CHAPTER VI

WELFARE OF THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED
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Physical handicap had long been considered a curse and hence beyond human comprehension. It had to be borne in silence as expiation of one's sins. No wonder the physically challenged could look to no one for succour opportunities to develop long time. Christian missions were the earliest agencies to organise social and welfare services in the modern world. They did yeomen service in the cause of the deaf and the dumb. The Indian census report of 1909 shows that the number of the blind in the Madras Presidency was 34,000. Miss. Florence Swainson stated that there were two lakh deaf mutes in India. The missionary ladies who had compassion on the unfortunate section of people tried to find out ways to help them to lead a fruitful life, and without depending on others. The lady missionaries not only provided education but also initiated welfare activities for them.

Rehabilitation of the physically handicapped especially the blind, deaf, dumb and the crippled was the main aim of the women missionaries. This would help them get social recognition and make them equal in status to the fellow citizens. In general, deafness, dumbness and blindness were mostly due to factors like poverty, gross malnutrition, insanitation, tuberculosis, genetic factors, abnormal development influences, infection in the mother during pregnancy and prolonged mental tension. In rural areas, blindness was caused by neglect of

eye injuries. Even toys like airguns and catapults were known to damage the
eyesight of many children. Games like boxing, swimming, tennis and golf can
cause dislocation of the eye lens. Fire works, foreign objects and sparks from a
domestic fire and such things could harm the eye. More important, any delay in
seeking medical help from doctor and hospital often aggravates the situation. 4
The common causes for blindness are sickness due to sore eyes, crude treatment
for sore eyes with lime and salt, the deficiency of vitamin A, small - pox and
jaundice. 5

In Tirunelveli, most of the children lost their sight at an early age through
smallpox or ignorant treatment of sore-eyes (ophthalmia). Sore-eyes caused by
fierce winds and dust was a common occurrence during the months from June to
September. Application of salt and lime to sore eyes led to blindness in many
children. 6 The Diocesan record of Tirunelveli in 1900 informs that at Pannavilai,
eight members in a family became blind due to cataract at the age of three and
a few people lost eyesight due to maltreatment. 7 Shocked by the lack of
awareness among the poor illiterate people of even the basic health needs, the
missionaries came forward to establish rehabilitation facilities for the deaf, dumb
and the blind. They established schools for hearing impaired and for the visually
handicapped as the first step in and around Tirunelveli. In these schools, free
education was provided irrespective of caste or creed. Excellent instruction was

   pp.15-22.
6. Ibid., 1893, p.16.
imparted to them. Eventually, they were trained for useful avocations. Special aids, maps and instruments were prepared to facilitate proper training. Books were supplied to develop the reading habit. These schools were residential where the pupils stayed for a number of years till they were fit to take up some useful occupation.

**Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai.**

The first blind school in India was established in Amritsar in 1889 by Miss. Annie Sharp of England. In 1890, a blind school at Palayamkottai was started by Miss. Askwith\(^8\), the C.M.S. missionary. These two schools were managed by the C.M.S.\(^9\). It is said that a twelve year old blind boy, Suppu from Palayalakkampalai came to her bungalow in 1888 for alms. Irritated by this, she replied that she had come here not to administer charity but to teach. The boy politely replied, 'give me then education Madam'. She was touched by these words and realised that her missionary task should also be one of social welfare. She rebuked him for begging. He replied, what could a blind person do except begging? Miss. Askwith's immediate response was 'you can pull a *punkah*’ (a fan operated with hands). She taught him how to pull a *punkah* and promised to give him daily wages. He came daily from his house four kilometres away to the Sarah Tucker institution and engaged in the work. She told Suppu that in England blind people read books with fingers. His immediate reaction was a pleasant

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8. Miss. Anne Jane Askwith, an Irish lady was sent to India by the Church Missionary Society, London in November, 1881 to serve as a teacher at the Sarah Tucker Institution. Later, she served as the Manager of the Sarah Tucker Institution and the Principal of Sarah Tucker College, Palayamkottai (Edward Jonathan, D., *Miss Anne Jane Askwith and the School for the Blind, 1888-1919*, Palayamkottai, 1993, pp.1-2).
surprise to her. He said, 'please teach me also to read'. She felt very happy and began to teach him. She went to England to study how to teach the blind and learnt the Braille system. Miss. Askwith opened a class for the benefit of the blind children in the Sarah Tucker Campus in 1890 with seven pupils. In 1909, the institution began to function at Tharisanamanai in Palayamkottai. It steadily grew to be one of the biggest institutions in India, which provided general education and vocational training to the physically challenged sections of the society.

