



EDUCATION IN THOOTHUKUDI DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU: PERIOD FROM 1947 TO 1986

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Abstract:

The formal education which the Government imparts through regular schools generally stops with youngsters. The fact that this alone could not help achieving universalisation of elementary education sustains and emphasises on education to adults and dropouts through Adult Literacy and non-formal education programmes. Hitherto sporadic efforts are on foot to educate adults in a systematic way. Due to high dropout rates in the school education, the number of adult illiterates has continued to swell. The efforts taken under the Adult Education Programme has so far remained inadequate. The State Government's effort has been to integrate the existing school education system with adult literacy programme through the Total Literacy Campaign supported by Non-formal Education Programme for children. In most countries today, full-time education, whether at school or otherwise, is compulsory for all children up to a certain age. Due to this the proliferation of compulsory education, combined with population growth in the next 30 years more people will receive formal education than in all of human history thus far.

Key Words: Education, Literacy, Children & Government

Introduction:

Thoothukudi is a southern coastal district of Tamil Nadu located between the $8^{\circ} 19'$ and $9^{\circ} 20'$ N and $77^{\circ} 40'$ and 78° to E. The district is bounded by the Ramanathapuram district in the north east, by the Virudhunagar district in the north and north-west by the Tirunelveli district in the west and south and by the Gulf of Mannar in the Bay of Bengal in the east.

The district is like a mini India in shape. It is broad in the north and tapers towards south. The three northern taluks are Kovilpatti in the west, Ettayapuram in the centre and Vilathikulam in the east. The central taluk Ottapidaram touches the borders of the district both in the west and the east, Thoothukudi in the east and Srivaikuntam in the west and the east, bordering Thoothukudi taluk up to the sea from the belly. The southern most taluks are Sattankulam in the west and Tiruchendur in the east.

In the taluks of Tiruchendur and Srivaikuntam, there are windswept dunes which look like small hillocks. The wide seashore is filled partly with pure white and partly with a peculiar red soil piled up in great dunes known as *teris*. The *teri* region spreads in the area adjoining Nazareth and Tiruchendur. The vast water resources, known as *taruvais* in these sand dune areas, are judiciously tapped and utilised for cultivation. The region also abounds in Palmyra trees. It is an open country where cotton is largely cultivated on black soil, though a considerable extent of land still remains barren. The fertility of the black soil has helped rich cotton cultivation, leading thereby to economic prosperity of the region. Soil in the district may be classified into two varieties namely, red soil and black soil. The northern part of the region consists of the black loam and southern part, red loam. The black soil has high value when compared to the red. Kovilpatti and part of Srivaikuntam taluks on the north-eastern part of the district consist of black soil where cotton is grown extensively. The availability of cotton in abundance at a cheaper rate in the Thoothukudi district was

utilized by the British Company and this led to economic exploitation. Pearl fishery is one of the important professions in the Thoothukudi coast where able bodied and athletic men took up this profession.

The number of villages that border the district is 86. The length of the sea coast is 163.5 km. extending from Ovari in the south to Vembar in the north. The major coastal villages and towns are Ovari, Kulasekarapattinam, Manappadu, Tiruchendur, Veerapandyapattinam, Kayalpattinam, Punnaikayal, Thoothukudi, Tharuvaikulam, Vaippar and Vembar.

On the 20th October 1986 a new district, carved out of the erstwhile Tirunelveli district was born in Tamil Nadu and named after V.O.Chidambaranar, a great national leader hailing from Ottapidaram who led the Swadeshi Movement in the south. Since 1997 as in the case of other districts of Tamilnadu, this district has also been named after its headquarters town, Thoothukudi.

Traditional History:

Tradition asserts that Korkai, a village on the eastern coast of the Tirunelveli district was the ancestral home of the three brothers who founded the ancient dynasties of Chera, Chola and Pandya. The Pandyas remained in the place to rule the south while the Cholas and Cheras moved to north-west. When an eruption of the sea submerged the earlier city of Madura, the Pandyas moved their capital inland, to the site of the modern city of that name. The facts seem to point to an early invasion and colonization of the Peninsula of India from the south. The Fourteenth Century witnessed the expansion of the Muslims towards the south. In 1311, Malik Kafur invaded far south and established Muhammadan regime at Madurai and Tiruchirappalli. In the Fifteenth Century the Cheras of Travancore invaded the Pandya Country. Meanwhile, the Vijayanagar Empire emerged into a powerful one and established its regime in the extreme south also. 16 Emperor Krishna Devaraya in his last years (1529-1530) of rule organised the Nayakship of Madurai. Nagama Nayak, sent by him, began to assume more power and acted as an independent ruler.

