



## CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIGHER EDUCATION - A STUDY

**S. Thirunavukkarasu**

**Ph.D., Research Scholar (Full-Time),  
Department of History, Annamalai University,  
Annamalai Nagar.**



### ABSTRACT

*The District of North Arcot in Tamilnadu is well known for its deep rooted Hindu philosophy and Hindu religious practices and festivals. The Jalakanteswara temple in the fort of Vellore, the Margabandhuswami temple at Virinchipuram, the famous Arunachaleswarar temple at Tiruvannamalai were the Hindu philosophy and culture in this part of Tamilnadu from the very ancient days of history. The Roman Catholic Missions and the Protestant Missions from European Countries, America and Australia were responsible for preaching the gospel and planting the churches in the District of North Arcot. The American Arcot Mission started Voorhees College at Vellore in 1898 by Rev. William Issac chamberlain, the first principal of the college. From 1898-1905, there was very good academic and physical growth. After that Christian Medical College was stated in 1918 by Dr. Miss. Ida Sophia Scudder from American Arcot Mission. The men's and women's colleges started by the churches served as a boon to the society as a whole. Students from the districts around were also benefitted by the Christian College. They were the pioneers in imparting college education in the district and they have produced a galaxy of great men of eminence.*

**KEYWORDS:** European Countries , Roman Catholic Missions , Christian College.

### INTRODUCTION:

The District of North Arcot in Tamilnadu is well known for its deep rooted Hindu philosophy and Hindu religious practices and festivals. The Jalakanteswara temple in the fort of Vellore with its architectural beauty, the Margabandhuswami temple at Virinchipuram lying 13 kilometers west of Vellore, the famous Arunachaleswarar temple at Tiruvannamalai 90 kilometers south of Vellore, the Murugan temple at Valli Hill (Vallimalai) 21 kilometers east of Vellore and the Lakshmi Narasimha and Anjaneya temples at Sholinghur lying 60 kilometers North of Vellore and festivals such as the Karthigai Deepam festival at Tiruvannamalai that lasts for ten days during November and December every year, the Adikiruthigai and Car festivals at Valli Hill, the five week Karthigai festival at Sholinghur and Virinchipuram and the Renugambal Amman festival on all Fridays in the month of Adi (July - August) at Padaivedu in Polur Taluk depict the happy blend of Hindu philosophy and culture in this part of Tamilnadu from the very ancient days of history. The Hindu virgin soil did not restrict the gospel message bearers of Christianity from permeating and taking roots within its precincts. The Roman Catholic Missions and the Protestant Missions from European Countries, America and Australia were responsible for preaching the gospel and planting the churches in the District of North Arcot. The Catholics were the first to spread the gospel in the district and they were followed by the Protestants. Catholic Christianity made its inroads into North Arcot through the coming of two Jesuit Fathers to Vellore along with Venkata II the Raja of Vijayanagar, who visited Vellore in 1606 A.D. which was his other capital. The early attempts of the two Jesuit Fathers to convert Hindus to Christianity at Vellore were not successful. Before they could pursue further they were withdrawn by a peremptory order of Philip III of Portugal,<sup>1</sup> though the Jesuit Fathers left Vellore. Catholicism still found a place in the town by the presence of French

Catholic soldiers who garrisoned the hill fortress of the muslim ruler of Vellore. In order to facilitate the worship of these soldiers the local ruler Gulam Murturja Khan Bahadur conceded an acre of land to the French priest at the foot of the hill for the construction of a chapel. The title deed for this land was written in Persian language in the year 1004 in the Muhammadan Era (1626 A.D). A chapel was built on this ground, but the Catholics had to face problems and persecutions from the local Hindus and the Nawab. The first Catholic Christian church at Vellore was constructed at the foot of the Mountain by Fr.Francois.<sup>2</sup>

### HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

In the field of modern higher education in India the Christian missionaries were pioneers in many respects. They were to a large extent, instrumental in creating an educational ladder of the western type. Higher education of western model developed in India gradually and it became increasingly popular chiefly due to the medium of instruction, viz. English. The man who was commonly credited with the introduction of western education in English was *Thomas Bahinton Macaulay*. He came to India as a member of the Governor-General's Council in December 1834 and his primary task was to compose the *Indian Penal Code*. He was also appointed as the President of the General Council of Public Instruction in 1834 and in that capacity he played a very important role which had great impact on the entire system of education.

