

London Missionary Society in Spreading Education in Colonial Murshidabad District, 1824 – 1947: A Historical Review

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Abstract: London Missionary Society was founded in the city of London in England in 1795. Nathaniel Forsyth, as the first missionary of LMS, entered Bengal in the year 1798. After that, the missionaries of LMS entered in Murshidabad district in 1821. This society started its work in the district in the year 1824. In that same year, Micaih Hill took over the responsibility of seven schools. In March 1826, he started six more primary schools. Mrs. Hill (wife of Micaih Hill) concentrated on the affliction of rural women in the Murshidabad district. In 1825, she founded four native female schools. Mrs. Warden established two more girls' schools in 1826. They were run the girls' schools by their countless labour. After that Mr. Paterson established a girl school in 1832. The backward classes students of Hindu communities were provided education in this school. He set up an English medium school in the four decades of the nineteenth century. In this school were read 13 students who came from various religions. In 1832, an orphan asylum was established at Barack square in Berhampore city. London Missionary Society used to run a middle school in the asylum. At the first time, the total number of students of this school was thirteen. Later, the number of students of this orphan school increased from thirteen to forty-two. In 1845, An English medium middle school was established in Jubilee Chapel at Khagra with the help of Micaih Hill. The total number of students of this school was two hundred forty-eight in the year 1868. Recently, the name of this school is 'Khagra Gurudas Tarasundari Institution'. London Missionary Society was involved in establishing various primary and middle schools in different parts of the district as well as a teacher training college too. The college was established in 1937. Presently, the name of this college is 'Union Christian Training college'. The students from various backward classes of different religious groups and caste of Murshidabad district and beyond get the opportunity to take training from this institution until now. Thus, it is said that as a result of initiatives taken by the London Missionary Society became various positive changes in the field of the education system of the district. The spread of western education by the missionaries started the Renaissance in the district. Therefore, the contribution of the London Missionary Society in spreading education in the district cannot be denied in any way.

population to be around 1.2 million. As a result, in their experience, Murshidabad is considered a suitable centre for mission work. About three months later, on 8th March 1824, Micaih Hill and his wife appeared at Berhampore again and permanently started the mission's work.⁶ Micaih Hill had to face many difficulties while preaching in different parts of the district. The people from both Hindu and Muslim communities living in Murshidabad were very religious and orthodox at that time. Regarding the superstitions of the district's people, Micaih Hill wrote in his report that "Murshidabad about moral and prejudices twenty-five years behind their Calcutta fellows".⁷ Where he went to preach in the district, people in every part of the district used to condemn him. In this regard, Hill also wrote in his report that "for some years after I arrived at Berhampur wherever I preached, I was hooted and hissed. My voice was drowned with the clapping of hands and shouts of Harebool".⁸

From the above statements, it is clear that the people of Murshidabad district rejected Micaih Hill initially. But all these things also have a positive impact. Mr. Hill and his companions concentrated on education development in the district before spreading Christianity. Finally, London missionaries determined to spread education. At the same time, the matter of spreading Christianity and proselytization took place in the back seat.

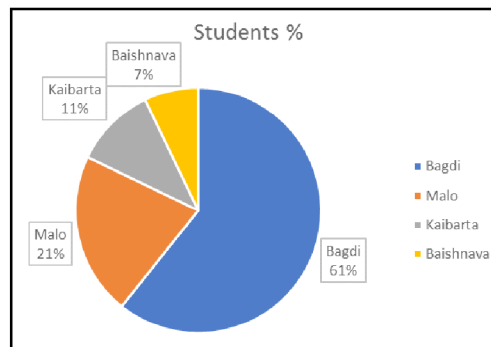
In 1824, Micaih Hill took over the responsibility of seven schools.⁹ Five schools of these seven schools were Bengali, one was Hindustani, and another one was Portuguese. Then he established one school after another at Dayanagar, Gopejan, and chaitanyapur. In 1825, schools situated at Gorabazar, Berhampore Bazar, Bundhaipara, Lalbagh were run by London missionaries. In March 1826, Micaih Hill started six more primary schools. Mrs. Warden was assisted Mr. Hill in the proper management and development of these schools. On the other hand, the husband of Mrs. Warden was Man-in-Charge of the Berhampore mission Centre. Three non-religious schools were set up at Gopejan, Bundhaipara, and Chaitanyapur in the year 1826. The school situated at Berhampore was closed down in 1827.¹⁰

