Early Schools in Madras

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Abstract

The educational services carried out by the missionaries during the 18th century continued during the 19th century. There was a progressive evolution of this policy which resulted in the local government taking more and more interest in the question as time went on and trying to persuade the directors to do so too. (Frank Penny, 1922, p. 253) In the early days of missionary activities, the establishment of a school almost inevitably followed the arrival of a missionary. In the scheme of missionary organization the second place was always assigned to education and among the valuable auxiliaries schools held a distinguished place. Mission schools were looked upon as “Preparatio evangelica” – Preparation for the gospel. The Christian missionaries established schools with the avowed purpose of converting Hindus and Muslims to Christianity. (Manickam S, 1988, p. 79).

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Introduction

Early in the 18th century, the East India Company began the educational activities in India. The Charter of 1698 directed the company to maintain ministers of religion at their factories in India and to take a chaplain in every ship. The ministers were required to learn the Portuguese language, which was commonly understood by the inferior servants at the factories. They also applied themselves to learn the native language of the country where they had to reside, the better to enable them to instruct the Hindus that shall be the servants or slaves of the same company or of their agents, in the Protestant religion. The Charter also directed the company to maintain schools, wherever necessary, in all their garrison and bigger factories. The first part of this direction obviously implies that the company was expected to spread the gospel amongst all its employees including Indians. By this time, the company had realised the political importance of a policy of religious neutrality and, therefore, refrained from carrying this out to its logical conclusion. (Syed Nurullah and Naick. J.P, 1943, pp. 45-46)

The second part of this direction was, however, complied with a considerable extent. The company encouraged the establishment of schools at the principal towns within its territories and gave them liberal grants – in – aid. Thus the St. Mary’s Charity School was established in Madras. Two more charity schools were established in the same town in 1717 by the Danish missionaries – one for Portuguese children and the other for Tamil children. In 1718 Rev. Richard Cobbe established a charity school in Calcutta by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K). In 1787 two more charity schools were established in Madras – one for boys and the other for girls. These schools were mostly intended for the education of the children of the company’s English soldiers – mostly by Indian mothers – although some of them admitted a few poor and orphan Indian children also. The funds were provided by subscriptions and donations from philanthropic and religious persons and the grants paid by the company. Throughout the 18th century, the encouragement of these and similar charity schools was the main educational activity of the East India Company. (Syed Nurullah and Naick. J.P, 1943, pp. 45-46) The charity schools of St. Mary’s in the fort, founded in the early 18th century was perhaps the first western type of school established in this country and ancestor of an educational system. (Muthiah. S, p. 4)

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Thus came into being the St. Mary’s Charity School in the fort, with a boys and a girls branch. The boys were taught to read and write cost accounts and the girls were instructed in reading and the necessary parts of housekeeping. (Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume, 1939, pp. 439-440) The school remained on its original site till 1871 when it was amalgamated with the Male and Female Orphan Asylums, which on the transference of the Military Male Orphan Asylum to Lovedale, moved to the site of that school at the old Redoubt, Egmore. (G.O. No. 169, 24th January 1946, Education Department)

The state efforts for fostering education were slow, even in England, government did little for education in those days. But the missionaries were more energetic. In 1711, the Society for Promoting Christian knowledge (S.P.C.K) offered to maintain one or more charity schools at Madras through the agency of the Danish missionaries at Tranquebar, of whom the famous Zieganbalg was the chief. The missionaries arrived in 1717 and in the same year they were given permission to erect two charity schools in the city-one for the Portuguese in the English town and the other for “Malabars” (Tamils and other local people) in the Black town. The school for “Malabars” established in the fort soon ceased to exist, as there was not much public appreciation for it, owing chiefly to the fact that the Hindu parents were averse to sending their children to a school definitely Christian in character. The school was reopened in 1726 by the missionary Schultz and attracted many students. This subsequently became the Vepery Anglo – Vernacular school. The Catholic missions also began their efforts early, but their progress in the city was slow. The first Catholic school St. Mary’s Seminary, Armenian Street, was founded in 1837. (Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume, 1939, p. 440)

In 1784, the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge established a school for the education of Anglo – Indian children in Madras and maintained a school master at an annual cost of £ 50. This developed into the Vepery Grammar School. It was subsequently enlarged several times and was the chief educational agency in Madras till the establishment of the Free Church Mission. Under Bishop Corrie, it became the “Madras Grammar School”. The mission also kept a charity school for girls at Vepery. Subsequently the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Mission also established schools in Madras. A school at St. Thomas Mount was also established in 1812. (Madras Tercentenary Commemoration Volume, 1939, p. 440)

From 1786, several institutions for the education and maintenance of orphans were established under the patronage of government. At this juncture, Sir Archibald Campbell assumed as the Governor of Madras in 1786. In 1787, Lady Campbell (original name of Lady Campbell is Amelica), wife of the Governor, was much moved by the wretched condition of the soldiers’ orphans, and set on a project for establishing an asylum for their reception. (Henry Dodwell, 1986, p. 105) Lady Campbell was impressed by the number of girl orphans of European parentage whose upbringing was neglected. The church fund was unequal to the support of the multitude, and Lady Campbell issued an appeal for subscriptions, which was liberally responded to by the community with the fund so raised, an asylum was founded in 1787 and was instituted in the same year. (Public Consultation, Vol. No. 1488, 4th March 1788) Liberal cash and gifts from the East India Company employees and the Nawab of Arcot most generously gave a house and a garden worth Rs.80,000 for the use of the asylum exclusive for the very liberal subscription. By 1790 the exigencies of war had increased the numbers to 200 girls, including newly orphaned Indians. (Sita Anantha Raman, 1996, p. 3) This institution was mainly opened for the maintenance, education and clothing of a limited number of orphans of European officers and soldiers in India. She was the first lady, as Governor’s wife, to start such welfare schemes in dispensing his hospitality. Thus, she gained a great reputation for her kindliness and charity. (David Leighton, 1909, p. 221) Gericke, a famous missionary was appointed the first superintendent. (Macleans Manual of Madras Administration, p. 566)

During the initial stage mere education was given to the female children of the asylum. They were gently boarded, tenderly treated, carefully educated and more strict attention was paid to teach them marks. They were taught to read and write the English language and arithmetic, music, French, drawing and dancing with lace tambour and embroidery, all sorts of plain and flowered needle work on moderate terms. Day scholars were also received and instructed in the same way as above. (Love Henry Davison, 1913, pp. 355-356).

