



Status of Tribal Education in India with special reference to Higher Education – An analysis

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The Scheduled Tribes represent one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. As the tribal population of more than 10.2crores, India is a country which has the largest population of tribals in the world. They constitute 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country (Census of India, 2011). Education is one of the chief agents of transformation towards development. Education is not only for economic development of tribes but also to help tribal communities for inner strength to meet new challenges of life. Education is an activity, a process which will improve the immediate living conditions and increase the potential for future living. Scheduled Tribes in India are indigenous people or original inhabitants of the country and are generally considered to be 'Adivasis'. The tribes are often physically and socially isolated instead of being absorbed in the mainstream population and have been confined to low status. The Scheduled Tribes often express passive indifference that takes the form of exclusion from educational opportunities, social participation, and access to their own habitation. Tribal communities are all not alike because their cultural traits and nature are products of different social and historical conditions. They belong to different racial stocks and religious backgrounds and speak different dialects. The tribes who live in primitive conditions were considered sub-humans since the 16th century. The general population who are in the mainstream society considers the tribal population as primitive, technologically backward, and illiterate. The above reasons are the root cause of the alienation of tribals in higher education. By giving more emphasis on livelihood options and other activities in the tribal hamlet, the tribal communities continue to ignore the value of Higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education, Scheduled Tribes, Issues and Challenges

Introduction

According to the 2011 Census, the literacy rate of the Scheduled Tribes of India is only 58.95% against the National literacy rate of 74.04 % and Andhra Pradesh literacy rate at 67.02%. Recognizing that the Scheduled Tribes are one of the most deprived and marginalized communities with respect to education, many programmes and measures have been initiated by the government since independence of the

country. Education of the scheduled tribes is a Constitutional obligation to equality of its citizen and it is also a crucial input in the nation's strategy of total development of tribal communities. In spite of the country's effort to guarantee dignity, equality and development according to the constitution, the tribal communities have trailed behind in education due to external factors and also internal constraints which include the cultural,



socioeconomic and psychological issues of first generation learners. India is native soil to a number of tribal communities with diverse eco-cultural, socio-economic, and geographical backgrounds. As per 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes (notified by the Government of India under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution) constitute 8.6% of the total population of the country, numbering 84.51 million.

Education, at the elementary levels, is of utmost importance to the tribals because it's crucial for total development of tribal communities and is particularly helpful to build confidence among the tribes to deal with outsiders on equal terms. Despite the earnest and determined efforts by the government for the overall development of the scheduled tribes, they are still far behind in almost all the standard factors of development. Since they are not aware of most of the programmes and policies made for their upliftment they are not able to participate in the process of development. The lack of awareness is due to high rate of illiteracy and very low level of education among the tribal communities. Hence the role of government is highly essential in the direction of improving the status of higher education of the tribals. The educational background of tribes is discouraging as compared to the rest of the population. Hence, education is an important path for upgrading the social and economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribes. In this context, the objective of this study is to analyse the trend of literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, dropout rates and Gender Parity Index of tribal education in India.

Problems of Tribal Education

There are many issues and problems in the field of tribal education which will have to be addressed (Das Gupta, N.K. 1964). They are as follows:

- Medium of language: Lack of knowledge of local language is a constraint for tribal children that thwarts their access to education.
- The location of the village: Since the tribal communities live in remote places or on hilly terrain they find difficult to attend school which is in a neighboring village or town.
- Economic condition: The economic condition of tribal people is so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.
- Attitude of the parents: As education does not yield any immediate economic return, the tribal parents choose to engage their children in remunerative work which increases income of the family.
- Teacher related problems: In the remote tribal areas the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon and this affects largely the quality of education.
- Lack of proper monitoring: Proper monitoring is hindered by poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

Government Policies and Programmes for Tribal Education

- Starting from the First Five Year Plan (1951-56) the government is gradually apportioning financial resources for the purpose of tribal development. During the end of the first Five Year Plan period (1954), 43 Multipurpose Tribal Development Projects (MTDPs) were created.
- During the Third Five Year Plan Period (1961-66), the government of India adopted the approach of converting into Tribal Development Blocks (TDBs) those areas which constitute more than 66 per cent



tribal population. At the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan (1969 - 1974), there were 504 TDBs in the country. Tribal Sub-Plan Strategy (TSP) was implemented in 1972 by the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare. TSP was founded on two objectives of protection against exploitation and socio-economic development. The TSP programs were implemented in the areas where Scheduled Tribe population was more than 50 per cent of the total population.

