

# A Study on the Factors for Low Literacy Rate among the Tribal Tea Labourers of the Nilgiris District, Tamilnadu, India

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*Abstract---* Education is considered the basic right of every citizen, irrespective of his social and economic status. But, it has been seen that some people are denied their right to education due to oppression prevailing in society even now. It might be due to lack of awareness among the people or some other economic and political factors. The paper deals with the issue on the poor literacy rate of the tribes belonging to the Nilgiris district of Tamilnadu. The tribes constitute six to seven per cent of the population in the district. The researcher tries to bring out the factors and reasons which prove to be barriers for the education of the children of the tribal community. The study speaks about the tribal tea labourers' problems which deprive them of the minimum level of education. There are a number of reasons like poverty, indirect human rights violation in the work place, lack of awareness, custom of the tribal community etc. Recommendation and suggestions were given on the basis of the above mentioned issues. The steps which have to be taken by the NGOs, Social activists and Government bodies have been suggested in the paper. The paper concludes that education, being a birth right should not be denied for the citizens in a democratic country like India.

*Keywords---* Tea Labours, Tribal Tea Labours, Literacy rate, Higher education.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is considered as a valuable tool to remove ignorance and create awareness among the tribes about their rights. Despite poverty, many individuals rise from their socio-economic level to an admirable position. This has been possible only through education which is common for all categories of people in society. The study speaks about the factors and hurdles which stand as a challenge in educating the children of tribal communities living in interior and remote tribal settlements in the Nilgiris district. The district is divided into six taluks for administrative purposes, namely Udhamandalam, Coonoor, Kotagiri, Kundah, Gudalur and Pandalur. The tribes form around 5 percentage of the total population of the district, where more than 70 percent of them reside in the rural region where education is accessible only after some barriers are overcome. The study has been conducted among the respondents from the primitive tribal groups like Kurumbas, Irulas, Kattunaickens, Kotas, Todas and Paniyas.

There are many government schools at all taluks in the district and a majority of the region can be connected with proper roads for transport facility. But in some cases the tribal settlements which are located in deep forests could not

be connected to roads which would take them to nearby villages or towns. Such people are denied proper education, even basic education. This seems to be the basic reason for the poor literacy rate among the tribal tea labourers. The tribal tea labourers work in tea estates close to their settlements. During the field research it has been found that many respondents are illiterate and only a few have undergone high school education. Apart from the distance, there are also other factors which prevail in the workplace; villages and community also prevents them from education. Such factors have been analysed in this study.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sarkar (1979) in his study mentions that there is a significant improvement among the tribal group of Naga society due to the growth of awareness about education. This results in progressive changes in their social life, economic status and interaction with the non-tribal group of their environment.

Jha and Jhingram (2002) in their study state that reasons like illness of a family member, transfer of the teaching faculty, natural calamities, drought and famine are considered to be the factors for the tribal children to discontinue their school education.

Srivastava (2004) in his study states that the tribal children are comparatively poor in mental health status than the non-tribal children. This condition prevails due to the problems faced by the tribal children in their villages as a result of poor economic and social conditions.

Gaurang Rami's (2012) in their paper mentions that girl students from the tribal community in Gujarat did not continue their school education due to lack of essential amenities like drinking water and separate toilet facilities and ignorance of the medium of learning, which was different from their mother tongue.

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Education plays a vital role in the socio-economic life of all the individuals and community in our society. The tribal community in our country do not flourish owing to lack of access to educational opportunities provided by the government. Lack of awareness and the social and economic backwardness are considered to be the factors for low literacy rate among the tribal community. The paper has been framed in order to find out the root causes for the poor educational status prevailing in the tribal community of the Nilgiris district.

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**IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

- ❖ To examine the problems faced by the tribal tea labourers regarding education

**V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The current research is confined to the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu, and further, reasons for the hurdle on availing of education facility alone are ascertained in this study.

**VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*Data*

Primary data are considered to be important for this study. They were collected by employing Questionnaire as well as Interview schedule method.

*Sampling*

By employing convenience sampling method, the data have been collected from 140 respondents.

*Framework of Analysis*

The data are analysed by making use of simple percentage.

**VII. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The following table reveals the results of the study.

**Table 1: Reason for Drop Outs**

Category	Reason for discontinue	No. of Respondents	Percent age
Uneducated	Poverty	12	34.29
	Compulsion to work (By parents)	8	22.86
	No nearby schools	8	22.86
	Not interested	4	11.43
	Stress from school (Demotivating)	0	0
	Restriction on basis of Gender	3	8.57
High school	Poverty	32	47.76
	Compulsion to work (By parents)	12	17.91
	No nearby schools	5	7.46
	Not interested	4	5.97
	Stress from school (Demotivating)	1	1.49
	Restriction on basis of Gender	13	19.4
Higher secondary	Poverty	7	18.92
	Compulsion to work (By parents)	16	43.24
	No nearby schools	2	5.41
	Not interested	4	10.81
	Stress from school (Demotivating)	3	8.11
	Restriction on basis of Gender	5	13.51
Graduates & Others	Poverty	1	0.71
Total		140	

