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Disparity in Literary and Educational Attainments among Tribal Sub-Groups: An analysis of Tribes in Kerala

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Abstract:

This paper reveals the education exclusion of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala. The study is descriptive in nature and analyses the level of literacy and educational attainments of tribes using Census data published by the Government of India. In this study, tribes concentrated in the tribal predominant districts of Kerala such as Idukki, Palakkad and Wayanad are considered. The major findings of this paper discuss inequality in literacy and education backwardness of tribes compared with that of the total population. Besides, the study points wide gender gap and literacy gap existing within the tribal sub-groups.

Keywords: Educational attainment, scheduled tribes, literacy, Kerala

1. Introduction

There are 35 tribal communities notified in the Kerala, numbering 484,839 spread over all the fourteen districts of the State. Each community is so heterogeneous in terms of culture, belief, livelihood strategies, social organization, economy and developmental perspectives. Wayanad district has the highest number of tribal population with 1,51,443 people, accounting for 31.24 percent of the total ST population of Kerala. Moreover, the tribes constitute 18.55 percent of the total population in the district (Census of India, 2011). The second largest tribal concentration is at Idukki with 11.51 percentages. Other significant concentrations of tribes are in the districts of Palakkad (10.1 percent), Kasaragod (10.08 percent), Thiruvananthapuram (5.52 percent), Kannur (8.53 percent), Malappuram (4.74 percent) and Kottayam (4.53 percent). Alappuzha district has the least tribal concentration with 0.31 percent of the total STs in Kerala. It can be further noted that tribes are more concentrated in hilly areas of the State. Although, the tribal population in Kerala segregated across all the districts, majority is concentrated in Palakkad, Idukki and Wayanad districts constituting around 53 percent of the total ST population.

2. Methodology

The present study analyses the literacy and educational attainments of tribal sub-groups using Census data released by the Government of India. For this purpose, the data from 2001 and 2011 Census were collected. The present study analyses the literacy rate and educational attainment of tribes concentrated in the three tribal predominant districts such as Idukki, Palakkad and Wayanad (Table 1). The tribes concentrated in Idukki are Muthuvan, Mali Arayan, Mannan, Hill Pulaya, Uraly and Palliyar¹. In Palakkad district, six major tribal communities are predominant and they are Irula, Eravallan, Kurumbar, Maha Malasar, Malasar and Kadar. In Wayanad district, the most tribal populated district of Kerala has five tribal communities concentrated in the district. They are Paniyan, Kurichchan, Kuruman, Kattunayakan and Adiyani.

¹ Tribes concentrated in each district is calculated based on population representation of each tribal community as per 2001 Census data

Districts	Population	Percentage of ST to Total Population	Percentage with in Communities
KERALA	484839	1.45	100
Kasaragod	48857	3.75	10.08
Kannur	41371	1.64	8.53
Wayanad	151443	18.55	31.24
Kozhikode	15228	0.49	3.14
Malappuram	22990	0.56	4.74
Palakkad	48972	1.74	10.10
Thrissur	9430	0.30	1.94
Ernakulam	16559	0.50	3.42
Idukki	55815	5.04	11.51
Kottayam	21972	1.11	4.53
Alappuzha	6574	0.31	1.36
Pathanamthitta	8108	0.68	1.67
Kollam	10761	0.41	2.22
Thiruvananthapuram	26759	0.81	5.52

Table 1: District-wise tribal population of Kerala
Source: Compiled from Census, (2011)

2.1. Literacy and Educational Attainments of Tribes Concentrated in Idukki District

Idukki, the second largest tribal concentrated district of Kerala has a Scheduled Tribe population of 55,815 persons constituting 5.04 percent of the total district population and 11.51 percent of the total ST population. As discussed, Muthuvan, Malai Arayan, Mannan, Hill Pulaya, Uraly and Palliyar are the tribes concentrated in the district. Only two out of the six tribal groups has a population of more than 20,000 people. Hill Pulayas and Palliyars are less than 3,000 in number. Among the tribes concentrated in the district, Malai Arayans have a literacy rate of 94.5 percent which is highest among tribes of Kerala, as well as higher than the literacy rate of Kerala (Census of India, 2001). Uralies also have better literacy (70.5 percent) which is above the State level ST literacy rate during 2001 i.e. 64.4 percent (Figure 1). The literacy rate of Mannan is 59 percent, standing below the State level ST literacy rate. The literacy achievements sparsely populated communities such as Hill Pulaya and Pliiyar is very pathetic as their rate is almost same as that of the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in India i.e. 47.1 percent². Muthuvan, the second highly populated tribal community of the district has even much more worse literacy rate of 41.5 percent, which is far below the national average of STs.

