

Socio-Economic Indicators and Quality of Life of the Scheduled Castes of Kerala: An Intra-community Assessment

Aparna S¹, D. Rajasenan² and Rajeev B³

¹Director, Centre for the Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP), Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), Kochi, Kerala, India; Email: rajasenan@cusat.ac.in

²Research Scholar, Department of Applied Economics, Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), Kochi, Kerala, India, Email: aparnashiva1@gmail.com

³Assistant Professor, CSSEIP, CUSAT, Email: rajeevbhaskars@cusat.ac.in

Abstract: Though, the SCs in Kerala are in an improved position in an all India comparison, still SCs are considered as an outlier group in the socially developed state of Kerala. They are backward in every facet of socio-economic criteria and quality of life indicators. The article tries to endorse the exclusion of the community in an intra-community delineation using both quantitative and qualitative contexts. 500 samples are amassed to work out the inclusion-exclusion based on SC development schemes using multi-stage stratified-random sampling. The samples for the SC households have been classified into sub-community levels in various districts. The study shows that there is no lack of development projects targeting the SCs development but governance failure makes the development schemes unfavourable to the SCs of Kerala as it does not generate the desired dynamics of income and employment multipliers. Inter-community differences in the socio economics of the SC community show that considerable differences are identified in the SC community and the sub-communities like Cheruman and Kanakkan. The same difference is also noticed in the standard of living among the various SC sub-communities like Kuravan, Parayan, Kanakkan and Vettuvan.

Keywords: Quality of life, Standard of Living Index, Scheduled Castes, Education, Employment, Income

1. INTRODUCTION

Kerala's inclusive development pattern, peculiar among the Indian states, giving opportunity to everyone in development discourse with high doses of investment in education and health sectors was considered as a special model to be imitated by the development thinkers globally as 'Kerala Model of Development'. This was probably an apt one to a country or state with low per-capita income for the 1960s and 1970s and hence Kerala model of development became a global dialogue in the development of development thinking. But the situation in Kerala in the mid-1980s made a big shift with the increased inflow of foreign remittances. Soon exclusionary leanings with noticeable inequality in income distribution and associated ramifications in poverty and education attainments. Nonetheless, the development indicators turned to be true only in a central tendency level, it is untrue in statistical dispersion framework identifying some communities in Kerala as outliers of the development dynamics and the Scheduled Caste's in Kerala is one such group. A cursory touch of their socio-economics gives a clear evidence that they are miserably backward and excluded in the areas of education, health, land owning and even in socio-cultural settings. Intensive institutional interferences in the form of development schemes since

independence, starting with Integrated Rural Development Projects to the present Scheduled Caste Development Projects both on the part of the Central and State governments, have resulted, in instead of uplifting the SC community to a situation of increasing immiseration, exclusion and hatred. Distilling the result in a development process of the Scheduled Castes, it shows implementation and governance lacunae, which in turn dampen the dynamics of development and hence it does not generate the requisite multiplier originally contemplated. In the light of this, it is worthy to identify the ins and outs for the formulation of such dampening dynamics of development of the SC community despite heavy doses of spending year to year to bring the outliers from the shackles of shame to fame and inclusion. To address these, it seems necessary to camouflage the perception of the community before embarking on any specific inclusion agenda in SC development activation.

2. SCS IN KERALA

For historical reasons the SC population of Kerala is less in comparison to other Indian states, as the SCs in Kerala is around 9.5 percent of the total population. Though Kerala is considered to be a progressive state, the ills of caste system are also paradoxically at the peak. Accordingly, the socio-economic indicators like, literacy, education (primary, secondary and higher education), Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) are piteously low in comparison to other social groups in Kerala. SC community in Kerala is a historically left out community from the main activities of the society and economy. This is generally considered as the reason for the low economic status and living in the society. SC history is entangled with the SC-Christians and SC-Muslims and hence they are not Hindu alone in Kerala.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

