

The Dynamics of Relationship between Colonial Modernity and Education in Kerala

Dr. Rekha P

Assistant Professor, P G and Research Department of History, NSS Hindu College, Changanacherry, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

The foundation of modern education was laid down in Kerala as part of the colonial discourse. It is necessary to understand the dynamics of relationship between education and colonialism. The development of education under colonial rule was to legitimize their domination and to serve their own economic needs.ⁱ Education in Kerala was designed by the colonial plans. Economic, political and cultural control over the subjected society was essential for the survival of colonial rule and education was used to achieve this goal. Attempts were made to develop, through education, a new set of values and justification of the colonial rule. As a result, education of Kerala loses its traditional and independent identity and becomes subordinate to political power.ⁱⁱ

KEYWORDS: *modernity, colonialism, social transformation, malayali identity*

INTRODUCTION

During the colonial rule, Kerala society experienced a social transformation. Western education, semi-capitalist economy, changes in land ownership patterns, creation of modern legal institutions etc. introduced a change in the thoughts of the peopleⁱⁱⁱ.

As an inevitable response to the challenges put up by colonial domination, there arose a deep self-contemplation into the cultural roots in the indigenous psyche, which eventually led to a so called intellectual and cultural regeneration or the social renaissance^{iv}. This social awakening helped the people to throw away the fetters of caste and religion which had constituted the basic units in Kerala during the pre-colonial period.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, when the administrative policy of the colonial state shifted from political subjection to political participation, representative institutions began to be encouraged in the body politic. This process of democratization created a public space based on the principle of civil rights. And to a certain extent this situation regulated the colonial rule of law^v. Even though severely curtailed in its scope of application and effectiveness,

How to cite this paper: Dr. Rekha P "The Dynamics of Relationship between Colonial Modernity and Education in Kerala" Published in International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd), ISSN: 2456-6470, Volume-7 | Issue-5, October 2023, pp.22-27, URL: www.ijtsrd.com/papers/ijtsrd59850.pdf



Copyright © 2023 by author (s) and International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development Journal. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



the new changes provided an opportunity to the Indians for political participation for the first time in their history. During this phase of democratization, various social groups strove to make their presence felt at all levels of administration and thereby wield more social power and prestige. Thus, the new momentum of social reform and revitalization campaigns enabled different caste groups to neglect subtle differences among themselves and forge wider ties of integration^{vi}.

The renaissance in Kerala was not an accidental phenomenon. It developed gradually through different movements of reforms and changes. It is from the colonial rule that Kerala had begun its process of transformation to modernity^{vii}.

Before the advent of the British in Kerala, the region was politically scattered, socially descending and economically stagnant. The primary motive of colonial domination was economic exploitation. The colonial regime had set in degenerative and regenerative social forces. According to Heera Sing, the interaction between non-European, Pre-colonial, Pre-capitalist structures and European colonial

capitalism worked dual engagement. That is a process of negotiation between the two, marked by accommodation and compromise^{viii}. This effected in Kerala a fundamental transformation during the colonial period.

The economic, political and social intervention of the colonial power did radically alter the caste based social structure of Kerala.

CHANGES IN POLITY, SOCEITY AND ECONOMY

Though the Malabar district of Madras presidency, Cochin and Travancore remained administratively separate from one another in the colonial period, the general structure of society and religion did not seem to have any keen distinction.^{ix} The princely states of Travancore and Cochin too adopted the British Indian systems of administration, administrative ideals and methods. The British Indian systems of Civil and Criminal procedure codes came into force in Kerala during this period.

The real beneficiaries of colonial education were a select few who had a specific role assigned by the colonial rulers in the continuation of the colonial domination. Colonial education was meant for better control of the colonial country rather than its independent development.^x

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 ground of modern education. In 1813 the British Parliament permitted European missionaries to enter the country under the new system of licensing. This finally threw the entire subcontinent open to missionary activity. It was during the British hegemony that the Protestant Christian principles directly opposed the caste-ridden society in Kerala. The principle of equality and a concern for others in the Christian gospel contradicted the Hindu idea of inequality of man implicit in caste. The objective of the Protestant missionary organizations was to evangelize the people. As part of that, they carried on educational and social reform initiatives.^{xi}

Samuel Mateer, the 19th century missionary writes:

Let (the educational class of Travancore) take a decided stand against the social evils of caste. Let them make an attempt in real earnest to raise the masses by primary education and by a new form and resolute measures against the cruel oppression of the poor and helpless; and a solid and general advance in national prosperity, power and happiness will speedily be evident to the world.^{xii}

