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PROBLEMS OF TRIBAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:
A MICROSCOPIC ANALYSIS

Dr. Sanjay Kumar Pradhan

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For the development of a society there is need for equitable and balanced progress of all the sections of human communities and for this perspective, it is imperative to bring the weaker, deprived and discriminated sections such as Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India to the forefront of educational revolution and mainstream of national development. Education imparts knowledge, and knowledge of self identity and human environment will infuse a sense of confidence, courage and ability among

the weaker sections of the society to know and overcome their problems associated with exploitation and deprivation, and avail socio-economic and political opportunities extended to them. Although there is a significant increase in the literacy of population of all categories in India, the tribals are far behind from the national increase. Despite special initiatives on tribal education by the government, since independence, the achievement is not as per expectations and the problem of tribal education



Kurukshetra September 2010

29

is still a matter of concern. Tribal education, being a distinct discipline with different socio-cultural fabrics and hardships, needs to be analyzed to focus on the problems associated with it.

Profile of Tribal Literacy in India

Since independence there is an increase in the tribal literacy but not as per the national average. The total literacy rate of the tribals in India is 47.1 percent whereas it is 64.8 percent at the national level. And on the basis of male-female percentage, the male accounts 59.2 percent (75.3 national) and female 34.8 percent (53.7 national). There is wide variation of tribal education at the State or Union Territory level. For example Mizoram tops with 89.3 percent, followed by Lakshadweep (86.1), Manipur (85.9), Nagaland (85.9), Andaman & Nicobar (65.8) and Himachal Pradesh (65.5). The poor performing states in India are: Bihar (28.2), Uttar Pradesh (35.1) and Orissa (37.4). The female literacy of the STs in India is 34.8 percent but yet much below the national level (41.9). States with low general and tribal literacy are also states with higher gender disparity. Accordingly, the ST female literacy rate in India varies across states and Union territories such as from 15.5 percent in Bihar to 86.9 percent in Mizoram. Except Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Nagaland, Sikkim, Andaman & Nicobar, Manipur, Meghalaya and Kerala, all other states and Union Territories have women literacy below the national level of 41.9 percent. (Census of India 2001).

Year	All categories			Scheduled Tribes		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1961	19.44	12.95	24.04	13.83	3.16	8.53
1991	44.13	39.29	52.21	40.85	18.19	29.45
2001	75.3	53.7	64.8	59.2	34.8	47.1

Source: Census 2001, and Working Group Report on an Education for Disadvantaged Sections (A and B), minorities, women, handicapped and other disadvantaged sections for the formulation of Sixth Five Year Plan (2002-07), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Secondary and Higher Education, 2005.

Problems

Poor economic conditions accompanied by subsistence economy is a great hindrance to successful education of the tribal children. Since their economic condition is poor and the very survival being at stake, the importance of education touches only the periphery of the tribal life. Almost all the tribes-whether food gatherers, hunters, fishermen, shifting cultivators, or settled agriculturalists lack adequate food to maintain the family for the whole year. In this situation, they find it difficult to afford their children to go school; rather, they see children as an economic asset in the family and contributes to the family income by working along with the parents and with others (Hansain 2004: 349). Boys work in the field with their parents and girls give help to their mothers at the housework. If the child is taken away from his normal economic work to attend school, the family deprives of the little income, which he brings. As a consequence, the parents have to feed the child out of their earning and resulted economic marginalisation of the household. In these circumstances, education, the basic necessity of life, is a matter of luxury for the tribal family. Further, the system of education and the economic benefit accrued from it is of 15-20 years of education from schools and colleges, where the parents have neither their patience or resource nor foresight to wait for such a long-term return.

Apathy of Parents

Both the tribal and non-tribal teachers find it very difficult to convince the tribal to send their children to school to adopt new ideas as they are more concerned with the present than the future and their concept of time is circular rather than longitudinal (Sujatha 1994). A large section of tribal parents do not send their children to school to utilise the free education opportunities offered to them. It is practical, utilitarian and vocational

30

Kurukshetra September 2010

aspect of education accompanied by the notion of immediate economic return appeals to the parents more than the academic discourse (Shoh 2005: 114-133). In addition, there are many factors responsible for apathy of the parents towards education.

- Psychological and social factors like illiteracy of the parents and their indifference to education, lack of encouragement by the community, motivation and "insecurity" of future for being educated.
- Low social interaction between students and teachers, and between teachers and parents.
- Suspicion over the sincerity of the non-tribal teachers and shortage of tribal teachers.
- The scattered population with low density and location of schools at a long distance, in consequence, has resulted in the indifference of the parents to send their children to walk a long to reach the school
- Parental hesitation to send the girls to co-educational institutions. (Mishra 1996 163-65 and Pradhan 2004: 150-153)

Apathy of children towards Formal Education

In many states tribal education is taught through the same book, which forms the curriculum of the non-tribal children. A tribal child who lives in an isolated and far flung place, untouched by civilisation, can hardly get interest in any information about Indian society, history, polity, geography, economy and technological development of his country. So the contents of the teaching syllabus, instead of pleasing the learners, generate indifference within the tribal students. All these are necessary part of any curriculum but the students are far away from these real

perceptions and they do not understand what they are taught. For them these information and knowledge constitutes alien and imposed portions of their thought, which have nothing to do with tribal history and tribal surroundings.

