



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**History**

**EDUCATION IN TIRUNELVELI REGION – A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**KEY WORDS:** Christian missionaries, Church Missionary Society, Primary education, Secondary education

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**ABSTRACT**

"Education for all" was the primary aim of the Christian mission in India particularly in Tirunelveli region. The mission had developed the principle that every congregation must have a school and every teacher must be a true Christian. They took a great deal of effort in the field of education by focusing their attention on the illiterates. This was also in keeping with their Gospel work, because the institution founded by them enabled them to share their religious views directly with the young people of the society. In those days, the downtrodden and the depressed classes in the society were totally denied education. But the Christian missionaries came forward to educate them and to give a lift to their status. In order to spread their views they founded elementary schools, high schools, colleges, teacher training schools and other special schools. An attempt is made in the following pages to highlight their deep devotion to education and its impact on the downtrodden.

**Pre-Primary and Primary Education**

For the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children, pre-primary education is quite essential and is also of great significance. Pre-primary education is followed by the primary education which is considered to be the basis for both secondary and collegiate education. Since 1840 primary education has been made compulsory in independent India. The idea of making primary education compulsory gained momentum in 1882. The Christian missionaries found education to be the most suitable media for spreading Christianity and to propagate the teachings of Jesus Christ. Hence they started a number of primary schools in and around Tirunelveli. In the history of Tirunelveli district the first School in the Tirunelveli area was founded by the converted Maratta Christian woman Clorinda in 1787. It functioned in a thatched house in Palayamkottai. More such schools were established by the Christian missionaries. These schools were situated in thirty-eight circles and their surrounding areas. These circles were Alvanari, Ambasamudram, Christianagram, Dohnavar, Idaiangudi, Kovilpatti, Kulathur, Megnapuram, Mukuperi, Mudalur, Nagalapuram, Nallur, Nalumavady, Nazareth, Palayamkottai, Pannaivillai, Pottalpatti, Puducottai, Puthiamputhur, Radhapuram, Sattankulam, Sawyerpuram, Sarandai, Tenkasi, Tuticorin, Ukkirankottai, Vagikulam and Vellalanvillai. The primary schools were situated mostly in rural areas. The prominent among them were the C.M.S Mary Arden Middle School, Adaikalapuram Primary School, Market Primary School, Montgomery Primary School, Usbourne Memorial Children School and Samadanapuram Primary School.

**The Usbourne Memorial Middle School**

The Usbourne family was a well to do one in London in the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were interested in the mission work beyond the sea. At that time Rev John Tucker, the European missionary from England was the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society of South India. Tucker's too was a rich family in London. Rev John Tucker had three sisters and Mr. Usbourne had two sisters. The Usbourne and Tucker girls were best friends. The eldest of the Tucker girls Miss Sarah Tucker was much interested in the education of girls in the Tirunelveli area. She began to contribute money for this cause. She often contributed appreciable amounts for women's education. As a result of this, a Girls Boarding School was started in Sathankulam in 1844. Like the Tucker sisters, the Usbourne sisters also took interest in the education of Hindu girls and started sending large amounts of money to Rev. Lash. After some time Miss. H. Usbourne died. But her sister Miss A.M. Usbourne continued her sister's noble work by contributing funds every year. She too died in 1876, leaving a legacy of Rs.5000 for these schools. Most of the Sarah Tucker Branch Schools throughout Tirunelveli district were established with the money contributed by these two dedicated souls who had never visited India.

**Secondary Education**

Secondary education is the super structure built over the plinth of the Primary education. It is the second stage in the system of public

education beginning with standard VI and ending with standard X in a high school or standard XII in a Higher Secondary School. An era of rapid growth of secondary schools, dawned with the creation of the Department of Public Instruction in 1855-56 as a consequence of the Woods Despatch. The Christian missions soon started schools to impart education in and around Tirunelveli in the nineteenth century. Their contribution to the educational development was immense in the south. Since 1882 there was a notable increase in the number of secondary and primary schools and the missionaries showed a keen interest in the development or education to girl students. The Christian missionaries who imparted education irrespective of caste and religion took the lead in the promotion of education among the Tamils. There were five important High Schools in the Nineteenth Century in the Tirunelveli District. Among them were St. John's High School for Boys at Palayamkottai, Schaffter High School at Palayamkottai, Caldwell High School at Tuticorin, St John's High School for Girls at Nazareth and Sara Tucker High School for Girls at Palayamkottai. The origin and growth of these schools prove the achievement of the missionaries in the field of secondary education.

