

## Scheduled tribes (ST) students: Challenge & development

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### Abstract

High School education for ST students is seen as one of the most emerging policy issues of contemporary India. Teachers engaged in teaching of ST student's face unique set of challenges, which are emerged primarily from the unique cultural patterns of Bedia and Santal community. This study was conducted in the native area of Nadia district of west Bengal. Interview of the teachers was conducted in order to get valuable data for understanding the research problem. Data was subjected to rigorous of content analysis to unveil the major themes and patterns in the interview data. The study identified that the issue with teaching ST students lies in their inability to adapt in normal school conditions. The study also reveals that there are large gaps between school culture and family culture of children, creating a situation of cultural mismatch, resulting into creating discipline problems, management problems and poor responsiveness of Bedia and Santal students towards academic activities.

**Keywords:** ST students, Bedia and Santal community, cultural mismatch.

## Alunos de tribos programadas (TP): desafio e desenvolvimento

### Resumo

A educação de ensino médio para estudantes TP é vista como uma das questões políticas mais emergentes da Índia contemporânea. Os professores envolvidos no ensino de alunos de TP enfrentam um conjunto único de desafios, que surgem principalmente dos padrões culturais únicos da comunidade de Bedia e Santal. Este estudo foi realizado na área nativa do distrito de Nadia, no oeste de Bengala. Entrevista com os professores foi realizada a fim de obter dados valiosos para a compreensão do problema de pesquisa. Os dados foram submetidos a uma rigorosa análise de conteúdo para desvendar os principais temas e padrões nos dados da entrevista. O estudo identificou que o problema com o ensino de alunos de TP reside na sua incapacidade de se adaptar às condições normais da escola. O estudo também revela que existem grandes lacunas entre a cultura escolar e a cultura familiar das crianças, criando uma situação de descompasso cultural, resultando em problemas de disciplina, problemas de gestão e baixa capacidade de resposta dos alunos de Bedia e Santal às atividades acadêmicas.

**Palavras-chave:** alunos ST, comunidade Bedia e Santal, desencontro cultural.

### 1. Introduction

India has a vast diversity of ST communities; each of them is unique and bizarre in their culture and lifestyle. But behind this seemingly beautiful world of ST people lies a world of poverty, impoverishment, alienation, apathy and illiteracy. While education is the optimistic endeavor of all the human development strategies, ST communities of India seem to be lagging behind in this sector as well, the gulf of differences in educational credentials between ST and upper class continues to widen.

The problem of ST community's education is one of the core issues and challenges in front of government of India. The problem is educated ST family is more than of framing policies and investing capital, it is of one of a developing a culturally responsive educational policy, which includes everything from curriculum development, Pedagogy, examination patterns extra-curricular & co-curricular activities, appointment & training of teachers

etc. The various forms of discriminations which have been part of Indian social system, continue to replicate themselves in government schools, which have begun to see an influx of Adivasi students, a majority of whom are first-generation learners. These children suffer at the hands of their upper caste teachers in schools, which has a critical impact on the subjective constructions as learners.

This has shaped the research focus on the dynamics of education inclusion, particularly aimed at assessing the impact of the entry of large numbers of traditionally excluded social groups into institutions to which they have been in the past systematically denied access (Balagopalan; Subrahmanian, 2003). Developing a culturally responsive educational policy remains the biggest challenge of ST student's welfare in the contemporary India. Understanding inclusion beyond enrolment would require that we look at the ways in which children and parents are both able, and not able, to feel a degree of comfort in the high school space (Balagopalan; Subrahmanian, 2003). The ST students are living in socially impoverished and lead a helpless life. Their educational development is entirely different from the general students. Since they are adopting their traditions, they are not able to mingle with ordinary people living in plains.

