

**Residual Illiteracy in a Coastal Village:
Poovar village of Thiruvananthapuram district**

M. K. George, Domi J

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Residual Illiteracy in a Coastal Village: Poovar village of Thiruvananthapuram district

M. K. George, Domi J*

Introduction

The State of Kerala hailed by economists and social scientists as a unique example in development, because of its successful performance in the social sectors, particularly health, education, and social welfare, despite its poor per capita domestic income, was declared a totally literate State in 1991. However, this achievement cannot really be claimed in the case of three major categories of the backward sections of the State, i.e., the tribesfolk, the marine fish workers, and the floating Tamil population. Of these, the fisherfolk are a community that contributes significantly to the economic output and nutrition of the people of Kerala. Fisheries form the main source of income for about three percent of the population and contribute to two percent of the net State domestic product (Department of Fisheries, 1990).

The fisherfolk population was 10.27 lakh according to 1998-'99 estimates. The total number of marine fisherfolk is estimated to be 7.97 lakh (Directorate of Fisheries, 1999). The total fisherfolk comprised 1,30,504 persons in 1990, of which 1,00,070 were marine fisherfolk (Directorate of Fisheries, 1990).

There are 222 marine fishing villages (a village every 2.25 km) and 111 inland fishing villages in the State. The villages of marine fishermen spread all along the coast vary among themselves on several counts, mainly religious composition. In general, households of the same religion or community live together. Only a few villages have mixed populations. Muslims predominate the marine fishing villages of the northern districts of Kannur, Kozhikode, and Malappuram, while Christians and Hindus dominate in the southern districts.

The socio-economic conditions of the fisherfolk in Kerala are one of the most backward in India. Seventy percent of their incomes go for food. Yet, they cannot afford sufficient calories for all the members of their households. Fishing being a seasonal activity, they have to look for subsidiary jobs, which are not always forthcoming. The Kerala fisherfolk have the lowest income among the fisherfolk of the world (Tables 1.1).

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Table 1.1 Percentage Distribution of Fisherfolk Households according to Annual Income

Districts	Less than 1000	1000-3000	3000-5000	5000-7000	7000-10000	10000-20000	(Rs)
Trivandrum	7.50	52.60	28.78	7.61	2.83	0.68	
Kollam	0.88	30.83	36.10	18.38	9.59	4.25	
Pathanamthitta	-	14.61	55.71	21.46	8.22	-	
Alappuzha	4.11	43.05	34.12	12.53	5.06	1.33	
Kottayam	1.95	41.95	34.35	15.29	6.08	0.38	
Ernakulam	0.38	35.85	40.07	15.75	6.22	1.73	
Thrissur	7.37	41.95	27.21	9.85	10.46	3.16	
Palakkad	1.40	17.74	16.37	8.87	37.20	18.45	
Malappuram	0.52	12.05	38.66	20.25	16.46	12.06	
Kozhikode	5.38	47.70	26.90	11.39	5.83	2.80	
Wayanad	12.90	16.94	13.71	10.48	31.45	14.52	
Kannur	4.00	32.30	30.59	17.27	9.55	6.29	
Kasargod	2.35	63.90	26.23	5.27	0.94	1.31	
Total	3.78	40.31	32.52	13.07	7.19	3.13	

Table 1.2 Household Expenditure of Fisherfolk

Expenditure Class	Percentage of Houses in the Class
Below Rs 500	0.27
Rs 500-1000	2.52
Rs 1000-1500	5.84
Rs 1500-2000	9.19
Rs 2000-2500	10.93
Rs 2500-5000	49.85
Rs 5000-10000	17.94
Rs 10000-15000	2.56
Rs 15000-20000	0.56
Greater than or equal to Rs 20000.	0.34
Total	100.00

Source: Department of Fisheries, 1990

Indebtedness, poor housing, and low quality of life are characteristics of the fisherfolk, in stark contrast to the high quality of life achieved by the State as a whole. Lack of appropriate entertainment, addiction to alcohol, and utter subservience to religious leadership and practices, still mark the life of the majority, though substantial changes are being brought about by factors like Gulf emigration, increasing political mobilisation particularly by the leftist parties, intervention by NGOs such as trade unions and finally rising levels of education. The revealing fact, however, is that the fisherfolk community has remained at the margins of society,

geographically, economically, socio-culturally, and politically (John Kurien and T. Achari, 1988).

The problem and its significance

The marginalisation of the fisherfolk is a problem that may be looked at from two perspectives: One, it challenges the credibility of the claim of Kerala being a 'model of development'; second, in terms of justice, and the goal of an egalitarian society, the marginalisation of a substantial number of persons, becomes unacceptable to the democratic polity in which we function. From an academic and activist perspective, it will be an interesting inquiry into the factors that have contributed to the perpetual marginalisation of this community.

In the democratic polity that we live and grow, education is considered a basic right of every individual. Education is seen as one of the primary means of development. The path towards our goal of egalitarianism is necessarily through equipping the backward sections with knowledge and skills. The present study is addressed to the problem of residual illiteracy among marine fish workers.

The study is significant for three reasons: First, it will provide an understanding of the process of impoverishment and marginalisation taking place, in the context of overall development. Second, it will provide an intervention strategy capable of replication in comparable contexts. Third, the findings will help planning for equitable development. The study was conducted in Poovar, a predominantly fishing and typical coastal village in Thiruvananthapuram district.

Objectives

The overall objective of the study is assessment of the present level of formal education in Poovar, a predominantly fishing village, and the formulation of a strategy for removing residual illiteracy. Reasons for educational backwardness would also be enquired into.

It appears that low levels of politicisation of the community and exploitative mechanisms at work in the fishing sector are the major reasons underlying educational backwardness of fish workers. It should be possible to make a breakthrough in the drive to literacy among them through a culture-specific approach.

Methodology

In order to assess the social and educational status of each household in the study area, a census survey was conducted, through trained investigators using a pre-tested schedule. Enumerators were selected from among the educated youth of the fisherfolk in the study area.

Sources of data

Besides the data collected through the household survey, information was gathered through

discussions with NGO representatives, church leaders, social activists, and youth leaders. Secondary data were collected from research centres, *panchayat* office, and published sources.

Definitions

Fish workers

International Conference of Fish workers and their Supports (I.C.F.W.S.) held at Rome in 1984 defined fish workers as “children, women, and men engaged as crew members, small fishers, processing workers and settlers.” The term excludes all those involved in the fish economy solely for income from profit or rent, by virtue of ownership of capital alone or involvement in arbitrage or speculation.

Fishing community or fisherfolk

“Fishermen community or fishing community means the society of those who are part of the ancestry and culture of fishing” (Thadeus P, 1999). Hence, fishing community includes families/ individuals not actively involved in fishing but belong to the castes considered to be following fishing as traditional occupation. The term excludes families/individuals who practise fishing but do not belong to the castes considered to be following fishing as traditional occupation. Hence, the membership is not voluntary and individual but necessarily compulsory and familial. Fishing community signifies a social rather than an occupational group.

Educational backwardness of the study population is assessed on the basis of its educational status in comparison with that of the general population of the State, at the different educational levels – primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Residual illiteracy is defined as illiteracy, which remains even after the total literacy campaign and declaration of the State as totally literate.

Variables of the study

The survey sought to gather data on:

- (i) Family variables;
- (ii) Home conditions;
- (iii) Religion;
- (iv) Sex;
- (v) Monthly family income;
- (vi) Literacy status;
- (vii) Enrolment status;
- (viii) Dropouts;
- (ix) Educational facilities and learning aids at home;
- (x) Educational problems of children and the elderly; and
- (xi) Occupational details.

Limitations of the study

- (i) A one-time household survey was found insufficient to capture all the complex factors of educational backwardness;
- (ii) There exists hardly any written history of the fishermen community. Lack of reliable historical evidence is a major lacuna for any serious study on this topic;
- (iii) Respondents hold back information in the hope of getting some reward from interviewers; and
- (iv) The general apathy of adults towards formal education was a handicap.

Action programme based on the study

The study was planned as a preparatory phase of an intervention programme for removing residual illiteracy. The strategy planned was to identify three categories of illiterates: (i) Residual adult illiterates (15-45 age group), (ii) Dropouts (5-15 age group), and (iii) Persons never enrolled (5-15 age group). However, the numbers of dropouts and never-enrolled persons were found to be negligible; further, they were unwilling to get enrolled or re-enrolled. Hence, we settled for an action programme for the residual adult illiterates.

Plan of the report

After an overview of theoretical and empirical discussions on the topic in the second section, we analyse the data collected for the study in section 3. The proposals of follow up action and further study are presented in section 4. In section 5, we draw the major findings and conclusion of the study.

2. The Background

It was only 70 years ago, through the *Akhila Tiruvithamkoor Mahajana Sabha*, that the voice of the fishing community was raised in the history of Kerala for the first time. Later, organisations on the basis of occupation such as *Kerala Swathanthra Matsyathozhilali* Federation, *Dheevera Maha Sabha*, and Inland Unions of fish workers and Boat owners were formed. Much later on, political parties also formed trade unions among fish workers. “But none of them succeeded in unionising the traditional fishing communities like *Araya*, *Marakkar*, *Mukkuva*, *Valan*, etc” (Fernandez, 1999).

