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the educational status of
scheduled castes in Kerala**

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Special component plan and the educational status of scheduled castes in Kerala*

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Abstract

This working paper investigates the effectiveness of the Special Component Plan (SCP) in improving the educational status of Scheduled Castes (SC) in Kerala. Utilizing primary data from a household survey conducted by the Gulati Institute of Finance and Taxation (GIFT), the study examines various educational indicators, including enrolment rates at different levels, dropout patterns, and challenges faced by SC communities in availing educational schemes. The analysis identifies issues like financial constraints, lack of awareness about programs, and procedural hurdles hindering access to educational opportunities. Based on the findings, the paper proposes policy suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of the SCP. These include increasing scholarship amounts, streamlining application processes, and implementing targeted awareness campaigns. The research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on educational equity in India by providing empirical evidence on the experiences of SC communities in Kerala.

Key Words: Scheduled Castes, Educational Equity, Special Component Plan.

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1. Introduction

The Kerala state stands out for its impressive social development indicators, particularly its high overall literacy rate which has historical roots. Social reform movements in the end of 19th century and early 20th century, championed by Christian missionaries and reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali etc emphasised education for all castes and genders. This progressive outlook was further bolstered by the state's pre-independence rulers, Travancore and Cochin, who implemented policies for compulsory primary education. Even before independence, in 1951, Kerala's literacy rate was 47.18%, significantly higher than the national average of 16.7%.¹ Following independence, Kerala's democratically elected governments prioritized public investment in education. A significant portion of the state budget has been consistently allocated towards building schools, expanding teacher training programs, and ensuring access to quality education across all communities. This commitment is reflected in Kerala boasting the highest literacy rate in India, at 93.91% according to the 2011 census, compared to the national average of 74.04%. This achievement is particularly noteworthy considering Kerala's historical disadvantages, such as its geographically dispersed population and limited natural resources.

Kerala's social development indicators extend beyond literacy. The state enjoys a high life expectancy (75 years, higher than the national average of 70) and a low infant mortality rate (6 per 1,000 live births whereas it is 28 at all India level) – figures comparable to developed countries.² This can be attributed to a robust public healthcare system and widespread awareness about health and nutrition. These statistics, comparable to developed countries, highlight the state's success in promoting overall well-being. A crucial aspect of Kerala's educational achievement is the emphasis on gender equality. As per census 2011, the female literacy rate in Kerala stands at 92.07%, with a minimal gap of just 4.04%

compared to males (96.11%).³ This commitment to educating girls has played a vital role in Kerala's social development trajectory. Despite these impressive achievements, Kerala still faces challenges in achieving complete educational equity. Scheduled Castes (SC), despite benefiting from the overall improvement in literacy rates, continue to lag behind the general population.

In this context this working paper focuses on the importance of education for social mobility and economic upliftment is particularly relevant for SCs in Kerala. Historically marginalized communities often face limited access to education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. The specific objectives of this working paper are to evaluate the effectiveness of the Special Component Plan (SCP) in improving the educational status of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in Kerala, then to identify the challenges faced by SC communities in accessing educational opportunities under the SCP and to propose policy recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the SCP. Within these broad objectives the research questions such as what is the overall educational attainment of SCs in Kerala especially in terms of enrolment rates, dropout rates etc and what are the primary factors hindering the access of SCs to educational benefits under the SCP and how can the present educational levels of SC community be improved through appropriate policy interventions.

2. A Legacy of Marginalization and the Quest for Equity

The Indian caste system, a hierarchical social structure, has historically placed certain communities at a significant disadvantage. Scheduled Castes, formerly known as "untouchables," occupy the lowest rung of this system and have faced centuries of social exclusion, economic deprivation, and discrimination. The caste system's origins are complex and debated, but it likely emerged around 2000 BCE. They faced

restrictions on social interaction, access to public spaces, and educational opportunities.⁴ The concept of "untouchability" formed the core of SC marginalization. SCs were considered "impure" and forced to live on the fringes of society. They were denied entry to temples, schools, and wells, further perpetuating their social and economic exclusion.⁵

India's independence in 1947 ushered in a new era of legal equality. Leaders like B. R. Ambedkar, advocated for social reform and affirmative action policies to uplift SC communities. The Constitution of India abolished untouchability (Article 17) and enshrined affirmative action policies for SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs). These policies include reservations in educational institutions and government jobs to promote their social and economic inclusion. Despite legal advancements, social discrimination against SCs persists. Stereotypes and prejudices continue to limit their access to opportunities. Educational disparities remain a significant concern, hindering their upward mobility and perpetuating economic disadvantage.⁶ Education is widely recognized as a crucial tool for breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion faced by SCs. By equipping them with knowledge and skills, education empowers them to compete for better jobs, challenge social stereotypes, and participate actively in society.

Kerala, a state known for its high social development indicators and progressive social policies, also presents a complex picture. Although Kerala's literacy rate is commendable, a significant gap exists between SCs and the general population. The 2011 census data shows a literacy rate of 88.7% for SCs, lagging behind the state average of 93.91%. This translates to a disparity of nearly 6 percentage points, highlighting the ongoing challenge of ensuring educational access for SC communities.⁷ The disparity extends beyond basic literacy. SC students often face higher dropout rates at various stages of schooling, hindering their chances of attaining higher education. Studies reveal lower enrolment rates in

secondary and higher education for SCs compared to the general population.⁸ This limited educational attainment restricts their access to skilled jobs and upward social mobility. Ensuring equitable access to quality education for all, particularly SCs, is crucial to realizing Kerala's full social and economic potential. The Special Component Plan (SCP) represents a crucial policy intervention aimed at bridging the development gap, including educational gap, for SCs. Analysing the effectiveness of the SCP in addressing these disparities forms the core of this working paper. By identifying the specific challenges faced by SC students and evaluating the SCP's impact on their educational outcomes, one can propose necessary improvements to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all in Kerala.

3. Education: The Engine of Social Mobility and Economic Upliftment

Education plays a pivotal role in promoting social mobility and economic upliftment for individuals and societies. It equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world and improve their life chances. It acts as a powerful tool for breaking the cycle of poverty. By equipping individuals with the skills and qualifications needed for better-paying jobs, education increases earning potential and opens doors to improved living standards.⁹ It empowers individuals to move beyond the socioeconomic circumstances of their birth and chart a path towards financial security. Moreover, education serves as a key driver of social mobility, enabling individuals to move up the social ladder. It equips them with the knowledge and confidence to challenge existing social structures and pursue opportunities that may have been inaccessible to previous generations.¹⁰ Increased educational attainment can lead to greater social inclusion and participation in civic life.

Education goes beyond just academic knowledge. It fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills, all essential for navigating the complexities of modern life. It empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health, finances, and careers.¹¹ Additionally, education can cultivate a sense of self-worth and agency, promoting personal and social development. From an economic standpoint, an educated population is vital for driving national growth and development. A skilled workforce fosters innovation, attracts investment, and contributes to a more productive and competitive economy.¹² Education equips individuals to adapt to evolving technologies and changing job markets, ensuring a strong and adaptable workforce.

Education plays a crucial role in dismantling barriers based on gender, race, caste, religion, colour and social background. By providing a level playing field based on merit and talent, education allows individuals from marginalized communities to compete for opportunities and challenge societal inequalities.¹³ Increased access to education fosters social inclusion and promotes a more equitable society. However, the benefits of education are not evenly distributed. Marginalized communities often face challenges in accessing quality education. Policies like the Special Component Plan (SCP) aim to address these disparities and ensure that all individuals, regardless of background, have the opportunity to succeed through education.

