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Genesis of Deaf Education in 19th and 20th Century in Madras Presidency

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ABSTRACT

The establishment of Special Educational Institutions in Tirunelveli District was an important milestone in the history of Madras Presidency. The British administration in the Madras Presidency was marked by a significant change both in cultural and educational life of the people. The Christian Missionaries gave an opportunity only to the orthopedically handicapped in ordinary schools. But the disabled like blind and deaf-mute were incapable of getting education in ordinary schools. So, they realized the actual difficulties of educating blind and deaf-mute. Subsequently, Miss Annie Jane Asqwith initiate to educate the vulnerable disabled people without any prior experience with the disabled. Now, it develop into not only the pioneer institution but also it cause for the formation of separate department for disabled under the able guidance of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Aim and objective of this research is to enlighten the readers to know the genesis and its development through the ages in Madras Presidency (at Present Tamil Nadu) during the last decade of 19th and 20th Century and analyze the challenges before the founder, how do they overcome the difficulties and shown the seed for the present development for understanding the historical background of Department of Differently Abled in Tamil Nadu.

Key Words: Deaf and Dumb, Deaf Mute, Differently abled, Disabled, Hearing Impaired, Physically Challenged, Physically handicapped

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Special Educational Institutions in Tirunelveli District was an important milestone in the history of Madras Presidency. The British administration in the Madras Presidency was marked by a significant change both in cultural and educational life of the people. The Christian Missionaries gave an opportunity only to the orthopedically handicapped in ordinary schools.¹ But the disabled like blind and deaf-mute were incapable of getting education in ordinary schools. So, they realized the actual difficulties of educating blind and deaf-mute. Subsequently, Miss Annie Jane Asqwith initiate to educate the vulnerable disabled people without any prior experience with the disabled. Now, it develop into not only the pioneer institution but also it cause for the formation of separate department for disabled under the able guidance of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.

Aims and Objectives

Aim and objective of this research is to enlighten the readers to know the genesis and its development through the ages in Madras Presidency (at Present Tamil Nadu) during the last decade of 19th and 20th Century and analyze the challenges before the founder, how do they overcome the difficulties and shown the seed for the present development for understanding the historical background of Department of Differently Abled in Tamil Nadu.

Methodology

This research article is based on Primary and Secondary sources, interviews, journals and new paper articles and historically describe and explanatory methods used for understanding the genesis of historical event for the formation of separate department for the neglected community in the last 2 centuries in Madras Presidency. This article definitely gave a vivid account on the genesis of deaf education and the effort of pioneer woman missionary who dedicate her life for the marginalized people of Madras Presidency, made everyone to think of Hearing impaired and their contribution to society.

¹ Department of Education Lr. No. 7236, 1916.

Founder of Deaf Education

Miss. Annie Jane Asqwith was a pioneer for educating Blind students in Tirunelveli District² of Madras Presidency. Paul Appasamy in his book *The Centenary History of C.M.S. in Tinnevelly*, (1923) rightly pointed out that Miss. Annie Jane Asqwith was a remarkable woman; her marvelous service stimulated other missionaries to extend their service towards education for the disabled.³ For instance, Miss. Annie Jane Asqwith's encouragement and inducement made Miss Florence Swainson to started a deaf mute school at Palamcottah in 1895 and another school at Mylapore in 1913.⁴

THE FIRST SCHOOLS FOR THE DEAFMUTES

The year 1895 was a landmark in the history of education among the deaf mutes in the Madras Presidency. Florence Swainson was moved by on seeing two deaf girls staying in the Sarah Tucker Compound and decided to start a class for the deaf children. They were admitted in the sewing class first. So, a school for the deaf mute was established at Palamcottah by Florence Swainson in 1895.⁵ It was the first of its kind in South India.⁶ At the time of the establishment of Palamcottah deaf mute school, only 2 schools existed in India,⁷ One in Bombay and another one in Calcutta. The Palamcottah deaf school was moved inside the campus of Sarah Tucker College during the academic year 1895-1896.⁸ The inconvenience of the Sarah Tucker College urged them to move the school for deaf mute to the Veranda of Swainson's Hospital in the year 1897.⁹ It received a keen attention from hospital and teaching staff. In 1897 the founder of the school invited a teacher for the deaf mute from England. Accordingly the teacher came to Palamcottah and took charge of the Deaf School in 1898.¹⁰

² *Report of the Administration of the Madras Presidency*, Government of Madras, (Madras, 1890 to 1948), p.104; *Annual Report of the "Sarah Tucker" Institution Boarding Schools & Branch Schools*, SPCK Press, (Madras, 1890 to 1895), p.7.

