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Access and Quality of Adivasis Education in Wayanad, Kerala, India:

Grass-Roots vs Top-Down Approach

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Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples is a long-standing impediment for their development worldwide, and the Adivasis in India are no exception. These tribal communities in Kerala, and India in general, still fare poorly in educational achievements compared to the general population. This study aims to observe and research the educational opportunities for these communities through a qualitative, multiple case study, which is composed of semi structured interviews of both government officials and Adivasis leaders in three villages of the Wayanad district in Kerala, India. Comparing the interviews of the Adivasis leaders and the officials in the smallest grass-roots level of village government, Gramma Panchayath, gives the research a perspective on the implementation of educational policies aimed at Adivasis groups. However, the results of this research show that the majority of policies implemented come from higher government initiatives. Although the higher government schemes improve their quality of life, it is harder for Adivasis voices to be included in the discussion. Yet, there are some projects initiated from the grass-roots, which confirms their ability to develop schemes, addressing the interest and necessities of the village's communities in education. The main conclusion of the study is that a negative teacher attitude towards Adivasis children and their culture often translate into higher drop-out rates for these students. For this reason, there needs to be a better cultural inclusion of Adivasis forms of knowledge to validate these cultures and ensure the quality of education for the Indigenous communities of Kerala.

Keywords: Indigenous Education, Adivasis, Kerala, Multicultural Education.

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Acceso y Calidad de Educación para Adivasis en Wayanad, Kerala, India:

Enfoque de Base o Enfoque Vertical (Pablo Ruiz-Peciña)

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La discriminación contra los grupos indígenas es un impedimento de larga duración para su desarrollo alrededor del mundo, y los grupos Adivasis en la India no son una excepción. Estas comunidades tribales en Kerala, y en la India en general, todavía tienen malos resultados comparados con los del resto de la población. Este trabajo de investigación tiene como objetivo observar y estudiar las oportunidades educativas que tienen estas comunidades a través de un estudio de caso múltiple compuesto de entrevistas semiestructuradas a funcionarios del gobierno y a líderes Adivasis en tres pueblos del distrito de Wayanad en Kerala, India. Al comparar las entrevistas de los líderes Adivasis y de los funcionarios a nivel comunitario del gobierno del pueblo, la Gramma Panchayath, esta investigación consigue perspectivas sobre la implementación de las políticas educativas enfocadas a los grupos Adivasis. No obstante, los resultados de esta investigación muestran que la mayoría de las políticas implementadas vienen dadas de forma vertical a través de niveles superiores del gobierno. Aunque los programas propuestos de manera vertical mejoran su calidad de vida, es difícil para los Adivasis expresarse en las iniciativas. Sin embargo, el hecho de que hay proyectos iniciados por el nivel comunitario confirma que tienen la habilidad de desarrollar iniciativas que atienden a los intereses y necesidades educativas de las comunidades de los pueblos. La conclusión principal de este estudio es que actitudes negativas por parte de los profesores hacia los niños Adivasis y su cultura suelen traducirse en mayores tasas de abandono escolar para estos estudiantes. Por esta razón, tiene que mejorarse la inclusión cultural de las formas de conocimiento de los grupos Adivasis para validar estas culturas y asegurar una educación de calidad para los grupos indígenas de Kerala.

Palabras clave: Educación indígena, Adivasis, Kerala, Educación multicultural.

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1 List of Abbreviations

AsianCrit	–	Asian Critical Race Theory
CRS	–	Critical Race Studies
CRT	–	Critical Race Theory
GDP	–	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	–	Gross National Income
HDI	–	Human Development Index
IK	–	Indigenous Knowledge
IMR	–	Infant Mortality Rate
KMD	–	Kerala Model of Development
KoHDR	–	Kottathara Panchayat Human Development Report
LatCrit	–	Latino Critical Race Theory
MCE	–	Multi-Cultural Education
MGRDP	–	Mahatma Gandhi Rural Development Program
MRS	–	Model Residential School
NSDP	–	Net State Domestic Product
SC	–	Schedule Caste
ST	–	Schedule Tribe
TribalCrit	–	Tribal Critical Race Theory
TEO	–	Tribal Extension Officer
TP	–	Tribal Promoter

2 Introduction

This Master's thesis aims to analyze a series of policies, also known as schemes, that are put into place by the Gramma Panchayaths, which is the lowest, grass-root level of the government in Kerala, India, to uplift the Adivasis community in the Wayanad district. Despite social and economic improvements, the Adivasis community is still the most poverty-stricken section of Indian society, commonly referred to as economically "backwards". The Government of Kerala has seen education as the most impactful approach to bring opportunities to the general population for development since its inception. This vision is extended to minorities, such as Adivasis communities, albeit its reach to them is still questionable (Isac, 2011, p. 2). I have been given the opportunity by the Kerala Legislative Assembly to personally interview members of the Paniya tribe in three of their different colonies. My goal is to observe and research the educational opportunities for these communities despite the levels of poverty and marginalization that they face. The question then remains: What grassroots initiatives are being implemented by the Gramma Panchayaths to uplift the indigenous communities and improve the quality of education in their schools? With the knowledge collected through this research, I hope to aid in the progression of potential solutions that will better the rights of indigenous people to acquire education on their own terms. In doing so, I would contribute towards setting a stepping stone towards achieving the fourth Development Goal of the UN of quality education.

Due to the Adivasis' extreme poverty condition, both the national and regional governments have a policy of affirmative action through various schemes, such as providing transport to schools, hostels and residential schools, as well as reserving seats for indigenous peoples in universities. In order to grasp the purpose and depth of action of some of these schemes, the research was formed as a multiple case study. Through semi-structured interviews of different officials in the village government, a picture of the schemes is drawn. The information gathered is contrasted and triangulated with the answers provided by the chiefs of three benefiting Adivasis colonies. With this

multiple case study approach, a sense of the different initiatives' effectiveness to provide access to quality education and life is constructed through the perceptions of the government officials and the beneficiary community.

2.1 Kerala, its Geography and Languages

The South West region of India is marked by green palm forestry areas along the coast and scraped parallelly by the Western Ghats. This mountainous range is bedecked with deep, heavy forests and expands through several Indian states, with a major part of it being in Kerala. The Western Ghats is a hotspot of biodiversity in the world. The mountains trap the southwestern monsoon and prevent them from reaching the Deccan Plateau in central India, while bringing extreme rains and floods to the region. Several groups of people live in the area. The languages of the region come from the Dravidian Language family, most notably Malayalam and Tamil, along with smaller languages from the same family.

2.2 The Adivasis of Wayanad

Within the Western Ghats lies the district of Wayanad. This district has the highest number of Indigenous communities, both as a population and percentage of the people. These communities used to live isolated from Indian society. Despite Indian dominance, some maintained a hunter-gatherer society, others became land laborers, but others, however, were forced into slavery. Through the passing of time, they have maintained some level of isolation from mainstream society. Each of these groups has a particular way of living and interacting with the rest of society that has shaped their modern way of life. In the Wayanad district, there are several tribes among them, in which the biggest are the Adiyani, Kattunaikan, Kurichya, Kuruman, and the largest of these groups, Paniya. (Paul, 2013, p. 12)

The Adiyar arrived to Wayanad as slaves to work on the fields for the higher castes of Indian society (Brahmins, Chetties, and Gounders). With the end of slavery by the British rule, the Adiyar became bonded laborers dependent on landowners. (Paul, 2013, p. 31)

The Kattunaikan were hunter-gatherers and had a relatively independent life in the forest and its fringes until the beginning of the last century. Now, their main livelihood continues to be forest production as well as cultivating land within the forest allocated to them by the Forest Officials. (Paul, 2013:30)

The Kurichya were said to be exceptional archers and maintained a link with the Princes of Malabar. Because of this, they enjoyed a better status. Traditionally, they were landowners and currently engage in cultivation of cash crops. The Kurichya believe they are superior to other communities, and they follow practices similar to untouchability with other tribal communities. (Mathur, 1977 from Paul, 2013, p. 27)

The Kuruman's main occupation was woodcutting and collecting minor forest products (Thurston, 1909 from Paul, 2013, p. 28). In time, they became settled agriculturalists and now work as agricultural laborers or marginal farmers.

Lastly, The Paniya were "brought to Malabar to work in the fields of *Janmies*, the then landlords. Traditionally they were bonded laborers and historical account of the community explains that contracts for bonded labor were made during the Valliyoor-kav temple festival season" (Thurstone, 1909; Mathur, 1977 from Paul, 2013, p. 26). Despite being the largest Adivasi community in Kerala, the Paniya are the most marginalized, with poor health conditions and no representation in politics. This is a legacy of having been particularly exploited economically even in more modern times as wage laborers (Santhosh 2008 from Manojan, 2018, p. 48). For these reasons, they were selected to be interviewed during this research project.

2.3 Kerala's Modern Political History

After India achieved independence from the British colonial power in 1947, the pre-colonial kingdoms were rearranged into the current states mostly based on the language spoken in the area. The Malayalam speaking areas of Travancore and Kochi were united with the taluk of Kasargod and the Malabar district of Madras to form the state of Kerala in 1956.

In the first regional elections of 1957, a Communist group was elected in the Kerala Legislative Assembly under E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The Communist group was largely formed by teachers (Namboodiripad, 1994) that wanted to improve the situation of their profession.

Immediately after the elections, the government started a series of acts involving land distribution and education reforms. The reforms were highly controversial for their leftist leaning goals. The Land Reform Act set a limit to how much land a family could own. However, due to amendments in the Bill by the Congress Party and to delays in the action taken, the land redistributed was less than expected. This directly impacted Indigenous communities to whom the excess land was to be given, but they never received it (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2004, p. 246).

The same reform also gave tenants and hut dwellers that worked the land a claim for the excess land. Moreover, the reform gave tenants, such as Kurumar and Kurichiyar tribes, some protection from eviction as well as fixing the terms of tenure or even full land rights (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2004, p. 246; Lieten, 2002, p. 60; Tharamangalam, 2010, p. 27). This act aimed to end the feudal system that was still active in the area, while abolishing exploitation and inequalities in the agrarian sector in order to promote economic development and modernization.

At the same time, the communist government introduced an Educational Bill aimed to improve the conditions of teachers in the state. Before the bill was passed, teachers started organizing to ask for changes in the educational system, specifically on how

private institutions treated the education facilities as their private business and, therefore, doing as they pleased with their employees such as having uncontrolled salary or hiring and firing teachers without regulation (Lieten, 2002, p. 17). On the other hand, private institutions paid higher wages than public centers. As a result, teachers wanted to balance these two issues. Following the teachers' demands, the bill focused on standardizing teacher salaries between the public and private sector along with creating a state list of qualified teachers that could be hired (Lieten, 2002, p. 63; Sato, 2004, p. 10). This controlled the quality of education provided to the students. Furthermore, the teacher salaries were paid through the state treasuries, which ensured that teachers would receive their salary on time. In cases when the schools were deemed to be badly managed, the bill allowed the state to take over for a limited amount of time and, in some cases, permanently (Unknown, n.d., p. 20). In retrospect, Namboodiripad (1994) writes that the 1957 educational bill generated the most controversy due to the bill being "connected to the ownership and management of educational institutions". The Christian community had heavy involvement in education, hence they felt the bill attacked their religious freedom and alienated them. However, the bill did not aim to abolish the system of private management of educational institutions, but instead it aimed to reform them. In other words, "the right of private managers to own and manage educational institutions was being controlled, rather than abolished." (Namboodiripad, 1994).

Claiming the Education bill to be unconstitutional, the Syrian Christian church and the Nair Service Society started the liberation struggle to overthrow the Kerala government. The struggle was supported by the landlord class and the Indian National Congress party. By 1959, the communist government was dismissed and replaced by an anti-communist government. However, both the Land Reform Act and the Education Act managed to pass through the assembly, and many of the provisions were implemented albeit with many amendments that left some sections out.

2.4 Kerala's Educational History

Kerala's educational achievements excel those of other Indian states. Even though the progress that came from the educational Act of 1959 and posterior policies outshine the previous advancements, it is important to note that Kerala's breakthrough in education started well before India's independence. In the Pre-British period, education was controlled by the higher castes of Hindu society, particularly the Brahmins. While other privilege castes were allowed in education, the repressed castes were completely excluded (Aiya, 1906 [from Unknown, n.d., p. 25]). During the British rule, education was characterized by missionaries building and managing schools in order to promote their religion, yet they did not disregard secular subjects. The missionaries started to introduce the excluded castes into their education, both in particular schools and general schools. By the first half of the 19th century, the princely state of Travancore issued a royal rescript where it was stated that the state should take care of the cost of education of its citizens (Unknown, n.d., p. 5). Even though this approach was narrowed in scope, it set the basis for public education.