Moon Type

Moon type of education to the visually disabled was invented in 1848 by Dr. William Moon, a blind man in England. He published books in Moon Type or imposed characters for the English alphabets for the use of the blind. Miss. Askwith, who was eager to educate the blind met Dr. William Moon in 1888. He, with the assistance of Miss. Askwith, prepared the moon signs for Tamil language. Dr. William Moon prepared the Gospel of St. John and the first Reader in Moon's type in Tamil language. Miss. Askwith taught Suppu, the Moon type. He mastered the art quickly. Later he was baptized with the Christian name, Devapirian. He collected a number of blind boys and girls from Palayamkottai to learn to read like himself. Miss Askwith started a class for them in the Sarah Tucker campus and made Devapirian the first teacher. It became the nucleus of the school for the blind in Palayamkottai.

The main aim of the school was to make the blind children self-supporting by giving them literary and industrial education. Separate classes for both boys and girls were started in the Sarah Tucker campus in 1890. Avoodaiammal was the first blind girl admitted in the school. She learnt Tamil alphabet within six weeks and was baptized with the Christian name, Kirubai Pattal. Later, the strength began to grow and the blind girls of the Sarah Tucker Institution were taught by one of the pupil teachers of the training section. The blind boys were accommodated in a separate building very close to the compound near the second gate of the Sarah Tucker institution. The school admitted all the blind students irrespective of caste. Miss. Nightingale, a C.M.S. Missionary conducted the meetings of Girl Guides and Bulbuls associations for the visually disabled on every Monday. The students played outdoor games in the evenings. They played group games, swings, jungle gym and sliding jack.

Askwith Tamil Braille

Miss. Askwith devised the Braille code in Tamil language which was called as ‘Askwith Braille’. Upto 1912, the students used Moon’s type for reading. The advantage of Braille over Moon’s type is that it can be written by hand. In 1912, Miss. Askwith introduced the Tamil Braille system in the school. Miss. Askwith gave Braille symbols to each of the Tamil vowels and consonants which had

13. Ibid., 1900, pp.7-11.
15. Louis Braille, a French man was the originator of the Braille system. While he was playing with tools in his father’s harness shop, an owl slipped and plunged into his eye. He was blinded at the age of three in an accident. He invented the Braille system in 1824. It consists of six raised dots and sixty-three combinations, can be worked out at the six dots. (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol.II, University of Chicago, 1768, pp.465-466).
phonetic similarity with the English alphabets. This phonetic relationship enabled the blind students to read English Braille easily. The Tamil Braille arranged by her came to be known as 'Askwith Tamil Braille'. The new uniform India Braille Code was introduced in 1947. It was devised by the Education Department of the Government of India. It is based on the Sanskrit alphabet of forty six letters, while the old method was based on Roman alphabet. It provided a common script for all Indian languages. Suitable adjustments were made for the Dravidian languages.

General Education

The blind school had three sections. Children below the age of ten were admitted irrespective of caste or creed in the educational section. They were taught upto VIII standard. They learned the general syllabus. The number of students in each section was limited to ten as the blind need individual attention and guidance in the class room. When they completed standard VIII successfully, they were encouraged to continue their studies. They were given a sound elementary education through the help of special apparatus and appliances. An instrument known as the Taylor’s Frame was used to do problems in Arithmetic. A variety of teaching aids and instruments were employed to teach geography and science. For teaching geography, raised relief maps were used. Special pegs were employed to form the different numbers on the frame.

of the school in 1952 was increased to 200. For the aged blind girls, poultry farming was introduced.\(^2\)

Intelligent students were encouraged to continue their academic studies in St. John's High School, St. John's College and Sarah Tucker Training Institute, Palayamkottai. The Director of Public Instruction, Madras gave special concession to the blind students to study in the Teachers Training Institutes. It helped them to get employment. In 1895, seven boys passed the Government Primary Board Examination and received certificates. They were employed as assistant teachers, catechists and monitors in the mission schools.\(^2\) Candidates who had already undergone the regular teacher training were given special training for one academic year to become teachers in the blind school. When they left the school, the institution issued to them a copy of every book in the Braille type, an arithmetic frame and a certificate of conduct to earn their own living. The institution itself employed more than twelve pupils as teachers and monitors in the Mission Schools. They were paid from the Blind School Fund.\(^2\)

