

A Study on the Impact on Education by the Catholic Society of Goa

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Abstract

Why is education crucial? More than anything else, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes education as a legal right. (UNICEF, undated) A nation may compete in the global market and develop economically if the quality of the workforce rises as the population educates itself. (US Department of Commerce) Unfortunately, poverty prevents people from completing their education, and this has created a vicious circle which could help the economy expand. Christianity is a minority community in India but has made commendable contribution to the education of the masses, irrespective of gender, religion, language, socio-economic-intellectual conditions of an individual.

Keywords: Commitment and Services of the Order of Friars Minor

1. Introduction

Why is education crucial? More than anything else, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes education as a legal right. (UNICEF, undated) A nation may compete in the global market and develop economically if the quality of the workforce rises as the population educates itself. (US Department of Commerce) Unfortunately, poverty prevents people from completing their education, and this has created a vicious circle which could help the economy expand. Christianity is a minority community in India but has made commendable contribution to the education of the masses, irrespective of gender, religion, language, socio-economic-intellectual conditions of an individual.

The COVID-19 pandemic-related school closings have only made matters worse, leading to lost educational opportunities and increased inequality even in the most affluent countries. (Shmis and others, 2020)¹ Additionally, it is where people acquire important life skills, social conventions, good judgement and logic, and how to tell right from wrong. The ultimate purpose of education is to assist individuals in navigating life and making a positive contribution to society. (Abulencia 2021)²

Ponda was a neglected and unattended New Conquest³ area of the Portuguese due to its Geographical position. It lacked education until the arrival of the Friars Minor in 1962. The people depended on agriculture for survival and did not require education. A government and a private trustee school, A J de Almeida High School GVM existed for the education of the local children, neither the parents nor the children felt the need to attend schools. A committed missionary, Fr. Paul Fernandes OFM⁴ moved around the whole of Ponda and the surrounding areas to convince the parents as well as the children on the importance of education in accordance with the rest of the area.

Panjim, the Capital city of Goa today, was a tiny village until the mid-18th Century. The Portuguese had established themselves in Old Goa, known as Velha Goa and was their capital city until mid-18th century. Due to the repeated attack of plagues, the Portuguese were forced to abandon the city and establish themselves in Panaji, the closest area. It has a number of colonial houses and plaza some of which are been converted into tourist residences and cottages with Goan special cuisine available. Don Bosco High School is the oldest school established for the boys and Mary Immaculate Girls High School, the first girls' school established during the Portuguese time stand as the pride of the city giving yeomen services to the society even today. Another major contributor to education in Goa is the Diocesan Society of Education (DSE) a registered society since 1962 with

¹ Shmis, T., Sava, A., Teixeira, J. E. N., & Patrinos, H. A., 2020, “ Response to Covid-19 In Europe And Central Asia”, In World Bank. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/862141592835804882->

² Abulencia, C. 2021, “Why is education important and how does it affect one’s future?” Organization.

³ New Conquest is a group of seven administrative sub-districts added to the Portuguese conquest in the 18th Century

⁴ OFM - Order of Friars Minor - A religious Order started in the early 13th Century by St. Francis of Assisi

a vision statement “All may have life, and have it in abundance” having educational institutions in almost every taluka. In the words of Zeferino D’Souza “Education is the motor and cause for any progress, development, change and modernization”⁵

2. A Brief History

The “New Conquests” are a group of seven administrative sub-districts or municipalities added into Goa in the eighteenth century. Ponda comes under the New Conquest of the Portuguese, a backward area in terms of social, educational, cultural and moral spheres. The Portuguese did not take any interest on this hilly area away from the sea coast. It didn’t have much to offer the Portuguese as it was a forested area. At the time of liberation it had a few shops and houses around the bus stand area (Praca) the rest of it continue to remain as forested area without much development until the industrialization and mining took momentum. People were mostly ignorant and didn’t feel the need to send their children to school and also there were no schools in the vicinity.