Caste and economic structures are in a way determined by the access to productive resources (Gerth and Mills, 1946; Dumont, 1980). Goli et. al (2015) explain the reasons for the multidimensional poverty among the SCs and it is the skewed land and wealth distribution and educational differences. It is equally important to identify a Poverty-Inequality Trade-off (Ravallion, 2005) as it explains high inequality leads to low poverty and empowerment vice-versa. This is based on the Kuznets hypothesis, rising tides flatten itself, growth initially triggers inequality but will settle later (Kuznets (1955). For an outlier community like the SCs education plays a crucial role. With this end in view the government initiates a plethora schemes that are meant to educate the marginalized for their socio-economic upliftment, which includes measures to improve educational infrastructure in most of the SC hubs, provide reservation in admissions, financial help in the form of grants to the students (Thorat, 2009).

Conceptually, the Scheduled Castes development of Kerala is based on poverty trap framework, according to it poverty breeds poverty and therefore it moves forward unintermittingly and hence ending to poverty trap framework. This is falling deleteriously in all walks of their life as of employment, income, education, asset holding and socio-politic spheres with differing vicissitudes. Social and economic oppression for long period make them to have only low educational attainments which in turn help them to attain low profile jobs with very low material achievement. This is working in a vicious circle of poverty level and finally they are entrapped in poverty trap.

Data are amassed with due consideration of the SC sub-community (intra-community) so as to work out the inclusion/exclusion based on SC development schemes in each zone. This will help to develop the sampling process based on multi-stage proportionate-stratified-random sampling. 500 sample households constitute the total sample size for the study. The samples for the SC households have been classified into sub-community levels in various districts.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Education

The educational attainment is pivotal in determining the occupational profile and thereby the income earning capacity of an individual. It is more important in the case of marginalized social groups like the SCs as they do not have any inherited assets in most of the cases. Hence, earnings of a community are based on better education and employment and these are the only options for these groups to escape from the clutches of vicious nexus of poverty, inequality and low living

standards emerging from the segregated living pattern. Here, the data on educational profile of the household members are discussed for those above 6 years to get a clear grasp of the present situation of level of education and thereby connect further to it with employment and livelihood situation of those above 18 years. Figure 1 is a clear elucidation of the same. It shows that illiterates are more among the Cheruman and Kanakkan (18.8 percent and 24.5 percent). Kanakkan has only 2.6 percent of the graduates which is less compared to the overall percentage. The proportion of graduates is less among the Kuravan and Thandan as well.

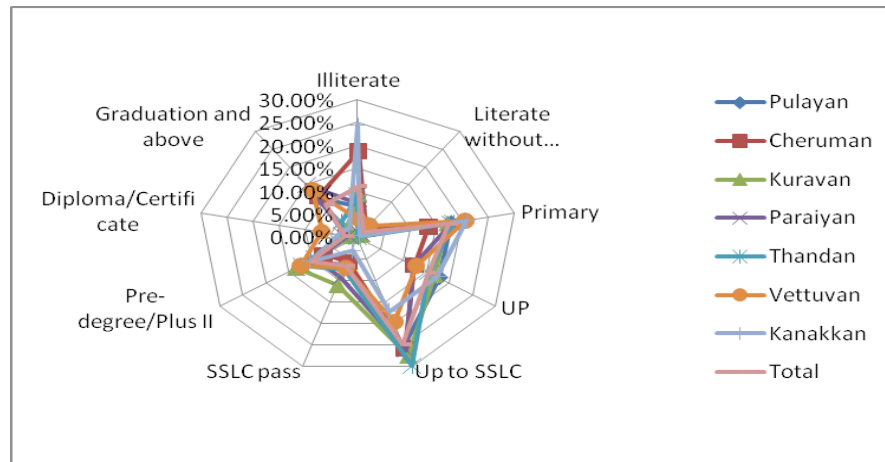


Figure. 1: Community and Education

Source: Survey data

The educational profile also differs largely based on gender. The percentage of graduates and illiterates are more among the females than the males. The results of other educational profiles are similar with a trivial difference. Figure 2 is a clear indication of the inferences obtained.



