

# Educational status of women in india



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Education and literacy can be viewed as essential prerequisites for the full integration of women into the social and economic life of the nation. Apart from providing greater opportunity for employment in the skilled and prestigious high-income jobs, female education and training have important consequences for the whole family's welfare, as well as for its individual members. Where the mother of the household has above average education she is more likely to enter the labour market and use her supplementary income to raise the standard of well-being of the family. In addition, most studies from around the world have found a relationship that is inverse between a woman's education and her fertility, and that is positive between her education and the early survival chances of her child (Ghazi, 1985). A child's academic achievement is also likely to be closely associated with its mother's level of schooling. The educational status of women therefore is the key indicator of the stage of societal development and the potential for progressive change.

Literacy is an important indicator of development among tribal groups. Among women in general, high literacy rates lead to lower infant mortality rates (Kingdon, 1999; World Bank, 1997), reduce the number of pregnancies and enhance the status of women both in domestic life and society. Additionally, the mother's literacy status and educational attainment have significantly positive effects on the child's human capital attainment (Sengupta and Guha, 2002; Colclough, 1982). The tribal population, in general, lags behind the Hindus and the Scheduled Caste population both in literacy and educational attainment. This discrepancy in human capital

attainment between the mainstream population and the tribes is particularly marked among tribal women. However, the literacy rates for scheduled tribes in India have also improved substantially from 1961 (8.54 per cent) to 2001 (47.10 per cent) for both males (13.04 per cent to 59.17 per cent) and females (2.89 per cent to 34.76 per cent) respectively.

## **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The present paper aims to focus on the educational status of Muthuvan women belonging to the state of Kerala.

## **THE STUDY POPULATION**

The tribes under study are known as Muthuvans who are residing in the Chinnar Wild Life Sanctuary in Devikulam taluk of the Idukki district in Kerala. The Muthuvan settlements are located in the interior of the forest. To reach the Muthuvan settlements are too difficult because of the segregated nature of settlements in the interior forest. Necessary and relevant information was collected from three Muthuvan villages in the Sanctuary namely Eruttalakudi, Puthukudi, and Fifth Mile. The study generates ethnographic data through secondary sources, participant observation, orally conveyed memories, personal observations and interviews.

In the 2001 census report the population of Muthuvan tribe is clubbed with the Mudugar tribe of Wayanad district therefore does not give the correct population of both these tribes. The population size of Muthuvan/Mudugar tribe has been given as 21000. The Muthuvans are settled agriculturalists, cultivating lemon grass, ragi, maize, beans, sweet potato and other allied

vegetables. Their chief food items are ragi and rice with leaves and vegetables. Each household produce their food.

## **LITERACY LEVEL OF TRIBES IN KERALA**

In all the five year plans, priority was given to educational development of the Scheduled Tribes. The main reason for the very slow spread of education among the Scheduled Tribes is the peculiar nature of their habitation.

Majority of the Scheduled Tribes are living in remote areas far away from educational institutions. The socio-economic condition prevailing in the tribal settlements are not conducive for studies. Lacks of sufficient educational institutions in tribal areas, their poverty etc, curtailed effective educational development among Scheduled Tribes. However, the literacy rate of the tribes in Kerala (64. 9 per cent) is far ahead of the tribal areas in India (47. 10 per cent) and even higher than the literacy rate of the total population of the country (64. 8 per cent).

The Muthuvans are very poor. Many of the students discontinue schools at Primary and Middle school due to financial difficulties. Though the state and central government is providing enough financial assistance in the form of scholarship, free boarding, lodging facilities, provision to text books and mid-day meals in primary schools, stipend and hostel facilities, not many tribal children are attracted to education. The Muthuvans have not been earning much to educate themselves. Their cultural surrounding and poverty creates hindrances in the process of their education.

## **NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AMONG THE MUTHUVANS**

Among the Muthuvans the dormitories were a kind of training institution for unmarried boys and girls. It is in this Chaavati (male dormitory) and Kumari Madam ( girl's dormitory) that the traditions were passed from mouth to mouth, from older age group to youths and from youths to younger ones. The parents and the elders of the village initiate the child into different customs and traditions of their community and group.

