CHAPTER V

Education, Socio-cultural Reproduction and Marginalisation

In India, educational backwardness and inequalities are most intensely experienced by Adivasi communities (NCFR 2005) and the situation is not very different in the state of Kerala well known for its educational achievements across social groups. Studies show that the gap in educational achievements between Adivasi and non-Adivasi communities is significant and it continues and there are significant intra-community differences among Adivasi groups. The persistent educational backwardness of the Adivasi people has been identified as the result of structural inequalities, historically evolved and consolidated under colonialism and capitalist development (NCFR 2005). The Kerala model of development, which attracted the attention of academicians and policy makers nationally and internationally, highlighted its superior educational and social achievements at low levels of income. While the Adivasi communities in general are excluded from the gains of the widely acclaimed educational experience of Kerala, a section of them have derived marginal benefits.

This chapter discusses how schooling reproduces social inequalities and cultural asymmetries by examining the educational experiences of the Paniyas and the Kurichias. The first section briefly describes the educational scenario in Kerala and Wayanad, and the state’s commitment to Adivasi education. The second section explores the differential educational experiences and outcomes and attempts to understand how historical advantages and disadvantages affect them in their everyday experience of schooling and thus shape their destinies. As described in the earlier chapter, there are notable socio-economic and cultural inequalities between these two Adivasi communities which get reproduced through the micro processes of the present schooling system.

Literacy and Education

Considering Kerala’s outstanding success in the field of literacy and education, the gap in literacy and education between non-Adivasi and Adivasi people, and between the various
Adivasi communities is striking. As per the census of 2001, the general literacy rate in Kerala is 92.1 per cent and the Adivasi literacy is only 64.4 per cent. The literacy rate of the Paniyas and the Kurichias in Kerala is 48.5 and 78.2 per cent respectively (Narayana 2010). In Wayanad, the overall literacy rate is 82.7 per cent, while it is only 49.4 per cent for the Adivasi people. The literacy rate of the Paniyas and the Kurichias in Wayanad was estimated at 52.3 and 80.8 per cent respectively in 2004 (Centre of Excellence 2006). The school dropout rate, another indicator of educational backwardness, is much higher among the Adivasi children of Wayanad as compared to children from other non-Adivasi communities (Table 5.1)

Table 5.1

Drop out Percentage of Students in Wayanad, Standards I - X (2000-2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All community</th>
<th>Scheduled Caste</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000-2001</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>6.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001-2002</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>6.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2008-2009</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2009-2010</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of the Deputy Director of Education, Information collected through RTI

Note: *compiled by the author from the data collected from the office
Further, the recent KILA survey (2008) reveals the severity of drop outs from schools, colleges and other courses. Among Paniya students there were 7694 (51.59%) drop outs and among Kurichia students there were 2344 (15.72%) drop outs according to their report.

As part of the Madras presidency under the British, Wayanad has had a slower growth in educational facilities compared to the rest of Kerala, which was under the princely states of Thiruvithamkur and Kochi. The first school in Wayanad, an upper primary school was established in Mananthavady only in 1869, and by 1900 there were just six schools in the region (Krishnan 1999). But educational facilities picked up momentum after independence. Yet, the number of schools in Adivasi areas of Wayanad remained few and some of the Adivasi children remained un-enrolled in schools (Mary 2002), although a baseline survey conducted in 2004 stated that enrolment was hundred per cent (Centre of Excellence 2006). Despite the growing educational facilities in Wayanad, the data on the highest educational attainment among the Paniyas and the Kurichias show that Adivasi students who cross secondary schooling form a very small proportion (Table 5.2).

### Table 5.2

**Percentage of the Paniyas and the Kurichias in Wayanad who attained different Levels of Education as of 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Paniyas</th>
<th>Kurichias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literate without Schooling</td>
<td>02.9</td>
<td>03.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>34.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>45.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Degree</td>
<td>00.6</td>
<td>02.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>00.2</td>
<td>00.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Graduate</td>
<td>00.3</td>
<td>00.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Training</td>
<td>00.0</td>
<td>00.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Centre of Excellence 2006: pp.69

Note: Survey conducted for 2139 respondents
As per the data for 2009-10, there are 292 schools in Wayanad, consisting of lower primary (LP) Standards I-IV, upper primary (UP) Standards V-VII and high school (HS) Standards VIII-X in the government, aided and private unaided sectors. In addition, there are 62 higher secondary schools (HSSs) Standards XI-XII (including 10 vocational HSSs), 15 schools under the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), one under the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE), one Kendriya Vidyalaya, and one Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (Government of Kerala 2011).

**State Commitment to the Education of Adivasis**

In the government and government aided schools, education is free for all the students. In these schools, Adivasi students are given two pairs of uniforms, textbooks and other study materials, an annual lumpsum grant and a monthly stipend up to Standard X. As per the data collected from the Adivasi development office located in Mananthavady, Wayanad, the respective annual grant and monthly stipend per student are Rs.140 and Rs.55 for Standards I-IV, Rs.240 and Rs.60 for Standards V-VII, and Rs.330 and Rs.70 for Standards VIII-X. Free breakfast and lunch are also provided in these schools for all the students up to Standard VII. However, most of the schools reported that they receive the funds for uniform, study materials and for conducting other Adivasi cultural programmes very late. While appreciating the special grants for Adivasi children, the Deputy Director of Education reported that a large part of the grants is dispersed so late that schools are unable to use the funds effectively. The Deputy Director of Education, who belongs to the Adivasi Community, took the initiative to arrange a night camp for one month for Standard X students before their final examinations, in schools with 30 per cent or more Adivasi students.

In Wayanad, the state Adivasi Development Department runs three Model Residential Schools (MRSs), two Ashram Schools and 28 pre-matric hostels for Adivasi students. They provide the Adivasi students free stay, board and education. The presence of Adivasi population in Wayanad and their comparative low status of education were criteria to select Wayanad for the state’s District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) project. The DPEP operative in the 1990s introduced a few single teacher Multi Grade Learning Centres (MGLCs) (also known as alternate schools) in Wayanad in 1997. They are being continued under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) of the central government. The programme of the MGLC is primarily meant for the Adivasi communities living in
remote areas. In Wayanad, this programme began with ten centres/alternate schools with 235 students in the age group 5-14 years (Kumar and Parthasarathy 2007). According to the office of the SSA in Wayanad, in 2010, there were 55 MGLCs with 1525 students in Wayanad.

The padanaveed (study centre) is another initiative that began in November 2008 under the SSA project to create a favourable atmosphere of learning for Adivasi children in their own colony/settlement eliciting community participation. The selection and organisation of padanaveed is entrusted to the panchayat education committee and to the schools near the Adivasi colonies. In 2009, there were 26 padanaveeds in selected Adivasi colonies in Wayanad. This initiative envisions extension of the programme to all Adivasi colonies in the district. One case of closure of padanaveed was reported in the study area during the study period. In this case, a Paniya house was used as the location and a non-Adivasi instructor was appointed to help children in their studies between 5 pm and 8 pm. A school teacher who lived nearby was to supervise the programme. Soon, the classes were shifted from the Paniya house to the supervisor’s unused cattle shed. Though there were 14 children in the colony, the daily attendance ranged from three to eight children. There were no benches or desks, except for a mat to sit on the floor. Reading materials were not bought, but snacks were provided. The instructor was changed thrice in three months and they were irregular. Thus this poorly organised padanaveed was closed down after three months. The padanaveeds in other colonies, as reported by panchayat members, were functioning.

Admission to the MRSs is based on an entrance test conducted at the state level. Not surprisingly, the Kurichia students with a better socio-economic background out-perform the Paniya students in the test and are in much greater numbers in the MRSs. Generally the MRS and Ashram schools meant for Adivasi students lack facilities. The government ashram school in Thirunelly, specially meant for students from the ‘weaker’ Paniya and Adiya communities, was found to lack even basic facilities. There was no hostel for girl children and they stay in the teachers’ quarters sleeping on the cement floor even during the winter. As reported by the warden, the poor hygienic conditions cause scabies and infection. The government Ashram school at Thirunelly did not have permanent teaching staff and when the students and teachers get acquainted with each other, the teacher is transferred. Despite these limitations, the overall performance of the Adivasi children is
better in the MRSs and Ashram schools than in the general schools (Centre of Excellence 2006).

In the study area, all the Adivasi residential schools reported that Adivasi children are excellent in extracurricular activities. For instance, Ambedkar Model Residential School Nalloornadu won the district level championship in school sports continuously for the last nine years (Malayala Manorama, Kozhikodu, March 21, 2011). They have also won prizes in drama competition and in Malayalam poetry recital at the district level youth festivals. In Thirunelli Ashram School, a Paniya student and his group won prizes in district and state level competitions for their project on Adivasi medicine.

Further, it was observed that in MRSs, there was no noticeable difference in the participation levels of Paniya, Kurichia and non-Adivasi students. Paniya and Kurichia students came forward to write and draw pictures on the board and explain it to their peers without shyness and they were very enthusiastic to show their drawing, painting and art forms unlike in other government and aided schools where non-Adivasi students form the majority (photo 16). A non-Adivasi teacher from a government aided school who was very observant and empathetic towards Paniya children stated, “I find Paniya students intelligent and smart when they join the school. Slowly they lag behind as they cannot adjust with the dominant culture of teachers and other students”. MRS and Ashram schools provide a comparatively better atmosphere for Adivasi children than other government and aided schools.

