



NEED FOR EMPOWERING SCHEDULED CASTES IN DIGITAL KERALA THROUGH EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION: A CLOSER LOOK INTO PALAKKAD DISTRICT

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Abstract

Scheduled Castes (SCs) denotes one of the most deprived and discriminated groups from historical times. In this ICT era too, their upward social mobility is an imminent need, the same being not very encouraging even though 75 years have since India obtained independence. This paper makes a closer look into the various indicators relating to the social mobility of SCs in Palakkad District of Kerala and makes suggestions for their faster upward mobility pointing out the vital need for vast ICT adoption.

Keywords: Caste, Enrolment, Employment, Empowerment, SHGs, Financial Inclusion, ICT, AI.

Introduction

India, the land of diversity, is often called the land of discrimination since society had been stratified according to the caste system. The caste system is a classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called varnas (Deshpande et al, 2010). The vast majority of people, however, belonged not to any of these ‘varnas’; so, they were called ‘avarnas’ (without varna) and they were cruelly discriminated in the society and were not in the mainstream society. They were deprived of opportunities for education, employment, right to worship etc. The term caste is used to refer to a particular group that follows the same occupation, same rituals, and the same way of living. Initially, there appears to have been only four castes arranged in a hierarchical order with *Brahmins* (clergy) at the top, immediately followed by the *Khatriyas* (warriors); then, at a distance by *Vysyas* (traders) and lastly the *Shudras* (servants) who occupied the bottom rung of the esteem ladder (Sana, 1993). Scheduled Castes (SCs) denote a typical group among the ‘avarnas’ and one of the most deprived group (‘bottom most’ castes) who were historically not included in any of the varnas. As a typical group ‘outside the varnas’ or ‘avarnas’ SCs were the most deprived lot from historical times; another such group being the Scheduled Tribes (STs) who were socially alienated group, were not in the mainstream society and were mostly living in the forest areas. Both these ‘Scheduled’ groups (SCs and STs) have been given special protection and concession in the post-independent India, both these being included as ‘Schedules’ to Constitution of India. Other ‘avarnas’, like SEBCs (socially and educationally backward castes) too have been granted some privileges in the Constitution of India if they qualify for ‘backward class of citizens’ status. This study focuses only on the SCs in Palakkad District of Kerala State in India.

Relevance and Significance of the Study

From the Vedic period onwards people from the bottom strata of the caste system have been exploited. There were many social reforms to uplift the underprivileged from the pre-independence era onwards. The SCs are the former untouchables of Indian society so they are prevented from going to school and finding better employment, thus they are still backward as per all social development indices. Over the generations, they have been thrown into the vicious circle of poverty. To overcome the backwardness



SCs have to achieve better status in education and occupation. Today, ICT has added another dimension to the above broad goal. The government needs to act proactively in favour of SCs and other deprived communities. A study of the SCs in Palakkad District is relevant in this context.

Kerala, popularly known as God's own country is the southernmost state of India. Unlike other states of India, Kerala achieved higher ranks in most of the human development indices. Education has the highest priority in human life. Education gains the highest priority in the efforts to attain better socio-economic status. Even in a comparably highest-ranked state like Kerala, compared to other social classes, there is substantial inter-caste disparity in the case of educational attainment of the head of the households of SC families (Deshpande, 2000). Strong disparities have been seen in the pattern of land holding, employment opportunity, income level, and educational attainment between Scheduled castes and other communities in Kerala (Sivanandan, 1976). Despite all the efforts made by the government, SCs are still lagging behind other communities of the society. So, this paper looks into the educational, occupational and allied aspects of SCs in Palakkad, the district with the highest SC population in Kerala.

Objectives of the Study and Methodology

- (i) To study the social, educational, employment related and allied factors of SCs in Palakkad District;
- (ii) To suggest broad steps to empower SCs in this ICT era, as Kerala is turning into a digital economy.

The secondary data used for this study were the ones collected and published conjointly by Kerala SC Development Corporation, the respective local self-governance institute, and Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) in 2010. The data were fairly comprehensive. This kind of data were not published after the year of 2010. The data from *Economic Review* (GOK) too were used for the analysis.