Therefore, Krishna Devaraya sent Viswanatha Nayak to suppress Nagama's rebel activities. Accordingly, Viswanatha suppressed Nagama and he was appointed Governor of Madurai on behalf of Vijayanagar Empire. Viswanatha Nayak, along with his able general Ariyanatha Mudali, organised seventy-two Pollams (Palayams) in Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Tirunelveli regions. Each Pollam was entrusted to the hands of a Poligar. Then he sent his general Ariyanatha Mudali to Tirunelveli for controlling the chieftains of the Tirunelveli Province. To strengthen the Nayak rule in Tirunelveli Province, Mudali built a fort at Palayamkottai. Among the seventy-two Pollams, many of the Pollams situated in Thoothukudi region. The Tirunelveli Poligars were divided into western and eastern bloc. The Western Pollams were located as contiguous units under the foot of the Western Ghats and no wonder the Poligars of these Pollams were later on called the western Poligars.

This region was also called as Marava Pollams. All the Naick Pollams that were situated in the eastern part of the Tirunelveli region were called Eastern Palayapattu or the Eastern Bloc which constituted the region of Thoothukudi.

The Nayak rule of Madurai continued for fifteen generations before it died out, early in the eighteenth century. The Portuguese arrived here by 1532, established their trading centres and brought the area under their control. From them the Dutch took over in 1655. In 1782 the English captured it and restored to the Dutch in 1785. Once again the English captured Thoothukudi in 1795. It was only under the Nawabs of Arcot in the eighteenth century that Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi came to be distinguished

from that of Madurai for revenue purpose. The English ceded Thoothukudi to the Dutch in 1818 and the English finally occupied Kulasekararaj, Thoothukudi in 1825. Since then up to Independence it remained under British control as a part of Tirunelveli district. In 1986 the district enjoyed a separate and individual identity as a district.

Definition – Education:

The continuous accumulation of knowledge from different directions is 'Education'. Education, in its broadest sense, begins at birth and ends at death. Education is rightly regarded as the very basis of civilized life. In its broadest sense, education is any process by which an individual gains knowledge which helps him to develop attitudes or skills. Education is the process of acquiring knowledge or experience which would bring about appropriate changes in one's behavior.

The term, 'Education' is derived from the Latin word 'Educare' which means to 'bring up' or 'bring forth'. Further, education is the deliberate systematic and sustained efforts to transmit, evoke or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills or sensibilities, as well as any outcome of that effort. The educational process of development consists of the passage of human beings from infancy to maturity.

Choice of the Study:

Tamil Nadu which was under the Congress party's rule during 1947- 1967, showed a remarkable achievement in the field of education in Thoothukudi region. Undoubtedly, it was the foundation laid by the Congress ministries in the field of education during the two decades of the post- Independence period that made the Thoothukudi region an outstanding example for others to follow its models. The Congress Ministries made strenuous efforts to promote educational activity to a greater extent and Thoothukudi stood as a shining example. From Primary education to college education, Thoothukudi had made great strides. The contribution of the Congress and Dravidian ministries in Thoothukudi region had not been taken as 'a subject for a critical research by earlier scholars. Further, few works on the educational development in Tamil Nadu had not focused much on the Thoothukudi region during the specified period. Hence an attempt is made to highlight history of education in Thoothukudi District of Tamil Nadu during 1947-1986. Indeed this period is known for the development of education and for the increase in the literacy rate in Thoothukudi region.

