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"The Influence Of Commissioner Sir Mark Cubbon On The Development Of Modern Education In Princely Mysore (1834-1861)"

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Abstract

This article revives the transformative role of Commissioner Sir Mark Cubbon (1834-1861) in establishing the modern education system in the princely state of Mysore. During his 27-year tenure as Chief Commissioner, Cubbon implemented comprehensive administrative, judicial, and educational reforms that transformed Mysore into what historians would later call a "model state." His policies toward education, including support for missionary institutions, the establishment of vernacular schools, and the creation of an accessible educational infrastructure, laid the groundwork for Mysore's emergence as a centre of educational excellence in nineteenth-century India. This paper analyses Cubbon's educational initiatives within the broader context of his administrative modernisation efforts and their lasting impact on Mysore's educational landscape.

Keywords: Mark Cubbon, Modern Education, Princely Mysore, 19th Century Educational Reforms, Colonial Administration, Vernacular Education, Missionary Schools, Historical Research Methodology, Education Policy in Mysore

Introduction

The history of modern education in Karnataka, especially in the princely state of Mysore, shows a strong influence from British colonial rule. Among the many administrators who shaped Mysore's future, Lieutenant-General Sir Mark Cubbon stands out as a key figure whose impact went beyond simple governance. He served as Chief Commissioner of Mysore from 1834 to 1861, leading one of the longest and most important administrative periods in the state's history.

Cubbon was born on August 23, 1775. He joined the British East India Company's service and gradually climbed the ranks to become one of the most respected administrators in colonial India. When he took over Mysore in 1834 at the age of 49, the state was recovering from a time of chaos following the Nagar rebellion and the removal of the maharaja's administrative powers. The British government needed a skilled and efficient leader to restore order and prosperity to the troubled region. Cubbon turned out to be exactly the transformative leader that Mysore needed.

The march of Mysore toward modernity began during Cubbon's time as commissioner. His approach to governance mixed elements of kind leadership with forward-thinking modernisation. This combination shaped the state's development for many years. His reforms touched on various areas, including reorganising the judicial system, developing infrastructure, setting economic policy, and implementing social reforms. However, his work in education stands out as essential to Mysore's rise as an educational leader in India.

This article looks at how Cubbon's administrative methods and educational policies laid the groundwork for modern education in princely Mysore. This groundwork helped build the state's reputation as a forward-looking and enlightened region.

Methodology and Scope

This study uses a historical research method mainly based on a close look at archival sources. These include official government records, administrative reports, correspondence, and writings from the time of Sir Mark Cubbon's administration in Mysore, which lasted from 1834 to 1861. The research critically examines primary documents for their authenticity and relevance. It also places these documents in the context of the social, political, and cultural environment of 19th-century Mysore.

A qualitative approach helps trace developments in policy and educational reforms, as well as their effects. This is done by gathering information from various historical sources. The study also references secondary scholarly literature to position its findings within the larger discussions about colonial education policy and governance in princely states. This flexible approach acknowledges the changing nature of historical sources, enabling a thorough exploration and refinement of research questions during the study.

This study looks at the educational policies and reforms put in place during Sir Mark Cubbon's time. It focuses on developing and modernising vernacular and English education systems in princely Mysore. The research examines the social and political contexts that affected educational changes. It also explores how colonial administrative needs interacted with local cultural practices. Additionally, it highlights how these reforms shaped the future of education in Mysore. The study specifically covers the years 1834 to 1861, providing a detailed understanding of Cubbon's role in establishing modern education in the area.

The Context: Educational Landscape Before Cubbon

To appreciate Cubbon's contributions, one must understand the educational landscape he inherited. Before British influence, education in Mysore, like in most parts of India, followed traditional patterns led by religious institutions. Brahminical schools taught Sanskrit and religious texts, while Persian schools provided training for administrative and judicial roles under Muslim patronage. Vernacular schools appeared sporadically, teaching in local languages such as Kannada and Tamil, but these were unorganised, privately managed, and mainly accessible to upper castes.

The indigenous vernacular school system, although widespread across India with over 16,000 such institutions documented in the nineteenth century, lacked standardisation, government support, and a systematic curriculum. These schools offered basic literacy, arithmetic, and practical skills like letter-writing and account-keeping, but they varied significantly in quality and accessibility.