Empowering the Deprived and the Marginalized in the ICT Era: Some Past Studies

Many earlier studies have pointed out that ICT act as a key too and as a catalyst of economic development especially the growth of the poor, the marginalized and the deprived groups; thus that of rural economy, women empowerment, etc. also. The prospects of the ICT industry too were studied by some scholars, so also the need for using scientific tools, minimizing social inequalities etc. Manoj (2007)[20] "ICT industry in India: a SWOT analysis" *Journal of Global Economy* has studied at national level about ICT industry in India, pointed out the vital significance of this industry in the development of Indian economy, and made suggestions for sustainably promoting it. Manoj, P.K. (2005) [21] "Cost accounting systems in Banks-for strategic advantage through effective cost management" *The Management Accountant* has noted the need for managing costs scientifically in banks, and in Manoj, P.K. (2005) [22] Scientific pricing of bank products through cost accounting-a vital need in the LPG regime, *The Management Accountant*, has noted the need for scientific pricing for the efficient bank management.

Pickens (2009)[23] has clearly noted as to how a popular ICT tool (mobile phone) played a key role in financial inclusion, women empowerment and rural development through 'banking the unbanked' in Philippines. Manoj (2010) [24] "Impact of technology on the efficiency and risk management of old private sector banks in India: Evidence from banks based in Kerala" has observed that ICT-adoption by banks has made them more efficient. The imminent need for a concrete policy at the national level to address the issues of the rubber sector has been dealt in detail. *The Hindu* (2015) [25] wherein the



welcome features of the new policy announced in April 2015 has been discussed. A study by Nasar and Manoj (2013)[26] “Customer satisfaction on service quality of real estate agencies: An empirical analysis with reference to Kochi Corporation Area of Kerala State in India” has noted that greater level awareness should be provided to real estate agents; and that transparency and social networking are needed for customer service and business growth. Manoj (2013)[27] “Prospects and Challenges of Green Buildings and Green Affordable Homes: A Study with Reference to Ernakulam, Kerala” has noted the high growth prospects of green homes as they can create huge employment avenues and ensure fast economic growth.

Besides ICT adoption, some studies have pointed out the need for faster sustained economic growth through diverse kinds of technological interventions, development models and tools; right from educational loans to exports and from SEZs to ecotourism. Varghese, K.X, and Manoj, P.K. (2013)[28], “Educational loans and the higher education sector in India” have noted that study loans can improve HR quality in the nation, youth employability and they should be promoted. Manoj, P.K. (2014) [29] “Role of ICT in Women Empowerment: A Study with a Focus on 'Kudumbashree' programme in Kerala State of India”. *International Journal of Information Technology & Computer Sciences Perspectives* has pointed out the excellent women empowerment potential of SHGs under *Kudumbashree* poverty alleviation programme. K.K Nasar and P.K Manoj (2014) [30] Factors influencing the purchase of apartments: some empirical evidence. *Clear International Journal of Research in Management, Science and Technology* have noted the major factors influencing the apartment buyers which include infrastructure like ICT. Manoj, P.K. (2015) [31] “International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT) and its impact on coffee exports from India: An analysis” has observed the vital role of ICTT to boost exports and economic growth. Manoj, PK (2009)[32], *Special economic zones in India: financial inclusion: challenges and opportunities* has noted the role of SEZs for expediting economic development. Manoj, P.K.(2017)[33]“Segmentation Strategy for Promotion of Ecotourism Products: Evidence from Thenmala Ecotourism” the author has pointed out that meticulous planning using segmentation of tourists can lead to economic growth through ecotourism.

Rajesh and Manoj (2015)[34]“Women Employees work life and challenges to Industrial Relations: Evidence from North Kerala” has noted the crucial importance of a trade-off between job life and family life of employed women to improve the industrial relations. Manoj (2016)[35]“Employment Generation from Rural Tourism: A Field Study of the Local Community at Kumbalangi, Kerala” has noted the vital capability of tourism to create employment avenues, along with suggestions like better infrastructure, ICT resources, online services, etc. Manoj (2016)[36] “Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) for Faster Housing Development in India: An Analysis in the Context of the New Regulatory Policies of SEBI” has observed that innovations in financing models such as REITs are vital to bring about rapid development of India’s housing status which could lead to faster development of the whole Indian economy, given the linkages of housing. Manoj (2016)[37] “Bank marketing in India in the current ICT era: Strategies for effective promotion of bank products” observed ICT-enabled marketing as a key need for India’s banking sector in this digital era. A study by Lakshmi and Manoj (2017)[38] “Service quality in rural banking in north Kerala: A comparative study of Kannur district co-operative bank and Kerala Gramin bank” has pointed out that KGB could make greater use of ICT than KDCB thus enabling the former to get an edge in the market. Another paper by Lakshmi and Manoj (2017)[39] “Rural Customers and ICT-based Bank Products A Study with a Focus on Kannur District Co-operative Bank and Kerala Gramin Bank” has observed that ICT-enabled services of Kerala



