

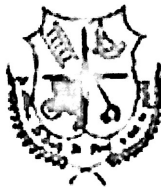
**International Conference**  
*on*  
**Unleashing the Innovation Potential**

26<sup>th</sup> November 2011

**Editors**

**D. Gomathy**

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*Organised by*

**Department of Management Studies,  
Ethiraj College for Women,  
Chennai.**

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**SCITECH PUBLICATIONS (INDIA) PVT. LTD**

Plot No: 52, O.No: 2/128, N.No:2/619, First Main Road,

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**ISBN: 978-81-8371-420-4**

Published by V. Ramesh for Scitech Publications (India) Pvt. Ltd, Plot No: 52, O.No: 2/128, N.No:2/619, First Main Road, VGN Nagar, Iyyappanhangal, Chennai - 600 056.

# The Educational Policy of the Dutch in Jaffna (1658-1796) - A Historical view

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The Dutch who followed the Portuguese as ruler of the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka had contributed notably for the development of education in Jaffna on some aspects. The main aim of their educational policy was to propagate the tenets of Christianity of the Dutch Reformed Church which they professed with this in view; they established schools near their Churches, appointed teachers and priests and engaged themselves in this work. As a result of this, many people especially young boys and girls were benefitted. This provided in course of time, an opportunity for them to get employment during the rule of the British who ruled after the Dutch as rulers of this area. The religious education introduced by the Dutch paved the way for the composition of Tamil literary works with new flavour. In this research article, the writer wishes to discuss the nature and condition of indigenous educational tradition of Jaffna, the impact of the Dutch religious education on the culture of Jaffna, the extent of success in the educational and religious activities of the Dutch and other related topics.

## The Arrival of the Dutch in Sri Lanka

The Dutch established their headquarters at Batavia in Java and were attracted by the cinnamon of Sri Lanka. One of the aims of the Dutch was to expand their activities in the south Indian ports and thereafter to concentrate on Sri Lanka. Their contact with Sri Lanka started in 1602 and the kings of Kandy were cordial towards them. The contemporary Kandyan king Rajasingha II who ousted the Portuguese from Sri Lanka without realizing the actual motive of the Dutch showed great interest on them. The Dutch got an opportunity to expand their power fully in Sri Lanka with the end of peace between the Portuguese and Dutch in Europe in 1652.

Following this the Dutch began to capture the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka one by one. In 1658 the Dutch conquest Jaffna and Mannar had the dual purpose of getting pearls from Mannar and elephant trade of Jaffna. There are no two opinions on this.

The educational system that existed in Sri Lanka began the advent of Europeans was traditional, this was very influential in Sri Lanka. Both Hindu Education tradition in Tamil area and Buddhist education tradition of Sinhala area were prevailed. The Brahmins of the Hindu tradition were noted for their proficiency in religious education. Generally the *Gurukula* (Student stay with teacher for studies) system was in vogue as in India with the introduction of Buddhism into Sri Lanka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. During the period of the Tamil kings of Jaffna the king was the custodian of Education.

## Educational activities of the Portuguese in Jaffna

The Portuguese who first arrived in Sri Lanka in 1505 gradually set up schools with the main purpose of propagating Catholicism which they professed. Friars from Franciscan, Jesuit, Dominican

and Augustine churches in Portugal were brought here to achieve their goal. The priests from these orders set up schools and their churches (*Kovilpattu Padasalai*) and engaged themselves in education and religion hence it is clear that the Portuguese used education as a means to propagate their religion. The Portuguese used the Portuguese language for administration, and later as languages for education. Later they included the indigenous language for education.

They divided the Jaffna peninsula and the adjacent islands into 32 divisions (*Kovilpattu*- as the divisions were attached to particular Kovil-here church). According to Portuguese sources these Friars were at first engaged in conversion to Catholicism in Jaffna. A good number of people in Mannar became Catholic. The education provided by the Jesuits had three stages, namely, the primary, intermediate and higher education. Generally education and conversion were inseparable during the period of European rule. The idea that all must be educated is an important factor for the economic prosperity of a place is found in Christianity. Thus the Europeans carried on their administration by incorporating education and religion. In this background the conservative society of Jaffna with the desire for new ideas had to change.