The dormitory system exist as a kind of school where the Muthuvan youths of either sex learn how to perform their conjugal and social duties as also the lore of the clan. These Muthuvan dormitories are chiefly meant for imparting social education to the Muthuvan children. Muthuvan dormitory especially the Chaavati functions as if it is a club, a place for juvenile happiness, a non-formal school, and also a training center for children for making the Muthuvan boys as mature community members. At least up to the second quarter of the 20th century Muthuvan's had both male and female dormitories (Krishna Iyer, 1939; Luiz, 1962) to train their youths to a useful and mature community member. But now the female dormitories (kumari madam- where ' kumari' indicate the young unmarried-girls, ' madam' indicates dwelling) had undergone a process of decay.

The Muthuvan dormitory (Chaavati) acts as a club for members to come together to share traditional experience. Their folk-tales, folk-songs and folk dances reveals lessons in different agricultural operations, hunting, wood cutting, honey collection, and in economic pursuits. These stories and anecdotes speak about sanctity of Muthuvan discipline, social approbation,

social justice, law and order in their community. Chaavati enables them to get to know how to protect the community by learning the ways of defence against animal raids and enemy attacks, teaches them how to be useful for the community through co-operative labour, enables to know the community rituals and rites and also how to participate in them, provides an avenue to be community conscious and corporate in their feelings and actions thus making them responsible to the community. Members are also taught how to make fishing nets, traps, mats, ornaments etc., whereas in formal schools this kind of activities are absolutely not seen and home could not attract the Muthuvan children. From the dormitory, each Muthuvan acquire the knowledge about the flora and fauna, the forest track path, medicinal plants for various diseases and so on. In the Chaavati Muthuvan children are properly educated in order to face future eventualities of life and cope ages with the cultural requirements.

## **FORMAL EDUCATION**

Formal education is considered as important tools for social change and development. Formal education can be broadly divided in to two, primary and secondary education. Primary education is intended for all children aged between 4 years to 12 years where as secondary education is provided for children aged 12 years and above. In general any type of education oral or written is the action of developing the individual mentally and morally.

For primary education in all the study villages government established primary schools with a single hut class room which will house all the students up to IV standard, handled by a single teacher. Muthuvans send their children to school up to primary level. To attract the children to school,

government provides many facilities for students in primary level. All students in the primary school are provided with book, pencils, and slates for free of cost. Government also provided mid-day meal to all students in the primary level. In mid day meal per day 150 gram rice and 30 gram dal and 2 eggs in a week are provided.

Children above the IV standard will be sent to the tribal hostels and tribal schools away in the block or district headquarters. But once they come for vacation, majority of them never return to hostels. The strange life style and schedule at the hostel, being away from the parents and the village, missing all the cultural and social freedom, all these make them quit the hostels and keep them still close to illiteracy. Like any other people they too feel comfortable to speak their own language and dialect, the ' enavan pech' (our own speech).

## **LITERACY TRENDS AMONG THE MUTHUVAN WOMEN**

Among the Muthuvans the demand for education is much lower than as compared to other tribes in Kerala. Muthuvan women have to work in order to cope with their daily living and do not place a high value on education. Additionally, in the remote Muthuvan hamlets where a good infrastructure is lacking, women find it difficult to have access to schools. Many are not even aware of the existence of schools in their areas due to lack of communications and networks.

## **LITERACY LEVEL OF THE MUTHUVAN WOMEN**

Even though Kerala has a high literacy rate even in the rural areas (90.9 per cent), women among the Muthuvan tribe are still lagging behind in literacy (36.98 per cent compared to the women literacy rate of Kerala, 87.80 per cent). The general trend of high female literacy rates in Kerala and the high status of women in the state have no impact on the literacy rate among the Muthuvan women because of their isolation and living in the dense forest away from the main stream.