During this period, all lower castes, which shared similar socio-economic status such as *Vannars*, *Mannars*, *Ezhavas*, and *Kammalas*, started a process of consolidation and Sanskritisation. For example, *Vannar*, *Mannar*, and *Neriyar* castes unified themselves to form the *Vannava* group, the common name by which they are now known. Blacksmith, Carpenter, Goldsmith, and related artisan castes formed the *Viswa Brahmana* group. Stratification and hierarchy are techniques by which the caste system existed in the society. Hence, integration of castes meant a reverse process, which gave them strength to fight for their right to occupational mobility (Fernandez, 1999). In fact, the fisherfolk also shared almost entirely the same socio-economic status with these communities, but theirs was a different history.

The traditional fishermen community of *Mukkuva* is believed to have come from Ceylon (Sri Lanka). *Mukkuvas* known also *Dheeveras* or *Arayas* comprise the sub-castes of *Paravars*, *Nulayas*, and *Valans* (Fernandez, 1999).

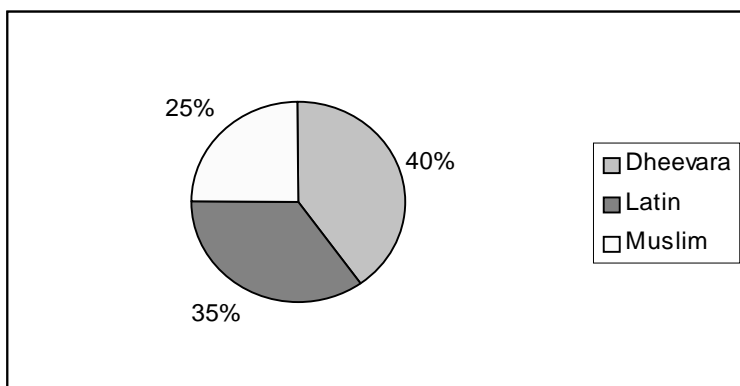
Structure of fishing community in Kerala

There are three major sections in the fishing community of Kerala: (i) *Dheevera*; (ii) Latin Catholic, and (iii) Muslim community. According to 1991 Census estimates, the fishermen population in Kerala was 9.6 lakh. According to the statistics available in the Department of Fisheries, 40 percent of the fishermen families belong to *Dheevera* (Hindu), 35 percent to Latin Catholic, and 25 percent to Muslim communities (Udayathanu, 1990).

Vernmental Organisation

Latin community fisherfolk are concentrated in south Kerala – Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Alappuzha districts. *Dheevera* community is concentrated in the districts of Kollam (Karunagappally taluk), Alappuzha (between Alappuzha and Ambalappuzha), Ernakulam, Thrissur, and Kasargod. Muslim community fisherfolk are concentrated in the coast of Malappuram, Kozhikode, Kannur, and Kasargod districts. In the case of inland fishing communities, the Latin Christian community dominates southern Kerala and the *Dheevera* community, the Central and Northern districts (Clement Lopez, 1999).

Figure 2.1 Composition of Fishing Community in Kerala



Source: Department of Fisheries, 1990

Christian fishing community

The Christian fishing community includes different caste groups ranging from forward castes to *Dalits*. These different communities belong to different socio-economic strata. They are spread over 11 dioceses of Kerala (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 Proportion of Latin Catholic Community in Kerala

	In Lakhs	Percentage
1. <i>Ezhunootty</i> and other Syrian communities	4.65	33.21
2. <i>Anjootty</i> (Fishing community)	1.85	13.21
3. <i>Munnootty</i> (Fishing community)	2.80	20
4. <i>Nadar</i>	1.15	8.21
5. <i>Dalits</i>	1.85	13.21
6. Anglo Indians	0.60	4.30
7. Others (<i>Ezhava</i> , <i>Mangloorian</i> , <i>Chakrava</i> , <i>Billava</i> , etc.)	1.00	7.14
Total	14.00	100.00

Source: Clement Lopez, 1999

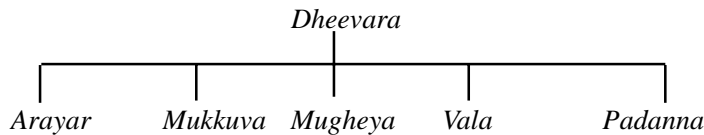
Anjootty and *Munnootty* are fishing communities. They are concentrated in Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, and Alappuzha dioceses (Clement Lopez, 1999).

Dheevera community

The Government of Kerala brought the different sub-sections of the Hindu fishing community under the name *Dheevera* in 1984. The *Dheevera Sabha* was formed in 1975.

The *Dheevera* community includes five sub-sections, which are illustrated in Fig. 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Divisions of Dheevara Community



The fishing community among Muslims is known as *Kadappurathukar* (beachmen).

Educational backwardness

Income from traditional fishing being highly seasonal and uncertain, the fishermen households find it difficult to plan their children's education.

Lack of productive resources coupled with exploitation by moneylenders and middlemen from outside the community has pushed fishermen into severe poverty and indebtedness. Owing to lack of ownership of landed property or other valuables to offer as security, they are not in a position to raise loans from regular institutional sources.

The fishing community, comprising backward caste Hindus and Latin Catholic Christians mostly converted from low caste Hindus, has always remained socially backward. They remained educationally backward also. Separated from the mainstream population socially and even geographically and living in densely populated coastal habitations, the fishing community remained socio-culturally and economically stagnant for centuries together.

In the realm of political bargaining the fishing community has failed to participate and to reap benefits. This is particularly true of the Christian and Muslim fisherfolk for whom religious identity was more important than community identity. In addition, the Catholic Church, one of the best organisational set-ups in the world, does not provide much room for its laity to emerge as socio-political leaders.

Religion plays a major role in determining people's attitude towards education. It is said that Christianity generally supports education. However, Catholicism did not entertain achievements of education and wealth. Till recently, earning of wealth and education was not considered by the Catholic Church a sign of achievement.

Occupational and sectoral factors

Traditional fishing does not provide income sufficient to maintain a high standard of living. The average earning of a traditional fisherman is only between Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,000. Lack of marketing mechanism leads to high fluctuations in the price of fish. Hence, a fish worker never gets a reasonable price for the product. When the catch is high, the price falls since the demand in the domestic markets for their catch remains inelastic.

Traditional fishing is practised in Kerala not as a collective but an individual enterprise. The number of people fishing in a canoe will be less than 10. The canoe owner, himself being a fish worker no class conflict arises between him and the other workers.

In this study, we hypothesise that while all these factors do play a role, the central factor would be the political. Freirean insight that education is ultimately a political process and hence the educational backwardness can be handled only through a political and cultural approach is upheld. In the action programme that formed the second part of this study, a literacy campaign was organised under this assumption.

Socio-economic and political factors

According to the human capital approach, inequalities in income distribution are explained by the productivity differences arising from educational status. Historical data from Kerala suggests that the nexus between economic factors and educational attainment was strong and that educational development by itself might not bring about educational equalisation in a highly structured and hierarchical society (Josephath Thomas, 1998).

Goelz (1975) examined whether there existed a direct and significant relationship between growth of education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels on the one hand and economic development as measured by per capita income on the other. He found a high and positive correlation between the two. Gopinathan Nair (1978) enquired into the influence of educational development on the course of educational, demographic, and occupational change. He found a positive relation between education and social development in Kerala.

Tharakan (1984) in his analysis on the socio-economic factors in educational development – Case of 19th Century Travancore - challenges some of the commonly held views. For him socio-economic factors were more important than the relative merits of the educational policies. He identified three factors of that period in Kerala.

- (i) Commercialisation of the economy and the resultant demand for literacy.
- (ii) Change in social structures and hence the rise of elite from the castes and communities which had not been allowed to lay claim to bureaucratic positions linked to educational qualification.
- (iii) The peculiar settlement pattern, which made it possible for a larger proportion of the people to make use of schools.

Shukla and Krishnakumar (1985) point out the need for a serious re-examination of the conventional ideas regarding the ameliorative capacity of education.

Perhaps the one thinker who made the debate on the ideological function of education a current and popular topic is Paulo Freire (Freire, Paulo, 1968). In order to release the power of education and consequently to humanise society, one needs to bank upon the ideological and critical education. Similar thoughts are echoed by Reimer, Ivan Illich, and others (Illich, Ivan, 1971).

Family background

According to Josephath Thomas (1998), “Education with its inbuilt function as a ‘screen’

has an important role in facilitating upward mobility and achieving equality. However, it is constrained by the operation of family background variables; its influence on economic success of individuals is so pervasive that educational achievement *per se* is contingent on it.