³ Appasamy, Paul, *The Centenary History of the C.M.S. in Tirunelveli*, (Palamcottah, 1923), p.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Bicentenary of the Tirunelveli church Souvenir*, p. 14.

⁶ *Portrait of Diocese of Tirunelveli*, (Tirunelveli, 1992), p.23.

⁷ *Annual Report of the "Sarah Tucker" Institution Boarding Schools & Branch Schools, 1890-1895*, S.P.C.K. Press, (Madras, 1895), p. 174.

⁸ *Annual Report of the Palamcottah School for the Deafmute -1895*, pp.1-14; *Centenary of the Tirunelveli Bishopric 1896-1996*, pp. A.32-33.

⁹ *Report of Public Instruction of Madras Presidency-1901*, p. 354.

¹⁰ *Report of Public Instruction of Madras Presidency-1897*, p. 264.

The Annual Report of the school (1898) pointed out that the Mazapore Mission of North-Western Provinces sent five orphan deaf girls to the school in 1897.¹¹ They were admitted and given free education along with boarding and lodging. Moreover, the Palamcottah deaf school's students were drawn from Central Provinces, Bengal, Bombay, Calcutta, North –Western Provinces, Ali-Rajpur, Travancore, Tamil districts of Madras Presidency, Orissa and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Hence, this school ran an International School for the Deaf children. Though they were admitted without any prejudice,¹² the western diet system was not suitable for the vegetarian students of the school. As a result the management appointed vegetarian cook in 1898. Ultimately, the student strength was increased to 39 in 1898-1899.¹³ For the sake of administrative convenience, the school was shifted to a rented building near Palamcottah Central Jail in 1900. The Principal of Palamcottah deaf school had a very long desire to shift the school to a permanent building. It stimulated Florence Swainson, the founder to purchase an area of 14 acres of land with a building, opposite of the Palamcottah Central Jail. After some alterations, the school was shifted to the permanent building in 1901 with 44 pupils. Gradually, the strength of the school has also increased. Hence, the management requested the Government to sanction Grant -in -Aid. So, the Government sanctioned a sum of Rs. 14,022 under rule 112 of the grant-in-aid code.¹⁴

According to Brockway, the then Principal of Christopher's Training School, Madras (1949), the founder of the school for deaf mutes in Palamcottah went to England in 1901. Under such circumstances Florence Swainson voluntarily merged this school with the management of *Zenana* Mission, England. Yet actual power vested in the hands of the founder. Florence Swainson returned to India in 1902 and met all the Christian Missionaries of North India for financial assistance. The missionaries magnanimously gave a huge amount to Palamcottah deaf mute school to meet the challenges that were confronted before them.

Due to the absence of Florence Swainson, the founder of the Palamcottah Deaf Mutes School, nobody was able to run this school efficiently because of lack of administrative ability and inefficiency among the staff. During the academic year, 1901-1902, the strength increased to 68. Among them 36 were

¹¹ *Quinquennium report 1906-07 to 1911-12, p. 148; Report of the School for the Deafmute, Palamcottah-1898*, pp.1-4.

¹² *Report on Public Instruction 1911-12*, p.148.

¹³ *Report of the Administration of Madras Province-1904*, p.64.

¹⁴ *Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker Educational Institution, Palamcottah-1898-99*, pp. 1-8.

boys and the remaining 32 were girls. This led to two divisions by the founder, one for girls and other one for boys. During 1902-1903, the strength was considerably decreased to 31 against 68 in the previous year (1901-02). After the arrival of the founder from England, both boys and girls schools were amalgamated into one in 1903.¹⁵ Both Tamils and non-Tamils students were studied in the Palamcottah deaf mute school. So, in 1905 an agreement was made with the staff to handle classes both in Tamil and English.¹⁶ Hence, the teachers were divided into two groups, the first group taught Tamil for Tamil students, and the second group taught English for English speaking students.

