UNHEARD VOICES:
A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala

Research Report Submitted to
www.cry.org
Ensuring lasting change for children

by
Dr. Seetha Kakkoth
Assistant Regional Director,
IGNOU Regional Centre,
Kaloor, Cochin, Kerala.

May 2012
Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Child Rights and You (CRY-India) and National Child Rights Research Fellowship (NCRRF) for their financial support to this research project. I would like to thank the NCRRF team of CRY for their continuous encouragement, intellectual support, comments and feedback. Let me extend my heartfelt thanks to Prof. D.L. Sheth, Dr. Babu Mathew, Krish, Vijayalakshmi Balakrishnan, Puja Marwaha, Keith, Chhaya and all other resource persons in the team.

My special thanks to Prof. Vineetha Menon, Prof. Jayaprakash Raghaviah and Dr. Alice Mani Jacob, for their fruitful discussions and invaluable comments. I acknowledge my thanks to the officials of Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Nilambur and Forest Department and also to the Headmaster, teachers & staff, Ashram School for their co-operation. My thanks are also due to Swapna, the Project Fellow.

I am grateful to my tribal communities (Cholanaickan, Kattunayakan and Pathinaicken) and especially to the Ashram school-drop outs, their parents and friends for their open-hearted co-operation and support, without which this work could not have been possible.
UNHEARD VOICES:
A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala

Abstract

This study is an enquiry into the subjective experiences of the Ashram school drop-outs of Cholanaicken and Kattunayakan (including Pathinaicken) tribes of Nilambur forests, Kerala, South India. Ashram schools are residential schools established in India, as per the recommendation by the Dhebar Commission and the National Policy on Education (NPE), exclusively for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) for their educational advancement. It is significant to note that even after providing all infrastructural facilities and educational inputs, drop out of children from these schools is a common phenomena. In this context, the study concentrates on the issues of drop-out children from one of the two Ashram Schools in Kerala viz., Indira Gandhi Memorial Model Residential School, Nilambur, Malappuram district. It focuses on the essence/spirit of the drop-out children’s voices and those of their parents, friends and social functionaries; and juxtaposing them against the narratives of the officials and staff with whom they have close everyday contact in the school system. Upon analyzing the issues, certain suggestive measures for the improvement of Ashram school were arrived at and are given along with the concluding remarks.
CONTENTS

Introduction
The Problem, the Universe and Objectives of the Study
Methodology
A brief profile of Tribes under study
Ashram School
A Child’s Typical day in the Forest Habitat
A Typical day in the Ashram School
The Problem of Tribal Drop-Outs: Diverse Perspectives
Perspectives of the Drop-out Children
Conclusion

References

Annexure-i: Details of Drop-out children from Ashram School, Nilambur (1993-2010)
Annexure-ii: Decade-wise Drop-out rate of children from Ashram School, Nilambur
Annexure-iii: Interview Schedule for Ashram school Headmaster and Teachers

Photos: Life in the Forest

Photos: Life at School
UNHEARD VOICES:
A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala

I

Introduction
India is homeland to a number of tribal communities with diverse eco-cultural, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds. According to the 2001 Census, Scheduled Tribes (notified by the Government of India under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution) constitute 8.14% of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million. In the state of Kerala, 1% of the total population is tribal population, comprising of 36 unique Scheduled Tribes (ST) whose livelihoods are also varied: hunting-gathering, shifting cultivation, settled agriculture, contract labour, etc., are some of them. According to the 2001 Census, the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes of India is only 47.10%. Against the National literacy rate of 65.8%, this is appalling. Even in the State of Kerala with a high literacy rate at 90.92%, that of the Scheduled Tribes is far behind, at only 64.5%. Realizing that Scheduled Tribes are one of the most deprived and marginalized groups with respect to education, a host of programmes and measures have been initiated ever since independence of the country. Education of ST children is important not just due to a Constitutional obligation to equality of its citizen or special entitlements to ST, but because it is a crucial input in the nation’s strategy of total development of tribal communities. However, despite nation’s efforts to ensure constitutional equality, dignity and development that they themselves wish for, the tribal people have lagged behind in education owing to external as well as internal constraints, socio-economic and cultural background of the tribals and psychological problems of first generation learners etc. (Arora and Mehmi, 2006; Mehendale, 2008, Nanjunda et al, 2008; Srivastava, 1968, Sujatha, 2000; Verma, 1990).

The Problem, the Universe and Objectives of the Study:
In spite of Constitutional guarantees and persistent efforts, tribal children continue to lag behind the general population in education and there is a wide gap between the drop-out rate of tribal children and non-tribal children (Sujatha, 2000; Arora and Mehmi, 2006).
Within the Scheduled Tribes, the drop-out rate of children belonging to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs)\(^1\) is observed to be very high. In order to tackle this issue, the Dhebar Commission and the National Policy on Education (NPE), recommended to establish Ashram schools/ residential schools in tribal areas in large numbers. Consequently, in the State of Kerala, two such Ashram Schools have been established exclusively for PTGs: one in Palakkad district (for Kurumbar and Kadar) and the other in Malappuram district (for Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan).

This study concentrates on the Ashram School drop-outs in Malappuram district, with special focus on the subjective experiences of the drop-out children for the exclusive insights from such narratives, set against the narratives of the officials with whom they have close everyday contact in the school system.

