

**Dynamics of Change in Kerala's Education System:  
The Socio-economic and Political Dimensions**

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**Working paper No.12**

**March 2005**

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## **Dynamics of Change in Kerala's Education System: The Socio-economic and Political Dimensions**

**K.K.George and Parvathy Sunaina \***

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper attempts to situate the dynamics of change in the educational sector of Kerala in the broad context of the dynamics of its economy, society and polity. It deals with the political and social forces, which have been impacting upon the State's educational system. The paper begins with a brief overview of the developments in the State's education, its distinguishing characteristics and the major issues, which have cropped up in recent years. It discusses some aspects of Kerala economy and society, which have a direct influence on the State's education system. Growth in State Domestic Product, structural changes in the economy, growth in employment and unemployment, international migration, demographic changes and State's fiscal crisis are some of the areas covered under this head. The paper also examines the trends in the educational finances of the State.

The paper finds that the share of education in the State's budget has reached an all-time low precisely when the State Domestic Product has been recording all-time high growth rates. The vacuum created by the withdrawal of the State is now being filled by unaided self-financing institutions, especially in the professional educational sector. There is a paradigm shift in the State's education from an all-inclusive system, attempting to reach education to all social and economic groups, to an exclusive system, limiting access to the upper echelons of society. The pendulum seems to be swinging from one extreme to the other, from a highly subsidized and state sponsored system to a total student financing system. This shift in approach has the potential of undermining the very Kerala Model of Development and is likely to have far-reaching adverse social and economic consequences.

Key words: Kerala, Education, Economic growth, Public Expenditure, Unemployment, Migration, Demographic changes.

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This is a modified version of the paper presented at the National Seminar on "Strategies and Dynamics of Change in Indian Education" organized jointly by IAMR and CARE at Delhi in November 2004.

The views expressed are only the personal views of the authors and not those of CSES.

## **Dynamics of Change in Kerala's Education System: The Socio-economic and Political Dimensions**

This paper attempts to situate the dynamics of change in the educational sector of Kerala in the broad context of the dynamics of its economy, society and polity. The paper is divided into five Sections. Section I gives a brief overview of the developments in the State's education, its distinguishing characteristics and the major issues which have cropped up in recent years. Section II discusses some aspects of Kerala economy such as growth in State Domestic Product structural transformation of the economy, growth in employment and unemployment, international migration and demographic changes which have a direct influence on the State's education system. Section III examines the trends in the educational finances of the State. Section IV discusses the two-way relationship between educational development and socio-economic changes in the State. Section V deals with the political and social forces, which have been impacting upon the educational system.

### **Section I**

#### **Developments in Education- An Overview**

##### **Features of the System**

It goes to the credit of Kerala that it has achieved already all the millennium goals set for education, much ahead of time. As is well known, Kerala was the first State to have achieved universal literacy. There is near universal enrolment in the schools. The drops out rates are very low in schools. The failure rates however continue to be high.

Kerala has been able to reduce the regional disparities in education to a large extent. It has been able to remove the wide disparities in literacy and enrolment at all levels between the Malabar region of the erstwhile Madras Presidency and the regions covered by the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin<sup>1</sup>. More than 94 percent of the rural population is served by primary schools/sections within a distance of one kilometre while 98 per cent of population has got one school within a distance of two kilometres. More than 96 percent of the population is served by an upper primary school/section within a distance of 3 kilometres. Nearly one-fourth of the rural population is served by a secondary school within a distance of 2 kilometres. Nearly 98 percent of the rural population has the facility for secondary education within 6 to 8 km. (In spite of the wide coverage of schools, there are still areas, mostly in the tribal belts, which do not have adequate schooling facilities in their neighborhood). Facilities for higher education and technical education too are available to rural students in reasonable distance. The widespread transport system and the highly subsidized transport rates for students further facilitate easy access for rural students to higher educational institutions.

Kerala has been able to achieve gender equity in education to a large extent. Nearly half of the students in lower primary classes are girls. There is not much gender disparities in the nursery schools either (Centre for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies, 2002). The proportion of girls is higher in higher classes in schools. This proportion is much higher in Arts and Science colleges both at the graduate and postgraduate levels. The representation of girls in professional courses is, however, comparatively low. Among the teachers in schools, the presence of female teachers is around 70 per cent in Kerala as against 50 per cent in the country. In Arts and Science colleges, female teachers constitute around 50 percent of the teachers.

The literacy rates for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population, though lower than those of the general population, are higher than even the literacy rates for the general population in India. SC students constitute 10.7 percent and ST students 1.2 percent of the total enrolment in schools. These figures may be seen against the

estimated share of SC and ST students in the school going population (10.4 percent and 1.2 per cent). The share of SC and ST students in enrolment in higher education is commensurate with the share of SC and ST communities in the total population of the State, which is 9.8 per cent and 1.1 per cent, respectively. The dropout rates of SC and ST students are slightly higher (1.57 per cent and 3.47 per cent) than the average of all communities (1.36 per cent). Failure rates of SC and ST students in the matriculation examinations too are higher.

The education scene in Kerala is dominated by private agencies, both aided and unaided. 57 per cent of the schools are in the Private Aided sector and 6 per cent in the Private Unaided sector<sup>2</sup>. The proportion of schools in the unaided sector is increasing. There is also rapid growth of schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Council of Secondary Education (ICSE). At present, there are 282422 students studying in 511 such schools. (Educational Statistics Since Independence, 2004). The vast majority of these schools are in the private unaided sector. The local bodies used to run many schools, mostly in the Malabar region. But most of these schools have been taken over by the government. Dominance of the private aided colleges in the Arts and Science college sector is much more than in the school sector. In the engineering and medical education, the unaided sector, which was non-existent till the nineties, has come to dominate by the end of 2003.

### **Major Developments**

The system of direct payments to teaching and non-teaching staff in the aided schools and colleges was introduced way back in the early seventies. The service conditions including pension of the staff in the aided schools and colleges are the same as those of their counterparts in the government run institutions. The service conditions of staff have improved considerably. There is also job security. The salary and pension of staff in the aided schools and colleges are revised along with that of the government staff periodically. The appointment of teachers in the aided schools and colleges however is done *de facto* by the managements, while the salary and all other benefits are paid by the government. It appears that the privatization of education in Kerala is only 'pseudo privatization' (Tilak, 1991).

With improving salary and service conditions, employment in aided educational institutions has become very attractive. This attractiveness in the context of the high unemployment of the educated in the State has led to totally unintended results. The freedom in appointments has been misused by a large number of private managements with impunity. The worst practices of corruption, nepotism and communalization in appointments are in vogue. The appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff has become an easy way of mobilizing resources, not all of which are used for developing educational institutions. It has become a means for building up patronage networks and strengthening the economic and political clout of the communities, which run these institutions. Instances of auctioning appointments are common. Large sums of unaccounted money, running into lakhs change hands. Obviously, quality of teachers suffers (K.K.George, George Zachariah and N.Ajith Kumar, 2003)

Under the decentralised system introduced in the wake of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution, pre-primary, lower primary and upper primary schools come under the jurisdiction of the Grama Panchayats and urban local bodies. High schools come under the District Panchayats, Municipalities and Corporations. The jurisdiction of the local bodies however is confined to the government schools. Some of the financial, administrative and developmental functions of education management were transferred to these bodies though there is still dual control over the staff. The salary of the staff continues to be paid directly by the government.

