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## EVOLUTION OF DISABILITY EDUCATION IN TAMIL NADU: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE FROM PRECOLONIAL TIMES TO INDEPENDENCE

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### ABSTRACT

The Latin term "Edu-care," which means "to bring up," is the source of the English word education. Instead of several forms of non-formal and informal socialization, the subject of education deals with teaching and learning techniques in a school or setting that is similar to a school. In Tamilnadu pre-colonial past, the disabled were widely regarded as integral members of society, with several examples being documented as monarchs, poets, artists, fighters, and so forth. Western society has focused on the education and care of the disabled since the sixteenth century.



**KEYWORDS:** *informal socialization , integral members , Western society.*

### INTRODUCTION

Valentin Harvy, who is referred to as the "father and apostle of the blind," subsequently established a separate school for the blind in Paris in 1784. This research article offers an impartial history by highlighting literary and epigraphical evidence in the context of disability education in precolonial Tamilnadu. According to Thiruvalluvar's drawings, only the knowledgeable are considered to have eyes, whilst the eyes of the uneducated are only sores. Since education is the only thing that can provide insight and illumination, only the educated possess the true eyes. The Tamils understood the importance of vision and hearing long ago. In the course of their everyday lives, they came to understand and feel the necessity of hearing and seeing, without which a man could not move about on his own. They generously offered the handicapped precedence as a result.

The safety and care of children with disabilities had received considerable attention before the start of the Christian period. The 18th and 19th centuries saw the realization by society of the value of educating and rehabilitating individuals with disabilities thanks to Christian missionaries, especially nuns, who were instrumental in Tamil Nadu's colonial past in the field of education for the disabled. Bombay became the home of the first deafmute school in 1884. In Amritsar, the first school for the blind was established later in 1887. In the area of education for the disabled, the Christian missionaries were the forerunners, laying the groundwork for a deafmute school in Palayamkottai in 1895 and a blind school in 1890. The status of disability education in the state of Tamil Nadu from 1890 to 1947 is the

main subject of this research, along with the several groups that supported it, including missionaries, British colonialists, Hindu societies, and others. It also attempts to follow the development and history of several governmental measures concerning disability education, including the establishment of disability schools, programs, and curricula during these 57 years in the 19th and 20th centuries. The country has implemented policies in the area of education to either teach students with disabilities in normal courses or classes tailored to their skill levels. One important tool for bringing about social, economic, and cultural change, especially about disability—is education, as the University Education Commission (1948) noted. The country had taken the lead in offering disabled children education in the mainstream classroom or programs tailored to their skill level. The circumstances surrounding education for the disabled underwent a significant shift upon the establishment of these schools.

### **Institutionalization and development of disabled education in Madras Presidency:**

Missionaries from Christianity went to India to share the good news of Jesus. They employed education as a means of advancing their religious goals. They thought that education was the only way to easily establish a connection with the entire community. There were several influential Christian groups in Tamilnadu, including the Baptist Mission Society, Christian Mission Society, Christian Mission Society, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London Mission Society, St. Augustinians, St. Franciscans, and St. Dominicans<sup>1</sup>.

The British permitted Christian missionaries to propagate Christianity across India in 1813, as per the Charter Act. Thus, a deafmute school was founded in Spain in 1554. The latter two decades of the nineteenth century, according to Brockway (1949), were a turning point in the church Mission society's educational program in Palayamkottai<sup>2</sup>. Two sisters, J.A. Askwith and Florence Swainson, were dispatched to Palayamkottai in 1880 by the Church of England Zenana Mission Society (CEZMS). At Palayamkottai, J.A. Askwith established the Sarah Tucker Women's College in 1886. In 1897, the northwest province's Mayapur mission sent five orphan girls to the institution. They were accepted and provided with boarding and accommodation, and free education. Students from the central provinces, Bengal, Bombay, the northwest region, Ali-Rajpur, Travancore, the Tamil area of Madras Presidency, and Ceylon were accepted into the Palayamkottai deafmute school. Without any discrimination, they were admitted<sup>3</sup>.

