"Education for all" was the primary aim of the Christian mission in India particularly in Tirunelveli region. The mission had developed the principle that every congregation must have a school and every teacher must be a true Christian. They took a great deal of effort in the field of education by focusing their attention on the illiterates. This was also in keeping with their Gospel work, because the institution founded by them enabled them to share their religious views directly with the young people of the society. In those days, the downtrodden and the depressed classes in the society were totally denied education. But the Christian missionaries came forward to educate them and to give a lift to their status. In order to spread their views they founded elementary schools, high schools, colleges, teacher training schools and other special schools. An attempt is made in the following pages to highlight their deep devotion to education and its impact on the downtrodden.

**Pre-Primary and Primary Education**

For the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children, pre-primary education is quite essential and is also of great significance. At the present stage of development of our country, a planned and an immediate expansion of the pre-primary education is essential.\(^1\) Nurseries and nursery schools are important because little children need guidance.\(^2\)

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Pre-primary education is followed by the primary education which is considered to be the basis for both secondary and collegiate education.³ Since 1840 primary education has been made compulsory in independent India. The idea of making primary education compulsory gained momentum in 1882.⁴

The Christian missionaries found education to be the most suitable media for spreading Christianity and to propagate the teachings of Jesus Christ. Hence they started a number of primary schools in and around Tirunelveli. In the history of Tirunelveli district the first School in the Tiruneveli area was founded by the converted Maratta Christian woman Clorinda in 1787.⁵ It functioned in a thatched house in Palayamkottai. More such schools were established by the Christian missionaries. These schools were situated in thirty-eight circles and their surrounding areas. These circles were Alvanari, Ambasamudram, Christianagram, Dohnavar, Idaiangudi, Kovilpatti, Kulathur, Megnapuram, Mukuperi, Mudalur, Nagalapuram, Nallur, Nalumavady, Nazareth, Palayamkottai, Pannaivillai, Pottalpatti, Puducottai, Puthiamputhur, Radhapuram, Sattankulam, Sawyerpuram, Sarandai, Tenkasi, Tuticorin, Ukkirankottai, Vagikulam and Vellalanvillai. The primary schools were situated mostly in rural areas.

The prominent among them were the C.M.S Mary Arden Middle School, Adaikalaparam Primary School, Market Primary School, Montegomary Primary School, Usbourne Memorial Children School and Samadanapuram Primary School.⁶

³ Ibid., p. 268.
⁴ Ibid., p. 73.
The Usbourne Memorial Middle School

The Usbourne family was a well-to-do one in London in the beginning of the nineteenth century. They were interested in the mission work beyond the sea.\(^7\) At that time Rev John Tucker, the European missionary from England was the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society of South India.\(^8\) Tucker's too was a rich family in London. Rev John Tucker had three sisters and Mr. Usbourne had two sisters. The Usbourne and Tucker girls were best friends. The eldest of the Tucker girls Miss Sarah Tucker was much interested in the education of girls in the Tirunelveli area. She began to contribute money for this cause.\(^9\) She often contributed appreciable amounts for women's education. As a result of this, a Girls Boarding School was started in Sathankulam in 1844.\(^10\)

Like the Tucker sisters, the Usbourne sisters also took interest in the education of Hindu girls and started sending large amounts of money to Rev. Lash. After some time Miss. H. Usbourne died. But her sister Miss A.M. Usbourne continued her sister's noble work by contributing funds every year. She too died in 1876, leaving a legacy of Rs.5000 for these schools.\(^11\) Most of the Sarah Tucker Branch Schools throughout Tirunelveli district were established with the money contributed by these two dedicated souls who had never visited India.\(^12\) Soon after the death of Miss A.M. Usbourne, Rev. A.H. Lash decided to establish a girl's