The Madras Presidency Report (1908) on Public Instruction stated that a multiple handicapped girl was admitted in Palamcottah deaf mute school in 1908.¹⁷ The management provided all kinds of facilities to make a rapid improvement of the girls in the educational Institutions. Florence Swainson, the founder of the Palamcottah deaf mute school extended her co-operation and took efforts to establish a second deaf mute school at Mylapore in Madras on January 1913. It gave an opportunity to the isolated and miserable deaf mutes in the Northern districts of Madras Presidency. The Secretary of the Department of Education (1914) stated that, the Madras deaf mute school was at first functioning in a rented building at Vepery. Later, the management of the school decided to purchase a permanent building in Mylapore.¹⁸ It was a suitable place not only for school but also for the habitation, because it was free from pollution and noise. This building at that time was under the control of St. Bede's European High School.

Department of Education G.O. No. 14, 1915 clearly stated that the management of Mylapore deaf mute school requested the Government to purchase the building at Rs. 40,000 but the Government sanctioned only half the amount of Rs. 20,000 under grant-in-aid code.¹⁹ Consequently this school was shifted to Mylapore in 1915. The total number of the deaf mute schools in Madras Presidency increased to two in 1914-1915 including the Palamcottah Blind school and Mylapore Deaf mute School. Correspondingly the strength rose to 113 in 1914-1915 against 99 in 1909-1910. As per the Law Department of Education, G.O. No. 89 (1921), the Government of India realized the importance of education to the disabled. So, in 1916 the

¹⁵ *Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Letter No. 4248, 1901.*

¹⁶ *Report of Administration of the Madras Presidency-1903*, p. 543.

¹⁷ *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency for 1911-12 & for the Quinquennium 1906-07 to 1911-12*, Vol. I, (Madras, 1913), p.148.

¹⁸ *Report on Public Instruction in the Madras Presidency-1913-14*, p.10. .

¹⁹ *Letter to the Secretary of the Department of Education, Letter No. 1989, 1914.*

Central Government had undertaken special measure for the Development of education among the disabled. The Central Government thought that the charitable agencies and aided schools were the only way for the spread of education among the handicapped students. It paved the way for the foundations of new schools particularly deaf mute's schools in the Madras Presidency.

SPECIAL SCHOOL TEACHERS' TRAINING SCHOOL

There was no school for trained teachers of deaf mute children in the Madras Presidency, till 1918. It forced the Government, to arrange a special training class for the teachers of disabled.²⁰ Under such circumstances, the Government persuaded the Palamcottah Deaf mute School to open a *special training class in 1918*.²¹ As a result, the Palamcottah deaf mute school opened a training class in 1918 and gave training to the women teachers of blind and deaf mutes. Later it provided training only for the teachers of deaf mutes.²² During the initial stage, the management of the training school did not admit the Non-Christian teachers for training, because they thought that the converted Christians were loyal to the management.

Since 1916 some non-Christian management also established schools for deafmutes all over the Madras Presidency. The Dharmayaga Deaf School in Guntur and Sri Meenakshi Deaf School in Madurai were started in 1920 by the Hindu Management. After the establishment of these schools the parents easily enlisted their children in these special schools. As a result, the numbers of school going students were increased considerably.

As per the Madras Presidency Report on Public Instruction, (1927), the Sethupathi Deaf School was established at Madurai in 1922 with 18 students. It was the second Non-Christian School in Madurai region and third in the Madras Presidency. The Education Department G.O.No. 1210 (1923), remarked that when the Hindu management established deaf schools. There was no Non-Christian Special School Trained Teacher to teach the deaf mute in Madurai region because the management of the Palamcottah Teacher Training School was not willing to admit the Non-Christian Teachers for training. Moreover it was the only Special Teacher Training School throughout the Madras Presidency. Due to the above mentioned problem, the Sethupathi Deaf School suffered much without trained teachers and inadequate facilities. As per the Law,