Nature and Scope of the Study:

Education had always been a factor for the development of an individual and the society. India, right from ancient times had been a significant seat of learning and a great centre of educational activity. Even during the period of Muslim rule, the growth of education in India was not impeded. But the picture was different during the colonial era. The imperialists seldom paid heed to the development of education. Except under administrative exigencies and for their own selfish interests the alien administrators offered education to the masses only to serve the imperial masters as English knowing Assistants. Gandhiji made a statement in 1931 to the effect that the literacy in India has diminished during the colonial rule and that it was because, soon after their advent, the British closed down the existing schools and the indigenous institutions of learning. Thus, the British Administrators, when they came to India, instead of taking hold of things as they were, began to root them out. This was the sad state of affairs at the time of India's independence. From the dawn of independence, it became the responsibility of the nationalist leaders of India to improve the condition in every field of human activity. It was in this context that the leaders felt that priority must be given to education along with the economic imperatives. The provinces of India followed suit

and there was a tremendous educational activity all over the districts of Tamil Nadu including Thoothukudi.

Objectives of the Study:

The study put forth certain objectives to understand the course and trend of educational activities in Thoothukudi District. The objectives were:

- ✓ To trace the early evolution of educational consciousness among the Tamils.
- ✓ To trace the forces which backed the backward and downtrodden people to attain education.
- ✓ To trace the circumstances which prompted the government educational measures.

Methodology:

The methodology employed in the Thesis deserves special mention. It is historical, narrative, analytical and critical. Vital issues were analysed to corroborate the hypotheses. Inductive and deductive processes were logically employed to marshal the ideas and to arrive at conclusion which constitutes the vital findings of the research work.

Limitations:

Even though the study period is fixed from 1947 to 1986, sporadic references are given about the second half of the Twentieth Century which is unavoidable. Some primary materials collected from different places were not easily accessible because of the restriction to issue contemporary records. For some volumes and documents, dates were not available. Some of the published works are silent with regard to the author, place and year of publication. Thus care has been taken not to misinterpret the available data.

Missionary Education:

The Christian missionaries took a pioneering interest in the promotion of education in the district. Perhaps religious motives might have forced them to take such a large interest but it did a lot for the upliftment of the society especially the poor. It is they who devised a liberal system of education open to all the inhabitants irrespective of caste creed or religion. A.J.Stuart views the role of missionaries in education in the district thus:

“The impulse given to education in this district is partly owing to the exertions and influence of missionaries whose schools intended chiefly for Christian converts who usually belong to the lower castes are also largely attended by boys of higher castes attracted by the superior instruction afforded, it is also partly due to the intelligence and appreciation of civilization shown by that large part of the population which consists of Brahmins and Vellalas.”

In the Sixteenth Century the Jesuits, led by St.Francis Xavier, the superior of the Jesuit mission in India were very active in setting up schools in the whole of India including South India for the propagation of their faith. He started the first school in the fishery coast. In 1567, Father A. Henrique Henriquez established a Tamil School at Punnaikayal for young ones who were sent there as catechists and he himself taught in the pupils in the schools. The oldest educational institution in Thoothukudi is the Jesuit run St.Xaviers School. Its origin can be traced as far back as 1600 during the Portuguese period when the missionaries started it as a Parish elementary school and Seminary. During the Dutch period spanning almost a century and half due to the suppression of the Society of Jesus, it functioned sporadically and without real growth. The school reopened in 1823 under the superintendence of the French Jesuits of new Madura Mission after the restoration of the Society of Jesus. It was raised to the status of a

middle school in 1872 and a high school in 1884. In 1978-1979, this school was upgraded into higher secondary school.

In 1842, there were four schools for boys two at Thoothukudi and one each at Meignanapuram and Ettayapuram. Christian missionary societies played a great role in imparting elementary education. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG) supported various schools in the Madras Presidency. Most of the schools were in Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli Districts. The society spent nearly Rs.40,000 for its educational activities in 1852 and Rs.30,000 in 1853. It also maintained two Teacher Training Schools one each at Sawyerapuram in Thoothukudi district and VEDIAPURAM in Thanjavur District. The Portuguese mission Ornells school was started in 1875 and became a middle school in 1929.

The Holy Cross School for girls was started in 1906 and was raised up to high school in 1941. The year 1906 witnessed the birth of another school for girls, viz., Viagula Matha Convent School, the forerunner of present St. Aloysius Girls School. In fact it is reported that even before 1906 the school functioned within the convent and in 1905 the sisters had opened another school in the north of the town. The Bon Secours Convent established in 1895 within the precincts of Our Lady of a Snows Church had its own school for girls. By 1909 the nuns of Holy Cross Convent had two schools to take care of one for the European or Eurasian (Anglo-Indian) girls and the other for Indian girls. St. Mary's College for women was started in year 1948, immediately after the independence.

