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Research Article

Problems of Marginalised Population in Kerala: Attaining the Educational Schemes and Sufficiency of Scheme Funds

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Abstract

Individuals gain the knowledge, skills, and empowerment necessary to challenge systemic injustices and advocate for their rights by investing in education for marginalised communities. Furthermore, education fosters critical thinking, social mobilisation, and collective action, enabling marginalised groups to pursue equal opportunities and equitable treatment. Allocating funds to education, public health, and medical services plays a vital role in promoting a healthier and more efficient workforce. While individuals may not always prioritise investing in human capital, the state, with its broader perspective, recognises the significance of fully developing human resources within a community. Education is a crucial element for socio-economic development, particularly for marginalised communities such as the Scheduled Castes (SC) in Kerala. They are facing so many problems while obtaining their educational schemes, which are provided by the Scheduled Castes Development Department functioning throughout the State. This Paper is based on the primary survey conducted in some selected districts of Kerala. This study is more useful to policymakers to identify the problems faced by the beneficiaries in obtaining the Scheme and to optimise future allocations, ensuring more efficient use of resources and better educational outcomes for SC communities in Kerala. Further research is recommended to explore the impact of timely disbursement of the scheme amount on any positive changes in the academic performance of the marginalised.

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1. INTRODUCTION

India's Scheduled Caste community in India has faced longstanding challenges that cause social discrimination, lack of access to education, and economic deprivation, all of which have contributed to their lagging behind in various aspects of development. Recognising the need to address these disparities and elevate the status of these marginalised groups within society, independent India adopted a comprehensive approach.

This approach involved two main strategies: first, providing constitutional and legal safeguards to protect their interests and prevent exploitation, and second, integrating specific components targeting their developmental needs into the country's Five-Year Plans. Initially, it was hoped that the benefits of overall economic development, spurred by investments in sectors like agriculture, education, health, and industry, would naturally extend to the Scheduled Caste

community over time. However, it became evident that this approach did not achieve the desired outcomes. Consequently, a new strategy was formulated during the Sixth Five-Year Plan to address these shortcomings. Education is the backbone of social and economic development; it plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life and enabling upward social mobility. For marginalised communities, the government have implemented many educational schemes to ensure equitable access to quality education. Over the years, significant financial resources have been allocated towards these schemes, which include both capital expenditure for infrastructure development and revenue expenditure for operational costs. Despite these efforts, there is a need to comprehensively assess the efficiency of these schemes. This study aims to analyse all the problems or hindrances faced by the beneficiaries in obtaining the educational pursuit for continuing their education without interruption. Most of the marginalised communities are living below the poverty line, and their main sources of income for the continuation of studies lie in the educational schemes, but they are facing so many problems while availing these schemes on time. The objective of this study is to find out the main problems of the beneficiaries and the knowledge gap that hinders the ability to make informed policy decisions and optimise future allocations to enhance the educational prospects of SC communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Indian society is stratified along multiple axes, including caste, religion, language, and region. Caste is the most deeply entrenched of these divisions, and it has a profound impact on social, economic, and educational opportunities. (Sekhon, 39). Radhakrishnan et al. (2018) reported that a lack of proper awareness about educational schemes among SC communities hinders their effectiveness and the availability of the scheme in time. This may involve investing in infrastructure, education, healthcare, social welfare programs, and other targeted initiatives that uplift marginalised communities and bridge the gap between different income levels (Rehman Sobhan, 1993). According to Naidu and others (1994), the lowest rung among the scheduled castes was historically deprived of access to education for centuries and compelled to engage in unclean and degrading hereditary occupations. However, in independent India, various efforts were made to uplift them, leading to the initiation of multiple programs to improve their situation. Consequently, there has been a noticeable, though gradual, positive change in the education and occupation of this marginalised group. Kunhaman's (2002) study concludes that the distressing situation of SCs and STs has not been alleviated due to the flawed implementation of existing policies and programs, rather than a deficiency in the policies themselves. The lack of effective execution and proper implementation may lead to many problems in these communities, despite the presence of well-intentioned initiatives and schemes. In 1989, Joseph conducted a study that underscored the economic and social importance of investing in education for weaker sections of society. A study by Kusum K. Premi in 1974 found that protective discrimination had a positive impact on the

