

# CONCEPTUALIZING THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF KERALA

Written by *Ashish Joe S S*

*Research Scholar, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India*

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## ABSTRACT

Formal and institutionalised education at all levels had its beginnings in Kerala much earlier than in the rest of India. As per the 2001 census the literacy rate in the county is 62% whereas Kerala retains its position on the top with 89.8%. This paper is an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the metamorphosis of English language education in Kerala over the years. The land's contacts with the language dates back as early as 1616 when Capt. Keeling set his foot in the soil. Drawing heavily from Schneider and Joybrato Mukherjee the paper ventures to provide a theoretical skeleton to explain the modern manifestation of the colonial agenda. It explains how, even after large scale government policy formulation to make education a public asset, the state has failed to de-privatize formal education hence giving vent for a modern manifestation of the old colonial idea of 'education for an elite few' that has made education 'a private merit good'. Though the dynamic model of Schneider and the triangular representation of Mukherjee map the evolution of *English language*, variables that the framework present possess a universality which helps for its successful application to explain the developmental phases and agendas of *English language education system* also.

**Key Words:** English Language Education (ELE), Kerala, Dynamic Model, Educational History

[Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Review \(AJMRR\)](#)

ISSN 2582 8088

Volume 2 Issue 2 [April - May 2021]

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few centuries, education has undergone drastic changes in its meaning and purpose both in terms of its intrinsic worthiness and instrumental roles. It has taken meanings as varied as enlightenment-dispeller of darkness, agent of social change, human capital, a segmentation device and to a 'private merit good', to mention a few. Such connotational and instrumental changes can greatly be attributed to people's changing ideological mindsets and praxis. Adam Smith, placing education as the nucleus of his thinking views that the system of national education indebted for "superior intelligence and the providential, orderly habits of the people", was the basis of good civil government, economic activity and progress (Vaizey 1962).

The propensity to see Indian education as a whole and to analyse and evaluate it in global terms must be tempered by an appreciation and understanding of State and regional differences. Because primary responsibility for education in the federal system lies with the States and Indian States differ as much or more than European nations do with respect to language, history, social structure, levels of per capita income, administrative capability, and political effectiveness and many more diverse planes. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2016 in its preamble recalls: "The 42nd Constitutional Amendment in 1976 brought about a fundamental change...recognizing the importance of the federal structure of our country and giving equal primacy to both the central and state governments as partners... Any policy on education has to acknowledge the inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial nature of a holistic education process and the important role to be played by the States." (p.4). To procure a peripheral overview of states' educational affairs we take the case study of Kerala, a state that stands out with a remarkable track record in terms of educational development and literacy. Education-the term, throughout the paper, will now forth signify English language education.

This paper is an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the metamorphosis of English language education in Kerala over the years. The land's contacts with the language dates back as early as 1616 when Capt. Keeling set his foot in the soil. Drawing heavily from Schneider and

Joybrato Mukherjee the paper ventures to provide a theoretical skeleton to explain the modern manifestations of the colonial agenda. Though the dynamic model of Schneider and the triangular representation of Mukherjee map the evolution of *English language*, variables that the framework present possess a universality which, I feel, helps for its successful application to explain the developmental phases and agendas of *English language education system* also.

### ***About the land, its people and the coming of English***

Stretched across an approximate 39,000 square kilometres, Kerala is one of the most densely populated states of India with little industrial base for its economy. Having the unique status of installing the world's first ever democratically elected communist government, the state also has a reputation for being politically informed as well as volatile. Education, in general and English education in specific, has played a pivotal role in shaping the modern phase of Kerala. Fighting the rising global warming threats Kerala's lush tropical ecology, highland spice estates and long coastlines interspersed by calm lagoon draw a huge amount of tourist from around the globe, contributing a great deal to the state's income.

