

PROBLEMS OF EDUCATION AMONG THE SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA: FINDING A BALANCE

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ABSTRACT

While the 83rd constitutional amendment considers education as a fundamental right of all Indian citizens, inequalities continue to be pronounced between the various castes. The present paper documents the disadvantaged status related to accessing school education of Scheduled Tribe children which remain largely unaddressed and remain as significant barriers to attend school. Furthermore, physical remoteness, social exclusion, severe poverty, psycho-social determinants act as impeding factor of accessing education. The paper suggests some holistic measures highlighting the basic causes of the problem in a context-specific, comprehensive manner.

Key words: First generation learners, social exclusion, dropout rate, tribal education, inclusive education.

INTRODUCTION

Education has not yet been the priority of the tribal communities, not yet been an integral part of tribal culture. This has been a harsh reality despite 58 years of 'planned development' in the country. In their perception of life, education has failed to emerge as a part of their survival strategy. The lack of educational atmosphere and infrastructure at home as well as dependence on subsistence economy force their children out of schools at the primary and early secondary stages that time the boys are ready for odd jobs, and the girls for domestic chores for helping their working mothers. The Government Policy of protective discrimination and a string of development programmes have succeeded in giving some relief to the relatively better off section among the tribes but have failed to arrest the process of marginalization of the average tribal people who have been pushed to the fringe in all spheres of life-economic, social, educational, cultural and political. It has been widely acknowledged that the socio-economic condition in rural India have constrained the process of primary education and the social inequalities of caste, class and gender have been identified as the major causes of educational deprivation among children in India. According to Jean Dreze, "Literacy achievements in India depend crucially on the social context: the gender division of labour, the kinship system, caste related norms, economic entitlements and so on" (Dreze, 2003). A large proportion of tribal children, especially in tribal areas are either denied access or are failing to complete even five years of basic education. And even they complete, the promotion from primary to secondary education is but a distant dream to the millions of tribal children in India still today. Traditionally known as *adivasis*, Scheduled Tribes (STs) constitute about 9% of India's population. One of the distinguishing features of STs is that majority of them reside in scattered habitations in remote and inaccessible hilly and forest areas of the country. Nearly 22% of tribal habitations have less than 100 population and more than 40% have 100 to less than 300 people, while others have less than 500 people (Sujatha, 2002). Nine states- Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Gujrat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and west Bengal – together account for more than four-fifths of the total tribal population in India.

OBJECTIVES

This paper analyses the extent of social exclusion of tribal children in education in India and addresses for a comprehensive policy response which highlights the barriers to accessing education of this group.

PROGRAMMES TAKEN BY GOVT. OF INDIA

As a basic component of human development, the 83rd Amendment to the constitution has made free elementary education a fundamental right of all the citizens of India. Realizing the need to improve the overall status of tribals, their education has emerged at the forefront of recent development efforts. The national Policy on Education (1986) is one of them, which specified the following:

- Priority will be accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas;
- There is need to develop curricula and devise instructional material in tribal languages at the initial stages with arrangements for switchover to regional languages;
- Promising ST youths will be encouraged to take up teaching in tribal areas;
- Ashram schools/residential schools will be established in a large scale in tribal areas;
- Incentive schemes will be formulated for the STs, keeping in view their special needs and lifestyle.

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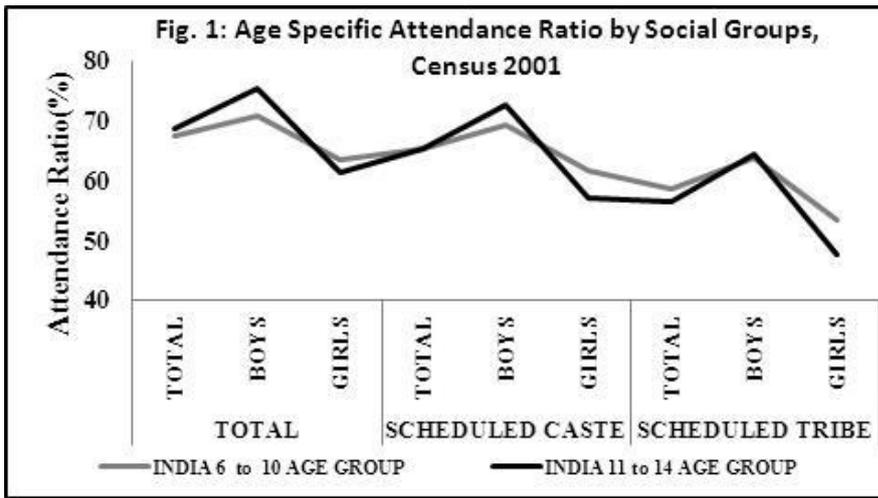
The NPE (1986) and the Programme of Action (POA) in 1992 are characterized by its recognition of the heterogeneity and diversity of tribal areas. These policies have given thrust on importance of instruction through the mother tongue for effective teaching. But in spite of such initiatives, many tribal communities are still without school.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF TRIBE IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

