

EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION IN PRIMITIVE TRIBAL GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF KARNATAKA

MIDATALA RANI*

Abstract

India is one of the major countries having large concentration of tribal groups in the world. Among the tribals, the primitive tribal groups (PGTs) are highly vulnerable. These groups are still isolated from the mainstream of civilized society. They are small in number and are still having pre-agricultural technology. The rate of literacy among them is extremely low. The Government of India constituted several committees to suggest measures for the welfare and development of the tribes during different plan periods. Both the government and non-governmental organisations have implemented several policies and programmes for the upliftment of the tribals. But the result is not very significant and encouraging because of rigid traditional aspects of the tribals. Sometimes their dwelling places would be beyond reachable. The present paper examines the educational status and understand the reasons for low rate of literacy in two identified primitive tribal groups of Karnataka State viz. Jenu Kuruba and Koraga.

On account of the socio-economic backwardness of the tribals, the Government of India has given tribal development a major attention during the five year plan period. Further a number of provisions have been brought into the Constitution to safeguard their basic interests. In the year 1991 Planning Commission remarked that, "tribal welfare should aim at the advancement of the social and economic life of the tribes within a reasonable time with a view to gradually integrate them with the rest of the country on an equal footing". The total number of scheduled tribe population as per the 2001 census is 10.08 per cent of the total population in India. The Anthropological Survey of India in its People of India Project (Singh, 2002) listed 623 tribal

* Professor of Political Science, Manasagangotri, University of Mysore, Mysore

communities out of which 573 are notified as scheduled. The People of India Project shows that the tribal groups speak 218 languages out of which 159 are exclusive to them. Most of the tribal groups are bilingual or multilingual at the community levels. According to People of India out of 623 tribal communities 500 are bilingual ones.

Even though education in India is multilingual many tribal languages are struggling to create a space for themselves in the field of education. The Sixth All India Educational Survey of National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2005) shows that out of 41 languages used in schools (as medium of instruction and subjects) only 13 are tribal languages. Out of these 13 tribal languages in schools only 3 to 4 are used regularly as medium of instruction (Jingran, 2005). The rest are languages taught as school subjects or used as Mother Tongue in some special programmes not on a regular basis. An analysis of the use of tribal languages both as medium of instruction and as school subjects shows that a large number of tribal languages are weakened and endangered by their exclusion in school education. The tribal communities which should have been served with more attention have become victims of deprivation and Human Rights violation. Though number of efforts have been made for overall development of scheduled tribes the results are not very encouraging. The major objective of this paper is to prepare a background for discussion to understand the reasons for diminishing tribal education among primitive tribal groups. The paper will look for such avenues where some of the suggested policy interventions and implications can play a significant role in improving tribal education in general and primitive tribes in particular with focus on Jenu Kuruba and Koraga primitive tribes of Karnataka.

Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)

The first attempt to identify the primitive tribal group in the country was made during the Census of 1931 (Mohanty, 2002). The criteria followed in the identification of the primitive tribal groups are:

- A stagnant and diminishing population
- Pre-agricultural level of technology
- Very low level of literacy

These tribal groups live in extreme poverty, are subjected to varied exploitation and have low level of literacy. As per the circular of the Government of India there are 74 primitive tribes in India. During the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-79) to the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) 75

primitive tribal groups have been identified in 14 States and 1 Union Territory. But in reality the number of PTGs are less as some of the PTGs are found to appear in more than one state. For instance Kattunayakans are found in Kerala and Tamil Nadu; Dongaria Khonds live in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. As per 1991 census the total population of PTGs is 24,12,666. It is observed that the PTGs are mostly concentrated in States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. Thus the Central India belt is a home for primitive tribal population of India. It reflects that in the course of long history of the migration of people of India, the primitive tribes found a secure place in the central India. The position of the primitive tribes in comparison to the general population as well as tribal population is as follows as per the data base of 1991 census.

Table 1
Population of India 1991 Census

	Scheduled Tribes	Primitive Tribes	% of PTGs to total STs
Total population	67758380	2412666	3.56%

Source: 1991 Census Report

From the above table, it is evident that 3.56 percentage of the scheduled tribes constitute the primitive tribal groups in India.