It was the missionaries who first began to promote female education in Kerala. In their schools teaching of Christian theology was a prominent subject. However along with the Christian teachings they also gave importance for the teaching of the subjects like geography, arithmetic etc. Instruction in missionary schools was in the vernacular, i.e., in Tamil and Malayalam. Missionary activities were also linked with the establishment of dispensaries and hospitals though their basic object was to convert people to Christianity. In the case of establishing modern schools it was the missionaries who started that venture first and later the state too began to establish modern schools.^{xiii} One of the advantages of modern education was that it worked as an instrument in breaking the chains of caste system in Kerala during the colonial age. Similarly, the introduction of modern education was a powerful factor of social mobility to the lower caste groups.^{xiv}

The modern western education caused a change in traditional informal learning. That is the westerners introduced formal and methodical teaching in the schools. They also made prescribed syllabus for the students. In addition to these novelties, they supplied printed books and writing materials. Subjects like physics, chemistry and history taught in missionary schools had tremendous influence on the indigenous thought and challenged the traditional view. These new things which were not known to the indigenous society spread informally among them and in the surrounding areas of the schools. Thus, education proved to be a dynamic agent of social change for low castes.^{xv}

Before the arrival of missionaries in Kerala, the government did not take any interest in the field of education for low caste people. In 1817 a Royal Script, addressed to the Dewan Peshkar at Quilon was issued in Travancore. It was written by James Munro and the Rescript was remarkable because it declared universal education^{xvi}. So, several schools were established in the 19th century by the CMS missionaries. In spite of upper-caste opposition, the missionary effort had the support of state power in Travancore and Cochin, particularly during the time of Dewan Munro.^{xvii}

The progress of education of the depressed classes in Malabar was not satisfactory. The chief hindrance in the way of their education was ignorance and it did not prevent them to elevate themselves out of their position of serfs.^{xviii} However the credit for having laid foundation of western education in Malabar area goes to the Basel Evangelical Mission. The government of Madras introduced a plan for improving education among the Muslims and started

separate schools for them. However, the Muslims and the Nambootiris had remained backward in terms of educational progress. It was only after the formation of the Yoga Kshema Sabha (1909-1910) that, modern education began to spread among the Nambootiris.^{xxix}

Initially the educational facilities were mainly restricted to the upper caste Hindus and Christians. Caste prejudices kept backward communities away from schools. Hence they were forced to do their hereditary occupations under the caste obligations. Thus, literacy was limited to the lower caste groups. The British did not care much about the mass education. Their policy was to educate a select few. Subordination of education to political power was the basic character of the colonial education policy. The colonial administration was to promote an educational policy which served its own interests. New schools and colleges were established to promote learning. New social, political and economic ideas came through the channel of western education. But the Christian Missionary schools admitted all, irrespective of caste or religion.^{xxx}

The spread of education fostered the growth of political consciousness and organized attempts began to be made to find a political solution to social problems. When educational qualifications were linked to bureaucratic appointments, opportunities for education became a point of contention in the society. Soon education began to be apparent by different sections as the entrance to political and administrative positions.^{xxxi}

The political movements of Kerala began with the Malayali Memorial of 1891.^{xxxii} It was submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore as a representation of the Malayalis who had been denied job opportunities in the government posts. Though it was submitted as a common representation of the Travancoreans, most of its signatories were the members of the Nair community. The Malayali Memorial had gained broad publicity not only in Kerala but outside also. Though could not achieve much, it helped the growth of political awareness among the people of Travancore. Following the Malayali Memorial, another memorial Ezhava Memorial was submitted under the leadership of Dr. P. Palpu.^{xxxiii} It requested the government to provide those profits enjoyed by the Christian converted Ezhavas to the Ezhavas of Travancore. Later several memorials were submitted by different communities demanding their case. The claims and counter claims made by different castes for government jobs fostered the communal and caste consciousness among them.

With the spread of English education, a modern middle class emerged among all the castes in the

society. This middle class gave the lead in the coordination of the community organizations.^{xxxiv}

Undoubtedly the new education broadened the horizon of knowledge. The revival of socio-political consciousness and the crusade against traditional social evils were simply the outcome and the impact of educational growth.^{xxxv} The establishment of printing press and easy availability of books removed the traditional barriers and made education accessible to more people. Along with education, the missionaries bestowed particular concentration on evangelical work among the backward classes in the native society.

