



# Educational Status among the Scheduled tribes: Issues and Challenges.

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## Abstract

Scheduled Tribes are geographically, socially isolated and economically marginalized communities. In the post-Independence period, sincere and concerted efforts were made for the economic and educational development of tribal's. Despite these efforts the performance of the tribes in education is much lower than the Scheduled Castes. As the studies on tribal education suggests that the policy makers approach paid little attention to culturally linked education. This has led to drop outs and directly impacted their overall educational status illiberal of naturalization of ideas, from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration" (quoted in Varma 1996). The tribes in India usually reside in hill areas, forests, near the seas, and in islands. Their life style is quite different from non-tribal's (Preet 1994). It is not that their societies are static, but the pace of social change in tribal society is very slow. Education is one of the essential requirements for man-making and nation building. It is indispensable for development of human resources. Education imparts knowledge, skills, and character. After independence, the Constitution has empowered the backward classes with reservations in education and jobs

Keywords: Scheduled Tribes, Educational Status, social change, socio-economic & Education conditions

## Introduction

Education is one of the essential requirements for man-making and nation building. It is indispensable for development of human resources. Education imparts knowledge, skills, and character. After independence, the governments in India relied more on literacy mission emphasizing 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic) to

fulfill the expectations of the Directive Principles of State Policy. At the backdrop of the New Education Policy, likely to come up shortly, the paper makes a critical attempt to appraise the statistics and status of the education among Tribes across India. Development should not be studied in isolation. Development is not synonymous with the growth of a few affluent persons. As Amartya Sen (1999) stated unless the capabilities among human beings are adequately addressed and deprivations faced by marginalized groups are overcome, development cannot take place. In fact he stressed on the capabilities and human freedoms, and this freedom can only be achieved when the people are guaranteed political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and security. Although these conditions are different from one another, they are all inter-connected. India has a rich glorious heritage, but a sizeable part of Indian population is yet to get benefits out of it. They are still tribal communities which are primitive and live in secluded areas as (Verma 1996). The Imperial Gazetteer of India, 1911 defines tribe as a “collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so” (Nithya 2014). According to D.N. Majumdar “A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialization of functions, rule by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise united in language and dialect, recognizing social distance with other tribes or caste without any social obloquy attaching to them, as it does in the caste structure, following tribal traditions, beliefs and customs, illiberal of naturalization of ideas, from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration” (quoted in Varma 1996). The tribes in India usually reside in hill areas, forests, near the seas, and in islands. Their life style is quite different from non-tribal’s (Preet 1994). It is not that their societies are static, but the pace of social change in tribal society is very slow. Since they are materially and economically backward, attempts have been made by the Government to develop them. Today, the governments in all countries are paying special attention to development of the tribes (Nithya 2014). Though our national leaders and constitutional makers are committed to uplift the tribal people, a desired level of development has not been achieved yet (Chandra Guru et. al: 2015).

**In the light of above observations, the paper critically sets the following objectives.**

1. To study the complex variables responsible for lower level of education among tribal’s;
2. To review the effectiveness of different educational programmes and their impact on tribals, and
3. To assess the educational gaps and suggest suitable remedial measures for improvement of their education.

The present paper is mostly based on secondary data from various research studies including census data, committee reports on tribal’s, annual reports of tribal welfare ministry, Report on Selected Educational Statistics, and also NSS reports, etc.

## Review of Literature

There is considerable literature on tribal development and growth of education among the tribal's. According to Virginias the colonial state did almost nothing to improve the socio-economic conditions of the tribal's other than providing them protective measures. He says that the post Independent India also continued the same policy with little modification such as providing certain percentage of seats in state sponsored educational institutions and government services. Under these provisions, 7.5 per cent jobs were reserved both in central and state government for tribal's. This has opened a large pool of government services to them. Though reservation provides employment opportunities, the lack of educational qualifications and necessary skills denied them of the jobs, and the reserved seats remain vacant in many cases. In the case of quota for higher grade services, the condition is even worse as candidates with necessary qualifications are not available.

Gaurang Rami's (2012) paper discusses the status of primary education in the tribal district of Dang in Gujarat. In the district, there are about 412 primary schools; out of which 378 primary schools are run by the district panchayat. The paper concludes that most of the schools have buildings, but they fail to attract the girl students owing to lack of other essential amenities like drinking water as well as separate toilets for boys and girls. The common toilet facility has prevented many tribal girls from enrolling beyond 5th standard. Hence, the drop out ratio goes higher among the tribal girls. Another problem that makes tribal students leave schools is the medium of instruction which is quite different from their own vernacular dialect.

