

# Whys and Wherefores for Dropout of Scheduled Tribe Children from Public Schools in the State of Telangana, India

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**ABSTRACT:** The education of tribal children has remained as an instigating research issue for a number of years in India. The current study highlights that the high dropout of tribal boys and girls is primarily due to 'disinteresting education' image shared by tribal children. It is pointed out that the educational processes and structures, especially those related to teaching or pedagogy require urgent attention. School cultures of residential schools in the tribal areas need culturally sensitive pedagogy together with the culturally sensitive organization of co-curricular activity, boarding and lodging and health care. The paper argues that wholesome welfare approach to the education of tribal boys and girls has its own set of limitations. The training of teachers needs appropriate modifications for innovativeness, positive attitudes, and skills in counselling.

## INTRODUCTION

The official statistics of the Department of School Education, Government of Telangana, India reveals a staggering dropout rate of school children in the age group of 6-15 years. Out of the children who were enrolled in 2007-08 at different schools in the state for their first standard and who should have been in the school till 2017-18 and passed out tenth class during that year/session, about 318,000 children were reported to have dropped out of the school. From the data of the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE), it is estimated that about ten lakh children have dropped out of the schools in the last three years. Statistics collected by the Department of School Education also revealed a higher dropout rate for boys and especially for tribals. The dropout

rate for ST children is recorded as 11.98%, 7.46% and 49.44% respectively at Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary levels. The rate increased from 48.87% in 2015-16 to 49.44% in 2016-17. Further, it is also noted that the gap between the General categories and the ST category is quite significant at all levels and particularly at Secondary level with a difference of 22.49%. The data also reflected that the dropout rate is relatively high in the tribal-dominated districts of Komaram Bheem, Jayashankar, Mahaboobabad, Nagar Kurnool, and Adilabad of the State. If the data collected by the government is correct/not misleading, it establishes itself as a very disappointing state. It has been duly observed that the State has been making efforts to increase the accessibility and boosting the infrastructure in the schools. The government is also striving to step up incentives of different kinds to encourage schooling of children.

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A large number of studies have been made to explain the poor educational attainment of tribals in India (Sujata, '87; Sharma, '92, 2015; Yadappanavar, 2003; Bhukya, 2016; Rupavath, 2016; Sharma, *et al.*, 2016; Gupta, 2017; Veerabhadru, 2018). The government tribal welfare functionaries have generally maintained that the dropout rate in residential educational institutions is very low, though only about one-fifth of the tribal children enrolled in schools are in residential educational institutions. It is held that merely about 15% of children studying in day schools get admitted in different types of residential institutions after completion of their II grade. The insufficient number of residential educational institutions in tribal areas is thus assumed to be the prime factor leading to dropout of tribal children before they reach VI-grade. However, the distribution of residential educational institutions across districts also reveals that it is the Schedule Tribes who live outside the Scheduled Areas that are primarily affected by the lack of residential educational institutions (Sastry, 2017). Some educationists too maintained that the agrarian crisis particularly during the last decade or so had created very unfavourable conditions for tribal children for education. They also advocated for residential schooling to tide over the situation (particularly the situation that arises out of migrations of tribals for wage employment). Similarly, some studies on migration and its impact on education also noted how residential education and N.G.O support had given positive results (Smita, 2008) towards retaining children in schools when the parents migrate temporarily. Since the dropout rate continues to be high in spite of many efforts by the government, it is strongly felt that there is a need for a large scale community-based survey to identify the multiple factors leading to dropout in the current socio-cultural environments of schools and the relative significance of them in different regions and among different communities<sup>1</sup>.

#### THE NATURE OF THE STUDY

A study on the school dropouts with a community-based sample in the tribal communities in Adilabad district of Telangana state has been conceived to address the above-stated issue. A total of 1110 dropouts among children in the school-going

age<sup>2</sup> were interviewed since April 2018. These interviews focussed on ascertaining the reasons for dropout of the children, besides an attempt to identify the schools that contributed to high dropout. Some of the major findings of this study are discussed here.

#### MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

##### *Tribal communities and the Mandals<sup>3</sup> covered: Scope and Outreach*

The study sample covered the major tribal communities like Gond, Kolam, and Lambada besides the other smaller communities in terms of their population size in the district, like Naikpod, Andh and others. The respondents were approached in nine mandals, namely Bazarhatnoor, Bela, Bheempur, Gadigudu, Gudihathnoor, Indravelly, Narnoor and Neridikonda. These mandals were selected as the proportion of the tribal population is high. It was expected that a high proportion of tribal population in these districts will help achieving the sample size in the given time schedule<sup>4</sup>. A total of 83 villages in these nine mandals were visited and the children were identified with the help of local government functionaries like local school teachers, Anganwadi workers, ASHA etc., along with the village elders. The sample covered in different villages depended on the total number of dropouts in that village as well as the children available for the interviews on the days of fieldwork by the investigators. Thus a highest sample of 246 was obtained from Narnoor mandal, followed by Utnoor with 205. The sample was comparatively low in case of Bazarhatnoor, Bheempur and Gudihathnoor with 48, 62 and 65, respectively.

Of the total children interviewed, the number of boys was 747 and the girls were 363. Many girls who dropped out were not available or did not give consent for interviews particularly in the villages falling in the mandals of Bazarhatnoor, Bheempur and Neridikonda. The percentage of girls varied between 22% and 43% in different mandals. In the final sample, those belonging to Gond community accounted for 63 per cent. This is expected because Gond community is numerically dominant in the district<sup>5</sup>. Similarly, the other two communities namely Lambada and Kolam too accounted for significant percent in the sample owing to their population size. The sample of Lambada

was slightly less compared to their size in the district perhaps owing to the relatively less number of dropouts and also because of their population size in the selected Mandals. The distribution of the respondents by communities is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of sample respondents by tribe.

Tribe	No.	%
Gond	697	62.8
Kolam	166	15
Lambada	137	12.3
Naikpod	37	3.3
Andh	47	4.2
Others	26	2.4
Total	1110	100

Table 2. Distribution of sample respondents by their current age.

Age (in completed years)	No.	%	Age (in completed years)	No.	%
Six	12	1.08	Twelve	127	11.4
Seven	33	2.97	Thirteen	114	10.3
Eight	32	2.88	Fourteen	173	15.6
Nine	29	2.61	Fifteen	460	41.4
Ten	73	6.58	Total	1110	100
Eleven	57	5.14			

In Table 2, the distribution of sample respondents by their current age is given. As can be seen, the children whose age was reported 15 years comprised about 40%. This could be slightly because of errors in recording the age of the children. Some of these children may be fourteen or even /younger, but the reported age was considered<sup>1</sup>. The higher proportion of boys and girls in the age group of 13-15 years is expected as the grown-ups dropout more than the children in the younger age group.

#### *Schools from where the children dropped out*

Tribal children by and large study in government managed schools of different kinds. The most easily accessed institutions are the MPP/ZPP schools<sup>1</sup> or the primary schools under the management of Tribal Welfare Department as these are generally located within their habitations. However, the children may not have facilities for education beyond V grade in these Government Primary (G.P) schools and hence they move out to other schools for higher education. The choice is then frequently an Ashram school that is not very far. Ashram schools may also have primary sections and in that case some tribal parents prefer to

admit the younger children in an Ashram school located nearby to their habitation if their elder siblings are studying higher grades in the same school. The choice for other residential schools, Gurukulams and Kasturba Balika Vidyalayas (for girls), model schools and residential schools under the control of Tribal Welfare Department of the government is also picking up in recent years, though it is influenced by many factors. Some children are seeking admission in private schools under the arrangement of sponsorship by the Tribal Welfare Department of the State Government. Thus, it will be of great importance to know the schools from where the tribal children dropped out. In Table 3, the distribution of respondents by school last studied is given.

Table 3. Distribution of respondents by school last studied.

Type	No.	%
Ashram	646	58.2
Residential	119	10.7
Gurukulam	24	2.16
Others	321	28.9
Total	1110	100

Table 3 above shows that 58.20% of the respondents are from Ashram schools under the management of tribal welfare. The ashram schools have greater proportion of tribal children and also they have primary sections. Dropout of many children after their primary education or immediately after middle school generally by the tribal children results in greater contribution of ashram schools to the pool of dropouts.

The enrolment of tribal boys and girls for the year 2017-18 in the nine mandals where the study has been undertaken reveals that a majority of the tribal boys and girls are admitted to the Ashram schools, though their number is small compared to the Mandal Parishad (MP) or Zilla Parishad (ZP) schools. While in the 339 MP/ZP Schools, a total of 8069 children are enrolled with an average strength of 23.8 per school (a total of 11900 children are in the 33 Ashram school with an average strength of 360 per school). That means the children in the Ashram schools account for 39.58% for the total tribal children in all the schools. The children in the Government TW Primary schools constitute another 17.49% (Table 4).

