



## CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES CONTRIBUTION FOR THE EDUCATION OF DEPRESSED CLASSES ON PRE INDEPENDENT INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO TRICHINOPOLY DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

Trichinopoly is reputed for the antiquity of its civilization situated on the banks of Cauvery. It has been the centre of many empires and battle fields, besides being an important strategic place. It is also chiefly noticeable for its remarkable Rock Temple and the group of temples clustered in and around it. Trichinopoly District shines as a prominent centre of education in TamilNadu on par with other important places in India. A beginning in modern education was made by the Christian Missionaries in Trichinopoly district to propagate the religion through educational Institutions. The Tranquebar Danish Mission was the pioneer in spreading education in the district. As early as in 1756, two of the missionaries, tracked many places in the district, founded schools in Srirangam and Trichinopoly.

In 1854, the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (SPG) in foreign parts supported not less than 186 schools, the majority of which were in the district of Trichinopoly and composite districts of Madura, Tanjore and Tinnelveli. The Missionaries took keen interest in education to the students of depressed classes at the time when the government did very little to shoulder the responsibility in this regard. The earnest efforts for the spread of higher education to the students of depressed classes in Trichinopoly district were made by Christian Missionaries during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hindu society is governed by the laws of Manu (Manudhrma shastra) who has prescribed all sorts of the occupation was based on the caste system All the upper caste people were allowed to do higher and prestigious works. But depressed classes were getting low class work and least payment in the case of Trichinopoly district, three major caste people allied, that people called as i) Paraiyan (Adi Dravida, Panchama, Paraiyar, Sambavar and Vettiyan). (ii) Pallan (Devendrakulatham, Kudamban, Pallan, Pannadi, and Kadaiyan). (iii) Sakkiliyar (Arunthathiyar, Madavi and Pagadai). This people also called as some different names, depressed classes, Dalits, Scheduled caste. The depressed classes, who were subjected to severe indignities, disabilities and inhuman treatment, were attracted to religious like Buddhism, Christianity. The Christian missionaries in particular gave them shelter, provided them with better living conditions and a better quality of life. The primary object of the missionaries was to spread the Gospel and to win converts to Christianity. With that object in view the Christian missionaries founded schools whenever they from a small congregation and wherever they got an opening and converted to Christianity through education, particularly the depressed class students were the major conversion groups in Trichinopoly district in first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Some of the Christian missionaries provided several welfare measures for the students of depressed classes particularly in the field of education. St John's vestry school, Bishop Heber school, St Joseph's school, Holy cross school, Philomina school, SPG college, St Joseph's college, Holy cross college were the notable Christian missionaries institutions to the upliftment for the students of depressed classes in the district. They were provided free and quality education, free food, medical facilities, scholarship provision, social assurance programmes

*and cultural consciousness. The Christian missionaries were the only eye opener for the education of depressed class students in Trichinopoly district. They have provided many useful works and clear cut vision for the education of depressed class students and built their bright future, complete life in the world.*

**KEYWORDS:** *civilization situated , modern education , Holy cross school, Philomina school.*

## INTRODUCTION

Trichinopoly is reputed for the antiquity of its civilization situated on the banks of Cauvery. It has been the centre of many empires and battle fields, besides being an important strategic place. It is also chiefly noticeable for its remarkable Rock Temple and the group of temples clustered in and around it. Trichinopoly was a part of Uraiyur till the close of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and had an separate identity. In the writings of early Greek travellers Uraiyur is figured frequently. The Author of the Periplus of the Erythrean sea mentioned Argaru (Uraiyur) as the centre of trade. It is also referred as Koli in the Sangam Literature. It would appear that, up to Viswanatha's reign Uraiyur was the capital of the country, and that he founded Trichinopoly, fortified and greatly enlarged it.

The Tamil name of Trichinopoly is Tri-Sira-Pilly (Tri-Sira-Puram) or place of the three headed demon and it is also called by European Scholars-Cirutapalli or the holy Rock town and Tiruchinna-palli or holy little town. The anglicized form Trichinopoly is the modification of Tiru-Cinna-Palli. To begin with, Trichinopoly was nothing more than the solid rock around which the city bustles today. Around the rock there was a fort (now all the walls of the fort have been removed) which is called Rock Fort or malaikottai. Trichinopoly District shines as a prominent centre of education in TamilNadu on par with other important places in India. The Chola courts at Uraiyur and Jeyamkondacholapuram served as places where learned courtiers, elder scholars and poets converged; the Srirangam Temple was the religious centre which propagated Vedas and Hindu Scriptures. It has been understood that Rock Fort housed a Jain Monastery filled with Jain teachers and philosophers. Karur which was an integral part of the district, has served -as the capital of Sangam Cheras was the place where the famous Tamil epics Silappathikaram and Manimekalai were compiled. The above fact bear ample testimony to the fact that, it has been since remote past a glorious centre of learning had been in existence in and around Trichinopoly.