The Ashram school known as Indira Gandhi Memorial Model Residential School (IGMMRS) for the forest dwelling Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) like the Cholanaickan and Kattunayakan (including Pathinaicken) was established in 1993 at Manjeri in Malappuram district, which is almost 70-90km away from the tribal settlements to which it caters. Although the children belonging to PTGs who got admission in this school were provided with amenities such as free food, accommodation, uniform etc., they were reluctant to return to school once they go back to their settlement during holidays/vacation. Assuming that distance is the main reason for the drop-out of the children, the Ashram School was shifted to Chandakunnu, Nilambur in 2006, thereby reducing a distance of almost 30-40km between tribal settlement and school. But against

\(^1\) The Government of India in 1976 have categorised 75 tribal groups/sections/ communities as Primitive Tribal Groups (now known as Particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups- PTGs), based on the criteria of Pre-agricultural level of technology, less than five per cent literacy, marginal or stagnant rate of growth etc. The PTGs in India are seen distributed in 15 States/Union Territories. In Kerala there are five PTGs viz., Koraga, Cholanaickan, Kattunayakan, Kurumbar and Kadar. These PTGs form only 5.3 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes population of the State (For more details, See., Kakkoth, 2004). The literacy rate of these communities are as follows: Cholanaicken-39.6\%, Koraga-78.5\%, Kadar-57.67\%, Kurumbar-56.6\% and Kattunayakan-59.41\% (Source: KILA Survey, 2008)
expectations, the issue of drop-outs not only continued, but also enhanced\(^2\). It is estimated that out of 515 students who took admission between 1993-2006, 103 became drop-outs, showing a drop-out rate of 20%. Since 2006, when a total number of 216 students took admission, the drop-out rate during the five year period (2006-07 to 2010-2011) came to 38.8%. As many as 84 children (50 boys and 34 girls) were dropped out since 2006 and in the admission register, the ‘reason for leaving’ was recorded as ‘long absence’ in the case of 81 students. It is significant that though there was cent percent enrolment of children at primary level of education, the drop-out rate comes to below 50 percent at the school final\(^3\). The school authorities report that even after concerted efforts, they failed to check drop-out rates. It is in this context that an attempt is made here to examine the issues of drop-outs.

\(^2\) Annual admission and drop-out details are given as Annexure-i

\(^3\) Decadal Drop-out rate is given as Annexure-ii
The study had the following objectives:

1. To understand the subjective experiences of the Ashram school drop-out children that lead to their dropping out.

2. To elicit the perspectives of the Ashram school staff and officials of the Integrated Tribal Development Department (ITDP), parents of drop-outs and tribal elders regarding the issue.

3. To analyse the issue anthropologically based on the perspectives of different categories of people — the children, the school personnel, tribal development officials and tribal elders, and field observations with the aim of suggesting measures for the improvement of Ashram school.

Methodology:

As this study mainly focused on the perspectives of drop-out children and their subjective experiences, the study began with collection of their whereabouts from the school admission register. In the school admission register, children belonging to Cholanaicken, Pathinaicken and Kattunayakan are given a misleading singular identity, viz., ‘Kattunayakan’. It was found that during this five-year period (2006-07 to 2010-2011), the total number of drop-outs from various settlements of the Cholanaicken, Pathinaicken and Kattunayakan come to 84 (50 boys and 34 girls). These children hailed from 20 settlements that are located 10 to 40 km away from the Ashram school. Since these settlements are scattered within the Nilambur forest division at great distances, it was difficult to reach all the settlements and locate the drop-outs, establish rapport and conduct interviews with them within the short duration (four months) of fieldwork. Hence, it was decided to conduct intensive fieldwork in the selected settlements of the drop-out children.

The settlements selected are Alakkal and Myladipotti (the largest settlements of the Cholanaicken), Mundakadavu and Punchakolli (the Pathinaicken settlements) and Appankappu (the Kattunayakan settlement). The rationales for selecting these settlements are as follows:

---

4 The Nilambur forests, which cover an area of 760.29 sq.km, is administratively divided into Nilambur South and North Forest Divisions. The Nilambur South Forest Division has an area of 366.17sq.km and has two forest ranges viz., Kalikavu and Karulai ranges. The Nilambur north forest division (394.120sq.km) constitutes three ranges viz., Nilambur, Edavanna and Vazhikkadavu ranges (Kerala Forests and Forestry Handbook : 1995). Mundakadavu settlement comes under Karulai range of Nilambur South Forest Division and Appankappu, Punchakolli and Alakkal settlements fall under Vazhikkadavu range of Nilambur North Forest Divisions.
a) The Cholanaickan, is a numerically small community with only 101 families in 2008 (KILA Survey, 2008), forming only 2.82% of the total tribal population in the district. In order to curtail the nomadic tendency of the Cholanaickan who are leading a semi-nomadic life inside the interior evergreen forests and reside in caves and leaf shelters, the Government of Kerala in 1970s established the colonies in Alakkal and Myladipotti to resettle them there. It is the children from these colonies who are enrolled in the Ashram school for formal education. Hence, the study was confined to the drop-outs from these two settlements.

b) Mundakadavu and Punjakolli were selected as they are the major settlements of Pathinaicken from where maximum enrolments and drop-out of Pathinaicken children are reported. Unlike the Cholanaickan, the Pathinaicken live in the semi-deciduous forests but they are also numerically small, with a population below 500 in 2010. It is to be noted that no separate survey of Pathinaicken is available as they are enlisted with Kattunayakan.

c) Appankappu colony was selected as it is the major settlement of the Kattunayakan in Nilambur, with almost 80% of the Kattunayakan of the area living in this colony. The school admission register shows maximum number of enrolment as well as drop-out of Kattunayakan children from this colony. Unlike Cholanaickan and Pathinaicken, Kattunayakan are located in the fringes of forests and though small, are numerically larger than the former two groups, with 517 families in the district in 2008 (KILA Survey, 2008).

From the 48 drop-outs (30 boys and 18 girls) from the selected five colonies, only with 41 drop-out children, rapport could be established and interviews conducted. This included 6 Cholanaickan, 21 Pathinaicken, and 14 Kattunayakan children. I could not meet 7 drop-outs (4 girls and 3 boys); one girl had died during childbirth, three girls had migrated to distant settlements on account of their marriages, one boy was in jail on charges of putting fire in the forest, and two boys had migrated out in search of jobs.
Out of the 41 drop-outs thus included in the study, there are 27 boys and 14 girls. The male drop-outs are almost double the number of female drop-outs. Of the 27 boys, 14 are unmarried, 12 are married and one, a widower, where as in the case of the 14 female drop-outs, except one, all are married and a few having one or two children. In the beginning of my fieldwork, all these drop-outs were reluctant to open their mouth and most of the time, whenever they saw my face, they move inside the forest. So, I had to follow them to establish rapport and it took some time to earn their trust. In addition to these, many a time my fieldwork got delayed or interrupted due to bad weather and threat from elephants. However, I could conduct both individual as well as focused group interviews with these children to understand their experience of their school as well as of settlement life. A Schedule was prepared to understand their attitude towards class, syllabus, headmaster, teachers and other staff, food, accommodation, extra-curricular activities etc. During my stay in the settlements, I observed day-to-day activities of these children. Case studies of these children were taken and genealogies were drawn to understand their nature of family, marital status, their relationship with other drop-outs within and between colonies etc.

