

# Issues and Challenges of School Education Faced by Tribal Students in India: A Critical Review

## OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:  
ASH-2022-09044823

Volume: 9

Issue: 4

Month: April

Year: 2022

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 20.12.2021

Accepted: 15.02.2022

Published: 01.04.2022

### Citation:

Ottaplackal, Joshen Joji, and K. Anbu. "Issues and Challenges of School Education Faced by Tribal Students in India: A Critical Review." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2022, pp. 25–30.

### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v9i4.4823>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

## Joshen Joji Ottaplackal

Research Scholar, Department of Social Work  
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4664-8390>

## K. Anbu

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work  
Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India

### Abstract

Education is one of the liberating forces anticipated for an egalitarian society based on equality and justice. Makers of the Indian Constitution cognized of its value have set a deadline of 10 years after the promulgation of the constitution to achieve universal compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. To much distress, after 74 years of independence, even primary education is far from being universal, but the state has relentlessly pursued the goal. Much of the population have reaped the fruits of Modern Education, but a significant population is lagging. Scheduled Tribe, with more than 104 million people, has poorly performed compared to the rest of the people. The current study will comprehensively review the issues and challenges for imparting education to children from indigenous communities. The article is entirely based on secondary data gathered from various government sources and derived from numerous research studies conducted in India. The study's outcome can improve the implementation of the fundamental right to education in its true spirit while giving due regard for the tribal identity.

**Keywords:** Education, Tribal Identity, Scheduled Tribe

### Introduction

Education is essential for the overall development of human beings. Realizing its importance, every governments have invested in these sector to improve the quality and reach of educational institutions throughout the country. These are evident from the literacy rate the country has been able to achieve from 18.32% in 1952 to 72.98% in 2011 (Census, 2011). Even then we are far from achieving universal literacy. Educational achievement among different social groups in India is highly unequal. Despite the numerous government initiatives to improve the academic output for the scheduled tribe, they are still lagging behind the general population. As per the 2011 census data, the literacy rate among the scheduled tribe is 58.96% compared to 72.99 % for the total population of India.

With a Tribal population of more than 104 million people, India constitutes the second largest tribal population globally. Tribes in India are enormously diverse in their culture, tradition and modes of living. These are evident because India has 705 notified tribal groups from heterogeneous and varied backgrounds. One of the unique characteristics of tribal communities is that they primarily reside in remote hilly areas and deep forests and live-in scattered habitation, which is hard to access (Sujatha, 2002).

The Indian constitution, cognized of the distinctive requirements of the scheduled tribe, have incorporated special provisions to ensure their protection and development. Article 15(4), 16(4), 19(5), 23, 46, 330, 332, 335 and 338 of the constitution of India have provisions for both scheduled caste and scheduled tribe, while Article 29, 164, 244, 244(A), 275(1), 339(1), 339(2) are exclusively for the scheduled tribe. Apart from that, Articles 371(A), 371(B) and 371(C) have provisions that apply to certain areas coming under the north-eastern states (Verma, 1995). Despite all these provisions and other welfare schemes, “they disproportionately represent the people living below the poverty line, are illiterate and suffer from extremely poor physical health” (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014).

This paper will comprehensively review the issues and challenges for imparting education to children from indigenous community. The article is entirely based on secondary data gathered from various government sources and derived from numerous research studies conducted in India.

### **Approaches towards Tribal Development**

India pursued a policy of Integration underlined by the five principles envisioned by the first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. It ensured protective safeguards over their land and culture, political safeguards for their proper representation in the democratic institutions and developmental safeguards for improving their socio-economic conditions. India rightly rejected the assimilation policy in the early decade of independence itself. The proponents of assimilation argued that tribes are nothing but backward Hindus. In his book, Ghurye (1943), a renowned sociologist, argued that tribals are backward Hindus but integrated imperfectly as a class among the Hindu society. This assertion of denying the difference can still be found in various quarters of Indian society (Xaxa, 2005). Researchers such as Gupta and Padel (2018) have argued that even though the state has done away with the policy of assimilation, but in reality, education induced assimilation has reached a large scale through government-run residential schools. When addressing the problems in Tribal education, it is then necessary to look into the impact of ‘mainstreaming’,

happening through government-sponsored education programmes, on their cultural identity.

