

Tutorial and Parallel Colleges in Kerala

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Summary- *A forerunner of the private sector in higher education today, tutorial and parallel colleges emerged out of an unmet demand for college education, with a culture of non-formal higher education that is still remembered.*

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The college was run like a regular college. Students would arrive at 7:00 a.m. The teachers had to be present at 6:55 a.m. Students that came in late were given a late chit.”

- Sreekumar K., Mathematics teacher
Our College, Thiruvananthapuram



Figure 1. Our College started as a tutorial in 1952, became a large parallel college in the 1970s-80s, now a coaching centre-cum-tutorial. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

Tutorial colleges (also called tutorials) or institutions offer supplementary teaching to students from primary to higher educational levels. The classes are usually held in the mornings, evenings, and during vacations. The earliest tutorial institutions started in the 1930s. These institutions provide coaching, career counselling, and guidance to students. Parallel colleges are slightly different, offering regular coaching to students privately registered with universities. Many tutorials function as tutorial-cum-parallel colleges. At present-day Kerala, tutorials flourish while parallel colleges have dwindled as a consequence of various higher educational policies.

Coaching centres offer specialised training or coaching aimed at a specific set of examinations like the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), Joint Admission Test for Masters (JAM), Public Service

Commission (PSC), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), etc. They also provide supplementary teaching, career counselling, and guidance.



Figure 2. Zephyr is a modern coaching centre that functions in Thiruvananthapuram. It offers both entrance coaching and tuition to students who require it. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

This article is an enquiry into the beginning of alternative educational institutions that supplemented formal institutions and the reason for their phenomenal growth. Interviews with staff of a few coaching centres and parallel colleges, students of parallel colleges, and the children of the founder of the first tutorial college were made to get a picture of why these institutions came into being and the reason for their decline. I have included information from biographies of some of the founders and teachers of tutorials and parallel colleges and a couple of research papers available on these institutions.

The First Tutorial College

Baby Joseph, his daughter, said that the first tutorial college was started by M.P. Paul as a means of livelihood.¹ He started the tutorial to put food on the table when he lost his job at St. Thomas College, Trichur (now Thrissur). He had a conflict

¹ Interview with Baby Joseph at Puthenpally on 9 March 2023.

with the principal of the college and was terminated from the college.

He rented a large house from the Kadathunadu Raja for the running of this institute. The building was opposite the Bishop's House on that road. George Onakkoor mentions that his colleagues had no idea that he was starting this college. After a year, the college was moved to the city on Kuruppam Road. Many of the young writers of the time used to meet at the college in the evening. Thus, the tutorial college was also a meeting place for the progressive thinkers of the time according to Joseph Mundassery, his former colleague.

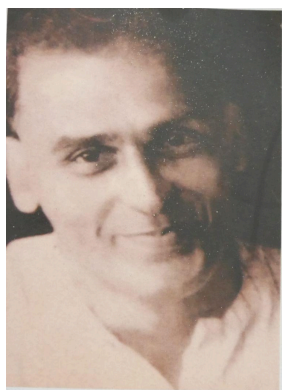


Figure 3. M.P. Paul. Image: JANAL archives



Figure 4. Baby Joseph, daughter of M.P. Paul. Her father used to ask her to attend his

tutorials before her university examinations. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

M.P. Paul Against St. Thomas College

In March 1932, the college management decided to cut the teachers' salaries with retrospective effect. This was in response to a financial crisis the state was experiencing. Paul and a few other teachers protested against this as their salaries were just about enough to cover living expenses. The college was collecting fees as usual and it did not appear as if the financial difficulties were affecting the college directly. Several official correspondences went to and from Paul and the college authorities. He filed a case against the college management and the Catholic bishop of Thrissur in 1932. Since the Catholic Church did not want a scandal, they reached an agreement with him. He was paid the arrears without interest (₹606) and his dismissal was changed to resignation.

