
UNIT 19 EDUCATION

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Learning Objectives

The main aim of this unit is to explain:

- an outline of educational status among tribals;
- cognition of tribals regarding formal education;
- the limitations of educational system among the tribals; and
- recent attempts by the government to ameliorate the educational status among tribals.

19.1 INTRODUCTION

One cannot ignore the role of education in bringing about socio-economic development of Scheduled Tribes (STs). It is one of the most potent instruments in empowering the tribals and bringing about their socio-economic betterment. This unit on Education among the tribes in India discusses the educational status of different tribes, tribal perception of the formal educational system and drawbacks of the educational system among the tribals.

The aboriginal tribes of India are often considered to be the oldest and the original inhabitants of the country. In the beginning, most of them lived a life of relative isolation. It was mostly during colonisation that the tribal underwent a sea change. From being relatively autonomous to living a life of subjugation was one of the adverse consequences of the expansion of British rule in India. Their land was forcefully taken away and they were compelled to recede further into the hilly gorges and the wilds.

Post-independence, special attention was given to the tribal population. From isolation to assimilation to finally integration, different principles have been used by the government as the guiding criteria. It is worth stating here that before the 1950s the Government of India had no concrete programme for the education of tribal. Post-independence with the adoption of the Constitution, the promotion of education of Scheduled Tribes became a special responsibility of the Central as well as of the State governments (Hasnain 1979, pp 196-201)

The government has taken several steps to improve the educational status of the tribal. Opening of Ashram schools (see box for details), vocational training centres and the

introduction of monetary incentives in the form of different scholarships, such as Pre-matric scholarship, post-matric scholarship, scholarship for Top class Education, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship and National Overseas Scholarship, for Scheduled Tribe students are a few such steps in this direction.

Ashram Schools: Ashram schools can be considered as one of the unique features of promoting education among the tribals. They are residential schools which impart education up to the secondary level to children belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs). Teachers and students live in the same premise and this close interaction is a step in the direction of promoting better opportunities. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has been implementing a central scheme which aims at establishing ashram schools in Tribal Sub Plan areas since 1990-91.

Despite all these efforts, the status of education among the Scheduled Tribes is considerably lower than the total population in general. The spread of formal education among the tribal population in India can be discerned from facts reported in the census data. The tribal population of the country, as per the 2011 census, is 10.43 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. The census figures of 1931 disclosed that only 0.7% of the tribal people were literate. This rose to about 16.7% in 1981 against 36% for the entire country. The literacy rate among the tribal women is far more dismal and much lower. Despite government efforts to promote education among the Scheduled Tribes (STs), their literacy rates as compared to the national average has remained low, a Parliamentary Committee had stated. The countrywide literacy rate as per Census 2011 is 73% but for Scheduled Tribes, it is 59% only. Barring a few tribes of the North-East region, like the Khasi, the Garo, the Nagas, etc., who have become literate over the years mainly owing to spread of Christianity, the spread of education among the tribals in general is not very positive.

The puzzling and the focal question here is whether tribal societies can enter the national mainstream while maintaining their distinctiveness and unique socio-cultural aspect. In continuation with this there is no denying the fact that if we wish to integrate the tribal population into the mainstream and improve their status, education becomes indispensable. It is only through educating the tribal can we ensure a prosperous and secure life. The policy of integrated development of tribal areas can be achieved through educating the locals.

One of the main goals of government officials and policymakers has been to provide education to tribals and bridge the gap that exists between the literacy rate among the tribes and the general population in India. One step in this direction is that every year in the annual budget a considerable amount of money is sanctioned for educating the tribal. Different government surveys and studies have indicated that there is no paucity and dearth of schools or other educational facilities and scholarships for the implementation of tribal education schemes. Yet the educational status of tribals is dismal and poor. Formal education has failed to appeal to the tribal community. The tribals are still reluctant to accept the positive and significant role of education. They still can't relate to the idea that education can make their lives better. One main reason behind this is the fact that formal education is far removed from the social lives and has not been necessary for the members of tribal societies to discharge their social obligations.

19.2 SOME STATISTICS ON EDUCATION AMONG TRIBALS

According to the Census records the literacy levels of Scheduled Tribes have improved over the years. The literacy rate increased from 8.54% in 1961 to 11.3% in 1971, rising marginally to 16.35% in 1981. Within this, the tribal female literacy rate was much lower, at 4.85% in 1971 and 8.04 in 1981. Yet the gap between the tribal population and the total population has not reduced much. The literacy rate among the tribal improved by 11.86 % from 2001 to 2011. The literacy rate has, however, all along been lower both for males and females as compared to the total population. According to Census 2011, the gap between literacy rates of Scheduled Tribes and the total population is still around 14.03%. Among states, Mizoram and among Union Territories, Lakshadweep have the highest literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes while the lowest literacy rate was observed in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. However, among states, the highest number of Scheduled Tribe students appearing for the High School examination was in Madhya Pradesh.

