

# CHURCH OF THE AMERICAN CEYLON MISSION



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## Youth Leadership/Ezhuvaal and Scholarship Program

Sri Lanka has a free public system of education which remains the primary means for social mobility in the country. However, over the last decades it has become clear that youth from poor families and communities face systemic challenges and barriers to succeeding through the educational system and this is particularly true for youth from historically marginalized and rural communities.

We have worked over the last several years to develop programs that provide such youth with the skills and capacities required to pursue higher education or vocational studies. The programs include extra academic support including resitting exams, English classes, and also life and leadership skills for youth. In particular, we have developed "Ezhuvaal" Young Women for Social Change program to help address the specific cultural barriers faced by too many young women in pursuing their ambitions and goals. We then seek to provide scholarships for students to go to university in Sri Lanka, or South India and Bangladesh, or vocational training according to their interests and abilities.

Ezhuvaal ("She Will Rise Up") is in its third year for young women from war-affected and marginalized communities in the North-East and Up-Country. This year in addition to the support of Goldsmiths College (London University) and Visions Global Empowerment, we have also had the support of Move92 ([move92.org](http://move92.org)). The program is led by well known feminist activists: Kamala Vasuki, Sarala Emmanuel and Ponni Arasu. The course, shaped by a feminist perspective, seeks to enable the participants to access tools to view their own lives and the world around them with the intention of creating a just and equal life and society for all. The participants also went through sustained English classes, computer skills, other physical fitness forms, art forms, etc. This year again, the program has had to cope with the disruptions caused by the pandemic as it was in 2020, and in 2019 by the Easter bombing.

Inspite of these challenges each year, we are delighted that now a total of 11 young women have been admitted to the Asian University for Women in Bangladesh. We are confident that this education will be transformative for the lives of these young women who are all first generation university students. They will be pursuing degrees in the fields of Environmental Sciences, Public Health, Bio Infomatics, Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Having been through the Ezhuvaal workshops, apart from their formal school education, they have identified and to some extent broken through barriers (gendered and others) within themselves and beyond to grow as individuals. We believe they have the tools to seek out and internalize that which any higher educational institutions or the world at large may offer them as opportunities to learn and grow.

## **I. STUDY AT THE ASIAN UNIVERSITY FOR WOMEN [www.asian-university.org](http://www.asian-university.org)**

AUW educates young women from all over Asia ranging from Yemen to China to develop women leaders in this region. Additionally, they have a distinctive commitment to recruiting and supporting women from economically and socially marginalized backgrounds and they provide up to two years of preparatory studies to help women who did not have the privilege of elite or English language education to be prepared to participate fully in their undergraduate programs. The undergraduate education is also modelled on the Liberal Arts College model and provides an interdisciplinary learning environment with a strong emphasis on developing critical thinking skills required to empower young women to play a leadership role in society.

## **II. STUDY IN SOUTH INDIA**

We regularly send students to Indian colleges such as Madras Christian College, Women's Christian College (Chennai), Stella Maris College (Chennai), American College (Madurai) and Lady Doak College (Madurai) in fields as diverse as: Political Science, History, Psychology, Visual Communication, Sociology and Psychology, and Social Work. All of these colleges provide partial scholarships for our students – waiving tuition and hostel charges - so that we only have to cover personal living expenses, learning materials, air fare and expenses for their school vacations.

All of these programs offer these students an opportunity to lay a strong foundation for their life and to build a career in which they cannot only support their families but also play a leadership role in their communities.