**Vocational Training**

Boys and girls were given vocational training, after the completion of their general education. They were trained in handicrafts too. The vocational training lasted for five years at the end of which they were given proficiency certificates by the Government of Madras. They were employed in offices,

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factories and workshops. Trained boys obtained jobs in cycle, telephone and match factories. Trained men and women who could not get job outside the school were employed in the sheltered workshop attached to the school. As the schools increased, the number of looms and production also increased. The school offered job-oriented courses for the blind. Mat and cotton-weaving, basket making, rope making, net making, wood-works and rattan-work were the main crafts taught in the vocational training course. Tape weaving, knitting poultry-keeping and gardening were the other allied vocations for the students. They invariably developed the senses of hearing, touch and smell to an extraordinarily high degree.

Trained blind teachers taught subjects like weaving, cane works and gardening. They maintained a garden adjacent to the school and cultivated vegetables for their own use. The gardening activity was a good physical exercise for them. The students showed interest in extracurricular activities. They learned music. Miss. Henry and Miss. Leigh taught them to play musical instruments. The blind pupils formed a band of musicians and accompanied the Tamil evangelists in their open-air gospel preachings. The orchestra of the blind was in great demand at weddings and Church functions. In 1910 the blind school admitted seventy four boys and thirty five girls.

Young blind men and women were employed as teachers and evangelists

in various places of the mission district. Miss Askwith appointed a young man, A. Jonathan David, in 1910 as gymnastics instructor cum writer. By undergoing training in gymnastics, games and sports, students could undertake any hard manual labour. Blind boys worked as part-time punkah pullers in government offices and earned their pocket money.

Admission

Boys and girls of the age between four and ten were admitted in the ratio of 1:2. In exceptional cases, adult blind too were admitted. Physically challenged candidates from different parts of India and foreign countries especially from Ceylon were also admitted. The students were given free education, training, lodging and boarding, because most of them were orphans or destitutes. They were given financial assistance to visit their homes during term holidays. The school fed the children and paid them wages for the various tasks they did in the boarding houses.

The annual expenditure of the school in 1954 was Rs.70,000/-. The State Government offered a liberal grant of rupees 14,000 in recognition of the

27. Interview with Edward Jonathan, the former Principal of Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai, 18 June 2006.
remarkable missionary service.\textsuperscript{30} As the number of students increased rapidly, the schools faced accommodation problem. Therefore on 1 August 1908 Miss. Askwith purchased twelve acres of land, one mile east of the Sarah Tucker campus, from a man of Asari community for rupees 5000/-.\textsuperscript{31} On 20 August 1908, the foundation stone was laid for the blind school by Mrs. Ancheson Williams, the wife of the then Bishop of Tirunelveli. The building was declared opened on 14 June 1909 by L. Davidson, District Collector of Tirunelveli and named Tharisanamanai.\textsuperscript{32}

**Branch School at Pannavilai**

A branch school for the blind was opened in 1893 with six boys at Pannavilai, twenty three miles away from Palayamkottai.\textsuperscript{33} It was administered by Nallathamby, an instructor trained in the parent school. The students who were admitted in the school became Christians.\textsuperscript{34} Mrs. F. Wilson of Canada, sister of the then Bishop Morley, donated four weaving frames for the blind boys of the school at Pannavilai. It helped them to earn their livelihood by weaving grass mats in different colours. As Miss. Askwith found it difficult to supervise the school at Pannavilai, in 1904 a house near the Sarah Tucker Institution was taken for rent. All the twenty adult students were transferred to the new campus. Along with them, the mat weaving frames were also brought to the new campus.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Annual Report of the Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai, 1954, pp. 2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Paul Appasamy, *The Centenary History of the C.M.S.*, Palayamkottai, 1923, p.273.
\item \textsuperscript{32} *The Light-in-darkness Birthday League*, Pamphlet No.7, Palayamkottai, November 1908.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, 1900-1901, p.338.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker College, Palayamkottai, 1901, p.26.
\end{itemize}
leaving fifteen younger boys at Pannavilai.\textsuperscript{35} A blind school was opened at Ootacamund in 1893 and Suvisechamuthu, a blind teacher was appointed as the manager.\textsuperscript{36}

