



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## WESTERNIZATION AND DISCONTINUITY OF THE HEREDITARY KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION; AN OUTLOOK INTO THE INDIGENOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM OF TRVANCORE

(Social History)

PARVATHY S

Research scholar

Department of History

University College

Thiruvananthapuram

### ABSTRACT

Hereditary knowledge production refers to knowledge or practices passed down from generation to generation that form part of the traditions or heritage of Indigenous communities. Missionary activities and the spreading of western education system gradually uprooted the traditional education systems of Travancore. Education not only confined in the four walls of a class room or grasp knowledge from the textbooks but it reflects the character formation, cultural, vocational, mental and physical developments of the students. Moral, intellectual, physical, mental and academic development of the student is guaranteed in the indigenous educational institutions. Colonial domination in the educational field adversely affected the traditional knowledge structure of a society. To imitate an alien system of education a system was completely rooted out from the society without preserving it for future generation. This paper throws light on the importance of traditional education system, what was its limitations, about how they vanished from the society due to westernization of education and how could it be reinstated by making improvements in a value-based education system.

Key words: Traditional knowledge, Colonialism, Gurukulam, Salais, Ezhuthupalli, Westernization, Indigenous knowledge structure.

## INTRODUCTION

Knowledge production is an essential factor for the development of every society. Traditional knowledge or hereditary knowledge passed from one generation to other making this development process more effective. For imparting knowledge education played a vital role. According to Martin Luther king Junior “The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education”<sup>1</sup>. In two simple sentences this quote reflects the essence of a value-based education system. Education system nourishes a student through continuous intellectual activities like creative thinking, writing, discussions, physical activities, proper guidance for character formation etc. These nourishing factors should be worked properly to mold a student who is responsible to the family as well as the society. All these factors are guaranteed in the indigenous educational institutions. By avoiding the limitations of indigenous system and accepting and understanding its proper essence, it is a fruitful and intellectual one.

Kerala has a proud literacy rate which left behind other states of India resulted from the continuous process of educational development. Contribution of various aspects like indigenous educational institutions, Missionary activities, westernization of education etc. paved the way to this proud achievement. Among them the contribution of Indigenous institutions was given not much importance because of the limitations like denial of education to lower sections of the society, brahmin domination etc. even if the roots of education lying in it. Education not accessible to every section of the society was a serious problem concerning the indigenous educational institutions. But why the society cannot think to improve and develop such a system? Development can be brought by removing the mistakes from a system and give necessary changes to it without dropping its essence. The traditional system was vanished from the society without taking any appropriate essence from it as a result of the background created by the missionaries and colonial power. Why the society do not have the ability to think to improve their own system for development of education? Which were the positive and negative aspects of indigenous education system? Can we adopt any essence from it for making present education system effective? Here an attempt is made to answer these questions by studying the Indigenous education system of Travancore.

Travancore was perhaps the first state in British India that recognized education as a state responsibility<sup>2</sup>. Education was given in Travancore through the indigenous educational institutions scattered in different parts namely *Salais*, *Sabhamutts*, *Ezhuthupallis*, *Kudipallikkudams* etc. Many Malayalam

autobiographies like *Kanneerum Kinavum* of V. T Bhattathirippad, *Jeevithasamaram* of C.Kesavan, C.V Kunjiraman's *Njan etc.* portraits the positive and negative aspects of Traditional education system specially the Ezhuthupalli system. A popular education system existed in Travancore during Sangham age without any caste restrictions, inequalities etc. But the arrival of Aryans completely changed the scenario and the society confronted a severe Brahmin ascendancy in every aspect. Due to their domination the standard of education deteriorated and became unreachable to other sections of the society. But during the age of Kulasekharas rapid progress can be seen because of the emergence of *Salais* as educational institutions which were attached to the temples. Another form of Indigenous educational institutions which existed in Travancore were Ezhuthupallis, *Kalaris*, *Gurukulams* etc. and each one of these institutions had its own curriculum, teaching methods, admission procedure etc. This paper attempts a detailed study of these aspects.

Evidence about education system of Travancore is available from Sangam age itself. In the Sangam age rigors of caste and communal barriers were absent and the social evils of untouchability and unapproachability were unknown<sup>3</sup>. People irrespective of caste and gender were entitled to get the benefit of education. Women also have the right to get education. All these shows that a high literacy rate and a popular education system existed during this period. But there was no much evidence about the early years of Middle Ages. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, present Umayanalloor was a center of Buddhism and they established an educational institution under a banyan tree at Sasthamcovil. It continued till the 10<sup>th</sup> century and taught Great principles of Buddha, Ashtangahridaya and Agriculture.<sup>4</sup> Their educational institutions were known in the name *Pallis*. Perhaps it was the influence of Buddhism that educational institutions established along with each temple. Education under a banyan tree provide comfort zone to the students to think freely and breath pure air and they taught the lessons from nature also. From there the students understood that education is not a matter confining to the four walls of a classroom but to realize the world around them.

