# Towards Inclusive Education in Tribal Areas of Odisha
## An Empirical Analysis

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**Abstract**

*This paper re-examines the linkages between tribal literacy, constraints for inclusive education, and socio-economic and cultural development of the tribal society in India. Using an analytical survey of 640 households, the study empirically evaluates the factors responsible for the low literacy rates and analyses various constraints and opportunities for accessing primary education among the tribal population of Koraput district in the state of Odisha in India. The paper argues that the lack of essential infrastructure and inadequate educational incentives has significantly impacted the quality of teaching and education in the tribal schools of Koraput district. The study concludes that the successful implementation of 'inclusive education' in India involves revamping and restructuring the existing educational system in tribal areas, which calls for framing educational policies that are context-specific, fostering the principles of expansion, inclusion and excellence in the field of education.*



### Introduction

Tribal development in India can be understood from three key perspectives namely, 'isolation model', 'assimilation model' and 'integration model'. Isolation model was initially propagated by British anthropologists and administrators in India.

The British government's policy was solely directed and dominated by the colonial interests based on

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isolation and exploitation of the tribal communities. Hence, acquiring formal education became a difficult task for these tribes. Ghurye (1980) challenged the isolation model and advocated the assimilation model. He argued that the tribes will continue to remain poor socially, economically, educationally and politically if they are not in contact with other people in the society. But, Ghurye's assimilation model was not considered appropriate for the development of tribes because of the tendency of the dominant culture to absorb the marginalised tribal culture and its age-old traditional institutions in the assimilation process. Accepting a new dominant culture would be detrimental to the tribe's indigenous culture. As a result, many contemporary scholars advocated the integration of indigenous tribal culture with modern culture. 'Integration model' allows for only positive intervention of the dominant modern culture, thus protecting the core culture and institutions of the tribes.

The formal education system in India has unfortunately not factored the 'inclusive' elements while designing the course curriculum for tribal education. Even after many years of independence, the builders of modern India have not been able to provide tribal population an appropriate inclusive educational pattern conducive to tribal development. Although the constitutional provisions are designed and aimed to safeguard the interest and welfare of the tribal communities, tribal marginalisation continues as the measures are either underutilised or inefficiently implemented (Xaxa, 2014). Rupavath (2016) suggests that tribal education in India must be viewed as a 'perspective from below', which allows critical enquiry and initiatives for greater participation by tribal communities. He emphasises that the local people should be considered as the key stakeholders and consulted for planning educational provisions (Rupavath, 2016).

## Educational Situation of Scheduled Tribes in Odisha

Census data (2011) reveal that Odisha is one of the low ranking states (25th) of India; portraying more than two-fifths of the population as illiterate. The census indicates that literacy rate is only 73.45 per cent in Odisha. Majority of Odisha's poor and marginalised communities are categorised as Scheduled Tribes. These groups are lagging behind in their educational attainment when compared to the general population in terms of enrolment in school, completing their secondary and/or higher education, etc. Table 1 shows the literacy rates of tribal population in Odisha in comparison to the general population.

The overall literacy rate of the STs has increased from 22.3 per cent in

**Table 1**
**Literacy Rate (in per cent) of General Population and ST Population in Odisha during 1991–2011**

| Year | General | | | ST | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ***Male*** | ***Female*** | ***Total*** | ***Male*** | ***Female*** | ***Total*** |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 1991 | 63.09 | 34.68 | 49.09 | 34.4 | 10.2 | 22.3 |
| 2001 | 75.95 | 50.97 | 63.61 | 51.48 | 23.37 | 37.37 |
| 2011 | 82.40 | 64.36 | 73.45 | 63.7 | 41.2 | 52.2 |
| *Shows the gap between the total literacy rates of STs and of the general population | | | | | | |