Pradhan and Sanjay Kumar (2011) describe that despite special initiatives like Ashram schools, introducing vernacular at primary level, and teaching in local dialects, the tribals are still lagging behind the non-tribals. Under such circumstances, the government and policy makers should put best efforts to improve their educational status. Arun Kumar Ghosh's paper (2007) provides in-depth literature on the tribal education in Jharkhand and West Bengal. He says that few tribals are badly in need of special attention for literacy and basic education. He discusses the causes for low literacy among the tribals of "Ho" and "Mahali" in Jharkhand and "Lodha" in West Bengal. He observes that the female enrolment ratio of the tribals is much lower among these tribals than that of their males. A further sharp decline of enrolment was observed immediately after the primary education, and this trend continued among males and females. During the cultivation period, the drop-out rate is more because children are required to assist their family members in sowing, weeding, plantation, and harvesting activities. Economic hardship is also a major factor for the drop out of the tribal children. To achieve gender equity in education, a number of suggestions have been given by the author such as motivation of parents to send their daughters to school, curriculum to be customized to the needs of tribal children, separate toilets for girls.

Vinoba Gautam's paper (2003) on Janasala experience, a collaborative programme between the Government of India and United Nations agencies to achieve universal elementary education, especially for girls and children from the deprived communities, working children, and children with specific needs. It tries to cover nearly three million children; out of it, 33% would be tribal children. Under Janasala, many favorable

interventions were undertaken to improve quality education of tribal children. The study proposes that as the tribal children possess cognitive abilities, a suitable curriculum and teaching methods need to devise. Finally, the paper concludes that non-tribal education has very limited value in tribal cultural milieu because it does not match with the lifestyle of individuals and the needs of the tribal community. There is a need to linking school education with life and the needs of the tribal communities.

## **Tribal Scenario**

The tribal population in India is numerically a small minority, and they represent an enormous diversity of groups. They vary among themselves in respect of language, dialects, physical features, size of the population, etc. They live largely in isolation, but they spread over the length and breadth of the country. Prior to the Constitution, the tribes were variously termed as aboriginals, adivasis, forest tribes, hill tribes, primitive tribes, etc. these groups were included in the 'Depressed Classes'. Later, the Indian Franchise Committee of 1919 had accorded a separate nomenclature for these groups for census reports, and in 1931, they were recognized as primitive tribe. Only in 1951 order, they were identified as scheduled tribe (Verma 1996). In 1951, the number of schedule tribes was only 212, and their number has increased to 705 by 2011 (census). In spite of their own language, they can speak in common language of the state where they live. There are more than 270 such languages in India (India Education Report, 2002). As per 2011 Census, they are 10.43 crore tribes constituting 8.6% of the total population of the country and occupying about 15 percent of the country area in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions ranging from the plains to forests, hills and inaccessible areas. There are 75 ethnic groups considered as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Scheduled Tribes are in largest number in the state of Odisha (i.e. 62%). The largest concentrations of indigenous or Schedule Tribe people are found in two distinct geographical areas. More than half of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in Central India, i.e., Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%) and Rajasthan (8.86%). The other tribal populated areas are in the North East, i.e., Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh. Among the states of India, Mizoram has the highest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (94.43). In contrast, Uttar Pradesh stands with the lowest proportion of Scheduled Tribes (0.57). In India, as many as 20 states and 2 union territories have the highest concentration of ST population. The national average is 8.6%.

## **Educational Status of Tribal's in India**

India advocates inclusive growth, but owing to lack of education and skill development, the marginalized sections are not becoming part of the inclusive growth. To ensure inclusive growth, the Constitution has empowered the backward classes with reservations in education and jobs. For this purpose, the Constitution of India has earmarked certain special provisions to enable the SCs and STs to access education. These special provisions were adopted through the amendment to the Constitution in 1951, and a special clause was added to