In 1894-95, the Travancore government started a fund for the schedule castes, and by 1904, the government had taken the entire cost of education of the "backward classes" (Nair, 1976, p. 33). During the second half of the century, the government continued their push for intervention in education by promoting vernacular education, grants in aids, creating a teacher training center, and introducing lower castes to public institutions, although with little support and success. By the first half of the 20th century, the government consolidated their hold on education and strengthened the schools, for instance, by eliminating English schools at the primary level and replacing them with schools where the teaching language was Malayalam. In order to safeguard the ability of the repressed classes to attend school, policies of concessions, such as grants and midday meals were set in place. (Nair, 1976, p. 36; Unknown, n.d., p. 18). This allowed poor families to send children to school even if only to ensure the children would be properly fed at least once a day. Following the suggestions of the Educational Reforms

committee of 1933 and the Education Reorganisation committee of 1945, primary education became free and compulsory by 1955. One of the first schemes envisioned by the communist government elected in 1957 was the Educational Bill, which was first published in July of the same year. According to Dhanuraj (2006, p. 9) the bill aimed 'to provide for the development and better organization of educational institutions in the State providing a varied and comprehensive education service throughout the State'. This was to be achieved by making elementary education free of cost and having the government bear its expenses. The government would pay teacher's and non-teaching staff's salary directly or through the school in order to prevent late payments, as was usually the case in the private sector. Benefits to the students were also seen as a result. Students in need were provided midday meals, books, and clothes. To continue providing these services, the fees collected from the school manager would be deposited to the government exchequer to fund the expenses. A state committee would be constituted to advise the government in educational matter with similar committees at district and local levels.

Other points of the bill were aimed at creating further job security for the teachers. For instance, if a teacher lost their job due to lack of vacancy, they would be reappointed in the next vacancy. Within the bill, there were other policies that were significantly more controversial. First, teachers had to be appointed from a government list of qualified teachers. This was perceived by the private educational organizations as reducing their liberty to manage and run schools. Second, the government was given the right to take over the management of schools for up to five years or completely if paid compensation for it. This was seen as a direct attack on the school management and religious freedom of the minorities running the schools. As a reaction, the "Liberation Struggle" ('Vimochana Samram') began a process to stop the bill through the national congress by deeming it unconstitutional (Dhanuraj, 2006, p. 18)

Despite these efforts to halt it, the Bill passed with some amendments, however, congress forced the dissolution of the communist government and called for new elections in 1959. Notwithstanding these complications, The Educational Bill marked a new vision and an undeniable precedent for education in the state. As the political forces wrestled for political control during the following decades, the general course of the state has been to invest a high percentage of the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) in education. This trend is one of the pillars that brought about what is known as the Kerala Model of Development (KMD). The two bills introduced by the first communist government mentioned above allowed the state to redistribute wealth and resources across the population.

Nair (1976, p. 35) already explains that the government made efforts to invest in education by any means, showing how this pillar was built from the early stages of the state's political and economic development:

“There is a widely prevalent notion among educational planners that in countries like India with an acute dearth of investible resources, the attainment of goals like universal primary education is next to impossible without causing serious setback to the development of productive activities which compete for the available stock of physical resources. Viewed in this light, the magnitude of resources that the people and the government were able to mobilize during the past several decades for investment in education would seem to be enormously greater than could be expected from a state like Kerala which has an extremely low level of per capita income.”

In other words, Kerala was able to spend its resources on social improvement for the general population despite having a low Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This model of development is characterized by a high Human Development Index (HDI) with a low per capita income and almost stagnant economic growth. (Parayil, 1996, p. 944; Véron 2001, p. 601; Kannan, 2018, p. 5).

In order to quantify human development, HDI uses three indexes based on health and life expectancy, education, and the standard of living, measured by the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita. By assessing these variables, HDI aims to view the development of a country in human terms rather than purely economic lenses (United Nations,

n.d.). By using HDI, more importance is given to human well-being rather than their economic output. This mindset helps to understand Indigenous communities rather than turning them invisible due to their low economic impact.

Parayil (1996, p. 944) argues that income and GDP per capita are meaningless and inadequate measurements of socioeconomic development since other states of India have higher GDP but fared badly in social indicators of development that HDI measures as relevant for a healthy society. In fact, Parameswaran (2007, p. 54) states that “Beyond a certain level, GDP or increase in per capita use of natural resources does not lead to any perceptible increase in the human development index (HDI). It shows that the supposedly developed countries are using their resources wastefully, inefficiently, producing goods and service that have little or even negative welfare value — like advertisements, armaments production, narcotics, insanity urbanization, mad traffic and so on.” Instead of using resources on providing and improving social security, these developed countries use the capital to boost further capital accumulation with little to no benefit for society.

The KMD has been compared to the development path of Cuba. “The achievements of Kerala and Cuba are well-known and well documented. Their HDI ranking, high for their level of income, in fact masks their real gains because of the one third weight given to income. For example: Cuba ranks 51, at the top of the High Human Development group, but if we look at the *GNI per capita rank minus HDI rank* Cuba’s score is 52, the highest for any country –indicating that it has succeeded better than any other country in translating its income into social well-being.” (Tharamangalam, 2018, p. 24)

From the beginning of the KMD, K.N. Raj’s vision –widely accredited to draft the first Five Year Plan– was to use the little resources available effectively for the development of “human capabilities”. (Kannan, 2011, p. 3). At the same time, Raj saw the importance of rural development and advocated for decentralized governance. The high participation of the lower classes in electoral politics allowed the Model to progress their

planned economy while simultaneously promoting reforms that translated in economic benefits to the agricultural classes. Franke's and Chasin's (2000, p. 6) case study of a village in central Kerala regarding the agricultural reforms of 1969 shows how tenants benefited from the redistribution of the landlord's land, effectively reducing class and income inequality. Furthermore, KMD's reforms allowed all sections of society to enter education and has made Kerala the lead state in educational achievement in India (Deb, 2014, p. 14).

A new tendency explained in Kumar and George (2009, p. 56) is the growth of unaided schools which try to recover the entire capital from the students and whose educational project are guided by commercial considerations. The main reason proposed for the sprouting of these institutions is an on growing middle class that prefer to put their children in private schools, claiming that the quality of education is higher there. The increase in private schooling "creates a bigger gap between classes as well as deteriorates the public services due to a lack of enrollment". (Kumar and George, 2009, p. 59; Tharamangala, 2018, p. 24-25)

"The yearly educational expenses - academic and maintenance incurred by the families of a medical student were higher than the average household income of the low-income group. It implies that medical education is beyond the reach of these groups as the scholarships cover only a fraction of the private costs. In the case of lower middle-income group families, the average private cost was more than 50% of the household income." (Kumar and George, 2009, p. 56)

This movement towards an elitist education by the upper and middle class is consolidated by the use of shadow education, such as private lessons for entrance exams at university, which the marginalized groups cannot afford (Kumar and George, 2009, p. 56).

Regardless, the universalization of education had a mutually reinforcing effect. For Tharamangalam (2010, p. 368), the most important statistic is that of female literacy. It grew to 88% by 2001 “which, directly or indirectly, has influenced several other achievements, most notably the rapid decline in Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and fertility, but also general health, nutrition, and well-being.” As the social indicators continue to rise, they bring a high rate of economic growth described by Kannan (2007) (from Kannan, 2018, p. 5) as “a ‘virtuous cycle of growth’ arising out of the initial focus on human development”. The combination of economic and social indicator’s growth is a characteristic of the contemporary development scene in Kerala (Kannan, 2018, p. 5). In the past, Kerala was described as a paradox because it was spending on social sectors well beyond its economic capacity. However, as the economy grew, the state shifted its priorities away from education (Kumar and George 2009, p. 59)

Even though the KMD has pushed education further in the state than ever before, studies show that not all sectors of society benefit from it equally. According to Dilip (2010, p. 8) “the Kottathara Panchayat Human Development Report (KoHDR), prepared in 2008 [...] brought out the striking socio-religious differentials in education attainment in a Panchayat. The findings report showed that the poor connectivity of tribal colonies and their poverty contributed to their lack of access to education beyond the upper primary stage”. This report is further confirmed by Dilip’s own results finding that about “one fifth of tribal children are found to be out of the schooling system. One third among [Schedule Tribe] (ST) and a fifth among Muslim students are over-aged.” Even though overage schooling in higher secondary schooling is a problematic trend across Kerala’s education, it is emphasized for ST students, half of which never enter that stage of education at the correct age frame. Despite these failures, Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2004, p. 264) contend that the reforms advanced by the Kerala Model have been, to a large extent, inclusive of the Adivasis, because they received much needed improvements in their access to educational facilities.

2.5 Decentralization Processes in the Government

In 1993 the Indian government passed the 73rd amendment in which a three-tier government at the sub-state level was recognized and given legal status. This act, now known as the Panchayath Raj Act, was proposed as a process of decentralization and power devolution to the people. The Act had widely different applications throughout the country. In Kerala, it was passed as the People's Planning in 1996 in an attempt to move towards democratic decentralization and rejecting neo-liberal positions that pose the state and civil society as opposing binary categories (Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2006, p. 634). The experiment divides the government in District, Block, and Gramma Panchayath, from bigger to smaller. Each of the levels have different powers and control on budgeting and organization. For this research, it is important to understand the role that the Gramma and Block Panchayath plays in education and development projects. In rural areas, primary education (grades I to VI) is under the control of the Gramma Panchayath, that is the village governance, while secondary education (grades VII to X) and higher secondary education (XI & XII) are controlled by the Block Panchayath. Whereas in urban areas, all the powers over education relay in municipalities. During this paper whenever Panchayath is mentioned without any specification I refer exclusively to Gramma Panchayath.

The Panchayath have power on selecting and administering books, curriculums, uniforms, feeding the children and teaching methodologies. However, staff and teacher hiring power is on the hands of the "departmental bureaucrats and controlled by them based on the Kerala Education Rules and Kerala Service Rules. (Mukundan and Bray (2004, p. 121). The local government bodies also have the capability to run institutions, maintenance and construction of schools.

The Government relays on the local self-governing institutions for programs such as Competency Education Program, Ardran Mission, and Life Mission. The first program promotes science education as well as comprehensive education. Ardran Mission promotes healthcare. While Life Mission is in charge of building houses for the

homeless. The Adivasis community directly benefit from some these programs as it was mentioned during the interviews.

At the same time, the Gramma Panchayath has power to develop and organize educational schemes for the grades under their control (grades I to VI). These schemes can vary greatly from one Panchayath to the next based on their assessed necessities. When schemes prove to be fruitful, the Block Panchayath promotes other Panchayath to copy and adapt them. Gramma Panchayath schemes were chosen as the main focus of this research because of their flexibility to find local solutions for their population using their internal knowledge.

2.6 Adivasis Education

The educational achievement literature points that tribal communities across India have a much lower literacy rate than the general population or other disadvantaged groups like the Dalit.

As mentioned above, the KMD has led to a much higher literacy rate in Kerala than the rest of India. “Economic Review Report (March 14, 2013) states that Kerala has 94 percent literacy rate and lowest dropout rate of school students (0.53%) in the country” (Joy and Srihari, 2014, p. 2)

Yet, the KMD has not been able to achieve the same stunning results across all sections of society. While tribal communities have seen improvement, they lag behind from the general population. The literacy rate of the tribes across India was 8.54% in 1961 going up to 24% for males and 18% for females in 1991. That same year, the ST literacy rate in Kerala was 74% and 51% for male and female, respectively. (Sahu, 2014, p. 50; Franke and Chasin, 2000, p. 4; Steur, 2009, p. 27; Isac, 2011, p. 7) Furthermore, the KMD appears to have a positive impact on the education of Indigenous communities as shown by the fact that the dropout rate of ST students in Kerala is 31.4%, while the average for India is 77.7% (State Resource Centre, 2002. From Kjosavik & Shanmugaratnam, 2004, p. 245)

While the state has succeeded in reducing the size of non-literates among Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) categories and narrowing of the gender gap in education, inequalities in schooling between SC/ST and 'other' categories have continued to persist. This is well exemplified in Kochar (2006) (from Oommen, 2008, p. 23) whose data shows educational attainments by social groups. Taking 10-year age cohorts of the population, Kochar analyses the proportion of each cohort from oldest to the youngest who has completed eight years of schooling, distinguishing cohorts by caste (SC and ST, versus other castes). The research shows that a persistent caste gap exists in schooling at this level, with almost no reduction in this gap across age cohorts. The fact that Kerala's educational achievement for the general population has not been reproduced in ST category is further confirmed by Veerbhadranaika, Kumaran, Tukdeo, Vasavi, (2012, p. 60). Their research contrasts higher education enrollment for adivasis communities across India. Kerala is the only state in which there is higher enrollment of girls (13.34%) than boys (9.97%) in higher secondary, yet the total is 11.78%. This statistic is still above the Indian average (6.60%) but lagging behind states such as Uttar Pradesh (61.03%), Himachal Pradesh (18.34%), Uttarakhand (17.36%). This shows Kerala has room for improvement in their endeavor to educate its ST population.

