

THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS OF SCHEDULED TRIBE (ST) STUDENTS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL IN COOCHBEHAR DISTRICT

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Abstract

The constitutional provisions for the scheduled tribes are there; and the Government of India is trying its level best to uplift them; yet the desired goal has not been reached. The present paper seeks to identify the educational problems of them in the district of Coochbehar, though a less ST populated district in the country. Students, teachers and some guardians of four elementary schools of the district are interviewed. Descriptive survey method was followed in the study. The sample size was small, and the purposive sampling technique was followed. The study reveals poverty, lack of awareness, inaccessibility of areas, old practices, uncongenial school climate, use of other language, early marriage, drunkenness, etc. as the major problems that hamper the education of the ST students in the district.

Key Words: *Education, Scheduled Tribes, students, teachers, guardians, problems.*



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Introduction

The caste-based stratification of the Indian society has negatively influenced the equality of educational opportunity for long for the disadvantaged sections, especially for the Scheduled Tribes. Article 342 of the Indian Constitution prescribes the procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of the Scheduled Tribes such as (i) indications of primitive traits, (ii) distinctive culture, (iii) geographical isolation, (iv) shyness of contact with the community at large and (v) backwardness. Their problems of education are many---inaccessibility of areas, uncongenial school climate, poverty, old practices, language, school timing, etc. The Constitutional provisions are there for them. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is responsible for the education of the ST students. There are many centrally sponsored schemes for the education of the STs such as free education, stipends, free text books, boys' and girls' hostels, free coaching, vocational training, etc. Yet they have not been able to come at par with the other caste people of the society.

Related Studies

The following review work has helped the investigator in many aspects to complete the present study-----

Sharma (1994) studied educational attitude of tribal students. The objective was to study the general understanding of educational lifestyle through the study of selected modes of educational practices followed by them and to study the attitude of the tribal students towards education in comparison to the non-tribals. The major findings were that the three groups differed significantly on sex and caste of students. The educational attitude of three groups on the basis of the caste and family size, as well as caste and family education was also found to differ significantly.

Tali (2002) examined the impact of education on the developmental pattern of tribals in Orissa. The study followed normative survey method and the multi-stage random sampling technique. The sample consisted of 300 households. Three tools—village development index, household assets and an interview schedule were used to collect data. The collected data were analysed by chi-square test of independence to test dependence or relatedness of the attributes. The educated tribal people had positive and democratic attitude towards family matters and education for girls. No association was found between educational level and religion. Tribals with low education were found more conservative in outlook. Educated women were found participating in politics. The educated tribals had better economic conditions utilizing improved method of agriculture and co-operative society.

Mohanty (2008) studied the disparities in the level of living of tribal households in Keonjhar district. The standards of living of Juang and Bhunias were studied as the most primitive tribals in Odisha in different locations like accessible and inaccessible. A greater degree of variation in annual income per household was noticed as 60-70% of this annual expenditure only on food. There was a wide disparity in the level of living among tribals of different locations as well as different communities of same location. Inequalities were maximum in case of Juang and then Bhuniya households. Bhunias of inaccessible location enjoyed highest level of living in all aspects.

Sarkar et al. (2010) identified the effect of socio-emotional climate on problem-solving ability of tribal and non-tribal secondary students of Jammu Region. The study was carried out on a sample of 1317 from both tribal and nontribal areas selected by cluster technique. The data were collected through SESCI, Dr. Mrs. Renuka Kumari Sinha and problem-solving ability by L.N. Dubey. The students of high achievers and low achievers in problem-solving ability

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do not differ significantly in their perception of the school. Culture and levels of problem-solving groups do not interact significantly as regards the perception of the socio-emotional climate of the school.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale of the present study may be shown from the following aspects-----

- A) Education as Instrument-----Education influences the socio-economic and cultural development of the country. But an educational and economic gap between the elite and the great masses is widening. The Government is trying its level best to open new schools in remote areas for the weaker sections. Here the need for developing the tribal people through education is felt.
- B) Constitutional Obligation-----Our Constitution has recognized the relative backwardness of the weaker sections of the society, and in its directive principles it has proclaimed the most realistic goal for fastening the democratic process and guaranteeing human rights. The constitutional provisions for the education of the STs are there, and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs is primarily responsible for the education of the ST students as per the Constitution.
- C) Educational Schemes for STs-----The Government of India has started many schemes like stipends for ST students to provide financial assistance to the ST students at all levels of education, but the impact of these programmes is marginal. Moreover, preparation of textbooks in tribal dialects, orientation of teacher educators on tribal life and culture and supplementary readers on tribal customs or tribal heroes are really praiseworthy attempts.
- D) ST Population Strength-----West Bengal is not one of the densely populated states in the country, and Coochbehar is not one of the districts in India where ST people form the larger part of the total population; rather SC population is higher here. Yet a little chunk of ST people lives in the district which necessitates the study. At lower primary level the total ST students in the district was 3275 and the same at upper primary level was 3428 during 2012-13.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were to-----

