

SIXTH SEMESTER (HONS)

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INDIAN TRIBES AND EDUCATION

Introduction:

India is a home to a large variety of indigenous people. The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. With a population of more than 10.2crores, India has the single largest tribal population in the world. This constitutes 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country (Census of India, 2011). Education is one of the primary agents of transformation towards development. Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development of tribes but also for inner strength of the tribal communities which helps them in meeting the new challenges of life. It is an activity or a series of activities, or a process which may either improve the immediate living conditions or increase the potential for future living. It is the single most important means by which individuals and society can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well-being. **Professor Amartya Sen** recently emphasized *education as an important parameter for any inclusive growth in an economy*.

So, education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the Scheduled Tribes. Literacy and educational attainment are powerful indicators of social and economic development among the backward groups in India. Currently, the tribes lag behind not only the general population but also the Scheduled Caste population in literacy and education. This disparity is even more marked among Scheduled Tribe women, who have the lowest literacy rates in the country. The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the scheduled tribes is significant. Education, especially in its elementary form, is considered of utmost importance to the tribals because it is crucial for total development of tribal communities and is particularly helpful to build confidence among the tribes to deal with outsiders on equal terms.

Despite the sincere and concerted efforts by the government for the overall development of the scheduled tribes, they are still far behind in almost all the standard parameters of development. They are not able to participate in the process of development, as they are not aware of most of the programmes and policies made for their upliftment. This is mainly due to the high incidence of illiteracy and very low level of education among the tribal people. Hence, the

educational status of the scheduled tribes and the role of governance in this direction are highly essential. So, education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the Scheduled Tribes.

Status of Tribal Population in India:

India has total tribal population of 10.43 crores which is 8.6% of total population of India as per 2011 census. The literate tribal population constitutes a majority in the northeastern states of Mizoram and Lakshadweep (94.4%), Meghalaya (86.1%), and Nagaland (86.5%). The states with no Scheduled tribe groups are Punjab, Chandigarh, Haryana, Delhi and Pondicherry.

The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 per cent in 1961 which has increased to 63.1 per cent in 2011. But female literacy of tribes is only 54.4 per cent compared to male literacy of 71.7 per cent. During the post-Independence period, the Indian government implemented legislation and allocated funds to facilitate access to enrollment in primary education in India. As a result, both literacy rates and gross enrollment ratios of boys and girls across the general population have increased substantially during the past 50 years.

Gross enrolment ratio of ST boys is more than ST girls in all classes. The gross enrolment ratio is higher in class I to V which is 137.2 for ST boys and 136.7 for ST girls but it is only 90.7 and 87 in class VI to VIII. It implies that the tribal enrolment declines significantly in higher class.

So far as educational problem in tribals is concerned, it is closely related to their cultural practices and economy. The hunter and gatherer tribes wander from one place to another in search of hunting birds and animals as well as the collection of food from the jungle. Shifting cultivators also change the place of residence each year to the purpose of doing shifting cultivation. In this situation, they have to face the problem of non-enrolment in the schools, because permanent settlement is a must for the enrolment in school. Agricultural tribes and Artisan tribes live permanently in the villages. Their children are enrolled in the schools, but they have to face the problem of nonattendance and dropouts due to their poverty and workload during peak agricultural season and the season of collection of some minor forest produce under Government or private contractors. Tribals, working as migrant labour, move from one place to another in search of work. They move with their family. In this situation, they have to face the problem of non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropouts.

Causes of Low Literacy among the Tribals:

The following are the main causes of low literacy among the tribals:

- i. Non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropouts due to cultural practices and migration for work.

- ii. Poverty
- iii. Syllabus not according to tribal area/environment
- iv. Lack of educational institutions in remote tribal areas
- v. Medium of teaching no in tribal languages
- vi. Examination system
- vii. Absence of teachers
- viii. Lack of coordination between parents and teachers
- ix. Time-table of the school nor according to workload of the tribals
- x. Lack of Tribal Education Policy
- xi. Holidays not according to tribal economy
- xii. No proper implementation of various schemes of educational development

Means to Remove Low Literacy:

The existence of low literacy can be removed by the following means:

- i. Attempt to rehabilitate the families of hunter, gatherers and shifting cultivators in permanent villages.
- ii. Establishment of community residential schools in all tribal areas only for the tribals.
- iii. Inclusion of local events and culture in the syllabus,
- iv. Appointment of female teachers of the community.
- v. Teaching in tribal languages.
- vi. Examination in tribal languages.
- vii. Time-table of school according to workload of tribal communities.
- viii. Arrangement of holidays according to tribal economy.
- ix. Arrangement of free accommodation, food, dresses and reading materials.
- x. Proper implementation of different educational development schemes.
- xi. Establishment of non-formal educational institutions.
- xii. Establishment of vocational education institutions.
- xiii. Encouragement of sports in the schools.
- xiv. Encouragement of music and dance by the schools.
- xv. Encouragement of craft making by the schools.
- xvi. Formation of a separate tribal education policy.