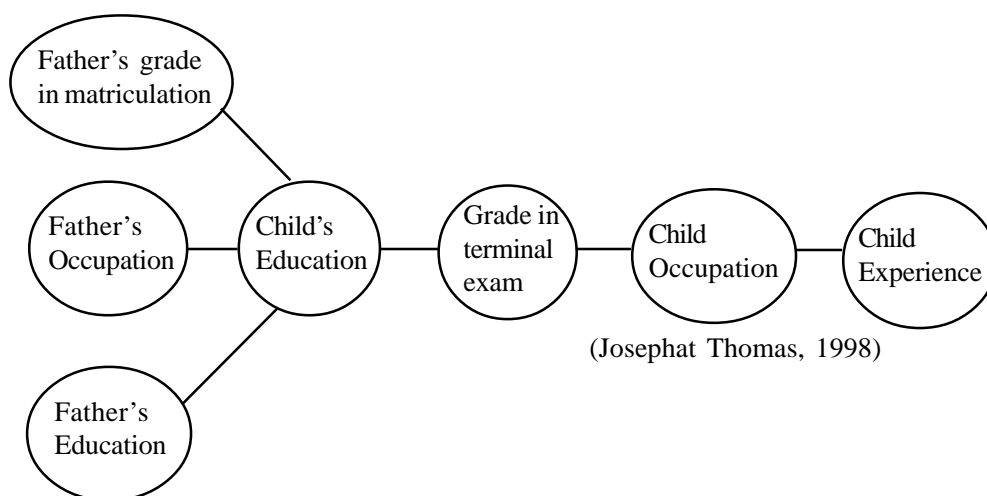
Shah (1984), Ball (1986), Zayone (1983), and Srivastava (1984) have examined the home and related variables which influence educational achievement.

Family background influences mental ability of children through pre-natal and post-natal care, intake of food, and the ability to go through a sustained educational process. In the case of the last variable, namely ability to learn, not much difference is observed as between the deprived and the not so deprived (Bhagawathi, 1973).

Parental income and ill-health indicate the ability of parents to finance the cost of their children's education (Bhagawathi, 1973). Inequality in access to funds may lead to differences in educational attainments and hence occupational and earning differences (Chiswick, 1969; Atkinson, 1975). Parental wealth and income are probably associated with value orientation and aspiration or as Bowels (1972) argues one's occupational 'opportunity set' which involves a choice among jobs entailing different alternative benefits.

Parent's position in the hierarchy of relations is an important aspect of socio-economic background. It develops in children's personality traits corresponding to particular class cultures. It is again reinforced in the secondary socialisation institutions, i.e., school (Kohn, 1969; Bowels, 1972). These personality traits play a major role in determining one's success in gaining higher incomes.

Figure 2.3 Family Background Factors Contributing to Educational Backwardness



Studies on educational backwardness in coastal areas

Jessy Thomas (1989) asserted that in the three fishing villages studied by her, the problem

was not primarily one of illiteracy but rather inability, for a variety of factors, to rise above a 'threshold level' of educational attainments (i.e., above secondary and matriculation level of schooling), which would facilitate movement into gainful employment outside the sector. The author has examined the role of religion, family background including family income, educational level of parents, their involvement in children's educational activities and associative physical surroundings listed as housing conditions, lighting facilities, drinking water facilities, and the like.

Using Coleman's classification, she concluded that fisherfolk's low financial capacity and lack of sufficient human capital were the major factors that hindered their educational attainments.

In a later study, George (1998) using sample data from three districts in Kerala claimed that the educational backwardness of the marine fish workers has to be located in socio-economic constraints, cultural factors, school variables, family variables, individual behavioural factors, occupational pattern, and mode of production. From an analytical point of view, he argued, that the inadequacy of political mobilisation and consolidation of the community, contributed to the educational backwardness of the marine fish workers.

Literacy and education are the hallmarks of Kerala's social advancement. On this count, fishing communities lag behind. John Kurien (1995) has given the following figures of literacy levels of fishermen of Kerala in a comparative perspective (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Literacy Rate among Workers in Kerala (1981)

	Male	Female
All workers	89	70
Fish workers	67	44

(John Kurien, 1995)

The literacy levels in five fishing villages of Thiruvananthapuram in 1999 were around 75 percent (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Literacy Rates of Five Coastal Areas (1999)

Place	Literate (%)
Thiruvananthapuram \Corporation (Coastal)	73.5
Paruthiyoor	62
Kollomcode	75
Vizhinjam	76
Anjengo	73

(PCO, 1999)

Conclusion

The foregoing review indicates that educational backwardness is an integral part of the overall inequality and marginalisation of the fishing folk. Hence, educational effort alone cannot deal with the problem of educational backwardness. The words of Foster (1995) seem to be highly significant in this context.

“We are illiterate, we become illiterate, we remain illiterate, in spite of literacy classes, because we are not an integral part of circuits of participation of communication and of cultural and social political and economic expression. To change the illiteracy problem, we must be willing to do so with an experimental situation rather than routine education as usual. Groups confronted with exclusion on a daily basis have to deal with the obstacles of illiteracy such as under-qualification, and technological inferiority. Political expression of the voiceless is important to this cause” (Foster, 1995).

3. Poovar and Its People

Poovar is a historically important, ecologically diverse, and socially and religiously rich village. In history, there are references of a fish-landing centre at the southern tip of Thiruvananthapuram then called 'Offier'.

Poovar, in the Neyyattinkara *taluk*, lies at the very southern tip of the Kerala State at about 28 km south of Thiruvananthapuram city. The revenue village Poovar has a land area, roughly covering about 4000 acres.

Poovar *panchayat* is surrounded by Karumkulam *panchayat* on the north, Kulathoor *panchayat* on the South, Arabian Sea on the west, and Thirupuram *panchayat* on the east. It has two coastal wards predominantly inhabited by the fishermen community. Fisherfolk live in a very narrow strip of land along the coastline for about one km in length. Fisherfolk houses in the village keep a safe distance of almost 50 meters from the sea with some exceptions. Natural calamities such as sea erosion do not cause much damage in the village.

The socio-economic overheads of the village are relatively well-developed. In this village, there are seven schools, three of them high schools, one a higher secondary school, and one a vocational higher secondary school. Christians manage three schools, which profess a pro-fisherfolk bias. There are six libraries in the area; two of them managed by the fisherfolk themselves.

There is a KSRTC (Kerala State Road Transport Corporation) sub-depot and the Bus Stand is hardly one km away. A Community Health Centre and a Homoeo hospital are located 200 metres away from the residential area of the fisherfolk. Other facilities such as Post Office, Police Station, Electricity Office, Banks (State Bank of Travancore, The Vysya Bank, and Canara Bank), Telephone exchange, Public Market, Sub-registrar's Office, *Matsya Bhavan*, *Matsyafed*, SIFFS, Primary Agricultural Credit Society, and *Krishi* (Agriculture) Bhavan also exist. There are plenty of religious institutions. The Loyola Social Welfare and Charitable Society, established in 1968 facilitates educational and cultural awakening among the fisherfolk.

Socio-economic profile

Poovar *panchayat* had a population of 25.6 thousand in 1991 of which nearly two-fifths were Hindus, about one-third were Christians, and a little more than one-fourth were Muslims (Census, 1991). Almost 60 percent of the Christians are fisherfolk.

It has been noted that the sex ratio among the Christians is unfavourable to females. Fishing and marketing are the major sources of income for the Christian population; trade and commerce form the major occupations of the Muslims and the Hindus are mainly peasant farmers or agricultural workers.

During some seasons, when the sea becomes very rough and the fish workers are forced to remain idle (for about four to six months a year), they live under conditions of severe poverty.

Mechanisation has almost swept through the traditional mode of technology. Fishing techniques have changed dramatically during the past quinquennium. Traditional *catamarans* have almost entirely been replaced by medium size plywood boats operated by out-board motor engines. Owing to depletion of fish within their traditional fishing boundaries they now go to deeper waters travelling for two to three hours (150-200 km) from their coast. Operational cost has increased to an average of Rs 1000 per day per unit.

There are at present 140 plywood boat units in the village and almost 200 out-board motors (OBMs). Some fishermen still use *catamarans* and traditional knowledge. But the majority, particularly the younger generation, find them unattractive and even uneconomical. John Kurien (2000) states that mechanisation of the sector will have negative impact on the economy of the community in the context of reduction of subsidies, globalisation policies, and depletion of fish resources.

Economic goals have gained ascendancy in the area only in recent years. The fisherfolk here continue to be religious, steeped in conventional beliefs and attitudes. While religious festivals and ceremonies are conducted with great enthusiasm, cinema, television, and alcohol have made a deep dent into their daily lives. Women in fishermen households, except fish vendors, have enough leisure time to engage in religious matters. But religiosity is getting overpowered by economic pursuits and the lure of affluence.

Changes

Literacy and educational standards in the village have improved significantly in recent years. The health and hygiene profile of the locality has also improved vastly with improvement in the quality and variety of food intake and hygiene practices.