The renewal of the school curriculum and the textbooks is a hotly debated issue in the state. In 1996, responsibility of renewing the curriculum and textbooks in schools up to Class IV was entrusted with the state unit of DPEP, which adopted a child-centered curriculum, and an activity oriented pedagogy. The task of revising the curriculum and textbooks is now with the SCERT. Curriculum changes in higher education are not taking place frequently as they have to undergo time-consuming processes.

A major trend noticed from the nineties is the growth of unaided schools and self-financing courses. There had been phenomenal growth in self-financing institutions for imparting technical, medical and paramedical education. There is also growing presence of self-financing institutions in the teachers training segment. Most of the job-oriented courses are now run on self-financing basis, either in the newly started unaided institutions or in the existing aided colleges themselves. There is no job security for the teachers in these institutions and their service conditions are in most cases much worse than in the government owned/aided institutions. As a result, many of these institutions are not able to attract good quality teachers. Turnover of teachers is also quite high.

There is phenomenal increase in the number of 'non-formal' educational institutions, in the unorganized sector. These are not affiliated to any University or government agencies. Most of them offer job-oriented courses and are run on commercial basis. There is no reliable estimate of the number of these institutions or the students enrolled in them.

### **Major Issues**

The low quality of education at all levels and in all types of institutions is a major issue of concern. Providing adequate opportunities for higher education particularly in technical subjects has become another major issue from the mid eighties. It was this concern, in the context of high demand for job oriented courses and the massive exodus of students to other states in search of such courses, that has led to the starting of self financing educational institutions on a large scale in the State. The capacity, (or the lack of it,) of the State to finance education and alternate modes of financing became important issues in the discussions on education in the nineties. An allied issue, of access and equity also came to the centre stage.

## **Section II**

### **Trends in Kerala Economy**

#### **Growth Trends in State Domestic Product**

The capacity of the State as well as the households to spend on social sectors like education depends on the per capita income. But, Kerala in the past was spending much beyond its economic capacity on social sectors because it had the right priorities. Kerala's development experience therefore used to be described in the past as the paradox of high degree of social development despite low rates of economic growth. In the sixties, seventies and the eighties, the compound annual growth rates of per capita Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) were quite low (1.41 percent, 0.45 percent and 1.87 percent respectively). These rates were lower than the growth rates for the country as a whole (K.K.Subramanian, 2003). It appears that Kerala economy has been slowly coming out of the stagnation phase. The turnaround came in 1987-88. Growth in State's per capita NSDP continued in the nineties (4.56 percent), though the growth rate has slackened somewhat in the second half of the nineties (EPW Research Foundation, 2003). It may be noted that part of the growth of per capita NSDP was due to the steep decline in population growth. But growth has been taking place in the total NSDP also. There are reasons to believe that growth may be sustainable as large central

government investments particularly in the infrastructure sector are planned for the State. The State, off late has also become more investor friendly.

In a way, the per capita NSDP is an insufficient indicator of the disposable income of the households in Kerala. The per capita consumer expenditure of Kerala was higher than its per capita income. In per capita consumer expenditure, Kerala ranked only eighth in 1972-73 among the fourteen major states in India. But it improved its position to third in 1983 and further to second by 1993-94. In 1999-2000, Kerala stood first among major states in per capita consumer expenditure (Jose Sebastian, 2003), though its rank in per capita NSDP was only eighth in that year. This is not surprising in view of the large quantum of remittances received from the out migrants (to other states) and emigrants (to other countries) from Kerala, discussed later. It is estimated that the remittances to Kerala from its emigrants to other countries alone were equivalent to 22-25 percent of NSDP (K.C.Zachariah and S.Irudaya Rajan, 2004).

Major structural changes had been taking place in Kerala economy. The share of agriculture in NSDP has come down from 39.1 percent in 1980-81 to 35.7 percent in 1990-91. It came down further to 30.6 percent in 1997-98. The share of industry also came down, though only marginally. Its share came down from 24.5 percent to 24.2 percent and further to 24.0 percent during the period. Service sector was the fastest growing sector in Kerala economy. Its share improved steadily from 36.4 percent in 1980-81 to 40.1 percent in 1990-91 and further to 45.4 percent 1997-98 (EPW Research Foundation, 2003). It appears that the Kerala economy has made a direct jump from agriculture to service sector, bypassing the industrial sector.

The sectoral shift in employment is in a way more directly relevant to our discussion on education than the sectoral shift in SDP. There was a dramatic decline in the share of primary sector in employment between 1961, 1981 and 1991 according to the Census (Mridul Eapen, 1994; K.K.George and N.Ajith Kumar, 1997). The trend continued between 1993-94 and 1999-2000 (B.A.Prakash and M.P.Abraham, 2004). However, unlike in the case of NSDP, the share of secondary sector in employment has increased. But the most dramatic change was in the share of tertiary sector. This phenomenal growth in the service sector employment is attributed to the large-scale inward remittances from the emigrants to foreign countries and the out migrants to other states from Kerala.

### **Trends in Unemployment**

The chronic unemployment problem has always been the Achilles heel of the State. It is this problem which is the single biggest factor which determines the character and content of education in the State. Though there was growth in NSDP during the nineties, it was actually a jobless growth. The employment elasticity for Kerala for the period 1993-94 to 1999-00 was the lowest among the major states in India. While the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the State grew by 5.5 percent per annum during this period, employment grew by just 0.7 percent. As a result, unemployment rate of Kerala increased from 15.5 percent in 1993-94 to 21.0 percent in 1999-2000. The rate of unemployment in Kerala was almost three times the All India rate. It was the highest among states in India (The Economic Survey, 2003-04).

Despite this large unemployment, we find the paradox of immigration of unskilled, semi-skilled and off late, skilled labor, not only from neighboring states like Tamilnadu, but also from distant states like Maharashtra, Orissa and West Bengal. The immigration from other states, which started as a trickle has now become almost a torrent. Part of this

immigration is in the nature of replacement migration, to replace the out migrants and the emigrants from Kerala. A partial explanation of this paradox may also lie in the character and content of State's education, discussed later.

Unemployment problem in Kerala is largely a problem of the educated. The prevalence of unemployment is more among the educated persons as may be seen from the table below.