²⁰ *Annual Report of the School for the Deafmute, Mylapore-1909-10 & 1914-15.*

²¹ *Annual Report. Of the C.M.S. Schools for the Blind, Palamcottah, 1910, pp.1-7.*

²² See *Annual Report of the C.M.S. Schools for the Blind, Palamcottah, S.P.C.K. Press, Madras, 1908 to 1918; Annual Report of the Schools for the Blind, Palamcottah, Wesleyan Mission Press, Madras, 1919 to 1924.*

Department of Education, G.O. No. 497 (1923), the Government appointed a One Man Commission for the inspection of this school in 1923.²³The Commission submitted its report to the Government on January 1924. Based on the recommendation of the Commission, school was closed in the academic year 1923-1924 and the Guntur Dharmayaga deaf school was also closed for the same cause.

According to Law, Department of Education G.O. No. 946 (1924), the strength of Sri Meenakshi Deaf school had increased to 35 in 1924 against 20 in 1923, because most of the students from the Sethupathi Deaf School were admitted in the year 1924. As a result Sri Meenakshi deaf School got only a temporary recognition from the Government since the School had no special trained teacher.²⁴ During this time the Government introduced a Policy stating that, the temporary recognition was continued till the teachers received special training. Later the Government forced the Palamcottah Deaf School's management to admit non-Christian for Special School Teacher's Training. The Government also stated that it had the right to withhold the grant if the management did not adhere to admit four non-Christian teachers out of six for special training²⁵. So the numbers of trained teacher in Southern part of Madras Presidency were increased.

Department of Education G.O. No. 946, 1924, highlighted that the growth of both Tamil and Malayalam speaking students enrollment rose tremendously in Palamcottah Deaf School. Among them 25 students came from Kerala in the year 1925. As a matter of fact the management decided to bifurcate the school into two based on the Medium of instruction taught. Thus, Tamil and Malayalam as the medium of instruction introduced there..²⁶ They received instruction through their own mother-tongue in the industrial section too..

As per the Letter No. 7857 to the Secretary of Government (1926), two missionaries of St. Augustine Mission Society popularly known as the "Belgium Sisters", (native of Belgium) organized an orphan asylum in the early years of Twentieth Century and provided education to orphan children in Mulagumudu near Nagercoil. They approached the then Archbishop of Madras to start a new school for the deaf mutes anywhere in Madras Presidency. The Archbishop granted permission to establish a deaf school at Srivilliputhur in Ramnad district, considering the backwardness of this place. The Belgium sisters then

²³ Department of Education, G.O. No. 497,1923.

²⁴ *Department of Education G.O. No. 946*, 1924.

²⁵ *Memorandum No. 2840, dated 12.02.1923, The Government of Madras Ordered to the Director of Public Instruction; Department of Education G.O. No. 1210,1923.*

²⁶ *Report on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency, 1925; Government of Madras-Education & Public Health Department (Education) G.O. No. 1052, dated 09.05., 1938*, p.148.

started a school for the deaf mutes in 1924 at Srivilliputhur under the control of St.Xavier's College, Palamcottah.²⁷ The school gave an opportunity to the miserable deaf mutes in the area of Ramnad district. However, the provision for the education of defective children continues to be inadequate. There were only 13 recognised schools for the blind and 15 schools for deaf-mutes with a total enrollment of 510 pupils out of 971 defective children in India. Whereas 3 Deaf schools with 149 pupils enrolled out of 254 defective children in Madras Presidency in 1926-27.

The Report on Public Instruction (1930) of Madras Presidency pointed out that the Palamcottah deaf school opened a nursery class in 1929 for the welfare and advancement of deaf mutes. In general all the deaf mute students in Madras Presidency came from a poor family background. The school provided free facilities like education, boarding, lodging and clothing. But in 1930 the government passed a resolution to collect fee from the students.²⁸ Accordingly, the schools charged a fee of Rs. 5 per mensum from those who belonged to the family income over Rs. 900/- per annum.²⁹ The Central Institute of Defectives, Mysore granted two merit scholarships to the students of Mylapore deaf school based on their academic progress in the same year. All over Madras Presidency, the number of deaf mute students increased to 224 in 1929-1930 against 153 in 1919- 1920.³⁰

The Administrative Report (1930) of the Madras Presidency was of the opinion that the municipalities played an important role in the progress of special education during the last one and half decades of British Administration in the Madras presidency. The Coimbatore Municipality was the pioneer in this field.³¹ In 1931 the Coimbatore municipality opened a deaf mute school with one boy and one girl at a Choultry without the approval of the Government. It received the Government recognition in 1932.³² The establishment of Municipality Deaf School was another milestone in the history and development of special schools in Madras Presidency. Still it is functioning as high school with Vocational Centre.

