

EDUCATION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL REPRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL PEOPLE IN WAYANAD, KERALA*

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Abstract

This paper discusses how schooling reproduces social inequalities and cultural asymmetries in contemporary India by examining the experiences of two tribal communities (the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas) in the Wayanad district of Kerala. There are notable socio-economic and cultural inequalities between these two tribal communities. The Paniyas are more backward and disadvantaged than the Kurichiyas. This social differentiation is reproduced through the present schooling system. The Paniyas experience discrimination in school and lag behind the Kurichiyas in educational achievement. An important pedagogic problem faced by the Paniyas in school is their inability to cope with the schooling provided through a language that is not their mother tongue. Land ownership, and the cultural and social capital resulting from it place the Kurichiya community at a comparatively better position than the Paniyas, who have a labour class and slave caste identity. Access to land is critical for the socio-economic and educational development of tribal communities.

Introduction

In India educational backwardness and inequalities are most intensely experienced by tribal communities (NCFR 2005) and the situation

is not very different in the state of Kerala well known for its educational achievements across social groups. Studies show that gap in educational achievements between tribal and non-tribal communities is significant and it continues, and there are significant intra-community differences among tribal groups. The persistent educational backwardness of the tribal people has been identified as the result of structural inequalities, historically evolved and consolidated under colonialism and capitalist development (NCFR 2005).

The development discourse sees education as offering the most legitimate and decisive means of social mobility in order to transcend structural inequalities. Placing emphasis on equal educational opportunities and individual motivation, the human capital theory has been the driving force behind a series of educational reforms. The social reproduction theories in education, however, refute these assumptions with the argument that educational institutions and processes on the contrary reproduce social inequalities in society. They point out that cultural and social factors serve to reproduce the ruling relationships, and legitimise the ideologies of power and control through educational practices. While Althusser (1971) provides a sketch of how school is the most effective ideological apparatus that reproduces capitalist relations of production, Bourdieu elaborates the social and cultural processes of schooling that transmit dominant culture and ideologies through a series of interrelated concepts such as cultural and social capital, habitus and symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Bourdieu's analysis of the forms of capital, namely, economic, cultural and social capital and their transformation into symbolic capital helps understand how conversion of capital results in hierarchy in social class, status, privilege and domination. According to Bourdieu (1997), cultural capital can exist in three forms: first in the embodied state (that is, in the form of long standing dispositions of the mind and body), second in the objectified state (in the form of cultural goods such as pictures, books and monuments), and third in the institutionalised state (in the form of academic qualification or legitimate knowledge of one kind or the other). To locate the relationship between schooling and the larger cultural setting, Bourdieu uses the concept of 'habitus' which is "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively

adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (1977: 95). Habitus engenders all the thoughts, perceptions and actions consistent with those conditions, and they are socially constructed in the school sites. Social capital mainly refers to the various kinds of valued relations with significant others and symbolic capital refers to prestige and social honour (Bourdieu 1997). Further, Bourdieu argues that violence is exerted on social groups through the imposition of cultural and social symbolism in everyday life to shape their social worlds in such a way that it is experienced as legitimate and normal. Every pedagogic action is objectively symbolic violence as the dominant culture is imposed by an arbitrary power (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Analysing the role of curricular contents and pedagogic practices in social reproduction, Apple (1979) explains how the de-politicisation of pedagogic action works to produce social differentiation in the guise of neutrality. He scrutinises not only the prevailing practices of education for unequal achievement, unequal returns and selective curricular incorporation, but the very social arrangement of political, social, ethical and economic interests and commitments that are uncritically accepted in the day to day life of educators. He criticises the notion of knowledge as neutral and views knowledge as power, and explains how social interests are embodied in the curriculum that generates inequality. However, for understanding how larger discourses shape the context of learners, teachers and the schooling processes, these theories do not detail out the everyday, subjective experience of the learners in the context of the historical exploitation and social subjugation experienced by their families and communities. In the Indian context, Das and others (2001), while discussing social suffering, expose the violence in extreme situations as well as the embedded everyday violence in the ideological apparatus, policies and programmes of the state, and explain how violence shapes subjectivity and affects the capacity to engage in everyday life.

Some of these concepts and frameworks are employed to understand the ability and inability of different tribal groups to participate in the state sponsored education system. Accordingly the education system is viewed as recreating the relationships of domination by legitimising the ideologies of power and control over tribal people and thereby perpetuating the historical violence against them. While studying contemporary

tribal reality and their marginality we must consider the subjective experience of systematic violence of extreme situations as well as subtle forms of symbolic violence in their everyday life. Tribal people cannot be viewed as mechanical agents of history, ignoring the critique and resistance they offer through their collective and individual responses to the dominant forces.

This paper explores the differential educational experiences of two tribal communities, the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas, in Wayanad district of Kerala state and analyses how educational processes not only reflect social inequalities but also contribute to their reproduction through curriculum, pedagogic practices and the school culture. It attempts to understand how historical advantages and disadvantages affect the everyday experience of schooling and shape destinies. The paper is based on ethnographic data collected from select Paniya and Kurichiya hamlets and school sites in five panchayats of Wayanad district during 2009-2010.¹ The government and government aided schools meant for all children, and the model residential schools (MRSs), hostels, multi grade learning centres (MGLCs) and *padanaveeds* (study centres) meant for tribal students were visited for gathering data. Participation and interaction of tribal children were observed in the regular classroom as well as in the play ground, and in their respective households and villages.