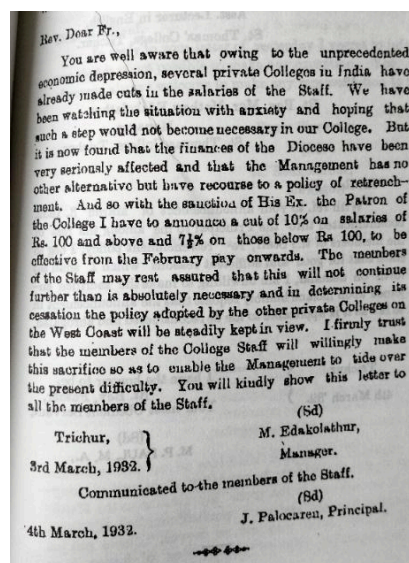


Figure 5. Copy of the letter sent to M.P. Paul by the St. Thomas College management on 4 March

1932 informing him of the salary cut with retrospective effect from February 1932. Image: 'History of a Cut' from *M.P. Paulinte Sampoorna Kruthikal*, II

M.P. Paul was a Catholic. Taking on the Catholic management in a legal battle, especially a bishop, was an unprecedented act. He received death threats.

Baby Joseph, his daughter, remembered that their mother used to be scared for his life when he went walking alone at night or in the early morning.

There must have been so many scandalous stories flying around the incident that Paul wrote a short essay on the incident. He published it together with copies of his joining letter, correspondence between him and the college authorities, and the legal documents on the case, called *The History of a Cut*.

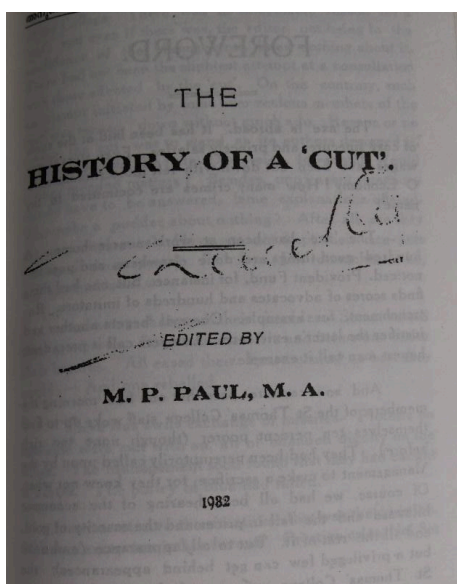


Figure 6. Cover page of the booklet *The History of a Cut* reprinted in *M.P. Paulinte Sampoorna Kruthikal*, II

A Repeat at Changanassery

The Thrissur incident was repeated a few years later in Changanassery, albeit with a few changes. In 1934, M.P. Paul was home and getting ready to go to Chennai for his BL (Bachelor of Law) when he was invited to head the English department at St. Berchman's College, Changanassery (SB College). An intermediate college (equivalent to Plus Two or Pre-degree) till then, SB College had received permission to start degree classes, provided there was a postgraduate teacher to take up the helm.

In 1936, the principal changed and Paul had differences of opinion with the new appointee, Fr. Romeo Thomas. Paul was asked to leave SB College. Though he had signed a five-year contract with the college, he was let go after three years. Paul filed a case against the management. He had difficulty in finding a lawyer who would take on a case against the Catholic bishop. Finally, Adv. M.N. Govindhan Nair (father of filmmaker G. Aravindan) agreed to take on the establishment. The college management lost the case. Simultaneously, Paul started another tutorial college called M.P. Paul's College in Changanassery.

Moving to Kottayam

Paul moved the tutorial at Changanassery to Kottayam since he would get more students there. He started another college in Ernakulam. During World War II, many buildings were taken over by the British for war purposes in Ernakulam, including St. Teresa's College. There was a general atmosphere of fear that the war may come to Cochin (The princely state. Ernakulam was a town in the princely state then) too. When people started leaving Ernakulam, Paul decided not to continue in Ernakulam and remained in Kottayam.

In 1949, he was invited to join the newly opened Mar Ivanios College to head the English department. The college authorities of Ivanios had already advertised that Paul would be part of the teaching team and used this to persuade him. When he came to Thiruvananthapuram, he liked the city. There were more educational opportunities there. So, he moved his family to Thiruvananthapuram.



Figure 7. The Department of English of Mar Ivanios College, where M.P. Paul was the first Head of the Department. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

A building behind Palayam Church on Nandavanam Road was rented to start another branch of M.P. Paul's College. The downstairs floor was for the family. There were halls on the first and second floors where students were taught. His classes used to have 100–150 students.

George Onakkoor mentions in his book that M.P. Paul made more money than if he had continued teaching in a regular college due to his tutorial colleges. But, "He did not become a businessman. He gave more salary to the teachers than a regular college. He would pay the salary on time for all the 12 months. He showed how a model educational institution should be run."