The author of 'La Mission Du Madura' records the existence of several other parochial schools in Thoothukudi in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. Thekkur School (Southern side of the town), Vadakkur school (Northern side of the town), St. Antony's school at V.E. Road for the benefit of scheduled caste children and Puckle channel school started in 1911 for the children of the ward. Besides St. Mary's College, a pioneer institution for the cause of women higher education, the Holy Cross High School was subsequently upgraded as Holy Cross Home Science College in the year 1975, created new grounds in the diversification of women's education into more practical vocational areas. In higher secondary education too, priority was given to women's educational institutions as the church could count five higher secondary schools for girls in the town as compared to four for boys. St. Thomas Matriculation is the latest addition to the list. Besides these, 17 elementary and middle schools to complete the network of the educational institutions also are maintained by the Catholic Church in Thoothukudi.

A missionary known to posterity as a scholar, historian and linguist, was Bishop Caldwell who has associated himself with various villages of this district for more than 50 years. He and his wife laboured hard for the betterment of people of this area. Incidentally he produced a lot of research materials connected with this area and languages of the people of the entire south India. His contribution to the betterment of the people, their culture and their language are highly regarded. He started many schools for boys and girls in and around Idayangudi. Eliza Caldwell's female Boarding School was the first of its kind in the Diocese of Madras and the teaching of the girls in those days caused great amazement among the parents who exclaimed, "What she may teach the cows next". She also gave the school the character of an industrial school by teaching them to make lace which became a flourishing branch of manufacture and source of considerable and increasing profit to the school. Though it began functioning only with eight girls, it had rapid growth with 100 boarders. The educated girls set an example to their uneducated neighbours and they became models to the rest of the

people of what a Christian women ought to be. She was a pioneer of Women's education. In 1887 when Caldwell was appointed as the Bishop in SPG in Thoothukudi, he transferred the girls' boarding school to Thoothukudi as Victoria Girls School which was inaugurated on 8th November 1887. It was named after Queen Victoria to mark the fifty years of her reign. When Caldwell was appointed as the Bishop of Thoothukudi, since Sawyerpuram was an insignificant village, Caldwell transferred the high school and a second grade college originally functioning there to Thoothukudi and classes were conducted to obtain First Degree in Arts and Bachelor of Arts degree courses. The college functioned well for ten years. However financial problems led to the closure of the college in 1891. The college was converted as a high school thereafter. The college was revived in 1962 at Sawyerpuram.

Literacy:

The census reports are the standing sources which provide statistics on the literacy of a district. Census reports use different yardsticks to determine literacy level. As per 1991 census, the yardstick used in determining the literacy level is the ability to read and write with understanding in any language. A person who can merely read but cannot write is, however, not a literate as mentioned earlier. In this Census, the literacy level was determined only for those aged seven years and above, as against five years and above in the earlier census. The population of less than seven years of age has been treated as illiterates in this census. The details of literate persons in the district, based on the Census reports of 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 are given below

Table 1

Year	Total Population		Literary Persons			
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Literacy% District	Literacy %State
1951	454227	487977	113888	148735	27.87	-
1961	501683	534018	266330	149585	40.15	36.39
1971	588865	619919	351142	236814	48.64	45.40
1981	657303	693278	430964	326563	56.08	54.39
1991	709760	746160	500769	420091	73.02	62.66
2001	764087	801656	598669	542290	81.96	73.47

Though 1991 census is the first one after the formation of the district, statistics of the earlier census reports on the taluks which formed the area now Thoothukudi district have been completed to arrive at this statement.

Growth of Elementary Education:

The Government of Tamil Nadu have taken several efforts to create a system of education, at the grass - root level, for achieving the constitutional objectives of providing free and compulsory education to all under the age of 14 years. The concept of universalisation of Primary Education lays great emphasis on the elimination of discrimination amongst various strata of society through high quality of education in public funded schools to enable the poor, girls and deprived classes of society to get education in their locality itself. The eighth point of the 15 point programme of the State Government pronounced on the Children's day of 1993, relates to the universalization of primary education ensuring a minimum of five years primary education to every child. Even prior to this, the State has a wide network of Government funded local body primary schools. In this district, the role of the missionaries in setting up such schools is also significant.

