

Educational Progress In Travancore: Review On The Role Of Travancore Royal Family In Higher Education

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“Education is the basic tool for the development of consciousness and the reconstitution of society” -Mahatma Gandhi.

In Kerala formal and higher education started much earlier than rest of the Indian states. Educational initiatives made the state the most literate one and placed it as well ahead in gender and spatial equity. During the initial phase of educational expansion, education got its prominence for its intrinsic worthiness and played the role of enlightenment and empowerment. Kerala has occupied a prominent place on the educational map of the country from its ancient time. Though there is no clear picture of the educational system that prevailed in the early centuries of the Christian Era, the Tamil works of the Sangam age enable us to get interesting glimpses of the educational scene in *Tamilakam* including the present Kerala¹. The standards of literacy and education seem to have been high. The universal education was the main feature of sangam period. But the post sangam age witnessed the emergence of Brahmin domination and it spoiled the egalitarian nature of education in Kerala².

In ancient and medieval period educational institutions attached to the temples were known as Salais, they were located in southern Kerala mainly in Travancore region and Sabha mutts they were located in northern and central Kerala. Among these kanthallur salai one of the famous salais located in Travancore. It shows the role of the state in education sector. The village schools called Ezhuthupallis were also established to impart education to the non-Brahmin youth. The Kalari was an indigenous institution peculiar to Travancore they acted as the military training centers³. So it reveals the ancient and medieval concept of education was rich.

British colonial rule had laid transformation in the pre-colonial Travancore society. Britishers used several strategies as the tool of transformation, including education, technology, economy and administrative tools.⁴ The introduction of western education acted as a catalytic agent. It also had a profound role in the life of Travancore people.⁵ The system of education in Travancore on modern lines through the agency of public schools was introduced by European missionaries. The London Missionary Society or L.M.S. was the first Protestant community which sent missionaries to Travancore and the first L.M.S. missionary to reach Travancore was Rev. William Tobias Ringletaube in 1806⁶. They opened the first English school of Trivandrum at Mylady in South Travancore in 1809. The seeds of Protestant Christianity sown by the L.M.S. fell on a soil made extremely fertile through the decay of traditional institutions. In course of time the seeds of education sowed by Ringletaube grew in bulk and it gives shade and shelter to the unprivileged sections of society. Ringletaube was followed by Rev. Charles Mead, who was an educator, builder, economist and social reformer. He started a commercial school in Nagarcoil in 1820, where printing, book binding, leather making, paper making, weaving, silk worm rearing etc. were taught. He also started a bazaar school, an industrial school, and a printing press.

The interest shown by successive maharajas of Travancore in educating their subjects was a remarkable achievement in the field of educational sector.⁷ A new era of progress in the realm of female education started with the arrival of Charles Mead. Girl's Schools were established at Nedumangad, Parassala, Marthandam, Kuzhithurai, Kanjirapuram, Tittuvilai, Erenipuram, Santhipuram and Jamestown.

Johanna Mead launched the most courageous plan of offering education to girls in Travancore and started the first girl's boarding school of Travancore at Nagarcoil in 1819. Stitching, weaving, embroidery etc. were taught there. All the teachers were women. This is the first vocational school for girls in Travancore.

The missionaries conducted the female education programme at three levels viz., Primary, Secondary and Teacher education. The educational institutions of the L.M.S. included Seminaries, Boarding schools, Anglo- Vernacular Day schools, Village schools and Night Schools.

The educational system was also safe in the hands of the royal family. Travancore was ruled by several brilliant sovereigns include men and women, and they contributed much to the prosperity of the country. Under their powerful administration the state took keen interest in the growth of English education in the 19th and 20th centuries by extending toleration to those who were engaged in that field and also by implementing reforms from time to time for the uniformity and efficiency in the course of instruction. The rulers of Travancore gave opportunities to Christian Missionaries to start English Schools and took formative steps in higher education. Travancore had always been in the forefront of other states in education. The government even provided the students with scholarships for attracting more students to English schools.⁸ Christian missionaries introduced scientific, secular and rational education in Travancore state.⁹

The second half of the 19th century laid strong foundations in the field of education and it leading to the massive educational activities in Travancore. During this period the direct involvement of the government in the educational sector through educational reforms and the policies were more increased than in early periods. During this period Educational development in Kerala entered its modern phase. The political social and economic conditions were also favorable to such a change.