Currently, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is being implemented as India's main programme for universalising elementary education. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children. -The new law provides a justifiable legal framework that entitles all children between the ages of 6-14 years free and compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education. It provides for children's right to an education of equitable quality, based on principles of equity and nondiscrimination. Under this scheme, it can be safely concluded that some improvement in the percentage enrolment of Scheduled Tribe students to all categories (i.e., Primary, Upper Primary and Secondary level) has been made in 2010-11 since 1995-1996.

The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has increased from 80.4 in 1990-91 to 119.7 in 2010-11 for the Scheduled Tribes and from 78.6 in 1990-91 to 86.5 in 2010-11, for the total population. From 2003-04 to 2010-11, the GER was higher for STs than the total population, both for males and females. Despite improved GER among the tribals, the dropout rate among them is still high. In the case of tribals, dropout rates are as high as 35.6% in Classes I to V; 55% in Classes V to VIII; and 70.9% in Classes VIII to X in 2010-11 and this is significantly higher than all India figures.

Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for any stage is defined as percentage of the enrolment in that stage to the estimated child population in the respective age group.

Dropout Rate is the proportion of pupils/students who leave school during the year as well as those who complete the grade/year level but fail to enroll in the next grade/year level the following school year to the total number of pupils/students enrolled during the previous school year. It is a critical indicator reflecting lack of educational development and inability of a given social group to complete a specific level of education.

19.3 DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF TRIBAL EDUCATION AND THEIR LIMITATIONS AND DRAWBACKS:

A. Teachers in Tribal Schools

The teachers imparting education to the students in school are generally outsiders and non-tribal with very little understanding of tribal customs, values, norms and culture, in general. The teachers are unable to establish a rapport with tribal students because of the difference in their social backgrounds. Because of this, they are unable to relate to them and sympathise with their needs. The non-tribal teachers view the tribal students as 'savage' and 'uncivilised'. The teachers are filled with a sense of superiority and hardly make an effort to bond with the children. Consequently, teaching and learning suffers. The ideal scenario in such a case would be to appoint an insider as a teacher, i.e., to have teachers from the tribal community itself. However, the reality is that there is a paucity of qualified tribal teachers and in some cases there are none. In such a case there is little choice but to appoint an outsider as a teacher in a tribal school. If outsiders are appointed as a teachers in tribal areas then they should first undergo some kind of special training that familiarises them with the tribal life and their culture. They need to be sensitive and sympathetic towards the tribal way of life and value system. One important step in this direction is to learn the local vernacular. This attempt of learning the local language goes a long way in establishing rapport and easy acceptance by tribal students.

It is not just the social background of teachers and their lack of knowledge of the tribal culture that poses obstacles in the effective discharge of their duties and responsibilities. The teacher-student ratio may also pose a challenge to effective classroom teaching and the spread of education in general. Most primary schools in tribal areas are managed by a single teacher whose presence is more an exception than a rule. That lone teacher is overburdened, managing all the responsibilities singlehandedly. Generally, this single teacher is seen teaching different topics to different classes simultaneously. Thus, he may be expected to follow a non-stop six-hourly schedule of teaching daily which has an adverse impact on his role as a teacher. Besides this, teacher absenteeism is a common problem in tribal schools. All this poses a hindrance to the growth of education in tribal areas.

The daily newspaper, Times of India, dated 18 August 2016 carried an article on tribal school in Rourkela. 'The education complex for students of PaudiBhuyan tribe in the district, established in March, has been languishing for the want of teachers' (TOI). The article reported that some odd 155 students all belonging to the PaudiBhuyan tribe enrolled in the school when it was inaugurated in March 2016. But the children are seen sitting idle as till date not a single teacher has been appointed in the school.

B. School Building:

One of the prominent observations on the education system among tribals is related to the school building and its infrastructure. It is stated that the school and their surroundings have a long drawn impact on the psyche of children studying there. Most schools in tribal areas appear as alien and ugly structures in tribal villages. Most of them lack basic infrastructure, like blackboard may be missing, table and chairs are absent. Most

of these schools even lack basic amenities like drinking water and toilets. It is reported that schools may even lack an adequate number of classrooms. Thus, each classroom may be accommodating more than one class and few classes may take place in the open. It is not surprising that shortly after the school building is constructed, scant attention is paid to its maintenance resulting in neglected and dilapidated infrastructure.

C. Education Schedule:

The school year, daily classes and holidays are designed without taking into consideration the tribal culture. There is little reference to the tribal annual calendar while preparing the school calendar. Tribal festivals, important tribal events and agricultural cycles are not referred to while preparing and planning the school timetable and its activities. Local conditions and requirements of the people are least acknowledged. The school authorities and policymakers have failed to strike a balance between the needs of the household and the needs of education. Thus, education is seen as conflicting and limiting the needs of households.

D. Mismanagement of Funds:

One popular misconception pertaining to tribal education is that there is a dearth or paucity of funds. Lack of funds is not the main reason for the poor maintenance of school buildings. Mismanagement and bungling is the prime reason behind the neglect of school building. S.N. Rath (1981) has given a very graphic and vivid description of the situation. He states that often a roofless dilapidated structure situated far away from the village in midst of an empty expanse are often pointed out as a school.