The MP/ZP schools, under the control of the Department of School Education more directly, too

contribute to the pool of dropouts substantially. The dropout of the children at an elementary level of education in these schools is difficult to discover as the teachers of the schools do not remove the names

of the children of the local villages even when they are absent for a long period. At the same time, the parents (as well as children) also do not accept openly that the children have 'totally' dropped out from the school.

Table 4. Distribution of schools by enrolment of tribal boys and girls in the nine selected Mandals in the year 2017-18.

Type of School	Number	Boys	Girls	Total
Govt. T.W Primary Schools	342	2620	2640	5260
MPP_ZPP Schools	339	4154	3915	8069
T.W Ashram Schools	33	6531	5369	11900
KGBV_ Mini Gurukulam_ Society Schools	16	593	1537	2130
Others	44	1687	1020	2707
Total		15585	14481	30066

A total of 321 dropouts interviewed in the survey reported to have last attended schools other than Ashram school/Residential school/Gurukulam. About 70% -80% of them actually belonged to MP/ZP Schools and the others went to private schools for their education under sponsorship scheme or on their own funds. Among the dropouts from GP schools,

majority withdrew just after 2-3 years of schooling and a few after five years of schooling. Those who went to other schools, probably after their primary education in a public school (about 50%) dropped out after two years of schooling in such schools, i.e. before reaching 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Many others in that category dropped before completing 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

Table 5. Type of school and age at which the children dropped out.

Age group (in years)	Ashram		Residential		Gurukulam		Others		Total	
	N0	%	N0	%	N0	%	N0	%	N0	%
6 to 7	25	3.87	11	9.24	9	37.5	66	20.56	111	10
Row %	22.52		9.91		8.11		59.46		100	
8 to 10	188	29.1	35	29.41	6	25	106	33.02	335	30.18
Row %	56.12		10.45		1.79		31.64		100	
11 to 12	190	29.4	35	29.41	5	20.83	67	20.87	297	26.76
Row %	63.97		11.78		1.68		22.56		100	
13 to 15	243	37.6	38	31.93	4	16.67	82	25.55	367	33.06
Row %	66.21		10.35		1.09		22.34		100	
Total	646	100	119	100	24	100	321	100	1110	100
	58.2		10.72		2.16		28.92		100	

The row percentages in Table 5 do subscribe to the above trend. 111 of the respondents out of 1110 children contacted dropped out when they were 6-7 years old. This means that they had only 1-2 years of schooling (unless they were admitted at an underage). Out of this 111, about 60% belonged to the category of 'other' schools<sup>1</sup>. The children who were admitted to Ashram school at a younger age too seem to be having difficulty to carry on. Mostly the children of G.P. schools prefer to shift to an Ashram school or other residential school after their primary education. However, if they are admitted while younger for their primary education in an ashram school, they have difficulty of different kinds. About 32% of Ashram school dropouts in the sample reported to have discontinued their schooling before reaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade (i.e. when their age was lesser than 10 years).

The children of different mandals perhaps have differential access to Ashram schools and others. In Utanoor mandal, 22.9% of the respondents belonged to residential schools. In Narnoor mandal which also has as much sample as Utanoor in the study, the children who reported to have dropped out of residential schools accounted for only 6.9%. On the other hand, many of the dropouts in this mandal belonged to 'other' schools which included the G.P. schools. Tribal children of Utanoor mandal preferred private schools and 29.3% of children who dropped out in this mandal belonged to the private schools and many of them dropped out after reaching IX-X grades.

Table 6 portrays the number of schools under different management categories. The Govt. TW Primary schools are the highest.

Table 6. Number of schools under different managements in the selected Mandals.

	Bhempur	Bela	Bazarhatnoor	Gadiguda	Gudihathnoor	Indravelly	Narnoor	Neredikonda	Utnoor
Govt. TW	17	32	26	50	29	47	34	27	80
Primary schools									
MPP_ZPP	17	50	33	23	29	43	34	44	66
TW Ashram School	1	3	3	3	2	4	6	3	8
KGBV_	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Society_ Gurukulam									
Others	1	3	2	0	5	7	4	4	18
Total	36	90	66	78	72	83	80	80	174

Distribution of dropouts by type of school and mandal shows that the proportion of children dropping out from residential school or Gurukulams is negligible in case of Bazarhatnoor, Bela, Bheempur, Indravelly and Narnoor (Table 7). This is largely because children of these mandals

either go to the Ashram schools or G.P schools. The contribution of GP schools to dropout is particularly more in case of Bheempur and Narnoor mandals. In case of Indravelly, and Gadiguda the contribution to dropout appears to be more from the Ashram schools.

