

**Becoming Educated: Community Philanthropy and Education Among Mappila  
Muslims in Kerala**

Yoosuf Ali MP

Doctoral Fellow

The Centre for the Study of Social Systems

Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

[mpvanimel@gmail.com](mailto:mpvanimel@gmail.com)

## **Abstract**

In the wake of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, there has been talk on how genuine philanthropy can shape educational possibilities, especially for marginalised and vulnerable communities in India. With an exceptional educational landscape, the Mappila Muslim community of Kerala showcases the quintessential interplay of community philanthropy and education. The intent of this study is to document the educational philanthropy trends among Mappila Muslims. It further wants to unveil the experiences and motivations of multiple stakeholders—learners, teachers and management, and identify the gaps in community philanthropy and education. This paper examines two community-based educational institutions, namely; Social Advancement Foundation of India (SAFI) and Farook College. It employs a case study method to intricately understand the nuances of educational philanthropy. Based on in-depth interviews with the stakeholders, the study offers a ground understanding of community philanthropy and education, and contributes significantly to the literature. The findings of the study reveal that the two institutions under study are engaged in diverse forms of practices which include the provision of scholarships, competitive exam preparation, skill and network building, trust building, and diverse services beyond education. The experiences of students reflect a positive attitude towards accessing higher education. Effective coordination among philanthropists, statesmen and the community has enabled the actualization of community-engaged models in higher education. Gaps that are restraining the scope of community philanthropy in education, and existing between the vision and outcome of these educational models have been identified at the stakeholders and institutional levels.

Keywords: Community Philanthropy, Education, Kerala, Mappila Muslims

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.58178/246.1045>

### **Acknowledgement**

I express my sincere gratitude to the Centre for Philanthropy for Inclusive Development (CPID), ISDM, for providing me with the opportunity to undertake this study. The fellowship's dedicated research focus has significantly enhanced my comprehension of philanthropy, particularly in the context of community philanthropy and education in India and among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala. I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone at CPID for transforming this project into an enjoyable and fruitful experience, overcoming numerous challenges. Special appreciation goes to Mr. Pratyush Singh, Dr. Ria Sinha, Ms. Urvi Sriram, and Ms. Mallika Luthra for their continuous guidance and support throughout the fellowship. Prof. Lata, and Mr. Murty for their valuable feedback and suggestions that have been instrumental, and I am truly grateful for their mentorship.

I would like to acknowledge and express my thanks to all those with whom I had the pleasure of interacting and discussing my work at various stages of the fellowship. This includes, among others, Prof. Suresh Babu, Dr. Insha and Dr. Eisha, whose insights enriched my research.

Finally, my deepest thanks go to all the participants who generously shared their time and insights, contributing to the depth and richness of my study. As always, my family has been an unwavering source of support, and their love accompanies me in all my pursuits.

## Table of Content

	Page No
1. Introduction	5
2. Theoretical Background	6
3. Literature Review	7
4. Research Objectives	10
5. Research Questions	11
6. Research Methodology	11
7. Analysis, Findings, and Discussion	12
8. Conclusion	23
References	25

## Introduction

Approaching philanthropy from different vantage points makes it possible to infer how its various forms contribute to a better understanding of the collective pursuit of well-being. According to prevailing trends in global philanthropy, education is a central unit attracting major philanthropic contributions, after religion (Barman 2017). Philanthropy has been key in bringing about many fundamental changes to the field of education, paving the way for examining India's philanthropic influence and state of education.

The Muslim community in Kerala stands different from its counterparts in the country in terms of socio-economic and political mobility. Literature (Osella and Osella, 2009; Alam, 2021) shows that Muslims in Kerala are at par with other communities with regards to their regional social, economic and political performance. Large-scale migration to Gulf countries has helped the community achieve social and educational upliftment through diaspora philanthropy (Purayil, 2022), materialising the idea of giving back and ensuring that fellow beings are taken care of when they are in need. With the increasing importance of educational philanthropy, there have been attempts from the community to restructure the educational landscape of the state.

