

EDUCATIONAL REFORMS OF E.M.S. MINISTRY IN KERALA

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Abstract

The Kerala Education Bill of 1958 was a landmark in the educational history of Kerala. This act paved the way for a uniform system of education both public and private in the state. The education bill or act was introduced for the first time in Kerala State. After India became sovereign republic successive Governments were elected to rule the country. Successive Chief Ministers and education ministers were appointed and they made their exit. But nobody could take such an important step towards improving the life of the people. Such an important step was taken only after 1956 when Travancore-Cochin and Malabar were united into Kerala State. The election that took place in the united Kerala State in 1957 E.M.S. Namboothiripad and his Communist Party were voted to power. This paper seeks to focus on the educational reforms of E.M.S Ministry in Kerala.

Keywords: Kerala Education Bill, Education History, E.M.S. Namboothiripad.

INTRODUCTION

Historical Background

In olden days the Vedapadasalas and Kudipallikudams conducted classes in the temples and private houses and provided the then needed education to the people. Education was however, in Vedas which was the exclusive right of the high castes, particularly the Brahmins. Sanskrit was also taught to the Namboothiri. Higher education was imparted to them by the Vedapadasalas and mutts. There were other institutions for popular education called the pallikudams and kudipallikudams. Many eminent Acharyas were associated with Gurukulas that were in existence during those days. Many Acharyas were associated with the Gurukulas.

Thunchathu Ezhuthachan, the Father of Modern Malayalam, was one of the famous Gurus. However during this period, the caste Hindus dominated the field of education. At this juncture the Europeans came for trade. The Protestant missionaries who came after them in an attempt to get more converts to their religion started the education work with great enthusiasm and zeal. With the arrival of Protestant missionaries, English education assumed new significance. The two Protestant agencies that operated in the 19th century in Travancore were the London Missionary Society (L.M.S.), 1806 and the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) 1816. Both these Missionary Societies took keep interest in the spread of Western education.

William Tobias Ringletaube, the Protestant missionary came to Mylaudy in 1806. From there he started his work. He established churches and in the church compound he conducted schools and those schools imparted western education. Thus education began to spread to Nagercoil, Neyoor, Marthandam, Parassala and Trivandrum. Not only to these places but to the neighbouring villages too. In these schools they not only taught scripture but other subjects also.

The Church Missionary Society commenced its work in Travancore in 1816 as a mission of help to the ancient Syrian Church at the instance of Col. Munro, the then Dewan of Travancore. The missionaries opened schools and congregations in several parts of the state. The first C.M.S. school was started by Thomas Norton in 1817 at Kottayam which was their headquarters. By the end of 1827, C.M.S. had seven schools. Henry Baker followed the plan of Thomas Morton at Kottayam, Mundakkayam and other places. The mission had a high school for girls at Kottayam. They also opened a college at Kottayam. On 1879, the Diocese of Travancore-Cochin took shape. They had more than 165 schools by the dawn of the 20th century.

The Catholics too started establishing schools in all the religious centres. Thus during the 20th century by the year 1945, Dewan C.P. Ramaswami Aiyer issued an order to nationalize schools under the cloak of compulsory education.

By the order, all private primary schools were abolished and all grants to them were stopped. The scheme was to be started from the school year 1946-1947. The scheme was introduced from the far south and gradually to extend it to other parts of Travancore and Cochin. The scheme was opposed by the Catholics. They rose to the occasion with their pastors and teachers.

Panampalli Scheme

By the year 1950, the private secondary school teachers started their struggle. They asked for higher pay, security of service, promotion by seniority and other favours which were being enjoyed by their colleagues in Government schools. For the first time the rumbling was heard. By August, 1950, the first conference of Managers was held. In that meeting the following decisions were taken:

1. The Managements agree to pay 87½ percent of the fee collected to the Education Fund and from which the Government would pay to the teachers.
2. The teachers would be paid directly by the Government to make sure that they are paid their salaries without fail.
3. The Headmasters should be appointed according to seniority.
4. The Management were required, in the appointment of teachers to select from the list published by the public service. No one could be appointed from outside. In violation of this scheme the Government had the right to interfere.

This scheme was not implemented because the managers of the private schools opposed this scheme stoutly. They felt that the new scheme affected their independence in all respects. Hence Panampalli Govinda Menon was not very serious about the implementation of the scheme. In the midst the political scenario of Travancore and Cochin underwent a sudden change. The existing ministry fell to the political pressure of the opposition political parties. New ministry came to power in 1957.