Even though the performance is better and the apparent disparity is less in MRS and Ashram schools, one non-Adivasi teacher from an MRS suggested that teachers be thoroughly acquainted with the Adivasi culture and trained in the use of Adivasi language to teach Adivasi students. He realised that they are taken away from their culture and kept in a jail like atmosphere. He reported that in residential schools and other Adivasi hostels, children are reluctant to return to school after the holidays. Every year, one or two children disappear after the holidays, but teachers go and get them back if possible. The Adivasi students are not allowed to go out of the school premises to make a phone call or to buy stationery. One of the Headmasters reported that the collector had suggested that the children should not be sent to their settlements even during holidays in order to control the rate of drop outs and absenteeism. The headmaster found this suggestion impractical as it violated the basic right of the child. The Centre of Excellence study
(2006) also reported that there is an environment of severe restriction in MRS and Ashram schools.

According to a study by the District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Wayanad, the pre-matric hostels were overcrowded and without the minimum facilities. They failed to provide the necessary educational environment and neglected the students’ physical, intellectual and psychological needs. This study brings out many critical findings regarding the attitude of the government officials and teachers. They consider the facilities extended to the Adivasi children more as a favour than as a right, and are of the view that the Adivasi students deserve only the minimum facilities and comfort, as what they are provided is comparatively better than what they have in their homes (DIET 2007). Stating shortage of staff as a reason, students in these hostels were made to assist in cooking and cleaning. In Kunnal colony, parents reported that they sent four children to the nearby Adivasi hostel and they came back when the warden was not there due to the strict rules and hesitated to go back again. Fewer Kurichia students use the facility of the pre-matric hostels as compared to the Paniya students. The MRS hostels meant for all Adivasi communities were found to be in a better condition than the ashram school hostels and the pre-matric hostels mainly used by the Paniyas and the Adiyas in Wayanad (DIET 2007). Thus the state provision of educational facilities reproduces the internal division among different Adivasi groups.

The increase in the number of schools and hostels and the sanctioning of MRSs, Ashram Schools and MGLCs indicate better access of educational institutions to Adivasi children. However, the infrastructure is poor in the schools meant for Adivasis and the facilities are graded, which reinforces the Adivasi/non-Adivasi differences and also the intra Adivasi group differences. Further, the special provisions for Adivasis are considered a favour and this curtails their individual right and dignity. Instead of introducing Adivasi language and culture, strict discipline is imposed and Adivasi children face alienation in the government and government aided schools, and even in the schools specially meant for them.

**Religious Organisations and Adivasi Education**

Indigenous knowledge and their development initiatives were considered backward by colonial thinking and its educational institutions. The post-independence educational agenda gave much importance to modernity grounded in the scientific and the rational
paradigm of development with a focus on national integration neglecting local identities and regional differences in culture. According to Sharma (2003), the school borrows its cultural paradigm from the socially dominant groups, either rejecting or seeking to modify all other forms of cultural expressions. She points out that colonialism extends to our mind as in the case of territory and hegemonises indigenous systems of knowledge. The structural functionalist and developmental paradigms in education treat education as the means for social change, personal development and nation building. This notion of education revolving around growth and development ignores the multiple dimensions in which the process of education has to be understood. The absence of a cultural critique and an analysis of the micro politics involved in the educational institutions and in the process of schooling are major limitations of this perspective. The cultural alienation in schools begins with the negation of Adivasi identity. The general lack of respect shown towards them forces Adivasi children to try and disown their 'Adivasi' identity from the very start of their schooling. Among Paniyas, the younger generation is found to be reluctant to own their identity and at times, they try to escape the discrimination by identifying themselves as Hindus. Nima aged 36, from Kunnil colony defended stating,

If we categorise different religions as Hindu, Muslim, and Christian we fall under the Hindu religion. In school registers they are giving our religion as Hindu/Paniya. But god has not created any division and human beings are creating division among different religions.

Nima considers the school register as an official document and as providing the rationale for perceiving themselves as Hindus. When the Bhajan mandali (devotional songs sung in groups before going to the Sabarimala temple - initiated with the support of Hindu groups in the area) was conducted in one settlement with loud speakers and illumination, I asked the reason for conducting it elaborately as it was not a practice earlier. One of the Paniyas replied, “When we live in a modern society we have to show people that we can also do it. We struggle a bit, but our children will get credit for that”. And he added, “But we have not changed our core traditions, values and rituals”. It emerges that worshipping Hindu gods and adopting Hindu rituals is one way to escape the label of being primitive. As Bindu (2003) points out Kurichias with their claims to higher ritual status among the Wayanad Adivasis are more susceptible to the Hinduisation process in comparison to the Paniyas.

The Kurichias show a greater tendency towards sanskritisation and claim Hindu identity as a symbol of their modernisation. In a government school when a Kurichia girl
was asked in which category she belonged, she immediately whispered something to her friend next to her and then told me, ‘I am from Ambalam (temple)’. The entire Kurichia students in the class then repeated the same. There are temples attached to the Kurichia tharavads in that area and the children thought associating themselves with temple give them a special status as high castes. As Bindu (2003) points out, the trend among Kurichias to adopt vegetarianism perceived as a ‘high culture’ is to make a claim to modernity. In the case of Vaishnava Kurichias of Wayanad, she argues that religious conversion among them is a negotiation with modernity.

According to Cheria et al (1997), the Catholic church on the other hand focuses its educational interventions mostly among the migrant Christian population. The educational facilities helped the Christians among the migrants who encroached Adivasi land to become even more powerful by enhancing their economic and cultural capital. Even though the church occasionally expanded their services to include Adivasi people, their approach was charity based and with a mentality to redeem Adivasi culture (ibid). However, in Catholic educational institutions in Wayanad, conversion is not seen as an agenda in recent times and religious practices are not forced on students from other communities. Even though Catholic Schools are not found to be propagating their religious ideology explicitly as was the case during the British period by the missionaries, the underlying ideology that views Catholic values as superior and Adivasi cultures as backward continues to prevail. For instance, even though Adivasi children are well versed in their folk songs, their songs were not sung as prayer songs in schools or at other common cultural festivals. These subtle ways of practices are not seriously taken by the teachers or school authorities. But I felt that it was a serious issue when Adivasi children showed shyness and reluctance to sing their nadan pattukal (folk songs) but sung other Christian and Hindu prayers without hesitation in the schools as well as in their colonies. When I started singing a Paniya song, they started laughing but slowly joined with me and taught me new songs. It was observed that Adivasi children were lagging behind in educational achievements and cultural activities unlike the other children in Catholic schools. There were no efforts reported from the school authorities to teach the Adivasi children in their language in the study area. Rare initiatives are reported like in Eachome, a Catholic school where a Paniya teacher is appointed to explain the lessons in Paniya language.
The Pentecostal churches (a sect of Christian church) are active in orienting the Adivasi children through their preaching and night classes. Converted Adivasi pastors are used to conduct religious orientation to the Adivasi children and adults. It has been observed that Paniya pastors who are illiterate instruct their children using very attractive teaching aids like colourful cubes depicting pictures symbolising Jesus (photo 18). The Paniya pastor’s illiteracy is not a teaching block. They also conduct group games and dramas to teach them how to spread religion to others. The instructions began by creating a feeling of backwardness in the children saying that they are in darkness and Jesus invites them for enlightenment by confessing their sins. The innocent children immediately closed their eyes and started asking pardon for their naughty behaviour at school and home. In Kaloor, Bathery there is an institution run by the Pentecostal mission, where they conduct tuition classes for the children. Adivasi children and their parents attend many of their prayer services and counselling sections. One pastor from that organisation married an Adivasi girl in the locality.

To resist the cultural imperialism projected by colonial education and the Christian missionary efforts to save Adivasis from continuing the ideology of the white man’s burden, Hindu organisations were active in spreading Hindu revivalism through educational institutions. In Kerala, under the Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) (Kerala office at Kozhikode and All India office at Jaspur) there were forty Rural Study Centers, four Hostels and fifteen Bala Sanskara Kendras (Children’s Cultural Centers). The Vanvasi Vikas Kendra registered as a cultural organisation (Reg.61/79) was involved in the education of Adivasi children in Wayanad. In one of their tuition centres in a Paniya colony, it was observed that the class began with the Gayatri Mantra and the Hindu instructors taught them using Hindu Purana stories. In Valli colony they insisted the Adivasi instructor celebrate Sreekrishna Jayanthi in the settlement and the Adivasi instructor rejected it. She stated,

The Temple is very near our settlement and they celebrate Sreekrishna Jayanthi elaborately in the temple and our children participate in it. I am against another celebration in the settlement according to their suggestion. In the colony we like to celebrate our traditional cultural festivals.

When I enquired about the reason for Hindu gods occupying the worship place in one Paniya house, Nellan from Kunnil colony replied angrily… “Do not try to test me. Without becoming modern nothing is possible today. At least our children need acceptance in the wider society”. It emerges that worshipping Hindu gods and adapting to
Hindu rituals is one way to escape the label of backwardness attributed to Paniyas. It appears that a two way process of invasion and adaptation of Hindu culture is happening among Paniyas. The Hindu revivalist movement initiated this change among them and included them in the lowest rung of Hindu religion by calling them *Vanvasi* (forest dweller).

In Lakshmi Smaraka Girijan Sadanam at Kaniyampatta, a boy’s hostel run by a Hindu organisation, the daily routine begins with *Pratah Smarana* (prayer in Sanskrit language worshipping Hindu gods) at 5.15 am. After school hours, there is *Sakha* (bowing down before the saffron flag and then doing mass drill and prayers before the flag) at 5 pm, *Bhajan* and *Arati* at 6.30 pm, *Ekatmata Mantram* at 9.45pm. When few of the student inmates were asked about the meaning of the prayers, they were not able to explain. There was a temple next to the building and students actively participated in temple worship.

