

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
LOYOLA COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), CHENNAI

REPORT ON IMMERSIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE OF STUDENTS

In this centenary year, the Department of Sociology undertook a unique immersive learning study in the distinctive Jawadhu Hills of Thiruvannamalai District, Tamil Nadu. The primary objective of this one-of-a-kind learning experience was to provide first-hand exposure to the unparalleled socio-economic, cultural, and environmental dynamics of the rural communities in the Jawadhu Hills for the I, II & III year undergraduate students. This report details the key activities and observations from the study, which took place for three days, from **August 28 to 30, 2024**. Nearly 171 students, accompanied by five faculty members, participated in this immersive learning to gain their first insights into the tribal village lifestyle.

Day 1: Arrival and Village Exploration

The journey commenced with 5 buses departing from the Loyola College campus at 12:30 p.m., arriving in the Jawadhu Hills later that evening at Don Bosco Tribal Welfare Centre, Jamunamarathur, where the stay was arranged. After a delightful dinner, the students prepared for an extensive exploration planned for the next day. The following morning, the students received an enlightening briefing on local customs, traditions, and community dynamics from the rector of Don Bosco, Rev. Fr. Amala Vinodh SDB. His scintillating presentation was nothing short of captivating, offering profound insights into the historical context of the hills and the intricate social structure that underpins the villages of Jawadhu Hills. Fr. Amala Vinodh provided a comprehensive analysis of the region's cultural heritage and elucidated the ongoing social initiatives and developmental plans, making it an indispensable introduction to our field study. His eloquence and depth of knowledge truly set a remarkable tone for the immersive learning experience that followed.

The students were divided into 10 groups to thoroughly explore various villages in the region. This immersive learning initiative aimed to cover five tribal villages, namely Koviloor, Perungattur, Veerappanur, Palamarathur, and Thimiramarathur, with two groups assigned to each village and a faculty to guide them. The students observed the religious places, schools, agricultural fields social setting and panchayat system in action, taking note of the decision-making processes and community involvement in local governance. Detailed studies were conducted on the basic social institutions, age old customs, traditional arts and crafts and festivals unique to the region, highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the tribal communities. Special attention was given to understanding the primary employment opportunities, which drives their life and livelihood, such as agriculture, forestry, and

handicrafts, which form the backbone of the local economy. Additionally, the students examined the educational opportunities, healthcare facilities and sanitation practices within the Jawadhu Hills. Post-lunch students conducted structured interviews with village elders, community leaders, and local residents, gaining valuable insights into the challenges faced by the community, such as access to education, healthcare, and the impacts of climate change. The third-year students were instructed to collect the data using a survey form, second-year students observed the emic and etic perspectives, and the first-year students observed the major social institutions operating in the village, ensuring a comprehensive and in-depth study.

Reflections and Presentation

In the evening, students gathered to present their observations and experiences. Each group shared its findings, highlighting unique aspects of its assigned villages. This session encouraged a rich knowledge exchange and fostered a collaborative learning environment. Each group presented its findings, concluding the day with meaningful insights. This exercise was crucial for synthesising their learning and understanding diverse perspectives on rural life.

Day 2: Interaction and Presentation

On the second day, students engaged in a detailed interaction with the professors to discuss the observations and findings from our village visit. During this session, the students presented the data on various socio-economic aspects, including education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. Professors provided thought-provoking feedback, encouraging them to critically analyze the information and consider the broader implications of our findings.

The discussion also helped the students to identify critical areas for further investigation and refine their approach to understanding the community's needs and challenges. With the professors' guidance, students prepared a comprehensive presentation that synthesized their observations and proposed actionable recommendations for improving local conditions. This collaborative process was instrumental in deepening our analysis and enhancing the overall quality of the research. After completing the presentation, the students embarked on the return journey to Loyola College. The bus departed at 1:00 p.m. and arrived safely at the college by 9:00 p.m.

The immersive learning study in the Jawadhu Hills provided an invaluable educational experience for the students. It broadened their understanding of rural life, highlighted the complexities of tribal communities, and underscored the importance of cultural preservation and sustainable living. This trip exemplified the commitment of Loyola College and the Department of Sociology to experiential

learning, fostering a deeper appreciation for the diversity of rural India and enhancing students' academic journeys beyond the classroom.

Overall, the immersive study trip was a resounding success, achieving its primary goal of broadening students' perspectives on rural life in Tamil Nadu. The hands-on experience allowed students to appreciate better the socio-cultural dynamics and challenges rural communities face. Through interactions with residents and community leaders, students developed a more nuanced understanding of education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability issues.

Immersive learning enriched their academic learning and fostered empathy and a sense of social responsibility. This experience will undoubtedly influence students' future endeavors and contributions to society.