Furthermore, the different socioeconomical and cultural context affects the tribal children success in education. The literacy rate of the Paniyas and the Kurichiyas in Kerala is 48.5 and 78.2 percent, respectively (Narayana, 2010 from Isac, 2011). In Wayanad, the overall literacy rate is 82.7 per cent, while it is 49.4 per cent for the tribal people (Isac, 2011, p. 7).

Dilip (2010, p. 13) analyses the rate of overaged students in school. Overaged is defined as children that are two or more years late to enter a particular standard. His study

sees Caste-based inequality among ST's and SC's retention rate. From all the ST students enrolled in the first standard, only 46% made it to the 10th standard. This stands out as far below other disadvantaged communities like the SC with 77% and 86% for the general population (Dilip, 2010, p. 8). This claim is complemented by Joy's and Srihari's (2014, p. 2) data stating that a 66.93% of the total dropouts in the district of Wayanad belongs to Scheduled Tribes. "From the academic year 2007 to 2012, there is a gradual increase in the tribal dropout among the total dropouts in the district. It was 61.11% in 2007-08 where the tribal dropout of 2011-12 is 77.23%. This shows the increase of 16.12% of drop out only in the tribal sector. An average increase of 3.22% dropout has been taking place in the last five academic years. This is what clearly shows that projects implemented so far for the enhancement of tribal education was not effective and failed to reduce the dropouts." (Joy and Srihari, 2014, p. 2)

Dilip's (2010, p. 22) analysis of age cohort groups and gender shows that higher education was negligible among ST and SC students. "Even in early 2000, it was much below among STs than what it had been among forward-class Hindus and forward-class Christians during 1956-66." With this, only 15% of female ST children achieve higher education. Furthermore, one fifth of Tribal children are out of school, and one third are overaged.

There are many factors affecting the education of the Adivasis community in Kerala. Anbuselvi and Leeson (2017, p. 206) interview tribal students and family members as well as their teachers about the difficulties and motivation to pursue education. According to the interviewees, the attitude of other students is an important factor for dropping out. This is consistent with other research papers such as Manojan (2018, p. 50) or Veerbhadranaiika (2012, p. 32). His research among Paniya tribes in Kerala shows how Paniya children face exclusion based on caste, color and language from society and schools. Isac (2011, p. 16) further elaborates how Paniya children are labelled as

Paniyante makal (Paniyan's daughter) and *Paniyante makan* (Paniyan's son) in a derogatory manner, both in government and aided private schools. The same study by Isac also mentions how "a Paniya Warden in an Model Residential School (MRS) reported that her non-tribal colleagues constantly made comparisons between the tribal and non-tribal children, and they complained that the tribal children were not hygienic, had foul smell, and were not competent." Students that may overhear comments like this can develop and internalize an inferiority complex, causing their drop-out.

Among tribal communities, there is a stigmatic feeling that education makes their offspring deviant, insolent and alienated from their society (Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 206). Effects of this alienation are noticeable on how Adivasis children tend to disregard their traditional games in favor of modern games like cricket. More importantly, art forms and folksongs are being lost, and the few that know them are discouraged by teachers from performing them (Manojan, 2018, p. 49). At the same time, Manojan's (2018, p. 50) research shows that parents generally approve of the schooling system, as they expect education to bring progress to the community. The same view is shared by the Adiya tribe, according to Kumar (2015, p. 83). This contrasts with the majority of the literature stating that there is a lack of parental support creating an unfavorable atmosphere at home, which in turn leads to dropping out. (Isac, 2011, p. 14; Joy and Srihari, 2014, p. 2; Sahu, 2014, p. 51; Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207). Alcohol abuse by parents is also mentioned as a social factor influencing an atmosphere that hinders education at home.

Possibly the most important factor affecting the tribal children drop-out is their economic situation. Sometimes, children need to contribute to the family wages, so they are required to work in the fields (Isac, 2011, p. 13; Sahu, 2014, p. 51; Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207; Mohan et al. 2017, p. 76). Despite families receiving stipends for each school-attending child (GoI, 2008, p. 3; Sahu, 2014, p. 51), most families live day to day. If the stipend is delayed, they have no choice but to take the children to work.

The subjects of mainstream education seem irrelevant and unfamiliar for most of the tribal children. “They talk about, for instance, the mechanisms of airplanes instead of telling them how the communities produce food out of crops” (Manojan, 2018, p. 45). This makes the curriculum unrelatable to the Adivasis children, which contributes to a disenchanting feeling with education and their drop out.

On top of this, language alienation is a constant reality across tribal communities in the world where the dominant language is prioritized over the indigenous language (Jacob, Liu, and Lee, 2015, p. 42). However, psycholinguistic studies show that children’s cognitive development is better facilitated through the mother tongue, especially during the first years of schooling (Ssebbunga-Masembe, Byalusaago Mugimu, Mugagga, and Backman, 2015, p. 175). In the case of Adivasis communities of Wayanad, 4 languages compete for priority. The indigenous language, Malayalam, English, and Hindi, in that order (Manojan, 2018, p. 49). Due to the appointment of non-tribal teachers, it is impossible to use the indigenous languages as the medium of instruction (Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207).

Moreover, owing to poor English language teaching, the access to higher education for tribal children is further hindered. According to government data from the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examinations of March 2007, the pass percentage for ST and SC was 60.7 and 65.7, respectively, while the overall pass percentage was 82.2 (Kumar and George, 2009, p. 58) This disparity between the vulnerable groups and the general population shows a deficiency in their education even when they reach the end of high school.

Manojan (2018, p. 50) shows that students have interest in having indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, and when discussions are held on community related topics, tribal children participate more actively. In the same research, community people express the importance of preserving their traditional knowledge by passing it on to the younger generations, but the children show little interest toward the topics.

As it has been said before, the Adivasis communities in rural areas live scattered on the fringes of the forest. As a result, access to school facilities is difficult. Even though there are transport programs and residential schools, the conditions of these schools are very poor, the hygiene is below standard, and the meal programs are insufficient (Lakshmi, 2003 as quoted by Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207)

3 Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in the introduction, the Adivasis, or Schedule Tribes, are several groups of people native to the Indian subcontinent. But, what does that mean for their social status, development, and education? Through this theoretical framework, I aim to establish a thorough and coherent understanding of indigenous culture, identity, and education from a global perspective and how it relates to the Tribes of India and the Paniya specifically. In this research, Native and Indigenous will be used as synonyms.

3.1 TribalCrit

TribalCrit is a theory developed by Brayboy (2005), following a trend of different theories sprouting from Critical Race Theory (CRT) to meet the demands of different racial groups. CRT was developed as a response from Critical Race Studies (CRS) in the mid 1970's. For CRT theorists, CRS's attempts to critique and change societal and legal structures affecting race were not fast enough. Out of this discontent, CRT is born to address issues of racism and other forms of subordination. CRT takes a new ontological perspective in its research, accepting and valuing experiential knowledge. Narratives and testimonies become key data for CRT (Brayboy, 2005, p. 428).

From the mid 90's, CRT is applied to educational research as a perspective on the institutionalized difficulties of people of color in education. It aims to terminate the influence of racism, sexism, and poverty in all educational aspects. Despite the theory working as a framework on itself, it was developed in the context of the American Civil rights movement with a focus on Black-White dichotomy, excluding other racial groups out of the conversation. As a result of this shortcoming, several Critical Theories are developed, such as Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit). LatCrit and AsianCrit widen their focus to their specific race struggles in the US while maintaining the lens of race as their main perspective.

What sets TribalCrit apart is a change on the race lens to one of colonialism. “While these theories have developed to meet the specific needs of Latinos/as and Asian Americans, they largely maintain the basic premise of CRT that racism is endemic in society. In contrast, the basic tenet of TribalCrit emphasizes that colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). In his later work, Brayboy (2013 :93) explains how Native Americans are in an exceptional position in relation to other races due to their character of nationhood, which is their need for sovereignty and self-determination. This legal status “complicates Indigenous experiences in ways that are similar and unique from other racialized people” (ibid.). TribalCrit is rooted in the varied epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous Communities. Despite differences depending on time, space, place, tribal nation, and the individual, some commonalities in these epistemologies and ontologies arise.

The main tenets of TribalCrit are:

- 1) Colonization is endemic to U.S. society.
- 2) U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, colonization, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
- 3) Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and the racialized nature of our identities.
- 4) Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
- 5) The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
- 6) Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples closely follow each other toward a problematic goal of assimilation.
- 7) Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples; they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.
- 8) Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
- 9) Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (Brayboy, 2013, p. 92)

While the focus of this theory is Indigenous people living in U.S. society, the present research will utilize the lens proposed above applied to the Indigenous Communities of India. For this regard, I revisit the first and second tenets with an Adivasis focus. To do so, it is important to mention that many of the Adivasis communities like the Paniya and Adiya in Wayanad were not victims of white colonialism any more than they were victims of their previous oppressors. This oppression, dating centuries earlier in an undocumented history of cultural erasure, forced removal of their original lands, not unlike the dislocation of Native Americans to reservations. Yet, the Adivasis have an added layer of slavery and bounded work without land rights, during which much of their previous traditions were lost.

The rest of the six tenets can be easily extrapolated to other indigenous communities and will be applied and revisited throughout this section.

3.2 Multicultural Education

To further analyze the role of education in the Adivasis context, that is, a dual context where a minority culture is embedded in a dominant, larger educational setting, it is important to refer to the nuances of Multi-Cultural Education (MCE). Writer (2008) comments how MCE is often seen as a continued process of colonization where minority cultures are misrepresented as “food, fun, festivals, and foolishness” by educational institutions and, ultimately, the larger society (Writer, 2008, p. 4). She argues that Multicultural education can be thought as a continuum. On one end of the MCE continuum there is a superficial multiculturalism, in other words, cultures are used as a token for a lesson. On the other end, there is MCE as social justice. The superficial MCE is criticized for simply brushing over minorities in a superficial manner without questioning the dominant society. Hence, this reiterates and supports the privilege of the mainstream society (Writer, 2008, p. 4). Within this continuum, Writer advocates that MCE as social justice must deal with privilege by “redistributing power and re-

sources, identifying and utilizing various forms and sources of knowledge, confronting oppression, and examining the intersectionalities of the various forms of diversity within oppression". By MCE social justice becoming an integral part of the curriculum, it is able to go beyond a superficial view of native culture. It then exposes the privileges of the dominant culture, equating and validating the minority group.

Combining CRT/TribalCrit with MCE as social justice creates a school environment where the dominant master narrative and prejudices can be dismantled to create a nurturing environment for Indigenous identity, culture, and knowledge to flourish. Exposing a wide range of perspectives and experiences as sources of valid knowledge is paramount for contexts like Adivasis communities. Even within the Adivasis group, tribes have asymmetrical power relations and social status. Landowning tribe of the Kurichya still discriminate lower socioeconomic groups like Paniya and Adiya in reminiscent ways of untouchability practices. Transforming this uneven relation is a prerequisite step for the Adivasis peoples' emergence as equal to the dominant society.

Therefore, MCE does not limit itself to the school setting; it ought to transform not only the curriculum and teaching methods but also how stakeholders interact with the school. For MCE as social justice to occur, there needs to be a historical understanding of oppression and indigenous life. With this goal in mind, this section will define the main concepts informing the research.

3.3 Indigenous Education

Education of Indigenous communities around the world faces a series of difficulties that seem to overlap across communities. There is a shared struggle for cultural continuity, intergenerational cultural transmission, and cultural self-determination (Porter, 2015, p. 243).

In many cases, the education offered by mainstream society fails to cater for the communities' needs for survival. This is often translated in high drop-out rates, social

discrimination, and marginalization, as well as indigenous students being placed in special education at an abnormal rate (Jacob, Cheng, and Porter, 2015, p. 6, 52; Scaglione, 2015, p. 294; Weaver, 2015, p. 452).

3.4 Indigeneity

Jacob, et al. (2015, p. 2) defines indigeneity as the cultural identity and politics of the First Peoples of a given geographic location. Furthermore, they extend the definition as the “significance and power of identifying oneself as an agent of continuity and change”. Indigenous communities are marked by a particular way of living, a language, and an identity by themselves and others. Adivasis in this sense identify as the original inhabitants of their land, maintaining a culture through time and change.

Indigenous people around the world have a series of legal status given by the different nation states. In the case of India, ST are recognized as disadvantaged groups, but not as indigenous communities. However, they fall well within the limits of indigenous people. The existence of supranational organizations like the UN allows for groups of people to be recognized as indigenous even when states deny that right. (Levi and Durham, 2015, p. 418)

3.5 Identity

Identity is constructed between how we see ourselves and how others see us or, rather, how we think others see us (Hall, 1996 from Cheng, 2015, p. 383). Cheng (2015) concludes that identity is a dynamic process to describe selfhood while excluding others. In other words, “the power of recognition and misrecognition is based on power and exclusion”. For indigenous communities, separation from the mainstream can mean empowerment to uphold traditions and a sense of community, but it has often been

realized in a social separation from the mainstream in the form of oppression. Indigenous identity is rooted in a connection to a specific land to care for (Dean, 2015, p. 431), causing them to seem estranged from the rest of society.

