

Education of Tribal Children

A Need for Improvised Pedagogy

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to answer some of the questions on pedagogy of the adivasi children in the tribal schools of Andhra Pradesh. Provision for quality education for the tribal children through mother tongue instruction, types of action plans for implementing multilingual education, contextualisation of the content of the school textbooks, support materials required, provision for support materials in tribal dialects, contextualisation of classroom transactions, integration of life skills in the curriculum, overall need for modification of pedagogic routines in tribal context, in-service teacher training programmes are some of the emerging issues that need urgent action in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Various recent studies on education of tribal children (from the perspective of social inclusion) throw light on the poor state of affairs. A recent study on school management practices under SSA supported by European Union states in its report that the prescribed curriculum and related TLM (Teaching Learning Material) are top-down in nature and do not create opportunities or the administrative space and scope for need-based development of material and need-based planning at the school level and inclusion of children in border areas and tribal/ forest areas remains weak. Similarly, transition rates from primary to upper primary and secondary show significant dropout rates in case of marginalised sections and minority religions, and there are significant gender differences. Literacy rates among SC, ST and Muslim minority children still lag behind in many states. In brief, decentralised community mobilisation efforts have improved enrolment but this cannot be said for inclusion of the most deprived communities or social groups.

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Indian Constitution prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex or place of birth. It stands for equity and equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Inequitable circumstances leading to socio-economic and educational deprivations have created imbalances in society, affecting more severely the communities which for historical reasons and lack of resources have tended to remain backward. The Constitution has made provisions for safeguards (social, economic, educational, cultural, political, service) and protective measures to ensure all round development of weaker and disadvantaged sections. It also provides that States will promote educational and economic interests of weaker sections of society, in particular scheduled castes and tribes.

The national policy on Education (1986, 1992) and its programme of action (1992), have identified special measures for fulfilling the constitutional commitments to scheduled tribes which include opening of primary schools, Aanganwadis, non-formal and adult education centres, construction of school buildings in tribal areas, development of curricula and instructional materials in tribal languages so as to render tribal students switch over to regional languages in course of time. The priorities also include establishment of residential schools, formulation of

incentive schemes and scholarships for higher education, and designing curriculum at all stages to create awareness of the rich cultural identity of tribal people and their enormous creative talent. Various short term and long term measures as indicated in the programme of action on National Policy on Education (1992) have been identified for this purpose. A number of welfare, administrative and educational provisions have been made to improve the situation in respect of scheduled tribes. Funds have also been earmarked for the educational upliftment of this group under Tribal Sub Plan. The major programmes of Elementary Education viz. District Primary Educational Programme, *Lok Jumbish*, *Shiksha Karmi*, Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education and the National Programme for Nutritional Support to primary education have accorded priority to areas with concentration of scheduled tribes.

Scheduled Tribes deserve a high priority in any programme of elementary education and the main reason is that a large majority of the tribal children who are not part of the formal system of education come from this group. The Working group report on education of the disadvantaged sections during Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) brought out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in November, 2001 has mentioned that: "despite the fact that there has been an increase in the

literacy rate of the SCs/STs since independence, the present position is still far from satisfactory. The overall increase in the literacy rate in the country during the period 1961-91 was 28.19% against which increase in literacy rate for scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes during the same period was 21.07 respectively". The situation in respect of these sections of people is still far from satisfactory and greater efforts are required to bring them on par with the general population.

The Tenth Five Year plan has also recognised the need for increasing their retention and reducing their dropout rate as one of the measures to empower them. Therefore, there is a need to identify issues, which need to be addressed through carefully devised methodology of teaching these children so that they are in a position to derive full benefit from the education system. National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE, 2000) recognised the need to respond to the specific educational needs of the learners from various sections of society by integrating socio-cultural perspectives in the educational programmes, partly by showing concern for linguistic and pedagogical requirement of socially disadvantaged groups. This is more relevant to scheduled tribes as they exhibit different culture and use different languages. Some of the languages do not have their own script and use scripts of other languages. India is a multi-

cultural and multi-lingual society. Tribal population constituting 8.1% of the total population comprises different social systems and dialects. Contextualisation of curriculum and incorporation of fundamental rights of the disadvantaged groups are the right kind of steps to be taken up for promoting respect for all cultures, equity and democratic values.

