

## A STUDY ON EDUCATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA: SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Abstract**

*The status of any social group is determined by its levels of health-nutrition, literacy education and standard of living. The tribal women, constitute like any other social group, about half of the total population. However, the health of tribal women is more important because tribal women work harder and family economy and management depends on them. It has been reported that illiteracy, in tribal as well as non-tribal population, is positively correlated to health. The tribal women, as women in all social groups, are more illiterate than men. The low educational status is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and their presence in the school. Like others social groups, the tribal women share problems related to reproductive health. All these factors were discussed in detail.*

### **Introduction**

Educational backwardness is a distinct gender dimension. An education system should provide a new culture of work ethos and an array of young talented, skilled and well equipped target group who will be able to shoulder the developmental responsibilities. It should make an individual better suited to the needs of the ever changing dynamic world. The structuring or restructuring of educational system should also contribute to reduce the social gaps by enabling proper recognition to whatever extent one is able to pursue or acquire a skill.

At this juncture it is pertinent to quote Prof. Harbion of Princeton University. He rightly observes that, “Human resources constitute the ultimate basis for wealth of Nations. Clearly a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilise them efficiently in the national economy, will be unable to develop anything else”.

Socialization is synonymous with education. Brook Over (1955) writes. “It includes any social behaviour that assists in the induction of the child into membership in the society, or any behaviour by which the society perpetuates itself through the new generation”. Margaret Mead (1943) defines, education as the cultural process, the way in which each newborn human infant is transformed into a full member of a specific human society. Both these definitions indicate one aspect - socialisation or education is a cultural process in which

inculcation of norms, values attitudes morals and skills, the members of the society ensures continuity in each generation with regard to various aspects of society. Socialisation in a traditional society stabilizes social norms and values. It is essentially a conservative and culture transmitted process. Elementary Indian education never brought any radical innovation of values. However, with the changing world, the concept of education is experiencing a complete trans-valuation. Today education is a powerful agent of social change. It unlocks the door to modernisation. It also paves a sure road to economic modernisation and progress.

The tribal community all over India has been subjected to various forms of deprivation such as, alienation from land and other forest resources since the British rule. Women by nature have, greater ability to organise people, resources and work. They have greater perseverance adaptability and attitude for discipline and cleanliness. To utilise their creativity, adaptive and organizational ability and to motivate them to participate in education, development of their own group is actually required.

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic and political structure of her society. They exercise free and firm hand in all aspects related to their social and economic life. In the process of change, the tribal woman is forced to adhere to certain norms which may even take away her freedom, her control over the traditional productive system, her house, family and children and even her own life. The process of such alienation has an impact on the tribal women. It is often alleged that the level of aspiration of these women as a group is low and they are quite satisfied with what they are and with what they have. It is most often not true only to womenfolk but to everyone who feels helpless and frustrated. However, in order to develop and raise their level of aspiration, adequate educational opportunities are to be provided, so that they get motivated to participate, support and also ultimately learn to initiate their own programmes of development. The Report of the Working Group on Tribal Development (1980) Suggests: "We feel while the core economic sectors might hold primacy in planning education is the key to tribal development.... Education is an input not only for economic development but also for inner strength of the tribal communities so that they can meet the new challenges on terms of some degree of capacity".

### **Problems associated with Education of Tribal women**

In India, many studies have revealed the educational development of tribal women by quantitative indicators like enrolment, literacy rate and educational facilities. When literacy has been recognized as an important tool of empowerment, the tribal society has been greatly disadvantaged and the tribal woman is enormously handicapped. Though the governments have taken several steps in the development of tribal education projects and schemes, much remains to be done. The progress achieved in this field is far from satisfactory. The welfare programmes have not been effective due to inadequacies in the administrative machinery, lack of sensitive trained management, lack of general preparedness for large investments, deficiency in accounting systems, procedural delays and lack of proper monitoring and evaluation. The constitutional directive to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years has not yet been fulfilled. Educational experts admit that this failure is mainly due to the slow progress of education among girls, SCs and STs. Moreover the tribals have no faith in formal education. Many of them do not know anything about education, schools, colleges, degrees etc. Though there has been five-fold increase in the literacy of tribal females, it is still much lower than the national average for the females. Literacy among tribal women has been lagging behind all other sections - urban males, urban females, rural males, rural females, SC males (urban / rural), SC females (urban / rural) and tribal males. The low educational status of tribal women is reflected in their lower literacy rate, lower enrolment rate and higher dropouts in the school.

The drop-out rates for girls are higher than those for boys in tribal population. The drop-out rate for tribals at the secondary level is as high as 87 percent and for the girls it is almost 90 percent. Consequently, there is a negligible percent (0.06 percent) of tribal women in institutions of higher education. However, various factors are responsible for the slow progress of the educational development of tribal women.

