



## The Origins of Collegiate Education in Kerala and the Dynamics of Community Power Balance

K. M. Vishnu Namboodiri

Assistant Professor Stage Two and Former Head, Department of History, Mar Thoma College Tiruvalla; e-mail <[dckmwnias@gmail.com](mailto:dckmwnias@gmail.com)>

### KEYWORDS

Kerala, College, Education, Caste, Christian Missionaries, State

### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the origin of collegiate education in Kerala, India. More specifically, it looks at local conditions that aided the development of collegiate education. The term “Kerala” refers to the south Indian region that includes the modern state as well as historical entities such as the Kingdom of Travancore, the Kingdom of Cochin, Zamorin’s Calicut, and the Madras Presidency, among others. The European concept and practise of higher education based on the Renaissance and Enlightenment are used to discuss what is now known as “college.” Postcolonial education in this region is traced to European ideals brought to the east by merchants, missionaries, and colonisers during their expeditions and endeavours. Political, religious, and social change have also been considered in this study.*

The agency responsible for the commissioning process of higher education in Kerala is a mixture of societal and state actors. Government administration, legal, and statutory entities, plus other delegated and ascribed structures of power within the state system are all examples of state actors. Civic groups, communities, and representatives outside structures are also examples of societal actors who have a say in important decisions. Private agencies such as Christian missionaries were credited with increasing the level of education in Kerala. Slotting caste institutions and private-sector educational institutions into important roles has given Christians and Hindus influence over policies affecting the educational sector throughout Kerala. It would be correct to say that it was in the early 1950s—immediately after independence—that educational facilities in Kerala grew, and the trend continued even after the enactment of the Kerala Education Act.

The Portuguese missionary efforts in India began in the 16th century. At the time, a group of Christians founded the College of St. Paul to educate those wishing to spread the faith. Three years after the arrival of Jesuit priest Francis Xavier, he explicitly states his belief that the Archbishop of Nazaranee is an orthodox bishop who deserves the protection of the Crown. However, Xavier’s priests were suspected of being heretics by the Portuguese. This caused him to propose setting up a college to educate priests who would be more faithful to both their church and their empire. In 1541, a representative was sent by the first bishop of Goa, Dom Joao de Albuquerque, to Kerala to establish a seminary for future candidates of the priesthood. The college’s first rector, Fr. Vincente de Lagos, sent seven young men—seminarians—to the College of Cranganur that same year. The seminary established by the Franciscans at Cranganore (Cranganur) became an important Latin center for training Syrian youth. Thomas bishops refused, however, to ordain priests trained in Latin seminaries. The seminary provided a strong foundation in Roman theology and offered no training

in Eastern Orthodoxy or Aramaic. Though located in the state of Kerala, a region known today for its divergent religious traditions and languages, the curriculum was based on European curricula. This provided the students with some religious education but little exposure to local cultural traditions and languages. The successor of Mar Joseph, Mar Abraham, asked the Jesuits to help reform the education of the Syrian clergy in the Eastern tradition. Accordingly, in 1577, a Jesuit house was established at Vaipicotta; it became a College between 1581 and 1584. Aramaic, Malayalam, Ethics, and Theology were some of the major subjects taught there. Even already ordained priests attended these classes. A school for laymen was also opened at Cochin; this left the Vaipicotta Seminary to educate the clergy. The Cranganur College, run by Franciscans, became a secular school serving lay students. The College of Angamali and the College of Cochin, which were founded for the education of Malabar Christians in the Roman faith, led to the spread of knowledge about Latin and Portuguese. The later Raja of Cochin was fluent in Portuguese, and often corresponded directly in that language. In fact, until the establishment of British supremacy in Kerala, Portuguese continued to be the diplomatic language of the Kerala rulers. Fr. Lancilotti established another college in Quilon, where he admitted younger boys than older ones. He accepted children from more influential noble families. He had the blessing of Ignatius Loyola in his undertaking such schools.

