



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Special Schools for Dalits in Colonial Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

In the Indian social order Dalits had not sanctioned any rights on the cultivation of intelligence and acquiring knowledge. This situation has changed over the coming of Christian Missionaries in to our society. Activities of Christian missionaries had brought positive change in the social and spiritual life of Dalits. They are providing free education to all caste children's including Dalits. Perhaps it was in the missionaries' schools, children of all sections got an opportunity to get an education. Yet Christian missionary schools inclusive policy faced difficulties. Some Hindu caste people have withdrawn their children's from the missionary schools when the children of untouchables began to enter into. This has led to the creation of special schools for Dalits children's. This article discussed on which other agencies, such government and nongovernment organizations work in involved in creating special schools apart from the Christian missionaries.

Keywords: Dalits, Education, Hariajan, Labour Department,

Introduction

The past educational system in the country was not allowed to all, it was the preserve of only a few privileged sections until the nineteenth century. When western education was introduced by Christian Missionaries, the downtrodden people were encouraged to get educated. The missionaries first initiated Dalits education in Tamil areas. This article discusses about the role of Government and Non-Government agency in Dalits education apart from Christian Missionaries in Colonial Tamil Nadu. During the period the untouchable people were called by different names such as Panchamar, Depressed Classes, Pariahs, Downtrodden, Oppressed People, and Harijans. The government reports called this people "Pariah and

Kindred Classes". I include the caste like Paraiyas, Pallas, Valluvars and Chakkliyers the major caste of untouchable community in Tamil Nadu¹. The word Dalit was not familiar before 1970s but it became popular after Panther Movement. The scholars of Social Science and Historians also accepted this word. According to Milind Awad, *Dalit is not a caste it is a social category*.² All the Paraiyas and Kindred Classes were totally affected by religious and caste discrimination, Socio-economic imbalance, poor education. Here I want to describe my view on the usage of the Word Dalit as any one or more classes to struggle for his empowerment, the education to play major role of Dalits upliftment. The Wood's dispatch (1854) introduced Grand-Aid System to financially support the non-government, education agencies and therefore number of schools were started. In this article, I have discussed about primary level schools started by both government and non-government, education agencies since 1893 to 1947 in geographic areas covering Tamil speaking area which was the part of Madras Presidency.

Historical Backgrounds of Special Schools

In the early 1880s, the Public Instruction Department in Madras Presidency realized that the government policies in reaching educational facilities to the depressed Classes had drawn a blank³. The government faced lot of problems and challenges related to depressed class education. The high caste people did not accept the entering of dalits students into common schools. This was not the situation of Dalits society only in Tamil Nadu but also all over the India. In 1882, the Indian Education Commission or Hunter Commission discussed education, growth and conditions and this commission, particularly concentrated on the education of depressed classes. Mahatma Jhothira Govithrao Phule, one of the revolutionary Dalits in India, Phule was submitted a memorandum to the Education Commission, Bombay headed by Hunter in which he reiterated the government to make primary education compulsory for the children of the untouchables. Further, he advocated separate schools or special schools for them as they were not allowed to sit along with the caste Hindus owing to caste prejudices.⁴ The Commission suggested, "Objected to association with the children who were assembled on the board or municipal or government schools, should be encouraged to set up a special school and apply for grant-in aid"⁵. On this suggested helping non-government agencies involved to promote Dalits education.

¹ Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1891-1892, Government Press, Madras, 1892, P.95.

² Milind Awad, "*Historical Context of the Idea of the Dalit*", Think India Quarterly, Vol.13, No.3, Pp210-216, July-September 2010, New Delhi.

³ Raj Shekhar Basu, Nandanar's Children – The Paraiyan' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2011,P.169

⁴ R.K.Kshirsagar, Dalit Movement in India and Leaders, M.D.Publications, New Delhi, 1994, P.127

⁵ William Hunter, Report of the Indian Education Commission Report-1882, Government Press, Calcutta, 1883, P.7

Magna Carta of Panchama Education

The Government of Madras Presidency encouraged private agencies to establish schools for Dalit. In 1892 the Christian Missionary bodies submitted a proposal to the Government of Madras, they suggested the opening of special schools for Dalit children from public funds.⁶ The government accepted the missionary suggestion and issued the special order (G.O.No.68) on the education of the Pariahs, on 1st February, 1893. Its first special order for Dalits education in Madras Presidency. That order discussed following heads,⁷

1. Special inspecting agency.
2. Special provision for training teachers.
3. Establishment of special schools of public funds.
4. Special conditions of aid.