Gramin Bank (KGB) have been accepted to a greater level than KDCB's non-ICT-enabled services. A study by Joju, Vasantha, and Manoj (2017)[40] "Future of brick and mortar banking in Kerala: Relevance of branch banking in the digital era" has observed the vital need for 'human touch' as in 'brick and mortar' banking even if ICT or virtual banking is the new normal. Another study by Joju, Vasantha, and Manoj (2017)[41] "Financial technology and service quality in banks: Some empirical evidence from the old private sector banks based in Kerala, India" has observed that Fin-Techs could significantly enhance quality of banking service and have become vital in modern days. Manoj (2017)[42] "Construction costs in affordable housing in Kerala: Relative significance of the various elements of costs of affordable housing projects" has prioritized different cost elements for better cost control, and noted ICT as a key tool for cost control.

Manoj (2017)[43] "Cost management in the construction of affordable housing units in Kerala: A case study of the relevance of earned value analysis (EVA) approach" has demonstrated EVA as a powerful weapon that could effectively manage various costs of construction. A study by Joju, Vasantha, and Manoj (2017)[44] "Electronic CRM & ICT-based banking services: An empirical study of the attitude of customers in Kerala, India" has noted the key significance of ICT-based banking practice called e-CRM (Electronic Customer Relationship Management) as an enabler of efficient and competitive banking, along with noting good feedback of customers to latest ICT-based products like e-CRM. Another CRM paper relating to bank management area by Manoj (2018)[45] "CRM in old private sector banks and new generation private sector banks in Kerala: A comparison" has noted that CRM adoption by the new private sector banks (NPBs) being to a greater extent than that of the old private sector banks (OPBs) particularly in respect of the latest ICT-enabled or Electronic version of CRM (i.e. e-CRM); thus enabling the NPBs to get a clear competitive edge in the market vis-à-vis the OPBs. Manoj (2019)[46] "Social banking in India in the reforms era and the case of financial inclusion: Relevance of ICT-based policy options" has suggested ICT-based strategic options to enhance social banking that fits into the current digital banking regime. Manoj (2019)[47] "Dynamics of human resource management in banks in the ICT era: A study with a focus on Kerala based old private sector banks" observed the key relevance of ICT-enabled policies for the management as well as development of bank staff in this very competitive digital era. Manoj (2019) [48] "Competitiveness of manufacturing industry in India: need for flexible manufacturing systems" pointed out the vital significance for adoption of ICT as well as other technological advances such as flexible manufacturing systems (FMS) so as to make Indian manufacturing sector more competitive, given the globalization pressures.

A paper by Joju and Manoj (2019)[49]"Digital Kerala: A study of the ICT Initiatives in Kerala state" has studied the major initiatives in the ICR front in Kerala, the State in India having many unique 'firsts' like the topmost in internet penetration, topmost in literacy (universal literacy) etc. and has suggested strategies for the better use of Kerala's vast ICT potential for its faster development. Joju and Manoj (2019) [50] "Banking Technology and Service Quality: Evidence from Private Sector Banks in Kerala" have observed ICT as an enabler of banking quality and as such ICT-adoption should be encouraged. Ali and Manoj (2020) [51] "Impact of Falling Price of Rubber-A Case Study of Kothamangalam Taluk in Ernakulam District" has pointed out that due to frequent price falls affect the livelihood of farmers and that governmental interventions like minimum support prices are vital. Manoj (2015)[52] "Prospects of Responsible Tourism in Kerala: Evidence from Kumarakam in Kottayam District" has noted that responsible tourism (RT) has vast potential for supporting economic growth, if sustainably promoted. Manoj (2016)[53] "Determinants of sustainability of rural tourism: a study of



tourists at Kumbalangi in Kerala, India” has noted the key variables affecting tourism’s sustainability in the rural context and also suggested strategies like upgrading digital (ICT) resources as of the factors. Manoj (2015)[54] “Impact of Rural Tourism on the Environment and Society: Evidence from Kumbalangi in Kerala, India” noted certain adverse impacts that are imminent in rural tourism and that it is vital to control such effects. Manoj (2019)[55] “Tourism Sector in Kerala in the Post-Flood Scenario: Strategies for its Sustainable Growth With a Focus on Responsible Tourism” observed the crucial part that RT could play for revival of flood-hit Kerala economy.