educational advancement of Scheduled Castes. The study showed that literacy rates, enrolment rates, and the number of Scheduled Castes in Class I and II positions had all increased significantly. This suggests that protective discrimination has helped to level the playing field for the Scheduled Castes and given them more opportunities to succeed in education. A study by Suma Chitnis in 1972 found that education has been a key focus of programs aimed at improving the status of the Scheduled Castes. These programs have included laws against untouchability and caste-based discrimination, as well as reservation of seats in educational institutions and employment opportunities. Education is seen as a way to empower the Scheduled Castes and enable them to succeed in a society where their status is determined by merit rather than social background. The research revealed that casteism significantly influenced the educational opportunities available to the Scheduled Castes, leading to educational backwardness in this community. Consequently, the lack of quality education hindered their access to better employment opportunities, resulting in lower earnings, reduced purchasing power, and a poor standard of living. As per L.P. Vidyarthi and N. Mishra's observations in 1977, education does offer benefits to the scheduled castes as well. Educated individuals from these communities can secure gainful employment or engage in various services, leading to more comfortable lives. Despite acknowledging the positive impact of education, they face a significant hindrance in their inability to educate their children. The government's provision of free education and stipends for scheduled caste pupils is an attempt to support their educational pursuits. However, due to generally dire economic conditions, they are unable to send their children to school. This economic deprivation lies at the core of their challenges, with all other problems being closely tied to their poverty. In essence, while education has the potential to uplift scheduled caste communities, the prevailing poverty remains a formidable barrier that prevents them from fully accessing and benefiting from educational opportunities. Addressing the economic disparities and providing additional support could play a vital role in empowering these communities to break free from the cycle of poverty and enhance their access to education. In 1969, Chandrasekhara conducted a study focusing on the educational challenges faced by the Scheduled Castes in both rural and urban areas of Mysore. The research revealed several reasons contributing to the high dropout rate among Scheduled Caste students. The study identified the following factors as key reasons for the high dropout rate. Scheduled Caste parents often have a negative attitude towards education, and they have low aspirations for their children's education. This can be due to several factors, including their lack of education, the social stigma associated with the Scheduled Castes, and the economic challenges they face. Poor economic conditions of the families. Irregular and untimely governmental assistance. Frustrating experiences of the pupils within the school environment. According to Sorokin P.A. (1959), if an individual remains in the same occupational, economic, and political status throughout their life, their behaviour tends to become inflexible and rigid. The continuous performance of the same work under

unchanging social and economic conditions leads to a fixed state of mind and behaviour.

The gap of the present study is to identify the problems of the marginalised communities in attaining the educational schemes. Most of the studies concentrated on the educational backwardness of the communities, but there are no studies that deal with the problems faced by them in availing educational schemes. And to assess whether the scheme amount is sufficient for carrying out the educational needs of the scheduled caste communities.

METHODS

Kerala has an SC population of 30.39 lakhs as per the 2011 census. The Sex Ratio is 1057/945. The literacy rate is 88.7%. Male literacy (92.64%) is greater than female literacy (85.07%). The total Sc Population is greater in Palakkad District. The district Palakkad has an SC population of 403833. Out of which, 206382 are females and 197451 are males. Thereby, the sex ratio is 1045 females for 1000 males. The population for this study includes all beneficiaries of educational schemes belonging to the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in Kerala, totalling 3,039,573 individuals.

To ensure a representative sample, districts with the highest, medium, and lowest numbers of scheme beneficiaries were selected. These districts are Kasargod, Palakkad, and Kozhikode, with beneficiary populations of 53,283, 403,833, and 199,191, respectively. Beneficiaries from these districts were identified using a simple random sampling technique. The

sample was collected from each of these districts in the ratio of 8%, 62%, and 30%, which reflects the proportion of the SC population in these districts relative to the total SC population of the state. The distribution of the sample is as follows: Kasargod: 8% of 53,283, which is approximately 32 participants. Palakkad: 62% of 403,833, which is approximately 248 participants. Kozhikode: 30% of 199,191, which is approximately 120 participants. This stratified sampling approach ensures that the sample is proportionately representative of the SC population across different districts and domicile categories, thus enhancing the reliability and generalizability of the study's findings.

3. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the main problems raised by the beneficiaries during the primary survey are listed below, are, non-availability of correct information about the schemes, Delay in processing the application, Difficulty in getting a caste certificate, Difficulty in getting documents from the respective agency, non-availability of funds, Complex procedures, Amount not sufficient/ Inadequate funding, and Non-cooperation from the authorities. Most of the respondents' opinions are that the main problems are the complex procedures for obtaining the fellowship, the insufficient amount of the scheme for carrying out the education, and delays in processing applications, among others. And also finding out any relation between the scheme and the sufficiency of the amount.

Table 1: Problems faced by beneficiaries in availing of the schemes

| Problems | N | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | Mean | Rank |
|--|-----|---------|---------|------|-------|------|
| Non-availability of correct information about the schemes | 400 | 3 | 6 | 1603 | 4.007 | 6 |
| Delay in processing of the application | 400 | 4 | 6 | 2221 | 5.553 | 4 |
| Difficulties in getting a caste certificate | 400 | 1 | 3 | 988 | 2.47 | 8 |
| Difficulties in getting an income certificate | 400 | 1 | 3 | 678 | 1.695 | 9 |
| Difficulties in getting documents from the respective agency | 400 | 3 | 5 | 1675 | 4.187 | 5 |
| Non-availability of funds | 400 | 1 | 7 | 1384 | 3.46 | 7 |
| Complex procedures | 400 | 9 | 9 | 3600 | 9 | 1 |
| Amount not sufficient/ Inadequate funding | 400 | 8 | 8 | 3200 | 8 | 2 |
| Non-cooperation from the authorities | 400 | 6 | 7 | 2651 | 6.628 | 3 |

Source: Primary Survey

The most significant problems faced by beneficiaries in availing of the schemes are the complex procedures (mean = 9, rank 1) and inadequate funding or amount not sufficient (mean = 8, rank 2). Non-cooperation from authorities (mean = 6.628, rank 3) and delays in processing applications (mean = 5.553, rank 4) also rank highly, indicating key areas for improvement. Lesser issues include difficulties in obtaining caste and income certificates, which have lower mean scores and ranks

Scheme and Sufficiency of Funds

H0: - There is no significant association between the scheme availed and the beneficiary's opinion on the sufficiency of the fund

H1: - There is a significant association between the scheme availed and the beneficiary's opinion on the sufficiency of the fund

Table 2: shows the scheme's amount sufficiency

| Count | | Sufficiency | | Total |
|--------|-----|-------------|-----|-------|
| Scheme | | 1.0 | 2.0 | |
| | 1.0 | 25 | 183 | 208 |
| | 2.0 | 120 | 72 | 192 |
| Total | | 145 | 255 | 400 |

Source: Primary Survey

Table 3: provides the results of chi-square tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|---|----------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 110.095 ^a | 1 | .000 | | |
| Continuity Correction ^b | 107.922 | 1 | .000 | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 117.034 | 1 | .000 | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .000 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 109.820 | 1 | .000 | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 400 | | | | |
| a. 0 cells (0.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 69.60. | | | | | |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table | | | | | |

In the Chi-Square test, as the significance value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis can be rejected. Hence, there is a significant association between the scheme availed and the beneficiary's opinion on the sufficiency of funds.

4. DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that the most daunting challenge for beneficiaries is navigating the complex procedures involved in accessing the education scheme. This complexity likely stems from administrative intricacies, making it difficult for beneficiaries to comprehend the process fully. Following closely behind is the concern over inadequate funding, indicating widespread apprehension among beneficiaries regarding the adequacy of financial support provided through the scheme. Another significant issue identified is the perceived non-cooperation from authorities, suggesting a systemic problem in how authorities respond to the needs of beneficiaries. This lack of cooperation undermines the effectiveness of the scheme and adds to the frustrations of those seeking assistance. Additionally, delays in processing applications contribute to beneficiaries' difficulties in accessing the benefits of the scheme, highlighting inefficiencies in administrative procedures.

