



Educating the Rural Folk: The Historical Role of Palliyam LP School in Social Transformation in Rural Kerala

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Abstract- This study examines the historical evolution of Palliyam LP School, Thillenkeri, Kannur, and its contribution to educational and social transformation in rural Kerala. Using historical methodology, archival records, interviews, and local development documents, the article analyzes how a primary school became an instrument of literacy, social mobility, democratization, and cultural change. The study argues that elementary education played a significant role in weakening caste barriers, promoting civic consciousness, and facilitating socio-economic development in North Malabar.

Keywords- Rural Education; Kerala History; Local History; Educational Development; Social Transformation; Primary School.

I. Introduction

Kerala's educational achievements are closely connected with the expansion of primary education. Local educational institutions played a crucial role in disseminating literacy and creating social awareness. This article investigates the historical development of Palliyam LP School and evaluates its contribution to the transformation of rural society.

The present study titled ‘Educating the Rural Folk: History of a Primary School,’ is an attempt to analyze the role of a primary school in a rural area in North Kerala. The study tries to highlight such aspects like the establishment and growth of a school and its impact in a rural society. Since education is considered as a parameter for development, the growth of a school is connected with the all-round development of the concerned village.

There existed a sacred educational system in India catering to the needs of a privileged few. Kerala is not an exception to this general rule. Here also, education was confined to the salais attached to temples. These centers were known as the centers of knowledge or vidya. Kantalur salai was one of the earliest Salais to exist in Ancient Kerala. It was called the Nalanda of the South. We have sufficient inscriptional evidence about the functioning of this institution. Subjects like Martial arts, Vedic, Astrological practices and Magic were taught in these centers. The Brahmins were mainly the receiver of this kind of Knowledge. The salais were attached to the temples and were free boarding schools for the Namboodhiri boys. Temples had the responsibility to look after the salais.



II. Review of Literature

Previous studies on Kerala's educational history have focused on state-level developments. However, village-level educational institutions have received limited scholarly attention. Works by Radha Kumud Mookerji, William Logan, K.K.N. Kurup, N. Ajith Kumar, and E. Sreejith provides important contextual insights for understanding educational development in Kerala.

Kerala samsakaram written by Dr. N. Ajith kumar, deals with the ancient educational system especially the Gurukula form of Education in Malabar. Malabar Manual written by William Logan was another source material for this regard. KSPA published by Kerala Saksharata Prerak Association, deals with the local history of the concerned area. Vikasna Rekha 2002-2007 and 2017-2022 of Thillenkeri Grama Panchayath was another primary source material. Ninav, a souvenir which deals with the vidyalaya charitram of Mattanur upajilla. The School admission Register of the respective school is an important source material for the study and it has been used extensively. Interviews with Mr.M Ramachandran Rtd. Headmaster of Palliyam L P school, Vilengeri Krishnan, the former Vice President of Thillenkeri Grammar panchayath, K. Gopalan Nambiyar , Rtd.Headmaster of Vanivilasam L P School, A K Jayarajan Master, Planning Committee Vice Chairman of Thillenkeri Grama Panchyath, P K Jithan, Grandson of P K Govindan Gurukkal etc. also provided valuable information for the study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To trace the historical evolution of Palliyam LP School.
2. To examine its role in rural educational development.
3. To analyze its social, economic, and cultural impact.
4. To evaluate the relationship between elementary education and community transformation.
5. To assess the impact or role of primary schools in educating the rural folk.
6. To assess the impact of Palliyam L P school in developing a remote village in Kerala i.e., Thillenkeri.
7. To enquire about the changes effected in the socio economic and cultural life of the local people.

III. Methodology

The study adopts a historical research methodology. Primary sources include school admission registers, visitor diaries, interviews, and local development reports. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and published historical studies relating to Kerala's educational history.

IV. Historical Background

Before the spread of modern education, Kerala possessed indigenous institutions such as salais, gurukulams, kalaris, and ezhuthupallis. These institutions created an educational culture that later facilitated the acceptance of modern schooling.



Thillenkeri is a renowned village in Kannur District. The word Thillenkeri is associated with a divine concept. It was originated from the term the site of Thiruvilengeri Appan. This was generally a myth and being part of traditional believes of the people. Thillenkeri was an area under the famous Kottayam dynasty. It was a small village situated in the foothills of Puralimala. The majority of the population was farmers or farmers who were outraged. It was a fertile area originates from the top of mountainous and touched by number of streams. The village is located 35 kilometers North East of Thalassery, one of the main city in Kannur. The village extends about 25.06 square kilometers. The total population of the Thillenkeri Gramapanchyath according to the 2011 census report was 14583.

The early history of Thillenkri was not recorded properly and were shrouded in mystery. Some of the areas in Thillenkri can be trace forth the Vayanattukulavn Thottampattukal and Puralimala Muthappan Thottams. There was an indication of caste system that is in several areas people lived as a community. Namboothiri, Nambiyar, Thiyyas, Vaniyas, Chaliya, Veluthedan, Kavuthiyyan, Vilakkatal avan, Vannan, Malayan, Pulayan, Paniyar, Adiyar, Muslim and Christian were the caste and religious groups in the village.