### **The Educational Activities of the Dutch in Jaffna**

The Dutch oppressed the Hindus and Catholics till they firmly established their power in Jaffna. But in course of time, they released penal laws that were in force with a view to avert any opposition to them. Thus they pursued their educational policy. Their educational activities were directed towards the propagation of religion like those of the Portuguese. But, in course of time, they established well organized schools. They changed the tenor of education in keeping with the needs of the society. This is to be considered as one special feature of the Dutch educational activities. In this respect they could be credited for having established a well organized educational system in Sri Lanka.

As the Dutch had more interest in the life and social benefits of the people of Sri Lanka their educational system and activities had become inseparable. Like the Portuguese the Dutch also used the schools for the conversion of the people. They had established schools in the *Kovilpattu* of all the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka including Jaffna which were under their rule. They made provisions for imparting education systematically. It is notable that like the Portuguese, the Dutch showed greater interest in providing primary education for the people. Like the Portuguese the Dutch also kept the management of schools under the purview of the government and did not allow the clergy to control it. That is they were keen that the ruler of the government must hold the responsibility of conducting the educational institutions. In this way it is notable that the Dutch government generally looked after directly the educational activities in several areas including Jaffna.

As a result a well planned and systematic procedure was followed in educational administration, teaching, appointment of teachers and examination methods. Thus a centralized control of education had come into existence for the first time. As they learnt the indigenous languages and approach to the people, the gap between the priest and people became easily narrowed. As part of their policy

of conversion they had to preach Christianity to the people of Jaffna from their childhood. They had greater interest to converting the children rather than the elder. The main purpose of primary education provided by the Dutch was basically for conversion. They attached greater importance to subjects that give emphasis to Christianity. They used the local teachers who were already engaged in this education in the schools. It was noted that the priest would provide them with religious training in advance.

The Dutch commander Van Goustein proposed the plan for the training of local youths as school teachers for the first time. His idea was to set up a training school in Jaffna for the purpose and it should be supervised by the Dutch commander.<sup>14</sup> Further, the preachers who learned the indigenous language were given high salary and additional allowances.<sup>15</sup> They realized that it was the best method to approach the local people in their mother tongue. But it was in abeyance for a long time. Later the special commissioner Adrian Van Raede took this plan into consideration. It was expected that the teachers who passed out from this training school would be appointed as teachers in schools. Those who worked as religious propagandists in the local churches would be promoted as a priest. Some of them functioned as local translators and clerks in the Dutch government service. They also were given the prerogative for the appointment of posts like Mudaliyar and Vidane.

On the basis of this plan a seminary was established at Nallur in 1690.<sup>16</sup> In this respect it was appropriate that the Dutch was to establish their first institution for higher education in Jaffna. The reason was that there were greater number of schools and greater number of students who studied in Jaffna. Provision were made for the instruction of Dutch language in morning and Tamil language in the evening.<sup>17</sup> This training school attracted not only the Jaffna society but also the upper class of the Vanni area. In this seminary which is the higher educational institution of the Dutch, provisions were made for the study of languages like Dutch, Greek and Hebrew. As the seminary aimed to provide the basic requirements for those who would become teachers and priest, European languages were given importance in the curriculum. Therefore it is clear that the curriculum was not designed with the people of Jaffna and their cultural background in view. This was confirmed of a limited area of knowledge.

