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# CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES FOR THE GROWTH OF EDUCATION AT THIRUCHIRAPALLI REGION: A STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

Tiruchirappalli is region is having wide scope for the study of contribution of Christian Missionaries in the field of Education. Several buildings were constructed through the ages for developmental education and political purposes in this district. Educational institutes like St Joseph's College, Bishop Heber College actively given higher educational opportunities even now. This paper highlights the contribution of Missionaries in education in and around Thiruchirapalli Region.

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**Keywords:** Colonial, British, Catholic, Carnatic, Tranquebar, East India Company.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tiruchirappalli widely called Trichy or Tiruchi is an important urban centre in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. Trichy is the fourth most prominent municipal corporation and the fourth biggest urban agglomeration in the state. The Rock Fort city of Trichy spreads 64.57 square kilometres on the fields between the Shevaroy Hills in the north and the Palani Hills in the south and southwest. Trichy city is totally fenced by agrarian fields on all sides. Popularly known as the 'Boiler Capital of Tamil Nadu', the Tiruchirappalli Municipal Corporation has carried distinguished attempts in constituting a lot of government offices in and around the city.

## 2. CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN EDUCATION

The 19th century witnessed the educational contribution of missionaries in Tiruchirappalli town. The Christian missionaries came forward to establish schools and colleges, while the East India Company was reluctant to accept direct responsibility for the education of the Indians. The new Madras Mission managed by the French Jesuits took a keen interest in education. The Tranquebar Mission had two divisions, such as the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) and the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (SPG). These two societies under Rev. Schwartz made a beginning of organized modern institution-based formal education in Tiruchirappalli. Rev. Schwartz, the eminent among many missionaries, was the torch-bearer of education in the town. With the assistance of Major Preston, a military officer, Rev-Schwartz built a room for the purposes of worship as well as for learning for children. This was the Christ Church which was built in 1761 and the Schwartz School was formed in 1762 at Tiruchirappalli which had about 2,500 inhabitants. In 1763 military officers formed the 'Vestry Fund' which was utilized for the education of the children of European descent. In 1770 about fifty children in the English section and twenty-two in the Tamil section were imparted education.

This was a bright beginning of formal education in Tiruchirappalli town. The St. John's Vestry School is believed to be in the direct line of descent from Schwartz's English section and Bishop Heber Schools were from Schwartz Tamil Section. These Schools were started in 1762 under the SPG mission. In 1826 Rev. Joseph Wright, the Chaplin of Tiruchirappalli was instrumental in having the Vestry School moved from the Fort premises to the Mission compound at Puthur, the suburb of Tiruchirappalli

where the military regiment was stationed. This 'outward move' of this cultural-based urban organ had a 'centrifugal effect'. In its shift, it had effected a new urban development in the Puthur area. Environmental conditions and military lines were the prime reasons for this transfer. Hence environment determines the form and pattern of culture.

The zeal of missionaries further witnessed the proliferation of schools and morphological change of fort city and the growth of surrounding areas. In 1826, Rev Bishop Heber expired at Tiruchirappalli. As a mark of respect to this departed Bishop, a 'Heber Memorial Fund' was created and donations were collected. A portion of this fund was spent for the construction of schools at Sengulam, Tennur, and Uraiyur, the crowded urban villages of Tiruchirappalli. These three SPG school buildings were constructed at respective places and opened for learning in 1827. A considerable number of children joined these schools. The Primary School at Sengulam was the best Tamil School which gave free education in 1827 for 70 native children. The school building was extended about 1620 sq feet in which 5 sections of classes up to 5th standard functioned. Like formal education, the subjects taught were Sculpture, Ancient History, Church catechism, Arithmetic, Grammar, Tamil, and English. In 2115 Sq. feet, the primary school at Tennur was a school of paying system, where 105 children from well-to-do families studied. The subjects taught were Theology, English, History, Geography, Mathematics, and English grammar. European children were in large number. Only one section was in Tamil which consisted of 30 boys and the rest were of English medium.

The first college as well as for a long time the only college was the SPG College. After a hundred years of service in school education, the SPG mission entered the field of higher education hence the SPG College was the outgrowth of Swartz School started in 1762. As a second grade college, affiliated with Madras University; it was upgraded to first Grade College in 1883. During this time, the students' strength raised to 136. A number of degree courses were introduced. Students from different areas studied in this institution. In 1889 the student's strength was 202. The provincial government had granted 9.10 acres of land at the outskirts of Puthur to SPG College. In 1919 the revenue department acquired 7.61 acres of land for the famous SPG College, for the purpose of the playground and for the construction of a hostel. Then the College came to be known as Bishop Heber College in late 1920.

Honors Courses in History and Mathematics were introduced in 1925.

According to Frykenberg, high schools that he established so impressed the East India Company's resident at Thanjavur that the company's directors in London and its government at Fort St George in Madras, were persuaded to subsidise them, even though none of these schools lay within the company territory" "Maratha Brahman youths who would eventually fill uppermost rungs of civil service positions within the entire Madras presidency flocked to these schools. The curriculum, combining biblical and Christian texts with principles and sciences of the enlightenment, included English literature and European philosophy," pointed out Frykenberg. The contribution of the Christian missionaries in giving education to all sections of the society in Thanjavur and the state of Tamil Nadu has never come under such an attack as it has now.

Christian missionaries in Tamil Nadu have also inadvertently contributed their mite to Tamil literature as well, said educationists. Majority of the books first printed in Tamil were done by the missionaries. After Portuguese missionaries, came German, the Danish missionaries, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, who produced the first Tamil Bible and Henry Plustschau. The missionaries also sought the help of the native teachers to teach in the schools founded by them.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Besides starting schools and colleges, the missionaries also made a significant contribution towards empowering women through education. In the first half of the 19th century, the missionaries started promoting women education. Missionaries rendered educational, medical and humanitarian services in Tanjore and Thiruchirapalli Region.

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