3. Commitment and Services of the Order of Friars⁶ Minor

Late Fr. Paul Fernandes OFM was a visionary with a mission to transform the parish and the mission. The community of priests formed Trusts and Societies for education and literacy. The priests either walked or cycled house to house meeting people and the scantily dressed children. A boarding was started for the needy and boys from the Fabrica⁷ (a church organization) and the neighboring parishes⁸ of Kharwadem, Opa, Khandepar and Queriem. A small primary school was run in the priests’ residence and the number of children enrolling in school began to increase. Since the Friars lacked space and trained staff to run the school, they invited the sisters, Daughters of Mary Immaculate of Regina Pacis, Bombay, with an offer of a large land for trivial cost and a mission to educate the local children. Thus a school was established with the name St. Mary’s High School for the boys and girls of the locality. The sisters used to go to every nook and corner making door to door visits with pleas, beg parents, illiterate and economically poor, to send their children to school. The children were given mid-day meal in the form of porridge⁹ to encourage attendance

The Franciscans¹⁰ was the first religious order to arrive in Goa in 1517, the Church in memory of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi at Old Goa exists even today. It was later taken over by the

⁵ Zeferino D’Souza, 2018, “Montage D.S.E. Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”. Instituto Nossa Senhora de Piedade, D.B. Marg, Panjim, Goa 403 001.

⁶ Is a religious priest belonging to the Franciscan Order

⁷ Fabrica is a Church organization that takes care of the administration and financial matters of the Church appointed by the Archbishop.

⁸ The smallest administrative unit of the church under a priest

⁹ A mid-day meal provided consisting of oatmeal or a cereal boiled in milk

¹⁰ A religious order founded by St. Francis of Assisi in the early 13th Century

Jesuits. St. Anne's Church in Ponda was a substation of the Jesuits later taken over by the Diocese of Goa and in 1962, after the liberation of Goa, entrusted to the Franciscans¹¹. (*Custodio Dias says in his Article "Nostalgic Moments with Franciscans, written and published in the church magazine on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee, 2012*). Interviews with various people of the place, mostly above the age of 60-65 further confirms that Ponda was a jungle and the Leopards, foxes and jackals were seen moving around and howling in the villages at dusk and dawn. The people were basically very poor as no means of living existed except for a match box factory (closed down later) at Curti and newly commissioned CMM factory ¹²(closed down 50% now).

4. Growth and Transformation

The pace of development began in Ponda with the CMM and Match factory. Fr. Cornelius OFM used his influence to get the locals employed in these factories. The majority of the area had no electricity and the young boys were seen studying under the street lights. Fr. Paul, a frail, thin, white bearded, disciplined and cultured person who was fluent in Konkani, Hindi, Portuguese, English and other South Indian languages would take free tuition classes for the boarders and day scholars in the mornings and evenings. The boarding was a learning place of academics, prayers and an exposure to music, sports, dramatics and culinary skills. The friars also provided career guidance and financial assistance to the youth to pursue higher studies. The poverty and misery ended when Ponda became an industrial area with a number of factories and today everything happens at the wink of an eye and the click of a button.

On 10 November 1980 after necessary negotiations with due formalities the school building, the land and the management of the school administration was handed over to the Franciscan Hospitaller sisters, Bombay. The Franciscan Hospitaller Sisters play a vital role in the education of the young boys and girls, from near and far, leaving distinct marks in the lives of those who passed out through its portals. St. Mary's High School has made a history for Ponda and in the lives of hundreds of students who have turned out to be successful in different walks of life, in various parts of the world some of them are still a part of this Alma Matter as staff, parents or as close collaborators. Savio Dias along with his 4 siblings studied from K. G. to X in St. Mary's school recalls that the school gave an excellent service to the society and was the most preferred school by all, for its commitment and service.

St. Mary's School and its Contributions to Society

St. Mary's School situated now in the urban area of Ponda on a little mountain catered to the students from the neighboring villages like Usgao, Sonarbag, Candepar, Opa, Keri, Curti, Durbhat, Siroda, Borim, Dhavali, etc. Being the only Catholic institute most of the catholic students came to be educated from this prestigious institute without neglecting the local students of other faiths. There have always been a mixed set of staff from Christian and Hindu religious beliefs with the common goal to educate the young for the transformation of the society and students from Hindu, Muslim and Christian faith having a natural blend of faith. There had always been a great number of migrant population either from Kerala and Coorg of the educated parents who have come because

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¹² Cosme Matias Menezes Factory

of the Industries in Ponda and its neighborhood as well as the engineers of the PWD or electricity departments.

Eye witnesses life experiences

Due to the increasing number of industries and mines in and around Ponda a lot of mixed population came to settle in these areas. Down the ages a great number of migrant populations came to be students of St. Mary's School. Most of the people from South India and a few from the other parts of India were educated and held good posts in different industries. A diverse set of students with varied social, religious, economic, language backgrounds educated together forming a perfect unity in diversity. Helen Paul and her five siblings were one such family migrated from Bangalore with a Tamil speaking background at a time of war between India and Pakistan in 1970s. The children were educated at St. Mary's School. Helen recalls that the school was a place not only to learn academic but all human and spiritual values, helped with emotional and career guidance, to develop confidence, and above all to be joyful always. As soon as she completed her studies she was employed in the same school and she educated her children too through the same institute. The students of today are the citizens of tomorrow, they are the doctors, engineers, teachers, professionals, politicians, and the people in various services. So what we sow today we will reap tomorrow.

