

Educational Backwardness among the Youth of The Koraga Community in Kasaragod

P.M. Mathew*

Abstract

The Koragas are a tribal community found mainly in parts of Dakshina Kannada, the Udupi districts of Karnataka and the Kasaragod district of Kerala. The Koraga community is one of the most primitive clans who are traditionally involved in basket making. Their financial, educational and cultural status is very low and they are backward in their lifestyle. This paper is an attempt to understand the educational backwardness of the Koraga youth in the Kasaragod district of Kerala, India. This is the main focus because it is the root cause of problems such as poverty, disease, malnutrition, high mortality rates and backwardness which prevail in the tribal community. The data was collected from 50 members of the Koraga community between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Some of the reasons for the educational backwardness of the Koraga community are the medium of education, declining health, low levels of awareness, and a lack of proper guidance and motivation.

Keywords

drop out, educational backwardness, Koraga youth

Introduction

The Koraga community is one of the most primitive clans and they are traditionally involved in making bamboo baskets. As their traditional livelihood is not enough to support them, finding work outside is difficult as other communities practise untouchability against them. The Koragas

* Department of Social Work, Christ University, Bangalore, India.
Email: mathew.pm@christuniversity.in

have their own highly unique folk culture and language. Their language is Koraga which has no script and is grouped among the Dravidian languages. It is divided into a number of distinct dialects which are separated from one another by both geographical and social factors. Most of the Koragas are bilingual and multilingual, the other languages being Tulu, Kannada and Malayalam. The Koraga family structure reveals the disintegration of joint families. The Koragas are part of a matriarchal family system and they worship major Hindu deities along with their specific type of 'bhuta' worship. They observe simple ceremonies during death, puberty and marriage (Nalinam, 2013). The people of the community are named after animals, creepers or plants.

The Koragas of Kerala reside solely in the region of the Kasaragod district. According to the Kerala Institute of Local Administration survey 2011, there are around 445 households with a total population of 1644. These people are financially, educationally and culturally backward and their number of passes required for a SSLC is very low when compared to the educational status of the other tribal communities of Kasaragod.

Educational backwardness is one of the uppermost concerns at present, since it is the main reason which contributes to the rise of numerous other flaws. Like all the other sectors of socio-economic life, the education sector plays an important role in the development of lifestyles and situations of tribal people. On the whole, the policy of compulsory formal education has made some impact on tribal groups (Hasnain, 2007). In many states tribal children are taught the same curriculum as the children of urban and rural areas in the rest of the state.

Education in its elementary form is considered to be very important for the tribal groups because of its crucial role in the all-round development of tribal communities and also by helping them to build and increase their confidence levels. Even with the concerted efforts by the government for the overall development of the scheduled tribes, they are still far behind in most of the standard parameters of development. The major reasons for this are illiteracy and a very low level of education rate (Sahu, 2014).

One of the major problems in tribal education is that of language. The nature of the habitat of the tribal community is also responsible for the slow growth of education. Most of the tribal villages are scattered and this necessitates the children having to travel long distances to attend schools. The infrastructure of schools in some cases also plays an important role in

the growth of education among the tribal folk. Nair (2007) highlights the importance of non-formal education, particularly in tribal areas, to include the hardest-to-reach group of children in remote areas. Arya and Chauhan (2012) mention the factors that affect tribal education such as the attitude of other students, social factors, economic factors, suitable teachers, lack of interest in formal education, lack of facilities, nature of habitat, number of teachers, family environment, communication and cooperation from stakeholders.

Methodology

The research question is why the Koraga community of the Kasaragod district is educationally backward. The objective of the study was to understand the factors leading to the educational backwardness of the Koraga youth in the Kasaragod district. The study was conducted in the Badiadka, Puthige and Karadka Gramapanchayats of the Kasaragod district in 2017 and used a descriptive research design. The sample for the study consisted of 50 people from the Koraga community between the ages of 18 and 35 years. Purposive sampling was used in order to obtain data from the respondents. Data collection was conducted through interview schedules.

Results and Discussion

The study shows that the majority (60%) of the respondents were between the ages of 26 to 35 years and others between 18 to 25 years, with the majority (52.5%) being females. They were more literate than males and the number of females who had completed their high school education is higher than that of males. The size of the land possessed by each of the respondent's family is less than 10 cents which shows that the people are not earning enough income for their livelihoods from the cultivation of their land. As a result, most of the people are engaged in the tradition of making bamboo baskets.