**Table 1**  
**Unemployment Rates in Kerala (Usual Principal Status)**

Category	1993-1994 (%)		1999-2000 (%)	
	Kerala Total	Of Educated Persons above 15 years	Kerala Total	Of Educated Persons above 15 years
<b>Rural</b>				
Male	7.2	18.5	7.6	15.0
Female	15.8	49.6	19.7	49.1
Person	9.4	27.2	10.9	25.3
<b>Urban</b>				
Male	7.6	12.6	6.9	9.9
Female	24.4	40.6	26.4	41.9
Person	12.0	21.4	12.5	21.2

**Source:** Prakash, B. A. and M.P Abraham. 2004. 'Employment and Unemployment in Kerala', in B. A. Prakash (ed.), *Kerala's Economic Development: Performance and Problems in the Post Liberalisation Period* pp. 94, 95 & 97, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Note: Based on NSSO, 2001.

Unemployment rate among the educated persons above fifteen years was much higher than the rate for the general population in this age group. The problem was much more acute among educated women. Nearly half of the educated women in the rural areas were unemployed. In the urban areas, more than 40 percent of the educated women were unemployed (B.A.Prakash and M.P.Abraham, 2004).

The education-wise break-up of work seekers in Kerala also confirms the nature of the unemployment discussed above. More than 80 percent of the work seekers had qualifications of SSLC and above. The proportion of this category of work seekers was increasing in the nineties (Economic Review, 2003). Among the professional and technical work seekers, the largest group was that of ITI certificate holders (68.5 percent). The next significant group was that of diploma holders in engineering and technology (23.9 percent).

The growth in unemployment among the educated is not surprising as the employment in the organized sector grew only by 7.7 percent between 1990 and 2002. The public sector employment showed only marginal increase during the above period (1.6 percent). Though growth in private sector employment (15.3 percent) was relatively high, it was inadequate to offset the near stagnation in public sector employment.

## International Migration from Kerala

“Migration has provided the single most dynamic factor in the other wise dismal scenario of Kerala in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is one of the positive outcomes of the Kerala Model of Development. In Kerala, migration must have contributed more to poverty alleviation than any other factor including agrarian reforms, trade union activities and social welfare legislation” (K.C.Zachariah, E.T.Mathew and S.Irudaya Rajan, 2000). The number of emigrants to other countries increased from 2,30,740 in 1982 to 6,37,103 in 1992 and to 18,44,023 in 2003. Taking into account the Return Emigrants, the number of Non-resident Keralites stood at 27,37,965 in 2003. The emigrants per hundred households were 26.7 in 2004. The number of Non-Resident Keralites per 100 households was still higher at 39.7. The annual remittances from the emigrants increased from Rs.13, 652 crores in 1999 to Rs.18, 465 crores in 2003. Emigration has affected all sectors of society including education. The remittances had made tremendous impact on income distribution among regions, communities and religious groups, as the distortion of emigrants in the State was very uneven. It has however made a significant impact on poverty alleviation in the State.

## Fiscal Crisis

Despite the large volume of external remittances to the State and despite the recovery of its economy in the nineties, the State has been facing recurrent fiscal crisis from 1983-84 onwards. Fiscal crisis of the State had been a major reason adduced by the Government for reducing budget allocation to social sectors, including the education sector. The crisis had set in Kerala earlier than in most other states. The dimension of the crisis for the State also had been bigger (K.K.George, 1993, 1999). The ratio of Gross Fiscal Deficit (GFD) to GSDP shot up from 4.8 percent in 1991 to 7.3 percent in 1999-2000. Though the ratio came down by 2001-02, it was still high at 4.1 percent.

**Table 2**  
**Major Fiscal Indicators**

Year	GFD/ GSDP	Revenue Deficit (-) or Surplus (+) / Revenue Expenditure	Revenue Deficit / GFD	Revenue Deficit/ GSDP
1985-90 (Avg)	N. A.	-8.8	36.4	N.A
1990-95 (Avg)		-10.4	44.0	
1995-00 (Avg)		-16.7	53.3	
1990-91	4.8	-14.9	52.8	-2.6
1991-92	3.9	-11.3	45.3	-1.8
1992-93	3.1	-9.2	46.1	-1.4
1993-94	3.6	-8.6	39.7	-1.4
1994-95	3.5	-7.9	36.1	-1.3
1995-96	3.4	-6.9	30.9	-1.0
1996-97	3.5	-9.5	41.7	-1.4
1997-98	4.9	-13.6	46.5	-2.3
1998-99	5.4	-22.0	67.4	-3.6
1999-00	7.3	-31.3	79.9	-5.8
2000-01	5.6	-26.5	81.2	-4.5
2001-02	4.1	-22.3	79.7	-3.3

**Source:** George, K. K. and K. K. Krishnakumar. 2003. *Fiscal Management in Kerala: Constraints and Policy Options*, Working Paper No. 9, pp. 31-33. Kochi: Centre for Socio-Economic and Environmental Studies (CSES).



The problem of deficit in Kerala is more in the revenue account. The share of revenue deficit in GFD has increased from 36.4 percent during 1985-90 to 44.0 percent during 1990-95 and further to 53.3 percent during 1995-2000 (K.K.George and K.K.Krishnakumar, 2003). Revenue deficit as a percentage of revenue expenditure reached an all time high of 31.3 percent in 1999-2000. The earlier start of the fiscal crisis, its larger dimension and the larger component of revenue deficit in fiscal deficit can be traced at least partly to the larger allocation of the State for social services especially education, which have larger revenue content in expenditure. The ratio of revenue deficit to revenue expenditure has been coming down in recent years. But this reduction in revenue deficit was made by drastic compression of expenditure rather than by raising additional resources. In fact, the own revenue of the State in relation to its SDP declined from 1989-90 onwards. The State's own resource mobilization efforts were lower in the nineties than in the eighties. The efforts came down, especially from 1994-95. The decrease in Central revenue transfers also contributed to the fiscal crisis. The ratio of central revenue transfers to NSDP came down from 7.0 percent in 1990-91 to 3.5 percent in 2001. The decrease in transfers to Kerala was much more pronounced than in the case of other states (K.K. George and K.K. Krishnakumar, 2003).

The steep decrease in Central transfers and the reasons thereof have its impact on State's education finances. The decrease was essentially the result of the conflict of priorities between the Centre and the State, which has been emerging for quite some time. Due to this conflict in priorities, Kerala had been getting very low quantum of Central funds for its education sector (K.K.George, 1993, 1999). The Centre's current priority is in reaching at least the Millennium goals, which implies tackling the first generation problems in education and other social sectors. Having solved these problems already, Kerala's priorities should now lie in tackling the second-generation problems induced by its very success in these fields. In the educational sector, having achieved universal literacy and near universal schooling, the State's priority now lies in increasing opportunities for tertiary education to the large number of students coming out of the schools. This problem, which Kerala has inherited, is a problem faced by the developed countries. But the State does not have the economic strength to tackle this problem unlike the developed countries. And there is inadequate appreciation of these State-specific problems by the Central Government.