\(^9\) Mary Harris, *op.cit.*, p.1.
\(^10\) Henry Packianathan, V., *op.cit.*, p.32.
\(^11\) Mary Harris, *op.cit.*, p.2.
\(^12\) *Ibid.*
school as a lasting memorial to the Usbourne sisters in the heart of Palayamkottai.\textsuperscript{13} Rev Lash announced this proposal to the public who welcomed it enthusiastically. As a result, the present site of the existing school was made available through the kind efforts of the District Collector Mr. R.K. Buckly.\textsuperscript{14} He himself laid the foundation stone on 2nd March 1878.\textsuperscript{15} The school building was completed on 4th November 1878. It had thirty students.\textsuperscript{16} The Usbourne Memorial School stands in the heart of Palayamkottai as a fitting memorial to the kind hearted Usbourne sisters who sacrificed their wealth for the cause of the low caste Hindu girls of Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{17}

**Secondary Education**

Secondary education is the super structure built over the plinth of the Primary education. It is the second stage in the system of public education beginning with standard VI and ending with standard X in a high school or standard XII in a Higher Secondary School. An era of rapid growth of secondary schools,\textsuperscript{18} dawned with the creation of the Department of Public Instruction in 1855-56 as a consequence of the Woods Despatch.\textsuperscript{19}

The Christian missions soon started schools to impart education in and around Tirunelveli in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{20} Their contribution to the educational development was

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.3.
\textsuperscript{14} Henry Packianathan, V.,*op. cit.*, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Mary Harris, *op. cit.*, p.4.
\textsuperscript{18} Aggarwal, J.C., *op. cit.*, p.268.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
immense in the south.\textsuperscript{21} Since 1882 there was a notable increase in the number of secondary and primary schools and the missionaries showed a keen interest in the development of education to girl students. The Christian missionaries who imparted education irrespective of caste and religion took the lead in the promotion of education among the Tamils.\textsuperscript{22} There were five important High Schools in the Nineteenth Century in the Tirunelveli District. Among them were St. John's High School for Boys at Palayamkottai, Schaffter High School at Palayamkottai, Caldwell High School at Tuticorin, St John's High School for Girls at Nazareth and Sara Tucker High School for Girls at Palayamkottai. The origin and growth of these schools prove the achievement of the missionaries in the field of secondary education.

\textbf{St. John's School for Boys}

In the beginning, it was an Anglo-Vernacular school founded by the C.M.S in 1844.\textsuperscript{23} At that time it served as a booster to the prestige of the mission. It was also the chief educational establishment in the province. It continued to flourish under Zalown and able supervision of Gruickshen,\textsuperscript{24} a Eurasian who was blind from the age of ten. He was a much respected teacher whose name was a household word in Tirunelveli.

From 1844 to 1860, around 2050,\textsuperscript{25} boys were admitted into the school. Among 2050 students only ten embraced Christianity. More than fifty of those who were educated in the school held public employments in Tirunelveli.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{History of Higher Education in India}, Vol.I, University of Madras, 1987, p.3.
\textsuperscript{22} Rajayyan, K., \textit{op.cit.}, p.263.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 1889-1860, p.141.
Among the forty passed candidates in the much–sought after civil service examination of this school, the boy who got the first mark was also from this school.\textsuperscript{26} For the next fifty years, almost all high officials of the district were the products of this school.\textsuperscript{27}

Whenever there was a conversion in this school, it led to a decrease in roll number, as in the case of Munshi, a student who was converted which resulted in a decrease of school attendance from 123 to 90.\textsuperscript{28}

When W. Cruikshanks, the headmaster retired, Mr. Spratt\textsuperscript{29} became the principal. He introduced some changes in the school to raise the standard in 1871\textsuperscript{30} and in the same year it was upgraded as a matriculation school.

