

## **Imposition of Alien Rule: Colonial Motives and Education in Kerala**

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*Cultural assimilation is an effective form of subordination of the colonized. Education plays an important role in the process. Education as the ideological state apparatus deprives the colonized of their indigenous learning culture. It leads to a condition of hybridity wherein the colonized cannot differentiate their own from the alien. It reflects on their perception of their language, literature, rituals, beliefs and ultimately on them. Their culture appears to be demeaning to them and eventually disassociate them from their own native practices. Education facilitates conquest by consent. The idea of infiltration first made the elite the admirers of the culture of the colonizers and the masses were being taught by using them. Thus without much efforts and bloodshed, the British subdued the colonized. The paper attempts to explain how cultural assimilation, the main motive of the colonizers, was achieved through education in Kerala.*

**Key words:** Colonization, Assimilation, hybridity, consent, native practices, conquest, infiltration

### **Introduction**

The study of colonialism has been concentrated more on ideological rather than economic and administrative transformation. Education is an effective mode of cultural reproduction and reliable tool of ideological dominance. The introduction of western ideas and

values through English education had created influences in the cultural, intellectual, and ideological spheres were deeper than those changes introduced in the political and administrative spheres. The British colonial education is became a reality in Kerala with the joint effort of the British government, missionaries, native states, individual and social organizations. Each of them had their own preoccupation while introducing a new knowledge system. This paper is n attempt to present the colonial policies and motives of education in Kerala.

The process of colonization involves one nation or territory taking control of another nation or territory either through the use of force or by acquisition. As a byproduct of colonization, the colonizing nation implements its own form of schooling within their colonies. It is defined as an attempt to assist in the consolidation of foreign rule. The idea of assimilation is important to colonial education. Assimilation involves the colonized being forced to conform to the cultures and traditions of the colonizers. Gauri Viswanathan points out that cultural assimilation is the most effective form of political action because cultural domination works by consent and often precedes conquest by force.<sup>1</sup> After a few years of political conquest, the British in Kerala consolidated their position by introducing public education system. Shift from indigenous system of education to that to the one introduced by the British was unbelievably fast.

Colonizing governments realize that they gain strength not necessarily through physical control, but through mental control. This mental control is implemented through a central intellectual location, the school system, or what Louis Althusser would call an ideological state apparatus. Colonial education is directed at absorption into the metropole and not separate and dependent development of the colonized in their own society and culture. Colonial education strips the colonized people away from their indigenous learning structures and draws them toward the structures of the colonizers. The indigenous history and customs once practiced and observed slowly slipped away. The colonial education system and development had adverse effect on Mappilas of Malabar. A number of Arabic-Malayalam works were produced in a wide a variety of subjects on both religious and secular themes. Even dictionaries and newspapers were printed and published

in Arabic- Malayalam. The printing press established by Mappilas in different parts of Malabar. The cultural language of Mappilas had thus developed many of the capacities of a literary language. But the position of this language was reverted by the colonial interventions.

Growing up in the colonial education system, many colonized children enter a condition of hybridity, in which their identities are created out of multiple cultural forms, practices, beliefs and power dynamics. Colonial education creates a blurring that makes it difficult to differentiate between the new, enforced ideas of the colonizers and the formerly accepted native practices. Many of the practices which bound the society as it was were thrown to oblivion due to the incursion of the western values through education. Matrilineal system, joint families, polyandry, rituals related to one own family tradition and native language were looked at with scorn. The process annihilates a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is farthest removed from themselves.<sup>2</sup> Not only does colonial education eventually create a desire to disassociate with native heritage, but it affects the individual and the sense of self-confidence. It is held that colonial education instills a sense of inferiority and disempowerment with the collective psyche of a colonized people. In order to eliminate the harmful, lasting effects of colonial education, postcolonial nations must connect their own experiences of colonialism with other nations' histories. 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. A new educational structure must support and empower the hybrid identity of a liberated people. 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

Much of the reasoning that favors such a learning system comes from supremacist ideas of the colonizers. Thomas B. Macaulay asserts his viewpoints about British India in an early nineteenth century speech. Macaulay insists that no reader of literature could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. He continues, stating, it is no exaggeration to say, that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England. The ultimate goal of colonial education is this: We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. While all colonizers may not have shared Macaulay's lack of respect for the existing systems of the colonized, they do share the idea that education is important in facilitating the assimilation process.