²⁷ *Lady Superior, Institute for the Blind & Deaf, Madras sent a letter to the Secretary Government of Madras, Letter No, 7857 B, dated 16.03.1926.*

²⁸ *Father Leabeau, Madras sent a Letter to the Lady Superior of St. Augustine Missionary, Mulagumudu, Letter No. 2420, dated 25th August, 1924; Little Flower Convent, School for the Blind and Deaf Souvenir of the Golden Jubilee, Madras, 1976; Souvenir of the Diamond Jubilee, Madras, 1986.*

²⁹ *Report of Public Instruction, Madras, 1930*

³⁰ *Annual Report of the Central Institute of Defectives, Mysore, 1930.*

³¹ *Report on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency, 1919 & 1930.*

³² *Annual Report of the Coimbatore Municipality, Coimbatore, 1931-32; Administrative Report of Madras Presidency, 1930.*

In 1933 a Deaf School was started at Nanguneri in Tirunelveli district with 18 pupils headed by a former teacher of Palamcottah Deaf School and the Government recognition was granted to it in 1934.³³ There was a constant rivalry between Nanguneri Deaf School and the management of Palamcottah Deaf School. The Palamcottah School management never paid any need to the progress of Nanguneri Deaf School. As a result Nanguneri School faced lots of difficulties such as non-availability of teachers and inadequate building facilities. It led to the closure of the school in 1934.³⁴

The Report on Public Instruction (1935) of the Madras Presidency remarked that Madurai region was badly affected by famine and epidemics during the 1934. This natural calamities forced the Sri Meenakshi Deaf School to shift its location to Devakottai in 1934. Finally it was closed in 1935. The Mylapore Deaf School opened a hostel for its students in the same year. As a result the number of students in this school increased to 120 in 1935-1936 against 85 in 1934- 1935.³⁵

The Report (1937) on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency stated that the industrial section of the Mylapore Deaf School participated in an exhibition held at Madras in September 1936 and received a merit certificate from the Organizing Committee.³⁶ This school celebrated its Silver Jubilee in the same year (1937). His Excellency the then Governor of Madras inaugurated the Silver Jubilee Celebration and opened the Silver Jubilee and Meditation Hall. In 1937 the Coimbatore Municipality introduced a Mid-Day Meals Scheme to the students of Deaf School.³⁷ So the enrolment of the students increased substantially.

The Madras Administration Report on Presidency Report (1940) stated that a school named “Manorama Deaf School” was opened at Erode by a private management in 1939.³⁸ It was strengthened by deaf mutes in and around Erode. One of the physicians from Vellore hospital paid a visit to Palamcottah Deaf School with a view to treat the ailing and also to classify the deaf mutes into different categories in the same year.³⁹ As a result, the teaching staff easily understood the nature of the deaf mute and taught lip

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Report on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency, Government of Madras, 1933; Education & Public Health department (Education), G.O. No. 1052, 09.05.1938, Government of Madras.*

³⁵ *Report on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency, Government of Madras, 1935.*

³⁶ *Annual Report of School for the Deaf, Mylapore-1934-35 & 1935-36.*

³⁷ *Administration Report of Madras Presidency, Government of Madras, 1935.*

³⁸ *Annual Report of Mylapore Deaf School, 1940.*

³⁹ *Annual Report of Karaikudi Municipality, 1944.*

reading and sign language depending upon their needs. The strength of the school going deaf mutes throughout the Madras Presidency was growing steadily.