The problem of educational development among tribal communities is quite complex. The existing literature have given thrust on inadequate provision of educational institution in these communities for the slow progress of education, socio-economic characteristics as well as school related factors for drop out and stagnation. In addition, indifferent attitude and lack of motivation are noteworthy also. It is thus evident that the rates of wastage and stagnation among the STs are considerably higher than the other communities, at all the stages (Naik, 1972). The literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes is low at 47.10 % in India according to Census of India, 2001, which is well below the national average. Especially the female literacy rate among tribes (34.76% as per

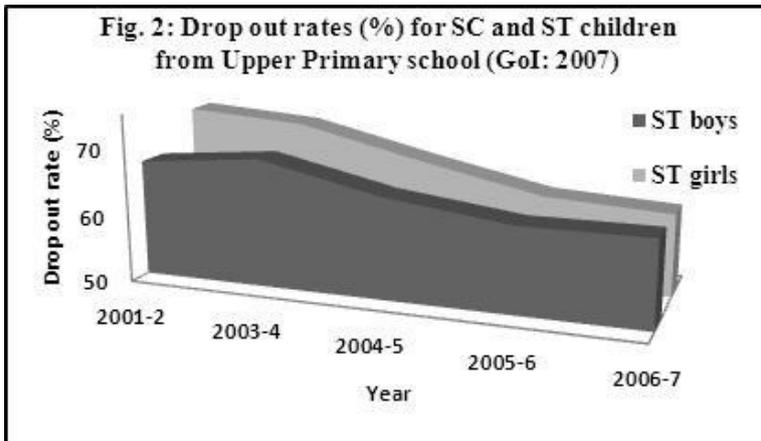
Census of India, 2001) is strikingly low. High levels of absenteeism and alarming dropout rates characterize tribal areas. In spite of constitutional guarantees and persistent efforts, their educational development is far from satisfaction.

Nearly 45.02% of tribal population falls in the age group of 0 to 14 years. Out of every six children in India, one child is a



tribal child. According to 61st National Sample Survey, current attendance rates for children in the age group 5-14 years are 72.6% for Scheduled tribes in rural India. Similarly, the situation is also serious regarding school drop out of this socially under-privileged groups, as shown in the graph below.

Though there has been considerable decline in drop-out rate of STs, but much still need to be done for upliftment of these groups in upper primary and secondary education.