**Schaffter High School**

In 1818\textsuperscript{31} Rev. James Hough started an English school at CourtaIlam Road in Tirunelveli. In 1822\textsuperscript{32} Rev. James Hutchinson shifted the school to Palayamkottai. In 1823, the school was restarted in its original place by the efforts of Rev. C. T.E. Rhenius and Thirumanam Sulochanana Mudaliar. In 1865, it became an Anglo-vernacular school.\textsuperscript{33} In 1878, Rev. H.J. Schaffter was appointed the first principal. He worked very hard for the development of the school. In 1880\textsuperscript{34} it was upgraded as a high school.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 1858-1859, p.134.
\textsuperscript{27} George Muller, D.S., *op.cit.*, p.30.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, 1870-71, p.137.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p.4.
Caldwell High School

Originally this school was founded in 1843\textsuperscript{35} at Sawyerpuram. The founder of this school was the great educationist and eminent Tamil Scholar, Dr. G.U. Pope.\textsuperscript{36} By the efforts of Rev. Robert Caldwell, it was shifted to Tuticorin. In 1883\textsuperscript{37} it was upgraded as a high school and Rev. Arumainayagam\textsuperscript{38} was appointed headmaster of this school. He worked very hard for the development of this school. It catered to the educational needs of the people of Tuticorin and the surroundings villages.

St. John's Girls High School, Nazareth

St. John's Girls' School was the first Girls High School in South India. This girls' school was destined to become the first school for Indian girls to be recognized as a high school by the Madras Department of Public Instruction. It was started by Rev. James Hough in 1820 with twenty girls. Mrs. Michael from Tanjore was appointed a teacher in the Nazareth school. She taught needlework to the students.\textsuperscript{39} But it was closed down in 1826 due to financial constraints.\textsuperscript{40} In 1843, Anne Cammerer started St. John's Girls’ Primary School in Nazareth. She was the wife of Rev. A. F. Cammerer, who was the pastor of Nazareth from 1838 to 1858. The missionaries met with much opposition from the natives of Nazareth.\textsuperscript{41} In order to collect students for the new school, Anne Cammerer went from house to house, spoke kindly to the

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, 1823-1824, Palayamkottai, 1824, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{40} Susikaran Thangaswamy, Nazareth Varalaru (1800-2002), (Tamil), Chennai, 2002, p.29.
\textsuperscript{41} A tablet in the St. John's Church, Nazareth.
parents, offered gifts to them and stressed the need for female education. Consequently, parents agreed to send their children to the school. Thus the nucleus of the St. John's Girls’ School was formed in 1843. Mrs. Anne Cammerer also served as the first Principal.\(^{42}\) She constructed a boarding school in 1848 to accommodate forty-one girls. Similar schools were founded at Mukuperi and Alwarthirunagari, near Nazareth in 1848. She passed away on 15 September, 1849 at the early age of twenty-eight.\(^{43}\)

In 1860, Mrs. Sarah Scarbarough, sister of Rev. Brotherton, took charge of St. John's Girls’ Primary School, Nazareth. During her time, the school was upgraded into a middle school. Sarah Scarbarough jointly managed both the boys and the girls schools of Nazareth.\(^{44}\) After the death of Rev. Brotherton, the school was brought under the control of Anne Brotherton. Due to her efforts, the school got government grants-in-aid in 1869. After the death of Anne Brotherton in 1869, the school came under the control Mrs. Harriet Strachan from 1870-1876, the wife of Dr. Harriet Nicholson Strachan. She also took charge of the Girls’ Boarding School in 1869.\(^{45}\) Canon Margoschis\(^{46}\) was appointed the superintendent of the school in 1876. He stressed the

\(^{42}\) *Dinamalar*, Tirunelveli, 19 July 1987, p. 3.

\(^{43}\) Madras Diocesan Committee Report, 1861-1862, Madras, 1862, p.31.

\(^{44}\) Annual Report of S.P.G., 1867, p. 120.

\(^{45}\) Madras Diocesan Committee Report, 1868-1869, Madras, 1869, p.16.