The history of Kerala has been one shrouded in shadows of lapses in various periods of history. Nevertheless, from the limited sources that are available, the earliest inhabitants are traced back even earlier than 5000 B.C. (Arora, Sinha, & Singh, 1999). It is believed that the coast of Kerala had foreign trade contacts with both the East and the West. It is also a widely acknowledged, but at the same time debated, belief that St. Thomas the Apostle arrived in Kerala in 52 A.D. (Medlycott, 1905). This led to the advent of Christianity to the whole subcontinent for the first time. However, there are no convincing evidences to find out if education of any formal sort was imparted by him to the people there. Starting from the pre-Christian era to about the 8th century A.D., Buddhism and Jainism are said to have flourished in the region. Many of their temples and monasteries were later converted to Hindu temples that still stand functional. As in any other part of the world, the Buddhist and Jain Viharas offered widespread education. Meanwhile, the first

five centuries of the Christian era is when the famous Sangam Age existed. The geographical entity that we refer to as Kerala today was part of the territory called Tamilakam at that point. Much of history of this age is constructed with the help of the oft-applauded Sangam Literature.

The British cession of Malabar took place in 1792 after the fall of Tipu Sultan. In 1800, the region was merged with the Madras Presidency. The rest of the region - the kingdoms of Cochin and Travancore - remained Princely States, under certain agreements with the British (James, 2004). The wake of the century also witnessed numerous activities by the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Missionary Society (CMS) (Smith & Choules, 1832). The earliest from the LMS, Rev. William Tobias Ringeltaube started his work in Travancore by establishing a school in Mylady in 1806 (Hacker, 1908; Lovett, 1899). He then started six schools eventually. While the next two of LMS, Rev. Charles Mead and Rev. Charles Mault (along with their wives) engaged in numerous educational activities for all sections of the society (Beena, 2011). However, the first advocacy for English education seems to have come from the British Resident in Travancore, Colonel John Munro. The wives of these missionaries were instrumental in education for girls. Starting with the Royal Rescript of 1817, various rulers of Travancore, including stalwarts like Swati Tirunal, offered immense support in spirit and in resource to the missionary efforts in education. One of the Dewans, T. Madhava Rao, was a major proponent from the government in devising educational policies (James, 2004). The CMS was the prominent missionary organization that was active in Cochin, while the Basel German Evangelical Mission led by Dr. Herman Gundert (who incidentally edited the first dictionary in Malayalam) was the mission force in the Malabar region (Menon, 2007). The various educational ventures that came about, both in English education as well as Vernacular education, are the composite efforts of the monarchs of the Princely States, the Christian missionaries and the British Residents.

As in the case of most other presidencies or Indian subcontinent as such, Kerala also had its initial contacts with the English world in terms of trade. Master Ralph Fitch, often called the *Pioneer Englishman*, came in as a tradesman seeking a land of spices. The white man penetrated the courts and seats of power making his presence felt as a trade representative of England. Education was

never their concern as they struggled hard to run deep the roots of their empire in the land. The British conquest of Malabar in 1792 revealed the colonizer who was hiding till then under the veil of a tradesman. What followed was a series of conquest as they had already established their forts of power at various parts of the state which made it easy for them to mobilise their forces. In April 1793 a formal treaty was signed between the Travancore Maharaja and the Company. By 1795 Travancore completely surrendered to colonial supremacy. Cochin's resistance weakened by 1800 and soon the company took over the administrative affairs. It is to be noted that only after the company had established a complete authority over the land that they started to undertake or even allow educational ventures. The first school was established in 1806 by W.T. Ringletaube, a London Mission Society (LMS) missionary, in Mylady (Travancore). The first ever English school was started by Rev. J. Dawson in Mattanchery (Cochin) in the year 1818. As from the part of the royal native government the first English medium school was started by Raja Swati Tirunal in 1834 at Travancore. The period from 1806 to 1871 saw a rapid expansion of education and establishment of schools many of which are still functional.

A nativization phase started with the coming of the first popular ministry headed by Pattom Thanu Pillai in 1948. Though the Britishers had left the land by then, the ways of the Raj had penetrated so deep into the psyche of the public that they happily kept alive many of the English traditions and protected the English art and architecture. The CMI schools extending branches to various corners of the state can be seen as the first step towards nativization of the educational sector. They closely followed the English curriculum yet made some changes so that the textbooks could bridge the cultural gaps. Unaided schools mushroomed across the state by the 1990s. Most of these schools had English as their medium of instruction.

The formation of the state (1956), provided an individual position for Kerala in the map of the country. The year 1957, a milestone in the history of the state, witnessed the first ever democratic election of a communist government in the history of the world. One major socio-political wave of change that hit the shores of the state was privatization. With the coming of International

schools, the education sector got largely privatised and has in turn become what I would like to term-‘a private merit good’.

