

# SPECIAL SERVICES OF MADURAI CONGRAGATION OF IMMACULATE CONCEPTION FOR THE UPLIFTMENT OF WOMEN (1999-2000) : A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are considered to be very important centuries in the history of the Christian church in India. Missionaries from different western countries came to India to spread the gospel of Lord Jesus Christ and to work for the uplift of the neglected, downtrodden and suppressed people, who had been suffering oppression in the hands of a few who were exploiting them for centuries.

The missionaries who first came to India for evangelizing the country did gospel work in addition to great social service by means of starting hospitals, orphanages and destitute homes, special institutions for blind, deaf, dumb, physically handicapped and mentally retarded persons who were uncared for by the society for generations together,

The early missionaries evinced so much interest in social work and community development service because one of the great commandments of Lord. Jesus Christ was that the suffering masses must be taken care of and anything done to anyone of the least of thy brethren is done to Him.

### Keywords:

Congregation – Conception – Pastoral work – Charism – Evangelism – Retarded – Medical Mission – Yeomen Service

## INTRODUCTION

All the activities of the Congregation of Immaculate Conception revolve round the welfare, well being and progress of women and girls belonging to all walks of life with different socio-economic backgrounds.

## SPECIAL SERVICES OF CIC

In addition to regular educational, medical and social services, the congregation also has certain special programmes for the uplift of women, especially for those who are below the poverty line and living in the last rung of the socio-economic ladder. They are running many institutions for the uplift of the poor and the destitute. They include orphanages, homes for destitute women, homes for senior citizens (women), homes for neglected women on moral charges by their relatives and community and so on.

The different schemes and projects undertaken by CIC during the year 1999-2000 can be classified as follows:

Non-formal and Adult Education Programmes.

Self Employment Schemes for Women.

Human Right Forum Rural Extension Health Programmes.

Eye Camps.

Awareness Programmes on Environmental Cleanliness and Ecology.

Awareness programme on Natural Family Planning.

Awareness programmes on siddha medicine for populating the indigenous medicine.<sup>1</sup>

There are also programmes for the uplift of poor dalits, street children, the unwedded mothers, alcoholic addicts and child labour. First aid classes were conducted for rural folk and certificate were issued.<sup>2</sup> Seminars are conducted for women with a view to provide value education. In the women's forum the evils of dowry system are brought to light to the rural women and steps were taken to encourage inter-caste marriages.

## NON-FORMAL ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Non-formal and Adult Education Programme centres were started several decades ago and literacy drive was given importance. Sisters who are specially trained in adult education method and techniques are given this responsibility. Adult education programme is not merely concerned with the literacy due, but it is concerned with life and the aim is all-round development of the adult members of the society. Importance is given to small savings. A monthly report is presented to the CIC by the concerned sisters. At the end of every year, an evaluation was made to assess the progress of the centres.

Villages like Panjampatti and Silukkuvarpatty are taken as model villages and surveys are made. A syllabus is also framed for the guidance of nearly twenty animators. The NSS girls of the nearby schools take active interest in this scheme. In addition to literacy, they explain to the village women their fundamental rights, their role in the development of their village and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The year 1994 was celebrated as the international year of the family welfare by UNO and hence several adult education centres were opened with the help of the girls studying in higher secondary classes who volunteered under the supervision of the concerned sister. <sup>4</sup>During the year 1999-2000, there are thirty adult education centres effectively functioning in and around Madurai city and more than 2000 adult women are benefitted by this scheme.<sup>5</sup>

In this connection it is worth quoting the old adage

“When you educate a man you educate an individual

When you educate a woman you educate a whole family”

