

# **Memoirs of a Principal: My Time at Bishop Moore College.**

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My tenure as the Principal of Bishop Moore College, Mavelikara, was a journey marked by challenges, rewards, and unforgettable lessons. Serving in this esteemed institution amidst the complexities of Kerala's student politics was no small feat. Principals often navigate a tightrope, balancing the demands of administration with the disruptions caused by a highly politicised student environment. Yet, these very challenges also became opportunities for meaningful change and growth.

Having served as a lecturer at Bishop Moore College for thirty years before stepping into the principal role (2009 to 2011), I had the advantage of intimately understanding the nature of our students and staff. I observed that only a small fraction—about 10 to 20 percent—were actively involved in politics, yet their influence often disrupted the harmony of the institution. Similarly, in any organisation, a small disruptive minority can wield disproportionate power.

From my experience, the student body could be categorised into three groups:

1. The Negative Minority (10–20%): Often uninterested in academics, they posed challenges that demanded tactful management rather than direct confrontation.
2. The Indifferent Majority (50%): Largely disengaged, they were neither contributors nor troublemakers but required encouragement to participate meaningfully.
3. The Committed Minority (30%): These students were the heart and soul of the institution, deeply committed to their education, future, and the college's major goals.

I realised that the key to success was neutralising the negative minority, sensitising the indifferent majority, and empowering the committed few. With this vision, I initiated a transformative program for our students.

## **Training Tomorrow's Leaders**

Every Saturday, we hosted full-day training sessions for three selected students from each class, conducted by professional trainers across South India. Initially met with skepticism, the program soon gained momentum as students found the sessions engaging and beneficial. Seventy students attended these sessions each Saturday from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. I made it a point to spend at least an hour with them, building a personal connection and motivating them to become the college's ambassadors.

The college management supported this initiative, covering trainers' honoraria and providing refreshments to the students. Over 20 Saturdays, these sessions nurtured our young participants' leadership skills and personalities. These trained students became my trusted allies, offering feedback and resolving minor issues in their respective classes, such as organising debates during a teacher's absence. Their sense of responsibility rippled across the student body, inspiring others to participate actively in the college's mission.

## **The Water Warriors**

One of our most impactful projects involved engaging students in an outreach program focused on water conservation. Sponsored by Malayala Manorama, students visited ten homes in their neighbourhoods, armed with brochures on water issues and survey forms. Before the visits, they underwent interaction training, which they later shared with their peers. A total of

1,300 students participated, visiting 13,000 houses and forming a bridge between the college and the local community.

This experience was an eye-opener to many of our students. Their surveys revealed widespread water scarcity, igniting their passion for environmental advocacy. These students earned the title “Water Warriors of Bishop Moore College,” leaving a legacy of environmental awareness. One student told me, “Sir, this is my first time visiting a house in my locality. I could understand their reactions and body language and learned how to respond and convince them. It was an enriching experience.”

### **Memorable Moments**

After my retirement, I visited Christian College, Chengannur, to deliver a lecture on environmental topics. As I prepared to leave, a young lady from the MA program rushed to my car, much to the Christian College principal's surprise. She said, "Sir, I am what I am today because of you. Your training sessions transformed my outlook and leadership skills." Her heartfelt words were a testament to the enduring impact of our initiatives. Such moments after retirement, when students express gratitude, are truly priceless.

### **The Mentor's Legacy**

Bishop Moore College's founding principal, Rev. K.C. Mathew, emphasized the importance of teachers as mentors and wardens rather than mere lecturers. He believed teachers should visit students' homes and provide holistic guidance. He always referred to the staff and students as the "Bishop Moore College family." Rev. K.C. Mathew was keen on bringing renowned scholars in arts, science, and social fields to the college to interact with students. NAAC members, after inspecting the college records, told me, "Your college has a good foundation."

As a student of Rev. K.C. Mathew, I embraced this philosophy, treating students as VIPs and fostering friendships. This approach often led to humorous and enlightening encounters. Students were convinced that the principal was approachable, engaging, and willing to interact with them at any time. I designed enough programs for the disruptive student community to make them either passive or less aggressive.

One day, a student ambassador informed me about a fellow student vomiting outside the campus after consuming alcohol. I could not take direct action since the incident occurred outside the college grounds. When I confronted him, he admitted he aspired to become a clergy member. I asked how he planned to reconcile his drinking habits with his spiritual calling. His candid response was, "When I become a pastor, I'll share my transformation story. People love hearing about redemption!" Though humorous, this incident highlighted the importance of integrity in leadership.

On another occasion, a student from a poor background, reluctant to reveal his home details, surprised me with his creativity. He was more interested in church activities than academic work. As a pretext for visiting his house, I expressed interest in attending his church. Two days later, he brought me an invitation—but with another teacher listed as the speaker. When I asked why I wasn't invited, he quipped, “Our committee decided to invite someone knowledgeable this time!” His answer amused me. Though he avoided my visit, he continued his friendly conversations with me.

### **A Lifelong Connection**

The bond between a teacher and students is sacred. Even years after leaving the classroom, the impact of these relationships continues to resonate. Bishop Moore College was more than an institution; it was a family where every student mattered. Looking back, I cherish

the opportunity to have mentored, inspired, and learned from my students. Their growth and success are the true measures of my tenure.

My journey as Principal was not just about managing an institution; it was about shaping lives and leaving a legacy of empowerment and hope.

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