



**CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES CONTRIBUTION TO WOMEN
EDUCATION ON PRE INDEPENDENT INDIA WITH
REFERENCE TO TRICHINOPOLY DISTRICT**

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Abstract:

The local Puranas have mentioned the word Trisirapalli which latter was termed as Tiruchirapalli, the European writers mention it as Holy Little Town (Tiru-china-palli). The Britishers started calling it as Trichinopoly. Trichinopoly is centrally located inland district, which is situated in the heart land of Tamil Nadu, which has no coastal land. Earnest efforts for the spread of women's education in India were made by Christian Missionaries during the first half of the 19th Century. In Madras, the first attempt by the missionaries for opening a school for education of Indian girls was made on 17th October 1821. The number of Christian schools for girls gradually increased. In 1845, the first girl's school under partial Indian Management was opened there. The missionaries were pioneers in many respects in Trichinopoly District. The First women's College, First girls school were all established under the auspices of the Christian Missionaries in the District. 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 Women's Education and in socio religious life of the District.

Christian Missionaries Contribution to Women Education on Pre Independent India with Reference to Trichinopoly District:

The local Puranas have mentioned the word Trisirapalli which latter was termed as Tiruchirapalli, the European writers mention it as Holy Little Town (Tiru-china-palli). The Britishers started calling it as Trichinopoly. Trichinopoly is centrally located inland district, which is situated in the heart land of Tamil Nadu, which has no coastal land. The District was well irrigated by Cauvery, Coleroon, Nandiyar, the Amaravati rivers, These rivers irrigate about 1,13,600 lakh acres of land leaving the land fertile. The District might have been an ancient seat of civilization on the banks of Cauvery, as Tamil Literature, mentions in its verses "She never fails in her course even if the sky" (rain). As the region lies on the fertile river bed the civilization that thrived in the region had rich cultural heritage.

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 Jeyamkonda Cholapuram 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 where 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.

The region witnessed heightened political activity during the Chola rule. There was greater political turmoil in Trichinopoly during the Nayaka rule which was succeeded by the Muhammadan rule under the Nawabs of Arcot. With the transfer of the district under the British Rule in 1801 the area witnessed political stability.

Footsteps of Christian Missionaries in Trichinopoly District:

Education, if looked at beyond conventional boundaries, encompasses our life, stimulates our mind and provides deeper understanding of all actions. 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. With the coming of British Rule in India, the efforts of socio-religious reform movements the scenario changed, as the cleavage within the society was opposed and attempts were made to irradiate it. 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. Before the enactment of the Act education was provided to the Indians through Gurukula System, Mathas, Gatikas.... Etc. Further the clause 43 of the Act clearly states that

"... a sum of not less than one lac rupee in each year shall be set apart and applied to the revival and improvement of literate and the encouragement of the learned natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territories in India".

Thus the act was an eye opener, as there was no state intervention in the education here before, but with this the Company started intervening in the administration and management of education with public revenue. 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.

In the field of Modern 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. Education of western model developed in India gradually and it became increasingly popular chiefly due to the medium of instruction i.e., English.

A beginning in Modern Education was made by the Christian Missionaries in Trichinopoly 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 Rector 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 then 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 countries, supported not less than 186 schools, the majority of which were in the district of Trichinopoly and composite districts of Madurai, Thanjavur and Tinnelveli. The missionaries took keen interest in education at the time when the government did very little to shoulder the responsibility in this regard.

Progress in Education with the Onset of Colonialism in Trichinopoly District:

The Indian education when compared to the system in developed countries like U.S.A. and U.K. has a longest history and oldest traditions. One can observe for periods of development in the history of Indian education: Ancient, Muhammadan, British and Post – Independence.

Before the nineteenth century the Indian culture and social organisations were at their lowest ebb. When the British came to this country, they found themselves in an educational vacuum. Learning and enlightenment were more or less non-existent; and the natives of the country steeped into a deplorable state of ignorance, conservatism and superstitious beliefs.