In its eagerness to reach education to all classes and all regions, Kerala in the past had compromised on quality standards. Upgradation of quality at all levels is therefore emerging as another area of priority of the State, whereas the Central government's priority is still in reaching the minimum quantitative targets. Similar conflicts in priorities have emerged between the State and the international development agencies. Consequently, these agencies too had been keeping away from the State's education as also its other social sectors.

### **Section III**

#### **Trends in Expenditure on Education**

The share of education in the total expenditure of the government (revenue and capital) had been coming down almost steadily from the Fifth Five Year Plan onwards.

**Table 3**  
**Share of Education, Art, Culture & Scientific Research in Budgeted Expenditure**  
**(From 1974 to 2002-03)**

(Figures in percentages)

Plan Periods		Revenue Expenditure	Capital Expenditure	Total Expenditure	Plan Expenditure	Non Plan Expenditure
V	Kerala	35.5	1.7	27.4	10.6	32.5
	All States	22.6	0.4	15.5	5.4	20.2
VI	Kerala	31.9	1.5	24.1	8.2	30.7
	All States	21.1	0.5	15.0	4.5	20.2
VII	Kerala	27.9	1.2	22.2	6.9	2.7
	All States	20.7	1.0	15.9	5.8	20.9
1990-92	Kerala	26.7	2.8	22.3	5.4	26.9
	All States	20.6	1.4	16.6	5.7	21.2
VIII	Kerala	28.2	2.7	21.9	6.2	27.0
	All States	19.7	1.3	16.3	8.4	19.7
1998-99 to 2002-03*	Kerala	21.2	1.5	18.9	5.1	23.1
	All States	19.9	1.0	16.6	8.6	18.9

**Source:** George, K. K. 1993 (Second Edn. 1999). *Limits to Kerala Model of Development*, pp. 83. Thiruvananthapuram: Centre for Development Studies (CDS).

\***Computed from:** *State Finances*, Various Issues, Reserve Bank of India.

The share of education came down from 27.4 percent during the Fifth Plan period to 18.9 percent during the five-year period ended in 2002-03. It may be recalled that even the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin State had spent a much higher proportion (26.0 percent) of its budget on education in 1954-55 (P.R.Gopinathan.Nair, 1981).

It appears that there is no direct relationship between economic growth and the public expenditure on education in the State. The largest expansion of the school system took place in the sixties, seventies and the eighties. Public expenditure on education remained high when the per capita income was growing only very slowly. The school system continued to expand at a lower pace during the eighties when the economic growth was picking up, though at a lower pace. But there was squeeze on every type of government expenditure in the nineties, which witnessed the highest growth rate in per capita SDP. But the growth in educational expansion was only in the Higher Secondary segment brought about as a result of the policy decision to shift the Higher Secondary education from the colleges to the schools. Consequently, most of the expansion in professional education had to take place in the unaided sector.

The reduction in government funding affected all types of expenditure, particularly the plan and capital expenditure. The share of plan expenditure on education in the total plan expenditure of the State has come down from 10.6 percent to 5.1 percent during the above period. The above share of Kerala was lower than that of the average of All States during the nineties. As a result, the plan component of expenditure on education for Kerala in the nineties was much lower than the All States-average. The already low capital component of the expenditure on education came down further from 1.7 percent to 1.5 percent during the above period. There are two possible reasons for the decreasing plan and capital components of educational expenditure, which though understandable are not fully justifiable. Most of the intake capacity creation in schools (except the Higher Secondary schools) and colleges run by the government had been completed by the eighties. The expansion that took place in the nineties was mostly in the unaided sector. Besides, most of the educational institutions in Kerala are in the private sector, either aided or

unaided. The government has no capital expenditure commitment even for the aided sector. But the above analysis also brings out that there was enough financial leeway for the State to fund the expansion of intake capacity for technical and medical education by diverting funds from the school and Arts and Science college sub sectors. But the State chose the easier way out by opting for self-financing institutions. There was also scope for diverting funds for quality upgradation. Instead, it allowed the squeeze on education expenditure, which has led to the lowering of quality. The funds available now for investment in libraries and laboratories or for maintenance of capital assets already created or for providing educational inputs of a current nature are grossly inadequate leading to deterioration in quality. The decreasing availability of funds for the above vital purposes may be seen from the increasingly large share of consumption expenditure in the Final Outlay (consumption expenditure + capital outlay) on education. The share of consumption expenditure was as high as 92.4 percent in 1998-99 (Economic and Functional Classification of (Kerala) Budget- 1993-94 to 1998-99, 2000). The share of compensation for employees alone (wages, salaries and pension) in the total consumption expenditure on education which was already very high in 1993-94 (91.2 percent) increased further to 93.6 percent in 1998-99. This implies decreasing provision for current inputs and for maintenance.

The analysis of budgetary expenditure on education according to the different sub sectors shows that the share of primary education has been coming down rather drastically (K.K.George et. al., 2003). The share of secondary education has been increasing. The share of higher education and technical education has also been going up. The share of primary education has been coming down as most of the expansion in this segment had been completed by the eighties. Besides, whatever expansion that took place since then had been largely in the unaided sector.

### **The Private Cost of Education**

We had seen earlier that the per capita income had shown high rates of growth in the nineties than in the previous decades. This high growth in per capita income, the reduced size of the households (it came down from 5.3 in 1991 to 4.7 in 2001) and the lower number of children have increased the capacity of a large number of households to bear a larger share of the cost of education. But despite these favorable developments, the ratio of recovery of public expenditure on education by the way of fees has been coming down. It came down from 2.4 percent in 1991 to 1.7 percent in 2001 (K.K.George and K.K.Krishnakumar, 2003). This declining cost recovery aggravated, to some extent, the financial crisis in education.

The low cost recovery from students however does not imply low cost of education to the students. To offset the low quality in the government and aided sectors, partly due to poor financial provisioning, the students resort to private tuitions on a large scale. This makes free education unceasingly turning out to be a myth in Kerala. A recent study on the household costs of school education has shown that the percentage of students receiving private tuition range from 6.7 percent in the pre-primary schools (!) to 34.1 percent in high schools. These ratios were 11.8 percent for primary schools, 21.5 percent for middle schools and 29.6 percent for higher secondary schools (N.Gopalakrishnan Nair, 2004). A survey conducted among a sample of 500 college students in different colleges in Thiruvananthapuram by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala in 1992 had revealed that private tuition accounted for 18 per cent of the total expenditure as against four per cent for college fees. (KEC, 1999).

Data on the monthly per capita expenditure on education brought out by the National Sample Survey, 55<sup>th</sup> round (1999-2000) show that, rural Kerala had been spending much more than rural India on education (NSSO, 2001). The difference is substantial (Rs.20.26 for Kerala against Rs.9.37 for India). In terms of the per capita educational

expenditure in rural areas, Kerala ranked third after Punjab and Haryana. But urban India was spending more than urban Kerala (Rs.37.1 for India against Rs.34.7 for Kerala). The proportion of households spending on education, however, was much more in both urban and rural Kerala. In terms of this ratio, Kerala's position was first among states. The survey reveals that rural-urban difference in educational spending by households was much less in Kerala than in the country as a whole. This is true if we take both the per capita expenditure and the proportion of households spending on education. Many micro-level studies have shown that spending on education by households is much more than indicated by the NSSO survey (CSES, 1997; N. Ajith Kumar, 2004; N. Gopalakrishnan Nair, 2004).