An educated population is a cornerstone of economic development and sustained growth. Individuals with higher levels of education contribute to a more skilled and adaptable workforce, driving innovation and productivity. This, in turn, fosters economic growth and technological advancement, creating a more competitive and prosperous nation.¹⁴ Education plays a crucial role in promoting informed and active citizens. By fostering critical thinking and analytical skills, education empowers individuals to participate effectively in democratic

processes. It allows them to hold governments accountable and advocate for policies that benefit society as a whole.¹⁵

In this context this working paper focuses on the importance of education for social mobility and economic upliftment is particularly relevant for SCs in Kerala. Historically marginalized communities often face limited access to education, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion. The SCP aims to address these disparities by providing targeted educational opportunities for SCs. By analysing the effectiveness of the SCP and investing in quality education for SC communities, Kerala can further its goals of social equity and economic progress.

4. The Special Component Plan: A Policy Intervention for Scheduled Caste Development

In its quest to address historical inequalities faced by SCs, the Indian government has implemented various affirmative action policies. The SCP, introduced in 1978 and renamed as Scheduled Castes Sub Plan in 2006, is a crucial financial strategy aimed at accelerating the development of SC communities. Article 48 of the Indian Constitution empowers the union and state governments to promote the social and economic interest of the weaker sections of the society, in particular SC and ST. Recognizing the limitations of relying solely on legal pronouncements against the social and economic disadvantages, the government adopted affirmative action policies to bridge the gap between SCs and the general population.¹⁶ The SCP falls under this umbrella of affirmative action, aiming to ensure SCs benefit proportionally from overall development plans. The SCP mandates that all central ministries and state governments allocate a specific percentage of their annual plan budget in proportion to their population for the welfare of SCs. This earmarked allocation is then used to design and implement targeted schemes that address their specific needs across various sectors, including

education, healthcare, housing, and economic development that directly benefit SC communities.¹⁷

The primary objectives of the SCP are multifaceted and encompass both short-term and long-term goals. A central objective involves uplifting SC families from poverty. The SCP allocates resources for income-generating schemes, skill development programs, and infrastructure development in SC-dominated areas to create sustainable livelihood opportunities.¹⁸ Moreover, the SCP aims to promote social mobility for SCs by facilitating access to education, healthcare, and social services. By empowering them with knowledge and skills, the SCP seeks to create pathways for upward social mobility and greater social inclusion.¹⁹ By allocating the plan fund specifically for SC development, the SCP strives to bridge the gap in socio-economic indicators between SCs and the general population. This includes closing the disparities in literacy rates, educational attainment, and access to basic amenities.²⁰ Additionally, education is a critical focus area within the SCP framework. By allocating resources for scholarships, improving school infrastructure in SC-dominated areas, and providing quality education, the SCP aims to enhance educational opportunities for SC students. This, in turn, is expected to contribute to their improved employability, higher incomes, and greater social mobility.²¹ After the abolition of planning commission and the establishment of NITI Aayog in 2015, Kerala is the only state in India which still continues the planning board and SCP as well. In this context, this working paper aims to discuss three objectives such as to assess how well the Special Component Plan (SCP) has improved educational attainment among Scheduled Castes (SC) in Kerala, to analyse the educational experiences of SC communities in Kerala, focusing on factors like enrolment rates, dropout patterns, and barriers faced when utilising educational programs and finally based on the discussions, the paper aims to recommend policy changes to strengthen the SCP.

5. Literature review

Addressing the educational disparities faced by SCs in India necessitates a review of existing interventions. The survey of literature reviews relevant studies on educational interventions for SC communities, focusing both on national trends and specific initiatives in Kerala. There is not much literature available on the educational status of SCs in Kerala except few. Analysing these interventions can provide insights into the effectiveness of the SCP and inform policy recommendations for achieving educational equity in Kerala. To get a better understanding of the existing research landscape on this issue, the review of literature is arranged in four themes such as Caste, Social Hierarchies and Regional Disparities in Indian Development, Education and Social Exclusion, Kerala-Specific Studies on Caste and Education

1. Caste, Social Hierarchies and Regional Disparities in Indian Development

David Mosse (2018) discusses in his work "Caste and Development: Contemporary Perspectives on a Structure of Discrimination and Advantage" the enduring impact of caste in shaping life opportunities in India. He critiques development policies that overlook the persistent influence of caste and advocates for integrating caste considerations into global development discussions. D.K. Verma (2012) in his work "Politics of Social Backwardness and Empowerment of Other & Economically Backward Classes" explores the political landscape surrounding policies aimed at empowering socially and economically backward classes, including OBCs, and the effectiveness and motivations behind these policies. The study of Kumar and Mitra (2009) titled "Social and Economic Inequalities: Contemporary Significance of Caste in India" examines the continuing significance of caste in social and economic vulnerability, arguing that lower castes bear a greater burden of deprivation across various socioeconomic indicators.

The book of Jean Drèse and Amartya Sen (1997) - "Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives" provides a broad overview of India's economic development with a focus on regional disparities. It emphasises the significant differences in the quality of life across various Indian states and aims to inform national development policies by highlighting the specific challenges faced by less privileged regions. Farhana Khatoun (2022) in the work "Disparity in Access to Higher Education among Socio-Religious Groups in Urban India" explores inequalities in access to higher education among different religious groups in Indian cities, analysing data from household surveys to understand the factors contributing to these disparities. The research of Kumar and Mandava (2022) titled "Factors Influencing the Use of Institutional Deliveries for Childbirth in India" research identifies economic disadvantage, social group membership (backward castes), and rural residence as significant barriers to institutional deliveries, with an analysis of trends over time.

2. Education and Social Exclusion

Kumar (2023) in his work "Discrimination Faced by Dalit-Adivasi Students in Higher Education" examines the everyday experiences of exclusion faced by Dalit-Adivasi students in Indian higher education, highlighting how discrimination hinders their access to quality education. Mishra and Ramakrishna (2023) in their "Education of Socio-Economic Disadvantaged Groups" examines the educational challenges faced by marginalised groups, including religious minorities, girls, and people with disabilities, and evaluates existing government initiatives aimed at increasing access to education for these groups. Ramachandran (2022) in his work "Current Issues and Trends in India's School Education" provides an overview of the challenges facing India's school system, including the uneven distribution of schools, access to higher secondary institutions, and the implementation of the Right to Free and Compulsory Education. Basant and Sen (2020)

in their work "Quota-Based Affirmative Action in Higher Education: Impact on Other Backward Classes in India" investigate the effects of quota systems in Indian universities on OBC enrolment, focusing on potential unintended consequences, especially in regions with limited affirmative action histories.

The study of Bagde, Epple, and Taylor (2016) - "Does Affirmative Action Work? Caste, Gender, College Quality, and Academic Success in India" titled analyses the impact of affirmative action policies on university admissions in India, finding that these policies increase college attendance among targeted students without evidence of harm to academic success. P. Kannappan (2008) in the work "Scheduled Caste Welfare" examines the effectiveness of Indian government programs designed to improve housing conditions for Scheduled Castes, highlighting areas for improvement and the impact on these communities. Hickey and Stratton (2007) in their work "Schooling in India: Effects of Gender and Caste" explore how gender and caste intersect to influence educational access and experiences, particularly in eastern India, focusing on the persistent segregation and disparities faced by lower caste students and girls.