In the recent past Planning Commission had issued some guidelines to the states that tribal development plan should emphasise on elimination of all forms of exploitation, rapid social and economic development, improving their organisational capabilities and narrowing down the gap between the levels of development of the tribals and others by providing proper education. The Commission also suggested that the Integrated Tribal Area Development Plan focusing on the specific problems of the tribal people must be implemented vigorously emphasising on the cultural fabric of the respective tribes.

Primitive Tribes of Karnataka: A Profile

Karnataka State inhabited by Kannada speaking people is situated in the West Central part of peninsular India. It is bound on the north by Maharashtra, on the north-west by Goa, on the east by Andhra Pradesh, on the south and south-east by Tamil Nadu, on the south-west by

Kerala and on the west by Arabian Sea. The State covers an area of 192,204 sq km and occupies 5.31% of the total geographical area of the country. It consists of a narrow elongated belt between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats with coastline of about 400 kms. The hilly track of Western Ghats with its evergreen forests is a home for many tribals who mainly depend on forest produce for their sustenance.

Jenu Kuruba and Koraga tribals have been identified as PTGs in Karnataka State. Jenu Kuruba tribe is concentrated in Mysore, Chamarajanagar and Kodagu districts of the State. The total population of this tribe is around 27,597 (2001 Census). Literacy rate is extremely low. They usually live in hamlets and huts made out of bamboo. They believe in magic, sorcery and witchcraft. Neither polygamy nor polyandry is practiced. Besides working with bamboo, collection of minor forest products like herbs, honey, roots and fruits are their major occupation. Poverty exists more in this group.

Koraga is a very primitive tribal group in Karnataka State. They are concentrated in Dakshina Kannada and some parts of the Udupi districts of the State. They also live in some patches of Kerala and Karnataka border. They believe in magic, witchcraft and local medicine. Their total population is 11,566 (2001 Census). The Koragas are socially, educationally and economically backward. They have their own rich culture and traditional heritage. Their traditional occupation is basket making.

Education – A Tool For Development

Opening of the tribal areas in the wake of modern developmental process have brought in contrast two distinct value systems – one based on inherent tradition and the other on technology and innovations. Harmonious synchronisation of the two systems is highly essential for rapid development of tribals (Jha, 1995). It is here education plays a vital role and it is the backbone of every society. It is a tool for social change. To spread education among marginalised sections of society has been a formidable task in India. Modernisation and globalisation have tremendously influenced tribal education and culture. The uniqueness of the tribal culture which enriches the country's cultural mosaic is fast disappearing and even getting distorted under powerful influences of dominant urban culture. While dealing with the poor educational attainment of tribal children to formal schooling, researchers tend to emphasise the economic marginalization of these communities, their illiterate home environment, inadequate facilities for education and culturally the alien nature of the school system. Lack of education is largely responsible for the

exploitation and pitiable plight of the tribals. Due to this, the tribals have not been able to take advantage of new development. The above mentioned factors explain the low level of education among the tribal children (Rani, 2000). Another important factor is school process. This is most crucial because heavy drop outs and almost stagnation of tribal children within a year of admitting to primary school has been reported since last decade. A large proportion of the poorer tribal children, on account of raising cost of the schooling and economic burden cannot afford to benefit from education. Most of the tribals tend to use their children for ancillary service that would bring in some added income for their starving families (Nagda, 1998).

According to the 2001 census the average literacy rate of these two PTGs is 28.6 percent. As per the table given below Jenu Kuruba tribe has very low literacy rate when compared to the Koraga. Even though Jenu Kuruba tribe is in a more advantageous situation, its literacy rate is comparatively low than Koragas. In both the cases female literacy rate is little bit higher than males.

Table 2
Literacy Status Of PTGs Of Karnataka

PTG	Total Population	Total Literates	Male Literates	Female Literates	Male	Female	Total
Jenu Kurubas	27597	4033	3172	2161	15.10	19.29	17.09
Koraga	11566	3543	1678	1865	27.82	29.38	28.06

(Source: Mohanty, 2002)