This study, in particular, is interested in examining the role of community philanthropy in the educational empowerment of Mappila Muslims of Kerala. It proposes to map the different dynamics of community philanthropy using various accounts of multiple stakeholders including students, teachers, and management, and unveil the contribution of community-engaged models in higher education. To understand the nuances of community philanthropy and education, this study is

examines two selected community-based management institutes in the Malabar region of Kerala, namely Farook College and Social Advancement Foundation of India (SAFI) College. The study documents the early phase of materialising the vision and the next phase of operationalisation for both institutions. In both phases, the scope of philanthropy has been actively used to develop infrastructure, strengthen the college-community relationship, and for local area development. A community-engaged model in higher education requires a strong understanding of local dynamics and its potential in resource mobilisation and day-to-day operations. While the state regulatory framework is important to balance the public and private interests involved in such models, it is necessary to facilitate educational progress through a flexible framework.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **1. What is Community Philanthropy?**

Doan (2019) provides a definitional framework for community philanthropy. Based on her study in Vietnam, she argues that despite attempts to localise development and reduce social and economic gaps between communities, marginalised communities lack a sense of ownership in philanthropic efforts. In this context, it is relevant to look into the concept of community philanthropy and address it, not as an organisational form, but as a practice. Community philanthropy fundamentally includes some common norms, such as, reciprocity, solidarity, transparency, obligation, and trust. Based on the needs and context, community foundations are engaged in the norms and practices, including socially embeddedness, prioritising relationships, co-producing, focusing on root causes and pooling resources, etc. There is a debate about the term 'community' referenced in community philanthropy, on whether it includes a geographical unit or something else. Doan makes a broader definition of

community possible in the context of philanthropy. She suggests that it refers to shared geography, identity, value, interest, culture, and faith.

### **1.1. Towards Sociology of Philanthropy**

Sociologists studying philanthropy have adopted the method of looking into philanthropy through its social contexts (Barman, 2017; Ball, 2008). Their studies primarily ask a few fundamental questions, about the theory of gift-giving (Mauss, 1950), the motivation beyond actors, and philanthropy's personal and distributional consequences. The explanatory framework offered by sociological studies of philanthropy and its classification into different types of social contexts, including micro, meso, and macro, have attempted to give a theoretical account of the subject and situate it in multinational contexts (Barman, 2017).

Sociological studies around philanthropy build its theoretical orientation around aspects of gifting and the associated rules. Societies, primitive to the most advanced, have different types of gifting practices. Anthropological accounts like Mauss's (2002) *"The Gift: Forms and Reason of Gifts in Archaic Societies"* build their narrative on the principles of reciprocity and solidarity. Theoretically, looking into philanthropy demands a basic understanding of the theories of gift-giving. These are drawn mainly from sociology and psychology that focus on ideas like altruism, different forms of exchange principles of reciprocity, etc.

### **1.2. Mapping Education Philanthropy in India**

Many studies (Srivastava, 2015; Ball, 2008) on how philanthropic organisations shape educational interests and agendas focus on the fundamental relationship between knowledge and power. The imaginaries of organisations and their operation within the market and state framework position the debate of legitimacy of the reforms and

their extent. Miglani and Burch's (2018) study around educational reforms and mapping the scapes of philanthropic influence becomes an exciting reference for looking into education philanthropy and emerging trends in the United States and India. Their study is located in the context of the globalisation of education and its merging with neo-liberalisation. Multiple national and global policy regimes and the increasing role of international agencies in shaping educational interests have widely influenced the global free market and promoted the development of human capital, and the global knowledge economy (Miglani and Burch, 2018). The way the forces of the market have been inspiring a movement of replacing the state with the market and weakening the structure of the state fundamentally maps the shifts in education and society. The influence of philanthropic structures on education and policy has been a significant contemporary phenomenon (Miglani and Burch, 2018).

### **Literature Review**

This section reviews existing literature on different aspects of education and philanthropy in India. It further narrows it down to philanthropic intervention in Kerala and specifically documents the larger channels of religious, political and civil society groups among Mappila Muslims, and their role in reshaping educational structure.

### **Philanthropy and Education in India**

Drawing from multiple examples of Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) in Asia, Candland (2000) examines the practices and unique socio-cultural dimensions required for development in Asia. In specific reference to India, Candland quotes Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen's study on development and the example of the state of Kerala, to explain how religious social organisations, people organisations and appropriate policy became necessary for public action (Candland, 2000). Dreze and Sen emphasise that social opportunities cannot be guaranteed either by



government agencies or market mechanisms alone, but rather, they must be achieved through public action. Kalapura (2015) further contextualises faith-based organisations engaged in community development through charity, welfare and capacity-building institutions for marginalised communities in Bettiah, West Champaran district of Bihar, and highlight the relevance of philanthropic organisations in the socio-economic welfare of the community. The method they have adopted comprises building the cultural capital of the community to enhance the capacity, and an economically self-sufficient community, thus facilitating purposive action in the community.

In the context of trends in educational philanthropy, Roberts (2016) has critically examined philanthrocapitalism and its impact on the formation of private universities to satisfy the need for increased participation in higher education in India. Ironically, philanthropy is more robust in an environment of income inequality, while the goal of higher education is to facilitate the equal participation of students belonging to different strata of society and reduce the income-inequality.

