

Leadership Study on the impact of inclusive learning, student friendly projects and dropout rates among tribal students in Thariode, Wayanad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to SALPS Thariode, Mission & Location

SALPS Thariode was founded in 1950 by Servants of India Society, under the guidance and vision of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His aim was to establish schools and educate the underprivileged and those who did not have access to education as he believed that India wouldn't be fully independent unless everyone has access to education. Servants of India Society, founded in 1905 was the first secular organization in India to devote itself to the underprivileged, rural and tribal people, emergency relief work, the increase of literacy, and other social causes. Under this organization, Wayanad district in Kerala is now home to 7 schools in rural areas. These schools were founded with the vision to support the tribal community in Wayanad and were hence named Serve India Adivasi LP Schools (SALP Schools). The volunteers of Servants of India Society approached Mr. M K Jinachandran, a social reformist, who provided them with the land and infrastructure facilities.

SALP School Thariode, a private-aided school backed by government, is situated 3 kms from Banasura Sagar Dam in Wayanad district of Kerala, the largest earthen dam in India and the second largest in Asia. Land acquisition to build the dam started in 1987 and hence a large group of residents had to migrate to various places. The initial school building, along with public and private buildings were engulfed by the dam. In 1990, the locals and villagers reconstructed the school in a location called "Bibleland". Due to the relocation and lack of population in the area, there are limited families and hence students, in the area. Bibleland is primarily home to the Tribal Community and consists of people from the Paniya,

Kurichya and Kaatunayka community, along with Christian, Hindu & Muslim minorities hailing from small scale agricultural families.

1.2 Socioeconomic, cultural & educational challenges.

The school faced an uphill battle against low attendance, especially among tribal students. Cultural practices like accompanying parents on forest expeditions for essential income often took precedence over education. Many tribal families lacked awareness of the long-term benefits of schooling, viewing children's labor as a crucial source of income. Even those who started primary classes often struggled with irregular attendance, leaving them unprepared for upper grades and vulnerable to dropping out. Based on research, from 2007 to 2012, approximately 6374 scheduled tribe students have discontinued schooling in Wayanad district, where the total dropout of the district is 9523. This indicates 66.93% (approx) dropouts belong to Scheduled Tribes in this district (Joy & Srihari, 2014.).

Persuading both children and parents to prioritize education became the school's top priority. Building trust with the community proved essential. The teachers understood that flashy school buildings with concrete school grounds wouldn't hold students' attention. Instead, they implemented innovative projects, like incorporating tribal knowledge into lessons, organizing parent-teacher meetings, and offering after-school activities with a strong participation of the local community. The ecosystem that the school has created gradually chipped away at the barriers, paving the way for a more inclusive learning environment.

2. SCHOOL PROFILE

2.1 Total student and teacher strength, classrooms, staff and infrastructure.

Presently, SALP School Thariode (Serve India Adivasi LP School Thariode), a Lower Primary institution, accommodates students from 1st to 4th grade, totaling fewer than 100. Additionally, a pre-primary class is facilitated through collaboration with the Parents-Teachers Association.

The school operates under the guidance of four educators, including the Head Mistress, and has five classrooms, a designated Teachers' room, large school ground, nature-friendly campus, green campus, computer classes, a fully-equipped kitchen and essential amenities such as electricity, water, sanitary facilities, and a library accessible to all students.

Notably, 45% of the student body hails from the Tribal community, with the remaining students representing the general community. They come from Christian and Hindu backgrounds.

3. SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths

- The school has been successful in being a zero dropout school for the last 13 years. The school actively worked on preventing Tribal students dropping out of the school from 2007 and was successful in doing so by 2009. With the continuous effort and support from the teachers and parents, SALP School was able to prevent students from dropping out.
- Additionally, SALP Thariode is also the first Bag- free school in Kerala.

- The school is a nature friendly school and protects and enriches the environment around the school. The school, situated in an acre is home to over 100 trees, and also consists of a green classroom with a green roof consisting of 50 medicinal creepers, and a Miyawaki forest.
- Tribal friendly schools ensure students and parents are motivated to come forward in all sects of the society by embracing them.
- All students achieve a minimum level proficiency in reading and writing. By the 4th year, all students are capable of reading and writing in English, apart from the normal syllabus, while most schools are struggling to achieve a common minimum level of this proficiency.
- Holistic development of the students are given a strong focus by focusing on a common minimum level of proficiency, communication activities, and cultural events involving all students.
- From 2007 till 2023, the school has been successful in producing Lower Secondary Scholarship Winners from the school, a Kerala State Scholarship Examination.
- Active community participation and contribution through the mission : “School for everyone, Everyone for school.”

