

Socio-Political Analysis of the School Dropouts among 'Paniya' Children in Wayanad

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Abstract

The development of education during the post independence period has been conditioned by the natural goals and its aspirations are enshrined in our constitution. Several committees and commissions were formed to increase the educational status of the nation. A large number of educational institutions were started in rural and tribal areas for the spreading of education especially among the Scheduled Tribes. Compared to the general education level, the status of tribal education is still far below. Art. 45 of the constitution of India stipulated as, "the state shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they attained the age of fourteen years. A number of schemes and incentives such as scholarship, free residential facilities, free books, and above all, reservation of seats in educational institutions, were introduced and implemented. Even though the above facilities were provided by the government for the scheduled tribe, their problems are still continuing.

KEYWORDS: Paniya community, Adiya community School dropouts, Wayanadu, Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes.

Introduction

School dropout is one of the major social problems in India. India spends just 3.5 % of its GDP on education, way below China's 8%. While 96 % of Indian students are enrolled in primary schools, 40% are dropped by the age of ten.

Dropout rate is very high among the tribal's, especially in Paniyas. The poverty of tribal people doesn't permit them to keep clan their home environment. They don't get nutritious food, so tribal children fall ill. The parents could not treat them timely due to economic scarcity. So they suffer a long period. During suffering the children remains absent from school and after recovering from illness he loses his appetite for study.

India, due to its diverse ecosystem, has a wide variety of tribal population. Tribal people constitute 8.14% of the total population of the country, numbering 83.51 million (2001 Census). There are 697 tribes notified by the Central Government under article 342 of the Indian Constitution with certain tribes being notified in more than one state.

There are thirty five tribal communities in Kerala. Among them, 'Paniya' forms the majority; the 'Paniya' and 'Adiya' communities in Wayanad district are very backward and most of them are land-less agricultural labours. Among the districts of Kerala, Wayanad has the highest tribal population followed by Idukki and Palakkad districts. 'Paniya' tribes are seen in Wayanad, Kerala, Mysore and Kodagu districts of Karnataka and Nilgiris districts of Tamil Nadu.

FACTORS AFFECTING TRIBAL EDUCATION

A tribe is a group of people comprising families, or alone, or having its own customs, occupying a specific geographic territory and being independent of or having little contact with the dominant national society of the country in which they live. Tribals of India resides in such a territory, which is marked by presence of hills, forests, islands, mountains, seacoasts etc. Therefore some scholars consider tribe as a territorial group. Official definition of 'scheduled tribes' is '*indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with community at large and bad awareness*'.

According to Article 342 of the Indian constitution, tribal is entitled to have development benefits. There are several issues regarding the dropouts of 'Paniya' school children in Wayanad. Tribals in Wayanad have to face a number of problems due to their isolated residence situated in remote areas. But they are closely and emotionally related to their land and forests. They accepted outsiders in their territory which created more problem than benefits to them. The tribals are the children of nature and their lifestyle is conditioned by the eco-system. Unrealistic educational aspirations of parents, social and geographical isolation, broken family environment, poverty and misery, rigid customs and rituals, bilingualism etc., are identified as several causes for the hindrance of tribal education.

The level of education is often viewed as an indicator of the development of any country. Earlier, the welfare activities in the state for tribals were mostly concentrated on educational programmes. A number of schemes and incentives such as scholarship, free residential facilities, free books, and above all reservation of seats in educational institutions were introduced and implemented. These facilities are provided by the government to the scheduled tribes (ST) but their problem still continuing.

The following are the main reasons for the low level of education and dropout among tribes:

1. Nature of Habitat

Most of the tribal villages are scattered. This entails long and tiresome travels to attend schools every day. A study made by ST development department revealed that nearly 10 % of the tribal habitats are very remote and lack even primary school facility within a radius of 2 Km. However, the school facilities in primitive tribal areas are poor; 71.95% of the primitive tribal groups are lacking school facilities within 1 Km area. The social and economic conditions prevailing in the tribal settlements are not conducive for better education. Lack of sufficient educational institutions in tribal areas, poverty, inability to catch the children from pre-primary level, lack of nutritional and health care programmes, poor enrolment and dropout from higher education etc., curtail the effective educational development among Scheduled Tribes.

2. Social Factors

Formal education has not been necessary for the members of tribal societies to discharge their social obligations. There is still a widespread feeling among the tribes that education makes their boys defiant and insolent. This feeling alienates them from the rest of the society, while their girls turn modern or astray. Besides, some of their superstitions and myths also play their part.

3. Economic Factors

Most of the tribal people are living in poverty; it is not easy for most of them to send their children to school and still manage their living.

4. Lack of Interest in Formal Education

In many states, tribal children are taught using the same books which from the curriculum of non-tribal children of the urban and rural areas of the rest of the state. Obviously, the content of such books rarely appeals to the tribal children who come from different cultural backgrounds. Under the traditional tribal set up, a child enters adulthood with confidence. He knows his environment thoroughly, knows how to construct his own house, cultivate his field, weave his cloth; in short he acquires all the skills to lead a reasonably comfortable life within the limitations of his culture. The simple skill of reading and writing acquired from a formal school is no match for this. A suggestion here is that certain tribal activities like agriculture, dancing, hunting, tribal games and archery must be allowed to find fullest expression in the extra-curricular activities of the school, thus providing some continuity of the traditional values.

