

EDUCATIONAL PROSPECTS AMONG PANIYA TRIBE OF KERALA: AN ANALYSIS

**Jaisreekumar V. and **Eldhose Varghese*

This paper discusses some issues concerning equality, quality and availability of Education by focusing on people belonging to paniya tribe residing at Wayanad District of Kerala. The poor financial status and Lack of awareness becomes a barrier in their education. The study suggests the methods for improvising education system among the Paniyas.

Keywords: *Paniya tribe-Kerala, Education System, Paniya-wayanad District.*

Evidence from anthropological research proves that about 4000 years ago in forest areas human beings habituated in groups. Because they lived in these areas even before the foreign invasion they are known as 'Tribes' meaning pre dwellers. They are called as 'gothravargakar' or 'girivargakar' in Malayalam, literally meaning 'people who live in groups' and 'people who live in hills' respectively. The term scheduled tribes applies to them as they are included in section 342 of the Indian Constitution. Modern philosophers prefer to call them 'dalits' meaning 'those who have been suppressed'.

The Tribes who lived here exhibited a high order of social and cultural status.

1. They practiced socialism and communism even before China and Russia dreamed about it.
2. They have the ability to adapt to any hostile environment.
3. They detected the presence of elephants through odour.
4. They could identify tubers they could be eaten during each season.
5. Tribes knew to collect honey from high branches without climbing them
6. They grasped the technique of catching birds using gum.
7. They knew to climb trees.
8. They knew to collect forest products.

* Kerala Institute for Research Training and Development Studies of SC and ST, (KIRTADS), Chevayur, Calicut, E-mail: jaisreekumar@gmail.com

** Department of Anthropology, R. V. Nagar, Pondicherry University, Puducherry.

9. They knew to fish with traps.
10. Moreover, they knew the productive medical use of various herbs in the forest.

But this wisdom alone is not enough to survive these days. With the changing times, the world has changed; forests have given way to suburbs.

This indicates the essentiality of education among tribes. Attaining modern education doesn't mean leaving behind traditional knowledge. Whatever exists should be maintained, enhanced, and self sustained, and later, new knowledge acquired. Modern education has a significant role to play in the development of scheduled tribes. Tribes were for a long time suppressed, kept as slaves, and sold like cattle, resulting in their physical and mental humiliation. Education is the remedy to cure this humiliation. Education for salvation is what should be the purpose of tribal education. Salvation must be defined in terms of ending poverty, illiteracy, superstitions, slavery and exploitation.

If we concentrate on three factors, changes can be made in tribal education levels:

1. All children in school going age must reach schools.
2. They must be retained in school at least until primary education is achieved avoiding drop outs.
3. Providing alternate education for elders.

For this a local survey must be done in villages and a list of all children aged 5 years who have to join school in the next academic year be prepared. In the very beginning of each academic year it must be assured that everyone in the list is receiving formal education. But there are lots of problems prevailing in the existing educational system. So there are alternative schools established as part of the search for a suitable environment for tribal education. But in most tribal villages, the situation doesn't permit alternative education. It is even more difficult to retain the enrolled students in the schools. Dropouts among adivasi students are more due to

1. Guardians taking them to work places when they go for work.
2. Older children being kept to baby-sit younger ones.
3. Children asked to stay at home to prepare food for working parents.

To those who stay back at home during school going age and those who have crossed that age the importance of education must be aptly envisaged.

The adivasi is like an elephant that doesn't know its massiveness or strength and allows itself to be led by mere human beings. Therefore the main lesson to be taught to an adivasi is to resist exploitation. Every adivasi must be able to recognize his true potential.

EDUCATION AND MARGINALIZATION

Marginalization refers to a phenomenon in which certain groups of people are relegated to powerless positions within the society due to factors like caste, class, religion, gender and occupation. The consequences of marginalization systematically block the individual and the entire community from availing the rights, opportunities and resources. Education is considered as the most powerful tool to wipe out all inequalities and also to promote human development, accelerate social transformation as well as to achieve economic progress. Equitable distribution of educational facilities is essential in order to overcome the deprivation of education. This paper discusses some issues concerning equality, quality and availability of education by focusing on people belonging to Paniya tribe residing at Pulpalli, Wayanad district of Kerala. The tribal population of Kerala is 364,189 as per the 2001 Census, which works out to 1.14 percent of the State population. The sex ratio of the tribes is 977, whereas for the general population it is 1,000. The districts where the tribes are concentrated are the hill regions of Wayanad, Palakkad, Idukki, Kottayam and Trivandrum. The district of Wayanad alone accounts for 36 percent of the total tribal population in the state and Alappuzha has the lowest concentration at 0.87 percent. The Paniya tribe constitutes the largest group with 56,952 persons and the Malakkuruvaan tribe is the smallest group with only 8 members.

