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ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF TRIBAL CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN NORTH EAST STATES

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the paper is to study the issues and concerns of tribal children education in North east States of India. There are about 645 such tribal communities in India and about 145 tribal groups are living in North East States of which 78 are large and the rest small comprising 22.81% of northeast population. The tribal population constitutes a majority in the Northeast States. Mizoram is the largest tribal populated state in India with 94.46% followed by Nagaland 89.15%, Meghalaya 85.94%, Arunachal Pradesh 64.22%, Manipur 34.20%, Tripura 31.05%, Sikkim 20.60% and Assam 12.41%. The age group of 6-14 years of ST children in the country constitutes 8.95%. In case of North East States the school age group of 6-14 years of ST children constitutes 2.14 million (1.5 million boys, and 1.4 million girls) which constitutes (28%) in the same age of all children (7.48 million) as on 2007.

There are some barriers for spreading out education in tribal community of the society. This situation deals with the physical as well as socio-economical obstacles of north eastern part of India.

INTRODUCTION:

The Scheduled tribe population constitutes one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups in India. Tribal people are said to be original inhabitants of the country, they are called as adivasis, meaning indigenous people. There are about 645 such tribal communities in India and about 145 tribal groups are living in North East States of which 78 are large and the rest small comprising 22.81% of northeast population. According to the 2001 census, the total population of eight north eastern states, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim was 37.77 million out of which tribal population constituted 8.43 million (22%) and it has been estimated to increase further to 11.2 million (26%) in 42.2 million NE population in 2007 as per data projected by MHRD. In 2007, NE states contributed ST population 12.33 percent to the 91.7 million tribal population of the country. The tribal population constitutes a majority in the Northeast States.

Mizoram is the largest tribal populated state in India with 94.46% followed by Nagaland 89.15%, Meghalaya 85.94%, Arunachal Pradesh 64.22%, Manipur 34.20%, Tripura 31.05%, Sikkim 20.60% and Assam 12.41%.

In contrast to the national picture of tribal literacy rate, the north east states show a quite different trend. The literacy rate for tribal population is highest in Mizoram followed by Sikkim and Nagaland. The average literacy rate of tribal people of NE states is also higher than national average of tribal literacy. It is to be noted that tribal women literacy rate is also significantly higher in Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland.

North East States Rate as Per 2001 Census

Sr. No	Name of State	Total Population (Including ST)			ST Population			Gap Between ST & All People
		Total Population	Male	Female	Total Population	Male	Female	
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	54.0	63.8	43.5	37.04	47.66	26.11	-07.26
2.	Assam	63.3	71.3	54.6	62.52	72.34	52.44	-0.78
3.	Manipur	70.5	80.3	60.5	65.85	73.16	58.42	-4.65
4.	Meghalaya	62.6	65.4	59.6	61.34	63.44	59.20	-1.26
5.	Mizoram	88.8	90.7	86.7	89.34	91.71	86.95	+0.59
6.	Nagaland	66.6	71.2	61.5	65.95	70.26	61.25	-0.65
7.	Sikkim	68.8	76.0	60.4	67.14	73.81	60.16	-1.66
8.	Tripura	73.2	81.0	64.9	56.48	67.97	44.60	-16.72
9.	NE States	68.4	66.9	56.0	63.2	64.0	52.8	-5.2
10.	India	64.84	75.26	53.67	47.10	59.17	34.76	-17.74

Educational development for the tribals is the gate way to all the developmental achievements. Education has been perceived as the main instrument not only for economic advancement but an upward mobility and status equalization for all disadvantaged groups. In reality, most of the tribal communities in India in general and North East in particular have not taken the advantage of education satisfactorily to transform to modernity. Of course, there are valid reasons, both internal and external. The Indian constitution has specially identified tribal as weaker section of society and has made provision to check their exploitation and further their uplifting. Under the direction of Article 46 of the Constitution government is committed to promote with special care the educational as well s economic interest of the weaker sections of people in general and of the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in particular. Realising the scheduled tribes are one of the most deprived and marginalize groups with respect to education host of programmes and special incentives have been introduced expecting tribals can catch with their non-tribal counterparts. In spite of several initiatives launched by the central and state governments for the educational programmes since Independence, tribal population still lag behind their non-tribal counterparts with respect to access to schools, enrolment and completion. In this contest the newly enacted Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009 has acquired great importance. The main spirit behind the RTE Act is that it does not only perceive education as a vital importance for every human life but it also conceives education as a prerequisite for realization of human right. The RTE Act 2009 aims to ensure eight years schooling within five years to all 8.5 million out school children which largely includes disadvantaged mrginalized sections including ST children. For the first time in India's history, children will be guaranteed their right to quality elementary education by the State. With the enactment of RTE Act 2009, India has joined with few countries in the world which have such a national provision to ensure eight years 'Education for All' children.

