

Thyagasilar Kakkan: An Architect of Transformative Education

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Abstract: This article closely examines Kakkan's contribution to educating society, shaping lives and building a better future; Kakkan improved the quality of life of the people of Tamil Nadu by providing access to knowledge and skills. He helped individuals to rise above poverty, secure better jobs, and make informed decisions. This has resulted in transforming countless lives. Educationalists like Sarveypalli Radhakrishnan and social activists like Nelson Mandela have championed education as a tool for societal upliftment, emphasizing its importance as a universal right. Kakkan's contribution to educating society comes in diverse forms, like giving formal education accessible to everyone, especially marginalised communities. He also introduced vocational training programmes to make learning more inclusive and practical. Kakkan's stood for eradicating inequality and promoting social justice.

Keywords: Formal education, Inclusive education, Inequality, Social Justice.

Introduction

A great man does not seek applause or place; he seeks truth, the road to happiness, and what he ascertains, he gives to others (Ralph Waldo Emerson).

A man becomes a good man via education, and the world views those with education as valued. Numerous social activists have ensured everyone has equitable access to this education. However, only the poor had access to education in the early days of this social control, and it continued to be a lifeline for the underprivileged. Gandhi and other social reformers battled to ensure everyone had equal access to this education. As a branch of the Indian National Congress, the Harijan Welfare Association was founded. Through this association, the impoverished and oppressed could access effective education. Inspired by Gandhi's ideals, Gandhi sought social progress and liberty, placing a high value on freedom. Among those who put this into practice in Tamil Nadu is Vaidyanath Iyer, NMR Subraman from Madurai.

Love of glory can only create a great hero. Contempt of glory creates a great man. The first test of a truly great man is his humility. Thyagasilar Kakkan transformed his society by paving the stones of education for his society to make it fully bloom and fruit. The one who travelled this route and put in a lot of effort to advance was Madurai Melur. To make advancement, they also put in a lot of labour. The obstruction was caused by

Kakkan, who was from the Madurai Melur district's Tumbaipatti hamlet. Night schools were established in the slums by the Harijana Welfare Society to educate the underprivileged. With the Harijan Welfare Association, Kakkan started his educational endeavours. In addition to his extensive academic work, Kakkan has endured numerous challenges during his job. It is not hyperbole to state that Kakkan was the driving force behind the establishment of multiple schools in Tamil Nadu as a form of collaboration and support during Kamaraj's rule.¹

Early years

Kakana was born in Madurai District Melur, Thumbai Patti Village, Sirukudi Nadu, on June 18, 1909. His parents, Pusarikakan and Guppi, were married in 1901, and their third son, Kakkan, was born on June 18, 1909, after he changed his course of study to public service and freedom struggle after failing the school final exam. Feeling devastated by his failure, Kakkan had the opportunity to meet Vaidyanatha Iyer, who helped him by explaining his predicament. In addition, Kakkan pledged to help with loans and secure employment with Arishana Seva Sangh. When an opportunity arose, he requested Vaidyanatha Iyer to describe his predicament, and Vaidyanatha Iyer also assisted Kakkan. In this manner, he pledged to secure employment at Arishana Seva Sangam and offer loan support, to which Kakkan agreed. However, he requested that the funds be removed from his monthly paycheck.

Employment at Arisana School

A sevaalaya for Arisana students was established in Senai City, Madurai, in 1934. In the past, they established night schools in the Madurai neighbourhoods where Arisana students reside and receive their education. Kakkan joined the Arisana Seva Sangam as a young boy, allowing him to observe first-hand the plight of the underprivileged and destitute kids. By observing the kids, he understood that because the child's parents are poor or uneducated, there is no reason to deprive the child of fundamental human rights to healthcare, education, and proper nutrition. If Kakkan had been aware of the amount of education pupils required, he would have tried to ensure everyone had access to it. Children from low-income families found it challenging to attend school and pursue their education. Their daily commute hampered their schooling. There came a time when they could not study while living in dorms. Given their position, Kakkan reasoned that he ought to do all he could.

Kakkan advocated social justice through education. He worked for the upliftment of the marginalized. Kakkan realised that by educating the poor, he could eradicate social evil and promote social equality. As a leader, he worked tirelessly to ensure that education reached the most marginalized sections of society by pointing out the importance of literacy in the fight against the oppressors. He worked harder to eradicate caste-based discrimination by racing the slogan that education is the right for all. He also stood for women's education by understanding that societal progress can be brought only through women's empowerment. Thus, he was championing cast and gender equality in education³.

Kakkan established a dormitory in 1940 for both boys and girls to provide housing for underprivileged students. To do this, he established a student residence under Gandhiji's name and another under Gandhi's wife Kasturibai's name. He struggled all day due to the independence struggle, but there was no chance he could continue running the hostel. Since Kakkan's wife was a teacher before their marriage, he has helped her in her education career since they married. The fact that his wife made a significant contribution is notable. He even used his wife's thali to run the guesthouse. There was a lack of presence. The hostel has been included in the Arisan Welfare Association, and it is noteworthy that it continues to operate and assist several students with their studies. Kakkan also introduced hostels for downtrodden students. He built hostels for students from scheduled castes and other groups, providing them with a safe and supportive environment to pursue their studies. He introduced financial assistance to support children's education from economically weaker sections.