Considering the educational qualification of the women respondents in the study area, out of the total 211 respondents 71.09 per cent are illiterate, 18.48 per cent studied up to the primary level, 10.5 per cent were in the Middle school level. Only two respondents were studied up to Higher Secondary Level and two were studied up to graduate level.

Due to the provision of incentives such as mid-day meal programmes and distribution of uniforms, there is a slight increase in the number of children who go to school. In the sample population, Muthuvans in the age group of 5 to 19 years showed some inclination towards schooling. Out of 92 boys and 83 girls, 81.66 per cent boys (75 boys) and 80.53 per cent (67 girls) attended school. These are obviously the first generation learners because the largest number, 82.66 per cent boys (62 out of 75 boys) and 79.10 per cent girls (53 out of 67 girls) were in the primary school. The number of girls and boys in the Middle and High school were meager. There are many reasons for this condition. Non-availability of middle schools in the vicinity of tribal settlements as well as the failure of ITDP schools in the state of Kerala to offer Middle schools and High Schools is the two most important reasons



for the educational backwardness of tribal children. Poverty of the parents is yet another reason. Above all they are still unaware of the importance of education.

## **EDUCATION OF THE MUTHUVAN GIRL CHILDREN**

The girl child among the Muthuvans is denied the future opportunity of the total development. The reasons associated with not educating girl child are financial constraints, early marriage, submissiveness, and motherhood. After attaining puberty, Muthuvan girls are not allowed to go to school even if the school is located in the settlement itself. Girls have no say on the topic of education. It is entirely their parent's decision. Regarding their aspiration to educate their daughters, the parents had different response. More than half of them wanted to send their daughters to schools but others thought it was futile. In absence of hired labour, the girls work at home and fields is of utmost importance and all considered the fact that eventually the girls have to get married and start their families. Where parents are enthusiastic about educating their daughters, they enroll their daughters in schools but rarely allow them to complete their schooling. The girls study up to primary school only; since there is no middle school in their area they have to go to town to continue their education. The Muthuvans are reluctant to send their girl children out of their settlements since they are very much concerned about the safety of their daughters. Thus they discontinue their education at the primary level and turn to household chores and agricultural activities.

From early childhood itself Muthuvan girls play a prominent role in running the family. By the age of 12-14 years most of the girls join the agricultural force. The girls also supplement the household income through their labour-

force and also participate in minor forest produce collection. If they have spare time in spite of all these activities and obtain permission from their parents then they may go to school.

According to 47.86 per cent of the respondents the reason for their present educational status is that the facilities were not available for them to get educated, 0.94 per cent revealed that girls education was not allowed, 6.16 per cent said the reason that because of agricultural activities and household chores they did not get time to study, 3.31 per cent opined that they did not have any interest to study since this education is worth less for them on account of that they are staying in the forest and they possess enough knowledge from the forest itself to cope with their lives.

Out of 211 respondents 93.36 per cent are ready to send girl children to school up to primary level, while 6.63 per cent shows unwillingness to send their girl children to school. They are of the opinion that girl children should first learn how to manage household chores and agricultural activities as they have to manage her husband's house after marriage.

From early childhood to begin with, girl children are trained in various domestic chores. As soon as girl is grown up enough to play she is regarded old enough to work. She may be seen assisting her mother in all domestic work bringing fuel from the forest, carrying water from the nearby pipe and by attending to small babies. She has to attend all kinds of domestic work. When the girl children started to manage the household mother can go for agricultural activities without any hindrance.

In absence of hired labour, the girls work at home and fields is of utmost importance and all considered the fact that eventually the girls have to get married and start their families. Other than going school 50. 23 per cent of the girl children were managing the household chores, helping in agricultural activities and taking care of the younger children. Even if the schools were located in their hamlet itself, due to these work burdens girl children were always withdrawn from the schools.

## **DROP-OUT AMONG THE MUTHUVAN CHILDREN**

Drop out is an evil of primary education. Primary education is imparted with two main objectives as to make the children literate and to prepare them for becoming responsible citizen of the country. So the children to be literate should have at least four years schooling and to be a responsible citizen most have and eight years of schooling. The drop out pupils of the study area is large. So it is very important to analyze the cause for drop out.