In the beginning, it was an Anglo-Vernacular school founded by the C.M.S in 1844. At that time it served as a booster to the prestige of the mission. It was also the chief educational establishment in the province. It continued to flourish under Zalown and able supervision of Gruickshen, a Eurasian who was blind from the age of ten. He was a much respected teacher whose name was a household word in Tirunelveli. From 1844 to 1860, around 2050, boys were admitted into the school. Among 2050 students only ten embraced Christianity. More than fifty of those who were educated in the school held public employments in Tirunelveli. Among the forty passed candidates in the much-sought after civil service examination of this school, the boy who got the first mark was also from this school. For the next fifty years, almost all high officials of the district were the products of this school.

In 1818 Rev. James Hough started an English school at Courta1lam Road in Tirunelveli. In 1822 Rev. James Hutchinson shifted the school to Palayamkottai. In 1823, the school was restarted in its original place by the efforts of Rev. C. T.E. Rhenius and Thirumanam Sulochanana Mudaliar. In 1865, it became an Anglo-vernacular school. In 1878, Rev. H.J. Schaffter was appointed the first principal. He worked very hard for the development of the school. In 1880 it was upgraded as a high school.

Originally Caldwell High school was founded in 1843 at Sawyerpuram. The founder of this school was the great educationist and eminent Tamil Scholar, Dr. G.U. Pope. By the efforts of Rev. Robert Caldwell, it was shifted to Tuticorin. In 1883 it was upgraded as a high school and Rev. Arumainayagam was appointed headmaster of this school. He worked very hard for the development of this school. It catered to the educational needs of the people of Tuticorin and the surroundings villages.

St. John's Girls' School was the first Girls High School in South India. This girls' school was destined to become the first school for Indian girls to be recognized as a high school by the Madras Department of Public Instruction. It was started by Rev. James Hough in 1820 with twenty girls. Mrs. Michael from Tanjore was appointed a teacher in the Nazareth school. She taught needlework to the students. But it was closed down in 1826 due to financial constraints. In 1843, Anne Cammerer started St. John's Girls' Primary School in Nazareth. She was the wife of Rev. A. F. Cammerer, who was the pastor of Nazareth from 1838 to 1858. The missionaries met with much opposition from the natives of Nazareth. In order to collect students for the new school, Anne Cammerer went from house to house, spoke kindly to the parents, offered gifts to them and stressed the need for female education. Consequently, parents agreed to send their children to the school. Thus the nucleus of the St. John's Girls' School was formed in 1843. Mrs. Anne Cammerer also served as the first Principal. She constructed a boarding school in 1848 to accommodate forty-one girls. Similar schools were founded at Mukuperi and Alwarthirunagari, near Nazareth in 1848. She passed away on 15 September, 1849 at the early age of twenty-eight. In 1860, Mrs. Sarah Scarbarough, sister of Rev. Brotherton, took charge of St. John's Girls' Primary School, Nazareth. During her time, the school was upgraded into a middle school. Sarah Scarbarough jointly managed both the boys and the girls schools of Nazareth. After the death of Rev. Brotherton, the school was brought under the control of Anne Brotherton. Due to her efforts, the school got government grants-in-aid in 1869. After the death of Anne Brotherton in 1869, the school came under the control Mrs. Harriet Strachan from 1870-1876, the wife of Dr. Harriet Nicholson Strachan. She also took charge of the Girls' Boarding School in 1869. Canon Margoschis was appointed the superintendent of the school in 1876.

#### **Sarah Tucker High School, Palayamkottai**

The Sarah Tucker High School has done yeomen service to the cause of most of the students hailed from poverty-stricken families. The Sarah Tucker High School for women owes its existence to Miss. Sarah Tucker of England and her friends who raised money for the founding of a small school for training teachers with a model school in 1858. The school was upgraded into a high school in 1890 with five girl students. The number of students increased to thirty-four in 1897. The school had IV, V, VI and VII Forms. The curriculum of the school was framed exclusively for the matriculation examinations of the University of Madras. In the beginning, the management found it difficult to get a sufficient number of girl students due to opposition from the public. However, constant efforts of the women missionaries bore fruit in the end and parents sent their girls to the school. Most of the students came from poverty-stricken families. In 1890, Miss Askwith became the manager of Sarah Tucker Institution. The school had five eminent European women missionaries: Miss R. Edith Howard, Miss M.M. Frost, Miss Lindsey, Miss Labroy and Miss Pawson. Miss. Cowell taught English and Physiology to the students.

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