\(^{46}\) Arthur Margoschis arrived in India in 1875 and came to Nazareth in 1876 and he laboured for 31 years. He is called, 'Father of Nazareth'. He established an Orphanage and Industrial School for the orphan children of great famine in 1877. The Nazareth Native Christian Provident Fund was inaugurated in honour of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. He raised a sum of Rs.20,000 for a new building for St. Johns' High School and Training School for Girls at Nazareth. As an appreciation of the splendid Philanthropic and educational work done by Mr. Margoschis, the Government of India presented him with the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal in 1901. He wrote articles on Indian subjects in the journal, Madras Mail. His last article was the review of the Sister Nivedita's book, Indian Fairy Stories. ('In Memorium of Arthur Margoschis, 1852-1908', *The Madras and Tinnevelly Diocesan Magazine*, Vol. III, June, 1908.)
need for good education for women and started a kindergarten school. The Nazareth Co-
operative Bank Committee presented a sea-saw for the kindergarten.\textsuperscript{47}

The school attained the status of a high school in 1886. However, the school became a
full-fledged high school only in 1888. The first set of women students to pass the matriculation
examination in the Madras Presidency was from this school.

\textbf{Sarah Tucker High School, Palayamkottai.}

The Sarah Tucker High School has done yeomen service to the cause of most of the
students hailed from poverty-stricken families. The Sarah Tucker High School for women owes
its existence to Miss. Sarah Tucker of England and her friends who raised money for the
founding of a small school for training teachers with a model school in 1858. The school was
upgraded into a high school in 1890 with five girl students. The number of students increased to
thirty-four in 1897. The school had IV, V, VI and VII Forms. The curriculum of the school was
framed exclusively for the matriculation examinations of the University of Madras. In the
beginning, the management found it difficult to get a sufficient number of girl students due to
opposition from the public. However, constant efforts of the women missionaries, bore fruit in
the end and parents sent their girls to the school.\textsuperscript{48}

Most of the students came from poverty-stricken families. The children were boarded and
clothed. The school supplied them with petticoats and jackets which they wore during class
hours only. Children were given slates, pencils, books and also received four \textit{annas} a month as

pocket-money. They were given regular presents of plantain fruits, sweetmeats, dolls and clothes so that they would attend classes regularly. When they returned home for vacations, they were provided with sustenance allowances. During holidays, the boarders taught their illiterate neighbours to read, write and also arithmetic and engaged in dress making and embroidery. They entertained the children of their village with stories. The orphan boarders remained at school during the vacation.  

In 1890, Miss Askwith became the manager of Sarah Tucker Institution. The school had five eminent European women missionaries: Miss R. Edith Howard, Miss M.M. Frost, Miss Lindsey, Miss Labroy and Miss Pawson. Miss. Cowell taught English and Physiology to the students.

Elliot Tuxford Girls High School, Megnanapuram

Mrs. Mary Thomas started a Boarding School at Megnanapuram in 1841 with four pupils. She was the wife of Rev. John Thomas, a C.M.S. missionary at Megnanapuram. The educational department of the three united districts of Megnanapuram, Satthankulam and Asirvadhapuram was under her charge. She managed the school for thirty years with great success. Two hundred and forty six pupils successfully completed their studies under her able guidance. The school imparted education to the poor girls of Megnanapuram and its neighbourhood. The school children did not attend school regularly due to their family

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51 The Village Neduvilai was named as Megnanapuram by Rev. Rhenius in 1830.
circumstances. During the palmyra season, the children had to work along with their parents to eke out a living. However, since free education, food and clothing were available easily, they were also keen to attend classes in spite of such hardships.⁵⁴ The children were given plantains, jaggery and parched corn regularly. Those who came from distant places were given curry and rice. In the evening, they amused themselves with games. The school offered financial assistance to the widowed mothers of girl students.⁵⁵

Rev. Tucker laid the foundation for the new building of the school on 20 June, 1844. It was called Mary Elliot Tuxford School⁵⁶ in memory of Mary, the wife of Rev. E.B. Elliott, formerly Vicar of Tuxford.⁵⁷ The school had to its credit European teachers, Miss. Sophia Hobbs, Miss Darling, Miss. E.C. Vines and Miss. Frances Thomas.⁵⁸ Subjects like Tamil, Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography and History were taught besides music, needle work, embroidery, tatting, cotton spinning, cooking and gardening.⁵⁹ The students of this school had the advantage of having their character moulded.⁶⁰ Since the school was situated in the midst of paddy fields, when epidemics like cholera broke out, the students voluntarily nursed the sick people in the surrounding areas.