Dhuni, a former resident of Lakshmi Smaraka Balika Sadhanam (Hostel for Adivasi girls run by Hindu organisation) said,

> We have to jump out of bed when we hear the word *Uthishta* (A Sanskrit word meaning wake up). Every child is compelled to participate in the prayer services and the *Shakha*. It is taught that bowing before the saffron flag is similar to bowing before *Mathrubhumi* (the Nation) and they have their own National Anthem for that. I was advised to join their organisation after passing SSLC to serve other children. But I did not go back.

It emerges that in these hostels, the everyday routine for the Adivasi child is planned to expose and attract these children to Hindu religion. The strict discipline and religious practices followed in these institutions have no connection with the Adivasi spiritual practices of ancestor worship and nature worship. This clearly indicates the Hindutva agenda of right wing politics to spread cultural nationalism with its ideological inclination towards Hindu philosophy and Hindu Nation building neglecting all other voices. But the government gave sanction to these institutions and the Adivasi department gave grants and scholarships to these children. One tribal development officer in the study area reported that the government’s enquiry before giving sanction is only to make sure that these institutions are not anti national and there is no forcible conversion into Hindu religion.

It appears that government and educational institutions run by religious agencies work together to redeem Adivasi culture and help them join the ‘mainstream’. They ignore if it
is religious ‘mainstreaming’ or ‘mainstreaming’ through development programmes. However, everyday coercive religious practices in the institutions which destroy Adivasi culture and religion are not taken into consideration or challenged by any agency. As Cheria et al (1997) points out, the Hindus not only civilize the Adivasis but also teach their religion, customs and traditions through their institutions. According to Sunder (2009) the State’s act of omission and commission are central to the enterprise of religious mobilisation in educational institutions.

It emerges that the crushing of Adivasi culture and religion by these organisations are not addressed by the government. However, the religious organisations cannot be criticised harshly until the Adivasi children and their adults are given enough space for their own cultural evolution in educational institutions through policy reforms and its effective implementation in consultation with Adivasi people. However, few alternate government programmes like MRS and Ashram Schools are not able to produce much change in the educational inequalities and marginalisation faced by Adivasi students and especially by the Paniyas as the teachers and the entire system support the idea of ‘mainstreaming’ rather than affirming specific cultures. Sunder (2010) warns against the serious danger of education becoming a means for individual alienation from the community in the absence of factors that affirm cultural pride in Adivasi identity in schooling processes. The following section discusses the complex micro processes that perpetuate and reproduce the inequalities and alienation in the school site through every day teacher student interactions and peer interactions.

**Schooling and Reproduction of Socio-Cultural and Educational Inequalities**

Several studies have reiterated that poverty, lack of parental motivation, ill health and insensitivity of teachers/peers to the Adivasi situation result in high drop out rates; this combined with absenteeism and failure are the major reasons for the educational backwardness of Adivasi children (Centre of Excellence 2006). As Nambissan (2006) points out, mere quantitative indices of school enrolment, attendance and completion rates are not enough to assess equality in educational opportunities, but more complex processes that position social groups differently in knowledge, skills, cultural attributes, self-worth and social respect need to be addressed. Following are some of the processes of schooling that continue to reproduce social and educational inequalities.

**School Enrolment, Absenteeism and Drop out**
As against the official claim of 100 per cent enrolment, school visits, especially during the rainy and lean economic seasons, showed many Paniya children out of school. Teachers from the government and aided schools confirmed that the Paniya children remained absent for nearly fifty per cent of the school days. However, teachers marked them present on records to receive children’s grants and also to secure their own jobs. It is well known that teachers try to ensure maximum attendance in class on the sixth working day of the academic year when the headcount in class is done by the state education officers in order to determine the enrolment figure.

Poverty continues to be a major cause of poor enrolment, absenteeism and early drop out. Landlessness and irregular employment place the Paniya families in a vicious cycle of poverty and their children are expected to supplement the meagre incomes of their families. Girl children were often sent for paid domestic work or had to stay at home to look after younger siblings. In a Paniya settlement in Thirunelly panchayat, one boy was reported to be waiting for his grandmother who had gone to Kodagu (earlier called Coorg), a district in Karnataka for wage labour in order to procure a shirt for him to wear to join an ashram school. His father was an alcoholic and mother was too anaemic to work. The Kurichia children do not face severe vulnerability as land provides them the minimum economic security. No Kurichia child remains absent from school due to lack of necessary material for schooling or household matters like lack of firewood at home. Among Kurichia children, there was no drop out due to child labour. Poverty affects the schooling of children in many indirect ways too. For instance, poor economic conditions of the Paniyas stretch puberty rituals of girls over a month, which keeps the girls away from school and many of them drop out subsequently. The Kurichia community, in relatively better economic conditions, completes the puberty rituals within a week and sends the girls back to school.

With regard to the relative educational disadvantage of the Paniya community, an Adivasi promoter from Thirunelli panchayat reported that a Paniya settlement of 42 families had 25 drop outs among children in the age group of 5-18 years. This settlement had no Paniya student who had passed Standard X and many children discontinued schooling after Standard IV as the UP school was 8 km and the High School was 18 km away from the settlement. The Kurichia children have the means to travel to school by
bus and therefore the distance does not deter them from schooling. Mary (2002) shows that prolonged poverty and non-accessibility to the school continue to be the major reasons for drop outs among Adivasi children and especially among Adivasi girls in Wayanad.

In a personal interview, a Deputy Director of Education from the Kuruma Adivasi community reported that during one of her official visits to Chenadu school, she found that 16 Paniya students had dropped out in Standard X. As an outcome of this experience, she reported that in the academic year 2008, she introduced a programme in which the education department divided teachers into squads who did home visits and they found 1520 students in the school going age were at home and they managed to enroll 1420. In Valad, the government high school and Government Board School Mananthavady teachers reported that they did home visits and enrolled Paniya students in different classes, but majority of them again dropped out due to lack of family support and other personal reasons.

There were no drop outs from 2005 onwards among the Kurichia students in the settlements selected for study except for a few who failed in Standard X. But some of the school drop outs of this community resumed their studies. For example, a boy from the Kurichia community, who dropped out from Standard VIII in 1999, started working on his own land by cultivating paddy and bananas, and earning an income. He resumed his studies later and in 2009 passed the thulyatha pareeksha (examination equivalent to Standard X). He applied to a polytechnic and also appeared for the Public Service Commission test for acquiring a salaried job.

Further, it was observed that during the Sabarimala season, Paniya children quit classes as the community participates in the pilgrimage to Sabarimala, sometimes family members go or they are busy helping organise Bhajan mandalis (photo 21). Besides, they are very strict about the purity/pollution taboos during these days and Paniya girls quit classes for a minimum of one week saying that there are swamis (boys who have taken vows to go to Sabarimala) in their class. The Hinduisation process happening among the Adivasi communities impose more restrictions and strict purity/pollution taboos among the Paniya girls. However, during their own festivals and rituals also they quit classes and parents seldom object as they perceive it as the minimum exposure they receive to learn about their own culture.
The DPEP in Wayanad seems to have had some positive impact on the schooling of Adivasi children. A few teachers from government and aided private schools reported that the DPEP has improved the Adivasi children’s enrolment and attendance in primary classes. The MGLCs/alternate schools have improved the enrolment of Adivasi children especially in the interior Adivasi areas. However, there is uncertainty about the continuance of the MGLCs, namely, whether the state government will finance them when the central government funding under the SSA ceases. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 provides for the right of every child to have formal education in LP school within 1 km and UP school within 3 km. But the MGLC teachers find this provision impractical in the interior localities of Wayanad, where the number of children is not viable for formal schools and the existing MGLCs may have to be continued. In addition, these alternate schools have the advantage of being sensitive to Adivasi culture and language, an important aspect of their retention in school.

Adivasi parents in the study area appreciated that there is little more child friendly atmosphere in the primary classes now than in previous years. They were happy about the entertainment included in the primary classes, and at the same time were worried about the fact that they were not even learning to read and write properly even after reaching the upper primary classes. Even though the change into DPEP has brought in a more child friendly atmosphere, they reported stronger expressions of alienation by Paniya children especially when they reached the UP and high school classes. In one of the Paniya settlements, an Adivasi promoter Eva reported that one Adivasi girl picked up a cloth to hang herself and threatened her parents saying that she would commit suicide if she were compelled to go to school. In another settlement, the Mooppan said that her daughter was adamant that she would not go to school even if she were cut into pieces. Eva shared that now parents are fearful to be strict with their children as they are exposed to all kinds of misbehaviour projected through television channels. These instances are indicative of the acuteness of cultural alienation that Paniya children undergo during schooling. A Kurichia student from Tulsi tharavad reported,

In Kalpetta SKMJ school while interview and admission to the archery training centre was conducted, a Paniya student came with her mother to give the Standard X exam for failed students. But seeing the interview outside, both of them stood there expecting their turn. When the teacher enquired the purpose of their waiting they said that they had come to write the Standard X exam. The teacher explained to them that the examination was being held in another location and by that time the exam time was almost over. The girl started crying and they went back without appearing for the exam.
These experiences of Paniya students clearly indicate the severity and complex nature of alienation they face in modern educational institutions.