Table 7. Distribution of dropouts by select mandals and school type.

Mandal	Ashram		Residential		Gurukulam		Others		Total	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Utnoor	85	41.4	47	22.9	13	6.3	60	29.3	205	100
Bazarhatnoor	34	70.8	1	2	0	0	13	27.1	48	100
Bela	71	73.2	1	1	1	1	24	24.7	97	100
Bheempur	31	50	2	3.2	0	0	29	46.8	62	100
Gadiguda	85	63.9	21	15.7	9	6.7	18	13.5	133	100
Gudihathnoor	32	49.2	10	15.3	1	1.5	22	33.8	65	100
Indravelly	134	79.7	8	4.7	0	0	26	15.5	168	100
Narnoor	118	47.9	17	6.9	0	0	111	45.1	246	100
Neridikonda	46	61.3	11	14.6	0	0	18	24	75	100
Others	10	90.9	1	9	0	0	0	0	11	100
Total	646	58.2	119	10.7	24	2.1	321	28.9	1110	100

This study shows that about one-fifth of the children dropped out after completing five years of schooling. Those who dropped out after completion of 8-9 years of schooling comprised another one-fourth of the total respondents (Table 8).

Table 8. Distribution of respondents by number of years of schooling completed

Years	No.	%
One	41	3.69
Two	72	6.49
Three	83	7.48
Four	109	9.82
Five	216	19.46
Six	139	12.52
Seven	140	12.61
Eight	135	12.16
Nine	175	15.77
Total	1110	100

The data separated from different tribal communities showed some interesting findings (Table 9). As many Lambada children as the Kolam, reported having dropped out during the age 6-10 years and in both the cases they accounted for about 50%. On the

other hand, the dropout for this age group among the Gonds is 39.7% and for the other tribes it is only 18.2%. This gap between Lambada and Gond is reduced when the age group of 6-12 years is considered and it is widened between Lambada and Kolam for that age group. That means that higher percentage of Lambada children drop out before 10 years of age than Gonds. But if the Lambada children cross this hurdle, many will go to the higher grades (IX-X) as their dropout is lesser in the age group of 11-12 years, (VI-VII grades). On the other hands, the Kolam children continue to consistently dropout in more numbers at all grades. For Gond children, the hurdles are more at the age of 12-13 years. Thus, the more or less same percentage of children remain among the Gonds and Lambada by the time they reach X grade. While only about 18% of Kolam children reach the grades of VIII and above, about 57.7% of children of tribal communities belonging to Naikpod, Andh, Pradhan and other smaller sections in the district seem to be reaching such higher grades. These trends perhaps also need to be correlated with gender differences in different tribes. The dropout is

more consistent (I to IX grade) for Kolam. More girls than boys drop out during the stages of I-VIII in case of Gond and Lambada. The dropout of girls is more regular in case of other tribes. The age at menarche for girls being 12 years to 14 years, this data thus indicates

that this physiological change may be producing certain stress for girls of Gond and Lambada community (relatively more for girls of Lambada community) in view of their upbringing and social expectations which may perhaps be causing their dropout at that age.

Table 9: Distribution of dropouts by community and age at which dropped out.

Age (in years)	Gond		Kolam		Lambada		Others		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Six	19	2.73	9	5.42	14	10.2	4	3.64	46
Seven	37	5.31	15	9.04	11	8.0	2	1.82	65
Eight	52	7.46	16	9.64	16	11.7	6	5.45	90
Nine	67	9.61	20	12.05	13	9.5	2	1.82	102
Ten	102	14.6	23	13.86	12	8.8	6	5.45	143
Eleven	89	12.8	30	18.07	14	10.2	13	11.82	146
Twelve	96	13.8	24	14.46	17	12.4	14	12.73	151
Thirteen	74	10.6	10	6.02	9	6.6	19	17.27	112
Fourteen	116	16.6	19	11.45	30	21.9	37	33.64	202
Fifteen	45	6.46	0	0.00	1	0.7	7	6.36	53
Total	697	100	166	100.00	137	100.0	110	100.00	1110

