

Colonial Knowledge and Social Change in Malabar- 1792 -1857

Prabhakaran PM
Research Scholar
Principal, Kendriya Vidyalaya,
Port Trust Kochi, Kerala, INDIA.

Abstract: Education helps in the true manifestation of one's own capacities and capabilities and it is an indispensable factor for cultural life. Kerala, the God's own country, often hailed as the land of literacy had a firm foundation in education including female education. This paper seeks to understand the nature of colonial education and the nuances of education provided by it through the lens of curricular knowledge in social and cultural life. The British Indian education conceived in India as an act of securing and consolidating colonial power. By the introduction of the British Model modern education, they sidelined indigenous education which was marked by diversity. The major social function which colonial education fulfilled was to differentiate the superior culture derived its forms from the orientalist narrative of the essential difference between a superior West and an inferior East. This study tries to present some preliminary considerations on the impact of colonial education under East India Company in Malabar.

Key Words: *Patasala*(elementary school), *Ezhuthupalli* (school),*Kudipallikudam*(school), *Othupalli*, (school), *salai*, (school), *Ezuthachan* (teacher), *Asan* (teacher),*Mullaka*(teacher) *Vaidika*(Priest) *savarana* (upper caste) *Namboothiri* (Brhamins)*Mappilas* (Muslims of Malabar)

Introduction

From the eighteenth century onwards, Europeans had developed a scientific temperament and rational thinking in all walks of their lives. The Europeans began to manifest their power and hegemony through a gradual extension of 'officializing' procedures that established and extended their capacity in many areas in their lives. In India, British entered a new world that they tried to perceive and comprehend using their own forms of knowing and thinking, which they think scientific and rendering the socio-economic world of India into a series of 'facts.' As and when the administrative power stemmed from the efficient use of these 'facts' its collection lay at the foundation of the modern state based on new knowledge.

The introduction of Western ideas and values through English education had created influences in the intellectual, cultural and ideological spheres were deeper than those changes introduced in the political and administrative spheres. The western system of education became a reality in Kerala with the joint effort of the British government, Christian missionaries, native states, individuals and social organizations. Each of these institutions had their own preoccupations while introducing a new knowledge system through the language of

English and vernaculars. This paper is an attempt to present some preliminary considerations on the impact of colonial education in Malabar under East India Company.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is generally analytical and descriptive. All the data are critically analysed and presented in a scientific and objective way. The present work follows an accepted historical research methodology such as perusal of archival sources and textual criticism on secondary works and dissemination of final conclusion.

The Indigenous System of Education

Though Kerala had developed indigenous education before the arrival of British, there were no formal educational institutions other than village school known as 'Ezhuthupallis', or 'patasala' and an 'Ezuthachan' or 'Asan', as single teacher to teach all the children belonging to different age groups in same class.¹ This practice didn't have a scientific approach as it could not provide the most minimal of mental, moral or intellectual development. Educational system in the pre-colonial Kerala centered on the Brahmanic-sanskritic traditions, was the monopoly of the *Nambothiries* and it was within the reach of only the privileged sections of the society.² Brahmins being placed as ritual authority and temple managers, education was concentrated on the study of Vedic and other religious and puranic texts.³ There were temple centered institutions called *Salais* for Vedic cum material learning accessible only to the *Namboothiries*⁴. Apart from this, *Vedapatasalas* and *Sabhamutts* organized at the household level meant for the education of Brahmins.⁵

At the end of this course the learner was expected to secure a thorough grounding in Sanskrit along with working knowledge in Malayalam, the emphasis was on reading rather than writing. This promised Brahmins a livelihood as a *vaidika*. It has been thus concluded that the functions of literacy among Brahmins were: to conserve custom, to organise and sanction the feudal Kingdom, religious and philosophical exchange of ideas and to provide artistic entertainment to the ruling caste.⁶ The local ruling class *Naduvzhis* and other *savarna* Temple castes also got almost the same type of education.⁷ The traditional *patasalas* were run by individual initiative with no aid from the state.⁸

The Nayers who constituted the lesser mobility, village headmen, Military retainers and clerks took education nearby *Ezhuthupalli*. Apart from the elementary education, the Nayar caste mainly concentrated on vocational learning such as martial arts, wrestling, accounting and medicine. Performing arts were also formed part of vocational education. An important feature of this education was that, unlike Brahmins, Nayar caste learning was mostly in Malayalam. The retelling of Sanskrit text into Malayalam and the availability of many Sciences related to different vocations such as astrology, hora, Vastu etc in Malayalam language.⁹