The financial support offered by the state or the proximity of school to children’s homes do not seem to compensate for the alienation that the Paniya children experience in formal schools. For instance, in one of the Paniya colonies, there were only 13 families and the school was only half a km away. Out of the 14 school-going children, six had dropped out during 2005-2010. The school’s insensitivity seems to have been the reason for the drop outs. For example, Ruha’s daughter, Thansa passed Standard VII in 2010 and Ruha took her to join the nearest HS. Thansa was very embarrassed at her inability to write Malayalam when the clerk handed over the application form to her. Seeing this, the clerk teased her, “She will have to study hard or pay money.” Even though Thansa completed the admission procedure, she became adamant that she would not go to school again. She narrated her humiliating experiences in the previous school where teachers continuously exposed her lack of knowledge in front of her peers.18

Ruha, a sick widow, could not change her daughter’s decision. As she was enrolled in the school register, the Adivasi department put pressure on the school authorities to give the financial aid given by the state to Thansa. Even though the school clerk informed Thansa and the family about the grant, they did not go to collect it. When asked why she was not going to take the money especially when they were struggling for their daily survival, Ruha just shrugged her shoulders and hesitated to talk. School authorities and teachers commented, “The Paniya parents are interested only in the monthly grants and not in their children’s education.” While they value education and make efforts to avail themselves of educational facilities, such humiliating remarks by non-Adivasi teachers are far more difficult to face than their debilitating poverty conditions.

**Parental and Community Participation**

The general perception of the teachers is that Paniya parents are not motivated to educate their children. The Assistant Education Officer as well as the Deputy Director of

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18 It was also found that Adivasi children especially the Paniya children faced difficulty in doing their homework, following what is apparently a simple requirement of maintaining a separate notebook for each subject neatly due to the poor household facilities and illiteracy of their parents. The teachers’ unrealistic expectations, expressed in the form of scolding, punishment and public remarks make the Paniya children feel humiliated.
Education who hailed from the Kuruman Adivasi community accepted that the system failed to motivate and conscientise Adivasi parents especially the Paniya and Kattunayakan communities about the need for education. The Deputy Director from Kuruman Adivasi community stated,

Adivasi people are satisfied with the minimum in their life and they do not accumulate. But they cannot live in their old pattern and culture as they are in the midst of another culture of exploitation. They have to earn for the day to day survival and they are not able to give much attention to their children’s education. But it is very urgent that Adivasi people realise the needs of the time and move forward and education becomes the most important aspect of their development.

The parents of Adivasi children rarely participate in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. They give many reasons for not going to meetings such as loss of a day’s work, ill health and so on. One PTA committee member among them stated, “We go, sit there, sign or give a thumb print and come back. If I have education, then others listen to what I say, otherwise they say that I am drunk”. In comparison, there was better participation by Kurichia parents in the PTA meetings. Duna, a PTA executive member from the Kurichia community said that at PTA meetings, she enquires about her children’s education. She also commented that Paniya parents neither ask teachers anything about their children nor respond to teacher’s queries.

One Paniya parent, Lavan reported that nowadays teachers show more understanding towards their children in the primary classes and so they are interested in sending their children to school and enroll them at the age of six. According to Lavan,

Before, my children used to beat their chest when they were compelled to go to school. It was so painful for me and I did not compel them to go to school till they became eight years old. In our colonies small children were not taught toilet habits. In the school, teachers did not understand their language and children sometimes did it in the class. Earlier teachers used to scold the children as well as their parents for their untidy habits in the classroom.

Nellan (36 years) from Kunnil colony reported that earlier, both Kurichia as well as Paniya community faced severe punishment by the teachers. He as a child had fainted with the beatings of one teacher for his lack of cleanliness and running nose. He felt that physical punishment is less now and children experience more freedom in primary classes than ten years ago. However, they expressed that lack of knowledge about the Adivasi way of life acts as a block for the teacher in reaching out to the Adivasi child.

Parental apathy in educating their children is perceived by school authorities as one reason for the Paniya children’s absenteeism and drop out. However, some of the stories
narrated by children show that parents expect their children to attend school regularly. A few Paniya children narrated their story of bunking school and hiding in forests and coffee gardens to escape scolding from their parents. Four children from the Kunnhil colony who were sent back by the headmaster of the school for being late at school were found trying to hide themselves in the gardens to escape their parents’ anger. One girl shared a story of hiding with her elder sister “….that day instead of going to the school we went to the coffee garden and collected coffee seeds which had fallen down, sold them in the market, bought some eatables with that money and slept till evening. When the school time got over we went home and nobody came to know about it.” It emerges that, at least some of the children are caught between the apathy of the school and punishment from their parents.

The non-Adivasi teachers’ and officials’ construction of the Paniya parents’ apathy towards their children’s education was not reflected in the study area. It was observed that even if the male head was an alcoholic, the female head in Paniya family took the responsibility of children’s education if their survival needs were met. The Paniya parents’ inability to participate in the schooling of their children is misconstrued as lack of interest in their children’s education. The eagerness of the parents to obtain the available educational facilities for their children reveals that the Adivasi parents are not apathetic towards the schooling of their children. For instance, one of the hostels for the Adivasi children had 56 students against the official capacity of 45, and 19 cots were adjusted in the space meant for only 10 cots in order to accommodate the 56 students. The congested dining room was used for also keeping their clothes and school bags. Despite the poor conditions, there was great demand for seats in the hostel.

In a MGLC specially meant for Adivasi children near their settlement, the teacher was found successful in incorporating their cultural specificities and variations (photo 17). When that school faced a threat of closing down due to lack of funding, the teacher called a PTA meeting and all the parents gathered to discuss the issue in spite of their work load. The discussion went on from 3pm to 5pm and one parent expressed her anxiety to return through the forest late evening as there were elephants. An old Mooppan responded immediately, “To escape from elephants in future we have to hear and discuss these issues today.”
Classroom observations and casual talks with teachers in the study area revealed that many teachers are not equipped to deal with the constructivist methodology and elicit participation from Adivasi students and parents. Often teachers thrust difficult assignments and projects on the students. Most of the Paniya children being first generation learners cannot expect any support from their parents to do the assignments. Krishna, an educated Kurichia from Thulsi thravad in Thavinjal panchayat reported that even he felt helpless when his daughter studying in Standard IV approached him with a difficult assignment. The student was asked to write about Veerakkallu (A special stone installed to commemorate the Kings, military officers and Chief). Krishna had to take the assistance of a history lecturer to help his daughter with the home assignment. Being a government employee, he could discuss with the teacher the issue of giving difficult assignments to the students without providing any assistance. Paniya as well as Kurichia parents reported that they were not able to assist their children with much of their homework. However, Kurichia parents were able to help if the assignments dealt with their traditions, customs, cultivation practices, Adivasi medicine or topics of this nature.

**Labelling, Peer Segregation and Teacher Apathy: Schooling Experiences**

The view that Adivasi people are inferior as they lack cognitive abilities necessary for acquiring modern knowledge and skills is pervasive. The following view of a leader from a left political party who is also a panchayat president is indicative of the deep rootedness of these stereotypes in Kerala society. According to him, the Paniya community is ‘underdeveloped’ because “they are less intelligent. There may be some genetic reason for their backwardness. They could not catch up with modern society.” He considers the Kurichia community as forward looking like the non-Adivasi people. Such essentialising comments are echoed by the non-Adivasi teachers too.

The practice of treating Adivasi people in general and the Paniyas in particular as inferior, goes on in the schools and classrooms too. As Balgopalan and Subrahmanian (2003) point out, teachers have a crucial role in influencing the Adivasi children’s self-constructions as learners and in transforming the school as an inclusive space for them. On the contrary, non-Adivasi teachers perceive that the Adivasi children, especially from the Paniya community have low IQ and that they cannot be on par with the non-Adivasi children. When permission was sought to observe a classroom in a government aided
school, one teacher’s response was, “Oh, what is there to observe? Majority of our children are from the Adivasi group!” Similarly, the principal of a college of education in the study area reported that his students hesitated to go to the Adivasi majority schools or to the MRSs for their training, because they believed that it might adversely affect their performance and evaluation. Even teachers of the MRSs, meant for Adivasi children, were not free from these demeaning constructions.

In schools, the Kurichia children have a more respectable social and cultural identity. The Kurichia children are more accustomed to the disciplined atmosphere and the hierarchical structure of the school as they socialise within the authority structure of the *tharavad*. The Paniya children on the other hand are found to be passive and frightened. The situation could be different in the alternate education centres for Adivasi children. For instance, George (2005) has pointed out the diverse learning spaces and methodologies in *Kanavu* - an alternate education experiment for Adivasi children. He observes that the experiment recreates the Adivasi children’s loving commune by promoting their culture, life skills and values, and thereby challenges the hierarchical structures and the competitive, individualistic values in current education. A student of Kanavu from the Paniya community, Leela (2010), points out that it is Kanavu’s dream to pass on the wisdom of their ancestors to future generations of their people rather than follow the common trend of ‘mainstreaming’ through education. However, the value conflict can be perceived from the everyday instructions in schools. A non-Adivasi teacher expressed her concern by encouraging the Adivasi child to become modern and stylish… “Are you not interested in travelling by a scooter and shine like others? Study well…!” Even though she was trying to motivate the child, the underlying comment was against the Adivasi world view.