Individual as well as focus group interviews were also conducted with the social functionaries, parents, neighbours and friends of the drop-out children in order to understand their views on education and also on the drop-out children.

I visited the Ashram school several times and had discussion with the headmaster, teachers and other staff members. During my visits, I observed the activities of students and staff. An interview schedule\(^5\) was administered to the headmaster and teachers of Ashram school to elicit their perspectives on tribal culture in general and on drop-out children in particular. I also made visits to Integrated Tribal Development Department (ITDP), Nilambur and interviewed the officials such as Project Officer, Assistant Project Officer, Tribal Extension Officer etc., to understand their views. The data thus obtained has been analyzed in relation to the perspectives of these categories of officials on the drop-out children in order to throw new light on the issue and to come up with practical solutions.

---

\(^5\) See Annexure-iii
A brief profile of Tribes under study:

As mentioned, Cholanickan and Kattunayakan (including Pathinaicken) are numerically small communities who live in Nilamur forest of Kerala. Etymologically naicken denotes king and; Kattu, Chola and Pathi indicate forest, evergreen forest (shola) and deciduous forests respectively. Thus, Kattunayakan, Cholanickan and Pathinaicken are considered to be the ‘king of forests’, ‘king of evergreen forest’ and ‘king of deciduous forest’ respectively, based on their habitat. Anthropologists are of the opinion that both Cholanaicken and Pathinaicken are the offshoots of the major tribe Kattunayan. The dialect (a mixture of Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam) of communities are also found to be similar (Somasekharan Nair:1981).

All these communities (within the tribe and between the tribes) have distinct territories called chemmam and each chemmam is headed by an elderly male member called chemmakaran, who is also the socio-religious leader of the community. They follow tribal endogamy and chemmam exogamy. They are patrilineal and follow neo-local or patrilocal residence pattern. Nuclear family is the basic socio-economic unit of these communities and they depend on forests for their livelihood. Small scale hunting, food gathering, fishing, collection of forest products and forest labour are their major economic activities. For collection pursuits, they move inside the forests with their families. Children are considered as assets and are a helping hand to their parents. Members of a particular chemmam have the primary right to collect resources from their own chemmam only, as their value system does not permit them to access the resources from other regions without permission. They worship ancestral spirits and believe that violation of this mutual trust will invite the wrath of their ancestral spirits. Although their ecosystem is encroached by non-tribes, they try to maintain harmony among themselves and also with nature.

---


7 The Nilambur Valley ecosystem had a major role in the cultural speciation of the Pathinaicken and Cholanaicken. The Kattunaicken live in Wayanad district, adjacent to Nilambur Valley. Those who reached Nilambur forests, in the past, in their adaptation process could give genesis to two distinct sub-groups viz., Cholanaicken and Pathinaicken, because of the geographical isolation and ecological distinctiveness of the habitat. The Cholanaicken live in the evergreen upper ghat forests of Nilambur Valley and Pathinaicken hamlets are located in the lower valley semi-deciduous forests. Their distinct identity is attained first by fragmentation and then continued segregation of the sections from their main tribe, for centuries (Mathur, 1977).
Ashram School:
The concept of ‘ashram’ is based on Hindu philosophy and traditionally, an ‘Ashram’ was the centre of learning where the teacher (guru) and the students (shisyas) were lived together as part of the institutional complex. One major objective of this system was to provide the learners with a congenial environment to improve their skills and craftsmanship under the able guidance and supervision of the guru (Behera, 2007: 179).

The Ashram school for the PTGs of Malappuram district was started in Manjeri in the year 1993 in a temporary building provided by the Scheduled Caste Development Department. Later, the Scheduled Tribe Development Department constructed its own building in Jawahar colony in Chandakunnu in Nilambur and the Ashram school was shifted to this 5acre area in 2006. A two-storied building with two mess halls and a kitchen, two hostels, one for boys and another one for girls adjacent to the school, the school has good infrastructure and modern amenities. It also receives academic support from the department of education, and administrative support from the Scheduled Tribes Development Department through Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP), Nilambur, Malappuram district.

Initially, an Upper primary school, it was later upgraded to High School in 2004-05. Although with an annual student enrollment of 35-42 and a total enrolment of 731 with 385 boys and 346 girls from 1993-2010, the school has permanent teachers only upto upper primary level. In the high school section, teachers are on contract basis, but there are 11 non-teaching staff-- one clerk, five cooks, two ayahs, two sweepers (one full-time and one part-time), and a peon. The school is a self-contained one with its own compound wall. Based on the infrastructure facilities and the result of the previous three years (2006-2009) this school has been awarded the ‘Best Model Residential School Award- 2010’. The drop-out children are a blemish on the school’s record.

The report is arranged in such a way that the first part deals with the problem, universe of the study, objectives, methodology, a brief profiles of tribes and a small description of the Ashram school. A comparison of a child’s typical day in his/her forest habitat and at school is given in the second part. In the next session, one may read through the
reflections of the school and tribal development authorities to understand the sense of alienation that one can glean in the snippets of experiential narratives of the children. The final, fourth section of the paper would deal with these aspects before moving on to the discussion and concluding remarks. Certain suggestive measures for the improvement of Ashram school are given at the end.

II

A Child’s Typical day in the Forest Habitat:
The habitat of Kattunayakan, Pathinaicken and Cholanaickan is of the Nilambur forests, deciduous to interior evergreen forests. Despite the geographical variations in their habitats, these communities have one thing in common: their livelihoods are closely related to the forest ecosystem. Children have significant roles in their family as well as in their community.

A child’s day in a settlement begins with a choice: whether to get up early or laze around is his/her own choice and not forced upon. It is not unusual to see many children sleeping in the open with their pet dogs even during the noon-time. When compared to boys, girls get up early and they help their parents and grandparents in daily chores like fetching water from the nearby river, cleaning utensils, washing clothes, collecting fire-wood, cooking and serving food, looking after younger siblings, cleaning rooms, yard, etc. When parents go for work, a girl child takes care of the home along with her grandparents (if they stay back) and her younger siblings till her parents come back home.