#### **Section IV**

##### **The Relationship between Education and Socio-economic Changes**

Kerala's education system has emerged as a very large economic activity. Nearly one fifth of the population are students, even without counting the large number of students in the non-formal educational institutions. Education sector is one of the biggest employers in the State. The number of teachers is equivalent to about 50 per cent of the total number of workers in the registered factories. Teachers constitute nearly 18 per cent of the total employment in the organized sector. Questions are being increasingly raised whether public and private expenditure to sustain educational activity on such a massive scale has really yielded commensurate returns in terms of economic development and employment generation. A negative answer to this question is shared by large sections of people and policy makers now. This provides the social and political sanction for cutting public expenditure on education, a tendency noted earlier. This is also one of the underlying reasons for the State's drowning efforts to raise resources to finance educational expenditure despite economic growth in the nineties.

It is often not realized by those who argue in favor of a shift in a state's priorities further away from education, that educational development has contributed much to the social and economic development of the State. Education, particularly women's education has contributed to the decline in mortality rates in Kerala. It has also helped the State in containing the birth rate and bringing about the much acclaimed demographic transition. It is the low population growth that has led to the steeper increase in the State's per capita income, disproportionate to the growth in its SDP. It has facilitated the large-scale emigration and out migration of people, whose remittances sustain the Kerala economy today.

##### **Education and Unemployment**

The swelling unemployment of the educated has prevented the State from reaping the full social and economic benefits of its educational development. Unemployment is to be understood not merely as the denial of opportunities for the individuals. It tantamounts to a denial of opportunities for participation by the unemployed in the State's economic activities and contributing to its economic development. As was seen earlier, more than one-fourth of the rural educated and one-fifth of the urban educated were unemployed in the State. The female unemployment rates in the State were still higher. This implies that the State could not get the potential contribution of a sizable segment of educated persons, particularly of women to its economic development.

More than the lack of economic growth and consequent disability to invest in education, it is the growing unemployment that has been setting the limit to further public investment in educational development today. The increasing unemployment of the educated has sapped the willingness of the State in funding education. It is often asked whether there is any point in government spending more on education, which leads only to higher

unemployment. It is argued that the State instead of spending on education should now invest more in productive activities, which may result in employment creation. But growth by itself does not generate employment as may be seen from Kerala's experience in the nineties. Promoting growth with employment calls for a change in the strategy of development and attendant policy framework followed by both the State and the Central government. There is certainly a limit to what the State can do on its own in promoting employment, especially that of the educated. But the State can definitely do much more to attune its educational system to the changing labor market trends within the state, country and abroad. Solution to unemployment problem also requires that the quality of education should be improved substantially. It is felt that low quality has contributed, at least partially, to the unemployment problem in the state by making many of the educated persons unemployable in today's changing job markets.

It is argued that the nature of education and its content have contributed to the unemployment problem of the State. The education system in the State evolved to cater to the limited segments of white-collar job markets within the state and outside. In this process, education in Kerala 'remained frozen as an inert academic exercise'. The system got de-linked from the production processes within the state. Education also led to the divorce of the mental labour from physical labour. This dichotomy is very much visible in Kerala leading to an obsession with secure white-collar jobs and a general reluctance to undertake manual labor (Kerala Education Commission, 1999). This aversion to manual jobs, which is not, a recent phenomenon has contributed to the unemployment problem. These links between education, mental attitude and unemployment were noticed as early as 1931 by the Census of Travancore. It noted: "... unemployment has been aggravated in recent years by the rapid spread of education which has created in the minds of the youth an aversion to manual labour and a craving for employment in government" (quoted in P.R.Gopinathan.Nair, 1981).

Educational needs like family improvement, community improvement and skills development received only marginal importance in the state. Besides, "Experiments to combine vocational activity with academic pursuits really did not take off. Vocationalisation, with its stress on labour skills, was out of tune with the dominant middle class concern of social advancement" (Kerala Education Commission, 1999). Sporadic attempts for vocationalisation of education as a separate component also failed due to faulty implementation as also due to social resistance.

Long years of schooling might also have led to 'de-skilling' of children (K.K.George and N.Ajith Kumar, 2001). The students fail to master the traditional skills normally acquired by a process of apprenticeship. The school curriculum fails to equip the students with either the traditional skills or the modern skills. The 'de-skilling by education' together with the feudal values of disdain for manual labour inculcated at the schools and colleges might have resulted in the 'paradox of scarcity of labour' in a state where the unemployment rates are the highest. Kerala's requirements for unskilled and skilled labour today are increasingly met by the migrant labour from neighbouring states as noted earlier.

It is a paradox that despite large scale unemployment particularly that of the educated, the private demand for higher education has been increasing. It appears that higher education performs a 'baby sitting' role in the State. The availability of a large pool of qualified manpower looking for jobs has led to the upgrading of the hiring standards or 'escalation of qualifications', implying *de facto* devaluation of higher education. Very often, education has come to the students and their parents as a means to disguise the unemployment. The process of disguising unemployment is made easier by the hidden subsidy provided by way of very low fees. Proximity of the higher educational institutions to the students and the low transportation cost made possible by cross subsidization of bus fares have also helped in

bringing down the cost of education. The increasing capacity of the households to support the unemployed helps them to remain in higher educational institutions. This is particularly true about the non-resident Kerala (NRK) households. The low opportunity cost due to high unemployment itself tends to increase the private demand for education. Another factor that increases the demand for higher education despite unemployment is the relatively lower waiting period and higher compensation for better qualified candidates (E.T.Mathew, 1995).

There is yet another economic logic behind this paradoxical phenomenon of increasing demands for education in the State, despite high unemployment. According to the general perception in Kerala, investment in education though risky, in view of the high unemployment is less risky than other avenues for investment in the State, say in small-scale industry. It is perceived that there are not many alternative avenues for less risky investments readily available in the state.

The high unemployment has resulted in a rat race among students from the nursery classes onwards. It has encouraged rote learning by students and examination oriented coaching by the teachers. The whole school education system is now getting tuned to the entrance examinations for professional courses. This leads to neglect of regular academic studies in the schools. It has also made students to go in for large-scale tuition. These trends have led to neglect of co-curricular activities. Unemployment has also influenced to a great extent, the preferences of the students for subjects and courses of study. There is mad rush for job-oriented courses. Arts and science courses are at a discount. There is a big scramble for admission to professional courses. The best and the brightest students opt out of courses in arts, science and humanities leading to deterioration in the quality of education in these subjects. The long-term consequences of this decreasing diversity in courses, on Kerala economy and society are not yet realized.

