

## Unproductive mindset of youth a growing concern to Kerala

NS Ramesh Chandran

Assistant Professor & Head of the Department of Social Work, National College of Arts & Science, Thiruvananthapuram, & Guest Lecturer, National Institute of Speech and Hearing (NISH), Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

### Abstract

Kerala, a small State situated in the south-west part of India has a fairly good record of social development and the highest human development index in the country. But unemployment of youth is a serious cause of worry for Kerala. It is not that opportunities are not coming up but an air of naiveté has created a sort of adverse attitude towards dignity of labour in the youth today. New generation's preference for white collar jobs, nay their reluctance to accept blue collar jobs has become a hard nut to crack. Teenagers looking for University education are often misled by preconceived notions generated from a distorted educational system. The skewed psyche of parents has further added fuel to the burning problem. The drowsy, unproductive and arid thoughts of the youth are the real apprehensions that vex the State. How to help the youngsters flush out repulsive thoughts and replenish their outlook with healthy perspectives about dignity of labour, should be the major agenda of youth welfare agencies. Educating the youth to identify, mobilize and bring out the unique capabilities lying hidden in them and to consolidate the general abilities constitute the real nitty-gritty of youth empowerment. Simultaneously the State Government should focus on a wide spectrum of multiple skill development programmes which will compensate the deficit created by industrial backwardness. The wisest way to enhance the productivity of youth in Kerala and to arouse them from lassitude is to work for a skill driven society rather than a knowledge driven society. The article makes an attempt to apprehend why the youngsters of Kerala are dragging their feet on the question of being very selective about jobs and what can be done to harness the issue.

**Keywords:** dignity, white collar job, blue collar job, psyche, empowerment

### Introduction

Kerala, a small State situated in the south-west part of India has a fairly good record of social development and the highest human development index in the country. But unemployment of youth is a serious cause of worry for Kerala. According to the NSSO (National Sample Survey Organization) the State has the highest incidence of unemployment. Human Development Report 2005 Kerala, states that young men in the age group of 15-25 experience a high unemployment rate while this is true for the 15-30 age group for women. Kerala's unemployment rate is 7.4% which is much higher than the national average of 2.3% as per the 2013 data. (Kerala's Public Service Commission). These figures obviously elucidate the magnitude of the problem of unemployment in Kerala. It is not that opportunities are not coming up, but an air of naiveté has created a sort of adverse attitude towards dignity of labour in the youth today. New generation's preference for white collar jobs, nay their reluctance to accept blue collar jobs has become a hard nut to crack. Globalization, growth of IT industry, increased foreign employment, extravagant modern life, propensity to make a fast buck, want of appropriate skill development are other social dimensions which rub salt into the wound.

Strangely the Educators and Politicians in Kerala still have not sensed the imminent danger of unemployed youth succumbing to self destruction. Or is it that they are simply undermining the gravity of the problem for other reasons? Time is ahead for a serious introspection, failing which Kerala will have to pay the price for serious lapses.

Respect for jobs, right judgment about an employment, understanding the resourcefulness of an occupation, trying to

see the good perspectives of any line of work, willingness to involve in any vocation are social issues which school children should come to understand explicitly. Teaching such subjects at tender age will help the students develop the right vision about job scenario.

Social work Agencies can do a lot by helping the youngsters flush out repulsive thoughts and replenish their outlook with healthy perspectives about dignity of labour. Educating the youth to identify, mobilize and bring out the unique capabilities lying hidden in them and to consolidate the general abilities constitute the real nitty-gritty of youth empowerment. It is a task to be taken up by youth welfare agencies. Sadly in Kerala neither social organizations nor academic institutions have put in responsible efforts to conceptualize and disseminate the right dimensions of empowerment in social circle. "Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important". (Nanette Page & Cheryl E. Czuba, 1999) [12]. Another definition is that "Youth empowerment comes from the individual attitudes, shared cultures, and everyday structures that children and youth share with adults throughout society". (Adam Fletcher, 2016) [1].

Kerala should think in terms of linking skill development with the concept of "Labour bank" which will be a good initiative to address unemployment issues effectively. It will also be instrumental in strengthening the feelings of dignity of labour in younger generation. "The participatory approach in

the design, organization and operation of the Labour Bank can be a powerful institutional intervention for mitigating some of the imperfections in the agricultural labour markets". (Lijo Thomas and and Siddayya, 2011) [10].