Paniyas and Kurichiyas

As per the census of 2001 among the 35 tribal communities in Kerala, the Paniyas form the single largest group (22.5%), followed by Kurichiyas (9.0%). Wayanad district has the highest proportion (37.4%) of the tribal population in the state, but tribals constitute only 17.4 per cent of the district's population (Census of India 2011a). Tribal people who had been in the majority in Wayanad a century ago became a minority over a period of time (Aiyappan 1992). Today (as per 2001 census) the Paniyas constitute 44.7 per cent and the Kurichiyas 16.9 per cent of the tribal population in Wayanad (Census of India 2011b).

Socio-Cultural Context

Despite the large forest cover and a thriving plantation economy in Wayanad, poverty among tribal communities is very high, estimated at 60.4 per cent (Chathukulam and John 2006). The level of extreme poverty is indicated by the fact that 32 starvation deaths were reported among the tribal people in 2002 from a single panchayat, Noolpuzha in Wayanad district (George 2004). As per the report of the Resettlement and Development Mission 2002, set up by the government of Kerala, landlessness among the tribal population is highest in Wayanad district. Out of the 26408 tribal families in Wayanad, 28.9 per cent families were landless, 29.8 per cent had less than 10 cents of land, 25.0 per cent had 10 cents-1 acre, and 16.3 per cent had more than one acre (Government of Kerala 2004). Over the years, many of the traditionally cultivating and land owning tribal communities in Wayanad were dispossessed of their lands by the non-tribal migrants into this region and the expansion of land market to the forest regions. Further, the state acquisition and privatisation of common lands and forests alienated the tribal people from their community rights over these lands (Bijoy and Raman 2003). In the study area, a few Kurichiya *tharavads* (joint families) own land above five acres as joint property, but majority of the nuclear families among them own land of less than two acres. Most of the Paniya families are packed in their settlements within 2-5 cents and very few of them own land of more than half an acre. Many Kurichiyas are agricultural farmers while Paniyas are mainly wage labourers.

Being a landed class, the Kurichiyas enjoyed higher social status. They were also skilled in martial arts and were well known as a warrior community. Behaviour (similar to the erstwhile practice of untouchability in the caste system) towards the lower class tribal communities, and matriliney similar to the Nair caste, historical association with the political power derived from being part of the army of Pazhassi Raja² and the economic advantage of having had received large tracts of land as grant and reward for their military service contributed to the higher social status of the Kurichiyas among the tribal communities in the region. On the other hand, the identity of

belonging to, so to say, the slave caste from the pre-colonial times has placed the Paniya community at the lowest rung among tribal people and also in the hierarchy of the caste and class structures. The Paniyas were exchanged and sold as late as the beginning of the 20th century even though the Indian Penal Code had declared slavery a crime in 1883 (Therakam 2010). The traditional practice of untouchability kept a Paniyan 20 meters away from the others even during the early period of independence. Although the poor and landless among the Kurichiyas were ill-treated by the landed class, it was not as severe and brutal as the treatment meted out to the Paniya community.

The Kurichiyas valued hierarchy and discipline within their *tharavad* and considered disobeying elders a major offense (Aiyappan and Mahadevan 1990). The Paniya community has a flat kinship structure with an elderly male as the head of the community, the *Mooppa*n. There is far greater age and gender equality among the Paniyas than among the Kurichiyas. The Paniyas mainly speak a dialect of their own called the Paniya *Bhasha* at home which has no script. The Kurichiyas speak the North Malabar dialect of Malayalam (Menon 1996). They use both Malayalam and their dialect at home and are more bilingual than the Paniya people.

The difference in the socio-economic status of the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas is reflected in, and reinforced by the perceptions and attitudes of the non-tribal people towards them. The constructions of the Paniyas as thieves, liars and lazy are used to legitimise the behaviour of violence towards them. A land owner stated: “Oh, the Paniyas, *nayinte makkal* (an abuse literally meaning children of dogs)! One day I went with my car to fetch them for work. They refused to come. See their pride! They deserve *iruttady* (severe beating); there is no other way to tame them.” In contrast, the non-tribal people often refer to the Kurichiya *tharavad* and their ‘*adyathvam*’ (of high social rank, aristocratic and cultured). A retired headmaster stated: “The Kurichiyas are the most trustworthy ‘Nairs’ brought by Pazhassi to fight against the British. They are very honest and keep their word, not like the Paniyas who are liars and inconsistent in their work.”

However, despite their higher status compared to the Paniyas, the Kurichiyas do not enjoy the social status equivalent to the other upper castes and classes in the larger society. The non-tribal people underplay and disregard the Kurichiyas' historical role in the anti-colonial struggle. For instance, a non-tribal from the Edavaka panchayat commented: "Oh, what could the Kurichiyas have done with their bow and arrow when the British came with their guns!" Ignoring the fact that the Kurichiyas fought the British even after Pazhassi's death, he praised only the Nair warriors in Pazhassi's army. The non-tribal constructions thus not merely reinforce the divide between the Kurichiya and the Paniya communities but through their deft narratives constitute 'tribal' and 'non-tribal' identities as distinct categories with inherently inferior and superior traits.

Literacy and Education

Considering Kerala's outstanding success in the field of literacy and education, the gap in literacy and education between non-tribal and tribal people, and between the various tribal communities is striking. As per the census of 2001, the general literacy rate in Kerala is 92.1 per cent and the tribal literacy is only 64.4 per cent. The literacy rate of the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas in Kerala is 48.5 and 78.2 per cent respectively (Narayana 2010). In Wayanad, the overall literacy rate is 82.7 per cent, while it is 49.4 per cent for the tribal people. The literacy rate of the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas in Wayanad was estimated to be 52.3 and 80.8 per cent respectively in 2004 (Centre of Excellence 2006). Dropout rate, another indicator of educational backwardness, is much higher among the tribal children of Wayanad compared to that of the others. As per the data collected by the author from the office of the deputy director of education, Wayanad, the rate of school dropout in Wayanad for the year 2009-10 was 1.2, 1.4 and 3.5 for the total population, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes respectively.