The British East India Company's educational policy in the early nineteenth century was mixed and often contradictory. The Charter Act of 1813 allocated funds for education in British India, but progress was slow and contentious. The well-known debate between Orientalists, who supported traditional Indian learning, and Anglicists, who pushed for English education, remained unresolved during Cubbon's early years in Mysore.

When Cubbon took office in 1834, Mysore had only one significant modern educational institution: the Raja's Free English School, established in 1833 by Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar III in Mysore city. This groundbreaking institution showed the ruler's recognition of the importance of English education, but it existed almost in isolation within a large area that had very little educational infrastructure.

Cubbon's Administrative Philosophy and Educational Vision

Cubbon's approach to governance was based on a few key principles that shaped his educational policies. First, he believed in using local talent in administration instead of relying heavily on European staff. This idea created a need for educated Indians who could take on various administrative roles. His government was very efficient and economical, costing only about £13,000 a year and needing just four Europeans to run the entire state.

Second, Cubbon supported social reform and equal treatment under the law, regardless of caste or religion. This forward-thinking view made the environment more welcoming to educational growth beyond traditional elite groups. By ending corporal punishment, forced labor, and different forms of slavery, he showed a commitment to human dignity that naturally extended to access to education.

Third, Cubbon saw education as essential to both efficient administration and social progress. He did not lay out a detailed educational philosophy like later Indian reformers did, but his support for educational institutions showed he understood how powerful education could be.

Edward Washburn Hopkins, writing in 1901, created the term "cubbonize" to refer to effective, local-led administration. This idea recognized that such governance needed an educated administrative class, which could only be reached through organized educational development.

Support for Missionary Education

One of Cubbon's most important contributions to modern education in Mysore was his active support for Christian missionary educational institutions. During the nineteenth century, missionaries played a key role in bringing Western-style education to India, and Mysore was no different.

By the 1830s and 1840s, missionary societies, such as the Basel Mission and the London Missionary Society, had started opening schools in various parts of Karnataka. These institutions operated in towns like Tumakuru, Shivamogga, and Hassan, offering both English and "Anglo-vernacular" education. This system taught English alongside local languages.

Cubbon's administration gave vital support to these missionary institutions through grants-in-aid, land allocations, and cooperation. His support was based on practicality rather than ideology. Cubbon understood that missionary schools offered quality education, introduced modern subjects and teaching methods, and helped create an educated population capable of contributing to Mysore's development.

The missionary schools brought several changes to the education system in Mysore. They focused on practical subjects such as natural sciences, mathematics, and modern geography, while still teaching traditional humanities. They supported education for all, regardless of caste or gender, by setting up schools for girls and lower-caste students who had mostly been left out of regular schools. The missionaries also helped develop the Kannada language by publishing textbooks, religious texts, and other materials in Kannada, which enriched the local literary tradition.

Most importantly, missionary institutions provided examples of organised education with structured curricula, exams, and qualified teachers. These elements would later influence government educational policies. By the 1850s, many missionary schools had been set up across Mysore, creating a network of modern educational institutions that added to and expanded on the single Raja's School.

Development of Government Schools and Infrastructure

While supporting missionary education, Cubbon also worked to expand government-run educational institutions. The administration took over the Maharaja's School in Mysuru and gradually improved its facilities and curriculum. This institution, along with missionary schools, formed the core of English education in Mysore.

More importantly, Cubbon's administration began to establish schools in district towns across Mysore. By the 1850s, government high schools and district schools were founded in several major towns, including Bangalore (1858), Hassan (1852), Tumkur (1852), Shimoga (1854), Chitradurga (1861), and Chikmagalur (1862). This expansion reflected a clear policy to spread educational facilities geographically, ensuring that modern education was not just in the capital city.

The creation of these district schools served several purposes. They provided secondary education to students from district headquarters and nearby areas, lessening the need for families to send their children to Mysore city for higher education. They also created jobs for educated Indians as teachers and administrative staff. Additionally, they acted as centers for spreading modern ideas and knowledge to smaller towns, helping with overall social progress.