The school was financially supported by the friends of England. They contributed £3 per annum for each pupil. The principal supporters of the school were Mrs. Dr. Wilson and Miss Wilson of England. Due to the increase in the prices of food and clothing, there was a severe

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⁵⁵ Church Missionary Record, September, 1860, p. 290.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 1844, p. 262.
⁵⁷ Ibid., 1862, p. 273.
⁵⁹ Church Missionary Record, September, 1862, p. 273.
⁶⁰ Ibid., 1852, p. 163.
financial constraint.\textsuperscript{61} When Mrs. Mary Thomas went to England in 1860, she appealed to her friends in England for further financial assistance. In response, the Ladies Association supplied clothes and stitched garments like jackets and petticoats for girls and trousers for boys. The school sold the surplus clothes to the wives of mission agents and the former boarding school girls.\textsuperscript{62} The average number of girls for years upto 1864 was eighty. A few students had undergone the course of study at the Teachers' Training Institution, Palayamkottai and the Sarah Tucker College for the Madras Matriculation Examination. Meritorious students were given training in teaching practice to appear for the government examination in 1865. The girls who got trained thus could find educated young men as life partners. It was like a dream come true for the missionaries, for young men engaged in the mission as teachers could not have found suitable brides otherwise. \textsuperscript{63}

**Collegiate Education**

Upon the plinth of the elementary education and the superstructure of the secondary education was raised the structure of the collegiate education.\textsuperscript{64} The collegiate education is the last and final stage in the three-tier system of academic curriculum. With the establishment of the University of Madras in 1857 began the growth of collegiate education in the Presidency of Madras.\textsuperscript{65} The Protestant missionaries in the southern part of Madras Presidency took keen interest in the promotion of collegiate Education. On account of their tireless work two incomparable institutions of collegiate education were founded. These two institutions came out

\textsuperscript{61} Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, 1865, p. 240.
\textsuperscript{62} Report of Mrs. Isabella Wyatt and Miss. Louisa Caldwell, Boarding School, Idaiyangudi, 1 October 1869.
\textsuperscript{63} Report of Church Missionary Society, September, 1858, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{64} Aggarwal, J.C., \textit{op.cit}, p.268.
\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Ibid.}
as offsprings of the C.M.S. High school and Sarah Tucker High School. The first one was named St. John’s College and the second was called Sarah Tucker College. These two colleges were in Palayamkottai. Apart from these there was a college in Tuticorin. This was named Caldwell College. But it was only short lived.

**St John's College, Palayamkottai**

In 1844 the C.M.S School was started by the Church Missionary Society at Murugankurichi. Originally it was called English School and was housed near the famous Holy Trinity Cathedral. In 1878 it became a college when Intermediate Course was started. In the same year it was shifted to Vannarpet. St John’s College is at present one of the biggest institutions of higher learning in the area.

**Caldwell College, Tuticorin**

This college which was opened on the 13th January 1883, consisted of the college and high school classes of the institution previously known as the S.P.G. College Sawyerpuram. It

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was originally founded in the year 1843 by Rev. G. U. Pope as a Training School for Mission Agents.\textsuperscript{70}

In the year 1880\textsuperscript{71} it became a second grade college and in 1883 by the efforts of Caldwell, it was transferred to Tuticorin. It was named after Caldwell and also got affiliated to the University of Madras.\textsuperscript{72}

**Sarah Tucker College, Palayamkottai.**

For a long time, there was no higher educational centre in Tirunelveli to impart education to the girl students. So, the missionaries, with renewed dedication came forward to establish a college exclusively for women. The Sarah Tucker College is one of the most important institutions in the Madras Presidency and was the first college for women in the State. It was established in 1896 and was affiliated to the University of Madras.\textsuperscript{73}