Brennan, a master attendant at Tellicherry, left Rs. 12,000 for establishing a school to educate all creeds and denominations before he died in 1859. The Basel Mission opened the school in 1862. But due to mismanagement, the government took over the school in 1872 and made it a District School. In 1883, the middle and high school sections were given to the municipality for operation; and in 1891, it was affiliated with Madras University as a second-grade college: junior college. In 1919 the government took over the college and school sections of Brennan's trust. A secondary training school was attached with it in 1925. It is now a First Grade College recognized as a Centre of Excellence with the status of 'Heritage College'. Brennan, a master attendant at Tellicherry, left Rs. 12,000 for establishing a school to educate all creeds and denominations before he died in 1859. The Basel Mission opened the school in 1862. But due to mismanagement, the government took over the school in 1872 and made it a District School. In 1883, the middle and high school sections were given to the municipality for operation; and in 1891, it was affiliated with Madras University as a second-grade college: junior college. In 1919 the government took over the college and school sections of Brennan's trust. A secondary training school was attached with it in 1925. It is now a First Grade College recognized as a Centre of Excellence with the status of 'Heritage College'.

The Victoria College of Palghat was founded by the British Raj in 1866 as a rate school. The government took it over between 1884 and 1885 when it was then returned to the municipality. In 1925, it became a first-grade college. The high school department was attached to the college as a feeder school, where carpentry, blacksmithy, and commercial subjects were taught. A night school for backward classes was opened in 1926. The College celebrated its centenary on a grand scale in February 1968 based on the starting of rate school, again it celebrated Centenary in the year 1989 based on the starting of the college. After the implementation of UGC Act in 1990 the Last Batch of Pre-Degree was delinked in 2000. The college is currently affiliated to the University of Calicut with 11 Post-Graduate Courses and 15 Under Graduate Courses under 18 departments in Arts & Science subjects and recognized as a Centre of Excellence by the Government of Kerala.

In 1848, the Basel missionaries established a primary school at Kallayi. The school was later transferred to Calicut, and in 1872 it was raised to a middle and in 1878 to a high school. And the high school developed into a second-grade college. Unfortunately, during World War I, the Basel missionaries had to give up the work, but in 1919, the Madras Christian College took over the school and renamed it Malabar Christian College. In 1927, the college was handed back to the Basel Evangelical Missionaries,

Switzerland. The College is a Heritage Institution situated in the heart of the Calicut city. At a time when education was the right of the elite sections of the society, the German missionaries, who were the founding fathers of this institution, threw open its doors of learning to all sections including women, the lower castes and the less privileged and since then the College has been in the forefront of imparting education without discrimination.

The Zamorin College was started in 1877 under the leadership of C. M. Barrow and was intended for the young princes of the Zamorin family. However, it soon opened its doors to all students (Nayars as well) and enjoyed partial financial assistance from the Madras government. In 1879, this institution became affiliated with the Madras University as a second-grade college and was run by a board; the Zamorin served as president of the board. The school came within a trust in 1921 and began to receive funds from the Zamorin himself. This institution is the present Guruvayurappan College.

In 1845, Ernakulam had its first English school, which offered only an elementary education. In 1875, A. F. Sealy, a European, was appointed headmaster of the school at Ernakulam. Under his able leadership, the school began to grow; by 1868 it became a full-fledged high school competent enough to prepare students for the matriculation examination, which qualified them for admission to a college or university. In the year 1875, Ernakulam High School became a second-grade college with affiliation to Madras University. As a result of this affiliation, modern education in Cochin had developed steadily. The number of colleges and high schools subsequently increased, but the number of primary schools began to drop. By 1931 nearly 75 percent of the educational institutions were under private management

Rev. Mead, a representative of the London Mission Society, came to Travancore in 1817 and died in 1873. He stressed the communication of religions and useful knowledge, educating children and young adults to speak English, Tamil, Malayalam, and Sanskrit. He established a seminary at Nagarcoil, which became a first-rate college. Although the London Mission Society had started schools in southern Travancore earlier, an English school that offered rigorous academic courses with a faculty of expert teachers did not exist until Kottayam Seminary School opened in 1816. The seminary became a college within seven years, dividing from its parent institution after extensive deliberations by the Travancore Division Synod of 1836, and after long deliberations, the C.M.S. college was divided up and became a wholly independent entity under the missionaries. It later got affiliated with the Madras University in 1882.

Although most of the Syrian parochial schools lost momentum after their connections with the missionaries were severed, many Syrians continued to provide education. In 1856, the M.D. Seminary Boarding High School was established, the first boarding high school in Travancore and a precursor to today's Baselius College, offering higher education in arts, science, and commerce.

