

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA

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Abstract

Education is considered to be an important element in developing individuals in a comprehensive manner, exposing them to greater awareness, better compensation of their socio-cultural environment and improving socio-economic conditions. The same goes for the Scheduled Tribes in India which has helped them improve their socio-economic status in the country. This paper focuses mainly with the current and comparative literacy and level of education of the Scheduled Tribes of India, emphasizing on the problems, policies and programmes at the same time.

Introduction:

The Constitution of India has identified certain ethnic minority groups by giving them special considerations, and these groups are traditionally named as the Scheduled Tribes (STs). They constitute around 8 per cent of the total population of the country. According to Census 2011, there are 573 Scheduled Tribes residing in different parts of the country, most of them having their own languages different from the language spoken in the state where they are located. There are 270 such languages found in the country. The tribal languages in India have

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predominantly originated from major language families like the Austric, Tibeto-Chinese, Dravidian, etc.

Majority of the Scheduled Tribes live in scattered habitations located in interior, remote and inaccessible hilly and forest areas of the country. Almost 22 per cent of tribal inhabitations have less than 100 population and more than 40 per cent have less than 100 to 300 people, while others have less than 500 people. (Sujatha 2000) Despite the fact that, the tribal community constitute only 8 per cent of the total Indian population, they are in majority in several states and union states. They form an overwhelming majority in states such as Mizoram (94.75 per cent), Lakshadweep (93.15 per cent), Nagaland (87.70 per cent). However, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan constitute for 83 per cent of the total tribal population, even though the fact that non tribal population form the majority in these states. (Census 2011)

Literacy Rate of Total SC and ST (1961-2011):

Literacy rate is defined as the percentage of literates among the population aged seven years and above. (Census 1991) In spite of improvement in the literacy levels of STs, the gap in literacy levels, both for tribal men and women has not be bridged yet. The Scheduled Tribe population of India has risen from 28.30 per cent in 1961 to 72.99 per cent in 2011, while the literacy level amongst the STs has risen from 8.53 percent in 1961 to 58.96 per cent in 2011. However, the literacy rate, all along has been lower both for men and women of STs when compared to SCs and total population. The male-female gap in literacy rate fir the STs has decreased from 24.41 percentage points in 2001 to 19.81 percentage points in 2011.

India has an average literacy rate of 58.96 per cent for ST population. Among states, the highest literacy rate for STs is found in Mizoram and Lakshadweep, whereas the lowest is found in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. (Census 2011) Throughout the country, out of

152 districts (with more than 25 percent of ST population), 28 districts have ST literacy below 50 percent and 9 districts have female ST literacy rate below 30 per cent. (Statistics of School Education 2010-2011 2012)

Policies and Programmes:

The STs are considered to be amongst the most deprived and marginalized sections of Indian society. Hence, the government of India has incorporated a host of welfare and development initiatives keeping in view their overall development. The tribal sub-Plan approach has been taken into consideration for the development of the tribes which emerged as the main strategy from the Fifth Five Year Plan. The sub-Plan approach, other than the core economic sectors, has accorded prioritization to Elementary education. The Elementary Education has been given priority as it is an important input for the overall growth and development of tribal communities, majorly to boost their confidence so that they can deal with the non-tribal community on equal terms. Since Elementary education was accorded priority, a detailed and broad policy framework for education has been adopted in the tribal sub-Plans, which would ensure equal importance to quantitative and qualitative aspects of education.

Another development in the policy of tribal education came with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986. (National Policy of Education, 1986, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI) According to the policy, the following provisions are included:

- Priority would be accorded to opening up of new primary tribal schools in tribal areas.
- Secondly, curricula and devise instructional material in the tribal languages needs to be developed in the early stages with provisions for converting into regional languages.
- Thirdly, the youths belonging to the ST category would be encouraged to take up teaching in the tribal areas. This would be very beneficial for the tribal community as it

will ensure to the tribal youth as well as educational facilities to the children of the backward classes.

- A large number of residential schools to be established in tribal areas for facilitating comprehensive education for the children. This would encourage their families to send their children to school.
- Certain specific incentive schemes will be formulated keeping in view the needs and wants of the Scheduled Tribes, so as to help them lead a decent life.

The policy recognised the heterogeneity and diversity of the tribal areas. The policy also demanded to transform the primary education structure with emphasis on improving access in tribal areas. The policy also focused on instructing in the mother tongue for effective teaching and emphasised on incorporating content and curriculum that are relevant to local. Moreover, it also demanded of production of books in local dialects. Based on these considerations, the norms for establishing primary schools were relaxed to suit tribal areas in order to improve access to education. For example, Madhya Pradesh has slowly decreased the population size in order to open schools in habitations with 200 population. Similarly, the government of Andhra Pradesh has established schools in areas where there are even twenty school-age children. However, despite the government implementing such relaxation of norms, many tribal areas are still devoid of schools as they do not meet the prescribed criteria.

Progress in Literacy:

Literacy is regarded as a pivotal and primary index of educational development. The data on literacy from 1971 to 2011 show that literacy rate for STs has increased from a low of 11.30 in 1971 to as high as 58.96 in 2011. (Registrar Census of India 2010-11) But this increase in the literacy rate does not imply the comprehensive growth of educational standard. Over the years, the gap between STs and non-STs has also increased. Even though educationally

developed states like Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu have higher general literacy rates, they are way behind the smaller and tribal-concentrated states in terms of tribal literacy rates. Disparity among various states in terms of tribal literacy rates is very high, ranging between 82.27 per cent Mizoram and 17.16 percent in Andhra Pradesh. The data reveal that the degree and level of educational development have been quite uneven among various states and among different sections of population within any given state. The data further reveals that north-eastern states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya who have a higher concentration of tribal in relation to their total population have done exceptionally well in terms of higher literacy rate. But in mainland states such as Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh which are inhabited by a overwhelming number of tribal when compared to the north-eastern states, the tribal literacy is recorded to be very low. The growth of literacy rate between 1971 and 1991 was steady but it increased significantly post 1991 and now stands at 58.96 per cent. This trend is also reflected in relatively backward states as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, etc.