Early educational initiatives in Travancore show the interrelationship between the political decisions and educational activities. The direct initiative of the state in the field of education began in 1817 when *Rani Gowri Parvati Bai* (1815–1829) with the assistance of Diwan Col. Munroe introduced free and compulsory education in Travancore under state control¹⁰. This was followed by the establishment of many Govt. vernacular schools for the education of the children and guardian of Children in the age group 5-10 was enjoined under law to send them to the schools. The foundation of English education was firmly laid in all areas of Travancore. In due course many colleges were started both by the Government and private agencies in different parts of the state to meet the growing demands of general as well as professional education. During the Rani's rule, missionaries from overseas entered the scene in a significant way. Generous help in land, money and material was made

available to them to start institutions of learning throughout the kingdom, with greater concentration in places like Nagercoil, Alappuzha, and Kottayam etc.

Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma shows a great attention to formal education and western education. His period witnessed the Spread of English education on a large scale. He visited the Nagercoil Seminary of the L.M.S and invited John Roberts, the Head Master of the Seminary, to start an English School at Trivandrum. It later came to be known as 'Raja's Free School'¹¹. This school developed into a college and V.Nagam Aiya, the historian, civil servant and chronicler of Travancore, was the first graduate from this college.

In 1835 Swathi Thirunal established five more such schools in Thuckalay, Alappuzha, Kayamkulam, Paravoor and Chirayinkeezhu. Storing and preserving ancient manuscripts were taken up and a Granthappura was made effectively operational. The Thiruvananthapuram observatory was set up by him in 1836. It possessed the most sophisticated equipment available in the West at that time.

During *Uthrom Thirunal Marthanda Varma's* reign (1846-60) students who passed with high grades were offered jobs in government service. The Maharaja would personally attend the examinations of the students and encourage them in many ways. Deeply interested in and knowledgeable about Western medicine, popularity was generated by him in its theory and practical application. The skeleton in ivory representing a human body was specially made to enable him to study about it. Today it is an exhibit in the Natural History Museum in the Thiruvananthapuram zoo complex.

During the time of Ayilliam Tirunal (1860–1880) Travancore government entered significantly into the field of education and Madhavarao, the Diwan gave shape to a fairly ambitious education policy in Travancore. Government setting up a separate fund for the educational activities is noticed for the first time during his administration. Every year a sum of Rs. 20000 was appropriated towards the establishment of vernacular schools in every district on a sound basis¹². He also envisaged a comprehensive plan for educational development. Some of its major objectives were

- Establishment of government schools including a central vernacular school at the capital
- Establishment of a school in each Taluk of the state
- A normal school for the training of teachers
- Encouraging private agencies to start schools through liberal grant-in-aid
- Upgrading and integrating the indigenous schools into the formal system
- The establishment of a Text Book committee to translate and write books of all kinds.

A grant-in-aid system was introduced which was greatly helpful in spreading elementary education. Special attention was bestowed on girls' education leading to the setting up of schools like the Zanana Mission Girls' School. In 1847 a Law class was opened to prepare candidates for the B.L. Degree examination. During the reign Raja's School was raised to the status of a college affiliated to the University of Madras.

During the reign of Maharaja Moolam Thirunal (1885–1924), Schools were opened all over the state and categorized, with education starting at primary level and going on to specialized colleges. Free primary education was granted to backward classes. Another step of great consequence was the introduction of free education for the fishing community. During his time Victoria Medical School with an attached hospital for women was put up in Kollam. A 'Normal School' for girls was experimentally started in 1887-88. The Government Industrial School was thoroughly reorganized, also set up of a Reformatory School for juvenile offenders. The Sanskrit College, Ayurveda College, Maharaja's College for women, Law College, Arts College, an Agricultural Demonstration farm and school, Survey School etc. were established.