E. Economics Factors:

There is no denying the fact that the poor economic conditions of tribals are one of the reasons that tribal families show little interest in getting their children educated. Most of the tribals are living in abject poverty under a subsistence economy. Each member of the household contributes to the household economy. Children too are seen as potential workforce. They are not mere consumers but active producers of the household. In the given scenario, sending children to school means depriving the household of the potential labour force. If a child is taken away from his normal economic work to attend school, the families' ratio of a number of workers and number of dependents get affected. The family is deprived of its economic contribution. Also when he is sent to attend school, the family has to support him and feed him out of their earnings. Verrier Elwin (1963) has very succinctly summed up the scenario in the following lines,

'For the tribal family, to send its grown-up boy or girl to school is essentially a matter of economics; and entails dislocation in the traditional pattern of division of labour ...many parents cannot just afford to send their children to school'.

Thus, the economic condition of tribal societies pose a great obstacle as far as providing education to tribals is concerned. The hardships of life have made them tough and practical. Many of them consider education to be a luxury beyond their reach. The majority of tribes exhibit a simple economy. Most tribals still practice hunting, food gathering or shifting cultivation. Issues of sustenance and survival are still central to their life. The question of education and its significance does not appeal to them.

Moreover, the benefits of education are not immediate. Any economic benefit the child can bring to his family is only after ten to fifteen years of schooling. Given their critical

situation and little understanding of the significance of education, the parents lack both patience and foresight to wait for such a long period. All this adds to the lack of any initiative and efforts on part of the parents in sending their children to school.

F. Lack of Interest in Formal Education:

One problem with education in the Indian context is that the 'urban middle class oriented educational system has got superimposed on the entire nation both in terms of its structure and content'. The tribal children are taught from books that are used for educating the non-tribal children of urban and rural areas. One drawback of teaching the tribals using these books lies in the fact that the tribal children are unable to identify themselves with the contents of such books. L.R.N. Srivastava (1968 :77) puts the problem more lucidly by saying that 'tribal child who lives in an isolated and far off place untouched by currents of modern civilisation can hardly assimilate any information about history and geography of the country, about the industrial and technical development, uninteresting and outdated stories and about important personalities unknown and unheard of in tribal areas. He has to be given complete information about his neighbouring communities, his village life, social organisation, beliefs and practices and then pass on to the national scene where we can introduce him to India which is his country. Then only he will be able to grasp what is happening in his village, in his state, in his country and if possible, in other countries of the world'.

It is not only that the tribal students are unable to relate to the contents of books but the medium of instruction is also a problem and limitation. Thus, another major problem in tribal education is that of language. Most tribal languages and dialects are in the elementary stage. In the given scenario the state has little choice but to impart education to tribal children through the medium of regional language. Thus, the medium of education is one of the factors that makes the entire education system less appealing and attractive to many tribal students.

19.4 GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL STATUS AMONG TRIBAL

The Department of Education has always introduced different schemes and policies to improve the status of education of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 as updated in 1992, has been one such step in this direction. Its main objective was a reduction of disparities and equalisation of educational opportunities by catering to the specific requirements of those who have been denied equality so far. The Policy and its programme of Action (POA), 1992 contains specific directions and measures for the educational upliftment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. One such step in this direction is the norm of having a primary school within one-kilometre walking distance from SC/ ST habitation of 200 population. The opening of one model residential school in the tribal area is recommended. There is an attempt to make pedagogy relevant to the tribal student so that their interest in learning gets strengthened and they don't find it alien. Curriculum and co-curriculum include aspects of meta-skill upgradation of tribal children. Curricula for meta-skill upgradation are to include aspects of tribal games and sports, archery, identification of plants of medicinal value, crafts, art and culture, folk dance and folk songs, folk paintings, etc. Another step in this direction is to provide free primary and secondary education to all Scheduled Tribe children. In addition to these, University Grant Commission has issued special instructions to all Central Universities, Education Secretaries, State

Government/UT Administrations to implement reservation orders in matters of admission of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The University Grants Commission has set up special cells in universities/institutions for effective monitoring of various measures taken up for improvement in the educational level of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

19.5 SUMMARY

The role of education in improving the status of tribals cannot be disputed. Different surveys and studies have revealed that the tribal people are lagging behind the general people in terms of educational status. Different limitations in the tribal educational system have been outlined. The paucity of qualified and motivated teachers, poor infrastructure and inability to relate to the school curriculum are few such limitations. The tribals are unable to understand the significance of education in their lives because of a lack of any direct link between formal education and discharge of socio-economic duties. Despite all these shortcomings, the government is taking several steps to improve the educational status of the tribals and bridge the gap between the tribal and mainstream population.

References

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Sample Questions

1. What are the various shortcomings in the tribal educational system?
2. Write an essay on education among tribes in India.