

# A STUDY ON THE LITERACY RATE OF MAJOR SCHEDULED TRIBE COMMUNITIES IN WAYANAD, KERALA

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## Abstract

Kerala the state well known for its socio-economic development is the homeland of many scheduled tribe communities. Kerala ranks first among the Indian states in the human development index. But Scheduled tribes in the states have failed to reach par with other sections of society. They continue to be the most disadvantaged and marginalized section in the state. Scheduled tribes in Wayanad lag behind the other sections of the society in their basic achievements like education and literacy. Scheduled tribes are the most backward and marginalized section in Wayanad concerning education. High rate of poverty and low level of income among them are the result of low educational attainment levels and illiteracy. The literacy rate of scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district is (71.36%) which is lower than the district's average literacy of 89.03 percent. The literacy rate of the tribal in the district is lower than that of the general as well as sc population. Despite the continuous efforts on the part of the government to bring the scheduled tribes into the mainstream of the economy the tribals continue to be the most marginalized section in the district. The paper aims to study the literacy rate of five major scheduled tribe communities in the Wayanad district of Kerala namely Paniyan, Kurumar, Kurichiyan, Kattunaikan, and Adiyar.

**Key Words:** Tribal Communities, Literacy, Educational Attainment, Wayanad

## Introduction

Literacy is the key to the socio-economic progress of any country. It is the basic requirement that every individual should possess in society. In simple words, literacy means the ability to read and write. Literacy is defined by the national literacy mission as acquiring the skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one's day-to-day life. The scheduled tribe population in India is one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in the country. Tribal population in India is considered to be the most primitive settlers of the Indian peninsula. They are generally called Adivasis implying indigenous people or original inhabitants of the county. The tribal communities in India have been recognized by the Indian Constitution under 'Schedule 5' of the constitution. Hence the tribes recognized by the Constitution are known as 'Scheduled Tribes'. Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India defined scheduled tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution".

As per Census 2011, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes (STs) was 59% whereas the overall literacy rate was 73%. The tribals are the most backward section in Kerala concerning education and literacy. The low educational status of tribals is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrollment rate, and high rate of dropout from school. According to the 2011 census Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala is 74.44 percent, which is lower than the State average literacy of 93.91 percent. District-wise data shows that Kottayam (94.31%) has the highest literacy rate followed by Thiruvananthapuram (89.85%). The literacy rate among scheduled tribes is lowest in Palakkad (57.63%) followed by the Thrissur district (67.88%).

Among the districts in Kerala, Wayanad District has the largest Scheduled Tribe population in the State (35.94 percent). Tribal is the most backward section in Wayanad with regard to education and literacy. The literacy rate of scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district is (71.36%).

## The objective of the study

The literacy rate of scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district is lower than the district average literacy of 89.03 percent. The literacy rate of the tribals in the district is lower than that of the general as well as sc population. The objective of this paper is to study the literacy rate of five major scheduled tribe communities in the Wayanad district of Kerala namely Paniyan, Kurumar, Kurichiyan, Kattunaikar, and Adiyar.

## Methodology

The study mainly uses data from secondary sources. The data from Census 2001, Census 2011, and scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013 was used in the present study to systematically analyze and understand the rate of literacy among the five scheduled tribe communities in Wayanad

## Tribal Population in Kerala: An Overview

Kerala is a well-known state in India famously known as god own country situated in the southwestern region of India. The state is well known for its socio-economic development. Kerala ranks first among the Indian states in the human development index. Its human development indices are equal with many developed countries like us auk Japan etc. despite having high standards of human development the Kerala economy stands 9<sup>th</sup> among Indian states in terms of annual growth of state domestic products and 6<sup>th</sup> in terms of per capita state domestic product. This paradoxical condition of high socio-economic development with low per capita income has been a topic of debate over the past three decades.

As far as the tribal population in the state of Kerala is concerned it is the homeland of several tribal communities. The majority of these communities inhabits on the western slope of Western Ghats. As per the 2011 census, there are 484839 scheduled tribe populations in the state constituting only 1.5% of the total population of the state.

District-wise distribution of scheduled tribe population shows that the Wayanad district (1,51,443) has the highest proportion of scheduled tribes in the state followed by Idukki (55,815), Palakkad (48,972), and Kasargod (48,857), and Kannur districts (41,371). Alapuzha is the district having the lowest scheduled tribe population in the state Paniyan, Irula, Kattunaikan, and Adiyar are the major scheduled tribe communities in the state. Table 1 shows the district wise distribution of scheduled tribe population in kerala.