Consequences of Illiteracy:

The existence of illiteracy brings the following consequences in tribal society:

- i. Blind faith / belief in superstitions
- ii. No attempt to root out social evils
- iii. Belief in Dain (witch), Spirits
- iv. Poverty
- v. Crime
- vi. Juvenile delinquency
- vii. Exploitation
- viii. Oppression
- ix. Lack of modern occupation
- x. Lack of awareness to their rights
- xi. Victim of different kind of diseases
- xii. Lack of interest in scientific knowledge

Problems of Tribal Education:

There are many critical issues and problems in the field of tribal education. They are as follows:

- I. **Medium of language –**

- Language is one of the important constraints of tribal children which prevents them access to education.
- II. **The Location of the Village –**
The physical barriers create a hindrance for the children of a tribal village to attend the school in a neighboring village.
 - III. **Economic Condition –**
The economic condition of tribal people is so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.
 - IV. **Attitude of the parents –**
As education does not yield any immediate economic return, the tribal parents prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income.
 - V. **Teacher Related Problems –**
In the remote tribal areas the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon and this affects largely the quality of education.
 - VI. **Lack of Proper monitoring-**
Proper monitoring is hindered by poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

Government Policies and Programmes for Tribal Education:

After independence, following the provisions of our constitution under **Articles 15(4) and 46**, our Central as well as State government have established primary, middle and high schools in tribal areas. A number of voluntary organizations have also come forward in tribal area for the purpose of educational development in tribal areas. As a result, the literacy among the tribals has been achieved to some extent, but still far away from the national literacy rate. Again, there is also vast difference in literacy rates of male and female.

Starting from the **First Five Year Plan Period (1951-1956)** the government is steadily allocating financial resources for the purpose of tribal development. Towards the end of the plan (1954), 43 **Special Multipurpose Tribal Development Projects (MTDPs)** was created. During the **Third Five Year Plan Period (1961-1966)**, the government of India adopted the strategy of converting areas with more than 66 per cent tribal concentration into **Tribal Development Blocks (TBDs)**. By the end of **Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-1974)**, the number of TBDs in the country rose to 504. Additionally, in 1972 the **Tribal Sub-Plan Strategy (TSP)** was implemented by the **Ministry of Education and Social Welfare**. TSP was based on twin objectives of socio-economic development and protection against exploitation. It was generally implemented in the areas where the Scheduled Tribe population was more than 50 per cent of the total population.

Suggestions:

Some suggestions for improvement of tribal education are as follows-

- a) **Literacy campaign** –
Proper awareness campaign should be organized to create the awareness about the importance of education. Extensive literacy campaign in the tribal dominated districts may be undertaken on a priority basis to literate the tribal.
- b) **Attitude of the tribal parents** –
The attitude of the tribal parents toward education should be improved through proper counseling and guidance.
- c) **Relevant study materials in local languages** –
All study materials should be supplied in local languages of tribes.
- d) **Appointment of Local teachers and female teachers** –
It is suggested to appoint more tribal teachers and female teachers in the tribal areas. The ecological, cultural, psychological characteristics of tribal children should be considered carefully by the teachers in tribal areas.
- e) **Stipends and various scholarships** –
Since higher education among the tribes is less, special ST scholarships should be provided to the tribal students perusing higher education, particularly in medical, engineering, and other vocational streams.
- f) **Residential schools** –
More residential schools should be established in each states and districts and extended up to PG level in tribal areas.
- g) **Social security**-
Social security of students, especially of adolescent girls is of great concern in residential schools.
- h) **Proper Monitoring** –
Higher level officials should check the functioning of schools frequently relating to the teaching methods, working hours, and attendance registers.

Conclusion:

Education is the key to tribal development. Tribal children have very low levels of participation. Though the development of the tribes is taking place in India, but the pace of development has been rather slow. If govt. will not take some drastic steps for the development of tribal education, the status of education among tribes will be a story of distress, despair and death. Hence time has come to think it seriously about tribal education and inclusive growth. So, there is an urgent need for various govt. interventions, planners and policy makers to address this problem and allocate more funds in the central and state budgets for tribal education. Easy access and more opportunities should be provided to the tribal children in order to bring them to the mainstream of economic development.