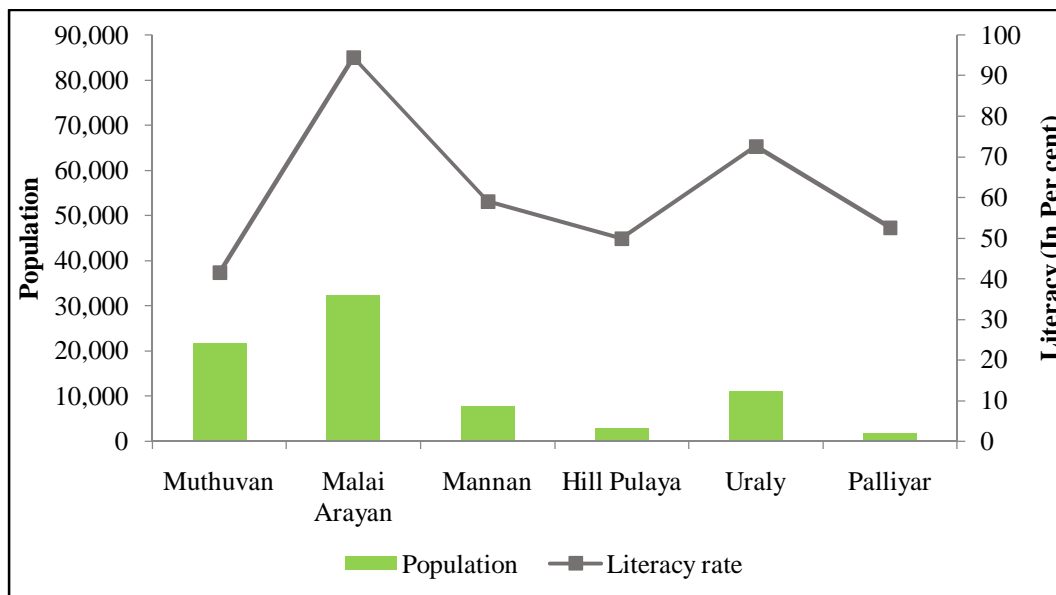


Figure 1: Population and literacy rate of tribes concentrated in Idukki district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

² Literacy rate as per 2001 Census data.

Community	Muthuvan	Malai Arayan	Mannan	Hill Pulaya	Uraly	Palliyar
Literate without educational level	5.9	1.0	3.1	3.5	1.9	1.9
Below Primary	47.5	17.9	36.2	48.7	35.6	35.6
Primary	27.9	22.5	32.0	29.0	31.2	31.2
Middle	12.7	27.9	21.1	13.3	22.1	22.1
Metric/Secondary	4.7	18.5	5.9	4.0	6.8	6.8
Higher secondary	0.8	6.0	1.0	1.0	1.5	1.5
Higher Education	0.4	6.2	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Educational attainment of tribes concentrated in Idukki district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

From the above analysis it is evident that Muthuvans, Hill Pulayans and Palliyars have very low literacy rate. Moreover, the low educational attainment of these communities which is depicted in Table 2 indicates that they are very backward in education. Except for Malai Arayans, other five communities have poor educational attainments. Among the literates belonging to Muthuva and Hill Pulaya, more than half of them are having education below the primary level only. The representation from these communities possessing higher educational degrees is also very meagre.

2.2. Literacy and Educational Attainments of Tribes Concentrated in Palakkad District

Scheduled Tribe population of the Palakkad district is 48,974 where, 24,314 are males and 24,658 are females (Census of India, 2011). The Scheduled Tribes of the district constitute only 1.74 percent to the total population of the district, but, Palakkad remains as the third largest tribal concentrated district of Kerala as 10.1 percent of the tribes are located here. There are six tribal groups which are concentrated in the district viz. Irula, Eravallan, Kurumbar, Maha Malasar, Malasar and Kadar. Among these, Irula is the predominant group concentrated in the district and their population comes around 24,000 (Census of India, 2001). The lowest populated tribal community concentrated in the district is Maha Malasar as they are only 116 in number. For other four tribal groups, the population ranges between 1500 and 4000 people. Out of the six tribal groups, Kadars and Kurmbar comes under the category of Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) of the State³. The literacy rate of various communities shown in Figure 2 indicates that the literacy campaigns targeting STs in the district was not successful in achieving the desired results. Irrespective of the population size, all the communities have poor literacy rate which is below the State average literacy rate of STs. The literacy rate of Malasar is only 20.8 percent and for Eravallan it is only 34.7 percent, which are not even comparable with that of national average of STs. The literacy rate of the communities such as Irulas (49 percent), Kurumbar (48.6 percent) and Malasar (42.8 percent) are almost similar to that of the national average of STs only. Kadar community, one of the primitive tribal groups of Kerala has achieved comparatively better level of literacy rate i.e. 61.8 percent during 2001.