**Guild**

Miss. Askwith started a guild named the Light-in-darkness Birthday League on 21 August 1900 in England to raise fund for the benefit of the blind children. Through this, she appealed to the people of England for gifts and money as thanks offering on their birthdays. Her appeal had a tremendous impact and they liberally donated money for the blind children of Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{37} The guild published pamphlets highlighting the work and growth of the institution. Generally, the members of the Birthday League gave six-pence\textsuperscript{38} annually on their birthdays towards the welfare of the blind. The British Blind Branch of Light in Darkness League was started in 1904 by Miss. Hilda Boord of Stanley Gardens in London. It supported the Sinhalese girl, Sachia Arumaimani. Mrs. F. Wilson and Mrs. Morley supported eleven blind students.\textsuperscript{39} Regular subscribers were found in England, Canada and Ireland.\textsuperscript{40}

**Finance**

In the beginning, the Home Missions hesitated to grant financial assistance to the women missionaries of Tirunelveli. Hence, the lady missionaries

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\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 1905, pp. 17-18.
\textsuperscript{36} Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker Institution, Palayamkottai, 1893, p.16.
\textsuperscript{37} Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker College, Palayamkottai, 1901, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{38} Pence was a coin in Britain. A pound was equivalent to six pence.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 1905, pp.15-22.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 1902, p.15.
worked without any salary. However, during their furlough, they appealed to the people of England and Canada for financial assistance. For maintenance, the institution depended mostly on voluntary contributions from the friends of India abroad. Besides this, grants-in-aid were received from the Government of Madras, the Central Government, the Central Social Welfare Board and the Diocese.\textsuperscript{41} Annually the blind school received rupees 1300 from the government as educational grant and rupees 1200/- from District Boards. But these grants covered only one fifth of the total expenses.\textsuperscript{42} In 1903, the Government of Madras sanctioned rupees 15,684 for the construction of two buildings for the school. Philanthrophists from England, Canada, Riviera and Germany supported the school with endowments.

Miss. Moon and her friends sent books and Brailles slates at a low price through Moon's Society for the students. Mrs. Morley almost single handedly ensured the support of the people in England, Canada and the Riviera for the cause of the blind children.\textsuperscript{43} Through the Missionry Leaves Association and the Bible Society, people sent parcels of prizes, books and other articles for them.\textsuperscript{44} The C.M.S. London continued to make an annual grant of rupees 2,000. The German friends of the Tirunelveli Mission helped the school with a regular maintenance grant to meet the extra cost involved in feeding the inmates. Further, the Churches in the Tirunelveli Diocese helped the school with contributions.\textsuperscript{45}

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\textsuperscript{42} The Light-in-darkness Birthday League, Pamphlet No.11, Palayamkottai, July 1912, p.6.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 1903, pp. 16-17.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 1909, p.14.
\end{flushright}
The overseas friends of the mission sent petticoats, jackets, rowkies, to the blind school students. Apart from these, dolls, sewing cotton and scissors were sent as prizes.\textsuperscript{46} In 1915 M.D. Thirumalai Mudaliar, a philanthropist in Tirunelveli, donated £100 as a coronation gift to the blind school.\textsuperscript{47} Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, visited the schools on 27 February 1914 and planted a banyan sapling to commemorate his visit. He sent a donation of rupees 1,000 to the schools. Rich people of Tirunelveli donated money for the construction of hostels and to arrange feasts for these less fortunate children. Talavoy Mudali, a well known charitable Hindu gentleman, donated money for the construction of a hostel in 1912.\textsuperscript{48} Zamindar of Singampatti was a regular donor of rupees 50/- on his birthdays on August 28 every year. M. Ponnappa Pillai, a contractor and philanthropist from Palayamkottai, donated one acre of land as a coronation gift to the school in 1912.\textsuperscript{49} The C.M.S. London, contributed rupees 2000/- towards the principal’s salary.\textsuperscript{50} The National Institute for the Blind, London gave a grant of £500/-.\textsuperscript{51}

