

## **Decolonization of Higher Education in Kerala: An Analysis of Intial Two Decades of Post Inde- pendence Period**

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### **Abstract**

Decolonization is an ongoing process engaged consciously or unconsciously by the colonized world. The political independence from colonizers doesn't indicate colonization. Rather, it set the exact background for the indigenization of the colonized. Transfer of power from colonial masters to the natives ensured the process of colonization. The deep routes of colonization need time for rectification. In some cases, the colonial cultural values have influenced the native ways of life in such extent that decolonization seems difficult. This is particularly applicable in the case of cultural life of the natives. Colonialism as a cultural conquest percolated to native life primarily through the introduction of western education in colonized countries. India, as a colony of Britain was not an exception. The paper examines the colonial influence in the field of higher education in Kerala and the process of decolonization initiated in the first two decades of post independence period

**Key words:** De colonization, hybridity, reorientation of curriculum, indigenization, diversification of content, reimagining.

Decolonization is a powerful tool for deconstructing colonial influences on knowledge and education. Decolonization represents a further dismantling of western centred institutions, systems, symbolism and standards within the higher education system. The decolonizing

approach seeks to re-imagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiology. Decolonization cannot take place without contestation. It must necessarily push back against the colonial relations of power that threaten indigenous ways of being. Decolonization is opposite to colonial ways of thinking and acting. It demands an indigenous starting point and an articulation of what decolonization means for indigenous peoples of different countries. Elder argues-Decolonization characteristically includes rewriting the curriculum and syllabi, if only to bring about the minimum of changing the ‘law-breaking insurgents’ to the ‘nation’s heroes’ in the struggle for independence<sup>1</sup>. Postcolonial educational studies not only investigate the legacies of colonialism but also work on strategies towards the decolonization of the minds – on both sides of the colonial divide. Alfred argues that decolonization can only be achieved through the resurgence of an indigenous consciousness channelled into contention with colonialism<sup>2</sup>. Decolonization is the process of undoing colonizing practices. Within the educational context, it means confronting and challenging the colonizing practices that have influenced education in the past, and which are still present today. Decolonization involves reflecting on the structure of educational institutions, and their role within the larger society. It is also important to confront the power relations within these institutions. The study examines the decolonization of higher education occurred in the initial two decades of post independence period in Kerala.

In India, the first two decades of post-independence witnessed emphasis on learning science and technology to help the nation grow. India is probably the only nation which has put the ‘scientific temperament’ as one of the directive principles in its constitution. The western economic and social growth model was imitated without a speck of scepticism. The institutions of higher learning in science, engineering and technology grew at a rapid pace even at the cost of universalization of primary education. These institutions were hailed as harbingers of modern era and growth and technology marvels were hailed as ‘temples’ of modern India. The science which became the talisman for growth was western science and was the one which evolved and originated with European modernity and the renaissance. The native

science/scientific method were frowned upon as a make-shift arrangement. Even the medicinal and health practices which were indigenous in nature were looked upon as crude, orthodoxical and uncouth and the western medicine system alone was hailed as science. The education system of India and other colonies got over-awed by the seemingly progressive uniform pedagogy and evaluation. Anyone who differed from this view was labelled as a crude aboriginal.

The Radhakrishnan Commission (1948) was the first attempt in post-independence period to formulate and develop an education culture of India. The Radhakrishna Commission bore the aspirations and dreams of newly gained freedom of a nation towards progress. Freedom of a colonized country does not mean an altogether a straight path towards progress. A colonized country which is embedded in its colonial past for more than two centuries tumbles on its past often and, an alien path from its colonized past seemed to be improbable and sometimes seemed to be practically impossible. Radhakrishnan Commission manifested it well. It projected both indigenous and colonial elements in its recommendations. The commission also recommended that the curriculum should be based on Indian philosophy and culture. The recommendation is important in view of the curriculum followed under the British rule. Instilling European values and culture was one of the objectives of colonial education system. Teaching the works of Shakespeare and other British literary stalwarts, history of Greek and Roman civilizations; and modern European history at University level influenced the mind set of youngsters in favour of the British in India.

Once India gained independence, colonialism as a political issue ceased to exist. Cultural, social and economic issues raised during the struggle for independence were seemed corollary to gain political independence. Independent India seemed more practical in churning out its own vision of development and the values that independent India upholds. It does not seem vociferous in repealing its colonial cultural ethos as was during the time of the struggle for independence. It manifested in the selection of medium of instruction in higher education Institutions in India after independence.

