

**Report by Amb(Rtd.) T. P. Sreenivasan on a Seminar about Autonomy held at
Sacred Heart College**

Today, I not only inaugurated, but also stayed throughout the day at a Seminar on Autonomous Colleges at the Sacred Heart College. I am glad that the KSHEC co-sponsored the Seminar. It reassured me that the Autonomous Colleges will succeed in Kerala, despite hesitations, apprehensions and outright opposition to the idea.

Most aided colleges, chosen for autonomy, were represented and those who did not attend lost a good opportunity. The success of the Seminar was on account of two outstanding resource persons, Fr. Dr. Thomas Mathew, VC, Christ University, Bangalore and Dr. Nirmala Prasad, former Principal, MOP Vaishnav College, Chennai. The Principal and Manager of Sacred Heart College, the Provincial, Rajagiri Province and the Dean and Administrator of the Rajagiri College not only struck an optimistic note and underlined their commitment to making autonomy a success.

Expecting the usual cynical and pessimistic questions, I spoke passionately about the value of autonomy and stressed the courage and vision of the Government in my inaugural remarks. I also complimented the organizers for heeding my advice to avoid rituals, including flowers and souvenirs at academic seminars. During the interactive session, I discovered that I was preaching to the converted and the discussion was on other issues such as Faculty Training Academy and RUSA.

Fr. Dr. Thomas Mathew spoke eloquently of his experience of transforming an affiliated college into a University. He noted that the Kerala students had the least mobility and that our teachers were not able to transfer their brilliance to the students. Humility and strong will, he said, should be the main qualities of a great teacher. He shared the excitement of liberation from the constraints of the affiliated colleges. Anyone who hears him will look forward to the academic freedom offered by autonomy.

Dr. Nirmala Prasad was equally impressive in her presentation. She stressed the advantages of collaboration with industries, opened out by autonomy. She suggested that fears of extra work for teachers can be removed if technology is used for teaching as well as for holding examinations. The autonomous colleges will have the learning ambience of IITs and IIMs. Introduction of courses that combine academic programs with skills should be possible in autonomous colleges.

I know that several seminars have been held on Autonomy, but this one was the most useful one that I have attended. We should have more such seminars, involving the designated colleges, including Government Colleges.

I shall welcome comments and suggestions for making autonomy colleges a success in Kerala. There are already 441 autonomous colleges under 85 Universities across 21 states. Why not in Kerala?

I congratulate the Principal, Sacred Heart and Dr. CM Joy, Seminar Coordinator and request them to circulate this message to all concerned. This will also be posted on the KSHEC website

Sincerely,

TPS