The school conducted a special Teachers Training Course for six teachers. Four were sent by the Government of Madras and two were private. At the end of the course, the Diploma Examination was conducted for three days.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{46} Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker Institution, Palayamkottai, 1894, p.17.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{The Light-in-darkness Birthday League}, Pamphlet No.14, Palayamkottai, July 1915, p.3.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., No.13, May 1914, p.17.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., No.10, June 1912, p.4.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 1948-1949, p.40.
\textsuperscript{52} Annual Report of the Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai, 1954, p.3.
23,000/- for the construction of two new halls for weaving. These halls were dedicated by Bishop G.T. Selwyn on 30 June, 1951. In order to impart better instruction to the blind students, the management sent Mr. Edward Jonathan to U.S.A. in June, 1950 to study the methods of teaching and training the blind and about the rehabilitation of the blind. The expenses were met by scholarships from the United States Education Foundation, the Watmull Foundation and the Perkins Institutions for the Blind in Massachusetts. When Edward Jonathan was in America, he was able to collect rupees 9,000/- for the school from the people of America.54

John Milton Society, the Perkins School for the Blind, the Crusade Scholarship Committee, Watumull Foundation in USA, American Foundation for Overseas Blind, New York and the Church Missionary Society, London offered financial assistance to the school.55 The UNESCO appealed to different countries for help for the school through the Gift Coupon Project. The school children of Japan sent UNESCO Gift Coupons worth £2385,00 to the blind school to buy in exchange sound projector, incubator and other equipments for the school. The Central Social Welfare Board donated rupees 2,500 for the purchase of equipments and appliances. John Milton Society of New York sent a Uformite Press, costing rupees 2,000 to take copies of Braille documents.56

53. Edward Jonathan was the first Indian Principal (1951). He collected Rs.2,500 in America for the purchase of apparatus and appliances for the use of the blind. Mr. Edward Jonathan. He wrote a book, Miss. Anne Jane Askwith and the School for the Blind, 1888-1919.
Blind School Products

The products produced in the blind school found a good market in Kodaikanal, Bangalore, Kotagiri, Coonoor, Ootacamund, Nazareth, Tuticorin and Palayamkottai. Handloom products like towels, bedsheets, dusters and napkins were sold to the government hospitals, officers and railways. Mats, rugs, nice table-cloths, side board cloths, dainty little pinafores, bedsheets and carpets made by the blind students could be easily sold abroad. Mrs. Hamnett, Mrs. Mactaggart and Miss. Walford undertook the sale of the articles on behalf of the poor blind children. The money raised by sales was utilised for the welfare of the blind children of the village schools. Besides, a large quantity of products were sent to England and Canada for sale which brought additional income to the blind school at Palayamkottai. In 1947, the total income from the annual sale of products was rupees 5000/. In 1952, the annual sale income increased to rupees 16,200.

Principals

Miss. Askwith was the Principal of the Blind school, Palayamkottai until 1918. The Silver Jubilee of her service was celebrated on 19 November 1906. An exhibition was conducted to display the children's works and to commemorate the selfless service of Miss. Askwith. It was conducted during the coronation.

57. Interview with D. Edward Jonathan, the former Principal of Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai, 16 May 2006.
durbar celebrations, when a large number of European and Indian friends of the missionaries participated. Miss. Askwith was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind medal in 1907 by the Government of Madras for her thirty four years of meritorious educational and philanthropic works among the blind.

Miss. Askwith was succeeded in 1919 by Rev. Canon W.G. Speight who was blind. He lost his sight in the First World War, when he was an Army Officer of England. He served as the Principal of the Blind School at Palayamkottai for twenty eight years from 1919 to 1947. He was assisted by Mrs. Speight, Vewin Fred Maude. When the Rev. Speight went on furlough for one year from 1923 to 1924, the school was put under the charge of Miss. Pakenham Walsh of Mengnanapuram. A fund was raised in memory of Miss. Anne Jane Askwith in 1924. A printing press was purchased for the publication of Braille literature. The number of useful articles like looms and cane materials were increased.

From June 1948, the school began to use the new Braille codes. The work of the school in both the educational and industrial departments continued to be of top quality. Rev. M.C. Langton was the Principal from 1947 to 1951. He donated an electric pump and a radio for the welfare of the blind students. The radio was useful both for entertainment and for instruction. The school purchased a wagon to transport the finished products from place to place and for

exhibitions. Miss. A. Lindsey served as the Correspondent of the blind school at Palayamkottai from 1951 to 1956. Mrs. Alamoo Edward Jonathan was the Principal in charge from 1956 to 1957. She developed the school to achieve high standards. She also founded a Nursery for blind babies. With the permission of the Government, the boys’ and the girls’ schools were amalgamated with effect from November 1956.