## SELF-EMPLOYMENT SCHEMES FOR WOMEN

Those lepers who were healed and had training in the rehabilitation centre take up certain self-employment schemes with the help of CIC. For example those who leave the Damien Leprosy Control Centre, Nilakkotai take up street cleaning, agriculture, cattle farming and rearing of silk worm. This develops in them a sense of independence, self-respect and self-confidence. The CIC helps them also to secure loans from governmental agencies and banks. More than fifty lepers who left the Damien centre are

rearing sheep, running petty shops, vegetable shops and barber shops. The CIC helped them to get interest free bank loans for buying cows, sewing machines and so on.<sup>6</sup>

Amala Annai Women's Employment Opportunity centre was started in 1993 in Madurai Province by the CIC to provide job opportunities to the poor women. During the year 1999-2000 it was renovated with the financial assistance given by the Sarvodaya Mission, Karaikudi. Twenty three women are involved in spinning and weaving, five women in candle making and make a livelihood out of them. Further, five girls are sent to T. Kalluppatti for learning book binding and ten other girls to Manamadurai for leaning candle making and incense stick making.

Ninety three girls including fifty five belonging to scheduled castes are taught different vocations like wire bag making, muffler and sweater weaving, making decorative articles, preparing fruit jam, fruit juice and pickles and through these programmes they are made to develop self-confidence and self-reliance.

Following table shows the beneficiaries of the rehabilitation activities done by the CIC

**TABLE**  
**BENEFICIARIES**

Domiciliary Rehabilitation	753
Tailoring Project	116
Dairy Project	49
Bank Loans	39
Educational Sponsorship	68
Vocational Training and Job placement	25
Life Settlement	09

## RURAL HEALTH PROGRAMME

Rural welfare programme is not concerned with any particular individual, but is a problem which involves social, economic, political and cultural aspects of a society. Hence health programme does not stop with curing and healing diseases, but helping and teaching rural women the need and necessity of pollution - free environment to prevent illness and diseases.

The aims of women's welfare schemes are to enable every rural woman to be self-sufficient and independent. Their motto is "our health is in our hands. Our welfare is in our hands".<sup>8</sup>

Public health centres are functioning in four villages (Karaikenni, Venkatachallpuram, Kollaneerampatti, and Kiladipatti) and 8100 patients with different deficiencies and diseases have been treated, apart from that 720 patients of tuberculosis and asthmatic disease have also been given treatment.<sup>9</sup>

In six villages special health centres were developed for physically handicapped children, arrangement were made for 2030 children to get polio drops and 105 for triple vaccine injections. They arranged old age pension for ten widows from the state government.<sup>10</sup>

## SIDDHA MEDICAL CENTRES

Two senior field workers were deputed to undergo a prolonged course conducted by Tamil Nadu Self-Help Organisation. After the training they conducted classes in women's centres and made them understand the effective use of siddha medicines and popularised them.

A medical farm was developed and different medicinal plants are being grown. Free treatment is given to patients with these native Medicines, which is becoming popular.<sup>11</sup>

## LEPROSY CONTROL CAMPS

The doctors, nurse and sister go to nearby villages once in a week to meet the lepers and to give them treatment. With the help of the leprosy prevention centre at

Manavamadurai, twelve leprosy patients were given interest free loans for buying cattle and running petty shops etc.<sup>12</sup>

## EYE CARE CAMPS

In coordination with the Aravind Eye Hospital, Madurai and the Eye clinic of Salaigramam, an Eye camp was conducted and 250 persons out of whom 180 women were given 102 Mra Oculanlena free of cost.<sup>13</sup> The Damien Eye Hospital organised Eye Camps in Dindugal, Madurai, Ramanadanpuram, Sivagangai, Virudhunagar, Thanjavur, Pudukkottai and Theni districts and free treatment was given. 1087 persons including 620 women were benefited by this eye operation campaign.<sup>14</sup>

Forty five members of the staff of different colleges in Madurai city and professors in the Madurai Kamaraj University visited the Damien Eye Hospital to be multifarious activities and appreciated the Services done by the CIC. It is worth mentioning that the Damien Eye Hospital has received many awards for the great humanitarian service rendered by them.<sup>15</sup>

