

**School Curriculum and Tribal Students: Implications'****Vikas Mane**

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**Abstract**

*Most tribal live in forest areas, and so not exposed to urban culture, others are mobile, so not able to reside permanently and settle for prosperity. Their xenocentric cultural identity and general alienation by the urban and rural elites, drives them into isolation from the mainstream. In the process the biggest casualty is education. . The registration, attendance and school drop-out rates of the tribal children are the worst in the society. All these deficient parameters are due to the mainstream society following a school-education model that caters only to the urban mainstream culture, not matching the xenocentric tribal culture. School Curriculum in Ashram Schools, Teacher training and motivation in Tribal schools, Language of Instruction, accommodating the culture and avocation pattern of tribal's in school curriculum are the most important issues that need to be tackled so that the socio-cultural identity of the tribal's is retained and at the same time they given exposure of mainstream culture. And again at the same time the mainstream culture avails of the indigenous and sustainably developing lifestyle of the tribal culture.*

**Key words:** Tribal Curriculum, Ashram School, Indigenous Culture, Teacher Training,

**Introduction**

The tribals languishing at the lower end of our socio-economic system are a socio-economically and educationally underdeveloped strata of our society. Surviving on forest produce and moving about in urban areas doing menial jobs or selling small utility products. Most tribals live in forest areas, and so not exposed to urban culture, others are mobile so not able to reside permanently and settle for prosperity. Their xenocentric cultural identity and general alienation by the urban and rural elites, drives them into isolation from the mainstream. In the process the biggest casualty is education.

### **Need of Research Study of the Scheduled Tribes (STs)**

As discussed earlier the scheduled tribes are at the bottom of the socio-economic and educational ladder of development in our society the literacy levels of the tribes people are the lowest in the society. The registration, attendance and school drop-out rates of the tribal children are the worst in the society. All these deficient parameters are due to the mainstream society following a school-education model that caters only to the urban mainstream culture, not matching the xenocentric tribal culture. Such patronage school systems with their infrastructure and academics, militates and alienates the tribal children from their own culture, occupational patterns, language and identity. this is no justice, even to the Constitution of India, which gives the fundamental rights of protection and preservation of language, culture and religion to all communities of the society.

And further, with this mismatched school system our tribal children shall never pass through their education, leading to youth, who are unemployed or underemployed and those who may hurt the law, order and peace of our society. This grim situation warrants a research project to find the tribal socio-educational status and suggest changes to the traditional school system to suit the culture and identity of the tribals

### **Educational Development of the Scheduled Tribes:**

The Departments of Elementary Education and Literacy and of Higher Education in States have provided special incentives to ST students which include textbooks, uniform, abolition of tuition fee and so on. Special focus is also accorded to ST students under the District Primary Education Programme, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Mid-day Meal Programme, Navodaya Vidyalaya, National Talent Search Scheme, aid the like.

The Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme is in operation since 1944-45, and open to all ST students whose parents annual income is up to Rs. 1 Lakh to facilitate students to pursue professional courses.

The scheme of establishing Ashram Schools in Tribal sub-plan (TSP) areas provides funds for construction of school buildings as well as hostels and staff quarters. The scheme of construction of hostels for ST boys and girls provides for the construction of new hostel buildings as well as extension of the existing hostel buildings. The scheme of setting up educational complexes as being implemented for promotion of education among tribal girls is 136 identified law literacy districts of the country. A Scheme for vocational training in tribal areas for developing the skills of tribal youth for a variety of jobs as well as self-employment, is also in operation.

#### **Present Educational Status of STs:**

Between 1961 and 2001, the literacy rate of STs increased 5.32 times, while that of total population increased 2.69 times. However, the gap between the literacy rates of STs and of the general population continued during the three decades between 1971 and 2001 almost at the same level of 17.70% and above, but with marginal variations.