Lending the ‘Triangle of Determinants’ model put forth by Mukherjee, the next section provides a new theoretical sketch that would well explain the current educational system of the state. It explains how, even after large scale government policy formulation to make education a public asset, the state has failed to de-privatize formal education hence giving vent for a modern manifestation of the old colonial idea of ‘education for an elite few’ that has made education ‘a private merit good’.

## **MAPPING THE EVOLUTION OF E.L.E (KERALA) USING THE TRIANGLE OF DETERMINANTS**

Drawing from Mukherjee’s *Steady States in Evolution of New Englishes* I would like to employ the Triangle of Determinants to explain the current educational scenario in Kerala. The starting node of this model is the fourth phase of the Dynamic Model. The triangle has three variable- a Common Core that forms the base and two converging sides that explain the Interferences and the Autonomous nature of the educational system as represented in Fig.1. This section will proceed with a short elaboration of each of these variables and the common thread that holds them together.

### ***The Common Core:***

Krishna Kumar in his *Political Agenda of Education* (2005) states that “At the heart of the colonial enterprise was the adult–child relationship...This adult–child relationship entailed an educational task... The agenda was to train the native to become a citizen” (p.26). The concept of ‘citizen’ represented a new way of life and a new social order that encapsulated the idea of an ‘urban bourgeoisie’- a social thought that was running rampant in England during that time. With the Charter act of 1813 being passed, the British started showing some interest in education. Several of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century administrators were influenced by the liberal stream of thought which sees

itself manifest in the Property Rights Act, observes Krishna Kumar. As a commercial institute metamorphosed into a colonial state, they needed assistance from a ‘civil society’ comprising of elite natives who can help the Company to change its “rhetoric from profit for itself into service of the empire” (p.28).

In a note written by Lord Minto, Governor General from 1807- 1812, he says that the ignorance of the natives hinders good governance. Alarming rise in crime rates were ascribed to the ‘the uncultivated state of mind’ of the natives. Minto saw the importance of education for civil administration which ultimately meant the translation of one’s concern for the safety of property into the desire to strengthen the state’s efforts to establish order. The agenda of colonial education can thus be summarised as “the vocabulary with which a miniscule civil society could legitimize its rise in the midst of exploitation of the working population” (p.32). The colonial idea of ‘citizen’ was confined to men of status and property. The labouring section of the society referred to as the ‘masses’ were never considered as individuals with rights to education and social comfort. Hence, education, English language education to be more specific, rested with an esoteric group who could ‘afford’ it. They formed the crux of the colonial civil society.

### ***Interference:***

I use ‘interference’ to denote the socio-political-cultural features that shaped English language education in Kerala. Formal and institutionalised education at all levels had its beginnings in Kerala much earlier than in the rest of India. As per the 2001 census the literacy rate in the county is 62% whereas Kerala retains its position on the top with 89.8%. This unique position which the state attained in the educational map of India is not the result of a sudden spurt of activity in the field of education in recent times but the climax of the enlightened policies followed by its rulers from early days and the intellectual pursuits of the people spread over several centuries.

A brief history about the spread of English education in Kerala has already been stated in the outset. Under this section I would like to categorize agents of interference into three main groups.

1) The work of missionaries 2) contributions of the royal government 3) other organisations. There might be elements that exist beyond these three categories but this paper would like to limit the study to these three emphatic factors.

For administrative convenience Kerala was divided into three administrative provinces by the British- Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. Three different mission societies worked in these three regions. In the south, London Mission Society (LMS) carried out the educational activities. It started with the establishment of a school in Mylady by Rev. Ringaltaube as mentioned earlier. Christ Mission Society (CMS) headed educational and mission activities in and around the Cochin province which covers the central Kerala region (geographically speaking). Basel Mission, pioneered by Herman Gundart, worked in the Malabar region. It was the only non- English mission society that operated in Kerala.

The first sign of interference from the royal government came in 1834 when Swati Tirunal Maharaja started an English medium school in Travancore. During 1835-1843 Swati Tirunal started District English Schools at Kayam Kulam, Kottar and Chirayinkil. In 1917, Her Majesty Rani Parvathi Bhai issued a proclamation that education is the responsibility of the state. This was a turning point in the educational history of Kerala. The adoption of KER (Kerala Model) in 1959 paved the way for Universal Education in Kerala.