The study shows that none of the respondents had graduated, with most only completing high school. Similarly, the number of respondents (54%) who completed their primary education is higher than those who completed high school. It also shows that all the respondents had discontinued their education due to various factors. At present most of them are engaged in their traditional employment of making bamboo baskets

after dropping out of school. The majority (82.5%) of the dropouts have not attempted the equivalency examination. The study shows that half of the respondents are aware of the *Saksharatha* (literacy) mission but that awareness was not enough for them to continue with their education.

The influence of the Kudumbasree programme was notable among the Koraga community. The majority of the women are members of Self Help Groups and Kudumbasree programmes. The majority (85%) of the respondents have bank accounts and the main reason for this is the emergence of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) programme. The MGNREGA is a social security scheme that attempts to provide employment and livelihoods to rural labourers in the country. The scheme is designed to provide any adult who registers for rural employment with a minimum work guarantee of 100 days each financial year. The respondents use the bank account only for the transaction of MGNREGA funds. The people are still not aware of the banking procedures. Only 55 per cent of the respondents have savings of their own.

Table 1. Reasons for Dropout

<i>Reasons for Dropout</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Failure in examinations	14	28
Financial difficulties	26	52
Health problems	12	24
Lack of aptitude	22	44
Lack of proper guidance	16	32
Medium of education	36	72
Parent's health	2	4

N=50

There are various reasons for the educational backwardness of the tribal community among which some major reasons for the high dropout rate are noted in Table1. It was found from the study that all the respondents were dropouts from their schools, irrespective of the classes they attended. There was a lack of aptitude observed among them. The main reason found for this is the lack of scripts in Tulu and in their language. They have to learn in Kannada or Malayalam as these are the scripts and the medium

of education in schools. This has caused them many difficulties in understanding and studying the subject.

Jhaand Jhingran (2002), in a study relating to the educational backwardness of tribal people and the medium of education, have suggested the use of the mother tongue or home language as a medium of instruction in the early stages of education.

Lack of guidance at the right age was another problem faced by the respondents during the dropout phase. If they had received timely guidance they might have reached an acceptable level of education. From the study, 24 per cent of the respondents were found to be suffering from health issues during their period of studies which is also a reason for their dropout. If 24 per cent was affected from such a small population, the size should naturally increase in proportion to the larger population. This implies a need for the provision of better health facilities and awareness of the benefits they could receive in the field of health.

The majority (72%) of the respondents did not receive any government scholarships during their studies. This was another contributing factor to their dropout rate from schools because of the consequent financial constraints. The lack of financial support from any source also led them to choose employment which provided some income. Even for those who received scholarships, it was a meagre amount which was insufficient to meet their education expenses. Most of the respondents opted for their traditional mode of occupation, but they earn very little income from it. In addition to depending on their traditional occupation, they also take part in the MGNREGA. For their traditional occupation of making baskets, they have to spend days in the forest collecting the raw materials, but the amount they receive for this laborious activity is very low and they do not make any profit from it. Due to their insufficient educational qualifications and lack of motivation, certain job opportunities provided by the government or private sources cannot be accessed by these people.

From the study it is evident that a vicious cycle is formed in which low income leads to poverty which in turn leads to educational backwardness. Educational backwardness further leads to low income. The majority of respondents were also not part of any organisations. This is also a problem in terms of their development as they do not have any opportunities to form groups, discuss their problems and find solutions for better ways of dealing with them on a common platform.

Conclusion

The study recommends that the educational status of the Koraga community be improved. It is evident from the study that different factors like medium of education, poverty, health problems and lack of aptitude have contributed significantly to the educational backwardness among the Koraga youth of the Kasaragod district. Social ostracism has also contributed to their educational and economic backwardness. Their lack of education is one of the main reasons why they do not avail themselves of the many services that they ought to receive. Their socio-economic conditions have never improved owing largely to their lack of education, lack of awareness and their declining population. Their various health issues are a growing concern for the community and this can only be dealt with by improving their level of education. Better schemes can be formed through networking with various voluntary organisations.

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