The article makes an attempt to apprehend why the youngsters of Kerala are dragging their feet on the question of being very selective about jobs and what can be done to harness the issue.

**Obsession with medical/engineering profession**

Today Medical/Engineering profession has become an obsession with students and more so with parents in Kerala. Teenagers looking for University education are often misled by preconceived notions generated from a distorted educational system. The skewed psyche of parents has further added fuel to the burning problem. "In India, engineering is not just a profession. It's a cult. Coaching for entrance examinations starts as early as in Class VI. What started as a stereotype of a stable, secure career from the older generations is now driving the ambitions of the country's youth to solve some of the world's most pressing problems." (Mayank Jain, 2017) [11]. The fact of the matter is that the entrepreneurial mindset of self financing institutions tacitly encourages and exploits such obsessional syndromes of students and parents for commercial interests. It is nothing but, making hay while the sun shines. "Many of the new breed of educational entrepreneurs is guided largely by commercial or other extraneous considerations. Even the religious and the caste groups which used to finance education partly out of their own resources, are now choosing

the easier option of student-financing for promoting education." (K.K.George, 2011) [3].

"Most of the job oriented courses like nursing, medical, engineering, management are now in the self-financing sector. More than 80 per cent of the engineering colleges, nursing colleges, and pharmacy colleges are in the self-financing stream. More than three-fifths of the institutions offering medical courses in different streams such as Allopathy and Ayurveda are also self - financing in nature" (ibid)

The saddest part is that in spite of taking up enormous financial burden by the parents and putting in a lot of efforts by the students for the sake of procuring a professional Degree/Diploma, unemployment continues to ride unbridled. "Unemployment among engineering graduates has been on the rise from 6389 in 2005 to nearly 3 times at 17,895 in the year 2013. Unemployment among ITI certificate holders had shown a clear tendency to decline from 1,24,410 in 2005 to 87,270 in the year".( KM Shahjahan, 2014) [15]. More dangerously the situation has created a sort of personal vanity among parents and children. Finding that they are not getting the expected jobs, some of them are forced willy-nilly to accept other jobs that come in their way, while a few prefer to remain unemployed because they don't want to compromise their ego of being eligible only for a high profile job. Some get a belated realization that a regular Government job or a secure bank job is far more important than the loftiness and smugness of academic qualifications. Thereafter their attitude towards professional courses changes significantly and mania for professional jobs desert them for good.

**Table 1:** Figures about unemployment in Kerala Total work seekers in Kerala (2005-2012) (Lakh persons)

Year	General work seekers	Professional/Technical work seekers	Total work seekers
2005	34.93	1.77	36.70
2006	36.93	1.64	38.57
2007	38.39	1.49	39.88
2008	40.01	1.43	41.44
2009	41.54	1.46	43.00
2010	41.60	1.50	43.10
2011	41.98	1.64	43.62
2012	43.29	1.70	44.99

Source: Appendix 3.73, economic Review, Volume 2, P 168

The stark reality is that the young generation is very much ignorant about aptitude, ingenuity and the larger goals of University education. They are simply carried away by crazy thoughts which alienate them from the logic of reasoning. They often view a professional degree as a treasured possession, something like a magic wand which will fetch them a bright and promising future.

Figure: 1 presents a bleak picture of the increasing rate of educated unemployment in Kerala. It is the mad chase of professional Degree holders to get hold of glamorous and highly remunerative jobs which virtually ends up in unemployment.

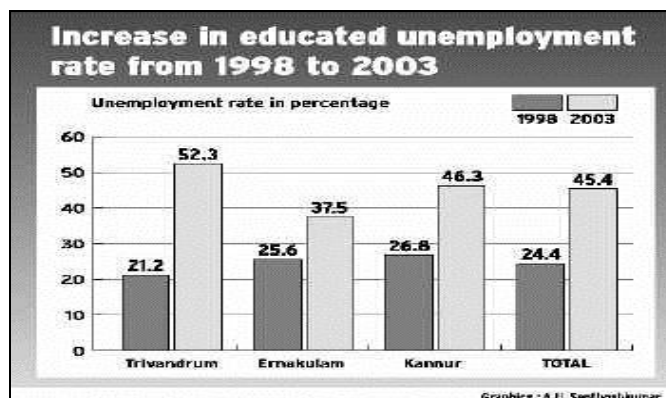


Fig 1: (www.thehindu.com)

The fundamental step in the process of youth empowerment is to subject all high school children to veracious SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges) analysis. Such an exercise will invariably help the growing buds realize their true potentialities and equip themselves with the right vision to opt for a discipline of their choice. It may be seen as a thoughtful step to put a halt to the foolish syndrome, looking for engineering and medical admissions, at least to a small extent.