Paul's colleges were popular mainly due to the charisma of Paul himself and because

he engaged the services of excellent teachers. Vincent Paul, his son, mentioned that the colleges had to be stopped after his death.² C.J. Thomas, his son-in-law and a writer and teacher, did not have the business acumen of M.P. Paul. The tutorials were a financially successful venture when he was alive. The family lived in comfort. Baby Joseph remarked that they had liquid cash after these colleges were started. Paul's lecturer jobs did not pay that well. In fact, Paul did not want his children to marry teachers since he knew how low the remuneration was.

Times were hard for the family after Paul passed away because the income from the tutorials had stopped. At some point, Paul's gold medal, which he had received for placing first in his BA examination, was melted and some of the gold was used to craft a ring. Baby Joseph was wearing it at the time of the interview.



Figure 8. Vincent Paul, son of M.P. Paul. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

² Interview with Vincent Paul at Puthenpally on 24 March 2023.

Tutorials after M.P. Paul

M.P. Paul was instrumental in starting the Sahithya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham, a cooperative society of writers, in 1945. The society met frequently. "Many gained recognition through these meetings. It led to the progress of the literary field. I believe that more than a writer, he was a kingmaker of writers," said Rosy Thomas about the group.

The venue of the meetings were often Paul's tutorial colleges or his home. The writers of the period were a close-knit group. They were all aware of Paul's success with tutorials.

Paul encouraged his friends to start tutorials. Many of them, including Joseph Mundassery, who taught in St. Thomas College, Thrissur, and later became the Education minister of Kerala had started tutorials. Concurrently, other people started tutorials and these started to take in students from schools to higher educational institutions. It is said that there were more than 10,000 tutorial institutions by the end of the 1970s. The tutorials have morphed into institutions like Byjus, Brilliant, etc. in the recent past.

In later years, when the number of students increased in schools and the failure rate became proportionally more, the government modified rules to give grace marks and all-promotions to students. With the increased access to students from all rungs of society, the established educational institutions could not cater to the different academic abilities of the students. Moreover, in higher education, the number of students exceeded the capacity of government and aided colleges. Simultaneously, tutorials increased exponentially. They filled in a

lacuna that could not be filled in by formal educational institutions.

Tutorials did not need permission and were not under any governmental inspection in the early years. Many of them could not or did not maintain the quality of the oldest tutorials. Tutorials became a mode of employment for the unemployed because these could be started with minimal capital. In later years, the tutorials became evening colleges and then parallel colleges as a result of various policies passed by the government.

Arrival of Parallel Colleges

Demand for higher education grew rapidly in the 1970s in India. The factors that led to this were (a) an increase in socio-economic mobility, (b) the availability of jobs requiring people with advanced educational qualifications, (c) a decline in jobs for the relatively less educated, and (d) longer wait period for suitable jobs for the less educated. As a result of various socio-economic, political, and demographic factors, access to primary and secondary schooling was high in Kerala before the 1970s. The state did not have enough higher educational institutions to cater to the entire student population. The Education Commission of India 1964-66 recommended the introduction of private registration, correspondence courses, and evening colleges in India. Following this, private registration for university exams was allowed in 1971 and 1976 in Kerala and Calicut Universities respectively, leading to the emergence of private coaching institutions.

Additionally, there was an expansion of evening colleges. The University of Kerala started an Institute for Correspondence courses in 1976. These steps widened

access to higher education for those who could not attend regular colleges.

L. Gopikrishnan started teaching in Viswabharathy, a tutorial-cum-parallel college, in Neyyattinkara in the 1980s. He mentioned that there was another reason for the increase in the number of these institutions in the 1980s. “The educated youth in Kerala were going through a period of unemployment and resulting unrest. Many of them, including me, were attracted to Naxalism as a result of this. The government took strong steps to check the Naxalite movement. Many of those with an affinity towards Naxalism started tutorials to counter their unemployment. Parallel colleges provided them with employment and took them away from the Naxalite movement.”³

Though Gopikrishnan was employed in a parallel college, he used to teach tuition there. Zoology was his subject, and he taught botany and zoology. He would give special coaching for the entrance examinations (NEET). He said with quiet pride, “At least 100 students I taught have passed the MBBS entrance and become doctors now.”



