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## ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT



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**Abstract:**-This Article aims at highlighting the development of elementary education as seen in the district of Virudhunagar which became a separate district in 1985 by trifurcating it from the district of Ramanathapuram. Hence, it gives a brief account of the topographical set up of the district, its educational status from the age of Sangam to the present age in Tamil Nadu, the educational facilities and benefits given to the educational institutions as well as the ratio of the school going children, the gender wise literacy rate of the district, the enrolment and attendance of the students, examination results, the educational administrative structures of the district and finally the practical suggestions for improving the elementary education of the district.

**Keywords :**development , elementary education , topographical , educational facilities .

### INTRODUCTION

#### District at a Glance

Virudhunagar District is located in the southern part of Tamil Nadu. The District of Virudhunagar was carved out as a separate district in the year 1985 as a result of trifurcating Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu state.<sup>1</sup> It is bounded on the north by the districts of Madurai and Sivagangai, on the east by the districts of Sivagangai and Ramanathapuram, on the south by the districts of Thoothukudi and Tirunelveli and on the west by a portion of Kerala State and the district of Madurai. It has an area of 4432.55 sq. kms. The administrative headquarters is located at Virudhunagar town. According to the said notification, eight Taluks viz. Rajapalayam, Srivilliputtur, Virudhunagar, Tiruchuli, Kariapatti, Aruppukkottai, Sattur and Sivakasi were separated from Ramanathapuram district and formed as a new district. At present, the district consists of eight Taluks and eleven Community Development Blocks.

#### Elementary Education- A Background

Education is an essential aspect of culture of the people of any nation. It enables intellectual advancement, cultural refinement and social development. It is an intangible asset of a nation. Education is an instrument of social change. Individuals achieve development of character. The development of character of the people ensures the character of the nation. The social values are preserved and enriched by education. Even in the classical age of the Sangam, Tamil Nadu education got its due importance.<sup>2</sup> There were no caste restrictions and sex taboo. However, the situations changed during the periods of the Pallavas and the Cholas. When the Europeans arrived at India, the system of education in India was in a bad shape. Their contribution to education could not be under estimated.

The Christian Missionaries started many schools at

different places in the Presidency of Madras. The efforts taken by the British administration were given further impetus by the indigenous political leaders of the Justice Party who had an opportunity to decade and implement policies and decisions under diarchy. Elementary education is the vital starting point of education of the children. A great beginning was made in this regard in 1920.<sup>3</sup> The period between 1920 and 1954 witnessed remarkable development of elementary education in Tamil Nadu.

Until about 1920 the Elementary Education was left in the hands of private agencies. In 1920 Elementary Education Act was enacted which set up an Education Council for each district. This Council consisted of persons, some nominated by the Government and others elected by the Local Bodies. All matters concerning elementary education were to be carried on only in consultation with these Bodies. In common with other district, the study region also had such a Council established.<sup>4</sup> These Councils laid great emphasis on wide diffusion of elementary education. The Madras Education Act was later modified so as to introduce an element of compulsion.

The Heads of Municipalities, District Boards etc. were empowered to impose penalties on parents who withdrew their children from elementary schools. The District Education Council came to be replaced by Taluk Advisory Council in 1939 which were in turn abolished a couple of years later (1941) after its powers were vested in the Department of Education. In 1946 penal powers which hitherto rested with Municipal Chairman and District Board Presidents were transferred to the District Educational Officers.<sup>5</sup> The overall effect of all these measures was to raise the percentage of pupils passing through V Standard.

#### Educational Institutions in Virudhunagar District

Government Educational institutions are run by

## *Origin And Development Of Elementary Education In Virudhunagar District*

State/Central Government. The syllabus, curriculum and teachers are decided and selected by the State/Central. The education is provided through four units - Primary Schools, Middle Schools, High Schools and Higher Secondary Schools. At present there are 1,073 Primary Schools, 282 Middle Schools, 113 High Schools and 172 Higher Secondary Schools are in Virudhunagar district. The total number of Schools at present in the district is 1640.