Though the Dutch government encouraged education and instruction of religion (Christianity) it did not take interest to make financial provision for this purpose. The finance allocated for this was less than what is required. Such schools were requested to run with their own income. As a result, the salary of the teachers was paid from the income from fines.<sup>18</sup> The government paid salary for the expense of the priest. After establishing their power in Sri Lanka, the Dutch started to set up their schools. The Dutch avoided war as far as possible and followed a policy of peace. In keeping with the administrative needs, the Dutch divided the regions of Sri Lanka under their way into Galle, Colombo and Jaffna Commandaries. As Jaffna was separated from the other two by the Vanni area, it was not affected by the war waged between the Dutch and the kings of Kandy. As a result there were more opportunities for the development of Jaffna than for other two. The Dutch were keen to use the indigenous language as the medium of instruction for education. The activities of

Rev. Baldaeus in Jaffna were notable in this respect. He has said that those who were engaged in religious propaganda should know at least one of the indigenous languages. He himself set an example by learning Tamil and served as a forerunner in this respect. Some fundamental philosophical texts were translated from Dutch to Tamil under his supervision. During the period of Dutch rule the children were compelled to attend the schools. Hence their language policy was more successful than fulfilling the above need and the policy of compulsory education. At the beginning, schools were set up for the employer of the V.O.C and the children of the Burghers. Thereafter, Private schools and schools attached to the churches (*Kovil pattu*) were established. Gerritde Heara proclaimed some order in 1679 for those who had relation with the schools. The same time, the Dutch had also appointed Correlis Doan Simons committee with the purpose of rectifying the defects in the schools. The institution named Scholarchale Vergadering established in 1663 formed the basis of Dutch administration of education. The main aim of this committee is to supervise the schools and educational institution.

One of the special features of the educational set up of Dutch in Jaffna concerned with female education. Separate schools for girls were not established in Jaffna. Though it appeared to be slur in the Dutch educational policy. They proclaimed some orders for the protection of the girls. As compulsory education was in vogue and measures were made taken for the protection of girls, the parents allowed their girls to attend the schools till the 8<sup>th</sup> year. They had to leave the schools by the 10<sup>th</sup> year. The government taking into consideration the hazards that the girls might face did not take interest in higher education for them. The parents too approved this.

Even then, compared with the previous periods due to the compulsory education introduced by the Dutch, female education had developed to some extent. The schools attached to churches at Kaddaiveli and Karainagar are the important schools established by Dutch among those built adjacent to the churches (*Kovilpattu*). In their schools attached to the churches the administrative divisions (*Kovilpattu*) the attendance of students increased due to instruction in the mother tongue and the compulsory attendance of students. In these schools yearly examinations method also was followed. These were supervised by Scholar Chale Vergadering. The curriculum work time, holidays, qualifications of the teachers and similar aspects were made known as government order.

Another special feature of the Dutch educational system was continuities education. Generally, all schools functioned continuously throughout the year. There were no definite terms (of period) and long holidays. As pointed out earlier the Dutch used education for religious conversion in Jaffna. Though they followed the same policy among the people in the Eastern and Western regions and the Vanni region of Sri Lanka their religious propaganda activities were not successful as in Jaffna. Because of this reason educational service was not conducted in a special way in those regions. 15012 students studied in the Schools at Mannar and Jaffna in 1663. The number of students increased to 18000 in two years. Statistics indicate that in 1756, 30859 students attended schools in the regions like Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa etc. Progress in education usually paved the way for literary activities on the basis of this idea and the religious freedom granted by the Dutch in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A lot of Tamil literary works were written in Jaffna.

## Conclusion

It might be said that in the history of Education in Jaffna, the education of the people of Jaffna progressed by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Dutch conquered the Portuguese and established their power in the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka. Following their predecession had given an institutionalized education to this country. That was a regularized system of education. But the Dutch followed an educational system that was considered necessary for the expansion and consolidation of their power in Jaffna and other parts of Sri Lanka. But their educational activities in Jaffna were conclusive to the development of knowledge among the younger generations in Jaffna. Particularly their educational activities about female education were worthy of note. Their educational policy led to the formation of western culture among the people of upper classes a Jaffna. In their system of education propaganda for conversion formed an important place. In spite of this they were the forerunners to compulsory education, continuous education, female education the development of literary activities and some other later developments.

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