### **Emigration's Impact on Education**

Kerala economy today is linked more to countries outside particularly to the Gulf countries than to some of the regions within the country. Both the labor markets abroad and the remittances of the emigrants have influenced State's educational system. Remittances have boosted the spending capacity of a number of NRK households. K.C.Zachariah and S.Irudy Rajan (2004) have shown that the average expenditure on education by a non-resident Keralite household was much more than that of a resident Keralite (Rs.7731/- as against Rs.6143/-). The emigrants spent 24 percent of the cash remittances on education.

A large segment of the emigrant population from Kerala is literate and that a sizeable proportion among them is highly educated. The proportion of educated among the emigrants is increasing. The rate of increase in migration in recent years is higher among persons with higher qualifications leading to higher remuneration and consequently larger quantum of remittances.

The emigration and the consequent remittances were uneven among regions, religions and communities as was seen earlier. This implies that private expenditure on education varied widely among regions and groups leading to positive and negative results. For instance, the NRKs per 100 households were as high as 72 in Pathanamthitta district. But it was only 4.3 in Idukki and 6.6 in Wayanad, the most backward districts in the State. Conversely, migration has helped in reducing the regional disparities. For example, the high proportion of NRK households in Malappuram (68.5 percent) and Kasargod (50.9 percent) districts helped these educationally backward districts. Similarly, the higher proportion of NRK households among the Muslims (81.3 percent) improved the lot of this educationally backward community. On the whole, emigration has helped in reducing the poverty in the State.

Emigration has been exerting a large influence in the selection of the subjects and courses of studies after secondary schooling. Emigration and the resultant remittances are important factors that have strengthened the sectoral shift in employment towards the service sector in the State. The job profile in this sector is different from that of agriculture and industrial sector. Besides, the State's education is getting increasingly linked to job markets abroad. The non-formal education system in Kerala played a major role in tailoring education to the markets abroad particularly the Gulf. The antenna of the non-formal educational institutions seems to be more sensitive to the changes in job markets elsewhere. Besides, they have much more flexibility in responding quickly to these changes. Subjects like spoken English, Foreign languages especially Arabic, travel and tourism management, hotel management etc. came to be offered in the non-formal system. Computer education also received a big boost. The study by K.C.Zachariah and S.Irudaya Rajan recommends, justifiably so, that special attention may be given to the general and technical education and to provide special training to potential emigrants so as to enable them to compete successfully with their counterparts from other countries. They have argued for "educational reforms taking into consideration both the emerging remittances induced job opportunities in the State and the requirements of job markets in the Gulf." According to them, "there is every justification for introducing Gulf studies in our schools and colleges. Today, we can make out a strong case for our students to learn much more about Gulf geography, Gulf history, Gulf politics and Gulf language."

### **Education and Demographic Transition**

One of the biggest achievements of Kerala from the seventies was in controlling the population growth. The growth rate in population declined to 1.76 percent in the seventies from 2.33 percent in the sixties. It came down to 1.34 percent in the eighties and to just 0.91 percent in the nineties. The growth rate in population of Kerala was less than half that of the country. The Crude Birth Rate had come down from 25.0 during 1974-80 to 20.3 during 1984-90 and to 17.1 during 1994-2001. The Total Fertility Rate declined from 2.9 to 2.0 and to 1.7 during this period. It may be noted that the Total Fertility Rate was less than the Replacement Rates in all the districts of Kerala except Malappuram. (S.Irudaya Rajan and Sabu Aliyar, 2004)

Despite the steady decline in infant mortality rate and child mortality rate, the proportion of children under 15 years in the total population has been coming down steadily. Even in absolute numbers, there was a decline in the number of children; the number declined from 8.9 millions in 1981 to 8.6 millions in 1991 and further to 7.4 millions in 2001. It is estimated that the number of children will go down further to 7.2 millions by 2011 (S.Irudaya Rajan and Sabu Aliyar, 2004). The decline in the number of children below five years had set in from the eighties itself. The number of children in the age groups of 5-9 years and 10-14 years had started declining a decade later in the eighties. Population projection for India and the States - 1996 to 2016 - indicates that the number of persons in the age group of 15 to 19 is likely to have decreased from 3.3 millions in 1996 to 3.2 millions in 2001 (Statistics for Planning, 2001).

**Table 4****Children under 15 Years, Composition and Share in Population**

Year	Total Pop <sup>n</sup>	Pop <sup>n</sup> Under 15 Years ('000)	Share in Total Pop <sup>n</sup>	Share of Different Age Groups In Total Children					
				Below 5 Years		5-9 Years		10-14 Years	
				No. (000)	%	No. (000)	%	No. (000)	%
1961	16903715	7205	42.62	2509	34.8	2443	33.9	2253	31.3
1971	21347375	8595	40.26	2855	33.2	2876	33.5	2864	33.3
1981	25453680	8901	34.97	2721	30.6	2922	32.8	3258	36.6
1991	29098518	8617	29.64	2662	30.9	2847	33.0	3108	36.1
2001	31838619	7429	23.40	2447	32.9	2256	30.4	2726	36.7

**Source:** Rajan, Irudaya S. and Sabu Aliyar. 2004. 'Demographic Change in Kerala in the 1990s and Beyond,' in B. A. Prakash (ed.), *Kerala's Economic Development: Performance and Problems in the Post Liberalisation Period*, pp. 62 & 73. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

The low growth of population has important ramifications on every aspect of Kerala society. The changes are almost tectonic in scale. The impact of demographic changes on education sector has been quick, direct and spectacular. The decrease in the number of children in all age groups has resulted in the decline in enrolment. The enrolment in primary schools has started decreasing from 1972-73 and that in upper primary schools from 1975-76. Decline in secondary schools started later in 1995-96 (KEC, 1999). The declining enrolment has rendered many schools 'uneconomic'<sup>3</sup>. The number of such schools, which was 1407 in 1997, increased to 2541 in 2003 (Economic Review, 2003). Many teachers have become excess over the requirement. The number of these surplus teachers, called 'protected teachers' was 3738 in 2003. There is now a mad scramble for students among teachers and school managements so that schools are not closed and teachers are not rendered surplus. Many unethical practices have crept into the system to snatch away students from one school to another. Excess capacity is also developing in physical infrastructure like school buildings and play grounds.

The trend of decreasing enrolment is likely to spread to higher educational institutions in the near future as, according to the population projections, persons in the age group of 15-19 are likely to come down. With the large-scale shift to job-oriented courses and technical institutions, excess capacity is already emerging in Arts and Science colleges. Even the large number of self-financing professional colleges started in the nineties find it difficult to utilize fully their intake capacity. Consequently, even very low quality students are getting admitted to professional courses leading to dilution of quality of professional education.

**Section V****The Social and Political Dimensions**

We have noted at the beginning of this paper some of the laudable aspects of Kerala's educational development, which have been taken note of by both scholars and development agencies. Some of the recent trends however are threatening to undermine these achievements and their beneficial impact on Kerala society. Commercialization, communization and politicization are now entering the educational system in a big way with possible long-term consequences, to the whole Kerala society. It is likely to undermine the positive features of the nationally and internationally applauded Kerala Model of Development.