Superstitions and Prejudice

Superstition, blind beliefs and prejudices play negative role in imparting education in the tribal areas and tribal schools. Except tribal communities in north-eastern region, there is widespread feeling in the tribal community that education makes their children defiant and insolent and alienates from the rest of their society. Since some of their educated boys felt alienated and cut off their links with their families and villages after getting education and employment, a large section of tribal groups oppose the spread of education. This is further complicated when religious groups teach the students by focusing on the glory of their religion and religious values. This religiosity, in consequence, often encourages educated pupils to abrogate their ancestral village and their socio-cultural interaction with the kins as it found among Ziminagas in North East (Panda 1988: 79-83). Further, some of the superstitions and myth prevent parents to educate their children. Some tribal groups believe that their god shall be angry if they send their children to schools run by 'outsiders'. Here outsiders include formal curriculum for education, non-tribal teachers and teachers outside their locality.

Problem of suitable Teacher

The competency and interest of the teachers is of prime importance in generating interest of the students towards education. The non-tribal teachers treat themselves 'civilized' and tribals as 'uncivilized' and 'savage'. So there is little appreciation of the tribal values and way of life. There is no good relationship between children

Kurukhetra September 2010

31

and the teachers. Sometimes the teachers for their personal work use the tribal students. For a non-tribal teacher, the cultural gap plays a vital role due to the long hanging dominant ideology, and he treats tribal students differently. Even a tribal elite, often a proactive teacher, has a special power in the village setting for which tribals are afraid of him. The ego and selfish motive of such tribal teachers have been discouraging the tribal to send their children to the educational institutions (Panda 1988: 79-83). Moreover, although there are views that the tribal teachers are best suited to non-tribal teachers, instances shows that the tribal teachers of one community looks students and parents of another community hesitantly. Some of the tribal groups, better educated and progressive in thinking have some prejudices against backward tribals e.g. the Valmiki tribe in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh occupies lower ritual status than Kondareddi tribes, but are mostly educated. If a teacher from Valmiki tribe teaches Kondareddies, the later will not prefer to give the former a house for shelter, and does not treat them equally. On the same way, Valmiki teachers feel that the Kondareddies are lazy and superstitious. (Sujatha 1994)

Effective functioning of the tribal education much depends on teachers and their willingness to teach and positive attitude to live in tribal areas close to tribal schools. However, in practice the teachers are reluctant to reside in such areas, rather they stay in nearby towns. Only in those cases teachers would like to stay if the area is inaccessible. In maximum cases teachers in the tribal areas see the appointment as 'stop-gap' arrangement. So there comes the problem of insincerity and non-

commitment of interaction of the teachers with the guardians and discussion with them over the education of their children.

Problem of Language

Language provides social, psychological and emotional expression of an individual in a society. But in the absence of knowledge on tribal dialect both students and teachers face the problem of communication and teaching-learning. It is found that tribal students are often ridiculed, humiliated and reprimanded for speaking in their own language, and are punished for failing to talk in their standard language or continuously lapsing back in the mother tongue (Nambissan 1994: 2752). It is the regional and national language that reduces tribals to minorities in their own home. Educating children through the regional and national language is not wrong but the students should be familiar with her own language first to develop enthusiasm in education which in turn bring linguistic and social skills that prepare them for formal education in future.

Although there is the need of introduction of tribal dialect in the curriculum and teaching-learning process yet there is the paucity of literature and text books in tribal dialects. Developing script and vocabulary and preparing teaching and learning materials for tribal children is a complex and problematic task because of a large number of spoken languages involved and their rudimentary forms which have not developed into a written form that can be used in school language. The government and different commissions have recommended that the teachers knowing tribal languages are to be posted in tribal areas, the data reveals that only 6 percent of the teachers who are in the primary schools belong to tribal communities and out of

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32

Kurukhetra September 2010

this 50 percent of the teachers are untrained and are basically matriculates or below that (National Population Education 1996: 91).

Inadequate Facilities in Educational Institutions

School buildings in the tribal areas are without basic infrastructural facilities. The schools basically have thatched roofs, dilapidated walls and non-pastoral floors. In Ashram schools which are residential in nature, there is no space for the children to sleep. As a consequence, the classrooms turn into dormitory and vice versa. In addition to poor maintenance of the school and class rooms, inadequate teaching-learning materials such as blackboards and chalks causes problems for the teachers and students in teaching and understanding the content.

Wastage and Stagnation

Problem of education in the tribal areas is also the problem of wastage and stagnation. Wastage is the withdrawal or dropping out of a student before completing the prescribed period of the concerned course. A data revealed by the Eleventh Five Year Plan also indicated the high drop out of the STs at different levels of study. As per the data, at the Primary level, the dropout rate among STs in 2003-04 was 48.9% and 70.1% at the Upper Primary level. It indicates the apathy of the Tribals and tribal students for the existing curriculum and system and problems of teaching-learning process. When a student takes more than one year to pass a class it is considered a case of stagnation. As per the 11 Five Year Plan report, stagnation at the

primary level was 67.3 percent whereas it was 49.3 percent at the Upper Primary level. School timing i.e. clash of class hour with the working hour particularly during the harvesting period, formal education, poverty, lack of academic atmosphere, unwillingness of the teachers to convince the parents and parental apathy towards education and lack of proper medical aid, balanced diet and suitable self-employment opportunities are the major factors for which there is wastage and stagnation.

Conclusion

Education is the most effective instrument for ensuring equality of opportunity but the tribal people are lagging far behind non-tribals due to one or more reasons. The problems associated with education of the tribal children in India is manifold, complex and inter-related. Factors like poverty, apathy of the parents, superstition and prejudice, lack of suitable teachers, alien language, inadequate facilities in the educational institutions and wastage and stagnation causes major hindrances in the process of education in the tribal schools; schools located in tribal areas and spread of tribal education. In this context, educating tribals needs concerted effort by the government and officials.

(The author is Assistant Professor in Political Science, Mody Institute of Technology & Science, Lakshmangarh (Sikar), Rajasthan, e-mails: sanjaypradhanjnu@rediffmail.com, and sanjaypradhanjnu@gmail.com)

Kurukhetra September 2010

33