Aryanization and the increasing hold of the caste system brought changes in the popular education system and it deteriorated the standard of education and literacy. Women as well as low caste people were denied the right to education<sup>5</sup>. Chaturvarna system emerged in the society due to the coming of Aryans and Brahmins dominated the high strata of caste system. Progress in education started during the reign of Kulasekharas of Mahodayapuram. Large number of temples were constructed and educational institutions were attached to each temple. Educational institutions established along with important temples were known as

*Salais*. Influence of Kulashekara Alwar, Cheramanperumal Nayanar and Shankaracharya contributed to the ultimate destruction of Buddhism in Travancore. Many Buddhist temples were converted to either Vaishnava or Siva temples but the system of keeping the educational institutions with the temple was continued by them<sup>6</sup>. An inscription of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century in Manikanteswara temple in Kottarakkara shows evidence to *Salais* and Vedic colleges attached to it.

*Salais* attached to temples were residential in nature. They were Vedic institutions and admission was restricted to Brahmin children only. Inscriptional evidence shows some important *Salais* like Muzhikkulam *Salai*, Thiruvalla *Salai*, Kanthalur *salai*, Parthivapuram *Salai* and Sreevallabhaperumchala. Among them Parthivapuram was established only for Brahmin students. First reference about Kandalur *Salai* can be seen in the Parthivapuram copper plates and many controversies existing relate its place of origin. Detailed description about Kandalur *salai* can be traced from the Prakrit champu *Kuvalayamala* of Jaina saint Udhoythanasuri<sup>7</sup>. There a strict rule existed that the student should reside in these *Salais* for education and deal with religious and non-religious subjects. The earliest *Salais* have no facility for accommodating more students. Number of Students increased when they get land and other donations. Taxes collected for the functioning of *Salais* were known as *Salabhogham*. Students were known as *Chattan* or *Chattar*. It is the Prakrit form of *Chathran*. Main subjects taught in these institutions were Philosophy, Vedas, Dhanasasthra and Politics. Teachers should have academic talent in these subjects. In the model of Kandalur *salai* Karunandakkan established Parthivasekharapuram *salai*<sup>8</sup>. There were 95 seats in Parthivapuram *Salai* and 175 in Thiruvalla<sup>9</sup>. Division of seats to different subjects prevailed in these institutions. Admission should give on the basis of qualification and there was as an entrance exam conducted for this purpose. This process is continuing till now. Students who wish to join have basic knowledge about Grammar, Mimamsa and Paurohithya. According to Arthasasthra, one who have the qualities of '*susrusha, Sravana, Grahana, dharana, vinjana, uha, apoha* (avoid illogical things) and *thathwa* have the right to get education. There is no doubt that teaching should be based on memory as there was no printing and paper in that time. Repetition is the only way to by heart the lessons. So, memory and critical thinking power of the student should be increased. Today for calculations, students need electronic devices like calculator, computer or a mobile phone. But in the indigenous institution students have the ability to answer the complicated calculation within seconds without the help of any devices. In an educational institution, discipline is as important as syllabus and the indigenous educational institutions follow

strict rules for maintaining it. Respect should be maintained between student and a teacher and no student have the courage to disobey the teacher. Offensive students were punished severely and even expelled from the *Salais*. The basic lessons of the character formation starting from here. After completing education, the student should be self-reliant. Most of these *Salais* were converted into military academies during Chera-Chola war<sup>10</sup>. The severe battle which prolonged for about hundred years lead to the destruction of *Salais*.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the *Salais*, *Sabha mutts* were existed in the northern region for Brahmin children. There were other institutions like the *Ezhuthupallis* for the education of non-Brahmin children. Each village had its *Patasala* or *Ezhuthupalli* which undertook the task of education among the common people under the guidance of *Ezhuthachan* or *Asan*. The *Asan* initiated the children into the mysteries of the three Rs at a very early age<sup>12</sup>. By standing with great respect the students welcome their *Asan* to the class. At first, he imparted writing and Mathematics; then grammar, Amarakosa, *slokas* etc. Lessons were written by pupils on 'ola' or palmyra leaf with an iron stylus.<sup>13</sup> Students should recite prayers in the evening and study lessons carefully before sleep. This process was strictly ensured by the parents and oversee by the *Asan*.<sup>14</sup> Everyone attribute the missionary activities and colonial intervention paved the way for modernization of education, but they are really indebted to the *Ezhuthupalli* system of Kerala. Because in the first half of the 19th century England faced huge illiteracy rate and the *Ezhuthupalli* system was used to reduce it. The *Ezhuthupalli* system of Kerala which is imitated by England to reduce their illiteracy rate in the name monitorial system or Madras system or Mutual instruction<sup>15</sup>. Charles Dicken's *Sketches by Boz* portrays this sympathetic condition of Parish school teachers of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After education from *Ezhuthupalli* a Nair student continue his education in *Kalari* and a Brahmin student in Mutt. It was a customary for children who had their primary education in the village schools to proceed to *Kalari* for getting training in the offensive and defensive system of warfare. Tamil epic *Manimekhalai* gives reference to a university in the name Vanchi near ancient Kodungallur and have facilities for higher studies in six darsanas namely Lokayatha, Boudha, Samkhya, Nyaya, Vyseshika and Meemamsa.