Miss. Nightingale developed Girl Guides and Bulbuls associations. A demonstration tour was conducted every year to places like Nagercoil, Sivakasi, Srivilliputhur, Virudhunagar and Aruppukottai, Maduri, Coimbatore, Erode, Salem and Tiruchirappalli. Usually, the related demonstrations and lectures were held in High Schools, Colleges, Social Organization Centres and in Town Halls. It lasted for one hour and more. At the close of each demonstration, the school orchestra would sing a variety of songs. In 1961 a rehabilitation centre for the adult blind named Home for the Aged Blind with seventeen older women was started at Muthur, near Palayamkottai. The School for the Blind, Palayamkottai was upgraded to High School in 1992.

Blindness in rural areas can be prevented by not only removing poverty, but also educating the masses and providing proper medical help whenever necessary. This could be done by widespread propaganda in the form of posters, 

pamphlets, films and talks and by the establishment of eye clinics and eye hospitals manned by trained personnel.

**Florence Swainson School for the Deaf, Palayamkottai.**

Florence Swainson, a woman missionary of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society founded a school with three deaf children in the campus of Sarah Tucker Institution in 1895. The school accommodated children from Lahore, Agra, Delhi, Calcutta, Poona and Ceylon. The children, besides learning their ordinary lessons, learned to earn their livelihood. The Government of Madras in 1901 recognised the school. TDTA took up responsibility of this institution in 1947. The Bishop of Tirunelveli was the Chairman of the Governing Body of this institution. The school was upgraded into a high school in 1978 and Higher Secondary School in 1993.

In 1887, while Florence Swainson was working in the Sarah Tucker College, Palayamkottai, she rendered social service to the poor women of the locality. When she was engaged in social service, a ten year old deaf and dumb girl, D. Packiam came to her for medical treatment. She taught her how to read and write. She conducted regular classes for the hearing impaired from 1895

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70. Florence Swainson was a qualified nurse. The Church of England Zenana Mission sponsored her to serve as a Missionary in India in 1882. First, she served in Amritsar, Punjab. Later, she was transferred to the Sarah Tucker Institution at Palayamkottai in 1890. She was well known for her missionary speeches. (Madras Diocesan Record, 1893, P.103; Proceedings of the C.M.S. for Africa and the East, 1893-1894, p.158.).


74. Interview with Samuel Vijayapalan, S., former Principal, Florence Swainson School for the Deaf, Palayamkottai, 8 June 2000.

in the Sarah Tucker Campus with four girls. Within five years, the strength of the school rose to twenty. Soon deaf children from various orphanages were admitted. Deaf and dumb children neglected by parents took shelter in the school through Bible women and others. In the beginning, Florence Swainson taught Tamil words through pictures and words. Delighted by her success in this endeavour, she learnt a little of dactylology, the art of talking with signs and teaching aids. She adapted the English finger alphabet to Tamil and began to teach them reading, writing and arithmetic. A great advance took place with the introduction of lip-reading by Miss. Cooper in 1919.  

Swainson purchased fourteen acres of land, opposite the Central Jail Palayamkottai from Dr. Dhanakoti Raja for rupees 4,500/- with donations from England. The school for the deaf and dumb began to function from the new building in Palayamkottai from 1897 onwards. The Government of Madras granted recognition to the boys school in 1898 and the girls school in 1899. The Government of Madras in 1901 issued the recognition order for the amalgamation of boys and girls schools. Miss Campbell taught spoken English to the deaf and dumb children. Miss Swainson obtained a government grant of rupees 4674/- and built dormitories, room for the sick, teachers' room, two kitchens, store room and latrines. In 1910, she received another building grant of rupees

76. Florence Swainson, 'Deaf and Dumb School', The Harvest Field, November 1898, p. 420.
78. Proceedings of Director of Public Instruction, No. 2335, 10 April 1901.
1650/- and built a building for the school. Further, she received money from donors in India and abroad. Most of the deaf and dumb students were sponsored by her friends in England. In 1949, the strength of the school was 107 out of which 104 were boarders.