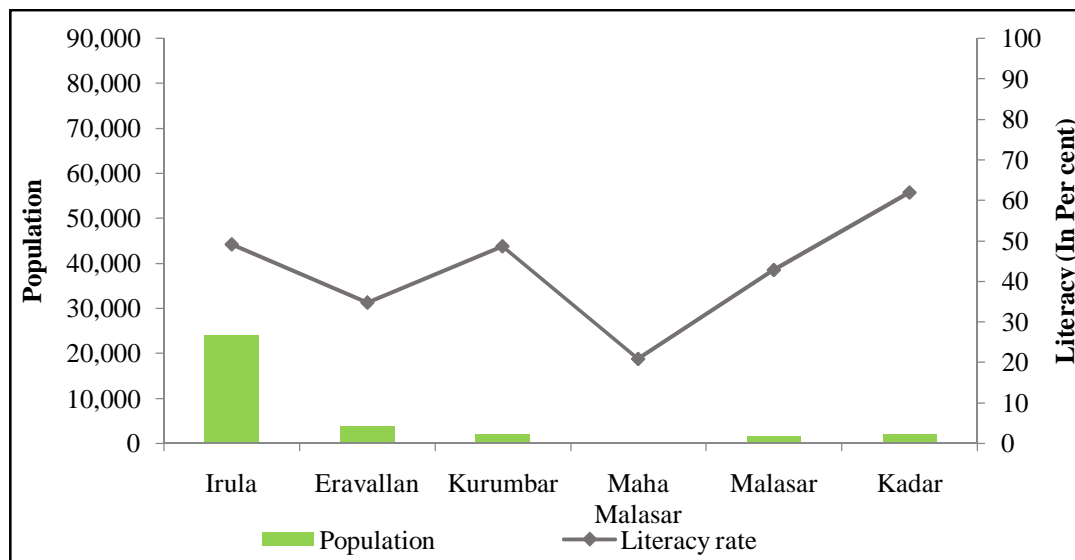


Figure 2: Population and literacy rate of tribes concentrated in Palakkad district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

³ Five tribal communities in Kerala are notified as primitive considering the stage of transition into modern society. They are Kattunaikans of Wayanad, Koragas of Kasaragod, Cholanaikans of Nilambur Valley and Malapuram district, Kurumbar of Attappady and Palakkad districts and Kadars of Cochin.

Community	Irula	Eravallan	Kurumbar	Maha Malasar	Malasar	Kadar
Literate without educational level	5.8	3.6	7.9	0.0	6.3	3.3
Below Primary	33.2	32.3	42.0	25.0	36.1	44.9
Primary	31.8	37.4	22.8	55.0	27.7	24.8
Middle	17.7	18.9	16.4	10.0	15.1	19.1
Metric/Secondary	8.7	5.6	7.2	0.0	12.1	6.3
Higher secondary	2.0	1.2	2.0	5.0	0.8	1.1
Higher Education	0.8	1.0	1.7	5.0	1.9	0.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3: Educational attainment of tribes concentrated in Palakkad district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

The Kadar community was unable to exploit their better literacy accomplishment to achieve higher educational attainments (Table 3). The primitive communities such as Kadars and Kurumbar also have poor educational attainments as more than 45 percent of the literates are having education up to primary only. For other communities, the proportion of literates with low educational level is high. The communities such as Kurumbar, Maha Malasar and Malasar, have only a few people who have achieved higher education.

2.3. Literacy and Educational Attainments of Tribes Concentrated in Wayanad District

Wayanad district has the largest tribal population in Kerala with highest number of tribal settlements (Kerala Scheduled Tribe Basis Information, 2010). The Scheduled Tribe population of the district is 1,51,443 representing 31.24 percent to the total ST population of Kerala (Census of India, 2011). There are five tribes which are concentrated in the district viz. Paniyan, Kurichchan, Kuruman, Kattunayakan and Adiyani. Among these, Kattunayakan is classified as “Primitive Tribal Group” by the Government, depends mostly on forest for their livelihood. For all the five tribal groups, they have a population of more than 10,000 people. As per 2001 Census data, Paniya is the largest tribal community in the State with a population numbering 81,940 accounting nearly one-fourth of the total ST population of Kerala. Even though they are the largest tribal community in Kerala, their social condition is very miserable compared to that of other tribes. Figure 3 and Table 4 indicates that the Paniyans are no exception with regard to education too. The literacy rate of Paniya is only 48.5 percent which is almost very close to that of the national average of STs and far below the State average of STs. The higher population representation the community did not made any significant implications on inclusion of them in the development process.

