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EXPANSION OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN COLONIAL TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:

The Colonial British Administration done yeomen services in the field of education. The Christian Missionaries had taken up the issue of education as a social problem which was responsible for the backwardness of the native people of Tamil Nadu. The British Government allowed the Christian Missionaries freely into the nook and corner of India as per the Indian Council Act of 1813. The Missionaries involved in spreading Christianity with inculcating awareness of the illiteracy of the masses. The Government backed the efforts of the Missionaries to start many secondary schools in various districts of the Tamil Nadu. Many private agencies also involved in establishing secondary schools which was felt imperative necessity of the native people. As a result, Zillah, taluk and private schools emerged in number which was a great panacea to the suffering masses in many grounds.

KEY WORDS:

Despatch, Zillah, Moffusil, Missionaries, University.

INTRODUCTION :

The British brought many changes into their educational policy by passing the Wood's Despatch of 1854.¹ The Despatch recommended for the expansion of education. The expansion took place at different stages. The Government expanded the secondary education through the grants-in-aid system, the application of departmental inspection, the translation of suitable books into Indian languages and the bestowal of rewards on deserving pupils.² The private agencies - missionaries and other individuals also started and maintained the secondary schools. They instructed the students through English and other languages and prepared them for the University entrance examinations.

ADVANCEMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Secondary education was mostly advanced in the urban areas of the district. The upper classes of society were independent with fertile lands and educated talent in trade and commerce. The middle class also paid much attention to improve their position. The Nattukkottai Chettiars were for example, mostly engaged in commerce, trade and money-lending.³ They found their commercial concern in Burma, Ceylon, Straits Settlement, Mauritius, South Africa, etc. Education became essential in order to know the business methods and organizations. So, they acquired education to a large extent. They gave strict training and long apprenticeship to their boys and it made them very efficient in their profession and very methodical in whatever they understood to do. Pillai and Mudaliars were also merchants and shop-keepers. They realized

the necessity of acquiring knowledge to maintain their business in a good way. This made them to pay much attention to secure education.⁴ Weavers, goldsmiths, brassmiths, cultivating classes and even masons showed interest to get education to a certain extent.⁵ The Christians and Madura Musalmans showed much interest in education. Madura Musalmans were mainly Rawtars, a pushing commercial class. Knowledge of reading and writing was essential to them in order to maintain the business affairs.⁶ It made them to seek education. By 1930 the region had a large literate population, which could read vernacular newspapers.

ZILLAH OR DISTRICT SCHOOL

Zillah or district school was the first and largest school in Madurai town.⁷ Due to the outcome of the Despatch of 1854 the Government opened a Zillah school in March 1856. It established this school in the northeast corner of the great arcade of Thirumalai Nayak's palace in Madurai. Due to the dwindling condition of the arcade the Government transferred the school into Nawbhat Khanor music pavilion of the palace. Few years later, the Government wanted to use the pavilion as the police headquarters. As a result, it moved the school near the Madurai Railway Station in 1856.⁸ The people subscribed partly to construct this building, which now forms part of the existing Madura College. The Government appointed enlighten as Headmasters of the school. It was the only English school at that time in the town. So, the people showed much interest to get admission in the school and to acquire English education.⁹ In order to restrict the heavy rush, the Government abolished its lowest class in 1864 and admitted into the Anglo-vernacular school of the American Mission.¹⁰ The Zillah school consisted of six classes.¹¹ The teachers imparted knowledge in various subjects to the students through the medium of English for all the classes.¹² It prepared the students for the matriculation examination. In 1872 it sent thirteen boys to write the examination and secured good results. Out of thirteen boys, two obtained first class.¹³ Due to the financial restrains of the Government, a Managing Committee took over the administration of the school in 1889.¹⁴ The committee was renamed as the Madura Native High School Committee. M.S.Narayanasami Iyer, secretary of the committee¹⁵ took over the management of the school, partly with the contribution of the Government.¹⁶ This body opened the Madurai College in the same year and was called Madurai Native College Committee. In 1905, it became the Madura College Board. It renamed the Native High School as Madura College High School.¹⁷ It worked vigorously to improve the standard of living and intellectuality of the pupils.

TALUK SCHOOLS

With the opening of the Zillah school, the Government opened taluk schools at Dindigul and Periyakulam in 1856.¹⁸ They gave instruction to the pupils through the medium of Tamil. It became easy for the rural people to send their children to these schools. Most of the people in rural areas did not know the importance of education. Moreover, it was very difficult to the rural children to absorb the points through the instruction of English. So they showed much interest to get education in the vernacular school. Yet, the taluk schools didn't show much improvement in its quality. Its teachers taught the pupils reading, writing, elements of arithmetic and surveying through the instruction in Tamil.¹⁹ Due to the non-qualification and inexperience of the teachers they could not lead the students to a higher standard.²⁰ Actually the pupils never showed any curiosity in the final examination at the end of the course. Out of fifty taluk schools, nineteen were purely elementary. Only nine out of the whole number made considerable attempt to go through the entire course.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Besides the existence of the Zillah and Taluk schools, many private schools came into existence. The Christian Missionaries were the pioneers in extending education all over the region.²¹ They rendered an incalculable service to the cause of education. Other social service organizations also worked for the modern civilization of the people. The Christian Missionaries especially the Jesuit Missionaries like Father Fernandez, Robert-de-Nobili, Britto, Beschi, the American Missionaries like Todd and Hoisington and Lutheran Missionaries made earnest endeavours for the proselytization and the education of the natives of the region. In fact, it was in contravention of the Despatch of September 7 1808 declaring strict religious neutrality.²² It refused to lend authority to any attempt for the propagation of Christianity.

