

Who Joins Ashram Schools? (A Study of Ashram Schools in Karnatka)

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INTRODUCTION

Social progress, political development, cultural achievement, and transformation are possible only by the attainment of minimum standards of living or we may say social progress is contingent upon economic development. Thus economic condition is a decisive factor, when it is good it results in a progressive cycle in the lives of the people, otherwise it results in poverty that puts the vicious cycle into motion.

In any community where the poor people form the majority the possibility of spreading literacy and education becomes all the more difficult. Owing to absolute poverty members of such communities can not utilize the educational opportunities.

Aryanayakam (1963) rightly remarks: "India, like other under-developed countries of the world, is a poor country. The majority of the people are underfed. They lack proper housing, clothing, sanitation and the like. Living under these uncongenial conditions, they have almost lost the faculty of clear thinking. It will indeed be a wastage of efforts if we try to teach people about proper dietary requirements when they do not have the means to procure even one good meal a day. There seems to be no use in trying to teach them what an ideal home should be like or what should be the proper sanitary measures when they are hungry and without adequate clothing or shelter. The basic requirements must be supplied first before we think of educating them".

The Scheduled Tribe (ST) people in Karnataka are no exception to this. In other words one can say that the ST's in Karnataka are caught amidst the same situation.

After independence of the country, a series of measures aimed at the welfare and allround development of the STs were initiated and implemented in tribal areas. However, these programmes could not make much headway because of the poor economic background of the tribal people.

Sachidananda (1967) opines that in modern society the major link of education to social

structure is through economy and this is a linkage of both stimulus and response. The economy of a community guides to a large extent the quality of education it should have. Had there been no industrial revolution in the West, universal compulsory education could never have been possible there. The amount of money to be spent on education depends upon the economic resources of the community.

D'Souza (1980) feels that the differential utilisation of educational facilities provided can be attributed to the prevalent socio-economic variance in the home environment.

It is clear that in an under developed tribal community, where the poor people form the majority, owing to sheer poverty, they could not avail of the educational opportunities. Thus, the educational development of the tribal people is inter linked with their socio-economic condition. Hence prior to solving the problems associated with the educational backwardness of the tribals the problem of bread must be satisfied. Among the tribal people who hardly get meal twice a day, education is a tall talk, taking into account the predominant role played by socio-economic factors in determining the utilisation of facilities by the STs.

This paper seeks to examine the socio-economic profile of the Ashramites and there by assess its impact on their utilization in terms of their enrolment, retention in the school system.

METHOD OF STUDY

The study was conducted on a sample of 270 inmates of Nine Ashram schools located in the four districts of the three divisions of Bangalore, Bangalore (rural), Mysore and Tumkur divisions of Karnataka state.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The class wise distribution of the respondents is presented in table 1. From the table it can be inferred that the number of students who get enrolled into lower classes is more but as the inmates move from lower to higher standards their

percentage decreases.

The children as they move from lower to higher standards become fit enough to engage in some productive activity or the other. The grown up boy students are thus forced to leave the schools either to participate in paid economic activity outside the household or to participate in the household economic activity. The girl students on the other hand are brought home to assist their parents in the domestic chores. This explains the high dropout rate of the inmates as they move from lower to higher standards.

From the table 1 it is evident that the enrolment of the Ashramites normally takes place after the fifth year of the child. On the whole 15.55% of the inmates entered the Ashram school in their fifth year: as large as 80.75% got enrolled between 6-8 Years followed by a tiny fraction of 3.70% who got enrolled between 9-11 years. It is observed that the enrolment is more at the ages 6-8 and very less at 9-11 years.

Table 3 throws light on the duration of stay of the inmates in the Ashram school. Among the Ashramites, 3.33 % of them have less than one year of stay; 6.67% have 1-2 years of stay; 6.67% have 2-3 years of stay. About 44.81% have stayed in the Ashram school for 3-4 years while 36.30% have stayed for 4-5 years. 1.48% have 5-6 years of stay in the Ashram school and 0.74percent have above 6 years of stay in the Ashram school.