3. Kerala-Specific Studies on Caste and Education

John, Ali, and Rejikumar (2022) in their work "Bowed, Bent and Broken: Low Participation of SC and ST in Kerala's Technical Higher Education Programs" investigate the underrepresentation of SC/ST students in Kerala's technical higher education programs, contrasting this with the state's overall development narrative. The study of Rejimon and Smitha (2021) titled "Model Residential School Education to Scheduled Caste Pupils in Kerala" evaluates the impact of Kerala's Model Residential Schools on SC students, focusing on how these schools address dropout rates and improve educational attainment. C. Sasi (2021) in his doctoral dissertation "Human Capital Formation of Scheduled Caste in Kerala: Problems and Prospects in Education"

explores the educational challenges faced by SCs in Kerala, analysing social and economic barriers and proposing solutions for improving educational opportunities.

K.V. Syamprasad (2019) in his work "Merit and Caste as Cultural Capital" critiques the idea of meritocracy in education, arguing that the Indian caste system unfairly disadvantages lower castes and proposing affirmative action as a necessary policy intervention. Nummenpää (2014) in his case study titled "Educational Experiences and Career Aspirations of Marginalised Groups in Kerala" investigates how social background and economic status influence the educational journeys and career goals of marginalised groups in Kerala. K.K. George (2011) in his working paper "Higher Education in Kerala: How Inclusive is it to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?" delves into the reasons behind the continuing exclusion of SC/ST groups from various fields, including education, in Kerala. Justin P. Jose (2010) in his work "The Lives of Tribal Children at School Milieu in Kerala" uses a phenomenological approach to explore the school experiences of tribal children in Kerala, highlighting the social and familial factors that shape their interactions and challenges. Several studies pointed out common challenges across India such as bureaucratic hurdles, lack of community participation, and inadequate infrastructure in SC-dominated areas can hinder the effectiveness of interventions and highlighted the need for rigorous evaluations of existing SCP-funded programs to assess their impact on learning outcomes and identify areas for improvement. The reviewed studies collectively underscore the impact of educational interventions on SC communities in India, with specific emphasis on Kerala's SCP initiatives but a comprehensive study on the educational status of SC in Kerala is still to be materialised.

6. Methodology

Both primary and secondary data were used in this working paper. Secondary data were gathered basically from budget documents, economic review, journals, books etc. The primary data was taken from the household survey conducted by GIFT to assess the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries of various schemes implemented by Scheduled Caste Development Department (SCDD). Since no such comprehensive scheme-wise, year-wise, area-wise, agency-wise list of beneficiary SC households was readily available, the study team adopted a specially designed two step sampling; first step was listing of households and the second the detailed survey of sample beneficiaries. The purpose of listing of households was to select sample respondents from a comprehensive list which includes the household status and scheme availing details of all SC members of the sample wards of the selected local bodies. This list was prepared after visiting all the SC households in selected sample wards. In the second stage, a detailed survey of sample beneficiaries was conducted regarding 25 major schemes including education. To ensure maximum representativeness, sample households were selected distinct-wise for each scheme.

A Two phased multi-stage sampling scheme with deep stratification was used for the selection of households. Each district in Kerala is considered as a basic stratum under the sampling process. The panchayats in each district are taken as rural stratum, and municipalities as the first urban stratum and the corporations as the second urban stratum. The local bodies in each district were first stratified as High Land, Mid Land and Low Land according to geographical location. The panchayats in each of these strata were further stratified into those with concentration of SC population and without concentration (concentrated and non-concentrated). It was done by arranging the panchayats in each geographical stratum in descending order of percentage shares of SC population based on 2011 Census. The

cumulative share of SC population is computed and those panchayats accounting for 50% or more of SC population in the geographical stratum is included in the ‘SC concentrated’ sub-stratum and the rest in the ‘SC non-concentrated’ sub-stratum.

One panchayat/ municipality from concentrated & one from non-concentrated were selected in each geographical stratum so as to ensure the coverage of all the categories of local bodies in each district. It was proposed to select at least One Panchayat/ Municipality from each of the three categories of Land such as Low Land, Mid Land and High Land. The next sampling strata was wards in each selected municipality/panchayat. The wards in each sample local body were first stratified into SC concentrated and SC non-concentrated wards based on percentage share of SC population. The procedure followed for the wards is the same as that followed for the classification of local bodies explained earlier. After stratification, one ward each was selected from each category. Simple Random Sampling Without Replacement (SRSWOR) method was used for the selection of panchayats/municipalities and wards. In the first phase, survey was conducted in all SC households (13508 houses) in selected sample wards using a structured questionnaire. In the second phase, sample beneficiaries were selected based on the first stage survey and detailed scheme-wise structured questionnaire was employed in sample SC households (3121 houses) and 54864 SC members were surveyed.

7. SCP allocation during 13th five-year plan period

Table 1 shows the allocation to special component plan in the 13th (2017-22) in the state of Kerala.

Table 1: Outlay and Expenditure of SCP during the 13th Five Year Plan period (in crore)

Year	Total State Plan Outlay	Total SCP Outlay	SCDD Outlay			LB Outlay		
			Outlay	Expenditure	Expenditure %	Outlay	Expenditure	Expenditure %
2017-18	26500	2599.65	1427.60	1275.27	89.32	1172.05	936.6	79.91
2018-19	29150	2859.62	1570.36	1167.4	74.33	1289.26	1070.07	82.99
2019-20	30610	3002.84	1649.00	754.87	45.78	1353.84	735.39	54.31
2020-21	27610	2708.54	1487.39	1313.38	88.30	1221.15	1125.87	92.19
2021-22	27610	2708.54	1487.39	1267.07	85.18	1221.15	1082.75	88.66
Total	141480	13879.19	7621.74	5777.99	75.81	6257.45	4950.68	79.11

Source: *Economic Review 2023*, p 305.

Table 2 shows the allocation of SCP funds to the SCDD and local bodies (LBs) in Kerala, from 2017-18 to 2021-22. The total SCP allocation for the period was ₹ 13879 crore, which represents an average of 9.81% of the total state plan outlay. Of this amount, ₹ 7621.74 crore (54.91%) was allocated to the SCDD, while ₹ 6257.45 crore (45.08%) was allocated to LBs. that the total state plan outlay and total SCP outlay increased from 2017-18 to 2019-20 but then decreased in 2020-21 and 2021-22. The SCDD outlay remained relatively stable throughout the period, while the LB outlay fluctuated more significantly. The LB expenditure percentage was generally higher than the SCDD expenditure percentage, except in 2019-20. The LB expenditure percentage increased in 2020-21 and 2021-22, which may indicate an improvement in the utilization of funds for LB.

8. Allocation for education sector

Both SCDD and local self-governments formulate own schemes in education sector. SCDD allocation has 3 sub scheme components such as management of Model Residential Schools,

assistance for Education of SC Students and additional State assistance to post matric students which includes schemes such as Initial expenses to the students those who admitted to medical/engineering courses, assistance for studying abroad, monthly stipend, pocket money to hostellers, aid to primary education, stethoscope, laptop and book banks, special incentives and Ayyankali Talent Search Scholarship etc. and local self-governments allocate according to the local needs of the people and to some committed expenditure such as meals to SC nursery schools etc.

Table 2. Allocation to Education Schemes in the 13th Five Year Plan Period (BE) (crore)

Year	Scheduled Castes Development Department			Local Self Governments		
	Total	Education	%	Total	Education	%
2017-18	1427.60	419.10	29.4	1172.05	165.27	14.1
2018-19	1570.36	435.49	27.7	1289.26	244.15	18.9
2019-20	1649.00	316.71	19.2	1353.84	253.41	18.7
2020-21	1487.39	335.00	22.5	1221.15	211.63	17.3
2021-22	1487.39	335.00	22.5	1221.15	242.31	19.8
Total	7621.74	1841.30	24.2	6257.45	1116.77	17.8

Source: Budget documents

Table 2 highlights the allocation trends regarding education schemes within SCDD and the Local Self Governments (LSGs) during the 13th Five Year Plan Period. The allocation for education schemes within SCDD has seen fluctuations over the years. It started at 29.4% of the total SCDD allocation in 2017-18, decreased to 19.2% in 2019-20, and then rose again to 22.5% in the subsequent years. Overall, the average allocation for education schemes within SCDD during the 13th Five Year Plan Period was 24.2% of the total SCDD budget. Similarly, the allocation for education schemes within the LSGs also varied during the period. It started at 14.1% in 2017-18, peaked at 19.8% in 2021-22, and averaged at 17.8% over the entire period. While both departments allocated a significant portion of their budgets to education

schemes, SCDD consistently allocated a higher percentage compared to LSGs throughout the period. However, LSGs showed a more significant increase in education allocation percentage over the years compared to SCDD.