These listed and briefly discussed above are the major interferences.

### ***Autonomy:***

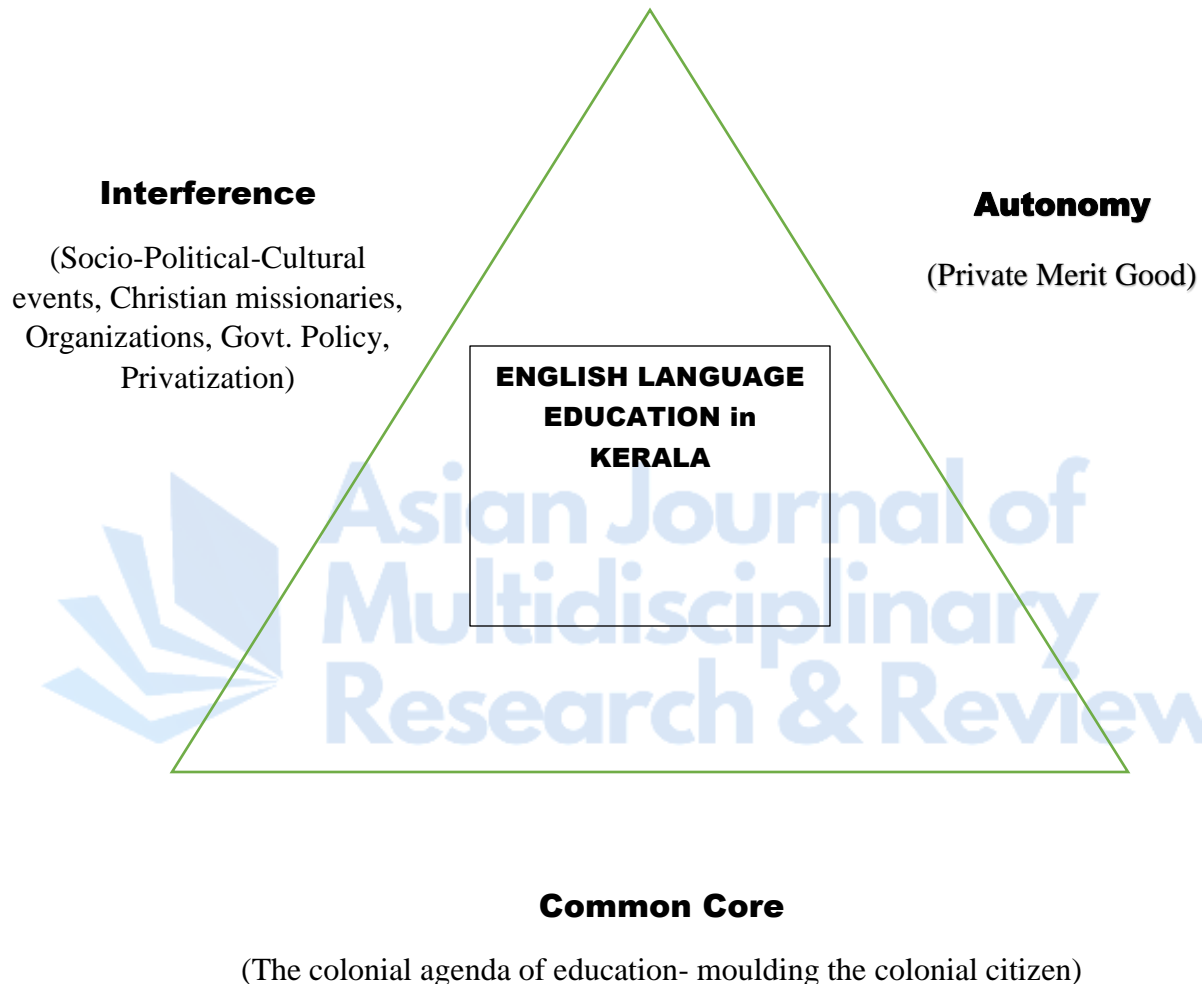
Since the formulation of the National Policy on Education, 1986/92, significant changes have taken place in India and the world at large. India's political, social and economic development is passing through a phase which necessitates a robust and forward looking education system. A major development relating to education sector in India has been the establishment of Constitutional and legal underpinnings for achieving universal elementary education. The Constitution (Eighty-sixth



Amendment) Act, 2002 that inserted Article 21- A in the Constitution of India envisages free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A of the Indian constitution entitles every child of the age of six to fourteen year with the right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till completion of elementary education.