The lower castes learned in *kutipallikutams* which was modeled after *Ezhuthupallis*. The hereditary teachers of these schools hailed from the caste of *Kutipatters* and *Kalarippanikkars*, both claimed descent from the

so called degraded sections of Tamil Brahmins.¹⁰ They had rudimentary knowledge in Sanskrit astrology and medicine. They placed emphasis on studying in Malayalam and Tamil instead of Sanskrit. A larger section of the people i.e. the lowest castes, who were under the servitude of upper castes and did agricultural and menial jobs, scarcely acquired any literate skills. Being mere slaves to work at the will of their masters, castes like *Parayas*, *cherumas*, etc were denied formal education in pre- colonial Kerala.

Other communities like Christians had not developed their own education system. They pursued the same type of education in traditional institution such as *Ezhuttupallis* and *Kudippallikutams*. The fact that first Mappila Muslims developed their own educational system; boys had their education in *Othupallis*, one teacher schools.¹¹ The teacher was called *Mullakka* a localized form of the Persian *Mulla*. Mappila education provided religious knowledge through Arabic medium.¹² Even though Arabic-Malayalam has grown as language of Mappilas by the beginning of 17th century evidence lacks to show that Arabic Malayalam text were included in the curriculum.

Though female education was not very popular, women of the upper caste, particularly Nairs got some traditional type of education. Because of early marriage and social custom very few girls remained in school to the end of the course. Indigenous education has been based on rote learning; and even in the second half of the nineteenth century, books and papers were not used in most of these schools.¹³ Children wrote on sand, rice grains or when they better at writing, on palm leaves. These traditional schools functioned as pre-primary schools even in the beginning of twentieth century.

Since the majority population of the society didn't get education because of the caste based norms, there was a total exclusion of depressed castes from all traditional educational institutions and this educational backwardness increased the degradation of these castes. Education was a monopoly of the upper castes and it was restricted to lower castes in order to protect their interests. By denying education to the lower class, they could easily suppress them and exploit their services for the benefit of upper castes. They also believed that education of lower castes would disturb the caste structure in which they enjoyed supremacy.

Colonial knowledge and active intervention of British

Malabar region confronted colonialism in the sphere of education with the beginning of missionary activities. The traditional system of learning was disrupted and dislodged in the colonial period and supplanted by a new system of education. The Christian missionaries did the spade work in the field of modern education and later by the state. The intention of missionary education was to break the chains of caste-slavery with the support of colonial government; later the colonial education policy also initiated the process of social change through education. In 1813, the British Parliament permitted European missionaries to enter the country under the new system of licensing.¹⁴ This eventually threw the entire subcontinent open to missionary activity. It was during the British hegemony that the Christian values directly opposed the caste-ridden society of Kerala. The Basel Evangelical Mission assumed the leading role in the spread of English education with the establishment of Schools at Tellicherry (1817) and at Barnasseri near Kannur, Chalat, Chowwa and Mulil.¹⁵

One of the main social activities of the missionaries in north Malabar was the founding of schools for the poor and the children of the oppressed castes, the *Cherumas*, *Pulayas* and *Ezhavas*, also encouraged the education of girls.¹⁶ Missionaries were fully aware of the fact that educational work was a necessary pre-requisite to their religious work. The main motive of the missionaries was to get access to the indigenous society through modern education and to propagate new cultural values which would help them in conversion of people to Christianity. The Christian Missionaries had an anti-caste ideology and it attracted lower caste people like *Tiyas* to its educational institutions. However, Christian missionary activities were quite limited; the growth of western education was much more delayed in Malabar, compared to other region of Kerala.

In the beginning, the English East India Company as the direct rulers of Malabar had no educational policy or programme of their own. The Company did not take the responsibility to impart mass education and even neglected the town centers like Tellicherry, Cannanore, Calicut and Palghat. The earliest efforts to spread modern education in Malabar had been a part of district administration and vernacular schools were established with the avowed object of training young men to state service as writes and accountant.¹⁷ The instruction given to the students of these schools was confined to reading and writing Malayalam and an acquaintance with simple accounts.