In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial and women are more important than in other social groups, because they work harder and the family economy and management depends on them (Awais, Alam and Asif 2009). The tribal women are also burdened with work in the fields and homes, and this is mainly responsible for their low rate of education. In the tribal society while boys work in the field with their parents, girls give every help to their mothers at the housework. The tribal girl child is viewed as a security and asset to the family, and so, the parents do not allow the girls to study (Sinha 2005). They think that if the child is taken away from his normal economic work to attend

school, the family deprives of the little income, which she 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.

### **Superstitions and Prejudice**

Superstitions, blind beliefs and prejudices play negative role in imparting education in the tribal areas. Even today in most parts of the country, the tribal women remains steeped in superstitions and ignorance with main presiding over their destiny (Rani, Rajani and Neeraja 2011). 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. They think that after becoming educated and getting jobs, their children may alienate from them and cut off their links with their families and villages. In some cases a large section of tribal groups oppose the spread of education among the girls because they think that their girls may marry to non tribals. 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). 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.

### **Women's role in political sphere**

The role of women's empowerment for a just society was highlighted in the Beijing Conference (1995). In all the four societies under study, women power does not extend to societal or political spheres. The economic power of the women in the household is not translated in to corresponding community authority. They are not ignored at household level but are not given due credit and importance at official level. Women supremacy is restricted within the family domain and does not extend to social or political spheres. It is interesting to note that although by convention every village Panchayat has a female member, the lady never bothers to attend the meeting or to take any active interest in the proceedings of Panchayat. Sikkim has a tradition of collective decision making by communities through the institution of Dzumsha. However traditional institutions do not witness a significant role for

women and *Dzumsha* is constituted of males only. In the absence of a male member, a female can represent her family unit. If a male head is absent from *Dzumsha* meeting, he is fined, however if represented by female head, she is liable to pay half the amount for her absence. This shows that women have a secondary importance in public affairs and community decision-making. Women are generally bypassed and marginalized either they lack the requisite skills, or because women's heavy and unending domestic responsibilities makes attending meetings and participating in decision making difficult. It always happens that men take over the more profitable activities.

### **Government Policies**

Education has been regarded both as an end in itself and a means of realizing other desirable ends. It develops the personality and rationality of individuals, qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status. It has been recognized as a major instrument which societies can use to direct the process of change and development towards desired goals. It provides for vertical mobility and can thereby help to equalize status between individuals coming from different social strata. As a result the movement for improving women's status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society.

Considering this Directive Principle, a number of Schemes and programmes have been initiated or implemented, such as schemes of incentives, financial assistance, establishment of Ashram schools, establishment of hostels for boys and girls. For the promotion of education among tribals, government provide pre-Matric and post-Matric Scholarships, coaching and Allied schemes for scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. The governments also established schools in some tribal areas. The students belonging to scheduled tribes are getting various concessions such as-free tuition, stipends, scholarships, free supply of text books, stationery and other equipments. Pre-examination training centres are established in some places to help them to appear for competitive examinations. In many tribal areas mid day meals are also supplied to create interest for education among tribal children. For the scheduled tribes and also scheduled caste, 20 percent of seats are reserved in technical education and relaxation is made in respect of age limit and qualifying marks (Rao 1995). In addition to this, government also aid to voluntary organization involved in

promotion of education among tribals under art. 275 (1). There are more than 600 Ashrama schools which provide both the basic education and vocational training situated in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madras, Karnataka, Orissa, Rajasthan, and Tripura. In fact ashram schools are greatly beneficial especially for girl child. Ashram schools are essentially residential schools with free boarding and lodging available to the pupil. In such residential schools besides study there is training in various crafts such as weaving, smithy, carpentry, tailoring etc. As most of the tribes are poor, offer of free boarding and lodging along with training in various crafts attracts most of tribes. Ashram schools have contributed to increase in attendance, reduction in the number of dropouts and ultimately increase in literacy rate. Vocational training in various allied activities, help in making girls self sufficient and self reliant. Ashram schools, besides other things, offer a good climate for study and produced good results better than ordinary primary schools. Apart from this, various state governments have also taken various steps to meet the educational development of tribal women and tribal girl child. For example in Andhra Pradesh as far as elementary education is concerned, the government has also undertaken several measures to reach out to tribal communities such as the Girijana Vidya Vikas Kendras with standards I and II in areas where “primitive tribal communities” reside; mandal (sub-district) level elementary schools; the “Alternative Schools” etc., and the monitoring systems such as the School Complex System. There have also been some special programmes such as bridge courses and back to school initiatives for dropouts. For adult literacy, the state has launched a special programme known as “Akshara Sankranthi” which is for “adults” above 15 years of age.