A study by Saritha and Manoj (2023) [56], “Social inequalities in IT sector: Evidence from Kerala State in India” has observed the existence of inequality among IT sector employees in Kerala along with the key requirement for removing it for equitable development of Kerala’s IT sector. Manoj, P.K. (2015) [57] Housing Microfinance: A Study on Quality, Cost and Default Rate with Respect to Bhavanashree in Kerala has noted that housing microfinance (HMF)type home loans have lower quality (higher NPAs) and also that their transactional costs are higher. Manoj (2023)[58] “Affordable Healthcare and Affordable Housing: Need for an Integrative Approach for the Holistic Growth of the Digital Economy of Kerala, India” *Community Practitioner*, has noted that a knowledge society like Kerala must promote housing and healthcare sectors holistically using ICT. Manoj, P.K. (2023) [59]. ICT for Sustained Community Development in India in the 5G Era. *Community Practitioner* has noted the vital need of high-end ICT resources to provide better internet connectivity for fast and equitable growth. A more recent study by Sruthy Krishna, and Manoj, P. K. (2023)[60] ‘Technological Advances and the Sustainability of Natural Rubber Cultivation in Digital India: A Study with a Focus on Kerala State’ has studied as to how technology influences the sustainability of rubber cultivation in India, and has also suggested some strategies for sustainability. Maharashtra-based study by Wankhede, G. G. (1999)[61] could disclose the social and educational challenges faced by SCs in that State, and a later study by the same author Wankhede, G. (2016) [62] has focused on higher education by the SCs in Maharashtra. The need for better education for getting gainful employment and the vital need for ICT in modern days could be noted in almost all studies. In short, in modern times ICT-oriented training is vital for the SCs.

Demographic profile of SCs of Palakkad

As per the census data of 2011, the SC population in Kerala is 3,039,573 which represents 9.10 percent of the population of Kerala State. Among the districts, Palakkad has the highest SC population which is 13.24 percent of the total SC population of Kerala, and 20.91 percent of the Sc families of Kerala live in Palakkad. As per the order of the government of Kerala, in 2008, if more than five SC households are living nearer, this hamlet should be considered as a colony, and then collect the data from them, in this way different development programs can be allocated to the different parts of the district. As per the data, there are 4310 SC colonies in Palakkad which is 16.45 percent of the total SC colonies of Kerala.

A positive sex ratio is a sign of social development and it is a far-fetched dream when we observe the data from India as a whole. Kerala is experiencing a positive sex ratio and it is also influencing the sex ratio of the SCs. The condition is also observed in Palakkad as the district shows a positive sex ratio of SCs. Not seeing women as an economic burden may have contributed to the positive sex ratio. Even though they are forced to work as unskilled laborers, women's participation in the workforce is quite high among SCs which is necessary to tackle poverty. Menon et al (2019), studied female work and labor force participation in India, and they found that more disenfranchised social groups have higher



rates of labor market participation of women.

Table I: Demographic profile of SCs of Palakkad

	Palakkad		Kerala
	Number	Percentage	
SC colonies	4310	16.45	26198
SC families	71515	20.91	564329
Total population	311376	13.24	235208
			7
Male	153075	13.32	114901
			3
Female	158301	13.16	120307
			4

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Literacy rate of SCs of Palakkad

The literacy rate in India is improving over decades. There is an increasing trend in literacy rates among the SC population, but the rates remain quite below the national average (Suman Acharya and HariharSahoo, 2019). Kerala ranked 1st in literacy rate among all the states of India. Kerala has a long tradition of social reform movements which has a strong anti-caste face. This fact has contributed to a far improved status of SCs compared with other parts of India. Deshpande (2000) finds that, caste disparity in Kerala is significantly lower than in other parts of India. By analyzing the data from the Palakkad district, the literacy of the SC population is lower than the literacy of the total population of the district. Kottoppadam and Eruthempathi are the most and least literate panchayats respectively. It is noticed that Kottoppadam is the panchayath where SC literacy is higher than the total literacy rate of the entire district. SCs are afflicted by problems such as non enrollment, stagnation and dropouts besides illiteracy (Wankhede, 1999).