Figure 9. Gopikrishnan was a former parallel college teacher at Viswabharathy, a parallel

³ Interview with L. Gopikrishnan at Thiruvananthapuram on 18 August 2023.

college in Neyyattinkara, Thiruvananthapuram. He is now a filmmaker and writer. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

Principal Olivil

Viswabharathy had around 3000 students when Gopikrishnan, a former teacher, was teaching there. It was started by Velappan Nair for students who had failed their 10th Standard exam. All the teachers were school teachers. The institution was expanded when government-employed school teachers were prohibited from teaching in private institutions. There were checks by the vigilance department. Often, the government teachers had to sneak in and out to teach the students in the parallel college. This was true for various other colleges of the time. Gopikrishnan directed a movie based on this theme in 1985 called *Principal Olivil*. Later, he wrote a book about his experience of making the movie called *Principal Olivil: Ente Ormakal, Anubhavangal*.



Figure 10. An advertisement for the movie *Principal Olivil* (1985). The movie deals with the employment of government employees in

parallel colleges and his experiences in general. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

Between 1971 and 1978, there was a significant increase in the number of privately registered candidates for exams. The largest growth was seen in pre-degree Arts and Commerce exams (1027%), BCom (1840%), and BA degree in Arts (334%). The proportion of private candidates compared to the total enrolment in regular colleges was high, reaching 34% for pre-degree, 40% for BCom, and 46% for MA courses.

Educational institutions in Thiruvananthapuram had more students compared to other regions. Sreekumar K., a teacher at a parallel college, Our College, mentioned, “In the rural areas, though there were parallel colleges, they did not have a good reputation. The parallel colleges in Thiruvananthapuram were run quite well. This was a city and people did not have a problem studying in these institutions here.”⁴ Statewide, more students attended parallel courses than tutorials. However, in Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode, tutorials were more popular. Commerce courses in parallel education were the most popular, making up around 57% of total enrolment. Sreekumar mentioned that the BCom course at their college used to have a good number of students who did well in the exams.

Though they have faced criticism that the quality of education offered is not great, they were accessible and less expensive than private-aided colleges. The well-run institutions had experienced teachers, small libraries, laboratories, administrative staff, and even their own buildings. Gopikrishnan said, “Some of these colleges

had sub-par quality. But it cannot be denied that they helped a lot of students.”

Parallel College - Alternate College

Our College, one of the largest parallel colleges in Kerala in the late 1970s, had 8000 students on its rolls in the 1980–90s period. It had various branches including in Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam. Our College was started in 1952 by K. Balakrishnan Nair at Pattom, Thiruvananthapuram a few years after Paul started his college in the city. The college started as a tutorial while Balakrishnan Nair was a BSc student. He used to teach school students from the nearby school, English, mathematics, and science. The next year, he started a branch of the tutorial at his hometown, Aryanad. The students at Aryanad started calling the institution, Our Tutorial College. The branch in Pattom was subsequently called Our College.

Balakrishnan used to teach English, Hindi, mathematics, physics, and chemistry. His partner, Achuthan used to teach Malayalam and social studies. Sreekumar who had worked with the founder mentioned, “The college was started as an alternative educational institution. The initial students were given tuition in subjects that they needed. Later, the institutions were raised to the standard of a parallel college. We still have laboratories and the basic infrastructure for physics, chemistry, and biology.”



⁴ Interview with Sreekumar K. at Thiruvananthapuram on 16 August 2023.

Figure 11. The photo of K. Balakrishnan Nair hung on the wall of the office room of Our College amidst flyers of toppers from the college from the previous years. Image: JANAL archives

The Students

In M.P. Paul's College, initially, the classes were started for students who failed in English. In those days, students who failed would study by themselves as there were no tutorials or parallel colleges. BA English students joined at first. Later, the college expanded to include students who had failed in science subjects. Students who wanted to take up Engineering and Medicine were given admission based on their marks. Students from regular colleges used to attend classes at Paul's Colleges. Some students from SB College had joined so as not to miss Paul's classes. Paul's tutorials were meant to help students who needed extra help that formal educational structures could not provide. Considering the caste-class positioning of students in the early to mid-twentieth century, not many of the students would have been from the lower rungs of society. This changed when it came to the later parallel colleges.

Overall, parallel colleges had more students than regular colleges. Commerce courses were particularly popular because these courses were seen as leading to jobs and did not require too much infrastructure.