Mrs. Patricia Fernandes, an ex-student, a special teacher at Manovikas schools, recalls that the 13 years of initial studies have taught her endless lessons in life. First of all the school not only has provided education for sustenance of life but taught values and discipline that help her in her life and mission even today. But Patricia as a special teacher enjoys her job and is happy to help these children with special need either in academic disability or physical disability. Mrs. Catherine Fonseca, a primary teacher and an ex-parent of St. Mary's School has volumes to speak about the management through the 33 long years of association with different sisters. Though she had the qualification and opportunity to be a government High school teacher she chose to serve as a primary teacher in St Mary's School even against the wishes of some of the family members. Looking back she feels that it was the right choice she made then. As a teacher she enjoyed good cooperation of parents, management and colleagues and gave her best to the students' not only intellectually but also emotional and financial support to the needy.

Co-curricular activities and learning Experiences

Learning through doing was another important aspect of education. These were the light moments to enjoy and experience learning in depth. The various competitions like, debate, spelling bee, elocution, spot essay writing in different languages, drawing, singing, solo and group dance competitions, dramatics, musical orchestra, various camps and sports events gave opportunities to work in groups, share ideas, learn from each other, be sensitive to the needs and feelings of others, care and share talents and pull out the lazy to action.

Just as a day begins with the prayer invoking the blessing of the Almighty on the Institute, management, students, benefactors, the year – academic and calendar, also begins with special prayer services, Eucharistic celebrations, etc. with due preparations. Every new comer to the school, either staff or students is given an appropriate welcome. Similarly the farewells are also organized in a befitting manner to remember for life. The spacious ground gave ample opportunity to play and enjoy.

Success stories

Some of the back benchers, so called weaker students have excelled in life. Mr. Lobo, an IT engineer in a prestigious company in Verna today recalls that he was never an outstanding student in school. Being a son of an HR, his father would advise him to take up studies that would give him success and peace of mind. It is easier to manage machines than humans as the latter is very difficult to be satisfied or happy with anyone. Thus says Lobo that his father inspired him and today he is a successful and happy family man.

Mrs. Sibelia Dias along with her three other siblings were students of St. Mary's School and her mother was a primary teacher. All the 4 girls passed through the portals of St. Mary's School and the eldest of them all gave her life to the service of the Lord through the same Missionary Society of the FHIC. Today she holds the highest responsibility of this Congregation and resides at Lisbon, Portugal. Sr. Shirley recalls with nostalgia the experiences, participation in various activities of the school, the leadership role she played in the school cabinet, the guidance and encouragement received from parents, teachers, siblings and companions have helped her to reach these heights. Sibelia also is a teacher in High School and her kids get educated from the same institution with the children. There were also stories of the broken pieces that got them patched up and healed as they grew up like the Chinese broken clay pot made into a beautiful designer vase.

Cultural and Social life

The people of Goa enjoy parties and celebrations with music and dance. Fun and rightful enjoyment is part and parcel of life and culture so too the school annual days for the students and teachers. Those interested in dance will be chosen for dance, actors for dramatics and singers for singing. Some of them may be good at more than one act and some may not be good at anything, but if given a chance and training they might perform well.

Accompaniment and Counseling

Emotional support and counseling has become the need of the hour. Most of the students have become smarter than the parents, addiction to many social evils, unhealthy friendship, and competitions to become like the other or to become someone. The post Covid 19 times have become much more challenging than those days in the past. Most families today are single child, single parent (either due to death, divorce, and one partner working abroad). Many of the grown up 'single children' have decision making issues with regards to the choice of life partner, adjustments in family life, etc. These issues should be rightly guided and supported from the initial stages onwards for a healthy future. A trained counselor is a must in every school.

Mr. Lobo, the session in-charge of Putzmiester says, as an employer, he takes up group counseling for his employees. There is always a battle within the employee when one sees the higher employees earn a better salary and do a job with lesser difficulty and lesser risk (a white collared job). The money and time he spent on to learn and earn such a privileged position can be made to understand and resolve such complexities only through counseling and support on a win to win pattern. In every aspect of life to get the best out of another is the application of the best management tools – one's own approach. For this the school education plays a vital role as it might have not been taught but caught, moreover the experiences of life teach one certain life skills and lessons.

