

# Scope of education and dropout among tribal students in Kerala -A study of Scheduled tribes in Attappady

**Dr.HaseenaV.A**

Assistant professor

Post Graduate Department of Economics

M.E.S Asmabi college,P.Vemaballur,Kodungallur,Kerala

Email.economicasmabi@gmail.com

&

**Dr.Ajims P. Mohammed**

Principal

M.E.S Asmabi College

P.Vemballur

Email:ajimspm@gmail.com

## ABSTARCT

Scheduled Tribes in India are generally considered to be 'Adivasis,' meaning indigenous people or original inhabitants of the country. The tribes have been confined to low status and are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream Hindu population. Psychologically, the Scheduled Tribes often experience passive indifference that may take the form of exclusion from educational opportunities, social participation, and access to their own land. All tribal communities are not alike. They are products of different historical and social conditions. They belong to different racial stocks and religious backgrounds and speak different dialects. Discrimination against women, occupational differentiation, and emphasis on status and hierarchical social ordering that characterize the predominant mainstream culture are generally absent among the tribal groups. Adivasis are not as a general rule regarded as unclean or polluted in the same way as the Scheduled Caste population is perceived by the mainstream culture. However, the mainstream Hindu population considers the general tribal population as primitive, technologically backward, and illiterate. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the tribes have been perceived as sub-humans who live under primitive conditions. All the reasons are the route cause of the alienation of tribals in education and the Dropout. By giving more emphasis on other activities in the tribal hamlet, they are ignoring the value of education.

**Key words:** Adivasis, tribal culture, Dropout, Alienation, Mainstream culture

## INTRODUCTION

India is homeland to a number of tribal communities with diverse eco-cultural, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. According to the 2001 Census, Scheduled Tribes (notified by the Government of India under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution) constitute 8.14% of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million. In the state of Kerala, 1% of the total population is tribal population, comprising of 36 unique Scheduled Tribes (ST) whose livelihoods are also varied: hunting-gathering, shifting cultivation, settled agriculture, contract labour, etc., are some of them. According to the 2001 Census, the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes of India is only 47.10%. Against the National literacy rate of 65.8%, this is appalling. Even in the State of Kerala with a high literacy rate at 90.92%, that of the Scheduled Tribes is far behind, at only 64.5%. Realizing that Scheduled Tribes are one of the most deprived and marginalized groups with respect to education, a host of programmes and measures have been initiated ever since independence of the country. Education of ST children is important not just due to a Constitutional obligation to equality of its citizen or special entitlements to ST, but because it is a crucial input in the nation's strategy of total development of tribal communities. However, despite nation's efforts to ensure constitutional equality, dignity and development that they themselves wish for, the tribal people have lagged behind in education owing to external as well as internal constraints, socio-economic and cultural background of the tribals and psychological problems of first generation learners etc.

The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. Although Scheduled Tribes are a minority, they constitute about 8.2 % of the total population in India (Census of India, 2001), or 85 million people in absolute number. The Scheduled Tribes are not discriminated against in the same way by the mainstream Hindu population as the Scheduled Caste population in India. While the latter group belongs to the lowest hierarchy of social order and is often considered impure or unclean, the Scheduled Tribes have, for the most part, been socially distanced and living outside the mainstream Hindu society. The areas inhabited by the tribal population constitute a significant part of the underdeveloped areas of the country. Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India.

Education is the most important instrument for human resource development and has a great significance. One cannot imagine education without schools as it plays a major role in moulding the basic ideas, habits and attitudes of the children, with a view to producing well balanced individuals. Schools provide not only education to the children but also keep them away from the social evils. The main problem in schools is the problem of stagnation and drop out phenomena. Education is the key that opens the door of life. It plays a pivotal role in social change and it brings perfections in human life, an upward mobility in social status, radical transformation in outlook and perception. Education is widely accepted as the essential tool for the attainment

of the developmental goals and leads to political consciousness, awareness of rights and duties among the people of a nation and it is the most important instrument for human resource development and has a great significance in the context of developing countries.

The Indian Constitution identifies and provides special consideration for certain ethnic minority groups, traditionally referred to as tribes or tribals, as Scheduled Tribes (STs) who constitute around 8 per cent of the total population of the country. There are 573 STs living in different parts of the country. Most of the tribal communities have their own languages and culture different from the language spoken in the state where they are located. There are more than 270 such languages. Tribal communities in Kerala are scattered in different districts. Of these the highest concentration is located in wayanad, Idukki and Attappady block of Plakkad District. There are more than 37 tribal communities in kerala.