Sreekumar mentioned that currently, they have regular tuition for Plus Two courses and degree courses. The students would be enrolled in a college and join Our College for extra classes and guidance. They also provide short-term, medium-term, and long-term coaching for JAM and BSc Geology and foundation courses for students in Standards 8–10 (tutorials and

coaching for medical and engineering entrance).

According to Gopikrishnan, most of the students at Viswabharathy lived within a 10–20 km radius. The students got some discounts on the bus fare like regular students, but not the same amount. In the 1990s, regular college students paid 50% price for bus tickets and parallel college students paid 75% of the price.

"We had classes in the morning till noon, or only in the afternoon. The hours were not like regular college hours at Maharanis," mentioned Ruby Tomy, who did her MA privately in Maharanis College, Ernakulam.⁵



Figure 12. Ruby Tomy studied at Maharanis College, Ernakulam for two years in the early 1990s. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

"They bring in teachers from outside. These teachers were excellent. I am now doing an MSc Statistics course here at University College," said Athira Sreekumar, Thiruvananthapuram.⁶ She was a former student at Our College. In her fourth semester during her BSc when she found Statistics difficult, she decided to join Our College for extra-tuitions. She had heard about the institution through one of her friends who studied there. She mentioned

⁵ Interview with Ruby Tomy at Kakkanad on 3 October 2023.

⁶ Interview with Athira Sreekumar at Thiruvananthapuram on 18 August 2023.

that when she told her mother about joining Our College, the latter knew the college and had heard about it. Athira took advantage of the other courses offered by Our College, such as English, physics, and mathematics.

She studied for just that semester. From a BSc Mathematics student, Athira has gone on to do an MSc in Statistics after her one semester with Our College.

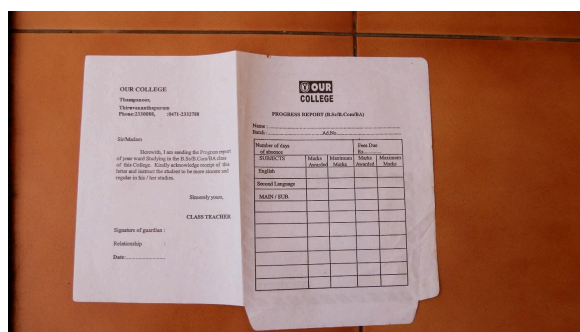


Figure 13. The Progress Report that used to be sent as an inland letter for the BSc, BCom, and BA courses offered at Our College. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

Advertising and Outreach

One distinctive aspect of parallel colleges is their substantial investment in advertising. These colleges use advertisements as a means to attract students. Their advertising methods encompass various channels like pamphlets, display boards, newspapers, and cinema slides. They even hire agents who engage in door-to-door promotion.

Rosie Thomas, daughter of M.P. Paul, mentions in the biography of C.J. Thomas (her husband) that he had taken on the running of the Thiruvananthapuram branch of M.P. Paul's tutorial after her father's death. He also bought a nearby tutorial that was not running well. The team that taught at M.P. Paul's was the same group

that was teaching in the new tutorial. The teachers asked him to advertise this fact. Paul used to advertise his tutorials even though they were popular. C.J. was not convinced about the necessity of advertising. Rosie mentions that this led to the tutorial becoming a colossal failure.

Sreekumar from Our College mentioned that the college had issues with enrolment once other institutions in the locality started door-to-door canvassing and telephone canvassing around 2007–08 for Plus Two. They would also go and meet the principals of the schools and give flyers to the students. The staff of the newer parallel colleges/tutorials would obtain the telephone numbers of the guardians and call them regularly. Balakrishnan Nair, the founder, was against the idea of this kind of advertising. "He believed that the college should get students by word-of-mouth. We did get a lot of students, but once other institutions started this kind of advertising, we could not keep up. Canvassing was a major reason for lesser enrolments in our institution," he said.



Figure 14. Rosie Thomas, daughter of M.P. Paul mentioned that lack of advertising led to the tutorials failing after his death. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

Residential Facilities

At Thrissur, the Tutorial was run in a big building by M.P. Paul. The family stayed on the ground floor and the classes were held upstairs. Some of the students used to stay with them. At first, M.P. Paul's colleges had an attached hostel for the girl students. Later, these became separate buildings. Houses were taken on rent to run these. They were called 'M.P. Paul's Hostel' with name boards placed outside them, according to Baby Joseph. Their mother, Mary Paul, was often unofficially appointed as the ladies' hostel warden. They had female students coming from places as far as Pala and Kanjirappally in the tutorial colleges, remembered Vincent Paul, Paul's son. The parents wanted them to have a safe place to stay. That was how the hostels were started. The warden was in charge of the food and various other non-academic needs of the students.