In the government and aided private schools in the study area, children from the Paniya community reported that they were labelled as *Paniyante makal* (Paniyan’s daughter) and *Paniyante makan* (Paniyan’s son) in a derogatory manner. Wright (1987) on the basis of her study of multi-ethnic classrooms argues that the practise of labelling children from marginalised ethnic background contributes to their underachievement in schools. A Paniya warden in a MRS reported that her non-Adivasi colleagues constantly made comparison between the Adivasi and non-Adivasi children, and complained that the Adivasi children were not hygienic and emitted a foul smell, and were not competent. The non-Adivasi teachers, despite sensitisation and training, see the Paniya children as
less capable, expect little from them by way of educational attainment, and label their language, culture and etiquette as ‘poor’ or of ‘low standard.’ Teachers’ negative attitude and insensitivity towards the Adivasi children, and refusal to engage with their lives and problems have serious adverse effects on their learning. As Kundu (1990) observes, teachers from the dominant society need to understand and appreciate the cultural knowledge and language of the Adivasi children in order to teach them. However, with regard to the Kurichia children, comments from the teachers were more encouraging.

They are very clean, orderly and well mannered in their interaction with others. Their elders used to practise untouchability. In olden times, their pittan (head of the joint family, now known as karanavan) would not allow their school going children to enter their house without taking bath.

While reaffirming the cultural practices of the Kurichias, teachers unknowingly valorise them and thus perpetuate a hidden curriculum of dominant caste practices. Many of the discriminatory and alienating practices go unnoticed, but labelling one group and positive affirmation of the other seem routine in school interactions.

The Paniya students do not interact with non-Adivasi or even their Kurichia classmates. They prefer to sit separately in the classroom and play separately, and were found not participating in the classroom activities and group discussions. In a government school, during a game with Standard IV students, it was observed that a non-Adivasi boy was hesitating to hold the hand of a Paniya boy who stood next to him. In a government aided school, a Paniya child from Standard III reported that if he touched his non-Adivasi classmates, they might beat him up. So he would not play with them and instead went to play with his elder brother during the school interval. Peer interactions in the classroom as well as in the playground not only reflect the social hierarchies but actively reproduce these inequalities. As argued by Kumar (2006), children’s curricular and extracurricular activities in school are not just about achieving academic success but are about producing and negotiating social differences. The discussion of Das et al (2001) on how the everyday experiences of violence shape the subjectivities and affect the capacity to engage in everyday life helps to understand the Paniya child. In the interactions in school, the Paniya children experience violence not only from their non-Adivasi peers but also from their teachers. In the context of the Dalit identity Guru (2009) suggests that
essentialising a particular identity as inferior has to be changed first, as essentialisation leads to the exclusion of some and hegemony of the other.\footnote{For example, the ideology of purity-pollution essentialises the Dalit’s identity as inferior, while it generalises the identity of the “twice-born” (non-dalit) as socially superior (Guru 2009).}

\textbf{De-Legitimisation of Language}

According to Bourdieu, culture is unthinkable without language and language cannot be analyzed or understood in isolation from its cultural context and the social conditions of its production and reception. Teaching Adivasi children through their native tongue and culture is stressed by many studies (Kundu 1994, Nambissan 1994). The Constitution of India as well as the national policy on education affirm the need for introducing primary education in mother tongue. Article 350A of the Constitution suggests imparting primary education in the native tongue, but as far as the Adivasi languages are concerned it has not been implemented, except where the Adivasi people are politically assertive or have representation in the political power structure. \textit{Nayam}, a booklet prepared by the DIET, Wayanad to introduce Adivasi culture to the teachers admits that although the DPEP and the SSA have created a more child friendly atmosphere in schools, they have not succeeded in making them Adivasi friendly. While language becomes a stumbling block for the Paniya children in their learning experience, historical advantages like parental education, bilingualism at home and better chances of interaction with wider society help the Kurichia children to overcome this block.

The Adivasi parents are acutely aware of the significance of the native tongue in learning. A Paniya PTA committee member reported that his community’s native tongue and art forms were neglected totally in school and that if they were given importance, their children would be enthusiastic and fare better in studies. This was also evident from the fact that Paniya children eagerly awaited and enthusiastically listen to the only programme in \textit{Paniya bhasha} (Paniya’s language) aired on their community radio. An Adivasi activist from Richur settlement insisted that in schools they needed trained Paniya teachers to teach the \textit{Paniya bhasha}. Even in the institutional spaces created exclusively for Adivasi students, they were often denied the right to speak their own language. For instance, in the MRSs and Ashram schools, Adivasi children were not free to use their native tongue. Use of the native tongue was viewed as a deterrent to mastering the dominant language of Malayalam. In contrast, some of the Kurichia
students of a school in Thavinjal panchayat expressed that they enjoyed the freedom of speaking to their friends in their own language. This school is popularly known as the Kurichia’s school. They are a majority in this school, which is built on land donated by the Kurichia community and it is situated near Kurichia tharavads. However, teachers reported that even there, Kurichia students feel shy to talk in their language in front of non-Adivasi teachers. As Nambissan (1994) points out, the home language of children is vital to the development of their culture, identity and self worth, and the continuous and total rejection of it can cause harm to the child’s natural desire to learn as well as the community’s attitude towards learning.

It is now well established that early education in the children’s native tongue provides the impetus to pick up concepts fast. A few teachers seem to be aware of the fact that the new constructivist method of teaching despite its child centeredness blocks a Paniya child’s learning because they use Malayalam as the medium of instruction. In the new method of teaching, they begin with an idea, then introduce sentences, words and alphabets all transacted in Malayalam. Here the child’s familiar settings are discussed but in a language unfamiliar to the child. Some teachers were of the view that in the new methodology of the DPEP, they could at least participate in drawing, singing, painting that can lessen the alienating effect, while neglecting the fact that these children seldom learn to read and write. Adivasi promoter Eva’s response affirmed this reality as she stated that the reading and writing skills of Adivasi students are poor even after they pass Standard VII. In a workshop conducted by the DIET of Wayanad, teachers did not seem convinced about the legitimacy of using Adivasi dialects in classroom learning. Their own unfamiliarity with the Paniya and the Kurichia dialects and their inability to convince the non-Adivasi children and parents about the legitimacy of such pedagogic practices were seen as major difficulties. In a workshop conducted by DIET Wayanad, teachers expressed their difficulty in writing a word pronounced in Paniya or Kurichia language on the board because non-Adivasi parents and children perceived it as a ‘wrong’ language and besides, they would be confronted for the same. Here it is relevant to note Apple (1979) who criticises the possibility of depoliticisation of knowledge creation as teachers do not enable the students to question the inequalities in society.

In a MGLC for the Adivasi children, when a Paniya child stated that her native tongue was Malayalam, the teacher applauded her for that answer. As Nambissan (1994) observes, the attitudes and expectations of teachers are communicated to children as part
of the hidden curriculum and influence children’s learning. Even though this teacher seemed to appreciate Adivasi culture, her action affirmed the illegitimacy of Adivasi languages in school. As Bourdieu (1977) argues, the reproduction of culture through pedagogic action and the symbolic violence exerted on its pupil is thus not pre-planned in its contents or formed by an arbitrary power.

Adivasi communities approach modern education in the hope of finding a sustainable source of livelihood especially in the current context of fluid labour markets. While they are aware of the significance of education in the native tongue and desire a legitimate space for their dialects in schooling, they do not want this to marginalise them further. A section of the parents feel anxious as they know the value of the dominant language in employability. Teachers reported that some of the parents said, “We send our children to school to learn ‘good language’ not our language.” “If you are going to teach my child in the Paniya bhasha I would like to put him in another school.” The situation of the Paniyas is somewhat similar to that of some of the non-Adivasi people of Kerala with regard to English medium education in preference to Malayalam, their native tongue. Referring to a study conducted by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishat, Aravindan (2006) reports that 44.6 per cent of the people in Kerala who send their children to English medium schools believe that education in the native tongue is preferable for better grasping of the subject. However, the current anxiety about higher education and employability forces parents to enrol their children in English medium schools. While non-Adivasi children are making efforts to make the shift to English education and cope with its demands, Paniya children in Wayanad are struggling to make their shift to schooling in Malayalam. In the current scenario, English medium education, whether desirable or not, seems a distant dream. In a social and political context where the majority of non-Adivasi population perceive Adivasi dialect as primitive, where it is not accepted as the official language and not included in the school curriculum, Adivasi people are forced to disregard their language so as not to lag behind in the pursuit of socio-economic development. This is true even in the case of the Kurichias who have made significant progress with education through the dominant non-native language.

However, some of the Kuricha parents have pointed out that exclusion of their dialect in school not only alienates the younger generation from their dialect but also prevents them from developing their language and culture further. According to them, loss of their dialect is also loss of the wealth of their ancestral knowledge, value system and rich
culture. They are of the opinion that their *nadanpattukal* (folk songs), traditional wisdom about the ecosystem, and vast knowledge of Adivasi medicine, agricultural and food practices are losing credibility and acceptance among their educated members. Introduction and use of Adivasi dialects in schools along with Malayalam especially in early schooling may create a school environment that not only enables Adivasi children's cognitive understanding but also provides a formal space that accords legitimacy and dignity to Adivasi language and culture. It is indeed true that the Kurichias have been able to achieve a level of schooling higher than that of the Paniyas and their proficiency in the dominant Malayalam language has contributed to this achievement. This differential achievement of the two Adivasi groups from the same region, has demonstrated, what Bernstein, Bourdieu and others have shown, the key role played by language in the reproduction of the dominant class and cultural relations.