Scheduled Tribes who have been historically out of the mainstream development initiatives partly due to the still continuing socio-economic barriers and partly due to the inadequacy of the Government programmes in reaching these disadvantaged groups, still find themselves in difficult to compete with other sections of the society. Tribes are very important in constituting the population of the country as they are 8.2 percent of the total population of India. They constitute 3.2 percent of the total population of Kerala. Tribal education has many problems to face as hindrance for development. These are external constraints and internal constraints.

**External constrains:** ST students constitutes 1.2 percent of the total enrollment in schools. The perspective adopted for educational development among tribal communities fails to adequately address the specific disadvantages characterizing tribal population .For instance, the population and distance norms formed by the government have not been beneficial to tribal locations because of their sparse population and sporadic residential patterns. Thogh Kerakla's performance compares well with those of other states. The disparities between the marginalized communities and other social groups in terms of quantitative and qualitative indicators. The disparities increase at higher and higher levels of education, particularly in technical and professional education which provide better access to more remunerative jobs. It theses disparities within the state that matter more in view of the high unemployment rate in the state and consequently the highly competitive nature of the labour market Further, in formulating policies and programmes for tribal education it is essential to understand the complex realities of tribal life and the expectation of tribals from the system, and this has never been done either by the tribal welfare department or by the education department. Consequently, no worthwhile policy for tribal education has been formed. Because the more pass percentage rate from the schools of STs can only produces more students for higher education. Besides most of the increase in

employment in the country and the state is taking place in the private sector rather than in the public sector. In such a context job reservation for STs in the public sector become less relevant today in accessing jobs by them.

**Internal constraints:** The internal problems of tribal education refer to the quality of school provision, suitable teachers, relevance of content and curriculum, medium of instruction, pedagogy, and special supervision. A majority of schools in tribal areas are without basic infrastructure facilities. Normally, school buildings in tribal areas have thatched roofs, dilapidated walls, and non-plastered floors. Research evidence shows that a large number of tribal schools do not have teaching-learning materials, or even blackboards. In tribal areas the opening of a school is equated with the posting of a teacher and same is the case with 'ashram' schools. Though the demand for changing the content and curriculum to suit the tribal context has been an old one, no serious effort has been made in this direction in any state, except for some sporadic pilot projects. The uniform structure and transaction of curriculum has put tribal children at a disadvantage. Apart from all this lack of awareness of the teachers about tribal culture and environment also force the tribal students to withdraw from education. All these issues are emerging in their primary and high school levels. These constraints force them to drop-out their education at very early levels and higher education will be only a dream for them.

### **Review of Literature**

Review of related literature is pre-requisite to actual planning of any scientific research. It allows the researcher to acquaint himself with current knowledge in the field or area in which he is going to conduct his research.

A comparison of the traditional and modern system and tribal higher education was made by **Narmadeswer Prased (1991)** who found that the tribe's men desire an education which may enables them to fit in to the modern world. Most of the students are dropping their education because of lack of suitability of present education with the tribal culture. The author suggested that the tribe's men should concentrate more on skilled occupations. Another important suggestion was for the setting up of special schools for them where adequate attention for them is ensured.

**Bairathi (1991)** has examined the role of education for tribal upliftment has said that the condition of school particularly in the interior parts of tribal settlements is worse. These are not well managed and there is shortage of teachers in most of the schools at all time. Primary level schools are managed by a single teacher. The teacher has to take care of not only the management of school, but also to teach many classes simultaneously in one big room. In such a condition a good standard of education cannot be attained. Shortage of teachers, lack of basic amenities as sitting arrangements, drinking water facilities, and high distance from home to school leads them to loose the interest in education and this force them to drop their study. He made the suggestion for improving the infrastructure facilities to improve the conditions of education and to remove Drop-out.

**Gadgil and Dandekar(1991)** has studied about the problem of wastages in tribal education by taking a batch of students in first standard in a given year following up in the subsequent years till the last grade are reached. i.e, fifth Drop-outs from school before completing the final grading of primary education constitutes wastes; and the incidence of wastage is computed from the proportion of Drop-out to the initial enrolment in the first grade. He reached the conclusion that attention by the teacher to a great extent can remove drop out. When the students are continuing their education in a better perspective then only they can easily get accessibility to higher education.