*Source:* Government of India, Census of India, Odisha, 1991, 2001 and 2011

1991 to 37.4 per cent in 2001, and to 52.2 per cent in 2011. Major tribes such as Gond, Saora, Santal, Munda, Kondh, Shabar, Kolha, Bhottada, Gadaba and Paroja have low literacy rates, reflecting the exclusion of tribal communities in the field of education in Odisha. The gap between the general literacy rate and ST literacy rate in 1991 is 26.8 per cent. However, it has decreased in 2011 to 21.25 per cent. This partly indicates that the efforts of the government to provide education to all have not reached the tribal areas. Among ST males, literacy rate has increased from 34.4 per cent in 1991 to 51.48 per cent in 2001 and to 63.7 per cent in 2011. ST female literacy rate has increased from 10.2 per cent in 1991 to 23.37 per cent in 2001 and to 41.2 per cent in 2011. The ST female literacy was low by approximately 28 percentage points as compared to the overall female literacy of the general population in 2001. It has not reduced significantly and the gap persists as it was only 23.16 per cent in 2011. This reveals the exclusion of tribal women in the field of education in Odisha. The Malkangiri district (undivided Koraput) has the lowest tribal literacy, i.e., only 35.2 per cent and Koraput district has the next lowest ST literacy, i.e., 35.4 per cent. According to the 2011 census, Koraput district ranks 28th among the 30 districts in Odisha with only 49.21 per cent tribal literacy. The tribes of Koraput have relatively low literacy rates when compared to other districts, states or general population. Considering the low educational status and exclusion of tribal communities from the formal educational structure, this paper attempts to make a critical analysis of the challenges of providing inclusive education to the tribes of Koraput district in Odisha.

Inclusive education system can be viewed as a solution to tackle the learning obstacles of the marginalised tribal children. The Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) adopted the principle of

inclusive education and the Dakar World Education Forum (2000) was initiated to reinforce it. Inclusive education system according to them should accommodate all children, irrespective of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic and other conditions. Inclusive education points to the diversity of needs of all learners, particularly the vulnerable learners of any society. It allows for increased participation of the members in the entire learning process and also in the every day activities. Inclusive education as a point of departure from the normal education, requires a gamut of strategies and actions to nurture solidarity and a sense of belongingness among children from diverse backgrounds (Tiwari and Tian, 2017).

## Objectives and Hypotheses

The main objective of this study is to analyse various constraints and opportunities for accessing primary education among the tribal population in Koraput district of Odisha. The sub-objectives include: (i) Studying the factors responsible for the exclusion and concomitant marginalisation of tribal communities in the domain of education; (ii) Studying the factors of low attendance and dropouts in the tribal area of Koraput district in Odisha; and (iii) Assessing the quality of primary education system, and providing suggestions and recommendations to strengthen inclusive education among the tribal population. The study hypothesises that the infrastructure facilities and educational incentives received in the schools of tribal areas are poor which can significantly impact the quality of education in the tribal areas.

## Methodology

Koraput district was selected as the study area because of its high concentration of tribal population and low tribal literacy rate. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources included census reports, survey documents, government records, Gram Panchayat files, local newspapers, etc. Primary data was collected from the village population, which included household members. Multistage sampling technique was used for the selection of households. Koraput district is divided into 14 blocks which fall under two main sub-divisions, namely 'Koraput' and 'Jeypore'. In the first stage, eight blocks out of the total 14 were selected from Koraput district on the basis of stratified random sampling (four each from two sub-divisions viz. Koraput and Jeypore, respectively). The selected blocks included Koraput, Semiliguda, Nandapur, Pottangi, Jeypore, Kundura, Kotpad and Boriguma. In the second stage, the unit of sampling was 'Gram Panchayat'; and hence two Gram Panchayats from each of the eight blocks were selected ($2 \times 8 = 16$), using stratified random sampling

technique, resulting in 16 Gram Panchayats. In the third stage, 'village' was considered as the unit of sampling. From each of the 16 Gram Panchayats, 2 villages were identified ($16 \times 2 = 32$), which resulted in 32 villages. In the fourth and final stage, 'household' was considered as the unit of sampling. From these 32 villages, 20 households ($32 \times 20 = 640$) were selected based on random sampling technique, which resulted in the total of 640 households for the study. The primary sampling unit was the household. Using the survey method, data was collected from one person from each household. It was either the head or any active adult member in the household.