**Neglect of Art and Culture**

Not only the language but also the art of the Adivasi communities are neglected in schooling. While the state government organises Adivasi *melas* (fairs) showcasing their arts in order to promote the tourism industry in Kerala, especially in Wayanad\(^{20}\) and spends crores of rupees on school youth festivals every year, Adivasi art finds no place in school youth festivals. While attempts are made to revive and represent the art form of various communities, including those that are forgotten, tribal music and dance find no place in the much coveted school youth festivals. Students, who win prizes, in these festivals are eligible for grace marks in the board examinations. This denial of opportunity to Adivasi students prompted the Deputy Director of Education, who hailed from the Kuruman Adivasi community, to initiate a separate Adivasi festival, the *gothra fest*, for the primary school children in 2010.

The Kurichias have however partly succeeded in mobilising support for their archery skills (photo 19). For instance, the Kuricia youth from the Thulsi *tharavad* stated that they were able to form archery teams with the support of the Kerala Institute for Research and Training and Development of Scheduled Tribes (KIRTADS). They are not only members of the Wayanad but also of the Kerala archery teams. The secretary of the Archery association reported that he has formed archery clubs in all the existing Kurichia

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20 Tourism occupies the central position in the development strategy of Wayanad when the agricultural sector fails to meet the revenue demands of the state.
And his team became state champions for six consecutive years and participated eight times in the national level competitions. In 2009, the government sanctioned an Archery Academy in Pulpally, Wayanad but according to this secretary it is enmeshed in corruption and bureaucratic hurdles. However, archery competitions are included in the school games and the Kurichia students participate at the school, state and even national level competitions and win prizes. They are awarded grace marks for their achievements. At the same time, they are aware that they may not be able to keep pace with the sophistication of the current archery competition without funds and support.

While the State denies recognition and legitimacy to the contemporary art forms of Adivasi communities, the school environment routinely reproduces the illegitimacy. Paniya parents are reluctant to visit school and even if they go there, they stand outside like outcasts until somebody enquires the reason for their visit. The Paniya children do wish that their parents visit their school, but they are made to feel ashamed of the way their parents dress as they often hear remarks such as, “Why do you dress like a Paniyichi (Paniya woman)?” Much of the time of the Paniya children in school is spent not in learning, but in coping with a situation that discriminates them in every way possible. While interacting with modern institutions such as schools, the Kurichia parents follow modern dress codes which help their children escape this symbolic violence. A Kurichia clerk in a government college was annoyed when his friend suggested that he preserve his cultural tradition in dressing. He reacted, “I am accepted in the college and among my friends because I wear a pant and shirt like them. If I go in my traditional dress they will treat me like a primitive.” Even though the historical advantages helped them to enjoy a higher status, their traditional dress code could not escape the stigma of primitivism and they adopted modern styles faster than the members of the Paniya community. The systemic nature of discrimination that exists in wider society creeps into school through cultural mechanisms and thus imposes symbolic violence upon groups or classes in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu 1997).

However, the Kurichia teachers attempt to legitimate their cultural knowledge through what may be considered subversive pedagogic strategies. They make efforts to introduce their culture in the classroom transaction of the formal curriculum. For instance, for teaching a lesson on cultivation, a Kurichia teacher, proud of her agricultural traditions, took her students to a Kurichia tharavad to participate in their Vilanattiutsavam, the paddy transplanting festival. The Paniya community traditionally known for their skills in
paddy cultivation had no history of ownership of paddy fields. They planted paddy for their masters with their traditional dance accompanied by *thudi* (musical instrument used by the Paniya community) known as *Kambalanatti*, a Paniya art form in which they do the work with rhythmic movement of the body and hands. Despite the rhythmic beauty of Paniya dance (photo 20) which they enjoy, its association with bonded labour until the 1960s makes it difficult for a Paniya teacher to be proud of it, unless accompanied by an understanding and critique of the history of the exploitative production relations in the region. School becomes sites for alienating and marginalising the Adivasi culture through covert and overt interventions and subtle pedagogic actions.

**Gender and Education**

Adivasi girls are doubly alienated for their ‘gender’ and ‘tribe’ identity. The dominant constructions and their adaptions are reproduced by non-Adivasi teachers, staff and Adivasis themselves. In Kunnil Paniya colony, out of six school drop outs, five were girls. There in many of the Paniya households it was observed that girl children have to support their mothers in cooking and fetching firewood and water. When women have no work, girl children studying in Standard V onwards go for domestic work in the nearby houses on Saturdays and Sundays for small payments ranging from Rs. 10 to Rs. 50 and at crucial situations, they send their children to distant places for domestic work. It is also noticed that Paniya girls go for domestic work after class hours when there is difficulty in surviving and they slowly become drop outs. Their special context of unemployment compels the Paniya women to seek their girl children’s support to run their families.

Poverty and disempowerment have led to the sexual exploitation of girls especially of the Paniya community. One Paniya colony reported several cases of ‘unwed mothers’ due to sexual exploitation when they go for domestic labour to support the family. Adivasi communities generally do not terminate these unwanted pregnancies nor do they disown the pregnant girls/women. Jitha, who worked as a village officer pointed out the patriarchy existing in the reservation policies and criticised the Supreme Court verdict to consider father’s caste for educational grants, reservation and other benefits, which restricts the educational opportunities of children of ‘unwed mothers’ in Wayanad. The village officer was of the opinion that considering father’s caste for caste certificate was unjust in a place like Wayanad where Adivasi people even hesitate to approach the village officer to get a certificate. She also mentioned that the Kerala Government has made
some modifications, for instance, if the children are living according to the mother’s customs and if they are socially and economically backward, they can be given the benefits of Scheduled Tribe children. She stated that this modification in policy was not helping much at the practical level, as the Adivasis were hesitant to reveal the story in case of ‘unwed mothers’ and even if they revealed it, village officers were not keen to verify these cases and give them caste certificates. However, we cannot forgo the fact that higher caste men marry Adivasi women to accrue the reservation benefits and in such cases, consideration of social and economic backwardness may be of help to prevent misutilisation of the benefit. In the Kurichia community, if a Kurichia girl marries a man from another caste and if the father dies, the father’s family or mother’s family may not accept the girl. Jitha reported that in such cases the children suffer and this can cause drop outs. However, there were no such incidents reported during the study period.

The responsibility of a housewife in a Kurichia *tharavad* is much more than in a nuclear family. In Kurichia *tharavads*, girls have the responsibility in helping their mothers in the kitchen as well as for drawing water and collecting firewood. Boys were found to be engaged in feeding cattle and going to the shops for buying stationery and food materials. In the Kurichia community, the division of labour between girls and boys is more visible as the girl’s mobility is restricted. Girls are mostly bound to their houses but boys go out to play, shop, read, and for archery practice and this give them more opportunity for socialisation. In the case of girls and women, there are restrictions to reach home before 6 pm. Until 20 to 30 years ago, the girls’ mobility was very much restricted due to their strict observance of pollution rituals and this affected their schooling. Today also in Kurichia *tharavads* there is restriction in sending their girls to other cities for higher studies and it affects their opportunities for higher education compared to boys. However, there is considerable negotiation happening in their communities and the restrictions are becoming less.

In Paniya and Kurichia cultures boys are not kept away from doing household chores like fetching firewood and water and looking after their younger ones. But boys are comparatively free and are not entrusted with responsibility as in the case of girls in doing household work. However, a Paniya girl and a boy enjoy equal mobility in going to the shops and surroundings. Paniya men of age 30 and above reported that when they were small, they were sent for cattle rearing by non-Adivasis and they could not go to school. Three to four decades ago, Paniya boys were assigned to keep watch of paddy fields
during the harvesting season to keep away birds from destroying the produce. Now there are no grazing lands available and Paniya boys are not needed for such jobs. Large scale paddy cultivation is also very rare today and there is no need to assign children for such work. So school going Paniya boys are comparatively free from domestic labour both at home and outside. However, there are incidents of boys going out for wage labour and consequent drop outs. However, a Paniya girl and a boy enjoy equal mobility in going to the shops and surroundings.

In Kunnil Paniya colony, two girls dropped out as a consequence of their friendship with boys. One girl while studying in Standard V fell in love with a boy who was doing vocational training. Both of them dropped out, but the boy continued his studies after a gap.

The difference in the sexual and social norms between the Adivasi and non-Adivasi people also causes alienation and drop out of Paniya students. In Kunnil Paniya colony, Yarah, a Standard VII drop out from the Paniya community states, “…it is because of ‘that’ teacher and my friends that I discontinued my studies and now I regret not going to school”. One teacher saw Yarah changing her dress in a coffee garden and in her view it was very indecent. She came to know that Yarah was friendly with a boy with whom she went out the next day cutting classes. This teacher reported the incident to her class teacher and headmaster and Yarah was scolded by both of them and they advised her not to repeat this ‘indecent’ behaviour. Yarha reported,

My classmates came to know about the issue and they started teasing me saying that ‘We have studied in this school till Standard VII but nobody in this school has created such a bad reputation, only this girl became like this. When my classmates started blaming me, I could not bear it and I came to my house and cried and said that I would not go to school. My father and mother went to the school because the headmaster called them and asked me to go to the school next day. According to their advice, I went to the school and again my classmates started teasing me. I cried and came back home and I did not go again to the school. That teacher and my friends ruined my future.