9. Physical targets achieved in educational schemes

Due to limitations in data availability and comparability, this analysis focuses on a select group of schemes from the larger pool of educational schemes. While there may be other valuable programs, consistent data for meaningful comparison was not accessible for all initiatives. Table 3 presents the physical targets achieved in selected educational schemes during the 13th Five Year Plan through SCDD.

Table 3. Physical targets achieved in selected educational schemes during the 13th Five Year Plan through SCDD (No.)

Sl. No	Scheme	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
1	Pre-matric scholarship	375116	384485	364403	361444	4,18,188
2	Post matric scholarship	173453	138389	134980	181472	184300
3	Assistance for studying abroad	9	11	21	17	106
4	Stethoscope	377	341	335	296	127
5	Laptop	2,357	1749	1543	1371	1110
6	Ayyankali Talent Search Scholarship	4,403	4094	4680	5115	7504
7	Study Room	6615	5127	4556	6935	6472

Source: Economic Review, various issues

The table 3 provides a glimpse into the number of beneficiaries for various educational schemes in India during the 13th Five Year Plan. Since the available performance reports don't show the original target numbers for each scheme, making it difficult to assess how successful each program was in achieving its goals. Hence more data and information would be needed to draw more definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of these programs.

The analysis shows that the number of beneficiaries for the pre-matric scholarship scheme increased in 2021-22 compared to 2017-18. The number of beneficiaries for the post matric scholarship scheme fluctuated throughout the period, with a decrease in 2018-19 and a subsequent increase in 2021-22. The number of beneficiaries for the Assistance for studying abroad scheme generally increased but Stethoscope scheme generally decreased over the period and there is a similar trend of decrease for the laptop scheme with a slight increase in 2020-21. However, the Ayyankali Talent Search Scholarship scheme and Study Room scheme show an increase in the number of beneficiaries over the period.

10. SC Educational status in nutshell

Table 4. Education and Gender of SC Household members

Education Qualification	Male	Female	Total
Illiterate	2.51	5.83	8.34
Too Young to enroll	1.58	1.35	2.93
Pre-School	1.69	1.53	3.22
1st to 8th Std.	19.10	18.62	37.72
9th and 10th Std.	14.61	13.89	28.50
+1, +2/Pre-degree	7.10	7.60	14.70
Graduate(General & Technical)	1.54	2.29	3.83
Post Graduate & above	0.26	0.50	0.77
Total	48.38	51.62	100.00

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017

The table 4 shows the distribution of educational qualification among SC household members according to gender the column 'Educational Qualification' lists the different levels of education attained by the household members which ranges from "Illiterate" to "Post Graduate & above". The analysis shows that 2.51% of the male members are illiterate, while 19.10% have completed grades 1 to 8; whereas a higher percentage of females (5.83%) are illiterate compared to males (2.51%). On the other hand, a slightly higher percentage of females (2.29%) have a graduate degree

compared to males (1.54%). Looking at the totals, it is seen that the largest percentage (37.72%) of members have completed grades 1 to 8, followed by those who are in the 9th and 10th Std (28.50%).

Table 5. Technical Education and Gender of Household members with age 15 and above (Percentage)

Technical Qualification	Male	Female	Total
ITI/ Diploma	1.6	1.2	2.8
TTC/ BEd/ Med	0.2	0.7	0.9
Others	0.1	0.2	0.2
Total	1.8	2.0	3.9

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017

The table 5 shows the distribution of technical education among SC household members aged 15 and above. The column ‘Technical Qualification’ lists the different types of technical qualifications held by the household members which includes ITI/ Diploma, TTC/ BEd/ MEd, and Others. The percentage of male household members in each technical qualification category shows that 1.6% of the males have ITI/ Diploma qualification, whereas a higher percentage of females (0.7%) have TTC/ BEd/ MEd qualification compared to males (0.2%). The total percentage of household members (male and female combined) in each technical qualification category reveals that ITI/ Diploma (2.8%) is the most common qualification, followed by TTC/ BEd/ MEd (0.9%) and Others (0.2%). Major observations from the table show that a slightly higher percentage of females (2.0%) have a technical qualification compared to males (1.8%).

11. SC Educational Levels: A Categorical Analysis

Table 6 to 10 present the educational status of SC on the basis of their educational qualifications achieved. To get better understanding, the data is arranged into six categories such as post-graduation and above, graduation, higher secondary, secondary, primary (1 to 8 standards), illiterate and also on the basis of age group. While focusing on the present generation, including various age groups can provide insights into educational trends over time and allows to see if there have been improvements or setbacks in educational attainment for SC students across generations. Moreover, examining educational attainment across all age groups can help assess the effectiveness of past educational policies for SC students.

Table 6. Qualification Category: Post Graduate and Above Percent

Scheme	Gender	Age Group							Total
		15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Availed via Scheme before 2007	M		0.1	5.5	4.9	0.6	0.3	0.5	11.9
	F		3.1	6.4	3.9	0.8	0.3	0.4	14.9
	T		3.2	11.9	8.8	1.4	0.6	0.9	26.9
Availed via Scheme 2007-2017	M	4.0	13.1	2.9					20.0
	F	13.4	28.6	5.3					47.3
	T	17.4	41.7	8.2					67.3
Not through Scheme	M			0.7	1.4	0.1	0.3		2.4
	F	0.2	1.5	1.6				0.1	3.4
	T	0.2	1.5	2.3	1.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	5.8
Not Applicable	M							0.0	0.0
	F							0.0	0.0
	T							0.1	0.1
Total	M	4.0	13.2	9.1	6.2	0.7	0.6	0.5	34.3
	F	13.6	33.2	13.4	3.9	0.8	0.3	0.5	65.7
	T	17.6	46.4	22.5	10.1	1.5	0.8	1.1	100.0
Percentage on Total Population		0.8							

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017, M_Male, F_Female, T_Total

This table 6 shows the distribution of the SC population in India with Post Graduate and above qualifications according to gender, age group. The data shows that there's a significant gender gap in obtaining postgraduate qualifications. Females have a higher

percentage in all categories. The most prominent gap is for "Availed via Scheme 2007-2017" where females (47.3%), over two-thirds (67.3%) of those who availed the scheme during this period, outnumber males (20.0%) by more than double. Government schemes appear to have played a significant role in increasing postgraduate education among the SC population. The data shows a concentration of postgraduate qualifications in younger age groups (15-34 years) for both genders, particularly for those who availed schemes. This might indicate a recent increase in educational opportunities or a younger population benefiting more from recent schemes. Looking at the total population, only 0.8% have a Post Graduate and above qualification.