Even Though such problems are present in the study area, the Panchayath Kottoppadam has achieved almost 95 percent of literacy which could be taken as a model for other panchayats and makes necessary changes accordingly.

Table II: Literacy of SCs of Palakkad

Total literacy rate of Palakkad	88.49
SC literacy rate of Palakkad	83.99
Most literate Gramapanchayat- Kottoppadam	94.08
Least literate Gramapanchayat- Eruthempathi	64.65

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Enrolment of SCs in School- Palakkad

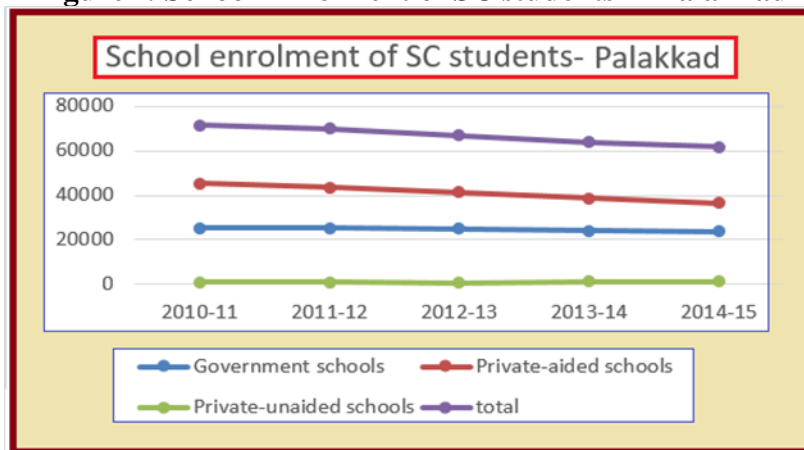
Educational attainment can improve one's economic and social status. In spite of all the improvements in educational attainment, studies reveal that SCs comprise the largest section of illiterates in India (Annapurnam and Inbanathan, 2017) even though there are various initiatives by the government to improve their prevailing poor status. Even in a micro-level study conducted in a village in Kerala shows SCs still sand at the bottom of rankings of educational attainment (Scaria, 2014).

Kerala experiences high enrolment rate in schools among other states in India (Handbook of statistics on Indian States, RBI 2020). As a result of decline in fertility rate, for the last decade Kerala



experiencing decline in enrolment (Retanakumar, 2006). Data from Palakkad substantiating the above remark that is, there is a decline in enrolment for SC students also. Retnakumar (2006) finds that, poor quality of teaching in government funded schools is significant in accounting for decline in enrolments. But, data from Palakkad reveals Since SCs have chosen government or government aided schools over private unaided English medium schools due to the low economic as well as social status.

Figure I: School Enrolment of SC students in Palakkad



Source: GOK, *Economic Review*.

Educational status of SCs in Palakkad

Educational achievement among villagers, SCs, STs and other Backward Castes are considerably less well educated than upper castes (Krishna, 2002). The data from Palakkad is substantiating the above remark as educational backwardness is a predominant issue of the community. The highest number of the people are having only primary level education and only 31 percent of them have secondary level education. The persons those who have medical, engineering, and other professional degrees account for less than 1 percent of the total population of them. Though the accessibility of school education in India has improved over the years (Khan, 2018), many of SCs could not get formal education.

A literacy mission implemented by the GOK could help SCs/STs; they being more prone to stop formal schooling due to their poor socio-economic conditions. Kerala has shown the best example as to how people could be made literate sans formal education. Literacy mission could reach the STs as well, who are similar to SCs in backwardness; they being located in geographically alien places. The GOK has implemented literacy programs in compliance with UNESCO to turn Attappadi and Wayanad, where STs are more prominent, fully literate (The Hindu, 2020). This type of neo-literacy program has significant influence on SCs also and it turned 3 percent of SCs literates in Palakkad.

