlang, who told her of the Lushais having problem being under women; that they found it difficult to accept Chapman as a replacement for Mr. Savidge and he suspected that perpetrators of such anger and violence were Serkawn mission school boys, workers and masters at the mission compound.<sup>26</sup>

This event was not a spontaneous response to Chapman's educational system and her conduct but it had been brewing for a very long time. Way back in 1919 when she first arrived in the South Lushai Hills, she was told that no girls school was needed and she was not wanted there and was given six months notice to clear out. Chapman found the general attitude of the church towards the mission 'puzzling and worrying' which she likened it to spoil children who would hear neither rules nor discipline with ridiculous demands especially the educated ones and they always seemed to win.<sup>27</sup> The oppositions to both Chapman and the education system she managed came through even among the Lushai teachers during teachers' conference held at Serkawn in 1929. In her frustration with the situation, she questioned

if giving education enriched their spiritual life at all.<sup>28</sup>

Due to the antagonism towards women's education, sometimes it was almost impossible to get foodstuffs for the hostel. The girls often had only rice and salt to eat. Many girls could not continue their education due to this reason. It was also difficult to get apparatus for the school. She believed that many girls too came because life was easy and comfortable not because they wanted God, which was her explicit goal for the school.

There also seemed to have been a disagreement between the missionaries themselves regarding the way girls' education was conducted. Chapman and Bowser thought it was a pity that BMS women had no higher qualifications and that the pioneer missionaries did not push some of the bright boys for a higher qualification though they were as good as any highly qualified men. She continued to raise the importance of recognised standard qualification<sup>29</sup> This issue seemed to make her all the more keener to get a higher qualification for her adopted daughter, Lalziki, who proved to be a brilliant student and went on to finish Master of Education.

During the time when there was much antagonism towards girl's education and personal attacks on her and her colleague M. Clark were gaining momentum, she claimed that there too was a lack of interest and sympathy towards the girl's school at Serkawn from the Bengal executive and lots of criticism, acute antagonism from



fellow missionaries in Serkawn and Calcutta.<sup>30</sup> The problem continued in that decade and it was Pastor Rohmingliana who passionately argued the need for a bible school. He suggested that young bright students focused on joining high school in the plains in order to join government services rather than mission work. He spoke about spiritual crises and that many Christians were going back to old heathen tradition. He believed that there was too much stress on secular education as compared to building up the church and equipping the native Lushais.<sup>31</sup> This suggested the crises and problems were not just to do with female education but with the ideal of education itself. It was around this time when the mission was faced with the prospect of having to give up their educational venture to the government, which they deeply feared. Some of the educated Mizos had become suspicious of the mission and the education system that they managed. It was recorded that some people went out four days from Lungleh to meet the Director of Public Instructions of Assam for complaints and suspicions if the missionaries received grants and keep aside some of it from the Mizo boys and these led to the loss of *joie-de-vivre* in Lushai.<sup>32</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The early days of women's education in South Lushai Hills were tough and the journey long and arduous but it was a firm and strong foundation that Chapman and her colleagues had laid. Her contribution

towards women's education in the South Lushai Hills is exemplary and was recognised by the Indian government by giving her a *Kaisar-I-Hind* medal. Though there was great antipathy against women's education for a very long time, however the old girls/teachers from the girls' school were continuously invited to nearby villages to take morning service on Sundays because people felt they knew how to speak and they could not deny their teaching qualities.<sup>33</sup> The station report of 1942 commented that Serkawn Girls' truly produced educated girls with many of them having decidedly strong personalities<sup>34</sup> which was a constant source of conflict and suspicion in the society which was overtly patriarchal. Serkawn Girls' School continued to create a niche for itself in a male dominated sphere till 1950 when it was amalgamated with the Boys school and handed over to the government.<sup>35</sup> Serkawn Girls' School was a forerunner in the development of higher education for women not just in the south but the whole of Lushai Hills and the old Serkawn School girls took on the lead of Chapman in developing the conditions of Mizo women. Back in 1930 Chapman wrote, 'these girls were a revelation even to me, they seemed so utterly different from the ordinary Lushai girls. I have never before realised what a difference the school has made to their lives,' and these girls continued to change lives not just for their fellow women but also for the society at large.<sup>36</sup> BMS: IN/113Chapman.

**ENDNOTES:**

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- <sup>2</sup> Hluna, JV. (1992). *Education and Missionaries in Mizoram* (p.52)Guwahati, India: Spectrum Publications.
- <sup>3</sup> We use this term from Jürgen Habermas' formulation in *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*, Beacon Press, 1985
- <sup>4</sup> Calvinistic Methodist Archives, Welsh National Library, Aberystwyth (henceforth CMA) CMA 27, 285. D.E. Jones.
- <sup>5</sup> Baptist Missionary Society Archives, Regents Park College, Oxford (henceforth BMS): IN/113 Anderson.
- <sup>6</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1907) F.W. Savidge.
- <sup>7</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1910) F.W. Savidge.
- <sup>8</sup> Anderson, *Op. cit.*,
- <sup>9</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1912 ) F.W. Savidge.
- <sup>10</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1913) F.W. Savidge.
- <sup>11</sup> BMS: IN/66 Chapman.
- <sup>12</sup> BMS: IN/113 Chapman.
- <sup>13</sup> BMS: IN/66Chapman.
- <sup>14</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1922) F.W. Savidge
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- <sup>17</sup> BMS: IN/113 Station Report (1925).
- <sup>18</sup> BMS: IN/91Station Report (1928).
- <sup>19</sup> BMS: IN/66 Chapman.
- <sup>20</sup> BMS: IN/113 G.A. Small.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*,
- <sup>22</sup> Ralte, Lalnunpuii. (2015). "Women's education in the Colonial Times" in Malsawmdawngliana & Rohmingmawii(Eds.), *Mizo Narratives*, Guwahati, India: Scientific Book Centre (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)
- <sup>23</sup> BMS: IN/ 66 Chapman.
- <sup>24</sup> Hooks, B. (2000) *From Centre to Margin*. London, England: Pluto Press.
- <sup>25</sup> BMS: IN/113 Oliver.
- <sup>26</sup> BMS: IN/113 Chapman.

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- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*,
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,
- <sup>29</sup> BMS: IN/91 Chapman.
- <sup>30</sup> BMS: IN/91 Chapman.
- <sup>31</sup> BMS: IN/66Rohmingliana.
- <sup>32</sup> BMS: IN/113Station Report (1939).
- <sup>33</sup> BMS: IN/91 Chapman.
- <sup>34</sup> BMS: IN/ 113 Station Report (1942).
- <sup>35</sup> Lianzuala, Rev.C. (2005) *Mizoram Sikulhmasate (1894- 1952)*. (pg 77). Aizawl, India: Lengchhawn Press,
- <sup>36</sup> BMS: IN/113Chapman.

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