Following his appointment as a political minister, Kakkan maintained his efforts in education. He later met K. K., the district's first education officer, in Madurai Melur. He established a teacher's school in the villages

without schools and taught the impoverished people about education after meeting and talking with Venkata Subramanian⁵. Even if education was not a sector that was exclusively for him, he requested that enough plans be made for nurturing. He asked that proper plans be created for nurturing, and because he was attached to education, he paid attention to it even if it was not his area of expertise⁶. He oversaw the impoverished people's welfare and took the required steps to improve their standard of living and development. It's important to remember that Madurai's agricultural education was also founded when he planned numerous initiatives, such as building new schools, furnishing dorms, and offering educational scholarships⁷. Education for the oppressed was remarkably ineffective in 1956 when untouchability was a preeminent issue. The chief minister at the time, Kamaraj, established numerous schools for underprivileged pupils and completed the necessary preparations for their education. The poor have been given 58,68,416 rupees for their education in 1956-1957⁸ and 69 lakh 89 thousand 100 rupees in 1957-1958. They have taken the required steps to further their education.⁹

Scholarships for education

To support impoverished children with their education, the federal and state governments have partnered to give aid.

Table 1.1 Fund Allotted for Education Years in Tamil Nadu

Year	Central Government (in lakh)	State Government (in lakh)
1960-61	12.18	22.51
1961-62	13.10	25.61
1962-63	14.15	36.50

Reports of Madras Legislative Assembly Debates, (1960-63)

S.Sc. 1960-61. 17 ST students have received scholarships, compared to 20 in 1964, 65 to 60. Similarly, three people received the stipend in 1960-61¹⁰, and ten received it in 1964-65. Forty students received the scholarship in 1960-61 for Other Backward Classes, while 100 received it in 1964-65. Both postgraduate and vocational students are eligible for scholarships. Five hundred students were awarded the grant in 1960-61 for worthy classes¹¹, and seven hundred students were awarded it in 1964-65. Annually, 700 students receive the award, regardless of their caste. Regardless of caste, Kakkan has created schemes allowing people to attain economic development and advance in life by increasing annual stipends.

Agriculture College of Madurai

The Madurai Agricultural College is one of Kakkan's most noteworthy accomplishments. It is situated in the Madurai neighbourhood of Othakadai. It is located in the Thekkadu forest, which is the foothills of Anaimalai, and was selected as the ideal location for the institution. Although the college needed roughly 300 acres of land to be established, Kakkan got 80 acres of government land out of 109 and 200 acres of private land after appropriately speaking with the local population. On August 19, 1965, the then-chief minister, Bhaktavatchalam, officially opened the college. Today, Kakkan is widely regarded as the individual who allowed students from neighbouring districts and Madurai to attend and study at this college.¹²

In honour of their educational aspirations, Kakkan has provided Arishan students the assistance they require to further their education. 1803 pupils in 1956-1957. Twenty-six hostels were operating with female students in 1964-65 for these demographic groups. Three hundred twenty-eight dorms accommodated 22,000 female students in 1964-65. Twenty-six hostels were operating with female students in 1964-65. Three hundred twenty-eight dorms accommodated 22,000 female students in 1964-65. To accommodate more students, particularly Adivasi students, in addition to Arizona students, the number of dormitories was expanded from five in 1956-

1957, where there were only 265 students, to thirteen in 1964-1965¹³. In doing so, he has given 495 students housing, established boarding schools for the children of hill farmers, and guaranteed their education.

Between 1964 and 1965, 32 dorms were open to delisted students. About 3224 pupils have used this method of study. Students from Arisan were thus taken off the list of tribal people, and 25959 of them remained and studied in roughly 375 hostels in 1964-65.¹⁴ The government has enabled pupils in these circumstances to pursue education, enhance their academic performance, and advance economically. The effort significantly improved school enrolment and literacy rate growth in the state over the decade. 18.33% in 1951 to 36.39% in 1961.

Kakkan laid the foundation for equitable education in Tamil Nadu. His efforts to mainstream the oppressed class through education remain a cornerstone of Tamilnadu's commitment to social justice. His contribution to education reflects his unwavering dedication to equality and empowerment. By championing access to education for all, he played a vital role in transforming Tamilnadu into a state known for its inclusive education system. His legacy inspires efforts to use education for social appraisal and justice.¹⁵

Conclusion

Contributions to education or contributions to humanity lay the foundation for an informed and progressive society. By fostering learning, empowering individuals, and addressing barriers, we can ensure that the light of education continues to illuminate the path to a brighter future.

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