In the light of East India Company's Charter Act of 1813, on 15 September 1826, three *Tahsildari* Schools were established in the towns of Tellicherry, Calicut and Palghat.¹⁸ The teachers attached to these *Tahsildari* schools were selected by *Tahsildars* and *Munsifs*. By 1829 Company had decided to make the English language of communication throughout the country. The District Collector played an important role in the instruction of English education through Collector Schools and *Tahsildari* Schools.¹⁹ In 1835 it was resolved to abolish the *Tahsil* and Collector schools and entrust the affairs of education to a new Board to be designed by the Committee of Native Education.²⁰ There were frequent changes in the policy and personnel in the field of education in Madras Presidency from 1836 to 1854. In 1836, the Board of Public Instruction was reconstituted into a Committee of Native Education which was replaced in 1841 by the University Board. English medium Provincial Schools were established in chief towns of Madras Presidency that included Cumbaconum, Bellary, Rajamudry and Calicut.²¹ This shows that government took more responsibilities in education during the second half of 19th century, still mass education was neglected.

The Wood's Despatch of 1854 has suggested the constitution of a separate department of education, the institution of universities at Presidency towns. Along with Bombay and Calcutta, the southern region of the country was exposed to higher education with the establishment of the Madras University. Subsequently, the middle class people from Malabar were attracted to Madras to take higher education. On the basis of the recommendations of the University Board, Calicut Provincial School was started on 1 November 1854.²² It provided education up to the standard of the First Arts of the Madras University. The course of study included instruction in the English language, Geography, Elementary English, Indian arithmetic, Euclid, Algebra,

Trigonometry etc.²³ In the vernacular department, the instruction was confined to a grammatical study of the Malayalam language and translation from and to in English.

Following the *Woods Despatch*, as a part of the decision of opening government schools and aiding private schools in different parts of the country, the provincial government of Madras decided to open a few vernacular schools in Malabar. A Government Anglo Vernacular School was established at Calicut in 1855.²⁴ The Government introduced a scheme of bringing schools under the inspection and control of the government through the system of grant-in-aid. Grant in Aid rules was published to encourage private agencies in the field of education in 1855. Herman Gundert was appointed as the first inspector of schools of Malabar in 1857.²⁵ As per the Madras Provincial Report of 1871, the education status of Malabar was, Primary School 145 (only in private sector), Middle School 38 (35 in private sector), High School total 3 (Private Sector,2) and one colleges in Govt Sector.²⁶ The data indicate that the progress in the field of education, especially in the higher education sector was very slow. This shows that British government was not interested in the progress of mass education or not willing to take the responsibility of mass education in Malabar. Further, the middle schools and high schools in the government sector were not sufficient to meet the growing educational needs of the society.

Impact of Colonial Education

The British education focused on three important aspects: the ideological base of colonial education, agencies and social groups who participated in the process of knowledge dissemination and the formation of a new middle class group for different functions of colonial government in Malabar. It clearly proves that the British had a clear agenda while introducing a new knowledge system through the language of English. Colonial educational policies have had a far-reaching negative and positive effect on traditional educational practices and social system are as follows. Firstly, colonial powers actively reshaped the linguistic makeup of the region and implemented educational systems that were clearly geared to suit their own needs: who would act as interpreters between the Government and the mass. The British were mainly interested in instilling notions of European morality in their colonial subjects and at forming an easily available and cheap labour resource for their economic endeavors.

Secondly, during the formative period itself British had imposed English language and in the process rode roughshod over the indigenous languages. The colonial processes worked to undermine the language traditions that served as the roots of education for indigenous communities of the region. Because languages embody cultural knowledge and are integral to community identities, shifting to colonial language, British used English language as a powerful form of ontological and epistemological domination over the people of the region. This indicates that language policy was always tied in some way to Britain's political and economic interests in the region. Thirdly, little efforts were made to expand the education system to cover all subjects and to open up all levels of education to all pupils because skilled positions were generally reserved for Europeans.