article 15(4). This clause empowers the state to make special provisions for the educational development of the SCs and STs (Sahoo 2009). These special provisions too have failed to bring impressive impact on their literacy level as many tribals have their own peculiar and vernacular language different from the common language spoken in the state where they reside. It's found that as many as 22 per cent of tribal habitations have less than 100 population, and more than 40 per cent have between 100 to less than 300 people, while others have less than 500 people (Panda 2011; Sujatha 2008). Their literacy rate did not go beyond 8.5 per cent in 1961. In the same period, the female literacy rate was much more depressing than that of male literacy, just 3.2 per cent. Recognizing their deprivation and marginalization in Indian society, the Government of India has started an innovative scheme for the promotion of education among Scheduled Tribes, i.e., the establishment of Ashram schools. The Ashram school concept started in the Third Plan in all scheduled areas across India. It aims to promote education to the marginalized in a customized way. In addition to Ashram schools, there was construction of hostels for boarding and lodging to tribal students in the schedule areas. These special measures were introduced to achieve targeted results in elementary education among the tribals. In spite of this, the literacy rate has not crossed beyond 11.39 percent in 1971 because of the complex nature of issues like absenteeism, stagnation, drop-out, and seasonal migration by the tribal children. In the meantime, the Debar Commission of 1960 identified certain specified reasons for the educational backwardness of tribals. They were vague generalizations like inappropriate and unattractive teaching methods adopted by the teachers, etc. It also touched other problems like poor economic condition and subsistence economy. In such a situation, children are seen as economic assets to supplement the family income by working with the parents and with others. In a situation of dire necessities of life, education becomes a matter of luxury for the tribal family. All these factors have contributed to work out a broader policy for tribal education. In this background, the Dhebar Commission made recommendations to provide the mid-day meal, clothing, free book, reading and writing materials, etc. to all the tribal children in backward areas. The commission further recognizing the topographical factors recommended the opening of schools in localities where there were at least 30 school-going children, though there should be a school within one mile. The commission then suggested adjustment of timing, vacations, and holidays of schools to suit the tribal social and cultural life. It even proposed to create an atmosphere of tribal culture in the schools (Ministry of Tribal Welfare, High Powered Committee, and Government of India Report 2014:158-159). The Kothari Commission has also highlighted that the tribals deserve education with great emphasis and attention. In view of this, the Kothari Commission endorsed the recommendations of the Dhebar Commission with a note of urgency that "intensive efforts' must be made to provided for five years of early education to all tribal children by 1975-76. In order to achieve the literacy rate among tribals, the Commission also suggested the need to educate parents simultaneously. Initially despite intensive efforts on tribal education, literacy rate increased marginally from 11.3 per cent in 1971 to 16.35 per cent in 1981(Table-1); whereas in female literacy, there was no sign of relief, and it remained single digit, i.e., 8.04 per cent in 1984. This indicates that in the first three decades of independence, the growth of tribal education was very slow due to high dropout rate and the growing gap between tribals and non-tribals. Due to this higher education among the tribals also suffered severely.



Recognizing the low literacy rate, the Tribal Sub-Plan which was introduced in the Fifth Five Year Plan which had also accorded priority to promotion of education in children and women (Xaxa 2011; Sujatha 2008). Inspire of these efforts, the Fourth All India Educational Survey (1978) has revealed certain harsh facts on tribal education that more than 25,000 tribal habitations had no school at all. As far as secondary schooling was concerned, 82.18 per cent of the tribal population was within reach of eight kilometers, and only 18.8 per cent of them had access to higher secondary school (Ministry of Tribal Welfare, High Powered Committee, Government of India Report: 2014). During the Sixth Five Year Plan, it was estimated that nearly 56 per cent (49 per cent boys and 70 per cent girls) of the tribal children were yet to receive elementary education. Looking at this challenge, the National Policy on Education (NPE) was framed in 1986 with an aim to reduce the stagnancy at primary level and increase the disadvantaged sections participation at higher levels. On the other, the Seventh Five Year Plan (1985- 90) also gave 'overriding priority' to universalization of elementary education to all the children in the age-group of 6-14 years by 1990. Based on the understanding of the tribal problems, the NPE recommended number of measures like developing curricula and devise instructional material in tribal language at the initial stage with arrangements for switch over to regional languages, importance of instruction through the mother tongue for effective teaching and encouraged incorporating locally relevant content and curriculum, besides emphasizing the localized production of text books in local dialects. All these initiatives have changed the primary education graph of STs from low to high, and therefore it showed results in higher education. Whatever the results may, the gap between the ST and non-ST population remains to be the double digit from 22.21 to 14.03 per cent between 1991 and 2011, and it (including female literacy) continues falling below the national average (Table-2). The 2011 Census data indicate that educational development of the STs is quite uneven among different states. The data indicate that some states with higher concentration of tribal population have been doing extremely well. They are Mizoram (91.5%), Nagaland (80.0%), Manipur (77.4%), and Meghalaya (74.5%). Whereas some states with more number of tribal habitations continue to perform very low. They are Jharkhand (57.1%), Madhya Pradesh (50.6%), Orissa (52.2%), Rajasthan (52.2%), and Andhra Pradesh (49.2%).