### **1.3. Community, Education and Philanthropy in Kerala**

Despite lower economic performance among other Indian states in the last 50 years, Kerala has achieved great human development, with respect to health and education. Oommen (2014), in his study on 50 years of development trajectory in Kerala, looked into integrative growth, inequality, and well-being and explained that despite lower per-capita income and caste-class inequities, the state has great human development attainment through the process of public action, involving philanthropic interventions. Singh's (2011) longitudinal analysis of social development in Kerala points out that articulating a strong sense of community is reflected in Kerala's social development and how it generated progressive social policy and

societal monitoring of the public infrastructures, including schooling and hospitals. By analysing social development, Singh (2011) argues that shared identity can generate politics of the common good. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand local developments including transnational migration and global remittances to the state and the consequential shifts in economic and education policies.

#### **1.4. Piety, Charity, and Education among Muslims of Kerala**

The notion of *Sadaqah* and *Zakat*<sup>1</sup> and the religious practices associated with them become critical in the spiritual journey of the Muslims (Bonner, 2005). The extension of Quranic mandates and interpretation, to an extent, becomes fundamental in restructuring the practices of almsgiving, which are voluntary and compulsory among Muslims. Contextualising almsgiving in Kerala informs diverse forms of activities associated with charity, including reforming the community through education. Post 1920, Malabar and the rehabilitation of Mappila rebels significantly shifted how the community was organised. Multiple socio-religious and political organisations were formed which resulted in community building. Cultivating a collective identity and cultural articulation of pride through different aspirations is evident in the history of the Mappila Muslim community in Kerala (Kottakkunnummal, 2015). Muhammedali (2007) also investigates the historical backdrop of organised relief and charity activities in the Malabar region post-1921. Post the 1921 rebellion in Malabar, multiple community organisations such as the Malabar Central Relief Committee (MCRC), Devdhar Malabar Reconstruction Trust (DMRT), and the Mappila Aid Committee facilitated the moral and economic reconstruction of the people. The most successful reconstruction was in South Malabar, wherein the downtrodden people were provided with education. DMRT promoted educational activities

---

<sup>1</sup> Sadaqah is voluntary whereas Zakat is obligatory.

including setting up of schools in different parts of Malabar. Charity in Malabar informs how context, faith, and circumstances shaped the practices associated with giving and its many meanings.

When contemporary developments in education and community philanthropy are considered, various models of education have emerged with increasing capital inflow through Gulf remittances. Osella and Osella (2009) discuss the orientation of Muslim entrepreneurs towards self-transformation through education, and the relationship between private interest and common good led to the formation of multiple platforms like the Social Advancement Foundation of India (SAFI), which aims to reform higher education. Another philanthropic venture, Promoting Regional Schools to International Standards through Multiple Interventions (PRISM), by Faisal and Shabana Foundation in collaboration with the Government of Kerala tries to improve the deteriorating state of the schools in the state. In collaboration with IIM Calicut State Planning Commission, this venture moved into action mode for improving public education infrastructure (Sahasranamam and Mitra 2019).

### **Research Gaps**

Based on an exhaustive literature review, it is evident that communities practising diverse forms of philanthropy in Kerala have not been studied much from an academic point of view. There is a missing link in highlighting the social development that the state has achieved and how different communities contributed to this. The culmination of diverse factors like remittances, philanthropic actions, and state policy, in materialising social and educational upliftment is not comprehensively documented. The question of how communities are making use of philanthropy in education and contributing to community development requires to be studied.

## Research Objectives

The study is centred around the following research objectives:

1. To document the trends in community philanthropy and education among the Mappila Muslim community in Kerala.
2. To understand how multiple stakeholders perceive their experiences of educational philanthropy.
3. To identify the gaps in the vision and outcomes of community philanthropy and education.

## Research Questions

To address the research objectives, the following research questions have been drafted:

1. What are the emergent practices related to community philanthropy and education among the Mappila community in the Malabar region of Kerala?
2. How do multiple stakeholders understand the experiences of community philanthropy and education?
3. What are the gaps in the vision and outcome of education and philanthropy among the community-administered educational institutes in Kerala?

## **Research Methodology**

The methodology employed in this exploratory study has a qualitative orientation, recognising the complexity and richness of human experiences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Utilising ethnographic methods, including observation, structured, and in-depth interviews, the research aims to capture the intricate dynamics of community philanthropy and education. The case study method is integral to this approach, with a focus on two individual cases, SAFI and Farook College. These case studies allow for an in-depth exploration of educational philanthropy within each unique context.

