



# GROWTH OF WOMEN EDUCATION DURING COLONIAL RULE

(Case study based on Madras and Pondicherry)

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## Abstract

This study will give us a clear vision about how the Colonial rule encouraged women education in Madras & Pondicherry, the same is crucial as there are very few accounted details about the facilities that were available before the arrival of the colonial rule. This study restricts itself to the locations of Madras and Pondicherry. Diving deeper into the subject we would like to emphasise that in Pondicherry “Thinnai Palligal” or small schools which were run by upper caste Brahmins & Vathiyars, who were very well versed in local languages, religion and arithmetic. These schools were exclusively for students from rich and elite families of same or similar castes, other caste students were not to be a part of these schools. Only during the eighteenth century we can see some efforts by the foreign missionaries in the field of education which marked the beginning of modern education especially towards women.

In comparison during the 18th century in Madras they had limited number of schools for women, where only the dancing girls were preview to certain form of education because of their profession. The quality of education of the 18th century Madras is as described by Swartz; "under a frame of Government so

wretched, the education of the young is miserably neglected. Few children learn to read and write and cast accounts and they are exclusively boys.<sup>1</sup>

**Keyword:**

Colonialism, British Rule, French rule, Missionaries, South India, women education, social reforms, Schools, Colleges.

**Introduction**

Through the review of multiple literatures about education systems which document the various stages of evolution of education in India, it is established that the period in which the Rig Veda was written also placed high importance to education of Indian women. There are many hymns supporting these claims in the Rig Veda which indicates the status of women in the society. During that period it was stated that there were more than thirty women sages with specific hymns related to them. Over the centuries it has been observed that these important position held by women have deteriorated, the prime reason for the same is attributed to the custom of child-marriage, confining women to do household chores, and lack of formal education in the formative years.

The colonial rule had brought many changes in the society as well as in the field of political and economic life of the people; the Britishers were not concerned about the educational reforms as they were involved in the Judicial and administration of Madras. But later we can see the efforts were taken by British with the help of missionaries to educate women and eradicate the social evils which were prevalent at that time. It was also noted that Madras was one of the most progressed cities in India especially in the field of education as compared to other northern states.

The education system at Pondicherry underwent significant reforms as soon as the French took over from the British, they gave a serious thought to the problem of education and wanted to improve the condition of the women in the society by educating them. **Benoist Dumas (1735-1742)** will be remembered as the first French Governor in Pondicherry took the initiative of setting up a school for girls; because of him Ursuline sisters came to India to start up school for girls.<sup>2</sup> In the meanwhile missionaries had opened three primary schools, one in Pondicherry called Ecole de la rue Royale in 1820, another in Karaikal for teaching Tamil and French and a similar one at Mahe. Debassyns de Richmont through his vision to promote the cause of education took steps to in ensuring the promotion of female education at various establishments. In 1826 he invited the sisters of the Congregation of St. Joseph de Cluny to Pondicherry from Bourbon. The ordinance of 10th February 1826 authorised them to open Pensionnat de Jeunes Demoiselles in Pondicherry where primary and upper primary education was imparted. A free school was later added to the Pensionnat.<sup>3</sup>

The royal ordinance of 30 September 1843 was a landmark and a turning point in the field of education because it sought to modernise education. It was turning point because it attempted to provide the same kind of education as in France with a view to bringing about the about the cultural assimilation of the local population through French education. Even though the system of education was biased in favour of French language, the study of local languages was not neglected.<sup>4</sup>

The great poet **Rabindranath Tagore** in his poem showed us the The plight of women in medieval India and at the starting of modern India as :

"O Lord Why have you not given woman the right to conquer her destiny?

Why does she have to wait head bowed,

By the roadside, waiting with tired patience,

Hoping for a miracle in the morrow?"<sup>5</sup>

## Education of Women in Madras

A famous Indian philosopher '**Vatsyayana**' wrote that women were supposed to be perfect in sixty four arts which included cooking, spinning, grinding, knowledge of medicine, recitation and many more. The condition of the women during the time of Pallavas was one of subordination, even though they were generally held in esteem. Women, who were dedicated to religious services in temples, were called devadasis or davaradiyars. These women were expected to please the deity in the temple by their service; but the temple was a public institution so these women were also naturally exposed to public privileges.

During the early part of the 19th century we can see some progress in the women education. In 1850 Carpenter, a reformer, at a meeting with the local leaders and the Director of Public Instruction, was informed about the great obstacle in the way of opening girl's school was to get the female teachers and it was impossible, still step was taken to infuse new life into the position of female education .<sup>6</sup>

The Hunter commission which was appointed in 1882 suggested to the Government that female education should be considered as a duty of the Government and they should take immediate action towards the education of women.<sup>7</sup> The Madras Government also agreed with same and directed to implement the same.