Problems of Tribal Education:

In spite of constitutional guarantees and persistent efforts, the tribal communities of the country continue to lag behind the non-tribal population in education. The reasons are internal, external, socio-economic and psychological.

External Constraints:

The policies adopted for the development of education among the tribal communities are not adequate enough to fight against the disadvantages typical to the tribal population. For example, the population and distance norms that the government had initiated have proved to be futile for the tribal areas because of their sparse population and isolated residential patterns. Moreover, both the tribal welfare department and the educational department failed to understand the complex realities of tribal life and the expectations of tribal from the system

while formulating the policies and programmes for tribal education. No substantial and worthwhile policy has been formulated for the educational development of the tribal.

Secondly, the governing bodies have adopted a dual system of administration as far as planning is concerned. The department of Tribal Welfare looks into tribal life and culture and governs the developmental work at the local level, including education. But the tribal welfare department does not possess the expertise in planning and administration of education and academic supervision. But on the other hand, the Education department essentially deals with the planning of education development in the state level. It incorporates the guidelines and instructions related to textbooks, curriculum, appointment of teachers, etc. This department formulates uniform policies for the entire state. To take the example of school calendar, where the holidays are prepared and adjusted according to the formal school set up in a non-tribal context, with very little consideration for the locals and their festivals. The failure in gauging the tribal social issues and the lack of sensitivity to their problems, along with the inefficient selection and recruitment of teachers in the tribal areas has resulted in poor performance and absenteeism in the tribal schools. The lack of coordination between the two departments has invariably prevented the growth and development of education amongst the tribal.

Internal Constraints:

These problems majorly deal with the quality of schools, suitable teachers, relevance of content and curriculum, level of teaching and instructing. Schools in tribal areas function with bare minimum facilities. Maximum of schools in tribal areas are devoid of basic infrastructure facilities. These schools generally have thatched roofs, dilapidated walls and rugged floors. Research done by NGOs reveal that many schools do not have even the basic teaching aids like blackboards, tables, chairs, etc. In many 'ashram schools' that are normally residential in nature, have no space for children to sleep. As a result, the classrooms are

converted into dormitories. Due to the absence of adequate sanitary provisions, many children are found to defecate in the open leading to getting in contact with serious diseases, which results in high dropout rates.

Socio-Economic And Cultural Constraints:

These factors encompass poor economic conditions, social customs, lack of awareness for the value of formal education, cultural ethos, etc. The predominant cause for the educational deprivation of tribal has been their poor economic condition and poverty. The main occupation of tribal is agriculture, done either by shifting cultivation or terrace farming, which has low productivity. As a result, the children of the family are involved into the occupation so that they can directly or indirectly contribute to the family income by grazing the cattle or collecting fuel. etc. In spite of the fact that adequate steps have been taken to make elementary education free for the children with extra incentives, it has failed to serve its purpose. First, maximum of benefits do not reach the beneficiaries i.e. the tribal children as it is mis-utilised by those who are in charge of allocating them. Second, the incentives that are like slates and uniforms are of substandard quality. The economic condition of the tribal is so deplorable that even the smallest personal expenditure incurred in acquiring writing materials and clothing makes it difficult for them to send their children to schools. In an economy, which is dominated by struggle for survival, the options are limited.

Another major reason for the non participation of tribal children in the mainstream education is, the fact that education does not seem to give any visible or immediate benefits and tribal do not see and think beyond their present. The involvement of opportunity cost leads to their limited participation. Majority of children who do not go to school, if not directly, indirectly contribute to the economic activity of their family by working in households. In the recent years, the government has been trying to improve and enhance the economic conditions of the tribal by initiating several development activities, essentially

related to agriculture, cattle rearing, horticulture along with monetary and non-monetary subsidies. Moreover, the poor health conditions of the tribal children, who suffer from contagious diseases like malaria, diarrhoea and eye infection, is also another reason for their limited participation in schools. Such diseases affect their attendance at school. Furthermore, some tribal communities are seasonal migrants (Sujatha 2000) which results in absenteeism among their children, thus affecting their educational aspirations.

Conclusion:

Short term policies entirely will not be furnish the purpose of educational development of the tribal children. Hence, it is very essential to adopt long term plans that would involve a robust meaningful policy framework. The primary focus should be more on quality and equity as in providing quality education to the tribal children that would make them efficient and independent in the long run. Secondly, it is necessary to make the school schedule and calendar in accordance to the local communities in the tribal context. This would make the local communities develop a sense of belongingness resulting in more participation of tribal children. Third, provisions to provide locally relevant materials to tribal students should be incorporated. Availability of locally relevant materials will not only facilitate faster learning but will also help the children develop a sense of affiliation to school. Moreover, building partnership between the community and the government would make education a lot more effective and sustainable. Such partnership would also ensure supervision and monitoring of educational development. And lastly, measures to develop skill, competency and teachers motivation is required for strengthening and sustaining the educational development of tribal areas. More emphasis should be given on recruiting efficient and competent teachers who can imbibe right education among the children and are willing to work for the upliftment of tribal.

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