

SCHOOL DROP-OUT AMONG THE TRIBAL CHILDREN IN KERALA: A CASE STUDY OF WAYANAD

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ABSTRACT

The Wayanad district have the largest tribal population in Kerala (India) with 8 scheduled tribes including Adiyar, Paniyan, Mullukkurman, Kurichyan, Vettakkuruman, Wayanad Kadar, Kattuniakkan and Thachanadan Mooppan. Education has been given the least priority in Wayanad, from time immemorial. Enrolment rate is very high but there are hundreds of children in each panchayath who have never entered the doors of any schools till now. Many are admitted to schools, but they do not remain. The government initiated many projects to reduce and eliminate the drop out issue. But still the number of the dropout of tribal children is continuing. Hence the present paper is an endeavour to shed light on the various glitches and projections of school dropout among the tribal children in Wayanad.

Key Terms: Drop-out, tribe, Ekadyapaka Vidhyalaya, Asramam School, Gothrasaradi

Wayanad- An overview

Wayanad is an Indian district in the north-east of Kerala state with administrative headquarters at the municipality of Kalpetta. It is set high on the Western Ghats with altitudes ranging from 700 to 2100 meters. About 885.92 sq.km of area of the district is under forest. There are many indigenous tribals in this area¹. Historians believe that the human settlements existed in these parts for at least ten centuries before Christ. Much evidence of New Stone Age civilisation can be seen in the hills throughout the present day Wayanad district.²

The recorded history of this district is available only from the 18th century. In ancient times,

this land was ruled by the Rajas of the Veda tribe,³ and then by the Kutumbiyas (Kudumbiyas), the Kadambas, the Hoysalas, the Vijayanagara empire, the Mysore Wodeyars and the Sultans, Kottayam royal family and finally by the British. When the State of Kerala came into being in November 1956, Wayanad was part of Kannur district. Later, south Wayanad was added to Kozhikode district. To fulfil the aspirations of the people of Wayanad for development, North Wayanad and South Wayanad were carved out and joined together to form the present district of Wayanad. This district came into being on 1 November 1980 as one of the twelve districts of Kerala, consisting of three taluks; Vythiri, Mananthavady, and SulthanBathery.

Tribes in Wayanad

Wayanad has the largest tribal population in Kerala with 8 scheduled tribes including Adiyar, Paniyan, Mullukkurman, Kurichyan, Vettakkuruman, Wayanad Kadar, Kattuniakkan and Thachanadan Mooppan. These communities have a number of symbolic oral narratives. They are tribal groups, who were treated as bonded slave labourers by the landlords up to 1976. Now majority of them are agricultural labourers and some of them are marginal agriculturalist. They spoke their own languages as their mother tongue. The soil and climate of Wayanad are suitable for horticulture on commercial basis. Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of the district. Most of the lands in the district are used for agricultural purposes. More than half of its population are engaged in agriculture in order to earn their livelihood. The chief agricultural crops in the district are Coffee, tea, cocoa, pepper, plantain, vanilla, rice, coconut, cardamom, tea, ginger, etc. Wayanad is known for its rice production. The two rice of the district namely Wayanad Jeerakasala rice and Wayanad Gandhakasala rice has their different properties. Another source of economy in the district is the cattle farming. The tourism sector of the district is very developed and every year a huge chunk of revenue comes from this sector helps in its economy to a great extent.

It is the least populous district in Kerala. Unlike the other districts of Kerala, barring Idukki, in Wayanad district, there is no town or village named same as the district (i.e., there is no "Wayanad town"). According to the 2011 census Wayanad district had a population of 817,420, roughly equal to the nation of Comoros. This gives it a ranking of 482nd in India

(out of a total of 640). The district has a population density of 383 inhabitants per square kilometre (990/sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001–2011 was 4.6%. Wayanad has a sex ratio of 1035 females for every 1000 males, and a literacy rate of 89.32%, the lowest in the state.