### **Status of School Buildings in Virudhunagar District**

There is no significant discrepancy regarding school facilities such as classroom and status of buildings. It is heartening to note that all the school buildings in Virudhunagar district have pucca buildings.<sup>7</sup>

### **Enrolment and Student Attendance**

In Virudhunagar district, all the classes from I to VIII standard, the percentage of attendance of children exceeds 92% which is an encouraging trend indeed. In VIII Standard exceeding 99% and II & VII standard attendance is 98%. This is due to the sincere efforts by SSA functionaries at all levels such as the Chief Educational Officers (CEOs), Assistant Educational Officers (AEOs), teachers, Village Education Committees (VECs) or Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and education volunteers. Attendance rate of children is a crucial index of educational development in Virudhunagar district. The attendance rate also reveals gender equity in general and community wise equity in particular. This indeed is one of the greatest achievements of SSA, which aims to achieve gender equity by 2010 both at primary and upper primary levels.<sup>8</sup>

### **Examination Results in Virudhunagar District**

In the Virudhunagar district the percentage of pass is nearly 100. Though on account of no detention policy at the primary level, the percentage of pass is 100 or near 100, at the upper primary level also it is very nearly 99. This reveals the hard work done by the teachers in ensuring near one hundred pass percentage in all the classes. The key indicators of student enrolment, attendance and pass percentage show encouraging performance after the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.<sup>9</sup>

### **Literacy Rate in Virudhunagar District**

Literacy Rate in Virudhunagar District is 67.04% with 76.29% of males and 57.45% of females being literate. The percentage of child population in the age group 0-6 yrs is 12.94% as per 2001 census. The rate of dropout as per the records from the department of education in Virudhunagar district recently stated is as follows. Average literacy rate of Virudhunagar District in 2011 were 80.75 compared to 73.70 of 2001. Male and Female literacy rate were 87.46 and 73.14 respectively.<sup>10</sup> For the 2001 census, the same figures stood at 83.96 and 63.64 in Virudhunagar District. Total literate in Virudhunagar District were 1,943,309 of which Male 967,437 and Female 975, 872 respectively.

### **Educational Administration in Virudhunagar District**

The district of Virudhunagar has been trifurcated into educational district with the headquarters of

Virudhunagar for the educational administration. The jurisdictions of the control of the two Educational Districts are as follows:

#### **i. Aruppukkottai. ii. Virudhunagar.**

The head of the Education Department is the District Educational Officer who is under the immediate control of the Divisional Inspector of School.<sup>11</sup> The Divisional Inspector of School directs the District Educational Officer of the region in carrying out the policies of the Education Department and has direct control over all high schools, training schools and special schools in the district. The Divisional Inspector of School is under the control of the Director of Public Instruction (DPI).

### **Training Programme for the Elementary School Teachers**

In-service training programme for the elementary school teachers under the aegis of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) are programmed in collaboration with the Directorate of Teacher Education Research and Training (DTERT) in Virudhunagar district. The training programmes are structured to enable the teachers not only to strengthen their teaching skills but also to update the knowledge in their respective subjects.<sup>12</sup> The DTERT also coordinates with SSA to strengthen the classroom process, augment child friendly teaching methodologies and bring out the inherent talents of students in the primary and upper primary schools. The field level programmes of the DTERT are organized through the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET) which are involved in the training of elementary teachers as well as monitoring and action research of the SSA programme.

### **Quality of Elementary Education in Virudhunagar District**

Imparting quality elementary education to all was a major objective during the period under study. Quality dimensions viz. basic infrastructure facilities, teacher preparation, capacity building of the teachers and monitoring learners' assessment have been given special thrust. New strategies have been evolved to guide classroom practices, which are designed to address multi-grade and multilevel learning issues. Introduction of computers at the primary school level itself with appropriate multimedia material have also helped to improve learning quality and make the school more attractive for the student.<sup>13</sup>

### **Extension of Elementary Education in Virudhunagar District**

Elementary education has recorded a marked progress in Virudhunagar district. The following table shows that all the villages in Virudhunagar district with a population of 500 and above are provided with facilities of elementary education.<sup>14</sup>

**Table: 1**  
**Education Development Index**

Population of the Village (1)	Number of Villages (2)	Number of Schools (3)
Above 2,000	92	92
Between 2,000 to 1,000	130	130
Between 1,000 to 500	188	188
Between 500 to 200	962	563
Less than 200	-	-

Source: Statistics are furnished by the Director of Public Instruction.

As a consequence of the various measures adopted by the Government, elementary education has progressed very much in this district. In fact all villages with a population of over 500 have elementary schools, most of them run by the Panchayat Union Councils. But the fact remains that much more has to be achieved.

