

## **Role of educational development and religious affiliation in the upliftment of tribes in Kerala**

D Narayana

Former director of Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation, Thiruvananthapuram

### **Introduction**

Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Kerala numbering around 4.85 lakh in 2011 account for only 1.45% of the population of the state. Although every district now reports the presence of ST, over 75% of them reside in just six districts, namely Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, Palakkad, Kottayam and Idukki. There are about 35 scheduled tribes in the state, their numbers ranging from a few hundreds, or less – Arandan (283), Kochuvelan (38), and Maha Malasar (154) to name a few – to more than 20,000 each – Kanikaran (21,251), Malai Arayan (33,216), and Paniyan (88,450) are some of the examples. In a highly urbanized state with the level of urbanization close to 50%, the ST are a largely rural group with close to 90% of the population confined to rural areas in 2011.

Traditional settlements and means of livelihoods of the ST too are highly differentiated. Kadars and Muthuvans lived deep in the forests collecting roots, honey, and catching birds and animals for subsistence. Paniya and Adiya became bonded labourers as outsiders began occupying vast tracts for settled cultivation in Wayanad and neighbouring districts around two centuries ago. Koragas were basket weavers living in the midlands in close proximity to other inhabitants, carrying out scavenging, removing dead cattle and buffaloes. The highly varying groups of population has been subjected to an almost uniform instruments of development, some of which are assigning land for cultivation and housing, provide housing and sanitation, education, affirmative action in formal employment and so on.

A clue that things have been changing for the tribes becomes evident when we look at the movement of tribes across the districts. In the year 1981, 68% of the tribes lived in four districts of the state – Wayanad (36.5%), Idukki (14.8%), Palakkad (11.0%) and Kottayam

(5.8%). The same four districts show the share of tribes falling to 57% by 2011. An 11 percentage point fall over thirty years is significant and suggests that tribes have been shifting from their traditional land and forest based occupations to non-land based occupations. What is the pattern of such movement of tribes? Which tribes have been able to move? What channels have helped them move out of land? Have the development initiatives of the state played a part in it? These are the issues taken up for investigation in this paper.

### The pattern of spatial movement of tribes

As regards the pattern of spatial movement of tribes, it may be presented in a tabular form as shown in Table 1.

One of the striking dimensions of the transition that could be read from the Table is that the tribes in the upper panel (small change in spatial concentration) mostly belong to the northern (north of Thrissur) districts and the tribes in the lower panel to the southern districts. Urban living is also higher for the tribes in the lower panel. The two together suggest that tribes in the southern districts have been moving out to urban areas of other districts, or in districts where they were traditionally rural dwellers.

**Table 1.** Spatial and rural-urban movement of tribes in Kerala over 1991-2011

District Level Concentration	Urbanisation Rising	No Change in Urbanisation
Small Change in Spatial Concentration	Arandan(2.8%), Kadar(6.3%), Koraga(40%), Kudiya(2%), Kurichiya(5%), Kuruma (3.5%), Malai Pandaram (11%), Uraly(2.4%)	Adiyan(1.2%),Eravallan(0.4%), Hill Pulaya(1.7%), Irular(1.8%), Kattunayakan(4%), Paniyan(3.5%)
Large Reduction in Spatial Concentration	Kanikaran (8.7%), Malai Arayan (9.6%), Malai Vedan (10.5%), Malayan (3%)	Malayarayar(10.5%), Mannan(3.4%), Muthuvan (1.5%)

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Tables.aspx>, 1991 and 2011.

Note: Small change – less than two percentage points.

Figures in brackets are level of urbanization in 2011.

Any analysis of de-concentration of scheduled tribes is incomplete without a look at the growth of tribal population in relation to that of the non-tribal population in the districts of Kerala. The population of Kerala grew by 4.9% between 2001 and 2011. While the tribal population grew by a phenomenal 33%<sup>1</sup> overall, population growth is negative or close to

<sup>1</sup> There is a problem with the counting of scheduled tribe population in Kerala. The ST population is reported to be 320,967 in 1991 and 364169 in 2001. The increase is only 13.46%. In 2011, the count shows 484839

zero in most of the districts which are largely rural, such as Idukki, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam, but relatively higher (more than 5%) in rapidly urbanizing districts such as Thrissur, Ernakulam and Kozhikode. The scheduled tribe population too shows a similar pattern but with more intensity. In the rapidly urbanizing districts such as Ernakulam, Thrissur and Kozhikode the tribal population has risen by between 65 to 150 percent over the ten years. In the largely rural districts (urbanization level less than 5%) of Idukki and Wayanad, the growth of tribal population is around 10%. It is obvious that rapid urbanization of the districts is fueled by movements of population into these districts of both non-tribal and tribal. The growth of tribal population in these districts is relatively higher because their base is lower.

