

## **Contribution of Travancore rulers to the advancement of Education in Kerala**

By Uma Maheshwari

July 2015

### **The Present scenario**

A month after classes began; school children across Kerala have no text books. The state government appears unperturbed by the state of affairs.

Although the government claims that the SCERT textbooks have been printed, that is not the case. Textbooks with new curriculum for Classes 2, 4, 6 and 8 have not been printed while, the other classes have not yet reached schools.

The Students' Federation of India (SFI) took to the streets in protest on Monday, with the march to Secretariat office in Thiruvananthapuram turning violent following clashes with the police. In a bid to offset the delay, the state government has postponed the first quarterly exams, which are usually held before the Onam festival. Students will now take the exam in September instead of August.

Education Minister Abdu Rabb has a rather novel explanation. "Exams have not been postponed because of the delay in distributing textbooks. Actually Onam has come a month early," Abdu Rabb.

The textbooks are available online and parents have been asked to download them from the SCERT website. But with most textbooks running into dozens of pages, not many can afford to do so. This has made it difficult for children who study in schools in tribal and coastal areas as also students from low income groups tough to cope.

The District Information System for Education (DISE) for the year 2013-14 showed that Kerala had the worst textbook distribution system, and about 70.72% of the schools do not receive books on time.

In 1969, Education Ministers from various countries met at Tehran to discuss eradication of illiteracy. On 23<sup>rd</sup> 1987-February a new movement called "Appeal" (Asia Pacific Program of Education For All) was inaugurated in New Delhi, to tackle illiteracy and to provide basic education to all.

In Kerala the total literacy movement was first initiated at Ernakulam district and Kottayam municipality in the late 80's. On 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1990, the then Prime Minister Shri V P Singh declared Ernakulam as the first total literate district in India. State wide literacy survey was conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> of April 1990, 28.52 lakhs of people were found illiterate.

With the help of voluntary organisations like Sastra Sahitya Parishath classes were conducted to educate the illiterate and on 18<sup>th</sup> of April 1991, Kerala became the first total literate state in India.

This is not an overnight achievement and the credit goes to the rulers of Travancore who laid a very strong foundation in imparting education to the common man. The role of Christians

Missionaries too supplemented the vision of the rulers. In the early years of the 19th century, the London Missionaries in South Travancore and the Church Missionaries in North Travancore started number of educational institutions. Instructions in reading, writing and arithmetic formed the part of the curriculum.

Maharani Gauri Parvathi Bayi sanctioned the CMS to establish a College at Kottayam. She donated 21,000 Panam (then currency in Travancore) to the CMS Church to start an educational institution in Kottayam which is currently the renowned CMS College. It was thrown open for secular education in 1815, followed by a Seminary School in Nagercoil in 1818. This is the bicentenary of the CMS College.

Benjamin Bailey, a Missionary arrived in Kottayam. He was made the Superintendent (Principal) of the 'CMS College'. During his tenure as Principal from 1817 to 1819 Bailey laid the foundation for modern education modelled on western education.

Benjamin Bailey was the progenitor of printing and book publishing in Malayalam, the native language of Kerala. He established the first printing press (the Kottayam CMS press) and started printing Malayalam in Kerala. He was the first lexicographer in the language. He translated the whole of the Bible into Malayalam and printed them.

In 1834, Maharaja Swathi Tirunal established the Raja's Free School at Thiruvananthapuram. Soon similar English schools were opened in other parts of the kingdom.

In 1848, Maharaja Uthram Tirunal Marthanda Varma appointed T Madava Row as the tutor of his heir apparent – Princes Ayilyam Tirunal and Visakham Tirunal. In 1858, the Maharaja appointed him as the Dewan of Travancore. In twelve years, he brought about great reforms in the field of Education.

“While the Government was not wanting in their efforts to spread English Education in the country, little progress has been made as regards to sound instruction in the vernacular language, through which alone any considerable impressions can be made on the masses” observed Madava Row.

