

## **Ethnopsychological Perspectives on Education for Adivasi Children in India**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Acknowledgement of heterogeneity of cultural identities figures prominently on the agenda of sustainable development. In this context, Adivasi (tribal) communities in India assume the status of marginalised communities owing to disadvantages accruing from their societal positioning. Living in diverse ecological settings and pursuing lives with cultural uniqueness exhibited in the patterns of livelihood, settlement, language use and religion, they are differentiated from the 'mainstream'. Following the norms of equity and equality the official provisions of affirmative action have offered a set of measures including introduction of (modern) education. Education of this sort was conceived to be a source of modernisation and social change to bring them closer to the mainstream. Against this backdrop, the paper examines the progress of education of the Adivasi children and their social representation, emerging identity concerns and explores the possible choices. To this end, educational policy and practices of formal education are analysed from ethno-psychological perspective and some relevant pedagogical interventions are outlined for the educational development of Adivasi children.*

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### **Introduction**

Tribes certainly show features characteristic of a society. Interestingly enough it is neither a sociological category nor an anthropological one. It is a product of a 'history of exploitation of some people by some others, usually within the boundaries of a nation state, (see Channa-Mitra, 2008). It is also a contested

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category used for classifying identity of a group in relation to other groups. It also indicates inadequacy to accommodate the changes taking place in other communities. But the most crucial fact is that there is mismatch about the reality of these groups and the ways they are construed, represented and understood. Historically 'tribe' evolved to connote a set of negative traits under colonial regime (Radhakrishna, 2006). In recent years there is revival of interest in studying various tribes in their own right (see Bird-David, 2008; Das, 2004; Dube, 2003; Shangkhani, 2006).

The discourse about tribes is often undertaken within the framework of development. The technological civilisation is becoming universal criterion of development (see Aseniero, 1985). This position delegitimises other cultures, especially the cultures of indigenous people (Banuri, 1990) and results in devaluing them. Thus the western science and knowledge is given priority over local, particularly non-western systems of knowledge. It is often held that western world view, culture and modernity stand for development and a singular culture is promoted at the cost of diversity. Therefore it is urged that culture be added as the fourth pillar of the sustainable development along with ecology, society and economy as three other pillars.

Acknowledgement of heterogeneity of cultural identities importantly informs the agenda for sustainable development. This, however, is incommensurate with increasing homogenisation and shrinking space for cultural diversities which is emerging in the wake of globalisation. Though there is agreement about the threats of ecological imbalance a viable approach to development is still out of sight. The imbalanced development leads to uneven distribution of benefits, contributes to ecological costs and devaluation of the cultural and indigenous knowledge and practices (Gottlieb, 1996). It is realised that the vision of sustainable societies must respect diverse cultural identities, self-reliance and social justice along with ecological balance. There is an urgency to acknowledge cultural arena of identities, practices, knowledge, arts as an asset for sustainable society cherished with the values of universal human rights and social justice.

### **Tribal People in India: A Case of Delegitimised Cultural Identities and Marginalisation**

Living in diverse ecological settings and pursuing lives with cultural uniqueness exhibited in the patterns of livelihood, settlement,

language use and religion the tribes of India comprise 8.2 per cent of the total population, identified with 461 ethnic groups (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Trends in the Proportion of Scheduled Tribe Population**

Census Year	Total Population (in millions)	Scheduled Tribes (Population in millions)	Proportion of STs Population
1961	439.2	30.1	6.9
1971	547.9	38.0	6.9
1981	665.3	51.6	7.8
1991	838.6	67.8	8.1
2001	1028.6	84.3	8.2
2011	1210.8	104.3	8.6

**Source:** Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India, 2013, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI.