Cultural profile

Fisherfolk in Poovar are Christians without exception. They throng the churches on Sundays and other special days. This religious attitude may be because of the nature of their occupation, which is highly uncertain, challenging, and risky. Religion still largely influences the fisherfolk in terms of their attitudes, behaviour, thoughts, and aspirations. During rough seasons when they do not venture out into the sea and on holidays, they go to cinema or play cards, or remain at home idling away their time. Education and media have made a lot of changes in the lifestyles of the modern generation. On the whole, the fisherfolk in Poovar is a community in transition.

Demographic profile

The total population in the two coastal wards is 3674: 3047 Christians, 317 Muslims, and 310 Hindus. The density of population is one of the highest in the State.

The fisherfolk live close to the sea on common lands and were not made after private property in land and other assets, unlike the mainstream population. The high density of population is a serious matter of concern for the quality of life of the people; the housing problem is very

Table 3.1 Density of Population, 1991

Kerala	749
Fisherfolk Density in Kerala	2136
Trivandrum Fisherfolk	6,838
Coastal Wards of Poovar Panchayat	12,156

acute. This has been pointed out as an indication of low social development and low status of women in fisherfolk. The sex ratio (920 women per 1000 men) among the fisherfolk in Poovar is unfavourable (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Sex-ratio in the Locality: Religion-wise

Religion/ sex	Males	Females	Total	Sex ratio
Christians	1587	1460	3047	920
Muslims	158	159	317	1006
Hindus	152	158	310	1039
Total	1897	1777	3674	937

The average household size for all communities in Poovar taken together is 4.1 members. Among the fisherfolk it is only slightly higher, 4.2 (Table 3.3). This shows that the message of family limitation has been accepted by the fisherfolk as well.

Table 3.3 Household Size: Sex and Community-wise

Religion/ sex	Male	Female	Total
Christians	2.2	2.0	4.2
Muslims	2.0	2.0	4.0
Hindus	1.8	1.8	3.6
Total	2.1	2.0	4.1

Table 3.4 Age Profile of the Population

Age Group (years)	Male				Female				Total	Percent
	Chr*	Mus	Hin	Total	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total		
0-15	494	41	38	573	513	51	47	611	1184	32.2
16-45	867	89	74	1030	763	88	85	936	1966	53.5
46-60	140	17	29	186	127	17	25	169	355	9.7
60+	86	11	11	108	57	3	1	61	169	4.6
Total	1587	158	152	1897	1460	159	158	1777	3674	100.0

* Chr: Christian, Mus: Muslim, Hin: Hindu.

The proportion of the child population (0 to 15 age group) is about one-third and of the elderly population (above 60 age group) less than five percent. Housewives account for about 17 percent. Thus, about 46 percent of the population comes under the labour force. Subtracting the unemployed of about 12 percent, we find the working force in the area to be about one-third of the total population.

The fertility rates have declined heavily in recent years. The low proportion of the elderly population is an indication of lower life expectancy and poor health and hygiene status. Hard labour, unhygienic living conditions, and unscientific health and hygiene practices lead to high morbidity and mortality rates among the fisherfolk.

Occupational status

A detailed occupational break-up of the population is given in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5 Occupational Status of the Population

Occupation	Male				Female				Grand Total	%
	Chr*	Mus*	Hin*	Total	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total		
Housewife	0	0	0	0	480	64	75	619	619	16.85
Fishing	622	0	0	622	0	0	0	0	622	16.93
Govt. service	8	0	2	10	3	0	0	3	13	0.35
Self-employed	32	49	63	144	16	4	6	26	170	4.63
Private-employed	18	4	7	29	14	1	3	18	47	1.28
Business	7	15	7	29	4	0	0	4	33	0.90
Student	360	26	38	424	354	35	39	428	852	23.19
Money lending	1	0	0	1	6	0	0	6	7	0.19
Unemployed	161	19	5	185	199	26	17	242	427	11.62
Gulf emigration	127	19	12	158	4	0	1	5	163	4.44
Retired	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	0.08
Fish-vending	2	0	0	2	144	0	0	144	146	3.97
Elderly	79	5	5	89	70	6	1	77	166	4.52
Domestic service	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0.05
Children	166	21	12	199	165	23	16	204	403	10.97
Handicapped	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.03
Total	1587	158	152	1897	1460	159	158	1777	3674	100.00

* Chr: Christian, Mus: Muslim, Hin: Hindu

The total number of active fish workers in the village is 622. The number of Christian fisherfolk (the population engaged in active fishing in the locality) families in the locality is 733. Thus we find that there is not even one active fisherman in every household. Occupational mobility and diversification has been on the increase in recent years. It is seen that 163 persons from among these households have emigrated to the Gulf countries. Unemployment, which comes to about 12 percent, is quite high. Only 13 persons have found a place in government services. All these 13 persons work as last grade servants or lower-grade military personnel.

Monthly income

Information on monthly income is difficult to collect; it is even more so in the case of

persons of the unorganised sector. Income from fishing and fish vending is highly seasonal. We had taken particular care to collect reliable income data to the extent possible. The enumerators were taken from among the community members. They knew the respondents closely. Table 3.6 gives information on income of 899 households belonging to the three religious groups in the study area.

Table 3.6 Family Income: Monthly

Income	Male				Female				Total	%
	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total		
Below 1000	39	3	3	45	44	2	3	49	94	10.46
1001-2000	77	5	17	99	15	0	1	16	115	12.79
2001-3000	251	32	22	305	5	6	1	12	317	35.26
3001-4000	105	10	24	139	5	1	2	8	147	16.35
4001-5000	73	9	6	88	5	3	0	8	96	10.68
5001-6000	27	1	0	28	3	0	0	3	31	3.45
6001-7000	38	2	2	42	3	0	0	3	45	5.01
7001-8000	12	3	2	17	0	0	0	0	17	1.89
8001-9000	7	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	8	0.89
9001-10000	18	1	1	20	0	1	0	1	21	2.34
10001-20000	5	1	1	7	0	0	0	0	7	0.78
Above 20000	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.11
Total	653	67	79	799	80	13	7	100	899	100.00

Chr: Christian, Hin: Hindu, Mus: Muslim

The sum of the monthly income of the 899 families is Rs 3,290,825.00 or Rs 3660.54 per family. Nearly three-fifths of the households had monthly incomes of less than Rs 3000; and more than 10 percent remained below the poverty line of Rs 1000.

Home condition

Home condition is a key variable in the learning outcome of children. Living conditions, facilities, and basic infrastructure play a great part in the education, health, and attitude of children. Presence or absence of electricity, and latrine, type of roofing, and domestic water source were the four variables on which we focused our attention to examine quality of living of the sample population.

Data were collected from 899 households living in 660 houses. More than one household living in a house is a phenomenon observed among all the religious groups in the area; among the Christians, 733 households were found to be living in 554 houses (Table 3.7).

The average number of members in a fishermen household is only 4.2; but per house, the number comes to 5.5. On an average, 1.32 families live in one house. About 73 percent of the houses are occupied by single households, 22.17 percent houses by two households.

Table 3.7 Number of Households and Houses

No. of members in Households	Christian		Muslim		Hindu		Total		%
	HH*	Houses	HH	Houses	HH	Houses	HH	Houses	
1	400	400	40	40	57	57	497	497	72.98
2	260	130	22	11	20	10	302	151	22.17
3	69	23	18	6	9	3	96	32	4.70
4	4	1	0	0	0	0	4	1	0.15
Total	733	554	80	57	86	70	899	681	100.00

Only less than five percent have three or more households living in them.

It was found that nearly nine-tenths of the households live in electrified houses (Table 3.8). Some marginal differences are observed in this proportion among the different religious groups.

Table 3.8 Electricity facility in the houses

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Present	643	80	70	793	88.2
Absent	90	0	16	106	11.8
Total	733	80	86	899	100.00

Table 3.9 Latrine facility in the houses

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Present	349	71	66	486	54.1
Absent	384	9	20	413	45.9
Total	733	80	86	899	100.00

For 54 percent of the households, separate latrine facility is available: 48 percent for Christians, 89 percent for Muslims, and 76 percent for Hindus. Thus we find that in the matter of latrine facilities, the condition of fisherfolk households is the most despicable. Though there are a lot of schemes available with the *Grama panchayat* and *Matsyafed*, owing to lack of ownership right to homestead plots for the households and to excessive population density construction of latrines is often accompanied by quarrels among neighbours. In the event, men and women of the fisherfolk use the beach as public toilet.

Drinking water for the house is obtained from public water supply or wells. About one-fifth of the households live in houses which have own running water taps. And nearly seven percent have their own wells. The others use either common taps or common wells. In the case of drinking water sources, not much difference is observed among the three religious groups. Housing conditions of the area are unsatisfactory for more than 20 percent of the

households which live in huts and thatched small houses. But the majority of houses have tiled or concrete roofs (Table 3.11).