- i) To know the feelings of ST students about the problems of their education.
- ii) To know the feelings of teachers about the problems of ST students.
- iii) To know the feelings of guardians about the problems of ST students.

- iv) To juxtapose all the problems relating to the ST students

Methodology

In order to collect data as per the above objectives, descriptive survey method was followed. Four schools of Tufanganj-II block of Coochbehar district were selected of which two were primary schools, one was upper primary school, and another was madhyamik siksha kendra. Of the selected schools, Rasikbill Forest Basti 5th Plan Primary School, and Rsikbill Madhyamik Siksha Kendra fall in Mahishkuchi-II Gram Panchayat, and Baroshalbari Bochamari Special Cadre Primary School, and Dakshin Changtimari Junior High School fall in Shalbari-II Gram Panchayat of the selected block of the district. In case of the primary schools, all classes (I—IV) were covered, and in case of upper primary or madhyamik siksha kendra, all classes (V—VIII) were covered. 16 students were selected from each school purposively with 50% boys and 50% girls, taking two boys and two girls from each class. Four teachers from each school, and four guardians from each school area were consulted. All the information were collected through an expert validated interview schedule.

Major Findings

The feelings of the ST students about their problems were cross-checked with those of the teachers and the guardians, and accordingly the findings of the study may be presented as below----

Institutional

- 1) Teachers are not always sympathetic towards the ST students.
- 2) Textbooks are not received in time.
- 3) Boys' or girls' hostels are not there.
- 4) Ashrama school or residential educational complex is absent.
- 5) Most of the students are first generation learners.
- 6) No textbook or reference book was found in tribal dialects at lower primary level.
- 7) Teacher-orientation on tribal culture is not done.
- 8) The ST students cannot understand the language of the teachers properly.

Financial

- 9) No stipend or scholarship is received by the MSK students except book grant.
- 10) The received amount is used for other purpose in the family.
- 11) Some students come to school half-fed.
- 12) The ST students have to help their parents in earning.

- 13) Most of the guardians depend on small land, forest, etc.
- 14) Education loan facility is not available.
- 15) The guardians have not heard about AMSY & NSTFDC.

Social

- 16) Some old practices and beliefs hamper their education.
- 17) Early marriage hinders the education of the ST girls.
- 18) Drunkenness of some guardians pollutes the academic atmosphere at their home.
- 19) The guardians are not aware of the need of education.
- 20) Adjustment problem is found in some cases due to low caste, and low income.

However, there are some positive points which may be presented as-----

- a) The infrastructure is congenial under SSA.
- b) The ST teachers are there in ST areas.
- c) Language problem is not acute.
- d) The areas are not inaccessible.
- e) Earning a square meal is not a problem for the majority.
- f) Teaching-learning materials are available.
- g) Arrangement of mid-day meal is there.
- h) Free textbooks, uniforms, stipends, and scholarships are there.
- i) The other category students mix freely with the ST students.
- j) Tuition fee is exempted.
- k) They are getting the benefit of Micro Credit Finance (MCF).

Educational Implication

In spite of the constitutional guarantees and persistent efforts of the Government of India, tribal communities are lagging behind the general population in education. But there should be an educational system that will take the society towards its cherished goal of egalitarianism. So the upliftment of the tribals through the present system of education is an urgent need; and the present study may help in setting an example of a district where all people are almost equally educated and benefitted. The problems faced by the ST students of Coochbehar district may be almost same as faced by the ST students of the other states or districts of the country which should be checked.

Conclusion

Only the constitutional provisions and the Government programmes would not suffice to address the problems faced by the ST students of the district as well as of the country. The teachers' own behavioural example would be most effective and powerful to the ST students. The other staff should also ensure non-discrimination between STs and non-STs. Frequent meetings between the staff, school teachers and parents should be arranged for them regarding their wards' education. Brainstorming of the guardians in this regard is extremely essential. The present type of studies may be conducted in other districts of West Bengal and also of other states of the country, especially where the ST population concentrates.

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