The boys usually move inside the forest, either with their parents or with their friends, for collection of forest produce. While roaming inside the forests, they eat whatever edible items they get on their way and whenever they come across a river, they never miss a chance to take a bath and do fishing. They also help their parents in the transaction of collected n.w.f.p (non-wood forest products) item with tribal co-operative society/agents/non-tribes and buy provisions. In addition to these, they help their parents’ in house construction. Bringing bamboo from the forests, cutting and shaping them for making walls and doors for house, making hearth etc., are some of their jobs in the settlement.
Both boys and girls do various activities in their settlements such as climbing on trees, swimming, fishing, making *poonikotta* (bamboo basket used for the collection of forest resources), singing etc. Small children, irrespective of gender, play kitchen activities by imitating their parents. There is no hard and fast rule or appropriate timing for any of their daily activities. Moreover, they are not controlled by the elders. Punishments in the form of scolding, abusing, beating etc., are usually very rare. In the case of Cholanaickan, Bhanu has observed this. He writes: “The Cholanaickan are very mild and peace loving people. They do not even abuse their children for any wrong they commit. If they commit any wrong, it is taken easily and the elders very patiently and politely teach the young ones and advise them not to repeat it again” (Bhanu, 1989: 96). The attitude of Cholanaickan parents does not appear to have changed since his study more than two decades ago.

In any tribal settlement inside the forests, a common scene that one can notice is that of children playing, fishing and swimming in the river nearby. Children are ‘free birds’ in their habitat and have unrestricted freedom to move around and enjoy their life. “They learn through participation in economic production and other activities organized by adults, beginning as voluntary participants who perform simple and repetitive tasks while having observational access to the mature practices of elders. It may be that no one pays attention unless one does something wrong; they receive instruction only as a corrective feedback and guidance. Gradually they progress to more advanced tasks they see others perform” (Behera, 2007: 178). In short, a typical day in the forest habitat of a tribal child is care free and uncontrolled.

**A Typical Day in the Ashram School:**

The Ashram school for the PTGs of Nilambur is situated on the Nilambur-Edakkara road, hardly 200 m away from Veliyanthodu bus stand. When I first visited this school, I was surprised to see the compound wall and the dry surroundings without any greenery. As I entered the school, I heard the sound of bell, indicating the lunch break. As soon as the sound of bell was heard, the students rushed out of their classrooms. Cooks were ready to supply meals and two Ayahs stood in front of the kitchen to make the children queue-up in
such a way that the small children (LP section) are allowed to have their lunch first, followed by children from the UP, and then the High school classes. The ayahs were busy trying to control the loud noises of the children. The children collect the rice and curry in their plates and move towards the mess halls. On the way to mess halls, a large container of drinking water is kept on a table, from which they can take water. Boys and girls have separate mess halls furnished with tables and benches. After lunch, the children washed their plates and tumblers and kept them in their respective places. Majority of the girls then went inside their classrooms while the boys roamed in the playground till the bell for the afternoon classes pealed at 1.55 p.m. Many boys hang outside the classrooms till the watchman orders them to get inside the class in a loud and rough voice. Afternoon classes are from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. On the day of my visit, some classes did not have teachers and the children had been asked to read their lessons or do some exercises. In a Hindi class that I observed, the teacher wrote certain Hindi words on the blackboard, read them out and asked the students to repeat them. Occasionally she also made the children write out certain Hindi words on the blackboard. Only a few students came forward to write on the blackboard. Children in the back rows appeared least interested in the class and were looking out through the windows. While I was walking past the classrooms, I noticed some small children in the first standard sleeping in their chair while holding on to their slates.

The bell rang at 3.55 p.m. It is time for the National Anthem. Following this is a long bell at 4.00 p.m. indicating the end of the classes for that day. The children move to their hostel and come back to the kitchen forming a queue, this time, for the evening tea. They are now allowed to play for an hour- from 5.30 to 6.30 p.m. After this, one has to be ready for the 15minutes’ prayer (6.45 to 7.00 p.m). This is to be followed up by the study time from 7.00-10.00 p.m. with 30 minutes’ break for a quick supper in between. Then it is back to study. One is allowed to go to bed only at 10.00 p.m. By this time, the children are desperate for their sleep.

Each hostel is a three-storied building with long verandahs that are closed off with iron bars, giving the impression of a prison cell. Inside are the dormitories which can house 20-30 students. Cots are put together on two sides and the children huddle together in the
cots. Many children complained that they feel uncomfortable with the sleeping arrangement which does not give them any moving space in the cots. Some children say that sometimes they sleep on the floor.

A child’s day in the hostel begins at 5 a.m. If they fail to wake up on time, they are punished. They have to assemble for morning prayer by 6.30 a.m. and begin to study by 7.00 am. They can have their breakfast between 8.00 a.m and 9.10 a.m. and then get ready to go to school. Before the first bell at 9.45 a.m., they have to be in school. The morning class begins at 10.00 a.m with a prayer. One has to wait till 11.30 am for a 10 minutes break. Morning class ends at 1.00 p.m. for the lunch break. They stay in queue for lunch. The routine continues………

The bell is symbolic of a strictly regimented school and residential life. Failure to comply with the rules invites severe punishments such as blows, beatings, ear-pinching, imposition, abuse and ridicule. Failure to do homework, making noise in the class, failing in exams, all invite punishments. Thus, a child’s day in ashram school and hostel are controlled and conditioned by rules and regulations, a stark contrast to their life in the forest habitat where they are free as birds.

III

The Problem of Tribal Drop-Outs: Diverse Perspectives

In the words of the headmaster of the Ashram School:

“The parents of these students do not have any relationship with the society outside and are unaware of the importance of education. All teachers are talented. Usually a child comes to the 1st standard with some knowledge about the alphabets. But in the case of the Ashram school children, they know nothing when they come to the 1st standard. Teaching such children is a herculean task”.
A teacher remarks about the children’s own lack of exposure:

“They do not have any outside exposure. For instance, if a question is asked on a national festival, they cannot answer. They told me that they do not celebrate any festivals in their colony they only have their rituals”.