Universalisation of Elementary Education in Virudhunagar District

Since the inception of Virudhunagar, the district has had a policy objective of universal elementary education through the enrolment and retention of all children in the age group of 6-11. With the implementation of a massive nationwide programme, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the goal has been expanded to enrol and educate all children in the age group of 6-14 years. The policy for universalisation of elementary education in Virudhunagar district envisaged the enrolment of all children in the age group of 5-10 and retaining them in the schools for a minimum of 5 years. <sup>15</sup> The District Primary Education programme was launched during 1994-95 in the first phase and in 1997-98 in the second phase covering classes I to V. Considering the progress attained by the district, SSA was launched in all Taluks, covering classes I to VIII.

Access to school and regular attendance are the important factors that determine the success of the elementary education programme. The district has provided an elementary school in every hamlet with a population of more than 300, within a radius of 1 km. In order to encourage enrolment and attendance, various welfare schemes have been introduced. The district had a major lead in introducing innovative schemes like the Nutritious Noon Meal Schemes, free cloths distribution and free textbooks distribution. These welfare schemes in Virudhunagar district are briefly explained below.

#### **i. Nutritious Noon Meal Schemes**

The key objectives of the Nutritious Noon Meal Schemes are:  
Protecting children from classroom hunger,  
Increasing school enrolment and attendance,  
Improving socialisation among children belonging to all castes,  
Addressing the issue of malnutrition among children and social empowerment of women by creating employment.

The noon meal scheme was introduced in the Chennai Corporation in 1921 by the Justice Party. This scheme was continued as the Noon Meal Scheme during the Chief Minister ship of K.Kamarajar and as the Nutritious Noon Meal Scheme during the tenure of M.G. Ramachandran. Under the Government headed by M.Karunanithi, this scheme has been strengthened by providing three eggs per week and the present Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Selvi.J.Jayalalitha has further strengthened by providing five eggs per week.<sup>16</sup>

Under the Nutritious Noon Meal and School improvement schemes, free supply of meals for the poor children in the elementary schools has been introduced in the district since 1985, with a view to encourage poor children to study. This Scheme is largely financed by the voluntary contributions in all parts of the State. This Scheme is in operation in 1,640 schools in the district. Funds for this purpose are also collected from individual as charity offering. About 90,000 pupils in the primary schools benefit by the nutritious noon meal schemes. <sup>17</sup> The attendance of children in these schools showed rabid improvement.

#### **ii. Free Cloths Distribution**

It was found that a number of children, particularly girls, fought shy of school for want of proper clothing. Lack of suitable clothes kept away many a children, who were otherwise quite willing to attend. Hence, the Department of Public Instructions went a step further and concentrated efforts have been made to organize free supply of clothing to the poor children. A further development of free clothing scheme has been the idea that children in receipt of free clothing should wear the same uniform. The cost of this scheme is met by donations from the generous public.<sup>18</sup>

#### **iii. Free Textbooks Distribution**

All the children in the Government, local body and private aided schools in Virudhunagar district are given free textbooks. However, the children enrolled in private schools in Virudhunagar district are not given free textbooks<sup>19</sup>.

#### **Role of Educational Institutions in Virudhunagar District**

Educational institutions like schools and colleges are the most important parts of a district. Not because they impart education: they are like great factories which produce necessary goods to mankind. This is what the Virudhunagar district dearly needs. Thus, the role of the educational institutions is very great. If a system is to be truly understood then it is imperative to take into account its historical origins- only then we can understand the Political, Cultural, Social influences that have led to the present system.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Problems and Constraints of Elementary Education**

In spite of many significant strides made in the field of Elementary education, one area that still remains elusive is quality. Universalization of Elementary Education needs a special thrust on girls' education as well as greater rigour in planning, targeting and implementing the interventions designed. Statistics reveal that despite best efforts, disparities persist especially in rural areas and among

disadvantaged groups. The disparity is more acute in the enrolment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

#### **Future Challenges of Elementary Education in Virudhunagar District**

Putting together expected developmental changes in the next century and the fundamental requirements of sustainable development, the future challenges of education in Virudhunagar district may be described as:  
Training youngsters in logic, the manipulation of abstract symbols and increasing language skills too.  
Ensuring flexibility in syllabus and installing a management structure which accommodates change with ease.  
Re-training the entire population frequently.  
Imparting training in social skills.  
Imparting knowledge of religious, moral and ethical values and training students to tolerate, if not appreciate, multiplicity of religious experiences.  
Sensitising students to the issue of the critical balance between environmental preservation and economic progress.

All these issues pose complex philosophical problems and raise difficult policy issues. Instead of expanding further on these controversial issues, we shall now concentrate on one topic and use it as an illustration of the meaning of paradigm shift in resolving ticklish issues. The topic chosen for this purpose is the conflict between merit and social justice in the context of admission of students to the higher educational institutions.

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