Figure. 2: Gender and Education

Source: Survey data

The educational profile based on the age (Figure 2) is a clear proof that the elder generation of the SC communities have been averse in terms of getting educated, however various schemes and programmes and assistances have helped the younger groups to attain better education. In fact the field inference shows that the youngsters are more aware of the advantages of getting educated and the importance of education in getting a good job and respectable position in the society. However, another major finding from the field data is that the educational attainment of the younger groups is also less and confined to graduate level only.

4.2 Employment

In spite of the fact that the dropout ratio and unemployment are low, the inferences from the field shows that full-time and secured employment is still a myth among the majority. The type of employment for the 911 employed members is evaluated based on community and gender. Figure 3 shows the community-wise results. Majority (42.5 percent) of the SC community members are wage earners in the off-arm sector. Public sector and private-sector employment are 14.4 percent and 10 percent respectively. 12.4 percent employment is obtained from the employment guarantee scheme. Self-employment is very less at 11.6 percent (total for self-employed farming, off-farming and animal-husbandry). Community-wise, the proportion of government employees are more among the Pulayan and Vettuvan community. Thandan and Vettuvan, along with Pulayan have more private sector employees.

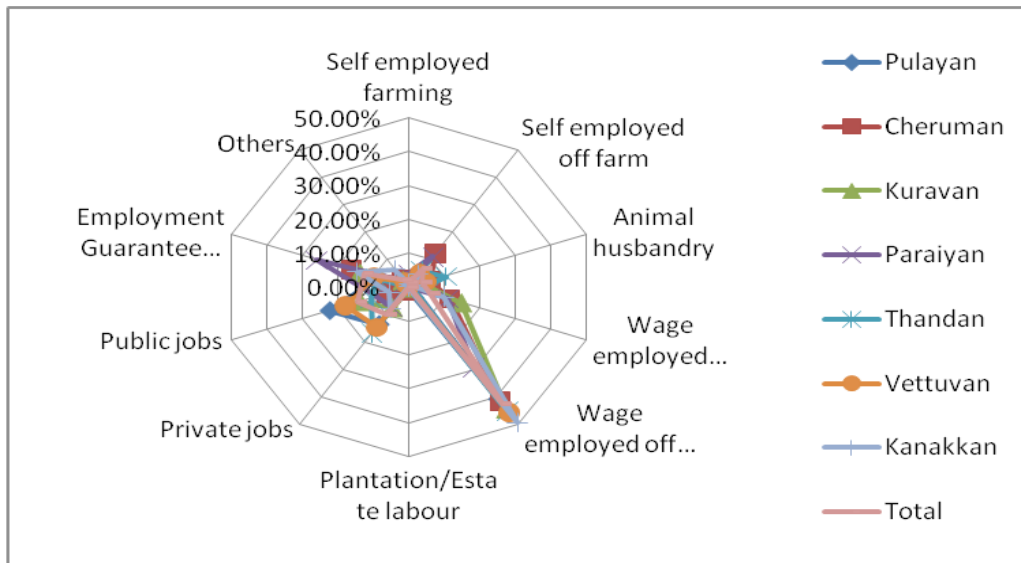


Figure. 3: Communities and Main Employment

Source: Survey data

The reservation in the government sector has largely helped the SC communities to get into the government sector regular jobs. However, even the 14 percent of the SC community members work in the government sector are working mostly in the lower ladder jobs like sweeper, peon or at the most in clerical jobs. This is due to the lack of education and low skill sets to obtain a good job. Needless to say, that the situation of the remaining SC community members is dismal in getting a regular employment is a major issue to most of the SCs. Land ownership among the SCs is very less and hence own agriculture activity not carried out by most of the members. Employment pattern shows that most are working as wage laborer's and this is highly seasonal in nature. The irregular pattern of employment makes their earning erratic and hence has a high toll on the household income levels. For the employment guarantee scheme as well, the number of days of employment are limited per year. Inferences from the field data show that there is very less distinction between the main and subsidiary employments. The MNREGS scheme has been the prime subsidiary employment for the SCs.

