

# Progress of Women's Education in the Union Territory of Puducherry

T. Radha, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

The present study examined about women's education in the Union Territory of Puducherry since independence. The paper is designed to obtain the information about the progress of literacy in the Union Territory of Puducherry since independence. The study revealed that there is a marked increase in the female literacy at present. Only rich and upper girls were educated in the past where as opportunities are open for all to participate in higher education now. The observation seems to be valuable and appropriate as far as women's education is concerned.

## INTRODUCTION

Educating women benefits the whole of society. When women are educated their dependence automatically disappears or at least decreases. Education helps women to resist exploitation, besides of course empowering them to be self-reliant. Where women are educated they can become potential sources for harnessing a community's resources for general well-being. Education which increases women's awareness leads to their overall development in particular and social in general

Women's education can serve as a powerful instrument for individuals to achieve upward social and economic mobility and achieve power and status in society. It is a source of mobility, equality and empowerment both at the individual and at the social level

### A. About the Union Territory of Pondicherry

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The Union Territory of Pondicherry has a chequered history. The original name of Pondicherry was Vedapuram or Vedapuri which suggests that Pondicherry was traditionally a seat of learning and vedic culture. The name Pondicherry is also connected with 'PODUCA'. At the time when the French came, Pondicherry came to be known as PUDUCHERY which means new village. Pondicherry existed 12,000 years ago. This long period may be divided into four sub periods, namely the Ancient period, the Tamil period, the period of Alien-Rulers and the period of the struggle for freedom.

The ancient people of Pondicherry had links with the Indus valley civilization. The Territory was under the Andhra dynasty, which was replaced, by the Pallava dynasty in the fifth century. The first quarter of the fourth century witnessed the rule of kings. The Pallavas, the Cholas and the Pandyas ruled this Territory. Pondicherry was under the Vijayanagar Empire during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Muslim rulers followed it. In course of time the Portuguese came to Pondicherry, and then came the Danes who lived in Pondicherry for a short time. The French influence began to spread after the Danes left Pondicherry. Francois Martin was sent to Pondicherry and he transformed what was considered to be a fishing village into a flourishing textile port. In 1693, Pondicherry passed on to the hands of the Dutch who purchased it from the ruler of Gingee. Four years later, Pondicherry was again transferred to the French. The French trade was transferred from Surat to Pondicherry.

In 1742, Joseph Francois Dupleix became the Governor of French India. After the rule of Dupleix, the supremacy of France began to decline and the British brought Pondicherry under their rule. Control over Pondicherry swung between the French and the English subsequently. But in 1861, the French came back and permanently settled in Pondicherry till the merger. The French ruled Pondicherry for a period of 138 years.

The freedom struggle in India had its impact on Pondicherry also. Pondicherry provided shelter to the nationalists like Sri Aurobindo Ghose, Poet Subramaniya Bharathi and Sri V.V.S.

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Iyer. After India became Independent the demand for the Independence of Pondicherry grew in strength. A series of events ultimately led to the freedom of Pondicherry from the French rule, on 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1954 when Pondicherry merged with the Indian Union. The French possessions in India were de facto transferred to the Indian Union and Pondicherry became a Union Territory and foreign rule came to an end. But only in 1963 Pondicherry became officially an integral part of India after the French Parliament in Paris ratified the treaty with India.

A Union Territory (UT) has its own government but falls directly under the Central Government in New Delhi. Though a UT also has an elected Chief Minister and cabinet members, laws and legislative regulations made in these areas have to get sanction or need to be ratified by the Central Government (Centre). The Centre is represented by the Lt. Governor, who resides at the Raj Nivas, the former palace of the French Governor. The Centre is also responsible for the financial well-being of these Union Territories, whereas the states get more or less a fixed amount and need to balance their budget by their own revenue and income. Hence taxes in the U. Ts are usually lower than the states. For instance: 3% sales tax in Pondicherry versus 10% and above in neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

Pondicherry still has a large number of Tamil residents with French passports, whose ancestors were in French Governmental service and who chose to remain French at the time of Independence. Apart from the monuments pertaining to the French Period, there is the French Consulate in Pondicherry and several cultural organisations, and even the Foyer du Soldat for war veterans of the French Army. Of the cultural organisations the French Institute, the Alliance Francais and the Ecole Francais d'Extrême Orient are noteworthy. Education is considered to be a potent input in Socio-cultural and economic development of the country. Experiences of the developed countries have shown a strong correlation between educational investment and economic development. This called for more expenditure on the development of education. Therefore, educational planning and growth of educational facilities have become the order of the day and the Union Territory of Pondicherry is no exception to this.