Weakness

- The school is an Aided School supported by the government. However the aided school status of the school restricts itself from certain government funds/projects that the other government lower primary schools have access to for the development of the school.
- Highly competitive English medium private schools drawing students from other communities.

Opportunities

- SALPS Thariode has been successful in establishing a strong relationship with the tribal community in the area. The school has been successful in doing so by providing quality education to the students from the tribal colonies, taking both the parents and students on recreational trips and support through various projects during COVID and the floods that usually affect the areas during the months of June and July. Since the parents from the tribal community have a strong and trustful relationship with the school, the possibility to uplift more members from the tribal community through projects and learning sessions would be effective. For example, a lot of people from the tribal community are unaware of the reservation system and believe that a government job would be impossible for them. By educating them and supporting them with their studies, it would be possible to uplift the community.
- Sharing the best practices and educational reforms with the upcoming educationalists to help them scale and spread.

Threat

- Due to recent developments in the area focusing on tourism, including the development of multiple large scale resorts and restaurants, the possibility of families and students increasing in the area is slim.

4. COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION

4.1 Cultural pressures, values, attitudes, needs and expectations of the school's surrounding community.

Thariyode village of Wayanad has a substantial population of Schedule Tribe (ST). Schedule Tribe (ST) constitutes 32.73 % while Schedule Caste (SC) were 5.63 % of total population in Thariyode village.

In Thariyode village out of total population, 747 were engaged in work activities. 89.96 % of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 10.04 % were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months.

Of 747 workers engaged in Main Work, 123 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 400 were Agricultural laborers. Out of the students in SALPS Thariode, around 30% of the students belong to the Paniya Community, 10% belong to the Kurichian and Kattunayakan community. The rest of the students belong to the general community.

Please refer to the different types of tribal communities and more information about them here: <https://kirtads.kerala.gov.in/tribals-in-kerala/>

Particulars	Total	Male	Female
Total No. of Houses	385	-	-
Population	1,653	797	856
Child (0-6)	205	116	89
Schedule Caste	93	41	52
Schedule Tribe	541	278	263
Literacy	86.60 %	90.90 %	82.79 %
Total Workers	747	462	285
Main Worker	672	-	-
Marginal Worker	75	24	51

Table exhibiting demographic data of Thariyode.

5.0 PROBLEM SITUATION

5.1 Main Problems:

- High drop-out rates, particularly among tribal students: This significantly impacts student success and limits educational opportunities for the community.
- Irregular attendance, even among enrolled students: This hinders learning and progress, leaving students unprepared for higher levels, further increasing dropouts in upper primary levels.
- Lack of parental commitment and awareness: Tribal communities prioritize forest activities for income, often neglecting the importance of education.

5.2 Reasons and Underlying Factors:

- Cultural practices and priorities: Dependence on forest resources for income leads families to view education as secondary. Children are often taken along for work, disrupting attendance.
- Limited understanding of education's benefits: Many parents lack awareness about the long-term advantages of education and its impact on future opportunities.
- Challenges in bridging the cultural gap: Traditional practices and beliefs can create a barrier between the school and tribal families, making it difficult to build trust and understanding.

5.3 Challenges and Issues in Detail:

- Early drop-out: Students entering Upper Primary classes lack necessary skills due to irregular attendance, leading to feelings of insecurity and further drop-out.
- Convincing parents to prioritize education: Changing deeply ingrained cultural practices and economic priorities requires significant effort and engagement with the community.
- Sustaining student motivation: Retention goes beyond initial attraction; the school needs to find ways to make learning relevant and engaging for tribal students.

6. CHANGE INITIATIVE AND STRATEGY

6.1 Specific Change Initiatives:

- The first step that was taken by the school was the introduction of swings in an effort to attract students to the school. Due to the lack of budget, swings were made of discarded tires. Students and even parents were enticed by the swings and made regular visits to the school. The swings, along with the breakfast system introduced by the government and the loving attitude by the teachers attracted many tribal students to the school.
- Promoting Hygiene and Inclusion: An obstacle schools all around Kerala face is the separation and lack of integration between tribal and general students. SALPS Thariode also noticed this issue and provided both the students and parents with classes on the importance of hygiene. Additionally, stars were provided to students who shower everyday, brought handkerchiefs to school, clean uniforms etc. Small gifts were also given to students who maintained good hygiene, were punctual etc. This

motivated students to come to school regularly and also boosted the integration within students, hence helping create an inclusive environment.