Table III: Educational Status of SCs of Palakkad

Sl. No.	Educational level	Individuals	Percentage
1	Illiterates	46088	16
2	Neo literates	8347	3
3	Primary level	100460	34
4	Secondary level	89309	31
5	SSLC pass	29955	10
6	Plus two/ PDC pass	13174	5



7	Graduation (Degree)	3837	1
8	Post Graduation	561	-
9	Engineering degree	54	-
10	Engineering diploma/certificate	139	-
11	Medicine	20	-
12	Other professional degrees	231	-
13	Professional diploma/certificate		-

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Multiple reasons may have contributed to the less number of students in higher studies. Wankhede (2016) studied the higher education of SC students of Maharashtra and found that SC students strongly feel the absence of guidance and support in academics and in making career choices. The evidence from Palakkad has shown from the table that, there are less than 10 percent students in degree classes and less than one percent are doing post-graduation. Absence of social capital accelerates less participation of SC students in higher studies. Communities with high social capital will achieve superior outcomes in multiple domains (Krishna, 2002). Certificate courses have comparatively higher chances of employment. Unfortunately, only 4 percent of the SC students are studying the certificate courses.

Table IV: SC Students in Palakkad

Sl. No.	Class / Course	Students	Percentage
1	Upper primary	37864	48
2	High school	21684	27
3	Higher secondary	10150	13
4	Degree	5041	7
5	Post-Graduation	246	-
6	Certificate courses	3432	4
7	ITI/ITC	133	-
8	Diploma course	226	-
9	Other professional courses	588	1
10	B.Tech	98	-
11	Medical/Ayurveda/Homeo	12	-

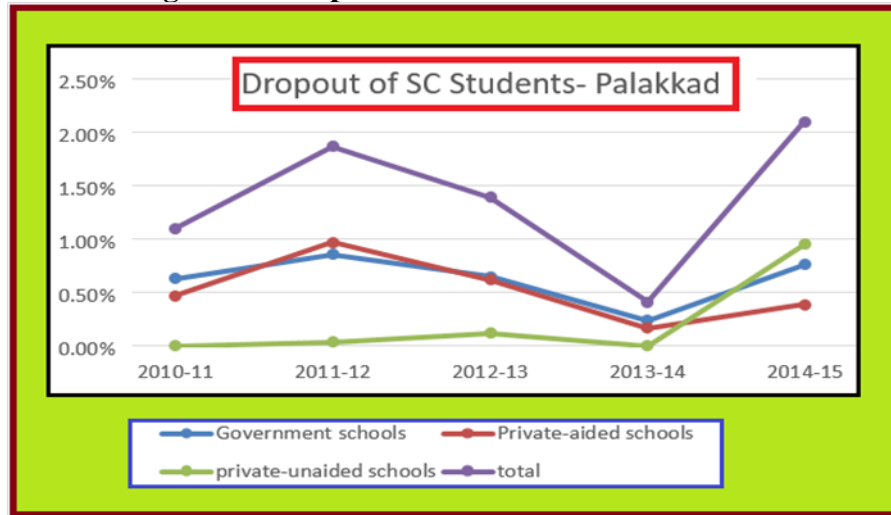
Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Dropouts from education-Palakkad

Discontinuation of formal education is an important issue of vulnerable people of the society. In India, Drop out from school is high among the children belonging to Muslim, SC, and ST children (Sateesh Gouda and TV Sekhar, 2014). Kerala has lowest dropout rate among other states of India. According to Corrie, (1995) the Human Development Index for the SC child of Kerala is highest among all other states of India. The data shows dropout rate of SC students of Palakkad. Dropout from government, government aided schools and private unaided schools are constitute less than 1 percent which is a positive fact. And the data reveals almost a static tend in dropout of SC students of Palakkad



Figure II: Dropout of SC students in Palakkad.



Source: GOK, *Economic Review*.

The data from Palakkad shows that more than 70 percent of the persons who discontinued their education in their secondary classes. Most of the SC girls from Palakkad discontinued education in their secondary classes same as boys. In the higher secondary, degree, and PG courses, the dropout rate is high among girls. It may be that girls are encouraged to get married at this age rather than being educated. Improvement in women's education is not only reflected in the labor market but it also has a great social impact. Rising levels of education improve women's productivity in the home which in turn can increase family health, child survival, and the investment in children's human capital (Hill and King, 1995). The more educated the girls, the more developed the society. Educating girls will lead the overall development of the backward communities like SCs.