Many educational rules were passed and salary scales of those in the education department were revised. A number of technical scholarships for studies in European countries were instituted and technical education encouraged. With the sanction of a Chair in History and one in Physics in the Maharaja's College, this institution was raised to nearly the highest level among the educational institutions of the Presidency.

During *Pooradam Thirunal Rani Setu Lakshmi Bayi (1924-1931)* Education continued the upward trend. This period witnessed sizable increase particularly in primary schools where a double shift system was made available, while Vernacular schools experienced considerable increase in strength. Full- fledged schools including girls' schools sprang up in many parts like Nagercoil, Alappuzha etc. A new college hostel was opened giving admission to all students irrespective of caste or creed. As a further concession, poor and deserving pupils from those oppressed classes and communities were exempted from paying examination fees on an experimental basis for five years. The provision of noonday meals to poor pupils staying far away from their homes was also sanctioned. This scheme involved generous contribution from the public too. The present site of the Maharaja's college for Women was made available by the Regent to this college which was founded during the reign of Sree Moolam Thirunal and more subjects were added. The teachers' salaries were enhanced from time to time and grants extended to private schools. Medical inspection of college students was yet another positive step. 22.02% of the total exchequer of the state was earmarked for education.

Sree Chithira Thirunal Bala Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore was the last in the line of Rulers of the princely State of Travancore. The unique blend of the ancient and modern streams of education influenced the educational policy which raja was followed during his reign.

The most important feature of the educational policy of king was the recognition of the need for giving a vocational orientation to education. A scheme of compulsory primary education in the age group of five and eleven was inaugurated in the State on 11th February, 1946. All encouragement was provided to private agencies, particularly those belonging to minority communities, to participate in the State's effort to eradicate illiteracy. The Government realizing the severe handicaps of the down trodden sections of the people announced full fee concessions, mid-day meals and even free clothes to the children. Hostels were also set up for them.

The most memorable achievement of His Highness was the founding of the University of Travancore. The need for a separate Travancore University had been felt for long, so that Travancore could have complete freedom in shaping its

educational policy and priorities. Two Committees were appointed to enquire into the question of establishing a separate University, in 1919 & 1924. After considering their recommendations, on 1st November 1937, the Government issued the University Act. Special emphasis was given to vocational education to meet the requirements of modern conditions. The administration of the Government Colleges and the control of all the Private Colleges in the State were transferred to the University.

Institutions like the Public Library and the School of Arts were also placed under the University. The Institute of Textile Technology, an Engineering College and a Central Research Institute to carry on research in Pure and Applied Sciences, especially in subjects which have a direct bearing on the agricultural and industrial needs of the State were also started. A Department of Marine Biology was another significant addition. The inauguration of the Faculty of Oriental Studies and Fine Arts and the establishment of an Oriental Manuscript Library bore eloquent testimony to the deep and abiding interest taken by His Highness in the encouragement of studies relating to our ancient cultural heritage. The expenses of the University were to be met fully by the Government.

CONCLUSION

Education and its expansions are of much significance in human-rights perspective. This was fully accepted in theory and practical application by the Maharajas of Travancore. Kerala emerged as the first state in India with a claim to cent percent literacy standing on the foundation laid by the rulers of Travancore. The contributions of rulers of Travancore are of great importance in the reorganization of our present system of education.

Without their help and support the western education and the western ideologies couldn't lay foundation in Kerala soil. The main intension behind the establishment of western education was the spread of Christianity and the creation of a social group who always supported the Europeans. But the rulers had an intension of modernization of the state through the eradication of rigid practices prevailed in society during that period like illiteracy untouchability etc. and they were educated and had awareness about the role of education in modernization of the state. The

modern education thus became an important instrument which helped the ignorant society to think independently.¹³

Notes and References

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- 10 Sreedhara Menon, A., *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, p.299.
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