### **Conclusion and Intervention**

Education is the most effective instrument for ensuring equality and opportunities but the tribal people in general and women in particular are lagging far behind non-tribals due to several reasons. The problems associated with the education of tribal children in general and tribal girl in particular in India are complicated, inter-related and manifold in structure. Factors like poverty, indifferent attitude of the parents and children, superstitions and prejudice, lack of suitable teacher, problems of language and communication, inadequate facilities in the educational institutions and high wastage and stagnation causes major hindrances in the process of spread of education among tribal women. However, since the problems are centuries old, there should not be pessimism in the approaches towards tribal education. However, we should not wait for a longer period to come to resolve the issue.

Therefore, it is time now to address the problems of low literacy rate among tribal women in India seriously and resolve the menace through positive and effective means.

***Some of the recommendations in this regard can be attributed through the following points***

1. Ignorance of tribal people and lack of information in the tribal areas handicaps the schemes and programmes of the government. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the government, civil societies and public to create awareness among the tribal people about government programmes, meant for them, and advantages of education among tribal women.
2. Education of the tribal women is not a mere learning process rather, it should be a means for creativity and occupation as per the necessities and requirements of the tribal community. Therefore, the main aim of education should be to make tribal women economically independent, understand their problems and take concerted effort to make their life better.
3. By preparing curriculum and teaching-learning process, suitable to the tribal dialect, culture and localities can create interest among the parents as well as students of tribal communities. By the process, the tribal children will get attracted to the schools. If the school language is changed into mother tongue and the syllabus is in tune with tribal culture, such as stories of tribal heroes who fought for India's freedom struggle are included, or modes such as story-telling, showing video films, etc., are added, it will generate more interest for the pursuit of education. The tribal teachers who understand the tribal language and culture must be posted in tribal schools. They should be given incentives to try to generate motivation among tribal girls and their families about the value of education, especially girls' education.
4. Although government allocates a large chunk of money to promote education among the tribal girls, yet, there are delays in the process of implementation and in some cases, corruption paralyses the programmes and objectives. Hence, attention should be given for the speedy execution of policies, strict implementation of existing anti-corruption laws and making tribal-specific laws to check corruption in the tribal areas.

**Table 1. Urban and Rural Literacy rates of ST Population**



State	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	Rural		Urban		Total	
North-East						
Mizoram	86.11	77.71	87.55	96.01	91.71	86.95
Nagaland	67.09	57.72	91.63	85.60	70.26	61.35
Meghalaya	58.72	53.97	88.95	84.58	63.49	59.20
East						
Bihar	37.57	13.30	74.18	55.28	39.76	15.54
Orissa	50.35	22.07	69.80	45.77	51.48	23.37
West Bengal	56.60	27.88	68.57	48.20	57.38	29.15
Central						
Madhya Pradesh	52.51	27.24	67.47	45.89	53.55	28.44
West						
Gujarat	58.06	34.60	71.01	51.78	59.18	36.02
Maharashtra	64.52	39.88	82.98	64.70	67.02	43.08
Rajasthan	61.23	25.22	75.74	42.97	62.10	26.16
North						
Uttar Pradesh	46.71	18.34	60.61	39.54	48.45	20.70
Himachal Pradesh	77.18	52.50	92.03	81.15	77.71	53.32
South						
Andhra Pradesh	46.09	24.48	66.16	45.99	47.66	26.11
Kerala	70.20	57.28	84.96	77.70	70.78	58.11
Tamil Nadu	47.19	29.48	66.56	50.68	50.15	32.78
India	57.39	32.44	77.77	59.87	59.17	34.76

Source: Annual Report. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India

**Table 2. Gross Enrollment Ratio for the ST Population (Gender wise)**

States	Gross Enrollment Ratio			
	Classes I-V (6-11 years)		Classes VI-VIII (11-14 years)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
<b>North East</b>				
Meghalaya	90.20	92.97	41.57	51.25
Mizoram	119.27	122.69	78.25	77.97
Nagaland	72.93	70.90	38.03	38.28
<b>East</b>				
Bihar	59.60	32.54	18.56	8.53
Orissa	103.38	87.33	38.37	26.59
West Bengal	108.07	94.55	60.48	29.76
<b>Central</b>				
Madhya Pradesh	91.93	71.77	41.65	24.57
<b>West</b>				
Gujarat	111.59	107.87	67.82	58.18
Maharashtra	116.62	106.40	72.92	63.75
Rajasthan	18.72	106.39	64.80	31.79
<b>North</b>				
Uttar Pradesh	130.36	124.59	108.57	99.26
Himachal Pradesh	126.51	122.14	100.62	75.92
<b>South</b>				
Andhra Pradesh	118.11	113.56	54.33	38.53
Kerala	112.94	107.71	84.62	80.77
Tamil Nadu	105.69	113.21	85.55	99.17
<b>India</b>	104.80	92.25	55.03	40.78

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