

Pioneering Higher Education: State Initiatives by the Rulers of Modern Travancore

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ABSTRACT: The princely state of Travancore, shows par-excellence in the field of education in the state of Kerala. They established modern educational system to the entire community through free land grants and money grants as gifts or even by other forms of initiatives from the royal side. The aim of the study was to trace out the growth of higher education in the princely state of Travancore before the integration with Kochi. It is a well-known fact that Kerala is far ahead in the key indicators with respect to social development such as literacy rate, health etc compared with other parts of the country. The development of literacy was the net result of the efforts of State intervention, Missionary activities and various socio- reform movements. In the growth of education, the native Enlightened princes and princesses played a crucial role for the spread and made it accessible to common people. The growth of education under the native states of Travancore and Kochi are commendable. Since the rulers of Travancore were more Enlightened than that of counter parts in Kerala, they took keen interest in the education of their subjects. From vernacular to English education, from primary to higher education, the roles played by them should be acknowledged. It concludes that the princely states introduced and established and promoted modern educational system throughout the states.

KEYWORDS: *Princely State, Higher education, modern education, Travancore*

Introduction

Prior to the formation as a separate political entity, Kerala was a cluster of several princely states. Among them the prominent Princely states were Travancore, Cochin and Calicut. When we trace the history, we can see that Travancore enjoyed a unique position in terms of rich landscapes and resources in comparison with other princely states. ‘The total area of Travancore is 7091 square miles. Compared to the adjoining British Districts, it is about four-fifths of Madura, nine-tenths of Coimbatore, one and one-fourth of Malabar and one-third of Tinnevely. Compared to other native states, Travancore is about one-twelfth the size of Hyderabad, one-fourth of Mysore, seven-eighth of Baroda, two-seventh of Gwalior, more than five times the size of Cochin and 6 times that of Pudukkottai. It is smaller than the principality of Wales by 279 square miles and bears England and Wales together, the proportion of 1 to 8.’¹ When it comes to the 18th century, Kerala was constituted of three separate political entities. ie. Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. While Malabar was directly under the British Government, others were indirectly controlled by the British through various treaties.

In the field of education, The Princely State of Travancore, shows par-excellence. From the traditional system of education to the modern system, we can trace out the interference of the princely state, sometimes through free land grants and money grants as gifts or even by other forms of initiatives from the royal side. There were cordial relationships with the colonial rulers, maybe, that is why we can see less interference from the British side on the educational matters in the Princely State of Travancore.

Despite this Travancore may be the first state in British India which recognised the importance of education as a responsibility of the state. Her Highness Rani Gauri Parvati Bai issued a rescript in 992 M.E.(1817), in which Her Highness resolved that “the State should defray the entire cost of education of its people in order that there might be no backwardness in the spread of enlightenment among them, that by diffusion of education they might become better subjects and public servants and that the reputation of the state might be advanced thereby”² We can consider this as the Magna Carta in the educational history of Travancore and ‘the

credit of being the first Indian princely state that made primary education free goes to Travancore'.³

Even though it was under the spell of Caste system, Kerala's early system of education had a definite order and structure. But with the interference of missionaries and subsequent introduction of western education, Kerala's traditional system of education evolved into a modern one. Educational institutions set up as a result of state initiatives promoted only vernacular languages at first. But with the passage of time, they started to introduce more subjects and finally fell on par with western education.

Immediately after the Queen's Proclamation of 1817 regarding free primary education to all, The First English school was opened at Trivandrum. The then Maharaja, His Highness Swathi Tirunal was impressed by the school run by the LMS missionaries in Nagarcoil. Receiving inspiration from here, in 1834, an English school was opened at Trivandrum and it was placed under Mr. J Roberts, who had been working as the principal of the same school at Nagarcoil, and a monthly grant of Rs. 100 was given to him. In 1836, it was converted into the Sircar Free School, and Mr. Roberts was given a monthly salary of Rs 300. This was the foundation of English Education in Travancore⁴. Considering it as a model, the Government of Kochi also started many schools for western education. Thus, the schools started by the Governments of Kochi, Travancore and the Missionaries became centres of higher education in Kerala.

It can be rightly said that Wood's Despatch (1854) is considered as the Magna Carta of the Indian Educational system as the foundation of higher learning was imbibed from there. It recommended a few measures such as, the appointment of Director of Public Instruction, Grand-in-aid system, foundation of provincial universities etc, had its own impact in Kerala too. Especially the Grand-in-aid system (means private institutions were financially supported by the government) was adopted by the princely states. It helped the growth of private educational enterprises in Kerala in the later periods which is an integral part of education in Kerala.