#### **Literacy and Educational Level**

Literacy and level of education are two basic indicators of the level of development achieved by a group/society. The literacy results in more awareness besides contributing to the overall improvement of health, hygiene and other social conditions. According to 2001 Census, percentage of literate persons (those who can read and write with understanding) aged 7 years and above, among ST population of Maharashtra is 55.2 percent, which is lower than 76.9 percent of reported for the state population as a whole. The literacy data show that the ST population of the state has made significant improvement in literacy during the decade 1991-2001. The literacy rate, which was 36.8 percent in 1991, has increased by 18.4 percentage points in 2001. Though the literacy rate has improved substantially among ST population, it is much below the literacy rate of the state population.

Among the numerically larger STs, Koli Mahadev are reported to have the highest literacy rate (65.8 percent) followed by the Gond (62.5 percent), Kokna (57.8 percent), Thakur (50.9 percent), Varli (41.9 percent) and Bhil (40.6 percent) The female literacy rate of 43.1 percent among ST population is lower as compared to 67.0 percent among total female

population of the State. The highest and lowest female literacy rate of 52.9 percent and 29.3 percent are recorded among the Koli Mahadev and Varli respectively.

**Educational levels attained by major STs**

Name of ST	Literate without educational level	Below Primary	Primary	Middle	Matric/Sec/High Sec, Intermediate etc.	Technical & Non-technical Diploma	Graduate & Above
All STs	3.3	41.7	25.7	13.6	13.4	0.2	2.1
Bhil	7.0	49.9	23.5	8.6	9.7	0.1	1.3
Gond	2.0	40.3	26.2	16.9	13.0	0.1	1.4
Koli Mahadev	2.4	35.3	28.2	15.2	15.9	0.3	2.6
Varli	3.6	52.7	26.8	10.0	6.0	0.1	0.7
Kokna	2.8	38.9	26.1	13.1	16.3	0.4	2.5
Thakur	2.9	43.8	25.8	12.4	12.2	0.3	2.6

Out of the total literates, 45 percent are literates without any educational level or have attained below Primary level. The literates, who have attained education upto Primary and Middle Levels constitute 25.7 percent and 13.6 percent respectively. 13.4 percent are having educational level up to Matric / Higher Secondary etc. levels, implying that about every 7<sup>th</sup> ST literate is a Matriculate. Literates with educational level of Graduation and above are 2.1 percent. Individually, Koli Mahadev and Thakur have the highest 2.6 percent each of Graduation and above educational level.

The educational level table shows that the drop out is conspicuous after the Primary level and again after the Matric / Secondary levels among and major STs. Population in the age group 5.14 years are the potential students. Two third (66.2 percent) of the ST population in this age group is attending various educational institutions. In this regard, Gond have the highest 76.3 percent school going children.

**Design of Study**

**Study Area**

The government – run and government aided Ashramshala’s constitute the universe of this research project. 15 Ashramshala’s including three government-aided Ashramshala’s have been selected for this study.

## **Sample**

The sample consists of Ashramshalas, students and teachers. Fifteen Ashramshalas were selected as sample for study. Fifty eight teachers including nine woman teachers were selected. Thirty parents, a couple from each school, were selected for study. And total of Five hundred and Nineteen students, including 280 girls and 239 boys, complete the sample size of our research study. The schools have been selected from Junnar, Khed and Ambegaon tehsils of district Pune. The schools were selected on the basis of tribal population of the taluka.

Variables – Independent and Dependant

## **Data Collection**

Both primary as well as secondary data were collected. The primary data was collected by the field associate after orientation regarding data collection. The main activities included fieldwork and the collection of all relevant information.

## **Tools and Techniques**

The required information was collected through the use of types of schedules meant for parents, teachers and students. The tools of data collection included teachers schedule, student schedule and parents schedule.

## **Analysis of Data**

The data thus collected was qualitative and quantitative. Coding of the data was done to facilitate data entry. All the data was analyzed and tables were prepared. Observed data was carefully edited before being incorporated in the report.