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability

to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid” (Albert Einstein)

**Literacy vis-a-vis education**

It is a matter of pride for Malayalees that Kerala is the most literate State in India. On 13/01/2016 the Vice President Mr Hamid Ansari declared Kerala a total primary education State. Table – 2 illustrates the comparison of literacy rates between Kerala and other States.

**Table 2:** Literacy Rates in Kerala and Other States

	Literacy Rates per cent		Net attendance ratio in the Class-group I-VIII	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
2010				
Andhra Pradesh	54.9	72.3	83	88
Himachal Pradesh	73.2	87.7	95	96
Karnataka	62.9	79.3	89	93
Kerala	91.8	96.2	93	94
Tamil Nadu	72.3	88.0	93	91
National Level	56.3	72.1	84	87

Source: NSSO, Participation and Expenditure in Education’ NSS 64th round (July2007 – June 2008)

It is also laudable that female literacy, both in rural and urban areas, equally maintains a high percentage in terms of male

literacy.

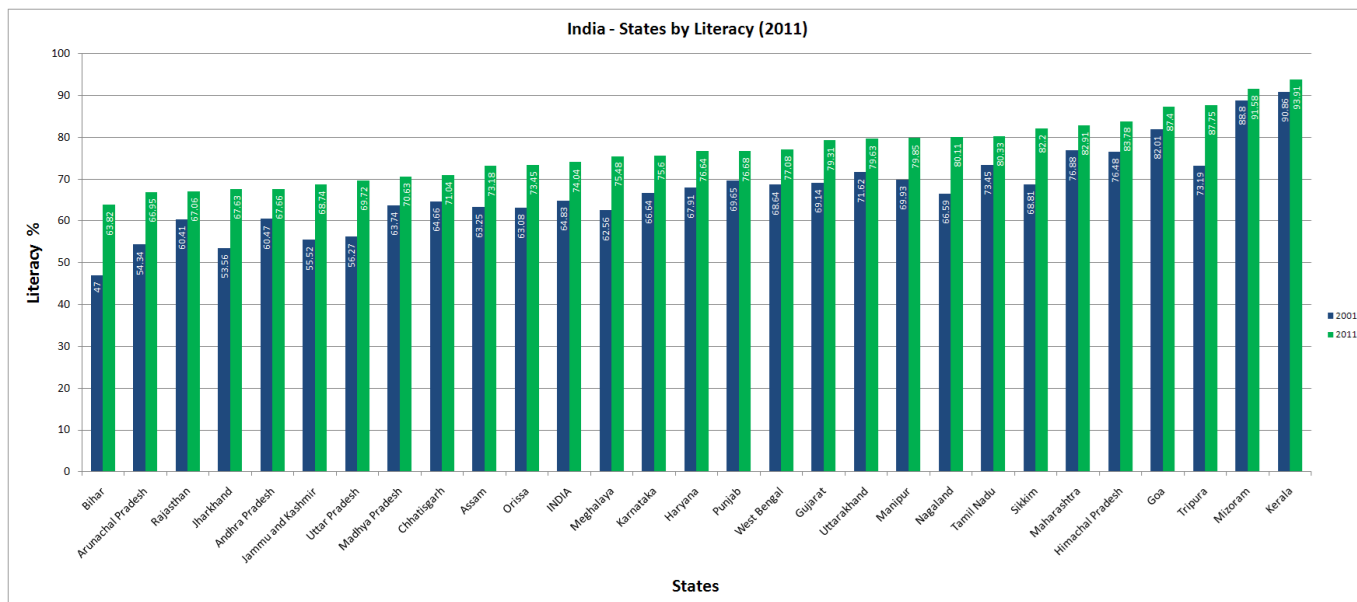
The figures in Table – 3 demonstrate the fact cited.

**Table 3:** Kerala Literacy Rate

	Total	Rural	Urban
Persons	90.9	90.1	93.4
Males	94.2	93.5	96.1
Females	87.7	86.8	90.9

As per census 2001

Figure: 2 gives a comparison of literacy among the various States



**Fig 2:** (en.wikipedia.org)

Let us understand that literacy is not simply an ability to read and write; on the other hand it should be viewed as a potent empowerment tool. The 2001 census data makes it very clear that “Literacy forms an important input in overall development of individuals enabling them to comprehend their social, political and cultural environment better and

respond to it appropriately.”