As part of the Madras presidency under the British, Wayanad has had a slower growth in educational facilities compared to the rest of Kerala which was under the princely states of Thiruvithamkur and Kochi. The first

school in Wayanad, an upper primary school was established in Mananthavady only in 1869, and by 1900 there were just six schools in the region (Krishnan 1999). But educational facilities picked up momentum after the independence. Yet, the number of schools in tribal areas of Wayanad remained fewer and some of the tribal children remained un-enrolled in schools (Mary 2002), although a baseline survey conducted in 2004 stated enrolment to be hundred per cent (Centre of Excellence 2006). Despite the growing educational facilities in Wayanad the data on the highest educational attainment among the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas shows that tribal students who cross secondary schooling are a miniscule (table 1).

Table 1
Percentage of the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas in Wayanad
Who Attained Different Levels of Education as of 2004

Level	Paniyas	Kurichiyas
Illiterate	47.7	19.2
Literate without Schooling	02.9	03.1
Primary School	34.1	28.3
Secondary School	14.2	45.6
Pre-Degree	00.6	02.5
Graduate	00.2	00.3
Post-Graduate	00.3	00.6
Technical Training	00.0	00.3
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Centre of Excellence 2006: 69

As per the data for 2009-10, there are 292 schools in Wayanad - consisting of lower primary (LP) of classes I-IV, upper primary (UP) of classes V-VII and high school (HS) of classes VIII-X in the government, aided and private unaided sectors. In addition, there are 62 higher secondary schools (HSSs) of classes XI-XII (including 10 vocational HSSs), 15 schools under the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education), one under the

ICSE (Indian Certificate of Secondary Education), one Kendriya Vidyalaya, and one Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Government of Kerala 2011).

State Commitment to Education of Tribal People

In the government and government aided schools education is free for all the students. In these schools tribal students are given two pairs of uniforms, textbooks and other study materials, an annual lump sum grant and a monthly stipend up to class X. As per the data collected from the tribal development office located in Mananthavady, Wayanad, the respective annual grant and monthly stipend per student are Rs.140 and Rs.55 for classes I-IV, Rs.240 and Rs.60 for classes V-VII, and Rs.330 and Rs.70 for classes VIII-X. Free breakfast and lunch are also provided in these schools for all the students up to class VII.

In Wayanad, the state tribal development department runs three MRSs, two ashram schools and 28 pre-matric hostels for tribal students. They provide the tribal students free stay, board and education. The state's District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), operative in the 1990s, introduced a few single teacher MGLCs (also known as alternate schools) in Wayanad in 1997. They are being continued under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) of the central government. The programme of the MGLC is primarily meant for the tribal communities living in remote areas. In Wayanad this programme began with 10 centres/alternate schools having 235 students in the age group 5-14 years (Kumar and Parthasarathy 2007). According to the office of the SSA in Wayanad, in 2010 there were 55 MGLCs with 1525 students in Wayanad.

The *padanaveed* is another initiative that began in November 2008 under the SSA project to create a favourable atmosphere of learning for tribal children in their own colony/settlement eliciting community participation. The selection and organisation of *padanaveed* is entrusted to the panchayat education committee and to the schools near the tribal colonies. In the year 2009 there were 26 *padanaveeds* in selected tribal colonies in Wayanad. This initiative envisions extension of the programme to all tribal

colonies in the district. Only one case of closure of *padanaveed* was reported during the study undertaken by the author. In this case a Paniya house was used as the location and a non-tribal instructor was appointed to help children in their studies between 5 and 8 p.m. A school teacher who lived nearby was to supervise the programme. Soon, the classes were shifted from the Paniya house to the supervisor's unused cattle shed. Though there were 14 children in the colony, the daily attendance ranged from 3 to 8 children. There were no benches or desks except a mat to sit on the floor. Reading materials were not bought, but snacks were provided. The instructor was changed thrice in three months and they were irregular. Thus this poorly organised *padanaveed* was closed down after three months. The *padanaveeds* in other colonies, as reported by panchayat members, were functioning.

Admission to the MRSs is based on an entrance test conducted at the state level. Not surprisingly, the Kurichiya students out-perform the Paniya students in the test and are in much greater number in the MRSs. The ashram school in Thirunelly, specially meant for students from the 'weaker' Paniya and Adiya communities, was found to lack basic facilities. There is no hostel for girl children and they stay in the teachers' quarters sleeping on the cement floor even during the winter. As reported by the warden, the poor hygienic conditions cause scabies and infection. Despite these limitations, the overall performance of the tribal children is found better in the MRSs and ashram schools than in the general schools (Centre of Excellence 2006).

According to a study by the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Wayanad, the pre-matric hostels were overcrowded and without the minimum facilities. They failed to provide the necessary educational environment and neglected students' physical, intellectual and psychological needs. This study brings out many critical findings regarding the attitude of the government officials and teachers. They consider the facilities extended to the tribal children as favour rather than right, and are of the view that the tribal students deserve only the minimum facilities and comfort as what is provided is comparatively better than what they have in their homes. Stating shortage of staff as reason, students in these hostels

were made to assist in cooking and cleaning. Fewer Kurichiya students use the facility of the pre-matric hostels as compared to the Paniya students. The MRS hostels meant for all tribal communities were found to be in a better condition than the ashram school hostels and the pre-matric hostels mainly used by the Paniyas and the Adiyas in Wayanad (DIET 2007). Thus the very state provision of educational facilities reproduces the internal division among different tribal groups.