In the 19th century, women of Murshidabad in the field of education were also very neglected and oppressed. It was considered a crime for women to receive an education. In the Indian subcontinent, western's missionaries were the pioneer for educated of women themselves. It is mentioned in this context, it was the missionaries of Europe who started the primary movement for women's education in Bengal. Through the efforts of some missionaries, the process of educating women in Bengal in a modern and organized way began.¹¹ Hill couple concentrated on the affliction of rural women in Murshidabad. In 1825, Mrs. Hill founded four native female schools.¹² One of which was reserved for Christians. The remaining three schools of the four schools situated were at Gorabazar, Kalikapur, and Farasdanga. The Location of another school is not known. The school located at Gorabazar was called

'Gorabazar L. M. S Primary School'. Since its inception, the school has been popularly known as Mission School to the local people. However, after independence, the school was renamed, which is presently known as 'Gorabazar Silpamandir Girls High School' to the district's people. In 1826, Mrs. Warden established two more girls' schools.¹³ Then in 1845, two girl schools were founded at Chhaighari and Daulatabad.¹⁴

It was not an easy task for London Missionaries to run the girl schools on the soil of Murshidabad district at that time. Mrs. Hill and her friends had to face many difficulties. Because the people of the district were reluctant to send their daughters to school for fear of losing their religion. Also, upper-caste Hindus and Muslims were strongly opposed to allowing their daughters out of the house. The missionaries dealt with all these problems with infinite patience and confidence. Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Warden, and Mrs. Bradbury worked tirelessly to run the girls' schools at Gorabazar, Kalikapur, Farasdanga, Chayaghari, and Daulatabad. Even in girls' schools, students were told Bible stories in the form of parables. As a result, the students in the school could gain the knowledge in making their moral character.

From December 20, 1832, Mr. Patterson began assisting Micaiah Hill in the mission.¹⁵ Mr. Patterson started a girl's school in Murshidabad district with the help of a local teacher. The native teacher was paid five rupees per month. There were 28 female students in the school, all of whom belonged to the Hindu community. Among the 28 students, 17 students were from the Bagdi caste, 6 students from the Malo caste, 3 students from the Kaibarta caste and 2 students from the Vaishnava caste.¹⁶

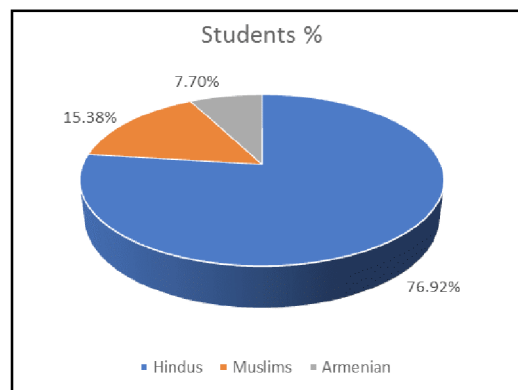


Source: Arup Chandra (edited), Murshidabad Itibritta: Part 2, Basabhumii Publication, Berhampore (Murshidabad), 2004.