*Gurukulams* give specialisation in higher branches of learning. Here the Guru plays a crucial role in moulding and nurturing the character of the students. The word *Gurukula* or *Gurukulam* is a combination of two words, Guru meaning teacher and Kula meaning family or home. Thus, the term *gurukula* translates to 'the home of the teacher.' This is exactly what the *gurukula* was- a home for pupils or *shishyas* to learn and

acquire knowledge. *Shishyas* would reside in or near the Gurus home and acquire knowledge from the teacher. The *Gurukula* System of education was one of the earliest systems of education in Travancore till the advent of the British and some *Gurukulams* also run parallel to the modern system of education. This system acted as a model for the way the students must learn, think and act with intelligence. The students or *sishyas* were not only taught theory through ancient texts but also trained in physical fitness and taught how to manage day-to-day living and engage in activities like singing, dancing, craft, sports, and yoga. This ensured the mental, physical and intellectual development of the student. Everyone was considered equal in a *Gurukula* system of education. This system was comprehensive and included the activities for the holistic development of students. Moral, physical and spiritual wellbeing of the student was guaranteed. Students were being taught to co-exist with nature. Some of the subjects taught were Mathematics, Astrology, Grammar, Science, Astronomy, Languages, Early Medicine etc. The routine followed in these institutions were inflexible. This guaranteed the discipline and regulation in the lives of all the students. Students were taught how to behave in the society and respect elders. Teachers monitored and observed the behavior of students. To ensure effective learning students had to recite the Vedas and other ancient texts daily. This leads to memorization process more active. Debates and discussions occurred frequently on certain topics. It helps to analyze and apply critical thinking on subject matter. Kodungallur *Gurukulam* was famous for its specialty in admitting students without caste discrimination. Teachers were scholars who were highly qualified in subjects like Nyaya, Vedantha, Vyakarana, Alankara, Ayurveda, Jyothisha, Sculpture, Music, poems etc.<sup>16</sup> By breaking the chains of caste restrictions, *Thampurattis* of the Kodungallur *kovilakam* give instructions to the students and they enjoyed freedom with the support of their husbands. 'Young men who were desirous of pursuing their studies found no difficulty in attaching themselves to the pundits, physicians and astrologers of reputation who had the kindness and generosity to help the aspirants for knowledge. More was learnt from the association with the guru and in the light of his example than from regular teaching or pedagogic discourse. But the advantage of this *Gurukula* system of education was enjoyed by only a very limited number of people.'<sup>17</sup>

Travancore government paid no attention towards development of the education of common people until the 1830s and they usually received education from the *Asans* and village schoolmasters of the indigenous educational institutions<sup>18</sup>. Beginning of modern education is traced to the issue of Royal rescript by Rani Gouri Parvathi Bai of Travancore in 1817. This proclamation is considered as the Magna carta of education in

Travancore.<sup>19</sup> Rulers of Travancore made significant contributions to the development of education and a number of institutions were established for this purpose. The manner in which the state of Travancore intervened to foster the indigenous education and assimilate it into the modern educational system that was being built as a cementing factor in the administrative and socio-economic modernization of Travancore<sup>20</sup>.

According to Dr.S.Radhakrishnan, former President and Vice president of India, development of personality is more significant than accumulation of intellectual tools and academic knowledge. This concept is proved in the indigenous educational institutions. Education not only provide to acquire academic knowledge but to provide a responsible and self-reliant scholar to the society. At present a student can achieve knowledge in one branches of knowledge. *Gurukula* system provides the student to get knowledge from any subject at a time. Because of this fact they acquire knowledge in all relevant subjects and they can be meaningfully called as a 'scholar'. Before adopting an alien system of education, a second thought could have been necessary. For making indigenous education institutions more effective and acceptable to everyone it could have given education without any caste discrimination and vocational training could be implemented and more relevant subjects should be brought in to the curriculum and facilities should improve to accommodate more students by avoiding harmful elements which destroy the nature.