- Adaptive Textbooks: Shorter versions of government textbooks ("adaptive textbooks") improved subject understanding and performance. Since the big textbooks often intimidated the students, by introducing adaptive textbooks that were shorter versions of the textbooks provided by the government, students were able to better learn subjects like English, Malayalam and science faster. Students are also motivated to create their own versions of small story books.
- "30 nimisham(30 minutes) Project" : The active learning hours for a child is 6 hours. Out of these 6 hours, half an hour was set apart to provide individual attention to students based on the subjects they were weak in, hence resulting in better performance and upliftment of all students.
- LSS Exam Support: Training students for the Lower Secondary Scholarship exam resulted in consecutive LSS winners from 2007 onwards.
- Communication Skills: "We Can" project focused on daily English sentence practice to improve communication skills.
- Bagless School: Providing textbooks for home use and writing notes in a single notebook eliminated the need for heavy bags, making school accessible and reducing health issues. Due to the lack of proper infrastructure in homes, most students lost their textbooks in the rain. To aid in tackling this issue, the teachers provided textbooks to be kept in homes and also kept copies at school. By doing so, and writing all notes in a singular notebook, the school was successful in becoming the first bag free school in Kerala. By being bagless, transportation to school became easier for children and also helped reduce health issues related to carrying heavy school bags. Being a bag free school has greatly benefitted the

health and posture of the students as well. According to a study in 2017, focusing on the health issues faced by students by carrying school bags in Kerala, “ 82% of both girls and boys suffer from back pain and it was also observed that 80% of students faced some kind of discomfort ((Devanarayanan & Parameshwaran, 2017).

- Nanna Bucket Project (Goodwill bucket/Kindness Bucket): Students contribute daily groceries to a bucket, which is used to support underprivileged families in the community, fostering empathy and trust. This also fostered as a way to build trust with the community. This can vary depending on the students and be anything from toothpaste to soap to rice or sugar. Once the bucket is filled, teachers pool money together and buy other necessities like rice, sugar, medicines etc and are then given to financially disabled families in the area, including the tribal families. This has yielded two positive results: the lessons on charity and helping the poor for the children, and a way to connect and build trust with the local community.
- Furthermore, both teachers and students are taken on recreational trips or tours every year, and have so far visited places like Mysore, Calicut, Trivandrum, and Visamaya amusement park. Unlike other school trips, parents are also included in these trips to help better connect with not just the students but also the parents. Due to limited funds, people from tribal colonies seldom travel and hence this is also an exciting opportunity for them. The trips are usually funded by the teachers and other well wishers.
- Furthermore, cultural programs are conducted on a regular basis, where all students learn tribal songs and dances and the whole school participates in the Annual Day of the school. This helps create a strong bond within the tribal community. This has resulted in boosting the confidence of the tribal students and also consecutively, preservation of the tribal songs and

dances that are in the process of being forgotten and overwritten. The Annual day is also a stage for all parents to express their talent, and is considered to be a huge festival for the entire village.

6.2 Plan of Action and Strategy:

- Focus on Community Integration: Including parents in school trips and cultural programs built trust and fostered a sense of belonging for tribal families.
- Student-Centered Approach: Love, positive reinforcement, and individual attention were key to boosting student confidence and motivation.
- Small, Scalable Projects: Initiating new projects each year, based on student needs, allowed for continuous improvement and adaptation.
- Sharing Knowledge and Expertise: SALPS Thariode became a "model school," training BEd students, volunteers, and MSW students on their drop-out-free and inclusive environment methods.

6.3 Rationale behind the Chosen Approach:

- Addressing Cultural Nuances: Understanding the importance of forest activities for tribal families led to initiatives like swings and flexible school attendance, not forcing immediate change.
- Building Trust and Relationships: Engaging parents in school activities and showing genuine care for students fostered trust and encouraged continued attendance.
- Empowering Students: Providing individual attention, celebrating achievements, and offering opportunities like LSS exam training boosted student confidence and motivation.

- Sustainable Practices: Utilizing discarded materials for swings and minimizing school supplies made initiatives cost-effective and adaptable.
- Community Involvement: Nanma bucket project and cultural programs fostered a sense of responsibility and connection within the community.
- By combining these elements, SALPS Thariode successfully addressed the challenges faced by tribal students, creating a drop-out-free, inclusive environment and earning recognition as a model school. Their story demonstrates the power of community engagement, student-centered learning, and innovative solutions in overcoming educational barriers.

7. OUTCOMES AND LEARNING

All these educational projects and charity projects have resulted in the tribal community realizing the importance of education, building confidence in students, inclusive education and creating a tribes friendly school with zero dropout rates since 2009. As a result, SALPS Thariode was selected for the Television program “ Harithavidyalam” Season 3 (<https://hv.kite.kerala.gov.in/>) where they were able to highlight all the projects done by the school to bring more awareness on how to maintain a dropout free school and how to increase confidence among students.