From the above pie chart, it is revealed that every student in the school belonged to the lower caste of the Hindu community. Among the total students, about 61% came from the Bagdi community, about 21% from the Malo community, about 11% from the Kaibarta community, and about 7%

from the Vaishnava community. Moreover, they were the poorest part of Bengali society. On the other hand, the native teacher was a Brahmin in the caste. He taught the lower caste and backward class girls of the society and he gave the identity of a generous and humanitarian people in the Murshidabad district at that time. The name of the teacher was not known. The average age of enrollment in school was 7.2 years and the school leaving age was 12.7 years.¹⁷ For studying in the school the students received a variety of favors from the missionaries, including financial opportunities. Of the 28 students in the school, 24 received one paisa a week for attending school, while the other four received two paise. Apart from this, each student received a cloth (Rs. ten annas) for every four months and one ornament at the end of the year. In addition to this, every student got one rupee for their marriage or at the funeral time of their parents. There were two lady workers for caring the students. Among the two lady workers, one used to take 13 students from their house to school, after the end of the classes they were reached by lady worker to their home. Another lady worker used to take 15 students from their house to school, after the end of the classes they were reached by this lady worker. Every lady worker got one anna in a week for each student for that work. In this way, the London Missionary Society brought the girls of the backward group into the arena of education. As a result, the missionaries were able to create a bright and humane image in the society of Murshidabad.

In four decades of the nineteenth century, Mr. Paterson founded an English medium school at his outhouse or office house. The school was unpaid. Students from different communities of the society used to come to the school for study. There were 13 students in the school.¹⁸ Among the total students, 10 students came from the Hindu community, 2 students came from the Muslim community, and 1 student was Armenian.



Source: A. Mitra, West Bengal Census 1951: District Hand Book Murshidabad, Sree Saraswati Press, Calcutta, p. 109.

From the above pie chart, it is easily clear that among the total number of students 76.92% were Hindus, 15.38% were Muslims, and 7.70% were Armenian. The students from Hindu communities belonged to a different caste. Among the ten Hindu students, six students belonged to the Kayastha caste, three students were brahmins, and one student belonged to kaibarta caste. Therefore, most of the students from the Hindu community belonged to a higher caste. As a result, it can be realized that the London missionaries were able to educate the upper caste boys and girls of the Hindu society. Which helped to lead the society of Murshidabad on the path of change. However, the school was held three days a week, the remaining four days closed. Which days were closed, it is not known. On the days when classes were held, Patterson himself taught for one and a half to two hours. During classes, every day, Paterson himself taught students one hour to two hours. There were taught five books in English in the school, such as Murray's Spelling Book, Woollaston's Grammar, Goldsmith's History of English, the English reader, and Murray's Grammar.¹⁹ Since English was the medium of instruction in the school, the students could acquire proficiency in English. The average age of admission in the school was nine to ten years, and the average age of leaving school was twenty-two to twenty-three years. Therefore, the role of the school in the spread of western education is very essential in the district.

District Magistrate J. P. Pringale established an orphan asylum on the western part of Barak Square in Berhampore city in the year 1832.²⁰ London Missionary Society used to run a middle school in the asylum. Only the children of the ashram got the opportunity to get an education in the school. At first, the asylum had been started with nineteen orphan children. Among the nineteen orphan children, four children died of cholera disease. After that, two orphan children were sent to a Christian school which was run by the London Missionary Society situated at Bhabanipur in Kolkata. The remaining thirteen children were studied in Bengali and English languages. There was a clerk in the school or asylum.²¹ He was given as a salary five rupees in every month. There were in the asylum five days of every week (Monday to Friday), from 6 a.m to till midday the children of the school were studied, and from the midday to 4 p.m the children of the school used to workshop work. But there was a break of one hour. After a few years, the number of orphans in the ashram is increased. The forty-sixth annual report of the London Missionary Society states that the number of children in the asylum increased from 13 to 42.²² Thereafter, the children of asylum were provided general education as well as handicrafts, cottage industries, etc. vocational education; through this work, the orphan children become independent in the future. After a few times, Miss Ashar, a missionary of the London Missionary Society, was closely associated with the Ashram school. She taught music in the asylum every day. She was most respected by everyone in the asylum for her sweet behavior. So, the asylum was widely known to the common people as

the Home of Mrs. Ashar. It is specially not known to us that rightly in which time the asylum school was closed. But, perhaps after the missionaries left the district, the asylum school was closed.

