



## Modernity and Tradition in a Princely State: Role of the state in Shaping Hybrid Identities through Primary Education in 20th Century Travancore

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**Abstract:** The 19th century was a turning point in the educational history of Travancore, driven by colonial incursions and initiatives of Christian missionary societies like the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Mission Society (CMS). The role of these societies was instrumental in bringing in Western education, particularly among downtrodden sections like women and lower castes, undermining traditional caste hierarchies. The educational reforms were impelled by missionary fervor as well as colonial interests, with the British government and the princely state patronizing the institutionalization of Western knowledge systems, including medicine. Whereas modern conceptions of equality and progress were ushered in by these reforms, they also perpetuated colonial power structures that marginalized indigenous languages and knowledge. The introduction of English education, particularly after Macaulay's Minute of 1835, further synchronized Travancore with colonial administrative objectives, producing a Western-educated elite class and consolidating British cultural hegemony.

This educational shift encouraged hybrid identities as colonial and traditional cultural values crossed. Building on Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space," the Travancore colonial education system was a space of negotiation where indigenous and Western values existed, opposed, and transformed one another. These identity transformations were not passive assimilations but active negotiations that produced new social realities. Still, the literature fails to reflect these multiple identity formations and the profound cultural implications of colonial education. The Travancore case provides rich terrain for further research, especially on how colonial-era policies of citizenship and education continue to inform present-day educational practices and social identities in postcolonial India.

**Keywords:** Hybrid identities, Post Colonialism, Identity, Travancore, Missionary societies

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## Introduction

The 19th century in Travancore, a princely state in southern India, represents a significant period of educational transformation influenced by colonialism and the interplay of various cultural and social identities. The educational policies and practices during this era were shaped by the colonial agenda, which sought to impose Western values and knowledge systems while simultaneously engaging with local traditions and identities. The educational landscape in Travancore during the colonial period was significantly shaped by the interplay of missionary activities and state policies.

Colonial education in Travancore was significantly influenced by missionary initiatives, which aimed to reform societal norms and promote Western values. The London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Church Mission Society (CMS) played pivotal roles in introducing educational reforms that targeted marginalised communities, particularly women and lower castes (Cleetus, 2023). These reforms were not merely educational; they were deeply intertwined with the socio-political fabric of the time, as they sought to challenge existing caste hierarchies and promote a new social order based on Western ideals of equality and modernity (Devika, 2005; Doss, 2022)

## Importance of Study

- Investigate the socio-political, economic and cultural contexts that influenced the creation and implementation of primary education policies in Travancore.
- Analyse the enduring influences of colonial education on social identities and cultural interactions in Travancore, highlighting its long-term effects beyond the colonial period.
- Investigate how colonial educational policies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the formation of hybrid identities and the emergence of a 'Third Space' within Travancore.
- Explore the complex relationship between colonial educational framework and identity formation, particularly in the context of cultural hybridity during a crucial era in history.
- Enquire the colonial primary education had a profound impact on children in Eastern societies? While it provided access to new knowledge and opportunities, it also led to significant cultural dislocation and a crisis of identity.

## Methodology

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and historical analysis to examine the role of the Travancore state in shaping hybrid identities through primary education. The research methodology is structured around data collection, critical interpretation, and theoretical engagement with postcolonial perspectives.

To ensure a balanced analysis, the study will employ archival analysis involving a close reading of primary sources to uncover nuanced insights into colonial and indigenous educational discourses. The findings will be placed within the broader historical, cultural and socio-political context of the state to understand how educational policy was framed.

### *Role of the State in Shaping Hybrid Identities through Primary Education*

The institutionalisation of Western education in Travancore was not solely a missionary endeavour; it was also facilitated by the support of colonial authorities. Palanki notes that the British and princely rulers' patronage was crucial in establishing Western medical practices, which paralleled the educational reforms initiated by missionaries (Palanki, 2022). This triangular patronage comprising- state support, missionary zeal, and local demand—created a conducive environment for educational advancements. The missionaries' focus on education was part of a broader strategy to instil Western values and practices, which often conflicted with traditional norms but ultimately contributed to the modernisation of society (Doss, 2022).