### **Issues and Challenges of Tribal Education in India**

Issues and challenges plaguing tribal education are multifarious. The current study reviews papers for understanding the most pressing problems in the education sector. Dropout from the schools continues to be a significant challenge. Students drop out due to varied reasons. Kakkoth (2012) studied the subjective experience of school dropouts belonging to particularly vulnerable tribal groups in Kerala. The study found out that early marriage, lack of freedom in school especially for boys, issues within the hostel, school and family, illness and religious issues were reasons for dropping out of school. The author also observed that teacher’s lack of familiarity with the tribal dialect or their ways of life had made the learning process difficult for the students. Difficulty in understanding subjects like Mathematics, Hindi and English, fear of teachers which are few of the challenges associated with first-generation learners, and non-functional parent-teacher association inhibited the learning process and led to dropout.

Language is an essential medium of instruction. Learning in the mother tongue will enhance learning outcomes and help in cognitive development. The Indian constitution, through Article 350 A, guarantees that the medium of instruction for primary education to be the mother tongue. However, according to a study conducted by Bagai and Nundy (2009) it is often overlooked. In their qualitative study, to understand the key issues challenging educational development in Tribal areas, they found out that government schools use the state’s official language as the medium of instruction, which is unfamiliar for the children from tribal hamlets, making learning hard for them. They also found that curriculum content is irrelevant for tribals ways of life and argued for greater incorporation of local content. Teacher absenteeism, gender bias, insufficient incentives and educational opportunities for children of migrating workers are other issues that need intervention.

Poverty has a multifaceted impact not only on the individual but also on the country. Mitra

and Singh (2008) have documented the causal relationship between poverty and low literacy rate among scheduled tribe women in India through their literature survey. Poverty is a vicious cycle, pushing people to the ongoing process of impoverishment. It denies the opportunity to get a better education. Poverty significantly limits tribal girls access to education, leading to a high dropout rate, low gross enrolment ratio and illiteracy.

An audit report prepared by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (2007) to gauge the performance of various schemes implemented for the educational development of scheduled tribes and scheduled caste has shown the financial constraints and mismanagement plaguing the sector. The report highlighted “Underutilisation of funds, inter-state imbalances in allocation of funds, non-availing of central assistance, delayed/non/short release of funds, unspent balances lying with States/UTs, diversion of funds etc which are symptomatic of deficient financial management were observed in respect of most of the schemes”. The report also highlighted insufficient publicity for different schemes, inadequate hostel facilities, and delayed scholarship distribution.

Education helps an individual to reach their full potential. Our current approach of one fit for all towards education will not help in achieving the full potential. People are uniquely distinct from one another in their abilities. Studies show that tribal students are good at extracurricular activities such as sports and arts (Kakkoth, 2012). In their review of the literature (Brahmanandam and Basu, 2015), India’s policymakers for tribal education are focused on developing a national curriculum rather than creating courses for skill development and spotting talents.

Awareness is the key to overcoming ignorance. Being educated will help people to be aware of their rights and empower themselves. Research suggests (Patra et al., 2021) that the awareness level about education is far less among the semi-literate compared with literate. The study analysed the educational awareness among marginalised communities in West Bengal found no significant difference in the level of awareness about education among the young and old generation and between

males and females. There need to be more awareness campaigns focusing on the semi-literate and illiterate population. Learning by doing is a practical approach over rote learning. Students can understand how the concepts relate to a real-life situation. Panda (2018), in a descriptive study, found out that visiting science museums positively impacted the student’s engagement with science subjects. She observed that students from the scheduled tribe community fail to adapt to the science curriculum due to language of instruction and less practical exposure.

India is a very diverse country, yet as a nation, it has moved in one direction. Diversity provides an opportunity to learn about others. Multicultural classrooms are venues where different socio-economic backgrounds interact with each other. This type of classroom has its advantages as well as difficulties. Pagan (2017) studied the challenges faced by students from scheduled tribe communities in a multicultural classroom setting. Tribal children isolate themselves from the rest when the teachers, parents and society neglect them. No proper training for handling students from diverse backgrounds, Inability to develop communication with teachers due to fear of punishment or intimidation, indifference from parents towards education and lack of encouragement are forcing them to withdraw from others leading to dropping out later.