The growth of missionary enterprise in the period between 1833 and 1853 was facilitated by cordial relationship that existed between the Company and missionaries. This period was one of the greatest reforms and liberal thinking in the social life of England and as a result, many of the Company officials who came to India at this time were also inspired by missionary zeal. Between 1835 and 1853 the Government and private educators had thrice made educational experiments, but met with no success. Therefore in 1853 the Charter of the East India Company was to be renewed and the need for defining the educational policy had become necessary.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Education Dispatch of 1854 was issued. (Wood's Dispatch) After the President of the Parliamentary Committee, Sir Charles Wood, and later Lord Halifax. It provided for the system of grants-in-aid. Taking advantage of the Government's decision to pay substantial grants to any one preparing to establish schools and colleges to teach secular subjects with reasonable efficiency, the missionaries decided to found still more schools and colleges.

### HIGHER EDUCATION IN NORTH ARCOT DISTRICT

Besides giving a thrust for primary and high school education in the district from the second half of the nineteenth century, Christianity took the lead in providing college education at the far end of the century. The growing strength and popularity of the mission high school at Vellore and the absence of a college within a radius of hundred miles from the town and the inability of the parents to spend on their children for college education at distant places like Madras or elsewhere made the church consider the possibility of starting a college at Vellore in North Arcot district. In view of the availability of higher education at the colleges in Madras, the government was not in favour of starting a college at Vellore. But the American Arcot Mission decided in 1897 to start a second grade college in this historical town.<sup>4</sup>

### VOORHEES COLLEGE VELLORE

With the approval of the University of Madras, the American Arcot Mission started second grade college at Vellore in 1898, the college started functioning with eight students. Under Rev. William Issac chamberlain, the first principal of the college from 1898-1905, there was very good academic and physical growth. In recognition and appreciation of his services, the University of Madras conferred on him the title of the first fellow of the University in the North Arcot District. The Government was also pleased to nominate him as the first chairman of Vellore municipality. He was also the first foreign recipient of the Kaiser-I-Hind Gold Medal award. The American Arcot Mission college became the largest educational institution in the Madras presidency outside the city of Madras.<sup>5</sup> As the college section was housed in the mission high school building the need arose to construct separate college buildings to meet the requirements of the University and need of the growing strength of the students at the college. As the

management started mobilizing funds, one Ralph Voorhess who was pastor and member of the Referral Churching America came toward with a generous donation of \$ 25,000 in 1902. The management purchased phased the land adjoining the mission high school and started constructing the new college buildings along with the government grant. The foundation was laid by Henry Nitchie Cobb, the Secretary, Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Church in America on 9<sup>th</sup> January 1905. The College was named as Elizabeth R. Voorhees College after the name of the donor's wife, Elizabeth Rodman, who herself later contributed a sum of \$ 10,000 for the construction of a hall and the Principal's quarters. It was in August 1918, that Lord Pentland, the then Governor of Madras Presidency formally opened the new college buildings. The College entered into a new phase of academic life with the introduction of intermediate classes in the place of First Arts Classes according to the new University regulation in 1909.<sup>6</sup> Three groups under part III namely (i) Mathematics, physics and Chemistry; (ii) Ancient History, Modern History and logic and (iii) Physics, Chemistry and logic were offered. Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, and Sanskrit languages were taught under Part II and English was offered under Part I. The student strength rose to 89 in the year 1913 of which 13 Christians and 76 non-Christians.

Admission of girls from the year 1924 marked a new chapter in the status development of women in this part of India. In this respect Voorhees College became a part of the revolution that was going on Indian Society for the emancipation of women. After a quarter of a century the number of women students rose to 35 in the year 1949. Today the college has ten disciplines at the undergraduate level and four disciplines at the post-graduate level with a student population of 1416 of whom 83 are women with 88 teaching staff on the faculty. The College has a N.C.C. Unit and Three N.S.S. units to train students take their place as responsible citizens in the Indian polity. The achievement and contribution of Voorhees College could well be assessed from the galaxy of leaders it had produced to serve at the national and international levels. The following are among the distinguished alumni of the college –Dr. sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, former President of India and one of the World's renowned philosophers, Dr.Malcolm Adiseshiah, former Deputy Director General of UNESCO and Vice-Chancellor of the Madras University, Dr Chandrasekar, a world renowned demographer and Mr.P.Ramachandran, former Union Minister and Governor of the State of Kerala<sup>7</sup>.