The Adivasi (tribal) communities in India assume the status of culturally devalued and marginalised communities owing to disadvantages accruing from their societal positioning. They are part of the nation's development agenda. However they are paying the cost of nation's development. Their sustainable network with nature, co-existence and self-reliance has been broken. These groups occupy very low position on the list of indicators of development. They are characterised by geographical and social isolation from the mainstream society. Their survival is often tied to the land and forest resources. As Xaxa (2011) observed though the state led policies prioritised tribal development and it had significant impact there is a progress-regress relationship disguised under the agenda of *national development*. The integration oriented policies aimed at breaking the isolation between the tribal and non-tribal communities through land, labor and credit market have created an exploitative relationship between the two where tribals stand at the receiving end as a marginalised group. If the isolation and integration debate is further peeped in, it can be observed that protection and mobilisation approaches are held as keys to developmental plans. The tribals have been given constitutional and legislative rights aimed at ensuring their social representation in politics, government jobs and education. Such provisions have significantly mobilised them towards the Indian middle class but only a small segment of the tribal population could benefit. It has been observed by some scholars that tribal communities were in

a better situation in their natural habitat (Bhowmik, 1998; Preet, 1994). As noted by Xaxa (2011) the standard of life of tribes who lived within their traditional social and ecological system may have been low on quality indicators of the state but poverty in the form of hunger and deaths were generally absent. Maharatna (2005) observed mortality advantage in the case of tribes and held that due to a 'healthy life style pattern and practices such as child care and use of indigenous herbal/natural medicines, tribes could be expected to experience a (relative) mortality advantage' (p. 134).

The developmental programmes were aimed at removing and fulfilling the 'deficits' of tribes in terms of their socio-cultural practices, economic activities and relationship with nature. The underlying assumption was deficit impedes the smooth transition from forest to non-forest settlement. Such interpretation does not take cognisance of environmental degradation caused by developmental project and completely ignores the exploitative relationship between tribal and non-tribal groups. Their socio-cultural assets that unfolds a sustainable life is neither acknowledged nor researched, rather their social structure, occupational practices, quantitative aspects like-mortality rate, fertility rate, literacy rate were used as evidence to describe them as uncivilised and underdeveloped community. The onus of failure of developmental programs is again located among tribes. Assessment report of such projects frequently cite evidences, i.e., isolation, mostly geographical isolation, lack of rigour in plan implementation and traditional world view and lifestyle of tribal communities. It does not acknowledge harmonious and sustainable relationship between man-environment where land, forest, water and other natural resources are deployed with ethics of care.

### **Education of and for Tribes: A Contested Territory**

Following the norms of equity and equality the official provisions of affirmative action have offered a set of measures including introduction of (modern) education. Education of this sort was conceived to be a source of modernisation and social change to bring them closer to the mainstream. However, it is questionable as to how education has impacted the tribes. Most of the studies of tribal students report problems of access, retention and achievement. Glimpse of explanations given by these studies affirm two reasons: the lack of institutional infrastructure and resources for education, and inability of the tribes to pursue the formal education (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Bagai and Nundy, 2009). Both the explanations

locate the root of problem in tribal communities. The first explanation carries an implicit assumption of tribal community being low in cultural capital necessary for education. The second explanation shows unwillingness of tribes for formal education. Historically, the overt and covert practices of education were considered the arrangements of a colonial system, legitimising western knowledge aimed at preparing human resources to be deployed in industries and services as required by the colonisers. The structure, institutions and processes of formal education gradually assimilated the elite and urban and maintained a distance from local knowledge, language and other cultural practices. Thus people from the margins didn't find genuine space for themselves in the structure of formal education. The tribes had to face double disadvantage: geographical isolation and cultural alienation. Both the issues were identified as impediments to tribal development and strong recommendations were made to improve the status of education among tribes (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**Major Policy Recommendations about Tribal Education**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Priority will be accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas.</li> <li>• Develop curricula and devise instructional material in tribal language at the initial stages with arrangements to switch over to regional languages.</li> <li>• ST youth be encouraged to take up teaching in tribal areas.</li> <li>• Ashram/residential schools will be established.</li> <li>• Incentive schemes for the STs in view of the special needs and life style.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>National Curriculum Framework (2005)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emphasis on multilingual education as a 'holistic approach.'</li> <li>2. Textbook production, publication in tribal languages.</li> <li>3. Curriculum must acknowledge and depict tribal life.</li> <li>4. Inclusion of Tribal/Dalit folklore and languages.</li> </ol> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Right to Education Act (2009)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Local authority be responsible for providing education.</li> <li>2. Steps to enroll drop-out students in age appropriate classes.</li> <li>3. Infrastructural support including buildings and learning materials.</li> <li>4. Necessary teaching support including well trained teachers.</li> <li>5. Establishment of norms for teacher training and certification.</li> <li>6. Greater role of School Management Committees in: (a) Monitoring school working, (b) Recommending school development plan, (c) Monitoring grants.</li> <li>7. Comprehensive Quality Enhancement plans.</li> </ol>
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The policy recommendations show that 'status of education' is equated with 'education' as whole but measured in terms of gross enrolment ratio (GER), an indicator that shows how many tribal children are attending the schools. The data show that significant achievement has been noted in terms of enrolment and arresting the dropout rates (Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3**  
**Gross Enrolment Ratio (Scheduled Tribes Students)**