**Table 1. District-wise distribution of Scheduled Tribes in Kerala**

District	Scheduled Tribe Population
Wayanad	151443
Idukki	55815
Palakkad	48972
Kasaragod	48857
Kannur	41371
Thiruvananthapuram	26759
Malappuram	22990
Kottayam	21972
Ernakulam	16559
Kozhikode	15228
Kollam	10761
Thrissur	9430
Pathanamthitta	8108
Alapuzha	6574

Source: Census 2011

## Tribal population in Wayanad

Wayanad is a district in the northeastern part of Kerala, famous for its natural beauty. The name Wayanad is believed to have derived from the word Vayal-Nadu – the land of paddy fields. One of the important features of the Wayanad district is its large Adivasi population. Wayanad District stands first with 35.94 percent of the Scheduled Tribe population of the State. The tribal's in Wayanad consists mainly of Paniyan, Kurumar, Adiyar, Kurichiyar, And Kattunaikan are the aboriginal tribes of Wayanad. The Kurichiyar is considered to be the most developed among the scheduled tribes in the state. Though the district is one of the most backward among the district in Kerala, cash crops like pepper, cardamom, coffee, tea, spices, and other products earn sizeable foreign exchange for the country. The state also has the highest forest density in the state.

The scheduled tribes in Wayanad form the most backward group among the weaker section of Wayanad. Scheduled tribes have lived as secluded entities for centuries unaffected by the society around them. This social seclusion has been considered to be the major factor responsible for their slower growth and socio-economic backwardness. Their social realism is characterized by poverty, illiteracy, socio-economic and sexual exploitation by settlers, and the depletion of their traditional resource base. Scheduled tribes lag behind the others in their basic performance achievements like education and health which had played a crucial role in the development process of the district.

As per the 2001 census, there were 136062 tribes in the Wayanad district constituting 17.93% of the total population of the district. And in the 2011 census it was marked 151443 constituting 18.76% of the tribal population of the district. The following table depicts the total tribal population in the Wayanad district.

**Table 2. Total tribal population in Wayanad**

ST Population In Wayanad		% of ST Population to The Total Population of Wayanad	
2001	2011	2001	2011
136062	151443	17.93	18.76

Source: Census 2001, Census 2011

Each tribal community in the district has its special lifestyles, culture, customs, traditions and religious practices tribal have agriculture as their principal economic activity. Other than agriculture they depend on forest and forest products for their livelihood. The study mainly focuses on the five major scheduled tribe communities in Wayanad namely Paniyan, Kurumar, Kurichiyar, Kattunaikan, and Adiyar. Paniyan is the largest single tribe in Wayanad and they are mostly casual agricultural laborers, Kurichiyar stands second and they are a mostly settled agriculturalist community who practices cooperative farming. The majority of the Kurichiyar have land holdings. Kuruman has traditionally settled cultivators today they are marginal farmers. Kattunaikan is a honey-collecting community. They lag in education and do not possess any land they prefer to live in the forest. Lastly, Adiyar is the landless agricultural laborer of Wayanad. Adiyar does not have the education of land they were subjected to the worst form of bonded labor till 1976. Apart from the above-mentioned groups, there are also smaller groups like Kammara, Kondakapus, Kondareddis, and Kota.

**Table 3 Community-wise population of scheduled tribes in Wayanad district**

Community	Total Population
Paniyan	81936
Kuruman	19736
Kurichiyar	32896
Kattunaikan	17436
Adiyar	10055

Source: scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013

**Literacy rate scheduled tribe communities in Wayanad district.**

Scheduled tribes are the most backward and marginalized section in Wayanad with regard to education. The literacy rate of scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district is (71.36%) which is lower than the district's average literacy of 89.03 percent. The literacy rate of the tribals in the district is lower than that of the general as well as sc population. The study mainly focuses on the literacy rate of five major scheduled tribe communities in Wayanad namely Paniyan, Kurumar, Kurichiyan, Kattunaikar, and Adiyen. These tribes follow their special lifestyles, culture, customs and traditions, and other religious rituals. These tribes don't have a written script for their language and their history can be understood only through their oral traditions and religious practices. The following table shows the literacy rate of general as well as scheduled tribe populations in Kerala as well as in the Wayanad district.

**Table 4 Literacy rate of general population Vs scheduled tribes**

State/District	Literacy Rate	
	General Population	Scheduled Tribes
Kerala	94	75.08
Wayanad District	89.03	71.36

Source: census 2011

The literacy of tribes in Kerala is much better compared to the national average but there is a significant gap in the educational attainment between the general population and the tribal population in the state.