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## **Education During Pre-merger Period**

The Union Territory of Pondicherry is created with a glorious history of education. It has been a great centre of learning since eighth century AD. The copper plate inscriptions at Bahoor speak of 'Vidyastana' which means a seat of learning. A Sanskrit college was functioning there even from the beginning of the eighth century. The Sanskrit learning continued during the Chola period as well. A Sanskrit college was functioning at Thirubuvani. Some Tamil Colleges also must have existed during this period. The information regarding the system of education prevailing in the Territory till the arrival of the French in 17 century is copious. There were Thinnai Palligal– small schools run in the house premises of teachers, hailing from high caste Hindus and Vathiyars and Pandits who were well versed in arithmetic. Religion and local languages were also imparted to the students.

The seeds of modern education in the territory were sown only during the French rule in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1703, the Jesuits established a few schools in the territory for the children of the settlers. The other Europeans and a few Indians also revived education in these schools. The Jesuits also opened a college in Pondicherry which was closed during the French Revolution of 1879. Apart from these colleges there were two other educational institutions. In 1738 the Ursulines came to Pondicherry to run schools for girls. This came as a great boon to the spread of girls' education in the state.

Nineteenth Century added further momentum to the spread of education in the Union Territory. Compete, the First Governor General, appointed after the final restoration, evinced keen interest in promoting education among the youth. On his request, the missionaries reopened and closed colleges. Annual grants in cash were given to these institutions. The missionaries also opened three primary schools, one in Pondicherry called Ecole de la rue Royale in 1820, another in Karaikal for teaching Tamil and French and a similar one at Mahe. The region of

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Desbassyns de Richemont saw the growth of primary, secondary, collegiate and professional education. He promoted girls' education by establishing schools for girls, invited the sisters of the congregation of St. Joseph de Cluny from Bourbon to Pondicherry. The school was called Pensionnat.

The Royal ordinance of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1843, was another land mark in the history of education, because it sought to modernise education at par with international standards. It sought to train the youth for jobs in all colonies. Even though the system of education was biased in favour of French language, local languages were also given due importance. The period between 1843 and 1877 was considered to be the golden age for education; it was during this period that several institutions of importance were established, Maison De' education in Karaikal, the Petit Seminaire College in Pondicherry, to quote a few. A free girls' schools for all children in Yanam and Mahe and the Calve College for Hindus were also opened. During 1838 to 1863, courses in Law, medicine, etc., were introduced. The examination system known as Brevet de Capacite' de I enseignement Secondaire was introduced in 1863.

In 1879, there were 38 government schools and 227 private schools. Government spent 91,774 francs on primary and 53,000 francs on secondary education. Many French trained inspectors were appointed to control the primary as well as secondary education..

### **Land Marks in the French Rule**

Following are some of the landmarks in education under the French Rule.

**1827 : Free schools – one at Pondicherry and one at Karaikal – opened**

**Public library - opened**

**1837: Law classes began**

**1842: Registers of birth, marriages and deaths opened at Pondicherry,**

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Chandranagore, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam

**1847** : Royal College, later known as the colonial college opened

**1867** : The Express of France named a school for Hindu girls as St. Eugiene institution

**1873** : A free school for girls founded at Mahe by a Zamindar

**1877** : A school named calve college opened

**1890** : Public library opened at Karaikal

**1891** : First official census taken

**1946**: Political reforms. The Governor's post abolished. Post of The  
(Commissioner of the ninth French) Republics created. The General  
Assembly turned into the Representative Assembly.

\* Successive Governors improved infrastructure, industry, law and education over the  
next 138 years.