According to the non-Adivasi teacher, she just tried to correct the child from her early ‘love affair’ and wanted to inculcate in her a sense of ‘decency’. According to Yarah’s father this was not the way to correct an adolescent relationship between a boy and girl. He said… “that teacher is my neighbour and she could have told me a word before reporting it to the headmaster”. According to him, the teacher had the moral responsibility to discuss and clarify this issue with the parents and counsel the child if necessary. However, what the non-Adivasi teacher perceived as indecent behaviour was not indecent
in Paniya culture. There was no stigma associated with changing the dress in a coffee garden. It was observed that when they go for wage labour, they change their clothes in the garden. During puberty celebration, they take the girl to the garden, her kith and kin surround her and they remove her old clothes and make her wear new clothes and ornaments. Even though the non-Adivasi teacher was her neighbour, she failed to understand Paniya culture. The teacher’s abysmal knowledge of tribal values and culture, despite being a neighbour was surprising. The teacher judged her according to non-Adivasi norms about socially accepted behaviour and sexuality. However, boys are comparatively found free from such scrutiny as teachers assume less moral responsibility in correcting their ‘indecent’ behaviour.

Paniya girls experience more cultural alienation in schools as their community has tremendous freedom in sexual expression, which is alien to non-Adivasi culture. For instance, during my field work I have observed a Paniya Mooppan allowing her daughter to live with her proposed husband three months before marriage. However, the structural and cultural oppression of women through dominant constructions of gender and sexuality are invisible in the school curriculum and its pedagogic actions. The discrimination and oppression is promoted through a hidden curriculum and its pedagogic practices. Yarah’s friend’s comments reveal that the tendency to interpret the natural sexual attractions as immoral is widespread in the school atmosphere and children perceive and cognise it when they are young. The award winning Malayalam film ‘Mathilukal’ (1989) (based on a short novel written by Basheer in 1965) symbolically represents Kerala culture which create a thick stone wall between opposite sexes in the cognitive territories of the Malayali mind. However, the Paniya and Kurichia culture did not assign labels of immorality to the attraction between their girls and boys and this may be one reason for the absence of rape cases and sexual crimes by Paniya and Kurichia men in the study area unlike non-Adivasi cultures. On the contrary, non-Adivasis who describe sexual attraction as immoral, sexually exploit the innocent Adivasi women and abandon them, which causes immense suffering to the women and their children.

One Kurichia elder expressed that their strict discipline in the community helps their girls from forming early relationships and the consequent dropping out from school. It emerges that the Kurichia community’s norms about sexuality has more similarity with non-Adivasi norms and they keep strict discipline and segregation after menstruation. Thus, Kurichia girls were projected as decent and disciplined in their behaviour and they
were not criticised in the public or by the teachers for deviant behaviour. At the same time, Kurichia nuclear families were found to be more liberal in their norms about sexuality. In the study area, there was one case where a Kurichia girl had a relationship while studying in Standard X, but she did not drop out and they married later. She was not interested in continuing her studies.

Menstruation and the concept of pollution resulted in the absenteeism of Kurichia as well as Paniya girls from school. Until ten years ago, Kurichia girls used to be secluded for seven days during menstruation and this affected their studies. The number of days has been reduced to three in recent times and there are also liberal and educated parents in the study area who did not have such strict rules and sent their girls to school during menstruation. Through education, Kurichias became more liberal but there were those who observed purity/pollution rituals less strictly due to modern hinduisation trends among them.

The gender disparity is reinforced by assigning works such as sweeping and cleaning to the girls in schools. However, the initiative taken by the government to distribute cycles to Adivasi girls who are from distant areas studying in high schools can be considered a positive move. Gender deserves a very elaborate discussion in school curriculum, but the pedagogic practices are not efficient enough to give a liberative interpretation on gender relations and sexuality.

Marginalisation of World Views and Strategies of Resistance

Adivasis’ experience of marginalisation and resistance extends to their world views, values and culture. Adivasi teachers, leaders and activists continuously counter the ideological domination by constantly referring to the virtues and values of Adivasi world views and way of life as not only legitimate but even as a superior alternative. They see the tremendous potential in Adivasi children and feel strongly that, if schooling provided them a chance, they with their knowledge and experience of environment, and their patience and practical skills would contribute in no small measure to the scientific and technological world. In a group discussion, Adivasi and Dalit leaders expressed that according to modern science and philosophy, ecology is understood more theoretically negating the practical experiences of people. They expressed that environmental studies

21 Interview with Geethanandan, Janu and Thankachan on 29/5/2010 at Sikshak sadhan during a training programme for Adivasi people and Dalits.
are included in the category of science education. The Adivasi people have an overall vision of environment and they can perceive it holistically and intuitively instead of compartmentalising it into different science topics. According to them if this experiential wisdom is properly integrated in the environmental education and development activities it can show a way forward to answer the environmental issues of today. A Dalit activist, Geethanandan said that if the Adivasi way of looking at nature is integrated with scientific findings it will be a leap in consciousness and a liberating experience.

Nellan, a shaman from the Paniya community reported that traditionally they recognise a person as knowledgeable on the basis of her/his ability and the extent of service to their society and the ability of a person to mobilise and coordinate the goodness and talents of its members for the well being of the society. While discussing this point, one Paniya youth remembered their ancestor’s advice to the youngsters “Do not say that I do not have enough and quarrel ….whatever we have is for all”. In all the Paniya and Kurichia settlements in which I have stayed or visited, their old Mooppan or leader was described by the members of the community as the most service oriented person among them without seeking any profit or returns. He is happy to receive if they shared anything out of their generosity. Thus, the Mooppan, their headman is bestowed with honour and respect.

The egalitarian philosophy is present in their oral traditions and practices. The small children are taught to share equally among their peers. I have observed that a culture of sharing as against the culture of accumulation is taught at home especially by the grandparents. However, we cannot deny the fact that the Paniya community is not insular from non-Adivasi values and that they also engage themselves in reproducing the ‘mainstream’ ideas. For instance, during my stay in a Paniya house, the parent was advising his children to study, “Now we have to bow before officers to get things done for us. But if you study well and become employers, others will bow before you to get things done”.

The Kurichia elders too shared their nostalgic feelings about equitable sharing and self reliance that existed in their joint families and criticised the erosion of these values in today’s education. A Kurichia Karanavan claimed that without any education our ancestors looked after the tharavads (its members ranging from 50 to 150) with equity and fairness. He brought out the contrast by pointing out that today’s educated youth is
inefficient and that he can hardly look after himself and his own small family and pointed
towards the increasing strife among the community members. According to him,
cooperation is becoming impossible and competition and violence have crept into their
society; he attributes this decline to the quality of education today He also held the
education system responsible for the cultural deterioration and challenged the value of
their schooling. He asked, while Adivasis had many folk songs in their culture “how
many of their students in school are able to write their own folk songs or poems on
Adivasi culture and life?”

Teachers from the Paniya and Kurichia community however stressed their children’s
strength instead of their weakness. In a Model Residential School in Thirunelli, the
warden who was from the Paniya community pointed out that Paniya children were very
talented not only in studies but in sports, arts and drawing too. Children also try to devise
strategies to counter their marginalisation when they get a chance. A Kurichia school-
going girl said, “Paniyas are the naughtiest children in our school. When non-Adivasi
students mock at them by calling them derogatory names, they try to retaliate by forming
their own groups during the interval, knock down the non-Adivasis from behind and then
they bunk classes to escape punishment”.

Adivasis have to be vigilant always and by mobilising their individual and collective
resources, resist exclusionary designs of the state and the dominant social groups. The
Kurichia leaders said that they resisted the move by the government to exclude their
children from reservation and school grants by labelling them as a forward community.
They fare better in getting jobs as they have representatives in the Panchayat and Block
administration unlike the Paniyas who have little or no representation in these bodies.
One panchayat member from the Kurichia community challenged an ICDS officer for
removing the application of a Kurichia woman for the post of Anganwadi teacher from
the file. The ICDS officer tried to give the job to a non-Adivasi who had applied for the
same post, ignoring the fact that the land for the Anganwadi was donated by the Kurichia
community located near the Kurichia households. This reveals that non-Adivasis try to
oust even the relatively powerful Kurichias, but the latter resist and sometimes succeed
partly.

The Paniya’s resistance is mainly passive and therefore does not reach the authorities
due to lack of political representation and mobilisation. The only B. Ed degree holder
among the Paniyas whom I came across was very upset that she, who desired to become a teacher, was turned down and was selected only as a Warden in a Residential School. Her case depicts that even the best (she is a first class Degree holder) among them are not recognised by the authorities. Also, she was not re-appointed in the following academic year even though a higher authority promised her a teaching job during the Paniyasadas22 (Deepika, June 26th, 2010). She believes that her Paniya identity is the cause for her plight and questions the purpose of the reservation laws and special privileges for the Scheduled Tribes. Another Paniya teacher Masi reported that even after becoming a teacher in a school, the children called her by her name, as she had worked as a wage labourer on their land. However, the symbolic power she achieved with the title of a school teacher equipped her young niece to challenge the previous employer’s children, “My mami (aunty) is a teacher now, call her teacher instead of calling her by name”. As Scott (1985) argues social agents are not passive bearers of ideology but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and partial penetration of these structures. He criticises the concept of ‘false consciousnesses’ of the subordinate classes and the ideological consensus secured by dominant groups and its legitimisation using culture as an instrument of power. According to him not the false consciousness of the marginalised but the awareness about practical consequences and their dependency on upper classes for survival keep them back from resisting the injustice.