**Table 2.** Distribution of districts by level of urbanisation and tribal population growth

Urbanisation % -2011	Tribal Population Growth % -2001 to 2011			
	Above 100	51-100	26- 50	25 or below
Above 60	Kannur (65,110) Kozhikode (67,156)	Thrissur (67,95) Ernakulam (68,65)		
36 – 60	Alappuzha (54,110) Kollam (45,107)	Kasaragod (39,61) Malappuram (44,87)	Thiruvananthapuram (54,29)	
11-35				Palakkad (24,11) Kottayam (29,20) Pathanamthitta (11,24)
10 or Less				Wayanad (4,11) Idukki (5,10)

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Tables.aspx>, 2001 and 2011.

Overall, Kerala has urbanized rapidly during 2001 - 2011. This decade has also seen negative growth of non-tribal population in the rural areas suggesting that intense rural urban migration has been taking place. Not only non-tribal population has been moving to non-farm employment (a key characteristic defining urbanization) but also tribal population. The tribal population has been migrating from their homelands to urban areas in other districts. Not all tribes in Kerala have been able to migrate to urban areas. It is largely the tribes of the southern districts who are leaving their rural home lands in search of non-farm employment in urban areas.

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reporting an increase of 33.14% when the count of non-tribals is in fact showing a fall. We suspect the inclusion of some tribes in one census followed by their exclusion in the next or such practices would have led to this situation.

### Educational attainment of tribes in a comparative perspective

One of the main channels of migration into non-farm employment is education. A look at the educational attainment of scheduled tribes in comparison with scheduled castes and all population would tell us whether it could play any role in migration. There are many educational indicators that could be used for this purpose. We use only one indicator, namely the proportion of graduates in the population by age class. The distribution by age class is important as it will throw some light on the progress in this indicator in time.

**Table 3.** Proportion of graduates in population by age class in a few districts of Kerala, 2011

Age Class (Years)	%Graduates - Kannur			%Graduates - Wayanad			%Graduates - Palakkad		
	ST	SC	All	ST	SC	All	ST	SC	All
Total	1.97	7.21	9.25	1.28	4.14	6.29	1.44	3.13	6.96
20-24	4.64	20.10	20.73	3.70	11.13	13.32	3.73	9.57	15.79
25-29	4.47	16.35	19.72	3.18	8.96	12.44	3.46	7.21	13.20
30-34	2.79	9.34	13.52	1.55	4.67	9.23	1.57	3.63	9.19
35-59	1.07	4.57	7.68	0.44	3.02	5.19	0.64	1.52	5.68
60+	0.54	1.65	2.69	0.05	0.72	1.18	0.31	0.36	2.64
Age not stated	2.27	4.09	5.45	0	0	4.01	0	2.83	4.69

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Tables.aspx>, 2011.

The sample of northern districts shows that educational attainment (%Graduates) of scheduled tribes in 2011 is lower than that of scheduled castes which in turn is lower than that of all population in the three districts (Table 3). Compared to the tribes, the percentage of graduates is 3.7 times for scheduled caste and 4.7 times for the overall population in Kannur. This is a huge difference. The difference between scheduled caste and tribe has not shown any sign of decline over the last forty years. This is not the case with the difference with all population; the difference has been coming down although at a slow pace. Part of the reason for the rising difference with the scheduled caste group is that they have been gaining at a higher pace compared to all population. In Kannur, the proportion for all population in the 60+ year's age group which was one percent point higher than that for scheduled caste has virtually disappeared when we come to the 20-24 years age group. The differentials between scheduled tribe and caste are slightly lower in Wayanad and Palakkad but the trend of the difference not coming down is persistent in both the districts. Same is the pattern with regard to the differential between scheduled tribe and all population. The picture is no different in the northern districts not shown here in Table 3. Overall, the proportion of population

attaining graduation among the scheduled tribes is lower compared to scheduled caste and all population and there is hardly any sign of the difference coming down over the years.