Maharaja Uthram Tirunal passed away in 1860 and his nephew Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma ascended the throne. He sanctioned a scheme for the organization and development of vernacular education. The proposal included a central school in the capital, mofussil schools in each taluk, a normal school for the training of training of teachers, the appointment of a Director of vernacular education with two inspectors as assistants, the institution of a text book committee to translate suitable books into Malayalam, and a book depot for the sale of text books. The first department school for boys was established in Chalai and girls in Karamanai, both in Thiruvananthapuram.

AUGUSTA BLANFORD:

In 1819, two British women happened to witness “sati” in Calcutta and decided to educate and sensitize women against meaningless rituals as this. “The only right way to do so is to educate Indian women” they thought and started a school in Calcutta in 1821.

Ms Cooke from England tried to persuade the girls and women. But they preferred to confine within the four walls called Zenana. The British women started Zenana Mission, a mission to educate the women. The Urdu word 'Zenana' means behind the veils. It took three decades to establish a school.

**But that was not the case in Travancore.** Women ruled the land and were visible in the public. It was in July 1864 that Augusta M Blanford, one of the earliest English Zenana Missionaries came to Trivandrum. When she was introduced to Maharaja Ayiliam Tirunal, Augusta expressed her desire to establish a school for the girls of the upper caste communities.

Augusta in her book “The Land of Conch Shell” says “The Dewan appropriated for my use a large old palace (Vadakkekottaram) built for a former Dewan. It was within the fort, the most sacred enclosure in Trivandrum. Though it was meant to be for a former Dewan he explained as he walked upstairs, it was never inhabited, being thought to be haunted. You, as a Christian, will not be afraid of ghost, he added, smiling”.

Augusta soon occupied the building and the school was opened on November 3, 1864. The school started out with the daughter and niece of Sir T Madhava Rao, the Dewan and two little girls of the Nair community. During Augusta’s stay here, the sister of Mr. Ballard, British resident in Travancore state, used to help her in the school. At that time, Augusta was on the lookout for a Bungalow to live in. With Ballard’s help, Augusta located a land. The then Government gave away the land to Augusta. The area was named Fernhill because of the greenery around the land.

There was a Hospital at the city (Hospital), residents keen to send and children Hospital. the Maharaja to open a dispensary alone. in 1885, a building was bamboo mat Fernhill



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When Augusta, who had been here for 43 years, left India in July 1906, the hospital, was named after her as the Blanford Memorial Women's Hospital. The hospital functioned well till 1914, but with the first World war raging, things came to a standstill. **Picture above is of Normal School** established by Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma. (This beautiful building near my house was demolished in early eighties to construct a multi storey building for KSRTC. I still remember this beautiful structure. )

**Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma and Education:** Permissions for English and vernacular schools were granted. HH the Maharaja's College (formerly the Maharaja's Free School) with a High School branch, a preparatory School branch and Law Class, Government Girl's School, all in Thiruvananthapuram, and 21 district schools in the mofussil (means outskirts).

Students from HH the Maharaja's College appeared for Matriculation Examinations for the first time in 1865 and BA examination in 1870. It was affiliated to the Madras University for Philosophy and Mathematics.

The Government School at Pettah was opened to girls of every class. Instructions were imparted in music, drawing and needle work. There was a special school in Mavelikkara for the noble class.

There were plenty of other schools conducted by the Missionaries. In 1870, the then ruler Ayilyam Tiunal Rama Varma increased the number of Schools and revised the curriculum. The syllabi included reading , writing on cadjan and paper, elementary mathematics, Travancore Geography. In the high school level, the curriculum included Indian History, Sanskrit and Tamil.

On the increasing number of unaided schools, Sesaiah Sastri the Dewan of Travancore in the Administration Report for the year 1873 said thus: "in the working of the village schools great opposition is experienced from the indigenous masters (asans-local teachers),who often set up private schools in close proximity of the Government schools, and put forth their efforts to induce the parents of boys and girls to patronize their own schools. They have still the education of the bulk of the youth of the country in their hands and as their discipline is lax, and fees are levied, in kind, so as to suit the convenience of the parents and as the subjects of instruction viz..Astrology, vocal singing and poetry, didactic and religious, congenial to the national taste, they (asans) still exercise great influence with the mass of the people".

