



DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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Kanyakumari District ranks first in the State in Tamilnadu in literacy. The Census of India 1991 reveals that literacy rate in that literacy rate in District was 71.13 percent against the country's literacy rate of 52.11 percent. After the successful completion of the Total Literacy Campaign for which the district received Dr.Malcom Adisesaish Award. The literacy rate has gone up significantly. The earlier efforts of the Christian missionaries since 1806, the introduction of compulsory education in 1930 in municipalities and selected villages and the extension of the same to the entire Travancore-Cochin state in 1946-47, have greatly helped the process.

History

It is certain that the teacher disciple tradition of education was prevalent in Kanyakumari District right from the Sangam period when literary activity in the District was thriving. In this tradition the student became almost a member of the teacher's family and it became a lifelong relationship.

After the rule of the Chera Kings, Kanyakumari District came under the control of the Pandaya Kings who were great patrons of letters. The educational system slowly evolved into the Pial schools of "Pallis" with a teacher having a number of students often in the veranda or "thinnal" of the house.

By the beginning of the 12 century AD, this region came under the rule of Venad kings and became part of the Travancore state. With the arrival of the Christian Missionaries in the 18th and early 19th centuries and the beginning of British rule in India, there were changes in the educational system. At this time majority of the population in the District belonged to the lower castes and were treated with utter disregard by the small upper caste community. It was at such a

time that the first schools were set up in the District by the Missionaries notably Rev. Tobias Ringeltaube. Against great odds, the number of schools fast increased. It was natural that these westerners introduced the Western type of education in these schools. By the time of the India Independence in 1947 education in this District had taken deep roots and was poised for a great future.

Primary Education

Primary education which is of great significance to the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children, is the most crucial stage of education especially to those with unsatisfactory home background. It comprises the first eight years of schooling which lays foundation for the personality, attitudes, self confidence, habits, learning skills and communication capacity of students.

When compulsory education was introduced in Kanyakumari District (1946-47), the district was part of the Travancore State. In Travancore State, Children between the age group of 5 to 10 were covered under the scheme, however the Madras State prescribed the age group of compulsory education as 6 to 11. In the year 1960-61, four years after the merger of the District with Tamilnadu, the age group of compulsory education was aligned with that of Tamilnadu as 6 to 11.

Number of Primary Schools

When the District was merged with Tamilnadu in 1957, there were 212 primary schools, between the period 1966 and 1976, there was a phenomenal growth in the number of schools. It rose from 221 in 1966-67 to 304 in 1976-77. Since then, only a marginal growth could be seen up to 1990-91. It may also be noted that the population of the District in 1991 was 16 lakhs. After the period, the number of schools remains constant at 330.

Middle School

Education in the age group of 11 to 14 is regarded as middle or higher primary education, covering sixth to eight standards.

Number of Schools

It has been observed that the number of primary schools up-graded as middle schools is greater than the number up-graded as high schools from middle school. An inference drawn from this fact is that there had been a demand for middle school education as a result of the impact of

Article 45 of the Constitution of India (1956). According to this Article all children must be provided with free and compulsory education until age of 14 within a period of ten years.

High Schools and Higher Secondary schools

Schools having classes either from standard I to XI or IV to XI or IX to XI was termed as secondary schools. But, as a result of the reorganization of secondary education in the year 1966-67, secondary schools have been renamed as “high schools”. The secondary education was made free with effect from 1984; prior to that tuition fee was to be paid to pupil for secondary schools. Eleven years schooling, one year pre-university course and three year degree courses at colleges (11+1+3) was followed in Tamilnadu till 1977-78. In the academic years 1978-79, a change was made in the schooling system under which ten years of secondary school course and two years higher secondary was introduced (10+2+3). Assigning an independent status to the +2 stage as ‘Junior college’ was also considered by dropped. There is scope for research whether this change indeed helped or hurt the quality of education in Kanyakumari District and of course elsewhere in the state also.

Number of Schools

The number of high schools in the District approximately double in two decades from 65 in 1956-57 to 123 in 1976-77. Improvement in economic condition of the people, status of new schools in rural areas, increase in the mobility of the people by introducing new bus routes, travel concession for school children in buses, minimum prescribed school-standard-based qualification for various government schemes and motivation for women to participate in all walks of life are some of the factors which motivate parents to send their girls to school.

Collegiate Education

Formation of the Scott Christian College as a second grade college in the year 1893 and affiliating it to the University of Madras marked the beginning of collegiate education in Kanyakumari District. In the year 1938, when the University of Travancore was established in the princely state of Travancore, to which this area belonged the college was affiliated with the University of Travancore. In 1950, the institution was upgraded to the level of first Grade college and offered mathematics in the B.Sc and history in the B.A. degree courses. This was the only college in the District upto 1952 when one more college the South Travancore Hindu College was started. Growth of collegiate education during the first fifteen years of the India was very

slow. Since, 1964, many colleges were established in the District. Though the District is small, it has 15 Arts and Science Colleges and one graduate teachers training college.

Professional Education

The people of the District are acutely disappointed by the disinterested shown by the government establishing professional institutions like medical and agricultural colleges in the District.

As agricultural land constitutes 6 percent and forest land constitutes 30 percent, agriculture is the main occupation of the majority of the people in District. Further, since the climatic conditions, irrigation facilities and topography are most favourable for agriculture, there is an urgent need for an agricultural college to carry out teaching, training and research and provide necessary information to the farmers. Surprisingly, there is no such institute in the District and students are required to acquire the necessary knowledge from other Districts or from other states. There is one Farm Research station at Thirupathisaram and a small horticulture research station at Pechipparai attached to Tamilnadu Agriculture University. The Pechipparai station can be converted into an agriculture college.

