



Educational Status of Tribal Women in West Bengal

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Abstract- Education helps in empowerment of tribal women by developing self-confidence and courage to overcome the problems they face in their daily life. The objective of the paper is to analyse the status of tribal education with literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, and Gender Parity Index in Westbengal. The analysis is based on secondary data. In West Bengal female literacy of tribes is only 47.7 % compared to male literacy of 68.2% and male - female gap in literacy rate of tribal women from rural area to urban area which are 21% to 14.4% respectively.

Key Words: Education, Tribal Women, Empowerment

I. Introduction

Socialization is synonymous with education (Sandhya Rani .G,N. *et al* 2011). Margaret Mead (1943) defines, education as the cultural process, the way in which each newborn human infant is transformed into a full member of a specific human society. Educational backwardness is a distinct gender dimension. (Sandhya Rani .G *et al* 2011).

Indian society is characterized by high degree of structural inequalities, based on the institutions of caste and ethnicity (Thorat. S, & Motilal, M., 2005). Nearly 8.6% of the country's population is and 5.50% of State's population are comprised of tribal and indigenous people in India and West Bengal respectively. In India, tribal people especially tribal women are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of this society. Special provisions have been made in articles 46, 275, 330, 332, 335, 338, 340 etc. to safeguard the interest of schedule tribes and to protect them from social injustice and exploitation. (Oraw. D and Toppo. D, 2012). There are 574 tribal groups who have been identified as schedule tribes in India. Central government and West Bengal State Government have introduced various important policies and programmes to overcome educational barriers and uplift educational status of tribal women for example- Right to Education Act, Sarva Sikshya Aviyan, up gradation of Primary

Schools under SSA, New Residential Girl's High Schools / Educational Complexes, Teaching in Tribal Language, Bicycles of ST Girls, various incentives etc. (Puhan. Rasmi Ranjan *et al* 2013) Despite of all these efforts, tribal women are lagging behind in all sphere-socially, educationally, economically and politically. But for the development of a society, there is the need of an inclusive progress of all the sections of the society, and for this perspective, it is imperative to bring the deprived, marginalized and weaker sections of the society as tribal women to the forefront of educational revolution in India. This is important for equitable growth of human resources and overall development of the nation. Today education a powerful agent of social change. It unlocks the door to modernisation. It also paves a sure road to economic modernisation and progress (Sandhya Rani .G.N. *et al* 2011). Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development of tribes but also for inner strength of the tribal communities by which by which they can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well-being. It will helps them in improving their immediate living conditions or increase the potential for future living. (K.K.Sahu., 2014) . The author made an attempt to analyse the educational status among tribal women of West Bengal with Literacy Rate, Gross Enrolment Ratio, and Gender Parity Index.

II. Methodology

This study is based on secondary data. Relevant secondary data has been collected from academic books, research papers of different scholars, Census of India, 2011, Human development reports and the reports provided by Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt of India, Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribe 2013 etc. The collected data was analyzed, tabulated and presented in the following pages.

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Education is a key component of Human Development Index. Social mobility of a backward community could be ensured and accelerated by providing education to that particular community. Thus it is important to analyse the educational attainment of tribal women to get a clear picture of their educational status in the state of West Bengal and accordingly the steps should be taken to make education accessible and gender equitable education to tribal community.

The trend of literacy of Scheduled tribes (STs) in India and West Bengal from 1991 to 2011 is shown in table – 1. The percentage of literacy among Scheduled tribes in India and West Bengal were 29.6% and 27.8 % in 1991 which has increased to 59% and 57.9% in 2001 and 2011 respectively. The Table -1 data also shows the gap in literacy rate between total polation and tribal population in West Bengal which were 29.9%, 25.2% and 18.3% in the year 1991, 2001 and 2011 respectively. Literacy Rate (LR) is defined as percentage of literates among the population aged seven years and above. Although literacy levels of STs have improved, but the gap in literacy levels has not declined significantly which reflect failure of the policies and programmes launched for tribal development by Central and Sate Government to bridge the gap during the time span of three decades also.

Table-2 Shows, the percentages of literacy rates of STs by gender and rural / urban. The data shows negligible differences between India and West Bengal which reflects almost same educational status of Tribal women in West Bengal and in India on an average. In West Bengal female literacy of tribes is only 47.7 % compared to male literacy of 68.2%. It is evident from the table-2 that there has been a significant difference in male - female gap in literacy rate of tribal women from rural area to urban area which are 21% to 14.4% respectively. Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for any stage (Different Classes) is defined as percentage of the enrolment in that stage to the estimated child population in the respective age group. Table 3 in the shows the GER of Tribal women at the Primary level (I– V), Elementary level (I- VIII) and Secondary level (IX-XII) in India and West Bengal. GER is higher in primary level and elementary level which is 122.4 for ST girls against 122.3 for ST boys and 115 for ST girls against 108 for ST boys respectively. Significant decline in GER found at secondary level which is 43.7 for ST girls against 48.5 for ST boys in West Bengal. Table-3 is the evident of high dropout rate among ST girls which may be the result of below discussed dimensional problems faced by tribal girls in their day to day life.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a socio economic index (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013) which reflects the enrolment of girls in school or access to education in comparison to boys. Table -3 also shows that the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal is same in Class I- V which is 1 and is higher in class VI-VII and class IX-X which are 1.06 and 1.03 respectively in comparison to average India. Although most of the data in this study reflects negative educational status of tribal girls but table -4 is evident of no gender discrimination in educational attainment of ST girls in West Bengal.