4.3 Individual Income

Individual earnings of the employed household members are compared based on gender and community and the average scores are shown in Table 1. Overall, the average male income is more than the female income. However, among the Pulayan community, the mean income levels of females are more than the males. The Pulayan and Vettuvan have the highest mean income (Rs. 5802 and Rs. 5381) and the Kanakkan community has the lowest income of Rs. 3491. The community-wise average income is shown in Figure 4. Thiruvananthapuram, Ernakulam and Thrissur have the high scores of average income and Idukki and Palakkad districts have lower scores as given in Figure 5. The average income for the three districts is more than Rs. 5500 whereas the income for Idukki and Palakkad is Rs. 3576 and Rs. 3721.

Table 1. Average Individual Income

Community	Sex	Income
Pulayan	Male	5600.2565
	Female	6164.3333
	Total	5802.9471
Cheruman	Male	4633.0893
	Female	3366.5075
	Total	4159.0056
Kuravan	Male	4648.2917
	Female	3259.6970
	Total	4082.5679
Paraiyan	Male	4982.7812
	Female	3976.5000
	Total	4572.8148
Thandan	Male	5043.9512
	Female	3678.6800
	Total	4526.8030
Vettuvan	Male	5918.6154
	Female	4430.3636
	Total	5381.8689
Kanakkan	Male	3724.3521
	Female	3076.9750
	Total	3491.0631
Total	Male	5046.4031
	Female	4521.6627
	Total	4851.7135