There is a fascinating history behind the founding of the first blind school during the Madras administration. A blind kid approached Sara Tucker's school in 1888 and begged for charity. The institution's principal, Shri A.J. Askwith, informed him that the institution's primary purpose is to offer education rather than charitable work. The youngster grinned and said, "So give me an education." His remarks moved the principal, who saw it as a challenge. The first school for the blind was established in Palayamkottai in 1890 under the direction of Madras after the youngster was welcomed right away as a member of the main home<sup>4</sup>. The first instructor at the blind school was a blind man who was hired in 1890. In 1892, the school was split into two sections, one for girls and one for boys. Every school has an industrial and educational part. The 3rs wing reading, writing, and math were taught in the educational portion. The industrial component taught basketry, brush manufacturing, cotton weaving, and other skills<sup>5</sup>. The Madras presidency saw a significant change In the Tinnevely region of the presidency, there were three schools for blind children: one for boys and one for girls at Pallamcottah, and a third for blind boys at Panivalai in the Tenkasi taluk. 15, 11, and 8 students were attending each of the three schools respectively, ranging in age from 8 to 27<sup>6</sup>. In addition to the regular curriculum, nine students in the baby, first, and second grades attended the Panivalai school, while fourteen boys and eleven girls attended the Pallamcottah schools where they were taught rudimentary industries. The Readers for the Blind has now been published in four of the common languages by Mr. Garthwaite<sup>7</sup>. To increase blind people's access to education in the northern Madras presidency in 1899. In Madras, a blind school was established by the South Indian Christian Blind Association. A youngster from the Palayamkottai Blind School received praise and the top prize from the government<sup>8</sup> in the same year after receiving 80% of the possible points in the primary board of examination's math test<sup>8</sup>.

According to the 1901 Madras Presidency census, there were around 28,547 blind and deafmute individuals. Only 28 blind and 54 deafmute school-age children were among them. It accounted for more than 0.1 percent of all the disabled people in the Madras Presidency. In a similar spirit, 3,67,297 additional persons were identified as disabled in the 1961 census. Nonetheless, the school had 1006 deaf kids and 672 blind students. It was equivalent to 0.5% of all disabled individuals. In 1961, the proportion of pupils with disabilities enrolled in school increased somewhat by 0.4 percent over 1901<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, the government approved grants of Rs. 14,022 under the assistance code. On March 31, 1904, there were 65 students enrolled in the deaf-mute school in Pallamcottah, as opposed to 31 on the same day the previous year<sup>10</sup>. To give educational possibilities in the northern region of Madras presidency, Tamil was taught in Tamil while non-Tamil was taught in English due to the increasing number of non-Tamil pupils enrolling at Palayamkottai Deafmute School. 113 students attended the second deafmute school in 1914-15, up from 1909-1910. In 1918, the Palayamkottai Deafmute School was established by the government on instructions to provide special training for instructors of the crippled. This included training women who taught blind and deafmute students<sup>11</sup>.

Under the instructions of the Archbishop of Madras, they established a deafmute school at Srivilliputtur in 1924, which came under the direct control of St. Xavier's College at Palayamkottai. In 1926, a little flower convent school for the blind and deaf-mute was established in Madras on Grems Road. On the advice of the St. Augustine Mission Society, 10 special instructors for blind and deafmute people traveled from Belgium to India in 1926<sup>12</sup>. During the Madras presidency, there were six deafmute schools with 553 pupils registered in 1947. Of these six schools, Srivilliputtur and Erode were shut down following independence for reasons related to poor administration, while Palayamkottai, Mylapore, Karaikudi, and Coimbatore remained operating in subpar conditions. There were fourteen schools designed specifically for children with physical disabilities, totaling seventy-eight (712) students, of whom sixteen (166) were females and five hundred (546) boys<sup>13</sup>.

