

Resisting the Tide: Taking Forward Public Higher Education in Kerala

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India Today- the context

- Communal-hyper nationalism driven politics of the Centre
- Severe dilution of economic and political federalism- latest VBSA
- Higher Education now an expanding field for profit generation

Kerala- the pioneer of welfarism and inclusive development

- Kerala is universally recognised for its excellent record in providing universal basic welfare in fields including housing, health, social security and education.
- Kerala's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is 41.3%. This is higher than the national average of 28.4%. However, Tamil Nadu has a GER of 47%, and Himachal Pradesh has 43%.
- 90 percent of colleges in Tamil Nadu private vs 70% in Kerala
- Kerala has the highest Gender Parity Index (GPI) of 1.44
- Kerala's allocates 15.29% of its total education budget to HE and
- Kerala invests 0.53 % of its GDP on HE while the national average is only 0.4%

How to safeguard accessible and inclusive public HE while improving quality

- This is the challenge that we have to meet while recognising increasing resource constraints and centrally dictated changes in curricula
- Latest threat is the impending VBSA
- Increase size of public HEIs without very large additional investments
- Resist unbridled privatization of HE sector through regulation
- Reduce the number and increase the size of existing universities
- Do away with single discipline universities
- Emphasize the civic role of HEIs

A Triangle of Coordination

- I begin with Burton Clark's schematic graphic only because it provides a simple preliminary heuristic to analyse the relative significance of challenges. In no country, including India, did a clear tripartite division as envisioned by Clark exist historically. Only the weight attributed to each vertex changed across time.

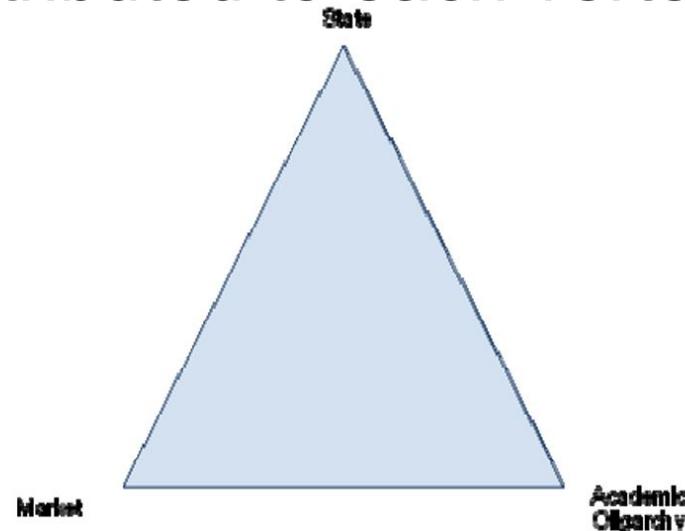


Figure 1. Clark's Triangle of Coordination (1983)

Market domination and the Attenuation of Public Education

- The development of Neoliberalism in India can be dated from 1991, getting strengthened with Reforms under the Narasimha Rao and becoming entrenched under BJP rule.
- By 2000 the attempts by big business to enter the HE sector- Ambani –Birla Report (2000)
- From Public good to Private good
- Sam Pitroda “National Knowledge Commission Report UPA 1
- Yashpal Committee report on “Renovation and Rejuvenation of higher education” submitted during UPA-2
- NEP 2020- formally recognized the role of the private sector in expanding access to higher education.

The State and Privatisation of HE

- Rapid privatization in Indian HE a result of conscious policy to privatize or inadequate attention being given to state sponsored HE expansion.
- India- SPU- 36% of total universities, 81% of total enrollment

Private HEI in Kerala

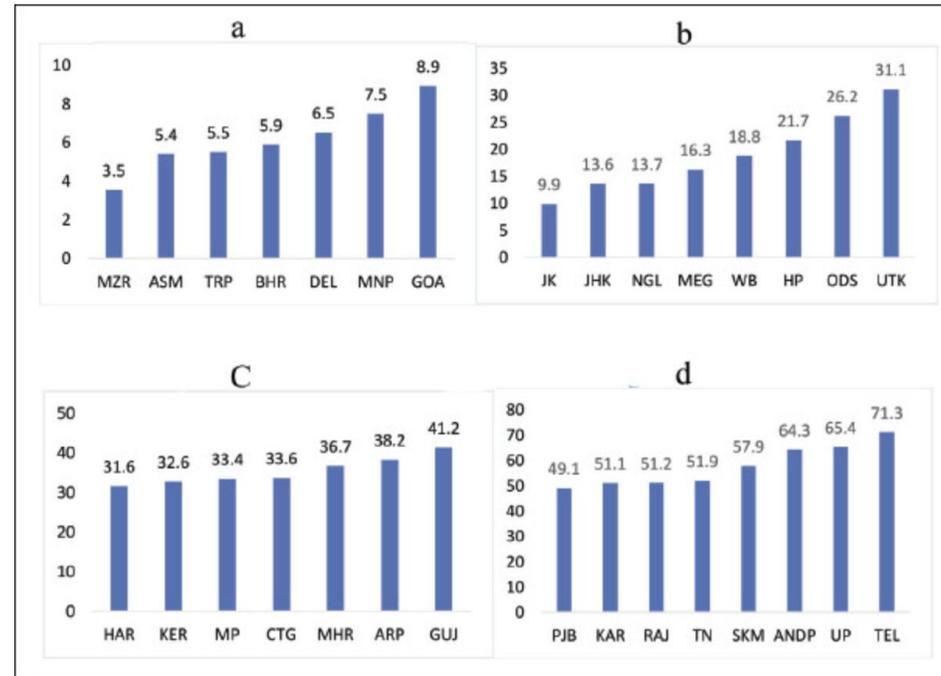
Kerala had **no private universities** until the passage of the *Kerala State Private Universities (Establishment and Regulation) Bill, 2025* on **March 25, 2025**

As of now, **the share of private universities in Kerala is effectively 0%**,

Kerala does have **private colleges**, but they are affiliated with public universities. These colleges operate under the academic framework of state-run universities and do not count as independent private universities.