Figure 15. A framed photograph of Mary Paul at their family home. Image: JANAL archives, 2023

At Our College, during its heyday, hostels were arranged for the students in all the branches of the institution. They had a separate team to take care of the hostel

and the students. Most of the modern coaching centres have facilities for the accommodation of the students, especially those receiving coaching for specific examinations.

The Teachers

M.P. Paul's tutorial college was run as a family enterprise. The teachers were acquaintances and friends or went on to become friends and in one case family. C.J. Thomas, the noted dramatist, was a teacher in Paul's tutorial. N. Gopala Menon was the teacher appointed to teach chemistry and physics at the Kottayam branch of the college. He went on to become the principal. Noted writer, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was a family friend and worked as the warden for the hostel in Ernakulam. Muttathu Varkey, another writer, used to teach at Paul's College.

Teachers had varying qualifications. Approximately 31% held basic degrees, while 9% had diplomas in the 1970s. The number of postgraduates differed by region, with the highest in Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram and lower in Kozhikode. Many teachers pursued different jobs after working for some time in parallel colleges, using the colleges as temporary employment locations.

Ruby Tomy, a former parallel college student, studied at Maharani's College near Kacheripady, Ernakulam in the early 1990s as mentioned before. She remembered that most of the teachers were young and inexperienced. There was just one good teacher. He was also the founder of the college. She did her MA (History) privately since she could not join a normal college due to various family reasons.

These colleges offered additional income to retired teachers. One of the teachers I met for an interview, who did not wish to be named, had retired from a prominent college in Thiruvananthapuram. He was teaching in a well-to-do coaching centre. He joined the institution since his student was teaching in the same place and told him they had openings for more teachers. For this older professor, teaching at the coaching centre provided additional income and took care of the free time he had since retirement. He was able to continue pursuing a profession he had been doing.

Generally, the selection of teachers happened through management decisions or tests in parallel colleges. At Our College, some of the teachers were permanent employees and had access to provident funds, said Sreekumar. The permanent teachers would get 2–3 days of holiday a month. But most of the teachers were on a contract basis and paid hourly. Therefore, they would not take holidays. “Work was quite hectic,” he remembered.

At Our College, forms were distributed to students where they marked the teachers’ teaching skills and willingness to further explain a concept. The students were not supposed to give their names. The teachers were retained or let go based on student evaluation. The reputation of the colleges and the competition among the various colleges meant that these colleges could not afford to have mediocre teachers.

At Viswabharathy most of the teachers were male. They stayed at a lodge near the college. The salary of the teachers was high and was based on their bargaining powers. Teachers with high demand would get higher salaries. Most of the teachers joined government colleges after gaining a few years of experience teaching in parallel colleges. Gopikrishnan mentioned that

though many parallel colleges employed qualified teachers, not every parallel college that existed was that scrupulous, “Many employed people with only a degree and publicised them as having postgraduate degrees.”

OUR COLLEGE		EVALUATION OF CLASSES	
NAME OF BATCH	NAME OF TEACHERS	Subject	PLEASE MARK
			I can follow the classes Very well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> Very difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Whether the Teacher Co-operates in class doubts raised Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
1.	[Handwritten Name]	Maths	Very well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> Very difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
2.	[Handwritten Name]	Maths	Very well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> Very difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
3.	[Handwritten Name]	Physics	Very well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> Very difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
4.	[Handwritten Name]	Physics	Very well <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially <input type="checkbox"/> Very difficult <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Figure 16. Form given to students to anonymously rate teachers in the past at Our College. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

The Decline of Parallel Colleges

Starting from the 1990s, higher education in Kerala underwent significant policy changes. The most prominent of these shifts was the introduction of self-financing colleges. For an extended period, private involvement in education was encouraged in Kerala, as in other states, through privately aided schools and colleges. These institutions received public funding but were managed privately. Such colleges are quite numerous in Kerala, constituting about a quarter of all colleges in the state in the 2012–13 period.