Communities such as Kurichchans and Kurumans have achieved better literacy rate of 78.2 percent and 76.6 percent respectively. Mullu Kuruman, one of the sub-groups of Kuruman and Kurichians are relatively better off than the rest of the tribal population in Wayanad district owing to their high land holding status (HDR, 2009). This indeed resulted in better literacy and educational attainment of these communities. Kattunayakan, the PTG residing at Wayanad district has the lowest literacy rate among the five groups concentrated in the district. They have only 40.2 literates indicating their worse condition in this regard. Adiyani, a similar vulnerable group like Paniyan, has only 52.5 percent literates.

The low literate communities such as Paniya, Adiya and Kattunayakan also have poor educational attainments (Table 4). These communities have less proportion of literates and among these literates, more than 80 percent of them have only education up to primary level. Kurichchans was not successful in converting their better literacy attainments to higher educational level as they have only 0.8 percent of the literates holding higher educational qualifications. But, Kurumans have significant representation of literates with higher degrees.

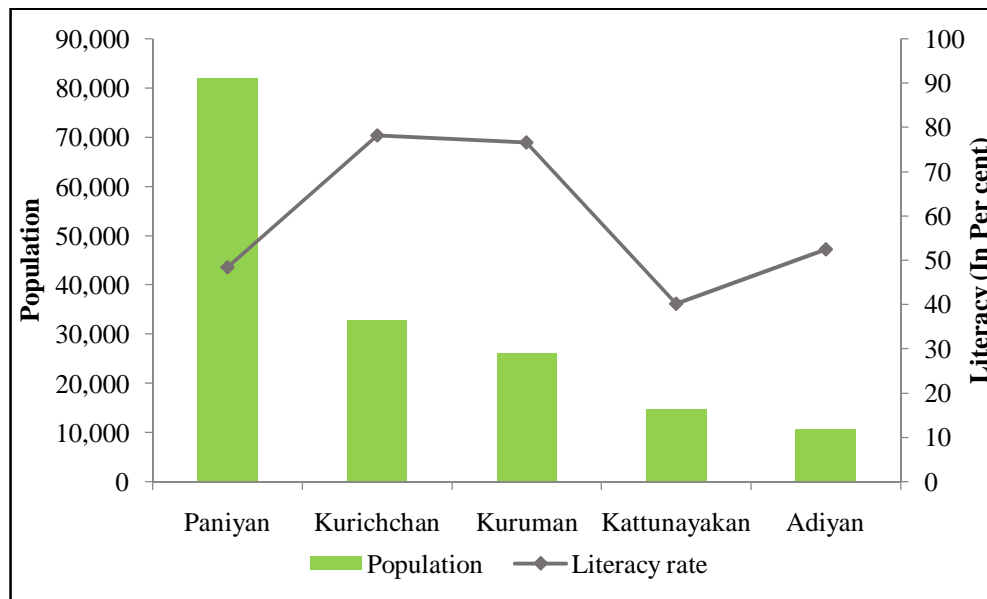


Figure 3: Population and literacy rate of tribes concentrated in Wayanad district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

Community	Paniyan	Kurichchan	Kuruman	Kattunayakan	Adiyan
Literate without educational level	4.0	2.5	2.1	7.2	5.2
Below Primary	50.5	23.8	23.2	48.0	41.8
Primary	33.0	34.5	25.3	28.7	33.0
Middle	10.0	28.6	30.3	12.3	15.1
Metric/Secondary	2.0	8.3	13.5	2.9	3.6
Higher secondary	0.3	1.6	3.5	0.5	1.0
Higher Education	0.2	0.8	2.0	0.4	0.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 4: Educational attainment of tribes concentrated in Wayanad district
Source: Census of India, (2001)

2.4. Wide Gender Gap within Tribal Sub-Groups

In the previous section we have discussed that the literacy rate of tribal sub-groups varies considerably. Among sparsely populated tribes as well as socially and economically very backward communities have low literacy rate. From Figure 4 it is evident that there exists wide gender gap among the literacy rate of tribes concentrated in Idukki, Palakkad and Wayanad district.

