

## **Missionaries rendered service to vocational education in North Arcot district – A historical view**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The district of North Arcot that is situated in the Northwest of Tamilnadu between 11° 55' and 13° 15' of the Northern Latitude and 78° 20' and 79° 50' of the Eastern Longitude with an area of 4,690.4 square miles has a great history behind it. In order to promote- the technical knowledge of the new converts in the district, the American Arcot Mission established an Industrial School at Arcot in 1886, in January 1918 to establish a demonstration farm and agricultural school. In 1922 an Agricultural Institute was started by Dr. J.J. De Valois, the salesians who took charge of the Catholic Church in rural 1928 draw their strength and spirit from Don Bosco was started Don Bosco Industrial School at Katpadi in 1928. The name of the Don Bosco Industrial School was changed to the St.Joshep Industrial School in the year 1962. Christianity did not stop with the preaching of the gospel and providing education and health care to the people at the district. The church was concerned more about the alleviation of the poverty and servitude of the oppressed communities, live a life of dignity and self respect unless they were made self-reliant through some trade other than being wage earning laborers under the high caste landlords in the villages.

**Key Words :** Vocational education, Missionaries rendered serevice, North Arcot, Christianity

### **INTRODUCTION**

The district of North Arcot that is situated in the Northwest of Tamilnadu between 11° 55' and 13° 15' of the Northern Latitude and 78° 20' and 79° 50' of the Eastern Longitude with an area of 4,690.4 square miles has a great history behind it. It was bounded on the north by Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, on the South by South Arcot District, on the west by Salem and Chittoor districts and on the east by Chingleput district<sup>1</sup>. In ancient times the district formed a part of Tondaimandalam, the earliest settlers were the Kurumbar and their existence is proved by the extensive but ruined forts in Padaividu near Polur in the district. The district assumed historical importance as it passed under the rule of Pallavas, Cholas, Rashtrakutas, the rulers of the Vijayanagar, the Muslims of the Deccan and the Mughals. It was also the scene of the Carnatic wars that led the British gaining a strong foot hold in India. The Vellore Mutiny of 1806 has a definite impact on the growing spirit of nationalism in India.<sup>2</sup>

Those who became Christians from the second half of the nineteenth century were and continue

to be a part of the society in the district. As such during the nineteenth century when India was going through a time of social and religious reforms the district of North Arcot was found to be a region of different religions, languages, castes, traditions and customs. North Arcot being a region with a number of Hindu Pilgrim centers had the broad shoulders to accommodate different faiths particularly Islam and Christianity which are of foreign origin. St. Thomas, in the first century A.D. and the Christian Missionaries who came to India from the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century were responsible for church planting throughout the length and breadth of India. The churches so founded by different missions, used several methods of approach to the subject of evangelism and church planting and establishment.<sup>3</sup>

### **Christianity in North Arcot District :**

The missionaries from abroad came into the district of north arcot to preach the gospel and win souls for Christ and establish churches in this part of the country in the year 1853. The mission of the church did not end with preaching and converting, the needs of the total man, meaning both spiritual and physical growth and development as envisaged by Christ, were to be met by the Church. Those who planted the church observed the social evils and exploitation to which the outcasts were exposed. They were the ones who got converted in great numbers when compared to converts from the high castes. They had to live under the mercy of high caste landlords and the money lenders. Those who accepted Christ were disowned by their friends, separated from their families, denied parental inheritance and almost ex-communicated from the village community.<sup>4</sup> The missionaries felt obliged to liberate the new converts from this social and economic deprivation. But it was difficult for the church to take up the responsibility to alleviate poverty and social inadequacies all the time. They felt the need to equip the future generations with professional training cum learning, so that they would become economically self-supporting rather than depend on their landlords and money lenders. Learning a trade was not open for all because every trade in the society was caste based, and the new converts from the outcasts were barred from taking up apprenticeship of any trade.

### **Missionaries rendered service to Vocational Education :**

Among the converts, people from the rural pariah community formed the bulk, they had forfeited their manliness and self-respect by their long years of servitude under the land lords. They were shut out from other trades and employments and they desperately struggled to obtain the bare necessities of life. The terms 'Self-Support' and 'independence' had no significance in their lives. The missionaries were convinced that they could make them self-reliant and self-respecting Christians by infusing new life into their old bodies only through the introduction of both agricultural and mechanical trades. Christianity in the district owes its existence to the Roman Catholic Mission, the American Arcot Mission, the Church of Scotland Mission, the Danish Mission Society, the Missionary Evangelical Lutheran India Mission and the Australian Presbyterian Mission.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Industrial School, Arcot :**

In order to promote- the technical knowledge of the new converts the American Arcot Mission established an Industrial School at Arcot in 1886, offering rug-weaving and carpentry courses,<sup>6</sup> in the meantime the mission rearranged the system of education under its control in 1890. The Arcot Academy' was divided under three levels namely, (i). infant to III class at Tindivanam; (ii). IV class to I Form at Arani and (iii). II to VI Forms at Ranipet. The Industrial School that was started at

Arcot was shifted to Arani Boarding School in the same year, in addition to the existing trades blacksmith, tailoring and printing were also taught. The first set of forty nine (49) students were presented for the Government Technical Examination and forty four (44) of them passed in 1892. It was made compulsory for all, the students to learn a trade before they switched over to the high school education at Ranipet and later at Vellore, when the high school at Ranipet was moved to Vellore in 1894.