AMERICAN MISSIONARY SCHOOLS

The private managements opened and maintained more secondary schools than the government in

the district, did partly with the help of government grants. The American Missionaries held three-fourths of the schools all over Madurai region.²³ Before 1850, there were no Government schools in the moffusil areas.²⁴ The American Missionaries, who became the pioneers in establishing schools in this region, opened boys' boarding schools at Dindigul, Thirumangalam and Thirupuvanam.²⁵ Due to the hard working and progressive activities of these missionaries, the government lent large hectares of lands to them at Pasumalai, five kilometers south of Madurai, in 1845 for establishing many educational institutions.²⁶ As a result, the missionaries transferred the Dindigul school to Pasumalai for its further expansion. Their main aim however was to impart education only to the Christians. The curiosity among the non-Christians to acquire education made the school to permit the non-Christians also in 1875 to develop their intelligence and to civilize them. Among the non-Christians it permitted only the candidates for missionary activities.²⁷ It appointed mainly the Christians as teachers. Yet it appointed Hindus also to teach the pupils. They imparted the religious knowledge mainly with other subjects. They taught the pupils the Bible and the tenets of the Christian faith before 1875. Due to the admission of the non-Christians, they imparted general education to the pupils of lower and higher classes on the basis of the principles of the Government. The pupils of this school became experts in different subjects. In 1879, it sent students for matriculation examination and obtained satisfactory results. It inspired the headmaster of the school George T. Washburn, to establish in 1881, the first Arts College at Pasumalai jointly with the efforts of the American Board.²⁸

SCHOOLS OF PRIVATE AGENCIES

Besides the American Missionaries, other private agencies too established schools.²⁹ The Sangam of Sourashtra Community and M.R. Ry. V.Ramabhadra Nayudu, the representative of the old poligar of the Vadakarai maintained their schools. The former established schools in the suburb and the latter established a girl's school at Periyakulam.

The private agencies also established lower secondary schools for boys and girls.³⁰ The American Missionaries established lower secondary schools for boys at Madurai, Dindigul and Melur. The Roman Catholic missionaries started their schools at Madurai, Solavandan, Palani, Melamangalam, Uttamapalayam, Bodinayakanur and Thirumangalam.³¹ The South Indian Railway maintained a school for European girls at Madurai.

Also the Muhammadans established a school at Dindigul. A committee of Nadars managed a school at Thirumangalam. The Native High School Committee maintained three lower secondary schools in Velliambalam, Mandapam in South Chitrai Street. In 1915 the Madura College Board took over the management of another lower secondary school in Swami Sannadhi street called Elukadal branch. It shows that the private agencies opened and maintained the schools all over the region. They showed much interest in opening not only the upper secondary schools but also lower secondary schools.³²

The mode of admission varied from one school to the other under different managements. The mission schools mostly admitted students from different classes of the society namely the Hindus, Native Christians, Muhammadans, East Indians, Europeans, Parsees, Paraiyahs, etc. Native Christians and Hindus, especially the Brahmins, formed a great majority in the schools.³³ The Brahmins occupied a conspicuous position in the society through they constituted a very small percentage of the population.³⁴ The native Christians and the pupils from poor families formed a majority in the Boarding Results Schools.³⁵ The high and middle class pupils who studied mostly in rural areas received education in the village schools. Only one-fourth of them studied in the schools and they hardly continued in the schools.³⁶

The schools run by the Nadar Sangham have preference to the members of its community in the admission and appointment of teachers. In the Muslim controlled managements, they gave priority of Muslims in appointments. For want of sufficient number of students, others were also admitted. The Railway School admitted mostly the children of Europeans who were preferred as teachers. They taught the pupils on the lines of western education, which was Europeanized in character.³⁷

UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Upper Secondary schools prepared students for the University Entrance Examinations. The number of matriculates increased at gradual pace in this district. In 1872, the Madurai Zillah School, which was the only Institution of First Grade at the time, sent thirteen male candidates. It got good results. Out of 13, two obtained First Class. In 1888, the Government framed a new scheme in conducting Public Examinations like the Bombay Presidency with a view to improving the mental ability of the students. It conducted Entrance Test afresh with a viva-voce test as a Preliminary to the Matriculation Examination. It

did not bring the expected result. In 1889, the Native School, Madurai, Zamindari High School, Sivaganga and Pasumalai American High School brought good results. The Government realized the quality of education from the above results.

The Secondary Board conducted Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination in 1911, in lieu of the Matriculation Examination, to improve the system of examinations. The certificate helped the students to seek employment in private or public service or to go for collegiate education.

Analyzing from the above ground reality, it may be concluded that the Secondary Education in Tamil Nadu highly expanded in number and strength. The Christian Missionaries managed most of the secondary schools with better administration

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