**Impact of Female Education**

The missionaries made a distinct contribution to the cultural, moral, intellectual and spiritual welfare of the girls of Tirunelveli. They not only imparted a sound education, but also opened their minds to the opportunities of service and inspired them to render social service to the people. The introduction of the residential system in schools and colleges, helped in the


\textsuperscript{72} *Ibid.* p.29.

moral, intellectual and spiritual growth of the students. The poor illiterate women could acquire knowledge of English through the women missionaries. It helped them to get employment both in the private and public sectors. All these factors gave them the means to redeem themselves from poverty, ignorance and superstitions.\textsuperscript{74} It was not just reading, writing, arithmetic, geography and grammar\textsuperscript{75} and needle work, that gave them empowerment, they had began to be trained in other skills too.\textsuperscript{76} Debating societies were organised in the schools. Subjects like, higher education versus elementary education for women were discussed.\textsuperscript{77}

Education and employment became tools for the economic progress of various Christian communities in the district. Children who received general and spiritual education from the Christian institutions found employment. Even married women became the trained agents of the S.P.G. and C.M.S.\textsuperscript{78} The educational institutions, managed by women missionaries were well disciplined. In the initial stages, orthodox Hindu families hesitated to send their female children to the mission schools but later, when they realised the importance of education they sent their children to the schools and colleges.\textsuperscript{79} A number of students took keen interest in the cause of education and served as teachers, headmistresses, principals and professors of government and aided colleges.

The educational institutions founded by missionaries helped their students to rise to prominent positions in the society as doctors, engineers and scientists. The spread of education and the opening of salaried posts had a direct economic impact on the womenfolk. Savings from

\textsuperscript{74} Church Missionary Record, June 1856, p. 133.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 1862, pp. 272-273.
\textsuperscript{76} Quarterly Report of S.P.G., June 1895, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{77} Church Missionary Record, 1931,p. 155.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 1871, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{79} Annual Report of S.P.G., 1874, p. 36.
salaries and professional incomes had become the capital needed for the starting of trade and industries. The educated Christians freed themselves from the economic restraint of the Hindu joint family system and enjoyed the new freedom of enterprise.80

The girls who were educated in the mission schools were employed in different capacities and they helped the women missionaries in all their endeavours. The educational institutions created a sense of social service in the minds of the students. The women missionaries also imparted moral and social value education to the students. They even conducted surveys and engaged in social work in the slums and organised work-camps. The women missionaries utilised their institutions for creating an awareness of the rights for achieving social justice in their students. Many teachers involved themselves in public life and actively supported social welfare programmes. They encouraged the students to save more and to help the poor people.

Christian colleges and schools were noted for discipline which students also inherited. The educational institutions fostered the mental, physical and spiritual attitudes of the students.81 The women missionaries removed the blind beliefs and prejudices from among their parents.82 Consequently, the women of the villages began to send their little children to receive education. By the efforts of the women missionaries, the system of caste found no room in schools, institutions and churches. The missionaries encouraged the children of various castes in their schools to mingle with one another so that they could ignore caste distinctions.

81 Annual Report of S.P.C.K., 1834, p. 34.
82 Frederick V. Moore, *Christians in India*, Delhi, 1964, p. 39.
Christian schools helped the outcastes to improve their position in the society. The Brahmin children of the mission schools attended the services in the church and sat with the Christian children of low caste.\textsuperscript{83} Thus the women missionaries overcame caste distinctions in the school and showed the way for the other missions. Missionary institutions were indirectly responsible for elevating the status of the outcaste and lower castes. Missionary education helped to break down the traditional caste basis of occupation and made it possible for an individual to reach upward status and gain occupational mobility. In a reference to the village schools of Tirunelveli, the Director of Public Instruction for the Madras Presidency reported that, "This is the most successful effort for the improvement of indigenous education which has yet been made in India."\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{83} Proceedings of the Church Missionary Society, 1919-1920, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{84} Church Missionary Record, July 1859, p. 199.