Till the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, there were no colleges in the full-fledged sense in Kerala. Because the then so-called

colleges were run by the missionaries and were not affiliated to any other foreign or Indian Universities. But after the Second half of the 19th Century, a modern phase in the history of education started in this region as the Government came forward with many revolutionary reforms and policies. Because during this time conditions here were favourable for such a growth.

Administrative changes were reflected in the fields of Public Instructions too. The history of administration of Travancore became a history of enlightenment and progress from Madhava Rao's Diwanship.⁵ During this time, His Highness Rama Varma succeeded Maharaja Marthanda Varma who was a person of highly intelligent sovereign. State spent large sums of money year after year on education. The forty years reign of Rama Varma was one of the important periods in Travancore history. During his reign he endorsed a new scheme for the development of vernacular education. Proposals were made for the introduction of a central school in the Capital, Mofussil schools in taluks, teachers training schools for giving training for teachers, appointment of a director of vernacular education, Introduction of a Textbook Committee for the translation of books into Malayalam, and a book depot for the selling of books etc.

To make necessary arrangements for higher learning Raja's English school was upgraded as a second-grade college to commence a higher branch of education. Affiliated to Madras University, it offered the students with F.A Course, and after 2 years of successful completion of course, they could even go for higher studies, where they were offered with BA. Thus, the first batch of students appeared for the examination in 1870. By this time, Maharaja's college was upgraded to a First-Grade college but got affiliation to Madras University only in 1877.⁶ Another notable feature of higher education during this time, "a collegiate department for training students for the BA Degree examination of the Madras University was opened. European professors of acknowledged ability were appointed to the college. Sixteen district schools were started as feeders to this college".⁷ A law course was started in the Maharajas college in 1875 and it was called as F.L, which was developed later into a full-fledged law college.

Travancore rulers were always interested in taking liberal and progressive policies towards education. An English school for girls opened in 1864, later developed into a college for women in 1897. The first Normal school was opened in 1885 and it developed into a Training college in 1911. A Sanskrit school was opened, and in 1889 it developed into the Sanskrit college.⁸ In 1892 His Highness Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma Said: “The elementary education of the masses is our paramount duty and an essential condition of good government...in most civilised countries of Europe, this principle has been carried so far as to recognize the necessity of compulsory education. Side by side, we have to popularise female education... Technical education is also essential. But it must be preceded by general education...”⁹

The first Director of Public Instruction was appointed in 1909 and it was followed by certain reforms in the educational sector in the region. In addition to literary education, professional and technical education also got momentum during this time. Law college under the control of High court, The Ayurveda college under the Director of Ayurveda, Industrial and Technical schools under the Director of Industries, the forest school, agricultural school, fishery school etc were maintained by the State governments. Besides these, certain quasi-educational institutions like Public Library Trivandrum and Departments of Sanskrit and Malayalam also were managed by the State government.¹⁰

In 1910, New Education and Inspection Codes were introduced, which marked the inauguration of the modern education system in Kerala. It touched all aspects of education including the quality of teachers, fee's structure, textbook for curriculum, rules for grant-in-aid etc. The B.A courses were started in 1914-15 in English, History and Economics. Starting up of new courses led to infrastructural shortages and soon decided to separate science and arts sections from the colleges. As a part of this, in 1924 arts section was shifted to Thycad, which later came to be known as Maharaja's Arts college. The science department, which remained in the same college, later came to be known as Maharaja's Science College. The Maharaja's College for girls, became a first-grade college which was renamed as Maharaja's College for Women.

Various steps of the Travancore state government for the progress of western education finally resulted in the establishment of Travancore university in 1937 which initiated further progress of higher education in Kerala. Even though the idea of establishment of a university was there in Travancore as early as 1900, various committees studied it and made recommendations but were not fruitful. In 1931 His Highness Shri Chithira Tirunal became the ruler and he made some reforms in the existing educational system.

With the advice of C P Ramaswamy Aiyar, the government of Travancore appointed an Educational Reforms Committee in 1932 under R M Sthatham, but observed that no immediate steps should be taken for the establishment of Travancore University. Before Travancore gets separated from the Madras University, necessary re-organisation should be taken into consideration in the field of higher education as the then system was not much satisfactory.¹¹ After so many efforts, the dream came true with the establishment of Travancore University by a royal proclamation on 1st November 1937 by the then Maharaja.

The period between 1945- 46 witnessed changes in the field of university education. An education Re-organisation committee was set up in 1945 and made some recommendations to improve education in Kerala. As per the recommendation made by the Education Reorganization Committee regarding the restructuring of the University Education, steps were taken. The Committee had recommended the institution of the Three-year degree course. A beginning in this direction of inaugurating the new course was made by the passing of an ordinance instituting the appropriate authorities of the University to take steps to start the new three-year degree course.¹²

Besides this, some notable striking events with university education are as follows

1. The institution of a Diploma course in Agriculture
2. The institution of a Diploma course in Bacteriology and Hygiene
3. The opening of two Pre-University Schools, one at Trivandrum under the control of the Director of Public Instruction and the other at Changanacherry under the management of the Nair Service Society.