Educational Scenario of Wayanad

Education has been given the least priority in Wayanad from time immemorial. Enrolment rate is very high but there are hundreds of children in each panchayath who have never entered the doors of any schools till now. The quality of education in the district is very poor and placed among the least in the country, and hence the district has been brought under a special scheme of District Primary Education Programme funded by World Bank. The main thrust is quality. Quality is intended to be raised by increasing the physical facilities, training of teachers and introducing the concept of M.L.L (Minimum Level of Learning). New text books are already being given to children along with hand books to teachers. The evaluation system is also thoroughly revised.

There are at present 266 schools (126 lower primary, 77 upper primary and 53 high schools) in Wayanad district. Five vocational higher secondary schools, two higher secondary schools and three teacher training institutes are there under the Department of Education. There are a residential upper primary school for scheduled castes at Muthanga and a residential high school at Nallurnad. Out of 1,38,339 students studying in these schools, 69,944 are boys and 68,395 are girls. There are 7,686 scheduled caste and 22,447 scheduled tribe students. In Wayanad 2,591 people share a school against the state average of 2,381 people per school and this district has one school for every 8.075 Kms. against the state average of one school per 3.2 kms. The average number of students in this district per school is 532 against the state average of around 481. Wayanad is a single education district with one Deputy Director, one District Educational Officer and three Assistant Educational Officers. It has also a District Institute of Education and Training, located at SulthanBathery. In order to improve the quality of education, the district has been brought under special scheme of District Primary Education Project, funded by the World Bank.

The education of tribals is still a big problem. In spite of a lot of efforts, they have not yet been brought to the main stream. Many are admitted to schools, but they do not remain. The only consolation is the two schools - Rajiv Gandhi Residential School at Muthanga and Dr.Ambedkar Residential school at Nallurnad, near Mananthavady - set apart for the education of tribal children. Both these have better facilities and are well run. The literacy rate in Wayanad is 70.61 per cent as per 1991 census and was only 57.33 in 1981. Thus there is an appreciable growth in the literacy rate in a decade. This is still below the state average of 89.81 per cent. Among the panchayats and municipality, Mullankolly has the highest rate of 77.11 followed by Vythiri, 75.71 per cent and Edavaka, 73.7 per cent.

The government initiated many projects reduce and eliminate the drop out issue, the important projects are following:

Model Residential Schools

In order to provide quality education to tribal students, there are 20 Model Residential School/Asramam School functioning under this department, in which two MRSs follow CBSE Syllabus. Extra academic facilities are also being provided in such institutions. Model Residential schools operated by the ST department are centres of excellence achieving impressive results in SSLC and Plus Two examinations consistently over the years. About 5500 students are studying in these institutions. Extra academic facilities are being provided in all MRSs like Special remedial classes for the 5th standard students, Spoken English classes for all students, Medical & Engineering entrance coaching in 7 MRSs having Science Batch, Motivation classes for all students and extracurricular activities like Student Police Cadet. NCC, NSS, Band Troupe, 'KALARY' etc.

Peripatetic Education to the Primitive Tribes- Ekadyapakavidyalaya (Single Teacher School)

To impart Lower Primary education to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups and other similar Scheduled Tribes, Peripatetic centres & single teacher schools have been set up in tribal dominated inaccessible areas of the State. This scheme is based on a single teacher programme, and the teacher is expected to visit the identified settlements and provide education. It is expected that the students will get interest in education without being

uprooted from their isolated settlements. There are 23 single teacher schools and 7 Peripatetic centres functioning under Scheduled Tribes Development department.

Tutorial Scheme for Students

The scheme is intended to provide special coaching to students of High School and Plus I & II classes to increase pass percentage. The monthly tuition fee would be directly given to parents for providing tuition through nearby tutorials.

Gothra Sarathi

The scheme is for arranging transportation facilities to students living in the interior forests and inaccessible areas, in association with the Education Department, Local Governments and the Parent Teachers Association.

Samuhya Patanamuri (Community Study centre in tribal hamlets) (New Initiative)

To solve the linguistic and dropout issues and to create ambience for education in hamlets, department has started 100 Community Study Centres in tribal hamlets throughout the state during 2017-18. One educated tribal youth from same community has been selected and who works as a facilitator and social worker. The Centre is equipped with computers with internet, LED TV, furniture, reading materials etc. About 30 students are accommodated in each centre.