Table V: Dropouts among SCs

Drop out class	boys	girls	total	percentage
Primary (1st-7 th standard)	647	517	1164	12
Secondary (8 th -10 th std)	3879	2935	6814	71
Higher secondary	575	644	1219	13
Degree and PG	132	195	327	4
Certificate ITI,ITC, diploma other professional courses	-	-	-	-
btech	3	-	3	-
Medical degree	-	-	-	-

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Reasons of dropout

While studying the case of SC and ST girls in Karnataka, Bagavatheeswaran et. al. (2016) finds that, lack of support from the family, direct and indirect costs to the family, child marriage, and influence of peers are the main interpersonal factors affecting the discontinuation of their education.

In Palakkad, most of the people from SC communities have dropped out of their secondary classes. From the specified reasons for dropout out of school, failure in class is an important one. The highest



number of people fall into the category of other reasons such as the lack of support from family, not interested in going to school, early marriage, etc. in all the classes. The category of other reasons have contributed highest to the list of dropouts. Distance from institutions and travel difficulties are the least important reasons for students dropping out of education.

Table VI: Reasons of Dropout

Reasons of dropout	Dropouts							Total
	Primary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Degree/PG	Certificate/Diploma/Others	B.Tech	Medical Degree	
Poverty	107	229	49	12	2	-	-	399
Economic issues	132	461	121	46	9	-	-	769
Distance from institutions	1	1	1	1	-	-	-	4
Travel difficulties	1	2	1	-	-	-	-	4
Failure	298	2715	362	81	5	-	-	3461
Feeling of isolation	35	77	20	9	3	-	-	144
Other reasons	590	3329	665	178	17	3	-	4782
Total	1164	6814	1219	327	36	3	-	9563

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Occupational structure of SCs of Palakkad

Educational backwardness will affect the occupational structure of a community. There is a high concentration of workers belonging to the scheduled population in the agricultural sector (Rayappa and Grover, 1979). It is observed from the data of Palakkad that 70 percent of the SCs are engaged in agricultural casual works. Most of them are employed under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS). As we considered MNREGS, Palakkad is one of the top three performing districts in Kerala.

Permanent employment is an employment relationship whereby an individual works for an employer and receives payment directly from the employer. Instead of employment security permanent employees have often receives benefits from their employers. The data shows that only 3 percent of them have permanent jobs. About 20 percent of them are having non-agricultural casual jobs.

The SC Development Department under the Govt. of Kerala (GOK) has provided various schemes to be self-employed such as financial assistance for purchasing auto/commercial vehicles, foreign employment schemes for those who are looking for a job in foreign countries, multi-purpose loans, etc. even with the provision of this support, only 2 percent among them are self-employed. Considering their poor situation now, the GOK needs to ensure more initiatives for the development of SCs in Kerala.



Table VII: Type of Occupation of SCs of Palakkad

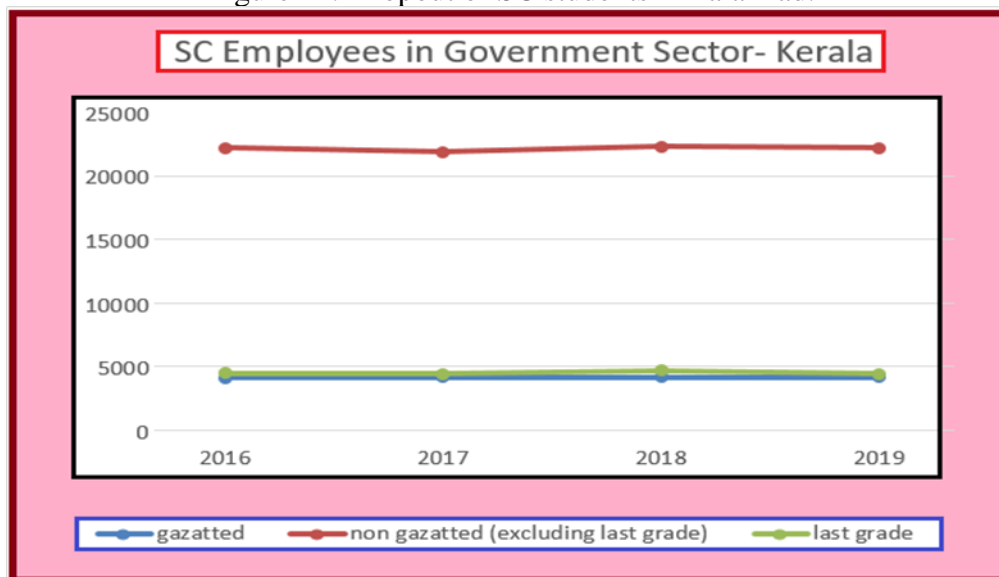
Type of Occupation	No of Persons	Total
Permanent	3423	3
Temporary	2278	2
Self employed	2195	2
Casual labor- non agricultural	23998	19
Casual labor- agricultural	85318	70
Other	5030	4
Total	122242	100