Source: Survey data

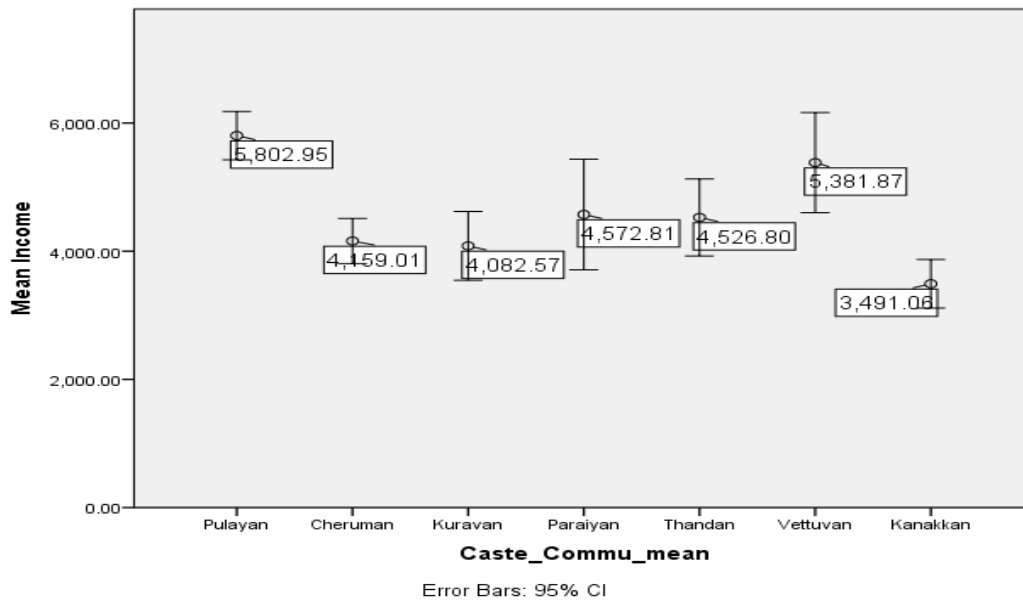


Figure 4 Community and Average Income

Source: Survey data

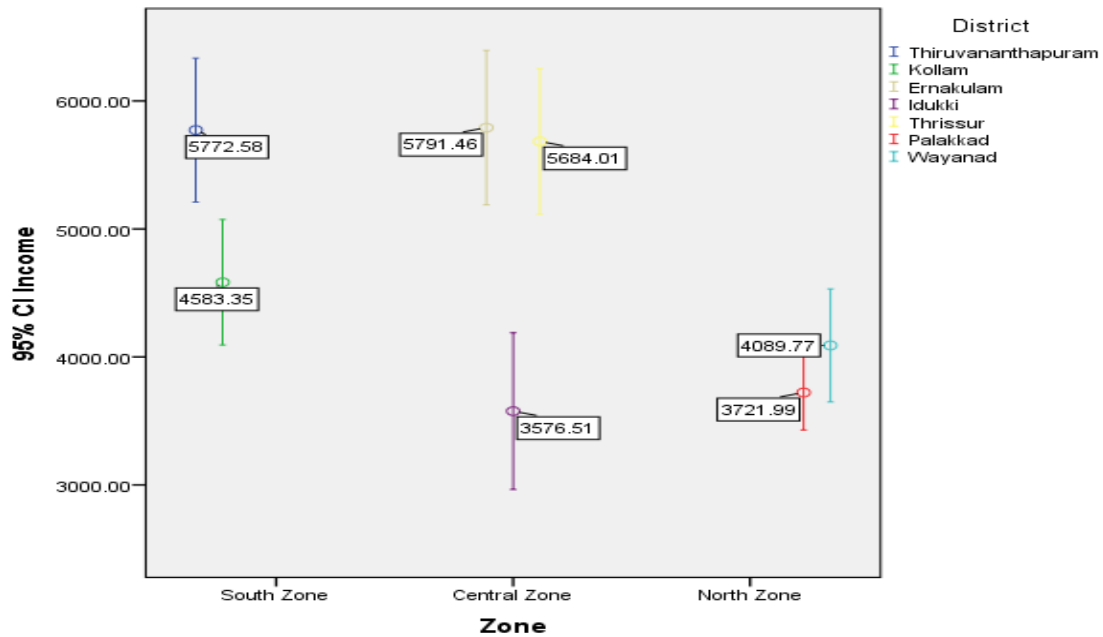


Figure 5 District and Individual Income

Source: Survey data

To further gauge the difference in income levels based on community and region, the ANOVA is used (Table 2). The ANOVA results for income are significant for zone, district and community and hence it is confirmed that there is significant difference in the earning levels of SCs in terms of zone, district and community.

Table 2 ANOVA

Zone					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	384368968.970	2	192184484.485	20.646	.000
Within Groups	8451974941.254	908	9308342.446		
Total	8836343910.224	910			
District					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	718913672.260	6	119818945.377	13.344	.000
Within Groups	8117430237.964	904	8979458.228		
Total	8836343910.224	910			
Community					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	692464715.262	6	115410785.877	12.811	.000
Within Groups	8143879194.962	904	9008715.924		
Total	8836343910.224	910			

4.4 Household's Standard of Living

The primary data and field inferences confirm considerable inter-community differences in the standard of living. To appraise this, a Standard of Living Index (SLI) is worked out based on the perceptions of the people. SLI normally explains the wellbeing of the people either collectively or across social classes in a certain period of time. The index is developed mainly by considering variables like house type, ownership, sanitation, drinking water and fuel used for cooking etc. These are scrutinized in a three-point scale according to their combined score. These are further apportioned into 'Low', 'Medium' and 'High' SLI groups.