Colonial domination and the missionary activities changed the education scenario of Travancore and the indigenous system began to decline. Here the missionaries created enlightenment among the common people the importance of education and created facilities for the access of education to all sections equally. So, the missionaries were a lighting factor for the development of a wild fire. Travancore had a group of people who had the knowledge of reading and writing. But it was confined to a limited section only. Missionaries understood this fact and they simply started to foster it. The relevance of the ancient *Gurukula* system of education and other traditional institutions' contributions cannot be forgotten. Though the concept has undergone significant changes to keep up with modernization, the basic essence of the traditional education system can be adopted in the modern education system. However, a large number of indigenous schools survived until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the state came to be increasingly concerned as to how these schools could be upgraded.<sup>21</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Travancore had a mysterious history of indigenous educational institutions which contributed a major role in educational development and made Kerala number one in literacy rate comparing to other states of India. Without a strong base a building cannot be constructed. Like this literacy of Kerala is not a sudden process. It had a strong base molded by the traditional education system. But the credit goes only to missionary activities and western education system by avoiding the hereditary knowledge producing institutions. Many of these institutions and the system were completely extinct from the society as a result of the colonial domination on education. Before the arrival of missionaries Travancore consist a group of people who had the ability to read and write confined only in a small section of the society was the limitation of the indigenous system. Nobody made an earnest attempt to reorganize or improve the traditional system by giving access to each and every section of the society. Westernization of education caused the deterioration of traditional knowledge structure and it resulted in the vanishing of an age-old system which has many positive aspects of its own.

By avoiding the limitations of indigenous system and go through its positive aspects, it concentrated on the holistic development of a student. Present system lacks many difficulties for the overall physical, mental and intellectual development of the students. Reviving the essence of indigenous system by making necessary improvements will work wonders on the education system of today. A perfect balance of modern education along with indigenous education system will be a flawless education system. In the modern system of education students can get their degrees by listening to their teachers in the classrooms and answering the question papers in the examination halls. Such was not in the case of traditional educational institutions. Several times during his course the student was called upon to pass through the speeches, when he was called upon to defend his own position and attack that of the opponent in heated discussions. Powers of debate and discussions were thus remarkably developed by the time when the student finished his education. An education system is not only valued by the percentage of marks acquired by the students but the outcome of the students' personal qualities and efficiency in extracurricular activities like sports, yoga, fitness etc. An efficient education system teaches the student to live harmonious with nature without harming any social beings. After completing education, a student become self-reliant. In the indigenous educational institutions' education was imparted for moral, mental, physical and intellectual development of the student. Reorganizing or restructuring of the indigenous

system can bring more changes in the field of education. If this thought come to the society before hundred years ago, the hereditary knowledge producing institutions can make drastic development in education.

## End Notes

1. [www.brainyquote.com](http://www.brainyquote.com)
2. K.G. Vijayalekshmi, *Educational development in South India*,1993, Mittal publications, New Delhi.
3. A. Sreedharamenon, *A survey of Kerala History*, National book stall, Kottayam, 1970.
4. M.Prabhakaranthampi, *Mayyanad oru charithrasampanna gramam*, National book stall, Kottayam, 2017.
5. Sreedharamenon, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, East west publications, Cochi,1978.
6. T.K Ravindran, *Institutions and movements in Kerala History*, Trivandrum,1978, p.9.
7. K. Sivasankaran Nair, *AnanthapuriNoottandukalilude,DC Books, Kottayam, 2004.*
8. Ibid.
9. Travancore Archaeological Series II, Thiruvalla copper plates 131-207
10. K.V. Eapen, *A study of Kerala History*, Kollen publication, Kottayam,1971.
11. The proceedings of xxii All India educational conference & fourth All India adult educational conference, Tvm,1946, superiendentgovt. press, Tvm, p.119-120.
12. Joseph Edamaruku, *Kerala Samskaram*, Vidhyarthimithram, Kottayam, 1971.
13. lamkulam Kunjan pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, National book stall Kottayam, 1970.
14. P. Bhaskaranunni, *PathonpathamnoottandileKealalam*, National book stall, Kottayam, 1988.
15. Sreejith E, *Keralathile Vidhyabhyasam charithram varthamanam*, National book stall, Kottayam, 2016.
16. P. Bhaskaranunni, opcit.
17. T.K Velupillai, *The Travancore state manual*, The govt. of Travancore, Trivandrum, 1940.
18. S. Ramachandran Nair, *Social and cultural history of Colonial Kerala*, Trivandrum,1999.
19. Sreedharamenon, opcit.
20. P.R. Gopinathan Nair, *Primary education, population growth and social change*
21. Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu state- Travancore 1858-1936*, Oxford university press, New Delhi, 1998.