Children in Age Group 6-14 in NE States: 2007

Sr. No	Name of State	6-10 Age All Children	11-14 Age All Children	6-10 Age ST Children	11-14 Age ST Children
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	140000	77000	95000 (67.8%)	52000 (67.5%)
2.	Assam	3234000	2008000	464000 (14%)	258000 (12%)
3.	Manipur	214000	141000	81000 (37%)	50000 (35%)
4.	Meghalaya	295000	175000	260000 (88%)	153000 (87%)
5.	Mizoram	90000	62000	87000 (96%)	60000 (96%)
6.	Nagaland	238000	150000	216000 (91%)	137000 (91%)
7.	Sikkim	56000	42000	12000 (21%)	9000 (21%)
8.	Tripura	328000	234000	128000 (39%)	79000 (33%)
9.	NE States	4595000	2889000	1343000 (47%)	798000 (27%)
10.	NE States 6-14 Age group	7484000		2141000 (28%)	
11.	India	118864000	73279000	10992000 (9.2%)	6220000 (5.23%)
12.	India 6-14 age	192143000	17212000 (8.25%)		

Source: Statistics of School Education, MHRD P. DE-121

There are 17.2 million ST children (10.99 million in 6-10 years and 6.22 million in 11-14 years) out of the total population of about 192.4 million in the country as on 2007. Hence the age group of 6-14 years of ST children in the country constitutes 8.95%. In case of North East States the school age group of 6-14 years of ST children constitutes 2.14 million (1.5 million boys, and 1.4 million girls) which constitutes (28%) in the same age of all children (7.48 million) as on 2007.

Enrolment of Tribal children in School 2007-08

Sr. No	Name of State	% of ST Children I-V			% of ST Children VI-VIII			ST Children I-VIII
		Total Population	Male	Female	Total Population	Male	Female	
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	77.4 (178144)	51.4	48.6	71.7 (56865)	59.9	48.1	235009
2.	Assam	18.0 (631220)	50.2	49.2	13.9 (257232)	51.1	48.9	888452
3.	Manipur	45.2 (159497)	51.4	48.6	35.5 (43952)	52.2	47.8	203449
4.	Meghalaya	108.7 (396213)	49.8	50.2	65.6 (105490)	47.4	52.6	501703
5.	Mizoram	120.9 (70892)	51.4	48.6	63 (56214)	50.9	52.6	501703
6.	Nagaland	93.3 (251777)	50.7	49.3	94.7 (11095)	51.4	48.6	262872
7.	Sikkim	36.7 (31968)	50.5	49.5	34.7 (11843)	44.3	55.7	43811
8.	Tripura	42.1 (195758)	52.2	47.8	32.0 (66908)	54.2	45.8	235009
9.	NE States	1915469			609599			2497411
10.	India	14682652			4715888			19398540

It is to be noted that about 2.5 million (1.86 million at Primary stage and 0.71 million upper primary stage) children are attending school during 2007-08 (Selected Educational Statistics 2-007-08) Three states in which majority are tribal have attained above 90 ST percent enrolment at elementary level, Meghalaya (93.08%), Mizoram (99.24%) and Nagaland (93.75%). Arunachal Pradesh has 72.7%

Sikkim 36.7% and Tripura 38.67%. Enrolment percentage of ST children in schools raised higher to the population percentage in all eight north east states. This high enrolment of ST children in schools in North East States has been on account of wide scale government efforts to universalize education and a growing demand among the tribal communities. A few initiatives which impacted positively are worth mentioning here. Elementary education is made free with provision of free text books, free uniforms and free midday meal have impacted. Similarly other factors like matrilineal society and Christianity have motivated the people to pursue education. The tribal society in general characterized by lack of discrimination against women and tribal women participate in all spheres of economic and social lives. This is particularly true among the matrilineal tribal groups in the North East states of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Despite this it is also observed that North East States have also shows lower promotion rate to the next grade than the average of all Indian states 84.50 percent in I-V classes. Arunachal Pradesh 77.50, Manipur 78.30%, Meghalaya 73.90, Nagaland 72.70% in 2007-08.