We shall consider only the main findings of this research project :

- i) Students favourite subjects – Teachers Perspective

**Table 7**

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Student Nos.</b>
1	Games	15
2	Science	11
3	Marathi	40
4	Drawing	9
5	Hindi	19
6	Social Sciences	29
7	English	1
8	Cultural Programmes	6
9	Maths	1
10	Environment	1

11	All subjects	2
12	No Comments	4

Marathi, Social Sciences, Hindi and sports activities (Games) are the most favoured subjects of the students, according to the view of the their teachers. This is a telling fact, showing the students' interest in the subjects relating to peoples' culture and socio-economic dynamics rather than to scientific subjects requiring abstract thinking. Subjects taught in abstract need higher levels of tutoring, which seem to be apparently less in evidence, in our teachers.

ii) Students favourite subjects – Reasons – Teachers perspective

**Table 8**

Students favourite subjects – Reasons

S.No.	Reasons	No. of Students
1	Mother tongue	28
2	Geographical conditions	8
3	Subject – liking	4
4	Easy to understand	7
5	Cultural background	2
6	Trained teachers	1
7	No response	8

Good performance due to education in mother tongue is a natural and just phenomena along with simple and understandable teaching and geographical background of the students are reasons why students like particular subjects.

iii) Subjects not liked by students-Teachers perspective

**Table 9**

Subjects not liked by students

S.No.	Subject	Ratio
1	English	43
2	Maths	46
3	Social Sciences	6
4	Science	7
5	Hindi	1
6	No response	11

The natural culprits are maths, an abstract proposition and English, which is still an alien and elitist language in India.

iv) Reasons for students not liking subjects

**Table 10**

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Number</b>
1	Weak fundamentals	5
2	Do not understand	10
3	Cannot imbibe	9
4	Foreign language	2
5	No tuitions	1
6	Low/No attendance	1
7	Rural background	2
8	No response	15

Most of the reasons of students not liking subjects relate to quality of teachers as well as weak academic backgrounds of students, language, foreign and regional dialect, are also problems of communication between teachers and students.

v) Suitable remedies to overcome dislike of subjects

**Table 11**

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Remedies</b>	<b>No of responses</b>
1	Educational material	7
2	Guidance	8
3	Reading-Writing	6
4	Extra-periods	7
5	Practice exams	9
6	Create liking for subject	5
7	Educational awakening	6
8	No response	10

The teachers have tried all traditional academics improvement tools, showing signs of concern for overall academic improvement of the students. The question is about implementation and quality of these tools for effective implementation.

vi) Need of Tribal Culture Training

**Table 15**

Need of tribal Culture training

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Response</b>
1	Yes	5
2	No	49
3	No responses	4

A huge number of 49 teacher respondents don't think need of tribal culture training is necessary. This shows either they are extremely conversant with tribal culture or are totally oblivious to the

unique needs of tribal socio-economic and educational life and are probably too mainstream oriented.

vii) Need of Tribal Culture-Complimenting vocational courses

**Table 16**

Tribal Culture – Complimenting vocational Course

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Option</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
1	Yes	34
2	No	20
3	No responses	4

Interestingly a large number of teachers think, tribal culture complimenting vocational courses are necessary. This proves that the teachers think that the culture and socio-economic profile of the tribal children are different and need different academic and vocational education inputs.

viii) Kinds of vocational education

**Table 17**

<b>S.No.</b>	<b>Vocational Education</b>	<b>Ratio</b>
1	Relating to Adivasi Culture	9
2	Small scale Industries / handicraft industries	16
3	Vocational training	8
4	No response	25

Vocational and small scale industries courses representing modern industrial economy are preferred by most teachers as compared to courses regarding Adivasi culture. A huge 25 have not responded to this question indicating apathy to the quality and utility of education they impart to the tribal children.

29 teachers acknowledged celebrating tribal festivals in school, while 27 teachers said no tribal festivals were celebrated in their school. This data is a major yardstick of huge denial and ignorance of a unique tribal identity and culture. And so, the resultant incompatibility and tribal alienation below par academic and otherwise performance of tribal children even when we have special Ashram schools for tribal children.

Conclusion and Suggestions : Now we shall focus on remedial solutions to the various aspects of tribal education.

1) Ashram schools or tribal schools.