Regulatory Oversight: All new private universities will be subject to a state-level regulatory framework to ensure academic standards and public accountability.

State-wise Privatisation of HE



Source: Based on All India Survey on Higher Education, 2019–2020.

Figure 1. (a) State with Least Privatisation. (b) States with Low Privatisation. (c) States with Moderate Privatisation. (d) States with High Privatisation.

States by per Student Expenditure on University/Scholarship/DL Education and Percentage Share of Unaided Institutions in Total Enrolment, 2019–2020.

Expenditure—Privatisation	States
States with lowest expenditure and highest privatisation	Punjab, Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh
States with lower expenditure and higher privatisation	Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Tripura, Karnataka
States with higher expenditure and lower privatisation	Jammu & Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur, Odisha, Haryana, Maharashtra
States with highest expenditure and lowest privatisation	Goa, Mizoram, Assam, Meghalaya, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Kerala.

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education 2019–2020, Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education, 2019–2020.

Note: Classification of states is based on quartile.

Expenditure on University/Scholarship/DL Education and Share of Unaided Institutions by States. 2019–2020

State Expenditure on HE Per Student	% Private Unaided Institutions
• Andhra Pradesh 17.6	64.3
• Arunachal Pradesh 33.3	38.2
• Assam 49.2	5.4
• Bihar 34.5	5.9
• Chhattisgarh 18.3 33.6	
• Goa 75.3 6.5	
• Gujarat 14.7 41.2	
• Haryana 22.2 31.6	
• Himachal Pradesh 18.7 21.7	
• Jammu and Kashmir 29.4 9.9	
• Jharkhand 18.5 13.6	
• Karnataka 14.0 51.1	
• Kerala 30.8 32.6	
• Madhya Pradesh 11.6 33.4 Maharashtra 19.5 36.7 Manipur 25.3 7.5 Meghalaya 48.4 16.3 Mizoram 63.6 3.5 Nagaland 27.9 13.7 Odisha 24.1 26.2 Punjab 12.0 49.1 Rajasthan 8.0 51.2 Sikkim 8.8 57.9 Tamil Nadu 8.2 51.9 Telangana 11.9 71.3 Tripura 14.5 5.5 Uttarakhand 10.3 31.1 Uttar Pradesh 5.1 65.4 West Bengal 17.6 18.8	

Sources: Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure, 2019–2020 and All India Survey on Higher Education, 2019–2020.

The State

- With the increasing erosion of state revenues, Kerala faces the serious problem of provisioning public goods, including education.
- Along with fiscal curbs the fragile state of federalism in India has also affected Kerala- a state known for inclusive development.
- Along with neoliberalism the Indian state has consciously embraced communal hyper-nationalism as its political-cultural agenda which requires it control and police colleges and universities.

State, Market and the University

- The University in India was a creation of the state.
- The public universities in India have been funded by the state.
- The rise of the unfettered market supported by the State is now increasingly active in the sphere of HE transforming a public good into a private or merit good at the risk of reducing access.
- HEIs, *via* emphases on skilling and industry-academia research are actively and directly being made part of the profit maximising capitalism.
- The civic role of HE is being increasingly reduced.

Resisting the trend

- While Kerala is not in a position to reverse the nation's commitment to neoliberalism, its capture of state tax resources or its divisive hyper nationalism it is in a position to resist the forces of destroying public education.
- One of the ways to prevent further erosion of public HE will be to take up the slack in the existing state subsidised HEI.
- Given the deteriorating state of large universities in the country, Kerala which has already made considerable progress in HE is well placed to develop high quality HEI meeting global standards.

Possibilities in the Immediate Future

- Better governance-Implement some of the recommendations submitted to the Government on HE governance reforms **without doing away with affiliation** and small nominated managerial style executive bodies
- Increase size -of universities by doing away with single discipline universities and dwarf colleges. Create Cluster colleges instead of Cluster Universities where feasible and start Constituent Colleges.
- Set up public funded academically autonomous degree granting HEIs in educationally underserved regions.
- Continuous training, continuous monitoring and frequent course corrections
- Committed funding from the government
- Strengthen KSHEC with increased participation from teachers, administrative support staff and students
- Tax paying private universities under strict government control to supplement funding for public universities
- Address regional inequities in HEI infrastructure
- Urgent need to step up critical and analytical pedagogical routines in UG teaching
- Leverage Kerala's efficient, equitable and socially inclusive education and cosmopolitan social ethos to attract students and academic resources, both nationally and internationally to participate in the accelerate growth of Kerala's HEI in the coming years.