Experiences of the close collaborators:

The Administrative and Multitasking staffs are always the close collaborators of an institution as they know everything and deal with everything. They are the best to be taken care as well just as the tree needs sunlight and water for its sustenance, is the administrative multitasking staff for an institution that believes in order, cleanliness and discipline. In St. Mary's School most of the heads of school were not very confident in the local language. Therefore communication to the local village people at times requires Konkani, their mother tongue whereas in other city schools Hindi or English will be sufficient. In such cases the clerical staff always acted as translators between the Headmistress and the parents and all the same knew every issue of the school. Every communication, finance and other details went in and out through them. Looking at the records and the cleanliness of the school and its surroundings reveal the responsibility of this section. Mrs. Flavia and Susan the oldest and Clinton, a new comer and an ex-student has volumes to share, the experiences of being with different Heads of the school and the lessons they learnt. Even the neglect of one person can affect everyone and in the bargain the committed and hardworking have to make the sacrifice, even the sacrifice of family and children left to the care of someone else.

The Qualities of a Good teacher

Thraisa Monteiro, a wife, a mother of four kids, each with 4 different intellectual and behavioral natures, is a teacher too. Very soft spoken, down to earth, highly intellectual with innovative ideas, best in organization and novelty performance. She was given an appointment at the first instant on a temporary basis but the confirmation of the same took four long years due to lack of class room control. This proves that to be a teacher, knowledge and talents alone will not be enough but a good class room management is also needed. Being a daughter of an excellent teacher, having a number of siblings and relatives in the profession alone did not make her a strict teacher. However she was always liked by most of the students, specially the naughty ones. On every teachers day such teachers are given a special recognition by the naughty students. Many trials and experiments have gone before the final choice of teaching profession. She was led to it through a teacher and a friend of her mother.

Democracy at the Grassroots

Almost every catholic institution has a school cabinet to help in the management of discipline as well as to build leadership qualities in students from a young age. This school cabinet is known in different schools differently as board of honour, student council, school cabinet, etc. These elections are also conducted in different schools differently. Some of the schools have election campaign with symbols during recess and voting with secret ballot papers in election booths and the announcement of result, oath taking ceremony and a formal function. All these are done under supervision and amicably. Though such kind of strong foundations are laid at school level yet we witness lots of abuses and misbehaviors at a higher level as these same students go up into higher education. But it is always heartening to hear from others that the students of Christian educational institutions always stand out differently.

Don Bosco High School, Panjim

Don Bosco High School, Panjim had a very humble beginning with a small school from Primary to High School. But now the campus caters to a wide variety of academic and non-academics in the campus from K.G. to P.G. Once an undeveloped or developing area now has become the busiest and the most occupied and developed space. It is because of the presence and services of the

Salesians¹³. The Salesians are known for their service to the youth everywhere and all times after the example of their father and founder St. John Bosco. The school session runs exclusively for boys from its inception but the rest of all courses cater to everyone irrespective of gender, religious, economic, caste or class differences. The mornings and afternoons the whole area is bubbling with life and joy as the young lives enter and exit with the parents or through other modes of transport, making the place, a very busy place.

Varied Sports activities and athletics are in the blood of the Salesians; they take utmost care to provide apt training and to have the best infrastructure. Almost every Salesian school is spread in sufficient space with an open ground as well as indoor games. Through the oratory sports and music are taken care of during the evenings. The campus is open to run the night school for those working persons who wish to continue their studies with the help of teachers who assist them in the completion of SSC and HSSC studies, an aided study under the Goa Board of Education, Porvorim, Goa.

Mary Immaculate Girls High School (MIGHS) Panjim, Goa

The Chronicles of Mary Immaculate Girls High School reveals the humble beginning of the school with the Portuguese sisters, been invited to take care of the education of the girls in the Portuguese Goa, the first active women missionaries to enter Goa from Portugal with the blessings of the foundress herself. A congregation known with the guiding motto "Do good where there is good to be done" undertook a variety of ministries like care of the orphan children, sick and the elderly, educate the youth and minister to the spiritual-emotional needs of the people. The Portuguese Government tried all the means and ways to educate the girls in Goa but for certain reasons it didn't take momentum. Thus the Franciscan Hospitaller sisters were invited to Goa to educate the girls as well as to take care of the abandoned children and the sick. With a desire to cater to the pressing need of the hour, the sisters started their service to the society in a formal school with attached boarding for the needy children in Panjim under the Directorate of Education, Porvorim, Goa. They also rendered various services in the initial stages at Mercês, Chimbêl, Birondem and other places around. Thousands of students have crossed the portals of this esteemed institute and have achieved great heights on land, sea and air, locally and globally in various fields and levels. Being in the heart of the city now, the school lacks sufficient ground to play different games within the campus yet it has produced a variety of champions up to international level.