After 1990, the Kerala government decided to promote more comprehensive private participation in the sector by permitting self-financing or unaided colleges. This change led to a surge of private entities entering higher education, encompassing various interests, not just philanthropic but also commercial. Self-financing colleges have become a significant presence in

Kerala's educational landscape. In 1991, there were no self-financing colleges in any discipline, and the entire higher education sector was composed of government and government-aided institutions. By 2012-13, self-financing colleges made up 58% of all colleges in the state, signifying their rapid growth and influence. Certain private-aided colleges also started self-financing courses within their campuses. What this meant then was that the students who earlier depended on parallel colleges could now join the more "respectable" self-financing colleges that were started in the big cities and smaller towns.

In the late 2010s, universities stopped private registrations and began categorising these students under the distance education programme. Concurrently, the University Grants Commission banned universities without an A+ accreditation from conducting distance mode programmes. Hence, many of the more than one lakh students in Kerala who used to appear as private candidates had to depend on other state universities for their registration. Additionally, the scheme of education for distance mode students was changed from that of regular students. Though the private registration scheme was brought back as a distance education programme it created a lot of confusion.

Sisir Kumar S.I., administration officer at Our College said that what created enrolment issues for their institution was the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ The college could not upgrade with suitable infrastructure during the pandemic. Now, many students who require coaching and tuition prefer to do it online. The management of the college was not convinced about the need

for online teaching after the pandemic and now it is affecting their enrolments.

L. Gopikrishnan said, "When pre-degree was delinked from colleges and attached to schools as Plus One and Plus Two, many of the rural schools had access to this level of education. The colleges were in bigger cities. The students from colleges used to go to the larger tutorials en masse. The need for large-scale tutorials for pre-degree students was no longer needed. Instead, smaller tutorials sprang up in large numbers near schools. The students preferred to join these institutions." Moreover, with the delinking of pre-degree, the number of seats available for Plus Two increased.

The Arrival of Coaching Centres

From the very beginning, coaching has been happening alongside regular tuition. In Kerala, coaching centres rose to prominence starting from 1984, when the first entrance exam took place. These centres give coaching to students, going beyond what they learn in schools. In Kerala, students aspire to do well in entrance exams like engineering, medical, PSC, civil service exams, IELTS, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and more. Coaching centres provide special training and guidance to help students prepare for these exams. Usually, when a certain exam becomes a big deal, a lot of coaching centres pop up to help students get ready for it.

⁷ Interview with Sisir Kumar S.I. at Thiruvananthapuram on 16 August 2023.



Figure 17. The SS Kovil Road, Thiruvananthapuram and environs have always been where many of the tutorials, parallel colleges, and now coaching centres function. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023.

“People are not interested in joining a tuition class. They think it is shameful, but they do not have an issue with joining a coaching centre for entrance examinations,” said Anish, coordinator at the Mar Ivanios College branch of Brilliant.⁸

Brilliant Study Centre, Pala was started in 1984, the same year that entrance examinations were started in Kerala. It is one of the most popular coaching centres for entrance examinations. Anish mentioned, “The main centre had started in 1983 to provide tuition to the students from Alphonsa College and St. Thomas College, Pala. However, when the entrance examinations were started the next year, the institution decided to provide coaching for these. The first batch of students at the institution managed to get a place in the MBBS entrance examination in 1984,” Anish added with pride.

The institution has centres in Pala, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kozhikode, Kollam, and Kannur. They have stand-alone institutions and ones that are affiliated with an educational institution.

Currently, Brilliant Study Centre provides foundational coaching from the 6th Standard. They provide examination practice for IIT and NIT entrance tests. Of the 30,000 students that study in the various branches, around 20,000 are repeaters, students who have taken a break year to retake the entrance examination.

Coaching centres like Brilliant have evolved to look like corporate offices and provide services from laboratories, canteen, and stores/shops to places for religious worship.



Figure 18. This branch of Brilliant Study Centre, Pala opened for coaching needs of students at Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in the Mar Ivanios College Campus, TVM. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023



Figure 19. The computer laboratory being set up at the Brilliant Study Centre, Mar Ivanios campus, 2023. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

⁸ Interview with Anish at Thiruvananthapuram on 17 August 2023.

Positioning a Coaching Centre

Cosmo and Our College are located in Thampanoor, a part of Thiruvananthapuram known for various kinds of coaching centres that offer training in subjects such as Tally (a computer application), PSC coaching, bank tests, Staff Selection Commission (SSC) tests, and more.