Considering the objectives of the study, an analytical survey was designed to understand the various constraints for providing inclusive education to the tribal children of Koraput district. In the context of this study, 'inclusive education' is defined as that which accommodates the educational and learning needs of all individuals from diverse cultural, social, linguistic, economic backgrounds and conditions. The study was designed to test the association of different variables like association between the contextual syllabus, language of instruction and attendance rate or drop-out rate of tribal students. It also tries to establish the relationship between the available infrastructure and method of teaching with the quality of education. The independent variables namely available infrastructure, medium of instruction and course curriculum were examined in association with the drop-out or attendance rate in class and the concomitant quality of education in tribal areas. The operational definitions of the variables are as follows.

- ***Infrastructure Accessibility***

  We define this variable as access to physical infrastructure namely school building, classroom, playground, library facilities, sanitation facilities, study chairs and tables, study hall, assembly area, sports facilities, etc.

- ***Quality of Teaching***

  It refers to the kind of teaching, which facilitates proper understanding of the subject; and ensures effective application of the theoretical knowledge in the practical world and real life situations. It also refers to the development of communication skills in multiple languages namely tribal dialect, Oriya, Hindi, etc.

- ***Educational Incentives Received***

  It refers to the availability of sufficient number of teachers skilled to teach in tribal languages and availability of teachers with tribal dialect. It also includes conducive-learning environment; healthy snacks; financial rewards for teachers; living quarters for teachers; pedagogy that includes music, plays, skits, dance, puzzles, games, etc.

Scaling methods such as nominal, ordinal and interval scales were used to measure and analyse the responses of respondents besides t-test, co-relation and regression methods. One of the purposes of the study was to understand the gender differences of variables namely—(i) infrastructure accessibility, (ii) quality of teaching, and (iii) educational incentives. So t-test was used for this purpose. Pearson moment correlation has been used to examine the relationship between variables (Table 6) and to check the significant contributions of variables like infrastructure accessibility, and educational incentives received towards the outcome variable, i.e., quality of teaching.

## Major Findings and Discussions

Out of the total 640 respondents, 538 (84.1 per cent) were male and remaining 102 (15.8 per cent) were female. They belonged to eight different communities namely, Gadaba (123 respondents), Paraja (218), Bhatra (63), Amanetya (56), Penthia (42), Bhumia (12), Durua (20) and Kondh (106). Data highlighted that the main occupation of the tribals was agriculture (439 respondents). Other key occupations included wage labour (174 respondents), service holders (14 respondents) and business (13 respondents).

Table 2 shows gender-wise distribution of respondents based on their education level in different villages. Data reveals that 512

**Table 2**
**Respondent's Level of Education**

| Sex | *Number of Respondents* | Education | | | | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *No Formal Education* | *Primary* | *Secondary* | *Higher Education* | |
| Male | Respondents | 423 | 89 | 19 | 7 | 538 |
| | Percentage within gender | 78.6 | 16.5 | 3.5 | 1.3 | 100.0 |
| | Percentage within education | 82.6 | 88.1 | 95.0 | 100.0 | 84.1 |
| Female | Respondents | 89 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 102 |
| | Percentage within gender | 87.3 | 11.8 | 1.0 | 0.0 | 100.0 |
| | Percentage within education | 17.4 | 11.9 | 5.0 | 0.0 | 15.9 |
| Total | Respondents | 512 | 101 | 20 | 7 | 640 |
| | Percentage within gender | 80.0 | 15.8 | 3.1 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | Percentage within education | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Source:* Fieldwork

respondents (80 per cent) have not completed their formal education, 101 respondents (15.8 per cent) have completed their primary education, 20 respondents (3.1 per cent) have completed their secondary education and only 7 respondents (1.1 per cent) have managed to complete their higher education. Only 12 of 102 female respondents had completed primary education, while only 01 respondent had completed secondary education. Multiple factors are responsible for this low educational status of respondents.