Pedagogy in Tribal Context

Subject matter and pedagogy are the important components of tribal education. Tribal children bring with them the rich experiences and perspectives of different cultures, which are different from other groups. They bring with them a set of values, attitudes, perceptions that may not be necessarily be the same as those of others. This diversity is at times confused with multiculturalism. While diversity refers to individuals/people that exemplify all cultural and congenial differences, multiculturalism means inclusion of theory, fact, values, and beliefs of all cultures. Therefore, the pedagogical strategies used for teaching in the tribal context are ought to be different. There needs to be synchronisation between school activities and lives of students contextualising curriculum and its transactions by linking with the experiences and skills of students.

The primary purpose of schooling is to assist an individual to develop her/his full potential as well as knowledge, attitudes and skills to interact with the environment in a

successful manner. Family, culture, community and total environment of a tribal child plays an important role in the teaching-learning process. It is necessary for the teacher to have complete knowledge and understanding about the various aspects of child's environment, which consists of her/his lifestyle, worldview, her/his cultural background, traditions and learning styles so that pedagogy of teaching is appropriately suited to the child's needs. This modification becomes more important if there is a big difference between the environment and the cultural context of the child and the teacher.

If one looks at the material used for training teachers in pedagogy one would notice that a uniform teacher-training package is being used for teachers of both tribal and non-tribal areas. There is almost no emphasis on understanding psychology of children from tribal areas, their specific-socio-cultural milieu, learning environment and the indigenous learning styles at home and community. Some of the training packages include a small module on tribal education, which often deals with macro issues mainly due to the paucity of time and space. As a result of this, in the post-training phase, the trained teachers find it difficult to establish an effective linkage between text books and the unique socio-cultural environment of tribal society. Composition of Indian society calls for specific pedagogical inputs in

teaching the tribal communities. This requirement is also supported by the recommendations of NCFSE 2000, which state that internationally, pedagogy is perceived not merely as a science of instruction but as a culture or as a set of sub-cultures as well which reflect different contexts and different teaching behaviors-inside and outside the classrooms.

The pluralistic nature of Indian society needs to be reflected in the pedagogical approaches. Since there is no single universal way in which learners learn, there is a strong need for looking into the specific cultural context in which a learner is placed. Though all learners process information in roughly similar ways, the content of processing varies considerably from tribal society to high socio-economic stratum of urban areas. Pedagogy, therefore, should be culture specific. Instead of using one uniform way of teaching-learning method, cultural practices like storytelling, dramatics, folk play, community living etc., should become a strong basis of pedagogy. Cultural specificity should get embedded in the pedagogical practices. This would lead to joyful learning and involvement of schools with the local people, their festivals, functions and lifestyles. The issues related with development of pedagogy of tribal education can be divided under the following categories: 1. Medium of instruction 2. Contextualising textbook content and preparation of material 3. Contextualising

curricular transaction 4. Integrating life skills and entrepreneurship and, information technology with curriculum 5. Changing timings and holidays of tribal area schools 6. Improving organisational climate in residential schools.

Medium of Instruction

Education through mother tongue has been emphasised both by Kothari Commission report (1964-66) and the National policy on education (1986, 1992) and its programme of Action (1992). The Constitution of India allows the use of tribal dialect (mother tongue as the medium of instruction in cases where the total population of a tribe is more than one lakh). In the NCFSE, 2000 and NCF-2005 mother tongue has been mentioned as the most vital factor for children's intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. It is the central factor in the nurturance of children's intellectual and emotional development. Various cognitive processes like perception, apprehension, responses, and creative expression are maximally developed through the medium of mother tongue, the medium of instruction, therefore, ought to be the mother tongue of children enrolled in schools. Smooth transition from students' operations in the mother tongue to those in the regional language is to be ensured. The transition from mother tongue to regional language is very critical to language learning. There is a need to take up studies on use of mother

tongue as the medium of instruction in schools serving tribal population.