Level/Years	Elementary (I–VII, 6–13 Years )	Secondary and Senior Secondary (IX–XII, 14–17 Years)	Higher Education (18–23 Years)
1990–91	80.4	NA	NA
1995–96	90.9	NA	NA
2000–01	88.0	25.7	4.2
2005–06	106.7	28.7	6.6
2009–10	117.2	39.3	10.3
2010–11	119.7	41.5	11.2
2011–12	111.8	43.9	11.0
2012–13	114.5	NA	11.1
2013–14	105.5	52.5	11.3
2014–15	104.0	56.5	13.7

**Source:** Educational Statistics at a Glance 2014–15, MHRD, GoI

**Table 4**  
**Drop-out Rates in School Education (Scheduled Tribes Students)**

Years	Primary (I–V)		Elementary (I–VIII)		Secondary (I–X)	
	Tribes	All Categories	Tribes	All Categories	Tribes	All Categories
1990–91	62.5	42.6	78.6	60.9	85.0	71.3
1996–97	56.5	NA	75.2	NA	84.2	NA
2001–02	52.3	NA	69.5	NA	81.2	NA
2005–06	39.8	25.7	62.9	48.8	78.5	61.6
2010–11	35.6	27.0	55.6	40.6	70.9	49.3
2011–12	35.3	22.3	57.2	40.8	65.9	50.3
2012–13	32.3	21.3	49.2	39.0	62.7	50.4
2013–14	31.3	19.8	48.2	36.3	65.4	47.4

**Source:** Educational Statistics at a Glance 2013–14, MHRD, GoI

The presence of tribes in the state sponsored institutions has increased. However, what education means to them and how it has been assimilated by the tribes is a matter of concern. Padel and Gupta (2015) criticised policy recommendations as ‘a stolen’ agenda from western countries like US and Australia. These policies involve education as a tool for assimilation by the cultures of non-tribes. The social representation of tribes as ‘backward’ and in need of ‘upliftment’ made them literate and opened the job opportunities but didn’t influence their social position. The milieu of educational institutions as well as work places is often biased towards non-tribes. Tribes still face identity burden and swing between two poles: ‘tribal culture and tradition’ and ‘educated and modern individual’.

The literacy rate for Adivasi Children shows significant improvement (Table 5) but a huge gap continues if we compare with other groups.

**Table 5**  
**Comparative Literacy rates of Sts and Total Population**  
**(in percentage)**

Category/Census Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total Population	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	72.99
Scheduled Tribes	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Gap	19.77	18.15	19.88	22.61	18.28	14.03

**Source:** Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India, 2013, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI

It can be also noted (Table 6) that there is a mismatch between what is said and recommended in policy documents and what is practiced in reality.

**Table 6**  
**Problems and Challenges in Tribal Education**

<p>Infrastructural Problems (Sujatha, 2011, Preet, 1994)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority of the schools lack basic infrastructural facilities.</li> <li>• Schools do not have teaching-learning materials.</li> <li>• Lack of minimum sanitary provisions.</li> <li>• Irregular supply of mid-day meals.</li> <li>• Lack of communication facility.</li> <li>• Untimely supply of study materials.</li> </ul>
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Curriculum and Pedagogy (Jose 2016, Brahmanandan and Bosubabu 2016, Sujatha, 2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium of teaching, i.e., English being a foreign language for tribal children.</li> <li>• Unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities or understand the texts properly.</li> <li>• Type of content in the textbook not relevant to the tribal community.</li> <li>• The rigid systems of formal schooling emphasising discipline, routine norms, teacher-centred instruction.</li> <li>• Non-contextualised and culturally insensitive pedagogy.</li> </ul>
Unequal treatments (Sedwal and Kamat, 2008; Bagai and Nundy, 2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal abuse, physical punishments.</li> <li>• Avoidance by the dominant castes students and teachers.</li> <li>• Tribal children's inability to establish a communication with non-tribes.</li> <li>• Non-tribal teachers having an attitude of indifference to tribal languages, traditions, cultures and life-styles.</li> </ul>