Another teacher makes the assessment:

“They have less grasping power when compared to mainstream children. They don’t know what a computer is and what an ice-cream is!”

Yet another teacher’s response:

“Both the children and their parents are innocents and they are living in their own world. Children do not possess a competitive mentality or have aspiration for reaching places or have goals in life”

There are very practical, natural and some trivial explanations given for the drop-outs.

“In the year 2006, a few girls ran away from the hostel. They jumped out of the compound wall of the hostel by tying their shawls together and using it as a rope. The reason for this, according to an office staff, was “a very simple one- Somebody scolding them!”

Another staff member presents yet another scenario:

“Usually Kattunayakan children have their own traditional names which are different from their names in school. For instance, a child who has the name Santhosh in school may be known as ‘Chathan’ in his colony and Athira in school may have the name ‘Mathi’. Sometimes, children call each other by their original name in front of the staff or children from other settlements who did not know this tribal name. This, they may find insulting or shameful and lead to drop-out. Sometimes teasing a boy linking his name with that of a girl may also cause shame and lead to discontinuance of studies”.
Another perspective on the drop-out is also a practical explanation that also takes the blame away from the system:

“In an academic year we get hardly 200 days for teaching; the rest of the days in an year is holidays and vacation like Onam and Christmas. Students go home during these holidays/vacations. Sadly only 30% children come back to school after vacation/holidays in the first week. The rest 70% return to school after weeks or months of re-opening. So, naturally such students cannot follow the classes as they have already missed several classes. This may lead to dropping out”.

In the case of girl students, a prominent reason for drop-out is their early marriages. A teacher recalls:

“Last year a girl of 7th standard went to her home for vacation and got married and stopped education. One of my students who was good in writing poems and stories also did not come back to school after vacation. Later I came to know from her friend that she got married”.

Remarked another, but added that this is slowly changing however.

“Many parents do not have any idea as to which class their children are studying. Moreover, many visit school in a drunken state. Without bothering to take permission of the class teacher, they directly barge into the class and drag their children home. Naturally, the shame of the incident may not allow such a child to come back”.

Many teachers and other staff do not have any idea of the life circumstances of the children under their care. Most of them have not visited the tribal habitats even once. One teacher’s response is very illuminating:

“I never visited any Cholanaickan colony, but I have seen a television documentary on Cholanaickan recently”.
The teachers from non-tribal background who have no exposure to the tribal ways of life or their habitats cannot appreciate the emotional needs of the children and their value systems. The value of ‘mutual trust’ that they show in not betraying a friend sometimes make them come across as “disobedient” in front of the non-tribal teachers/staff.

A non-teaching staff narrated an incident that took place some years ago when the ashram school was functioning at Manjeri:

“It was vacation time. After the students left, I noticed that some bulbs were missing. When they returned after vacation, I asked them who had stolen the bulbs. Nobody answered. I punished them all, but still they did not say who stole the bulbs. See, how disobedient are these children!”

While speaking to the drop-out children, I asked if anyone remembers this incident. One boy told me that he remembers it. He explained what happened: they had indeed taken the bulbs from the hostel, but it was not a theft. As electricity was not available in their colony those days and they were seeing the bulb for the first time, they had taken them out to show them to their friends in the settlement and bring them back, but unfortunately, the bulbs were broken. So, all of them agreed amongst themselves ‘not to tell anything’ and they had merely stuck to this agreement despite all the questioning.

Illustrating the ‘disobedience’ of the children, a teacher narrated another incident with children in her class, a couple of years earlier:

“One day, while I was leaving the classroom after a class, I heard somebody calling me by a nickname. I turned and asked who had done it. Nobody answered. I threatened that I would punish everybody if they won’t tell me who it was. None came forward. I punished the entire class, but my effort to find the ‘culprit’ did not succeed. See how disobedient these children are! They were not ready to tell the truth even when they would get punishment. But our children are not like this; they are afraid of punishments and tell us the truth if we threaten them. Anyhow, I am happy that the situation is slowly changing”.
She had given another example of children ‘changing’: somebody had broken an instrument in the lab and she could catch him with the help of other students. She is very happy that the students are now listening to the teachers and are becoming more obedient now-a-days. She does not have any idea that one of the very basic values of tribal culture—‘mutual trust’—is being eroded.

The suggestions made by the staff of the Ashram school to check the drop-out rate further reveal that they do not imagine that they need to tune into the tribal ways of life and their culture to understand the situations better. The teachers and staff locate the problem of drop-outs in the parent’s lack of awareness, the children’s slow pace of adjustment, and other such factors rather than on the need to improve upon their own understanding of the children’s emotional needs and how the system and they themselves might be failing them.

“Most of the parents are unaware of the activities and infrastructure facilities that are available in the Ashram school. So, a documentary of the Ashram school can be made by the teachers and the same may be shown in the colonies to create awareness and empower the parents”.

“Children have limitations in doing their day-to-day activities. They need help from the elders. If the Department can provide one Ayah for every ten children, we can solve the problems of small children to an extent.”

Other suggestions were:

“to provide vocational training along with teaching from the 7th standard. This would be helpful in checking the drop-out rate to an extent”

“A single teacher attending 40 students in 1st standard is the practice here. It is a fact that a teacher cannot provide equal attention and care to all the children. So, more LP school teachers may be appointed. Likewise, appointment of permanent teachers in high school section is also a must”.

The officials of Scheduled Tribes Development Department are also made their views known:

“Compared to other tribes of Kerala, drop-out rate is very high here. The level of basic education is very low among the Kattunayakan and Cholanaickan. Some of the students join in the 4th and 5th class, with whom teaching should start with primer. When such students share the class with other students a kind of inferiority complex develop in them which leads to their ultimate dropping out from the school” (Project Officer, ITDP, Nilambur).

The Project Officer suggests that to check the drop-out rate, facilities in the school may be improved so as to make teaching methods more interesting. He added that the role of teachers and other staff in the Ashram school is very important in this regard. The Tribal Extension Officer and Former Project officer also made similar opinion.

A tribal teacher highlighted the need for teacher-student closeness:

A teacher should show closeness to her students. Attachment between teachers and students is very important. Now-a-days education has become a business and teachers have become less committed to teaching. Of course, there are exceptions.