Great efforts to win over these masters were taken. Dewan Krishnaswami Row in the Administrative report for the year 1902 (three decades later) said, " the old asans still hold sway and decry the modern system of education among the ignorant folk who have still unbounded faith in the wisdom of their ancient Gurus. They hold their position by virtue of heredity, in some cases the parents of the school going population in rural parts are the pupils of the present asans, and many hold them in great reverence. In some other cases the half-starved asan (teacher) waits on the influential man of the village under whose patronage he starts a school, largely attended by the children of that village. The people generally resent any insistence on regular attendance, and strict discipline, and the masters are reluctant to submit to the control and supervision of the educational authorities without which no aid from state funds could be given. These circumstances led to the large number of unaided private schools."

The Maharaja's College and School, the Girls' school came under the control of the Principal directly responsible to the Government. The vernacular school came under the Director of Vernacular Education.

The teaching staffs were mostly unqualified. No general or professional qualifications were insisted. "There are many teachers employed who were perhaps the best or were nominated by consideration of their poverty....rather than their fitness ...but whose education has not kept pace with the world around them...of good character and punctuality and the routine forms of teaching were ignored, and they want the life and soul which alone can make teaching effective," observed the Superintendent of District schools. The lowest salary in the English school was Rs 8 and in vernacular schools it was Rs 5/.

The rate of fee in colleges were Re 1/-14 chukrams (the then currency) for college, Re 1/- and 7 chukrams for matriculation classes. The text books for use in the district schools except in regard to Matriculation classes, were not formally prescribed by any authority. The aided schools used their own text books. There were no tests in the shape of public exams.

In 1883 a chair was instituted for Chemistry in the college, besides a well equipped gymnasium. The three significant drawbacks identified were paucity of qualified teachers, inadequate inspection and the availability of proper text books. Two Normal schools were established to train teachers. Each teacher was given a scholarship of Rs 2 and 50 paise.

In 1892 the Maharaja said: "The elementary education of the masses is our paramount duty and an essential condition of good government...in most civilized countries of Europe this principle has been carried so far as to recognize the necessity of compulsory education..A good elementary school in each village and at each centre of rural population would be of first consummation..side by side we have to popularize female education.. technical education is also essential..but it must be preceded by general education.."

On the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the college Dr Harvey said, "in the beginning there were only 39 students and we have 185 now..the library could hardly be said to exist and we have more than 2,000 volumes of most valuable books. So far the college has produced 786 matriculates, 345 FAs, 164 Bas, 21 BLs, and 5 MAs." Various district schools were raised to High Schools.

There existed a school for ivory carving attached to the Huzur office (secretariat) which later became the Industrial School of Arts. Knowledge of lacquer work, kuftgari, wood carving, carving on ivory, horn, and coconut shell was imparted.

In 1888 the Maharaja established a Sanskrit college. A public lecture committee –a scheme to inaugurate a course of lectures in the college open to the public was implemented. A archaeological department was established in 1895 and Archaeological Monuments Preservation Act was passed in during the Viceroyalty of George Nathaniel Curzon.

The Public library was established by Maharaja Swathi Tirunal in 1839. In connection with the Diamond Jubilee for Her Majesty the late Queen Empress Victoria, it was opened to the public.

It was brought under the control of the Government only after the Diamond Jubilee for Her Majesty the late Queen Empress Victoria. “A well stocked and furnished reading and reference library for the public called the Victoria Diamond Jubilee Library will be opened here at the Government cost in a suitable building erected for the purpose” said the Maharaja Sree Mulam Tinal. The small library already in existence in the town was taken over by the Government and converted into a library open to the general public.