Education in Pre-colonial India was based on Varna System; the curriculum was mainly oriental in nature pertaining to the Vedas, Upanishads, Astronomy, Astrology etc. The Charter Act of 1813 assured in an era in Indian History. The Act permitted the Missionaries to setup Churches across India for the cause of Christianity and further provided state funding for the impetus of education in India. After the Charter Act of 1833 the Christian Missionaries, apart from the propagation of religion played a major role in bringing western and scientific education for the cause of Indians by setting up many institutions.

A beginning in modern education was made by the Christian Missionaries in Trichinopoly district to propagate the religion through educational Institutions. The Tranquebar Danish Mission was the pioneer in spreading education in the district. As early as in 1756, two of the missionaries, tracked many places in the district, founded schools in Srirangam and Trichinopoly. The famous Missionary Rev. Frederick Schwartz who belonged to this mission came to Trichinopoly in 1761 where he was welcomed by the English garrison. He stayed at the town raised subscriptions, obtained donations from the Nawab of Arcot, the nominal ruler of the country and founded a school and a church therein 1772. In 1854, the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (SPG) in foreign parts supported not less than 186 schools, the majority of which were in the district of Trichinopoly and composite districts of Madura, Tanjore and Tinnelveli. The Missionaries took keen interest in education to the students of depressed classes at the time when the government did very little to shoulder the responsibility in this regard. The earnest efforts for the spread of higher education to the students of depressed classes in Trichinopoly district were made by Christian Missionaries during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## EARLY HISTORY OF DEPRESSED CLASSES

The Puranas one saying that, Brahmin was born from the head of Brahma, Kshatriya was born from the shoulders of Brahma, Vaishya was born from the thigh of Brahma and Shudra was from the feet of Brahma. This is not a scientific, rational and environmental, therefore sudhras (depressed classes) do not have any god and goddesses, and our stand is that, nature is our source of power. The Saivites have Shiva, Vaishnavities have Vishnu, Brahmins have Brahma, Christians have Jesus Christ, Muslims have Allah, and all have their own history<sup>1</sup>. But depressed classes do not have a history of their own. Depressed classes have a history our hearts and mind are filled with an unknown joy, depressed classes are exposing to us part by part from the intelligent and strong Ravana to Trishanku. Who are all Sudhra kings and queens but are described as Rakshasas by the Brahminic literature. In this great effort of some leaders have studied the Brahminic myths and is placing before us in Dalitology the shenanigas of the Brahmins.

Depressed Means “The broken, “The crushed” or “The affected”. As depressed classes are Matriarchal, enjoy higher status in their community. Hence, hardly any anti – women attitude followed the matriarchal system. There were only bride price in the society i.e. man gave money to the girl for marriage. The mother Goddesses, the above shows that the depressed classes society was not chauvinistic and male dominated. To put in other words women had a higher position and there was more of equality among women and men. There is hardly and dowry or bride – burning problem among Depressed classes. As they all belong to the working class, both husband and wife together and share everything together<sup>2</sup>. Enslavement of women is essentially a problem of the Hindu society which is patriarchal and hence male dominated. It today’s society women groups, feminism, and equality are having the pseudo values. The imposition of Aryan and alien cultures result is suppression, oppression and discrimination. The Dravidians and the Tribal are the indigenous people of the nation. The suppression has cultural background. The oppression had economic connotation and the discrimination is gender – wise and also people wise.

The Hindu society is governed by the laws of Manu (Manudhrma shastra) who has prescribed all sorts of dos and don’ts to women. The Hindu caste system is based on Manu, even the occupation is based on the caste system. All the upper caste people were allowed to do higher and prestigious works. But depressed classes were getting low class work and least payment<sup>3</sup>. The Tamilnadu Government identifies some divisions of the depressed classes, that are called as scheduled castes recently. Therefore, the 78 names can be grouped into six major categories (i) Paraiyan (Adi Dravida, Panchama, Paraiyar, Sambavar and Vettiyan). (ii) Pallan (Devendrakulatham, Kudamban, Pallan, Pannadi, and Kadaiyan). (iii) Sakkiliyar (Arunthathiyar, Madavi and Pagadai). (iv) Kuravar (v) valluvan (Tiruvalluvar and Valluvam), (vi) others (all other castes not coming industry of the five groups). The first five groups consists of it sub castes and account for 95 per cent of the total population of Depressed classes in Tamilnadu while the others accounts for the rest.

