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“TRIBAL EDUCATION IN MAHARASHTRA: RECONNOITRING SOCIO-LEGAL TONES THROUGH THE PRISM OF CULTURE”

AUTHORED BY - DR PRATIK SALGAR & KRUTIKA JAIN

1. Introduction:

Education is the most important tool for the development of human beings. It provides people with the knowledge, and the skills they need for personal growth and help them build a quality life for themselves. Hence, education plays an important role in the development of a nation.

Historically speaking, education has been an important part of our culture. During ancient times India followed the Gurukul system where the student (*shishya*) used to go at the teacher's residing place and requested to be taught. In this ancient residential educational system, prevalent during the Vedic era, students were given knowledge about various subjects like language, science, mathematics metaphysics, etc. and not only were these the only teachings, but attention was also given to arts, sports, crafts, and activities which help them develop their intelligence and critical thinking. They were thought skills that would actually help them live culturally displaced life.

Unfortunately, this concept of the gurukul system has dwindled in the modern era. In the 1830s Lord Macauley proposed this “modern educational system” which lacks personality development. Teaching has now been confined to specific topics and student grades are given more importance than the actual knowledge. The modern education system has failed to recognize the deep-rooted cultural values which were present in the gurukul system. Things however are still better for people in the urban area.

In tribal areas situation is far worst. Even after seven decades of independence, education is still not accessible to every person in India. The literacy rates among tribal people are very low due to a number of reasons, some of them being a language barrier, financial conditions, lack of skilled teachers, lack of accommodation to place of education, lack of proper monitoring and lack of connection with culture and education. They do not have the basic necessity needed for education. We realized the importance of the internet during the Covid pandemic and how much of an impact

it has had on education. Most tribal areas do not have this much-needed facility of internet. Though the government has been enhancing educational policy, it is important to know how much of the policy was made keeping in mind these tribal people and how much representation they have had while making these policies.

2. Recognizing Right to Education as Fundamental Right:

Socio-Legal Aspects:

In 2002 by the 86th Amendment, Article 21A – Right to education was added. The Act, enforced on 1st April 2010, talks about providing free and compulsory education to all children aged group six to fourteen. Even after this enactment today in 2022 a large number of children are not receiving a quality education, most of these children belonging to the tribal community. One of the main reasons is the language barrier. The medium of instruction of education in most schools is in a language that the students from the tribal community are unfamiliar with. Language varies from place to place and region to region and using a standard medium of language for teaching is unfair to the students belonging to the tribal community.

Out of several scheduled tribes, communities in the country, 45 major tribal communities live in Maharashtra. Population wise Maharashtra has got a second largest ST population at national ST population (Kokate and Solunke 2011). There are 10,510,213 (9.4 per cent of the state population) people reported as STs.

Educational status of STs is very low in Maharashtra like most of the other States. Out of the total enrolment, the enrolment of STs is 12.85 per cent whereas it is 72.89 percent for others in primary education. The enrolment of STs at secondary level is reduced to 6.27 per cent when it is increased to 78.99 percent for others. At primary level, the GER for STs is higher than the other category and signifies a larger number of STs are repeated or remained in primary level as over/under age enrolment. The GER of STs is much lower than the other categories at secondary, higher secondary and a higher level of education which is just 49 per cent for STs against 73.7 per cent of all categories at secondary education level (Statistics of School Education, 2012).

[1] Bipin Jojo and Dhaneswar Bhoi (march 2018) Scheduled Tribe Children and Their Educational Accessibility: Evidences from Maharashtra School Education

Even though there are many different tribal languages spoken in Maharashtra, none of them have been mentioned in the Eighth schedule of the constitution. Even seeing with broader none of the tribal languages spoken in other parts of Indian have been given recognition amongst the 22 languages recognized by the Eight schedule of the constitution. Even though article 350A says that every state shall provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage for students belonging to a linguistic minority, there is very less implantation of this provision in reality

3. Issues and Challenges in National Education Policy 2020 and Tribal Education

It is significant to take into account following provisions of New Education Policy, 2020 from the point of view of analyzing issues and challenges of the research problem.