While it is important to understand indigenous as locally or culturally connected to genealogical inheritance (Green, 2007), for Breidlid and Botha (2015, p. 322), the most significant element is the historical significance of colonial domination by the west that shaped relations of dominance and subjugation persisting to modern times. In the case of Indian *Adivasis* communities, the relations of dominance and subjugation extend further into the past far before Western Colonialism.

Due to this colonial relation, Steur (2009, p. 28) sees indigenous identity as a product constructed in struggles over different visions of development during the latter half of the twentieth century. She further explains how the idea of indigenous people for tribals in Kerala became a political force during the 1990s. In this sense, the claim for indigeneity by the different *Adivasis* community becomes a struggle to improve their social conditions rather than a claim for locality. Her vision of a constructed identity questions the motifs of *Adivasis* towards self-identification as indigenous.

The oral history of tribals in Wayanad goes only as far as when they were brought as slaves and bonded laborers (Steur, 2009, p. 29). In fact, the largest groups advocating for indigeneity are the Paniya and the Adiyas whose name mean workers and slaves, respectively. Moreover, they easily identify themselves as landless agricultural workers, as opposed to other tribes like the Kurichias who are landowning farmers and traditionally treated other tribals as untouchables.

Despite the recent history of *Adivasis* taking the indigenous discourse and the lack of recognition by the Indian government, the present author recognizes these varied communities as indigenous to regions of India before Hindu society became mainstream. Tribals have a history of subjugation and oppression and, in many cases, being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. And, despite adaptations to their forced

occupation and new land, they have maintained particular ethnicity and a significant level of cultural independence.

Identity is both deeply embedded in places and steeped in stories. Stories provide links between the past, present, and future. Likewise, there is an intimate connection between language and identity. Markstrom (2010) describes, "The nuances contained in indigenous words convey subtle aspects of culture and identity that defy adequate translation into other languages." (from Weaver, 2015, p. 448). Ultimately, language connotations give deeper meaning to the oral stories, which are significant to the construction of indigenous identity.

3.6 Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge (IK) refers to the particular way of understanding the world for any given group of indigenous communities. Indigenous Knowledge often differs from contemporary Western knowledge on an ontological level, meaning their understanding and way of relating to the world is inherently different. That includes what is considered valid knowledge and how it is formed and transmitted. Even though each tribal group has their own ontological perception, there seems to be commonalities between Indigenous groups (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427; Breilid and Botha, 2015, p. 320). These include a transcendental relationship to the land, a strongly rooted ecological consciousness, and expressive oral transmission of knowledge. Many indigenous tribes in India and around the world do not have a written script, so knowledge is exclusively transmitted orally. Paniya is one such tribe, and even though there are instances of language being written with Malayalam or Tamil scripts, they do not have a script of their own (Isac, 2011, p. 6). This makes learning in the mainstream, which constantly uses the written word, that much more challenging.

Brayboy (2013, p. 95) discusses three forms of knowledge for indigenous communities. The first, cultural knowledge, breaks down the specific traditions, issues, and ways of

being and knowing that define the individual members of a community. The second form is academic knowledge, which is gained from educational institutions. The third form is the knowledge of survival, which encompasses the concept of adaptation and change in order to progress as individuals and as a community. This reiterates how formal education is only a fraction of the knowledge that can be transmitted. These different forms of knowledge do not need to be in conflict. In fact, knowledge learned in school can be used in conjunction with tribal knowledge toward social justice and survival for these communities.

Furthermore, IK often relates to their way of living and their land and customs, while the mainstream is focused on teaching basic literacy and topics that are initially not relevant for their lifestyle.

Including IK into education is a way to accept and value indigenous identity. However, as Breidlid and Botha (2015, p. 335) point out, governments in South Africa as well as Chile were incapable of overcoming the homogenizing forces of the hegemonic ideology when trying to include indigenous knowledges into the conversation. The same failure to adapt IK is portrayed by Huaman and Valdiviezo's (2012) (from Dean, 2015, p. 439) where they critically analyze the pedagogies of teachers of highland Quechua community schools. They expose how basic components of indigenous peoples' identities, such as Indigenous Knowledge, languages, customary practices, cosmo-visions, and the meaningful participation of community members, remain largely symbolic (Dean, 2015, p. 439). As a result, the efforts to preserve the IK becomes a simple act of tokenism.

Botha (2011) proposes the term Indigenous Consciousness as "a way of knowing that incorporates the political and metaphysical elements of indigenous identities" including political and spiritual beliefs and intuitive ways of knowing that construct their collective identity and knowledge (Breidlid and Botha, 2015, p. 335). By enhancing this

consciousness, indigenous communities can guide how IK can be incorporated into mainstream society. It is necessary to establish indigenous peoples' identities as positive and valuable rather than being commodified for economic gain. Dean (2015, p. 440) also contends on the same idea, highlighting that the intercultural educational environment must be formulated to "conscientiously include Indigenous knowledge in education processes from the school to the community". An understanding of this duality in knowledge can create the space for Indigenous communities to challenge the dominant knowledge as well as to become a bridge between the two schools of thought. Whether or not indigenous societies want to implement the dominant knowledge into their society should be up to them, yet the option should always be available.

A critique of this vision of "knowledges as utilities" that can be commodified by others comes from the hand of Porter (2015, p. 255). The symbolic inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge in education mentioned above becomes a fragmented commodity sold "in a neo-colonial global marketplace of education reform". For Indigenous knowledge to flourish in education, it ought to address indigenous worldviews and engage in political advocacy for sustainability and self-determination.

3.7 Development

As mentioned in the introduction, the Kerala Model of Development (KMD) tried to uplift its civil society through various processes of land redistribution and boosting education. Yet, an over emphasis on class struggle over identity politics and other intersectionalities left the Adivasis groups stranded midway in their process of development. While Adivasis communities certainly saw their situation improved, they have continued seeing their demands for land neglected. For indigenous communities around the world, development takes a meaning of reclaiming their ancestral lands to allow for self-sufficiency and ecological balance (Dean 2015, p. 431). Kjosvak (2010, p. 264) criticizes the development discourse, exceedingly focusing on the development

apparatus as a delivery system and the “treatment of the target population as passive recipients of development”. She argues that development gets transformed by the agency of the local people through their politization. The politization of the Adivasis people in Wayanad was therefore capable to change the course of development. This is clear in the struggle for land in Wayanad, but I argue that this politization has a role to play in transforming education to a more inclusive space. In this process, MCE would not only move social justice from the school to society, but society must reciprocally push for social justice in the school.

The effects of globalization are also felt in the indigenous context. Despite Indigenous peoples being characterized as local, the new interconnectivity around the world and the new technologies have become an open door for Indigenous activists to connect and relate in an international struggle. The internet is of particular interest in this aspect since as Niezen (2005) (from Levi and Durham, 2015, p. 418) comments, p. “[The internet] promotes local indigenous languages and cultures; and transfers power from technologically illiterate indigenous elders to media-savvy indigenous youth”. Therefore, with virtually unlimited knowledge about these communities available to the rest of the world, others can unite with them in their journey.

3.8 Decentralization

A key element for indigenous development is the issue of self-determination and governance. It has been mentioned above how the process of decentralization in Kerala allows for a wide arrange of educational and non-educational policies at a grass root level. This allowed Indigenous communities to have participation on the policies affecting them. Mukundan and Bray (2004, p. 113) clarify the literature of decentralization as either being functional powers of a legislative body, which are split in several bodies, or they can be territorial, meaning the powers are passed to more local governmental bodies. The decentralization process in India follows the territorial format.

Within this category, the process of decentralization is categorized by deconcentration, delegation, and devolution.

Deconcentration is described as “the process through which a central authority establishes field units, staffing them with its own officers” (ibid.). In contrast, delegation is when the local bodies have some decision-making powers, but the powers are only lent from the central authority. In devolution, the local government bodies have full power and do not rely on approval from higher bodies.

Mukundan and Bray (2004) proceed to analyze the Keralite region of Kannur to find that the decentralization processes in education where the local bodies could create projects of their own tended towards continuity rather than change. A major reason for this was the availability of funding that still depends on central government.

The reliance on funding from the central government shows a stage of delegation rather than devolution. For Aikara (2011, p. 166), decentralization and community have the same goal: “efficiency in the functioning of a project or programme of action at the grass root level”.

For that reason, a higher participation by civil society could be argued to increase efficiency in the decentralization process. At the same time, Evans’ (1995) ‘Embedded autonomy’ is developed to understand the relations between the state and society. “In a developmental state, the bureaucracy is ‘embedded in a concrete set of social ties that binds the state to society and provides institutionalized channels for the continual negotiation and renegotiation of goals and policies’” (Evans, 1995 from Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam, 2006, p. 535)

In other words, an increase of participation by Adivasis people creates a correspondence with the delegated organs to efficiently apply the programs demanded by the community. As civil participation increases, a further devolution is necessary to achieve real self-determination. In short, the tribal communities ought to have local mechanisms to decide over their land.

4 Methodology

The present thesis aimed to find out to what extent the decentralization of the government was affecting the Indigenous communities by drawing lessons from the different government schemes and their effect on the target communities. Due to the flexibility that Panchayath have to formulate and generate schemes, a qualitative approach was selected, allowing for flexibility in the data yields. Moreover, as explained in Brayboy's (2013, p. 92) tenets, qualitative research is preferred because it focuses on people's experiences: "Stories make up theory". In order to be able to discuss what course Adivasis education should focus on, hearing their stories should be the preeminent of any research.

Qualitative research has some advantages over a quantitative approach for the present research inquiry. Qualitative research helps to measure and give value to a phenomenon that is not easily quantified. While it could be possible to measure the amount of policies or how many Adivasis children benefit from them, this would disregard the impact depth that these policies have in the lives of the Adivasis communities.

Qualitative approach is inseparable from a number of assumptions regarding the validity and the creation of knowledge. From an ontological standpoint, qualitative research sees reality as constructed by "individuals interacting with their social worlds" (Merriam, 1998 from Yazan 2015, p. 137). This is consistent with CRT ontological perspective where experiences become key data (Brayboy, 2005, p. 428). For this reason, the experience and testimony of the Tribal community becomes a fundamental standpoint of the present case study. The knowledge of any particular policy by the Adivasis interviewee shows a greater impact and importance of the scheme for the community.

The research was designed as a multiple case study to allow for comparison of three different villages. This widens the study's capacity to display the Panchayath re-

sponses to Adivasis issues. At the same time, this increases the validity of the generalizations drawn from repetitive patterns in the three cases. At this point, it is important to clarify what constitutes a case since there are lots of ambiguities in the academic community. For Yin (2002), a case is a phenomenon within its real-life context. For Stake (1995), a case is “a specific, complex, functioning thing with a boundary and working parts”. Some like Merriam (1998) frame case as a phenomenon bounded to a context (Yazan, 2015, p. 138-9).

According to Simons (2009) (From Starman, 2013, p. 32), a case study is defined as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a ‘real life’”. For the present study, each case is constituted by a Panchayath with enough autonomy to create policies. They are bounded by their context of high percentage of indigenous population and the necessity to address their demands. Each case in the study is formed by multiple perspectives, namely the perspectives of the officials working in the Panchayath as well as the Adivasis community that benefits from the schemes implemented.

Thomas (2011) categorizes Multiple Case Study based on the time dimensions: Retrospective, snapshot, diachronic, nested, parallel, or sequential. The present study falls under ‘Parallel studies’ because “The cases are all happening and being studied concurrently” (Starman, 2013, p. 33). A geographical and ethnical dimension could be juxtaposed as the cases in the study form part of the same concurrent time, geographical region and same tribal group.

In the field of healthcare and clinical research, Harvey and Wensing (2003, p. 210) explain the use of multiple case study for evaluating small scale quality improvement

projects. I found their ideas easily transported to the present research with some adjustments since the different schemes aim to improve the life quality and access to education for the Adivasis community. Harvey and Wensing (2003, p. 210) state that the methods “help those involved in improvement initiatives to optimize their choice of interventions and use of resources”. Applying the methods to the indigenous education context allows us to see what policies have the biggest impact in motivating Adivasis children in continuing their education. The purpose of the evaluation is then “to compare similarities and differences in a number of local projects to draw out common lessons learnt and develop hypotheses for future research” (Harvey and Wensing, 2003, p. 210)

Some challenges identified by Harvey and Wensing (2003, p. 212) in multiple case studies are that the projects may be focused on different topics and targets; there may be variations in the implementation of the processes due to external influence. The outcome indicators used to audit the progress and impact of the project are likely to be specific for each site. To overcome these issues, the present study follows some key steps they propose. First, individual cases relevant to the issues are selected to be studied. Second, data is collected within individual sites using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Third, the data is analyzed within individual sites using appropriate quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis – for example, descriptive statistics, thematic analysis of qualitative data. And, lastly, data analyses are compared across sites to draw more general conclusions and/or generate hypotheses for further testing. (Harvey and Wensing, 2003, p. 212)

The data was formed by 12 semi-structured interviews. The interviews were carried out in the Wayanad district for having the highest concentration of tribal people, 35.82% of all ST in Kerala. (Menon, 2013, p. 672) Due to language barriers, the interviews were carried out with the help of a local translator studying English language at the University of Calicut. Owing to economical and time constraints, the interviews had

to be designed to be carried out in three villages of the Wayand districts. To further narrow the location, three villages pertaining to different Gramma Panchayaths were chosen on the basis of ST population using the official 2011 Census of the District.