Schooling and Reproduction of Social and Educational Inequalities

Several studies have reiterated that poverty, lack of parental motivation, ill health and insensitivity of teachers/peers to tribal situation that result in high dropout, absenteeism and failure are the major reasons for tribal children's educational backwardness (Centre of Excellence 2006). As Nambissan (2006) points out, mere quantitative indices of school enrolment, attendance and completion rates are not enough to assess equality in educational opportunities, but more complex processes that position social groups differently in knowledge, skills, cultural attributes, self-worth and social respect need to be addressed. Following are some of the processes of schooling that continue to reproduce social and educational inequalities.

Absenteeism and Dropout

As against the official claim of 100 per cent enrolment, school visits, especially during the rainy and lean economic seasons, showed many Paniya children out of school. Teachers from the government and aided schools confirmed that the Paniya children remained absent half of the school days. However, teachers marked them present on records to receive children's grants and also to secure their own jobs. It is well known that teachers try to ensure maximum attendance in class on the sixth working day of the academic year when the headcount in class is done by the state education officers in order to determine the enrolment figure.

Landlessness and irregular employment place the Paniya families in a vicious cycle of poverty and their children are expected to supplement

the meagre income of their families. Girl children are often sent for paid domestic work or stay at home to look after younger siblings. In a Paniya settlement in Thirunelly panchayat, one boy was reported to be waiting for his grandmother who had gone to Kodagu (earlier called Coorg), a district in Karnataka for wage labour in order to procure a shirt for him to wear while going to join an ashram school. His father was an alcoholic and mother was too anaemic to work. Also poor economic conditions of the Paniyas stretch puberty rituals of girls over a month, which keeps the girls away from school and many of them drop out subsequently. The Kurichiya community, in relatively better economic condition, complete the puberty rituals within a week and send their girls back to school. The Kurichiya children do not face severe vulnerability as land provides them the minimum economic security. No Kurichiya child remains absent from school due to lack of necessary materials for schooling or household matters like lack of firewood at home. Poverty affects schooling of children in many indirect ways too.

With regard to the relative educational disadvantage of the Paniya community, a tribal promoter from Thirunelly panchayat reported that a Paniya settlement of 42 families had 25 dropouts among the children of 5-18 years. This settlement had no Paniya student who passed class X and many children discontinued schooling after class IV as the UP school is 8 km and HS 18 km away from the settlement. The Kurichiya children have the means to travel to school by bus and therefore they do not discontinue schooling because of the distance of school. Mary (2002) shows that prolonged poverty and non-accessibility to the school continue to be the major reasons for dropout among tribal children and especially among tribal girls.

There were no dropouts from the year 2005 onwards among the Kurichiya students in the study area, except for a few who failed in class X. But some of the school dropouts of this community resume their studies. For example, a boy from a Kurichiya community, who dropped out from class VIII in 1999, started working on his own land by cultivating paddy and bananas, and earning an income. He resumed his studies later and in 2009 passed the *thulyatha pareeksha* (examination equivalent to class X). He applied to a polytechnic and also appeared for the Public Service Commission

test for acquiring a salaried job as a means of living a dignified life in modern society.

The DPEP in Wayanad seems to have had some positive impact on the schooling of tribal children. A few teachers from government and aided private schools reported that the DPEP has improved the tribal children's enrolment and attendance in primary classes. The MGLCs/alternate schools have improved the enrolment of tribal children especially in the interior tribal areas. However, there is uncertainty about continuance of the MGLCs, namely whether the state government will finance them when the central government funding under the SSA ceases. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 provides for the right of every child to have formal education in LP school within 1km and UP school within 3 km. But the MGLC teachers find this provision impractical in the interior localities of Wayanad where the number of children is not viable for formal schools and the existing MGLCs may have to be continued. In addition, these alternate schools have the advantage of being sensitive to tribal culture and language.

The grants offered by the state or the proximity of school do not seem to compensate for the alienation that the Paniya children experience in formal school. In the Kunnil Paniya colony, there are only 13 families and the school is only half a km away. Out of the 14 school going children five girls and one boy dropped out during the period of 2005-2010. School's insensitivity seems to have been the reason for dropout in the case of five of them. For example, Ruha's daughter Thansa passed class VII in the year 2010 and Ruha took her to join the nearest HS. Thansa was very embarrassed at her inability to write Malayalam when the clerk handed over the application form to her. Seeing this, the clerk teased her with the joking comment: "she will have to study hard or pay money." Even though Thansa completed the admission procedure she became adamant that she would not go to school again. When enquired about the reason, she narrated her humiliating experiences in the previous school where teachers exposed her lack of knowledge in front of her peers.³ Ruha, a sick widow, could not change her daughter's decision. As she was enrolled in the school register, the tribal

department put pressure on the school authorities to give the lump sum grant to Thansa. Even though the school clerk informed Thansa and the family about the grant, they did not go to collect it. When asked why she was not going to take the money especially when they were struggling for daily survival, Ruha just shrugged her shoulders and hesitated to talk anything about it. School authorities and teachers are used to make the common comment: “The Paniya parents are interested only in the monthly grants and not in their children’s education.”