The distribution of students of the various institutions as given below

Sl. No	Name of the Institution	Men	Women	Total
1	H.H. The maharaja's University College, Trivandrum	1452	334	1786
2	H.H. The Maharaja's College for Women, Trivandrum	---	590	590
3	H.H. The Maharaja's Training College, Trivandrum	64	47	111
4	H.H. The Maharaja's Law College Trivandrum	191	9	200
5	H.H. The Maharaja's Sanskrit College, Trivandrum	74	8	82
6	The College of Engineering, Trivandrum	469	----	469
7	Research Department (M.Sc. in Statistics)	17	----	17
8	Institute of Textile Technology, Trivandrum	70	2	72
9	St.Berchman's College, Changanacherry	1210	----	1210
10	Union Christian College, Alwaye	550	97	647
11	Sanatana Dharma College, Alleppey	198	49	247
12	C.M.S. College, Kottayam	330	150	480
13	Scott Christian College, Nagercoil	227	20	247
14	Diploma course in Shorthand and typewriting	31	10	41
	Total	4883	1316	6199

(Source: Travancore administrative Report 1946-47)

From the above table we can understand the total strength of the students in various colleges under the University increased to 6199 which was 5511 in the previous year as per the Travancore Administration Reports. Under the organizational control of the University, about 6 Government colleges were there in Trivandrum along with the Institute of

Textile Technology. There were 5 private-owned colleges in the mofussil acknowledged to the privileges of the University. The Central research Institute, the Public Health Laboratory, the Public Library at Trivandrum, the Oriental Manuscript Library, the Observatory and the School of Arts were also under the managerial control of the University.

A comparative analysis regarding the developments in the field of higher education in the neighbouring states provides an overview of the progress achieved during the same period of time. In the Princely state of Kochi, educational developments progressed towards a modern direction, like that of Travancore. By 1800, Kochi was placed under the Madras government till 1947 through a treaty. With the administration of Colonel Munro as the Dewan of Kochi, special arrangements were made for the progress of education. In Kochi, an elementary English school was started in 1845 which was raised to the status of a second-grade college in 1875, offering F.A courses affiliated to the Madras University. In 1925, it was upgraded as a first-grade college, known as Maharaja's College which offered courses at Degree level.¹³ In 1889, a number of educational institutions were opened in different parts of the state and private agencies came forward to start schools and colleges. In 1911, new school codes were framed to give support to the private management.

With the introduction of education rules and the amendments further in 1921, a grant-in-aid system was set up and so many private schools sprang up this time with government support. Modern education also progressed. There were three Governmental colleges and two private colleges in 1947. With the integration of Kochi with Travancore, all government colleges were put under the Travancore University except private colleges, as they were affiliated to Madras University till the Kerala state formation.¹⁴ But with the state formation all colleges came under the department of collegiate education and got affiliation to newly formed Kerala University.

Conclusion

Compared with other states in India, Kerala enjoys a higher level in the literacy rate. It is not a sudden achievement. Though the system of Education underwent drastic changes, there was an element of continuity

from the times before its roots. When we trace the educational history of Kerala, Traditional system of education in Kerala, under the caste system, was limited and thus there was limited scope for social mobility. But with the combined efforts of the colonial government and princely states, educational institutions flourished. Throughout the history of education, we can see that the state governments have given a lot of importance in making primary education available to all.

Medium of education has transitioned from vernacular languages to western languages and the great potential of western education has created a positive impact on society. The belief in the age-old caste system got diminished and people became more progressive in thinking which ultimately resulted in a drastic change in the history of Kerala. From the Travancore Administration reports themselves, we can understand that the rulers gave special considerations to education viz-primary, secondary and higher education which helped for the independent development of each sector. Besides the restructuring of the curriculum, we can see changes in all spheres like organisational structure, female education, technical education, scientific education, legal education and collegiate education. Furthermore, special focus was given towards improvement of quality of education, structure of courses, and towards the introduction of new courses etc.

Education in a society is not only a responsibility of the state. The private sector also plays an important role here. In the princely states liberal minded rulers realised the importance of the private sector in education and made legislations to support them to sprang up independently. It is highly commendable that the University of Travancore has grown from a small English medium school to a renowned university. History of education of Kerala can be considered as the fruitful results of the educational initiatives adopted by the princely states.

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