Pre – matric & Post-matric Hostels for Tribal Students

With a view to provide residential education to tribal students in remote areas, the department is operating **106** Pre-matric hostels and **5** Post matric hostels for providing boarding, lodging and tuition facilities to ST students. It is proposed to start 4 Post matric hostels during 2018-19.

Special Incentive to Brilliant Students

The scheme is for providing incentives to the brilliant students from ST communities who perform well in academics and come out with meritorious performance.

Ayyankali Memorial Talent Search and Development Scheme

Under the scheme, talented tribal students (day scholars) studying from 5th standard to 10th standard are the target group and continuous assistance is being provided to them to excel in academics and extracurricular activities. Every year, 200 students studying in 5th standards will be selected under this scheme through an intelligence test.

Assistance for Study tour to School & College going Students

Under this scheme, Post-matric students are given financial assistance for participating in excursions and study tours. Also, the scheme intends to conduct Bharat Darshan/All India Tour for selected tribal students with the approval of the SLWG.

Assistance to Orphans

This scheme is intended to provide special assistance to the scheduled tribe children who have no parents to look after. Assistance is given to care takers of such children. Each beneficiary is given Rs.1000/- per month.

Supply of Laptop to Students

The scheme is envisaged to provide Laptop to ST students of professional courses in approved University/institutes. The courses covered are MBA, M.Sc Computer Science, MCA, MBBS, BDS, BAMS, BHMS, BVSc.& AH, B.Tech and M.Tech and other Post Graduation Degrees.

Tribal Girl Child endowment scheme (Gothravalsalyanidhi)

Objective of the scheme is to start an insurance linked social security scheme for tribal girl child so as to ensure proper education, improve the capabilities and social status of girl child of tribal community. It will be a long term deposit scheme which attains maturity only after the child attains 18 years of age and has at least passed 10th standard. It will ensure holistic development of ST girl child starting with her birth registration, immunization, school admission and education upto 10th standard. The insurance amount can be used for higher education /settling in life. The scheme implementation has begun this year. All the tribal girl children born on or after 1/4/2017 are being brought under the scheme.

Gothrabandhu- Engaging Tribal teachers in primary schools(New Initiative)

To ensure proper education to tribal children, one educated tribal youth (men or women) with TTC/ B Ed. qualification from the same locality with knowledge in tribal dialect and Malayalam is selected and trained to function as mentor teacher in Primary Schools .These teachers are entrusted to addressing the language issues of tribal children, reducing drop outs and ensuring cent per cent enrolment . As per the scheme 241 qualified tribal youth were appointed in Wayanad district during 2017-18.

Post-matric Scholarships for Scheduled Tribe Students

Initially Government of India assisted this scheme completely. From 2014-15 onwards Central Government provides 75% of the actual expenditure under the scheme and State has to bear 25%.The scheme is intended for payment of educational assistance to the students undergoing various post-matric courses in and outside the state. These scholarships are granted and disbursed through e-grants (net banking).

Pre-matric Scholarship for ST Students Studying in IX & X Classes

During the year 2012-13, Government of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs has introduced the centralized scheme of Pre-matric Scholarship for needy Scheduled Tribe Students studying in classes of IX and X through DBT system. This Scheme is effective from 01.07.2012. Educational assistance such as lump sum grant, monthly stipend to pre-matric students is given under this scheme.

Vocational Training Institute & Training Centres for Scheduled Tribe students

There are two Vocational Training Institutes for Scheduled Tribe students functioning at Thiruvananthapuram (Kuttamala) and Idukki (Nadukani) for imparting training in 3 trades approved by National Council For Vocational Training. More over 11 vocational training centres are functioning under this department.

Nursery Schools, Balavadies,Kindergartens,Vikasvadies&Creches

There are 13 nursery schools, 10 kindergarten, 4 balavadies , 3 balavijnanakendras and 1 vikasvadi are running under the department to provide Pre-primary education to the tribal students living in very remote and inaccessible areas,. The students are given food, uniform, bag, umbrella etc.