Even though Kurichias are accepted in the area, in the larger history of India, Kerala or even Wayanad they are marginalised like the Paniyas. Their historically significant fight against the British known as the ‘Kurichia revolt’, which is the first ever agrarian struggle in India, has not been given due importance in school textbooks or even in the local classroom discussions. But the possibility of an inclusive curriculum is articulated by alternate education centres such as Kanavu where the history class for Adivasis start with the history of the independence struggle in Wayanad and a description of the Adivasi’s participation in it. Even though the curriculum and classrooms erase their history, the Kurichias began their mobilising by recalling their historic fight. With their continuous pressure on the power structures, they succeeded in building the monument of Thalackal Chandu, the renowned Kurichia fighter against the British. However, under

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22 Conference organised by Centre for Development studies and University of Montreal to discuss Paniya’s issues. During the meeting, Paniya Warden shared her touching experience of her achievement and neglect of the authorities.
modern development, Adivasi communities are forced into another culture without any preparation for the transition, and this contributes to their marginalisation (Fernandes 2008). As this study shows, schooling certainly does not prepare these communities for such a transition.

**Land as Material and Symbolic Power in Schooling**

Historically, the Kurichias owned land while the Paniyas were landless and bonded labourers. Over the years, the Kurichias lost most of their land and today they own only small tracts. In addition to providing some economic security, land is a source of prestige and power which has given better social acceptability to the Kurichia teachers and students in the context of schooling. In contrast, landlessness has translated itself into powerlessness for the Paniya teachers and students. Besides the status and power associated with land, ownership and agricultural produce gave Kurichias historically more opportunities for physical mobility and social interaction with non-Adivasi groups, village officials and also the market in connection with selling and buying of goods. The elders in one of the Kurichia *tharavads* stated that they were the ones who provided rice, ghee and wild meat to the officials in the British and early independence period. One elderly Kurichia leader said that the *adhikari* (village officer) needed their assistance in collecting and measuring coffee seeds as the produce was directly bought by the government department from the coffee gardens. The narratives show that many of these officials maintained friendly ties with them and exhorted them to send their children to school. Today, most of the Kurichia parents in the study area have basic education and a few of them are even employed in government services.

Further, land ownership and the economic and social status associated with it were seen as indicators of their capability to acquire education and this prompted teachers to approach Kurichia elders to motivate them to send their children to school when schools were first established in the area. Kurichia children are second or third generation learners like the non-Adivasi students in the area. However, their ‘subsistence farming’ is not enough to maintain even a middle class standard of living, much less to send their children to cities for higher education. The Paniya children are mostly first generation or second generation learners. Having been bonded labourers, their grandparents did not have the opportunity to school. The restrictions on their physical mobility imposed by the *jenmi* (land lord) severely restricted their interaction with others. However, ownership of
even a small plot of land seems to change the educational aspirations of some of the Paniyas in significant ways. In a small Paniya community under the Richur settlement project in Ambalavayal panchayat, 9 families possess 10 cents to one acre of land. There was a perceptible difference in their attitude to education and their ability to access it. The Ooru mooppan (headman appointed by the Panchayat) of that small settlement reported that there were no school drop outs among their children and the one child who had discontinued education was again enrolled in school. Land and its resources are integral to the Paniyas’ and the Kurichias’ culture and livelihood, a positive condition of their habitus, and the possession of it enables them to respond positively to modern education.

It is important to note that when the Kurichia students are taken out of the local context, their generic identity as ‘tribe’ becomes more prominent than their specific identity as Kurichia. For instance, a Kurichia student from Champa settlement, who joined a college outside Wayanad district for a degree course, was rudely shocked to find the perceptions of the other students about Adivasi people as primitive. He said, “I want to be looked upon as any other person in the world and do not want to be a museum piece for the media.” The historical advantages and the special habitus of the Kurichias are recognised only in their immediate locality and not in the wider social context. Thus land as symbolic capital operates here in a very limited manner and the Kuricha identity fails to transcend the Adivasi identity which is perceived by the larger society as ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’. The Kurichia community has been able to use its cultural capital in education mainly at the level of basic schooling as indicated by their low participation in higher education (see Table 5.2). However, the spread of schooling within the Kurichia community has been a transformative process gradually getting converted into political power. A member of the Kurichia community, elected to the state assembly in the 2011 elections, became a state minister, while the Paniyas find it difficult to become even a panchayat member. Both the Paniya and the Kurichia community members stress the need for at least one acre of individual land or having common land as a prerequisite to be able to educate their children, in addition to the free provisions that they get from school.

23 This project was started in 1958 as part of the programme of rehabilitating 100 bonded Adivasi labourers in the land bought by Kerala from the Tamil Nadu government. Even though they have fought for allotment of the project land from 1995 onwards, distribution of the title deeds to a few of them happened only after the historic Adivasi struggle at Muthanga in 2003 (Local Support Team 2010).
The Adivasi leaders and activists, aware of the material and cultural security that land provides, stress the need to reacquire access to their land in order that their children can approach formal education with courage and confidence.

In the current development discourse, education continues to be propagated as one of the most important means for the development of Adivasi people. In their continued emphasis on the importance of education for the well being of the Paniya community, the state officials and political parties have overlooked the association between access to land and education of Adivasi people. This is in spite of the fact that it is the land owning communities of the Kurichias and Kurumas who fare better in education and despite the longstanding demand of the Paniyas for land for their survival and ‘development’. The recently conducted KILA survey also affirms the importance of land in education. According to their survey findings majority of the students who are pursuing graduation, post graduation and professional courses hail from the landed class. Among the Kurichias of the 261 graduate students, 166 of them belong to the families who have more than 50 cents of land and of the 22 engineering students 15 of the students are from the families who have more than 50 cents of land. There are two graduate students and one diploma course student among the landless Paniyas. The seventy five graduate students and four engineering Paniya students belong to families who hold land up to 50 cents. Nearly 12 per cent of the students belonging to Paniya families hold more than 50 cents of land and there are sixteen graduate students and two engineering students from that category. However, the State repressed the Adivasi struggle for land and has not yet fulfilled the agreement signed on 16 October, 2001 to give one - five acres of cultivable land to the landless Adivasis. This seems to be the minimum prerequisite, as the present study has shown, to address the inequalities existing in educational experiences among the Paniya and Kurichia communities. In an interview, Adivasi leader C.K Janu said that the main reason for Adivasi children’s lack of education is landlessness and according to her the main concern of an Adivasi parent is to address their children’s hunger and it is impossible for them to have a vision of education, especially higher education without land (interview by Rekharaj 2008). However, from the time of independence, the promise of the government to give land to the landless Adivasi people has been repeatedly broken.

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24 Bijoy and Raman (2003) provide the major components of the agreement.
As Das and others (2001) argue, such a breach of promise is an extreme form of violence, which can result in the slow erosion of their trust in the State and its institutions.

Conclusion

Inequality ingrained in society gets transferred to the school through non-Adivasi teachers and the school community trained in the inequitable social system. The educational system has evolved a performance evaluation system entirely based on the non-Adivasi student’s performance, to evaluate the Adivasi students. Establishment of the MRSs or special schools does not address the issues of social and cultural alienation they face without changing the dominant discourses on what constitutes legitimate knowledge and finding legitimate space for Adivasi perception and their knowledge within the formal curriculum. The mismatch between formal schooling and the everyday lives of Adivasi children resulting in their intrinsic exclusion is not addressed through the state’s policy reform processes. An inherent limitation of Adivasi identity vs. national citizen’s is projected and perpetuated through the hegemonic institutions of the state. The National Curriculum Framework Review reports that the organisation of the Indian education system reflects clearly the caste, class and tribe stratified structure of society and its hierarchical ideology (NCFR 2005). A wide range of issues such as cultural hegemony of the dominant groups/classes, the identity as tribe, the identity as slave caste in the feudal and colonial periods, and the complex interface of all these play their role in perpetuating inequality in the education of Adivasi children.

The two communities, the Paniyas and the Kurichias cope with or resist the process of education in different ways. The Kurichia students are more resilient. They too experience exploitation in different degrees, but they respond differently due to their material, social and cultural advantages and the consequent assertion of power as a community. Both the communities undergo different degrees of violence and conflict that form their subjectivities differently, interfering with their learning and curtailing their cognitive capacities.

Along with a critical understanding of social structures as well as their ideological reproduction through educational institutions, understanding the subjective experience of violence and exclusion in everyday schooling is very important to explain the differential educational experiences and outcomes among Adivasi communities. In the case of the Kurichias, land provides them a better identity as it acts as a social, cultural and symbolic
capital in Wayanad context where Brahmin jennis were considered the sole owners of the landed property. Also the landedness and subsistence built on it reduced the dependency of Kurichias on dominant classes and the government, and provided them with better bargaining capacities unlike the totally dependent Paniya wage labourers. This provided better acceptability of Kurichia children in schooling in their local contexts. However, their generic identity as tribe gets crystallised in the broader context of National citizenship. The responses of the communities reveal that systematic violence can cripple the individual’s and community’s ability to resist domination and even to access policies and programmes purported to ‘empower’ them. In fact, in many ways it exacerbates their marginality by rendering their knowledge and culture illegitimate and their bodies and subjectivities sites of overt and symbolic violence.

The state supported hegemonic social and cultural constructions of knowledge negate the specific culture of the Adivasi communities. Instead of pluralising the learning spaces, the State, through its policies and programmes, tries to consolidate the inequitable mono culture by legitimising and reproducing the inequalities and dominant cultural practices. The education system and the pedagogic actions resist recognising and legitimising Adivasi knowledge, perhaps because it carries elements that contest the dominant mono cultural trends of society. However, this mono culture trends are not limited to education but extend to the entire life situation of Adivasis and their habitats. For instance, the spread of mono culture cash crop and the resultant deforestation and degradation of environmental resources have far reaching effects on the indigenous knowledge systems as well as on their survival and health. The next chapter discusses how resource depletion, knowledge depletion and the resultant poverty, hunger, malnutrition affect their health.