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

SC employees in Government service- Kerala

Employment in government sector is most preferred since it is more secured, comparatively well paid and most importantly well privileged of being a government employee. Participation of SCs in government sector have shown in the below line chart. The data shows a static trend in the participation SC employees in gazette, non-gazette and last grade services. The data reveals that more SC employees are working as non-gazette under the government of Kerala.

Figure III: Dropout of SC students in Palakkad.



Source: GOK, *Economic Review*.

Educational status of the unemployed SC persons (15-59 years)

The table shows that more than 40 percent of the total SC population is unemployed. The data also reveals that, lower educational status, and lower unemployment. In one way we can analyze the paradox as there are employment opportunities locally available for those who are less educated. At least they are employed even if it is unskilled occupations. At the same time, persons who have higher educational qualifications face the problem of unemployment. Besides personal and socio-economic-political reasons, existing conditions in the labor market like underemployment, frictional unemployment, and educational unemployment also add up to this paradoxical behavior.



Table VIII: Educational status of the unemployed SC persons of Palakkad

Educational status	15-59 years of age group		
	population	Unemployed	Percentage
Illiterates	20355	4471	22
Neo literates	6215	961	15
Primary level	55658	13707	25
Secondary level	79561	34692	44
Sslc passed	29685	18364	62
Pdc/plus two passed	13126	12169	93
degree	3810	2481	65
pg	559	304	54
Engineering degree	53	36	32
Engineering diploma/certificate courses	138	65	47
Medicibne	17	9	53
Other professional degree	225	111	49
Professional diploma/certificate	363	172	47
Total	209765	87523	42

Source: Detailed Survey about SC Colonies, KILA, 2010

Suggestions and Conclusion

It may be noted that the current status regarding the educational attainment and employment situation of the SCs in Palakkad, as revealed from this study is not very encouraging. Hence, more SC-targeted policy initiatives are required to address their problems and to bring them into the mainstream of the Kerala society. Besides the formal education, skill development and training programmes are vital to improve their employability. Training in ICT and allied advances like AI, is the need of the day for the SCs. Global experiences, like Pickens (2009) [23] relating to Philippines, suggest the use of ICT for the purpose of empowering the poor and the marginalized. Many such successful Indian experiences, like, Manoj (2010) [24] relating to ICT in banks and Manoj (2014) relating to ICT for women empowerment through micro enterprises of women, etc., also suggest the immense empowerment potential of ICT. The SHGs of SCs in Kerala needs to be encouraged to start ICT-based micro enterprises (MEs) run by the SC women. Hence, the technically qualified SC women get avenues to start own ICT-based MEs. In the ongoing era of *Digital India* of the Govt. of India and also that of *Knowledge Economy* thrust of the Govt. of Kerala, the utmost relevance of promoting MEs based on ICT and AI (artificial intelligence) need not be overemphasized. SC population, especially the educated ones get benefit out of such units.

The district Palakkad has the highest proportion of the SC population in Kerala. The educational and occupational status of SCs is still facing problems. The literacy rate of SCs of Palakkad is below the total literacy of the district, yet it is higher than the national level of the literacy of SCs. among the literates the highest number of persons have only primary level education. People who have higher educational qualifications account for less than one percent. The same trend is found in the case of the number of SC students in Palakkad. Under representation of SC students has shown in higher education. SCs of Palakkad have a higher tendency to discontinue their education in the secondary classes. Major reasons for this trend are lack of support from family, not interested in going to



school, early marriage, etc. majority of the employed persons are casual laborers in the agricultural sector. The study concludes that level of unemployment is higher among the SCs those who have higher educational qualification. This paradox needs to be studied in future, as a further exploration of this study.

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