Tribal is the most backward section in Wayanad concerning education. The scheduled tribes in Wayanad have been exposed to formal education only recently. They had a very poor response to formal education. One of the reasons for this was their social seclusion. The scheduled tribes have lived as secluded entities for centuries unaffected by the society around them. Majority of the tribal lives in remote areas far from educational institutions. Geographical obstacles also contribute to the low literacy of scheduled tribes in the district. Differences in tribal religion also affect their educational attainment and literacy. Other than this the socio-economic conditions of tribal families also affect the education and literacy of the tribal population. Obstacles like the high poverty rate, insufficient number of schools in tribal areas, and lack of resources in tribal schools also contributed to the lower literacy rate in the district. Another important barrier is language, most of the time the teachers are not fluent in tribal languages. Another important contributing factor to the low literacy and education among the tribes in the district is the caste discrimination they face from the upper caste children in the schools.. Among the tribal Paniyan community has the largest literate population in the district, followed by Kurichiyan, Kurumar Kattunaikan, and Adiyen respectively. Among the communities under study, Adiyen is the community that has the least tribal population in the district. The table shows the community-wise literacy among the scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district

**Table 5 Community-wise literacy rate of scheduled tribes in Wayanad**

Community	Literacy	
	2001(Census)	2008 (Tribal Survey)
Paniyan	33244	53415
Kuruman	17771	16555
Kurichiyan	22362	26903
Kattunaikan	4872	10325
Adiyen	4706	6663

Source: Census 2001 & scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013

**Table 6 Community-wise literacy rate of scheduled tribes in Wayanad**

Community	Total Population	Illiterate	Literates	Literacy In%
Paniyan	81936	28521	53415	65.19
Kuruman	19736	2670	16555	86.47
Kurichiyan	32896	5324	26903	83.82
Kattunaikan	17436	7084	10352	59.37
Adiyan	10055	3393	6663	66.26

Source: scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013

Besides the inter-tribal differences in literacy, there exists gender bias in the literacy rate of the tribal population as in other groups. The female literacy among the tribal is less compared to males in the same community. The literacy rate of tribal females in rural areas is found to be the lowest among all groups. The literacy rate of tribal females is still so much lower than the national average for females. The following tables show the literacy rate among females and males in the 5 scheduled tribe communities in the Wayanad district.

**Table 7 Literacy among the female population above the age of 5 years**

Community	Total number of females	Literates	Literacy Rate	Total number of male	Literates	Literacy rate
Paniyan	42349	25392	59.96	39725	28138	70.83
Kuruman	9966	8003	80.30	9812	9098	92.72
Kurichiyan	16414	12886	78.51	16670	14852	89.09
Kattunaikar	8827	4991	56.54	8643	5389	62.35
Adiyan	5272	3215	60.98	4825	3487	72.27

Source: scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013

From the above table, it can be observed that both among females and males the Kurumar tribe has the largest number of literates followed by Kurichiyan and Adiyan. And in both gender, the Kattunaikan has the lowest literacy rate as compared to other communities in the district. But it is evident from the table that there is a great level of gender disparity in the literacy level of these tribal communities. In all five communities, the female literacy rate is low as compared to their male counterparts.

To understand the inter-tribe variation in the educational attainment of the five tribes the data from the report on the socio-economic status of scheduled tribes survey 2013 is taken.

**Table 8 Inter-tribe variation in educational attainment**

Educational status	Community				
	Paniyan	Kuruman	Kurichiyan	Kattunaikan	Adiyan
Illiterate	28521	2670	5324	7084	3393
Below SSLC	48164	10931	21229	8857	5777
SSLC	1696	2993	3358	515	423
Plus Two	609	2129	1920	234	173
Graduate	74	429	352	16	36
Post Graduate	-	53	26	5	3
Diploma	155	278	210	38	17
Professional Education	11	45	33	3	2

Source: scheduled tribes of Kerala, report on the socio-economic status 2013

Community wise data on the educational status of scheduled tribes in the Wayanad district shows that there is an inter-tribe disparity in the educational attainment of these tribes and the number of people who have education below matriculation is very high depicting the fact that there is a higher rate of dropout of students in the tribal regions of Wayanad district. Kuruman and Kurichiyan tribe has better educational status as compared to Paniyan, Kattunaikan and Adiyar. The major reason for this dropout is their socio-economic backwardness and lack of interest in studies.

## Conclusion

Education is the key to the overall development of every individual. Education creates new opportunities and increases the income levels of the people. It is very important for the development of any nation. It is evident from the above study that tribes in the Wayanad district lag behind others in literacy and educational attainment. The government for the past few decades has been introducing and implementing various welfare programs with generous financial assistance to bring the tribal communities on par with the other sections of the societies. Despite all these efforts the tribal continue to be the most marginalized section in the district. Unfortunately, the tribal population in Wayanad has failed to take full advantage of the new opportunities created by the government to uplift them to the mainstream of society. Thus there is a need for policies which enhance inclusive development of these communities in the district.

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