Table 3.10 Source of drinking water in the houses

Water source	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Own Tap	129	35	11	175	19.47
Own Well	17	16	28	61	6.79
Common Tap	525	29	36	590	65.63
Common Well	62	0	11	73	8.12
Total	733	80	86	899	100.00

Table 3.11 Roofing Material of the Houses

Type of House	Chr*	Mus*	Hin*	Total	%
Hut	45	0	4	49	5.45
Thatched	84	29	28	141	15.68
Tiled	526	26	24	576	64.07
Concrete	78	25	30	133	14.79
Total	733	80	86	899	100.00

* Chr: Christian; Mus: Muslim; Hin: Hindu

The housing conditions of the fishermen are not seen to be worse than those of the Hindus and the Muslims. Housing quality does not, however, reflect the economic conditions of the households concerned. In fact, more than 90 percent of the tiled houses of the fisherfolk were constructed with grants / subsidies / loans from the Fisheries Department and various housing schemes. The loan component of the amounts received by fisherfolk had to be written off by the lending agencies due to default caused by their inability to repay. Most of the houses are built on common lands. Fisherfolk pay little attention to the maintenance and repair of the houses.

The huts are built by newly formed households which find congestion in their former houses too uncomfortable. They set up huts on the seashore. These huts are severely damaged during the rough seasons. The concrete buildings are small structures, built by Trivandrum Social Service Society, of Rs 35000 each. These buildings have only three small rooms and minimal facilities.

4. Literacy and Educational Status

The literacy and educational status of the inhabitants of Poovar is discussed in this section. Illiterates above seven years form 22 percent of the population. The proportion is much higher among the Christian fisherfolk, 24 percent. Literacy rates are higher among Muslims and Hindus both for males and females (Table 4.1).

The literacy levels in a particular age group could be considered a reliable indicator of the educational status of that particular age group. Table 4.1 gives an idea of the growth of education of the locality over time. The age group less than 10 years would be those born during the 1990s; the 11-20 age group would be those born during the 1980s and so on.

The population born during the 1990s is found to have near-universal literacy. The population born during the 1980s has a lower rate, say 92 percent; the population born during the 1970s has a still lower rate, 82 percent. For the 70+ age group, a population which must have been born during the 1920s, the literacy rate is as low as 36 percent.

The growth has been slow and gradual. The increase since the 1970s has been, however, remarkably high. This might have been associated with, and in part caused by the changes in craft and gear in the direction of mechanisation, which took place in the 1980s and 1990s.

The total literacy rate of the two coastal wards of Poovar is 78 percent (Table 4.2). The male literacy is 77 percent and female literacy is 80 percent. Literacy rate is higher among females of Christian population. Male literacy is higher among the Hindus and Muslims. Overall, females are found more literate than males in the area.

Literacy rate of fisherfolk in Poovar is lower than the State average. While the State literacy rate is above 90 percent; among the Census population of the study, it is only 78 per cent. Secondary data show that the rate of literacy is low in all coastal villages in Kerala (PCO, 1999).

Adult literacy level

For the above-15 years population the illiteracy rate in Poovar coastal wards is high (26.7 percent). Among the Christian fisherfolk, it is still higher, 30 percent.

The traditional kind of fishing which does not need formal education must have contributed to the low literacy level among males of the Christian fisherfolk. The high level of female literacy does not seem to have contributed to higher status for them in the fishing community which is highly male-dominated.

Age-wise analysis of literacy

Illiteracy rates are sharply declining among the younger generation. Among the age group of 11-15 years, illiteracy rate is as low as four percent; it is still lower at 0.5 percent in the age group of 8-10 years. Illiteracy is sharply declining among both males and females (Table 4.4).

Table 4.1 Literacy Profile of the Population: Age-wise

Age	Male								Female								Grand Total			Literacy %
	Chr*		Mus*		Hin*		Total		Chr		Mus		Hin		Total					
	Lit*	Illit*	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Total	
8 to 10	84	1	4	0	8	0	96	1	94	0	9	0	7	0	110	0	206	1	207	99.5
11 to 20	339	45	28	0	30	0	397	45	380	29	35	1	33	0	448	30	845	75	920	91.8
21 to 30	280	76	40	1	26	0	346	77	219	55	37	4	37	2	293	61	639	138	777	82.2
31 to 40	135	91	21	3	21	2	177	96	145	68	13	7	21	4	179	79	356	175	531	67
41 to 50	83	68	12	0	23	2	118	70	81	49	9	2	14	1	104	52	222	122	344	64.5
51 to 60	34	39	9	3	12	1	55	43	33	38	3	9	17	2	53	49	108	92	200	54
61 to 70	34	31	5	3	8	1	47	35	21	26	0	3	0	1	21	30	68	65	133	51.1
70+	10	11	0	3	2	0	12	14	1	9	0	0	0	0	1	9	13	23	36	36.1
Total	999	362	119	13	130	6	1248	381	974	274	106	26	129	10	1209	310	2457	691	3148	78

* Chr: Christian; Mus: Muslim; Hin: Hindu; Lit: Literate; Illit: Illiterate

Table 4.2 Literacy levels of the population above seven years of age

Religion/ Sex	Christians		Muslims		Hindus		Total	
	Lit*	%	Lit	%	Lit	%	Lit	%
Male	999	73.4	119	90.1	130	95.6	1248	76.6
Female	974	78.0	106	80.3	129	92.8	1209	79.6
Total	1973	75.6	225	85.2	259	94.2	2457	78.0

* Lit: Literate

Table 4.3 Adult literacy levels (Population above 15 years)

Sex / religion	Christians		Muslims		Hindus		Total	
	Lit*	%	Lit	%	Lit	%	Lit	%
Male	747	68.34	104	88.88	108	94.75	959	72.43
Female	677	71.49	82	75.92	101	90.99	860	73.76
Total	1424	69.80	186	82.66	209	92.88	1819	73.05

* Lit: Literate

Table 4.4 Literacy levels by Age and Sex

Age/Sex	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
8 to 10	96	98.97	110	100.00	206	99.52
11 to 20	397	89.82	448	93.72	845	91.85
21 to 30	346	81.80	293	82.77	639	82.24
31 to 40	177	64.84	179	69.38	356	67.04
41 to 50	118	62.77	104	66.67	222	64.53
51 to 60	55	56.12	53	51.96	108	54.00
61 to 70	47	57.32	21	41.18	68	51.13
70 +	12	46.15	1	10.00	13	36.11
Total	1248	76.61	1209	79.59	2457	78.05

Sources of literacy

The improvement in literacy rate was not much influenced by non-formal education. Only 3.2 percent of the total literate population is seen to have gained literacy through non-formal education. The Total Literacy Programme of 1991 and the subsequent Coastal Literacy Programme do not seem to have made much of a dent into the problem of illiteracy among the fisherfolk.

Table 4.5 Sources of literacy

Sources	Male				Female				Grand Total	%
	Chr*	Mus*	Hin*	Total	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total		
Formal	969	119	130	1218	927	106	128	1161	2379	96.83
Non-formal	30	0	0	30	47	0	1	48	78	3.17
Total	999	119	130	1248	974	106	129	1209	2457	100.00

* Chr: Christian; Mus: Muslim; Hind: Hindu

Literacy status of working population

The literacy status of the labour force is shown in Table 4.6 (Persons employed in government service, students, children, retired persons, and domestic servants are not included in this Table).

Table 4.6 Literacy status of the working population

Sex\ Religion\ Occupation\	Male								Female							
	Christian		Muslim		Hindu		Total		Christian		Muslim		Hindu		Total	
	Lit*	Illit*	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit	Lit	Illit
House wife	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	357	123	49	15	69	6	475	144
Self employed	30	2	42	7	58	5	130	14	16	0	4	0	5	1	25	1
Pvt empl.	17	1	4	0	7	0	28	1	14	0	0	1	1	2	15	3
Business	7	0	14	1	7	0	28	1	3	1	0	0	0	0	3	1
Finance	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	6	0
Unemployed	134	27	19	0	5	0	158	27	172	27	22	4	17	0	211	31
Gulf	126	1	19	0	12	0	157	1	3	1	0	0	1	0	4	1
Fish vending	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	63	81	0	0	0	0	63	81
Fishing	331	291	0	0	0	0	331	291	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Too old	40	39	0	5	4	1	44	45	29	41	0	6	0	1	29	48
Total	687	362	98	13	93	6	878	381	663	274	75	26	93	10	831	310

* Lit: Literate, Illit: Illiterate

It is found that 28.79 percent of the working population is illiterate: 46.78 percent of the fishermen, 56.16 percent of fish-vending women, and 23.26 percent of housewives.

Dropouts

Dropouts are defined in this study as persons who had joined the regular school but discontinued studies before completing secondary school. Those who had appeared for the SSLC examination, but did not get through are not considered dropouts (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7 Dropouts and Dropout Rates

	No. Enrolled	No. of Dropouts	Percentage of Dropouts
Males	1364	504	36.95
Females	1303	540	41.44
Total	2667	1044	39.15

Rate of dropout is higher among females than among males due to domestic chores assigned to girls. The fish-vending women most often are not in a position to look after their young children. Hence the elder daughters are withdrawn from school on a large scale soon after primary education. In the case of male it is due to early initiation into fishing. Child labour is widely prevalent among the fishermen community. Dropout rates of both males and females are, however, rapidly declining in recent years.