The high level of literacy which ought to push up educational standards, strangely has not taken place in Kerala. That means Kerala has not been able to bank on the merits of a literate society. Contrary to expectations the educational standards are found to decline awfully. “Kerala’s higher education

system has not expanded as much as one expects in a state where elementary education is nearly universal and secondary education has expanded reasonably well". (Jandhyala B G Tilak, 2001) [7]. Quality erosion is not only a factor which affects unemployment but also impacts on the overall development of the State. "It is widely held that there has been a drastic decline in the quality of higher education to unacceptable levels, and such a poor quality education will not contribute to development - economic, social and political." (Jandhyala Tilak, 2015) [6].

Literacy mission should ignite right values of life while academic education should cast a progressive mindset in young people for accepting and respecting any job. A standardized literacy programme and an impeccable education system are two complementary components in awakening the youth from lethargy to dynamism. Look at what 2001 Census Data points out, "Higher levels of education and literacy lead to a greater awareness and also contribute in improvement of economic and social conditions."

Mechanical implementation of welfare projects is not going to ensure the growth and development of the youth; instead Social work agencies, both GOs (Government Organizations) as well as NGOs (Non Government Organizations) should work incessantly for making an attitudinal change. Taking up a proactive role and building up an outlook to engage in a resourceful and quick-witted venture are characteristics which

galvanize youngsters into self-motivated actions. Such people never want to shirk their responsibilities nor idle the days away. "The country now needs to move beyond the parameters of literacy and primary education as yardsticks of educational achievement for youth. For this, mere expansion of colleges and universities will not achieve the required results unless there is value addition in terms of quality and relevance." (India Youth Development Report 2010) [5].

**Industrial backwardness and want of appropriate skill development**

The industrial backwardness of Kerala makes the State highly vulnerable to unemployment. "The Indian State of Kerala presents a paradox of development, with its remarkable social achievements and relative industrial backwardness." (Jayan Jose Thomas, 2005) [8].

"A policy decision in the 1930s – marked by a priority for investments in chemicals-based industries and the identification of hydroelectricity as a potential basis for industrialization – continue to have implications for industrial growth in Kerala today. With the policy decision in the 1930s, industrial structure in Kerala came to be locked into a pattern that offered very little potential for inter-industry inter-linkages and industrial growth" (ibid). Table – 4 shows the growth of working factories and average daily employment while Table – 5 presents District wise distribution of factories and Employment in the State.

**Table 4:** Growth of working factories and average daily employment- Kerala

Year	Number of working factories			Employment		
	Private	Public	Total	Private	Public	Total
2004	17790	529	18319	311147	94367	405514
2005	17837	528	18365	313994	94352	408346
2006	17883	528	18411	315448	94352	409800
2007	18061	390	18451	555320	110866	666186

Source: Department of Economics and Statistics

**Table 5:** District wise distribution of factories and Employment in Kerala

District	Factories				Employment			
	2004	2005	2006	2007(p)	2004	2005	2006	2007(p)
Thiruvananthapuram	898	893	898	899	30118	29884	30217	47854
Kollam	1903	1940	1930	1930	128898	132702	132490	228282
Pathanamthitta	509	525	528	528	9510	11260	11467	11475
Alapuzha	1247	1254	1260	1260	26708	27204	27319	41217
Kottayam	1262	1262	1265	1265	16615	16699	16791	27848
Idukki	335	333	338	338	8389	7611	7842	14904
Ernakulam	2938	2939	2957	2957	62779	62654	62654	106974
Thrissur	2522	2529	2529	2529	35052	35157	35156	55405
Palakkad	1873	1870	1875	1875	23430	23215	23752	38694
Malappuram	1020	1018	1022	1022	9290	9090	9170	15689
Kozhikode	135	135	135	149	20252	19015	19047	34878
Wayanad	1714	1718	1720	1925	6561	6589	6589	3741
Kannur	1705	1694	1699	1699	24945	24389	24409	37236
Kasargod	258	255	255	283	2967	2897	2897	1989
Total	18319	18365	18411	18659	405514	408346	409800	666186

Source: Department of Economics and Statistics

Table 4 and 5 depict a grim picture of the relationship between industrial growth and employment in Kerala. It deserves mentioning that some of the perceptive socio-political factors are also responsible for the industrial backwardness of the State. The militancy of the labour force

has often been a controversial and complex issue, which is said to hamper the progress of industrial activities. Labour disputes, affiliation of labour unions to political parties, high political sensitivity, disregard for manual labour etc are some of the social issues which work against the true spirit of

employment. “Intensity of labour disputes in Kerala is one of the highest in the country, and labour in Kerala has been frequently criticised for the industrial backwardness of the State.” (Jayan Jose Thomas, 2003) <sup>[9]</sup>.