## **Data Source and Collection**

Data collection involves multiple stakeholders, including student beneficiaries, teachers, and management representatives. Through direct social contact and engagement, the study seeks to highlight the lived experiences of the participants. Three distinct interview schedules were developed for students, teachers, and the management, following a bottom-up approach to comprehensively understand diverse perspectives within the educational community.

Research began with in-depth interviews conducted at SAFI and Farook College, focusing on the unique features, challenges, and contributions of each institution. This approach aims to capture the nuances of philanthropic initiatives and educational practices within the context of the broader community and at the institutional level.

Data analysis follows a thematic approach to identify the trends in the educational philanthropic landscape. The case study analysis involves examining the distinctive

features and contributions of each institution to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of community-led educational initiatives.

### **Sampling Methodology**

Sampling focuses on community-administered educational institutes in rural Malabar, specifically SAFI, and Farook College. The study spans from January to July 2023, involving a total of 62 interviews with students (48), teachers (10), and management representatives (4).

The data triangulation strategy incorporates multiple perspectives from stakeholders to provide a holistic understanding of community philanthropy and education. The inclusion of two different institutions, SAFI and Farook College, facilitates a comparative framework, enriching the depth of insights and providing a more nuanced exploration of community-led educational initiatives in the specific context of Kerala.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and their consent was obtained for the possible mention of their interview extract in the paper. All measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants' information.

### **Analysis, Findings, and Discussion**

This section discusses the detailed findings from the interviews conducted with three levels of stakeholders—students, teachers, and management. Before going to the interview analysis, it is important to examine the educational model proposed by both of the institutions using the possibilities of community philanthropy among Mappila Muslims in Kerala.

## **General Overview of a Community-Engaged Model in Higher Education**

### **Case 1: Farook College, Kozhikode**

Founded in 1948, Farook College is an aided and autonomous institution supported through community philanthropy. It can be identified as a place-based initiative to provide educational opportunities as well. Rowlathul Uloom Association, formed in 1942, took the lead in transforming the social fabric through the expansion of modern education in the region. Farook College was the only first grade college in central Malabar which was initially affiliated with Madras University. Following the state's reorganisation, it came under the auspices of the University of Kerala in 1957 and the University of Calicut in 1968. It offers 22 undergraduate courses, one integrated and 15 post graduate and three diploma programmes. The college is modelled in a residential pattern. The National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, Government of India has granted the college minority status and the autonomous status was granted by UGC in 2015.

The unique aspect of Farook College is that beneficiaries themselves are a part of different cycles of philanthropy: from providing aid, services and support to the upliftment and empowerment of the community. Infrastructure is provided by the community through generous contributions from well-wishers and teachers' salary is supported by the state government. The college is keen about identifying local needs and has designed multiple community outreach programs to serve those needs. EduSupport, Pain and Palliative care, and Skill development programmes are some of the examples.

## **Case Two: SAFI Institute of Advanced Study (SIAS), Vazhayur**

Social Advancement Foundation of India (SAFI) was formed in 2001, as a non-profit charitable trust, by entrepreneurs, educators and philanthropists from the Mappila community. They realised the need for creating leaders in different fields and promoting higher education and research in the fields of Science, Technology and Humanities. The institution has been funded by 617 benefactors, financing the purchase of the land and infrastructure development. It started as a self-financed and unaided higher educational institution in 2005. Currently, the institute is in a transition phase, moving from being an unaided to an autonomous institution and is aspiring to set up a private university in the region. The institution is focusing on educational reform through philanthropic action, to make education accessible. It conducts community outreach programmes including literacy awareness programmes, environmental conservation, and application of research and innovation. At present, it offers 13 undergraduate and 6 post-graduate programmes in Arts, Science and Commerce. It is affiliated with the University of Calicut and is recognised by the Government of Kerala and the University Grants Commission (UGC). It is modelled partly as a residential campus. The institution has diverse sustainable practices, including the adoption of three villages and a wide range of activities from plantation to health camps and literacy programmes for the locals.

### **Characteristics of the Sample Data**

The demographic characteristics of the respondents under study are essential to understand the operation of community philanthropy in the field of education, across the Malabar region. It includes various socio-economic indicators such as



age, gender, and region. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the respondents of the study.

*Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents from SAFI and Farook College*

Characteristics	SAFI	Farook	Total
Respondents:			
Students	23	25	48
Teachers	5	5	10
Management	2	2	4
District	4 (Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, Wayanad)	4 (Kozhikode, Malappuram, Kannur, Wayanad)	5
Age Group of Students	18-25	18-30	
Gender:			
Female Students	11	18	29
Male Students	12	7	19

Source: Author Compilation

The data set includes 48 students in total which comprises 23 students from SAFI and 25 from Farook College. SAFI has an almost equal proportion of male students (12) and female students (11), whereas Farook College has a higher proportion of female students (18), as compared to the male students (7). The age group of the students lies between 18–25 in SAFI and 18–30 in Farook College. The students belong to five different districts of the Malabar region—Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad,

Wayanad, and Kannur. The sample further comprises 10 teachers in total, five from each institution. Four management representatives were interviewed, including two from SAFI and two from Farook College.

### **Major Findings of the Study**

In an attempt to examine the role of community philanthropy in the field of education and get a detailed understanding of the contribution, experiences, vision, and outcomes of the multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, and management, this section presents the findings structured as per the research objectives, addressing them one at a time. The findings showcase the new horizon in the literature on community philanthropy and education, and further substantiate the findings of Srivastava (2015), Miglani and Burch (2018) Osella and Osella (2009), Sahasranamam and Mitra (2019).

#### ***1. To document the trends in community philanthropy and education among the Mappila Muslim community in Kerala.***

In corroboration to Doan's (2015) argument related to community philanthropy not being an organisational form but a practice and a process, this study also observed that the two institutions under study, i.e., SAFI and Farook College are engaged in diverse forms of practices. They include provision of scholarships, competitive exam preparation, skill and network building, trust building, and diversification of the services beyond education. In the process of manifesting community philanthropy, both institutions are involved in multiple community outreach programmes. SAFI has adopted three local villages for the upliftment of the locals. Farook College is involved in pain and palliative care, plantation drives, and ecological conservation activities.

The narratives of students from both institutions reflect that the vision of the founders and philanthropists is operationalised by focusing on beneficiary-oriented practices including students-centred scholarships, and awareness campaigns about advanced opportunities. For example, *EduSupport*, which is a scholarship program in Farook College for less advantaged students enrolled in their institutions, channels its funds from well-off parents, teachers, and students' contributions and old student associations. These practices extend to career development programmes, preparation for competitive examinations, and placement assistance. Students who benefitted from competitive preparation centres like the PM Institute at Farook College are setting up similar centres in different parts of the Malabar region. Such examples show the sustainable practices and reproductional aspect of community philanthropy in education. A female respondent from Farook College says:

*Many people are struggling when it comes to higher education, especially many girls who lack family support. We have many challenges including societal backwardness and orthodox and conservative mindset regarding women's education. In such cases college intervenes proactively. For some, it is financial issues, we have multiple scholarship assistance here., But in some cases, it is a family issue, in such instances, teachers give us extra support.*

Another male student respondent from SAFI mentions:

*People of my age gave an awe reaction when I chose SAFI. They were like why are you going there, it is more like a school and you can't 'vibe there'. Since it is a self-finance college, they have more regulations, and they have changed the attendance system and parents can see that. In my case, I have been associated with the Innovation Entrepreneurship Development Centre which helps us build*

*entrepreneurial skills and bring business ideas and incubation in partnership with Kerala govt, bringing innovation among the youth and promoting a start-up ecosystem.*

The narratives from stakeholders two and three; teachers and the management prove that both SAFI and Farook College are implementing a community-engaged model in higher education by focusing on foundational values and principles. Trust building with multiple stakeholders has remained one of the key areas of intervention and various strategies like continuous and consistent interaction with all the stakeholders, and taking their needs into consideration are used often. A teacher respondent from Farook College, who is in charge of the pain and palliative care unit narrates how the institute is building trust with locals and says:

*We started a palliative care unit by realising the needs of some of the unattended patients in the area. Locals had reached out to students by asking whether we can do any intervention and realising this need, we teachers joined them. There was a case of an old man, who was abandoned by his family, and during his last days, it was our palliative care members who were spending time with him in the hospital. Such interventions through our COP gave us wide appreciation and credibility from society.*

Further, it could be observed and interpreted how both institutions are making use of research and innovation in philanthropic practices and extending such innovations to the realm of the college. The models involved in both cases are actively engaged in facilitating educational reform in their respective domains by addressing the local circumstances and needs. Taking the context of international migration from Kerala, colleges are actively involved in providing additional support programmes like

skilling, networking, and building leadership qualities in partnership with the government and non-government organisations including NPTEL, ASAP and the PM Foundation. A female teacher respondent from SAFI narrates:

*We have been actively involved in skill development and employability enhancement programmes in our departments. Be it for students or the community, we have been actively engaged in many programmes. For example, our department is training students in mushroom cultivation and we extend it to the nearby areas as well, as part of generating a sense of social responsibility among the students. Especially, to cater to the needs of those female students who are taking a break after graduation, we are planning to come up with some short-term professional courses like medical coding.*