After a trial of six years the policy of giving industrial education to all was changed, the mission decided to impart industrial education only to those who opted for it and made it a purely technical one. The students acquired skills in the respective trades and were able to produce finished goods, particularly rugs and wooden articles. The Mission provided standard equipment's and tools at the school, the government was pleased with the quality of technical education offered at the school and came forward to assist with a grant for further development of the school.<sup>7</sup>

The arrival of Mr. W.H. Farrar, a technically qualified person from the RCA in 1898 was a turning point in the life of the Industrial school at Arani. Though the government syllabus was followed, he published a book on the methods of industrial work, it was very useful to other institutions. He introduced cabinet making, wood carving and aluminium work in the school, the Wooden articles produced at the Arani school had a very good market in the European countries. But Arani school was away from the railway station, from a commercial point of view the mission identified Katpadi to be a better place it being a railway junction. An area of about 25 acres of land was purchased from a muslim Abdul Sahib and the needed infrastructure was built for the industrial school. The school was shifted from Arani to Katpadi in 1914, carpentry, blacksmith and motor mechanic training were the three trades that were taught at the institute while other non-utility courses were dropped gradually.<sup>8</sup>

From 1915 the institute at Katpadi became the centre for the Government Technical Examination as it had all the infra-structural facilities. At the Industrial schools' exhibition held in Madras, the exhibits from the Katpadi Industrial Institute were ranked first in the Madras Presidency. During the twenties and thirties of the present century the Institute had no parallel in South India under the headship of Dr. B. Rottscheafer who carried the institution to great heights of glory during his tenure from 1920 to 1955. The business section was developed Hide by Hide with the teaching auction. For the past three decades, though the Institute faced financial problems for want of financial aid both from the church and the government, it has offered the following courses<sup>9</sup>.

Sr. No.	Courses Offered	Duration of Year	State/Central Govt. Recognition	Minimum Qualification
1.	Carpentry	3 Years	State Government recognized	VII Std, Passed
2.	Electronics	2 Years	State Government recognized	X Std, Passed
3.	Electrician	2 Years	Central Government recognized	X Std, Passed
4.	Non-formal	1 Year	Institute Certificate	VI to XI Passed/ Failed

It should be noted that admission to the different courses in the institute was open to candidates from other communities as well from a poor and rural background.

### **The American Arcot Mission Agricultural Institute, Kasam, Katpadi :**

The American Arcot Mission resolved in January 1918 to establish a demonstration farm and agricultural school. In 1922 an Agricultural Institute was started by Dr.J.J.De Valois on the 200

acres of land granted by the Madras Government, it was three miles east of Katpadi on the Katpadi-Vallimalai Road.<sup>10</sup> Dr.J.J.De Valois started the Farm with the motto “that the hungry may be fed and the Gospel preached”.

“Rural Reconstruction” was the corner stone on which the Agricultural Institute was founded. The pioneers of the institute believed that India was suffering not so much from lack of natural resources as from the under development of its human resources. So they wanted that preaching of the gospel through evangelistic, educational and medical work must be supplemented by an economic uplift of the life of the individual believer and the community to whom the Gospel was preached. The policy of the institute from the beginning had been development of total man, spiritually, physically and mentally and his well-being socially and economically as its goal.<sup>11</sup>

The Agricultural Institute emerged as a model one bringing in innovation in Indian farming and rural life. A higher elementary school for boys and girls was started in 1930. Christian boys from the villages who stayed in the hostel in the Institute Campus and day scholars both boys and girls from the nearby villages attended the school. The students were made to work in the fields with the farm workers of the Institute for two hours a day. They gained practical knowledge of farming by applying new methods along with their secular education.<sup>12</sup>

A demonstration Farm was started to give practical knowledge to the farmers around the institute about the various classes of crops and animals so that they could adopt them to local conditions and improve farming methods. Short courses during the slack farming months ordinarily in summer, were given to village leaders, farmers and young men to teach them new ideas to improve living conditions. Summer classes for village women, particularly for the village teachers' wives, were started and they were taught practical work in poultry raising, vegetable gardening and cottage industry as well as in the care of the home and their children