- a. The curriculum must include basic arts, crafts, humanities, games, sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, to develop all aspects and capabilities of learners; and make education more well-rounded, useful, and fulfilling to the learner.
- b. As a part of the thrust on experiential learning, art-integrated education will be embedded in classroom transactions not only for creating joyful classrooms but also for imbibing the Indian ethos through integrating Indian art and culture in the teaching and learning process at every level. This art-integrated approach will strengthen the linkages between education and culture.
- c. In addition to high-quality offerings in Indian languages and English, foreign languages, such as Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian, will also be offered at the secondary level, for students to learn about the cultures of the world and to enrich their global knowledge and mobility according to their own interests and aspirations.¹

The provisions abovementioned in the national education policy talks about the inclusion of arts crafts humanities games sports and fitness, languages, literature, culture, and values, in addition to science and mathematics, but merely making a provision is not sufficient. having a echanism for implementing these provisions is in question.

¹ https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

The new education policy also talks about teaching foreign languages to students like Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Russian. but children from tribal areas do even understand the common standard language practiced in those areas like Hindi Marathi or English. learning these languages is important for the development of students on a global level but the primary goal must be the development of students at the national level and teaching them indigenous languages. today in the name of development and due to the encouragement of teachers in schools to learn global languages, students are forgetting their cultural and ethical values and are in a race to be a better “foreigner” which is one of the causes leading to the migration of students to another country rather staying in India and developing the country.

The policy further talks about using art as a tool for learning and insists on experimental learning, but does not mention anything about training teachers in this particular form of teaching. There is also no mention in the policy for training teachers in tribal languages and getting nontribal teachers familiarized with tribal culture and area.

4. Tribal Education in Maharashtra: Nuances to be Understood

a. Language: As a Medium of Communication

As so many developed countries around the world have amply demonstrated, being well educated in one’s language, culture, and traditions is not a detriment but indeed a huge benefit to educational, social, and technological advancement. India’s languages are among the richest, most scientific, most beautiful, and most expressive in the world, with a huge body of ancient as well as modern literature (both prose and poetry), film, and music written in these languages that help form India’s national identity and wealth. For purposes of cultural enrichment as well as national integration, all young Indians should be aware of the rich and vast array of languages of their country, and the treasures that they and their literatures contain.²

The meaning of word “Communication” is “to participate” and “to share”, According to Oxford Dictionary it means “transforming or conveying of meaning”. A human is a social creature which cannot survive without communicating with one another, communication is key component in sharing knowledge, acquiring knowledge. In

² Page 14 NEP 2020

Maharashtra, the regional language of teaching is Marathi, English and even Hindi in some areas but for a tribe child even to learn the main stream languages which is important; but is hard.

Teachers appointed in these tribal area are required to know the tribe language as well as the culture of the tribe, so that children will feel protected and connected to the educational system. It is said by many professionals that child picks onto the knowledge which is given in their mother tongue, even the first words spoken, the basic things every child recognises in their mother tongue later on learns it in different language (I.e. A child whose mother tongue is Marathi will first recognize Sun as “Surya” in its mother tongue) That much importance is given to the mother tongue or the regional language, the development of special mechanism which will recognize these tribal languages and with the help of educational professionals there is need to take special training of these teachers and development of study material in these languages (for children aged between 2 to 8) later on they can pick up the mainstream languages . The main hurdle is language which feels alien to these children. It is important to build confidence between these kids in age group 6 to 8 years so that they can pick up the main stream languages.

b. Study Material for Tribal Education:

No doubt that Study Material, Curriculum, its sources are the wisdom for children but nothing can beat the Literature in your mother tongue. Tribal children can enjoy stories in their mother tongue much easily (aged between 2 to 8 years). The object of specialised Study Material designed for Tribal Children should be easy learning and making the education process more enjoyable, skill oriented for Children.

It is important for children to feel that they are represented in the Study Material (Literature / curricular) that they are reading, so that they are least likely struggle with the studies.

The geographical area, tribal culture, environment around the tribe area National Centre for Children’s Literature oversees, manages and plans the production of Children’s literature in Indian languages. The availability of Children literature in tribal languages

is a big issue. Jennifer H said “Books have the power to encourage students while at the same time enlighten other readers of the truths about lives, they don’t live” which significantly expresses how impactful the books / Study Materials can be for children.

The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, an international organization dedicated towards the work of protecting, promoting, defending Indigenous People’s human rights by their The Indigenous World 2022: India report recognized that India has 705 ethnic groups which are recognized as Scheduled Tribe.

The renowned linguist, Noam Chomsky once said that “A language is the Mirror of the Mind”. The literature that we read let it be Study Material – The subjects, the stories , the illustrations given are more easily understood if they are related to our day to day lives , the stories and knowledge passed through our ancestors and related to future as well.