Cosmo Centre is one of the new kinds of coaching centres that have emerged in the past 20–40 years. It was started in 2014 at Thiruvananthapuram to provide training for the IELTS examination. Allen Sujai realised that international migrations were increasing, but Malayalis were finding it difficult to score well on the IELTS test. He came up with a syllabus to teach IELTS students after collecting questions asked on the test over the years.

“Malayalis have always been good at rote learning. They wanted simplified answers to various questions asked at the exam. The IELTS did not have any syllabus. It was just a language test. We came up with a pattern; a way to make it simple. We came up with 30 concepts that made it simple for the students to answer,” said Allen Sujai, founder-director of Cosmo Centre, Thiruvananthapuram.

Students from as far as Kannur and Malappuram come to Cosmo for classes. “Earlier the students at the centre were mostly those going for higher studies after a degree. For the past 6–7 years, those who want to go abroad are students who have completed school. And parents are willing to send them abroad though it is quite expensive. Some of them take out loans. Usually, the students pay off the loan and do not burden their parents after the first year. They develop a strong work culture. Most of them do not come back,” added Allen.

Allen also mentioned that the socio-economic status of those hoping to immigrate has changed a bit. A few professionals are emigrating with a Permanent Resident (PR) card. And of course, the number of nurses who emigrate has also not changed. He added. “Classes last from anywhere between two weeks to two months. The centre started as a single unit in Thiruvananthapuram. It has now expanded to Kottayam, Ernakulam, and Coimbatore. In Thiruvananthapuram alone, we have multiple locations for training students.”



Figure 20. A video feed of a classroom can be seen at the office. Live cameras have become common in coaching centres. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023.

Differences - Then and Now

While the earlier tutorials and parallel colleges helped students with formal education and terminal examinations, the later coaching centres, in a sense, helped them with examinations that led to a course or the beginning of a course. This differentiation is not watertight and coaching centres do provide tuitions, especially those that offer foundational courses. Tutorials and parallel colleges started in a different era and many of them

carry vestiges of the era in terms of their physical appearance.

The facilities are minimal at the current building that houses Our College. The college does have a laboratory in a separate building with the necessary equipment for the courses offered. It has moved from a parallel college to one that provides tuition and specialised coaching for certain courses and exams. However, it is not able to compete with an institution like Brilliant with its state-of-the-art classrooms and facilities.

Parallel colleges provide coaching for subjects like mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and other core subjects that students study in schools and colleges. The focus is on helping students excel in their regular academic subjects by providing in-depth teaching, additional practice, and guidance. The teaching approach often involves smaller class sizes, which allows for personalised attention and interaction between students and teachers. Parallel colleges may also offer preparatory courses for competitive exams like engineering, medical, or entrance exams for other professional courses.

Coaching centres offer specialised coaching tailored to the requirements of specific competitive exams. The curriculum is aligned with the exam syllabus, and the teaching is geared towards helping students perform well in the entrance tests. Coaching centres typically offer comprehensive study materials, practice tests, and strategies for time management. In the well-run ones, the faculty consists of experts in the relevant subjects and experienced instructors who are familiar with the exam patterns and trends.



Figure 21. A class at the Brilliant Study Centre. Note the teacher wearing audio equipment for volume. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

For instance, in the Brilliant Study Centre, there are mentors. These are young teachers who help with the examinations and other minor teaching tasks, while the main coaching is done by senior staff. Coaching centres can be particularly intense and demanding, as they focus on preparing students for highly competitive and time-bound exams. They offer hostel and boarding facilities, especially for repeaters or in the summer vacation when many of the competitive examinations are scheduled.

A Rogue's Pit Burial

After M.P. Paul's death, the Catholic Church authorities refused to have him buried in the church cemetery or conduct the official death rites. Even his brother, Monsignor George Menacherry, was prohibited from conducting the rites. Paul was entombed in a vault outside the sacred ground called *chattambikuzhi* (Rogue's pit). M.P. Paul's services to the various Catholic institutions were forgotten by the authorities and petty politics won. However, over the years, when the cemetery was expanded out of necessity, his tomb ended up being located right in the middle of consecrated grounds.



Figure 22. The tomb of M.P. Paul was originally outside the sacred ground. When the cemetery was expanded, the tomb ended up in a prominent position inside. Image: JANAL Archives, 2023

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