### **Social Representation and Emerging Identity Concerns**

At the surface level, the exclusion of tribal children is explained as a case of deficit in terms of cognitive abilities. However, the main cause of exclusion lies in other factors such as coping with divergent social norms, cultural biases, exploitative social relations, hegemonic culture of social and state institutions. For tribal children exclusion is not an event at a given point of time, rather, it comprises of accumulation of experiences over a period of time due to discriminatory events distributed across diverse activities in various contexts such as family, community, school, peer group and other institutional settings where they don't have any entitlement and power for negotiation. They become voiceless without any kind of agency (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008). In this situation access in formal education is seen as a potential to actualise their capabilities and be at par with the mainstream. But if education itself leads them to exclusion, they are caught in a vicious cycle of disadvantage that reproduces them as a marginalised community. This kind of social representation and emerging identity concerns are adversely influencing the tribes in general and their schooling in particular. The presence of tribals in the formal centers of learning and work often compels to either accept the imposed identity of being modern and literate at the cost of shrugging off their own practices or moving away from the mainstream society and constantly living in isolation. While entering the mainstream system as students, teachers or in some

other role, they hardly find their cultural context, practices, knowledge, language as a part of experience in these institutions. Meanwhile, their social representations are stereotypical in depicting them as a primitive community living in isolation. The educational discourses treat primitiveness as a non-developed stage and work with the assumption that they should be thriving for development with State's assistance.

### **The Gap between Tribes and Non-tribes**

The formal education in modern India, owing its route to the ideal of western modernity, assumes that an educated individual is equipped with certain civic skills, a worldview based on rationality and scientific thinking, a self regulating and disciplined mind equipped with professional capacities and ethics. Any social group which differs from these norms is treated as underdeveloped. The state's programme along with other philanthropic enterprises chart developmental plans to supplement the knowledge, skill and attitude of tribal students. Therefore, tribes inhabiting in isolation and practising their own style of life are treated as 'non-modern' communities and are forced to assimilate modern knowledge and practices. The formal education for tribes is envisioned as a pedagogic tool marching towards the state of modernity. Although formal education has equipped tribes with the assets of literacy but it has also reinforced the negative construal of tribal identity of being inferior, alienated and underdeveloped. Balagopalan (2003) terms this tendency as 'internalisation of innate failure' that validates the proposition that if the tribal children are not able to sustain in the formal institution they and their community are lacking in certain skills, knowledge and attitudes. Therefore, the state wants to inculcate 'school identity'. The belief of teachers, parents and students about 'being tribal' means slow, unclean, uncivilised, having low cognitive ability, lack of family support. Therefore, they are assigned to manual jobs. While at home, the parents of tribal students and students themselves find it difficult to pass the exam or to complete any homework. Thus, the disjuncture between tribal culture and school practices remain unaddressed and formal education for them remains an imagined world.

### **Devaluing Cultural Identity and Indigenous Knowledge**

Introduction to a universal education system for masses accepts the norm of universal exposure to learning experiences and

evaluating the same against uniform standards. The process seems feasible, reliable and objective but underneath exclusion of cultures and histories of these communities make them invisible in the mainstream discourses. This is the case for tribes in India. The cultures and histories of tribal communities are missing from mainstream discourses of formal education. The curricula at different levels represent mostly urban middle class societies thriving for industrial development and leading towards global world (Agarwal, 2002; Balagopalan, 2003). If represented, their symbolic meaning is tabooed as primitive community inferior to the mainstream society. They are represented as isolated, strange and backward (Jose, 2017). Their cultural practices and indigenous knowledge are not adequate to teach as it is not compatible with the scientific ways of knowing, doing and learning. Such representations show prominence of the civilising discourse of education over the education as pursuit of vivid intellectual engagement enabling the individual to celebrate the multiplicity of worldviews.