Analysis of the stage at which they dropped out presents a clearer idea of the phenomenon of dropout among the sample population.

The highest rates of dropping out occur in between the third and the sixth standards, when children are of 7 to 13 years of age. Upper primary is the most critical in terms of dropping out. The importance of this stage is that the children, who are sent to schools, become strong enough to help parents at domestic work (for girls) and fishing-related works (for boys). Some children find it comfortable at home and sea rather than at school.

Altogether, above 90 percent of the dropouts occurred after they became literate. The rest, around 10 percent illiterate dropouts form a section of the residual illiterates found in the fishing community. Those persons, who are literate but dropped out before completing elementary education (44 percent) are very likely to become illiterate in future in the absence of continuing education programmes. Hence the best way to prevent illiteracy of the fishing community is to reduce dropouts at least in the LP and UP level.

Non-enrolled population: Poovar fishing village

Enrolment rate is another matter of concern while dealing with the phenomenon of educational backwardness. Non-enrolled are those persons who have never been in school. Rate of enrolment has improved significantly in recent years. This is partly due to the improvement in educational facilities in the locality. Six nurseries function in the locality, which have a strength of 180 children of the fisherfolk.

It is seen that though the locality has relatively high levels of literacy for all the three communities; the number of highly educated among them is extremely low. Only one-eighth of the literate population is seen to have passed the secondary school. The number of graduates among them (BA, BSc, and BCom) come to only 51 and postgraduates to only 9, out of a literate population of nearly 2500 persons.

Professional education

Professional education is also under-developed in the area. There were nine women (one with B.Ed, four with TTC, and four with nursing degree) who had professional qualifications. Among men, the corresponding number was only three (two with BEd and one with an engineering degree). The two men with the BEd degree and the eight women with BEd, TTC or Nursing qualifications were Latin Christians. The only engineering graduate of the locality was a Hindu.

Technical education

Technical education of the population consisted of diploma courses in technical trades approved and certificate issued by the government, but run by ITC not approved by government, and DCA and PGDCA courses (in computer application) and engineering diploma courses conducted by polytechnics. In this respect, Poovar is seen to be fairly advanced (Table 4.8). ITC, ITI, and DCA diploma holders account for more than 76 percent of the total number of technically qualified persons in the area. All the 94 male ITC holders were produced through a three-year-long project implemented by Loyola Social Works, Poovar, and a local NGO.

A large number of fisherfolk youth have acquired technical qualifications, in the hope of emigration to the Gulf countries. The educational status of the population (above five years of age) in Poovar is shown in Table 4.8.

The Christian fisherfolk are relatively backward in all aspects of education compared to the other groups living in the same locality and who share almost the same educational facilities. This is particularly so in the matter of secondary and higher levels of education, and more for women than for men.

Despite several favourable factors, such as reservation of seats, and stipends, and scholarships not many children of the fisherfolk get through university examinations, though many do enrol for Higher Secondary and degree courses. They are found more diligent to obtain stipend/lump sum grant than for learning. According to the youth of the area, poor hostel facilities, negligence of girls' education, and the so-called 'Gulf mania' are a few of the reasons for the lack of achievements in higher education.

However, the 'Gulf mania' has helped the fisherfolk youth acquire technical skills.

Though a basic and radical change is yet to take place in the fishing community, a critical mass, which gained access to education, has already emerged.

Table 4.8 Educational Status of the Population (above 5 years)

Education Level	Male				Female				Grand Total
	Chr*	Mus*	Hin*	Total	Chr	Mus	Hin	Total	
Literate only	5	0	0	5	4	0	1	5	10
Primary	369	20	19	408	391	23	24	438	846
Upper Primary	240	21	38	299	285	22	29	336	635
High School	242	45	37	324	227	46	29	302	626
SSLC	161	21	22	204	95	10	26	131	335
Higher Secondary	69	13	13	95	45	10	15	70	165
Graduates	21	3	5	29	15	1	6	22	51
Post-graduates	3	2	1	6	1	0	2	3	9
Professionals	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Technical	145	4	16	165	22	0	2	24	189
Teachers	2	0	0	2	5	0	0	5	7
Para Professionals	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	4	4
Others	14	0	0	14	52	1	2	55	69
Total	1271	129	152	1552	1145	113	137	1395	2947

* Chr: Christian; Mus: Muslim; Hin: Hindu

Educational facilities and learning aids

Out of the 487 households from which information was collected, 209 had no special facility for studies (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9 Facilities for learning present in the houses

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Nothing	187	8	14	209	42.9
Special space	61	6	15	82	16.8
Special room	19	1	1	21	4.3
Table, chair	33	28	32	93	19.1
Special light	61	6	15	82	16.8
Total	361	49	77	487	100.0

The learning aids which these 487 households had are reported in Table 4.10. It is observed that nearly nine-tenths of the families had books, but little else as learning aids. Two households possessed computers and 34 households, calculators.

Medium of instruction of the schoolchildren

The vast majority of the households send their children to Malayalam-medium schools. In

fact, only children of parents working in Gulf countries and of rather well-to-do households who constitute hardly five percent, study in English-medium schools (Table 4.11).

Table 4.10 Learning aids available with the households

Learning Aids	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Nothing	5	0	0	5	1.0
Books	325	44	63	432	88.7
Toys	7	0	1	8	1.6
Puppets	3	2	1	6	1.2
Calculator	19	3	12	34	7.0
Type writer	0	0	0	0	0.0
Computer	2	0	0	2	0.4
Total	361	49	77	487	100.0

Table 4.11 Medium of instruction of Schools Attended

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Malayalam	359	44	60	463	95.1
English	21	0	3	24	4.9
Total	380	44	63	487	100.0

Nearly two-thirds of the households send their children to government schools (Table 4.12). An unaided school which was opened recently by an NGO has attracted 15 percent of the schoolchildren in the area.

Table 4.12 Type of School Attended

	Christian	Muslim	Hindu	Total	%
Government	245	27	47	319	65.5
Aided	84	9	3	96	19.7
Unaided	51	8	13	72	14.8
Total	380	44	63	487	100.0

5. Literacy Campaign (2000-'01), Poovar

A campaign to eradicate the residual illiteracy in the study area was conducted during July 2000-January 2001 among a target group of 451 illiterate persons.

Towards an understanding of residual illiteracy

The Census Survey in Poovar highlighted the backwardness of the inhabitants of the area particularly the marine fisherfolk. In terms of educational backwardness, four major conclusions were drawn. They are,

- (i) Literacy rate in the area is well below the State average;
- (ii) Higher education is under-developed in that area;
- (iii) Levels of aspiration to learn are low; and
- (iv) Enrolment is near-total and dropout rates negligible, among the population in the age group of 5-15 years. The residual illiteracy rate of the adult age group (16-45) is high at around 22 percent.

For the action programme, 451 illiterates were enlisted but only 334 illiterates / semi-literates could be enrolled (Table 5.1). Data on the action programme were presented in the form of the following reports:

- (i) Pre-test reports of the learners;
- (ii) Periodic reports of the supervisor;
- (iii) Daily reports of the instructors;
- (iv) Monthly review meeting reports;
- (v) Forty-four case studies of learners;
- (vi) Summative evaluation reports; and
- (vii) Reports of external and internal tests.

Table 5.1 Illiterate Persons enlisted as the Target Groups, and Persons Actually Enrolled, for Remedial Programme

Sex/Religion		Enlisted		Enrolled	
		8-15 Years	16-45 Years	8-15 Years	16-45 Years
Male	Christian	16	233	15	135
	Muslim	-	4	-	4
	Hindu	-	2	-	-
Total (Male)		16	239	15	139
Female	Christian	4	172	4	163
	Muslim	-	13	-	13
	Hindu	-	7	-	-
Total (Female)		4	192	4	176
Total (all)		20	431	19	315

Preparatory phase

The Programme received wholehearted support from political and religious leadership. A master volunteer group was formed to co-ordinate the activities of the programme.

The Loyola Social Works, Poovar, an important NGO, and its volunteers offered all support to the programme.

Formation of Theera Saksharatha Samithy

Realising the importance of creating participatory structures for implementing the literacy programme, a *Theera Saksharatha Samithi* was constituted. It had the Bishop of the Latin Catholic Diocese of Thiruvananthapuram as chief patron and other local religious leaders as patrons. Educational experts, local political leaders, and social activists were also enlisted.

Street theatre

The youth wing of Loyola Social Works of Poovar, who are members of All-India Catholic University Federation (AICUF), presented a street theatre in five major pockets of the two coastal wards on a Sunday. It proclaimed the importance of adult literacy and requested the illiterates to join the literacy classes soon to be inaugurated. This public request created enthusiasm among the illiterates for joining the literacy classes.

