

THE ROLE OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIAN MISSION IN THE PROMOTION OF EDUCATION IN TIRUNELVELLI.

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Abstract

Bishop Middleton, the first Anglican Bishop of Calcutta who visited Tirunelveli in 1816 reports that he found in Palayamkottai a mission church and a Christian school with 41 children. In the same year James Hough was appointed as Government Chaplain in Tirunelveli. He mentions the existence of several small Christian schools; but complains that had no books and proper teachers. In 1818 he purchased a site near the Holy Trinity Church at Palayamkottai and started a school nearby. When he left Palayamkottai, two years later he had opened as many as 12 schools in the district.

Key Words: Tirunelveli, palayamkottai, Education, Christian,

Introduction

In Palayamkottai he had also established Preparatory schools for the training of teachers. It was developed later into secondary training schools.³⁰ In 1819, the Rev. Hough, Chaplain at Palayamkottai solicited from the Government pecuniary aid to the extent of 25 pagodas per month for the support of two schools, one at Palayamkottai and other at Tirunelveli. He had opened those schools in the preceding years (1817, 1818) under the auspices of Madras Corresponding Committee of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) for the instruction of native youth in reading, writing, arithmetic and the elements of English grammar. These schools were under the immediate superintendence of Rev. Hough; they were attended by the children of all castes. The books used in them were the New Testament, Shelter History of Bible, the Psalter with Lindly Murray's Grammar and the usual English spelling books and it was observed that, the introduction of the Christian scripture excited no alarm in the minds of the local populace. The Madras Government conceiving, however that they were not ³⁰ The Guide Book of Tirunelveli District the Thirty First provincial Educational conference, Ambasamudram, 1940, interested in the support of schools of such a nature, declined compliance with application.

In 1823, the first girls' boarding school was opened by Mrs. Rhenius in the district which is now called St. Mary's Sargeant Girls Boarding School.-The first training school for women teachers was opened at Kadachapuram in 1843, where it was carried on for 13 years. It was then closed down owing to the difficulties of obtaining adequate staffs and for two years a class for training women was attached to the Palayamkottai

Training School for Men. However in 1858, a separate Training Institution for Women was opened and called Sarah Tucker Training Institution.

Another forward step was taken in 1844 when the missionaries opened Anglo-Vernacular school for boys in Palayamkottai, the first of its kind in Tirunelveli district. This school developed into old Palayamkottai High school and later into St. John's College. A matriculation class was opened in 1871 and in 1878 it was affiliated to University of Madras for the First degree of Arts (F.A.) course. In the meantime another Anglo-Vernacular school on similar lines was opened in Tirunelveli town in 1889 and the college was moved from Palayamkottai and attached to this school. In 1896, the high school and college were moved to a new site on the road between the Junction and the town. In 1928 the college was once again shifted to Palayamkottai where new buildings had been planned. In 1891, a school was opened for blind boys and girls. The Orphanage for the Deaf and Dumb at Palayamkottai was started in 1899 by Miss. Swainson by private subscription.

The school today is one of the best institution imparting education and giving vocational training for the self support of the physically handicapped in the State. Palayamkottai is also known for its Borstal School for juvenile offenders. Missionary societies played a larger role in the elementary instruction. The society for the propagation of the Gospel (SPG) in foreign countries supported nearly 186 schools in 1854. Most of these schools were in Tirunelveli and neighbouring districts. In these schools over 5000 pupils including 1400 girls were studying, The society spent nearly Rs.40,000/- for the education activities in 1852 and Rs.30,000/- in 1853.

The S.P.G.Mission started schools in Dhonavur, Surandai and Pannaiyillai, all places in the interior parts of the district. At present, there are different categories of schools like, the primary, middle, high and higher secondary schools and teacher training institutes in the district. There are about a half a dozen colleges in the district. There are special institutes for handicapped, the school for the deaf, the Centre for the blind and school for mentally retarded all of which come under this category. The Catholic Institutes form a good number among them.

Bishop Sargent Teacher Training Institute

Bishop Sargent Teacher Training Institute owes its existence to a 'SEMINARY' established by Rev. James Hough in 1818 with nine students with a view to training teachers and church workers to serve in schools and churches. In 1856, the Seminary was recognised by the Madras Education Department as a training school. In 1912, the school was recognised by the Director of Public Instruction, Chennai and was named C.M.S. Secondary Training School. Later from 1928, the school was called Bishop Sargent Secondary Training School and from 1975, it has been named Bishop Sargent Teacher Training Institute.

Conclusion

The foregoing research reveals the Educational and Social contributions of Missionaries in Tirunelveli District from the early half of sixteenth century to present day. On the account of the settlement of the Portuguese on the Tirunelveli coast a Roman Catholic Mission was founded in Tirunelveli in 1532. In 1535 a quarrel took place between a Muslim and a fisherman at Thoothukudi. This incident led to a clash between the natives who

were the Paravas and the Muslims Paravas were rebbed, ill-treated and killed so the fisher folk were advaised by Joaodecruz a trader to approach the Portuguese for security.

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