*Reasons for dropout: personal/family related factors*

Studies on tribal education have often identified the factors leading to dropout under the categories like: a) student-related; 2) school-related; and 3) the incentives and facilities related. Data obtained on these three categories of factors are collected and analysed. In this study the children were asked if their decision to drop out was primarily due to: a) economic needs of the family; b) their responsibility to look after their siblings; c) any serious health problem suffered by them; d) any illness to any of their family members, and e) death of any family member. These were identified to be characteristically different from some other 'home' related factors (discussed subsequently below). The death of family members or illness to self or to family members resulted in some unanticipated social circumstances and psychological environment leading to some 'hasty' decision to drop out from the school. Further, these situations resulted in crisis with a bearing on the economic needs of family and new social responsibilities to the family members. Thus 'economic needs' and 'sibling responsibilities' may be independent of these (death and illness) factors at some times and at other times an outcome of them.

Health issues of children should attract the attention of the tribal welfare functionaries in order to partly address the dropout menace. The data suggests

dropout of about 20% of children on account of some illness to them (Table 10). Similarly, the morbidity or mortality of family members too is causing the dropout of significant number of tribal children. The interviews revealed that the dropout of boys is related more often to the death of family members while the dropout of the girls is mostly related to some chronic illness of close kin. The significance of sibling responsibility (i.e. the boys and girls dropping out for taking care of their younger siblings) has reduced in tribal societies. This was cited largely by children of single parents or when the mother is seriously ill. The economic needs of family forcing the children to dropout is still one important reason, but again this is in case of families where labour supply is affected due to health problems or when the family size is reduced due to some reason.

Table 10. Reasons for dropout – student related.

	Sibling responsibility	Health Problem (self)	Home sick
YES	67	200	121
%	6.04	18.02	10.9
No response	69	62	75
No	974	848	914
	1110	1110	1110

The dropout of children on account of additional economic demands on the family is almost never the case. The children and their families felt that the Government schemes in vogue do not force them to incur expenses on their wards' education in any substantial way. However, the cases of children leaving the school by being 'homesick' are often

reported. The tribal parents admit the younger children in a school outside their village, mostly if their older siblings are already studying in that school. Thus, in such case the sibling responsibility by the older children is carried out in the school rather than at their home. If the child has no older sibling studying in that school, they are still comfortable even if his/her parallel or cross-cousin is studying in the same school. These arrangements help overcome the problem of ‘homesickness’ of the younger children during their initial days of schooling. However, when the older siblings/kin to whom they are attached in the school dropout for some reason or other, then these younger ones too tend to withdraw along with them due to ‘suffering’ with some ‘homesickness’.

Though not very significant numbers, children

also cited that they dropped out as their family member (s) could not cope with their absence at home. The breakdown of joint and extended families in tribal communities is perhaps leading to stronger bondage between the parents and children living in nuclear families. This bond is naturally leading to greater anxiety and concern for their children living separately at that young age. This concern, as the detailed interviews reveal, lead to psychological disorders for parents, particularly for mothers due to ‘bad dreams’. These morbid conditions are generally explained by the tribals in terms of supernatural agents or non-human agents. Such states of ‘folk illnesses’/ ‘culture-bound syndromes’ will finally lead to getting the children back to home and discontinuing their studies (Table 11).

Table 11. Reasons for dropout – family related

	Family members could not cope my absence	Could not cope with expenses	Health problem of family member	Economic needs of family	Death of family member	No academic support at home
YES	62	21	69	211	76	29
%	5.59	1.89	6.22	19.01	6.85	2.61
No response	169	82	84	82	0	209
No	879	1007	957	817	1034	872
Total	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110	1110

*Current engagement of the school dropouts*

The economic value of the children is one strong argument in the explanation of dropout of the tribal children from school earlier and even today (Sujata, '87). One may not with certainty say today that children largely drop out due to economic needs of family. But it is certainly true that many children who dropout are engaged in some economic activity or other, supplementing their family incomes. Thus, the cause of dropout could be something and the consequence of withdrawing from school could be surely engagement in some economic activity due to the social pressure for the same. Given this, it may not be true that the children are always satisfied with their present engagement in farm or other work. In the current study, this assumption was tested by collecting data on the current engagement of children.

Very interestingly, almost one-third of the children who dropped out stated that they are not engaged in work that is of any significance to their families (Table 12). Of course this is expected in case of children who are in the age group of 6-10 years since they are too young. The data segregated by age groups shows

that 64.8% of the children in 6-10 years do not have any specific engagements. Among the others, many and mostly the girls said that they do involve in domestic work, including the care of their younger siblings. As many as 24.27% of children aged above ten years too confessed that they neither participate in any economic activity on a regular basis nor do shoulder any other family responsibility.