Article 46 of the Constitution of India states that, "The state shall promote, with special care, the education and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation". But in India, patriarchal nature of the society and the caste based stratification play the main villain for the education sector and the objective of attaining equal access to education for all. In Kerala we can see that students from the castes like Paniya, Adiya, Kadar, Kattunaika etc are lagging far behind the mainstream population in education. It is visible from the enrolment rate and the educational standard of enrolled students. Without facilitating proper educational facilities and curriculum, we cannot assure sustainable development in the education sector.

On visiting some villages in Wayanad district of Kerala over a period of two weeks, this researcher could see that many children from the disadvantaged, excluded groups were forcibly being sent to work to support

their family, thereby losing their opportunity to get themselves educated. From these communities, some children are enrolled in schools, but fail to attend the classes regularly because of several reasons. Some of these reasons are lack of parents' awareness, lack of motivation to the inappropriate syllabus, and lack of a broadened vision in education sector.

EXCLUSION IN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Exclusion in education can happen in many ways. Firstly, the text books are ethnocentric in nature since the time students started using it. By analyzing textbooks one can identify so many factors to prove this argument. It glorifies urban life and white collar jobs and at the same time it portrays rural life as not a preferable one and farmer's life as least preferable. This is in a country where 70% of the people live in rural areas. Secondly, our text books always present the needs and aspirations of the male population as more important than that of the female population. This tendency only helps society's patriarchal nature to grow more. These textbooks also neglect the minorities and their existence in India. The identity and existence of small religious groups like Jews and Zoroastrians are neglected in the textbooks with the primal vision of Tribal groups. Textbooks are consciously trying to picturize them as mere sub-organs of Hinduism. In Kerala, there are forty eight tribal communities throughout the State, out of which thirty eight are scheduled tribes and the rest are denotified tribal communities. Most of them have their own religion and vision about the Universe. For example, people from Paniya community are devotees of the goddess 'Ippimala teyya' and they should be considered as a separate religious group. The 'Kuttichathan', 'Kuliyar', 'Kattu Bhagavathi' or 'Kali', 'Malakkar', and 'Mariyamma' are the other chief gods and goddesses of Paniyas. Like this, every tribal community has a unique religion and worship practice. This pluralistic nature of our society should be revealed at least through our textbooks. Our present day textbooks can be seen only as the instruments to make a unified past for the whole of India and to ignore its multiple pasts and history. National curriculum framework clearly states that any curriculum should be framed prioritizing a student friendly environment and it should be able to promote their skills. They emphasize the relating of education with the students' natural environment and developing of the child's skills together with imparting formal education. This is only possible through creating multiple textbooks by taking into consideration the children's culture and vernacular language. The inability to recruit and train teachers who are sensitive to disadvantaged students and capable of dealing with students from different strata with diversity remains another major obstacle to provide social equality in education.