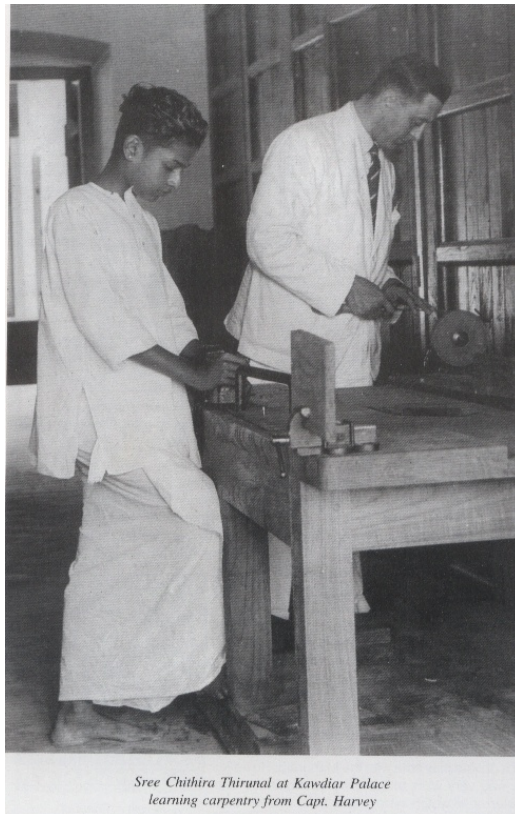
**A MARKED FEATURE of this period is the establishment of schools for the backward classes.** Owing to their conservative character, special schools were opened in their vicinity. Five schools for the hill tribes were another salient feature of the reforms. The Government provided books, slates and stationery.

*In 1903, the Maharaja accepted the responsibility of imparting free primary education to all the children in Travancore.*

The colleges were affiliated to the Madras University in 1906. Five years later, SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) was introduced. Weekly, monthly, terminal and annual exams were introduced. A special training college for the hill tribes was established in 1910. In 1909 a separate department for the publication of Sanskrit manuscripts was organized.

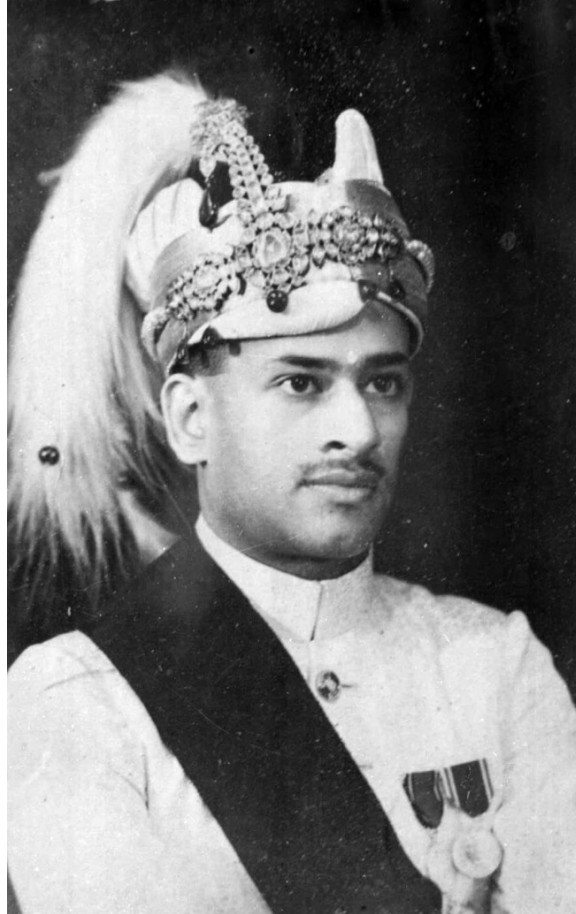
With the rapid advancement of education, a craving for healthy journalistic literature was visible. In 1915, the number of vernacular publications were 51 (4 bi weekly, 7 weekly, 16 religious newspapers and magazines, 2 educational, the rest general, social, and political). A press room was opened in 1915.

Though steps for establishing a University in Travancore began in 1919, it was realized only in 1937. Sree Chithira Tirunal Rama Varma, on assuming power in 1931, formed a committee to reform the educational system. Mr. R.M. Satham



*Sree Chithira Thirunal at Kowdiar Palace learning carpentry from Capt. Harvey*

MA IES, CIE a competent and eminent educationalist who presided the committee reported thus – “The disadvantages of remaining within the Madras University outweigh the advantages and that the future programme of Government, with regard to collegiate development, should be so should be so framed that it will ultimately become possible to establish a separate University of Travancore”.



Sree Chithira Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja

His Highness Sree Chithira Tirunal Rama Varma was the founder Chancellor of the Travancore University, his mother Maharani Sethu Parvathi Bayi became the first Pro Chancellor, Sir C P Ramaswami Aiyer as the first Vice Chancellor, Mr Papworth the first Pro Vice Chancellor and Parameswara Panicker the first Registrar.