A poultry plant especially for breeding was set up with a thousand birds of different varieties such as White Leghorn, Rhode Island Red, Black Minorca, Barred Plymouth Rock, Light Susses, Black Australorps and well Summer breeds. Kangeyan Bulls, Cows and Heifers were made available at the Farm to raise pure bred cows and bulls. The villagers around used the bulls for breeding, Surti buck goats and Jumna-paris goats from United Provinces were brought for cross breeding and for milk and meat. Fish breeding wells were maintained and supplied to the villages to rare fish, Gurummy, Stropalis, Lavicial fish and also the new Cutla breed were introduced and developed in 1933. The value of Horticultural work was highlighted in the Institute by providing mango, guava and lime nurseries.<sup>13</sup>

The American Arcot Mission Agricultural Institute became a big name, proving better than the agricultural schools at Anakapalli in Madras Province and Ta Uiparamba in Bombay. Dr. J.J. Deva Lois was made responsible along with the Maharaja of Pithapuram to organize the All India Poultry Exhibition at Madras in 1935. He was also invited to judge the poultry show in the Deccan Herald at Hyderabad. A Road Island Red Cockerel bought from the Cultural Institute Katpadi as a baby chick won the “Best Bud in the Shaw” award.<sup>14</sup> He became a referral person for poultry problems from different parts of the country. As he was receiving hundreds of letters, he wrote a booklet on “Poultry in India” in 1940 and made it available for all.

The year 1940 is very significant in the life of the Agricultural Institute, a new Farm area of 130 acres of land was purchased from Narayanaswamy Naidu and so the total land holdings of the institute became 330 acres. In the same year, L.Y. Dhasan who was sponsored by the institute to undergo special training at Wardha on the lines of basic education returned with new plans to make the school more vocational. The aim of the Institution was putting basic education into action

otherwise called “the Gospel of the dirty hand” The school children in the campus started working in the fields under the guidance of the Farm staff from 6’o Clock to 7’o Clock in the morning. The students were made to learn all the farm work, the two important concepts ‘the dignity of labour’ and ‘earning while learning’ were practiced in their true spirit.<sup>15</sup> Recognizing the services of the institute, the Madras University requested Dr. J.J. De Valois to deliver a series of lectures in 1942 dealing with the social and economic amelioration of rural India. He delivered three lectures on ‘rural education’ ‘rural youth movements’ and ‘the university and rural life’ following this, he was elected to serve on the imperial Council of Agricultural Research in Delhi and on the Madras Government Live stock Board.

The Institute was a pioneer in the modern concept of adult literacy, public health, family planning, youth development, leadership and sharing of the modern agricultural technical knowhow. The opportunity for this pioneering work was given to the institute through the World Neighbors Inc. of Oklahoma City, U.S.A in the year 1952. The Institute was sufficiently funded by this organization for a period of twelve years from 1952 to 1964. The institute started organizing Youth Clubs for boys and girls and made occupied them with activities such as maintaining a library, conducting indoor and outdoor games in the evenings, teaching health, hygiene and family planning with a team of qualified people in the villages, conducting night classes for adult literacy and teaching improvised methods in agriculture.<sup>16</sup>

The health team stressed on better nutrition by teaching the villagers to maintain kitchen gardens with plants in small vacant areas nears the house using the waste water. It prevented stagnation of waste water that breed mosquitoes, the use of smokeless Chula’s and sanitary latrines was also introduced through this programme. Classes were conducted and training was given to the traditional birth attendants to manage safer and cleaner home deliveries.

The work at the Farm was so very commendable that both the state and the central Governments started supporting the poultry and livestock programmes of the institute. The Government of Madras gave the full time service of a qualified Veterinary Doctor to be stationed at the Institute to supervise the poultry and livestock programmes. The rural development character of the institute was unique that the State Government had chosen the institute as the centre to train ‘Grama Sevaks’ who were to assume rural development assignments in the villages in the State. During the fifties and sixties, hundreds of Gram Sevaks from Madras State had their training at the Institute. A three year poultry development scheme drawn up by Dr.J.J.De Valois in 1954 was endorsed by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research. The Central Government came forward with generous grants from India’s Second Five Year Plan.<sup>17</sup> In 1955 the first programme of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research - “Commercial Chick Hatchery - Poultry Processing Plant - Pilot Project” was started in Katpadi. On the successful completion of this scheme over a five year period, a pilot scheme in the ‘Day Old Chick Industry Scheme’ was started which became a four-runner to the big programmes of Day Old Chick Industry throughout the country. Front 1955 the intensive poultry raising and propaganda scheme supported by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research was done in the villages within a radius of 25 miles.

Appreciating the services of Dr. J.J. De Valois, Sri Kamaraj the then Chief Minister of Madras State honoured him in 1959 with a Silver ‘Grama Seva Siromoney’ medal and Sri. Bakthavachalam, Minister for Agriculture presented him a scroll describing him as ‘having served India as an Indian transforming an arid region into a fertile area’.