Dr. Duncan, Acting Director of Public Instruction, proceeded to pass orders upon the various points;

1. To grant to Pariahs who are under instruction in training schools under public management the additional stipend of Rs.2 per month.
2. To grant to Pariahs who seek admission into training schools under private management.
3. To establishment of special schools for Pariahs.
4. As regards the provision of the sites for Pariah Schools
5. Provides sufficient for the supply of books, slates and furniture.

Therefore, this G.O (Go.68, Educational Department, 1st February, 1893) was called the *Magna Carta of Panchama Education*, the number of historians accepted on this term, for example Sabyasachi Battacharya (Ed) work of *Education and the Disprivilged: Nineteenth and Twentieth Century India*, Raj Sekhar Basu work of *Nandhanar's Children the Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956*, Y.Chinna Rao work on *Writing Dalit History and Other Essays*.

The Labour Department Schools

The philanthropists and Dalits leaders' like M. C. Rajah, and others long time demanded the government that they wanted separate department for Dalits welfare. On March 16, 1916 the Madras Imperial Legislative Council was moved related to this department⁸. In 1919, prior to the introduction of reforms, a special officer under the designation of Commission of labour was appointed to look after the interact of the depressed classes in all matters including education.⁹ C.F.Paddison, a senior officer of the I.C.S with wide and varied experience was appointed as the first special officer and was designated the commission of labour.¹⁰ The legislators of the 1920s were keenly sensitive to the problem of the depressed classes and eager

⁶ P.Subramaniyam, *Social History of the Tamils, 1707-1947*, D.K.Printworld, 1996, P.339.

⁷ G.O.No.68. 1st February, (Educational Department) 1893.

⁸ S.Sarashwathi, *Minorities in Madras State – Group Interests in Modern Politics*, Impex India Publication, Delhi, 1974, P.154.

⁹ *The Growth of Education in Madras Presidency since 1920*, The Government Branch Press, Ootacamund, 1920, P.37.

¹⁰ M.C.Rajah, *The Oppressed Hindus, Madras, 1925*, P.59.

to extend state aid to them in various ways. The aim of this department to help socio-economic and educational work on Dalits. This department not only offered for depressed class, but also it took care of Aborigines, Criminal Tribes and other works welfare. Promotion of elementary education was a primary concern of this department and so it stated separate primary schools for the depressed classes called “Labour Schools”. The number of these schools increased with the general expansion of the activities of the department. It was also the policy of the labour department to assist pupils of the depressed classes to get admission to public schools. It was repeatedly urged that no elementary school under public management or receiving aid from public funds should exclude any community; but the department found that caste prejudices were strong in rural areas and separate schools were necessary for the depressed classes.¹¹ The school provided free food, books and slates and later they started free hostels. The growth of education due to these activities is shown in the following table;

Table -1

Years	No.of Schools	Labour	Boys	Girls
1920-1921	109		-	-
1921-1922	164		1,179	123
1922-1923	254		-	-
1923-1924	469		12,886	1,608
1924-1925	656		19,774	2,440
1925-1926	723		22,417	3,189
1926-1927	926		29,239	4,679
1927-1928	1,178		36,885	5,914
1928-1929	1,583		47,262	9,274
1929-1930	1,784		52,858	10,746
1940-1941	1,198		38,848	13,229
1950-1951	1,349		64,351	33,656

Source: I. P. E. Mohan, *Scheduled Castes: History of Elevation, Tamil Nadu, 1900-1955*, New Era Publications, Madras, 1993. P.62.