**The National Council of educational Research and training** made substantial contribution to the area of tribal education. A seminar on tribal education in India (**1993**) organized by the National council of educational research and Training discussed the various aspects of tribal education like the facilities available, coverage, wastage and stagnation, utilization of financial assistance, basic problem of tribal education, socio-economic problems, curriculum, methods and text books and the relative roles of Government and voluntary agencies in the education of tribal people. The seminar altogether has suggested a new revised curriculum for tribal education. Familiarity in tribal language by the teachers also is essential for the improvement in tribal educational attainment.

**The evaluation committee on the welfare of scheduled castes scheduled tribes and other backward communities in their Report (1993)**, reviewed the different stages of tribal education in Kerala. Many suggestions were put forward regarding pre-primary education, primary education, higher education welfare of tribal students, improvement of tribal schools, compulsory primary education, education concession, methods to identify the drop-outs, encouragements to the drop-outs to continue in their study etc.

**Bapat (1994)** studied about tribal education and a well planned system of education for tribals was suggested by to remove the ignorance prevalent among tribals. After analyzing the reasons for the slow progress in tribal education and to remove increased drop-out among tribal children, the author suggested the type of education for the tribal children and adults. The educational system for them should be based on the current cultural history of the tribals. At the end a few suggestions are put forward for the improvement of tribal education by the author by focusing mainly on tribal culture. Authorities should focus mainly on their culture.

**Tapse (1995)** Enumerating the difficulties likely to be experienced in the field of higher education among the tribal students recommended the remedial measures by which these difficulties should be overcome. He pleaded that tribal education must conserve and develop the aboriginal culture and religion.

**Srivastava (1996).**The author's argument was that when the percentage of literacy among the tribal communities increased when they attained sufficiently high levels of educational development and when they properly understood their rights and privileges, the integration would automatically be achieved if proper arrangements for tribal development would be taken.

**Burman (1996)** has given the figures relating to tribal literacy and has revealed the then existing state of affairs in the field of education with regard to literacy. The author found out that inadequate use of tribal language always leads them to make a wrong view about tribal education. Difficulty in the use of tribal languages will force the students to drop their course at very stage of their education.

**Objectives of the study**

1. To examine the educational facilities available to the tribal students in higher education in Kerala.
2. To study the constraints in tribal education
3. To find out the causes of Drop-out among Tribal students in Kerala.
4. To document the policies and programmes initiated by the Government to improve the educational attainments of Tribal students.

**Hypothesis**

1. There is a positive relationship between the cultural factors and educational attainment among tribal students in Kerala.
2. There is an exclusionary disparity between the STs and non STs in terms of enrollment and attainment in higher education.

**Table 1: Dropout rate in Attappady**

Location	2008-2009		2009-2010		2010-2011	
	<i>Number of Dropouts</i>	<i>Percentage of Drop outs</i>	<i>Number of Dropouts</i>	<i>Percentage of Drop outs</i>	<i>Number of Dropouts</i>	<i>Percentage of Drop outs</i>
Agali	187	32.5	149	33.2	120	30.9
Pudhoor	190	33.1	145	32.3	124	27.6
Sholayoor	197	34.2	154	34.3	144	32.1

**Source: Survey Data**

**Tribesfolk in Attappady**

Tribal hamlets of Attappady are found in all the three panchayaths, namely, Agali, Pudhur, and Sholayoor. Irula hamlets dominate in all the three panchayaths. Kurumbas reside only in Pudhur and Sholayoor is an exclusively Irula Panchayath. Numerically, Irulas form the largest tribal community (82.25 per cent) followed by Mudugas (12.53 per cent), and Kurumbas (5.22 per cent). The annual compound growth rate of Kurumbas during the period 1961 to 1981 was 2.44 per cent as against 1.61 per cent in the case of Mudugas, and 2.41 per cent in the case of Irulas

**Table 2: Reasons for dropout from the perception of teachers**

Reasons	Frequency	Percent	Rank
Lack of interest in study	60	100.0	1
Economic problem	55	91.7	2
Health problem	40	66.7	5
Distance from home to school	48	80.0	4
Increases household responsibilities	51	85.0	3
Lack of awareness of parents	32	53.3	7
Crime activities in school	5	8.3	11
Language problem	24	40.0	8
Early marriage	19	31.7	9
Lack of food	5	8.3	10
Lack of proper guidance	34	56.7	6