The British Western attack resulted in a reinterpretation of Hinduism at both ideological and institutional levels and the conversion of the lower castes, especially the Harijans to Islam and Christianity was an important factor in promoting a changed attitude among the Hindu elites towards caste and untouchability.^{xxxvi}

The fruit of modern education was an intellectual awakening among the people and it became a critical long-term force in the making of a new social mentality during the 19th century.

The British regime introduced a new economic order which was characterized by British bureaucracy. Its main features were commercialization of agrarian economy, development of transport and communication and western concept of private property in land. Consequently, a new agrarian structure was born that was neither completely feudal nor fully developed on capitalistic lines. The colonial rule accelerated the creation of the national market and made the biggest transformation in the mode of production.^{xxxvii}

Thus, the colonial influence played a decisive role in the economic transformation.^{xxxviii} As a result, the indigenous social institutions and cultural practices came under critical study. The market economy, which had replaced the subsistence economy, had ruined the joint families. The corporate ownership of land and the right of subsistence of the members of the joint families compelled them to cultivate crops for their subsistence. Hence, they needed credit for improving more agricultural production and so they approached moneylenders. The moneylenders gave credit only on the security of land. Since the *taravadu* property could not easily be mortgaged the individuals were not able to get credit. They were also not able to benefit from the expansion of economy in the secondary and tertiary sectors due to the lack of capital raising facilities. Besides, caste pride did not allow them to do wage labour. So they gained only

little from the agricultural works, since their system of living and inheritance allowed no diversification of individual skills. It was this situation that prompted them to demand for legislations for partitioning the joint family properties.^{xxix}

A member of the joint family lived within the family but he had no right to decide what to do. The traditional system of joint family lacked spatial mobility and variety of occupation. Conservatism in social institutions is a chief obstacle in social change. In an age of individualism, the members of the joint families had no space for self-development as the *taravadu* was more important than the individual. With the establishment of private property in land and the individual right to its free disposal, there appeared a centrifugal tendency among the people to break away from the joint family. Joint families had been prevalent among the traditional land-owning communities in colonial Kerala which followed the patrilineal or matrilineal system.^{xxx}

During that period attempts had also been made to bring about change in the personal and family laws. The joint family set up was increasingly felt as unsuitable to the policies and prospects of the colonial economic environment.^{xxxi} In a joint family the right to property was traced through women and not through men. The *taravadu* properties were owned by the members of the family collectively. The property could not be partitioned without the consent of all the members. But the new changes and laws brought about by the land-labor relations unfavorably affected the joint family system. The system of production depending on slave labour had been replaced by one based on hired wage labour. The mode of payment of the land tax had been changed from kind to cash. The tenure reforms had conferred ownership and permanent tenancy right to the majority of tenants in Travancore and Cochin. In the Malabar District the agitations of the tenant farmers scared the *Janmis* and they became unable to turn out the tenants from the land. All these reforms, in one way or other, fostered the growth of individualism.^{xxxii}

The educated Nair youths voiced their protest against the matrilineal system of inheritance, joint family system and marriage practice and they attacked the Sambandham system of marriage and inheritance. The progressive minded Young Nambootiris

questioned the patrilineal system of inheritance and fought against several evil practices.^{xxxiii}

Under the colonial domination the orders of a political superior need to be obeyed.^{xxxiv} Colonialism, in the process of its socio-political engagement, introduced new politico-legal institutions, practices, concepts and principles of governance in the indigenous society. Colonialism also fused many local societies having diverse traditions, into one under the umbrella of a centralized administrative establishment. Till that time the liberal principles like equality before law, individual freedom, ownership rights over property, conceptions of human dignity etc were quite alien to the local peoples. These ideologies were firmly established in the subjugated society by the institutionalization of western education under the colonial aegis. With the expansion of education, a new class appreciating the Western values of enlightenment modernity emerged in the society. It was this class that became the chief partakers of the expanding bureaucracy and the evolving representative institutions introduced by the colonial state in the process of the systematization of its administrative procedures. It was also this class that performed functions of internalizing the colonial cultural ideology in the indigenous society and giving leadership to put up an anti-colonial political project under the guise of nationalism.^{xxxv}