The Report on Public Instruction (1940) pointed out that the Coimbatore municipality discussed the additional welfare facilities for the deaf mutes. So the Council meeting was held to make a decision. Based on the recommendation an ENT specialist was appointed from a General Hospital to make a visit to the deaf school twice in a year. The ENT specialist to appoint an ENT specialist was of the opinion that swimming and physical training would improve the physique and speech ability of the deaf children. Hence a swimming pool inside their campus was installed. The Mylapore deaf school installed a swimming pool in 1940⁴⁰ and the students utilized it for their physical training twice a day.

In Karaikudi Municipality, the municipal deaf school was functioning in an uncomfortable building with one teacher till 1944.⁴¹ As a result, the enrolments of students were very low. In 1944, the Karaikudi Municipality requested the Government to sanction the grant to build an Institution with all classroom facilities. With the government aid the municipality constructed a building and the deaf school was shifted to the new building in the academic year 1944-1945. During the same year, one more teacher was appointed, after which the student's strength was increased to 20 in 1945-1946⁴² against 15 in the previous years. The Coimbatore municipality also builds a new classroom and a hostel with Government aid in 1946.⁴³

In 1947 there were 6 schools for the deaf mute operated with the enrolment of 553 pupils in Madras Presidency. The Srivilliputhur and Erode deaf schools were closed after the dawn of Independence on account of mismanagement. At present the deaf schools of Palamcottah, Mylapore, Karaikudi and Coimbatore are functioning in amicable atmosphere. However the seed sown by Miss. Annie Jane Askwith for the empowerment of disabled boys and girls gives its fruit still. Thousands of disabled and neglected are self-reliant because of the giant efforts taken by Miss Annie Jane Asqwith at Palamcottah. Due to her selfless help to blind and deaf mute in the field of education, the government honoured her by *Heiser-i-Hind Award in 1907*. Many of the Allumane of this school are working in the Central, State Government Offices; Aided and Government Educational Institutions and recipient of National Awards. Miss. Annie Jane

⁴⁰ *Report on Public Instruction of Madras Presidency, 1937; Education- Quinquennial Report- 1932-37*, (Madras, 1938).

⁴¹ *Administration Report of Madras Presidency, Government of Madras, 1940*.

⁴² *Annual Report of the T.D.T.A., Schools for the Blind & Deaf, Palamcottah, 1939-40, pp1-4*

⁴³ *Annual Report of the Karaikudi Municipality, Karaikudi, 1944; Karaikudi Municipality, Souvenir of the Silver Jubilee, Karaikudi, 1955*.

Asqwith's effort changed the mentality of the society. The differently able people were confident to stand on their own leg to face the challenges of life to like others in the world. At present the Government had taken special effort to enhance the prestige of differently able people by way of introducing special concessions, rules and regulations for their well being.

As per Government of Tamilnadu G.O.No. 3535 dated 30.07.1953, the teacher pupil ratio was fixed at 1:8 for the schools for the Deaf and Blind in 1953. As per Tamil Nadu G.O. No. 1428 dated 16.08.1967, 100 per cent staff grant was granted in 1967.⁴⁴ At Present, Tamil Nadu Government announced 58 Awards under 14 categories every year⁴⁵. Almost all the district has a Government Special School. Private and voluntary organizations also promote education to the differently able student and integrate them with the normal social activities and maintain their statuesquo. Hence, the genesis of special education originate from Tirunelveli district of Madras Presidency, a pioneer district which extend its leap and bound to the entire State and Nation at present. The special schools are under the control of Department Social Welfare and Department of Differently abled under the direct head of Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. Now the hearing impaired education developed as higher educational institutions and first of its kind in India as well as 2nd in Asia. Thousands of hearing impaired are benefitted and educated and empower and live like normal hearing in the society. However, it need continuous monitoring and supportive system required for them. Tamil Nadu Government is declared as number one state in achieving for implementation of differently abled in India. Tamil Nadu is not only genesis of Education for Hearing impaired in Madras Presidency but also impart Higher Education for the Hearing Impaired in Tamil Nadu as well as for the entire India in modern scenario.

⁴⁴ *Indian Express*, English daily, Madurai, 21.03.1993, p.19.

⁴⁵ Daily Thanthi, Tamil Daily, Chennai, dated 04.07.2014 & 05.07.2014, p.4 .