An inter-zone comparison of the SLI is shown in Table 3. Overall, 58.2 percent of the households possess medium SLI score and 34.6 percent of the households are in the low SLI category. The proportions of households in the high SLI are only 6.8 percent. Zone-wise results show that north zone has higher proportion of households in the low SLI category (44 percent) compared to the central and south zones (31 percent and 28.8 percent). Those in the high SLI in the north zone are 3 percent, which is low compared to the other two zones. The inter-zone disparity in the standard of living is reconfirmed with the significant Chi-Square results in Table 4. Based on this, we reject the null hypothesis that the "Household Living Standards are same across Zones".

The difference in the SLI score is visible community-wise as well (Table 3). Kuravan, Parayan and Kanakkan have more than 50 percent of the households in the low SLI category. Vettuvan has the lowest (6.2 percent) of the households in the low SLI category and highest (84.4 percent) of the households in the medium SLI category. None of the Kuravan households is in the high SLI category. The differences in standard of living based on the community are reconfirmed with the significant Chi-Square test value shown in Table 4. Based on the results, the Null Hypothesis that "SLI is same across Community" is rejected.

Table 3 Community and SLI

Low SLI Medium SLI			SLI			Total
			High SLI			
Caste/Community	Pulayan	Count	47	125	22	194
		% within Caste/Community	24.2%	64.4%	11.3%	100.0%
	Cheru- man	Count	43	63	3	109
		% within Caste/Community	39.4%	57.8%	2.8%	100.0%
	Kuravan	Count	23	22	0	45
		% within Caste/Community	51.1%	48.9%	0.0%	100.0%
	Paraiyan	Count	17	11	3	31
		% within Caste/Community	54.8%	35.5%	9.7%	100.0%
	Thandan	Count	11	20	1	32
		% within Caste/Community	34.4%	62.5%	3.1%	100.0%
	Vettuvan	Count	2	27	3	32
		% within Caste/Community	6.2%	84.4%	9.4%	100.0%
	Kanakkan	Count	30	25	2	57
		% within Caste/Community	52.6%	43.9%	3.5%	100.0%
Total		Count	173	293	34	500
% within Caste/Community		34.6%	58.6%	6.8%	100.0%	

Source: Survey data

Table 4 Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.094a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	57.236	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.407	1	.006
N of Valid Cases	500		
a. 5 cells (23.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.11.			

Further to this, Correspondence Analysis is performed to illuminate the difference in the SLI scores based on community. Tables 5 and 6 show the Correspondence Table and summary Table respectively. Based on Table 6, it is inferred that the values are significant.

Table 5 Correspondence Table

Community	SLI			
	Low SLI	Medium SLI	High SLI	Active Margin
Pulayan	47	125	22	194
Cheruman	43	63	3	109
Kuravan	23	22	0	45
Paraiyan	17	11	3	31
Thandan	11	20	1	32
Vettuvan	2	27	3	32
Kanakkan	30	25	2	57
Active Margin	173	293	34	500

Table 6 Summary

Dimension	Singular Value	Inertia	Chi Square	Sig.	Proportion of Inertia		Confidence Singular Value	
					Accounted for	Cumulative	Standard Deviation	Correlation
								2
1	.295	.087			.849	.849	.040	-.155
2	.124	.015			.151	1.000	.043	
Total		.102	51.094	.000a	1.000	1.000		
a. 12 degrees of freedom								

Figure 6 shows the Correspondence Chart. It is evident that none of the communities is closer to the high SLI point. Pulayan, Vettuvan, Thandan and Cheruman are near to the medium SLI point. Cheruman is also close to low SLI. Kanakkan is exactly on the low SLI point, whereas Kuravan and Paraiyan are closer to the same.