Travancore aimed high by bidding to enlist the services of Albert Einstein as the Vice Chancellor of the University of Travancore by offering a salary of Rs. 6,000/- per mensem. Einstein however declined the offer and went to Princeton University in the US. “The foremost duty of the university – a duty which in my opinion, transcends the obligation for the intellectual and psychological development of the students is the well designed cultivation of a sound mind and to the extent possible of beautiful body” said the first Vice Chancellor Sir C P Ramaswami Aiyer.



The first convocation of Travancore University

## **AYURVEDA COLLEGE**

Sree Mulam Tirunal established Ayurvedic school in Thiruvananthapuram in 1888. At the Ayurvedic patassala people could receive instructions on Ashtangahrudaya – a system of medicine. Those who passed out were given grant in aid to open a Vaidyasala or small Ayurveda clinic. In 1914, admissions were thrown open to all subjects, irrespective of class or creed. Anyone who wanted to pursue higher studies in Calcutta were given a grant of British Rs 40/ per month.

With the formation of Kerala in 1956, the first ever communist Government led by E M S Namppothirppad came to power. Renowned Educationist Joseph Mudassery became the Minister of Education. He could partly implement his reform as the Education Bill that he introduced created controversies which eventually led to the downfall of the Government as a consequence of Vimochana Samram (samram means strike or struggle).

### *A bit about VIMOCHANA SAMARAM*

The first EMS Ministry formed in 1957 started functioning normally. However petty leaders tried to interfere in the day to day affairs in the lower level so much so that it became a “cell controlled administration”. Non communist were treated as secondary citizens. Prof Joseph Mudassery initiated a process to control the private management schools especially the ones with Government aid. He introduced a bill which controls the recruitment of teachers in private



schools. This created tension as most of the private schools were managed by Christian Managements.

Further the Land reforms bills of P S Nataraja Pillai, (it failed because of the fall of the PSP Government led by Pattom Thanu Pillai) were modified and introduced by the Revenue Minister also failed. Later Gouri Amma introduced the Bill which created new set of JANMIS (LANDLORDS) in place of the real ones. It took away the land from the real owners but it did not hand them over to the actual tillers but instead, a set of middle men appeared who grabbed the land and the peasants remained as laborers.

The affected turned against the government leading to VIMOCANA SAMARAM or the Liberation struggle. The Nair – Christian communities raised the banner of revolt. Congress joined the struggle later. Pt Nehru dismissed the elected EMS Government, imposing President's rule, the first dismissal of a State Government in Independent India.

Another reformer P N Paniker established Kerala Grandhasala Sangham (Kerala State Library Council). In 1977 he founded the Kerala Association for Non-formal Education and Development (KANFED). KANFED was highly instrumental in starting the Kerala State Literacy Mission which leads Kerala for its total literacy movement. Thus Kerala became the first State which won total literacy. To commemorate his contributions to promote education, June 19 (the date of demise of Paniker) is observed as the READING DAY in Kerala.

Kerala is the leading state in the country in terms of indices of human development, literacy being one among them. The e - Literacy Project launched in 2014, is contributing substantially to quickening the pace of Kerala's social and economic development and political empowerment of its people.

While appreciating Kerala's literary levels, the contribution of the Royal Family of Travancore to the present day status of education in Kerala must always be remembered.

**Editor:** To know the state of education in India before the British arrived it is a must to read 'Indigenous Education in the 18th century' by Dharampalji. We present links below.

#### **Also read**

1. Status of education in Britain and Madras Presidency <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Indigeneous-Education-in-the-18th-century-2.aspx>
2. Leitner report on Punjab <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Indigeneous-Education-in-the-18th-century-4.aspx>
3. The Decline of Mass Education in India <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Indigeneous-Education-in-the-18th-century-8.aspx>
4. Interview with Dharampalji <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Rediscovering-India-by-Dharampal-3.aspx>
5. In brief Indian education in 1820 <http://www.esamskriti.com/essay-chapters/Rediscovering-India-by-Dharampal-9.aspx>