On the whole 83.33% of the Ashramites have availed the Ashram school facility for 3-6 years. It means that the enrolled mostly at 7-10 years had a stay of 3 to 6 years of stay in the Ashram schools. It can be emphatically said that the free lodging and boarding facilities and such other facilities provided in the Ashram school have certainly facilitated the retention of the poverty

Table 1: Class wise distribution of respondents

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
III.	67 (45.27)	67 (54.92)	134 (49.63)
IV.	63 (42.57)	41 (33.61)	104 (38.52)
V.	9 (6.08)	7 (5.73)	16 (5.93)
VI.	7 (4.73)	3 (2.46)	10 (3.70)
II.	2 (1.35)	4 (3.28)	6 (2.22)
Total	146 (100.0)	122 (100.0)	270 (100.0)

ridden Ashramites, most of whom come from poor socio-economic background. This other wise would not have been possible in the absence of the Ashram Schools.

It can also be inferred that the stay in the Ashram Schools during the crucial years of schooling would definitely aid their continuance in the school system without dropping from it mid way. An effective secondary socialisation in such a stage can go a long way in ensuring better levels of educational attainment among the tribals. In this way the influence of their disadvantageous homes can be supplemented by a functional alternative in the form of Ashram Schools.

Housing Conditions

On the whole it can be said that housing conditions of the tribal students are neither cond-

Table 2: Distribution by the age at Ashram school enrolment age at enrolment in years

<i>Age at enrolment (in years)</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
5 th Year	23 15.55	19 15.57	42 15.55
6 – 8	119 8.40	99 81.15	218 80.75
9 – 11	6 4.05	4 3.28	10 3.70
12 – 14	-	-	-
Total	148 100.0	122 100.0	270 100.0

Table 3: Distribution by the duration of stay in Ashram school

<i>Duration of stay in years</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Less than 1 year	6 (4.05)	3 (2.46)	9 (3.33)
1 - 2	11 (7.44)	7 (5.73)	18 (6.67)
2 - 3	9 (6.08)	9 (7.38)	18 (6.67)
2 - 4	63 (42.57)	58 (47.54)	121 (44.81)
4 - 5	57 (38.51)	41 (33.61)	98 (36.30)
5 - 6	2 (1.35)	2 (1.64)	4 (1.48)
Above 6	-	2 (1.64)	2 (0.74)
Total	148 (100.0)	122 (100.0)	270 (100.0)

ucive to concentrate nor to study better. Single room houses, which too with no electricity facility hamper the study habits of the tribal children. Improper housing condition is, thus, considered as one of the factors not conducive for the educational advancement of the tribal students in the school.

Structure and Size of the Family: In the selected sample, it is learnt that the joint family norms are still in vogue. Of the 270 respondents 197 (72.96%) come from joint families and the remaining 73 (27.04%) belonged to the nuclear families. About two-thirds of the families of the respondents, it was observed, were larger in size having more than 7 to 8 members.

Parents and Literacy: Higher the educational level of the heads of the family, the greater was the enrolment of the children in the schools at the primary and secondary levels. Adult education is, thus, considered as a facilitator for spreading formal education among the tribal children.

The data collected from the respondents revealed that 70.00% of them were from among the families of illiterate parents. This should in no way be inferred as a reverse of the trend noted above. In a developing society more percentage of schoolchildren are bound to be from among families of illiterate parents.

In the present study the poor literacy level of the parents is considered as one of the causes for the educational backwardness of the inmates who are not able to continue in the schools for a longer period.

Parents Occupation

The matrix on occupation of the parents is presented in table 4. From the table it is evident that 86.71% of the families of the Ashramites have both their parents employed as coolie labourers. About 10.76% are cultivators, 0.63% are in service occupations. In the case of 11 families either father or mother is deceased. 2 are total orphans. There are 38.52% families where the father only earns and the mothers are housewives.

As evident from the matrix, a vast majority of the inmates households are lying under bare level of subsistence. The parents because of their poor occupational status cannot sacrifice the immediate help of the children for long term benefits of education bestowed in them. Thus the children are expected to earn something from any source instead of education at the age of schooling. Earning

and participation in household chores at the school age is the basic reason behind the high drop – outs of the inmates.