Formation of E.M.S. Ministry and Education Bill

Election to form new ministry was announced in 1956. As decided the election was conducted and the Communist ministry was voted to power. After the formation of the Communist ministry members of the newly elected Assembly shared their views and sentiments regarding the condition of teachers in private schools. The people's representatives demanded a change in the scale of pay of the teachers and service conditions. The personal experience of the then education minister Joseph Mundassery was another reason for the introduction of the Education Bill in the state. Further the Communist election manifesto also was responsible for the bill.

The Government Order

Before the passage of the Bill, the Government passed an order on 12th October 1957 implementing direct pay to teachers working in the private schools. The order authorized the Headmasters to sign salary bill which was signed by the Managers. The Action Committee of the Christian Associations and Managers of Associations agitated against the Government order. They justified their agitation on the ground that it was an attempt to enforce the bill even before its passage. Some managers had gone to the extent of filing writ petition in the High Court of Kerala challenging the validity of the order. But the High Court rejected the writ petition. The Managers were frustrated over the court orders. Hence the Management Association decided to close down the schools. But all their attempts failed. Hence they had decided to fight against the Bill when it was introduced in the Assembly.

Introduction of Textbook system

The Government also decided to introduce the textbook system. But the Managements, before the Government introduced the textbook system, allowed the booksellers to sell textbooks. The selling price of the books was not uniform. The booksellers fixed the price unilaterally. It created lot of tension and problem to the people and parents. Hence the Government decided to nationalize the textbook systems.

In an attempt to overcome this difficulty the Government constituted a Textbook Committee in 1957. The Textbook Committee was authorized to prepare textbook with uniform standard and price. The Government made arrangements to print textbooks in the Government press and sell them at moderate price and distribute them through College Co-operative Societies. These bold steps were taken to the benefit of the young scholars. But the Catholics could not tolerate these actions of the Government. The Catholics protested this very strongly. It was in this state of affair the Kerala Education Bill was introduced in the Assembly.

In the meanwhile, the Managers Action Committee of the Christian Association agitated against the passage of the Bill. The Managers justified their agitation on the ground that it was an attempt to enforce the provision of the bill before its passage. Some Managers filed writs in the High Court of Kerala challenging the validity of the order. But the High Court rejected the writs. The Managers Association disappointed over the court order. Hence they threatened to close the schools. But their attempts ended in fiasco.

The Objectives of the Bill

The order had benefitted thousands of teachers. It relieved them from the exploitation of the Managements. The Kerala Education Bill was introduced in the Assembly on 13th July 1957 and referred to the Select Committee on 20th July 1957 with the following objectives:

- i) To give the departmental rules and practices legal sanctions so that the department is in a position to enforce its orders and see that reasonable protection is afforded to teachers.
- ii) To regulate the choice, appointment, conditions of service, etc. of teachers in private schools without curtailing the supervisory powers of Managers.
- iii) To secure authority for Government to proceed effectively against grossly mismanaged schools.
- iv) To take over any category of schools of any area if Government are convinced of the desirability of such action in the interests of education.

- v) To set up a high level Advisory Board to guide Government in the matter of framing educational policies and to constitute, at district level, local Educational Authorities, comprising elected representatives of local educational interests, to assist the Department for the better conduct of educational affairs.

The Bill

It is the contention of the Kerala Government that in introducing the Education Bill, they have not done anything unprecedented. Joseph Mundassery, the Education Minister, in his statement of 11 July 1958, said that this Bill was not a “nationalizing measure”, and that it does not violate any of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution; but that, on the other hand, it is “a piece of protecting legislation intended to secure and safeguard the interests of teachers employed in schools under private management in Kerala”.

We will indicate here only those clauses of the Education Bill which the Government of Kerala thinks are important and which are controversial. The section number of the Education Bill is given in each case.

Establishment and Registration

All existing schools are considered as established and recognized in accordance with this Act. The Government may regulate the primary and other stages of education and courses of instructions in Government and Private Schools. After the commencement of this Act, the establishment of a new school or the opening of a higher class in any private school shall be subject to the provisions of this Act and any school or higher class established or opened otherwise than in accordance with such provisions shall not be entitled to be recognized by the Government. At the very end of this Act – under Financial Memorandum – it is stated that the intension of the Government is to take over all Primary Schools in one district in 1957-58.