The recommendation of Radhakrishnan Commission was an attempt to decolonize higher education of India. At the same time it

recommended many aspects that are already recommended by previous commissions in colonial India. It recommended the continuation of three year university education which was recommended already by Calcutta University Commission, 1917-1919 in practice in colonial India. Constitution of a central University Grants Commission was recommended. But much before this, on the recommendations of the Sergent Report, University Grants Committee had been set up in 1945 by the government of India<sup>3</sup>. Some recommendations of Radhakrishnan commission are with the intension of indigenouse development (rather than decolonizing the education system.) Establishment of rural universities is recommended for the industrial, agricultural and all round development of rural India. Junior colleges in the rural areas were also recommended. He said about villagers thus- They have been broken up. We have to revive them to-day and, make them. Cottage industries and small co-operatives require to be developed and machines to lighten the labours of men living in cottages<sup>4</sup>. Emphasis was suggested to promote native language, Hindi; but the prominence of English as emerging language of the world cannot be ignored. Therefore, the Radhakrishnan commission suggested retaining English as the library language. The Radhakrishnan Commission suggested the Un-Indian character of Education. One of the serious complaints against the system of education which has prevailed in this country for over a century is that it neglected India's past, that it did not provide the Indian students with a knowledge of their own culture. It has produced in some cases the feeling that we are without roots, in others, what is worse, that our roots bind up to a world very different from that which surrounds us<sup>5</sup>. Kothari Commission (1964-66) seemed more decolonizing in its approach as it emphasized on practically what India required for the moment and future. It also based its recommendation for education analyzing the nation's policy on development. It addressed the educational needs for the development of India; set the goals and guidelines in view of the needs of the nation. The commission recommended the educational program which is needed for the country. The Commission was, in fact, formed when India confronted the lack of expertise in many upcoming developmental projects. In the Report of the Kothari Commission, it is mentioned thus- Towards the end of

the Third Five Year Plan, a need was felt to hold a comprehensive review of the educational system with a view to initiating a fresh and more determined effort at educational reconstruction; and the Education Commission was appointed to advise the Government on the national pattern of education and on the general principles and policies for the development of education at all stages and in all aspects<sup>6</sup>. Kothari commission came up with clear cut decision about the languages to be studied in school and higher education levels. Postcolonial situation hints at the compromises that colonized countries made with their colonial past for the sake of development and future stands in the world scenario. Pragmatically, the colonized countries could not completely do away their cultural acquaintance with the colonizers' culture as the West continued to be the 'standard' in the world politics, economy and culture. Absolute decolonization seemed out of question in this situation. The emphasis on Hindi indeed indicates the wholehearted attempt of the Commission towards national unity through cultural integrity in which language plays an important role. The Commission noted in its Report thus- In developing Hindi as the link language, due care should be taken to ensure that it will serve, as provided for in Article 351 of the Constitution, as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India<sup>7</sup>.

In addition to it, Inclusion of Sanskrit and introducing regional languages as medium of instruction at university level clearly reflect the decolonial stance of the Commission. At the same time, the colonial past, forced the Commission to include English in the three language formula. The Commission justifies the inclusion of English thus- World knowledge is growing at a tremendous pace, especially in science and technology. India must not only keep up this growth but should also make her own significant contribution to it. For this purpose, study of English deserves to be specially strengthened<sup>8</sup>.

The Kothari Commission seemed more pragmatic in its recommendations as the needs of the society were enquired into before putting pen into paper. A large number of people from various walks of life was met and interviewed by the Commission. In the Forward to the Report of the Commission, it mentioned the strenuous efforts taken by the Commission to make the Report as genuine as possible. It read

thus- We spent about one hundred days in going round all the States and some Union Territories. We visited universities, Colleges and schools and held discussions with teachers, educationists, administrators and students... We interviewed men and women distinguished in public life, scientists, industrialists and scholars in different fields and others interested in education. Altogether we interviewed about 9,000 persons<sup>9</sup>. The consequence was the establishment of proper link between education and nation's development plan. In other words, the requirements of the nation and its people were set to be fulfilled by the Commission.