**Curriculum**

The children were taught to read, write and speak by gesture language. The girls could read and write and do sums very easily. Originally, Florence Swainson taught the deaf children with the help of the literature available from England. The Zenana Mission of England sent a missionary trained in teaching the deaf from England to help the school. Lip and speech reading methods were also followed. Tongue and lip movements vary to an extent for each and every sound. Separate ear moulds were supplied to them to hear sounds clearly. Miss Swainson trained teachers in the latest methods of educating the deaf children. A general education was imparted to them upto VIII based on the ordinary school syllabus. The medium of instruction was Tamil for all students of the Madras Presidency and English for the non Tamils students. Candidates who were successfully trained were sent to the ordinary schools for higher education. In addition to the regular lessons, vocational training in carpentry, tailoring, book-binding, printing and composing was given to the male students. The girls received

80. Manuscript written by Florence Swainson-application for grant for school building, 1910.
82. Madras Diocesan Record, 1900-1905, p.54.
84. Madras Diocesan Record, 1904, p.31.
instruction in basket-making, mat making, weaving, sewing, cooking, gardening and office work.\(^{85}\)

**Industrial School**

Florence Swainson started a women’s industrial class in 1896 for the benefit of the deaf and dumb girls, who could not pursue their studies and so were trained as teachers. They were taught cooking, needle work, thread work, cross stitch, linen embroidery, bead work, knitting, sewing and making of curry-powder. There were seventy pupils in the Women’s Industrial Class in 1902 belonging to different communities. They came from different parts of Tirunelveli district. Physically challenged poor girls were boarded in the Industrial School. These girls looked after the deaf little children.\(^{86}\) Miss. Walford and Miss. Doxey supervised the industrial class during the absence of Florence Swainson.\(^{87}\) The industrial class received orders from within India and abroad for the articles and cloths manufactured by the blind.\(^{88}\) The articles were made entirely with Indian raw materials. Miss. Sandys and other friends in England sold cross stitch design clothes made by the deaf and dumb students.

The Industrial School at Palayamkottai had a branch industrial school at Suvisechapuram. It helped several poor women in the nearby areas to gain a livelihood by making embroidery.\(^{89}\) The deaf and dumb school at Palayamkottai

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86. 'Miss. Florence Swainson’s Deaf and Dumb and Industrial Schools, Palayamkottai', *Gleaner*, July 1902, p.38.
88. Ibid., 1897, p. 12.
89. Ibid., 1898, p. 13.
was successfully run by lady missionaries of C.E.Z.M.S. The women missionaries taught the pupils high moral standards and baptized several Hindu children. Miss. Swainson found suitable employment for the outgoing students. She also took pains to get feedback from the employers on her old students. The school used flag signals for the children, red for boys and blue for girls. In sports, the girls were trained in the folk arts, badminton, net-ball and kummi.

Specially qualified teachers handled the classes. The students were trained to take charge of schools in different parts of the province. The deaf and dumb were thus equipped to obtain an honest livelihood. For unqualified teachers, special training called, 'In Service Training' was given. A few teachers instructed the adult deaf people living in various parts of the district. In the academic year, 1949-1950, nine women teachers and three men teachers were appointed in the educational section. Some of the deaf and dumb girls accompanied the lady missionaries of C.E.Z.M.S. and conducted Sunday school in the nearby villages. They explained the signs of the Wordless Book to the Hindu children. They learnt it very easily and many were baptized.

Products

The products made by the students of the deaf school, Palayamkottai

90. Madras Diocesan Record, 1900-1905, p.54.
were kitchen towels, sheets, dusters, carpets and mats. Cross stitch linen embroidery and bead work were done entirely on Indian materials. They also made surplics for the native clergy and earned a good income. These products were sold both in India and England. The donors from India and abroad sent designs to the Florence Swainson school for the deaf. Miss E. Cowell and Miss. Withers of England supplied the patterns for the dresses and helped to sell the school products. Florence Swainson received yarn from Harvey Mills, Tuticorin and a weaving loom from a retired Assistant Inspector of Schools in 1896. At Luknow Exhibition of Indian Art and Industry in 1902, the school received three merit prizes.