**Military Male Orphan Asylum**

Schools for Eurasians had long flourished in Madras. One of them, the Military Male Orphan Asylum was opened in 1789. In 1789, Charity School became Male Orphan Asylum. Opening of this asylum marked an era in the history of elementary education not only in Madras but also throughout the world. Prior to its formation a charity school existed in Madras, in connection with St. Mary’s Church. It provided for the education and
support of a limited number of the orphans of Europeans in India, without reference to the professions of the parents of the orphans. (Gazetteer of South India, 1855, p. 223) Its first superintendent was the famous Dr. Bell, whose interest in education was so great that he served without any salary. So that funds might be provided for the improvement of the school. (Sathianathan. S, 1894, p. CXV) The Military Orphan Asylum became widely known through the method of instruction borrowed from the indigenous system and first applied in it by Dr. Bell. In schools of this class, a few natives received a fair education. But the philanthropic spirit from which such institutions sprang, made its effects felt on the natives of the country more directly by another channel. (Report of the Indian Education Commission, 1882, p. 10)

Dr. Bell, famous as the originator of the "Madras System of Education", and cheerfully watched over its earliest years, till he returned to Europe in 1796. (Asylum Press Almanack, 1871, p. 574) He was well known as the founder of the "Madras" or "Monitorial" or "Lancaster" system of education. Under this system, most of the boys were teachers as well as students. They teach younger boys, while the elder ones taught them. As Dr. Bell was riding past a pial school one morning, he found bright boys teaching backward ones. The whole school was active although there was only one teacher. Dr. Bell employed this method among the boys in the orphan asylum, of which he was superintendent. He improved on the indigenous practice and established a system of mutual instruction, which he called the "Madras System" and claimed this as an "invention" (as distinguished from discovery). In 1796, he went back to England, and carried on an effective propaganda for the "Madras System". (Muthiah.S, p. 4) By 1867 the number of children had increased to 75 boys and 65 girls and the directors complained that the buildings in black town were totally inadequate. It was probably in response to this representation that government conceived the idea of transferring the Military Male Asylum to Lovedale, there to be amalgamated with the Lawrence Asylum, Ootacamund, and handing over its site at the old Redoubt, Egnore to the directors. (G.O. No. 169, 24th January 1946, Education Department)

The Madras Male and Female Orphan Asylums was also founded by Eurasians for relief of the poorer members of the community in the early part of the 19th century. (G.O. No. 305, 4th June 1901, Education Department) In the town of Madras the Civil Male and the Civil Female Orphan Asylums were founded and principally supported by the Eurasian community under the patronage of the presidency chaplains and more especially of the chaplains of North Black town. The Male Civil Orphan Asylum was founded as the Male Free School in 1807 and the Female Civil Orphan Asylum as the Female Free School in 1810, through the influence of Rev. Dr. R. Carr of Black town chapel. The school was originally in North Black town, and was supported by a number of subscribers who elected directors from their member; they constituted the first Board of Directors of this school. (G.O. No. 2936, 22nd November 1948, Education Department) The Madras Male and Female Civil Orphan Asylums were the institutions of the Church of England. The object of these institutions was to provide boarding, lodging and education gratuitously for the orphans of Europeans and Eurasians or Anglo-Indians. (Gazetteer of South India, 1855, p. 224)

**Madras Monigar Choultry**

The Monigar Choultry in Madras was an institution, which affords shelter, food and clothing to native poor and infirm persons without reference to caste. It was founded in the year 1808. (Gazetteer of South India, 1855, p. 224) Besides a Choultry or Pauper Asylum, it contains also an infirmary and a special asylum for foundling and stray children. This institution was supported by public contributions aided by the government. The management was placed under the supervision of a committee selected annually by the government from amongst the European and Native community. (Madras Administration Report 1875-76, 1877, p. 448) In 1867 the Venkatagherry Rajah built a Choultry to the east of the Monigar Choultry, which cost about Rs. 9,400. In this 70 paupers were fed daily and clothed, and 180 out-door poor receive two olluks of raw rice per diem. The Rajah contributed annually Rs. 5,000 to meet the expenses of this branch of the charity. He had forwarded to the directors a sum of one lakh, the interest of which was to further support the institution. (Asylum Press Almanack, 1873, p. 572) A Lying-in-hospital, attached to the Choultry, was built by P.S. Ramaswamy Moodley, one of the native directors. It supplied a want long felt in that part of the town. This institution was also the preparatory training school for the students of the Auxiliary Medical School. (Macleans Manual of Madras Administration, 1885, p. 633)

At first the work of missionaries was confined to the preaching of the gospel and spreading the message of the master. Gradually the pioneers began to pay attention to the needs and requirements of the people for a better and happier life. The contribution of the Christian missionaries in the field of education is substan-
tial and beneficial. For a very long time the Christian missionaries have been trying to spread primary and even higher education in India. They regarded educational institutions not only as a means of combating ignorance, but also as centres for building up character and instilling high ideals.

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