Parental apathy in educating their children is perceived by school authorities as one reason for the Paniya children’s absenteeism and dropout. However, some of the stories narrated by children show that parents expect their children to regularly attend school. A few Paniya children narrated their story of bunking school and hiding in forests and coffee gardens to escape scolding from their parents. Four children from the Kunnil colony who were sent back by the headmaster of the school for being late at school were found trying to hide themselves in the gardens to escape their parents’ anger. Parents’ apathy as one reason for children’s absenteeism and dropout, the non-tribal teachers’ and officials’ construction of the Paniyas, did not bear any evidence from the study area. One Paniya PTA (parent teacher association) committee member expressed the deep alienation the Paniyas faced in the school in the following words: “We go for the PTA meeting, sit there, sign or give a thumb impression and come back. If I have education, then others listen to what I say, otherwise they say that I am drunk.” Without addressing the alienation, the Paniya parents’ inability to participate in the schooling of their children is misconstrued as lack of interest in their children’s education. However, the eagerness of the parents to obtain the available educational facilities for their children reveals that the tribal parents are not apathetic towards the schooling of their children. For instance, one hostel for the tribal children had 56 students against the official capacity of 45, and 19 cots were adjusted in the space meant for only 10 cots in order to accommodate 56 students. The congested dining room was used for also keeping their dress, school bags etc. Despite the poor condition there was great demand for seats in the hostel.

Labelling, Peer Segregation and Teacher Apathy: Schooling Experiences

The view that tribal people are inferior as they lack cognitive abilities necessary for acquiring modern knowledge and skills is pervasive. The following view of a leader from a “left” political party who is also a panchayat president is indicative of the deep rootedness of these stereotypes in Kerala society. According to him, the Paniya community is ‘underdeveloped’ because “they are less intelligent. There may be some genetic reason for their backwardness. They could not catch up with the modern society.” He considers the Kurichiya community as forward looking like the non-tribal people. Such essentialising comments are echoed by the non-tribal teachers.

The practice of treating tribal people in general and the Paniyas in particular as inferior, goes on in the schools and classrooms too. As Balgopalan and Subrahmanian (2003) point out, teachers have a crucial role in influencing the tribal children’s self-constructions as learners and in transforming school as an inclusive space for them. On the contrary, non-tribal teachers perceive that the tribal children, especially from the Paniya community have low IQ and that they cannot be on par with the non-tribal children. When I expressed my wish to observe a classroom in a government aided school the teacher’s response was: “Oh, what is there to observe? Majority of our children are from the *adivasi* (tribal) group.” Similarly, the principal of a college of education in the study area reported that his students hesitated to go to the tribal majority schools or the MRSs for their training, because they believed that it might affect their performance and evaluation. Even teachers of the MRSs, specially meant for tribal children, were not free from these demeaning constructions. In schools, the Kurichiya children have more respectable social and cultural identity. The Kurichiya children are resilient to the disciplined atmosphere and hierarchical structure at school as they have experienced it at home, but the Paniya children are found to be passive and frightened. The situation could be different in the alternate education centres for tribal children. For instance, George (2005) has pointed out the diverse learning spaces and methodologies in *Kanavu* - an alternate education experiment for tribal children. He observes that the experiment recreates

the tribal children's loving commune by promoting their culture, life skills and values, and thereby challenges the hierarchical structures and competitive, individualistic models in education.

In the government and aided private schools in the study area, children from the Paniya community reported that they were labelled as *Paniyante makal* (Paniyan's daughter) and *Paniyante makan* (Paniyan's son) in a derogatory manner. Wright (1987) on the basis of her study of multi-ethnic classroom argues that the practice of labelling children from marginalised ethnic background contributes to their underachievement in schools. A Paniya warden in a MRS reported that her non-tribal colleagues constantly made comparison between the tribal and non-tribal children, and complained that the tribal children were not hygienic and had foul smell, and were not competent. There may be exceptions among non-tribal teachers, but from the majority we get the impression that they see the Paniya children as less capable, expect little from them by way of educational attainment, and label their language, culture and etiquette as 'poor' or of 'low standard.' Teachers' negative attitude and insensitivity towards the tribal children, and refusal to engage with their lives and problems have serious adverse effects on their learning. As Kundu (1990) observes, teachers from the dominant society need to understand and appreciate the cultural knowledge and language of the tribal children in order to teach them.

With regard to the Kurichiya children, comments from the teachers were: "They are very clean, orderly and well mannered in their relationship with others. Their elders used to practise untouchability. In olden times their *pittan* (head of the joint family, now known as *karanavar*) would not allow their school going children to enter their house without taking bath." While reaffirming the cultural practices of the Kurichiyas, teachers unknowingly valorise them and thus perpetuate a hidden curriculum of dominant caste practices. Many of the discriminatory and alienating practices go unnoticed, but labelling of one group and positive affirmation of the other seem routine in school interactions.

The Paniya students do not interact with non-tribal or even their Kurichiya classmates. They prefer to sit separately in the classroom and

play separately, and were found inactive in classroom activities and group discussions. In a government school, during a game with class IV students, it was observed that a non-tribal boy was hesitating to hold the hand of a Paniya boy who stood next to him. In a government aided school, a Paniya child from class III reported that if he touched his non-tribal classmates, they might beat him up. So he would not play with them and instead went to play with his elder brother during intervals. Peer interactions in the classroom as well as play ground not only reflect the social hierarchies but are sites that actively reproduce these inequalities. As argued by Kumar (2006), children's curricular and extracurricular activities in school are not just about achieving academic success but are about producing and negotiating social differences. The discussion of Das and others (2001) on, how the everyday experiences of violence shape the subjectivities and affect the capacity to engage in everyday life, helps understand the Paniya child. In the interactions in school, the Paniya children experience violence not only from their non-tribal peers but also from their teachers. In the context of the *dalit* identity Guru (2009) suggests that essentialising a particular identity as inferior has to be changed first, as essentialisation leads to exclusion of some and hegemony of the others.⁴

De-Legitimisation of Language

According to Bourdieu culture is unthinkable without language, and language cannot be analysed or understood in isolation from its cultural context and the social conditions of its production and reception. Teaching tribal people through their mother tongue and culture is stressed by many studies (Kundu 1994; Nambissan 1994). The Constitution of India as well as the national policy on education affirm the need for introducing primary education in mother tongue. Article 350A of the Constitution suggests imparting primary education in the mother tongue, but as far as the tribal languages are concerned it has not been implemented, except where the tribal people are politically assertive or have representation in the political power structure. *Nayam*, a booklet prepared by the DIET, Wayanad to introduce tribal culture to the teachers admits that, although the DPEP and the SSA have created more child friendly atmosphere in schools, they have not succeeded in making them tribal friendly.