In the history of India, the depressed classes, who were subjected to severe indignities, disabilities and inhuman treatment, were attracted to religious like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. The Christian missionaries in particular gave them shelter, provided them with better living conditions and a better quality of life.

### Missionaries Contribution for the Education of Depressed classes in Trichinopoly District.

The primary object of the missionaries was to spread the Gospel and to win converts to Christianity. With that object in view the Christian missionaries founded schools whenever they found a small congregation and wherever they got an opening and converted to Christianity through education, particularly the depressed class students were the major conversion groups in Trichinopoly district in first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The missionaries found that the gospel they preached depended upon the steadfastness of the converts (Depressed classes) since the missionaries could not stay with them always and help them in, their day to day spiritual growth. So they thought that if the converts could be taught to read and write, they could themselves read the bible and receive spiritual sustenance from it.

This method was already initiated by St. Francis Xavier in his work among the paravas of the Pearl Fishery Coast. According to D. O. Allen, one reason for the missionaries to educate the people was to make them more capable of understanding and appreciating the facts, evidences, the doctrines and duties of the scripture. Another reason for such an education was that it provided access to the people, and opportunities to preach the Gospel. The missionaries took up educational work in order to meet the needs on the converts and especially poor and depressed people in Trichinopoly district to train up Indian assistance for their proselytizing activities. But before the Indian assistants got their theological training, it was essential for them to have fundamental knowledge in the three R's (Reading, writing and arithmetic). The importance of vocational education was also born in the minds of the missionaries, and some schools planned their whole curriculum and training to poor and depressed class students for village life<sup>4</sup>.

They had also started vocational schools and to secure government jobs for the converts in particular poor and depressed class students order to give them a living and a status in society. They tried to uplift the social, cultural and economic condition of the converts, which could be achieved only through education. This duty became all the more urgent because neither the indigenous nor the government schools could admit all the Indian Christian children and they would have remained without education whatsoever if the missionaries had not organized schools of their own. It is out of this realization that the mission schools of modern India were born. The Despatch of 1854, popularly known as Wood's Despatch, provided for the system of grants-in-aid, taking advantage of the government's decision to pay substantial. This was the main key to open up for the education of the depressed class students in Tamilnadu particulars in Trichinopoly district. Grants to any one prepared to establish schools and to teach secular subjects with reasonable efficiency, the missionaries decided to found still more schools. This made it possible for them to achieve three objectives:

- a) Christians could find employment as teachers and Christian children could receive education which they found difficult to obtain elsewhere owing to caste prejudices
- b) The Christian schools and colleges was a valuable means of contact with Non- Christians and poor and socially affected students.
- c) Christian teachers could also be employed as catechists to watch over local congregation.

With these aims many missionaries schools and colleges were started in Trichinopoly district. At a later period when the tide of nationalism slowly became furious – it was recognized that one of the aims of the Christian schools and colleges were that it should be an agency for strengthening training and developing Christian students and that it should be training ground for leadership in the church. The great purpose of the educational mission was to leave mind of the community with Christian bent to all higher thought. The Lindsay commission of 1931 was also impressed by the theory of striving for excellence. In view of academic excellence, the commission suggested the closure of smaller colleges scatter all over in order to concentrate on a selected few, planted in well chosen centres to propagates their religions through education with the support of the poor and socially people. This had added advantage of conserving time and funds which could be utilized for strengthening such institution<sup>5</sup>. Thus when the prevailing atmosphere changed from time to time, the Christian institutions also adjusted themselves by slightly modifying their object to suit the changing conditions.

It is world – affirming. It assists in the total formation of each individual within the community. It includes a religious dimension that permeates the entire education. It is an apostolic instrument that promotes bet weans faith and culture<sup>6</sup>. It pursues excellence in its work of formation and witnesses to that excellence. It insists on individual care and concern for each person. It emphasizes activity knowledge, love and acceptance of self and provides realistic knowledge of the world in which we live. It is a preparation for active life and commitment. It serves the faith does justice, seeks to from 'men and women for others' and manifests a particular concern for the poor and socially affected people.