In the mid-four decades of the nineteenth century, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the London Missionary Society, a jubilee chapel was erected at Khagra, about two kilometers from Berhampore (north).²³ At that time, in 1845, Micaih Hill founded an English middle school in Jubilee Chapel. At this time the school was given the name 'Khagra L. M. S Boys High English School'. Mr. Hill and Mr. T. S. Lessel inaugurated the school on 15 March, 1845. It is pertinent to note that Mr. T. S. Lessel was sent to Berhampore by the London Missionary Society in 1838 for assisting in mission work. First-time Micaih Hill has maintained the Jubilee Chapel. The school was held in the morning and prayer music was held in the evening in the chapel building. From 1848 to 1849, for two years, Micaih Hill was relieved of the responsibility of maintenance by Dr. Boaz of the Union Chapel in Calcutta. Two tragic events had already taken place, in 1847 Mrs. Hill died at the age of fifty-seven years. Two years later, in 1849, Mr. Micaih Hill died at the age of fifty-nine years in a terrible naval accident near Varanasi.²⁴

However, after his death, Samuel Hill (son of Micaih Hill) developed the school at a higher level and began to conduct the mission work. In 1856, the colonial Government closed the school. Because, on the one hand, the apprehension of the Santal Rebellion and on the other hand, the fear of the Sepoy Rebellion had put the British masters in a deadly headache of anxiety. In this situation, the school in Jubilee Chapel was closed by British masters. The school was closed down along with Jubilee Chapel. As a result, all students of the school were forced to join Krishnanath Collegiate School. Later when the storm of rebellion was over, the thinking of restarting the school begins. Almost twelve years later, the school reopened with the full support of the London Missionary Society on 1868, 2 March.²⁵ At that time, two schools were running to teach up to the entrance in Berhampore city. One is Krishnanath Collegiate School and the other is Khagra L. M. S Boys School. At this time Missionaries got only 50 paise as a fee to the student monthly. On the others side, at this time students of the Government collegiate school were to give two rupees per month as a fee. Naturally, most of the students of the Collegiate school came to Mission school and were admitted. As a result, student numbers of the collegiate school were gradually decreased. In the 1868 march, the student numbers of Khagra Mission School were only 35, which increased to 248 in five months.

Year	Month	Number of students	Increased number of students
1868	March	35	—
1868	August	248	213

Source: Brojogopal Banerjee, 'L. M. S School: A retrospect' in the 125th-anniversary volume of Gurudas Tarasundry Institution, Khagra, 1971.

As a result of the increased number of students, it was needed to the proliferation of school's size and classrooms. To solve this problem, Maharani Swarnamoyi Devi of the Kasimbazar Raj family donated five thousand rupees to the school at that time. To improve the school, Reverend Bradbury and Reverend Samuel Hill tried their best to increase the number of students by providing various facilities to the students. Reverend Bradbury was a Homeopathic doctor himself. He provided free treatment to the students and gave little medicines. Along with this due to the service of the needy people of rural society he distributed medicines freely. Consequently, his interactions with the local poor, needy, and middle-class families took the form of thick clouds. In 1870, Mr. Charles Lance, Commissioner of Rajshahi Division, praised the Khagra Mission School and wrote that "The London Mission school at Khagra is a most flourishing institution, it teaches up to the entrance course, and almost the whole of the candidates sent up to the University entrance examination was successful. Reverend Messrs Bradbury and Hill, who manage the institution, take interest in its welfare."²⁶