Formal inauguration

Rt. Rev. Dr Soosai Pakiam, the Bishop of the Latin Catholic Diocese of Thiruvananthapuram formally inaugurated the programme on 27 June 2000 at a meeting presided over by the Parish Priest of Poovar church and felicitated by the Imam of Juma Masjid, Poovar, the President of the Poovar Village *Panchayat*, and the Director of Loyola Social Works. The meeting was covered extensively by the media.

Akshara Rally

In the *Akshara* Rally conducted with the purpose of reaching the message of literacy to all the parts of the village around 200 children, youth and women participated. The rally was made attractive and colourful with floats, placards, and banners declaring the message.

Training for volunteers

A two-day intensive training was provided for instructors. Most of our instructors were volunteers in the Total Literacy Campaign of 1990 and hence needed only recapitulation and updating. The contents of the training course included the following:

- (i) Adult literacy and residual illiteracy: concepts and characteristics
- (ii) Techniques of imparting literacy

- (iii) Techniques of dealing with the behavioural and attitudinal inhibitions of residual illiterates
- (iv) Need for and development of low-cost teaching/ learning materials
- (v) Educational backwardness of the fisherfolk
- (vi) Experience-sharing by participants of the critical events in their educational career
- (vii) New pedagogy: Freirean thoughts and DPEP methodology
- (viii) Introduction to the culture-specific curriculum

Workshop for preparing teaching/ learning materials

A one-day workshop was conducted, at which low-cost and effective teaching/ learning aids were prepared using old news papers, magazines, pictures, cardboard, and matchbox. Every instructor prepared a series of aids, which they took to their classes.

Organisational phase

The 334 illiterates enrolled were divided into 22 classes and put under 22 instructors trained under the programme. As more than 94 percent of the learners were Christians, 21 instructors were put in charge of the area inhabited by Christians. This area itself was divided into three parts: Varavilathoppu, Erikkaluvilla, and Pallom. One instructor was put in charge of teaching the 19 Muslim learners.

The programme succeeded in enrolling 167 women out of 176 targeted (95 percent). In the case of men, enrolment came only to 60 percent of the number targeted. The males enrolled consisted almost entirely (150 out of 154) of Christians engaged in fishing. The vast majority of them (135 persons) were of the age group of 16-45 years, actively engaged in fishing activities. Naturally, therefore, they hardly found time to attend literacy classes. The strategies for drawing illiterate fishermen to learning remains yet to be devised.

However, discussions with the literacy volunteers of the campaign shed light on some aspects of non-enrolment to literacy classes:

(ii) Migratory nature of fish workers: Many of the illiterate fish workers were not present in the locality during the period when the classes began. Most of the absentees were small-scale fishermen, who depended on ports for fishing (during the monsoon, when the sea is rough and prohibition on trawling is in force).

(iii) Addictive nature of the leisure time activities of the fish workers: The regular leisure time activities of the fish workers are playing cards (gambling), taking alcoholic drinks, and watching films. Weaning away the illiterates from these activities was well-nigh impossible. Only the highly motivated among them considered acquiring literacy more significant than such pastimes.

(iv) Lack of need for learning: Several illiterates identified claimed that they were literate enough in reading, writing, and arithmetic to carry on their daily lives. This sense of adequacy

creates in them a sense of complacency and indifference to learning.

The personnel of the literacy programme and the details of their teaching schedules are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Personnel of the Literacy Programme and Teaching Schedule

Name of Instructor	Place of Learning	Off Day	No. of Participants		Time
			Females	Males	
Stalin.P	Learners' house	Nil	6	7	4-5.30pm
Silvadasan Netto	Own house	Saturday Sunday		20	7.30-9.30pm
Anthrayos	Own house	Saturday Sunday	6		5-6.30pm
Ammimi.L	Own house	Saturday Sunday	9	12	4.30-6.30pm
Sheeja.V	Own house	Nil		28	7-8.30pm
Telma Juliet Voice	Learners' house	Saturday Sunday	6	2	5.30-6.30pm
Stellency	Learner's house	Saturday Sunday	14		5.30-6.30pm
Cletus.V	A house nearby	Saturday Sunday		19	7.30-9pm
Rajesh.S.N	Lerner's house	Nil		25	3-5pm
Ignatius	A house nearby	Nil		11	3-4.30pm
Jainamma	Own house	Sunday	15		2.30-4pm
Floreny Selvam	Learner's house	Sunday	19		4-5.30pm
Devadasy Peter	Own house	Sunday	19		5-6pm
Thankam.K	Own house	Saturday Sunday	8	7	5-6.30pm
Celine Silvadas	Learner's house	Saturday Sunday	14	3	2-4pm
Suseela . F	Own house	Saturday Sunday	6	5	5-6pm
Jisthy**	Own house	Saturday Sunday	14	5	4-5pm 5-6pm
Bonifasia	Own house	Nil	13		7-8pm
Franklin	Learner's house	Sunday	13		6.30-7.30pm
Charles.D	A house nearby	Saturday Sunday	6	2	3.30-4.30pm
Raju.J	A house nearby	Sunday		8	7.30-8.30pm
Jespy	Own house	Sunday**	12		4.30-6pm
Total			180	154	

** Class for Muslim learners

Nine classes were conducted at instructors' residences, six classes in one of the learners' house and seven classes in well-wishers' houses. Each class was supplied with a set each of the following materials: Rolling black board, chalk pieces, pencils, note books, instructor's diary, and copy of curriculum.

Dropping out: A phenomenon in coastal literacy

Dropping out has been a constant phenomenon all throughout the campaign process. Learners dropped out at different stages of the programme despite continuous coercion and prodding by volunteers. At the pre-testing stage only 260 persons came forth or were available in the locality. Two months after the classes started, the number of learners came down to 302 from 334. At the final stage, only 162 learners were available in the classes

The major reasons for dropping out discussed at the volunteers' meetings consisted of the following:

- (i) Persons who joined the classes merely due to external pressure were the first to drop out. Initial enthusiasm and motivation boosted by the inaugural ceremony, *Akshara* rally, street theatre, etc., eroded gradually. When actual learning started many of them did not have sufficient motivation to sustain the process.
- (ii) Learner-fishermen migrated to other places for fishing opportunities.
- (iii) Time constraints, inconvenience, and excessive work burden prevented fish-vending women from attending classes regularly.
- (iv) Difference in the levels of previous learning: As they were residual illiterates, levels of learning differed considerably among them. Some of the learners were dropouts from schools and others were non-entrants to school. Some had participated in the Total Literacy Campaign. The inability of the trainer-volunteers to manage such heterogeneous groups in a single class accentuated the problem of dropping out.
- (v) Some learners found it extremely difficult to learn due to their lack of exposure to an intellectually stimulating experience for decades together. They found their performance below par and felt ashamed to come to the classes. Some of them were even physically unable to write even to bend their fingers to hold a pen or pencil.
- (vi) Inadequate follow-up and personal attention by the volunteers was another reason. Though the volunteers were expected to be totally committed, especially in a campaign for removing residual illiteracy, a few among them did not fully realise their responsibility and failed to take prompt and effective action to arrest dropping out.

Timing of the classes

It was not possible to organise all the classes according to a uniform time schedule. Timing of the classes depended on sex, age, and type of work. Hence, instructors were given freedom to fix their schedule according to the convenience of their learners.

Generally, male learners preferred evenings (between 6 pm and 9.30 pm) and female learners early after noon (between 2 pm and 6 pm). Nor was it possible to conduct classes every day.

Housewives wanted to watch movies or serials in the television while male fish workers wanted to enjoy leisure on the two weekend days. Hence instructors were requested to hold classes at least four days a week. They were also directed to fix a time schedule for their literacy classes. The classes were of one to two hour duration. Nevertheless, some classes were lengthier.

Pretest

A pretest was conducted on 260 learners out of the 334 learners enrolled with the aim of assessing the proficiency of the learners in aspects of literacy and their earlier experiences of learning. Seventy-four learners disliked the idea of pretest or were not available in the locality to go through such a test. All the pre-tested learners were found to be total illiterates. Only a few of them were able to scratch their names on paper.

Pedagogy

Right from the time of instructors' training, we had stressed on a new pedagogy. The pedagogy took inspiration from the DPEP methodology and Paulo Freire's idea of conscientisation.

In the conventional literacy classes learning of letters and words were stressed and letters were taught independently of idea. In our literacy programme, the pedagogy was slightly different. The basic principle was to start with a discussion and create awareness among the learners about a selected topic and from the topic to enter into some relevant words to reach finally at the learning of letters.

This pedagogy had twin advantages: awareness creation or cultural education and acquisition of literacy with conviction. It was found that the methodology was interesting and effective.

Secondly, the pedagogy intended to use culture-specific curriculum, which gave literacy through words familiar to them, say words relating to fishing. Strangely enough, the learners showed more interest in learning words outside their cultural context. They were interested in discussing general topics: people's planning, need for education, and functions and services of *panchayat*. Fishermen youth evinced interest also in learning Global Positioning System (GPS) as it is a specific skill required by them for their job. It showed that in order to attract and motivate them, it is necessary to include topics important to them as an integral part of the literacy programme. In the classes where GPS was taught, even literate persons and members of the public attended enthusiastically.