The study also uncovers challenges related to document acquisition, indicating potential bureaucratic barriers that hinder the application process. This finding underscores the need for streamlining procedures to simplify document procurement for beneficiaries. Furthermore, the lack of correct information about the schemes underscores the importance of improving communication and outreach efforts to ensure beneficiaries are well-informed about available opportunities. The positioning of non-availability of funds in the seventh position suggests issues with the distribution and management of funds allocated for the schemes, contributing to beneficiaries' struggles. Finally, difficulties in obtaining caste and income certificates are ranked lower, indicating administrative hurdles or delays that hinder beneficiaries' access to necessary documentation. Most of the scheduled caste communities are living the below poverty line and one of the motivations to continue their education is educational fellowship. However, the marginalised communities face so many problems like complex procedures, inadequate funding, non-cooperation from authorities and delays in processing applications may lead to fellowship in time it may sometimes be for the closer of their education too. And also tests the relationship between scheme and employment through Chi-Square, revealing that many of the respondents'

opinions that there is no significant relationship between the scheme availed and employment. The findings suggest that the type of scheme availed by the beneficiaries does not significantly impact their academic performance. Both schemes appear to have a similar level of influence (or lack thereof) on academic outcomes as perceived by the beneficiaries. This might imply that other factors, beyond the type of scheme, play a more critical role in influencing the academic performance of the beneficiaries. The study shows that the most pressing issue identified is the complexity of procedures, which received a uniform mean score of 9.000, making it the foremost concern among all respondents. Closely following this is the problem of insufficient funds, with a mean score of 8.000, also showing no variation in responses. Another significant challenge is non-cooperation from authorities, which has a mean score of 6.404 and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.4918, indicating consistent feedback on this issue.

Additional challenges include delays in processing applications and difficulties in obtaining necessary documents, with mean scores of 5.513 and 4.050, respectively. These issues show moderate concern among respondents. The non-availability of funds and correct information about the schemes also emerged as notable challenges, with mean scores of 3.892 and 3.463, respectively, although the former displays greater variability in responses. Lesser concerns include difficulties in obtaining caste and income certificates, with mean scores of 2.625 and 2.054, respectively, though these issues exhibit more variation in responses. Overall, addressing the complexity of procedures and the insufficiency of funding should be prioritized to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of skill development schemes for scheduled caste communities.

5. CONCLUSION

The main aim of each educational scheme is to provide financial assistance for carrying out the education smoothly. There are 20 educational schemes provided by the Scheduled caste Development Department, Kerala for the educational development among the marginalised communities. The main aim of the Post Matric Fellowship Scheme is to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio among the scheduled caste communities. However, while the scheme aligns with this objective, budget allocation and central assistance have exhibited fluctuating patterns over time. In Kerala, recipients of post-matriculation benefits encounter delays in receiving fellowship funds, leading some to discontinue their education due to financial constraints. Therefore, the government must ensure the timely disbursement of scheme funds to students

during their academic pursuits rather than afterwards. The Department should take some remedial measures for the available scheme amount in time it may encourage the students to aspire their higher education without delay. In Kerala, those people doing PhD in different Universities face inadequacy of funds in time so they cannot carry out their work properly and may face difficulty in the payment of hostel fees etc. So, the policymakers should consider the problems of the beneficiaries and make available the scheme amount in time.

Future Scope of Research

This paper focussed on identifying different problems faced by students from scheduled caste communities in availing their educational needs. These problems may hinder the fellowship amount in time and it may sometimes lead to discontinuation of their studies. So, the policymakers should give due attention to the timely disbursement of fellowships on time. This is the major problem faced by the students from scheduled castes communities. The policymakers should simplify the procedures related to the applications and ensure the delay in processing time should be minimum.

In the current Scenario, this topic is very relevant because the non-availability of fellowship amount in time is the major problem faced by the students from scheduled castes communities also there is a possibility of making a comparative study of educational spending of some selected states and how the procedural formalities of different states in spending the expenditure related to educational attainment of Scheduled castes.

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