Cubbon's efforts to develop infrastructure supported the growth of education. His administration built over one thousand miles of roads across Mysore, making transportation and communication between towns and villages easier. This road network allowed students to travel to schools in district headquarters and enabled educational materials and ideas to circulate more freely throughout the state.

Improvements in the postal system under Cubbon's administration also helped education. They allowed for communication, the distribution of printed materials, and contact between educational institutions. The establishment of a government press made it possible to print textbooks, administrative documents, and eventually newspapers.

Vernacular Education and Language Policy

While English education received a lot of attention, Cubbon's administration also saw the value of vernacular education. Mysore had already established two Marathi vernacular schools in Dharwad and Hubballi in 1826, set up by the Bombay Native School and School Book Society, when those areas were part of Bombay State. This showed an understanding of the need for vernacular education alongside English teaching.

The educational policy during Cubbon's time reflected the ongoing debate in British India about the importance of English compared to vernacular education. The influential Wood's Despatch of 1854, issued by Sir Charles Wood, who was the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company, pushed for a system where English-educated elites would pass on knowledge to the masses using vernacular languages. This policy recommended promoting vernacular education at the primary level, Anglo-vernacular schools at the secondary level, and English colleges for higher education.

Cubbon's administration generally supported this framework. Although exact statistics from his time are scarce, available evidence indicates efforts to promote vernacular schools alongside English institutions. The government provided some help to vernacular schools, but this support was modest compared to what was given to English education.

The language policy had major implications. English education created a class of Indians qualified for administrative roles and exposed them to Western knowledge. Vernacular education, though not given as much emphasis, ensured wider literacy and maintained ties to local cultural traditions. This two-track system would shape Mysore's educational development for many years, with periodic conflicts between supporters of English and vernacular education.

Laying Foundations for Higher Education

While Cubbon's time in office did not lead to the establishment of colleges in Mysore—this happened later—his administration laid the groundwork for higher education development. By setting up and supporting high schools across the state, Cubbon's administration built a pipeline of students ready for college.

The high schools created during Cubbon's time gradually improved their curricula to help students prepare for university entrance exams run by the University of Madras, which oversaw Mysore until 1916. Several of these schools eventually added intermediate and college classes. For example, the Maharani's High School in Mysore, originally founded as a primary school in 1881 (shortly after Cubbon's time), became a college affiliated with Madras University by 1902.

The administrative and financial systems that Cubbon set up provided the stability needed for long-term educational planning. His effective revenue administration and fiscal management created budget surpluses that could be invested in education and other development activities. The law and order system he established ensured a peaceful environment for educational institutions to operate and grow.

Additionally, Cubbon's policy of hiring educated Indians in administration created a demand for educated individuals and clear career paths for those seeking modern education. This practical

demonstration of education's value motivated many families to invest in their children's learning, despite traditional resistance to new ways of teaching.

Social Reforms and Educational Access

Cubbon's social reforms created a better environment for educational growth. He established a uniform code of law that applied to all social classes, marking a significant change from the traditional discrimination based on caste. While Cubbon did not directly confront the social aspects of the caste system, his legal changes promoted formal equality, which would later include access to education.

The commissioner's ban on corporal punishment, forced labor, and various forms of slavery improved the status of lower castes and marginalized groups. These changes, along with the missionaries' focus on inclusive education, gradually opened up educational opportunities for those traditionally excluded from formal learning.

Cubbon's administration also aimed to reduce the influence of poligars—local chieftains. They calculated pensions for these chieftains based on the cost of keeping them in prison. This decrease in feudal power created space for modern institutions, like schools, to operate more independently from traditional power structures.

Cubbon supported healthcare initiatives, such as establishing hospitals and homes for lepers. This showed a broader commitment to social welfare that naturally linked to education. Both healthcare and education were investments in people and social development, reflecting a forward-thinking approach to administration.

Challenges and Limitations

Despite notable achievements, Cubbon's educational initiatives faced major limitations. The scale of educational expansion was modest compared to Mysore's population. Most schools served urban or semi-urban areas, leaving rural villages largely untouched by modern education. The vast majority of the population remained illiterate, especially women and lower castes.