The establishment of agricultural universities and technical institutes were, therefore, recommended by the Commission. In correspondence with the objectives of third five year plan, the Commission included the establishment of agricultural universities. It recommends at least one agricultural university in a State. For the industrial development of the country, research and technical education has given high priority. The commission explained its stance like thus- There should be a continuous review of the agricultural, industrial and other technical manpower needs of the country and efforts should be made continuously to maintain a proper balance between the output of the educational institutions and employment opportunities<sup>10</sup>. There is, of course, one thing about which we feel no doubt or hesitation: education, science-based and in coherence with Indian culture and values, can alone provide the foundation-as also the instrument-for the nation's progress, security and welfare. The statement in affirmative is the crux of the Commission; it cannot be otherwise as it is the predicament in which the colonized placed in the postcolonial condition. Science plus tradition, rational plus spiritual, and Indian plus western became the norm of India in its postcolonial situation. The reforms in education were not free from the norm.

A number of higher education institutions came up in Kerala in the two decades of post independence period. The educational scenario was quite live in Kerala already with the private involvement in it unlike in other states of India. Independence in 1947, even though Kerala State was not yet born, gave a fillip to the already lively educational sector. The State remained scattered in three divisions-

Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. The independence has given a fillip to the unification of these three territories and the aspirations for progress and development of each of these territories were heightened. Education was looked at as one of the ladders for progress and irrespective of governments of these territories; the reform spurt has given priority to educational development in these territories. However, Travancore was far ahead of the state of Cochin and Malabar in the educational progress

With the attainment of Independence, the pent-up aspirations and energies of the people were released and found expression also through education. It resulted the phenomenal growth of educational institutions and enrolment in the state. In this process of expansion, it was University education which grew more rapidly than school education. The growth in university education has been perhaps the fastest and the most pronounced in Kerala. It is gratifying however to note that the development of higher education in Kerala has taken place only after school education particularly primary education, had reached fairly high levels of expansion. Thus the system in Kerala acquired a fair degree structural balance unlike in the case of many other states. The years since independence witnessed commendable changes in educational efforts and policies on the part of government introduced with a view to providing adequate facilities for higher education. These efforts resulted in the opening of more colleges.

Kerala economy was basically agricultural and backward. It followed traditional method of cultivation and the small size of holdings made agricultural operations uneconomic. The shift to the cultivation of commercial crops from food crops during this period turned the food security of Kerala in jeopardy and there was no preparation to accept the change in the crop pattern. Absence of irrigation facilities exposed the poor peasants to the ravages of changing climate. Absence of big industries and uneconomic small scale industrial units turned Kerala economy sick and poor. The fishing industry ran on traditional equipment and the forest which covered 25% of total area of Kerala remained unutilized to its capacity. By mid-1950's Kerala remained as an industrially backward state with the dominance of traditional and labour intensive industries like coir, cashew, handloom

etc<sup>11</sup>. The higher education programmes started in Kerala after independence was not on the base of needs and urgency of Kerala society. The higher education and its curriculum had to solve these economic issues but no serious attention couldn't make in this regard. The existing political authority didn't made deliberate attempt to decolonize the education in Kerala.

A perusal of the development process of Kerala during 1947-67 indicates that the link between economy and education is conspicuously absent. To make it more clear, the agenda of education was prepared not looking into the needs of the economy. When Kerala agricultural economy moved predominantly towards the cultivation of commercial crops, education system of Kerala was not prepared to meet the needs of the economy. The article of Thayat Sankaran on education shares the general anxiety on the negligence of the inclusion of education in deciding the parameters of economic development. He opines that 85% of our population depended on agriculture. Another 10% earn their livelihood through spinning, weaving and other allied cottage industries. Modern education has not given enough thought and space in its purview how to incorporate the livelihood pattern of the 95% of population<sup>12</sup>. It stuck to the age old arts and science colleges. The colleges numbered around 123 that come up in 1960s. No attempts were made in the existing colleges to start new courses which catered to the changing needs of the economy. The observation of R .M. Manakyalath goes very well with the situation created out of the absence of a symbiotic relationship between economy and education.

‘Our university teaches all subjects under the sun! Twenty six research departments have started functioning in the university. Arts, science, oriental studies, fine arts, law, education, engineering, commerce, medicine, Ayurveda, agriculture and veterinary science are departments we have in our university but University of Kerala is still not able to render a cost accountant to serve the hundred crore capital invested Kerala Electricity Board<sup>13</sup>.