The first aspect of an Ashram schools or a Tribal school is if being set-up specifically or primarily to cater to the education of tribal students only. This is a major poser, should the tribal students be educated in isolated tribal peer groups? Or should they be made to study with a peer group of rural and urban culture mix? This isolatory tribal education policy of ours reeks of patronage and considers that we do not have anything to learn from the tribals lifestyle. This seems to be misplaced and wrong. The Maharashtra State Government has recently decided to increase the quota of non-tribal children to fifty percent in tribal schools. They want tribal children exposed to urban peer groups and urban life-style. But this is only half the objectives. We, the urban mainstream also needs to realize that we to have something to learn form the tribal culture. The importance of primary life-sustenance based on sustainable development, gender-parity, peaceful and humane community living and an overall natural and satisfactory life-style.

The tribal students shall also be exposed to urban life-styles and comforts, technology, tools and gadgets with quality human resources and infrastructure. They should be exposed to the best i.e. urban and developed and in return the urban students should be exposed to the best tribal practices of natural, sustainable and humane living. All this if we have mixed tribal – rural and urban residential schools shall give us a model tribal school protecting their cultural needs and identity and also exposing them to advanced education.

2) The Ashram schools are of two types one, that are run directly by the government, under the integrated tribal development programme, and second, that are run by private educational trusts, but fully funded by the government. Both face the same maladies of funding administrative lacunae, administrative and school management corruption, tardy or mismanaged school infrastructure, demoralized and under-trained teachers. And to top if all the curriculum contents that are most inappropriate to tribal culture and employability and teachers who are most disinterested in getting transferred to tribal school postings.

Running these tribal schools with the best tribal interest in heart will need a real political and administrative will of the government. A truly concerned education and tribal affairs minister are prime necessities for the tribal education system to run top-down in a very effective and quality manner. The basic problem with tribal Ashram schools is that they are given to politicians or their relatives as baksheesh of political power to milk for financial gains. The rut starts here.

These politicians or government bureaucrats drain these tribal educational institutions of finances and also misuse the tribal school personnel.

The other problem is that there is accountability but which can be managed by the wrong doers. The tribals are a poor voiceless lot who are basically not as interested in the school-education dished-out, as it is quite futile for their culture and employability. They are not united, are leaderless and vulnerable to deceit and fallacy. Without any concerted protests, except from the non-government organizations working for tribal education, or media people making news, the tribal education sector is hurtling worse than the mainstream education towards mediocrity or worse towards mal-utility. All this also has to do with tribal leadership being manipulated and bought-over by mainstream political parties losing out tribal interest in the true sense.

3) Teachers in Tribal schools – Teachers in India are generally or neglected lot with mediocre salaries, insufficient training, low dignity and having to utilize a lot of their time on government national activities such as the census count. The teachers in tribal schools are even worse off as they consider their tribal school posting to be a punishment side-posting. They start on a negative note. Then there is the question of social stigma. To associate with the tribals is largely considered as a social stigma. They have generally been considered to be ‘junglees’, outcasts and in some cases criminals. This mainstream generalized approach brings in a distaste of tribals and also a patronizing attitude, which refuses to learn new cultures and has ways of doing things. The teachers that we sampled have been eligible, qualified teachers but their in-service training needs a lot of doing. The sample said largely that they did not require tribal culture training. But this probably reflects their patronizing attitude. Tribal culture, language and socio-economic realities are significantly different from the mainstream cultures. They need exposure and learning, to understand and empathize. The teachers will do good, if they are made to undergo a short-term orientation course, before being posted as a tribal school teacher. The teachers should also be trained for vocational courses such as Agriculture and handicrafts and other tribal production systems, to be able to implement as new subjects in the tribal schools.

4) Language of Instruction – In the sampled Ashram Schools Marathi vernacular medium is the language of instruction. Marathi is the state language of Maharashtra. New language of instruction for tribal students is a very tricky and controversial issue. Ideally the mother tongue of the children should be their language of instructions. The tribal children

have their own dialect different from Marathi. But in the survey it was seen that the children did not have much of an issue with the language of instruction in school i.e. Marathi. But for best understanding, the language of instruction should be the tribal childrens' dialect at least till the age of six years. After that both the tribal dialect and Marathi instructions can go on to eventually carry on with Marathi as language of instruction. An of course English can also be taught as a language from the age of seven to the tribal children. The advantages of having a tribal language a medium of instruction till primary level include: - Tribal dialect instruction makes the process of education and learning easier and more natural.