Mr. Reverend Samuel Hill continued to work for the London Missionary Society in Berhampore and Murshidabad districts for more than four decades. He was such a man who gave priority to spreading education rather than preaching in the district. The matter becomes very clear if a small incident is described. Incidentally, Kaliprasanna Mukhopadhyay, the headmaster of Khagra Mission School, came in close contact with Samuel Hill when he was in the eighth grade at the Mission School as a student. After that, Kaliprasanna Mukhopadhyay expressed his strong desire to his Guru, Samuel Hill; before qualifying for the F. A examination. But Guru Mahasaya wanted to baptize Kaliprasanna after finishing his studies. In 18, the student Kaliprasanna again requested Mr. Hill and said that 'Baptism first, examination second'. Hill saheb again advised him and said that 'Pass the F. A examination first and then take initiation to convert to Christianity'.²⁷ Many such incidents can be mentioned; From which it is clear that Mr. Samuel Hill was more concerned with the development of education than preaching in the district. However, Samuel Hill was always trying to improve the education of the people of Murshidabad district who were lagging in education. Finally, on January 20, 1891, at the age of 66, this great man passed away at the cantonment residence of the Mission in Berhampore.²⁸ On the day of burying his body in the British cemetery near the present Berhampore Court railway station, all the students of the mission school, the teachers, and the general public of the district gathered to pay their respects at his funeral. From this, it is clear that he considered Murshidabad as his motherland to survive. It may be mentioned that Samuel Hill was born on 22nd December 1825 in the city of Berhampore. Perhaps, that is why he has donated sixty-six years of his life to service the people of the district. Instead, people from different parts of the district awarded him the title 'Sage Hill'.

In 1883, a directors meeting was held in London, there were in the meeting had been instructed to further strengthen the Berhampore Mission. At that year, Mrs. Bloomfield came to Berhampore, where she joined the Ashram school.²⁹ In 1887, Mrs. Lina Robinson and Mrs. Newell Tuck arrived in Berhampore. These three Missionaries were actively connected with the Missions work. Their role in the development of education in the district was also positively fruitful. Mrs. Robinson became closely associated with the Asylum in a very short time.³⁰ Since then, the vitality of the ashram school increased with more importance. These three missionaries gave the opportunity of taste of education to the hundreds of girls and women in the district through establishing various schools in the different parts of the district and providing zenana education.³¹

After the death of Revered S. J. Hill, Reverend Alexanders Sims came back from London and received the responsibility of the principal of Khagra mission school. After receiving the responsibility of the mission's school, he used to pray with the students in the school. School classes would begin after the prayer was over. After serving as principal for four to five years, he moved to the London Mission in Bhabanipur. Then, W. G. Brockway came in Berhampore from passing B. A degree from Oxford University and became the principal of Khagra Mission School. He used to teach English literature to the students in the school. After that, O. H. Strusberg and his wife Mrs. Elizabeth Strusberg came in Berhampore.³² Reverend Strasberg took charge of the London Mission School and managed the school efficiently. A year later, schoolhouses, including the Jubilee Chapel, were badly damaged in a powerful earthquake.³³ He established the Jubilee Chapel again. Sometime later and after this incident, he increased the size of the school grounds in collaboration with the colonial government, as well as he founded the present large red school building taking financial support from the London Mission. Mrs. and Mrs. Strusberg spread education in different parts of the district for forty-three years. Finally, in 1939, he returned to his homeland with honor. After independence, the name of Khagra Mission School was changed to 'Khagra Gurudas Tarasundari Institution'. At the end of 1956, the London Missionary Society decided to sell the school.³⁴ At this time Shri Gurudas Saha, one of the traders of Khagra and his wife Smt. Tarasundari Devi came forward to save the school. On 1 August 1960, the school was renamed 'Khagra Gurudas Tarasundari Institution' according to the name of Gurudas Saha and Tarasundari Devi.³⁵ Now it is a Bengali medium high school. The reputation of this missionary school has not been tarnished to the people of the district.

