

BIRTH AND GROWTH OF
SRI SHANMUGA HINDU LADIES' COLLEGE

1923-1942

This College, established in 1923, was celebrating 75th year of service to the young lasses of Trincomalee, imparting education in a strictly Hindu atmosphere. Most people of the present generations may not be aware of the birth and the growth of this institution through the years. It is with the intention of enlightening such people that we present here a history of the College and pertinent information about its founder, Mrs. Thangamah Shanmugampillai and her spouse, who together invested all their resources for the establishment of this college.

The early part of the 20th century was a period when the modern city life was unheard of, when life centered around villages and horse carriages were the sign of prosperity. It was a time when an English education and English culture were things sought after. However, Trincomalee, famous for its natural harbour and Koneswera temple produced many service oriented philanthropists who were keen on preserving the Tamil language and Tamil culture.

The founder of Sri Shanmuga Hindu Ladies' College was one such generous and concerned person. It is her private resources and personal endeavour which made the existence of this institution possible. Though born in a village and educated in a rural school, she was married to a wealthy groom from Trincomalee Town. Though not blessed with progeny, her sacrifice and forethought have made her the foster mother of thousands of girls in Trincomalee.

There were many obstacles in attracting students during the early days of the inception. St Mary's college conducted by Catholic nuns, had already earned an enviable reputation as an English Medium school with discipline as its secondary concern. Hence, most parents, even most Hindu parents, ignored the new school. A Small number of children, mostly from the poor families of Trincomalee, enrolled in this school. The founder had to obtain the services of a teacher from Jaffna and at times had to send out her horse carriage to collect the children and bring them to school.

Realising the value and need for an English medium education in a country ruled by the British Raj, she constructed 90' x 25' hall in 1926. This hall was declared open by a close friend of her husband, an eminent educator and the founder of Ramanathan College in Jaffna, Sir Ponnampalam Ramanathan. Miss. Bavani Narayanan, from India was appointed the administrator of the English division, Consequently, more parents who wanted an English education for their daughters but valued the Hindu culture and traditions began sending their children to this college.

In 1929, Miss. Nagamma Murugesu completed her teacher training at 18yrs of age and took over the administration of the Tamil division of the College. The dedicated and selfless service

of this lady for 41 years is a part and parcel of the growth and progress of this College. Affectionately called "Nagamma Akka", she contributed to the educational progress of many impoverished female students of Trincomalee. By her selfless service she earned the love and respect of our founder. While the Tamil section was under the administration of this hardworking lady continuously, the administration of the English division was changed once in three years as the English teacher administrators from India signed contracts only for a three year period of service. As a result of this the English division faced certain constraints.

1942-1960

In 1942, during the Second World War, Trincomalee was a major Army and Navy base. Hence, Trincomalee was bombed in this year causing the people to be displaced and take refuge in villages far away from the town. The college was reluctantly compelled to be closed and served as barracks for the armed personnel. When the situation improved, the school was re-opened in 1946 under Miss. S. Selvanayagi Nagaratnam, a native of Trincomalee. She will be remembered as Trincomalee's first female Ascetic, Rev. Sivananda Mathaji and the founder of Sivananda Thapovanam, an orphanage for girls.

During this period of history there were no Sinhala medium schools in Trincomalee. To cater to the needs of the Sinhala lasses in Trincomalee, a Sinhala Division was inaugurated at Sri Shanmuga Hindu Ladies' College. One Mrs. Silva from the south of Sri Lanka was she first Sinhala teacher here. Later she served as the Principal of the Sinhala M.V, Trincomalee.

This school which had two streams, English and Tamil, administrated separately was brought under a single administration in 1951. Nagamma akka who had served with dedication and selflessness for 22 years was the first Head mistress of the combined school.

A small hostel, three roomed with a tiled roof and a G. I. Sheets roofed Hall on vidyalayam street served to lodge girls from far away villages who studied here. Pandit Miss. Sinnathamby was the resident warden of the hostel. Mrs. Thangammah Shanmugampillai handed over the administration of the college to her close relative Mr. N. Krishnathan, District Judge, in 1953. She died in her 90th year with her beloved school reaching 30 years of Educational service having seen her dreams for the progress of her beloved institution being realized. This brought about many changes in the same year. The hostel was shifted to a land across the road, where the present Shanmuga Girl's Home is situated. Some members of the staffs were also found accommodation here.

Mrs. Mani Rahavachchiar, a film director, administrator from India, encouraged the fine arts during her tenure as Principal. 1966 can be called a milestone in the history of this College. For the first time, a native of Jaffna, Mrs. W. Thangarasa, became the first Ceylonese Principal

of the College. She was also very keen on improving our students' ability in arts and culture. Due to her efforts our students annexed the first place in the music and dance competitions conducted by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with UNESCO.