Ashram schools are providing educational facilities for students from tribal communities throughout the country. Some of these boarding schools are often mired in allegations of rape, sex abuse and corruption, see “Buldhana rape: Girls refuse to go back to tribal boarding school” (Maithra, 2016). These events will push students from not opting for these education facilities. Goyal (2016), through a commentary in Economic and Political Weekly, asserted that Ashram school in Maharashtra are becoming centres of abuse. He also found that 50% of sanctioned staff strength is lying vacant, insufficient infrastructure, lack of adequate toilet, non-functional water purifying systems, and most of them lack compound walls making the school ineffective. He observed that out of the entire ashram school in Maharashtra, 556 are run by NGOs. Governments are unable to make them accountable since politicians control a majority of them.

Children are one of the most affected populations during any violent conflict. Extreme Wing Extremism ideology found its footing in the impoverished interiors of India. Through the substantial efforts of successive governments through development activities directed at improving the social-economic parameters, India has been able to control LWE. In the confrontation between armed militants and security forces, children are caught in the middle. (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Kumar (2017) studied the effect of civil strife on the academic life of children in Bijapur. He found out that frequent conflict-induced factors such as loss of classes, destruction of the school, loss of academic records, displacement, disappearance have exasperated the education poverty already in the area. These conflict-induced factors had a profound impact on the academic life of students from the scheduled tribe compared with its effects on students from other communities. The dropout rate is high for tribal students. Boys dropped out are forced to migrate in search of a livelihood, and girls drop out due to safety concerns.

The Indian government is aiming to sanction 740 Eklavya model residential schools by the year 2022. These schools were built to impart quality education to tribal students. Researchers such as Gupta and Padel (2018), through their study, argue that education induced assimilation is happening through these residential schools. They even compared it with the stolen generation model of North American and Australia. The negative impact of the residential school model on the native population are well documented (Adams 1995; Milloy, 1999). They have destroyed language, culture, traditional ways of life and self-esteem. Schools were centres of abuse, and many have died due to illness and torture. Gupta and Padel (2018) also observed that policies are in place to implement instruction in the mother tongue, but these policies never translate into tangible actions. The authors also raised concerns over the assimilation pedagogy followed in large private schools exclusively for tribals, funded by corporates none other than those who plunder the natural resources in the tribal areas.

Covid had redefined normality. Education, too, had to adapt to the changed circumstances. With the national lockdown, schools were closed and

locked everyone at home. As per a newspaper report, see “Digital divide produced stark consequences for poor school children from rural and tribal areas: SC” (Tripathi, 2021); the Supreme Court of India, observed that the digital divide has stark consequences for the economically weaker section of the society. Students, especially from rural and tribal backgrounds, couldn’t afford essential gadgets to attend online classes. Their right to education provided in Article 21A of the Indian constitution was denied because they didn’t have the means to purchase the gadgets. Compensatory class to bridge the learning gap remains a big challenge.

### Suggestions

Based on the review author has some suggestions that can help improve the implementation of the fundamental right to education in its true spirit while giving due regard for the tribal identity.

1. Curriculum development has to follow a localized approach. It must take the views of all stakeholders involved. The curriculum must incorporate tribal festivals, celebrations, stories, history and activities that are congruent with tribal values for each region. The local community have to be engaged in all levels of curriculum development. This approach from the bottom to top will help address the lack of interest among students to learn.
2. The government have to encourage the building of local schools that are near to tribal hamlets. These can save them from unnecessary travel as well as help them to stay with their families. Another advantage is that there will be a continuity in their culture or traditional ways of life.
3. Policies regarding the language of instruction in the mother tongue need to implement in letter and spirit. As of now, there is a policy disjunction regarding the implementation of the same. There are a lot of successful experiments, such as Eklavya NGOs ‘Shiksha Protsahan Kendras’, which can be replicated elsewhere as per local demands.
4. Effective utilization of the funds allocated will only be happening when they are timely released. Awareness campaigns targeting the most vulnerable people will help in widening the beneficiary base.

5. Special training for teachers to understand the unique circumstances from which the students are coming. It can help them to have an empathetic approach while addressing the problems of the students. Language training workshops to learn about tribal dialect for teachers will help them better communicate with students and their parents.
6. Monetary and non-monetary incentives may help increase teachers' motivation; these may help arrest the dropout rate.
7. Nutritious food is essential for a healthy body and a healthy mind. In addition to the Mid-day meals, nutritious, rich breakfast for all classes can help improve the learning outcomes.
8. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme was again proved as a lifeline for entire India when most rural households lost their employment due to covid induced lockdown. The story of tribal communities benefiting from the scheme was also not different. Therefore, it is imperative to increase the number of days for employment under the scheme according to the local needs and circumstances and extend the scheme to the Urban areas to benefit the urban poor, which also include tribal migrants. An awareness campaign regarding the scheme can help to widen the beneficiary base.
9. Covid had disrupted the usual ways of life. Children have lost lots of classes due to this disruption. The stark digital divide which was evident during the lockdown needs to be bridged. Bridge course when schools reopen for tribal children can compensate for the learning loss that happened due to covid lockdown and the subsequent online class.
10. Doing a social audit of residential schools catering to tribal students regularly can prevent physical, mental and sexual abuse and the misuse of funds which enhance its quality.