Source: Primary data collected by the researcher

Table 1 reveals the reason for discontinuing education by the tribal labourers. The table has been categorised into segments, i.e., the respondents who were uneducated, those who had high school educational qualification, those who discontinued after higher secondary education and those who completed diploma or graduation. The respondents who were uneducated were 35 in number, in which 34.29 percent mentioned that due to poverty they never went to school; 22.86 percent stated that due to compulsion by parents, they were not able study; 22.86 percent stated that there were no schools close to their residence or settlements; 11.43 percent were not interested in studies and 8.55 per cent stated that there were some restrictions in their community which prevented them from pursuing education.

Table 1 also depicts that around 47.76 percent and 18.92 percent of the respondents discontinued their school and higher secondary education respectively due to poverty. Compulsion of parents made 17.91 percent of respondents to discontinue after high school and 43.24 percent of respondents to drop out after higher secondary school. 7.46 percent of respondents discontinued after high school and 5.41 percent of respondents discontinued their higher secondary education as there were no schools nearby. 5.97 percent of the respondents of high school category and 10.81 percent of higher secondary category stated that they were not interested to continue their higher education. 1.49 percent of high-school-completed respondents and 8.11 percent of higher-secondary-school-completed respondents mentioned that they discontinued their education due to some stressful situation faced during their school days. 19.40 percent of respondents discontinued their studies after high school due to the restriction on the basis of gender. Similarly, 13.51 percent of the respondents were not able to continue their higher education after higher secondary because of the restriction prevailing in their tribal community on the basis of gender differences. There was only one respondent who completed a diploma course. But he could not continue higher studies due to poverty.

**VIII. FINDINGS**

It has been found out that many tribal tea labourers have left their schools due to poverty. They were made to work in the tea estates by their parents. Some tribal tea labourers stated that the estate management stressed them to bring their children to estate as labourers. This also seemed to be one of the reasons for the children to discontinue their studies. Easy accessibility to school seemed to be a dream for many tribal children as they were residing in the interior forest region. This also became a major factor for discontinuing their education. Some respondents stated that they were not interested to continue their studies. The environmental factors too were found to play a major role in reducing the interest level among the tribal respondents. Some respondents mentioned about the de-motivating activities by the faculties and staffs of their school. The activities might be on communal basis or in other forms.



This made the respondents to discontinue from their school education. It was very common in the tribal villages for a girl child to discontinue higher education. It seemed to be a miracle if a girl completed high school education. Some customs and restrictions, based on gender, created hurdles in the educational career of female respondents.

## IX. SUGGESTIONS

Poverty has to be eradicated if the tribal children were to continue their education without any barriers. But eradicating poverty cannot be achieved within a short term. Efforts have to be taken by the government, NGOs and social activists along with teachers, associated with schools in the tribal regions. Poverty being an economic challenge could be abolished by implementing awareness programmes about the government schemes which were specially framed for the welfare of tribal community. The tribes have to be taught about the tribal welfare schemes of government bodies like Tribal Sub-Scheme(TSS) through special central assistance, Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, Central Sector Scheme which supports the marketing & development of Tribal Products, National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC), State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations (STFDCs) etc.

The teachers in the government schools and tribal residential schools of the district can concentrate on students' attendance and communicate to the education department if there are issues in the regular attendance of the students from the tribal villages. The NGOs and social activists should enquire about the details of child labourers employed in the tea estates near the tribal settlements. The teachers and the social volunteers can visit the tribal villages and counsel the parents to send their children to school, as it is the only way for the betterment of the future generation of the tribal community. The teachers have to treat the tribal students with care and affection thereby encouraging them to continue their higher education. The tribal children must be taught about the various opportunities and reservations provided by the government in education and employment sectors.

Awareness has to be created among the tribal community in abolishing the gender based dominance and customs. Female children have to be given rights of learning. Strict inspection has to be carried out in plantation estates in order to eradicate child labour system.

## X. SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

The present study could be extended for further investigation and for sorting out solutions to implement progressive measures in education among tribal community. This paper would support the future researchers as references to concentrate on tribal research. Further studies can be carried in the areas like tribal development and welfare.

## XI. CONCLUSION

Institutional factors like irregularity of teacher, negative attitudes of non-tribal students, poor infrastructure facility of government schools were also considered to be the factors

which influenced many to dropout. Parental involvement could minimise the dropouts and will encourage the growth in education level among the tribal community. Implementing proper strategies from education department and tribal welfare department will pave way for eradicating illiteracy among the tribal community.

It could be concluded that education being a basic right has to be made available to all categories people irrespective of their socio-economic, cultural status. Government has to concentrate on these issues and it has to be considered as the most serious issue.

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