Table 12: Distribution of respondents by their current engagement.

Current engagement	Yes	%
Work in family farm	311	28.02
Work as wage labour	146	13.15
Self employed	28	2.52
Domestic work	331	29.82
No special work	342	30.81

The decision to drop out by the children seems to be not an irreversible choice. Many children may have dropped out in view of some intensive negative experience for a few days and in the absence of appropriate counselling at that time. Many of them also may have felt that they failed to appropriately evaluate the social situations that they would face after their return to native place and on whether such

social circumstances will give them any satisfaction. Thus, it is interesting to know what proportion of children express regret for their decision to drop out and also whether they are willing to go back to school in case of such an opportunity now.

Data analyzed for children in the age group 6-10 years revealed that a large percentage (42.5) of them do repent for their decision of leaving school. Similarly, it is found that a little more than one-third of dropouts currently aged above 10 years also expressed to be regretting their decision to leave. It is these children who need some counselling to bring them back to school as they feel embarrassed to go back to the school where their classmates were in higher grades. More than that, they do exhibit a sense of fear to face the teachers and staff in the school where they last studied. At the same time, they may not be very willing to change the school and face a totally new social situation making them uncomfortable.

*Reasons for dropout: School related factors*

Of late, the educational research among the marginalized communities focussed on school-related factors for the educational failure of the children. The focus of the research is how far the school cultures are congruent with the cultures of the communities to which the children belong to. The expectations of the school- both academic expectations and expectations in regard to adherence to school norms governing discipline, relationships, organization of activities, student participation etc., are studied for their effect on the success or failure of the children in school (Sharma, 2018). Hence some of these aspects are included in this study.

The medium of instruction has been one of the central issues in the discourses relating to tribal education in India since the last 60 years. The support for promoting tribal languages as medium of instruction in tribal areas is still blooming. This subject also revolves around two important issues: a) how long the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction in schools in the tribal area? And b) how do we achieve the transition from tribal language to regional language? The governments have taken

landmark decisions in this regard at different point of time, like reserving all the positions of teachers for tribals in the tribal areas, starting of bridge courses for transition to regional languages etc. The operational problems and the lukewarm efforts in this regard are also, however pointed out. The party in power today in the state of Telangana promised many reforms in the field of education. The commitment to introduce English as a medium of instruction in tribal schools in phases is one that needs an examination in the present context. It is held that there is both need and demand for this. However, at the same time, the appropriate time to switch over to English medium and the preparation required for this switch over is still a matter of careful examination.

In Adilabad district of Telangana, all the major tribal communities have their own dialects. Language is recognized as a very important identity marker for these communities and that the efforts are made by the community leaders to promote this identity is discernible. In this study, a sizeable number of respondents identified the 'language problem' as the important reason for their withdrawal from school. Interestingly data segregated for the three major tribes in this regard revealed that children belonging to Gond and Kolam communities have this problem more than the children of Lambada community (15% and 8.5%, respectively). How far is this related to distribution of teachers by social background of teachers in the schools is however beyond the scope of the study.

The demand of the school to 'perform' particularly when the children reach higher grades is one of the reasons for dropout. The schools perhaps let the children free in the lower grades and fail in socializing them to the satisfactory performance of their roles when they reach the higher grades and at the same time practice systems that demand more from the children at higher grades. The home environment of tribal children is very different in view of lowly educated members in families and does not help equipping them for meeting the demands of academic expectations in school as they grow. These pave the way for the operation of push and pull factors for the withdrawal of tribal students.



Table 13. Reasons for dropout – school related.

	Could not cope with school demands	No interest in studies	Language problem	Classmates not supportive
YES	246	520	156	41
%	22.16	46.85	14.05	3.69
No response	75	87	62	12
NO	789	503	892	1057
	1110	1110	1110	1110

What needs to be noted importantly is that 46.85% of children reported that they dropped out because they have no interest in studies (Table 13). This obviously is a derivative; transpiring from the synthesis of many factors. The curriculum, the methods of teaching and the medium of instruction contribute significantly to this. The variation in regard to these three is not so much across the schools. Thus, probably only the highly self-motivated and those who have some role models in their families remain in the schools for a longer time than the others.