Sundar (2010) considers formal education for tribes as a source of alienation from cultural roots. She explains the point with data from central India. She found the tribes interested in formal education perceive it as tool of advancement, upliftment and social mobility. They believe that formal education will enable them to get rid of tribal identities and they will turn into 'Educated Adivasis'. The educated youth communicate with each other in the language learnt at the schools. They want to show themselves different from their uneducated peers. The negligence of their own language is the first step towards denigration of their worldviews and knowledge. The influence is perpetuated further. They start feeling uncomfortable by the idea of being a member of the family engaged in primitive activities, i.e., hunting, gathering, etc. They rely more on their new social networks with other caste people living outside of the tribal areas. Bayly (1999) termed it as entering into 'new epistemic communities'. It should be kept in mind that their membership of these new epistemic communities with an unequal power status have adverse effect on their identities. In the same manner Kumar (1989) elaborated how the schooling exposes tribal children to learn that 'they are backward'. He took an example of classroom teaching where issues of tribes were discussed. He observed that if any tribal student resists to affirm the negative representation of tribal, he/she is considered as

cognitively backward, because her arguments do not conform the textbook knowledge; if he/she accepts that representation, she is supposed to belong to a backward community. In the same way, Sundar (2012) highlights the subtle politics of religious identity taking place through schooling. She elaborated the same point with the help of two schools, one run by a Hindu organisation and other run by a Catholic missionary. The first type of school practiced predominantly Hindu culture where most of the students were tribes. They were supposed to be Hindu. On the other hand the Catholic School practiced the rituals of Christianity where most of the children were supposed to be Christian. Thus both the schools were dominated by the voice of 'powerful' groups and tribal culture as well as identity was devalued. We have developed a kind of thinking where if formal curriculum is practised, indigenous and cultural knowledge have to be dropped.

The data presented in Table 3 show that the issue of access has been addressed to some extent. Infrastructural measures are being strengthened though their pace is slow. The major concern now is to facilitate creating an interpersonal milieu that may integrate the tribes without threatening or devaluing their culture. Neither should we limit their world to the cultural resources of their own nor should they be compelled to surrender to a different culture through schooling. The linguistic, social and cultural diversity of tribes is not just a resource pool that can be churned into schools and educated individual can be mainstreamed. These resources are integral to their being. Any process for the sake of welfare or development should acknowledge it and be empathetic to it.

Educational experiences are pivotal to the construction of knowledge and identity. It should integrate the tribal ways of knowing, doing and being in their local milieu as valid as school knowledge and enable them with a critical understanding of both the tribal and non-tribal worlds. Gandhi's idea of *Nai Talim* may offer an epistemological and pedagogical approach for integration of cultural diversity in the classroom. It was adopted as an approach for *Aashramshala* schools but was misinterpreted as vocational education. Craft and work experience based education brings learners' funds of knowledge into the classroom. It strengthens the relationship between nature, community and individual, nurtures a sense of self-reliance, reinforces the dignity of labor and above all lead the community towards a sustainable life.

There are microcosmic experiments with tribal children under the umbrella of institution called school. Most of these institutes try to alienate themselves from the mainstream schools and embed them in the local milieu. They are part of empowering movement either working with isolated tribal groups or with displaced tribal people. They are different in their functioning, curricula and pedagogy. Most of them intensively work for primary and elementary levels of education. They also engage with adults. Some such efforts are summarised below.

*Adharshila Learning Centre*, started in 1998, defines education as a tool for liberation. The school has prioritised learning by doing as essential pedagogic approach. It practices democracy in school with active participation from student side. They are identified as Student *Karykertas* and use to participate in decision making and sharing the responsibility. They have right to express their opinions, to disagree with teachers and to negotiate with other stakeholders. The students passing out from *Adharshila* schools have completed their secondary level of schooling and are aspiring for further education. The students have completed many learning projects best suited to their context: listing herbal plants, bio diversity record of school, water and electricity data, etc. The school organises workshops related to theatre, communal harmony, gender and painting. A student led project on famines was published by Eklavya named '*Rukhi Sukhi*'.