Interactions with the parents and elders in the various settlements of drop-out children revealed the fact that majority of the parents wanted their children to have education, but they do not like to compel them. They feel that if they beat their children for the cause of education, the children will be unhappy. One mother told that when her son did not go to school after vacation, she compelled him to go to school. The son accused the mother of wanting to eat the food brought by his father all by herself without sharing it with him and that was why she was compelling him to go to school. The mother felt hurt by this and stopped asking him to go to school ever since.
“Here, in our colonies our children live and work according to their wish. They have total freedom and we never force anything on them”

This was the general attitude of the tribal parents and elders.

Parents from Alakkal accept that their children do not have any enthusiasm to go to school, and that they are interested only in roaming inside the forest and engaging in fishing. Elders and parents from Mundakadavu colony view the issue like this:

“Many have passed their school final from this colony. After that nobody knows what to do and all are engaged in forest labour and wage labour. Even, if anybody wants to study further, we do not get any financial assistance from the Government, except fee concession. Moreover, there is no one in this colony who can be a role model for other children. When older children drop-out from the school, younger children also follow them”.

The specific problem of Mundakadavu colony is that the children do not get proper guidance from any source. There are more than a dozen children in this colony who have successfully completed their school final and do not go for higher education owing to lack of proper guidance as well as financial problems.

A mother of three children from Appankappu colony, who studied upto Pre-degree emotionally alleged that teaching is a business for the Ashram school teachers. According to her, one day she enquired about the future of the children and asked what could be done for the improvement of the children’s education, and apparently, the headmaster of the school replied that they are not bothered about such things and that they need to teach only those who came to study and cannot be bothered about the others who did not return to school. According to her, teachers are least committed. She continues:

“In the Ashram school all children belong to one community and therefore they mingle only with their own community
members. They do not have a chance to see the students from other communities. Their communication is only about their own culture and nothing else. So there is no change in their outlook and no development socially, mentally and intellectually”.

She complains about the low standard of education in the school also.

“Here, in our colony, a student who has studied upto school final cannot count upto 1000. Their knowledge is limited to their books only. In the Ashram school they are living in a cage from 5 years to 15 years. They do not have any love towards their parents also. In the Ashram school they live like orphans. We love our children and we would like to be with our children. I think the main reason for drop-out is the lack of love from their parents. The children living in the settlement are smarter than those in the Ashram school.”

**Perspectives of the Drop-out Children:**

In contrast to the views of the Ashram school teachers and staff, my field work in the tribal settlements and interaction with drop-out children students gave a different picture of the issue.

“I don’t like someone forcing me to get up early in the morning. So, I was unhappy living in the hostel... Subjects like Malayalam and Science are good for me, but, English, Hindi and Mathematics are very tough. I could not follow English and Hindi classes. Whenever I commit mistakes, in front of others, teachers used to scold me, beat and pinch my ears. You ask others, almost 90% of the children have similar experiences. See, their beating caused swelling on my legs. Moreover, the staffs ridicule us by calling ‘adivasi’ and ‘Naicken’. Fed up with all these, my two friends and I decided to run away from the school. One day, we climbed on the compound wall and got on
to the branch of a tree outside that was almost touching the compound wall, climbed down, and somehow or other managed to reach our settlement”

Says a 13 year old 7th standard boy of Mundakadavu Colony who is a drop-out.

Deepak Kumar Behera (2007) has documented a similar experience from among the tribal children of Orissa. He writes: “For the tribal students in Ashram school, the dominating feature of childhood is that of powerlessness and lack of control over what happens to them. The activities of these children at school are bureaucratized by the adults (teachers). Mehendale also notes the same: “Research shows that tribal children are often subjected to overt discrimination by non-tribal upper caste school teachers who view them as ‘slow learners’ unable to learn despite several repetitions..........Teachers also demean tribal children by calling their parents ‘drunken’, with no interest in schools and education. ........ The tribal children are repeatedly subjected to verbal abuse at the hands of upper caste teachers and this has a critical impact on the way these first generation students view themselves as learners”.

“I fell from a tree while I was studying in the 7th standard and my hand was broken. So I could not go to school for a few weeks. When I went back to school, Ayah told me that I cannot be given admission in the hostel. So, I returned home. Moreover, I don’t like the boarding, because they don’t allow us to go outside of the hostel and the compound wall of the school”

Says a 7th standard drop-out boy of 15 years, from Punchakolli colony. He also said that he could not follow English and Hindi and remarked that he would like to learn if they are given good teachers who can teach well.

“I came back to my colony during an Onam vacation and could not go back to school soon after the vacation owing to financial problem. But, when I went back to school, I could not follow the classes and left the school”,

This was by a 10th standard drop-out boy of 17 years, from Mundakadavu Colony. He adds that he does not like the time-table system in the hostel and hates the sound of the school bell. He also recalls that the security person used to scold and beat if he saw children playing in the school ground except during the play time. Citing the examples of half a dozen of his friends in the settlement, he says that none got any Government job and he is convinced that there is no scope for any job even if one studies well. As Deep Behera observes in the case of Orissa, “As the tribal socialization is non-authoritarian, the tribal children dislike the threatening environment in the school. A tribal child would not submit to any physical beating, shouting or insult. Those students who somehow rather manage to continue for sometimes fail to secure the expected grade and eventually feel humiliated” (Behera 2007:181).

“I had pain on my hands and legs when I was in the 8th standard. My mother came to school and took me back home. When I stayed at home for a long time, I lost interest in studies and did not go back to school.”

This was by a 20 year old, 8th standard drop-out girl, from Mundakadavu Colony

“While studying for my school final, a proposal came from my own settlement and I got married, giving up my studies. Now I have a child”

Says a 10th standard drop-out girl of 19 years old of Appankappu colony, now a divorcée.

“I studied upto SSLC. I could not finish my school final due to my mother’s illness. She had tuberculosis and was admitted to the Medical College, Kozhikode for treatment and nobody was there to look after her beside me. So, I had to stop my studies.”

Remembered a 10th standard drop-out girl, 18 years old and married, also from Appankappu colony.

There are also instances of children dropping out due to illnesses.
"I had skin disease (scabies) and came back to my colony. When I recovered, I went back to school. But ayah told me not to come as the other students will be affected by scabies. So, I returned to my home”.