The London Missionary Society was involved with the establishment and management of Bengali and English medium schools as well as the establishment and management of a teacher training college to spread education in different parts of the Murshidabad district. Acharya O. H. Strusberg was in charge of the Berhampore branch of the London Missionary Society in the four decades of the twentieth century. He took upon himself the

responsibility of setting up a Teachers' Training College in Berhampore. He applied setting up the college to higher authority in Khagra L. M. S school. Apart from this, He also promised to take all the responsibilities related to the organizational structure of the college. An important meeting was held in Edinburgh House in London in 1937, there decided to establish the teacher training institution, and the Council approved the establishment of a teachers' training College in Berhampore.³⁶ At that time, the London Missionary Society took over all the responsibility of making college buildings, the dormitory, and the residence of the principal (including salary). Subsequently, the London Missionary Society established the Teachers' training College in collaboration with others six other missionaries in Berhampore. Due to the involvement of more than one missionary organization in the establishment of the college, the college was renamed 'Union Christian Training College'. The first principal of the college was Reverend Thomas Clement Vicary Saheb. The teaching of the college started with four students on March 7, 1936.³⁷ After starting the college officially, there was no opportunity for any female student to take training except male students. Later, in the academic year 1941-1942, the doors of the college were opened for female students too. In that academic year, four female students were admitted to the college. They were; Mrs. Yuthika Dutt, Mrs. Renuka Tagore, Mrs. Shefalika Sen and Mrs. Amina Khatun.³⁸ Since there was no college hostel at that time, arrangements were made for them to stay at the previously mentioned Miss Ashar's home or orphanage. However, the ashram had been sold to the Girls College authorities in 1947. From January 1, 1948, a Part of the headmaster's quarters of L. M. S Boys' School was used as a women's hostel. After independence, in 1975, the 'Bachelor of Physical Education course was included in the college.³⁹ Even today in the 21st century, this educational institution is considered a well-known teacher-teaching institution to all the affluent people of Bengal and the district. The students from different castes, backward classes, and Dalits of different religions of Bengal and the district get the opportunity to take training from this institution.

It can be concluded that the main objective of the London Missionary Society was to convert the people of different communities of Murshidabad district to Christianity; This is a matter of constant truth. It is commonly said that they used the spread of education as a tool to convert to Christianity. Let the observed matter is how far London Missionaries had been succussed in fulfilling their main objective? In this case, the help of two census reports of the twentieth century has been taken. The census report (1911) mentioned that the total population of the district was 1345073 at that time; There were 202 Christians. The number of converted Christians was 89. Which was very little compared to the total population. Again, how many people were converted by London missionaries in the converted Christian population is a matter of in-depth investigation. On the other hand, the census report of 1951 mentioned that the total population of the district at that time was 1771604.

There The Christian population was 745.⁴⁰ which was 0.05% of the total population. It is said that which is very little. However, there is no hesitation in saying that the spread of education by the London Missionary Society led to some positive changes in the education system of the district. The attractive feature of the mission school was various changes in curriculum. They included history, geography, and science as an element of modern knowledge in the conventional curriculum.⁴¹ They emphasized teachers' training and also arranged for printed textbooks. The schools founded by the London missionaries were run much more efficiently than the pathshalas. There were in the missions' schools used to teach much more than indigenous schools within a very short time. The students could learn high-quality reading, writing, and simple mathematics. The schools were run in a larger context and an orderly manner; Discipline, the punishment was relatively light. In addition, students were rewarded for doing well. The spread of education by the London missionaries ensured the moral understanding and economic security of the people of the district. The spread of Western education by the missionaries started the renaissance in the district indirectly. The students studying in the mission were appointed to the various jobs in the mission school later. So, London missionaries were able to make employment in the district. They had a commendable initiative, to bring the girls of the district to the educational premises. They introduced women's education in the district through setting up schools and providing zenana education. Which was a task of really challenging and hard work at that time. Therefore, the contribution of London missionaries to the spread of education in the district cannot be denied in any way.

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