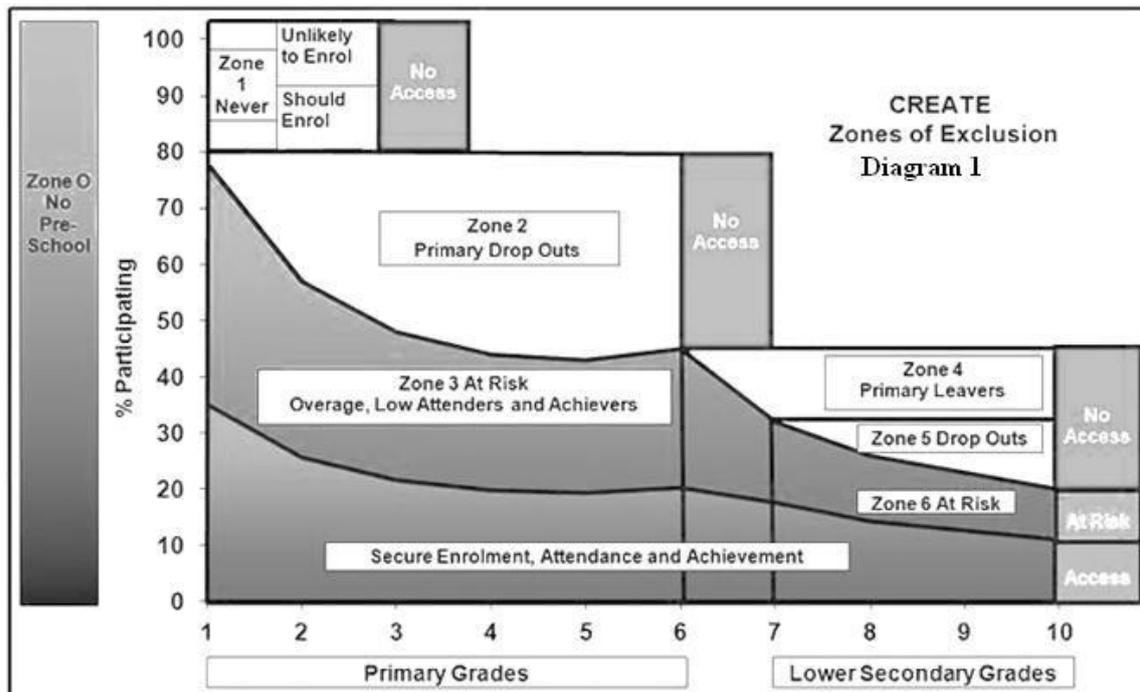


ISSUES OF TRIBAL EDUCATION

These factors impeding education among tribals can be categorized as Institutional and Non-Institutional Factors. The Institutional factors are related to *quality of school provision, language of instruction, content and pedagogy, academic supervision, teacher-related problems,* whereas Non-

institutional-factors include *physical isolation and remoteness and geographical barriers, economic uncertainty, socio-cultural discontinuity, and the difficulties at levels of policy, planning, implementation and administration* all of which play significantly.

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Quality of school provision</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Majority of schools in tribal areas beyond basic infrastructural facilities; b. Schools do not have teaching-learning materials; c. Lack of minimum sanitary provisions; d. Irregular supply of mid-day meals; e. Lack of communication facility; f. Untimely supply of study materials.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Language of instruction</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Medium of teaching, i.e. English being a foreign language for tribal children; b. Unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities or understand the texts properly;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Content and pedagogy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Type of content in the text book not relevant to the tribal community; b. The rigid systems of formal schooling emphasizing discipline, routine norms, teacher-centred instruction, making tribal children wary of school; c. Against the culture of free interaction and absence of force as embedded in tribal ethos and culture at home;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Teacher related problems</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Tribal children's inability to establish a communication link with the teacher results low attendance and high dropout rates; b. Teacher absenteeism; c. Non-tribal teachers having an attitude of indifference to tribal languages, traditions, cultures and life-styles fail to perceive the human values ingrained in tribal folk cultures; d. No special training on tribal languages; e. Quite thin Relationship between teachers, students and tribal villagers;
NON-INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Physical isolation and remoteness and Geographical barriers</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Most tribal habitations in forest and hilly areas; b. Poor accessibility and connectivity; c. Travelling a long distance every day to attend school becomes time factor;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Economic uncertainty</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Subsistence economy; b. High opportunity costs of tribal children; c. Unable to meet direct costs of schooling; d. Many benefits do not reach to the beneficiaries;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Socio-cultural discontinuity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Education not given much priority, in a society dominated by struggle for survival, options are limited; b. Social customs, cultural ethos, lack of awareness of the value of formal education conflict and gap between the home and school; c. Gender bias;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>Difficulties at levels of policy, planning, implementation and administration</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Policies and programmes formulated for tribal welfare not favourable in their environment, consequently, no worthwhile policy for tribal education has been formed; b. Policies lack sensitivity to tribal problems and failed to understand tribal social reality;



Educational Exclusion of tribal children (Followed by Model developed by Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions, and Equity (CREATE) (Lewin, 2007).

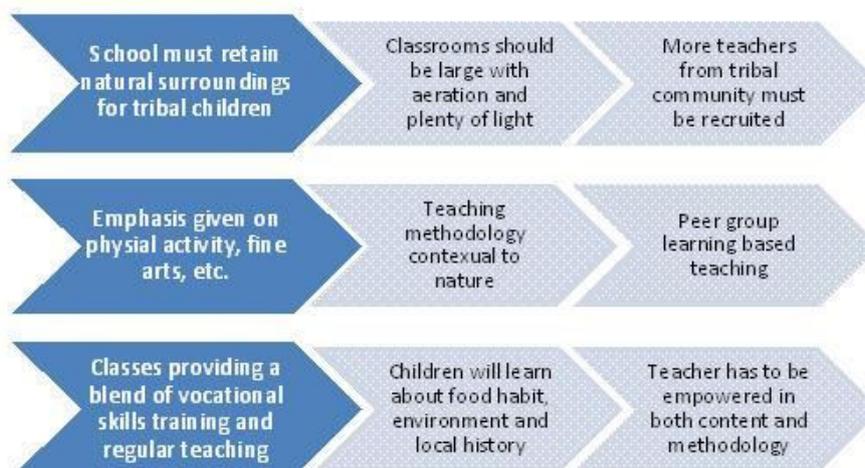
PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF FIRST GENERATION LEARNERS

