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**CONTRIBUTIONS OF CARMELITES OF  
MARY IMMACULATE CONGREGATION  
TO EDUCATION IN KERALA: 1831-2008**

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Education is considered as the key to modernization and a catalyst to the political and economic development of a society. If Kerala can stand comfortably on the frontline among the Indian States in education, it is mainly owing to the initiatives that Christian communities have daringly taken in the educational sector. The Catholic missionaries who first landed in Kerala were more interested in the propagation of their faith. The Portuguese and the Dutch made substantial contributions to education and learning in Kerala. The Protestant missionaries who followed then took a keen interest in the spread of Western education. The activities of the Christian missionaries for the cause of education, particularly in the Travancore-Cochin region are praiseworthy. The results achieved by Christian missionaries attracted also non-Christian organizations into the field.

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The missionaries and the Catholic Church in India envisaged education as an instrument for social mobility and social transformation in a society that was static till the beginning of the twentieth century in Kerala. One of the striking aspects of the educational reforms affected by the Christian community was the popularization and democratization of the very educational process in the society. Quality and discipline always remained the hallmarks of Christian educational institutions. By providing educational facilities to the poor and the underprivileged, the Christian educational institutions have proved their social commitment. The schools and colleges run directly by the Church or through religious congregations of Priests and religious Sisters constitute the major part of educational institutions in Kerala. The Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) Congregation is the first indigenous religious Congregation, started by the Catholic Church in India in 1831. Blessed Kuriakose Chavara (1805-1871), the founder of the CMI Congregation, took the initiative in opening schools for children, especially of the dalits. He established the first Catholic School at Mannanam in 1846, which was the first educational institution of the Syro- Malabar Church, and initiated a great social change in the caste-ridden society of Kerala. In 1864 Blessed Kuriakose Chavara issued the historic directive that every parish church should start an educational institution adjacent to it, which triggered a great revolution in the field of education in the history of Kerala, of the Church and of the society at large in later years.

Blessed Kuriakose Chavara was a trend-setter in making education available to all sections of the society. He took initiative in imparting quality education with value formation in the individual so as to effect holistic growth in the pupil and make him or her instrumental in social mobility and transformation. Today with its hundreds of educational institutions, the CMI Congregation is the trail blazer in education with clear vision and policy which are in agreement with the national policy of education and that of the Catholic Church. It is high time the CMI Congregation's presence in the field of education was made more prominent and the CMI identity, fraternity and solidarity promoted. The educational aim of the CMI Congregation is to transform the society, especially the underprivileged sections through education and other social programmes. Education, the most socially visible activity of the CMI Congregation today, is undergoing rapid changes in the country. Liberalization and permission for

educational institutions on a self-financing basis, increase of professional and technical institutions to meet the modern demands for such skills, introduction of creative and innovative study programmes, and entry of foreign educational agencies to India are some of the most notable changes in the field of modern education. The CMI educational institutions are also trying their best to keep abreast of the changes in the field of education in the country. This study, "Contributions of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate Congregation to Education in Kerala: 1831-2008," determines the impact and role of the CMI Congregation in the socio-economic progress of the Kerala State.

The present thesis is divided and presented in six chapters besides an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter, "Nineteenth Century Kerala and the Works of the Christian Missionaries," analyses the socio-religious and political background of Kerala during the nineteenth century which paved the way for the rise of the CMI educational institutions. The Kerala society of the nineteenth century was rigid and static in which no social mobility was allowed. The static nature of the society could be seen in its social system, which was exclusively in the grip of repetitive agriculture with no scope for innovation. The political system was controlled by the traditional monarchy, and the religious system did not find any need for change. It was in such a static society that education becomes an instrument of social mobility. The Protestant Missionary groups and the Catholic Churches in Kerala could be considered the pioneers in this field which contributed greatly to the progress of education in the nineteenth century.