**Source: Survey Data**

## **Reasons for Drop-out among tribal students**

- 1. Low socio-economic status:** - Tribals enjoy low socio-economic status. Miller (1988) has identified four major classes of variables such as cognitive variables, physical variables and motivational variables where disadvantaged learners show poor performance as compared with the advantaged groups.
- 2. Tribal concepts of pleasure:-** Tribals are giving more importance for their pleasure such as dance, music and other types of entertainments prevalent in the society.
- 3. Existence of ethnic stereotypes:** - Stereo typing is a natural and inevitable. It helps us to organize life. But such typing turns in to prejudice or stereotypes when based on little facts and it is used as a mechanism to establish the myth of racial or cultural superiority.
- 4. Tribal concept of learning:-** In most of the tribal cultures learning is an active pleasurable event mostly carried on among peers. But the existing system of education does not take in to account their learning style.
- 5. Linguistic problems:-**Tribal languages, except a very few, belong to Austro-Asiatic language family and are different from dominant non tribal languages of India which belong either to the Indo European or the Dravidian family. In most of the time tribals face acute problems in language.
- 6. Problem of learning English:** - Tribals need for English is great, they face problems in learning than their non-tribal counterparts. For tribals their typical use of regional languages interferes with English. For them English are 5th or 6th languages.
- 7. Problems in learning to read:-**Tribals have long oral tradition. Their culture is oral. Their history, myths and traditions are orally handed down from generation to generation. Most of the language does not have scripts of their own; their oral tradition still continues to exist.
- 8. Psychological problems:** - Financial problems of the tribals always make the tribals in a very depressed condition. They have lots of wants and but the means to satisfying them is very less. It leads to many psychological issues
- 9. Academic and administrative problems:** - Even though the number of programmes for the upliftment of tribal education is many, the percentage of people receiving these benefits is very less. Administrative authorities are always showing very neutral attitude towards the education of the tribals.

**10. Indifferent attitude of tribal parents:** - Tribal parents are mostly illiterate. They always show a very indifferent attitude towards the education of their children. They are interested in providing household responsibilities to their children a very early stage of their education. “The parents of these students do not have any relationship with the society outside and are unaware of the importance of education. All teachers are talented. Teaching such children is a herculean task”.

**11. Indifferent attitude of tribal teachers:** Teachers do not take much effort to improve the educational level of the tribal students. Lack of communication, high level of absenteeism in the class, bad result in study, lack of attention in classroom by the tribals are some of the factors that has increased the indifferent attitude of the teachers towards the tribal students.

**12. Indifferent attitude of tribal students:** Students clearly said don't like someone forcing me to get up early in the morning. So, I was unhappy to go to school... Subjects like Malayalam and Science are good for me, but, English, Hindi and Mathematics are very tough. I could not follow English and Hindi classes. Whenever I commit mistakes, in front of others, teachers used to scold me, beat and pinch my ears. You ask others; almost 90% of the children have similar experiences. See, their beating caused swelling on my legs. Moreover, the staffs ridicule us by calling , adivasi Fed up with all these, my two friends and I decided to run away from the school. One day, we climbed on the compound wall and got on to the branch of a tree outside that was almost touching the compound wall, climbed down, and somehow or other managed to reach our settlement”.

In addition to all the above causes some other causes can also be cited as the background for the reasons for Drop-out. They are:

1. Extreme level of poverty, deprivation and vulnerability
2. High levels of exclusion, developmental, social and economic
3. Extremely low level of empowerment-political, social and economic
4. Low level of access to entitlement
5. Practically zero participation in development matters with no autonomy in any form of decision-making
6. Poor human development with low level of literacy and access to health care
7. Rapid alienation of assets like land
8. Alarming depletion of social capital especially traditional forms of organization and leadership.
9. Quick deterioration of traditional knowledge system and cultural attainment.

10. Fast increasing tendency to use tribal people as ‘cat’s –paws in criminal activities like illicit distillation, cultivation of narcotic plants, stealing of forest wealth etc.
11. Dependency-inducing developmental programmes relying on distribution of benefits rather than building up of capabilities.
12. Implementation of ad hoc and stereotyped developmental programmes in the absence of proper planning.
13. Weak delivery system of public services.
14. Very weak monitoring system.
15. High level of exploitation of women by out-side

Change in curriculum would remain incomplete unless patterns of teacher-student interaction also change in the direction of coercion-free involvement of the ST students. The knowledge of social reality that teachers bring to the classroom, and their perception of the role of education are among the key determinants of teacher’s behavior. To a great extent, the norms of teacher-student interaction are shaped by the training that teachers receive prior to employment. Knowledge of social reality’ and role of education under prevailing social conditions do form a part of present training curricula, but like much else in teacher training, these segments receive a ritualistic observance. Teachers cannot be oriented towards new types of classroom interactions without being exposed to specific issues of social reality and functioning of school.