Another interesting trend is that both institutions focus on an appropriate leadership model in community philanthropy by taking the local and state administration seriously. They use a participatory approach and involve the local administration in all possible ways for effective functioning. A teacher respondent from SAFI College, who has been associated with the college since its formation, says:

*We have a very resilient and respectful communication method. We realise where we are located. We fall under the jurisdiction of the local self-government. The Panchayat administration has been very cordial with us. During the Covid pandemic, when the panchayat was in need, we opened up our college as a Covid treatment centre. We have a mutual trust between all these actors. We have continuous updation when it comes to communication with multiple agencies, I find*

*it an advantage of the educated professionals with philanthropic aims  
and they know how to deal with and operate it better.*

**2. To understand how multiple stakeholders perceive their experiences of educational philanthropy.**

Experiences in community philanthropy and education can be understood by looking into the challenges, strengths and motivation of the students, teachers, and management associated with it in the two institutes. This research has addressed the following questions precisely—how do students perceive the impact of community philanthropy on their learning? How do educators/teachers perceive the role of community philanthropy in providing educational infrastructure in the region? What motivates the educational philanthropist/management to invest in educational infrastructure and how do they gauge the success of their contribution?

Students were largely satisfied with the physical infrastructure, and to an extent, the management has made a serious effort to communicate the purpose and motivation of philanthropy-led educational activities. The motivation for joining a particular institution included course availability, geographical proximity, parents' choice and lack of good colleges in their locality. Experiences vary regarding socio-economic backgrounds, and there is a positive attitude towards accessing higher education across the different groups. While most of the beneficiaries were first-generation learners, they were facing problems such as lack of awareness about higher educational choices and options, financial issues, and lack of family support. With the emergence of community philanthropy in education, and measures like private and public scholarships, personalised mentorship support, and collaborative learning through an engagement model, many of the respondents

could overcome generational barriers in higher education. While studies in India show the underrepresentation of these communities in government and private sector high-profile jobs (Vakulbharanam and Motiram, 2016), there has been a focus on competitive exams and test preparations for premier institutions at both the selected institutions. Appreciating the infrastructure and educational services at the institution, a male student from SAFI narrates:

*I attended the SAFI IAS orientation that happened in Kozhikode, so I preferred SAFI. They have integrated coaching facilities as well, so I feel SAFI has an environment to nurture us personally. They have started an integrated coaching facility for the civil service examination. Along with pursuing a BSc in physics, I would be able to prepare for the civil service examination during my graduation only, so I am very hopeful about that. They have an entrance test and admission will be after that. Compared to govt colleges, we have better physical infrastructure. There is growth, maybe because of NAAC. I have visited a government college, they have old deteriorating buildings, while everything is good here.*

While students' experiences mainly showed positive aspects of educational empowerment through community-led models, there were concerns about how the private nature of such entities restricts and constrains student aspirations through imposed moral codes and regulatory frameworks like curfews, fund insufficiency, conservative ideas around gender and mobility, and lack of fair distribution of opportunities. There were also concerns about the quality of education among students and some of them were anxious about the possibility of failed social and educational mobility due to gaps in learning. There must be serious dialogue from

multiple ends to make higher educational spaces more effective and beneficial to the multiple actors involved. A female pass-out from Farook College says:

*See what happens to girls after graduation? There is a missing link in converting educational qualifications into employability opportunities for girls. When it comes to accessing college services, there are provisions like curfews after 6 p.m. for “morality” reasons. In our college, despite having more female students enrolled, we are not represented equally when it comes to opportunities. There are still some faculty members who have problematic views towards women working after their studies.*

The vision behind SAFI and Farook College was familiarising the avenues of higher education among the community. The responses collected from the management highlight that they have achieved it so far and are currently focused on modernising and diversifying the institutions by introducing new advanced courses to setting up centres for upskilling. From the very beginning, they have used micro-funding for setting up the college and its administration. This is still practised in meeting student and community needs, in terms of providing an accessible learning environment. There has been effective coordination among philanthropists, statesmen and the community which has enabled the actualisation of the vision of the founders. A teacher from SAFI College mentions:

*For the last few years through active interventions, we could reduce dropouts, especially female dropouts, in our department due to societal pressure on marriage and all. In such cases, we reach out to the parents and make them understand the importance of higher education. We have the mission of creating leaders, our*



*leader's academy trains students to develop different sets of skills during their college years. Students have been positively responding to such initiatives happening in the college.*

A management representative from SAFI describes his journey in the following words:

*From the very beginning, many visionaries were associated with the setting up of the college. 617 benefactors were involved in the purchase of land. We had a vision of building an educational township in this locality making it a residential model, but we could not fulfill that dream yet. Our founders had a vision of modernising the higher educational landscape in Malabar and we have been able to do justice to our vision and mission for the last 18 years. We have been diversifying our area of operation from school education to higher education.*

Another management representative from SAFI College expresses his view on the importance of community philanthropy practices:

*Only through initiatives like SAFI can we give something back to society. Imagine if SAFI was not there, students would have been forced to go somewhere else. We have to give back to society, and then only the cycle of giving will be continued. If I give something today, it may inspire someone else to give tomorrow, so the chain of giving should not be broken. The only thing is that the government should have a regulatory framework to check, but they shouldn't be restricting the business of higher education completely.*

**3. To identify the gaps in the vision and outcome of community philanthropy and education.**

To gauge the success of community philanthropy in the field of education, it is important to compare the vision with the outcome. This research has evaluated the existing gaps in this area at two levels—the stakeholder level and the institutional level.

A good number of students interviewed chose to join these two institutes because of the lack of educational opportunities in their hometowns. This shows a huge divide in the distribution of educational infrastructure in the state of Kerala. Analysing students' and teachers' responses shows a decreasing trend among students using available facilities at home institutions. Post-pandemic, increasing digitalisation in higher education has led to the rise of a unique hybrid model where learners are making use of digital medium in higher education. Such shifts challenge the so-called conventional models of philanthropy-induced infrastructure modernisation and community engagement model.

Management responses show the aspirations of autonomous institutions that would like to transform into a private university model. The available model of higher education in India is strictly a public education model. Excessive regulatory frameworks and lack of institutional arrangements show the challenges in the gradation of such institutions to an international level. The private-public divide and popular perception of the profit-motive of private institutions has been another challenge. Community philanthropy has been attempting to use an active engagement model in higher education as a bridge through their hiring practices and making local communities an integral part of institutional decision-making and everyday operation. A management representative of SAFI highlights the regulatory challenges and says:

*For example, in our senate at Calicut University, we, as a private unaided institute, don't have representation. At this point in time, they should be modifying these kinds of provisions, then only philanthropists can raise their voices through formal channels. We have regulatory framework hurdles in the state that prevent the institution from growing further. As of now, we have been in the field of higher education for the last 18 years, but we have only been granted temporary affiliation to Calicut University and we have to renew it every year. See normally, after a few years of trial, they should have given us permanent affiliation, but they didn't. In the end, they should realise that this is ultimately for the benefit of the people and there should be steps from the government to free such policy paralysis in higher education in the state.*

While there are a lot of claims around community-based educational institutions through print and visual mediums, there must be serious introspection from independent authorities regarding the quality, transparency and fairness in providing higher educational opportunities to the targeted population. The private character of such entities often tends to deviate from the founding vision and translate to a for-profit and a complete market-based model. Public scrutiny and relevant institutional framework become necessary in keeping such public-spirited institutions active and oriented. While the government frameworks check the infrastructure and achievements in a more bureaucratic manner, they should make more of a serious effort in checking the promised results and actual achievements of students as major stakeholders in such institutes.

Overall, this study identifies the gaps existing at two levels: gaps at stakeholders' level and gaps at institutional level. At the stakeholder level, this study identifies individual and socio-cultural gaps. The structural gaps identified at the institutional

level include implementational barriers that restrain the scope of community philanthropy in education and limit the operation of philanthropic efforts. The gaps at the stakeholder level primarily look into the individual gaps of students, teachers, and the management. Based on the analysis of multiple stakeholder interviews, more focus on the maximum utilisation of pooled resources is required and better background work has to be done by the teachers and the management to yield efficient educational outcomes. In addition to this, social and cultural gaps have been observed in terms of gender and educational empowerment, and employability of graduating students. The gaps at the institutional level examine structural problems which include legislative inefficiency in facilitating alternative players in education. In a more specific sense of community-engaged models in higher education, there are gaps at the implementation level too, which include constraints in identifying the best available human resources and materialising them. After the completion of all the levels of the analysis, the quality of education remains a concern. There is major scope for improvement in terms of learning outcomes and teaching practices.