Reasons For Low Literacy Rate

(a) Disparity in the Existence of the Schools

Compared to the other major tribals of the State these primitive tribal groups are a more disadvantaged population. As far as non-existing facility within a habitation is concerned, one can find that other major tribes of the state are placed in a favourable situation relative to their total population. Looking at the disparity condition in terms of deprivation more children of primitive tribal group are deprived of a primary school within their habitation. Children belonging to the other major tribes like Soligas, Betta Kuruba and Malae Kudiya are in a better position than the PTGs for they have atleast one Ashram School within their habitation (Shukla, 1998). However so far as the number of habitations without a school is concerned the PTGs

children are highly in a disadvantaged position. In general, primitive tribal children should have to commute more than 3 kms distance to attend a school. In some cases it is even more. Distance is also one of the major drawbacks in case of providing education to the people who are still away from modern world. Many of the parents don't like to send their children especially their girl children to school which is quite far away from their original habitation. Finally while a large population of school age children in the country still face the disadvantage of distance between their own habitation and the location of a primary school, the more disturbing situation is this disadvantage is high in case of PTGs habitations in the tribal belt of Karnataka.

(b) Language – A Medium of Instruction

The choice of the language is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education. Speakers of mother tongue which are not the same as the national or local language are often at a considerable disadvantage in the educational system (UNESCO, 2002).

The tribal situation in India presents a varied and complex picture and poses peculiar problems of social and economic development. Demographically speaking, there are more than 244 Scheduled Tribes with many sub-groups speaking some 100 languages/dialects. Most unfortunate thing is that major portion of Government's resources is diverted towards providing concessions and little is left for the development of tribal education, language and culture of these two PTGs. The striking aspect that emerges from the scanty data on languages in primary education is the almost total absence of tribal language in schools. The attitude of our policy planners towards these tribal people appears to be one of assimilation. Little is being done to preserve their culture. All major and minor tribes suffer with this kind of negligence. Linguistic experts have made no attempt to standardise tribal languages by developing scripts, elaborating lexis, writing grammar and dictionaries in tribal languages. Till today there has not been any serious efforts to provide basic education in their respective mother tongues. No proper curriculum has been framed based on tribal culture and tradition. Present education system does not orient the tribal children towards pursuing their own mode of life. In phonology and syntax the tribal languages are quite different from the medium of instruction like Kannada except in certain mutually borrowed lexical items due to their close contacts over a long period of time. This is one of the vital reason responsible for these PTGs poor literacy and dropout problem among tribal children (Pasayat, 1995).

Table 3

**Primary Schools According To Different Languages Used
As Medium Of Instruction - 1986**

Languages	Rural	Urban	Total
Official Languages (Listed in Eighth Schedule)	5,48,372 (96.9)*	72,025	6,20,397
Other Indian Languages (Not Listed in Eighth Schedule)	13,936 (2.5)	1,147 (1.5)	15,083 (2.3)
English	3,797 (0.6)	4,303 (5.6)	8,100 (1.3)
Total	5,66,105 (100)	77,475 (100)	6,43,580 (100)

Note: Figure in parenthesis is percentage of schools with different medium of instruction.

Source: Fifth All India Education Survey, Vol. 1, NCERT, 1996.

(c) Urban Biased

The success of one's education largely depends on the motivation. Basically tribals are living with low socio-economic status. Obviously the level of motivation and self esteem will be comparatively low among tribal children. The main reason for this problem is current education system is more or less urban biased, non-tribal and absence of culture specific. Even though these tribals are emotionally attached to their local cultural norms Government has no interest in providing education which is more suited to the tribal children. Modern teaching methodologies, content of text, appointment of non-tribal teachers and parameters for evaluation have become 'Grains of Iron' to the low motivated tribal children. Implementation of uniform textbooks both for urban and tribal children are one more hit to them. The theory, concepts, values alien to tribal people is generally contained in the textbooks which generates negative attitude and a big blow to the learners self confidence. There is no attempt to take stock of the existing situation regarding instructional material in tribal languages. Education policy documents also have not dwelt on the magnitude of tasks that are involved in the preparation of primers and textbooks for tribal children and have not outlined the concrete steps that have to be taken in this direction. The increasing tendency for tribal people to retain the regional language as their mother tongue is only one indicator of their growing vulnerability in the face of these larger social processes (Verma, 1995).