Twenty Years after India’s independence the Agricultural Institute turned over to native leadership. Dr. M.J. John took up the reins of the institute and carried on the programmes successfully.

He left the farm in 1971 to take up the principalship of Voorhees College, Vellore.<sup>18</sup> Financial constraints and changes in the administrative structure resulted in the withdrawal of some of the important programmes of the institute. The rural extension programme and the poultry farming are being carried on in a restricted manner. The middle school that served for a long time with basic education curriculum was upgraded into a High School in 1965 and later into a Higher Secondary School. Farm training to the students is now withdrawn. However, the institute continues to serve for the welfare of the rural communities in a humble way.

### **St. Joseph Industrial School, Katpadi :**

The Roman Catholic Church in the district also evinced interest in promoting the welfare of the poor rural destitute and orphan children from the rural communities. The Salesians who took charge of the Catholic Church in rural 1928 draw their strength and spirit from Don Bosco whose prime concern was to care for the uncared in the society and give them a life of dignity. The eyes of the Salesian Fathers fell on the orphan and destitute children who sometimes had fallen a prey to Juvenile delinquency and became anti-social elements at a later date.<sup>19</sup> The Salesian Fathers gave their attention to the light of the poor orphan and destitute children and started the Don Bosco Industrial School in 1928. In the beginning the school started offering a five year carpentry course. Within a short span of three years in 1931 the Industrial school was granted official recognition by the Director of Industries to impart instruction in cabinet making and carpentry. In the same year 25 boys underwent training in carpentry.

In the evenings academic classes were conducted to make the children qualify themselves for the E.S.L.C. examination so that when they went out of the school they could have the minimum basic academic qualification along with the professional carpentry course. When the students left the school after the completion of the course, they were supplied with a tool kit, so that when they got back to the native villages they could live by themselves doing the trade they learnt at the school.<sup>20</sup> In order to move more facility for expanse and improve efficiency of the industrial school, it was shifted to a beautifully location in six acres of land with extra-ordinary infra-structural facilities at Katpadi in 1953. The name of the Don Bosco Industrial School was changed to the St. Joseph Industrial School in the year 1962.

As years went by the Salesian Fathers realized that carpentry alone could not be a paying job in the modern world so from the year 1976 a new one year auto-mechanic course was introduced. In the year 1977 there were 107 trainees in the carpentry section and 10 students in the auto-mechanic course. Later new courses such as Tailoring, Welding and Band Playing were added in the year 1980, 1985 and 1987, respectively.<sup>21</sup> The poor orphan and destitute children are given the best theoretical and practical training so that when they leave the institute after finishing their courses and they are absorbed in different establishments. The production units particularly in carpentry is best known for its quality and skilled products. St. Joseph Industrial School offered the following courses.

Sr. No.	Name of Course	Nature of Course	Student Strength	Duration of Course
1.	Carpentry	Formal	65	Three Year
2.	Auto-Mechanics	Non-Formal	19	One Year
3.	Tailoring	Non-Formal	12	Two Year
4.	Welding	Formal	10	One Year
5.	Band Play	Non-Formal	15	Two Year

The people and the government have great appreciation for the commitment with which the Fathers mould the life and character of the poor and orphan youth who otherwise will be roaming about indulging in anti-social activities.

In addition to this prime, the technical institute of Catholic church is running 23 Tailoring schools, both in rural and urban areas of the district, two technical schools one at Tirupattur, and the other at Polur, two commercial institutes one at Ranipet and the other at Tirupattur, one Agricultural Training School at Sagayathottam near Takkolam, one spinning centre at Thirupattur and a Grace and Compassion Art Centre at Tiruvannamalai and one 'typing Institute at Tirupattur. Most of the Tailoring schools and one typing institute for women. The Agricultural Training School and Agro-Technical School at Polur are for men. The strength of the students in the various schools mentioned above which are run by the Catholic Church was 1010 during 1989-90 of whom 623 were girls.<sup>22</sup>

### **Conclusion :**

Christianity did not stop with the preaching of the gospel and providing education and health care to the people at the district. In the beginning the church was concerned more about the alleviation of the poverty and servitude of the oppressed communities from which most of the converts to Christianity came. The church realized the fact that the new converts cannot live a life of dignity and self respect unless they were made self-reliant through some trade other than being wage earning laborers under the high caste landlords in the villages. The Technical, Agricultural and Commercial institutes started by the churches in different parts of the district have in reality served in giving a trade to Christian young men and women to earn their livelihood by themselves with a sense of dignity of labour and self-respect. However, in course of time - deserving students from other communities were also admitted into these institutes, so that people below the poverty line belonging to any community could come up in life and live with economic independence.

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