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**ENDEAVOUR OF THE MISSIONARIES TO SPREAD  
EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU  
- A STUDY ON JESUITS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The Jesuits were the pioneers in the field of discovering and formulating new strategies for conversion. Filtration approach of the Brahmin Sannyasis and the subaltern strategy of Pandaraswamis<sup>[1]</sup> were the method devised by Jesuits for conversion in Tamil Nadu. Jesuit education has played a very decisive role. Jesuit education has a great relevance for a traditional society like India which is characterized by a system of domination and inequality. Jesuit schools and colleges can effectively contribute to the development of democracy by introducing the methods of teaching aimed at stimulating in the pupils powers of personal thought, make efforts to teach social concern and national commitment, to build up achievement motivation and social consciousness thus breaking down prejudices based on caste religion and language and to inculcate the dignity of manual work. Jesuit education has values of freedom; equality and fraternity are common goals of education, Christianity and democracy. The educational institutions were conducted by the Jesuits in Tamil Nadu emphasis on the Madurai Province of the Society of Jesus. It is an exploratory and descriptive study against the strategy of the Jesuits conversion. It investigates the objectives of Jesuit Education. The study aims to find out the extent to which the educational institutions set up by the Jesuits in Tamil Nadu and particularly in Madurai Province have sought to realize this.

## INTRODUCTION

Jesuit of the Malabar Province<sup>[2]</sup> opened a new mission at Madurai in 1595 for the purpose of the conversion of the inland people.<sup>[3]</sup> The Portuguese ways and life was a stigma to conversion. Moreover Christianity was considered as Parangi Margam<sup>[4]</sup> De Nobili(1577-1656) wanted to create an impression among the high castes of Madurai that his religion was not the religion of the Parangis. He boldly extended into the process of inculturation. He renounced the European habit and confined strictly to the measures and customs of the high caste. He adopted a priestly life exactly in the Indian pattern.<sup>[5]</sup> Hence he felt the necessity of donning the saffron colored garb of the sanyasi. In performing the ablutions, he was exactly like the Brahmins. As a result he was called Roman sannyasi in Madurai. The idea of Nobili was to concentrate on the high caste people and from them the Christianity would automatically filter-down to the lower caste and therefore Christianity would become the most popular religion in India. The strategy of Nobili did not work well. Neither the high caste nor the lower caste was lured in bulk to Christian fold. Hence the Jesuits started conversion process from below. For this purpose the Jesuits started a new mission of pandaraswamis. In Hindu religion there was a sect of Sannyasis called Pandarams mainly from Hindu Sudra caste. Fr.Balthazar Da Costa was the founder of

the Sudra mission in 1640. In due course the mission was exclusively reserved for Adi Dravidas.<sup>[6]</sup> The Jesuits organization did not find any harm in having a separate strategy to the conversion of the lower castes. The lower and middle class began to convert more. The Pandaraswami's simple living and dedicated works made them much wanted missionaries in all the residencies of Tamil Nadu. The champion of Pandaraswami was John De Britto. He started a church exclusively for the out castes, south of Celeron in the Cauvery delta.<sup>[7]</sup> Here he wanted segregation for the betterment of the outcastes.

These outcastes respected none of the Hindu taboos. Their conversion into Christianity made them follow a measure of bodily ablutions, which the Pandaraswami ipso facto followed. Hence the purpose was twofold.<sup>[8]</sup> one group of caste Hindu's converts difference to mix with outcastes could be checked and therefore it should not be a hindrance to accept Christ. The other was to build a measure of self-confidence in the minds of the out castes, that they were being cared. These were the internal adjustments made within the limited circle and no way found alien to the basic principles of Christianity. He did not want to make any compromise with regard to the basic tenets of the religion.

In the matter of religion even a low caste would in a way allow himself to be

instructed by a Parangi.<sup>[9]</sup> The lower castes, whom the Jesuits mention frequently in their letters were Suthras and many others. Others till the soil and are usually the serfs of the owners of the village. They have a right to all the cows which die of sickness or of old age.<sup>[10]</sup> They had their own spiritual leader whom they called Pandarams or yogis.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **The Educational Institutions of the Jesuits in Tamilnadu**

The Jesuit contribution to education can be traced back from 1567 onwards. In 1567, Fr. Henry Henriue, a companion of St. Francis Xavier, had a school at Punnakayal, to which boys came even from Goa. There was a seminary at Tuticorin here the Indians studied Portuguese, Latin, Moral Theology and Vocal Music.