Thillenkri has started organizational efforts for social movement since 1939, receiving the trumpeting of national uprisings in India. There were several instances of Resistance organized by ordinary farmers against the brutal abuse of the Janmies. The martyrdom of the peasants in these struggles not only became memorable to the people of Thillenkri but also became an exciting chapter in the history of Kerala.

In 1956, the Kerala state was formed. In 1957 the first Communist Ministry came to power under the leadership of Sri.E.M.S.Namboothiripad. The land reform and education policy implemented by this Government has laid the foundations of Kerala's development.

Origin and Growth of Palliyam LP School

The school originated from indigenous educational traditions and gradually evolved into a recognized primary educational institution. Community participation, local leadership, and educational reforms contributed significantly to its growth.

The foundation stone of the institution was laid during the first half of the twentieth century by the famous Sanskrit scholar and activist Mr. P K Govindan Gurukkal. The presence of a literate person in the society was inevitable. People depended on him to read and write. He had high position among the people. Everybody respected him. In most cases, the literate person in the village was the schoolteacher. Here the role of Sri. P K Govindan Gurukkal in bringing the educationally backward section of the society to the mainstream by getting into them has to be memorized. Educational institutions were known as Kudippallikudangal during those times.

These types of institutions were headed by the persons, belonging to higher caste, who can influence the whole community. Being a Gurukula form of education, the students have to go to the home of the Guru. At the same time Ezhuthasans were willing to go to the illams of the richest people of higher community. The early



earnings of the Ezhuthasans were the Gurudakshina, food, and gifts given during festive days. The rituals like Ezhuthiniruthal, Manaladiyanthram etc belong to this educational system.

The Palliyam school too was based on this Gurukula educational system in the earlier period. Consequently it moved from place to place and grew into a primary school. It was in Uzhakkatharkari near Anakuzhi in Thillenkeri that the school had its beginning. The Kudippalikkudas founded by honoured individuals like Sarvasri Appaperuvannan, Chattukutty Gurukkal, Govindan Gurukkal in various parts of the village were notable. Those who learned from this Kudippalikkudas formed an institution in Uzhakkatharkari under the guidance of A K Govindakurupp.

This is the first formal school in Thillenkeri. Kunjappa Nambiyar, Govindan Gurukkal, Krishnan Gurukkal, K.K.Narayan Nambiyar, Karippayi Chatthu Gurukkal were the former teachers of the institution. In 1913, the Deputy Inspector of Education visited the Ezhuthupallikudam and was fascinated by its educational system and promised to grant it permanent recognition. The only condition put forward was to appoint a trained teacher. Accordingly, a teacher called Sri Ambu from Katirur was appointed. He was considered as the first official teacher of the institution. Students from different corners of the locality were flown to the school. During that time Sanskrit, Mathematics, Astrology, Geography, Drama, Kolkali, Poorakkali, Manipravalam and Kavyam were taught along with local language in the day and night.

Sri Olayikkara Madhavn master was the first recognized headmaster of the school. Later P K Kunjhambu Master became the head master. During the time of Sri Kunjhambu Master, who was a well-known Sanskrit scholar and freedom fighter, the institution made rapid progress. In 1962, the Government issued special orders to abolish 5th standard from the entire educational institutions of Kerala. Due to certain geographical peculiarities the management of the institution approached the court and received the permission to follow the same system. The system continues even now.

After the death of Sri Govindan Gurukkal, his son Sri P K Kumaran Master became the manager of the school. Due to his extreme hard work, the infrastructure facilities became enlarged. The school got a playground and other spatial facilities under his able leadership. After his death in 1997, there was no proper management for a long 9 years. It further deteriorated the condition of the institution. There was no proper undertaking of the developmental sector for long years. The time also shows a steady fall in the number of students. The emergence of autonomous English medium educational institutions in nearby areas, the lack of transport facilities and the migration of families caused the heavy shortage in the number of students.

In December 2006, Sri.P K Sudheendran, took charge as school manager. He was very much interested in school development. The floor plastering was done by the help of the manager, teachers, representatives of the people, residents etc. The register also shows that Agriculture was the main occupation of the villagers during those days. Most of the students were from agriculture based families. Trade, Commerce, carpentry, Smith, Dobi, and Coolie were other fields of profession. From these it can



undoubtedly say that the financial status of the community was only medium or precisely moderate. From the register it was clear the female students who got the primary education were very few. People from such places like Palliyam, Thillenkeri, Uliyil, and Padikkachal mostly depended on this school for their primary education. The number of students who passed the fifth standard was very high.

However, the number of students going for higher education was very low. Economic inequality has forced society to turn away from education in the 1930s. Furthermore, there is not enough consciousness on the part of the villagers about the importance of education. This may be yet another reason for prolonged illiteracy. The students going for further studies mainly depended on Keezhur Higher elementary school situated in the nearby town, Iritty. It is also strange that none of the girls went to higher education in the early days. During that time, girls were married at an age of 10-12. They were denied for higher education. The work Mutthassi of Cherukad mentioned, the women who were educated were misinterpreted badly. The people considered the educated women as congressmen in that period.