### CHRISTIAN MEDICAL COLLEGE, VELLORE

While Christianity has contributed a great deal in the field of general education, its greatest achievement in this area of social development in the district is the founding of the Christian Medical College way back in the year 1918. It was an expression of Christian love and concern for the sick and suffering Dr.Miss.Ida Sophia Scudder, a member of the founding Scudder family of the American Arcot Mission in the district, was the architect of this great institution.

The mortality rate among pregnant women and new born babies for want of medical care rent her heart. The Indian custom forbade men doctors to attend on pregnant women. In order to redeem the pregnant mothers and new born babies from dying she wanted to start a college of medicine for women at Vellore that would send out well trained and qualified women doctors into the society. She gave vent to her desire to start a medical college for women in the Decennial Missionary Conference held in Madras on 1902.<sup>8</sup> It was only in 1914 her desire had drawn the attention of the South India Medical Missionary Association to favourably consider her plan. The Association that met in Kodaikanal on 27th May, 1914 authorised Dr.Ida to raise funds to start the medical college. Carefully considering the need for a medical college as presented by Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder, the Government of Madras permitted her to start the college. The availability of medical studies for women in Delhi and Ludhiana at a distance of more than thousand miles from Madras was a fact that convinced the government to favourably consider her proposal.<sup>9</sup>

The Government was pleased to pass orders to acquire 109.24 acres of land on the outskirts of Vellore at a cost of Rs24,014 for compensation and also to make available 17.30 acres of waste haul for the construction of the medical college. The Rockefeller's Foundation in U.S.A. released a realised a grant of \$

50,000 for the proposed Union Medical College in South India through the good offices of the Women's American Baptist Board.<sup>10</sup> It was on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1917 the Executive Committee meeting of the Women's Union Medical College held at Vellore resolved to start the medical school with only Apothecary and the Sub Assistant Surgeons grades in the beginning with the understanding that the courses for L.M. & S and M.B.B.S, would be added later. The 12<sup>th</sup> August of 1918 was a day of great importance not only in the history of Vellore but also in the history of the Indian sub continent as a whole, when Lord Pentland, the then Governor of Madras declared open the Union Medical School for women at Vellore. The first batch consisted of 14 women students, and it was started in a rented building in the officer's line, Vellore, which was previously used as a military officer's bungalow. Mary Taber Schell Hospital was used for teaching and practical work and the science lab at Voorhees College was used for science practical studies. The Government Pentland Hospital, Vellore, had supplied a number of postmortems for the medical school,<sup>11</sup> for practical training in ophthalmology and mental cases the students were sent to the Government Ophthalmic and mental hospital in Madras.

The medical school was shifted from the rented building at office line Vellore to the new campus of its own on the outskirts of the town in 1932. A beautiful well planned campus with good buildings was brought into being with the funds so far raised through local government grant, friends, missionary societies in North America and in Great Britain. The L.M.P. course was changed to D.M & S course in 1933, it should be noted that along with medicine, training of nurses and compounder was provided in the medical school. The medical students were trained to visit the patients in the hospital and prisoners in the Central Jail, Vellore, to cheer them up with Christian love and to villages for evangelistic work and to teach the villagers on health and hygiene. This kind of programme prepared them to understand and realize their social commitment to the poor and the needy.<sup>12</sup>

The period between 1937 and 1942 was one of nightmare to Dr. Ida Scudder as she was exposed to the new government regulations to replace D.M. & S course in medicine by the M.B.B.S., degree course, and the division of opinion on whether to start a co-educational medical college at Vellore or an All India Christian Medical College for men. As her mind was clouded in finding a solution to the manifold issues based on principles and policies, providence prevailed in making the Home Board to give way for an inter-denominational co-education medical college for men and women at Vellore. With the support of the different missions it was made possible to fulfill the requirements of the University of Madras to get affiliation for the M.B.B.S., degree course. The first batch of twenty five girls for M.B.B.S., course was admitted in July 1942 inspite of certain handicaps caused by the Second World War. Having been transformed into a Union Mission Medical College it was supported by fourteen Missionary Societies from America, Canada and Britain.<sup>13</sup> From 1947 the college became a co-educational institution with ten men and twenty five women students.