### Conclusion

Education opens the door of opportunity from ignorance, leads from oppression to freedom. Education is imperative for a nation to develop and progress. Governments were relatively successful in bringing educational opportunities to the most

marginalised section of Indian society throughout the years. But still, some gaps need to be overcome. Issues and Challenges facing tribal education are multifaceted. It requires a concerted effort from all the related stakeholders to readdress those issues. Sen (2000) through his capability approach states that freedom and development go hand in hand. One will complement the other. True freedom in the case of education for tribal can be having all the necessary means to achieve education. For wholistic development of tribals, their language, identify or culture cannot be discarded on the process of accessing education, while preservation and recognition of their uniqueness could enhance the result of being educated.

### References

- Adams, David Wallace. *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928*. University Press of Kansas, 1995.
- Brahmanandam, T., and T. Bosu Babu. "State of Primary Education among Tribals: Issues and Challenges." *Artha Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2015, pp. 127-44.
- Ghurye, G.S. *The Aborigines-'So-Called'-and Their Future*. Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, 1943.
- Goyal, Prateek. "Neglect and Abuse in the Name of Education." *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 49, 2016.
- Gupta, Malvika, and Felix Padel. "Confronting a Pedagogy of Assimilation: The Evolution of Large-scale Schools for Tribal Children in India." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2018, pp. 22-47.
- Kakkoth, Seetha. *Unheard Voices: A Study on the Perceptions of Tribal School Drop-outs in Kerala*. Child Rights and You, 2012.
- Kashyap, Aruna. "Being Neutral is Our Biggest Crime:" *Government, Vigilante, and Naxalite Abuses in India's Chhattisgarh State*. Human Rights Watch, 2008.
- Maitra, Pradip Kumar. "Buldhana Rape: Girls Refuse to go back to Tribal Boarding School." *Hindustan Times*, 2016.



- Milloy, John S. *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879-1986*. University of Manitoba Press, 1999.
- Mitra, Aparna, and Pooja Singh. "Trends in Literacy Rates and Schooling among the Scheduled Tribe Women in India." *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 35, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 99-110.
- Pagan, Steen. "Tribal Children in Multicultural Classroom." *The Communications*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2017.
- Panda, Snigdha. "Promoting Science Communication among Scheduled Tribe Students through Museum." *Journal of Scientific Temper*, vol. 6, 2018, pp. 166-76.
- Patra, Santanu, et al. "An Analysis on the Educational Awareness of Marginalized Communities of Nayagram Block, Jhargram District, West Bengal." *NSOU-Open Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2021, pp. 36-44.
- Performance Audit Report on Educational Development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*. Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2007.
- Primary Census Abstracts*. Office of Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 2011.
- Report of the High-Level Committee on Socio-Economic, Health and Educational Status of Tribal Communities of India*. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014.
- Sen, Amartya. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Shweta, Bagai, and Neera Nundy. *Tribal Education: A Fine Balance*. Dasra catalyst for social change, Mumbai. 2009.
- Sujatha, K. "Education among Scheduled Tribes." *Indian Education Report: A Profile of Basic Education*, edited by Govinda, R. Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 87-94.
- Tripathi, Ashish. "Digital divide Produced Stark Consequences for Poor School Children from Rural and Tribal Areas: SC." *Deccan Herald*, 2021.
- Verma, R.C. *Indian Tribes through the Ages*. Publication Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1995.
- Xaxa, Virginius. "Politics of Language, Religion and Identity: Tribes in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 40, no. 13, 2005, pp. 1363-70.

#### Author Details:

**Joshon Joji Ottaplackal**, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India,  
Email ID: joshenjoji@gmail.com

**Dr. K. Anbu**, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Pondicherry University, Puducherry, India,  
Email ID: anbucovai@gmail.com