**Tribal child’s days in usual days inside their habitat** A child’s day in a settlement begins with a choice: whether to get up early or laze around is his/her own choice and not forced upon. It is not unusual to see many children sleeping in the open with their pet dogs even during the noon-time. When compared to boys, girls get up early and they help their parents and grandparents in daily chores like fetching water from the nearby river, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, collecting fire-wood, cooking and serving food, looking after younger siblings, cleaning rooms, yard, etc. When parents go for work, a girl child takes care of the home along with her grandparents (if they stay back) and her younger siblings till her parents come back home. The boys usually move inside the forest, either with their parents or with their friends, for collection of forest produce. While roaming inside the forests, they eat whatever edible items they get on their way and whenever they come across a river, they never miss a chance to take a bath and do fishing. They also help their parents in the transaction of collected n.w.f.p (non-wood forest products) item with tribal co-operative society/agents/non-tribes and buy provisions. In addition to these, they help their parents’ in house construction. Bringing bamboo from the forests, cutting and shaping them for making walls and doors for house, making hearth etc., are some of their jobs in the settlement. Both boys and girls do various activities in their settlements such as climbing on trees, swimming, fishing, making *poonikotta* (bamboo basket used for the

collection of forest resources), singing etc. Small children, irrespective of gender, play kitchen activities by imitating their parents. There is no hard and fast rule or appropriate timing for any of their daily activities. Moreover, they are not controlled by the elders. Punishments in the form of scolding, abusing, beating etc., are usually very rare. They do not even abuse their children for any wrong they commit. If they commit any wrong, it is taken easily and the elders very patiently and politely teach the young ones and advise them not to repeat it again. In any tribal settlement inside the forests, a common scene that one can notice is that of children playing, fishing and swimming in the river nearby. Children are free birds' in their habitat and have unrestricted freedom to move around and enjoy their life. —They learn through participation in economic production and other activities organized by adults, beginning as voluntary participants who perform simple and repetitive tasks while having observational access to the mature practices of elders. It may be that no one pays attention unless one does something wrong; they receive instruction only as a corrective feedback and guidance. Gradually they progress to more advanced tasks they see others perform. In short, a typical day in the forest habitat of a tribal child is care free and uncontrolled.

### **Relevance of the finding for policy formulation**

In a broad sense, the socio-economic and cultural factors among tribals can be outlined as poverty and poor economic conditions, social customs, cultural ethos, lack of awareness and understanding of the value of formal education, conflict and gap between the home and school, etc. Studies on educational deprivation of tribals have inevitably linked it to their poor economic condition and poverty.

Education of tribals cannot be left to short-term Plan strategies. It is important that planners take a long-term view which is embedded in a meaningful policy framework. The most important need to improve the educational status of STs is to improve the strength of the students in school levels. Following are some important findings on tribal education for policy framework.

- Emphasis should be on quality and equity rather than quantity as has been the case in the past. The prime focus should be on provision of quality education that makes tribal communities economically effective and independent.
- In the tribal context, it is essential that the school schedule be prepared as per local requirement rather than following a directive from the state.
- Though it has been highlighted time and again, non concrete step has been taken to provide locally relevant material to tribal students. Availability of locally relevant materials will not only facilitate faster learning but also help children develop a sense of affiliation to school.
- In order to make education effective and sustainable, building partnership between the community and the government is important

- Environment building is of immense importance in the context of educational development among tribal communities. Community awareness and community mobilization, which are its core elements, should received equate importance and attention.
- The level of motivation for education is very low among drop out students. . Age factor is influencing drop out to a great extent. Stagnation is common among and high among the drop outs and is a contributing factor to become dropout. Irregular attendance in the class is the route for drop out. Most of the drop outs are from very poor and low income families. Many dropouts are daily wagers. The unawareness about the importance of education is a contributing factor for drop out. Peer group influence also influences the students to stop their education at very early stages. Drop out rat among boys and girls are same in all area.
- Decentralization of education management is another aspect that needs special consideration in the context of tribal areas.
- Skill development, competency building, and teacher’s motivation also need to be strengthened for sustaining educational development. The teacher should be made the centre of educational transformation, and therefore, must remain the primary facilitator.
- .Historical injustice toward tribals should be removed. STs who are studying for higher education are very low. Even in UG and PG courses their strength is very low.
- .in a broader level the first step to improve and to increase tribal’s participation in Higher education is to improve their interest in study even from the primary level. Motivation classes, awareness programmes, special incentives, more number of schools in tribal areas, more flexible teachers etc. has to be included in the educational streams. Automatically the pass percentage ratio of the STs will increase. That will produce more Ts in higher education.

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