### **Establishment of Special education institutions:**

To meet the requirements of the Northern Districts, the American Evangelical Missionary founded a blind school in Rentachintala. In 1913, Swainson established a deafmute school in Madras. In Poonamallee, a blind school was established by the Victory Mission Society in 1931. Most of the special schools were founded by lone missionaries. They were operating on government funding, subscriptions, and donations from both abroad and inside India<sup>14</sup>. The second school for deafmutes schools rose to 113 in 1914-15 against in 1909-1910. As per orders of the government, the Palayamkottai deafmute school opened a special training class for the teachers of the disabled in 1918 and gave training to women teachers of blinds and deafmutes<sup>15</sup>.

Hindu management schools for the deafmutes and special education have been established in the Madras presidency since 1916. In 1920, the Dharmayaga deaf school in Guntur and the Sri Meenakshi deaf school in Madurai were established. With just eighteen pupils, the Bhupathi Deaf School was founded in Madurai in 1922. Since the Palayamkottai Teacher Training School would not accept non-Christian instructors for training, there was no non-Christian special-trained teacher for deafmutes at that time<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, under the Madras presidency, it was the sole special teacher training institution. Subsequently, the government threatened to withhold funding until the administration of the Palayamkottai Deaf Schools admitted non-Christians for special instruction. Thus, Hindus were accepted to the school for special instruction by the administration. The Madras presidency had more qualified teachers as a result, and the challenges faced by qualified instructors in deaf schools were eliminated. Due to the large number of deaf students from Kerala attending the Pallamcottah Deaf School, there were separate classrooms for Tamil and Malayalam instruction<sup>17</sup>.

In 1929, Palayamkottai deaf school opened a nursery class for the welfare and development of deafmutes. Then two merit scholarships for the deaf by the Central Institute of Defectives, Mysore. The government had a policy to help the professional improvement of the teachers and bear fifty percent of the expenditure for the teachers who went for training in foreign universities. The teachers of Christian missionary special schools utilized these opportunities and went to foreign universities. After their

return introduced new methods of teaching, and they could train more specially trained teachers in Tamilnadu. The Christian missionary schools provided free education, boarding, lodging, and clothing. Moreover, doctors from mission hospitals visited blind schools periodically to provide medical facilities to the students<sup>18</sup>. After the First World War was over, eighteen blind soldiers were sent to the Palayamkottai Special School for rehabilitation. The educated blinds and deafmutes were appointed either as teachers, monitors, or Evangelists and paid by the mission school management funds. Thus, the missionaries helped improve the standard of living of the disabled in Tamilnadu. Simultaneously, the government-sanctioned Rs.945 for the purchase of looms and Rs.3900 for the construction of a shed to lodge the blind soldiers<sup>19</sup>.

Two schools, one at Dhanapet and another at Royapuram were opened in 1926 simultaneously by the corporation of Madras. The Royapuram school provided education for both boys and girls. In 1935, the Dhanapet school added a girl's section and also introduced the English medium. Further from 1939, a part-time music teacher was appointed to teach south Indian vocal music. 13 free boardings, lodging, clothing, and medical care were provided by the corporation of Madras residency<sup>20</sup>. The mission school management translated the Bible into Braille for general reading of the blinds. It also encouraged Christian missionaries to convert non-Christian students to Christianity. Subsequently, interested students were sent as evangelists. This met with some resistance from the parents of the Hindu students and resulted in the reduction of the school-going disabled. In these circumstances, the question of conversion of Hindu students resulted in the reduction of school-going disabled. In these circumstances, the question of conversion of Hindu students to Christianity came up for discussion in the Legislative Council. As a result, the government passed a resolution and strictly implemented it in special schools. It reduced the conversions in these schools. In short, the Christian missionaries provided education to the disabled along with evangelical activities<sup>21</sup>.