The East India Company was primarily a commercial concern and was unwilling to accept a direct responsibility for the education of the Indians for a long time. Even the outmoded traditional learning was the monopoly of a few privileged communities. The missionary clause inserted in the Charter of 1679 directed the Company to take a chaplain in every ship and maintain schools in all the garrisons and factories, mainly for the company servants.

When the Company became a territorial power in 1765, it established two institutions in higher learning – the Calcutta Madras (1782) and the Benares Sanskrit College (1791). They encouraged the oriental learning in Sanskrit and Arabic, but did not like to undertake the financial liability of running schools for the children of the Indian people, for it was bound to reduce their dividends. Under such circumstances, it was the missionaries who lifted up the torch of mass education and became pioneers of the modern education in India.

They tried to uplift the social, cultural and economic conditions of the Indian Christians. The situation 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 any education 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.

Origin and Growth of Women Education in Trichinopoly District:

Origin and growth of women education in distinct Woman have been occupying a subordinate position in the Indian Society particularly Tamil society for the past two thousand years. The non availability of any reference to the matriarchal domination in a patriarchal Tamil society warrants an analysis of the position of women Tamil Nadu. The legacy of the British rule in India was the kind of education they imparted to Indians. The native system of education was confined to mostly among the Brahmins were learned Brahmins Religious Education was an imperative necessity. Though the old Gurukula System had vanished its vestiges remained in most of the agraharams in Trichinopoly District and uneducated at the beginning of 18th century.

Earnest efforts for the spread of women's, education in India were made by Christian Missionaries during the first half of the 19th Century. In Madras, the first attempt by the missionaries for opening a school for education of Indian girls was made on 17th October 1821. The number of Christian schools for girls gradually increased. In 1845, the first girl's school under partial Indian Management was opened there. The Rajah of Tanjore established schools for teaching English at Tanjore.

It was reported before the Education Commission of 1882 by the Madras Provincial Committee that the following were the earliest schools for the education of girls in Madras Presidency. "The Church Mission Boarding Schools in Trichinopoly from 1837, the free Church Day School in Tinnelveli from 1845, the Native Female Education Society Central School in Madras from 1845, and the Wesleyan Mission Boarding School, Rayapattah, Madras from 1849 were some of the earliest school" Women's education rests on the claim that education is not the privilege of one sex, but equally, the right of both, and that neither one sex nor the other could advance by itself without a stain on the social and notional system and injury to itself. The British did not

show interest in female education during the rule of the East India Company. It is the Missionaries who took the initiative and tried to promote women's education. For this, the missionary women entered the Zenana to impart secular or western education to Muslim girls. This was the state of Muslim Women's Education before 1850 A.D. in the Madras Presidency.

It is only after the Wood's Dispatch in 1854 that the British Government accepted the responsibility of promoting female education. Till 1828 then, the Muhammadan girls had only religious education in the urban schools. In 1871-72, education for men fairly advanced in the Muslim community, but women's education was almost unknown. The Educational Census of Madras Presidency for 1871 has proved this. The fluctuation in the number of Muslim girls attending religious schools was remarkable.

Some of the Notable missionary women educational Institutions (schools) in Trichinopoly district.

St Joseph Girls School, Trichinopoly:

The forerunner of the St. Joseph girls school was St. Ann's, which the bishop established with the help of the sisters of St. Joseph of the apparition from France. On 1 April 1862 he opened St. Joseph girls school, an English Medium School for girls, the first of its kind in the Trichinopoly region. Mother Claudine Echernier was the force behind establishing the school. Mother Veronica of the Passion who was an English Anglican convert and a sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition was the superior of the school and headmistress of the school. After Independence the school was designated as an Anglo-Indian School.¹³

St Philomena Girls School, Tirchinopoly:

It was established in the year 1877. In the Field of women education St Philomena Girls school has an Important role in Importing women education in the region. It was established in the year 1877. By the fathers of society of Jesus. It is situated in the Melapudur near main bazaar in Trichinopoly town. This had become a central place connecting railway lines as well as the head quarters of the District. With the opening of the honors, the well equipped library and the availability of eminent teachers, the number of students enrolled up by leaps and bounds. The school has completed 141 years of its educational service. Many educationists were associated with the growth of the school.¹⁴