The Government of Kerala was keen on transforming the feudal social structure to the one based on social equality. Education was taken as the means by which the Government wanted to effect the

desired social transformation. As the intension of land reform package of the Government was the transformation of feudal economy, the thought behind the education reform package was to transform the feudal society. The society was based on the feudal ethos of social inequality and hierarchy. Caste system abated this social cleavage even more and the society as a whole appeared to be decadent and outmoded. The third five year plan document of the Indian planning commission described education as 'the most important single factor in achieving rapid economic development and technological progress and in creating a social order founded on the values of freedom, social justice and equal opportunity. The report of the Kothari Commission also pinpointed the role of education in social transformation. The Commission asserted that for achieving change on a grand scale.... There is one instrument, one instrument only that can be used: education. It also explained education as the agent of change of all kinds. What is needed is revolution in education which in turn will set in motion the much desired social, economic and Cultural Revolution<sup>14</sup>. No serious attempts were made to link between higher education and social order. The polity of Kerala was also in trouble and there was an inconsistent government system prevailed in Kerala. The political leaders more concentrated to their own political agenda rather than to connecting education and society. The pressure groups in the society during this period got more colleges and educational institution, but these educational institution did not start need based courses .The Anglo – Oriental controversy was not merely a controversy between two groups of British officials over the nature of education to be imparted to the Indians, but a controversy where the segments of contemporary Indian society were involved as opponents of each other. With the dawn of independence, the gradual spread of enlightenment among the masses and the rise of socially backward castes and classes in masses in national politics and administration, such conflicts on education have become more acute and confused than before, as reflected in the views often expressed by a host of political parties consisting of heterogeneous elements from the different segment of our society. As a result educational reforms when initiated by a political party or parties representing various segments of Indian society which have formed the government at the centre, they are often resisted at various levels

when pushed for implementation. And thus partly explains the failure of most of the educational initiatives since our independence.

The retention after independence of the British colonial administrative system as well as on the many of the numerous rules, regulations and acts including such draconian ones as the Official Secret Act, introduced by the British raj to govern India, obviously favour the domination in national politics and national administration, of the elite social groups of diverse castes and creeds brought up and nurtured in the colonial educational traditions. The domination of these social groups was almost complete in the first few decades of our independence till they were increasingly challenged by the weaker sections of the society including Dalits, the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes and other socially backward classes whose leadership had the benefits of the liberal and progressive education in the country.

The ruling classes should have been prepared to share their responsibility in the educational regeneration with the indigenous business and industrial houses as well as with a variety of private and non-governmental socio-religious organizations.

We have often deplored cramming by students at all levels without being able to provide a suitable alternative to the acquisition of learning by all. We have become alarmed at the rapid and unplanned expansion of higher education and enormous increase in the number of the unemployed educated persons without being able to put a stop to it.

Thus, those interested in decolonizing the classroom must take a first, crucial step: a personal commitment to political change. To deny the racial nature of politics (and power)—both inside of and surrounding the classroom—is to perpetuate the inequities created by colonization. In an attempt to decolonize the classroom, one can make many changes like diversify materials and content, teach to learning outcomes that address power and social justice, design assessments that allow diverse students to demonstrate mastery in diverse ways and involve students in the creation of knowledge, content, and curriculum. Unfortunately Kerala did not give preference for these activities.

Some questions to ask are: Who is in control of knowledge? What is their role? How did they gain this role? What maintains their power? Within a diverse population of students, part of decolonization is learning how to be an ally, and to work in solidarity with each other—not just among students, but staff as well. Perhaps the most essential part of decolonization is continual reflection. Higher educational institutions should be willing to reflect on curriculum, power dynamics, their own structuring, and any action undertaken on behalf of their students.

Curriculum is an important aspect of decolonization. Colleges need to consider whose knowledge and ways of knowing are given priority. Decolonized education is rooted in connections to place. Place-based education empowers students and helps restore cultural knowledge. Part of the process of decolonizing education is re-establishing links to the community. Education should not occur in a vacuum, and these links are essential for contextualizing knowledge, deepening understanding, encouraging community involvement, and reconnecting students with a vital support system. It is important, moving forward, to reflect on the goal of education. This reflection often uncovers motives for mandated education deeply rooted in colonialist policy. Alternative schools are excellent spaces for fostering decolonization, because they can challenge educational norms by providing a more individualized approach to education, rather than a ‘one size fits all’ approach; Implementing principles of decolonization, such as healing, empowerment, reflection, and connections to place and community; validating students’ experiences, fostering strength, helping students to form their identities, rather than forcing an identity on them, valuing cultural heritage and place-based knowledge, focusing on the positive, such as resilience and resolution, rather than a deficit-based approach and educating the whole person, not just the intellect. Let us sum up what are the things to do for decolonization of higher education in Kerala.

