

Educational Scenario among the Marathi Naik Tribal Community of Dakshina Kannada

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Marathi Naiks, recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in Karnataka, primarily inhabit the Western Ghats region of Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, and Kasaragod districts. Historically dependent on agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and wage labor, this community has long experienced social and economic marginalization. Their lifestyle has traditionally been simple and community-centered, with limited interaction with mainstream society.

Although statistical records indicate considerable educational progress in recent decades, disparities persist—particularly between men and women. This article analytically examines the educational scenario among the Marathi Naik tribal community of Dakshina Kannada and explores how education has contributed to social transformation within the community.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Marathi Naiks are essentially a migrated tribal group who settled in the forested areas of Dakshina Kannada. They cleared forest land and established agricultural livelihoods, gradually becoming recognized as a Scheduled Tribe. According to recent demographic data, the population of Marathi Naiks in Dakshina Kannada stands at 82,447, comprising 40,954 males and 41,493 females. The overall sex ratio is 1013, though the child sex ratio has declined to 958. Traditionally, the community worked as agricultural laborers, domestic helpers in upper-caste households, and farm workers. Like other tribal groups, their language, housing patterns, occupations, food habits, and cultural practices are shaped by their geographical environment.

III. EDUCATIONAL TRENDS AND LITERACY

As per 2013 data on Scheduled Tribes' educational statistics, the overall literacy rate among the Marathi Naik community is 80.9%. Male literacy stands at 87.0%, while female literacy is 74.9%. Although these figures reflect substantial progress, the gender gap remains a significant concern.

A research study conducted in 2020 by the Department of Sociology at Mangalore University reported that:

- 11.25% had completed primary education
- 13.5% had completed secondary education
- 17.75% had completed Pre-University education
- 12.73% had attained postgraduate degrees
- 3.25% remained illiterate
- 8.25% had pursued vocational education
- 1.25% had obtained technical education

These findings indicate upward mobility in educational attainment, including higher education; however, educational discontinuation remains a concern, especially at the secondary and pre-university levels.

IV. GEOGRAPHICAL AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Certain remote villages in Sullia Taluk—such as Ajjanapare, Deva, Badadka, Ollambe, and Battangaya—are still geographically isolated, requiring residents to traverse forest paths to access mainstream facilities. Children from these areas often reside in tribal Ashram schools from a very young age, separated from their parents.

Geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, limited transportation, and economic hardship continue to hinder consistent educational participation.

V. THE KASARAGOD ISSUE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Since the 1950s, the Marathi Naik community in Dakshina Kannada (Karnataka) and Kasaragod (Kerala) enjoyed Scheduled Tribe status, following the recommendations of the Kalelkar Commission. However, after the 1956 States Reorganisation, certain segments of the Marathi Naik community came under Kerala's jurisdiction.

In 2002, without a comprehensive scientific study, the Government of Kerala removed the Marathi Naik community from the Scheduled Tribe list. As a result, many students from Kasaragod pursuing higher education in Karnataka—particularly at Mangalore University—are compelled to pay general merit (GM) fees despite extreme poverty. They are deprived of scholarships, stipends, and other educational benefits reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

This policy shift has had long-term implications for intergenerational mobility and educational access.

VI. TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In today's competitive world, education is a vital tool for acquiring knowledge and employable skills. However, children from hilly and forest regions often struggle to adapt to rapidly changing technological demands. Many discontinue education midway and return to traditional agricultural or wage labor occupations.

Skill-based and technical education remains underutilized due to limited exposure, financial constraints, and lack of guidance.

VII. GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION

The educational challenges faced by Marathi Naik girls are particularly complex. Contributing factors include:

- Geographical isolation
- Economic hardship
- Early marriage and adolescent relationships

- Lack of tribal role models
- Cultural taboos surrounding puberty
- Inadequate school infrastructure and local-language instruction
- Limited parental support

As a result, many girls drop out of school during adolescence. For educational interventions to be effective, culturally sensitive approaches that respect tribal traditions while promoting empowerment are essential.

VIII. MARGINALIZATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The community's limited exposure to mainstream competitive environments has sometimes been misinterpreted as a lack of capability. In reality, systemic barriers, limited access to quality education, and socio-economic disadvantages restrict opportunities for skill development.

Many boys discontinue education after secondary or pre-university levels and return to agriculture or daily wage labor. The gap between the educated and uneducated sections of the community is widening.

IX. SUBSTANCE USE AND YOUTH VULNERABILITY

In certain remote areas, lack of supervision and structured engagement exposes adolescents to unhealthy habits such as alcohol consumption, smoking, and chewing tobacco products. These behaviors negatively impact both educational attainment and future employability.

X. EDUCATION: A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The contrast between educated and uneducated members of the community is stark:

- Educated individuals secure better employment and improved economic status.
- They are more aware of their rights and government welfare schemes.
- They invest in their children's education, promoting intergenerational mobility.
- Education enhances self-confidence and informed decision-making.

Conversely, illiteracy often perpetuates poverty, limited occupational mobility, and social marginalization.

Encouraging education within tribal communities is therefore not merely an individual benefit but a collective pathway to sustainable development.

XI. CONCLUSION

Despite persistent challenges, the Marathi Naik tribal community of Dakshina Kannada has witnessed significant educational, economic, and social transformation. While a segment still struggles with illiteracy and dropout rates, another segment has achieved remarkable success—earning doctoral degrees, becoming doctors and engineers, qualifying in prestigious examinations such as the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and Indian Police Service (IPS), serving as university professors, and contributing to scientific research institutions such as Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

However, the internal disparity between the educated and uneducated sections of the community remains wide. Sustainable development requires that progress occur across all dimensions and reach every segment of the population. Only through inclusive educational advancement can holistic community development be achieved.

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