Pernem is one of the remotest and most backward Taluka of North Goa. Since 2003 the Sisters of the Charity of St. Anne whose origin is Spain, have their head office (Provincialate) in Andheri, Mumbai started a school from K.G. to X for the local population whose total strength is 156 with 89 students in the Secondary, 50 in the primary and 17 in K.G. section. They have 8 teachers in the secondary section, 4 in primary, 2 in K. G. and 3 non-teaching staff. The school receives government grant in aid only for the primary and the rest are managed privately by collecting minimum/ affordable fees from the parents. Most parents from the rural set up prefer to send their children to city schools that have better facilities. Easy transport facility available by way of Gomant Bal Rath school Bus service, from the Directorate of Social Welfare provided by the Government of Goa or the State run Kadamba transport corporation apart from the private public bus services.

¹³The Salesians are another religious congregation founded by St. John Bosco with special Charism to take care of the youth.

Salasian Sisters of Don Bosco, Caranzalem: Our Presence

Auxilium Convent High school, Caranzalem, established in 1970 is run by the Salesian sisters of Don Bosco to cater to the educational needs of the children of the surrounding area of Taleigao and Caranzalem. From a very small seed planted with sweat, sacrifice, dedication and commitment to uplift and educate the poor children of the area, today Auxilium is a full-fledged High school, government recognized with nearly 1100 students. Most of the children frequenting this school are from Taleigao, Cakra and Odxel whose parents are daily wage earners. The Management makes an option to cater to these poor children in keeping with the spirit and Charism of its Founders.

Going in search of the lost sheep, Auxilium has also opened doors for the drop-outs of the neighbouring schools. They motivate and encourage the youngsters, giving them a second chance to complete their basic education through National open Schooling. It gives joy and fulfilment to see these students successfully complete their study and happily join the main stream of society. Although, 90% of the students come from the economically backward class and mainly migrants, the Management together with some good and generous benefactors and well-wishers have always sought to give these children the best facilities needed to make their learning enjoyable.

Auxilium School, Benaolim, Goa was started in 1990, runs classes from K. G. to X with around 900 students. Initially, the centre began with typing and sewing classes for the village young girls. Simultaneously the Kindergarten was started with few children of the village. Today Auxilium School is sought after in that locality along with other apostolate like NIOS, Remedial classes, parish apostolate and family visits.

5. Methodology

In this paper a few sample schools have been taken into consideration with specific questions and interviews to collect a sizable amount of data. A case study was conducted on four clerical staff of St. Mary's school of which one is recently retired; another one will retire soon, a middle aged (alumni) and a recent one who is also an ex-student of the same school. A number of ex-students at various fields of work, teachers who were parents and their parents who were teachers of the institute were also interviewed. The school magazines and St. Anne's Church Magazine on the occasions of the Golden Jubilee were referred. The Chronicles of the schools were referred for accurate data and some Newspapers were also referred. Priests who worked in the church and a number of Heads of the schools were interviewed and data was collected.

6. Findings, Suggestions and recommendations

Having encountered personally, people working in different areas of education under some of the Christian institutions in Goa I came to understand that the Christian institutions give commendable services in the development of the Goan society through the mission of education.

- A good number of alumni prefer to send their children to these schools and to have some association or the other with their alma Mater.
- The services rendered to the needy with a great amount of sacrifice without expecting a reward, only to witness joy in seen the end result.
- Almost everyone who has passed through the portals have good memories to share without forgetting some of the bitter experiences of partiality or indifferences by some teachers.

It is recommended that some of the institutions should update themselves with active ex-students associations, regular family visits of students and staff – know your client (KYC) policy. It is also realized that the change in the Heads of schools provides opportunity for better learning for staff and students though at times there may be insignificant adjustment difficulties.

7. Conclusion

The western liberal and nationalistic ideas have reached India through the nineteenth century education and Christian social activities. The Christian contribution to Indian education has been magnificent and it paved the way to the eradication of all social evils in India. The Christian management institutions have given significant services to the Goan society down the ages through a variety of services. Each Congregation or order has a specific Charism and have started at a specific need of the world, ready to accommodate itself to the needs of the place and time. Most of the institutions today cater to the neglected and the poor, even the urban prestigious institutions at one time have almost sixty to seventy per cent of its beneficiaries from migrant population or the emotionally and economically needy who lack attention otherwise. It is also heartening to see that the ethical spirit of the Goan society is high with so much of emigration and migration.

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