Dimensional problems associated with tribal women's educational achievement

Girls face a number of constraints and barriers to accessing and benefitting from education (Calder.R and Huda.K, 2013). It is evident from the above discussion that as tribal girls grow older enrollment rates drop off. In this section the author discussed dimensional problems faced by tribal girls in access and attainment of education. Firstly, Poverty and hunger are the main reasons for the non-participation of tribal girls in education. Though Indian Constitution secure free universal primary education, this often does not include costs of uniforms, textbooks, travel to school, meals, and other associated expenses which become burden to most tribal families and enrolling girls for higher education become luxury to them.

Secondly, Indifferent attitude of the tribal parents as well as is another hindrance towards tribal girl's education. Most of the tribal parents are unaware about the importance of education and they prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment to add on the family income or to take care of their siblings, to rear cattle, to help mother in house hold chores, in collecting the forest products like dried leaves, seeds etc.

Thirdly, the problem of insufficient number of teachers has been compounded by the problem of lacking skilled, committed and gender sensitive teachers (Calder.Rebecca and Huda.Karishma,, 2013) in schools of tribal area. Teacher absenteeism is one of the major problem in educational achievement in tribal areas. Most of the teachers lacking knowledge and appreciation of tribal value system and language which leads to failure in gaining the acceptance and establish a communication link with tribal students which force them to withdraw from education.

Fourthly, Most of schools in tribal areas are without basic infrastructure facilities for example lack of electricity and water, non-plastered floors, lack of proper sanitation facilities to deal with menstrual hygiene affects girls 'attendance (Calder.Rebecca and Huda.Karishma,, 2013) etc. are common feature of those schools

Fifthly, the problem of language and communication slow down educational attainment of tribal girls. Language skills first. (Mahajan, 2012) Despite several policy documents and a constitutional provision (350A) recognizing that linguistic minorities should be educated in their mother tongue at primary level, there is practically no education in Scheduled Tribe languages. This includes even those like Santhali, Bhili, Gondi or Oraon which are spoken by over a million people (Nambissan, 2000). But, the non-availability of teachers known tribal language and textbooks in tribal languages become challenges in their educational achievement.

Sixthly, in the tribal context, school timing is also major problem to tribal girls in attending school regularly. In Westbengal most of the tribal are agricultural labour and they go out for work in early morning and tribal girls are given the responsibilities of looking after their houses and doing various household activities by their parents which leads to irregular attendance and high dropout rates tribal girls.

Seventhly, political apathy towards the issue of educational empowerment of tribal women in another important problem. Lack of co-operation and co-operation between various government Departments looking after tribal education i.e. the tribal welfare department and the education department results in low enrolment of tribal girls in school education.

Though the above discussed problems are major obstacles towards educational attainment of tribal women another reason for their educational underdevelopment may be their lack of awareness about various policies and programmes which are introduced to secure their Human Rights as we as Tribal Rights by Indian Constitution. Another fact observed among tribal women in West Bengal that most of them are satisfied with their life i.e. with where they are and with what they have which indicates their low level of aspiration and motivation to be a part of developed community with modern advanced India.

III. Conclusion

Still in 21st century, Tribal women in Westbengal are marginalized in all sphere- Socially, economically, educationally and politically and despite of various progress and advancement, most of them are completely dependent on cultivation, forest product and haunting etc. Continuous exploitation and domination of mainstream people restrict the tribal women to mix with mainstream society. Low literacy rates among tribal women in this state and in India, continue to indicate a need for more holistic support for delivery of high-quality education among these disadvantage community. Education as powerful catalyst or change agent can help tribal women to find the right way to their development as well as the development of a nation. It is evident that despite the sincere and concerted efforts of the government of India, development of tribal women has been rather slow in comparison to schedule caste community. Therefore, it is important to think seriously about educational empowerment and inclusive growth of tribal women by ensuring coordination and cooperation between different departments of Government (the Tribal Welfare Department, School Education Department etc), Non- Government Organization, Local Self Government, and Community people especially the tribal women themselves in formulation and implementation of programme and policies towards spreading of social equity and education among tribal women.

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Table 1. Literacy rate of total population and Scheduled Tribes Population and Gap in Literacy rate – India /States/Union Territories: 1991-2011

Sl. No	State/UTs	Literacy Rate - 1991		Gap in Literacy Rate	Literacy Rate - 2001		Gap in Literacy Rate	Literacy Rate - 2011		Gap in Literacy Rate
		Total	ST		Total	ST		Total	ST	
1	India	52.2	29.6	22.6	64.8	47.1	17.7	73	59	14
2	West Bengal	57.7	27.8	29.9	68.6	43.4	25.2	76.3	57.9	18.3

Source : Census of India 2011, Statistical Profile of Tribal Women 2013

Table -2. Literacy Rates of Scheduled Tribe Women in Westbengal

Sl. No	State/UTs	Total		Rural		Urban	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	India	68.5	49.4	66.8	46.9	83.2	70.3
2	West Bengal	68.2	47.7	67.2	46.2	78.4	64

Source: Census of India 2011

Table – 3. Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) & Gender Parity Index of Scheduled Tribe Women in West Bengal

Sl. No	State/UTs	Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)						Gender Parity Index			
		Classes I-V (6-10 Years)		Classes VI-VIII (11-13 Years)		Classes IX-XII (14-17 Years)		Class I - V	Class VI - VIII	Classes IX - X	Classes I - XII
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
1	India	137.2	136.7	90.7	87	45.4	37.3	1	0.96	0.86	0.96
2	West Bengal	122.3	122.4	108	115	48.5	43.7	1	1.06	1.03	1.01

Source: Census of India 2011