## AWARENESS PROGRAMME

The aim of organising awareness programmes for rural women is not merely to create awareness in them in the field of social, economic, health etc, but to enable them to think critically and act creatively. These awareness programmes are a must as most of rural women folk still continue to be uneducated, and ignorant. Having that in view the CIC started Mother Mary Service Organisation in 1993 at T. Kallupatti, To begin with thirty villages around Kallupatti have been adopted for this purpose. The aims of this service organisation are, to work for the progress or the women and children who are poverty stickmen, to organise women's welfare associations, to create awareness in them regarding the various governmental programme and enable them to be benefitted by them, to create in them an awareness with regard to self-dignity, freedom and fundamental rights of women as provided in the Indian constitution, to create critical awareness regarding the dangerous consequence of alcohol, drug addiction, tobacco, etc.<sup>16</sup>

## **SPECIAL AWARENESS PROGRAMME**

A one-day awareness programme was conducted for the mid day meal workers at Saveriyarpalayam. Forty women workers participated in it enthusiastically and were very much benefitted. On 07.03.1999 (International Day of Women) for members of Artist Movement, 250 Artists women participated in the seminar. In the festival of women conducted on 24.04.1999 in coordination with SMSSS organisation more than 350 women participated. They were interested in discussions on women's liberation, need for a radical change etc. A Street plays on "Women, Arise" was enacted by some of the participants.<sup>17</sup>

## **HEALTH AWARENESS PROGRAMME**

A two day seminar was conducted to develop AIDS awareness in rural women at Andipatti; Awareness regarding the evil effects of AIDS, drug addiction and tobacco was developed through street dramas, songs, kollattam, and propaganda procession. A twenty one day "Mother-Child Care" training programme was conducted in December 1999 in Puliyaal village and forty women dalits have participated in the program and were richly benefitted. To create health awareness in children and adolescents, St. Paul's Children's Movement and Youth Movement were started and are functioning effectively.<sup>18</sup>

## **ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS**

Ecological or environment awareness is gaining momentum in the present day world. It is more necessary and relevant to a country like ours. Twenty one-day environment awareness programmes was conducted during the year 1999-2000 for students and teachers of primary, high and higher secondary schools and women in rural areas. Experts and specialists in environmental science were invited for special lectures. The discussions that followed were both interesting and fruitful.<sup>19</sup>

Thus the sisters of the congregation help to eradicate illiteracy and provide the poor women with self help projects like spinning, net making, dairy farming etc., thus enabling them to earn and live honourably. They have also given importance to health education like family planning, first aid and mother and child care. Various awareness programmes were created by the nuns to create awareness on social and Health issues.

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing pages reveal the special services rendered by CIC during the year 1999-2000, in the areas of Non-Formal and Adult Education, Self-Employment Schemes, Human Rights, Rural Extension and Health, Eye Camp, Environmental Cleanliness and Ecology and Awareness Programmes regarding Health and Family Planning. It is very evident from the above, that great service has been done for the welfare and upliftment of women especially in rural areas.

## END NOTES

1. CIC Work to be done during the year 1999-200, pp.43-46
2. *Ibid*, P.10.
3. CIC, *Anbu kural*, January, 1995, p.37
4. *Ibid*, p. 34.
5. *Ibid*, p.41.
6. CIC, *Anbu kural*, January 1994, p.60
7. *Ibid*, p. 47.
8. *Ibid*, p.6
9. *Ibid*, P. 53
10. *Ibid*, p. 55.
11. CIC, *Anbu kural*, January 1994, p.70
12. CIC, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, 1994, p.10
13. *Ibid*, p.8
14. *Ibid*, p.9
15. *Ibid*, p.9
16. CIC, *Anbu kural*, July 1994, p. 10
17. *Ibid*, p.49
18. CIC, *Anbu kural*, July 1994, p. 16.
19. *Ibid.*, p.55