- By affording a sense of assimilation, such a practice can aid in reducing drop-outs.
- This can also help increase a child's participation in learning processes at school.

But this also includes some disadvantages as:

- Often, tribals themselves perceive local content and tribal language education as a way to keep the community backward.
- Adequate dialogue with tribal communities may be required to gain acceptance of the tribal language as a medium of instruction. "The medium of instruction cannot only be the local dialect because of practical constraints, it must however start with that. More importantly, classroom transactions must be such that they show respect for the child's language identity and social background, instilling this dignity within a child, can be done even in a multi-lingual setting and be totally ignored even when the medium of instruction is the tribal language. You also have to account for people's (tribals) own aspirations of learning other languages". This is how a balanced view on language of instruction is taken by a Social Scientist – Priyanka Singh.

So it can be said that the importance of the tribal language as the foundation of a child in the early years, and the underlying benefits of increasing achievements / learning levels by granting familiarity, cannot be over-emphasized. In a multi-lingual society geared towards the default state language reliance on the local tribal dialect solely can entrench the differentiation between the tribal and non-tribal community-hindering the process of mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming is natural, but not at the cost of the annihilation of tribal language identity. Because ultimately diversity of all facets of human life, language included, ensures liberty to express uniquely and represents the various colours of the human social fabric.

And again using the tribal dialect as medium to transact the state curriculum particularly for the first few years, and introducing the state language gradually as the child becomes comfortable in the school environment, can yield positive results.

5) School Curriculum in Ashram Schools – The Ashram schools are run in a fashion similar to the urban or rural formal government schools. The only difference is that they are primarily for tribal children, located in tribal majority remote areas. And they are residential schools so that the children are fed and have place to stay at government cost.

The school curriculum consists of all the same social sciences, languages mathematics and science besides some vocational subjects.

In principle our school curriculum we have a problem of identifying and connecting with the real world needs and our cultural fabric. It is old-fashioned and based on theory and black-board teaching. They carry on inherent abhorrence of vocational training or manual skill building, which actually are the building blocks of the society. The Ashram schools primarily cater to tribal children. So they should consider the tribal socio-economic, educational and cultural uniqueness. Mainstreaming them through regional language and mainline curriculum is an issue that considering and catering to ground-level tribal needs and aspirations is a more important issue. Tribals being isolated and stigmatized naturally are exocentric and carry an attitude. This should be considered sensitively and fairly by the mainstream urbane community.

The students of these Ashram schools demand a variety of vocational courses including computers, personality development and physical education. Other subjects like practical agriculture, handicrafts and rural basic medicine and health care can also be taken. Tribals being forest and rural based, are free-wheeling hardy and focused in physical activities. These personality traits can be used in a big way by promoting a sports culture in these schools. They need sports infrastructure, coaching and an opportunity to reach the highest sporting excellence opportunities. Nurturing the tribals' inherent professions such as farming and handicrafts and at the same time introducing them to modern technological systems like industrial technical training and computer training is probably the ideal way to go.

The classroom obstacles to tribal students are due to a variety of reasons including demoralized teachers, inadequate school and class infrastructure, patronizing relationship between the teachers and the students. Most importantly what all that is taught in the class does not wholly interest the tribal students nor is it directly useful to the life-style they follow in their

indigenous cultures. This mis-match regarding language of instruction, relevant curriculum, teacher-students relationship, school and class-room infrastructure are issues which need to be addressed.

The overall solution lies in creating a curriculum which is value-based realizing the utility of technology, especially in socio-economic interests and which is variable according to geographical, and socio-cultural and educational realities. Most communities are distinct and at different stages of socio-economic and educational developmental stages. So different communities respond better to relevant curriculum so the urban and urbane mainstream being the socio-economic and educational leaders of the society, to carry the responsibility, moral and otherwise, to recognize these differing community realities and cater in relevant and useful manner.

Because if this is not done the mis-match between tribal aspirations and a patronizing mainstream shall cross all lines of civilian relationship leading to social or violent youth conflict.

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