Government policy making, in the national scenario as well as in Kerala, has been to universalise education. To see it in connection with the common core, the attempt here is to break free from the shackles of the class based ‘citizenship’ structure that British education brought in. Unfortunately, with the coming of privatization in early 1990s, the number of unaided schools have increased tremendously. Fig.3 provides a comparative analysis of Govt. and Private institute with medium of instruction purely in English. While Fig.4 shows the number of schools in Government, Aided, Unaided and Unaided & Unrecognized sectors where medium of instruction is done parallelly in English and Malayalam. Fig.5 consolidates both these tables.

Thus it becomes evident that though at policy making level a lot is being done to make ELE reach all strata of the society, at practical level the government agencies are not putting much effort.



### FIG.1

English Language Education (in Kerala) in the Triangle of Determinants:  
Common Core, Interference and Autonomy

[Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Review \(AJMRR\)](#)

ISSN 2582 8088

Volume 2 Issue 2 [April - May 2021]

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**NUMBER OF SCHOOLS - MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ENGLISH 2009-10 (PURE )**

DISTRICTS	GOVT				AIDED				UNAIDED				TOTAL			
	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL
TVM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	25	32	72	15	25	32	72
KLM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	23	14	17	54	23	14	17	54
PTA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	11	9	36	16	11	9	36
ALP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	9	8	34	17	9	8	34
KTM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	11	21	53	21	11	21	53
IDK	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	10	16	2	4	10	16
EKM	0	0	0	0	5	1	2	8	24	11	41	76	29	12	43	84
TSR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21	9	31	61	21	9	31	61
PKD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	12	35	57	10	12	35	57
MLP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	14	30	52	8	14	30	52
KKD	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5	9	16	30	5	9	17	31
WYD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	9	2	2	5	9
KNR	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	8	14	16	38	8	14	18	40
KSD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	11	15	41	15	11	15	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>629</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>640</b>

FIG.2

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS - MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ENGLISH (PARALLEL) 2009-10

DISTRICT	GOVT				AIDED				UNAIDED				TOTAL			
	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL
TVM	22	7	22	51	22	8	46	76	2	4	3	9	46	19	71	136
KLM	15	16	46	77	28	38	75	141	1	3	0	4	44	57	121	222
PTA	7	1	4	12	8	13	49	70	0	0	0	0	15	14	53	82
ALP	13	13	26	52	36	25	93	154	1	0	0	1	50	38	119	207
KTM	7	4	14	25	56	52	121	229	0	0	0	0	63	56	135	254
IDK	3	7	8	18	37	32	52	121	1	1	1	3	41	40	61	142
EKM	20	8	28	56	94	56	143	293	5	9	7	21	119	73	178	370
TSR	15	4	22	41	93	76	91	260	0	3	0	3	108	83	113	304
PKD	7	17	24	48	28	62	48	138	0	0	0	0	35	79	72	186
MLP	8	12	20	40	52	72	58	182	0	1	14	15	60	85	92	237
KKD	4	10	22	36	46	57	53	156	2	0	3	5	52	67	78	197
WYD	1	3	4	8	11	25	11	47	0	0	0	0	12	28	15	55
KNR	0	3	13	16	30	70	41	141	0	4	0	4	30	77	54	161
KSD	1	7	8	16	16	11	16	43	0	0	0	0	17	18	24	59
Total	123	112	261	496	557	597	897	2051	12	25	28	65	692	734	1186	2612

FIG.3

NUMBER OF SCHOOLS - MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ENGLISH 2009-10 (PURE & PARALLEL)