At that time, the activities of the educational department of Malabar was confined in to single high school in a taluk and a higher elementary school in an area of four or ten amsas. Two or three villages had only a lower primary school. Therefore, there were not enough educated teachers. One could become a teacher who could barely write and read. The number of teachers who passed higher training was very low. The recognised teachers of the institution during the initial stages Olayikkara Madhavan master, K.P. kunjikrishnan Nambiyar, Paithal Master Etc.

The visitors' diary get from the school shows that a health inspector visited the school frequently. Inadequation of infrastructure facilities clearly reported by the officials in the diary. In the early stages there was no lunch and uniform for the students. But with the advancement in infrastructure they maintained such facilities. The method of punishment during the early period was severe. Rubbing with sand and beating with iron rod were the extreme punishments prevailed. Due to this many abandoned their education.

Impact on Rural Society

The school improved literacy levels, encouraged social mobility, promoted awareness regarding civic rights, and contributed to cultural development. It also played a role in reducing social inequalities and expanding educational opportunities for marginalized communities.

The establishment of Palliyam L.P. School brought significant educational and social transformation to the rural village of Thillenkeri. Founded by P.K. Govindan Gurukkal during a period when educational opportunities were scarce, the school provided basic education to children from different social backgrounds and helped reduce illiteracy in the region. It created awareness about the importance of education and encouraged people to look beyond their traditional agricultural lifestyle, thereby broadening their social outlook and aspirations.



The school played an important role in promoting social equality and reform. At a time when caste discrimination and social inequalities were prevalent, the institution helped spread ideas of equality, justice, and human dignity. Education enabled people to question social evils such as untouchability and caste-based restrictions and encouraged participation in social reform movements, including temple-entry campaigns and peasant struggles. As a result, the villagers developed greater social and political consciousness and became more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Palliyam L.P. School also contributed to the cultural and economic development of the locality. The growth of literacy led to the establishment of libraries, reading rooms, cultural organizations, and drama groups, enriching the cultural life of the village. Education opened new employment opportunities beyond agriculture, resulting in improvements in income, transportation, and overall living standards. Women, who had previously faced educational disadvantages, gradually became active participants in education, self-employment, cooperative movements, and community development activities.

Furthermore, the school produced several distinguished personalities, including scientists, doctors, teachers, artists, administrators, and political leaders who contributed to society at regional and national levels. The institution inspired the establishment of other schools in the surrounding areas and laid the foundation for the educational advancement of Thillenkeri. Thus, Palliyam L.P. School served as a catalyst for social, economic, cultural, and intellectual progress, transforming a traditional rural community into a more educated and progressive society.

The case demonstrates that local educational institutions can become catalysts of broader social transformation. The history of Palliyam LP School illustrates how primary education contributed to modernization, democratization, and community development in rural Kerala.

IV. Conclusion

The study concludes that Palliyam LP School functioned not merely as an educational institution but as a center of social change. Its contribution to literacy, social awareness, and rural development highlights the transformative potential of elementary education.

The foregoing analysis shows the role of a primary school in effecting far reaching changes in the life and thoughts of the rural folk. A primary school is one in which children receive primary or elementary education. But the experience of Palliyam school reveals that it had a greater role in society than teaching the students writing, reading and arithmetic.

The meaning of education with all its multiplicity can be visible here. We know that in a broader sense, education means the process of development from 'infancy to maturity'. It begins at birth and continues throughout life, till death; from 'Womb to tomb' as they call it. It includes all the knowledge and experiences acquired during infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, manhood or old age, through any agency of



education. The primary school initiates a child into this wide world of ideas. In this way, one's whole life activities become the real source of education. To us, the ultimate goal of education is to spark a pursuit of knowledge in the child, so that they keep on learning as they grow into.

When an individual is educated, he is able to influence a whole society. The principle aim of an educational Institution is to bring forth a beneficent force to aid the society and thereby leading to social, economic and cultural upliftment. Excellence in education naturally led to the renaissance or new awakening. The school being a social organization, it had to accept the pulses of social and political changes of the society. The radicalization of Kerala society took place in the twentieth century and it disturbed the equilibrium that it had been maintaining for many centuries. Consequently this affected the school system as well.

The experience of Palliyam school for the last several decades further reveals the potential and power of education in imparting civic rights in a traditional society. It was through education that people became aware of their rights and privileges as citizens of a nation and began to raise the banner of revolt against the numerous age old inhuman practices prevalent in the society. Thus the village becomes the nerve centre of the anti feudal, anti colonial struggle of the region. The leaders who led the villagers in these struggles were all educated from the institutions of the region.

The study falls under the category of 'history of institutions' which became popular along with the popularization of local history. Studies like this has to be pursued further to understand the role of ideas in transforming the rural areas of Malabar and I hope the students of history will pursue such studies in future.

The history of a primary school thus shows that education is life and life itself is education. Education is nothing but experiences of life. It starts in the cradle and ends in the grave.

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