In 1864, there were 500 students in the Rajah's Free School on the campus of erstwhile Nagarcoil Seminary; however, King Uthram Thirunal abolished free education and only two students quit because they were unable to pay tuition fees. In 1866, Maharajah's College was classified as a Junior and Senior Department. The college became so famous in South India that it attracted students from neighboring states. Two years later, the standard of the school was upgraded, and Maharajah's College became a second-grade college under Madras University. The curriculum of the B.A. classes was comprised of Philosophy, Mathematics, and Chemistry as major subjects. In addition to these studies, history was introduced in 1900 and advanced Physics in 1907. The female teacher's school at Trivandrum trained women for careers in teaching; however, it only taught literacy and other basic studies. In 1874, the first law classes were organized in the Maharajah's College with forty-six students. They were intended for graduates of the college who wanted to take the B.L. examination offered by the Madras University. Eventually, classes were offered for high school graduates with a one-year training course, but when the university required that B.L. students be separated from the Maharajah's College, a separate law school was set up with a three-year curriculum. A chair of medical jurisprudence was also added in 1897

when Dr. Poonnen took over it. The Maharajah's College of Trivandrum later became the Travancore University, affiliating all the colleges in Travancore. It was the first university in Kerala. In 1957, when Kerala was declared a separate state, it was renamed the University of Kerala to serve all of Kerala. In 1866, when a school run by missionaries in the Cantonment area of Trivandrum was about to close due to lack of support, a woman named Ms. Abel took over and helped make it viable again; it soon began awarding the Fellow of Arts degree (FA) under the Madras University, making it what is today Trivandrum's Maharajah College and High School for Girls.

The Travancore government established a Sanskrit school in 1899 at Trivandrum to promote Oriental scholarship, and the school later became a college. The curriculum included Logic, Grammar, Rhetoric, Philosophy, Vedic Studies, and Literature. Examinations were administered in the fifth, seventh, and ninth years to confer degrees of Sastri, Upadhyaya, or Mahopadhyaya, respectively; higher degrees could only be achieved by Brahmans. Students also had to study secular sciences (Modern Mathematics and History), which was not part of traditional Sanskrit scholarship. The Pro-Caste Hindu policies of the Travancore state especially during the Dewanship of Sir C. P Ramaswami Iyer, and the alienation or the relative absence of Syrian Christian communities and Institutions till the early 1950's is worth noticing.

Another English high school was opened by Ms. Blandford in 1867 within the Fort at Trivandrum with government grants for caste girls. Royal women began to attend this school. St. Joseph's Convent College for Girls was established by nuns as a second-grade college. There were two other second-grade colleges in Travancore by 1904, and before Independence, only a few colleges existed in Kerala. In the 1950s some junior colleges opened, but considerable progress in collegiate education wasn't seen until the middle of the 1960s when several junior colleges became first-grade colleges. All of the colleges are run either by the government or private agencies. The Engineering College at Trivandrum is the only technical institute in Kerala, having been founded in 1939.

The literacy rate in Kerala in 1911 was 13.7%, with male literacy rate being 22.7% and that for women being mere 4.7%. Slow but steady improvement took place in the thn years up till 1921, when the total literacy rate stood at 19.7% with male literacy being 28.7% and for women it stood at 10.7%. Situation persisted even a decade further with a total percentage of 24 , the male literates being 34% and female 13.9% of the total Population. The figures with regard to Cochin and Travancore were much better in comparison to the Malabar region. In 1911 there were only two Government Arts Colleges in the Travancore Region and one each in Private Aided and Private Unaided Sector. By 1930, the number rose to seven. Government maintained the monopoly of Professional Colleges, numbering two. There was only one training college in the region with a student strength of one hundred in 1930. The interest in Sanskrit studies underwent ups and downs and the strength of scholars fell from 324 in 1921 to 51 in 1930. Progress in the takers of Arts Courses during the time was visible, with an increase from 432 students to 1114 and towards 2541 students, in 1911, 1921 and 1930, respectively.

The state system had placed in differentiated approaches towards various caste groups and religions when it came to the case of establishment of seats of learning. The pace of change was higher in the decade of power shift from that of a monarchy to a part of democratic, quasi federal setup and finally through the first communist ministry assuming power, initiation of the heavily debated Kerala Education Bill, its legislative negotiations, becoming of an Act, and the removal of the EMS government. Whole of the policies and reforms in the higher education sector of Kerala including the Kerala Education Act remined flexibly adjusted for the interest of dominant Hindu caste groups with sub-accommodation of the interest of the Christian and influential Muslim groups, albeit creating the pseudo-impression of inclusiveness towards the marginalized and the "Dalit communities" and when the traditional power centres were affected the various groups united as a force and checked the state machinery and policies from curbing their influence, clout and privileges

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