Fr Fernandez also built a Church, a school and a hospital at Madurai. The new learning of the Jesuits began to spread to other centres like Tiruchirappalli and Palayamkottai.<sup>[12]</sup>

From 1567, till to-date there is a far cry in education. These four centuries for the 909 a quiet growth of the Jesuit's Education at every stage. From elementary to University, first at parish or Mission station level, here each Missionary started a primary school for Catholic children to the taught their religion and the rudiments of reading and writing.<sup>[13]</sup> Jesuits ere the pioneers of

higher education among Catholics.<sup>[14]</sup> They rightly gauged that the 19<sup>th</sup> century as remarkable for intellectual outburst and transformation of social and religious values.

The Wood's Despatch says that the educational efforts of Christian Missionaries have been more successful among the Tamil population than in any other part of India.<sup>[15]</sup> The Filtration theory refused to work satisfactorily in Tamil country. As per this theory, the light must touch the mountain tops before it could pierce the levels and depth.<sup>[16]</sup> But the light or new education did not touch the common people, so the Christian Missionaries came forward as pioneers and established the first modern schools and colleges.<sup>[17]</sup>

Among the Christian Missionaries, the society of Jesus had become the most powerful instrument for the dissemination of Higher Education and a remarkable limb of the educational organization. The society started the following schools and colleges at various times to spread the good odor of Christ.<sup>[18]</sup>

### **SCHOOL EDUCATION**

St. Mary's Higher Secondary School, Madurai established under grand-in-aid system in 1879. In 1904 secondary education was started by Fr. Talon and first batch of SSLC sent out in 1908.<sup>[19]</sup> St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School, Thiruchirappalli which was added to the

college in 1884<sup>[20]</sup>. St.Xavier's Higher Secondary School, Palayamkottai originated as a Middle school in 1880 and became a matriculation school in 1884. Tuticorin traces its beginning in 1600. It was an elementary school in 1872, the school was raised to a middle secondary school by Fr.Everard and in 1884 Fr.Laventine made it into a high school. St.Mary's higher secondary school in Dindugal was started in 1903.<sup>[21]</sup>

St. Arulanandar's HIGH school, Oriyur, Ramnad district was opened as an elementary school in 1908. The school was upgraded into a high school in 1963. Carmel Higher Secondary School, Nagarcoil was founded in 1922 by the Bishop of quilon. It was handed over to Jesuits in 1949.<sup>[22]</sup> It enjoys a high reputation in the Kanyakumari District. De Britto Higher Secondary School, Devakottai, Ramnad district was founded in 1943 by Rev.Fr.Bonhoure,S.J.for the benefit of the people of Ramnad and it was recognized by the education department in 1947. St.Stanislaus basic training School, Sattur, Ramnad District was started in 1945 as a non-basic training school. In 1953, it was turned into a basic training school. Loyala Technical Institute at Madurai was started in 1952 as a preparatory school for the aspirants to the Jesuit Brotherhood.<sup>[23]</sup> Campion Higher Secondary School started by the Jesuit Fathers in 1935 is now managed by the Gabriel Brothers.

## University Education

St.Xavier's College, Palayamkottai was started in 1923 for the uplift of the catholic boys and fostering education among all communities. Loyola College, Madras was founded by Jesuit Fathers in 1925 with the aim of providing university education in a Christian atmosphere for deserving catholic students. St.Xavier's teacher training college was started in 1950 to help meet the need for trained teachers in secondary schools. Arulanandar College, Karumathur, Madurai district was taken by the Jesuit from the archdiocese to improve the rural areas.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Spiritual Education

The Church and the society have a role to play in the cultural renewal of the nation<sup>[25]</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Education confers a status to an individual. Educational status is an achieved status which an individual attains through his efforts. Importance of education and social statuses affected by education were well realized by the poets.

As ancient system of education in Tamilnadu was not sex discriminatory, women were encouraged to liberal and secular education. Women worked as teachers and their social statuses were noteworthy. Even though education was a private concern during the Cankam and

post-Cankam periods. It was formalized and institutionalized in the Pallavan and Chola periods. Schools and colleges attached to monasteries, temples and mutts began to function as socializing agency. Learning was considered as chief criteria for Kings, Ministers and Ambassadors. Role of teachers and students were codified clearly in the Nannul of Medieval period.

The Jesuits have done excellent contribution in the field of education initially at the primary level then even in high schools and collegiate education exclusively for women and down-drown. Education and social status are inseparably related in the cultural fabrics of Tamil society.

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