During the time of the East India Company and later, in the British rule, there seem to have been two motives working in the minds of the rulers: plundering the wealth of this land and the 'white man's burden' of civilizing the natives (the term used by them to refer to all Indians). British education policies in the Indian Subcontinent, which installed English language as the imperial language, as a measure to establish British influence and control over the colony looks into the historical beginnings of English in India in the postcolonial context in terms of the loss of Persian, the end of the indigenous system of education, formation of hybrid identities, segregation in society and the establishment of elite institutions.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) has called "submission by consent", in which the subjugated people concur in their own subjectivity and accept their inferiority before the imperial power.<sup>4</sup> Domination achieved by combining coercion and acceptance is more effective and lasting because the dominated is willing to cooperate with the

colonizer to further the state of affairs. This “hegemony”, to use the term as Gramsci used it in the 1930s, is best achieved by ‘interpellation’ of the native by using such ideological state apparatuses like education, church and the media.<sup>5</sup> A survey was ordered in 1822 and was conducted by the British district collectors. In the survey it was found that the Bengal presidency had 1 lakh village schools, in Madras there was not a single village without a school, in Bombay, if the village population was near 100, and the village had a school. Teachers as well as students of all castes were in these schools. The Brahmins accounted 7% to 48% of the teachers, and the rest of the teachers in any district, came from other castes. Further all children had their education in their mother tongue.

It can be said that the political and hegemonic aims were crucial factors behind the measures that were taken to formulate Britain’s Indian education policy. The historians Grover and Alka explained the hidden policy of the British East India Company in their attempts of the people in oriental languages that administrative needs of the Company required Indians well-versed in the classic and vernacular languages. In the Judicial Department Indians conversant with Sanskrit, Arabic or Persian were required to sit as assessors with English judges and expound Hindu or Muslim law from Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic books. Besides, the knowledge of Persian and vernaculars was valued in the political department for correspondence with rulers of Indian states. The clerical staff in the revenue and commercial departments had contacts with uneducated masses and for them knowledge of vernaculars was a must.<sup>6</sup>

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. In 1813 the British Parliament permitted European missionaries to enter the country under the new system of licensing. 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 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

these organizations was of course to evangelize the people of Kerala. But in practice their activity took on the character of movements in educational and social reform.

Filtration theory means, education is to be filtered to the common people. Drop by drop, the education should go to the common public so that at due time it may take the form of a vast stream which remained watering desert of the society for long times and high class of people should be educated and common people gain influence from it.<sup>7</sup> According to this famous doctrine, education was to permeate the masses from above. Drop by drop from the Himalayas of Indian life useful information was to trickle downwards, forming in time a broad and stately stream to irrigate the thirsty plains.<sup>8</sup> The Nairs of Kerala who belonged to the upper strata of society and few well to do backward families grabbed the opportunity first. The first novel in Malayalam, *Indulekha* (1898) borne the message that modern western education was the need of the hour. The author of the novel, Chandu Menon, was a magistrate in the British court at Tellicherry and was an admirer of the West. Soori Namboothiri, whose buffoon like character and demeanor in the novel, emanates from the conviction of the author that absence of modern western education turns a man a laughing stock. The book was widely read across Kerala and popularized in a way the advantages of modern western education. The novels published in the same decade like *Saraswati vijayam*, *Sukumari*, *Parongadiparinayam*, *Lakshmikesavam* etc. projected western education as the panacea for reforming the society. It demonstrates that the motives of the British were well executed by the natives.

The lower castes grabbed the opportunity of education offered by the British through missionaries. They also recognized the significance of modern western education. For them, education was a means to transform their lower caste identity. Sree Narayana Guru, the spiritual Guru of one of the backward castes called Ezhavas, advised his fellow caste men to establish schools instead of building temples. One of the strong demands of the deprived castes was to remove social barriers in the path of education. They themselves demanded the British to open more schools. It served as sites for the alleviation

of caste prejudices of the upper castes and the sense of inferiority of the deprived castes. On its own, caste would not wean. But in the schools, students started mingling without being conscious of their respective caste status. Thus education served two purposes- one to train the socially divided people of Kerala to form a common culture and values which would definitely ease the process of British conquest. Secondly, without aggression, the British could bring Kerala under them.

The section of society which abstained completely from the western education was the Nambuthiris and Muslims. The Nambuthiris, the caste which was placed at the apex of the caste hierarchy. They clung to the traditional native education system. V.T.Bhattathirpad, the person who initiated reform among the Nambutiris found that the traditional education system has turned his fellow caste men outdated and decadent. He encouraged them to go to schools. The Muslims abstained from the English education was due to their anti-colonial attitude towards the British.