Sir Thomas Munro, the Governor of Madras in his findings stated that the women reading and writing was less as compared to the dancing girls in Madras,: “To the women of brāhmanas and of Hindu in general, they (reading and writing) are unknown, because of the knowledge of them prescribed and regarded as unbecoming of the modesty of the sex and fit only for public dances, but among the women of Rajabundah and some other tribes of Hindus, who seems no prejudice of this kind, they are generally taught.”<sup>8</sup>

But still most of the girls were not allowed to study further because of the social evils which existed during that time (i.e. child marriage, the practice of pardāh system, devadassi) which were the main hindrance in their progress. Due to the Christian missionaries they were some changes and education became the main priority to remove the social evils and further work towards the women education and progress.

A major step was taken in 1882 by the Education Commission which suggested that “Female education should be treated as legitimate charge alike on local, on provincial or municipal funds and must receive special encouragement. The greatest care was to be exercised in the selection of suitable text – books for girls’ schools and that the preparation of such books must be encouraged. That female inspecting agency be regarded as essential to the full development of female education, and be more largely employed than hitherto”.<sup>9</sup> Following this three women’s colleges were opened during 1900 (i) the Sarah Tucker College, Palancottah, (ii) The Presentation Convent college, Vepery, (iii) St. Mary’s Presentation Convent College, Black Town, Madras in which there were was strength of 10 in each, the below table will show us the primary stage of education of girls because the parents did not want their gown up girls to be send to the college.<sup>10</sup>

Stages (Girls)	1896-97	1901-02
Upper Secondary stage	328	491
Lower Secondary stage	3,196	3,575
Upper Primary stage	5,350	6,078
Lower Primary stage	97,680	106,855

By the end of the 19th century, the Madras government had adopted the policy of advancing female education and encouraged private bodies and Christian missionaries to establish girl’s elementary schools and women's colleges in the Madras Presidency.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting to note from 1897-1902, three women students from South India took the M.A. Degree at the Madras University and in 1901-02 only one Madras student was qualified for the B.A. Degree.<sup>12</sup> During the twentieth century we can see more women taking up education in the field of medicine and law. Madras University is one of the first Universities which provided special courses only to women like B.Sc, M.sc in Home Science.

Post Independence we can see the changes and development of women because of the education which helped them to overcome the social evils in the society. “It may now be considered that anywhere in India, the need for the education of girls should be same like the boys without any discrimination and must be given equally opportunity for a country to progress”.<sup>13</sup>

### **Education of Women In Pondicherry**

Once the French occupied Pondicherry they laid the foundation of modern Pondicherry. The children of the French and these of the mixed race either of the Portuguese or the French required educational institutions therefore, the French company invited the Ursuline sisters in 1738 to come & start educational institutions in Pondicherry for girls.<sup>14</sup> The French administration in Pondicherry seems to have given serious thought to the development of education in French India.

Efforts were made in Pondicherry to re-open a college which was founded in 1787. In 1790, this college run by the missionaries was opened for public instruction. During the governorship of Monsieur le Vicomete Desbassyns de Richemont, this missionary college came to be known as the Royal College and was re-opened on 6th October 1826. Till then it was French missionaries who instructed the white population of French India. This instruction was mainly religious in nature. It was actually a primary as well as secondary school. However the Royal College like the earlier missionary college was meant only for the whites for many years, before Indians of all castes and creeds were formally admitted into it from 1879.<sup>15</sup>

There was little improvement in the condition of women in the eighteenth century. They continued to confine within the housed and charged with the duties of looking after the needs of the family and appeasing their husbands. Separate schools for girls were also started. The first girl's school was started on February 12, 1827. There was a separate Girls Central School in Pondicherry; there were quite a few girls' schools in Pondicherry town alone.<sup>16</sup>

In 1900, there were 50 public and 222 private schools in the establishment. While the number of government schools increased to 56 in 1932. This included carrying out some improvements in College Calve, opening of a big school for girls in Pondicherry.<sup>17</sup>

The total Number of students on enrolment in 1954 was 25.363.93 since then there has been an increase in the number of school Going Children which should be evident from the Following statement.