Table 4: Distribution by the occupation of the parents

Father's Occupation	Mother's occupation					
	Coolie	Artisan	Cultivation	Service occupation	Unemployed	Deceased
Coolie	137	-	-	-	55	2
Artisan	1	-	-	-	12	1
Cultivation	17	-	3	-	28	1
Service occupation	1	-	-	-	7	-
Unemployed	-	-	-	-	-	-
Deceased	2	-	-	-	2	-

Only a handful of inmates pass their primary levels and insignificant number of students' reach up to secondary levels or higher education.

Land Holdings: Nearly 71.85% of the respondents parents in the selected sample are land less agricultural labourers working on others' land in the village. Those who own some land are dry land cultivators and the size of the holdings is very small. Moreover the representation of tribal parents as persons with land taken on lease or share cropping is negligible.

Most of the tribal parents in the selected sample are poor and do not possess the required implements and livestock for cultivation. Except a hutment or a dwelling place majority of the respondents households in the selected sample are living in abject poverty. Hence, every able bodied including school going children are found supporting the family by supplementing income from other sources. For this very purpose, they abstain from the classes often. At times they even drop-out of the school to assist their parents who lead hand to mouth existence.

The female children, it was found, were the main victims of the financial stresses and strains of the family.

Income Levels

Tribal society's response to education depends not so much upon the enthusiasm with which it is brought there by the Government or the educational agencies but upon the society's own attitude, its capacity to cope up with the economic losses which it demands on the part of individual

families and the values attached to education in society.

Dhehar commission (1961) pointed out that “for a tribal family to send its grown up boy or a girl to school is an economic proposition and entails dislocation in their traditional pattern of division of labour”.

But it cannot be forgotten that if we examine the working of education in any society it is often found that besides the economically rich the poor may share an amount of education despite their repressive poverty if corrective steps are taken. It is established that education is always more in the higher economic groups and that economic factor usually operates as a major lever in education. It may popularise or delimit the spread of education.

In the light of the above statements, it becomes necessary to examine as to whom are the beneficiaries of education in the tribal society and what are the factors that largely shape and influence education in their society. To examine, particulars about the income levels of the respondents households have been analyzed.

In the study, about 67.04% of the families have an income of less than Rs.4,000 per annum. Taking into account the average price index, the average size of the families, the families of STs stand below poverty line; 17.78% of the families have an income ranging between Rs.4,001 – Rs.6,000; 6.66% families have an income of Rs. 6,001 – Rs. 8,000; 5.56% come from families with an income of Rs.8,000 – Rs. 10,000 and only a tiny fraction of 2.96% families have an income range of above Rs. 10,000 per annum.

It can be inferred that despite their poverty the consciousness created by the teachers about the actual benefits of education has inspired the poor tribal parents to send their children to the school. At the primary level as the school is situated in one's own village sparing the children for school has not been problematic.

Per Capita Income: From the analysis of the percapita income of the respondents it is clear that about 29.26% Ashramites households per capita income ranges between Rs.300 to Rs. 600 per year. Followed by 31.85% whose per capita income is between Rs.601 to Rs.900; nearly 21.11% families had a per capita income of Rs.901 to 1200; while 10.74% had a per capita income of RS.1201 to Rs.1500 per year. Only a small fraction of 7.04% had a per capita income

of Rs.1501 and above per year. These figures reveal the fact that a majority of the ST families, in the present study, are poverty ridden. Owing to their poverty they feel miserably letdown to provide the basic needs like nutritious food, clothing, etc., to their children. This badly affects the school performance of the Ashramites.

Index of Socio-Economic Status

The school achievement of the pupils is directly related to their social and economic background. Higher the SES higher would be the school achievement and vice versa.