The number of men students increased to thirty five in the next few years. In consideration of the efficiency and the high standard of college activities, the University was pleased to accord affiliation for starting post graduate courses in general medicine and surgery in 1950. As of today the college offers 12 posts graduate diploma and 35 degree and post graduate degree courses in various medical fields, which are recognized by the University of Madras. The courses are meant to train young men and women doctors and nurses who would dedicate themselves to go out to serve in needy corners of India in the spirit of Christ. The student body of the college is a mixture of various religions and communities of India and several other Asian countries. The outstanding feature of the admission procedure is allocation of 25 percent of the seats for candidates from low income families. Generous scholarships are available according to the needs of deserving students. One of the most important and features of the college is its one of the most important and distinct on training in community medicine which includes medical major emphasis on training the course nurses living in a village for several days or weeks during the students and nurses, designed to provide practical knowledge course and participating in activities designed experience in the life and health of rural people. Since nursing cares an important part in treating the sick and in teaching hygiene and health habits to the patients, Dr. Ida S. Scudder started a Lower Grade Nursing School in 1909 with three students.<sup>14</sup>

The nursing training was upgraded into a three year diploma course in 1932 admitting students with S.S.L.C qualification. Gradually the number began to swell and it was 68 in 1937. subsequently in 1946 a degree programme in nursing affiliated to the University of Madras were added. This became the first Nursing College in India to train nurses leading to B.Sc. degree in nursing. Today the college has student strength of 230 in the nursing diploma course, 231 in the four year B.Sc., degree programme and 20 in the two year M.Sc., programme.<sup>15</sup> The College of nursing of the CMC is well known for its contribution towards quality health care personnel throughout India and the world at large.

The significant role played by para-medical personnel in the total healthcare programme was well realized by Dr. Ida Scudder, To begin with she started the compounding course in 1903 and continued to introduce the needed para-medical courses in the college. The Lab Technician Training course was introduced in 1945 and other courses were subsequently added. Today there is 23 para-medical courses offered of which three are of degree level. The standard of both medical and para-medical courses offered at CMC is of international level and as such the students who go out of the portals of the college have global employment opportunities. The college has paved the way for hundreds and thousands of nurses and para-medical workers to go abroad and make good fortune which indirectly boosts our national foreign exchange. The men's and women's colleges started by the churches served as a boon to the society as a whole. Students from the districts around were also benefitted by the Christian College. They were the pioneers in imparting college education in the district and they have produced a galaxy of great men of eminence.

Education in medicine in the district is also a product of Christianity. The Christian Medical College, Vellore, boosted the image of this great historical town in the international arena. The district that was almost in the dark in respect of mother and child health care was liberated from that darkness through the service of the graduate women doctors produced by the Vellore Christian Medical College. The College of Nursing of the CMC has produced students who could give the best nursing care to the suffering patients. The standard of nursing education of this institution is well recognized throughout the World. The medical, para-medical and the nursing graduates from CMC is found serving in various countries abroad particularly in the gulf countries. Through them the society of North Arcot and different parts of Kerala were monetarily boosted and benefitted by the flow of gulf money and money from other countries. It can be said that the Christian educational institutions in the district were far ahead of their times. Some of the modern national policies for women's education, compulsory elementary education for the downtrodden, government hostels for the oppressed communities and free education are a duplication of the educational programmes started and run by the different churches during pre-independent. The Christian educational systems and patterns have set a useful model for the benefit of the society to be followed by the present day government and other private agencies.

#### REFERENCES:

1. H. Heras, *The Aravidu dynasty of Vijayanagara*, Madras, 1927, PP.464, 484- 485.
2. Ibid., PP.XXI-XXII.
3. W.I. Chamberlain, *Arcot Mission High School Notice*, Madras 1897, P.85.
4. K.K. Chatterjee, *English Education in India*, Macmillan publication, Meerut, 1976, P.22.
5. M. Voorhees Oscar, *Ralph and Elizabeth Rodman Voorhees*, Newyork, 1927, P, 129.
6. 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, *American.Arcot.Mission*, America, 1909, P.39.
7. 75 years platinum Jubilee, *Voorhees College*, Vellore, 1976. P. 2.
8. G.O.No.241, *Local & Municipal*, Madras, 29 May 1917, P.34.
9. G.O.No.958, *Public Department*, Madras, 19 June, 1915, P.45.
10. Ibid.
11. G.O.No.589, *Public Health*, Madras, 30 May, 1921, P.105.
12. 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, *Arcot Assembly*, Arcot, 1934, P.50.
13. Ibid., P.308.

14. Consolidated Report of the Arcot Co-ordination Committee, *The Indian Church Board* and the Annual Report of the *American Arcot Mission*, Madras, 1949 & 1950, P.58.Appendix No, III.
15. Dorothy Jealous Scudder, A Thousand year in *The Sight*, the story of the *Scudder Missionaries of India*, New York, 1984, P.218.

LBP PUBLICATION