Financial constraints hindered educational growth. Although Cubbon's administration managed funds well, the resources for education were still limited. The British colonial government focused on administrative and military spending, which reduced funds for social sector development, including education.

The focus on English education created social divisions. English-educated elites gained access to government jobs and social standing, while those without English education had fewer opportunities. This language gap would grow in the following decades, leading to ongoing tensions in Indian society.

Gender differences in education remained significant during Cubbon's time. While a few missionary schools allowed girls, government policies gave little attention to female education. Strong traditional views that dismissed female education as unnecessary, or even harmful, continued to obstruct educational growth for women.

The curriculum in schools prioritized administrative usefulness and Western knowledge, often overlooking local knowledge traditions. This bias in education sparked cultural tensions and debates about what education should include and its purpose—debates that still occur in Indian education today.

Legacy and Long-term Impact

Despite limitations, Cubbon's contributions to education in Mysore had significant long-term effects. The network of high schools he helped establish became the basis for later educational growth in Mysore. Many schools founded during or just after his time still operate today as respected institutions.

The administrative systems and principles Cubbon created provided the structure for future educational development. Later leaders of Mysore, including the enlightened Dewan Sir M. Visvesvaraya and Maharaja Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV, built on Cubbon's foundations to develop one of India's most impressive educational systems.

The establishment of Mysore University in 1916 marked the peak of educational development that began in Cubbon's era. Mysore became the first princely state in India to create its own university, reflecting the educational culture and infrastructure built over the previous eight decades. The university's founding allowed Mysore to move away from its reliance on Madras University and enabled the state to shape its own educational policies.

Cubbon's model of effective, modern administration influenced governance practices beyond Mysore. The term "cubbonize," created to describe his administrative style, showed how his methods were recognised by contemporary observers. His example proved that native talent, when properly educated and utilized, could govern effectively, challenging colonial assumptions about Indian administrative capabilities.

The educational institutions formed during Cubbon's time helped create an educated middle class in Mysore that played crucial roles in the state's political, economic, and social development. Educated Indians filled the growing bureaucracy, contributed to local literature and journalism, and eventually led nationalist and reform movements.

Mysore's reputation as a "model state" partly relied on its educational successes, which were made possible by the foundations Cubbon laid. By the early twentieth century, Mysore had become a center of educational innovation and excellence, with literacy rates and educational facilities better than those in most other parts of India.

Conclusion

Commissioner Sir Mark Cubbon's time from 1834 to 1861 was a significant period in Mysore's history. His efforts in education were a key part of his modernising agenda. He supported missionary schools, helped establish government educational institutions, improved infrastructure, and pushed for social reforms. Through these actions, Cubbon built the foundations for modern education in Mysore.

To understand his contributions, we must look at the historical context. The colonial relationship between British administrative changes and traditional Indian society was complex and often contradictory. Cubbon was not just a distant benefactor or a narrow-minded colonial official. He was a practical administrator who understood that education met both the needs of colonial governance and the aspirations of Indians for progress.

The educational development during Cubbon's time faced limitations, such as its modest scale, focus on urban areas, gender inequalities, and language divisions. These challenges reflected the broader issues of colonial rule and social attitudes in the nineteenth century. Still, Cubbon's policies opened doors for educational growth that future generations could expand upon.

The change in Mysore from a troubled region in 1834 to a stable and modern state by 1861 was largely due to Cubbon's vision and leadership. Education played a crucial role in this change, preparing Indians for administrative roles, introducing modern knowledge, and establishing institutions for learning.

Now, over 160 years after Cubbon's time, Karnataka is still benefiting from the educational foundations set in the nineteenth century. The schools, colleges, and universities across the state, the tradition of educational excellence associated with Mysore, and the educated population contributing to Karnataka's growth all trace back to the groundbreaking efforts of administrators like Mark Cubbon. They recognised the power of education and worked within their time's limits to make it available to the people of Mysore.

Cubbon's impact on modern education in Mysore teaches us that building institutions often takes generations, with each era building on what came before. It also highlights that education—how to access it, what to teach, the languages used, and who gets opportunities—has always been a battleground with competing ideas about society and progress. The foundations Cubbon established continue to shape the ongoing discussions about the role of education in Karnataka's development.

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