Revamping the curriculum is an important solution for decolonization. Open University report in 2019 provides the best succinct statement of the value of decolonizing the curriculum. A curriculum provides a way of identifying the knowledge we value. It struc-

tures the ways in which we are taught to think and talk about the world ... Decolonizing learning prompts us to consider everything we study from new perspectives ... Decolonizing learning helps us to recognize, understand, and challenge the ways in which our world is shaped by colonialism. It also prompts us to examine our professional practices<sup>15</sup>. A decolonized curriculum is not only more inclusive, it also problematizes established paradigms; engages with issues of power, hierarchy and equity; traces ideas origins; and shows how key concepts have been used for good and ill.

Reimagining syllabi is another method for the process of decolonization. A syllabus is many things at once: a class précis, a course calendar, a list of a class's requirements and readings, and, legally, a binding (and bloated) contract between students and professors. At its best, a syllabus offers something more: insights into a course's architecture -- its learning objectives, expectations, pedagogy, and sequence of activities and modes of assessment. As William Germano and Kit Nicholls make clear in their recent book on that humble, unremarkable document, preparing a syllabus provides an unmatched opportunity to engage in an intentional design process. Instructors should ask themselves: How do I transform my class into a community of inquiry? How should I structure, sequence and pace readings and assignments? What is the readings' purpose -- to provide essential background and reference information, supplements to lectures, models to emulate, or texts to explicate? What kinds of activities and assignments are most likely to help students attain the skills and knowledge that I want them to master and how can I best assess whether they have met the course's objectives?<sup>16</sup>.

Decolonizing the syllabus requires something more than the token inclusion of a number of non-Western or non-white authors. It's about how to engage and motivate students and encourage them to participate actively in their own learning. Equally important, it's about how to expose them to a wide variety of voices, perspectives and analytical frameworks; foster debate and discussion; and construct their own understanding of the subject matter.

Decolonizing the classroom is not simply about content. It's

also about classroom dynamics. A decolonization approach begins with recognition that classrooms are sites of power, privilege, hierarchy, inclusion, exclusion and implicit norms about appropriate forms of argumentation and behavior that they reflect certain cultural presumptions about gender, race and other variables. Among the challenges an instructor faces are how to maximize student participation, how to make every student feel a sense of belonging and how to orchestrate lively, dynamic discussions that are open and civil, where students feel able to express diverse (but grounded) opinions without fear of embarrassment or ridicule.

In *Pedagogies of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire's landmark 1970 call for a critical pedagogy, the author contrasts two opposing forms of teaching: "banking" content "into" students versus creating a learning environment where students and their instructor can learn from one another, drawing on their lived experience and cultural background. In Freire's view, the classroom should provide a space where the many students who have felt (and been) marginalized can feel empowered and view themselves as owners of knowledge who are free to question what is taught, rather than as recipients and regurgitations of whatever "official knowledge" is presented to them. Pedagogy, from this perspective, should challenge the idea that the instructor is the sole holder of knowledge<sup>17</sup>. The learning process, in turn, should involve investigation, dialogue and critical reflection, and the content and activities should emphasize relevance and applicability, with an ultimate goal of liberating students to think of themselves as independent and critical thinkers.

Equal educational access is not enough. Our goal should be to give every student an equal opportunity to participate and to help all students achieve a viable level of mastery. This requires an instructor to recognize and reject practices and norms that lead students to disengage and acknowledge that many traditional forms of assessment are biased and fail to accurately measure students' command of the course material. More than that, instructors must assume far greater responsibility for bringing students to success. Their primary role is not to purvey information, but to mentor, advise, tutor, coach and reach out proactively -- to truly be students' partners in their learning jour-

ney. Calls to decolonize the classroom make many instructors feel uncomfortable, fearing that this will contribute to a more toxic campus culture and divert attention from essential content and skills and result, instead, in an undue emphasis on systemic racism, white privilege, intersectionality, implicit bias, micro aggressions and language policing, turning the classroom into a T-group. In its essence, the demand that we decolonize our curriculum, syllabi, classroom cultures, pedagogy and assessments reflects values that almost all of us favor.

### Conclusion

There will be a deliberate attempt for the decolonization of higher education in Kerala. Kerala is far ahead in the general education whereas; far behind in the case of higher education. The decolonization of higher education is not an easy task. Kerala had to develop their own curriculum and other educational activities in accordance with the needs of the state. Kerala has to confront and challenge the colonizing practices that have influenced higher education in the past. It could be possible through the revamping the curriculum, reimagining the syllabi, rethinking the pedagogies and bringing the students to mastery level.

### End Notes

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