Table 7. Qualification Category: Graduate (General + Technical) Percent

Scheme	Gender	Age Group							Total
		15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Availed via Scheme before 2007	M		1.8	5.4	3.6	1.3	1.2	0.8	14.1
	F		3.9	7.2	2.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	14.1
	T		5.7	12.6	5.9	1.6	1.4	1.0	28.2
Availed via Scheme 2007-2017	M	11.8	12.4	0.2					24.4
	F	22.6	20.7	0.3					43.5
	T	34.3	33.0	0.5					67.9
Not through Scheme	M	0.1	0.3	0.8	0.1		0.2	0.1	1.6
	F	0.4	1.2	0.5	0.1		0.1		2.2
	T	0.5	1.5	1.3	0.2		0.2	0.1	3.8
Not Applicable	M						0.0	0.0	0.1
	F								
	T						0.0	0.0	0.1
Total	M	11.9	14.5	6.4	3.7	1.3	1.4	1.0	40.1
	F	22.9	25.7	8.0	2.4	0.3	0.3	0.2	59.9
	T	34.8	40.2	14.4	6.2	1.6	1.7	1.2	100.0
Percentage on Total Population	3.8								

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017, M_Male, F_Female, T_ Total

This table 7 shows the distribution of the SC population with Graduate (General + Technical) qualifications. Overall, 3.8% of the SC population has a Graduate degree and females (59.9%) have a higher percentage of graduates compared to males (40.1%).

A significant gender gap exists in obtaining graduate qualifications. Females have a higher percentage in all categories except "Availed via Scheme before 2007". The most prominent gap is for "Availed via Scheme 2007-2017" where females (43.5%), over two-thirds (67.9%) of those who availed the scheme, outnumber males (24.4%) by almost twice. There's a concentration of graduates in younger age groups (15-34 years) for both genders, particularly for those who availed schemes. This suggests a recent rise in educational opportunities or a younger population benefiting more from recent schemes. Overall, the table highlights the positive influence of government schemes in promoting graduate education among the SC population, with a notable impact on females.

Table 8. Qualification Category: +1, +2/ Pre-degree Percent

Scheme	Gender	Age Group							Total
		15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Availed via Scheme before 2007	M		2.1	4.8	3.1	0.7	0.3	0.4	11.5
	F		2.4	6.0	3.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	12.7
	T		4.5	10.8	6.5	1.1	0.6	0.7	24.3
Availed via Scheme 2007-2017	M	25.4	9.7	0.2					35.3
	F	26.3	10.5	0.5					37.4
	T	51.7	20.3	0.7					72.7
Not through Scheme	M	0.1	0.6	0.4	0.3	0.0		0.0	1.4
	F	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0		1.5
	T	0.4	1.2	0.7	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.8
Not Applicable	M						0.0	0.1	0.1
	F						0.1	0.0	0.1
	T						0.1	0.1	0.2
Total	M	25.5	12.4	5.5	3.4	0.7	0.3	0.5	48.3
	F	26.6	13.6	6.7	3.6	0.4	0.4	0.3	51.7
	T	52.1	26.1	12.2	7.0	1.1	0.7	0.8	100.0
Percentage on Total Population		14.7							

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017, M_Male, F_Female, T_Total

This table 8 shows the distribution of the SC population in Kerala with +1, +2/ Pre-degree qualifications according to gender, age group. A significantly higher proportion (14.7%) of the SC population has +1, +2/ Pre-degree qualifications compared to

Graduate degrees (3.8%) (refer to Table 20). There's a slightly smaller gender gap in this category compared to higher education qualifications. Females have a higher percentage overall (51.7%) but the difference is not as substantial as in Graduate and Post Graduate categories. Government schemes appear to have played a significant role in increasing +1, +2/ Pre-degree qualifications, particularly in recent years (2007-2017). More than half (72.7%) of those with these qualifications availed the scheme between 2007-2017. Similar to higher education categories, there's a concentration of these qualifications in younger age groups (15-34 years) for both genders, especially for those who availed recent schemes (78.2 %).

Table 9. Qualification Category: 9th to 10th Std Percent

Scheme	Gender	Age Group								Total
		10-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Availed via Scheme before 2007	M			5.5	10.2	7.2	1.9	1.1	1.4	27.5
	F			4.9	11.1	7.6	1.4	1.4	1.0	27.4
	T			10.4	21.3	14.8	3.4	2.5	2.5	54.9
Availed via Scheme 2007-2017	M	2.2	11.4	5.7	0.6	0.0				19.9
	F	1.6	9.4	5.3	0.5					16.8
	T	3.9	20.8	10.9	1.1	0.0				36.6
Not through Scheme	M		0.1	1.1	1.5	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.1	3.8
	F	0.0	0.1	1.4	1.7	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	4.4
	T	0.0	0.2	2.4	3.2	1.5	0.3	0.3	0.2	8.1
Not Applicable	M							0.1	0.1	0.2
	F							0.1	0.1	0.2
	T							0.1	0.2	0.3
Total	M	2.2	11.5	12.3	12.3	7.9	2.1	1.4	1.6	51.3
	F	1.6	9.5	11.5	13.3	8.4	1.6	1.6	1.3	48.7
	T	3.9	20.9	23.8	25.6	16.4	3.7	2.9	2.9	100.0
Percentage on Total Population	28.5									

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017, M_Male, F_Female, T_Total

This table 9 presents data on the percentage of the SC population in Kerala with qualifications between 9th and 10th standard, categorized by gender, age group. A significant portion (28.5%) of

the SC population has qualifications between 9th and 10th standard. There's a slight gender gap, with males having a marginally higher percentage (51.3%) compared to females (48.7%). Government schemes appear to have had a positive impact on 9th to 10th standard education, but to a lesser extent compared to higher education categories (refer to previous tables). Around a third (36.6%) of those with these qualifications availed schemes between 2007-2017. Unlike higher education categories, there's a wider distribution of qualifications across age groups, with some individuals in the 60+ age range. This shows that these qualifications might have been obtained earlier in life. The percentage of individuals who obtained these qualifications without using any scheme (8.1%) is higher compared to higher education categories. 8.1% of SC students did not benefit from the scheme stands out because it indicates that the program wasn't fully effective in reaching its target population. The possible reasons may be lack of awareness, technical and administrative issues such as non-production of caste certificate etc which are discussed in detail in Table 15.

Scheme	Gender	Age Group									Total
		5-9	10-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Availed via Scheme before 2007	M				2.8	7.1	8.5	3.6	3.1	4.0	29.1
	F			0.0	2.6	7.0	8.7	3.6	3.3	3.9	29.2
	T			0.0	5.4	14.1	17.2	7.2	6.4	7.9	58.3
Availed via Scheme 2007-2017	M	7.6	8.1	1.2	1.9	0.1					18.9
	F	7.7	7.4	0.9	1.5	0.1					17.6
	T	15.2	15.5	2.1	3.4	0.3					36.5
Not through Scheme	M	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.3	2.4
	F	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	2.2
	T	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3	1.0	1.3	0.5	0.6	0.5	4.6
Scheme	Gender	Age Group									Total
		5-9	10-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Not Applicable	M								0.1	0.2	0.3

	F									0.1	0.2	0.4
	T									0.2	0.5	0.6
Total	M	7.6	8.1	1.3	4.8	7.8	9.2	3.7	3.5	4.5	50.6	
	F	7.7	7.5	0.9	4.3	7.6	9.3	4.0	3.7	4.4	49.4	
	T	15.4	15.6	2.2	9.2	15.4	18.5	7.7	7.2	8.9	100.0	
Percentage on Total Population	37.7											
<i>Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017, M_Male, F_Female, T_Total</i>												

This table 10 shows the percentage of the SC population that has attained qualifications from 1st to 8th standard, categorized by various factors. Nearly 37.7% of the population has qualifications between 1st and 8th Std. Regarding the gender parity, there's almost equal representation of males and females (50.6% Male, 49.4% Female) with this qualification level. It appears that a significant proportion of the population (around 58.3%) benefitted from schemes before 2007 to achieve this qualification level. The data for the 2007-2017 scheme (36.5%) is also notable. Only a minimal portion (4.6%) attained qualifications without any government scheme. The highest percentage (15.4% and 15.6%) falls in the 5-9 age group, which is expected as this is the typical age for attending primary school. The percentage steadily declines with increasing age groups.