While language becomes a stumbling block for the Paniya children in their learning experience, historical advantages like parental education, bilingualism at home and better chances of interaction with wider society help the Kurichiya children to overcome this block.

A Paniya PTA committee member reported that his community's mother tongue and art forms were neglected totally in school and that if they were given importance, their children would be enthusiastic and fare better in studies. For instance, there was a programme in the *Paniya bhasha* (Paniya's language) on the community radio, and the Paniya children became very interested and enthusiastic to listen to it. A tribal activist from Richur settlement insisted that in schools they needed trained Paniya teachers to teach the *Paniya bhasha*. Even in the institutional spaces created exclusively for tribal students, they were often denied the right to speak their own language. For instance, in the MRSs and ashram schools, tribal children were not free to use their respective mother tongue. The Kurichiya students expressed the freedom they enjoyed in the Thenad school of Thavinjal panchayat. In this school, popularly known as the Kurichiya school, they are a majority and could speak to their friends in their own language. Further, it is situated near the Kurichiya *tharavads* and the land for the school was donated by the Kurichiya community. As Nambissan (1994) points out, the home language of children is vital to the development of their culture, identity and self worth, and the total rejection of it can cause harm to the child's natural desire to learn as well as the community's attitude towards learning.

Early education in children's mother tongue provides the impetus to pick up concepts fast. A few teachers reported that the new constructivist method of teaching despite its child centeredness blocks a Paniya child's learning because teachers use Malayalam. Here the child's familiar settings are discussed but in a language unfamiliar to the child. Some teachers were of the view that in the new methodology of the DPEP they could at least participate in drawing, singing, painting that can lessen the alienating effect, while neglecting the fact that these children seldom learn to read and write. In a workshop conducted by the DIET of Wayanad, teachers did not seem convinced about the legitimacy of using tribal dialects in classroom learning.

Their own unfamiliarity with the Paniya and the Kurichiya dialects and their inability to convince the non-tribal children and parents about the legitimacy of such pedagogic practices were seen as major difficulties.

In a MGLC for the tribal children, when a Paniya child stated that her mother tongue was Malayalam, the teacher applauded her for that answer. As Nambissan (1994) observes, the attitudes and expectations of teachers are communicated to children as part of the hidden curriculum and influence children's learning. Even though this teacher appreciated tribal culture, her action affirms the illegitimacy of tribal languages in school. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, the reproduction of culture through pedagogic action and the symbolic violence exerted on its pupil is thus not pre-planned in its contents or form by an arbitrary power.

Tribal communities approach modern education in the hope of finding a sustainable source of livelihood especially in the current context of fluid labour markets. While they are aware of the significance of mother tongue education and desire a legitimate space for their dialects in schooling they do not want this to marginalise them further. A section of parents feel anxious as they know the value of the dominant language in employability. Teachers reported some of the parents saying as follows. "We send our children to school to learn 'good language' not our language." "If you are going to teach my child in the *Paniya bhasha* I would like to put him in another school." The situation of the Paniyas is somewhat similar to that of some of the non-tribal people of Kerala with regard to English medium education in preference to Malayalam, their mother tongue. Referring to a study conducted by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat, Aravindan (2006) reports that 44.6 per cent of the people in Kerala who send their children to English medium schools believe that education in the mother tongue is preferable for better grasping of the subject. However, the current anxiety about higher education and employability forces parents to enrol their children in English medium schools. While non-tribal children are making efforts to make the shift to English education and cope with its demands, Paniya tribal children in Wayanad have yet to make their shift to schooling in Malayalam, leave alone English.

In a social and political context where the majority of non-tribal population perceive tribal dialect as primitive, where it is not accepted as official language and not included in the school curriculum, tribal people are forced to disregard their language so as not to lag behind in the pursuit of socio-economic development. This is true even in the case of the Kurichiyas who have made significant progress with education through the dominant non-mother tongue language. Some of the Kurichiya parents have pointed out that exclusion of their dialect in school not only alienates their younger generation from their dialect but also prevents them from developing their language and culture further. According to them, loss of their dialect is also loss of the wealth of their ancestral knowledge, value system and rich culture. They are of the opinion that their *nadanpattukal* (folk songs), traditional wisdom about the ecosystem, and vast knowledge of tribal medicine, agricultural and food practices are losing credibility and acceptance among their educated members. Introduction and use of tribal dialects in schools along with Malayalam especially in early schooling may create a school environment that not only enables tribal children's cognitive understanding but also provides a formal space that accords legitimacy and dignity to tribal language and culture.

It is indeed a fact that the Kurichiyas have been able to achieve the level of schooling higher than that of the Panyias and their proficiency in the dominant Malayalam language has contributed to this achievement. This differential achievement of the two tribal groups from the same region, has demonstrated, what Bernstein, Bourdieu and others have shown, the key role played by language in the reproduction of the dominant class and cultural relations.

Neglect of Art and Culture

Not only the language but also the art of the tribal communities are neglected in schooling. While the state government organises tribal *melas* (fairs) to promote tourism industry in Kerala, especially in Wayanad⁵ and spends crores of rupees on school youth festivals every year, tribal art finds no place in school festivals wherein the tribal students, if they win prizes,

can become eligible for grace marks in the examinations. This denial of opportunity prompted a deputy director of education, who hailed from the Kuruman tribal community, to initiate a separate *gotra fest*, tribal festival for the LP and UP school children in 2010.