RTE Act 2009:

The RTE Act 2009 envisages that each child must have access to a neighborhood school within three years from the time of notification of the Act that is by 31 March 2013. The act addresses concern for the quality education by prescribing minimum infrastructural quality through a mandatory schedule which specifies minimum norms for classrooms. Libraries, teaching-learning materials, separate toilet for boys and girls, drinking water and playground are basic requirements.. It also specifies norms for the minimum pupil teacher ratio, number of hour of teaching per week and for the year.

Universalizing Access:

Provision of schools availability within accessible distance has been relatively poor for the tribal children as compared to the non-tribal population. Most of the predominantly tribal populated habitations are bereft of basic infrastructural facilities like transport and communication. It is found that large number of tribal children is still at distant to attain equitable educational access. Equal educational opportunity in elementary education has not been achieved even in terms of access and survival. One of the challenges in providing education to tribal children is with respect to setting up schooling facilities in small, scattered and remote tribal habitations. The majority of the scheduled tribes live sparsely populated habitations in interior and inaccessible hilly and forest areas. 87.39 percent of schools imparting elementary education in India are located in rural areas in 2007-08. In case of North East States, the percentage of rural schools is even much higher, Arunachal Pradesh 93.39%, Assam 94.15%, Meghalaya 93.36%, Sikkim 95.83%, Tripura 93.39%, Mizoram 69.92%. Rural Tribal schools are ranked at the bottom interms of quality infrastrural facilities and human resources. It has also been serious concern that every second school in Arunachal Pradesh and every fourth school in Assam is a single teacher school where as Manipur 11.42%, Meghalaya 13.86% schools have single teacher schools.

In Assam, habitations having 300 or above populations and 500 and above populations are yet to have hundred percent coverage by one primary school and one UP school respectively. It means that the children in around 12 % of the habitations do not have primary schools in easy walking distance; while in around 10 percent of the habitations, children do not have easy access to Upper Primary schools. The percentage of habitations having primary school (44.48%) within the habitations was less than the national average (60.19) in 2002. Interms of the percentage of populaton having access to primary level schooling facilities Scheduled tribe (ST) population seems to be in a disadvantaged

situation compared to the average population in non-ST dominated habitations. The gap between educational facilities in the tribal and non-tribal has also been considerable. The gap is both quantitative and qualitative as well.

Higher Drop Out Rate among Tribal Children than Non-Tribal

It is to be noted that all North East States have attained higher enrolment of tribal children but they have shown poor progress in terms of reduction in drop out. The rate of drop out is found very high in the elementary schooling, which indicates that the educational system has failed to cater to the specific needs of tribal students. The drop outs rates for both boys and girls increase sharply as their educational level increases. However, as the level of education increases the gender gap becomes much more pronounced among the tribal groups.

Drop Out Rates in NE States 2007-08

Sr. No	Name of State	% All Category Students (Including ST students)			% ST Students I-VIII			Gap in Between ST & all Categories
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1.	Arunachal Pradesh	48.09	47.87	47.99	51.08	50.02	50.60	-2.03
2.	Assam	69.73	68.81	69.30	78.89	74.64	77.11	-7.92
3.	Manipur	41.03	42.88	41.93	62.64	65.37	63.95	-22.02
4.	Meghalaya	62.51	58.34	60.43	57.74	60.26	60.26	-0.17
5.	Mizoram	64.26	61.06	62.75	61.46	63.16	63.16	0.21
6.	Nagaland	46.84	46.44	46.65	35.50	37.47	37.47	-9.18
7.	Sikkim	68.13	61.65	64.93	53.33	37.54	45.03	-19.0
8.	Tripura	55.33	54.15	54.77	65.23	67.50	66.30	11.53
9.	NE States	56.99	55.15	56.09	58.10	49.10	57.92	-1.83
10.	India	43.72	41.34	42.68	62.62	62.31	62.48	-19.8

Source: Statistics of School Education, 2007-08, MHRD PP. D-101, D. 103

In tribal majority states Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, ST children drop out rate in classes I-VIII is higher but marginal as compared to all category of children. Within ST Children, girls drop out rate in classes I-VIII is again lower than boys in Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram and Sikkim. In case of Meghalaya girls dropout rate lower to boys by 2.34 points at I-V level and 1.28 points at VI-VIII level.