This transformation was supported by the colonial state's recognition of the importance of education as a tool for governance and social control. "The colonial world is a world divided in two... The colonized is not free. The colonizer's aim is to educate the colonized, but the purpose of this education is not to liberate the colonized, but to perpetuate the power structures that benefit the colonizer." (Fanon 2008). The resulting educational framework not only facilitated the spread of Western knowledge but also laid the groundwork for future social changes in the region. This policy had profound implications on social identities, as it marginalized local languages and knowledge systems, leading to a cultural dislocation among the educated classes. The resulting educational landscape was one where English became synonymous with modernity and progress.

But the real face of the British colonial education policy, articulated in Macaulay's Minute of 1835, emphasised the promotion of English as the medium of instruction,

which was intended to create a class of educated Indians who could assist in the administration of British rule while simultaneously reinforcing British cultural hegemony (Freeman, 2020). In Travancore, the rulers recognised the necessity of adopting certain aspects of this colonial educational framework to foster administrative efficiency and social progress. The introduction of English education was seen as a way to modernise the state and improve governance, reflecting a broader trend among Indian princely states to adopt colonial educational practices to forestall direct British rule (Yeh, 2016). The educational reforms introduced by colonial powers were designed to create a class of educated elites who could serve colonial interests, thus fostering a hybrid identity that combined elements of both colonial and local cultures (Sharma, 2024).

The shift in governmental policies in Travancore towards colonial education reflects a complex interplay of identity formation and hybridization influenced by colonial ideologies. Colonial education systems were designed not only to impart knowledge but also to create a new class of subjects who could navigate the colonial landscape while embodying a hybrid identity. This phenomenon is evident in various colonial contexts, where educational policies served as tools for both assimilation and resistance, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities that straddle traditional and colonial frameworks.

The existing literature often overlooks these nuances, focusing instead on the outcomes of educational reforms without critically analysing the underlying intentions and their implications for social identity formation. The concept of the “third space,” as articulated by Homi Bhabha, provides a useful framework for examining how colonial education created a hybrid cultural space where traditional and colonial identities intersected (Yeh, 2016). Furthermore, the concept of hybridity is crucial in understanding how colonial education facilitated the emergence of a ‘third space.’ This third space represents a liminal area where cultural exchanges occur, allowing for the coexistence of multiple identities and the creation of new cultural expressions. Bhabha’s theories suggest that this space is not merely a blend of two cultures but a dynamic site of resistance and transformation (Jayawardena, 2022).

The concept of hybridity is crucial in understanding the identity transformations that occurred within Travancore. As noted in postcolonial studies, hybrid identities emerge from the fusion of distinct cultural practices and identities, often as a result of colonial encounters (Fajar, 2024). This hybridity is not merely a passive acceptance of colonial norms but rather an active negotiation of identity, where individuals draw from both their indigenous roots and colonial influences to forge new identities.

Colonial educational policies in India, including Travancore, were instrumental in shaping the identities of individuals and communities. These policies often imposed Western educational models that conflicted with indigenous knowledge systems, leading to a unique blend of cultural identities. This duality is evident in the experiences of individuals who navigated between their traditional cultural practices and the new norms imposed through colonial education, reflecting a complex process of identity negotiation.

The children educated under colonial systems often aspired to emulate Western ideals, believing that success and social mobility were attainable only through the adoption of foreign values and lifestyles. This phenomenon is echoed in the experiences of African children, who were educated to aspire to British standards but found themselves confined to subordinate roles within their societies, as noted by Malisa and Missedja (Malisa & Missedja, 2019).

The interplay between colonialism and educational practices in 19th-century Travancore illustrates the complexities of identity formation and cultural exchange within a colonial context. The educational policies implemented during this period not only shaped social identities but also laid the groundwork for ongoing debates about the nature of education in postcolonial societies. The postcolonial studies laid the groundwork for scholars to examine the effects of colonialism on both colonisers and the colonised. By analysing how Western powers created and maintained dominance over Eastern societies, Postcolonial theories helped to shift the focus from the political and economic aspects of colonialism to the cultural, psychological, and intellectual dimensions.

The field of education in 19th century Travancore presents several research gaps, particularly regarding the interplay between colonial education and social identity formation in 19th century Travancore. It presents a rich area for exploration, particularly through the lens of third space theory. Also, historicize the shifts of the state in the civic policies about primary education in Travancore and the implications of these historical dynamics for contemporary educational frameworks. By addressing these gaps, the research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the legacies of colonial education and their ongoing impact on social identities and cultural exchanges

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