Holy Cross Girls School, Trichinopoly:

Holy Cross Girls School, Teppakulam, Trichinopoly is a well reputed school in an urban area in the District. It was started for the benefit of the Girls student of Trichinopoly, It was started as a primary school in 1901 in St. Mary's Tope, Trichinopoly.¹⁵ It became a lower secondary school in 1902, After a short while the school shifted to main bazaar road and raised to a high school in 1905, In the years that followed there was a growing public demand for a secondary school for women in Trichinopoly. Every effort is directed to the formation of character the instilling of good manners moral and spiritual culture of the young girls entrusted to the care of the sisters of the Holy Cross.

The only women's college in Trichinopoly District was Holy Cross College at Trichinopoly.

Holy Cross College:

Holy Cross College for Women is the oldest in Trichinopoly and has magnificent History. It was started for the benefit of them young girls of Trichinopoly as early as 1923 when higher education for women was considered almost a transgression against the age old respected customs and Indian Ideas. The College rose to its present position as a First Grade College from humble beginnings. Started as a Primary School in 1901 in St. Mary's Tope, Trichinopoly, it became a Lower Secondary School in 1902. After a short while the School was shifted to main bazaar Road and raised to a High School in 1905. In the years that followed, there was a growing public demand for a College for Women in Trichinopoly. There was no such institution in this part of the Presidency, South of Madras city. In response to that demand it rose to the status of a Second Grade College and was affiliated to the University of Madras in 1923. The College was elevated to the full status of a First Grade College in 1931¹⁶

One of the earliest colleges in Tamil Nadu started exclusively for girls, this college was started with 4 girls on its roll which rose to nine 1925, thirty one in 1930 and 148 in 1940. In 1923 when the college was started the intermediate course was introduced in the Department of Economics and it has established B.A Economics with specialization in Rural Management Course. The Department of English was established in 1923 to teach English to the students of Intermediate Classes. In the stream of Science the subjects such as Mathematics (1933-34), Chemistry (1935), Biology (1935) were introduced. The College also ran course for Religious and Moral Education and a separate department for it was created in the year 1923.

The Institution received help from St. Joseph's College in the close Proximity of which, it is situated and it owes its growth and welfare partly to the above Institution. Every effort is directed to the formation of character, the instilling of good manners, in fine to the intellectual, moral and spiritual culture of the young girls entrusted to the care of the Sisters of the Holy Cross¹⁷

Autonomy was made use of, to restructure courses in Economics, Physics, History, English Literature and Commerce with an accent on Vocationalisation. The Vocationalised undergraduate courses have a built-in component of on-the-job training, paving the way for institutional linkages with Business Establishments, Industries, Governmental and NGO Organizations. The Courses on Rural Management and Rehabilitation

Science are unique and they led to the development of manpower to meet the needs of the Nation and to develop the marginalized.

The College which started with five students and five staff members has grown from strength to strength with 4208 Students, 249 Teaching and 115 Non-teaching staff. Academic excellence, value based education, highly motivated teaching and supportive staff, well planned, socially oriented, extensive our each programmers and outstanding performance in sports, games and fine arts are unique features of Holy Cross College.

The College in all its glory now owes a lot to the Sisters of the Cross and the devoted Principals it had during this period of 87 years. Rev. Mother Sophie Descombes (1923-1949) was the first Principal and Founders' of Holy Cross College. The steady progress of the Institution was due in great measure to the pioneering Spirit of Mother Sophie who labored for the great cause of education. In 1945, Mother Sophie was awarded the Kaise-I-Hind Medal for her work as an educationist.18

Conclusion:

The Christian Missionaries have been pioneers in Indian Women 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 missionaries were pioneers in many respects in Trichinopoly District. The First women's school, First College for the Women were all established under the auspices of the Christian Missionaries in the District.

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 Women's Education and in socio religious life of the District.19

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