The success of any institution largely depends on its finance. To run the Florence Swainson School for the Deaf at Palayamkottai, resources were mobilised by various means. In the beginning, the Home Missions refused to grant financial assistance. So, the lady missionaries worked without salary. However Swainson appealed to the people of England and Canada for financial assistance during her furlough. They responded to her request and liberally contributed money and materials. The members of the Silent Service Guild gave twelve pences to the school through Miss. Taylor. The readers of magazines, like 'India’s Women', 'Day Break' and the 'British Deaf Monthly' sent contributions to the Deaf and Dumb School, Palayamkottai.

96. Report of Miss. Swainson, Deaf and Dumb School, Palayamkottai, October 1902.
99. Ibid., 1905, p.17.
100. Report of Florence Swainson’s Deaf and Dumb and Industrial Schools, Palayamkottai, July 1902.
Swainson's social work spread to other areas too. She developed a team of Indian staff. She opened schools in Madras and Thiruvalla in Kerala. The deaf and dumb school in Mylapore was opened in 1913. She was successful in purchasing a palatial building in the beach of Madras from the family of Dr. Dhanakoti Raju.\textsuperscript{101} Another school was started at Kalladaikurichi. The needle work of the students of this school was very famous.\textsuperscript{102} Malayalee teachers were trained in the Florence Swainson School for the Deaf, Palayamkottai. Later, a school was started at Manamadurai. This school became the parent school for the C.S.I. school for the deaf at Kanyakumari during the tenure of the missionary, Rev. Charles Chittenden and Mrs. Charles Chittenden who served in the school for nearly seventeen years. They also started another school at Kottaram. Later, similar schools were founded in Karaikudi and Trivandrum. In 1987, a school for the deaf and dumb was started at Nazareth. An adult Chittenden Deaf Centre was started at Palayamkottai in 1997.\textsuperscript{103}

Swainson built a Chapel and a hospital for sick girls. As she was a qualified nurse, she was mainly responsible for the establishment of Sarah Tucker Hospital in the Sarah Tucker Institution at Palayamkottai in 1892. The students of the Deaf and Dumb School and the Blind School and the people around Palayamkottai benefited. Nurse Morton and her friends ably assisted her. Nurse

\textsuperscript{101}. Report of Jabez Thangiah, the former Principal of Florence Swainson school for the Deaf, Palayamkottai, 1965-1966.
\textsuperscript{102}. Annual Report of the Sarah Tucker Institution, Palayamkottai, 1895, p.6.
\textsuperscript{103}. Interview with Rev. A. Raja Christopher, Chaplin for the Deaf, Tirunelveli Diocese, 15 February 2008.
Annal continued her work among the sick women in the town of Tirunelveli. In recognition of her invaluable work among the deaf and dumb, the Government of Madras awarded her the most prestigious Kaiser I - Hind Medal on 8 February 1909.

Miss Swainson left India in 1919. After her retirement, Miss. Morgan became the Correspondent and Principal of the school and served from 1920 to 1950. Miss. Morgan reported that fortyone deaf adults were employed in this institution in 1933. In the academic year, 1949-1950, nine women teachers and three men teachers were appointed in the educational section. One matron, two house-masters and five house-mothers were employed in the boarding house. Candidates who were successfully trained were sent to the ordinary schools for higher education. Miss Mac Bride worked in the deaf school as superintendent of the sewing section. She was also in charge of the hospital for the deaf. The Principal attended the seminar on the education of the deaf held at Mussoorie in September 1955 at the invitation from the Government of India.

The institutions of the Schools for the Blind, Palayamkottai and Florence Swainson School for the Deaf had been a boon to hundreds of physically handicapped children and adults. Every child was taught either a trade or some means of self support. The world celebrates the third Sunday of March every

105. Letter of A. Acheson Williams, Bishop of Tinnevelly and Madura to the clergy and other Mission Workers, March 1909.
year as World Handicapped Day in order to highlight their difficulties and to improve their conditions. The Government of India has reserved 1% employment for the blind and 1% for the Deaf and Dumb and is giving nearly fifty two national awards for the best employees, the best organization and the best teacher. The handicapped are given ample opportunities to work along with others in different sectors. These measures have enabled them to regain confidence which in turn has made them overcome their complexes. In recent years, special seats have been reserved in buses and trains for these physically challenged people. Today they seem to say “we want no pity, we want opportunity”.