Fourthly, the introduction of modern education was not uniform among the various sections of Malabar society. In the initial phase of the British rule, some of the communities like Mappilas and aboriginal groups of hilly areas and the depressed class were neglected. The government was fully aware of the mass illiteracy of

Mappila population and saw the need for making them literate and there by prevent the occurrence of *Mappila* outbreaks in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Due to the religious taboos, children of Muslim community were generally sent to Arabic schools attached to Mosques, instead of western type of educational institutions. Hence, the British forced to take some formative steps to improve the educational status of the *Mappilas*. British administration tried to implement Hunter's suggestions of providing grants in aid to Muslim schools in the region.²⁷ Further, steps were taken on this direction by giving training to *Mappila* religious instructors and also starting schools in *Mappila* areas in later period. But much progress was not achieved, due to the aversion of *Mappila* population towards the western education.

Fifthly, after initial apathy British came in the forefront of educational activities and tried to spread western education, but only a tiny fraction of population came into direct contact with the colonial practices in the region. There was no drastic change in the existing social setup and the social relations even during the mid of the 19th century. It is fact that Malabar was a neglected part of Madras presidency where the British had spent very little resources beyond the requirement of law and order.²⁸ Further, their educational policy was not in favour of structural transformation of the society through industrial development and popular education.²⁹ Though the policy had helped to increase literacy rates and popularize village schools in the place of *Ezhuthupallis*, the policy did not help to increase educational facilities at the secondary or higher levels or provide professional type of education.

However, there was no doubt that new education boarded the horizon of knowledge. British rule was largely responsible for the introduction and diffusion of a western style of education in Malabar, which penetrated into and transformed all the communities. Caste-wise, the Nambudiri *Brahmins* were late in receiving the benefits of modern education; whereas the *Nairs* and other intermediary castes took the lead. Among the depressed classes, the *Tiyas* took the lead in education.³⁰ But the condition of the depressed classes like *Pulayas*, *Parayas* and *Nayadies* was pitiable. Even the missionaries failed to enroll them in the schools partly because of the opposition of the higher ups in the society and partly because of the pitiable backwardness of these sections.

The chief hindrance in the way of their education is ignorance that did not allow them to evaluate themselves out of their position of serfs.³¹ Even though, the educational achievement of the depressed classes was marginal when compared to other sections of the Hindu Community, the spread of English education brought new ideas and institutions in the society. This was accelerated by the socio-economic changes that took place during the 19th century. Gradually, the *Tiyas* and other oppressed castes also realized the relevance of modern education in their life. The British Government and the Christian Missionaries, who spread that equality was their supreme priority, supported them.³² Thus it is clear that the gradual growth of co-education contributed immensely to the growth of common public space.

Conclusion

The political, administrative and economic policies of British government in India are explained to be consequence of capitalistic economic development took place in Britain. Educational policies and practices of colonial India always derived

its forms from the orientalist narrative of the essential difference between a superior West and an inferior East. The suggestion of Wood's Despatch (1854) to make education of the mass a responsibility of the government was no less connected with this development. But they realized that mass education as suggested by Wood's Despatch would not be possible through the medium of English.

Hence, they took recourse to vernacular languages to some extent, so as to use it as a medium of colonial ideological expansion. British taught English as the first language and vernacular as the second language, but large curricular space was provided for English also shows the colonial bend of mind. The intention of the colonial administrators of the need for cultivating a vernacular reading culture was not born out of their love for vernaculars including Malayalam. But it was out of colonial interest of using vernaculars for their ideological innovation. It is fact that Malayalam literature began to develop modern trends after its contacts with the colonial education is indicative of the colonial success. The intervention of colonialism through epistemological violence on the one hand and the pragmatic agency of education on the other imposed English and normalized the standard Malayalam over the people of Malabar. Further, it is argued that even when the colonial discourse of its pedagogical elaborations aimed to individual subjects, its benefits were appropriated not by all 'individuals' but at best by representatives drawn from all 'communities'.

Thus western education hastened the social transformation of Malabar; the important contribution of colonial education is that, it offered education to all people of the society irrespective of caste distinctions. In earlier periods caste decided one's education and only higher castes were enjoyed the fruit of education. The British Government gave employment mainly to the educated people, this attracted more people to good jobs. Here deserves special mention to the role of Christian missionaries and other private sectors in the spread of modern education. However, the colonial administration created a state sponsored western educational system to develop capitalist consumer habits. There is a shift to the age old to the modern society, which can be noticed in every sphere of life and society. But the traditional literature, art, architecture, music etc. are superior to any culture and it could not change by any colonial force.

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