It is also true that the children develop some

motivation and interest if they take admission in the schools which they prefer for some reason or the other. It is enquired in this study, whether the children could take admission in their preferred schools or not. It is found that about 40% of the children could not take admission in the schools that they preferred. Out of them 60% again took admission in the school from where they dropped out of pressure from their parents and another 14% on the pressure from the teachers. It is only just about 7% could not take admission due to non-grant of admission in their desired schools. (Figure 1)

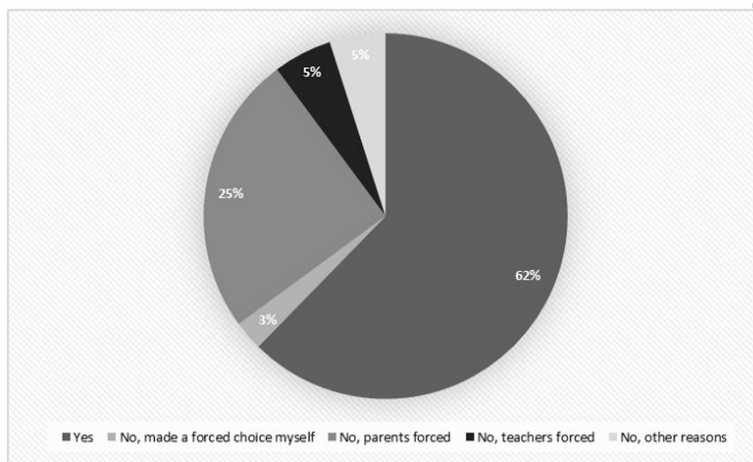


Figure 1. Did the children take admission in the schools of their choice?

*Reasons for dropout – Incentives and facilities*

The tribal welfare department approaches the education of tribal children from the perspective of welfare measures and so strives to provide various types of incentives to the children besides improving facilities to the institutions where they study. Often these incentives given are put to public scrutiny, and it is held that the dropout of the children is because of the failure of the government machinery to provide sufficient and good quality materials and/or facilities. In the present study, very negligible numbers of children

complained about the sufficiency of food in the boarding schools where they were studying, though about 9.76% thought that the quality of food was so bad that they had to drop out of the school on account of that (Table 14). There was similarly some concern about health care services in school as well. Around 7% of the children mentioned that they had to dropout due to inadequate health care. Many of those who mentioned this also stated that the water and food in the residential schools where they studied did not suit them. However, this study reveals that by and large,

the children did not have great issue with other supplies for hygiene, books, stationery etc., and also with regard to facilities in school and accommodation in the

dormitories. This could be due to low level of standards of expectations rather than due to the availability of such facilities at the optimum or very satisfactory level.

Table 14. Reasons for dropout – school related.

	Inadequate facilities in school	Poor accommodation	Water/ food did not suit	Food not sufficient	Food quality not good	No health care	Supplies not sufficient	Any other
YES	39	26	62	13	77	56	28	53
%	4.9	3.3	7.9	1.7	9.8	7.1	3.6	6.7
No response	29	10	14	27	3	26	34	62
NO	721	753	713	749	709	707	727	674
	789	789	789	789	789	789	789	789

### SUMMARY

The distribution of tribal boys and girls amongst different types of schools reveals that a majority of them are enrolled in the Ashram schools, though the number of these schools is still limited in the district. The predominance of children in Ashram schools and a higher proportion of dropout of children in the higher grades leads to greater share of Ashram schools to the pool of dropouts. The Tribal Welfare department needs to be credited for the effective organization and supervision in regard to incentives and dining facilities in schools. This is evident because very few children raised the same issues in their interviews on reasons for dropout. The primary reasons for dropout in case of the majority of the children are school-related. The 'unexciting school', the restraints imposed on children when they reach higher grades without socializing them for such discipline and the language difficulties are very significant factors for dropout. The demands to take up economic responsibility of the family primarily due to death or illness to family members/parent(s) too is an important cause for dropout of some significant number of tribal children. Generally, there is no pressure from family on children for contribution to family income directly or indirectly in the absence of any crisis in the family.

The schooling decisions of tribal boys and girls are largely taken by the children themselves and are chiefly influenced by their peers. The peer influence is resilient in case of girls than boys when it comes to taking the decision of withdrawal from school. The consideration to leave school often comes when the children need to transit from one school to another school for any reason including for higher education. Withdrawal of membership from one social group and the entry into a new social group at the time of transition is an issue for tribal children as their

membership in different social groups is primarily based on kinship, village and tribal affiliations. In any case, it is also true that the decisions of leaving school are considered as momentary and hasty by many. Therefore it is also seen that many children also regret their decision to give up schooling particularly after their social experiences in the village as 'truants'<sup>1</sup>.