Tells a 5th standard drop-out boy, from Appankappu colony.

There are also instances of a child dropping out following the drop-out of a sibling.

“When my brother left the school, I too left the school”

Said a 3rd std drop-out boy of 9 years from Appankappu colony. A similar story was given by another 3rd standard drop-out boy of 11 years, from Punchakolli colony.

As many as 19 children (17 boys and 2 girls) did not turn up after holidays/vacation as they hate their life in the hostel as well as in school. In the case of 3 girls, death of one of their parents was the reason for discontinuing their studies. A brother and sister were taken out of the school by their mother after the death of their another brother, a student of the same school, who fell ill while in school and died. Three girls discontinued their studies as they got married at an early age at the age of 12 and 13. Among the Kattunayakan/Cholanaickan/Pathinaicken, there is a belief that refusal of a marriage proposal for a girl may cause the girl and her sisters to remain unmarried. If they say ‘no’, to the first proposal, none will ask her in marriage again. Hence, they seldom reject a proposal even if the girl is only 12 or 13.

Field study shows that irrespective of sex, geographical location of the colonies and the identity of the tribe, whether Cholanaickan, Pathinaicken or Kattunaiken the problems faced by the drop-out children are similar. When marriage and issues related to home were main reasons for dropping out of the girls, lack of freedom is the main issue for boys. Analyses also show that out of 41 cases, apart from issues in the school and hostel which was the most predominant reason for the tribal drop-outs in this study (54%), family issues (37%), illness (7%), and religious issues (2%) also contributed to the drop-outs.
While teachers blame students for their disinterest, difficulty in understanding classes (especially English, Hindi and Mathematics) is the major problem of the children. Due to the fear of punishment, none come forward to express their doubts and views to their teachers. Teachers also find fault with parents for the drop-outs. The study reveals that 95% of the parents of these drop-out children are illiterate and the children are the first-generation learners. Though there is a Parents-Teacher-Association (PTA) in the school, it is not functioning. Teachers say that it is difficult for them to communicate with the parents due to their lack of familiarity with the latter’s dialect.

Though the tribes have distinct dialect, they told that they do not have much difficulty in understanding Malayalam, though they feel Malayalam as their second language. In school, amongst themselves they use their dialect, but to communicate with others, they use Malayalam. The children told me that teachers discourage them if they speak their dialect and they are asked to communicate in Malayalam instead. When compared to Appankappu and Mundakadavu, children from interior settlement (Alakkal and Puchakolli) interact with each other in their dialect especially while they are in their hostels. In many studies conducted among the tribes language problem is reported as one of the contributory factors for the increase in the tribal drop-out rate. But as far as the tribes under study are concerned, though they face communication problem in the beginning, they do not face much difficulty in conversing in Malayalam. They like Malayalam because the Malayalam text book contains stories and poems and their teacher is also very good to them. The children also like biology as this teacher uses the examples of plants and animals found in their surroundings with which they are familiar.

---

8 “Change in curriculum would remain incomplete unless patterns of teacher-student interaction also change in the direction of coercion-free involvement of the SC and ST students. The knowledge of social reality that teachers bring to the classroom, and their perception of the role of education are among the key determinants of teacher’s behavior. To a great extent, the norms of teacher-student interaction are shaped by the training that teachers receive prior to employment. Knowledge of ‘social reality’ and role of education under prevailing social conditions do form a part of present training curricula, but like much else in teacher training, these segments receive a ritualistic observance. Teachers cannot be oriented towards new types of classroom interactions without being exposed to specific issues of social reality and functioning of school. This is not happening at present. (Kumar, 1983: 1571).

9 Similar findings are also made among the Saora children of Orissa (Srivastava, Lal and Lal, 1971), Adilabad’s tribal community (Rathniyah, 1977) and tribes coming under Janshala, a joint programme of Government of India and five UN agencies (Vinoba, 2003).
They consider English and Hindi as their third and fourth language respectively. Many cannot read English and Hindi text books as they only know the alphabets. In the case of Mathematics, even the children who had dropped out from high school do not have much idea about addition, subtraction and multiplication. They find the syllabus boring as it does not contain anything that interests them and to use a term from Freire, the ‘banking method,’ does not appeal to them. It is a major complaint about the current universal education that the curriculum lacks relevance to the current life of a Scheduled Tribe child, and puts tribal children at a disadvantage (Govinda, 2002:93).

Almost all children are good at extra-curricular activities like sports, arts, drawing, painting etc. and have won prizes in school and the sub-district and district level competitions for various items. The trophies and certificates displayed in the glass almarah kept in the headmaster’s room prove this. Running, jumping, and swimming are a part of life for these children. Their drawing also reflects the beauty of nature in which they are born and brought up.

The female drop-outs who got married are having children and are found busy running their family life and only a few showed interest in continuing their studies. But majority of the male drop-outs who are currently engaged in forest related livelihood activities expressed their willingness to continue their education. But the drop-out children, who would like to continue their studies have unanimously opined that they would like to study if the school is run in their settlement and the teacher can come to the ‘settlement school’ in the morning and leave the settlement in the evening. The reason they give for such a suggestion is not surprising: “If the school is in the colony, we can go back to our homes in the evening, we can be with our parents, family and friends; go for swimming and fishing and roam inside the forest. In Ashram school, we feel like living in jails”. Thus, for these children, like anyone else, freedom is the most important thing in their life and they cannot bear sacrificing it. As Amrtya Sen (2000) forcefully put it, development and

10 ‘Banking method’ is a term used by Freire to describe how the oppressor/teacher teaches through relaying information, that is to be obtained by all. There is therefore no growth of the student as they are tested on memorization and reiteration.

11 “The residential schools for tribal children around the world – in Canada, America, Australia, Norway and even in Post-Independent India – have not been houses of enlightenment, rather they have
freedom go hand-in-hand. The absence of freedom or a feeling of disempowerment can lead to a sense of alienation, subjugation, and oppression and as Sen puts it, limits one’s capacity.