It is to be noted that drop out rate for ST students in classes I-VIII is higher 57.92 per cent in NE states as compared to national average 42.68%. Similarly the drop rate for all category students in classes I-VIII is also remain higher 56.09% in NE states as compared to national average 42.68%. Though there is lesser social and gender disparity in drop out rates in classes I-VIII within tribal majority states like Mizoram, Nagland, Meghalaya but dropout rate remain alarmingly high in states like Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and they have much higher dropout rate of ST children of national average 62.48%.

The Annual Status of Education Report, ASER 2010 prepared by Pratham, an NGO has also shown that the percentage of drop out for all students between 6 to 14 years of age in Assam and Meghalaya is higher than the national average. While the national average is 3.5%, the percentage for Assam and Meghalaya is 5% and 7.2% respectively. On the other hand, the percentage for the other

states is 2.5 for Arunachal Pradesh, 1.8 for Manipur, 2.2 for Mizoram and Nagaland and 1.9 for Sikkim.

Quality Improvement:

As per the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2010 over 50 per cent of students in class III cannot read class I level textbook and over 30 per cent of Class V children cannot comprehend what is written in class II syllabus in their own language. The report further revealed that almost 60 per cent of students studying in class V in both government and public schools in the state do not know the art of division in arithmetic, while almost 20 per cent pupils in class III are unable to even recognize numbers. Revealing more, only 45.5 per cent of schools in the Assam state have playgrounds, 23.9 Per cent have drinking water facility, 27.4 per cent “usable toilets” including 15.9 for girls and 59.4 have kitchens for cooking (mid day meals). However, the high drop-rate in schools here continues to be a large looming plague. Most of the states hardly address the issues related to teachers’ attitudes. Medium of instruction, textbooks and materials, and pedagogy and teaching-learning process in tribal areas.

School Buildings:

Schools in North East States operate in significant percentage either in partially pucca buildings or kachcha buildings. The percentage of school having partially pucca buildings is high. The percentage is as high as 74.60% in Mizoram, 57.89% in Nagaland, 46.11% in Meghalaya, 22.21 in Assam, 36.69 in Arunachal Pradesh and 13.99% in Tripura,. Similarly, the percentage of Kachcha buildings is also high. The number of kachcha buildings is significant in the states of Arunachal Pradesh with 34.75%, Assam 32.65%, Manipur 40.83%, Meghalaya 13.87%, Mizoram 11.38%, Nagaland 20.55%, Sikkim 9.24% and Tripura 8.90%. The majority of primary school classrooms in the NE states needed major and minor repairs a percentage of good condition classrooms in the region is comparatively low.

The Assam state has only one-third of the total schools housed in Pucca buildings and only 29.92 percent (lowest among all the states) of the classrooms identified as having good condition. compared to the all India percentage of 72.98% Further, 30 per cent of the schools are single-classroom ones in the state as compare to the average of 9 per cent for all the states in the country. The situation is worse in the rural areas with 57.88 per cent single-classroom schools. The average number of teachers in Assam is three against the all India average of schools, against the norm of at least seven teachers; the state has shortage of teachers. Coupled with this, the quality of teachers is yet another major problem for the state. Fifty per cent of the teachers in government school in the state are without any professional training. The corresponding figure for national level is only 14 per cent.

School Library:

Availability of library in the schools also exhibits a more alarming situation in North east States. Around 93.6% schools in Mizoram, 78% schools in Meghalaya, 90.8% schools in Manipur, 87% schools in Arunachal Pradesh, 55.9% schools in Sikkim and 86.7% schools in Nagaland do not have libraries to fulfill the criteria of the Right to Education Act 2009.

Drinking Water:

Availability of drinking water in the school is the most essential facility that every school should have as per RTE Act norms. 87 out of 100 schools have drinking water facility overall in India. (2007-08). Where as ASWER report 2010 shows that 56.9% schools in Nagaland, 47.3% schools in Mizoram, 70.6% schools in Meghalaya, 84.6% schools in Manipur, .9% schools in Arunachal Pradesh and 11.6% in Sikkim

do not have drinking facility.