## **REASON FOR DROP-OUTS**

The reasons for drop-out are depending on family status, economic imposition, bi-lingual education, lack of interest, etc. Among the Muthuvans it was found that the problem of dropout is not an isolated phenomenon, but it may be attributed to so many other facts.

### **1. Economic Backwardness**

The Muthuvans depend on agriculture for their subsistence. Further they also engaged in wage labour and each family income ranges from Rs 800/-to Rs. 1000/-per month. As such they find it difficult for them to spend hard earnings on the expenses of their children's education.

Though majority of the families depended on agricultural produce and collection of Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP), barter system has no longer very much effective in their daily living. Everything has a price now a days including education. Exploitation of non-tribes in procurement of agricultural produce from Muthuvans and consequently trap in vicious cycle of indebtedness accentuated the problem of poverty. Due to their poor economic condition, children assist their parents in familial subsistence. As such this drop-out problem is perpetuating in the study area.

## **2. Socio-cultural factors**

Socio-cultural practices of Muthuvans play a significant role in the overall development of children in the study village. The formal education which is imparted to Muthuvan children is devoid of learning about their own society and their vernacular language, they are forced to learn alphabets in alien language.

Even the teachers are not well versed with Muthuvan language and they teach in text book language. They are not bothered about whether the children are capable of understanding what they are taught. It is the fact that despite their tradition and culture these societies have to accept the innovation for getting employment. But they feel that the medium of instruction should be local up to primary level and the syllabus should be based on their culture and society. Lack of such amenable medium of instruction and territorial based education causing lot of confusion among the children. Eventually they turn down this education under those psychological pressure and phobia about the formal education.

### **3. Non-availability of facilities**

All the settlements had primary schools and Anganwadies, but these settlements do not have Middle school and High Schools. The Primary Schools in the study area was working with a single teacher in a small hut having only one room. All the students from Standard I to Standard IV were sitting in the same class room and the single teacher managed all the classes. Further analysis of the reasons for dropout showed that after the attainment of puberty girls never allowed to go to schools, in addition to this their economic conditions also forced them to dropout. The dropout generally occurred after the child completed the school. Where schools are not located at close quarters from the settlements, rates of dropout as well as non-enrollment are high. There is a natural hesitation on the part of most parents to send children to schools located at a distance.

Lack of appropriate atmosphere of schooling, continuous attendance, parental interest, study interest are some of the important problems of education faced by Muthuvan children. Few teachers perceived economic problems, inadequacy of clothing, lack of books and stationery as the reasons for poor attendance of students.

Poverty coupled with insufficient infrastructure is responsible for the prevalence of large scale drop out among the tribal children. The Muthuvan settlements are located in forest belts. Often children have to walk through wild animal infested forest tracts to reach the nearest school. This is a big safety risk. For example, not a single child in the school going age in the settlements in the midst of Chinnar Wild Life Sanctuary was going to school, where the schools are located away from the settlement. The Muthuvans are

especially apprehensive about sending girls through lonely forest tracts for a very genuine fear. Many a time not only they encounter wild elephants but also 'wild and lusty men'. There have been instances when forest contractors, non-tribal men in the neighbouring villages have tried to make sexual advance at these young girls.

## **PRE-METRIC HOSTEL FOR FEMALE CHILDREN**

The Kerala state provided a boarding institution for tribal girls- pre-metric hostel as it is called, in Marayoor, the nearby town of the study area, for the convenience of the tribal girls who are coming from the remote settlements. The hostel has now thirty-two boarders who are students in Government-run and private schools. Of them, only six are from Muthuvan community. As Muthuvans consider themselves as superior to the other tribes they do not prefer to admit their children to the hostel where they would have to live, inter-dine, and interact with the Malapulaya children. Muthuvans are claiming superior status over Malapulayas. The school dropout rate among Muthuvan children is said to be considerably high. It would seem that besides their hesitancy to stay and interact with Malapulaya children, Muthuvan children who are used to high altitudes and evergreen forest habitat and associated way of living find the hostel and school alienating. The resistance of Muthuvan parents to their children intermingling with Malapulaya children is very high. This also forms one of the reasons for not sending the children in the schools away from Muthuvan hamlet.