The villages of Thirunelly, Noolpuzha, and Panamaram had the highest number of total ST population as well as the highest proportion of Adivasis. Thirunelly has a total population of 29696, out of which 13179 (44.38%) are under the Schedule Tribe category. Noolpuzha has a population of 27833, out of which 11233 (40.36%) are ST. Panamaram, the biggest of the three villages visited, has a total population of 43468 people, out of which 10272 (23.63%) belong to the ST category (Directorate of Census Operations Kerala, 2011, p. 143). Therefore, carrying the interviews in these villages made the data relevant to the focus group.

The original intent was to interview the president and the secretary of each Panchayath as well as three Tribal leaders living under said Panchayath. Once we were in location, the research had to be modified because access to the remote areas, where the different colonies lived, was difficult and time consuming. The President is voted by the residents of the village or villages pertaining to the Panchayath through periodic elections. On the contrary, the Secretary is appointed by the District Panchayath. The tribal leader, or Ooru Mupan, was selected as an authority that would know if the children of the village were part of any government scheme to support their learning. The Ooru Mupan is usually the elder male of the colony, and his function is more honorary than commanding. The decision making of the colony is traditionally through a type of assembly that the Ooru Mupan presides. (Manojan, 2018, p. 48) Despite being an honorary figure, he is respected as an authoritative source of knowledge.

Instead of interviewing the Ooru Mupan of several different colonies, we had to select just one per Panchayath. With consistency in mind, it was decided that the Ooru

Mupan of a Paniya colony should be interviewed because they are a highly marginalized group whose perspectives would be the most insightful. Furthermore, the Paniya is by far the largest group in Wayanad, ensuring there would be a Paniya colony willing to be interviewed in each village.

To get in contact with the tribes, we had to talk to the Tribal Extension Office, who deals with the Adivasis' needs, affairs and issues related to bureaucracy. The officer had a lot of knowledge on tribal affairs, so it was also decided to interview the Tribal Extension Officer (TEO) in each of the Panchayaths.

Finally, the data could be categorized as the perspective on educational schemes and tribal affairs of three different government officials, president, secretary, and TEO; the perspective of the beneficiaries are represented by the Ooru Mupan. The officials and the beneficiary's different views allow for a clear picture of how schemes are decided, implemented, and received by the ST communities.

Beyond the research design, there were some issues worth mentioning. First of all, the interviews had to be done with an interpreter. While his assistance was superb, my ability to guide the interview and pursue topics arising through the questionnaire was extremely hindered. For instance, the president of one of the Panchayath mentioned a very interesting scheme, but I could not inquire as far as I would have wished. More on this will be mentioned during the data analysis below.

The basic structure of the interviews consisted of a series of open-ended questions. I formulated the questions with the expectation of finding widely different answers, so the questionnaire opened with broad questions. First, I asked about the importance of

education in their opinions. Then, I inquired about what difficulties the Adivasis community faced in education and how these are alleviated. And finally, I questioned about the communities' involvement in the schemes. The questionnaire guidelines were different for the officials and the Ooru Mupan. On the one hand, the purpose of the officials' interviews was to gather information about the different schemes implemented as well as the Panchayath's perspective on Adivasis educational issues and possible solutions. On the other hand, the Ooru Mupans' interviews were to gain insight on the impact of those schemes in their community and their perceived effects as well as the Adivasis perspective on educational barriers and their solutions.

In order to analyze the data, the interviews were transcribed and then thematically analyzed. First, all the schemes mentioned across the twelve interviews were listed. By this process, the different schemes were classified based on whether they appeared in one or several Panchayaths. During the classification, the comments and descriptions of the different interviewees were documented in order to compare the different perspectives regarding each particular scheme or project.

Every comment regarding the issues that Adivasis communities face socially and economically, which the interviewees thought affected education, were also categorized. It was interesting to note that most of the hurdles mentioned by the officials did not match with the issues the Ooru Mupans were concerned about. That points towards a mismatch between what the Adivasis and the Panchayath perceive is the root of the problem.

Finally, the observations regarding the Panchayaths' course of action to implement schemes were classified. This classification showed what the officials saw as impediments when implementing schemes, both as bureaucratic hurdles and difficulties to communicate the projects to the different communities. This classification also includes the course of action the Adivasis community takes when schemes are not satisfactory and how they communicate to the Panchayath.

5 Findings

During the interviews, the participants were asked how the tribal communities and the Panchayath coordinated to learn about the Adivasis needs. We quickly learned there was an attached office to the Panchayath that deals more directly with the Adivasis and is used as a link between them. The Tribal Extension Office gives all the information the Adivasis require and listens to their demands which are then carried by the appropriate institution, either the Tribal Extension Office or the Panchayath.

In order to decide what course of action is to be taken for any particular issue, the tribal Extension Office meets with each Adivasis colony. For this meeting, the traditional decision process of the Adivasis is followed in the form of an Oorukkoottan (Kjosavik, 2010, p. 257; Manojan, 2018, p. 6). During this meeting, all the members of the colony are welcomed to join and speak their minds, suggest actions to be taken, and complain when something is not working properly. The Oorukkoottan is held, in theory, at least every three months, but extra meetings can be called for when emergencies arise. However, the TEO pointed out that this is often not the case, and the meeting might not take place at the appointed time.

The Oorukkoottan seem to be a very general and standardized practice in the Adivasis communities of Wayanad since it was described in the same way by Kjosavik and Shanmgaratnam (2006, p. 644) by all participants.

The leader of the colony will preside the meeting; an assistant from the colony, known as Tribal Promoter (TP), will write down the minutes and the topics discussed, and the Tribal Extension Officer (TEO) will be the convener of the meeting. The Panchayath wards in charge of that area also attend the meeting. Once the different topics are discussed, an action plan is decided given the different priorities and practicalities.

One of the TEOs who were interviewed noted that when the discussion falls outside their most immediate interest, most of the colony will not attend. He states, *“When general topics are discussed in an Oorukkoottan they will not go to listen. They want things*

related to them, that is, houses for them, water supply for them." This leads to certain problems, such as community members that were not present in the gathering complaining about a specific action not being taken or asking for different things after the projects have been approved. Based on another TEO's experience, the lack of practical knowledge of the tribal community became, in some instances, a hurdle for prioritizing and budgeting. The TEO comments that *"They wanted to lay tiles to build a road. While their houses are very backward houses, they use hatched for the roof. They are asking for tiles in front of the house [instead of for their roofs]"* In order to solve this and similar problems, all three TEO had resorted to conducting prior studies about the communities' concerns and give priority to that knowledge in the Oorukkoottan.

Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2006, p. 644) quote one of their interviewees complaining about the meetings losing their potential to improve their lives. *"The Oorukkoottan meeting has now become a ritual. Earlier, the potential beneficiaries of projects were given marks [points] at the meeting openly by the participants. But now, the marks are already given to the beneficiaries prior to the meeting and these are just read out in the meeting. This promotes corruption and partisan politics."* However, our interviews with the Paniya reflect a general content with the way things are managed. According to the testimony of an Ooru Mupan, *"We complain about, or we make suggestions about anything there. Then things are decided and done there. We are not getting to the fullest, but we are suggesting, we are complaining in the Oorukoottans, so with that we are happy"*. It is possible that the Oorukoottans have once again regained their full capability. Nonetheless, the proper functioning of these meetings is of utmost importance for the community to have a voice. While educational matters can be discussed there, no particular instance of that was mentioned during the interviews.

The interviews also shed light on an unexpected topic that influence the ability of the Tribal Extension Office and the Panchayath to communicate effectively with the different Adivasis colonies. The Tribal Extension Office employs a number of assistants

from different colonies under the Panchayath. The Tribal Promoters (TP) have a key role as an essential link between the government institutions and the Adivasis people. The TP regularly visit the colonies to hear their concerns. Yet, their practical influence goes beyond their tasks: they convey the messages catching the communities' interests. Furthermore, they are trusted by the community because they are part of the community, while the TEO is not. As an interviewee puts it: *"I have been the TEO for 8 years in this department, I never had an experience in which they looked at me in a bad way [...] They are always positive, whatever I say is accepted, but I am not one of them"*.

The same TEO also emphasizes the influence of the TP with a specific example regarding the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Development Program (MGRDP). This government project provides employment for the local people with small jobs in different areas of interest in the region. Even though 2960 people are registered for the program, when the Block Panchayath announced the job offerings, only 125 people applied as available to do them. When it was seen that the tribal people registered were not coming in large numbers, the promoters were entrusted to convey the message back to the people. This proved effective as they were able to appeal to their necessities and interests; for instance, they announced that the jobs had daily wages rather than monthly salaries. Only then did they apply for the jobs in large numbers.

The TP are also important in the educational life since they are more aware of the difficulties faced in education and are able to report to the officials the complaints that the children do not voice directly to the Panchayath or TEO.

The interviews touched on a wide range of topics related to education. For the purpose of clarity, these have been separated as 1) Difficulties faced by the tribal communities, 2) Schemes that the three Panchayath had in common, 3) Particular schemes, 4) Difficulties face by the Panchayath when implementing schemes, and 5) Proposed schemes to improve education. In the following section, these topics will be further detailed and discussed.

5.1 Difficulties Faced by Tribal Communities

The interviewees pointed out several areas that affected to some measure or another the education of the tribal communities.

5.1.1 Alcoholism

Some of the areas of concern were related to their standards of living and social conditions. A recurrent topic that several of the officials interviewed brought up was the overuse of alcohol and ganja. Some parents spend their daily wages on these substances while not providing necessities for the family. One of the TEO comments that this type of problem was not present in their society. It was an effect of being forcefully mingled with 'outer society'. Alcohol is highly restricted in Kerala by heavy taxation and localized access in government-licensed shops. Yet, as the president of the same Panchayath notes, the Adivasis of their area get access to cheaper alcohol and ganja from the neighboring states. The Secretary of another Panchayath states that the usage of these substances is not limited to adults since ganja is especially popular among teenagers. Other studies point to alcohol abuse as a serious problem in the Adivasis community (Rupavath, 2016, p. 225; Mohan et al. 2017, p. 74; Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207). Teachers interviewed by Joy and Srihari (2014, p. 5) agree that family members arriving home drunk at night lead to children school dropout since they lack a proper studying atmosphere. While alcoholism can be a serious issue, it is not mentioned by Adivasis people as a problem plaguing their community. This begs the question of to what extent is this a factor in the communities, or are the teachers and officials using alcohol as a strawman to avoid assuming their responsibility on the educational failures of the Adivasis community?

Parallely, other indigenous communities, such as Native Americans, suffer from widespread alcohol and drug abuse that is linked to poverty, depression, and alienation. Rather than being the root of the problem, it is a manifestation of a generational trauma of identity loss and alienation. Further research pertaining the Adivasis should be carried out in order to stop the cycle of poverty.

5.1.2 Loss of Culture

Cultural and heritage loss was cited by a TEO as a generational struggle coming as a consequence of mixing with the outer society. *“Their ancestors didn’t want to live in society They wanted their own lifestyle. They have their own language, their own culture, their own rituals. And when it came to mingling with the outer of society, they came down from their own society. But they couldn’t mix in outer society. They are sort of in the middle, in a dilemma. What happens is they have lost most of their skills, abilities, their cultural value”*. A parallel situation can be recognized in the USA, Canadian, and Australian contexts of Indigenous education. The plan to assimilate indigenous cultures into the colonizer and mainstream society puts an end to their traditional ways of learning and, therefore, their culture gets degraded. The effects of assimilation of indigenous cultures are seen in many countries even long after the assimilation policies are stopped (Jacob, et al. 2015, p. 6).