*Aragamee* has engaged with the issues of tribal development for 25 years with the ideology of 'food and voice'. The organisation extensively works in the tribal areas of Odisha. It runs single teacher primary schools in remote tribal areas. The programme has yielded significant achievement in primary education in comparison to other schools. It has also empowered the tribal students with a sense of critical understanding. The students who are enrolled in the primary classes used to check muster rolls of MNREGA and made people aware about wage rate. The schools run by the organisation usually appoint tribal teachers in their school so that language barrier may be overcome. The teachers were trained to teach in a multilingual classroom. The schools have developed their own textbooks compatible with local context.

*Aide et Action*, an NGO, runs mobile library in government schools where tribal students are enrolled. Mobile library vans reach the schools in morning. There are 20 stacks of books arranged in graded manner with reference to reading skills. A resource person

helps students in selecting and reading the books. The books are in various tribal languages so that they can find culture in the stories and poems. Besides, the mobile library van moves in the community where resource persons organise story telling sessions and facilitate the reading skills among adults.

*Puvudham*, a government approved nursery and primary school located in Dharmapuri in Tamilnadu, caters to the needs of local tribal community. It also runs a bridge course for school drop-out students. The school has an eco-friendly environment with sufficient play area, organic farm and a little forest for children in a natural environment. The school is organised around the Gandhian philosophy. Work and education are not separate entities. The school tries to inculcate the values of harmony with nature and respecting dignity for farming as one of the significant occupations. Everyday community activities are treated as sources of learning. Language learning takes place through listening the stories and poems and translating them into drawings or other creative forms. Similarly, mathematics is taught by everyday activities such as Rangoli making, measuring the land, etc. Farming is a key activity around which teaching of academic subjects such as science, mathematics, language curricula is interwoven.

*Imalle-mahua* school is situated at Kondagaon district in the Baster area of Chattisgarh. The website of *Imalle-mahua* school narrates the story of its journey in first person. The school reflects essence of ownership and empowerment. In the initial years school embraced the philosophy *Nai Talim*, but due to teachers' ill-preparedness and students lack of interest, the management has chosen a different path. They put the learners' happiness, that is according to them is 'free will to work and play', on priority and organised the learning experiences accordingly. The learners were categorised into four groups—*Supari*, *Semar*, *Seethaphal* and *Soorajmukhi*. The schools routine is like a routine of family beginning in the morning between 6:00 am to 7:00 am with cleaning and preparing breakfast, and subsequently engages the students in various work experiences, having a robust lunch in afternoon and after lunch activities ended around 5:00 pm.

*Kanavu*, located in Wayanadu district of Kerala, is a school for tribal children celebrating the culture of collectivity through the local ways of learning and doing. The school begins with the recital of classical ragas and ends up with a folk dance form '*thudi*'. *Kanavu* gives great importance to the learning of music, dance, theatre,

martial arts, painting, etc. The school believes in philosophy of self reliance. It produces 70 per cent of its food requirement. Myths, tales and folklores find a respectable place in the curriculum. The students at *Kanavu* take training in both orthopaedic practices as well as self-defense.

These experiments and interventions aimed at educating tribal children reflect a pedagogic approach where modern school subjects are not taught for the sake of knowledge. These institutions provide interesting examples of innovative learning spaces marked with cultural sensibilities. Opportunity for learning is often constructed and embedded within the eco cultural context. Rather than compelling the learners to assimilate the culture of others these institutions interweave modern knowledge through every day practices. These schools bring out the following realisations:

- Opportunities for students to perform home and community roles.
- Students and their community voices get expressed and valued.
- The language, art forms, and work experiences form integral part of learning.
- Learning is characterised by intrinsic motivation, creativity and freedom to express.