Computer Education

Realizing the important of science and technology, planners and policy makers in free India give priority to different specialized studies. Computer applications are one of the new openings, which drive almost all fields. The tremendous progress in the computer industry has come out to be a boon to people. They have been also to use these electronic machines to the maximum extent. Therefore, computer courses are in good demand.

India is one of the fast developing countries for software development in the world. Its advantages like lower salary structure, ample supply of English speaking and technically competent human power make it an ideal source for information technology, Indian software programmes have been rates as one of the best by a group of 150 US and European hardware and software manufactures.

Large number of graduates' ad post graduates who come out of Arts and Science colleges in this District are searching for suitable jobs in the employment market. These job seekers on seeing the demand for computer personnel, knock at the door of the computer centres to get computer knowledge. Hence, there has a been a phenomenal growth in the number of private

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computer centres both in the urban as well as in the rural areas which design different modules catering to the need of different segments of the society depending upon the age group, level of computer knowledge, time schedule, cost structure etc.

Now days, these centres motivate students to join in certain courses which they can do at their own free time. So some of the students who do their regular studies elsewhere join these courses to get computer knowledge. These students are in an advantageous position while seeking employment.

Distance Education

The system of distance education was first set up in 1962 at Delhi University for under graduate courses. With the development of an Open University and Distance education Institute, the number of distance learners has also increased over the years. At present there are in the country four functioning open universities and 57 correspondence course institutes that provide access to higher education.

A systematic development of school education in the district gives equal opportunity for the people to avail of education at the primary and middle school levels. However a number of students fail to continue their studies beyond high school level. Among them only a small percentage of the dropout is due to lack of interest or aversion towards education. Rest of them dropped their studies in order to supplement their meager family income by way of doing some sort of ordinary work. These students show eagerness to continue their studies. When they get an opportunity they join in the distance education and continue their studies.

Similarly, at the higher secondary level too some students discontinue their studies, as they do not have finance to pay for their fees. These students could continue their studies through distance education while doing some job. Moreover, those students who are derived admission to higher education due to low marks can continue their studies through distance education.

Again, another section constitutes the degree holders. They need to improve upon their qualification through distance education to face competition in the real world situation. Thus there is a heavy demand for distance education in Kanyakumari District. Among all the universities that promote distance education, only Annamalai University and Madurai Kamaraj University and now the Manonmaniam Sundaranar University have penetrated into this District on a large scale.

Languages and Arts subjects were first offered to the students through distance education. But in due course, science subjects and even technical subjects are offered. As there is good number of students enrolled in Annamalai University and Madurai Kamaraj University, M.S.University and Indira Gandhi National Open University, they have set up study centres in Nagercoil, which is the headquarters of the District. Introduction of spot admission in these study centres reduces the bottleneck in the admission process. This encourages more students to join in distance education.

However, the commercial competition of these institutes has placed the quality of aush education on a questionable plank. The refusal of different Stage Governments to accept the B.Ed. correspondence degree of qualifying as teachers is a good case in point. There is always a standing charge against these institute/institutions that they liberally pass the students to infuse maximum enrolment in their courses. National Assessment and Accreditation Council set up to rate the Universities, Colleges and Departments is yet to rate these institutes. The earlier the assessment and accreditation of these institutions of higher education is done, the better it is for the future of higher education in South India.

Public Libraries

Public libraries play an important role in providing an opportunity for ordinary people to gain knowledge. Usually people in their spare time utilize the public library for reading newspapers or magazines of their choice. However, there are widespread allegations that the reading habit among the people, especially among the students, has gone down alarmingly. The advent of television viewing may be a possible logical reasoning. However, this is an area for further survey and research.

In Kanyakumari district there is a government district library situated at Nagercoil. Under its control there are 8 branch libraries, 18 rural libraries and 10 part time libraries functioning all over the District. Unfortunately, since 1995, the District Library Officer post' in Kanyakumari District is kept vacant and this duty is being looked after by the library officer of Tuticorin district in addition to other duties. Due to the absence of the District Library Officer, there are difficulties such as purchasing of new books, construction of new library buildings and starting of new branches in different places. This situation can also be an indication that the general public is not very keen nor demanding and may be not properly utilizing the existing facilities.

In the year 1997 Government of India's National Literacy Mission sanctioned Rs.48 lakhs for setting up 173 libraries as part of the continuing education project. But till March 1999 most of the libraries have not started functioning. In some case one Almira and few books are delivered but kept in the houses of Preraks who are paid Rs.300 p.m. for reasons best know to the District Collector, the selection Committee with representatives from NGOs like Tamilnadu Science Forum who worked in the Literacy Movement from 1990 was scrapped. Politicization and inadequate monitoring have rendered the Continuing Education Project in doldrums and people are deprived of the benefits.

Conclusion

The District has a long and distinguished record in education and literary achievements. The beginning of modern educational system in the District was initiated by Christian Missionaries about 200 years ago. It is most gratifying that presently the District has the highest literacy rate in Tamilnadu.

The District has a large number of high schools, colleges and technical institutions majority of which are privately managed. During the last decade there has been a mushrooming of private institutions for computer use and applications. On the whole the level of education in the District must be considered as good. Notwithstanding, there are some strongly felt needs for the District.

1. Agriculture including fishing is the main labor provider in the District with special advantages of cultivating rice, coconut, banana, tapioca, fruit trees, rubber, and spices etc, Therefore an agriculture college is a must for the district.
2. The District will benefit by a few research and development institutions/centres in fields of special interest in the District. These may include R& D including value addition in rubber, coconut, banana, fruits, environment etc.
3. There is a great need to strengthen rural libraries.

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