CULTURAL EXCLUSION

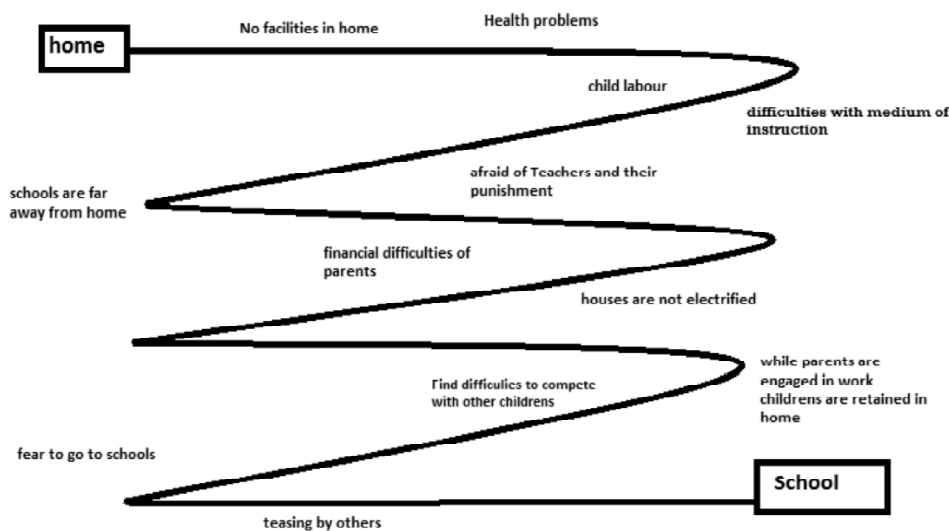
Tribal children are excluded culturally too. By the word culture, here we mean mainly the medium of instruction. There are 461 scheduled tribe communities in India and all of them have their distinct languages. But these languages are ignored and it has been seen as the marginalization of mother tongues of tribes and peasants. This list is added with thousands of other languages which our Constitution has identified and recorded. In Kerala, every textbook is printed either in Malayalam or in English. Teachers use Malayalam as the medium of instruction to explain the textual material. This also happens in societies where a majority of people use various other languages for communication. Students of primary classes may face difficulty to grasp what the teacher teaches and this automatically reduces their interest in studies. The Indian Constitution has judiciously mandated that every child should be educated through his or her mother tongue till the age of 14. Here it is to be noted that our government is neglecting the law existing in our country. However, the child needs to be taught to read and write in their mother tongue and every child should be trained to speak in their own mother tongue.

STRUCTURAL EXCLUSION

Another form of exclusion is through caste, religion, language, gender and ethnicity. The hierarchical structure of society through the caste system is the most prevalent among these. People who belong to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes suffer a lot because of this structuring of the society from time immemorial. Earlier they were considered as untouchables. Even though in 1955, the practice of untouchability was legally banned and made a punishable offence, they are discriminated in various contexts, even in class rooms. This is more prevalent in rural India including the villages of Kerala. It is observed that students belonging to Paniya community limit their friendship only to those who belong to their own community. There is a considerable growth in the rate of enrolment of children from tribal communities in government schools, but it does not imply that most of the children from tribal communities are going to schools. It is relevant to say here that the literacy rate of Paniya community is 5 percent. In order to find the reasons for this, studies were conducted by this researcher, in the schools of Wayanad district of Kerala state. The study revealed that caste and religion based exclusionary practices are still prevailing in the schools of Kerala. The percentage of dropout of children belonging to this community is high.

Children from Paniya community are more backward than others since most of the parents are illiterate. Even though most of the parents want to

map showing reasons for high rate of dropout among Paniya children



map showing education status of the children

send their children to schools, they are not able to do so because of their poor financial status. Due to lack of awareness, their living place also is not appropriate for children's well being. Unclean living habitat and poverty makes their children sick often which hampers their regular school attendance and becomes a barrier to their education.

IS PUNISHMENT NECESSARY?

The punishment methods adopted by schools are also most condemnable. While visiting one colony, children displayed various methods of punishment which they receive in the schools. Corporal punishment was banned from schools many years ago, but it is still prevalent in our schools. In India, education is becoming more and more biased. Inferior education for the backward students, middle level education for the middle class and excellent education for those at the top of the hierarchy is the present public practice. Our formal education system has become the playground of commercialization and all out competition. In this context, we need to create a novel learning method to promote creativity of children by taking their culture into consideration.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Education to dropouts: All excluded children in the age group of 6-14 years should be brought into the ambit of education. Separate training centers should be established by the government to prepare children to be enrolled in the appropriate classes according to their age.
2. School improvement programs: Governments should take initiative to improve integration of excluded children, train teachers to understand children's behavior and culture and to teach systematically. Teachers can also be trained on maximizing children's learning ability through adoption of innovative child centric teaching methodologies.
3. Sensitization of school administration should be undertaken to reduce biases against children and inclusion of children in school activities.
4. Work with the community: School administration should establish effective school management committees which are authorized to conduct school development activities. These committees have to carry out regular motivation classes for parents and children.
5. Teacher training institutions should train their students to adopt multi lingual approach and inclusion pedagogy.

References

- Chathukulam, Jose and John, M. S., (2006), "*Issues in Tribal Development; The recent experience of Kerala*", in Govinda Chandra Rath. *Tribal Development in India*. New Delhi. Sage Publication.
- Majumdar, D.N, T. N. Madan. (1986), *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*, Mayur Paperbacks.
- Nandakumar, K., (2011), *Nange Ippimalena Makka*, PEEP Wayanad.
- Tylor, E. B. (1990), *Dictionary of Anthropology*, Goyal Publishers and distributors.