The Kurichiyas have partly succeeded in mobilising support for their archery skills. For instance, the Kurichiya youth from the Thulsi *tharavad* stated that they were able to form archery teams with the support of the Kerala Institute for Research and Training and Development of Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS). They are members of the Wayanad and Kerala archery teams. Archery competition is included in the school games and the Kurichiya students participate at the school, state and even national level competitions and win prizes. They are awarded grace marks for their creditable performance. At the same time they are aware that they cannot cope with the sophistication of the current archery competition without funds and support.

The Paniya parents are reluctant to visit school and if they go there, they stand outside like outcasts till somebody enquires the reason for their visit. The Paniya children do wish that their parents visit their school, but they are made to feel ashamed of the way their parents dress as they often hear remarks, made to non-tribal students, such as: “Why do you dress like a *Paniyichi* (Paniya woman)?” Much of the time of the Paniya children in school is spent in not learning, but coping with a situation that discriminates them. While interacting with the modern institutions such as schools, the Kurichiya parents follow the modern dress code which helps their children escape this symbolic violence. A Kurichiya clerk in a government college was annoyed when his friend suggested to him to preserve his cultural tradition in dressing. He reacted: “I am accepted in the college and among my friends because I wear the pants and shirt like them. If I go to them with my traditional dress they will treat me as primitive.” The school borrows its cultural paradigm from the socially dominant groups, either rejecting or seeking to modify the other forms of cultural expression. The systemic nature of discrimination that exists in wider society creeps into school through cultural mechanisms and imposes symbolic violence upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu 1997).

Tribal teachers, tribal leaders and activists continuously counter the ideological domination by constantly referring to the virtues and values of tribal world views and way of life as not only legitimate but even a superior alternative. They see the tremendous potential in tribal children and feel strongly that, if schooling provided them a chance, they with their knowledge and experience of environment, and their patience and practical skills would contribute in no small measure to the scientific and technological world.

The Kurichiya teachers are relatively more successful in their efforts to introduce their culture in the curriculum than the Paniya teachers. For instance, for teaching a lesson on cultivation a Kurichiya teacher, proud of her agricultural festivals, took her students to a Kurichiya *tharavad* to participate in their *Vilanattiutsavam* (paddy planting festival). The Paniya community traditionally known for their skills in paddy cultivation have had no ownership of paddy fields. They planted paddy for their masters with their traditional dance and *thudi* (musical instrument used by the Paniya community) known as *Kambalanatti*, a Paniya art form in which they do the work with rhythmic movement of the body and hands. Despite the rhythmic beauty of this dance which they enjoy, its association with bonded labour until the 1960's makes it difficult for a Paniya teacher to be proud of it, unless accompanied by an understanding and critique of the history of the exploitative production relations in the region. Under modern development, a community, living in a land and natural resources based culture and history, is forced into another culture without any preparation for the transition, and it leads to marginalisation (Fernandes 2008). As this study shows, schooling does not prepare these communities for such transition.

Land as Material and Symbolic Power in Schooling

Historically the Kurichiyas owned land while the Paniyas were landless labourers. Over the years the Kurichiyas lost most of their land and today they own only small tracts. In addition to providing some economic security, land is a source of prestige and power which has given better social acceptability to the Kurichiya teachers and students in the school. In contrast, landlessness has translated itself into powerlessness for the Paniya

teachers and students. Besides the status and power associated with land, ownership and agricultural produce of land gave Kurichiyas historically more opportunities for physical mobility and social interaction with non-tribal groups, village officials and also the market in connection with selling and buying of goods. The elders in one of the Kurichiya *tharavads* stated that they were the ones who provided rice, ghee, wild meat etc. to the officials in the British and early independence period. One elder Kurichiya leader said that the *adhikari* (village officer) needed their assistance for collecting and measuring coffee seeds as the produce was directly bought by the government department from the coffee gardens. Many of these officials maintained friendly ties with them and exhorted them to send their children to school. Today, most of the Kurichiya parents in the study area have basic education and a few of them are even employed in government services.

Further, land ownership and the economic and social status associated with it were seen as indicators of their capability to acquire education and this prompted teachers to approach their elders to motivate them to send their children to school when schools were first established in the area. Their children are second or third generation learners like the non-tribal students in the area. However, it is observed that their 'subsistence farming' is not enough to maintain even a middle class standard of living and to send their children to cities for higher education. The Paniya children are mostly first generation or second generation learners. Having been bonded labourers, their grandparents did not have the opportunity for schooling. The restrictions on their physical mobility imposed by the *jenmi* (land lord) did not give them the chance to interact with others. However, ownership of even a small plot of land seems to change the educational aspirations of some of the Paniyas in significant ways. In a small Paniya community under the Richur settlement project in Ambalavayal panchayat, 13 families were given title deeds of 10 cents-1 acre of land in the year 2004.⁶ The *Ooru mooppa*n (headman appointed by the panchayat) of that small settlement reported that there were no school dropouts among their children and the one child who had discontinued education was again enrolled in the school on his own initiative. Land and its resources are integral to the Paniyas' and the Kurichiyas' culture and livelihood, a positive condition of their habitus, and the possession of it enables them to respond positively to modern education.