Incentive to Parents of ST Students

An amount of Rs. 50/- per month is given to parents of ST students studying in LP classes, who have 75% attendance in an academic year.

However, the conspicuous and overarching challenges of tribal education of the Tribal of Wayanad, sustainably subsume lack of facilities, the language or medium of instruction is the challenge for the tribal children and there is lack of written literature. The tribal children perceive Malayam language as a foreign language, despite enormous resources which are provided by the government the result remains insufficient, social factors, economic factors, lack of interest in formal education, lack of teachers is one of the main problem affecting the growth of tribal education, absenteeism or drop out a significant number of students may be on rolls but the actual attendance is very negligible, the students graduating are also less, inadequate infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and transport are difficult and the movement within the tribal areas more assiduous and exigent during the rain seasons.⁴

Reasons for Dropout

The education of tribal area is still a big problem. In spite of a lot of efforts, they have not yet been brought to the main stream. Many are admitted to schools, but most of them do not remain. Most of the dropped out children are living with their family. As per the study signifies, majority of the parents do not have proper education and they are early dropouts. The reasons for the dropout were subjected to poverty and unemployment. But now the situations changed a lot. The parents of the dropped out assert that poverty and finance are no more the issues for their children's drop out. The parents are aware that the projects and plans that are being implemented for the benefit of tribal uplift. As far as the parents are concerned, the reasons for the dropping out are purely related to individual attitude on education.

⁴Wurok Chan Malith, Tribal education challenges the case of Wayanad in Kerala, India and Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan International Journal of Academic Research and Development, Volume 3; Issue 6; November 2018; Page No. 146-152, www.academicjournal.in

Negative attitude towards schooling:

Many of the dropouts are having an unfavourable attitude towards education. They consider education as a boring process. They still are not convinced of the need of education for their livelihood. They are aware of the allowances from the government for their education. But the negative attitude towards education makes them stay back to their colony surroundings than going to school.

Peer group influence:

Many of the dropouts and their parents admitted that peer group influence is the reason for their decision to leave schooling. They were influenced by their friends who stopped education. So they also put a full stop. Some stop education, because any of their siblings would have discontinued education.

Alcoholism of parents:

The teachers agreed to state that the alcoholism of parents is a convincing reason for the dropout. They agreed that the children are not getting a presence of mind at home in evenings when his father/ brother/ mother/ relatives/ friends come drunk. This will result in the children to move away from education. At home, they are not given an atmosphere to study and sometimes nothing to eat too.

Early Responsibility:

Another reason for drop out is that to shoulder the family responsibility at an early stage. This forces the child to discontinue education when his/ her father died. The family finance and stability is a valid factor that leads to the dropout of tribal children. Even he /she want to continue education, indeed it's impossible.

Caste related issues:

Some of the dropouts agreed that, to an extent, caste issues were the reasons to stop education. The teachers who associated with this study also state that cast is a major issue for the problem. They agreed, some of the students feel reluctant to sit with a lower caste student

or upper caste student and to share the physical properties of learning. This orthodox attitude could be cited as a reason for dropout.

Health issues:

Healthcare issues resulted in the dropout of some tribal students in the district. The dropouts pointed out that adequate medical care was not given when it was needed. It made the dropout rate increasing. Many of the tribal students who dropped out pointed out that they were not given proper medical care while they were sick.

Inaccessibility issue:

Tribes in Wayanad are much better placed compared to the tribes located in the districts of Palakkad and Idukki for accessing elementary level of schooling. But still, there are many settlements which face severe physical inaccessibility concerns. Few percentages of settlements that needs to travel more than 5 km for reaching a school.

Conclusion

The literacy rate among tribes is very low when compared to the literacy level of Kerala. In this process the Government has initiated special educational schemes with flexible development projects. But still the number of the dropout of tribal children is continuing. There are number of reasons behind this, like lack of parental support and interest, inability to understand the medium of instruction due to mother tongue inhibition, lack of schools nearby, teacher absenteeism, attitude towards girls etc. Low literacy rates in tribal communities continue to indicate a need for overarching support that tackles issues from health to attitudes of non-tribal populations. Recognizing that the education system is currently designed for the dominant group, there needs to be investment in creating support mechanisms that supplement the assimilation of tribal children into the formal education system. Various projects specially designed for the tribal people by our government should implement effectively.