It is an altogether different story in the southern districts. While the proportion of graduates in the population 15+ years for all population is higher than that for scheduled caste and scheduled tribe in the southern districts of the state, there is hardly any difference between the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes (Table 4). In fact, in two of the districts the scheduled tribes are performing better than the scheduled castes. Turning to the time trend, it may be seen that while in Idukki the scheduled tribes have lost the advantage over the scheduled caste during the last ten years, in Kottayam and Thiruvananthapuram the scheduled tribes continue to maintain their higher educational attainments. Overall, the proportions of graduates in the southern districts are two to three times those in the northern districts for all population groups and the scheduled tribes too.

**Table 4.** Proportion of graduates in population by age class in a few districts of Kerala, 2011

Age Class (Years)	%Graduates - Idukki			%Graduates - Kottayam			%Graduates - Thiruvananthapuram		
	ST	SC	All	ST	SC	All	ST	SC	All
Total	3.56	3.87	7.87	7.56	6.92	12.40	6.45	6.34	13.89
20-24	8.79	11.15	18.13	20.20	18.56	25.71	13.35	13.47	23.26
25-29	9.05	9.95	17.88	20.62	18.64	27.56	12.73	13.79	26.97
30-34	5.39	5.29	12.01	10.62	9.86	18.58	9.25	9.03	20.75
35-59	1.88	1.86	6.26	5.01	4.18	11.35	4.98	4.69	12.75
60+	0.71	0.45	1.89	2.08	2.10	5.87	3.33	2.61	7.59
Age not stated	0	4.90	8.14	10.00	5.50	7.88	2.44	7.58	9.94

Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Tables.aspx>, 2011.

A comparison of the educational attainments of the people of the two regions within Kerala is quite revealing. Firstly, the proportion of graduates in the northern districts is significantly lower than those in the southern districts for both scheduled tribe and all population; for scheduled caste they are comparable across the districts of both southern and northern regions. Secondly, the proportion of graduates in population among the scheduled castes is higher than that among the scheduled tribes in north Kerala and is the other way round in south. Thirdly, in Kottayam, the scheduled tribes are racing to achieve parity with all population in educational gains. If education is a channel of transition to non-farm

employment, then scheduled tribes are definitely taking advantage of it in the southern districts of the state and performing better than the scheduled castes.

### **Access to education as public policy**

As regards tribal development planning in India, two major steps taken were Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) started during the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) and decentralisation since the mid-1990s. In Kerala, the TSP has undergone many transformations through the fifth to the thirteenth five year plans. Since 2009, the amount allocated for TSP has stood consistently above 2% of the total plan size. As the sub-plan can be prepared at any level starting from the habitat, village, or panchayath and get consolidated at the level of block panchayat or above, the voices of the most disadvantaged at the lowest level could be responded to by incorporating their concerns in the plan and acted upon. Plans at the Gram Panchayath/ Municipal levels could identify the needs much better than plans from above. Political representation in the local government councils could add to this process.

In Kerala, development programmes for the scheduled tribes are implemented through the Scheduled Tribe Development Department (STDD) and Local Governments (LG). The STDD has seven Integrated Tribal Development Project offices, nine tribal development offices and 48 tribal Extension Offices. The STDD implements various schemes which can be categorized under five heads: education, health care, social upliftment, cultural development, and other development schemes. Since 1997-98, the Government of Kerala has handed over a sizable number of development programmes to the local governments. TSP funds are substantial and 50% are handed over to the local governments.

Education is regarded as one of the most important catalysts for social development of ST and in turn for their economic development. In the initial years after independence, only a few feeble attempts were made to invest in the education of tribes. The introduction of TSP since the Fifth Five Year Plan made a huge difference to the educational development of the tribes. The universalization of primary education as part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan too made some significant contribution in this regard. Further, for enhancing tribal education, Model Residential Schools, Ashram Schools and Tribal Schools were set up by the government. Tribal students were also provided with hostel facilities along with financial assistance and other allowances.

The state has 18 Model Residential Schools / Ashram Schools distributed across the districts where the presence of tribes is substantial. The number of schools is the highest in Wayanad (5), followed by Idukki (2), Palakkad (2), and Thiruvananthapuram (2). Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Thrissur and Malappuram have one school each. Out of the 18 schools, eight of them have classes up to higher secondary, nine up to high school, and one up to upper primary. Seven schools are exclusively for boys, five for girls, and the remaining six both for boys and girls. These schools provide free food, accommodation, school uniforms and some monthly allowance.