Contextualising Textbook Contents and Preparation of Support Materials

In most of the states in India, tribal children have to learn from those textbooks, which are being used for the non-tribal children of the state as a whole. The contents of these books deal with subjects/topics unknown to the tribal children. The tribal children, who live in isolated and remote villages, may not be able to identify themselves with such type of textbooks because of their urban-based non-tribal contents. Besides the illustrations used in these textbooks are also from the world alien to tribal children. There is an imperative need that these textbooks are revised on a state-to-state and district-to district basis so that necessary changes in them could be made to suit the socio-cultural and linguistic requirements of children from various tribal communities. It may not be a simple task to prepare suitable textbooks for tribal children, as most of the tribal literature available is not in printed form but only in the oral form. Writing of books needs special skills, aptitude and a thorough knowledge of tribal life and culture. Such step certainly will lead to elimination of the hitherto existing biases. The actual situation is that this has not happened as the decision makers find it difficult to introduce different sets of textbooks prepared in different dialects, as

they do not find it feasible. Besides the efforts made by Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, some sporadic efforts have also been made to develop such books but the pace could not be maintained as the text book revision for the general population has been done at a much faster speed. The result, is that there is dearth of learning materials in the tribal dialects which is a strong factor contributing to high dropout rate of tribal children. Even the text books written in the regional languages do not permit the child to identify him with the content and its context. Besides the difference between the home language and the school language, non-inclusion of folk literature and culture specific stories, dialogues etc also hamper the interest of tribal children in learning.

There is a need to revise the prescribed text books on a State to State basis, which needs to be supplemented by development of culture specific material through District Institutes of Education and Training in collaboration with voluntary agencies working in the tribal areas. There is a need to develop specific support materials, both at the district and grassroots level, to support learning by tribal children in their own mother tongue. Some concrete steps in this direction have been taken by states under SSA programme. Culture specific teaching-learning materials have been prepared by the state governments such as Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh,

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh. This includes language books, glossaries, supplementary reading materials, bridge inventories, learning kits etc. Anada Lahari developed by the state of Andhra Pradesh under the Janasala programme is exemplary in this regard.

Contextualising Curricular Transaction

It has been found that the rigid system of formal schooling has made children wary of school. Formal schools often emphasise on discipline, routine norms, and teacher centered instruction etc. This is a contradiction and poses problems to the free environment of tribal culture. This has led to sharp difference in the surrounding social environment of home and school. This difference in two environments is, to a great extent, responsible for high drop out of tribal children from the school. The teaching adopted in schools is largely text book based and has clearly failed in making teaching interesting for tribal children. Tribal children are accustomed to learn in groups through observation and practice, which is sharply in contrast with rote learning practices of schools. This can be solved by the use of alternative teaching methods taking into account the capacity of the tribal children, availability of resources in tribal schools and the physical environment in schools. Teachers working in tribal

schools are expected to know cultural values, practices, traditions and communication style of tribal children as well as the factors affecting their achievements in schools and learning difficulties. *Adivasis* lay a great emphasis on learning by memory because of their oral traditions. They are very much fond of riddles and narrative personal indulgences. All these issues are essential not only for a contextualised teaching-learning transaction but also for adopting appropriate evaluation procedures for the continuous and comprehensive evaluation of the tribal children in their environment.

Holistic Curriculum

One of the objectives of education for life is development of life skills relevant to the target group and their local contexts. These skills are basically local specific. These life skills are important for individuals to face challenges in their life. These life skills can be classified into four broad categories such as: universal life skills, teacher oriented life skills, student oriented and subject oriented life skills. Student oriented skills need to be addressed in the specific socio-cultural context of *adivasi* children. Subject oriented values, which refer to clarity of expression; empathy and respect for individual differences etc. are also to be looked at from the perspective of the tribal children. Information technology has become an integral part of school education as it facilitates exchange

of information among students, teachers and researchers all over the world. Mobile phones, personal digital assistants, and computer screens are no longer status symbols. With the process of globalisation they became useful tools for cultural exchange and learning through use of IT as a tool to support pedagogical revolution in school system. However, schools in tribal areas, due to their geographical isolation are deprived of emerging educational support systems. Education has to address both globalisation and localisation related problems so that a balanced personality is developed. This task is more difficult in the tribal context where Information technology facilities are very limited.