Education can bring improvement in the status of tribal people and can form the basis for their integrated development and can lead them to prosperity and success in life. Here, it is important that planners should take a long-term view which is embedded in a meaningful

policy framework. In order to strengthen the rate of students in schools, tribal education must emphasise on quality and equity rather than quantity as has been the case in the past. It is essential to contextualize the school schedule as per local requirement rather than following a directive from the state. It is significant to take steps to provide locally relevant material to tribal students. Availability of locally relevant materials will not only facilitate faster learning but also help children to develop a sense of affiliation to school. Tribal education should ensure a partnership between community and government in order to make the education effective and sustainable. Environment building is an important factor in the educational development. Community awareness and community mobilization should be addressed. Tribal education should trigger off the importance of education for the skill development and competency building among tribal students.

Progression of deprived, marginalized and weaker section of the society is essential for the overall development of the country. Overall growth of the nation relies on the equitable development of human resources. Education provides knowledge, confidence, ability to encounter problem and to enjoy socio- economic and political opportunities. Hence exploitation of tribal people can be eliminated only through education.

Educational Attainment, Occupation and Income

When a community or an individual get education from outside of his or her usual inhabitation always show interest to visit or interact the fellow students or to get a job or at least to visit that place they visited during his or her school time. But here in the case of cholanaikka some of them were not willing to go outside the forest and get higher education. In case of occupation they are not willing to do work out side, for example Balan one of the cholanaikkan who passed plus two got a job as forest guard, but he resigned from his job and returned to his forest. Life saw they are use their wage which they get from the selling of product to outside the forest, they used this money to by household things, tobacco and liquor, which have a negative impact on many of the families. Hence in the case of income also the assimilation process is not satisfactory.

The main reasons for drop-out and unwillingness to come outside the forest may be due to:

- Lack of awareness about the outer world

- May be this inhabitation to mingle themselves with outside people who they felt more with a civilized group.

- Fear about the humiliation that they have expecting by mingling with others

- Fear of acculturation is another important factor that causes their educational backwardness. All these factors stood as a barrier in the way of tribal education. Hence an affirmative action plan is very much needed for the educational upliftment of them. Here are some suggestions for the better rehabilitation and assimilation of their people to the mainstream society.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Here is some suggestion for the educational upliftment and for the assimilation to the tribes to the mainstream society.

1. There should be awareness class for the community about the life and facilities available in outer world,
2. There should have pre-primary education within their enclave and should teach them by-lingually (both in Malayalam and in their own language), for which educated youth among the tribes can be utilized. They should be appointed to teach the children to reduce their fear and reluctance.
3. Awareness classes should be given to the parents about the necessity of education, by which children have to improve their living condition, then only we can curtail the school dropout,
4. There should be awareness classes to teach and motivate the educated youth among the tribes and to guide them to presume higher education and seek job outside the forest,
5. There should be exclusive reservation for the communities such as Kattunaikkas and Cholanaikkas, as their children shows less interest in their studies and the drop

out among these students are high.

6. Some women empowerment programme also should be provided for them, like National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme,
7. Job opportunities outside the forest should be opened to them and provide necessary trainings for improving their abilities and,
8. In order to improve their soft skill and to train them in new skills there should be classes, seminar, or workshop in this regard and strict maintaining of all the activities is also very much needed for its success.

The main challenges of education in Wayanad, include, lack of facilities, and the language of instruction, which is the challenge for the tribal children. This in addition to social factors, economic factors, lack of interest in formal education, drop out and inadequate infrastructure such as roads, bridges, is very arduous in the rainy seasons. In many of the tribal areas in Wayanad there is no insecurity but owing to the many challenges, tribals are encountering such as lack of land, lack of permanent livelihoods, lack of conducive environment for tribal children at home which encourages children to drop out. Hence more government attention and initiatives is needed for the upliftment of the community for their better future and for the progress of the nation.

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