5.1.3 Discrimination

Another social difficulty that Tribal communities have to deal with is that of discrimination and segregation. Despite not being part of the Hindu religion, they are treated as the lowest caste in the society, and their position is the same as the untouchables. While Indian society is, in general, moving away from the concept and culture of untouchability, the effects are still felt in society. One TEO expresses how the tribal community is discriminated by non-tribal people in their personal life. When asked about the school, he said that political parties keep an eye on such practices and speak against

it publicly, so this situation is not visible in schools. However, they are still being othered in a variety of ways. In the schools, he says, *“The teacher might be asking ‘Those who belong to ST stand up’ when they are asked to do that, the intention of the teacher is positive. Maybe he wants to write down the names and give them more attention. Even if the intention is good, the other people are receiving a privilege. They are seated while the others are standing. For any reason they are discriminated, whether knowingly or not.”* This form of othering can lead to serious psychological issues on the child, translating to learning difficulties, alienation from their peers and, ultimately, from school and dropping out. Further instances of otherness include, in the eyes of some officials, excessive reservations, such as seats on busses, which prevents their mingling with the rest of society as an equal part of it. This issue becomes clear when the Secretary of Panamaram Panchayath, who belongs to the Kurichyar tribe, suggests *“Most students should be admitted to general schools, rather than giving special schools to them because only then the cultures will be mingled”*, despite her comment being contradictory to the requests expressed by the tribal promoter interviewed with the Ooru Mupan who explicitly asks for Paniya only schools. These opposing views can be traced back to the unique social status of each tribe. Since the Kurichyar tribe enjoys a relative higher status compared to the Paniya, she might miss on some of the direct discrimination endured by the other tribes. The Kurichyar have had a longer tradition of owning their own land and therefore a better economic situation. The difference in intersection between class and indigenusness allow the Kurichyar to adapt to outer society. For the secretary of Panamaram, mingling and being part of mainstream society is the goal. While for the Paniya, TP coexisting while retaining their identity is more important.

5.1.4 Remote Location

Historically, the tribal communities have lived deep into the forest. For most of the indigenous communities, their relation to land is sacred and it cannot be easily abandoned (Kjosavik, 2010, p. 252-254). There is extensive literature on the difficulty of

accessing the school and how it has traditionally been a reason for a lack of enrollment in schools (Baiju, 2011, p. 17; Menon, 2013, p. 676; Joy and Srihari, 2014, p. 2; Kumar, 2015, p. 78; Rupavath, 2016, p. 209; Mohan et al. 2017, p. 73). Accordingly, one of the officials expresses her concern that *“If the school is far away from the house, they are not willing to go to the school”*. This is a serious concern that is already addressed in all of the three Panchayath visited by the program Gothra Sariti. This program will be explained in detailed further below.

5.1.5 Child Labor

At least one official in two out of the three Panchayaths raised the question of child labor as a major reason for the students dropping out from school. One of them comments that during the seasonal work in the plantations, the parents will take the children with them for work. This practice he mentions as Human Labor Trafficking since they move to the neighboring states for this seasonal work, resulting in the children missing school for large amounts of time and, in many cases, not being reintroduced at all.

Parents making the children work is a direct effect of poverty since the family units need the collaboration of the infants to earn wages. Hence, as a counter measure to this practice, several stipends are given by the Tribal Extension Office as well as by the Panchayath to children who attend classes regularly. However, these schemes run into certain problems that will be discussed below.

5.1.6 Child Marriage

Two of the officials raised concerns about child marriage being a common practice in these communities despite being illegal. Marrying at such an early age can be a direct reason for dropping out, especially for the girls. One of the officials explains how when the students go home from the residential school for vacation, some parents will marry them, leading to them not going back to school. On top of that, these child marriages

will often dissolve informally after few years, creating instability in the young families and repeating the cycle of dropping out from school. To stop this practice, it would be necessary to run educational projects among the colonies where child marriage is still a reality. Educating parents about the importance of education could discourage them from hurrying marriage at an early age. Research on the extent and frequency of this practice should be carried out if the Indian government wants to fully enforce their law.

5.1.7 Teacher Attitude

While all the aspects of the children's social life discussed above can have a deep impact in their educational attainment as well as their psychological well-being in general, the single most important set back is the teachers' attitude towards Adivasis. In all three Panchayath, the interviewees commented on the importance of good teacher-student relations. The president of Noolpuzha Gramma Panchayath states, *"In schools we must have an environment where children can work well. If a child from a tribe goes to the school and he or she is getting a bad behavior or a bad environment or a negative response from the teacher, then they won't go again."* Following the same idea, the TEO of Panamaram goes further to provide an example of a school in a nearby village where the headmistress and the teachers work together as a team, and as a result, there are no drop-outs in the school, in neither the general nor the tribal category. This example reinforces how significant the teacher is for the well-being of the students. In some occasions, the children complain to the Panchayath or the TEO, but more often than not, this is not the case. A tribal Promoter in Noolpuzhra found out that two girls were subject to negative comments from their teacher. The two girls had previously dropped out from school, but they decided to go back. Their decision to rejoin school was during the time that the Panchayath was giving bicycles to the tribal children going to school. Upon their arrival, the teacher made a comment saying that they had come back just to get

the bicycles. Following this event, the girls dropped out again. She explained the situation to the TEO, but nothing was done. The TEO from Thirunelly also received complaints regarding teachers' misbehavior, and he explained what a tricky situation it is. The teachers are also government officials appointed by the state. For this reason, they will not proceed with legal actions immediately. They sit down with the teacher in question and explain the seriousness of the issue as a warning and threaten to charge them with the Non-atrocity Act as a last resort if this behavior continues. It has been discussed by several authors in Castagno and Brayboy (2008, p. 970) that a good environment at school is essential for a child's development. This is even more true in the case of Tribal children, since, according to the Secretary in Panamaram, "*These children lack affection from their parents and thus should be treated with extra care*".

5.2 Shared Schemes

In order to alleviate these difficulties, the Panchayath with the Tribal Extension Office set in motion a series of schemes. Some of these schemes are developed by higher levels of the Panchayat or even the state government. Others are designed by the Gramma Panchayath and presented for funding. First, we will take a look at the schemes that are practiced in all of the Panchayath visited.

5.2.1 Meals

One of the first schemes proposed to bring children to school in the early years of the educational reform throughout Kerala was the introduction of midday meals. (Kapoor, Sreedharan, and Goyal, 1994, p. 80; Dhanura, 2006, p. 9). This has been taken a step further to bring tribal children to schools by alleviating harsh poverty (Anbuselvi and Leeson, 2017, p. 207; Mukundan and Bray, 2004, p. 123; Narayana, 2005, p. 2831; Gogoi, 2013, p. 8; Menon, 2013, p. 679; Rupavath, 2016, p. 9). All three Panchayath acknowledge the importance of ensuring proper meals for these communities. Children are given breakfast when they arrive to school, a midday meal, and tea and snack

in the afternoon. Furthermore, these meals are often extended to teenagers and pregnant women as well as the elder citizens of the community. Expanding this program beyond the school boundaries help reduce poverty across the community in general.

Adding to this, the Panchayath in collaboration with the Kudumbasree program provides facilities for community kitchen where ST members are able to cook for themselves and their community. Even though access to these community kitchens is free and open to all tribes, their involvement in them usually depends on the distance to it, so not all colonies partake in this activity.

5.2.2 Free Commodities

In order to lessen the school burden, the children are provided with free uniforms, sandals, an umbrella, school backpacks and other necessities. These allow for tribal children to blend with the general population and decrease the sense of otherness. This directly tackles one of the reasons for drop out given by Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2006, p. 641). Parents interviewed in their article explain how they would allow children to drop out of school when they could not afford books and uniforms and send them back the following year when they could afford them. The three Panchayath also provide the students each year with certain commodities that ease the studying capacity of the children. For instance, one year they provided the families with chairs and another year with tables, creating a study area at home that can be passed down to younger siblings and even other members of the community. It is a small investment with a potentially big impact throughout an extended period of time. In a recent year bicycles were provided, which might not seem like a necessity, but for some it can mean the difference between continuing studying or dropping out. This same policy is mentioned in Joy and Srihari (2014, p. 2), which shows that it is perceived as an advantageous action and is copied in different Panchayath. The ooru mooppan visited in Panamaram told us how his elder son dropped out after grade VIII

because he needed a bicycle to get to the school, but they could not afford it. In contrast, his 5-year-younger daughter is currently studying TIT (professional course) after completing grade XII successfully thanks to the provision of a bicycle. Other commodities provided by the Panchayath include a laptop for those students that complete their undergraduate degree. This provides access to the same studying materials that their peers in higher education have. When upper secondary school is completed, they also receive different musical instruments and sports materials that they share within the community. These are well received by the community since they have strong interest towards music, arts, and sports.

5.2.3 Life Mission

Apart from general commodities, the Panchayaths are collaborating with the state in the project 'Life Mission'. This project is focused on building lasting shelter for the poorest communities. Traditionally, seasonal houses would be built with the materials from the forest. The constructions would then be endangered during the heavy rains, while now they have a solid ceiling to cover their few possessions. These houses are built in installments: foundation, walls, and then roof. Providing houses tackles one of the biggest concerns among the poorer communities of the Paniya and Katinaikas. When asked about the main request of these tribes, the TEO in Noolpuzha said *"Houses, and cattle. Houses are the primary one, then the cattle"*. On the side of the tribes, the importance of these houses is also shown in a comment by the ooru moopan visited in Panamaram who said, pointing at the houses that surrounded us, *"Even these houses belong to the project of the Panchayath. They are helping a lot"*. Adding to the general living condition of the community leads to a better environment to study along with all the perks that living security provides to the psyche of people.

5.2.4 Stipends and Scholarships

Apart from general commodities, the Panchayaths are collaborating with the state in the project 'Life Mission'. This project is focused on building lasting shelter for the poorest communities. Traditionally, seasonal houses would be built with the materials from the forest. The constructions would then be endangered during the heavy rains, while now they have a solid ceiling to cover their few possessions. These houses are built in installments: foundation, walls, and then roof. Providing houses tackles one of the biggest concerns among the poorer communities of the Paniya and Katinaikas. When asked about the main request of these tribes, the TEO in Noolpuzha said *"Houses, and cattle. Houses are the primary one, then the cattle"*. On the side of the tribes, the importance of these houses is also shown in a comment by the ooru moopan visited in Panamaram who said, pointing at the houses that surrounded us, *"Even these houses belong to the project of the Panchayath. They are helping a lot"* Adding to the general living condition of the community translates in a better environment to study along with all the perks that living security provides to the psyche of people.

5.2.5 Transport

As previously mentioned, the remote location deep into the forest creates difficulties for some of the communities to commute to the school, and for this reason, the scheme Gothra Sariti was implemented. This scheme was mentioned by all the interviewees and works similarly across the three Panchayath. The Tribal Department, a department at the District Panchayath level, provides the funding for this facility. The Gramma Panchayath and the TEO are in charge of organizing how and to what colonies transport must be sent to. A Jeep or minibus, depending on the condition of the terrain, will pick the children from the remote areas and take them to school and back to their houses in the afternoon. The gas as well as the driver's salary is provided by the Tribal Department. This transport facility is also extended to take the children to

the facilities where other schemes are implemented, such as the study house in Panamaram, which will be detailed below with the particular schemes of each Panchayath.

5.2.6 Model Residential Schools and Hostels

Alongside the general schools, the tribal students also have access to Model Residential Schools (MRS). The idea behind these residential schools is that students are less likely to drop-out of school if they live there and only go to the colony during the weekends. Another option with the same idea in mind is dedicated hostels near the general schools. These methods are seen as effective by most of the interviewees; however, some questions are raised. On the one hand, this accommodation is exclusively Adivasis, which means children face no discrimination by non tribals. Still, cases of discrimination can happen between the upper-class tribes and the lower-class tribes. Some hostels go as far as being exclusively for one tribe and are preferred by some of the interviewees. *“We want a hostel for our own here or otherwise hostel that can accommodate us as well”*, comments the Tribal Promotor.

5.2.7 Mentor Teachers

Another scheme that has been introduced by the government was hiring mentor teachers. These teachers are hired by the government to teach tribal children from grade I to grade IV. They are able to speak their language and hence help them to stay in school long enough to speak the main language of instruction, Malayalam. Scholars advocate that the optimal learning scenario is learning to read and write in the mother tongue as a basis for the second language Jacob (2015, p. 131). However, this is not an option for many Adivasis since their languages usually lack a formalized script. Regardless, Willmot (2003) (from Shizha, 2015, p. 313) found that when the medium of teaching was changed to the mother tongue, children learned much better. Similarly, Cherkaraou (2004) (from Shizha 2015, p. 313) notes that teaching in the students' mother

tongue enabled children to develop critical thinking skills that stayed in later years and even in second languages. Furthermore, parents become more involved when indigenous children learn in their own language (Jacob, 2015, p. 133)

Normally, there is one mentor teacher per school, which means the mentor teacher-student ratio is extremely low. Since these mentor teachers provide a valuable service according to both the tribal interviewees and the officials, the government of Kerala should consider extending this program by hiring additional mentor teachers.

5.3 Particular Schemes

Apart from these general schemes that are implemented by many Gramma Panchayath, during the interviews we found instances of particular schemes developed by a single Panchayath in the area.