The controversy between the orientalist and the Anglicists had its effect in Travancore-Cochin also. During the first half of the nineteenth century the responsibility of imparting education lay primarily in the hands of the traditional indigenous institutions and the missionaries. The missionaries devoted more of their attention to spread English education while they ignored in their schools teaching of Malayalam and Sanskrit.<sup>9</sup>

The declaration on 7th March 1835 of Lord Bentick gave to the educational policy of the English in India a definite form, clear vision and an acknowledged agenda. In Travancore also state support to education took varied forms. One was that of the stipends and liberal allowances to students and teachers. In 1835, His Highness endowed twenty free scholarships to Nair students in the English school and built a new house for it.<sup>10</sup> The same year, the English school at Trivandrum was taken over by the government and given the title 'The Raja Free School'. This premier educational institution later developed in to His Highness the Maharajas' College.

According to J. Chand (2007), the Wood Despatch visualized India as a market for the supplier of raw materials to Britain and a

consumer market for the purchase of finished goods of Britain's industries. Thus its vocational policy was lopsided.<sup>11</sup> The Despatch of 1854 had its own vibrations and changes in the southern part of the peninsula too. The second half of the nineteenth century laid a strong foundation of rapid and massive educational development in the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin. The educational policy of these two states was based on the promotion of vernacular education and the encouragement of private enterprises. All the qualitative elements of the system, its value system, attitude to knowledge, emphasis on verbal and linguistic skills and content were favorable to the well-to-do classes and unfavorable to the poor mass of toiling workers. 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.<sup>12</sup> The Government introduced a system of Grant in aid to bring schools under the inspection and control of the government. 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.<sup>13</sup> 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 Government Sector.<sup>14</sup> The data indicate that the progress in the field of education, especially in the higher education sector was very slow. It 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.

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 understands 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. 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 early 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 shows that language policy was always tied in some way to Britain's political and economic interests in the region. Thirdly, the British made little efforts 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 formative 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 initial 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.<sup>15</sup> Further, steps were taken on this direction by giving training to Muslim 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.<sup>16</sup> Further, their educational policy was not in favour of structural transformation of the society through industrial development and popular education.<sup>17</sup> 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.

The British educational plan disturbed the indigenous system of “self-help” prevalent in India for centuries, and which suited the genius of the people. In the same way the British abolished the system of paying the school teacher from the revenue collected from villages, and these funds were diverted to selected government schools in urban areas for providing ‘modern’ education.<sup>18</sup> The British education policy helped in the creation of polarity in Indian society. The British educational system, based on utilitarian objectives, focused on the urban elite and the middle-classes and ignored the masses. Of more significance for this study is the fact that the British education policy favored elitist patterns that have persisted to this day. It was primarily designed to act as an instrument of social and political control for the natives, and as a means of providing the government low paid functionaries.

The East India Company in India was not originally interested in promoting any system of education. But as its empire in India expanded, the need arose for officers in the lower rungs of the administration. One of the main items of expenditure was the high salary of English officers and one obvious way of economizing was to employ Indian subordinates. Employment of Indians required their being able to read, write and speak English. Colonial powers perceived a political advantage in educating the natives. The British, for instance,

hoped that English education would close the gulf between Indians and English

The modern western education affected a change in traditional informal learning in the context of caste to a formal methodical teaching of western models with prescribed syllabus, printed translation and writings. Subjects like Physics, Chemistry and History taught in missionary schools had tremendous influence on the Hindu thought and challenged the traditional view. These new things which were not known to the traditional society spread informally to the areas surrounding the schools. Education proved to be a dynamic agent of social change for low castes.

The educational facilities were mainly restricted to the upper caste Hindus and Christians. Caste prejudices kept backward communities away from Government schools. They were tied to their hereditary occupations under the caste obligations. Thus, literacy was limited to the upper caste. The English education that developed under colonial sponsorship totally ignored the importance of mass education. In the new education the emphasis was to educate a select few. Subordination of education to political power made the basic object of their educational policy to strengthen colonial rule.

## **Conclusion**

Education can be seen as a tool of colonialism. The colonial influences destroyed and diminished the validity and legitimacy of indigenous education. And replaced and reshaped it with an education complicit with the colonial endeavour. Schooling as a formalised colonial structure served as a vehicle for wilder imperialist ideological objectives.

Hence, the British 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 and motives 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 British 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.

### Endnotes:

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