The focus of MRS/Ashram Schools sponsored by the Central government is to provide education at higher classes, and is residential in nature. Access to these schools is a problem for many tribal students. The state government runs a number of schools closer to the tribal settlements which are not residential. There are 90 such schools spread over all the districts of the state, except Alappuzha which has less than 1500 tribal households over half of whom reside in urban areas. Of the total number of schools, 49 are Lower Primary schools (I to IV class), 15 are Upper Primary schools (V to VII class) and the remaining 26 are High Schools. These are spread over the tribal dominated districts more or less in proportion to the tribal population.

The lack of access to schools and colleges of tribal children is addressed to some extent by locating hostels in various parts of the state. The Scheduled Tribe Development Department runs 108 pre-metric hostels distributed across districts where there is a concentration of tribal households. Wayanad has 28 hostels followed by Palakkad at 23 and Idukki at 12. There is good demand for these hostels as most of them are running beyond their intake capacity.

Turning to financial support for education, Kerala government provides lump-sum grant and monthly stipend to each tribal student. The amount rises with the level of education. The government provides financial support to tribal students for post-metric education too. The government bears the complete educational fees without any income limit for various courses. Monthly stipend and annual lump-sum grants are provided. Monthly stipend is not paid to students staying in hostels where the cost of food and accommodation is borne by the government. Only pocket money is paid to such students.

In addition to running schools and hostels and providing financial support, schemes have been designed for the educational development of tribal students. Ayyankali memorial talent

search and development scheme seeks to identify brilliant students studying at SSLC, Plus-one and Plus-two classes and failed students are also being run. There is a special scheme for students who secure first class in SSLC, Plus-one, Plus-two and graduation. Hence, financial support is not a constraint for tribal development and no distinction is made among tribes or regions.

Early childhood care and education got a boost with the introduction of ICDS programme in 1975. It is operated through the Anganwadi Centres (AWC). Over the years the attendance of tribal children in AWCs has grown and it is on par with other communities. In Kerala, apart from AWC, the Scheduled Tribe Development Department runs nursery schools and single teacher schools for enhancing primary education. Only around 11 percent of the 4644 tribal settlements in the state do not have AWCs. The absence of AWCs near tribal settlements was slightly higher in the northern districts of the state in the year 2010. A similar picture was present with regard to the presence of Multi Grade learning centres as well.

In recent years, Five Year Plans have been emphasizing the goal of ending the scourge of social disparity between the people of the scheduled tribes and other sections of the population. Education takes a pride of place in this endeavor. But the approach is one of starting additional finishing schools to motivate students for competitive exams, starting Model Residential Schools, pre-metric hostels, post-metric hostels, and of raising educational assistance like stipends and grants. Then there is the usual prescription that local governments should concentrate on social and economic empowerment of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other marginalized groups. Beyond replicating the hackneyed schemes anything innovative is hard to find.

### **Religious affiliation and urban living**

One of the important differences between the northern and southern districts is with regard to the religious affiliation of tribes. It may be seen from Table 5 that the northern districts report almost insignificant proportion of tribes as followers of Christian religion. Excluding Wayanad from the list of northern districts too does not make a difference. The proportion stays around 1.4%. Out of this small proportion some, such as Malai Arayan and Hill Pulaya have migrated from the southern districts and if they are excluded then the proportion drops to 1.27%. Thus, it can be said that among the tribes in the northern districts of the state hardly



any one professes Christianity, with only one exception of Koragas of Kasaragod. But their number in Kerala of 1582 is too small to make a difference to the overall percentage.

In the southern districts of the state as a whole, the proportion of tribes professing Christianity is 20.77%. Excluding Pathanamthitta and Idukki, the rest of south reports 24.63% professing Christianity. Among the districts, Kottayam reports 39.40% of the tribes professing Christianity. Thrissur and Thiruvananthapuram which are not included in any of the groupings report around 10% of the tribes being Christian. Thus, unlike the northern districts, the districts south of Thrissur report the presence of a sizable proportion of scheduled tribes adhering to the Christian faith. And the fact that more than 30% of them reside in the urban areas suggests that they are migrants.

**Table 5.** Proportion of urban population and christians among the scheduled tribes in Kerala

District	%Urban		%Christian -2011
	1961	2011	
Thiruvananthapuram	2.49	25.18	8.38
Thrissur	0.29	37.87	11.75
Southern Districts	0.83	15.04	20.77
Northern Districts	0.15	7.12	1.40
Southern Districts excluding Pathanamthitta and Idukki	-	30.42	24.63
Northern Districts excluding Wayanad	-	11.39	1.39

<https://censusindia.gov.in/DigitalLibrary/Tables.aspx>, 2011

*Note: Southern districts – Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Kollam, Idukki  
Northern districts – Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad.*

Do tribes following Christian religion make a difference to their educational achievements? It seems it does, if we go by the example of Malai Arayans - the numerically dominant tribe in Idukki and Kottayam - 46.30% of whom are Christians. In 1961, only 2.93% of them were Christians. Malai Arayan Christians in south numbering around 15,000 account for 60% of all Christians in the south; the rest are Malayarayar, Ulladan and generic tribes.