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1956-57	19,586	10,392	29,978
1957-58	22,031	11,827	33,858
1958-59	26,154	14,123	40,277
1959-60	27,171	15,089	42,260
1960-61	29,732	16,224	45,956
1961-62	34,557	19,857	54,414
1962-63	35,835	21,999	57,834
1963-64	37,869	23,040	60,909
1964-65	40,796	24,767	65,563
1965-66	44,585	27,621	72,206
1966-67	47,089	29,166	76,255
1967-68	48,829	30,420	79,249
1968-69	51,126	32,984	84,110
1969-70	53,833	34,545	88,378
1970-71	55,640	35,841	91,481
1971-72	58,132	37,534	95,666
1972-73	60,406	39,190	99,596
1973-74	62,349	40,934	1,03,283
1974-75	64,559	42,891	1,07,450

\* Compiled from the Abstract of Statistics:<sup>18</sup>

Now if we compare the literacy rate of Girls of Pondicherry with the rest of the states we can draw a huge difference. As per the 2011 Census Pondicherry has an average literacy rate of 76%, higher than the national average of 59.5%: male literacy is 82%, and female literacy is 71%.<sup>19</sup>

Education opened up many jobs for the youth in Pondicherry. With good fluency in French, English and the Indian languages, the job seekers stood very good chances of employment, especially in the vast French colonial empire and also for the women which we can see in the section of police –women is successfully functioning in Pondicherry.

The French had made a significant contribution to the growth of education, but also the very name Pondicherry was given to the place by them. Rightly, as Jawaharlal Nehru says, ‘the learning of French will continue in Pondicherry and make Pondicherry a centre in India of the French language, and a window of French culture, which is a great culture of the Western World’.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

Education is an effective tool which helped in the progress of women’s empowerment and also enhanced their self esteem and confidence. The colonial rule had brought many changes in the society, political and economic life of the people. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru rightly pointed out that, “If education is given to women then it will lead to education of home, society and the world at large”

Hence the contribution made by the missionaries in various parts of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry laid a corner stone for women education further enhancing in their growth and progress. Below is the Census of 1971 which clearly indicates the literacy rate of women (In Tamil Nadu & Pondicherry) as compared to other Indian states:<sup>21</sup>

Literacy Rate of Women As per Census 1971	India	Tamil Nadu	Pondicherry
Total	21.97%.	30.92%	40.14%



The “**Indian Woman**” was empowered and also emphasis was laid on education during colonial rule. This was confirmed by a study which suggested that the social status of south Indian women was better than the north Indian women. The Colonial treated the men and women as equals with no biases, the result of the same was that women who till now played supporting roles were drawn to the main stream. A lot of credit of the same goes to the Missionaries who created equality of education which in turn resulted in a rise in number of educational institutions and the number of girls studying in elementary schools. The impact of this can be seen in the large number of women participated in the freedom struggle. Many of them went ahead to take up important responsibilities leading to community development, promoting the cause of girl child education etc which make what both the sates what it is today.

Dr. M.V. Pylee says” Education is a pervasive agent of change; indeed it holds the key for social transformation and national developments. This is particularly so in the case of developing societies.<sup>22</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of the Reverend Christian Frederick, p. 109

<sup>2</sup> P. Raja and Rita Nath Keshari (2005), Glimpses of Pondicherry, p. 195

<sup>3</sup> Francis Antony Cyril (1982), op.cit.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Longman History & Civics ICSE 8, in Memoirs of Woman

<sup>6</sup> Six months in India Vol 1, by Mary Carpenter (London, 1868), P. 148& 149

<sup>7</sup> Report of the Indian Educational Commission, Calcutta, 1883, PP.599-600.

<sup>8</sup> Minute of Munro, June 25, 1822, Revenue Consultations, Vol.277, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> The Education Commission, 1882, p. 549

<sup>10</sup> P.Subramanian, Social History of the Tamils (1707-1947), D.K. Printworld (P)Ltd,pp.345

<sup>11</sup> Sathianathan, S. History of Education in the Madras Presidency, Madras, 1894, p. 73

<sup>12</sup> History of Higher Education in South India: University of Madras (1857-1957), Vol. 1, p.34

<sup>13</sup> O'Malley Modern India and the West. A Study of the Interaction of Their Civilizations, P.450.)

<sup>14</sup> K.S. Mathew, French in India and Indian Nationalism (1700 A.D. -1963 A.D.) Vol. 2, p. 330.

<sup>15</sup> J. B. P. More, Freedom Movement in French India, p. 37 & 38.

<sup>16</sup> A. Ramasamy, (1985), op.cit

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Census of India Report 2011, Government of India.

<sup>20</sup> A. Ramasamy, (1985), op.cit.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.teindia.nic.in/mhrd/50yrsedu/g/Z/EJ/0ZEJ0401.htm>, (retrieved on 12<sup>th</sup> January 2018)

<sup>22</sup> M.V.Pylee, “One Area where centralisation is necessary”, The Hindu, Madras (August 14, 1984): p. 17