To fulfill the needs of students desiring science education, a LAB was constructed and quality science teachers from Jaffna were brought down, providing them lodging facilities. Thus, in 1960, Sri Shanmuga Vidyalayam was elevated to the position of a grade II school. Sri Shanmuga Vidyalayam was taken over at the end of this year along with other denominational schools by the Government. Many changes took place after the change of administration. The teachers' hostel became the Shanmuga Girls Home. In 1965, a home science LAB was opened in the school premises

1960-1997

1960 can be considered a fruitful year for the college. A native of Trincomalee and past pupil of the school and a teacher with 12 years of dedicated service, **Miss. R. Visvalingam** was appointed Principal of the college. The fact that the college progressed in every aspect of education during her tenure as principle cannot be denied. All her thoughts and efforts were centered on the future progress of the College. In this year, the Hall which was demolished by the cyclone was rebuilt and was declared open by Mr. Hettiarachchi, the Education Officer of Trincomalee.

In the exhibition conducted to celebrate the educational Diamond Jubilee in 1969, our school was awarded many prizes and began to be considered as one of the best schools in the island. By the inspiration of the parent teachers association, the tireless efforts of the Principal and eagerness of the students, HNCE classes were started in 1976, opening a new chapter in the history of the college. This division consisted of Science, Commerce and Arts streams. Not only girls from Trincomalee but from the outlying villages, too, sought and gained admission to the College to read for the HNCE.

In 1977, the college was blessed with great assistance from Hon. R. Sampanthan, M.P for Trincomalee. On a visit to the school, he observed the congestion prevailing in the school and provided additional accommodation to ease the situation while praising and appreciating of the good work done by the school authorities.

In 1978, for the first time in its history the school sent students to the arts faculty, which became an inspiration to other students to follow suit in the same year, a part-time vocational training course was started by the Education Ministry aimed at school leavers. They were

taught sewing, English, typing and other skills which was a boon to school dropouts, providing them an opportunity to make a living for themselves.

It was also in 1978 that financial assistance was received to construct an overhead tank and to purchase instruments for the college western band to be formed. The untiring efforts of the Parent Teacher Association and the timely assistance rendered by the Member of Parliament for Trincomalee resulted in an adjoining plot of land being requisitioned for the college. A two storeyed building was constructed in this new plot of land from funds allocated from the decentralized budget of the M.P for Trincomalee. Consequently, the congestion in the school was eased to a certain extent.

1979 was a happy year for the school. With an additional building constructed in this year, for the first time in the history of the school, 21 students including 3 for medicine gained admission to the University. From this year onwards, our school has been sending a good number of students to the different faculties of the Universities.

The perseverance of our staff, past pupils and well wishers resulted in the collection of sufficient funds from the generous people of Trincomalee to construct a two storeyed building to lodge 20 girls from the outlying villages who had gained admission to read for the G.C.E (A/L) examination. Thus, this hostel named in memory of the founder Mrs. Thangammah Shanmugampillai solved a long standing problem faced by the students.

1983 was a sad year for all Sri Lankans because of the commencement of the Ealam war but it was also a happy year for the alumni of the school. On the 30th of March in that year the completed two storeyed building and the hostel constructed to ledge out of town students were ceremoniously opened by Hon R.Sampanthar, M.P for Trincomalee. This hostel also served as a refuge for the students of our college who were adversely affected by the ethnic violence of 1983 and 1990.

1997-Now

The staff and students of our school were made to shed tears of blood in May, 1997 when its Principal Mrs. R.Thanapalasingam lost her life under tragic circumstances. A bomb thrown at late Mr.A. Thangathurai, M.P for Trincomalee, exploded killing her and many others assembled for a function at the entrance to the college.

It is pertinent to mention here that in compliance with Departmental instructions, English medium education commenced in 2004. At present Grades 6 and 7 have English medium classes. An Information Technology Education Centre was also opened providing instructions

to teachers and students in Computer programming and allied activities. A website www.trincoshanmuga.sch.lk was also inaugurated in the college with the hope that it will enable us to keep our past students and well wishers, domiciled in various countries of the world to obtain information about the activities and progress of their Alma Mater.

From the early days, Sri Shanmuga gave prominence to vocational training to its students. Embroidery, pottery, gardening, making paper flowers were some courses conducted even when Shanmuga Vidyalayam was a private school. It may be mentioned here that some of these students have used their training to earn a livelihood.

The present Principal, Mrs. Chandra Balasubramaniam, blessed with a sense of creativity, with the assistance of the efficient staff, the School Development Society and active Past Pupil's Association is guiding the present generation of students on the path to success in life.