Functionality

Literacy is incomplete unless it is integrated with functionality. We have tried our best to go beyond mere learning of the 3R's (literacy). Learners were taught to read traffic signals, other relevant emblems, fill up application forms (for income certificates, community certificate, ration card, electricity connection, and kerosene permit) and write letters. They were also given lessons to fill up model application forms. Subjects such as national integration, history

of freedom struggle, and social reform movements of Kerala history were also discussed in the classes.

Evaluation

Internal test: Tests were conducted at the end of the training period, to evaluate the trainees. A week-long internal test was conducted by the instructors, under the supervision of the project personnel using question papers prepared in consultation with experts. Of the 162 learner-trainees, 119 participated in the internal test. Some learners, who could not participate in the internal test, took part in an external test conducted by an expert on adult education. A few learners participated in both the tests.

According to National Literacy Mission (NLM), a person requires a minimum of 70 percent marks to qualify the test. The test contained questions to assess the learners' ability in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Out of the 119 persons participated, 76 persons (64 percent) satisfied the NLM norms. Of these 76 persons, 45 were women and 31 men. Seventy-one percent of the learners qualified the NLM norms in reading, 88 percent learners in writing, and 94 percent persons in arithmetic. The best performance was in arithmetic. Literacy achievement of males was found to be lower than of females for the following reasons: (i) High dropout of male learners due mainly to migration; and (ii) Lack of enthusiasm in performing during tests. Given these factors, a pass percentage of 64 is considered remarkable.

External test

An external test was administered on a sample of 57 learners by a team of professionals under the leadership of Dr Reghu, Head of the Department of Adult Education, University of Kerala, on 24 January 2001. Forty-six of them (80.7 percent) passed the test. Six were males and 40, females.

All the participants in the test, except one, scored marks of more than 50 percent in numeracy and 51 percent in reading and writing. The literacy campaign must have raised the rate of literacy in the area from 78.05percent to 82.21 percent.

Overall evaluation of the campaign

Based on self-evaluation of the whole campaign team, the following factors were identified as having facilitated the effective implementation of the programme.

- (i) Co-ordination of efforts of political and religious leaders,
- (ii) Wholehearted support and leadership taken by a leading NGO of the locality,
- (iii) The efforts at environment creation, through media, cultural pageantry, and cultural competitions,
- (iv) Constitution of appropriate structures like *Theera Saksharatha Samithy*,
- (v) Group-specific and need-based training given to the instructors, including teaching/ learning methodology and skill training in the preparation of learning aids,

- (vi) Preparation of a culture-specific curriculum
- (vii) Continuous monitoring of the activities
- (viii) Regular tests (pre-test, post-test, external evaluation),

The following were identified as factors which hindered achievement of total literacy.

- (i) Migration of the male learners;
- (ii) Uncongenial environment particularly during the Monsoons;
- (iii) Distraction caused by political events (*panchayat* election which took place during this campaign);
- (iv) Feasts and festivals in churches, mosques, and temples;
- (v) Squabbles among neighbours and learners;
- (vi) Apathy among the core team of organisers;
- (vii) Curricular inadequacies;
- (viii) Inadequate follow-up of dropouts from literacy classes; and
- (ix) Slackening of enthusiasm among instructors.

Probably the most disheartening dimension was the decline of enthusiasm of some of the instructors. The fact remains that the instructor is the mainstay of a literacy effort.

An analysis of case studies prepared by the instructors brought forth the following factors facilitating or inhibiting learner performance.

- (i) Dropouts from literacy classes consisted of men who had discontinued studies in school for taking up fishing, and women, for taking up domestic chores,
- (ii) The achievers had some earlier exposure to primary education and had pleasant memories of learning,
- (iii) Achievers had high motivation,
- (iv) Achievers were regular in attending literacy classes,
- (v) Dedicated instructors could enthuse learners,
- (vi) Practical needs (like writing letters to spouses, keeping accounts, and reading religious books) lay behind the urge to attend literacy classes,
- (vii) Interest in learning and keenness to assist children motivated some of the better performing learners,
- (viii) Many of the better achievers had been participants of the Total Literacy Campaign
- (ix) Innovative teaching techniques helped keeping enthusiasm of learners,
- (x) Children's compulsion was a motivating factor,
- (xi) The worst-performing learners were invariably those who had no earlier schooling experience or had painful memories of education,
- (xii) The level of motivation of low-performing learners was low,
- (xiii) Most of the low-performers had negative views of their ability to learn,
- (xiv) Almost all low achievers mentioned work as an excuse for not learning,
- (xv) None of the low performers was regular in attending classes,
- (xvi) Alcoholism of members in the households disrupted class attendance of the learners,

- (xvii) The poor performers had been slow learners in school,
- (xviii) Addiction to television programmes acted negatively on some of the learners, particularly women.
- (xix) In the case of elderly fishermen, who use hooks, certain deformities of the hand created for them problems in writing. Long years of abstention from intellectual pursuits made it difficult for elderly learners to take to learning in an effective way.

6. Conclusion

We began this study of the residual illiteracy with a view to gaining a clear understanding of the phenomenon of residual illiteracy among the coastal people, particularly fisherfolk, and to implement a model action programme for its eradication.

Theoretical explanation

Educational backwardness is explained in terms of poverty, unemployment, opportunity costs, lack of schools and school facilities, inappropriateness of syllabus, and poor quality of teachers. In the case of our target population the more important factors appeared to be low politicisation of the community and religious and cultural straitjacketing. Commercialisation of the economy and its benefits had, by and large, bypassed the fish workers.

In the action programme, we approached the campaign with these views in mind. We began by enlisting support of political, cultural, and social leadership; we made an effort to link learning with the occupational needs of the learner; and we developed a culture-specific curriculum for training the target group.

Based on the results of literacy, we propose the following model for intervention for removal of residual illiteracy.

A model of intervention to eliminate residual illiteracy among coastal people

- (i) Collect data on levels of illiteracy and geographical location of the illiterates through participatory surveys.
- (ii) Identify and entrust the leadership of the campaign to a key agency preferably an accepted NGO in the locality.
- (iii) Enlist all the religious, cultural, and other service organisations in the campaign.
- (iv) Implement training to a core team of literacy teachers who would act as instructors and purveyors;
- (v) Prepare a culture-specific curriculum and supply texts and appropriate reading materials to teachers;
- (vi) Prepare learning aids appropriate for the campaign;
- (vii) Make arrangements for continuous monitoring and conduct pre- and post-training evaluation;
- (viii) Ensure follow-up action; and
- (ix) Build structures for sustaining literacy efforts.

Follow-up action in Poovar and suggestion for further study

Follow-up is an important factor in the case of neo-literates, to retain what they learned through the campaign. All the neo-literates who successfully completed the campaign effort requested arrangements for continuing education. The organisers held meetings with their volunteers to plan follow-up activities.

The target group for follow-up falls into two categories: the neo-literates of the campaign and semi-literates, who had participated in the campaign but could not pass the tests. We plan the follow-up programme at three levels:

- (i) A mobile library: Newspapers/magazines could be an effective tool of continuing education. The volunteers suggested distributing old/ used newspapers to each centre of learning (the place where the literacy classes were held). Social institutions such as Loyola Social Works would do this job.
- (ii) *Tulyata* (Egalitarian) classes: *Tulyata* class is a programme conducted by the State Literacy Mission. In this programme, neo-literates through a semi-formal education curriculum are taught to qualify themselves in an examination, on successful completion of which they would receive a certificate equivalent to a pass in standard 4 or standard 7 of the formal education stream, as the case may be. It is the Continuing Education Centres of Village and Block Panchayats that conduct such classes.

In the target area, there are two such continuing education centres. Linking our learners with these classes is envisaged. We plan to organise the neo-literates between the ages of 8 to 20 years through this class. Around 75 neo-literates out of 162, who completed the campaign effort, are interested in this programme.

- (iii) Continuing education classes: The semi-literates have requested continuation of literacy classes. We plan to continue the effort to make them literate using the services of committed individuals under the supervision of the Loyola Social Works, Poovar for at least five more months (till June 2001). In fact, three such volunteers have already started taking classes.

Conclusions

The residual illiteracy of the poor people of coastal areas, particularly marine fish workers, may be understood in the matrix of low politicisation, ineffective commercialisation, and religious and cultural obscurantism. Attempts to ameliorate this situation could prove successful even in the absence of radical social reform. However, it is ultimately education that would open up the long run path to progress. The doorway to education is, to be sure, literacy. However, as Nitya Rao pointed out in 1993, “without mass organisation of the poor, without mass participation in programmes of social and economic development, and without the universalisation of primary education, the gains of literacy campaign will be difficult to sustain”. What little may be achieved through the campaign mode is difficult to sustain unless backed up by appropriate ongoing supportive measures.

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