Elementary Education: Administration

The Director of Elementary Education is the Head of the Department in respect of elementary education in the State. Before the formation of a separate District Elementary Educational office, Elementary education was under the control of the District Educational Officers in each educational district. After the reorganisation of the elementary education set up, the office of the District Educational Officer at the Revenue Headquarters has been changed as District Elementary Educational Office. The District Elementary Educational Officer, Thoothukudi has control over the primary and middle schools. There are 12-panchayat unions. For administrative convenience, the Panchayat Union is divided into two blocks, an officer called Assistant Elementary Educational Officer, and Additional Assistant Elementary Educational Officer heads each block.

The Assistant Elementary Educational Officers and Additional Assistant Elementary Educational Officers are the drawing officers to their staff in respect of their block. The drawal and disbursement of the salary of the Panchayat Union in primary and middle schools Teachers, and grant-in-aid in respect of the recognised aided primary / middle schools. They conduct overall annual inspection of the Panchayat Union Schools and aided recognised primary / middle schools. Apart from the Panchayat Union and aided schools the Assistant Elementary Education

Officers in the Municipal areas draw and disburse the salary of the municipal schoolteachers. To each of the District Elementary Educational Officers, two mobile science vans are attached to tour the entire Revenue District to enable students of primary / middle schools to conduct experiments.

Conclusion:

Thoothukudi district witnessed many schools during the tenure of K.Kamaraj who was one of the most respected Leaders of the Congress Party and became the Fifth Chief Minister of the State of Madras. He opened Schools even in remote villages. He implemented a Scheme of compulsory education for Children upto the age of eleven, Opening of Basic Schools, Opening of Teacher Training Schools, Free Supply of Books and Slates, Opening of High Schools in villages with a population of 300 and above, He opened Hostels to Schools and Colleges and also introduced Fee-Concessions up to the S.S.L.C. Classes and Mid-Day Meal Scheme which was extended and fortified as the Nutritious Meal Programme by the Successive Governments.

As a first step to promote Primary Education, Kamaraj directed Local Bodies to concentrate first on the Provision of Facilities for Elementary Education until the areas within their jurisdiction were fully covered by an adequate number of Elementary Schools. Schemes of expanding facilities for Secondary Education were deferred till sufficient funds could be spared for the Establishment of Secondary Schools. The next step Kamaraj took was to make Elementary Education Free for all poor children (the income limit of the parents being Rs.100/- per mensem) from 1955. In 1962-1963, the final result of this Scheme was that all villages in Thoothukudi with a population of 300 and above were provided with primary Schools and more children were additionally enrolled in these Schools. The Government established Schools in every nook and corner of Thoothukudi district. The New Scheme in Secondary Education provided opportunity for a student to learn Mother Tongue or a Classical Language and Hindi, besides English. The State followed the Policy of Co- Education in the Primary Level.

To stimulate the enrolment of girls, Special Fee Concession and Scholarship had been awarded in large numbers both in Elementary and Secondary Level. In order to improve the Standard of English among School Children in Thoothukudi district, Teaching of English was to be started at a stage earlier than the existing stage. Kamaraj

took many effective steps to improve the Educational Facilities of Harijan Students. They already enjoyed Educational Concessions and Reservation of Seats in Schools and Colleges. The Supply of Uniforms Free of Cost to School Children also formed a part of the Policy of Kamaraj's Ministry to accelerate the Process of Learning in the State. In 1960, the Education Department provided necessary funds to supply Free Uniform to School Children.

From 1947 to 1986, the Thoothukudi district contributed much to the advancement of education in Tamil Nadu. The Government sanctioned more money for their Scholarships, Hostels, and Midday Meals etc., which helped them in their Educational Development in Thoothukudi district. The Government under the Congress and Dravidian Parties also witnessed many educational institutions during the tenure of 1947 to 1967 and 1967 to 1986 respectively. Unfortunately, there is no Government Arts and Science College in this District. Recently the Government started a few colleges which are under the control of the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University. Thus the Government policies towards education and socio economic development of the People in Thoothukudi contributed towards social changes there.

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