Table 11. Qualification Category: Illiterate Percent

Gender	Age Group									Total
	5-9	10-15	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65+	
Male	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.9	2.5	5.6	3.8	4.4	12.4	30.1
Female	0.3	0.1	0.3	1.5	5.1	11.9	7.7	10.8	32.4	69.9
Total	0.5	0.1	0.5	2.4	7.6	17.5	11.5	15.2	44.7	100.0
Percentage on Total Population	8.3									

Source: GIFT SC HPSS 2017

The table 11 shows the illiteracy rates categorized by gender and age group. A significant proportion (8.3%) of the SC population is

illiterate. There's a substantial gender gap in illiteracy. Females (69.9%) have a significantly higher illiteracy rate compared to males (30.1%). The illiteracy rate shows a declining trend with younger age groups for both genders. However, illiteracy rates remain high among older age groups (60+), particularly for females (32.4%). This indicates a need to bridge the gap for older generations who may not have had access to education earlier.

12. Unfinished Journeys: The alarming situation of drop outs in secondary education

Even Kerala is often hailed for its high literacy rate, grapples with a persistent challenge of the abysmally low continuation of SC students in higher education. With a staggering 89.26 per cent not pursuing studies beyond higher secondary education, this dropout rate acts as a significant barrier to their socioeconomic progress, perpetuating a cycle of marginalisation. (Table 4). Educational attainment is a key driver of social mobility. Higher levels of education equip individuals with knowledge, skills, and qualifications that open doors to better employment opportunities. For SC students, who have faced generations of social and economic exclusion, education is particularly crucial. A higher education allows them to compete in a job market increasingly demanding skilled labour. However, by dropping out after higher secondary school, SC students are denied access to these very opportunities. They are relegated to low-skilled, low-paying jobs, often in the informal sector, with limited career prospects.

The consequences of limited educational attainment extend beyond individual economic prospects. Low-paying jobs translate to lower household income, restricting access to basic necessities like quality healthcare and proper housing. This reinforces the cycle of poverty that has plagued SC communities for generations. Without sufficient income to provide quality education for their children, the cycle of poverty continues. Educational

qualifications of parents significantly influence a child's educational aspirations and achievements. Dropping out of higher education weakens the potential for SC families to break free from generational poverty.

Furthermore, limited education reduces social mobility for future generations. The dropout rate not only limits economic opportunities but also represents the unrealized potential of a large section of Kerala's population. Education empowers individuals and fosters social mobility. When SC students leave school early, their aspirations and talents remain untapped. This is a loss not just for the individual but also for society as a whole. Higher education fosters critical thinking, communication skills, and exposure to diverse viewpoints. These skills are essential for effective social and political participation. A low SC representation in higher education translates to a weaker voice in advocating for their rights and interests within the political system. This reinforces their marginalisation and limits their ability to influence policies that impact their community.

Educational institutions foster social capital, the networks of relationships that provide access to resources and opportunities. By leaving the education system early, SC students miss out on building these valuable networks. This restricts their access to professional networks, mentorship opportunities, and information about higher education and career paths, further limiting their social and economic mobility. The high dropout rate among SC students can lead to feelings of disillusionment and despair. This can lead to a sense of powerlessness and resignation, hindering their ability to challenge the status quo and achieve their full potential.

13. Agencies from which assistance is received

Table 12. Agencies from which assistance received (Percentage)

Agency	Up to 12th Standard	Graduation	Technical Education
SCDD	86.2	81.8	86.6
SCDD and Grama Panchayat	1.9	1.6	1.1
Grama/ Block/ District Panchayat	0.5	0.1	0.7
Govt. funded Agency	9.7	13.9	10.0
Others	1.7	2.7	1.5
Total	100	100	100

Source: GIFT SC HPSSS 2017-18

The table 12 shows the percentage of students who received assistance from various agencies for up to 12th standard graduation and technical education. SCDD is the most common agency for both up to 12th standard and graduation (86.2%, 81.8 %) and technical education (86.6%) as well. This suggests that government initiatives play a crucial role in supporting this community. The involvement of village-level (Grama Panchayat) and block-level (Block Panchayat) Panchayats appears minimal (0.5% and 0.7% for up to 12th standard and technical education respectively). This might indicate a gap in local-level support mechanisms. A small percentage of the population receives assistance from government-funded agencies (9.7% in up to 12th standard and 13.9 in graduation), other organizations (2.7 % in graduation and 1.5 % in technical education). The table highlights the dependence of the SC population on government initiatives, particularly through the SCDD. There seems to be limited involvement of local governing bodies (Panchayats) in providing assistance. The two major educational assistance are financial assistance such as lumpsum grants and stipends and material assistance such as laptops, books etc. SCDD manages financial assistance through the e-grantz portal all over Kerala to all eligible students and is a continuous process. Local governments don't have such jurisdiction to implement schemes all over Kerala. Due

to its autonomous nature, schemes may vary from local body to local body and from time to time. That's why greater dependency on SCDD for educational assistance.

14. Reasons for dropout

Table 13. Reasons for drop - out (Percentage)

Reasons	Up to 12th Standard	Graduation
Acquired a job	3.2	-
Lack of family support	20.5	-
Financial problems	42.1	10.9
Distance to Institution	1.5	-
Discrimination in the Institution	4.5	-
Learning difficulty	1.7	-
Failure in examinations	17.3	-
Illness	9.1	-
Marriage	-	89.1
Total	100	100

Source: GIFT SC HPSSS 2017-18

This table 13 presents data on the primary reasons, though there may be the co-occurrence of multiple dropout factors, why students drop out of school, up to 12th standard and graduation. Up to 12th standard level, financial problems (42.1%) are the leading cause of students dropping out. This highlights the economic challenges that can hinder educational attainment. Another significant factor is the lack of family support (20.5%), which could encompass various aspects like motivation, educational emphasis within the family, or even financial limitations of the family unit. Following financial and family-related reasons, a combined 19% of students drop out due to academic reasons (failure in examinations - 17.3% and learning difficulty - 1.7%). Health issues (illness - 9.1%), distance to educational institutions (1.5%), and discrimination within the institution (4.5%) are also contributing factors to dropping out. A small percentage (3.2%) leave due to acquiring a job, which could be seen as a positive outcome if the job is aligned with their skills and aspirations. In

the graduation level, marriage is the main reason for dropping out (89.1 %) followed by financial constraints (10.9 %). Overall, the table underscores the complex interplay of financial difficulties, lack of family support, and academic challenges that contribute to students dropping out of school.

15. Present Activity after dropping out

Table 14. Education: Present activity after drop - out (Percentage)

Activity	Up to 12th Standard	Graduation
Casual labour	65.5	-
Engaged in domestic duties	20.5	100
Job seeker	10.7	-
Employed in private sector	3.2	-
Total	100	100

Source: GIFT SC HPSSS 2017-18

This table 14 highlights the most common activities pursued by students after dropping out of school (up to 12th standard and graduation level). Up to 12th standard level, a significant majority (65.5%) of students who drop out end up in casual labor jobs. This suggests limited access to skilled employment opportunities after leaving formal education. A considerable portion (20.5%) is engaged in domestic duties, which could be due to gender roles or lack of alternative opportunities. Only a small percentage (3.2%) find employment in the private sector, indicating challenges in entering the formal job market after dropping out. A moderate number (10.7%) are actively seeking jobs, suggesting their potential willingness to re-enter the workforce. All of the dropouts from the graduation level (100%) are engaged in domestic duties. This table paints a picture of limited opportunities for those who drop out of school. Most end up in casual labor or domestic duties, highlighting the importance of programs that equip students with skills and support re-entry into education or the formal job market.