Change of Timings and School Related Holidays to Suit the Needs of Tribal Children

It has been advocated by many scholars and research studies that along with the academic studies, vocational training studies, courses also should be incorporated in the education system and curricular practices of *adivasi* children. At least a few hours' in a day may be allocated for vocational training of *adivasi* children in their schools.

Improving the Organisational climate of the residential, ashram, tribal welfare schools

In tribal areas there is a vast networking system of residential, welfare and Ashram type of schools which have

been established and functioning for the overall development of adivasi children. These schools are under the management, supervision and control of tribal welfare departments and integrated tribal development organisations. Reports on functioning of these schools across the country reveal mixed stories. While some schools are effectively functioning, other schools have not exhibited satisfactory results due to variety of reasons. Insensitive nature of supervision, lack of effective monitoring system, teacher absenteeism, poor motivating factors and poor residential conditions in these schools have a potential bearing on the socio-cultural practices of the adivasis. Teachers working in the tribal schools are generally not mentally geared towards serving tribal children. They generally teach in mechanical and routine manner. It is important to develop a specific training component for teachers and wardens who work in tribal schools. Moreover, teachers need periodic motivational training and field placement to become familiar with home environment of children and also their psychology. A few suggestions can be made to improve the educational scenario of the scheduled tribes of Andhra Pradesh.

- The government has to conduct sample surveys to know about the present state of education, literacy, academic achievement levels of the tribal children in primary, upper primary, residential and Ashram tribal schools in Andhra Pradesh.
- They should be provided with jobs which give them immediate remuneration and relief.
- A few more schools may be established and be provided with necessary infrastructural facilities.
- Rigid enforcement of the provisions of compulsory primary education Act is highly essential under RTE.
- Free coaching centres should be opened in the tribal villages for the educated and unemployed youth.
- Best sports persons are available among the tribal children, so physical education should be improved and special training facilities should be provided to make them national and state level players etc.
- Universalisation of ICDS with secured Anganwadi workers.
- Compulsory Elementary Education for PTG and Hill tribes' children.
- Reduction of dropout rate among PTG children.
- Need for providing commutation devices to tribal children to cover long distances to schools.
- Availability of Upper Primary and High schools in hilly tribal villages.
- Enhancement of Scholarships for the tribal children for Classes –VI to XII.
- Simplification of norms for

- admission to tribal children in government and aided schools.
- 25% clause to be activated to ensure children from these communities to be a part of the schools.
 - Girl-child friendly toilets in tribal schools.
 - Qualification norms for teachers should be in accordance with RTE norms.
 - Teachers working in the tribal schools should be versatile in local languages.
 - Strengthening of District Institutes of Teacher Education (DIETs) to ensure availability of local teachers to teach in mother tongue.
 - Community participation in tribal schools.
 - Nagaland model for strengthening the system of governance in tribal schools.
 - Local self-help groups, NGOs to be involved in the education system of tribal children.
 - School development plans for tribal schools.
 - No detention without effective implementation of Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation.
 - For migrant workers among the adivasis' alternative schools/tent schools/mobile schools.
 - Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas for tribal girls and effective skill development norms for girl child education in tribal villages.
 - Safety for the tribal children in Naxalite, interior forest areas to be enhanced.
 - Banning of screaming, bullying, beating, severe punishments in schools.
 - CSIR, Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya, Defence, schools in tribal villages
 - Facilities for post elementary education for tribal children in tribal localities.
 - Widening of Secondary Education network in tribal areas.
 - Greater thrust on quality education for the tribal children in schools.
 - Mobile, tent schools for the children of the migrant laborers among the adivasi communities, and post matric scholarships for tribal children.
 - Child survival and health issues affecting tribal children under the age of 18 need remedial action.
 - High levels of malnutrition in tribal villages require immediate attention.
 - Prompt action in the cases of atrocities on the tribal children.
 - Special concern for the health of the girl children.
 - Sale of children in some of the tribal villages to be considered seriously.
 - Access to public services (health, PDS etc) to be improvised.
 - Mobile hospitals for the tribal children.
 - Life skills training for women, youth and children in tribal villages may be organised.

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