The key constraints in accessing and utilising primary education for the tribes of Koraput district include: lack of motivated teachers, disguised dropouts and low attendance in class besides language issues. About 196 respondents (30.63 per cent) state that there is a lack of efficient teachers, who can teach or instruct using tribal language in combination with the dominant regional or alien languages as a medium of instruction at elementary level (Table 3). This is the primary cause for the lack of motivation among tribal students in the class. Findings reveal that language constraint is one of the major factors resulting in high drop-out rate in school at both primary and secondary levels among the tribal children. About 27.8 per cent of the respondents mentioned that the syllabus is unfamiliar for tribal children and their learning process as it does not reflect the tribal folk tales, hunting stories, tribal leaders, agriculture, tribal craft or any of the tribal religious practices, festivals, political organisations, etc. Besides, the data revealed the pre-dominance of disguised dropout, which was rampant in tribal areas at the primary level. Disguised dropout refers to the situation wherein the system conceals the fact that the students are missing from the schools, by manipulating the actual attendance sheet and other formal records. Lack of motivated teachers was also responsible for the poor situation of tribal education in the region. About 155 respondents (24.2 per cent) conveyed that teachers were casual in their approach towards the students.

To overcome the constraints discussed, the use of multiple languages in a single classroom along with the relevant course materials that align with the tribal culture of the area has been proposed. This is believed to reduce the drop-out rate of tribal school children and also aid in increasing their motivation to complete their education. Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) 2019 has prescribed a provision that the mother tongue or regional language should be mandatorily treated as the medium of instruction up to Class V. However, implementing this provision and achieving this in a time-bound period is not clear. There is a need to chalk out an appropriate and practical roadmap to address the issue on an urgent basis. For this to materialise, primarily we must focus on the preparation of course materials up to Class V in

**Table 3**
**Constraints for Learning in Primary Education**

| Gender | | Constraints for Education | | | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | ***Teachers' inefficiency at teaching in tribal language*** | ***Unfamiliar language as medium of instruction*** | ***Course curriculum*** | ***Lack of motivation in teachers*** | ***Improper teaching method*** | ***Lack of infrastructure*** | |
| Male | Respondents | 86 | 71 | 154 | 130 | 64 | 33 | 538 |
| | Percentage within gender | 16.0 | 13.2 | 28.6 | 24.2 | 11.9 | 6.1 | 100.0 |
| | Percentage within 'constraints for learning' | 87.8 | 76.3 | 86.5 | 83.9 | 84.2 | 82.5 | 84.1 |
| Female | Respondents | 12 | 22 | 24 | 25 | 12 | 7 | 102 |
| | Percentage within gender | 11.8 | 21.6 | 23.5 | 24.5 | 11.8 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| | Percentage within 'constraints for learning' | 12.2 | 23.7 | 13.5 | 16.1 | 15.8 | 17.5 | 15.9 |
| Total | Respondents | 98 | 93 | 178 | 155 | 76 | 40 | 640 |
| | Percentage | 15.3 | 14.5 | 27.8 | 24.2 | 11.9 | 6.2 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Source:* Fieldwork

different diversified languages. DNEP must start the programme at grass root level and implement it as early as possible.

Table 4 depicts the mean value and SD of study variables in a sample of 640 respondents. All items were answered using a five point scale (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5), ranging from poor to very good. It is clearly indicated that all the variables do not go over the neutral value, i.e., 3 of the five-point scale. By analysing the means, it is found that the respondents sense a gap in the availability of sufficient infrastructure and educational incentives. Due to lack of educational incentives and infrastructure accessibility, the quality of teaching is also poor. This quantitative information is represented in Figure 1 in the Appendices.

From Table 5, the researchers have derived the following hypotheses:

**($H_1$) :** "The infrastructure facility in the schools of tribal area is poor"— is supported.

**($H_2$) :** "The educational incentives received in the schools of tribal area is poor" — is supported.

Further, an independent sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the mean scores of infrastructure availability, quality of teaching and educational incentives received by the school children according

**Table 4**
**Mean Value and Standard Deviation Analysis**

| Measures | Number of items | Scale's Neutral Value | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure Accessibility | 11 | 33 | 16.44 | 3.89 |
| Quality of Teaching | 13 | 39 | 20.66 | 3.32 |
| Educational Incentives Received | 06 | 18 | 9.47 | 1.28 |