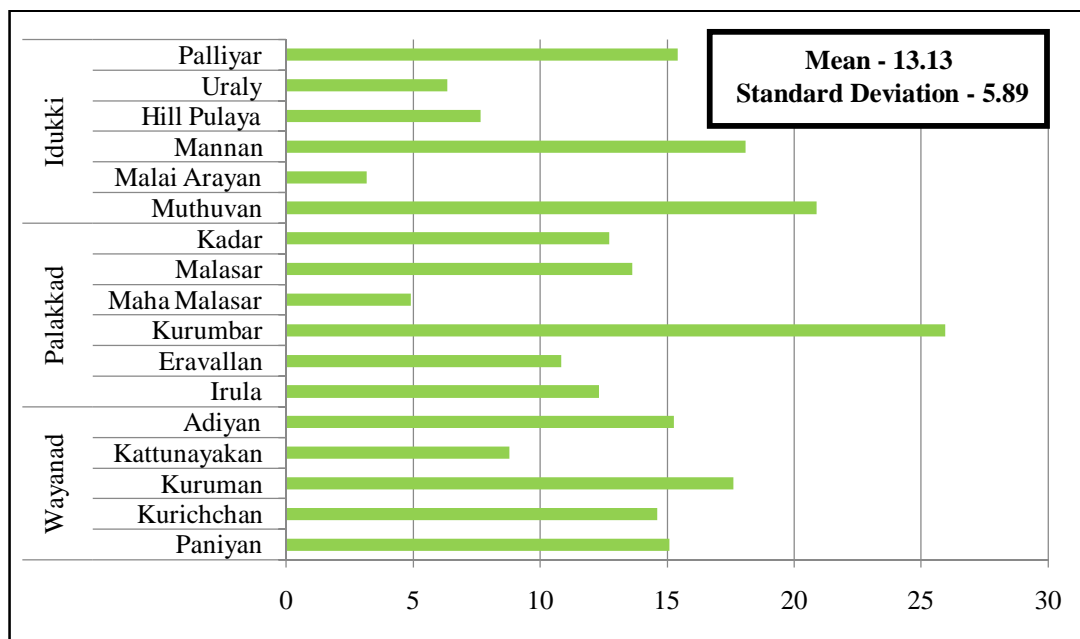


Figure 4: Gender gap of literacy rate among tribal sub-groups
Source: Census of India, 2001

The mean gender gap of these communities is 13.13 percent which is in fact more than the double of the gender gap of Kerala i.e. 6.52 percent. Tribes concentrated in all the three districts have the same issue. However, the higher standard deviation value indicates that the gender gap among the sub-groups varies considerably. Kurumbar, the PTG has highest variation between males and females which is exceeding 25 percent. The communities such as Palliyars, Mannans, Muthuvans, Adiyas, Kurumans and Paniyans have a gender gap of more than 15 percent. In this milieu, the literacy development of Scheduled Tribes requires giving more emphasis on bridging the gender gap among the tribal sub-groups.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of each of the tribal group concentrated in the districts of Palakkad, Idukki and Wayanad indicates that the educational development is unequal among them. Only three among the seventeen tribal groups considered for the study have better literacy rate. They are MalaiArayanas, Kurichchans and Uralies. But the Uralies could not convert their better literacy to higher levels of educational attainments. The literacy rates of sparsely populated communities such as Malasar, Maha Malasar, Hill Pulaya and Eravallan are far below the national literacy rate of STs. Among Primitive Tribal Communities such as Kurumbars, Kadars and Kattunakyakans, all the groups have poor educational attainments and low literacy rates. Considering their primitive traits, the present level of education could not help them to come out of this vicious circle. Out of these three groups, the educational exclusion of Kattunayakan is more significant. The socially and economically very backward communities such as Irula of Palakkad and, Adiya and Paniya of Wayanad, the extent educational deprivation is very high as they have very low literacy rate and poor educational attainments. Apart from these, the literacy rates of males and females across the tribal sub-groups vary considerably. The mean gender gap of these groups is even more than the double of total population of Kerala.

The picture of the tribes in these districts indicates that the policies aimed at the development of education was not successful among both the highly populated tribes such as Paniyans, Kattunayakans, Adiyans, Muthuvans, Mannans, Irula etc. and the sparsely populated communities such as Eravallan, Maha Malasar, Malasar, Palliyar, Hill Pulaya etc. In this context, an inclusive educational policy is vital for the overall improvement of the tribes.

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