Malai Arayans were called the Lords of the jungles who became tenants of the Rajas of Poonjar and Pandalam following the proclamation of the Maharaja of Travancore in 1789 investing all the forest land of the realms with the government. For almost a century thereafter they languished in bondage, penury and indignity and were subjected to various forms of taxation. It was Rev. Henry Baker's visit to the settlements of Malai Arayans that

changed their lives. Baker established 11 churches, and 27 schools across the High Ranges. The change in their lives brought about by adopting Christianity has been described by Joseph (2004) as,

“No aspect of the life of the Christian Malai Arayans was left untouched by the church ... Baker himself had delivered them from the clutches of Mohammedan merchants, who were the tax collectors of the Poonjar Rajah ... Shri M S Joseph, the first Malai Arayan to enter the IAS observes that the Missionaries came to their midst not with the bible in one hand and gun in the other as alleged, but with the word of God in one hand and the World of Science in the other. The religious classes introduced them to the heroes of Old Testament, who inspired the Malai Arayan youth immensely. The Church was also instrumental in inculcating in them an aversion for liquor, to which they had been traditionally addicted (p.163).

While the Church played an important role among the Malai Arayans in their cultural development and attitude towards education, Malai Araya Mahasabha of the Hindu segment in competition with their Christian brethren was awakening the Hindus. The two together helped the Malai Arayans to compete with the other Hindu groups to achieve educational development.

Similar initiatives must have taken place among the Malayarayar and Ulladans in the southern districts. The only tribe in the north which adopted Christianity is the Koragas of Kasaragod district, 16.50% of whom are Christians. As seen in Table 1, 40% of the Koragas live in urban areas, the highest for any tribal group in Kerala. What has worked for the Malai Arayans seems to have worked for the Koragas as well. Thus, religious affiliation has played a role in the educational development and the related movement out of the traditional occupations of tribes into urban occupations.

### **Summary and conclusions**

The paper has focused on the movement of tribes from their land and forest based occupations to non-farm occupations in the urban areas. It is observed that such migration is taking place to a much greater extent among the tribes in the southern districts of the state. The rapidly urbanizing districts of the state have seen phenomenal growth of tribal population. One of the main channels of migration has been education. As regards the proportion of graduates in the population, the achievements of scheduled tribes in the

southern districts are better than that of scheduled castes and they are seeking to achieve parity with general population. In the northern districts the achievements of scheduled tribes is lower than that of scheduled castes and is significantly poorer than that of the scheduled tribes in the southern districts.

Providing access to education has been one of the main pillars of public policy in the state. Allocations under Tribal Sub Plan in Kerala have remained consistently high in recent decades. Institutions have been set up in all districts of the state to provide early child care and nursery education to pre-metric schooling. Financial assistance without income limit of the households has been provided at all levels including higher education. There is no evidence of discrimination by tribe or region as regards assistance, and hence it could be said that equal access has been the hallmark of education as a public policy. But educational achievements of scheduled tribes have been different between the southern and northern districts and among distinct tribal groups residing therein. Their movement to urban areas too has been at different rates as reflected in the proportion residing in the urban areas.

A hint of an explanation of the differing performance of regions and tribes in educational attainment may be found in their religious affiliation. Those tribes who have migrated to urban areas have a higher proportion of Christians among them. An illustration of the historical experience of Malai Arayans suggests that religious affiliation does play a role in social development and educational attainments. It is not necessary that the entire tribe turns to a religion to achieve this goal. A certain segment switching over to a religion instills competition among those left behind resulting in higher achievement of both segments. The experience of Koragas, traditionally confined to the northern district of Kasaragod, too confirms this inference.

The policy message is clear. Allocating funds, and setting up institutions of care and learning is a necessary condition for educational gains of population groups but it is not sufficient. Social development and building an environment of dignity and equality among population groups too plays a very important role. It is not expected that a line department will be able to achieve this result. But what is surprising is that despite half the funds going to the local governments no significant change has come about. Local governments are expected to respond to local needs by developing innovative schemes. Have they failed is an issue calling for introspection.

**References**

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