It is important to note that when the Kurichiya students are taken out of the local context, their identity as ‘tribe’ becomes more prominent than their identity as Kurichiya. For instance, a Kurichiya student from Champa settlement, who joined a college outside Wayanad district for a degree course, was rudely shocked to find the perceptions of the other students about tribal people as primitive. He said: “I want to be looked upon as any other person in the world and do not want to be a museum piece for the media.” The historical advantages and the special habitus of the Kurichiyas are recognised only in their immediate locality and not in the wider social contexts. Thus land as symbolic capital operates here in a very limited manner and the Kurichiya identity fails to transcend the tribal identity which is perceived by the larger society as ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’. The Kurichiya community has been able to successfully use their cultural capital in education mainly at the level of basic schooling as indicated by their low participation in higher education (see table 1). However, the spread of schooling within the Kurichiya community at large has been a transformative process gradually getting converted into political power. A member of the Kurichiya community, elected to the state assembly in the 2011 elections, became a state minister, while the Paniyas find it difficult to become even a panchayat member. Both the Paniya and the Kurichiya community members stress the need for at least one acre of individual land or having common land as a prerequisite to be able to educate their children, in addition to the free provisions that they get from school. The tribal leaders and activists, aware of the material and cultural security that land provides, stress the need to reacquire access to their land in order that their children can approach formal education with courage and confidence.

In the current development discourse, education continues to be propagated as one of the most important means for the development of tribal people. In their continued emphasis on the importance of education for the wellbeing of the Paniya community, the state officials and political parties have overlooked the association between access to land and education of tribal people. This is in spite of the fact that it is the land owning communities of the Kurichiyas and Kurumas who fare better in education and despite the longstanding demand of the Paniyas for land for

their survival and 'development'. The state repressed the *adivasi* struggle for land and has not yet fulfilled the agreement signed on 16 October 2001 to give 1-5 acres of cultivable land to the landless tribals.⁷ This seems to be the minimum prerequisite, as the present study has shown, to address the inequalities existing in educational experiences among the Paniya and Kurichiya communities. From the time of independence the promise of the government to give land to the landless tribal people has been continuously broken. As pointed out by Das and others (2001) this breach of promise is an extreme form of violence which can result in the slow erosion of their trust in the state and its institutions in their everyday life.

Conclusion

Inequality ingrained in society gets transferred to the school through non-tribal teachers and the school community trained in the inequitable social system. How the non-tribal student performs, becomes the standard to evaluate the tribal students. Sanctioning of the MRSs or special schools will not address the issues of social and cultural alienation they face without changing the dominant discourses on legitimate knowledge and giving space for tribal perceptions and their knowledge. The mismatch between the formal schooling and the everyday lives of tribal children resulting in their intrinsic exclusion is not addressed through the state's policy reform processes. The National Curriculum Framework Review reports that the organisation of Indian education system reflects clearly the caste, class and tribe stratified structure of the society, and its hierarchical ideology (NCFR 2005). A wide range of issues like cultural hegemony of the dominant groups/classes, the identity as tribe, the identity as slave caste in the feudal and colonial periods, and the complex interface of all these play their role in perpetuating inequality in the education of tribal children.

The two communities, the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas cope with or resist the process of education in different ways. The Kurichiya students are more resilient. They too experience exploitation in different manner and degrees, but they respond differently due to their material, social and cultural advantages and the consequent assertion of power as a community. Both the communities undergo different degrees of violence and conflict that form

their subjectivities differently interfering with their learning and curtailing their cognitive capacities.

Along with a critical understanding of social structures as well as their ideological reproduction through educational institutions, understanding the subjective experience of violence and exclusion in the everyday schooling is very important to explain the differential educational experiences and outcomes among tribal communities. The responses of the communities reveal that systematic violence can cripple the individual's and community's ability to resist domination and even to access policies and programmes purported to 'empower' them.

The state supported hegemonic social and cultural constructions of knowledge negate the specific culture of the tribal communities. Instead of pluralising the learning spaces, the state, through its policies and programmes, tries to consolidate the inequitable mono culture by legitimising and reproducing the inequalities and dominant cultural practices. The education system and the pedagogic actions resist recognising and legitimising tribal knowledge, perhaps because it carries elements that contest the dominant mono cultural trends of the society.

Notes

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- 1 The five panchayats included in the study are Edavaka, Mananthavady, Thirunelly, Thavinjal and Ambalavayal.
- 2 Kerala Varma Pazhassi Raja (1753-1805), the erstwhile prince of the ancient Kottayam Royal Family based in the present Kannur district of Kerala, was the ruler of Wayanad towards the close of the 18th century. He was known for his

strong resistance to the British. He fought against the British East India Company along with the Kurichiyas and Nairs in Wayanad to protect Wayanad from the British rule. However, Pazhassi Raja was finally defeated in the year 1805 and the British took complete control of Wayanad.

- 3 It was also found that tribal children especially the Paniya children faced difficulty in doing their homework, keeping separate notebook for each subject, maintaining them neat and orderly due to the poor household facilities and illiteracy of their parents. The teachers' unrealistic expectations, expressed in the form of scolding, punishments and public remarks, make the Paniya children feel humiliated.
- 4 For example, the ideology of purity-pollution essentialises the *dalit's* identity as inferior, while it generalises the identity of the 'twice-born' (non-dalit) as socially superior (Guru 2009).
- 5 Tourism occupies the central position in the development strategy of Wayanad when the agricultural sector fails to meet the revenue demands of the state.
- 6 This project was started in 1958 as part of the programme of rehabilitating 100 bonded tribal labourers in the land bought by Kerala from the Tamil Nadu government. Even though they have fought for allotment of the project land from 1995 onwards, distribution of the title deeds to a few of them happened only after the historic *adivasi* struggle at Muthanga in 2003 (Local Support Team 2010).
- 7 Bijoy and Raman (2003) provide the major components of the agreement.

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