“As modern industries were slow to emerge and generated only too few jobs, Kerala’s labour market faced a crisis: work participation rates declined; educated unemployment is the highest of all States in the country; and the relatively better educated workers in Kerala had little option but to work in relatively (all relative to India) less value adding economic activities” (ibid).

In the backdrop of sluggish industrial growth it would be more appropriate for Kerala to take up a mission for training youngsters in multifarious skill development programmes on a large scale, in compliance with global standards. Apparently the benefits will be:

- Building up dignity and self respect in youth with regard to jobs
- Finding out effective solution to unemployment
- Generating a lot of self employment opportunities

Figure: 2 is a telling pointer which brings out the compulsion of laying stress to sophisticated skill development programmes rather than blindly encouraging University education.

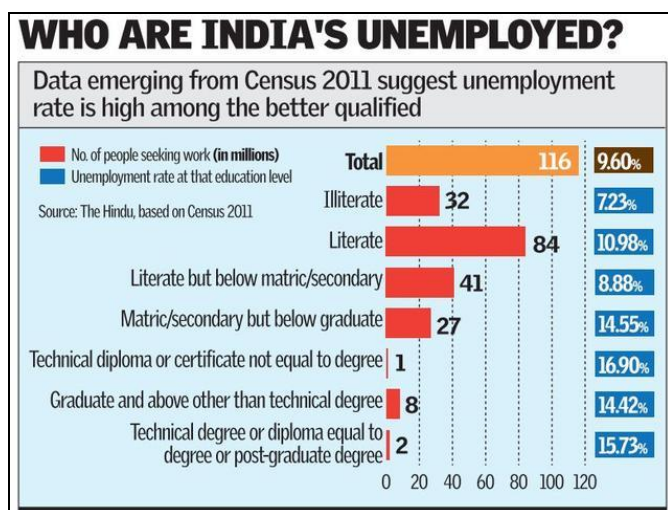


Fig 3: (ingene.blogspot.com)

Obviously the State Government has to drift away from conventional and stereotyped programmes hitherto followed. Give a new direction to identify novel areas, modern applications and sophisticated approaches in skill development. Any plan of action for skill development should ultimately help the beneficiary remain competitive in job market and promote self employment.

It deserves mentioning that appreciable are the efforts of the State Government to set up a nodal agency, Kerala Academy for Skills Excellence (KASE) aka NYPUNYAM, a non-profit public company for skill development activities. The employability potential envisaged by this apex body is very much innovative, impressive and promising. But that alone is not going to give the State a cutting edge. Many steps are further required. More and more Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) focusing on advanced and multiple areas of technology should come up. The Administration should seek the support of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) for developing

skill repositories and for ensuring sustainability of development. In fact the Government should seriously examine the necessity of forming even a ministry exclusively for Skill development. The wisest way to enhance the productivity of youth in Kerala and to arouse them from lassitude is to work for a skill driven society rather than a knowledge driven society.

### Conclusion

Unemployment is not the big issue which Kerala encounters today; rather it is the drowsy, unproductive and arid thoughts of the youth, responsible for joblessness, which are the real apprehensions that vex the State. Fundamentally the task should be to put in earnest efforts for extirpating probable misconceptions and misgivings about job placement from the minds of unemployed youth. The focus should be to frame a bent of mind in young people for taking pride in any job irrespective of its nature. Youth welfare organizations are the right agencies to take up that responsibility. Next comes the role of State Administration. Motivate and generate self interest in composite areas of skill development. Let the spotlight fall on a wide spectrum of multiple skill development programmes which will compensate the deficit created by industrial backwardness. It is indeed a herculean task, but never can be regarded as impossible if the Government is ready to exercise an unbending will.

“Much education today is monumentally ineffective. All too often we are giving young people cut flowers when we should be teaching them to grow their own plants” (John W. Gardener).

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