5.3.1 Thirunelly - Majari Kural

The Panchayath in Thirunelly was one of the five Panchayath selected by the state government to run a project called Majari Kural in the whole of Kerala. The project consists of teaching mathematics in a fun way. For this project, fifty students are selected from the most backward classes and Tribes. For every five children there is one volunteer, and on top of those ten volunteers there are three animators. The volunteers are required to have completed higher secondary, grade XII, while the animators need to hold a degree in some discipline, and some of them might even hold a Master's Degree. The animators are sent to Delhi for a special training before partaking in the activity. All the training costs are met by the Panchayath, but the salary of the volunteers and the animators is provided by the state government. Every day after 4 p.m. when school is dismissed, the selected children are taken to the facility with the jeep. At 6 p.m. they are taken back home. The idea of this project is to practice basic mathematics such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. In this way, the project complements what has been taught at school. In order to not be repetitive, the

lesson approach is different. According to the president of the Panchayath, there is not so much writing on the black board, and the activities are more participatory. By having such a low student-teacher ratio, the education of these children can be highly individualized, helping to overcome any difficulties they might have in their normal schooling. Moreover, the teacher involvement with the children is higher, so the facility can also become a safe environment for the children. In this manner, the project addresses some of the main issues identified by the officials as primary reasons for school dropout. Even though the initial purpose is an academic one, the end result goes beyond the boundaries of the facility and the school, forming children's social capacity and ability to engage in learning.

5.3.2 Noolpuzha - Kanmani

Noolpuzha had the most interesting project out of the three Panchayath visited. The president commented on a program called Kanmani or Social Emotional Learning. This project aims to not only prepare students for the competitive exams, but also to help the them to develop mentally and socially. For this project, six facilitators are hired. The selection process involves a written test, an interview, and a screening. Out of the current six facilitators, four have a BA or MA in psychology in order to help the development of the children. Unfortunately, the interview had to end due to time pressure, which meant that we could not inquire more deeply into the innerworkings of the program. The president was very eager to show how well the program was working. He commented that students had shown great improvement in their reading and writing skills. The main task explained by the president was the creation of a short magazine by the children involved.

5.3.3 Panamaram - Padana Veed

The TEO in the Panamaram Panchayath mentioned a program called Padana Veed. This program was explained as a Learning House, so the Panchayath provide the facility and transport where children can study and learn. No further details were mentioned during the interview.

5.4 Difficulties Faced by the Panchayath when Implementing Schemes

Despite the large freedom that the Panchayaths enjoy by implementing different projects, there are some hurdles they need to overcome to push the programs forward.

5.4.1 Clash with Other Government Bodies

The interviewees complained about conflicts with other government bodies. This is especially seen with the Forest Department. Since these communities tend to live inside the forest or on the fringes of it, their land falls under the forest reservation areas. For this reason, there are constant conflicts with the Forest Department. When there is any development program to build houses, or cut trees, make roads, etc. the Panchayath has to battle with the Forest Department and get consent from them. The President of Noolpuzha denounce that two thirds of the Panchayath Area is under the forest department, and most of the 300 Tribal colonies live in those areas. Furthermore, projects sometimes need to be approved by other departments as well. The Gramma Panchayath might need to approval from the Block or District Panchayath as well as from the Tribal Department.

5.4.2 Funding

Even when all these bureaucratic barriers are overcome, there is the issue of funding. The secretary of Thirunelly comments, *“There are some money reservations for the ST and SC programs but they are insufficient”*. As explained above, the devolution of power

should extend to allow Panchayath to distribute and attribute funding in what they deem necessary. The central government ought to acknowledge the necessity for expanding funding to develop these communities.

5.4.3 Unwillingness to Accept Benefits

A concern expressed by the different Panchayaths was that the tribal communities were not ready to accept the benefits offered for them. Yet this contrasts with the Tribal Promoter's comment on the value of the commodities and schemes. *"They are welcomed we don't have any hesitation to accept"*. This seeming contradiction can be better explained as a lack of knowledge of how the schemes work or practical availability to fill in the papers. The Secretary Assistant in Noolpuzha explains, *"Even if they are given something for free, they are not willing to accept them because they have some proceedings: You have to submit your identity card and submit the necessary writings. They are not ready to work for those"*. It is important to keep in mind, as it has been said before, that most of the Adivasis families live on a day-to-day basis. Skipping work in order to bring the necessary paperwork is not an option. On top of that, the time frame for applying to the different scholarships is too short, according to complains the assistant secretary. And even when the parents can afford the time, the complexities of the bureaucracy might be enough to put them off.

Other times, the community might not be willing to accept the scheme for cultural reasons. In Thirunelly, the Panchayath offered 50000-rupee capital to start a farming such as cattle. For the same enterprise, the general category would only get 25000 rupees. The reason given by the president is that they are not willing to change their form of living. They prefer their traditional means.

5.5 Proposed Schemes to Improve Education

The interviewees were asked in what ways they would personally improve schools to bring *Adivasis* children to school.

5.5.1 Improving and Increasing the Number of MRS & Hostels

The most common answer was to increase the number of MRS and Hostels where children can stay near the school. This recommendation was common for both the officials and the tribals interviewed.

Other recommendations included renovating the current schools in order to bring the technological features to a higher standard. The inclusion of technology does not necessarily translate in better learning. Yet, in a society with a massive interest in technology, this could translate to higher attendance. Despite Adivasis children having less access to technology within their communities compared to the general population, they are still interested in it and engaged in it. In fact, it has been mentioned that a struggle these children face is addiction to using their smartphones. It is to the point that they might drop out of the school because the hotels, MRS and general schools restrict their usage. It might be advantageous to embrace the power of technology and smartphones by teaching children how to access information and engage in the knowledge the internet provides, rather than being merely for entertainment. There is a lot of educational content on the internet, and schools should not be shy to make use of it.

In the process of renovating the schools, the same interviewee proposes a simple make over on the schools; painting the walls and doing general renovations could attract children to the area as a more engaging space while being cost efficient.

5.5.2 Art Project

Lastly, the assistant secretary in Noolpuzha also commented about an initiative that they designed called Gothra Kala Sangamam (Gathering of Tribal Arts), but they were unable to carry out due to lack of funding. She commented about this project, emphasizing how engaged tribal children are with the arts, especially music, but also cinematography. She said that teaching them how to produce these art forms in a technical

and practical manner could open doors for artistic expression and enterprises. Some of the interviewees were very ready to praise the innate talents of these children in areas such as music, dance, sports and oratory. However, when asked if the arts were promoted in school, the common answer was rather a negative one. Maybe these children would show more interest in the general curriculum if the art curriculum had more weight. Teaching the core curriculum through the arts as well as teaching the technical parts in the modern arts could lead to higher retention rates. Not only that, but the promotion of the arts and expression of their culture through them could translate in several benefits to their psyche and sense of value and worth. This could also mean bringing their culture to a higher standard and value in the eyes of the general Indian society, reducing discrimination and certain inferiority complexes.

6 Discussion

In this chapter, I set to discuss the importance and relevancy of the findings to a greater scope.

As we have seen throughout the findings chapter, the Adivasis community faces a series of barriers when children try to develop their education. From the start, the ability to enter education might be out of their reach considering their economic situation. In these cases, children might need to participate in the economical endeavors of the family. Even when children are enrolled in school, if they leave for an extended period of time, the chances of them dropping out rise. Similarly, practices such as child marriage, even though they are illegal, are still common. Child marriage not only leads to higher drop-out rates, but it also complicates their lives due to the new family relations they are forced to adapt to. This creates a poverty cycle that is hard to escape.

Yet, according to my findings as well as other research (Mohan et al., 2017, p. 72; Manojan, 2018, p. 50; Sahu, 2014, p. 49; Isac, 2011, p. 11), the biggest factor that leads to Adivasis children dropping out of school is teacher attitude. Not having a good environment in the school because of the teacher-student relations makes the learning space not welcoming. This makes the learning process distressing, especially for children who already struggle in school due creating and perceiving knowledge in a completely different way, which adds to the cultural and linguistic barriers. Teacher attitude is a non-tangible concept and can have a variety of effects on the students; these range from lack of respect toward tribal students, which devalues their cognitive abilities and culture, to sexually predatory actions towards girls, such as inappropriate touching. For this reason, teachers' attitude towards children should be highly monitored. At the same time, as discussed in the findings, teachers are government officials, so it is very difficult to implement corrective measures. While discrimination and predatory practices have legal consequences, other attitudes such as teacher absenteeism

are hard to tackle since teachers might have an “absence rotation” practice where they support and excuse each other, as Veerbhadranaika, et al. (2012, p. 40) points out.

Discrimination by teachers is not the only form of discrimination that Adivasis children face. As mentioned in the findings, tribal children might also be treated unequally by other children in the school, even by other Adivasis belonging to tribe of higher socioeconomic status. This shows the nuanced and complex situation that Adivasis cultures have. Prejudice towards these societies are historically rooted in the popular imaginary, so challenging the ideas that give birth to discrimination is a process that requires a constant struggle.

With this research, I set out to find what policies are in place to make education accessible to the Adivasis community. While most of the schemes mentioned by both the government officials and the interviewed Adivasis did not come from a grass roots initiative, the programs tackle longstanding issues that prevented Adivasis people to pursue education. These issues had to deal with the poverty condition of these groups. The most crucial scheme is the midday meals. Providing at least one nutritious meal a day in school ensures that children have the energy to attend school. Furthermore, parents are more likely to send their children to school if they know they are going to be fed.

As Adivasis people tend to live in remote areas in forests and hill areas, access to school is difficult (Panjekar, 2016, p. 11). The response by the government was to create a program to transport children to the schools and back home. This also reduces the barrier of schools not being in the nearest vicinity since they can now be transported much further distances in a shorter amount of time. Kumar and George (2009, p. 55) also comment how public transport, subsidized and reduced fares facilitate higher education for students in rural Kerala. In an all India context, Veerbhadranaika et al. (2012, p. 21) comment that Adivasis demands for transportation facilities have not

been met. The fact that the scheme of Gothra Sariti is general practice across Wayanad shows that the demand has been heard at least in this Keralite district.

To further alleviate the effects of poverty, the Panchayaths started providing different scholarship to school-going Adivasis children. While the implementation of these schemes has room for improvement, they are effective in reducing the need for children to leave school in search of work. It also helps to encourage parents to favor putting their children to school rather than work. However, my findings show that in some cases, the stipends are withheld until the student secures a high attendance rate. Yet, the money ought to be provided daily, or in advance, in order for it to effectively counter their poverty situation.

Outside typical scholarships, the economic burden of schooling for the families is also reduced by the provision of free commodities. These not only include personal material such as uniforms, backpacks and books, but also provided is furniture and other items that can be passed down to other members of the family. Providing children with tables, chairs and bicycles can have a longstanding positive effect beyond the duration of the school system.

The Panchayath also had long term programs, such as the Life Mission, which focuses on building lasting shelter for the poorest of the Adivasis communities. Having a permanent house improves the life condition of the family and allows for a better study space at home. At the same time, complying to mainstream standard could lead to dependence on the government to provide housing for them, since they lose the skill and knowledge to build their traditional seasonal shelter from the forest materials. Valuable indigenous knowledge such as this should be introduced in the curriculum of tribal schools. It is also necessary to question whether these houses were wanted by the communities in the first place or if they have been imposed as the path of development that the mainstream society considers correct.

Other general policies try to tackle issues rising from the cultural differences between the mainstream society and the Adivasis societies. These can be seen as the most controversial of the extended schemes. The creation of residential schools can help Adivasis children to evade prejudices and social marginalization as they can attend an all Adivasis school. The interviews showed a generally positive view on these by the Adivasis community. An interviewee even asked for an all Paniya residential school in the area. Residential schools are effective in reducing the drop-out rate; however, they can also become a pitfall when considering cultural loss. If the schools' staff is not well trained in the Adivasis cultures, these schools can become what are known as factory schools. In these factory schools, they can apply forceful assimilation on the grounds of bringing education to tribal children. The interviews point towards less alarming institutions where children can use their native language and where the different cultures are accepted. Nonetheless, these institutions where children are able to socialize and be educated in their own forms of knowledge have been "rendered defunct" in other regions of India and replaced with state sponsored standardized residential schools (Veerbhadranaika, 2012, p. 39). A transition from one type of residential school to the other can be swift and devastating for the Adivasis education and, hence, their forms of knowledge. For this reason, a careful eye has to be kept on these institutions. Control research on Wayanad, or Kerala in general, need to be encouraged by the government and third-party institutions.

Lastly, the findings brought up mentor teacher schemes in which a teacher with Adivasis language knowledge goes to schools to aid children by helping them in their own language. The benefits regarding the preservation of the language and cognitive development of using mother tongue to learn at early stages is already discussed during the findings section. Moreover, this program should be extended as the number of these mentor teachers is very limited. Teachers in these programs should also be educated in the different ways of knowing of the different tribes in a way that they would be able to adapt and make the knowledge more accessible to the tribal students.