The negative impact of the residential school system is well documented by Faires et al: “The residential school system had a tremendous negative impact on Native people as a whole. It broke up families destroyed languages and cultures, and in general, disrupted the traditional ways of the Aboriginal people. Native spiritual traditions were not respected and children were forced to perform Christian rituals. Children were physically, sexually and emotionally abused in the schools and often succumbed to sickness and death. Parenting skills were lost among Native people who went to residential school because they were not at home to learn from their parents. Many people who went to residential schools lost the ability to identify with their Native culture and lost their self-esteem” (Faires et al. 2002:2004 cf: Alcorn, 2006). Later, realizing the value of the concept of community and communal living, these residential schools were closed; instead local schools were opened, allowing the children to live with their parents.

The issues of tribal drop-outs is multi-faceted and mutli-dimensional and not as simple as can be captured by the term ‘long absence’ as can be read in the column titled ‘Reasons for Leaving’ as given in the school admission register.

IV

Conclusion:

Following John Ogbu (1981), we may conclude that in designing an educational policy, policy-makers should adopt a “cultural ecological approach.” By this, Ogbu refers to the social and economic context of schooling. According to him, formal education is to be linked, in important ways, to other features of society. Models of social reality influence the behavior of participants. May (1999) too has highlighted a system of education that stresses localized decision making, and policy reforms that comes from community

been prisons where tribals have been denuded of their self-esteem physically, culturally and spiritually(Giri, A.K, 2006:8-foreword in Alcorn).
participation, thus resulting in an education system that reflects the desires and beliefs of the community and its members (cf: Alcorn, 2008). In Martha Nussbaum’s view, the purpose of education is to cultivate humanity. This can be achieved through developing three capacities: the capacity for critical self-examination and critical thinking about one’s own culture and traditions; the capacity to see oneself as a human being who is bound to all humans with ties of concern; and the capacity for narrative imagination – the ability to empathize with others and to put oneself in another’s place. Keeping all these discussions in mind and also taking into consideration the essence/spirit of the drop-out children’s voices and those of their parents, juxtaposing them against the narratives of the officials and staff, this study suggests the following:

1. Instead of taking away and alienating small children from their home and parents, they should be given primary education in their own settlements. Committed teachers who can understand the pulse of tribal mind can be appointed for providing formal education to these children. The children may be taken out of their settlements once in a while to familiarize them with the world outside and they may be encouraged to mingle with students in various schools. Computer aided teaching facilities in the settlement may be adopted to show them various activities and to familiarize them and their parents with the scope related to education, places and cultures of interest, current affairs etc., to create enthusiasm in their budding minds to know more about the world outside. Once these children are mentally prepared for formal education, they may be put into the Ashram school from 5th standard onwards.

2. The concept of ashram school ‘exclusively for PTGs’ needs a rethinking at this point. Spending their life in settlement as well as in school with the same community members do not give these children opportunities to mingle with the cultures outside. The need of knowing and getting in touch with other cultures has been expressed by the informants within and outside the tribal group. There are instances, where Cholanaciken/Kattunayakan students who had successfully completed their school final and got admitted in an higher secondary school at Nilambur, coming back to their settlement as they failed to interact with non-tribal students and teachers. It is observed that the tribal children who have studied in MRS (Model Residential
School) in the neighbouring district of Wayanad have more chances to interact with children from other tribal communities such as Paniyan, Kurichiyan, Mullukuruman, Adiyan, Uralikuruman etc., and when compared to the Ashram school children, children from MRS have more confidence in their interactions and activities. Hence, it is suggested that instead of running ashram school ‘exclusively for PTGs’ it can be opened to the other communities in the area as well.

3. As many as 70 Cholanaickan/Pathinaicken /Kattunayakan children had successfully completed their school final from the Ashram school, since 2007, but none could purse higher education owing to the problem cited. Also they are handicapped due to their financial difficulties. Likewise, the same number of students had studied upto their school final and dropped out with the view that there is no meaning in further studies and also no scope for job. Therefore, upgrading of Ashram school upto degree level providing appropriate courses suitable to the communities and sufficient financial assistance to them is suggested for encouraging them stay on in education.

4. The content of education should boost their cultural norms so as to make them proud of their culture, rather than embarrassing them. The kind of education provided now does not take into the consideration of these aspects. The syllabus may also include vocational training courses suitable to the children.

5. Since these tribal children are very active in extra-curricular activities, those who can perform well in such activities can be given special coaching/training and they may be fine tuned to get careers in the field of Sports and Arts.

In conclusion, it may be noted that access to inclusive and quality education alone would help these particularly vulnerable indigenous communities to get empowered to integrate with the mainstream without losing their identity, “developing along the lines of their own genius”, as Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the country evocatively and insightfully put it.
References:


## Annexure-i

Details of Drop-out children from Ashram School, Nilambur (1993-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Admission</th>
<th>Drop-out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Decade-wise Drop-out rate of children from Ashram School, Nilambur

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of students who took admission in the 1st std (year of enrolment)</th>
<th>No. of students who reached 10th std (year)</th>
<th>Drop-out rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42 (1997)</td>
<td>19 (2007)</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 (1998)</td>
<td>22 (2008)</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 (2001)</td>
<td>17 (2011)</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>44.56%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Schedule

Ashram school Headmaster and Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Informant:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Community:</th>
<th>Post held</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational qualifications:</th>
<th>Official address</th>
<th>Home address</th>
<th>Phone No.</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. How long have you been engaged in teaching?
2. When did you join this school?
3. How/why did you join here (own interest or not- explain:)
4. What are the subjects you teach?
5. Medium of instruction
6. How is students’ response to the medium?
7. Which language of instruction would you consider to be most suitable for the students?
8. In which class do you have the maximum drop-out rate and why?
9. What is the gender ratio in drop-out rates and why is this so?
10. What is the main hurdle do you think students face in school?
11. How do you deal with the students who commit mistakes? Narrate incidents:
12. Your dealings with children who frequently fail in exam
13. What are the special facilities/incentives provided to the students?
14. What are the extracurricular activities in your school?
15. How is the participation of the students in these activities?
16. What kind of food is provided to the students?
17. How about the quality of food?
18. Do you have PTA in your school?
19. If yes, what are the roles of PTA?
20. If No, why?
21. What is your opinion about their parents?
22. Remarks:

Annexure-iii
LIFE IN THE FOREST
LIFE AT SCHOOL