The problem of dropout persists among all categories of children in both urban and rural India. However in the context of children studying in classes 1-10 the gap between the ST and total population of dropouts has reduced from 1990-91 to 1998-99. The reduction in the dropout rates could be because of various incentive schemes run by the State Government for the ST children such as providing free textbooks, uniforms and scholarships in Government schools. But schemes such as those providing for hostels for ST boys and girls are not implemented fully by the State owing to lack of financial resources and therefore fewer ST children pursue high school education and very few up to the college level. The policy of reserving seats for ST students at higher education levels is not widely availed since a large number of ST students do not even reach those levels and dropout at lower levels of school education. Even the Ashram schools run by both Government and NGOs are poorly maintained and sometimes lack even the basic facilities. Given the low level of literacy among the ST population several children for these communities happen to be 'first generation learners' and in the absence of State support for helping them to cope. With studies, many children drop out of the schools. This disproportionately low representation of ST children at higher level of education compounds the existing disparities among Indian society. Lack of proactive Government in favour of the STs is not linked only to lack of resources. Government indifference and lack of political will are largely responsible for the state of affairs (Mahendale, 2001).

(d) Inaction of Teachers

Teachers are the real directors of every tribal school. There was a time in India where teachers were equal to God. Major problem is that Government is recruiting teachers from the urban area to teach tribal children. Many of them have studied only in English medium schools and even don't know the regional language properly. In this situation how can one expect to teach the relatively disadvantaged tribal children down to their level. More unfortunate thing is that many schools don't have teachers for all the subjects. Even though many NGOs are hiring teachers to teach in tribal schools many of them don't even have basic degrees in education like B.Ed./TCH. Some of the teachers are prejudicial about the performance of the tribal children.

As they are the only literate persons having some political connections in the tribal areas, they neither fulfill their duties properly nor the concerned higher officers dare to take any action against them for dereliction of their duties.

(e) Teacher's Opinion

Many of the teachers are of the opinion that tribal children cannot understand the modern Kannada language. Content of the text is too standard to their level. Few of them will complain about the ignorance of the parents. More over teachers are facing many problems in tribal areas. Proper residential and medical facilities are a nightmare. Higher education for their children is not possible. Since many primitive tribal hamlets are deep in the forest it will be humanly impossible to reach the school due to the lack of appropriate transport. Moreover feedback from the students is completely absent. No proper laboratory facilities to teach Science effectively. Teachers raised and brought up in a more sophisticated urbanized society would find it difficult to adjust themselves to the tribal culture. This generates a communication gap.

(f) Parent's Apathy

Tribal community feels childhood or adulthood largely depends not on the physical age but on the degree of responsibility that children could successfully fulfill. Apart from that children's responsibilities towards the family and the contributions they make are significant and more important. In tribal society children from the early age will be engaged in cooking food, fetching water, sibling care, support in the field, collection of minor forest food, grazing, etc. Decision to give a chance to a child to spend happy childhood is not isolated from other aspects of household decision making nor are they purely household based. They reflect the norms and values of the wider community within which the tribal household is located and the social and economic possibilities which local contexts offer to different categories of households. Hence parents may think sending child to school means dislocation of traditional pattern of earning livelihood and of division of labour in their societies. Most vital problem for low literacy among tribal children is that children are considered by parents as economic assets to the family. The education of tribal girl child is more neglected because of deep rooted beliefs, traditions and mind sets.

(g) Universal Elementary Education (UEE) for Tribal Children

The question of how elementary education can be made universal has not received the attention it deserves. Recent study has shown that an alarmingly large number of children do not become literate even after four years of primary education especially in both rural and tribal areas (Sharma, 2002). Hence total school effectiveness and actual learning have to be the central theme rather than secondary concern for universal education. Further more important is that how

effective schools are and successive learning basically depend not only on school level inputs but also on many vital factors outside the school. Basic infrastructure of Ashram schools in tribal areas are worst than anything in many southern districts of Karnataka. Many schools don't even have hard roofs, hostels are ruining. Unavailability of playground, lab, library and separate toilets are most common in many tribal schools where children of these two PTGs are learning. Absence of extra curricular activities makes children learning as a kind of unavoidable burden. Since tribal children are completely different from urban children or at least from rural children learning should be a joyful experience for them otherwise simply they may be dropouts. For genuine universal elementary education the impact of the wider context on schooling has to be understood in a better way.

(h) Absence of Central Monitoring Unit

Absence of effective monitoring unit on the tribal schools is one of the major drawbacks in case of development of tribal education. Concerned inspecting staff hardly visit to the tribal schools. Some time even only once in a year. This makes teacher to lack commitment to their profession. It is even reported that teacher's visit one or two times in a week to the schools. This is due to low level of motivation, inspiration and commitment among the inspecting staff which are again matched by the low level of motivation and interest among the teachers. It is high time that Government should think to strengthen or establish Centralized Monitoring Unit especially for Tribal Schools headed by a chief having Anthropology or Sociology background.