It provides adequate personal care and concern for others. It celebrates faith in personal and community prayer, worship and service. It stresses lay Jesuit collaboration and relies on a spirit of community among administrators, teachers and parents, alumni and benefactors in an atmosphere that promotes community. It adopts means and methods in order to achieve its aims most effectively with a common vision and a common goal. It assists in providing the professional training and on-going formation that is needed especially for administrators and teachers. It is an apostolic instrument in the service of the Church as it serves human society. It prepares students for active participation at the Church and local community, for the liberation and service of others, taking Jesus as a model.

In the context of existing inequalities, injustices and dehumanizing poverty in contemporary society, the Jesuits are committed to challenge and change these oppressive structures through the colleges, towards the integral liberation of man in collaboration with Christians of different denominations, people of other religions and secular movements working with similar vision. Unfortunately, there are lots of people in the educational institutions who suffer from 'The Cain Complex' and repeatedly ask the question: 'Am I brother's keeper?' The scholarly privileged class has repeated this question to think only about themselves and their own future. What is needed is that the college imparts such an education as to give witness to social justice. In short, education must be value-based and value oriented. Educational enterprise should have faith and justice dimension to bring about the social change. It means that the educated and the educators should be committed to faith and Justice. The Jesuit educational institutions shape students into agents of social change preparing them for concerted social action and thus paving way to mass movements which will bring about the desired liberation. They will in their admission policies actualize the preferential option for the poor by giving a privileged place to the weak that are poor economically and academically and from them as men for others stamped with the Ignition hallmark of excellence and re orienting itself in order to respond to the crying needs of today's society.

They will also promote research in thousand branches of arts, sciences and relevant pedagogy which would help build a just social order.

To promote academic excellence and will suit the talents and abilities of the students and bring out the best in them, keeping in mind the needs of the society it seeks to serve to encourage innovative programmes, especially in three areas:

Syllabus ii) methods of teaching and iii) evaluation. To develop skills of communication and self study. To strive towards compassionate excellence by helping the socially and academically disadvantaged sections with remedial and flexible courses. To arouse in the students a sense of social justice, responsibility, compassion, sensitivity and concern for everybody especially through participation at extension programme; and to inculcate in the students basic moral, social and spiritual values necessary for building up character and developing personally through courses in Ethics Religion<sup>7</sup>. In the beginnings, Madurai Mission was started by Robert de Nobili, and then Trichinopoly and Madurai Dioceses were run by Jesuit that is why almost all the schools and colleges were founded in Tamilnadu. We are proud to say that many prominent and depressed class people studied in Jesuits schools and colleges<sup>8</sup>. As a continuation of Jesuits policy of option for the poor, Jesuits province must have a common vision and every apostate must have separate vision statement. Option for the poor was further deepened with the inclusion of option for Dalits in the province congregation started by the missionaries.

The goal of Jesuit secondary education is to "bring about a deep and urgently-needed transformation of the socio-economic structures that obtain today". Therefore, impelled by Jesuit preferential option for the poor we endeavour. To provide them an integral formation to suit the needs of our students in their adolescent years. To help them achieve a total liberation especially through prayer and God experience. To help them develop their talents, exercise their creativity and thus blossom into responsible citizens. To help them shape into men for other – imbibe and uphold the values of freedom, truth and justice – and thus usher in a radical transformation of society. St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School was started in 1844. The aim of this institution was to provide education to poor and depressed class students the Trichinopoly district and region particularly in and around the Trichinopoly Town but people



from other denomination are also admitted into this school and are treated well. There is no kind of any discrimination between any students of the school.

The Catholic students are taught catechism and the other students are provided moral education about god and their duties towards god. The primary aim of the school was to provide quality education for the students in particular for poor depressed students who belong to the back ward section of the society, through the mother – tongue. The Motto of the school was “*Pro Bono ET Vero*” (*for the Good and the True*) which means for the good and the true and it sticks to the motto very. The school serves as a home making them students to be faithful to god and man<sup>9</sup>.

The Jesuit communities have a clear – cut vision of the primary and secondary education their sole aim was to curd the emotions and feelings of the students which are varied in nature, and to set them right in due course of time. To make a good society to eradicate poverty to maintain balance of economic inequality and to make self – confident about himself were some of the goals of the school. To make the students to devote their life for others, freedom of every kind, truth to know the very necessity to being truthful and thereby lead to a social transformation and the like are some the goals set before them.