### DISCUSSION

The education of tribal children has remained as an instigating research issue for a number of years in India. This is partly because, as some of the problems were identified and solutions were given a new set of problems appeared from time to time. The initial problem was achieving physical access. Subsequently, the economic value of children and the social responsibility of tribal children in regard to taking care of their younger siblings has also been projected as one of the major reasons. Then the psychological variables like aspirations, motivation levels etc. of tribal parents as well as children got the pre-eminence. The research paved the way for reforms in the administration of school education. Further, the approach of welfare was strengthened from time to time.

The cultural deficit explanations provided for the educational failures of minority children in the U.S, the U.K and elsewhere were found suitable to explain the low educational attainments of tribals. Further, as it happened outside India, though the discourse that tribal children did not achieve because they did not experience a cognitively stimulating environment<sup>2</sup> too found some supporters, but it did not receive much attention perhaps because the cultural deficit explanation enabled educators to place the responsibility for school failure outside the school. (Sharma, '92).

The discourses relating to the discontinuity between school and culture of the children and on developing viable teaching-learning environments are popular in educational anthropology under (a) culturally appropriate (Au and Jordan, '81); (b) culturally congruent (Mohatt and Erickson, '81); (c) mitigating cultural discontinuity (Macias, '87); (d) culturally responsive (Cazden and Legget, '81; Erickson and Mohatt, '82); and (e) culturally compatible (Jordan, '85; Vogt *et al.*, '87) and culturally relevant pedagogy (coined by Gloria Ladson-Billings in '92). Somehow these discourses have not been given due attention by the Indian scholars and administrators in regard to tribal education. The current study highlights that the high dropout of tribal boys and girls is primarily due to 'disinteresting education' image shared by tribal children. So the educational processes and structures, especially those related to teaching or pedagogy require urgent attention. School cultures of residential schools in the tribal areas need culturally sensitive pedagogy together with the culturally sensitive organization of co-curricular activity, boarding and lodging and health care.

The wholesome welfare approach to the education of tribal boys and girls has its own set of limitations. The training of teachers needs appropriate modifications for innovativeness, positive attitudes, and skills in counselling. A more holistic approach is required with greater coordination in the policy and programmes of the department of school education and the department of tribal welfare.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The specific recommendations that emerge from this study are:

- Need for promotion of culturally sensitive and innovative pedagogic practices;
- Need for evolving appropriate participatory socialization strategies for preparing the children to easily adapt to the school norms in regard to study hours, assignments and other academic demands when they reach the higher grades.
- Periodic and regular counselling to the parents and kin of the children enrolled in

school on the safety and health care of children.

- Counselling to the girls approaching menarche and provision of health care to them.
- Development of positive attitudes among the children by public recognition of their talents and achievements in the curricular and co-curricular activities.
- Need to recognize the achievements of the alumni of the schools in school functions so as to help identify role models and gain confidence by the children.
- Promote school cultures that are inclusive in terms of celebration of tribal festivals, games, foods, tribal nomenclatures that promote pride and dignity to tribals and so result in participation and ownership.

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#### NOTES

1. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), Government of Telangana has awarded a research project to the author in the year 2018. This paper is based on the findings in one of the districts in Telangana. Hence, the author gratefully acknowledges the support of the SSA,

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2. For the purpose of this study the school-going age is considered as 6-15 years, keeping in view the problems of over-aged children in tribal schools and also the difficulty of ascertaining the exact age of the children in tribal areas.
3. 'Mandals' are administrative units below the level of districts in the state of Telangana.
4. The Mandals which stood in the first 10 positions in regard to the proportion of tribal population to the general population were selected for the study. Further, in the selected mandal, villages which had a minimum of 500 populations and in which the ST population is 50% or more were selected.
5. Gonds constituted about 46% in the undivided Adilabad district.
6. Sometimes the age was verified to be less, but the age recorded in the Adhaar card was more. In such discrepancy, the age recorded in the Adhar card was considered for the sake of uniformity.
7. Schools under Mandal Praja Parishad/Zilla Praja Parishad
8. Other schools here refer to schools other than Ashram schools, Government Residential schools and Gurukulams.
9. They are said to be 'poramboku'/'gali ki tirigetodu'
10. Studies pointed out 'deficiencies in schools in terms of teacher inadequacies like teacher absenteeism, negative attitudes of teachers, medium of instruction, content of education, etc.

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