### **Indoctrination Conditions of the disabled at the time of Independence:**

The expansion and diffusion of education in general and education for the disabled in particular have benefited greatly from the missionaries' efforts. Missionaries should be commended for enabling the downtrodden and disadvantaged to have an awakening to education. The government's and the missionaries' educational and rehabilitative programs helped the crippled go along a path toward a normal existence and prepared them for the social problems that society presents<sup>22</sup>. In Tamil Nadu, the education of disadvantaged people was pioneered by Christian missionaries. Missionaries operated the blind schools on their own until 1947. With the entrance of Western missionaries in India in the sixteenth century, disability education had its start. Missionaries should be commended for bringing forth an awakening to education among the disadvantaged and disabled. Recognizing the nuns' contributions to the education of underprivileged individuals in general and of children who are blind or deafmute in particular is crucial. Education is the primary preoccupation of any developing nation<sup>23</sup>.

Before 1947, missionaries operated the majority of blind schools. In the Madras presidency, eight blind schools were operating between 1890 and 1947. The Christian missionaries identified themselves as the pioneers of disability education in Tamilnadu by doing this. A thorough analysis of the handicapped population's educational experiences reveals that missionaries had a significant role in their upbringing<sup>24</sup>.

In India, the number of schools for children with disabilities increased dramatically after independence. In the state of Tamilnadu, specific schools are currently being established in every district. There are approximately 38 special schools in the entire city of Chennai. The majority of these institutions were established and operated by Christian missionaries and non-governmental groups<sup>25</sup>. One of the oldest hearing-impaired schools in Chennai is C.S.I High School, which was founded in 1912. Certain schools do not offer the higher secondary curriculum, which is necessary for students to finish their education. To ensure that students can enter the labor market in a competitive situation, schools need to develop alternative vocational training programs. There are seven special schools in Chennai city for people with locomotor disabilities<sup>26</sup>. Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre was established to provide a child with treatment which in turn leads to his or her education due to

extended therapy time. Every institution offers vocational training to help prepare children for their future needs in addition to rehabilitation services including hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, and other treatments<sup>27</sup>.

In 1953, special education for mentally impaired students was introduced to Chennai City through the establishment of Bala Vihar School. Rehabilitating a mentally challenged child involves a completely different interpretation of special education. Here education takes the form of teaching and training the child to learn self-help skills, motor skills, social skills, simple academic education, activities of daily living, sensory skills, concept training, occupational skills, and vocational skills depending on the level of retardation of each child. Special Educators play a vital role in this field. For the majority of mentally challenged children, special schools offer training to become special educators in the form of diplomas or B.Ed. degrees<sup>28</sup>.

Currently, the city of Chennai has just three blind schools, two of which were founded before independence. In 1962, St. Louis became the fourth institution to join the association. The only government-run school in the city is Victory Memorial School for the Blind in Poonamallee. Students receiving education for visual impairments are instructed in Braille<sup>29</sup>. At the Higher Secondary level, they are assigned theory subjects that are simple to study. Additional forms of training are also given to them and a crucial role is played by vocational training<sup>30</sup>.

### CONCLUSION:

Since independence, the central government and state governments have each made different kinds of concessions for the education of the disabled. In Chennai city, one government special school for each disability has been run by the state government. When non-governmental organizations have asked the government to establish special schools, the government has also been willing to grant them approval. Despite this, several of the government-run special schools lack the necessary land or structures to conveniently provide their services to the disabled. Even though the government provides funding for disabled education, these funds are typically not used appropriately. This ought to be properly managed.

To satisfy the need for special educators and to rehabilitate the disabled, the Rehabilitation Council of India must take the appropriate measures to increase the staffing requirements. This can be done by extending the number of training institutions and raising public awareness about disabilities. Enforcing inclusive education as a feasible choice for education for the disabled is essential. To put it simply, inclusive education means integrating programs for students with disabilities into the general education system rather than having them exist as separate programs. In the light of the principle of inclusive education, where there is no compelling reason to do otherwise, the government must take a law or policy decision that will ensure that all children are enrolled in regular schools. Special schools make sure that the integration of the disabled into society at all levels is successful and promising, in contrast to the human approach to the problems of the disabled, which is to keep them socially separated. It is admirable how these institutions have approached this assignment with such steadfastness. Through their innovative teaching strategies, these institutions have been providing these deprived kids with important services for almost a century.

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