The working group on Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes (2007) has clearly indicated that large scale industrialization and exploitation of mineral resources on one side and construction of irrigation dams on the other side have uprooted the tribal people out of their lands. Displacement has adversely affected the school going children and more often than not, acted as the factor of their discontinuation. The socio-cultural practices or socialization has also directly impacted on tribal children education. As Xaxa (2011) observed that traditional tribal society was not aware of formal education. It was the Christian missionaries who introduced this alien phenomenon of education to tribal society. As the school and its environment were alien to traditional tribal milieu, young tribal children do not wish to stay in it. Entering into school brings a new and external environment in which the child may not adjust. Also as those engaged in imparting knowledge were strangers to their society, the tribal students do not feel comfortable. The serious problem of high drop-out rate in tribal society is to a

considerable extent linked to this phenomenon also. The tribal drop-outs at primary, upper primary and secondary level was much higher than that of the general population in 2001- 02. The data on drop-out rates for the period 2005-06 to 2011-12 indicate a decreasing trend and hence an improvement in the status of school-going tribal children at all levels. During 2005-06 to 2011-12, the all India dropout rates fell down by 3.4 per cent for all children in classes 1-5 and 4.5 per cent for tribal children.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Tribals live in far flung areas forests are unreachable and inaccessible. Moreover, the tribal life and livelihood is directly linked to the forest resources. Due to this, their relations with outside world are either forged or severed depending on circumstances. During the British rule, their regions were made open for revenue collection mostly in the name of development. Moreover, the agrarian policy evicted the tribals from their own lands that went to the hands of non-tribal landlords and moneylenders. This gave rise to widespread discontent among the tribals who revolted against the British rule on several occasions. Due to this, the British opted for the policy of appeasement, as it had long term colonial interests in India. The sole aim was to let the tribes live in their own way as long as they did not cause trouble, and maintained status quo.

In the post-independence period, the Government of India followed a policy of limited assimilation through Nehru's Panchsheel policy which again restricted the planners from bringing radical changes in cultural and traditional life. The policy makers have made targets without understanding the nitty-gritty of their cultural and traditional life. This resulted in a situation where, according to Roy Burman, the new laws seeking to protect the tribals actually led to greater exploitation of tribals. It appears that development is possible only with the involvement of local people. Based on this observation, the orientation of planning must be customized, i.e., the planners must study the problems of tribals and plan accordingly.

Education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social status of marginalized communities in the society. It's very essential for backward communities like SCs and STs. Based on the discussion in the paper, the government has to do a lot to improve their educational status. Even after the implementation of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, only 88.46 percent of ST households are covered under primary schools in a radius of 1 km. There is decline in the percentage of school dropouts and out of school children among the tribals, but to further reduce the number, the curriculum should be prepared in their mother tongue. There can be mid-day meal, night school, adult education centres etc. Moreover, the government must appoint some tribal members as teachers wherever possible. This will certainly bring confidence and also motivate the tribal students to get enrolled to the school and keep on continuing. Along with this, more number of Ashram schools should be opened in their areas, and the government rules are to be relaxed so that more and more children can get into the school system. The premier institutions like IITs and IIMs are to reach out to tribals if they fail to turn up. There should not be any discriminatory treatment at such institutes, even if they joined. In

view of all these conditions, priority must be given to the sector wise plans and its implementations for the betterment of the tribal children.

The dearth of adequate schools and competent teachers to fulfill the goals of Right to Education Act, 2009 is another impediment in achieving the target of education in tribal areas. For addressing the current scarcity of competent teachers in tribal areas, special efforts must be made to train the teachers so that more number of competent teachers can get into the education system. Most of the educational schemes /missions are not really supportive to their betterment, and they have not generated any significant impact. The state education machinery is largely responsible for this situation. There should be proper accountability of the state education department to mobilize tribal's to primary education and skill developments. It's pertinent to note that along with primary education, skill development is very essential. There are good number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) based on micro-finance credit system. Many tribals get into it and have had first-hand experience self determination.

Inclusion of local culture, folklore, and history to the curriculum can help building confidence among the tribal children, and this approach may help in increasing their enrolment and retention at school since music and dance are the essential aspects of their cultural life. Therefore, storytelling, theatre, painting, music, and dance performances should be promoted at schools. Similarly, sports like archery, football, and other popular local sports are extremely beneficial remedies for dropouts; it should be promoted. The tribal literature and ethnology constitute the invaluable indigenous knowledge. It should be documented, researched, and promoted. For developing a better understanding of the tribal cultures and their promotion, there should be adequate number of cultural research and educational centers in tribal regions. An important step in this direction is to teach tribal history and culture at schools to both tribal and non-tribal children. It would indirectly help to overcome the paucity of teachers in tribal areas. Institutions of ITDAs/ ITDPs and micro-projects should support the tribal schools for betterment, inclusion of more children, and prevention of dropouts (Ministry of Tribal Welfare, High Powered Committee, and Government of India Report 2014).

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