## **Conclusion**

There have been increasing instances of Faith-Based Organisations actively taking part in community philanthropy. By studying the trend and pattern in community philanthropy and education, it is evident that there is a clear shift among local actors from charity and relief activities to the practice of philanthropy for the cause of education. This study, in sum, contextualises community philanthropy in Kerala among Mappila Muslims through in-depth interviews of stakeholders, including students, teachers, and management of two community-administered educational

institutions, namely SAFI College and Farook College. This study points out that the local communities have been experimenting with innovations in community-based giving and using distinct community-engaged models through unique practices and processes. An example of philanthropy for the cause of education shows the shift from donating land, food grains, and services to setting up computer labs and digital libraries, and modernisation of infrastructure, which can be actively seen among stakeholders including management, donors and alumni networks in the selected institutions. Understanding the result or outcome of such activities includes the positive relationship between community philanthropy and educational empowerment through increased educational enrollment, occupational and social mobility, and resolving gender and regional imbalances in educational attainment. Despite affirming the success of these community-engaged models, respondents differed in their opinions and concluded that there are many factors which influence the success of a model. But a public consensus and foundational values are indispensable for mainstreaming such philanthropy-led models in higher education. This study also observed a very smooth and well-formed relationship between the local community and the institutions, which helps them build trust when transitioning (public to private) in educational infrastructure. This study further found a shift in the social base of philanthropy. While early philanthropists pooled the inner resources of the community, now the local actors have been diversifying the scope of community philanthropy. They are moving from catering to educational needs to meeting the social and cultural needs of the community. Community philanthropy directly or indirectly facilitates many other philanthropic activities, including health care, voluntary support etc., in the region. Through their unique programmes, both institutions cultivate these values and transmit them to their students and their families. In both cases, the family, local and alumni networks are used for

educational and local development. Finally, it will be interesting to study the future scope of community-administered educational models and how they can be integrated into the traditional educational landscape across India.

## References

- Alam, Mohd. S. (2021). Community organizations and educational development among Muslims: Lessons from the “Kerala Experience.” *Journal of Civil Society*, 1–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2021.1886762>
- Ball, S. J. (2008). New Philanthropy, New Networks and New Governance in Education. *Political Studies*, 56(4), 747–765.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00722.x>
- Barman, E. (2017). The Social Bases of Philanthropy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 43(1), 271–290. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053524>
- Bonner, M. (2005). Poverty and Economics in the Qur’an. *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35(3), 391–406. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3657031>
- Candland, C. (2000). Faith as social capital: Religion and community development in Southern Asia. *Policy Sciences*, 33(3/4), 355–374.  
<https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1004857811117>
- Doan, D. (2019). *What is community philanthropy? - A guide to understanding and applying community philanthropy.*  
[https://www.kcdf.or.ke/images/publications/What\\_Is\\_Community\\_Philanthropy.pdf](https://www.kcdf.or.ke/images/publications/What_Is_Community_Philanthropy.pdf)

Hammersley, M. & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: principles and practice*. Holt, Rinehart, And Winston.

Kalapura, J. (2015). Philanthropic Organizations and Community Development. *Asian Journal of Social Science*, 43(4), 400–434. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685314-04304005>

Kottakkunnummal, M. (2015). Making up Pious Women: Politics, Charity and Gender among Muslims of Kerala. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(3), 358–386. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09715215155594275>

Mauss, M. (2002). *The Gift*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203407448>

Miglani, N., & Burch, P. (2018). Educational Technology in India: The Field and Teacher’s Sensemaking. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 16(1), 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973184918803184>

Muhammedali, T. (2007). In Service of the Nation: Relief and Reconstruction in Malabar in the Wake of the Rebellion of 1921. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 68, 789–805. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44147888>



Oommen, M. A. (2014). Growth, Inequality and Well-being. *Journal of South Asian Development*, 9(2), 173–205. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973174114536097>

Osella, F., & Osella, C. (2009). Muslim Entrepreneurs in Public Life between India and the Gulf: Making Good and Doing Good. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15, S202–S221. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20527697>

Purayil, M. P. (2022, November). Diaspora philanthropy and transnational giving among the Mappilas of Kerala. Centre For Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University.

Robert, K. (2016). Community trends in Indian Higher education: financial and partnership trends. *International Journal of Education Development*.

Sahasranamam, S., & Mitra, S. (2019). Faizal & Shabana Foundation: a venture philanthropic approach to education. *Emerald Emerging Markets Case Studies*, 9(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eemcs-04-2018-0052>

Singh, P. (2011). We-ness and Welfare: A Longitudinal Analysis of Social Development in Kerala, India. *World Development*, 39(2), 282–293.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2009.11.025>

Srivastava, P. (2015). Philanthropic Engagement in Education. *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, 13(1), 5–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973184915603170>

Vakulabharanam, V., & Motiram, S. (2016). Mobility and inequality in neoliberal India. *Contemporary South Asia*, 24(3), 257–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2016.1203862>