*Source:* Fieldwork

**Table 5**
**Descriptive Statistics and t-test between Study Variables**

| Measures | Gender | | | | t-test for Equality of Means with Degrees of Freedom (DF) 638 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Male (N–538)* | | *Female (N–102)* | | | |
| | *Mean* | *SD* | *Mean* | *SD* | t-value | Sig. |
| Infrastructure Accessibility | 16.43 | 3.92 | 16.45 | 3.74 | –0.04 | 0.97 |
| Quality of Teaching | 20.62 | 3.36 | 20.86 | 3.08 | –0.69 | 0.49 |
| Educational Incentives Received | 9.46 | 1.27 | 9.49 | 1.28 | –0.19 | 0.85 |

*Source:* Fieldwork

to the opinion of male and female respondents (N = 640). It was found that there are no significant differences between the opinions of male and female respondents. Table 5 depicts the mean score, standard deviation and t-value. The mean scores of 'infrastructure accesibility' for males and female participants are 16.43 and 16.45, which indicate that there is no significant difference between males and females regarding infrastructure accesibility in the schools. Table 5 depicts the significant value for this as 0.97, which is quite above the requisite cut-off of 0.05. Insignificant differences are observed in the mean score of quality of teaching and educational incentives received by school children according to the male and female respondents. The t-value for both factors has not reached the significance level of 0.05.

Table 6 demonstrates the correlation among study variables including infrastructure accessibility, quality of teaching and educational incentives received. There is a positive and significant relationship between infrastructure accessibility and quality of teaching ($r = 0.50$, $p = 0.01$), which suggests that higher values of infrastructure accesibility are associated with the higher values of quality of teaching. There was a positive relationship between infrastructure accesibility and educational incentives received ($r = 0.17$, $p = 0.01$), which indicates higher values of infrastructure accesibility are associated with the higher values of educational incentives received. Similar trend has also been reflected in the relationship between quality of teaching and educational incentives received. The relationship of these measures is positive and significant ($r = 0.28$, $p = 0.01$). This means higher values of quality of teaching are associated with the higher values of educational incentives received. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between the three variables.

From the multiple regression analysis (Table 7), the investigators wanted to determine which predictor has significantly contributed to the prediction of quality of teaching. It was found that the 'availability of infrastructure' is a predictor that reports the largest beta coefficient towards quality of teaching ($\beta = 0.47$,

**Table 6**
**Correlation among study variables**

| S.No. | Measures | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Infrastructure Accessibility | 0.79 | | |
| 2. | Quality of Teaching | 0.50** | 0.73 | |
| 3. | Educational Incentives Received | 0.17** | 0.28** | 0.62 |

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level
Values represented in the diagonals are reliability coefficients (Chronbach alpha)

**Table 7**
**Multiple Regression Analysis**

| Predictors | Quality of Teaching | |
|---|---|---|
| | $R^2$ | *B* |
| Availability Infrastructure | 0.29 | 0.47** |
| Educational Incentives Received | | 0.20** |

** Prediction is significant at 0.01 level

p≤0.01). The β value for educational incentives received on quality of teaching suggests that there is a significant correlation between them. It is observed that there is a significant impact of 'availability of infrastructure' on 'quality of teaching'. Similarly, there is a significant impact of 'educational incentives' received on 'quality of teaching'. In the analysis, $R^2$ value is 29, indicative of the 29 per cent of variability in the quality of teaching, which shows that it is low due to poor availability of infrastructure and poor educational incentives received in the schools of tribal areas. In other words, the hypothesis (H3), 'poor infrastructure and poor educational incentives will have a significant impact on the poor quality of education in the schools of tribal areas' is supported.