16. Problems in availing scheme

Table 15. Problems of scheme availed from different agencies (Percentage)

Problems	Up to 12th Standard	Graduation	Technical Education
Non availability of correct information about the schemes	9.8	9.9	8.1
Delay in processing of application	6.8	6.1	10.3
Difficulty in getting caste certificate	3.0	3.5	4.6
Difficulty in getting income certificate	0.6	3.2	0.9
Difficulty in getting documents from the respective agency	0.6	3.8	2.0
Delay in getting assistance from agency	5.0	6.1	10.3
Non-availability of funds	1.8	5.8	5.1
Complex procedures	3.3	7.9	7.3
Amount not sufficient	3.9	7.9	18.9
Others specify	27.6	15.2	13.2
No opinion	37.7	30.6	19.3
Total	100	100	100

Source: GIFT SC HPSSS 2017-18

This table 15 highlights the various problems faced by SC students who availed scholarship or assistance schemes for their education from different agencies. The data is categorized into Up to 12th Standard Graduation, Graduation, and Technical Education. A significant portion of students across all categories (8.1% to 9.9%) faced issues due to the non-availability of correct information about the schemes. This suggests a need for better communication and outreach programs. Bureaucratic Delays are another major problem. Delays in processing applications (6.1% to 10.3%) and delays in receiving assistance (5.0% to 10.3%) are common problems across categories. This indicates a need for streamlining bureaucratic processes.

Difficulties with Documentation is a pertinent problem across all categories. Obtaining documents like caste certificates (3.0% to 4.6%) and income certificates (0.6% to 3.2%) posed challenges for some students. This could be due to cumbersome procedures or lack of access to documentation services. Contributing to this factor, they face difficulty in getting documents from the respective agency (0.6 % to 3.8 %).

A lack of sufficient funds within the schemes themselves was a concern for some students, particularly in Technical Education (18.9%). This might necessitate reevaluation of funding allocation. Complex application procedures (3.3% to 7.9%) created hurdles for students. Simplifying the application process could improve accessibility. A substantial number of students (30.6% in graduation and 37.7% in up to 12th standard level) had no opinion on the problems faced, which could indicate a lack of awareness or a feeling of helplessness. A high percentage (37%) of beneficiaries responding with "No opinion" is significant and requires investigation. Additionally, "Others (specify)" categories (13.2% to 27.6%) suggest there might be other unaddressed issues. The problem encountered could be a combination of factors not addressed by the individual options, hence choosing "Others (specify)" might be the most accurate way to represent the situation.

Up to 12th Standard Graduation category faced fewer problems compared to others, possibly because these schemes are more established. Students pursuing Graduation faced slightly more problems compared to Up to 12th Standard Graduation, particularly with delays and complex procedures. Technical Education category faced the most significant problems, including insufficient funds, delays, and complex procedures. This might be due to the specific needs of technical education programs.

17. Suggestions from beneficiaries

Table 16. Suggestions of scheme availed from different agencies (Percentage)

Suggestions	Up to 12th Standard	Graduation	Technical Education
Not Applicable	7.7	3.9	2.6
Enhance the amount	44.9	46.5	44.1
Timely delivery/payment	18.7	21.5	25.8
Simplified procedure	4.1	11.4	10.9
Effective awareness about schemes to the stake holders	5.1	5.4	7.1
Others specify	19.5	11.4	9.6
Total	100	100	100

Source: GIFT SC HPSSS 2017-18

This table 16 shows the suggestions provided by students who availed themselves of scholarship or assistance schemes for their education from different agencies. The data is categorized into Up to 12th Standard Graduation, Graduation, and Technical Education. The analysis reveals that financial need is paramount. A significant portion of students across all categories (44.1% to 46.5%) suggested an increase in the amount of financial assistance provided by the schemes. This highlights the financial burden faced by students even with existing support. Timely Delivery of financial assistance is also crucial: Students emphasized the importance of timely delivery or payment of the scholarship/assistance (18.7% to 25.8%). Delays can create financial strain and disrupt educational progress.

Simplifying application procedures was a suggestion from a relevant portion of students (4.1% to 11.4%). Complex procedures can discourage potential applicants. Effective communication and raising awareness about available schemes were seen as important by some students (5.1% to 7.1%). This suggests a need for better outreach programs. A significant number of students had "Others (specify)" suggestions (9.6% to 19.5%), indicating there might be other unaddressed concerns. Overall, the table suggests that financial inadequacy, delays in

receiving benefits, and cumbersome application processes are the primary concerns. Additionally, there's a need for better outreach to raise awareness about available government schemes.

18. Discussion and Policy suggestions

Kerala, a state renowned for its high literacy rate, presents a complex picture when examining educational attainment among SCs. However, this achievement masks the persistent disparity between SC communities and the general population. SC literacy rates, though higher than the national average for SCs, remain lower than the state average. This disparity highlights the need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable access to education for SC students.

1. To enhance the effectiveness of existing schemes

While government initiatives exist, there's room for improvement to bridge the educational gap. During the household primary survey, the beneficiaries propose suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of existing schemes, focusing on four key areas such as increased scholarship amounts, timely delivery of funds, simplified application procedures, and improved awareness campaigns for stakeholders. 1) The current scholarship amounts may not adequately address the rising costs of education, particularly for higher studies. Increasing the financial support can significantly reduce the burden on SC families, easing their decision to prioritize education. This could involve analysing current living expenses and educational costs to establish a more comprehensive scholarship value. 2) Delays in receiving scholarship funds can disrupt educational continuity and create financial strain. Streamlining the disbursement process through online platforms or direct bank transfers can expedite the delivery of funds. Additionally, exploring pre-payment options for specific expenses, such as hostel fees, could provide immediate financial support. 3) Complex application procedures can discourage potential beneficiaries from applying. Simplifying application

forms and processes, potentially through online applications, can make them more accessible and user-friendly. Additionally, providing dedicated assistance centres with trained personnel including SC promoters can guide SC families through the application process and finally 4) Limited awareness about existing scholarship schemes can be a significant barrier to utilization. Targeted awareness campaigns through local media channels, community outreach programs, and collaboration with SC community leaders can ensure wider dissemination of information. Utilizing multiple languages can further enhance accessibility for diverse populations within the SC community.

2. To avoid implementation issues

The challenges beneficiaries encounter when availing themselves of government schemes aimed at improving their educational attainment can be categorized into three main areas: informational gaps, procedural hurdles, and resource limitations. 1) The *non-availability of correct information* is the major hurdle in availing the schemes. Beneficiaries often lack access to accurate and timely information about available schemes. Limited access to the internet, dependence on unreliable sources, and language barriers can create a knowledge deficit. This can lead to missed opportunities or applications based on incorrect information. 2) The *procedural hurdles* include delay in processing applications, difficulty in obtaining documents and complex procedures. Bureaucratic processes and a lack of transparency can lead to lengthy application processing times. This can cause anxiety and disrupt educational plans, particularly for students seeking timely financial aid. Secondly, obtaining essential documents like caste and income certificates can be a time-consuming and complex process, involving multiple visits to government offices. This can be particularly challenging for those residing in remote areas. Moreover, navigating the application process itself can be daunting. Multi-layered procedures with intricate steps can discourage potential beneficiaries, especially those with limited

literacy or experience dealing with government agencies. It was reported that even after submitting applications, delays in receiving support from the implementing agency can cause financial strain and disrupt educational continuity. 3) *Resource Limitations* includes non-availability of funds. Limited budgetary allocations or delays in releasing funds can impact the timely disbursement of scholarships and other forms of financial assistance. This can create uncertainty and force students to make difficult decisions about continuing their education.