School Sanitation:

Similarly, 65 out of 100 schools have common toilets in India, however only twenty five out of hundred schools in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam have this facility. Fifty-four out hundred schools have separate toilets for girls in the country whereas, on average, only one in nine schools in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur have separate toilets.

Trained Teachers:

Children have the right to have at least one qualified and trained teacher for every 30 pupils. Currently, the national average is about one teacher to every 34 students. In case of India, about 78% of the total teachers at elementary level possess one or the other professional qualification. In case of the North Eastern States majority of regular teachers are yet to attain professional qualification. There is shortage of qualified and trained teachers in all North East States. Professionally qualified teachers are Arunachal Pradesh 27.78%, Assam 37.23%, Manipur 27.86%, Meghalaya 29.54%, Mizoram 56.62%, Tripura 40.25% as DISE in 2007-08. This has resulted considerable number of teachers recruited from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa who have a little familiarity with languages and culture of the tribal children thereby remaining distinct as a non tribal teachers.

Learning Language:

Children from ethno-linguistic minorities attending school in unfamiliar languages not only perform poorly but are bound to drop out. This is a significant challenge for the Right to Education Act 2009. Since the tribal languages are distinctly different from the medium of instruction in schools (which is usually the respective State language) tribal children often find it extremely difficult to cope with their studies and homework. Except in the case of a very few tribal languages like Bodo, Khasi, education in tribal languages has not imparted so far in spite of the constitutional obligation of providing primary education in ones mother tongue. The content of the syllabus is also alien and since the textbook do not contain anything pertaining to their society and culture, they fail to create and sustain interest among the tribal children. The urban based mainstream oriented textbooks also create in tribal learners a negative attitude towards themselves and their culture. Tribal children face problems wherever teachers do not speak their dialect at all. This lack of language skills is as a serious impediment when the teacher is a non tribal and makes no effort to link the two linguistic experiences for the child. Lack of education through tribal languages is found responsible for tribal learner's poor reading ability.

The School Experience:

Tribal children's school experience is an important variable which determines whether the child continues to be in school or decided to drop out. Though all students face one or the other problems but certain difficulties are peculiar to tribal children. The experience of tribal children at school range from discrimination to a sense of complete alienation. Students encounter a series of obstacles including abuses and discrimination from teachers and fellow students from non-tribal background. Ideally, the school teacher must play a vital role in supporting the hurdles of first generation learners. But the teachers are often found to question the educability of tribal children. Schools as institutions and teachers as critical agents have remained fundamentally unchanged, the school atmosphere has not

always become conducive to accept and retain these children in schools. Teachers have preconceived notions about the uneducability of students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds and often make use of their family business, native place, mother tongue as a tool to make insulting remark about children and their communities. Due to such discrimination, children hesitate to join activities, develop low self esteem and leave school.

Measures for Improvements:

An increasing number of researches strongly advocate the use of the mother tongue or home language as media of instruction in early stages of education. This assumes great significance in the context of education of tribal children because their mother tongue is often quite distinct from the prominent languages in the state or regional languages. From the perspective of language, it is desirable to have a local teacher bilingual or multi-lingual schooling in view of its positive consequences for cognitive development and social interaction processes, it would need special treatment for tribal children to be able to cope. The present effort of the government to bring these children into formal school fails at two levels; firstly, because it is not able to enroll all tribal children and provide them access to good quality functional schools. The government has started providing alternative schools run by untrained inadequately educated local youth (para-teachers) also leading substandard education given out to those who are already marginalized. Secondly, for such marginalized tribal children access to education is not simply enough, the government has to take a proactive role in creating school environment which will treat tribal children with dignity and respect. There is as much scope for creative and constructive educational programme that will not leave them marginalized society; one's their culture, where they no longer are invisible people.

There is an immediate need for improvement of physical infrastructure in all schools in the remote north east tribal regions. This scenario can be beneficial for the change in perceptions and out looks of the teachers where as a result the tribal student may be benefited. The presence of tribal teachers, especially from the same community, it will believe that the teachers will understand the problem of the tribal children and their psychological problems may be solved out.

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