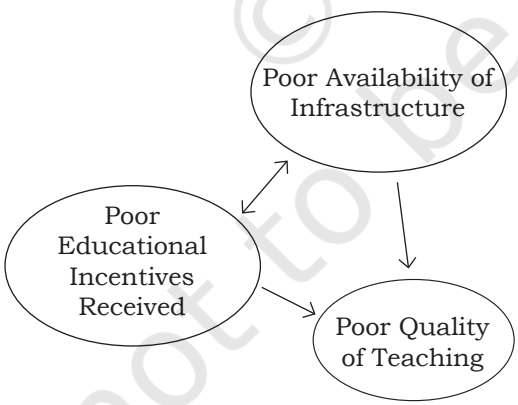


*Fig. 1: Model Analysis*

*Source:* Author's Fieldwork

## Suggestions and Conclusions

The future roadmap of tribal education in India depends upon three issues—'access' (expansion), 'equality' (inclusion) and 'quality' (excellence) of delivering education. The dimension of inclusiveness is important because even today many ST students are excluded from education at all levels due to economic, social and cultural disparities and barriers. The blueprint to reach the final goal of creating an educated community in India depends upon inclusive education that involves revamping and restructuring education in tribal areas particularly. This calls for educational policies that are context-specific and foster the principles of expansion, inclusion and excellence in the field of education. Our study corresponds to Mohanty's (2017) emphasis upon the need to develop a sense of pride in the tribal languages, both among the tribals and other

stakeholders as a development strategy to enhance tribal education. The findings of this study also resonate with Singh's (2016) observation that the involvement of educators, parents, community leaders and the civil society is essential to meet the challenges for creating better and more inclusive schools in India.

Based on our field work, some of the suggestions to enhance the quality of education in tribal areas include:

(i) Appropriate steps should be taken to reduce drop-out rates of schools in the tribal-dominated regions. Due to poverty, tribal families prefer to engage their children as wage labourers to earn for their daily bread rather than sending them to school to gain knowledge. To address this vicious cycle of poverty and illiteracy, viable employment opportunities must be created for the tribal population. Also, the government and NGOs must adopt initiatives to provide the required study materials to the tribal students free of cost for primary and secondary education at the right time.

(ii) There is need to create a healthy and enjoyable learning environment in the schools in the tribal areas. This is possible if the course curriculum reflects tribal life and culture, besides focusing on the dissemination of knowledge and skill development. Teaching pedagogy can be made innovative and interesting with the inclusion of plays, music, songs, skits, dance, puzzles, games, etc. Sports and library facilities should also be provided adequately.

(iii) Skill development programmes should be judiciously combined with the formal education that sustains motivation in learning. Formal education can be attractive and also meaningful for the tribal communities if it addresses the problem of unemployment. Hence, vocational education and skill-based learning, which also includes primitive tribal skills, should be linked with the formal classroom training and activities.

(iv) There should be a rigorous implementation of the capacity-development programmes for all the stakeholders namely, teachers, parents, students, local administrators, etc. The professional skills of teachers and students should be enhanced periodically according to the requirements. The education department can organise various motivational and leadership training programmes for teachers, parents and administrators. It may include training programmes to learn and instruct in tribal language or

dialect; updating knowledge regarding the contextual situation of a particular tribal area for proper implementation of the educational policies, etc. Proper implementation of educational programmes in tribal areas requires greater professionalism, responsibility and accountability. Full involvement and wholehearted participation of all the stakeholders become essential to reap effective and positive results.

(v) Teachers who are the key stakeholders in the process of imparting quality education should be provided with specialised training. Teachers serving in remote tribal areas should have a mandatory exposure to vocational education and local indigenous knowledge system of tribal communities. Incentives such as proper residential facilities within the tribal area, transport facilities, stimulating pay packages, etc., are essential to attract and retain the talented workforce in the tribal-dominated remote regions. There is also a need to address the issue of teachers, absenteeism, especially in the tribal areas. Higher authorities of the education department must seriously monitor the teachers in remote tribal areas by regular inspection. Teachers neglecting their duties must be punished and made accountable.

(vi) There is a greater need to create a growing consciousness among the stakeholders of the society at large regarding tribal education. The government should work in partnership with NGOs, civil societies, educators, social activists, youth of the country, bureaucrats, etc., to provide access to formal education of good quality to all the tribal children of the country. Educational programmes can be implemented effectively through interventions by the civil society at a macro level. Civil societies, teaching community, youth, politicians, etc., in the mainstream societies must be empathetic towards the tribal population in their struggle to access formal education. Right guidance, timely assistance and moral support by the society at large, at every step, shall build confidence in the tribal youth and make them self-sufficient. This shall eventually help the tribal population to integrate, fully participate and contribute to the nation's developmental process.

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