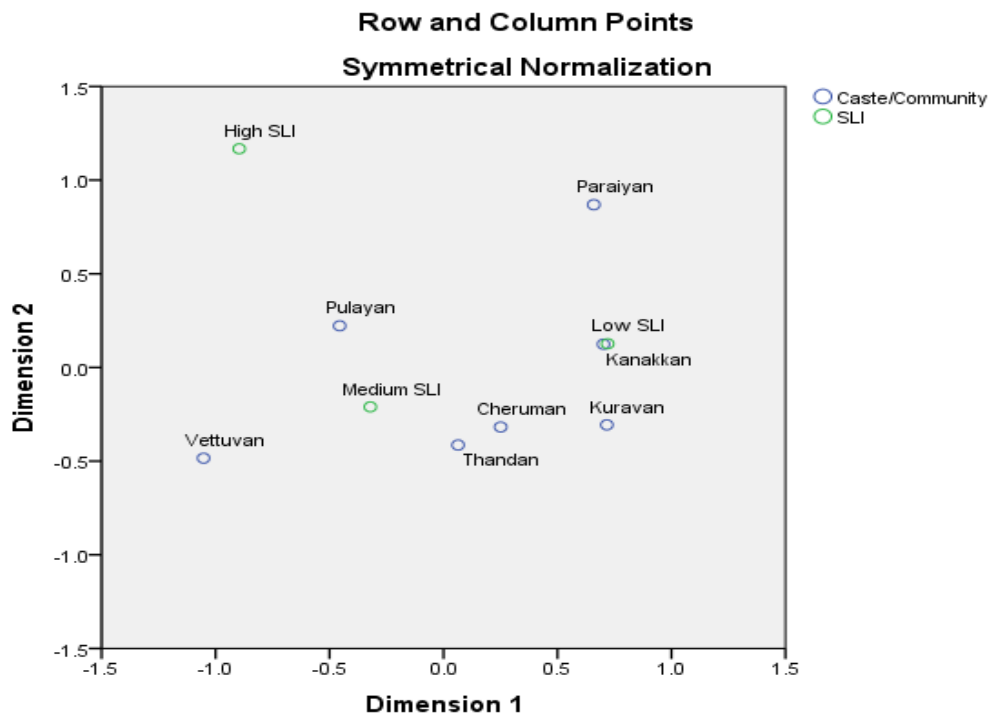


Figure. 6: Community and SLI

Socio-economic inference of the SC community shows deplorable situation. SC community in Kerala based on sub-community dimensions has a spatial relation. Among the various sub-groups of the community some are relatively good in employment and earning levels so also the nature of their socio-economics. Nonetheless, they are mostly working as casual workers is a clear authentication of their low standard of living and social exclusion. This is the reason why no one has come closer to the high standard of living index category. The visible factor for the low socio economics of the SC community is their backwardness in education and its associated tribulations in earning capacity and asset creation.

5. CONCLUSION

Inter-community differences of the SC community showed that illiterates were more among the Cheruman and Kanakkan. Kanakkan. The proportion of graduates was less among the Cheruman, Kanakkan, Kuravan and Thandan. The percentage of graduates and illiterates were more among the females than the males. Even though, unemployment rate and the dropout ratio were not alarming among the SC groups, the Cheruman and Kanakkan sub-communities have higher dropout ratios compared to others in the sample. Data showed that 62.8 percent of the males were employed compared to 35.7 percent females. As expected, the females were more in “doing household chores” category.

There are considerable inter-community differences in the standard of living. Overall, 58.2 percent of the households possessed medium SLI score and 34.6 percent of the households were in the low SLI category. The proportions of households in the high SLI were only 6.8 percent. Zone-wise results showed that north-zone has higher proportion of households in the low SLI category (44 percent) compared to the central and south zones (31 percent and 28.8 percent). Those in the high SLI in the north-zone were 3 percent, which was low compared to the other two zones. Kuravan, Parayan and Kanakkan have more than 50 percent of the households in the low SLI category. Vettuvan has the lowest (6.2 percent) of the households in the low SLI category and highest (84.4 percent) of the households in the medium SLI category. None of the Kuravan households was in the high SLI category.

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