CONCLUSION

Thus, the route of modernity in the Malayali society was essentially a middle-class affair. It was the educated middle class who had emerged among various communities played the decisive role of internalizing the cultures and values of modernity in the society.^{xxxvi} Therefore, those groups, who had failed to agree the forces of modernity by imbibing a middle-class culture on account of their historical backwardness, were seen to have expelled from the socio-political mainstream. Thus, the natural character of modernity did produce only benefits of combining within it the coercions of inclusion and exclusion as part of its discourse had left its concavity nature in the social structures of Kerala. Together with the renovated and fortified forms of ritualism and casteism, another confusing problem, was the hold that patriarchy enjoys in modern Kerala.^{xxxvii}

ⁱ K.N. Panikker, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1996, p. 127

ⁱⁱ Ibid, p. 128

ⁱⁱⁱ S. Ramachandran Nair, *Social and Cultural History of Colonial Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, Pp. 2 - 4

- iv K.K.N. Kurupp, *Modern Kerala*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1988, p. 92
- v Sunil P Ilayidam, 'Cross Currents with in a Cultural Critique of Kerala Renaissance', *Paper presented in the Seminar in Kerala Towards New Horizons organized by Jan Sanskrit, Delhi in Connection with the Birth Centuary Celebration of EMS Nambootiripad*, February 21, 2009, p. 39
- vi S. Ramachandran Nair, *Op.Cit.*, Pp. 36 - 38
- vii George Philip, *A Historical Anatomy of the Evolution of Social Revolution in Travancore*, Ph.D. Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Social Science, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, 2005, Pp. 152 - 154
- viii Hira Singh, *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants Paramount Power*, Canadian Scholars Press, Toronto, 1998, p. 58
- ix T.J. Mossiter, *Communism in Kerala: A Study in Political Adaptation*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1982, p. 17
- x Tapan Raj Chaudari, *Perceptions, Emotions, Sensibilities Essays on India's Colonial Experience*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 22
- xi Dick Kooiman, 'The Gospel of Coffee: Missions, Education and Employment in Nineteenth Century Travancore' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.19, No.35, September 1, 1984, Pp. 1536 - 1537
- xii Samuel Mateer, quoted in Samuel Nellimukal, *Kerala Samoohya Parivarthanam*, K.S. Books, Kottayam, 2013, p.
- xiii K.V Eapen, *Church Mission Society and Education in Kerala*, Kollet Publishers, Kottayam, 1985, p. 156
- xiv Ibid, p. 165
- xv P.K Michael Tharakan, 'Socio-Economic Factors in Educational Developments : The Case of Nineteenth Century Travancore' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.19, No.46, November 17, 1984, Pp. 1961 - 1963
- xvi George Philip, *Op.Cit.*, p. 168
- xvii Ibid.
- xviii K.V Eapen, *Op.Cit.*, p. 168
- xix R. Ramakrishna Pillai, *The Constitutional Experiments in Kerala*, Kerala Political Science Academy, Thiruvananthapuram, 1965, p. 21
- xx P. R Gopinathan Nair, 'Education and Social, Economic Development in Kerala' in *Social Scientist*, Vol.4, No.8, March, 1976, Pp. 33 - 34
- xxi Ibid.
- xxii S. Ramachandran Nair, *Op.Cit.*, p.43
- xxiii R. Ramakrishna Pillai, *Op.Cit.*, p. 44
- xxiv Ibid.
- xxv S. Ramachandran Nair, *Democracy and Power: Electoral Politics in Kerala*, Manak Publications, New Delhi, 2012, Pp. 23 - 25
- xxvi M.N Sreenivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 1998, p. 50
- xxvii P.K. Michael Tharakan, 'Development of Colonial Economy in Kerala 1850 - 1947' in P.J. Cheriyan (ed.), *Perspectives on Kerala History*, *Op.Cit.*, P. 32
- xxviii S. Ramachandran Nair, *Social and Cultural History of Colonial Kerala*, *Op.Cit.*, p. 48
- xxix Ibid.
- xxx K. Saradamony, *Matriliny Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century, Travancore*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999, p. 23
- xxxi Ibid.
- xxxii S. Ramachandran Nair, *Op.Cit.*, p. 51
- xxxiii Ibid.
- xxxiv P. Chandra Mohan, 'Growth of Social Reform Movements in Kerala', in P.J. Cheriyan, *Perspectives on Kerala History*, *Op.Cit.*, p. 485

- xxxv Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of Raj, New Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, Part. 4, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1997. p. 122
- xxxvi K.N Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony, Intellectual and Social Consciousness in Colonial Kerala, Op.Cit.*, p. 49
- xxxvii J. Devika, *En-Gendering Individuals the Language of Reforming in Twentieth Century Keralam*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 2007, p. 256