In the light of the above discussion we may conclude that on one hand economic backwardness is responsible for the low percentage of literacy in the younger generation and on the other social backwardness and lack of social consciousness are responsible for low percentage of children attending schools. When the school going children are few it can be well understood that higher education will be a rare phenomena in these PTGs. Hence, along with other development it is also necessary that we should create some awareness about significance of education among tribes, the facilities available to them for education and the role of education in the upliftment of social, economic and political condition of the tribal community.

Policy Implications

Some suggestions to handle the educational problems of Primitive Tribal groups are made based on the fieldwork and review of previous literature. These are brought out in this section.

1. Many basic differences can be seen between major tribals and primitive tribals in case of India. Hence the Government should bring a new educational policy especially for primitive tribals. It must be culturally and geographically specific. Moreover educational experts should be very sensitive while framing the policies, which should not destroy the social solidarity of the tribes and stifle their zest for life.
2. It is well revealed fact that modern education cannot cater to the basic needs of the tribes. Modern education system cannot deem to have held much relevance for them since they are from the outer world. During our field work it has been revealed that tribals consider 'culture as their first educator'. Hence there is need to identify the areas of minimum and maximum resistance to innovations in their culture. Once we identify enough space we can imbibe education into their culture.
3. It is high time to have special education programme made for tribal children in consonance with their privileged cultural pattern and also in keeping with the needs and resources of the area concerned in order to secure the maximum amount of tribal children participation. Moreover new education programme should be in a position to assert the existing perception, behaviour and action in education seeking process and culturally determined attitude towards use of different system of education.
4. The State Government should construct a Textbook Commission especially for tribal education development. While framing the textbooks experts should focus on three important perspectives: (i) Linguistic, (ii) Instrumental and (iii) Culture. From the primary level itself all text materials should be in their respective mother tongue. There is need to evolve scripts, grammar as well as appropriate vocabulary to communicate 'school knowledge'. Proper training should be given in tribal language, culture and society to the non-tribal teachers working in the tribal areas.
5. Lack of good quality teachers in sufficient numbers resulting in high pupil teacher ratio may be an important factor in explaining the variations of educational status in these two PTGs in education. Given the inaccuracies in enrolments and the absence of teachers probably pupil teacher ratio may not be efficient and meaningful variable representing the quality of tribal education.

End Note

The problem of dropout is still persisting among tribal students. Once they become dropouts what will be their next plan ? What will be their day-to-day context? How do their parents react for this ? In our fieldwork it is revealed that many dropout children have become child workers. Many of them are working with their parents in the field and in some big estates. Of course there are many reasons for children dropouts even from the primary stage. Suppose if Government is ready to overcome all these problems and modernize the tribal education system will parents send their children to school ? The Anthropological study on dynamic model of tribal child labour suggests that their decision to send to work today depends not only on current consideration such as the marginal productivity but also on expected returns to work compared with alternatives such as school attendance. The finding that increase in dropout suggest that at given levels of household income, the return to work relative to the return to school is significant determinant in sending their children to school. A natural policy implication is therefore to invest in raising the return to education. In addition to general investment in improving schools other measures including reducing labour market discrimination against tribal women and raising awareness to reduce inhibiting social norms are necessary. Policies that improve the labour market in rural and tribal areas may reduce the dropouts especially that of girls given the recent expansion of micro credit programmes, it is pertinent to note that developing tribal financial market may have positive spill over effects encouraging development of land and labour market. The growth of tribal action market will not only counter the substitution effect highlighted here, it may also generate overall income growth and reduce tribal inequalities. If so parents may not mind in sending their children to school.

While implementing the tribal development plans especially in case of education care should be taken to see that the cultural traits of primitive tribes are not disturbed within the process of their interaction with the mainstream of nation life. Moreover a careful watch on the trends set in motion which should not destroy the social solidarity of the tribes and hinder their zest for life should be the part and parcel of every tribal development policy. Further there should be lot of scope for prioritizing their needs, solving their own problems and raising their own resources to meet their urgent needs in all schemes by using their knowledge got from schools. Finally it can be said that educational activities will have to be simultaneous with economic development.

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