To address these challenges, a multi-pronged approach is necessary. First, for *information dissemination*, it is suggested to utilizing multiple channels like local media, community outreach programs, and dedicated websites with translated content can ensure wider circulation of accurate information. Secondly, to *streamlining procedures*, it is suggested to simplify application forms and processes, potentially through online applications, that can make them more accessible. Moreover, for improving inter-agency coordination, it is necessary to ensure smooth communication and collaboration between various government agencies involved in issuing documents and disbursing funds can expedite processes. For ensuring *transparency and accountability*, it is suggested to implement online tracking systems for applications and clear timelines for document issuance and fund disbursement can increase transparency and reduce delays. Finally for adequate *financial resource* allocation, it is necessary to review and potentially increase budgetary allocations for educational schemes in accordance with the needs and requirements of the SC community to ensure sustained support for beneficiaries.

3. Combating dropouts

The reasons for dropout among SC students are multifaceted and often interrelated which was analysed in Table 13. Financial limitations pose a significant challenge for many SC families. The pressure to contribute to household income, coupled with the

cost of education materials, uniforms, and transportation, can force students to abandon their studies and seek employment. Low parental education levels in some SC communities can limit their ability to provide academic guidance and encouragement. Additionally, some families may prioritize immediate financial needs over long-term educational benefits, leading to a lack of support for continued schooling. Long distances to schools can be a significant barrier, particularly for girls from SC communities. Limited access to transportation or safety concerns about long commutes can discourage students from attending regularly. Experiences of social exclusion and caste-based prejudice within schools can create a hostile learning environment for SC students. This can lead to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and a lack of motivation to participate in school activities. Inadequate academic support and a lack of resources can put SC students at risk of falling behind. Learning difficulties may not be identified or addressed promptly, leading to frustration, disengagement, and ultimately, dropout. Early marriage, particularly for girls, can disrupt educational pursuits. Societal expectations and family pressure to marry young can force girls to leave school prematurely. Personal or family illness can disrupt a student's education and lead to absenteeism, potentially culminating in dropping out of school altogether.

To create an education system that encourages SC students to stay enrolled, a multi-pronged approach is required. *Targeted and adequate financial aid* programs can alleviate the financial burden on SC families, ensuring that educational costs don't become a barrier to continued studies. *Educating parents* about the importance of education and equipping them with skills to support their children's learning can significantly impact student success. Programs like workshops and community outreach can foster a collaborative partnership between schools and families. Addressing issues like long distances to schools by providing transportation facilities or building more schools in SC-dominant areas can improve accessibility. Implementing strong *anti-*

discrimination policies and training teachers on sensitivity and inclusivity can create a more welcoming and supportive learning environment for SC students. Providing resources *for early identification of learning difficulties* and implementing individualized learning plans can support SC students struggling academically. Access to remedial classes and mentorship programs can address specific needs and learning styles. Exposing SC students to *diverse career paths* through career counselling can motivate them to stay in school. Understanding the connection between education and future opportunities can empower them to make informed choices about their academic journey.

4. Educated yet unemployed

Despite possessing educational qualifications, SC graduates often struggle to find suitable employment. Several factors contribute to educated unemployment among SCs in Kerala such as skill mismatch, social exclusion and discrimination, limited networking opportunities and entrepreneurial challenges. education system may not adequately equip graduates with the specific skills demanded by the job market. This can leave them unprepared to compete for available positions. Lingering caste prejudices can hinder SC graduates' access to employment opportunities, despite their qualifications. Societal biases may influence hiring practices, leading to underrepresentation in certain sectors. SC graduates may lack access to professional networks that can provide job leads and career guidance. Social exclusion can restrict their ability to connect with potential employers. While self-employment can be an option, SC communities often face limited access to capital, mentorship, and business support networks, hindering their ability to establish successful ventures.

To address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is required.

1) *Skills development* is the most important factor to encounter the unemployment issue. Revamping educational curricula to align with industry needs is crucial. Introducing skill-based training

programs and entrepreneurship development initiatives can equip SC graduates with the practical skills and knowledge desired by employers; 2) Promoting *diversity and inclusion* is another policy suggestion that implementing strong anti-discrimination policies within the public and private sectors is essential. Encouraging diversity and inclusion initiatives within workplaces can create a more level playing field for SC job seekers; 3) Establishing *mentorship programmes* connecting established professionals with SC graduates can provide valuable guidance and support during the job search process; 4) Providing *financial assistance* for skill development programs and entrepreneurial ventures can empower SC graduates to pursue their career aspirations. Establishing dedicated support networks can offer guidance on business development, marketing, and navigating bureaucratic processes and finally while existing reservation policies offer some protection, a review might be necessary to ensure their effectiveness in promoting equitable employment opportunities across all sectors.

19. Conclusion

This working paper has explored the intricate relationship between the Special Component Plan and the educational status of SCs in Kerala. The historical context of marginalization faced by SCs was highlighted, emphasizing the need for affirmative action policies like the SCP to achieve educational equity. An extensive review of literature established the centrality of education in uplifting SC communities. The analysis of SCP allocation during the 13th five-year plan period revealed a significant focus on the education sector. Scrutiny of physical targets achieved in educational schemes offered a mixed picture, with some exceeding targets and others falling short.

A detailed examination of the SC educational status revealed both progress and persistent challenges. While the literacy rate has improved, significant disparities remain compared to the general

population. The categorization of SC educational levels provided a granular understanding, highlighting the need for targeted interventions at all stages, from primary to post graduation and above. The exploration of agencies assisting SC students revealed a multifaceted approach, with government schemes playing a crucial role. However, the data regarding beneficiaries' present activity after dropping out suggests potential gaps in support systems for those leaving education prematurely. Additionally, the identification of problems encountered while availing schemes underscores the need for streamlined procedures and increased awareness. The beneficiary suggestions, focusing on improved infrastructure, scholarship disbursement, and career guidance, offer valuable insights for policymakers. The success of the SCP hinges on a multi-pronged approach.

Building on the findings of this study, future research should explore the long-term impact of the proposed policy interventions on the educational outcomes SC in Kerala. Specifically, longitudinal studies could assess the effectiveness of increased scholarship amounts, streamlined application processes, and targeted awareness campaigns in reducing dropout rates and improving enrolment across different educational levels and also delve deeper into the specific needs of different SC sub-groups. Additionally, comparative studies across different states or regions could offer insights into the varying effectiveness of the SCP and help identify best practices that could be replicated elsewhere. For policymakers, it is crucial to ensure that these interventions are not only implemented but also continuously monitored and adapted based on ongoing feedback from SC communities.

The paper offers a comprehensive evaluation of the SCP in uplifting the educational status of SC in Kerala. By employing primary data, the study delves into the intricacies of SC educational experiences, identifying key barriers such as financial limitations, inadequate program awareness, and bureaucratic obstacles. The research not only sheds light on the challenges

faced by SC communities in accessing educational opportunities but also provides actionable policy recommendations to optimise the SCP's impact. This work significantly advances our understanding of educational disparities and contributes to the broader discourse on achieving educational equity in India. The research advances our understanding of educational equity by highlighting specific areas where the SCP falls short and proposing actionable policy recommendations to enhance its impact. This work not only enriches the ongoing discourse on educational equity in India but also serves as a critical resource for policymakers aiming to improve access to education for marginalised communities. Sections of society, regardless of caste.

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End Note

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