The Christian missionaries did and doing their very best attains the above mentioned goals to the fullest in every possible way. There were became a reality day by in every as days passion. The school provided several welfare measures for the depressed classes, poor students. This is the only school the provides meals in the morning and in the afternoon free of cost. The coordinator of the school provides concession of one third part of the poor and deserving students, the sectary of the Institution takes good care of the medical facilities, scholarship were provided to the students<sup>10</sup> of depressed classes as well. There were special coaching classes for X and XII Std students to cope up with the public examinations, and they collect no fees at all the students. St. Joseph’s college was one of the best higher educational institutions to the upliftment of the depressed class students in Trichinopoly district. The institution does admit other students, irrespective of their caste and creed: their religious feelings and freedom of conscience are respected. The college imports the sound formation (religious, academic, social and physical) of the young, based on Christian principles. Every catholic student therefore attends, religion and every non-catholic students attends ethics classes, in which man’s fundamental duties to god, to his motherland, to self and to his fellow men are explained. He, she also takes part in out- reach programmes organised by the college. This Jesuit College trains young men and women of quality to be Leaders in all walks of life so that they may some the people of their nation in truth, justice and love<sup>11</sup>.

Accordingly, this college is to be an agent of social change instilling an awareness of the great need in India for social justice based on the dignity of the human person. Thus, it strikes to make its own contribution towards transformation of the present social condition, so that justice, equality and the moral values enshrined the constitution of India may prevail in the daily life of every citizen of India.

The Christian missionaries have their hostels for young people, especially for depressed class students these hostels namely, Sacred Heart Hostel (SH), the New Hostel (NH), and Bellarine Hostel (BH) make new home for all the young people who study in St. Joseph’s College and Schools in Trichinopoly. The hostels proved a good environment for the depressed class students to study, to learn good manners, habits and behaviours, lest they might be eroded otherwise. To make the students to study peacefully the Jesuits have provided good infrastructure in addition, they provide good food at low cost, and give them concession in the mess fees. It helps the students to complete their concession. Meticulously it helps the students to complete their education at a low cost. They also support the students by sanctioning loans and scholarships for the poor and needy. The Jesuits are interested to conduct seminars, mass prayers and retreats for the students to enlighten them in holy path to attain sacredness. They make the student to grow up spiritually<sup>12</sup>. Scrutinising recreation reveals the creativeness that improves the talents of the tender hearts, though they are engaged in education for a long period. Sports and games are being given and rejoiced for the students. Every year in the month of May Dalit student’s welfare association conducting<sup>13</sup>. English coaching classes for Dalit Christian students particularly for pursuing 12<sup>th</sup> standard student more than 100 students were Benefited in by this coaching classes. These classes were taken for 20 days. Students from interior areas in

the Kumbakonam, Salem, Pandicherry, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Dindigal were bettering from this school the main impacts of this coaching class were, knowledge development, Social Assurance Programme and cultural consciousness. Finally, it is very useful for depressed class student to build their bright further life and to complete in the world. Its none other than St. Joseph's College, to provide Mid day meals for the Catholic Dalits and poor of rural origin for this, the students ought to be poor, numerous students are being benefited by this scheme. Christian missionaries have been allowed fees concession for SC/ST students and the poor students. The college also sanctioned scholarship for meritorious students<sup>14</sup>.

Education was given only to the elite and the rich the past days. It remained a dream for the poor and also for the depressed class. This situation changed with the advent of the Christian Missionaries in Trichinopoly district in first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The Christian missionaries have a soft corner for the poor and in a special way for the depressed class. They started all their Missions, especially educational institutions having in mind the upliftment of the depressed class.

The Advent of Christian missionaries and their Mission was a real ray of hope the poor especially for the depressed classes. They approached the people and organised some society oriented programmes and they always keep in mind the poor and marginalised, when design their programmes. To make the students and society concerned persons in which they live, created new organisation. The Christian missionaries have a big role in the life of the depressed classes, they have formed many groups and movements for the upliftment of the people. They have made special policies in their institutions to give life change for the depressed class students. The Christian missionaries realized that the only way to uplift and bring out social status for depressed classes from the discrimination of the society by giving them education. This was the main tool to the development of the depressed classes and come out of the usual life, Christian missionaries provided lot of facilities to the depressed class students to make complete their studies well.

The Christian Missionaries have been pioneers in Indian Depressed classes education for the past one hundred fifty years. Even critics of christianity acknowledge the countries independences to the christian institution particularly in the past when the show obviously played a role for out of proportion to the number of christians in the overall population. The nineteenth century occupies a very important place in the history of India, for it was during this period that a new India was emerging under the rejuvenating influence of the West. Everything began to undergo a change for the better. There was an awakening in the field of education in particular depressed classes education and in socio religious life of Trichinopoly district.

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