Salvation Army officials visit girls' school

Early footage of the welcoming salute given to Commissioner Higgins of the Salvation Army on a visit to a girls’ school in Ahmedabad

Recorded in 1904, this film shows the carefully coordinated dance display performed by Gujarati schoolgirls to mark the seemingly brief visit of Salvation Army officials to their school. The Salvation Army set up its first foreign mission in Bombay in 1882, with members invited to undertake evangelistic work in Gujarat (which was then part of the Bombay Presidency) a little later.

Girls’ education was the subject of debate and political struggle in India from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The first girls’ schools in India were set up in 1848 by the Indian leader Jyotirao Phule and his wife Savitribai and were funded by private donations not the colonial state. Western missionaries and evangelists also lobbied for girls’ education though they too received little support from colonial officials and often aroused suspicion from non-Christian Indians who feared the schools would seek to convert and westernise their daughters. By the interwar years, there were a growing number of Indian, mission and government-run girls’ schools operating across India.

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