

Harbinger of Change: Agusta Mary Blandford

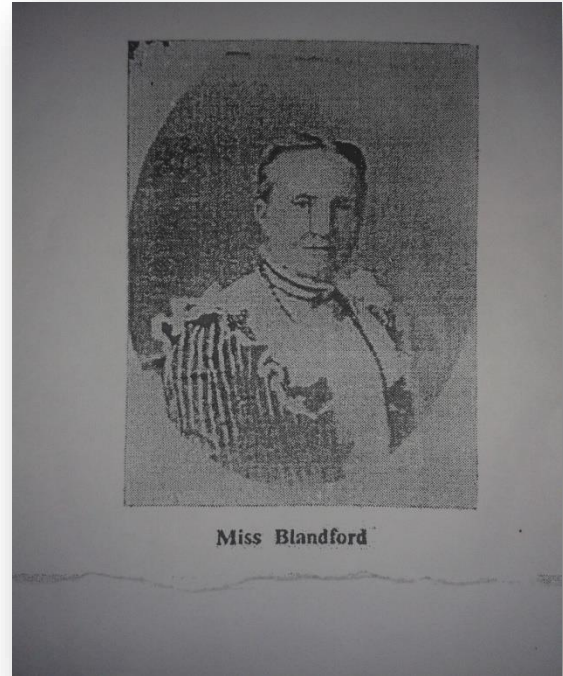
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Abstract:- Agusta Mary Blandford is one of the ablest and most successful Zenana missionary who has ever come to Kerala. She had laboured many years for women education and against child marriage. She also worked for the wholehearted progress of girls in Travancore. All her socio-educational reform activities were under the roof of Zenana fort mission school. This school has embarked a new development in the social condition of women in Travancore.

I. INTRODUCTION

Agusta Mary Blandford was born in 1800 as the second daughter of John Folliot Blandford in Wiltshire. She was a famous social reformer among women of Travancore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Not only when she was missionary, but also when she was a teacher in London, she worked for the emancipation of women in society. Blandford had come to Kerala in December 1862 along with Henry Baker, attached to the Indian female normal school and instruction society. She was a missionary, teacher, prolific writer and social reformer. Zenana fort mission school is the notable contribution of her in the women education of Travancore which was established in 1864. The missionary activities of Blandford were under the shadow of Church of England zenana mission, a missionary group started at spreading the gospel among women.

She was successful in her mission to impart English education to the girls in Travancore. Zenana fort mission school was the first school that attracted girls of the city and triggered a great transformation among young women of this princely state. This school was established in 1864 by Blandford where she had undertaken rigorous steps for changing the socio-economic and educational condition of society. In the beginning this school gave admission only to the upper class girls. But now it extended its service to the lower class of the society. On the influence of the zenana missionaries, Travancore rulers had taken a keen interest in promoting female education in the state. Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma (1832-1880) was highly successful in the social reforms and extended his support to Blandford for plan to start school for girls in Travancore. Rulers of Travancore were the great patrons of learning. The fort mission school continued to receive support and patronage from the administrators of state especially its rulers. T.Madhava Rao, the progressive diwan of Travancore has eased her to establish this school in Travancore.



Agusta Mary Blandford worked restlessly to educate the women in Travancore. She also started a hospital for women and children. She dedicated her precious forty-three years for missionary activities and social reforms in Travancore. In the beginning people were not ready to accept the reforms made by her because of their unwillingness to welcome modernity in the society. Condition of women was very deplorable in the late eighteenth century. She found that education as the best way to remove social anarchies in the society.

Despite a lot of criticisms and hurdles, Blandford established a school for upper class girls in Travancore. Diwan T. Madhava Rao remarked “very little, if anything, has been done for female education. This subject calls for prompt attention such education must be among other advantages, the foundation of important social reform”. Diwan had given a suitable old palace called “Vadakekottaram” for conducting classes. This school was publicly started on November 3rd, 1864 with four girls, a daughter and niece of the Diwan and two little girls of the Nair caste. In the beginning this school is known as “Vadakekottarampallikkudam” or north palace school. The school received a lot of appropriate favours including furniture, financial assistance and staffs from the government. It offered several courses like English, Drawing and other vocational courses to the girls. Later it became the milestone of women education in Travancore. Blandford left in 1906 for England and died aged 71 on September 25th, 1906 in England.

II. CONCLUSION

Agusta Mary Blandford and her social reform activities have achieved a conspicuous position in the history of Travancore. The zenana fort mission was not only her contribution to the society, but also made gifts to the precious chronicles of the micro-history of the city. She is obtained great success in the socio-economic and educational developments of women in Travancore.

In the beginning of Blandford's missionary activities in Travancore, Hindu prejudice and superstition made it impossible to open up the zenana's to light of knowledge. Travancore had achieved great educational progress after the intervention of Blandford in this sector. Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma and T.Madhava Rao were the keen supporters of her dream for a school. She believed that education can be used as one of the tool to transform the society and empowered women to act against social evils. Blandford has done a great and noble work in Travancore. Her initiatives in girl's education started a new epoch in the history of women education in Kerala.

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