The message is clear that the learning experiences should be designed in such a manner that they lend support and extend cultural and social mediators of tribal milieu. For the same teachers have to come out from the walls of schools and enmesh themselves as ethnographers and should have a fair and deep understanding of cultural practices of the community. It will help them to localise the curriculum. Drawing elements from cultural practices should be integrated within the classroom discourses with sensitivity and empathy. Such practices promote active student involvement and nurture an identity of empowered individual. Integration of learners' funds of knowledge doesn't mean excluding the school knowledge, rather it renders the classroom into a learning space where everyday knowledge and school knowledge both contribute to meaning making. The process also has scope where the myth that the scientific knowledge is only circulated through schools can be broken and indigenous knowledge of learners can be brought to the centre stage. In tandem with this, their communicative and language practices should be mainstreamed. It should not be done as an effort of conservation but as an effort of promotion

so that they don't feel alienated and harassed. The aspirations of parents, community and students should be acknowledged and given the scaffold. The community-school relationship should be strengthened and parents should have stronger voice and agency in decision making. Their social capital can be deployed through the same. Above all, assimilative practices that denigrate the cultural-social-ecological assets of tribes mould them into a conformist individual. We need to promote integrative practices which support sustainable development in everyday culture.

### **Concluding Comments**

In a democratic set up people should be allowed to grow and develop along their genius. The various forms of traditional art and culture should be encouraged. The tribal people are the oldest inhabitants of the country. They were subjugated by more recently arrived groups. The natural habitat of these people was disturbed and their land was taken away. They were pushed further into the hilly gorges and wilds, and forced to work without adequate compensation. They do require special attention from the government. In the past, many tribal groups were forced to assimilate into the dominant culture of the country. But some groups, such as the Bhils, Gonds, Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Khonds, Mizos, Nagas, and Khasis have resisted the processes of imposed change and preferred to maintain their cultural identities. The critical question is whether tribal communities can enter the mainstream while preserving their distinct social and cultural beliefs and practices.

It is widely held that education is indispensable to enable the tribal people to cope with the challenge of national integration. Education, therefore, would determine the likelihood of progress and success in life. The tribes neglecting modern education would have to suffer. However, the reality of schools gives a different picture. Despite considerable expenditure on schools, creation of other facilities such as scholarships and residential arrangements the achievements remain quite limited. Prevalence of cultural taboos, discrimination and low literacy rate are very common among tribal girls (Ghosh, 2007; Khora, 2005; Mishra, 2006; Rani and Nanjunda, 2007; Rani et. al., 2009). It is reflected in non enrolment, substantial degree of drop out and poor attendance (Ghatak 2005; Rana and Das, 2004). Teaching of language and mathematics (Panda, 2006) to the tribal students are problematic as they don't take into account the ethos of tribal pupils. In general

the educational progress is very low (Rao, 2004; Mohanty (2003). The domination and hegemony of dominant groups in terms of orienting knowledge, pedagogic practices, language, curriculum, evaluation, school timings should change so that justice may be done with the histories, socio-cultural contexts, needs and aspirations of these indigenous groups (Gregory and Gregory, 2007; Lauren, 2006).

The tribal youth find the incentives unattractive. The goal to assimilate the tribes remains unfulfilled and questions the implementation of tribal policies and strategies. The barriers in the success of educational programmes include unhealthy relationship between tribal students and their non tribal peers and teachers. They do not understand the psyche of tribal students, hold stereotypes (e.g., primitive, uncultured, not worthy of being learners, slow learners) and display discrimination. Tribal customs, mannerisms, language and cultural heritage are often undermined. The inferiority complex is implanted in them.

In many tribes adult males are often bilingual but the women and children speak tribal dialects only. The tribal child, on entering school, is suddenly expected to understand a different state language. This language barrier interferes with their education. Some attempts are being made to educate Gonds, Bhils, Santals, and other groups in their own tongues. According to recent reports, tribal children are responding well to such programs. The mother tongue based multilingual education has yielded good results.

The content and the method of tribal education need to be critically evaluated. The tribal youth come from a distinct historical and social background. They need special attention and orientation in their attempts to bridge the two cultures. The curricula are either irrelevant to them and/or offer only negative views of tribal societies. While official policies intend to provide several benefits, and extend facilities, few of them effectively reach the intended recipients.

The tribal youth, even while they study at the secondary and college levels, should, be encouraged to remain integrated with their own societies. Once they become culturally and socially alienated, it would be difficult to maintain the connection with their own societies and maintain traditions. Tribal students must develop inner resolve to resist exploitation and to safeguard their own rights.

The tribal cultures do have knowledge and practices which are valuable in many areas including health, agriculture, art

and sports, etc. These positive elements are often absent in the mainstream culture. There should be genuine attempt to learn and acquire this knowledge tradition as they are on decline.

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