¹¹ Sarashvathi, P.158

Harijan Welfare Department School

After freedom struggle our government continued its struggle against caste discrimination, therefore, to take mover advanced to help Dalits empowerment and reinforcement of welfare departments. Like the government of Madras was created a special department for Dalits, it started on 1st April 1949.¹² The first Director was V. Bhasyam Iyengar, a retired judge of the High Court, Madras.¹³ As earlier this department one of the part of Labour Department. The word “Harijan” came into popularity through Mahatma Gandhi who worked on Harijan shava Sangh, because the Congress Government also adapted. The department started to realize that educational advancement is the forerunner of all progress. Hence the Government paid special attention to the educational aspect of Harijan Problem.¹⁴ The welfare department framed two kinds of policy on Harijan education. First, they find out what are problems are facing for general schools on delights students and the second they are premed how to impure the special scheme for Dalits education. Their number is growing from year to year was 1292 on 31st March 1950 and they employed 2, 834 teachers of whom only 48 were untrained. The total number of children on the roll on 31st March 1950 was nearly one lakh.¹⁵

Non-Government Agencies

Model Schools and The Rajagopal Poor Boys School in Madras

T. John Rathinam, one of the great Dalit welfare activator in Madras. Initially, he came as a priest to propagate the principles of Christianity among Dalits. Rathnam started a school in 1886 at Thousand Lights, Madras. This school was called as “Model School, whose purpose was to teach Dalits children. He was starting another two schools at Teynampet and Makkima Magar.¹⁶ The Rajagopal Poor Boys Schools in Madras, another one the important primary school for Dalits¹⁷.

The Theosophical Society- Panchama Schools

Col. Henry Steel Olcott, one the co-founder of the Theosophical Society. In 1892 he met Pandit C.Iyothithasar the greatest dalits reformer, that relationship to help to create Olcott mind, he enter the role of dalits educational. The outstanding work for Olcott is remembered is the foundation of ‘Pariah Schools’ on 12th June 1894 at Adyar in Madras, it’s called Panchama Schools, it’s for free school for Dalits boys and girls¹⁸ Totally the Society had established five schools in Madras areas, the second school was started in 1898, Its called H. P. Blavatsky Memorial School at Kodambakkam, third school was started in 1899, under the name of Damodar K. Mavalankar Free School at Teynampet Memorial School at Kodambakkam in that

¹² Harijan Welfare In Madras State, Government of Madras, Madras, 1955, P.4

¹³ P.E.Mohan, P.62

¹⁴ Harijan Welfare in Madras State, P.7

¹⁵ *Ibid*, P.9

¹⁶ P.E.Mohan, P.68.

¹⁷ Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1892-1893, Government Press, Madras, 1893, Vol.I, P.87.

¹⁸ C.Paramarthalingam, Religion and Social Reform in Tamil Nadu, Rajakumari Publication, Madurai, 1997, P.83.

year. In 1902 fourth school was open under the name of the Tiruvalluver Free School at Mylapore. The last school was founded Krishnapet.¹⁹ The school syllabus was specially set up according to the needs of Dalits children's, the teaching extends through the 4th standard. This school introduced employments oriented education.²⁰ According to Olcott, "the pupils are prepared to keep bazaar accounts, make out bills, work out problems with compound numbers, such as English money, Indian money, English and Indian weights Madras measures of capacity, linear measure, time act..They gain knowledge of the outlines of Geography, paying special attention to this Presidency"²¹. The Society also introduced the free-midday meals schemes to improve attendance in these schools.²² Later on four society schools were looked after by government and converted to normal schools. Remaining one school run by the Theosophical Society, it's Called Olcott Memorial School at Adyar. The growth of education showing following table; Table - 2

Years	Number of Presented	Number of Passed	Percentage
1895-1896	14	12	86
1896-1897	33	25	75
1897-1898	34	21	62
1898-1899	54	33	61

Sources: (the table shows the number of Pariah children getting an education at the Olcott Free School and H. P. Blavatsky Memorial School between 1895-1899) *The Poor Pariah, p129*

Nandanar Kalvi Kazhagam

Swami Sahajanander was a religion based Dalit reforming thinker and Politician. He was a founder of Nandanar Mutt (Nandnar Madam) on 7th July, 1916, started his social reforms on Dalits society. On 20th May 1917 he founded Nandanar School in Chidambaram.²³ It's a primary level school, the school run to starting 25 pupils on Dalits Children's. Initially Nandanar Mutt ran the School with the help of some educationalists and Philanthropists like Muhammed Habinullah, K. Srinivasa Iyyengar, C. T. Muthiya Chettiyar, S. R. Annamalai and P. Kesava Pillai. In 1920, Chidambaram Municipality give the special grant to waste land on this mutt, its help to engarached his service. On March 1923 Swami reestablished his institution, it's called Nandanar Kalvikazhagam.²⁴ The mutt had managed two schools, 1. Nandnar Higher Elementary School for Boys, and 2. Residential School for Girls. Till 1938 schools were help in Government

¹⁹ H.S.Olcott, The Poor Pariah, (Pamphlets), Addison publication, Madras, 1902, P.10.