The involvement of the CMI Congregation in the field of education in Kerala is to be traced back to 1846 when Blessed Kuriakose Chavara started the first Catholic Sanskrit School and the first primary school in 1864 at Mannanam in Kottayam district. With the intention of extending educational opportunities and to create awareness about the need for education, Blessed Kuriakose Chavara, in his capacity as the Vicar General of the Syrian Catholics, ordered in 1864 that all churches should start schools, failing which, the churches were to be closed. The decree was epoch making and it heralded revolutionary changes in Kerala. He not only fostered the need for basic education but also paved the way for moral education. He was able to understand that the progress of the Church and society was possible only through learned priests and so he

introduced Western methods of teaching in the monasteries. In 1833, at Mannanam, he established a training centre for priests. Many students of these institutions have occupied high-positions in the religious, cultural and social fields of Kerala. These are dealt with in the second chapter, "CMI and Primary Education." The third chapter on "Secondary Education" focuses the CMI vision of education in general and the secondary education in particular. The CMI Congregation attached much importance to English education, which they understood to be necessary for the uplift of Kerala. English education had not been much valued among the Catholics of Kerala. Fr Cyriac Eliesus started the first English school for the Syrian Catholics at Mannanam, in 1885, under the patronage of Saint Ephrem. The High School and the boarding house have been a real nursery of priests and of eminent Catholic leaders. In order to conduct the schoolwork more efficiently, the Congregation started a Corporate Educational Agency in different provinces of the CMI Congregation. The CMI vision of education is founded on the idea of Catholic education contained in the teachings of the Universal Church and the Church in India, the CMI legacy of education inherited from the founders and its history and the needs of the modern society. The most important elements of the CMI character of education are holistic formation, value formation, quality education, co-operation of the families and social commitment.

The aim of higher education is to foster equitable social development through the empowerment of individuals who can contribute to the common good. Blessed Kuriakose Chavara had even planned a central college for the Catholic students when he was Vicar General; but it did not materialize then owing to various unfavourable circumstances. It is with his inspiration and vision that the CMI Congregation has established various higher educational institutions, such as engineering colleges, medical colleges, arts and science colleges, technical institutions, nursing colleges, nursing schools and teacher training institutions. The daring step in active consideration of the CMI Congregation is the opening of Autonomous Colleges, Deemed Universities and Private Universities. These are analyzed in detail in the fourth chapter, "Higher Education." The fifth chapter is "Non-formal Education, Fine Arts and Mass Media." The CMI Congregation considers education as a universal right of the people. This enables the CMI Congregation to consider also the education of the physically and mentally

challenged. It takes special interest in those people who cannot afford to obtain quality education, giving them financial assistance for formal education and non-formal methods of education. It conducts programmes like various forms of non-formal education, social research centres, literacy drive and job orientated training, involving modern methods and techniques to improve the quality of education in this field. The Congregation has initiated several cultural academies and centres in the country for the cultural development of the people of India.

The chapter on “Impact of Education on the Society” explains the impact of CMI educational institutions on the society of Kerala. If the women in Kerala are educated today almost as equally as men, the seeds of such a change should be traced back to the foundation of a religious Congregation of women, chiefly dedicated to the apostolate of women’s education, in 1866 by Blessed Kuriakose Chavara. An important activity of the CMI Congregation in Malabar was in the field of education. Most of the schools were started adjoining the parish churches where the priests served as pastors. These educational institutions helped in uplifting the cultural and behavioural standards of the people. The congregation makes special efforts to co-ordinate educational activities with the aims and goals of the nation so that the students may grow up as responsible citizens fully involved in the task of nation building. The congregation has grown over the years to become one of the nationally prominent educational agencies with a wide network of various types of institutions to meet the growing educational needs of the modern society. They became more systematic and formal in course of time. Thus through the large number of various educational institutions quality education is ensured.

Both the political and spiritual authorities have recognized the educational activities of the CMI Congregation. If the missionaries had played a leading role in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church of Kerala played a major role in the educational activities of the twentieth century. Thus CMI education apostolate is seen to be not merely helping the individuals for building up a future career but also giving genuine leadership in transforming the quality of life in the society.