Almost all of the tribal children are first generation learners, the first one in their entire generation to go to school and to receive education. They come to school without any orientation. Their home environment is both discouraging and non-facilitating to education. As there is no educational environment at home, their parents fail to provide any educational guidance to their children. This may lead to poor academic achievement and less healthy attitude towards life and society. Participating in schools and successfully completing the whole cycle with no one at home to support and to understand schooling processes is an uphill task for these little learners. They lack knowledge of time management, school finances and less likely to encounter a welcoming environment on school. Entering the school means for them that they are entering into an alien physical and social environment which they, their family and their peers have never experienced. They are faced with leaving a certain world in which they fit for an uncertain world where they know they don't fit. In Fact, tribal children find themselves 'on the margin of two cultures' and have to offer renegotiate relationship at school and at home to manage the tension between the two. As a result, they become the highest risk students for dropping out.

FINDING A BALANCE THROUGH EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT OF TRIBAL CHILDREN

The Government of India has repeatedly acknowledged the disadvantaged status of the tribal communities in education and recognized the need to address it. Several initiatives like *Village Education Communities*, *School Inspectors*, *Siksha Bondhu*, *Madhyamik Siksha Kendra*, etc., have been implemented to make Universal Elementary Education a success. Followings are some of the holistic social approach to access and success that are more likely to succeed in bridging the gap between tribal children and non-tribal children in India.

- Constructing *more primary schools and classrooms* is an obvious priority. A parallel strategy to increase school capacity is to seek ways to use existing facilities and teachers more efficiently to accommodate more pupils. Where feasible, for instance, multigrade classrooms and teaching pupils in shifts (e.g. one set of pupils in the morning, another set in the afternoon) can effectively expand the school system's capacity.
- The traditional time tables of school often clash with tribal children who are withdrawn temporarily from school in harvest times leading to more permanent removals. Therefore, *shifting systems, evening classes and flexible interventions towards schooling* may reduce drop outs.
- Involving tribal parents in the processes, i.e. *monitoring, accountability mechanisms and incentives through school governing bodies and increasing information flows to them* are the prime need of the hour so that the parents recognize the importance of education.

Diagram 2: BUILDING OF EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AT SCHOOL FOR TRIBAL CHILDREN

- *Environment building* is of immense importance in the context of educational development among tribal people. Geographical as well as social inertia must be a thrust area regarding tribal educational development.
- In the process of mainstreaming the tribal children in society, tribal dialect may be used as a medium for tribal children for the first few years and gradually introducing the state language as the child becomes comfortable in the school environment, can yield positive results.
- *Community awareness and community mobilization*, which are its core elements, should receive adequate attention.
- *Decentralization of education management* is another aspect that needs special consideration in the context of tribal areas. Considering the geographical terrain and communication problems in tribal areas, it is crucial to restructure the existing system.
- School curriculum must be culturally sensitive and provide children with economically viable options for life through vocational training so that tribals need to be employable;
- *Literacy programmes for uneducated tribal parents*, especially for mothers may enrich school participation of their children. Because Most of the little learners responded that being illiterate their parents do not understand the importance of education.
- Introduction of *Inclusive education* making school will be more attractive to the first generation tribal learners.
- The *flexible approach to learning (Door-Step School, School-on-wheels)* within the tribal habitation may give some positive result in educational environment.
- There should be a *mix-match combination format of traditional and non-traditional education system*. If possible, *vocational education* must be implemented along with *folk based education* in order to make schooling system effective and sustainable.
- Introducing monetary and non-monetary incentives for teachers in tribal areas;
- Improving community participation by training tribal teachers and youth as peer educators;
- Establishing and strengthening transitional centers in school which highlights in mainstreaming tribal children;
- Creating residential schools for tribal children;
- Recruitment of more female teachers in school making school environment gender-friendly;
- The *implementation of context, time and area specific educational policy* must be implemented so that much more tribal first generation learners are entrained within the policy framework.

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