²⁰ N.A.Courtright, How We Teach The Pariah, The Minerva Pree, Madras, 1906. P.7

²¹ The Poor Pariah, P.11

²² Raj Sekhar Basu, Nandanar's Children: The Paraiyans' Tryst with Destiny, Tamil Nadu 1850-1956, Sage Publication, 2011, P.183.

²³ Poovizhian (Ed), Swami Writings and Speeches, Karisal Pathippagam, Pp.55-56.

²⁴ *Ibid*, P.103

aid and philanthropic aid, on 1st July 1938 the charge of the school was handed over to the Government.²⁵

Harijan Sevak Sangh Schools

After Poona Pact of 1932, Mahatma Gandhi and Congress re-modification they untouchables service, Gandhi start All Indian Harijan Sevak Sangham. In the beginning Harijan Sevak Sangham was known as “Servans of untouchables Society”. The aim of the sangham was removal of untouchability and the liberation of dalits from the shackles of social, economic, educational and political disabilities.²⁶ The Tamil Nadu branch of the Harijan Sevak Sangh faithfully carried out the ideas of central organization. It’s formed at the provincial Anti-untouchability Conference held at Tiruchirapalli, on 20th November 1932 under the President of Dr. T. S. S. Rajan.²⁷ They established primary schools and hostels for Dalits children’s, Sangham even asked aid from the government for Dalit upliftment especially in the field of the education. Separate hostels were maintained with the government aid at Madurai, Dindugal, Periakulam, Lalgudi, Melur, Tiruchirappalli, Devakottai, Vellure, Namakal and Cheranmadevi etc., Along with government many rich people also donated money and property in the case of Dalits educational works.²⁸ The number of hostels and inmates increased gradually.

Table - 3

Year	Hostels	Inmates
1935	4	81
1940	18	378
1945	24	582
1950	45	1608

In 1933 sangham established 52 schools in Tamil Nadu, most of these schools were only primary and middle level stages²⁹ All schools followed education ideas of Gandhi, its called Wartha system this system of education to teach moral and ethical thinking, village basted handicraft works.

Conclusion

The beginning of twenty century Dalits slowly enters educational upliftment in Colonial Tamil Nadu. Those educational development was possibilities on the Government and Non-Government agencies. On 1st February 1893 first time Government of Madras Presidency passing special Government Order relates to Dalit Education, its turning-point of Dalit Education. Next, Labour Department, its stared number of schools in

²⁵ Swapna H. Samel, Dalit Movement in South India 1957-1950, Serials Publication, New Delhi, 2004, P.181.

²⁶ Sushila Nayar, Mahatma Gandhi Biography in Ten Volumes, (Preparing For Swaraj, Vol.7,) Varthamanan Publication, Chennai, 2008, Pp.218-219.

²⁷ P.E.Mohan, P.35.

²⁸ Swapna H Samel, Dalit Movement in South India 1857-1950, Serials Publication, New Delhi, 2004, P.176.

²⁹ P.E.Mohan, P.39.

Tamil speaking areas, many this community people got free education with scholarships. Another important result of this department was created number of teaching post in Dalits communities and other employment opportunities, after independence this department name was changed Harijan Welfare Department, its also continue educational service under government. Next non-Christian missionaries involved started on special schools on Dalit children. Colonel Henry Steel Olcott's, the Panchama Educational Scheme was a valuable result of Dalits educational development in Madras city, even today those schools were run successfully. Olcott was great supported to Pandit C. Ayothithasa and Erattaimalai Srinivan, this relationship to help Dalits consensus in Tamil Nadu. Rev. Jonah Rathinam was co-associated with Pandit C. Ayothithasa and Swami Sahajananda both leaders give special concentration on Dalits education. Jonh's motivated Pariah children in Madras areas. Swami was great educated and social work in Chidamparam. Many Dalits benefited his school, Swami was encouraged, particularly girls' education. After Round Table Conference (1930-1931) Mahatma Gandhi, anti-untouchability program was totally modified, his Harijan Sevah Sangh involved started number of schools in Tamil Nadu, Gandhi invited caste Hindus also involved Harijan educational program. The government and un-government agencies continue supporting Dalits education through his empowerment.

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