Property Lists

On April 1 each year, the manager of every aided school shall give to the Government a list of all movable and immovable properties of the school. If the Manager defaults in this or makes a false or incorrect statement the Government may withhold any grant or aid to the school.

Restriction on Alienation of Property

The Manager is not to sell, mortgage, lease, pledge, charge or transfer any property which belongs to the aided school. He can only do so by previous permission obtained in writing from the Government. If the Manager acts in contravention of the above stipulation the Government may stop aid to that school.

Managers of Schools

- (i) Any educational agency may appoint anyone as the Manager after having got the prior approval of such authority as may be prescribed.
- (ii) The Manager will be responsible for the conduct of the school.
- (iii) The Manager will be responsible for the property of the school.
- (iv) He shall be duly bound to maintain the records of the school correctly and properly.
- (v) He shall be bound to obey all lawful orders issued under provision of this Act or to be issued by the Government hereafter. He shall not refuse to show the records to and allow the inspection of the school by any officer so authorized.
- (vi) Manager will not have the right to close down the school, unless one year's notice has been given to the Government.
- (vii) In case the school is closed down or discontinued or its recognition withdrawn, the Manager will hand over to the government all the records and accounts of the school.

Recovery of Amounts due from the Manager

If there is any salary or arrears of salary which is payable by the Manager to teacher, then it will be lawful for the Government to recover such salary or arrears of salary from the Manager. And the Government will pay that salary or arrear of salary to the teacher concerned.

All fees dues collected from the students shall after the commencement of this Act be deposited with the Government.

Salary of Teachers and Grants to Aided Schools

- (i) The Government will pay salaries to the teachers direct, or through the Headmaster of the School.
- (ii) The Government will pay salary to the non-teaching staff of the aided school. The Government will prescribe the number of persons to be appointed in the non-teaching establishment of aided schools – their salaries, qualifications etc.
- (iii) The Government may pay to the Manager a maintenance grant.
- (iv) The Government may make grants-in-aid for the purchase, improvement and repairs of any land, building or equipment of an aided school.

Qualification for Appointment of Teachers

The Kerala Public Service Commission will maintain district wise registers which will contain the name of those persons in that district who are eligible for appointment as teachers. All those who are already teaching will automatically be registered in the State Register. The Government will prescribe the qualifications of persons for registration of teachers. Person whose name is not in the State Register will not be eligible for appointment in any Government or private aided school in the State.

All teachers in aided schools will be appointed by the Manager, but only from the panel of names given to him by the Government.

The Reaction to the Bill

The education bill attracted criticism from various sides such as the Christian Managements, political parties and communal sections like the S.N.D.P. Yogam and the N.S.S.

(i) The opposition parties in Kerala like the Congress and the P.S.P. opposed the bill. They alleged that in the field of education the government was trying to bring about a hidden qualitative change through an open quantitative change. The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee criticize that the Communist Party was trying their innovations in the field of education accepted ideals but at the same time it is planning to lay the foundation for Communist dictatorship. It is one of the best devices to brainwash the future generation of India.

(ii) The various committees constituted to prepare new textbook for the primary classes to be introduced in the next school year onwards.

(iii) The Arch Bishop and 13 Bishops met in a conference to make exception to the assumption of the Government that the primary education was the responsibility of a state. The Malabar Christian Association, the Protestant Christian Association in their resolution stated that the Government wanted to effect a thorough change in the education system with their ulterior motive of injecting in to the children atheism. They also wanted to inject other ideas of Communism. The appointment of teachers from the Government list was also taking away the rights of the Management.

They argued that it was the rights of the management to appoint teachers were their right. They further said that it is aimed at totalitarianism. The Congress party contempt the bill that ill conceived, ill drafted and totalitarianism in his approach and it was preparing for the Vimochana Samaram. Another praiseworthy step with which precipitated the Management was the introduction of textbook system. Before the introduction of the system, Textbooks were sold by the book sellers and there was no uniformity in the prices of textbooks sold by the different sellers.

In the absence of Government control, prices were determined unilaterally by the sellers themselves; it had created enormous difficulties to the schools.

CONCLUSION

Thus the education bill which was introduced to the welfare of the teachers and students was widely criticized. Without understanding the merit of the Bill, the Christian managements joined hands with the communal forces and became instrumental to the fall of the ministry. There are other reforms too that were opposed very stoutly by the people.

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