National Education Policy 2020 aims at following aspects:

- Enjoyable and inspirational books for students at all levels will be developed through high quality translation and in Indian Languages
- Teachers with knowledge of local language to areas with high dropout areas will be deployed
- Competitions and Olympiads will be available in regional languages.
- By 2021 the new and more efficient and comprehensive National Curriculum Framework for education of teachers will be formulated by NCERT based on vision and principles of National Education
- Policy 2020 and will be made available in all regional languages
- Policy recognized the tribal communities and children and the difficulties they face by saying that the special mechanism needs to be made for these children to benefit from these interventions.

c. Teaching Pedagogy and Teachers’ Skills:

National Education Policy 2020 talks about teaching pedagogy and teacher’s skills.

- Teacher Eligibility Test will be conducted to strengthen test materials in terms of Teaching pedagogy and teachers skills

- The interview will include the proficiency of teachers in local language for better communication between the students and teachers.

All curriculum and pedagogy, from the foundational stage onwards, will be redesigned to be strongly rooted in the Indian and local context and ethos in terms of culture, traditions, heritage, customs, language, philosophy, geography, ancient and contemporary knowledge, societal and scientific needs, indigenous and traditional ways of learning etc. – in order to ensure that education is maximally relatable, relevant, interesting, and effective for our students. Stories, arts, games, sports, examples, problems, etc. will be chosen as much as possible to be rooted in the Indian and local geographic context. Ideas, abstractions, and creativity will indeed best flourish when learning is thus rooted.³

Historically we have seen through the gurukul system the impact of a teacher-student connection on the progress and growth of the student. The presence of teachers from the same tribal community has shown to have better participation of students, as the tribal teacher from the same community understands the culture with greater sensitivity. A teacher from the tribal community would understand the problems of tribal students better and bring change in his teaching ways accordingly. They can connect the culture with the curriculum and make learning interesting for the students. The study material is often not available in the language of the tribal community which has been a cause of students not having an interest in education. a teacher bridge the difference between that and imparts education using available resources. teaching via drawing painting theatre sports etc at the primary level would engage the interest of students in school.

5. Culture in Education:

Multicultural education is advanced as an important response to diversity in educational processes. A closer view to multicultural education indicates that it is a movement for equity, social justice, and democracy as well as a philosophy and strategy to school reform.⁴

Culture in education plays an important role. When a child is born, his first connect is with his

³ Page 16 NEP 2020

⁴ Vandana Singh (April , 2022) . *Multicultural perspective and diversity in educational process of India: a study of children 's multicultural literature* . National institute of educational planning and administration, New Delhi

culture. The gurukul system had had culture integrated in their education system. Teaching core values of how to live a culturally disciplined life was one of the important teachings of the gurukul system. The modern education system lacks this. it is a race education system that promotes a crab attitude rather than brotherhood. The purpose of education is to transform a group of people into a civilized society and if education is not able to fulfill this purpose then it will be of no use. Children from the tribal area are not able to connect with education because of its lack of integration with culture. Many schools do not have to teach their students on tribal culture and festivals. We all are aware of Holi or Holika festival but very few of us know about Bhagoria Festival. People coming from tribal areas feel left out and gradually their interest in coming to school for education diminishes. Most schools only focus on giving textbook knowledge and lack physical activity. Unlike in the gurukul system where physical and mental health was given importance, most schools in rural areas lack this.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions:

Accessibility to basic primary education for tribal people is very low in Maharashtra. Most of these tribal areas are in undeveloped regions where basic infrastructure in schools like toilets is not provided. Toilets are not only important for good sanitation and hygiene but also for dignity, especially of young girls. Even today there are so many girls who are forced to stay at home once they reach puberty because of a lack of proper toilets as many cases of molestation have come forward when females are forced to defecate in open. So having a minimum level of infrastructure in tribal schools is necessary. There should also be hostel facilities provided for students who come from remote tribal areas.

Even though the government has taken initiatives there is low attendance of students of tribal communities in school because of poor economic conditions of families. A lot of tribal families depend on their younger members for basic livelihood as some parents fail to see the benefit of education and prefer to send their children to work. So programs for spreading awareness about the importance of education among tribal parents are important.

Appointment of non-tribal teachers in tribal schools is an evident problem as the teacher has a lack of knowledge of tribal language or culture, because of this students can't connect with the teacher. There should be a proper mechanism for training non-tribal teachers in specific tribal areas. There

should be inclusion of activities in curriculum that help the tribal children connect with the culture and history of their regions. Education will play an important role in development of tribal communities