- Through the Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act, 1996 it was made mandatory for the States that have scheduled areas, to give specific provisions for tribes to take up powers for development and decision making in their own communities. Ashram schools which were sponsored by the central government was for ST children exclusively from elementary education to higher secondary levels and it was initiated in the 1970s. The quality of Ashram schools which are not properly maintained has lowered the confidence in education as a foundation for social mobility.
- The collaborative effort of the international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA, ILO and UNDP along with Government of India helped in the making of Janshala Programme - a community based primary education programme, which aims to make primary education effective and accessible, for children from deprived communities, marginalized groups, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribes/minorities, children with specific needs and especially for girls.

Literature Reviews

Gautam, V. (2004) in his article identified that the dropout rates among tribal children is high. He analyzed that due to the medium of instruction in languages not known by children there are drop outs from schools. Appointment of non-tribal teachers who do not know to converse with children in their language which causes communication gap between the teachers and tribal children, are a few other reasons for high dropout rates in tribal schools. Maharatna, A. (2005) illustrates that the key challenge does not concern how tribes can be brought within the folds of mainstream society and culture, but how interaction between tribes and mainstream society can be developed which will be more voluntary and mutual. Lal, M. (2005) in the study shows that Dalits and Adivasis form the biggest number of school drop-outs and the largest group amongst the drop outs is girls. Hence, education should become the panacea for the weaker sections of the society. It needs to become an inclusive growth strategy for the economic and social upliftment of the tribal community. As the scheduled castes and tribes are facing new situation in development process, education takes a special significance in their growth. Nair, P. (2007) has stressed the importance of giving non-formal education to the tribal communities especially to those in the remote areas and whom it is hardest to reach. Therefore, Non Formal Education (NFE) focuses on children who are drop-outs from formal system of education. The non-formal methods provide room for creativity, innovation and add flexibility to a rigid system of organization, content, teaching method, target group of learners and evaluation procedures. Sedwal, M. et al.,(2008) focused on issues related to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes-groups



which are recognised for affirmative action within the Constitution of India. Abdulraheem, A. (2011) explained that education as an important parameter for any inclusive growth in an economy and the policies have to focus on inclusive rather than divisive strategies.

Discussion

- Literacy campaign: Proper awareness campaign should be organized to create the awareness about the importance of education. Extensive literacy campaign in the tribal dominated districts may be undertaken on a priority basis to make the tribal literate.
- Attitude of the tribal parents: The tribal parents who are mostly illiterate need guidance and counselling on the importance of education so that they encourage and support their children's education.
- Relevant study materials in local languages: All study materials should be supplied in local languages of tribes.
- Appointment of local and female teachers: There should be more tribal female teachers appointed to teach tribal children who can show more understanding and care to the children. These teachers should be able to recognize and appreciate the cultural, ecological, and psychological characteristics of tribal children.
- Stipends and various scholarships: Since higher education among the tribes is less, special ST scholarships ought to be provided to the tribal students perusing higher education, particularly in medical, engineering, and other vocational streams.
- Residential schools: More residential schools should be established in each State and districts and extended up to PG level in tribal areas.

- Social security: Social security of students, especially of adolescent girls is of great concern in residential schools.
- Proper Monitoring: Higher level officials should check the functioning of schools frequently relating to the teaching methods, working hours, and attendance registers.

Conclusion

Education is crucial to tribal development and tribal children have very low participation. There is political will for the development of the tribal community but the pace is very slow due to lack of cooperation from the tribals and also due to negligence in administration of the programs. If govt. will not take some drastic steps for the development of tribal education, the status of education among tribes will be a story of distress, despair and death. Hence tribal education and inclusive growth have to be given due importance. There is an urgent need for policy makers to intervene and plan to address the problem of ST education and allocate more funds in the central and state budgets for tribal education. Easy access and more opportunities should be provided to the tribal children in order to bring them to the mainstream of economic development.

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67

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