5. Lack of Suitable Teachers

Lack of suitable teachers is one of the major reasons for the slow growth of education in tribal areas. Most of the teachers employed for imparting education to the tribal children show little appreciation of tribal way of life and value system. They approach tribal people with a sense of superiority and treat them as 'savage and uncivilized' and hence fail to establish proper rapport with their students.

6. Number of Teachers

Most of the primary schools in tribal areas are single teacher managed ones. The presence of the teacher in the school is more an exception than rule. The enthusiasm of tribal people in the education of their children also depends considerably on the timing of school hours in different seasons. Most of the cases, it clashes with their important socio-economic activities.

7. Family Environment

Surroundings or environment is one of the important factors that influence the development of a person, particularly in educational development. Most of the tribal parents are farmers and labours; they have a little knowledge relating to modern world and modern environment. And most of the tribal parents are

addicts to alcoholic and tobacco items that create mental and economic problems in them. This unhealthy family atmosphere affects the children to a great extent and this leads to their poor performance in the class which finally results in their dropouts from school.

8. Bilingualism

Communication is one of the key factors affecting the development of tribal education. The language of the 'Paniya' tribe is a blend of Malayalam, Tamil and Kannada. The understanding of such a complicated tribal language is very difficult for the society and particularly for teachers. Owing to isolation, tribes are facing problems for expressing their ideas in modern and regional languages. So the tribal students often face problems for discussing their ideas and clearing their doubts with teachers.

9. The delay of funds

In Indian system, the funds will reach the stakeholders through a number of hands. Owing to red-tapism and other non-mentionable reasons, the tribal students may not be able to receive their financial supports in time. Even if they prefer to stay in tribal hostels, the lack of well-equipped tribal hostels limits their dreams. Such delays create problems to them which finally encourage them to attend other earning daily jobs quitting schools. The respective authorities need to be responsible for providing funds at right time at right hand.

10. Attitude of other students

The inferior performance of the tribal students in the general evaluation processes of the school causes their intellectual isolation from the majority of general students. The non-cooperating peers mentally isolate them and this leads to their rethinking whether this education must be continued or not. The success of tribal education will be completed only if kind and supportive cooperation from the peers is received.

11. Health Issues

There are diseases such as 'sickle cell anemia' which affects the tribal community. Such diseases keep them away from schools for prolonged time for treatments. Ultimately this disrupts their overall schooling process.

SUGGESTIONS

Education is the most effective instrument for ensuring equality of opportunity. Keeping this in view, the Government has been making several efforts to educate them by extending special educational facilities and reservation of seats in educational institutions. But the development of education is one of the important problems in the case of tribes. For solving this problem certain suggestions can be made.

1. Government can take measures to increase the awareness of the parents of the tribal children regarding the importance of education and proper utilization of existing educational facilities to tribal children.
2. Vocational institutions should be implemented for the tribal students for creation of new avenues.
3. The attitude of the tribal children towards education and the attitude of the teachers towards tribal education should be improved through proper counseling and guidance.
4. Educated tribal youth should be recruited as teachers and posted in tribal areas.
5. Establish separate residential schools for each tribal area and extended up to UG level.
6. Residential facilities with all amenities should be provided to teachers and other staff engaged in tribal education.
7. The authorities must ensure the effective participation of tribal parents in PTA.
8. Well-qualified and well-placed alumni of the tribal schools may be invited to the schools to share their experiences with the tribal students.
9. Study facilities can be provided to tribal children at correct time.
10. Regular attendance of the tribal children in the school can be ensured by giving extra incentives to the students. Students fulfilling attendance requirements of the school can be acknowledged by giving cash awards.
11. Higher level officials should check the functioning of the schools frequently relating to the teaching methods, working hours, days of the school and attendance registers.

CONCLUSION

Equal opportunities to all' is the basis of all democracies and education is one of the strongest tools for empowering any weaker section of the society. Higher rate of school dropouts among tribes depends on certain factors. Illiteracy of parents is the major reason for dropout, because illiterate parents, being unaware of the importance of education, prefer their children to go for daily jobs and earn the living rather than going to school. Parents have no personal contact with school teachers for improving the educational performance of tribal children. The tribal hostels do not promote the educational performance of children. The government should ensure the effective functioning of tribal hostels. This will help to reduce dropouts among tribal children. The awareness of the tribal children regarding the benefits of education can be increased by their interactions with the well-placed tribal alumni and the ill-attitude of the tribal parents towards the education of their children can be rectified by their active participations in parent-teachers association. This dual action can be considered to serve as a major tool for effectively reducing the school dropouts of 'Paniya' tribe in Wayanad district, Kerala.

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