The dominance of non-governmental agencies over the educational sector of Kerala was noted earlier. But most of these agencies belonged to religious or caste groups. They were guided by educational and social needs of not only



their own communities but also of the society around. Some of these private agencies were instrumental in taking education to backward regions, castes and socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Girls' education was also promoted by some of these agencies. The resources for starting schools and colleges were mobilized from the locality or from within the community using a variety of very ingenious techniques. Fees from the students constituted only one of the resources meant to meet at best, the recurrent expenditure. In other words, privatization did not lead to communalisation of education. The State also supported these agencies in a number of ways.

The phenomenal expansion of education from the nineties was mostly in the Unaided/Self-financing sector where the entire capital and recurring costs are sought to be recovered from the students as they are considered to be the sole beneficiaries of education. Some of the new breed of educational entrepreneurs are guided largely by commercial considerations. Even the non-governmental agencies like the religious and the caste groups which financed education partly out of their own resources, are now opting for the easier option of self-financing for promoting education, especially professional education. Even the universities and some of the government agencies are now going in for the self-financing route. Most of the job oriented courses like nursing, medical, engineering, management are in the self-financing sector (See Table 5). The non-formal educational sector, operating on purely commercial basis and offering job-oriented courses, is also expanding as seen earlier.

**Table 5**  
**Ownership of Educational Institutions (2003)**

Institution	Govt.	Aided	Unaided	Total	% Of Unaided in Total
L P Schools	2551	4003	158	<b>6712</b>	02.35
U P Schools	957	1870	124	<b>2951</b>	04.20
High Schools	984	1409	215	<b>2608</b>	08.24
Higher Secondary Schools	416	512	339	<b>1267</b>	26.97
VHSE Schools	247	128	-	<b>375</b>	00.00
Arts & Science Colleges	38	148	100	<b>286</b>	34.96
Polytechnics	42	6	8	<b>56</b>	14.19
ITIs	34	-	398	<b>432</b>	92.13
Engineering Colleges	9	3	64	<b>76</b>	84.21
Medical Colleges	5	2	6	<b>13</b>	46.15
Ayurveda Colleges	3	2	6	<b>11</b>	54.55
Homoeo Colleges	2	3	-	<b>5</b>	00.00
Dental colleges	3	-	6	<b>9</b>	66.67
Nursing Colleges	3	-	27	<b>30</b>	90.00
Nursing Schools	16	-	179	<b>195</b>	91.79
Pharmacy Institutes	2	-	9	<b>11</b>	81.82

Source: Computed from Economic review, 2003.

The social and economic mobility made possible by the educational system in the past is thus becoming near impossible. It appears that while the passports to unemployment are issued to every one through subsidized general education, very often of low quality, the same to employment opportunities are issued only to the elite groups carved out on the basis of their financial and social background (CSES, 1997). As a long-term consequence of this inequitable growth, this trend and the consequent denial of opportunities to large segments of society for upward social mobility can adversely affect the State's relatively high degree of social harmony and stability.

Almost all discussions on self-financing educational institutions highlight mostly the financial and equity issues. The impact of commercialisation on the quality of education and the capabilities of the educated manpower are not receiving due attention. Many studies have shown that self-financing professional institutions are not able to attract students from almost 95 percent of the households in the State (CSES, 1997; Abdul Salim, 2004, N. Ajith Kumar,

2004). This implies that these institutions are able to reach across only to a small segment of the population. These institutions and consequently the State are not able to tap the diversity of talents, backgrounds, attitudes and creativity of the vast majority of young persons. The long term consequences of this development to the competitiveness of the State's economy, operating in an increasingly human capital driven world economy are not yet receiving the attention it deserves from the opinion leaders and policy makers in the State, engrossed as they are with short term financial concerns.

At the school level, the spread of unaided, mostly English medium schools, run both on state curriculum and CBSE/ICSE curriculum is resulting in a new generation of students who have little knowledge of the local language, literature, culture, history and even geography. They are a socially disengaged lot insulated from the society around. The concept of neighborhood schools is at a discount. Students are transported over long distances. These students are disconnected from their neighborhood and lacks local community identity and feelings. Two classes of students seem to be emerging in the State with very little opportunities for interaction with each other. Most of the students in the unaided schools come from more or less similar socio-economic backgrounds. Long-term consequence of this development in education on Kerala society has not yet been understood and therefore is not yet part of the political discourse in the State.

The expansion of Unaided/Self-financing system can be traced partly to the emergence of a new middle class. The proportion of households in Kerala owning luxury assets like large houses, automobiles, telephone, television sets etc may give an indication of the emergence of this middle-class. (This proportion is much higher in Kerala than in the country as a whole. (NSSO, 2001; Census, 2001.) This class is both prepared and is capable to buy its way in the educational sector. Many of the less educated, but rich members of this class find education as a means for social mobility and respectability. There is a growing tendency for the middle class to opt out of the government owned and aided educational system avowedly because of its low quality but also due to social reasons. This tendency to quit the government system of education by the vocal and influential middle class in turn has led to further deterioration of the government system and the expansion of the unaided sector. A vicious circle thus seems to be closing in. This tendency of the middle class to opt out of the governmental system, whether it is of education or health care in turn has led to its unwillingness to pay for these services. It is this vocal segment of population with increasing political influence and financial clout, which now sets the agenda in the discourses on education and politics. This, in turn, has led to lower tax efforts of the government to finance public expenditure on social services, which they are no longer availing.

Higher education itself has helped the formation of this middle class. Those who have received higher education thanks to the high subsidy from the government have themselves moved into the new middle class. The growth of commercial agriculture, employment in industry and the service sectors have also contributed to the growth of this class. Land reforms helped the erstwhile tenants who were mostly belonging to middle castes and communities to throw away the feudal yoke and to become middle peasants. International migration has also helped in the middle class formation.

Expanding educational opportunities irrespective of regions, religions, castes and classes, was top most in the agenda of all the political parties in the past. State funding of education directly or through liberal grants-in-aid to private agencies helped this process of expanding educational opportunities. The need for subsidizing education by the government was not a contested issue till recently among the political parties. It is this political consensus in the State, which has contributed to the Kerala model of educational and social development. But the political parties do

not have any clear strategy of protecting the gains of the Kerala model of development from the onslaught of privatization and marketisation emanating from within and outside the country. Part of the reason for this situation lies in the growing influence of the affluent middle class in all political parties and community organizations.

Reforming the system dominated by private managements, many of them following undesirable labor practices were also on the agenda of all political parties, especially the left. The latter organized teachers under their banner and succeeded in ensuring job security, favorable service conditions, higher salaries and pensions. But the same political parties have ceased to take cognizance of the low salaries, poor service conditions and absence of job security in the unaided sector. Besides, faced with the fiscal crisis from the middle of the eighties, all the political parties had gone, to varying degrees, for the easier option of leaving the system to the market. They do not seem to have any new agenda on education.