**1947**: The English left India for good, but it lasted till 1954 when the French  
handed Pondicherry over to an independent India.

The merger period witnessed phenomenal expansion in the educational facilities. The number of pre-primary educational institutions has increased manifold. Primary education has attained a place of pride, which has enabled the union territory to achieve universalisation of primary education to the children. The Territory has also made considerable progress in the sphere of secondary and collegiate education (Deepthi, 1982).

While reviewing the progress of education in the Union Territory in the post-merger period, it should be mentioned that the Union Territory has attained significant progress in augmenting educational facilities. Girls' education has been spread to a large extent. Students belonging to weaker sections have come to receive more facilities from the educational system that has been developed. The expenditure incurred by the government on education has also been increasing year after year (Ramasamy, 1987).

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However, there is a wide spread suggestion that many of the institutions lack the basic infrastructural facilities though institutions have been growing. The educational system is also characterised by drop outs and stagnation at different levels of education. Thirdly, the main emphasis of educational system has been on general education which promotes literacy rather than productivity of the individuals. The system of education as in other parts of the country is said to be irrelevant to the needs of the society. It is hoped that with the advent of new education policy, these defects of the existing system may be removed.

### **Progress of Literacy in the Union Territory**

**Table 01 exhibits the progress of literacy in the Union Territory, noticed in the census year books .**

**TABLE 01. PROGRESS OF LITERACY IN THE UNION TERRITORY**

S.No	Year	Percent of literate to total population		Total
		Female	Male	
1	1961	24.64	50.39	37.43
2	1971	34.62	57.29	46.02
3	1981	45.71	65.84	55.85
4	1991	65.63	83.68	74.74
5	2001	74.13	88.89	81.49
6	2011	81.22	92.12	86.67

Source: Directorate of Education, Pondicherry

Register General and Census Commissioner, India

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As seen in the figure, the growth of literacy from the census 1961 to the census 2011, appears to be steadily growing in general and the female literacy in particular from 24.64 percent in 1961 to 81.22 percent in 2011, which indicates the fast growth in female literacy. No doubt, this fast growth has helped them to come out from their shells in search for better status in the society.

The female literacy in the 2011 census was 81.22%. The male literacy was found to be 92.12 % - a higher percentage. This may be due to the availability of educational institutions.

### Analysis

#### ◆ Progress of Literacy in the Union Territory Since Independence

The progress of literacy in the Union Territory Since Independence, between 1961 (First census) and 2011(latest) for males and females, is compared in the following table.

S.No	Content	Literacy Rate	
		1961	2011
1	Male	50.39	92.12
2	Female	24.64	81.22

The table shows a steady progress of literacy in the Union Territory for males from 50.39 and for females it was 24.64 in 1961 and 81.22 % in 2011. A marked increase in female literacy is observed.

#### ■ Comparison of female literacy in the union territory with the national level is given in the table below.

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S.No	Content	Literacy Rate	
		Female	
		1961	2011
1	Union Territory of Pondicherry	24.64	81.22
2	Nation	15.35	74.04

The female literacy in the Union Territory was 24.64% during the census year 1961 and it rose upto 81.22 % during the census year 2011. At the National level, for the same period, it was 15.35% in 1961 and 74.04 % in 2011.

Starting from the beginning (1961) the women literacy was found to be high (24.64%) in the Union Territory compared to the national level which was only 15.35% during the census year 1961. The same trend was observed in 2011 census too, with a remarkable rise in female literacy in the union territory than the national level which was 74.04v%.

## Conclusion

The development of education among women is the main instrument through which we can narrow down the prevailing social inequality and accelerate the process of economic and political changes in the status of women. The Union Territory of Pondicherry, known for its French education system, embarked upon massive expansion of educational facilities based on the Indian pattern since 1954. Today the Territory is one among the educationally progressive States/Union Territories in India.

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T. Radha, Ph.D.  
Lecturer  
Department of Home Science Extension Education  
Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women  
Coimbatore 641 043  
Tamilnadu  
India  
[vasanthradha@yahoo.co.in](mailto:vasanthradha@yahoo.co.in)  
[radhathirumurthy@gmail.com](mailto:radhathirumurthy@gmail.com)

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