The difference being born into a high SES family and a low SES family may be seen as the difference between being in an ‘expanding choice’ system and a ‘limiting choice’ system; the former implies that one is more likely to acquire the attitudes skills and resources to develop and expand one's personal development and life horizons; and the latter implies that the stated potentialities will not reach the critical level needed to increase both one's life choices and chances (Patel, 1991).

In the light of the above statement a socio – economic status index is constructed to probe whether or not the SES of the inmates has its impact on their school achievement. The SES index consisted of the sources of income of the family, Prestige of occupation held by the parents, educational qualification which they possess, size of the family, percentage of workers to non-workers, percentage of literate in the family, per capita income of the family, size of the land holding, place of residence and house ownership. The categories considered better were given more weightage. Based on the total scores obtained 3 gradations were demarcated. Accordingly those who obtained scores ranging between 0-40 were considered as coming from a poor level of SES followed by 40-60 moderate level and 60-100 fair level of SES.

As depicted in the Table 5, about 69.63% of the inmates come from poor SES level while 28.15% are from moderate SES level. Only a tiny fraction of 2.22% figures in fair SES level. From this it is clear that a majority of the Ashramites who make use of the Ashram school facilities are from the poor level of SES. It can, thus, be inferred that the Ashram school facility is made good by the poorest of the poor. Further the very fact that 44.8% and 36.30% of the respondents

availing this facility for 3 to 4 and 4 to 5 years, respectively indicate that the Ashram school facility has not only been availed by the poor tribal pupils but also they are retained in the school system without getting dropped.

Table 5: Socio-economic status index

<i>Scores</i>	<i>Boys</i>	<i>Girls</i>	<i>Total</i>
Poor	99	89	188
(Less than 40)	(66.89)	(72.95)	(69.63)
Moderate	45	31	76
(40 – 60)	(30.41)	(25.41)	(28.15)
Fair	4	2	6
(60 and above)	(2.70)	(1.64)	(2.22)
Total	148	122	270
	(100.0)	(100.0)	(100.0)

An analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of the Ashramites reveals the following facts:

1. Among the Ashramites households, the joint family norms are still in vogue.
2. The STs, it seems, prefer large families to small ones.
3. The enrolment of girl students in the Ashram schools is more or less equal to that of the boys.
4. The age group of the Ashramites ranges between 7 to 12.
5. The number of inmates who get enrolled in lower classes is higher. But as they move up from lower to higher classes the dropping out also increases.
6. The age at enrolment of the Ashramites ranges between 6 to 8 years.
7. Among the Ashramites 44.81% have had 3 to 4 years of stay in the Ashram school and 36.30% 4 to 5 years of stay which indicates their retention in the school system for longer periods.
8. A majority of the respondent's parents are poverty ridden. Nearly 71.85% of the inmate's households are land less agricultural labourers working on others land in the village.
9. The literacy levels of the parents of the Ashramites are very low. The poor literacy level of the parents is one of the main reasons for the educational backwardness of the Ashramites.

10. Taking into consideration the average price index, average size of the families, the ST families in the present study stand below the poverty line. In spite of their poverty, sparing the children for schools has not been problematic because, the schools are situated in one's own village.

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic profile of the Ashramites indicates that a vast majority of them belong to the poor socio-economic status group. Most of the parents of the inmates being illiterate, their occupational status reflects low earnings and the corresponding low economic standing. The poor conditions prevalent in their homes had made them utilize the Ashram school facility. The Ashram schools, thus, are catering to the needs of the poorest of the poor and are helping the inmates to remain in the school system without dropping from it.

KEY WORDS Socio-economic Profile. Education Scheduled Tribe.

ABSTRACT Educational inequality among Tribal children is a resultant of the socio-economic backwardness of their home environment and the illiteracy of their parents. After independence, several educational and welfare inputs have gone in to ameliorate the downtrodden Scheduled castes and the Tribal children to attain parity with other children in the educational attainments. Ashram School is one such input specially designed to suit children from Tribal background to attain better levels of education. An attempt is made in this paper to examine as to who joins and avails the input of ashram Schools and whether or not the socio-economic variance prevalent in their home environment is the causative factor for the differential utilization of the educational facilities provided for their educational advancement.

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