## **DISCUSSION**

Low literacy among the Muthuvan tribe in general and women in particular, presents a very serious problem. The demand side of labour market has a

feedback effect on the investment decisions on the Muthuvans in education. They are relayed on agriculture for their livelihood. The Muthuvans consider both boys and girls as economic asset to the family, therefore sending them to school upsets the traditional pattern of division of labour. Muthuvan girls usually help their mothers at home in all possible ways and work in the field in the agricultural seasons. In non-agricultural seasons they are usually engaged in the collection of minor forest produces, grazing cattle and goats, under these circumstances parents never force the children to go to school at all. Although economic constraints hinder tribal girls from getting educated, cultural, social and family structures also contribute to the tremendous variation in dropout rates of girls among the Muthuvans.

Besides going to school majority of the Muthuvan girls are managing the household chores, taking care of the younger children, helping in the agricultural activities, collecting minor forest produces and firewood. They also bring water from the far away pipes and looking after the livestock. Parents want the children to help them in agriculture and other allied activities. On the top of that, school vacations are not synchronized with the heavy agricultural seasons of sowing or harvesting. So the parents cannot be faulted for pulling out their children for getting of little extra help. The study area has only primary and middle level schools. After completing middle level education, they are unable to go to town for higher education due to cultural and safety reasons as mentioned earlier.

The Muthuvan literacy level, in general is quite low. But in case of Muthuvan women it touches the lowest bottom. Muthuvans as settled agriculturalists lack enough food grains to maintain the family whole year. Education

therefore is a luxury for them which they can hardly afford. Each school-going girl in a Muthuvan family is an economic unit and contribute to the family. If the girl is taken away from her normal economic work to attend school, the family is deprived of little income which she brings; instead, the parents have to feed the child out of their earnings which further reduces the economic stability of the family.

Merely increasing the number of schools in tribal areas or throwing up superficial incentives per se will not bring development to the doors of the tribal women or girl children. The actual needs and real life situations have to be taken cognizance of while planning schemes for tribal development. In order to facilitate tribal girls to make extensive and effective use of schooling facilities, schools must be located within easy and safe reach of children. This definitely is a meaningful incentive for a large number of tribal parents who are desirous of sending their children schools. One cannot expect young girls to walk for miles through dangerous animal and human infested forest tracks. It is easier to offer scholarships and gold medals to successful tribal learners than opening new schools in distant tribal belts or removing the actual hurdles to effective utilization of existing facilities.

The introduction of formal education is not without any negative impact. A set of values totally alien to the Muthuvan culture have now been introduced to their community. Often, the curricular content of class room training is in direct contradiction to their real life experiences. Barring a few exceptions tribal education programmes do not take into account the needs and conditions of tribal life and culture. A curriculum that is alien to their culture and ways of life leaves them confused. Such concepts as ' the father being



the sole bread earner', ' mother attends only to household chores', ' boys playing out-door games and girls engaged in domestic work' leaves them perturbed. Even the gender insensitive games that are taught in the non-tribal schools do not have positive attitude towards tribal values. The non-tribal culture at large does not have a very pro-women attitude and the same is reflected in the attitude of these teachers towards female children. The teacher addressed the girls as ' waste', ' burden', and scolded them whenever they did not show interest in the lessons or failed to answer their questions. They made a point to repeatedly remind the female students that their place was in the home and that kitchen work does not require any formal schooling. Teachers with such attitudes are doing great damage to the motivation of girl children because of their gender blind attitudes. Ideas that had hitherto not crept into Muthuvan mind have now been introduced. Many female teachers also act as a negative, influence on women and girl children. They express their displeasure and disapproval about such tribal practices as elopement, divorce and widow marriage. These young children are slowly developing a sense of aversion towards their indigenous practices, many of which are very progressive.