Additionally, due to these activities, SALPS Thaiorde has in recent months become a “model school”. Classes are being conducted to BEd students, volunteers, MSW students etc and are being taught how to create a drop out free, inclusive environment. Over the period of last two months, 6 schools have visited the school and training has been provided to over 500 people. They learn about

the various projects that were successfully implemented by the school, the impact it has created and also get to interact with all the students.

One notable aspect in all these projects is the love and care teachers put into interacting with the students. All students are treated with love and are given positive reinforcements, resulting in higher confidence in students, better grades and motivation to come to school.

8. LEADERSHIP AND ROLE MODELS

The most influential people who have aided in the success of these projects are the Head Mistress, the teachers and the parents. For example, initially, due to the lack of funds, there were several infrastructure issues to the school building. With the support of parents, and pooling money by the teachers, they were able to fix the ceiling and other infrastructural issues. Teachers and students all take active efforts to keep the school green, by watering the plants and keeping the school clean. Due to the continuous support from the parents and teachers, the school has been successful in creating such a positive impact. As a result, the school received the best PTA (Parents Teachers Associated Award) in 2016 in Vythiri Sub District and also received the best Environment friendly award recently.

9. THEORY OF CHANGE

A quote that the HeadMistress and teachers of the school abide by is “ നമ്മൾ ആരെനോ എന്തെനോ ആഴത്തിൽ അറിയാത്ത കുറെആളുകൾ. അവരുടെ ജീവിതത്തിൽ നാം ഇന്നിപ്പോൾക്കുറേക്കുന്ന ഭംഗിയുടെ പേരാണ് വിദ്യാഭാസം. ” This can be translated to “ Many people whom we do not know deeply . Education is the name of the beauty we sew into their lives.”

The Mantra that drives the school and its teachers is “ ഒരു സ്കൂളിന്റെ മികവ് എത്ര കുട്ടികൾ വന്നു ചേർന്നു എന്നതിലല്ല. ആ കുട്ടികൾ എങ്ങനെ പുറത്തേക്കു പോകുന്നു എന്നതിനാണ് സ്കൂളിന്റെ മികവ്.” This can be roughly translated as “ the excellence of a school is not in how many students join the school but rather how the students leave the school”. This means that the quality of the education, the morals and values instilled in the students is of core importance, over how many students join the school, or any other external factors that might seem appealing.

10. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, SALPS Thariode is a Lower Primary School situated in a small village in Thariode, Wayanad, Kerala with a strong tribal population in the area. The school, like other schools in Kerala, faced issues related to high dropout rates among the tribal students in the school. The school launched various projects to navigate through these issues, and with a lot of love and support from the teachers, the school was successful in being a dropout free school. Some of the notable projects launched by the school are 30 minute, subject based tuition lessons for students, based on the subjects they struggle the most with; “We can”- a project focused on learning every day conversational english phrases; “Namma bucket” - a project focused on supporting the less fortunate in the community, helping create a strong bond and trust with the community. Other projects like creating a environment friendly school, being a bagless school and other extra curricular activities arranged by the school has helped create a model school and a tribe friendly school, ultimately resulting in being a dropout free school.

The importance of synergy between the parents, the teachers and students is of much importance in this specific case. The teachers had the students’ and community’s best interest in mind and hence worked together, sacrificed their

personal time and contributed to the school financially, to make the ideal school they always dreamed about.

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Thariyode Village Population - Vythiri - Wayanad, Kerala. (2018).
<https://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/627332-thariyode-kerala.html>

KIRTADS | Tribals in Kerala. (2023).

<https://kirtads.kerala.gov.in/tribals-in-kerala/>

Appendix

Youtube links:

Mathrubhumi News: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxPPTa7DOsk>

Harithavidhyalayam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWSIDKdYXCo>

News Articles:

Times of India:

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kochi/here-is-how-a-wayanad-school-dumped-school-bags/articleshow/67823049.cms>

Mathrubhumi:

<https://www.mathrubhumi.com/news/good-news/salp-school-thariode-wayanad-first-bagless-school-in-kerala-drop-out-free-school-inspiring-story-1.8407144>

Media One:

<https://www.mediaoneonline.com/kerala/2019/06/27/keralas-first-bagless-school-in-wayanad>

LifeBeyond Numbers:

<https://lifebeyondnumbers.com/going-to-school-without-school-bags-this-kerala-school-is-setting-an-example/>

India times:

<https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/school-in-kerala-sets-example-by-doing-away-with-heavy-bags-provide-free-pencil-boxes-to-kids-361570.html>

Experience of B Ed students:

<https://www.veed.io/view/7eba3049-9b00-4ac6-aaf2-44e92a3ffe4c?panel=share>

Other pictures/ documents:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vzBa_CzMXGT9iE51b4jCDzvuiRLEm1Mz?usp=sharing

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CtHX2psriiV/>

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cs-XCCqN4Fs/?igshid=MTC4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D>