Students, teachers and non-teaching staff are all organized under the banner of political parties. Elections to college unions and the university bodies are conducted largely on party lines. Even the style of campaign is the same. There is a failure to cultivate substantive aspects of democracy while still clinging on to its forms. It is this emphasis on the form to the detriment of substance that led to all sorts of perversions (KEC, 1999). The University Grants Commission's scheme of replacing elections by nomination had only worsened the situation. It has served only to replace party politics with 'palace politics'. All university authorities like the Vice Chancellor, Pro-vice Chancellor and the Registrar are decided by the governments, irrespective of parties, on the basis of their political party leanings and their community connections. Nominations to Syndicate, Senate and the academic bodies are also decided on party and community lines. The deliberations in the above bodies are mostly on non-academic issues and are conducted on the model of legislatures with frequent walk-outs, 'rushing to the well of the house' etc. Even educational issues like curricular change are discussed on political and partisan lines. Both the support and the resistance to the DPEP curriculum introduced by the previous LDF government and supported by organizations like the KSSP was based more on political lines rather than on academic lines.

Underlying the politicization of education is the larger issue of the relationship between a democratic polity and the educational system. This problem is yet to be resolved satisfactorily in the State. The excessive politicization is one of the indicators of the desire of the political parties and the government to encroach on the space of the autonomous institutions like schools, colleges and the universities and use them as a means of exercising power and patronage. This to some extent reflects the failure of the political parties to appreciate the role of autonomous organizations in a pluralized democratic society (K.K.George, 1998).

Due to historical reasons both the demand for and supply of educational opportunities were created largely by religious groups and community organizations. Educational development in the State was spearheaded by Christian missionaries, local church, Nair Service Society (NSS), Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDPY) and in recent times by the Muslim Educational Society (MES) (Michael Tharakan, 1984; P.R.Gopinathan Nair, 1981). Education promoted by these agencies had conferred many direct and indirect benefits to Kerala society and economy as seen earlier. "It has helped vast sections of the population to liberate themselves from numerous social disabilities from which they had been suffering for many centuries in the past. Caste and religion which were formidable barriers to social and economic mobility have to a very large extent ceased to be so." (P.R.Gopinathan.Nair, 1981). As in the case of political parties, the present leadership of the community organizations, which were formed in the wake of the social reform movements, does not seem to have any fresh agenda. Unlike the earlier leaders of the community organizations, the new leaders lack clear vision regarding the future course for Kerala's society.

There is a flip side to educational development promoted by the religious and caste groups. As the Census of Travancore, 1931 noted, “The spread of education, instead of helping the break up of the barriers separating one caste from another has only strengthened them in some respects..... They remain as exclusive as ever... Each caste wants to continue as a separate unit of the body politic so that its interests may not suffer from want of advocacy.” This tendency has vitiated the politics of the State. The educated persons belonging to different communities though basically communal in their attitudes towards social, political and economic problems, combined to make a new middle class and managed to arrogate themselves leadership positions in almost all the social and political organization in the State. The above is one of the reasons why in spite of the spread of education among the masses, political movements in Kerala are wagged by communal organizations and why political preferences as revealed by election results oscillate from one coalition of political parties to another. (P.R.Gopinathan Nair, 1981).

All the religious and caste organizations in the course of time developed into pressure groups. From the very beginning, they had developed strong clout in Kerala politics. In fact, new political parties have been formed, largely to protect the interests of some of these communities. Kathleen Gough had brought out clearly the essentially communal character of the political movements in Kerala way back in 1969. She wrote: “The correlation between caste, rank and party support raises the question ‘casteism’ in Kerala politics... All parties in their efforts to control more seats jockey for influence with one or another communal association, NSS, SNDP, Muslim League and Catholic Church.” (Kathleen Gough, 1969). The whole politics of Kerala thus came to be dominated by these organizations, which had developed a vested interest in the issue of ownership and control of educational institutions. They however are not very keen of communalizing curriculum and textbooks as in some other regions of the country.

The political clout of the educational agencies and communal organizations was so strong that it could defeat all attempts to curtail the unhealthy labor practices of the private managements, made repeatedly by the rulers of Travancore and subsequently by both the Congress and Communist governments (George Mathew, 1989). As a result, none of the governments, whether under United Democratic Front (UDF) or Left Democratic Front (LDF)<sup>4</sup> has been able to curtail the widespread corruption, nepotism and communalization in appointment of teachers in aided schools and colleges. In fact, the effort to control the educational institutions by the government was one of the reasons for the ‘Liberation struggle’ waged against the Communist government in 1959 which resulted in its overthrow by the Central government. Since a large number of educational institutions are run by minority religious groups like Christians and Muslims, the minority rights enshrined in the Constitution become an added defensive weapon to protect their community and economic interests in education. It may be noted in this context that, the share of minority religions in Kerala’s population is much higher than in the country. Muslims constitute one-fourth (24.7 per cent) of the population as against 12.4 per cent in the country. The share of Christians in the population is nearly one-fifth (19.0 per cent) as against 2.3 per cent in the country. After the overthrow of the Communist government in 1959, no main political party- Congress or Communist- has ventured to handle the education ministry. Education ministers both under the UDF and the LDF with one single exception (he too belonged to a miniscule political party) are drawn from either the Muslim League or the Kerala Congress, the latter having close links with the Christian Church.

The Paper comes to the conclusion that the mammoth educational system of the State requires updating and modernization. If it is not to become a drag on the State’s economy and if it is to play a developmental role in an increasingly knowledge driven World economy. It also requires massive restructuring encompassing all aspects of education. Infusion of massive doses of funds is necessary for restructuring and modernising the educational system.

But funding is not the only problem. Over the years, a large number of interest groups with vested interests in the status quo have got well entrenched in the education system. Any change in the existing system is likely to upset the apple-carts of all these groups – students, teachers, employees and private agencies – organized on political lines and with strong influence on political leadership. Education is no longer a mere academic activity in the State but is an instrument of power and control. The soft state in Kerala, a prisoner of these social and political groups, does not have the capacity to resist these conflicting and retrograde pressures. If the state does not develop this capacity to resist these pressures as also to improve its fiscal capacity soon, both the market and the communal forces will take over and fill the emerging vacuum in education, notwithstanding all the loud rhetoric against the market and communal forces in the State’s political and public discourse.

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<sup>i</sup> Kerala was formed as a state by amalgamating the Malabar region and the erstwhile states of Travancore and Cochin in November 1956.

<sup>ii</sup> These data pertain only to the schools following the State syllabus.

<sup>iii</sup> Schools where the minimum strength per class is less than 25 and in case of Sanskrit and Arabic schools less than 15 are treated as uneconomic schools.

<sup>iv</sup> The UDF is led by the Congress (I) and the LDF is led by the CPI (M). These fronts form government alternately in the State.

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