DISTRICTS	GOVT				AIDED				UNAIDED				TOTAL			
	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL	LPS	UPS	HS	TOTAL
TVM	22	7	22	51	22	8	46	76	17	29	35	81	61	44	103	208
KLM	15	16	46	77	28	38	75	141	24	17	17	58	67	71	138	276
PTA	7	1	4	12	8	13	49	70	16	11	9	36	31	25	62	118
ALP	13	13	26	52	36	25	93	154	18	9	8	35	67	47	127	241
KTM	7	4	14	25	56	52	121	229	21	11	21	53	84	67	156	307
IDK	3	7	8	18	37	32	52	121	3	5	11	19	43	44	71	158
EKM	20	8	28	56	99	57	145	301	29	20	48	97	148	85	221	454
TSR	15	4	22	41	93	76	91	260	21	12	31	64	129	92	144	365
PKD	7	17	24	48	28	62	48	138	10	12	35	57	45	91	107	243
MLP	8	12	20	40	52	72	58	182	8	15	44	67	68	99	122	289
KKD	4	10	22	36	46	57	54	157	7	9	19	35	57	76	95	228
WYD	1	3	4	8	11	25	11	47	2	2	5	9	14	30	20	64
KNR	0	3	13	16	30	70	43	143	8	18	16	42	38	91	72	201
KSD	1	7	8	16	16	11	16	43	15	11	15	41	32	29	39	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>496</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>2062</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>884</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>1477</b>	<b>3252</b>

**FIG.4**

At this juncture seeing that the government itself is at a back foot, private unaided schools have seized their opportunity and has constantly tried to monopolise the educational sector. The expenditure that a family might incur while sending their child to one of these unaided schools is higher than what a commoner could afford. Thus, the 'masses' are conveniently denied their right for quality language education. Fig.5(a 2009-10 survey) suggests the economic class that prefer unaided schools. It clearly indicates that families with an annual income of 10,000 and above opts for unaided private school. Fig.6 shows the occupation of households and their choice of schools. Here we see that the self-employed households, agricultural labourers and industrial labourers all prefer aided or government schools. Education in Kerala thus stratifies the society widening the gap between the comforts of the elite and the struggles of the masses. Hence, English Language Education which was supposed to be a public merit good has become a private merit good in Kerala.

Distribution of Students in Schools by Household Income.(in per cent)

Management	Status	Class of family annual income						Total
		5000-10000	10001-20000	20001-50000	50001-100000	10001-200000	> 200000	
Government	LP	16.7	53.3	16.7	13.3	-	-	100
	UP	3.3	33.3	56.7	6.7	-	-	100
	HS	16.7	37.5	20.8	20.8	4.2	-	100
Aided	LP	30	36.7	26.7	6.7	-	-	100
	UP	13.3	20	36.7	13.3	6.7	10	100
	HS	-	10	43.3	23.3	20	3.3	100
Unaided Recognised	LP	-	-	-	22.7	45.5	31.8	100
	UP	5	-	5	5	20	65	100
	HS	-	-	-	6.7	23.3	70	100
Unaided Unrecognised	LP	-	-	25	37.5	25	12.5	100
	UP	-	-	10	60	20	10	100
	HS	-	-	-	-	-	-	100

FIG.5



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**Percentage Distribution of Occupation of Households Under Different Managements**

Occupation	Management			
	Government	Aided	Unaided Recognised	Unaided Unrecognised
Agriculture labour	21.1	13.3	-	-
Farmer	4.4	11.1	1.4	11.1
Industrial labour	2.2	4.4	2.8	-
Industrialist	-	-	1.4	5.6
Businessmen	5.6	14.4	16.7	22.2
Bank staff	-	1.1	9.7	-
Teaching	1.1	5.6	36.1	22.2
Government employees	6.7	11.1	16.7	11.1
Private employees	8.9	16.7	6.9	16.7
Self employed	43.3	22.2	8.3	11.1
Not in labour force	6.7	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100

**FIG.6**

## CONCLUSION

The data that has been presented here offer us a panoramic view of the current educational scenario in Kerala. The Triangle of Determinants clearly indicate that though we boast of having developed our own unique educational system deconstructing the framework that the British adopted, what we have finally managed to reach is the very old oppressive ideas of stratification that the white man tried to impart through his educational model. It's time for our policy makers to think deep in this direction and take necessary action because a house divided within itself can never survive.

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[Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Review \(AJMRR\)](#)

ISSN 2582 8088

Volume 2 Issue 2 [April - May 2021]

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[Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research & Review \(AJMRR\)](#)

ISSN 2582 8088

Volume 2 Issue 2 [April - May 2021]

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