A section of my interviews dealt with the different hurdles found during implementation of the different schemes. By asking what difficulties the Panchayath were experiencing, I hoped to gather some knowledge regarding the ability of the small village governments to pursue different grass-root initiatives. As seen in the findings, the different Adivasis groups propose different improvements in their societies, and they hope for the Panchayath to carry them out. Generally speaking, my interviews show that the Adivasis interviewees are content with the improvements, although they acknowledge them to be slower than they would like. The pace of development can be attributed the Panchayath's difficulties as expressed by the government officials. The largest hindrance of the Panchayath was its condition of being a delegated power rather than a full devolution of power. That is, the Gramma Panchayath have some decision-making power. But this still depends on a central authority or at least on a higher tier of government, the District Panchayath (Mukundan and Bray 2004, p. 113). This dependence creates two main obstacles. On the one hand, funding ought to come from the higher authorities, and therefore, it has to pass through the necessary bureaucracy slowing every action. On the other hand, there are other institutions that work independently of the Gamma Panchayath. Most notably, the forest Department deals with the land surrounding the indigenous communities. As the Adivasis land rights are contested, they cannot carry projects on the land without consulting the Forest Department (Veettil, Kjosavik and Ashok, 2013, p. 410). For this reason, whenever the Panchayath tries to implement any construction in the Indigenous colonies, it has to first deal with the Forest Department.

Some of the officials' answers regarding the difficulties to carry out schemes were highly surprising. The idea that the Adivasis community did not accept the benefits given to them seemed ludicrous. In fact, the answer became more bizarre as the Adivasis interviewees challenged this claim. The most detailed example given by one of the officials is how the Adivasis community did not claim the cattle given to them at a

very good deal. While this scheme might be a bargain and certainly help in their economic development, it goes against their traditional lifestyle. When dealing with Indigenous communities, it is of the utmost importance to consider the cultural implication of the different schemes and programs. The fact that the officials see the Adivasis' refusal as unwillingness to accept the benefits provided to them shows that the government officials do not understand the communities needs and wants. The development path that the government draws for the Adivasis does not align with their world view, nor their identity.

In the context of education, the implications of disregarding indigenous culture can be devastating not only in academic attainment, but it can also lead to complete cultural erasure. As Veerbhadranaika et al. (2012) point out, the education programs in India focus on integration of Adivasis into the dominant society; and, since the "dominant education system does no challenge structural inequalities", these inequalities are reproduced. According to Jacob et al. (2015, p. 39) any intentional assimilation policy towards Indigenous communities can be considered as indigenous genocide, as these cultures are effectively destroyed. None of my data suggests any type of direct correction by the Panchayath to prevent assimilation. On the contrary, the language used by the government officials imply an advocacy for the Adivasis to join mainstream society. For this reason, it is necessary to educate Panchayath officials on the importance of producing curricula that exalts Adivasis knowledges and cultures in schools with a high percentage of Adivasis children.

Moreover, it is also essential to create language programs for these communities. Some interviewees concede the need for tribal children to learn in their own language and admit that programs such as mentor teachers help in bringing Adivasis languages to schools, but they are not enough. Jacob (2015, p. 132) states that parents are the language teachers, who, in my opinion, should be hired as language teaches in Adivasis schools. A program like this would have the mutually reinforcing effect of upholding

Adivasis cultures and languages, as well as directly improving the economic situation of the community by providing teacher wages to parents.

With this research, I set to assess the ability of the Gramma Panchayaths to implement grass-roots initiatives to improve the quality of Adivasis education. After contemplating the different schemes carried out by the Panchayaths as well as their proposals, it is safe to state that the vast majority of the schemes come from a top-down enforcement rather than grassroots. Only two programs, Majari Kural in Thirunelly, and Kanmani in Noolpuzha, seemed to be truly grassroots. Arguably, there is a third program in Noolpuzha if we consider the art program, Gothra Kala Sangamam, which was never funded and carried out. The fact that these programs exist shows that the Panchayath have the capacity to organize and bring progress to such programs, yet this power is largely untapped.

While Majari Kural and Kanmani are organized by the Panchayaths in a grass-root manner, these are not to be viewed without a critical eye. Do they really address the Adivasis needs? Are they focused on improving academic results, or do they make use of MCE as Social Justice as explained in the theoretical framework?

The first program, Majari Kural, appears to be more academically oriented, as its focus is to improve children's performance in mathematics. However, they do this by reorienting the way knowledge is transmitted. There is very little written instruction, and the activities are participatory. This movement towards an oral education makes it easier for the Adivasis children to learn, but it also needs to adjust the subject to the indigenous knowledge of the region and its connotations. Further research of this program could focus on whether the examples are culturally sensitive to the Adivasis context. With the present knowledge, it is impossible to affirm if there is a correct usage of MCE as Social Justice. At the same time, children learning to improve their social abilities and having a safe space when the general context is one of discrimination, is a step towards social justice of some sort.

The second program, Kanmani, has an emphasis on developing children mentally and socially. The activity of writing a magazine could easily be positioned in an MCE task as the Adivasis children will write about their cultural knowledge and interests. I consider not having been able to gather detailed information about this program the biggest failure of this research enterprise. This leaves a clear research gap that could be taken up in future research.

I briefly want to mention how a program such as Gothra Kala Sangamam could positively impact the whole community. Art education would act as Social Justice in the context of MCE as it would be a gathering of different cultures of the Adivasis society. This would also bring their cultures to the mainstream society, acting as an agent of acceptance and shredding negative prejudices formed against Adivasis tribes. This would be a proper step of Social Justice coming from education and extending to the whole society. From this position, I urge policy makers to reconsider this and similar programs further.

As seen throughout this chapter, a challenge for the research was the unpredictability of the answers. This was taken into consideration from the beginning of the research design. I needed an approach that allowed me to compare possibly very unrelated data. The multiple case study, explained by Harvey and Wensing (2003, p. 212) in the methodology chapter, allowed for it. Their considerations for validity and reliability were followed by identifying cases of interest within the same context. This approach allowed me to answer my research question by comparing the three case studies to see the different schemes developed, their origins and implementation. It also answered further considerations and sub-questions that arose as the research was developed. One example was the cultural considerations of the educational policies and the effectiveness of the policies to improve access and quality of education to the Adivasis community in Wayanad. When assessing the effectiveness of the policies, greater importance was given to the perceptions of the Adivasis community as they are the end

beneficiaries of the schemes. Moreover, the reliability of the schemes is further supported by the authority of the officials interviewed.

Some ethical concerns of this research arise from its reflexivity, that is my own position as a European researcher without any ties to indigenous cultures other than respect and admiration. My interest for the Paniya tribe and Adivasis communities in general comes from the compassion for the marginalized sections of society. Learning about the struggles of these groups in India propelled me to design this research to understand their situation better and learn how to improve their social conditions. Other than that, all the ethical procedures regarding anonymity were followed, and no information other than the position held in the different Panchayaths has been shared.

Being able to travel to the villages and colonies seemed to be far out of my reach, but thanks to the Legislative Assembly of Kerala and their recommendation, I was able to talk to all the higher officials in the district. Of course, many of them did not speak in English, and I could not speak in Malayalam, so the aid of a translator was paramount. Coordinating with my translator during the interview was a challenge we easily overcame. Despite the incredible job of the translator, it is important to acknowledge how the collaboration might have influenced the research. Firstly, due to the nature of the semi-structured interviews, the participants talk extensively, which was a challenge for the translator to go over all the topics in the shortest amount of time possible. This meant that he often had to use his own expression and synthesize the answers. Occasionally, he had to ask further questions to understand the context of their answers, which could inadvertently carry the conversation off topic and limiting the answer. Secondly, interviewing government officials meant we had limited time that we could take from their duties. They were very glad to help, but some interviews had to be cut short due to these and other time constraints.

At the same time, access to the colonies where the Ooru Mupans were interviewed was difficult and time consuming. The Tribal Promoters from the Tribal Extension Office were fundamental in connecting us with the Ooru Mupans, and we were gleefully welcomed by the community into their land, an invaluable and unforgettable experience. To see with my own eyes the poverty and marginalization of the communities has fueled me to see this research to the end, and it inspires me to continue working with indigenous communities through my future career.

7 Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the different schemes put in place to consolidate Adivasis education by the grass root government level of Kerala, and whether these schemes were effective in their endeavor. After analyzing the answers given by the government officials as well as the Ooru Mupans, it can be stated that the majority of the schemes address the immediate necessity of the Adivasis community due to their poverty induced social status. This alleviation comes in the form of direct economic aid such as stipends and scholarships, as well as providing material commodities and necessities for schooling like books and uniforms. The aid is also directed to the whole community in the form of housing, roads, and wells, which improve their living standard and inherently, the children's ability to study at home.

The majority of the schemes are carried out across the three Panchayath visited, and it could be extrapolated across the district. This shows to some extent the viability and effectiveness of the schemes as the projects yielding efficient results tend to be copied and implemented in the surrounding area when the District Panchayath analyses the results. From expanding the midday meals to the Gothra Sariti and providing transport to school, these schemes effectively tackle social barriers and concerns for quality of education expressed on the literature during the previous decades. The words of the Ooru Mupan heavily resonate here: *"We are not getting to the fullest, but we are suggesting, we are complaining in the Oorukkoottans, so with that we are happy"*. The effectiveness of the schemes is truly evaluated by the people within the community who are directly affected by the changes, and their feedback ensures that the proper action is taken. Progress is slow, but the communities are being developed.

The research has also uncovered disturbing truths about the obstacles that need to be overcome to guarantee quality of education to these communities. Most notably, teacher attitude towards Adivasis children seems to be a major setback to creating a

safe environment. Archaic visions of caste and untouchability are still prevalent in Indian society, even when swept under the rug. Leaving this issue unaddressed allows discrimination to persist, trapping the children in a vicious cycle. As explained by the TEO in Thirunelly, there's little that can be done about teachers being condescending to tribal children since they have a permanent position as civil servants. It could be suggested that the requirements for these positions should be examined on a more personal level. Government schools should have a stricter selection process for their educators to ensure Adivasis culture is upheld and uplifted.

Education for social justice should be pursued as the means to critically revise power structures in knowledge creation and acquisition. A path to do so is to hire teachers from the indigenous communities. As a result, the government could create and promote teacher training in higher education that is specifically focused on attracting members of the Adivasis community. This would not only consolidate the schools' multicultural education, but it would also expand the professional opportunities of the Adivasis community. Another path to guarantee Adivasis attendance in the region is to modify the curriculum to bring school topics closer to their real-life issues and interests. Given the economic and social structures of these communities, the students would have a greater benefit with topics they can implement at home and in their daily lives. Curriculum change could also provide a space for indigenous knowledge and culture to be shared to the general category children. Therefore, Adivasis culture would stay alive within the community, and it would also create an acceptance in outer society that has not been present for previous generations.

The initial hypothesis for the research was that due to having a decentralized governmental approach, the Gramma Panchayath would have the ability to cater for the educational necessities of the village. This was partially confirmed by the initiatives the different Panchayath started. This ability was not implemented to the fullest as the majority of schemes were promoted by higher levels of the government, yet the Kanmani project in Noolpuzha breaks the ground to create successful projects outside

standard education. More attention should be put into tracking the achievement of this scheme.

As already mentioned, it is of interest for future research to follow up the progress made in the educational schemes such as Kanmani and how the program could be expanded. It seems also clear that more research on teacher attitude towards Adivasis children is urgent in order to assess the depth of discrimination in schools.

Cultural loss is one of the major concerns for indigenous communities around the world. Many groups have suffered from the direct policies of assimilation, an attempt to erase indigenous cultures under mainstream education. While the Indian constitution and Adivasis education does not aim at erasing Adivasis culture, the unintended result of mainstream education is often that. In order to keep Adivasis cultures alive, their language, traditions, and ways of knowing, learning and understanding the world need not only be represented in formal education, but also celebrated.

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Appendix 1

The questions included in Section A were asked to all the President of the Gramma Panchayath, the Secretariat, and the Tribal Extension Officer interviewed, while Section B collects some of the follow up questions that came up during the interviews.

Section A

What is your opinion on education, is it important? Why?

What is the biggest challenge that tribal communities face in education? In what ways?

How does the Panchayat aim to alleviate these challenges?

What are the schemes to achieve the intended outcomes?

What control mechanism does the Panchayat have to ensure the schemes are achieving the intended goals?

How do you involve the community in the policy decision making?

What are the main hurdles when implementing the proposed schemes?

Section B

What language is used to impart education for Tribal People?

How does discrimination affect schools?

What complaints about education do you receive?

How do Children go to school?

How could schools be improved to include Tribal communities?

What tasks do the Tribal Promoters have?

What language is used in the MRS?

Appendix 2

The questions included in Section A were asked to all the Ooru Mupans interviewed, while Section B collects some of the follow up questions that came up during the interviews.

Section A

What is the biggest challenge your community face in education?

How do you feel about the schemes planned by the government?

How do you feel these schemes affect your community's education?

How do you express your concerns on the schemes or when problems arise in the community's education?

How are you involved in the decision process for the different projects?

Section B

How do children go to school?

What is the main reason for children to drop out of school?

What role does gender play in education?

Do all the communities benefit equally from the different schemes?

What education systems do you have outside school?

Are you aware of any type of discrimination in the schools?