The constant social disadvantage has probably adversely affect their cognitive abilities as a result of which they fail to make achievements in academic, social and other fields (Muthu kumar; Tamilenth, 2013). The experience of education, under prevailing curricular norms serves to assist SC and ST children to internalize the symbols of 'backward' behavior (Kumar 1983). In extensive study on tribes in the state of Andhra Pradesh, K. Sujatha (1994) contends that the perspective adopted for educational development of ST communities fails to adequately address the specific disadvantages characterizing the ST population. Like, taking the case of teaching tribal children in formal schools, Sujatha (1987) on her research on Badia and Santal, found that the rigid system of formal schooling, which emphasize discipline, routine norms, teacher centered instruction etc. made the children wary of the high school.

This went against the culture of free interaction and absence of force as embedded in the tribal cultural ethos. She concludes that little effort has been given to understanding the cultural peculiarity and ignorance of the ST communities. Mukharjii (2009) also highlights the similar inability of the Indian government to address the peculiarities of tribal culture in designing educational policies for them. The school produces the sense of cultural alienation among ST students. Not developing a culturally responsive curriculum & co-curriculum is also one of the reasons for educational failure of ST children. Rathnaiah (1977) Besides holding poverty & geographic distribution as constraining factors in the education of the tribal children, contends that the schools did not address tribal festivities and celebrations.

Therefore, tribal attendance was found to be low during certain seasons. Additionally, he notes that the students were typically disinterested in co - curricular and extracurricular activities offered by the schools as they did not cater to tribal tastes. The educational system for them should be based on the current cultural history of the tribals Bapat (1994).

Research has maintained that tribal students are unique in their learning and cognitive strategies. Cognitive qualities of ST children have to be viewed and evaluated taking into consideration their ecological and cultural contexts that place very different demands on day-today life. Because of differences in the demands of tribal ecology, the patterning of their cognitive abilities shows considerable variation from those of other groups. A related and more important lesson is that ST children are neither culturally inferior nor cognitively less competent than the children of other groups.

Instead, many of their skills and abilities are highly developed and extremely sophisticated (Gautam 2003). Teaching ST students presents a special challenge to teachers and administrators, more so when it is composite classroom with children from both ST and Brahmin cultures. It presents different challenges and dilemmas for teaches, like the dilemma of medium of instruction. The issue is further complicated by the fact that language varies not only within a limited Geographical area but also among the various tribes and subtribes (Kanungo & Mahapatra, 2004).

Inadequate use of tribal language or difficulty in the use of tribal languages will force the students to drop their course at very early stage of their education. Criticizing the governmental policy of introducing tribal language as subject of study in some of the schools, Pattanayak (1981) argued that language as a subject of study is never equivalent to language as a medium of instruction. Sometimes teachers from other culture fail to appreciate the uniqueness & specialty of tribal culture. This creates a social distance between the teacher and the students in the tribal areas. The nontribal teachers are typically found to be dissatisfied with their job in the tribal dominated areas.

### *1.1 Research Question:*

What are the different types of problems and challenges in the process of teaching ST students in Nadia District, W.B.?

## **2. Methods**

Qualitative research design has been adopted in the present study. Qualitative content analysis is based on naturalistic enquiry that entails identifying themes and pattern and involves rigorous coding. Researchers selected 30 school teachers of Nadia District in West Bengal, Indian, engaged in teaching in schools with ST children. Researchers are conducted semi structured interviews to find out the major problems faced by teachers for teaching ST students. Questions are selected after careful follows the review of literature as well as expert advice.

## **3. Results**

Interview transcribed data was analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Transcribed Data from the high school teachers who participated in the present study were coded, line-by-line analysis produced categories and subcategories for problems of teaching ST students. Strategies are reported by the participants in the interview were summarized using emerging themes.

There are gaps between school cultures and family cultures has been the most emergent theme of the interviews, the gaps between family cultures and school cultures is a biggest hurdle in the way of teaching and learning of ST students. There is nothing in the home of the child which could reinforce academic work of a high school. While school culture encourages academic work, family culture discourages academic work deliberately or not to deliberate and encourages the child for family work. This results into their underperformance in the high school. This goes on like a vicious cycle the more they underperform more they distance from learning activities. It is very difficult to teach in such situations where children's home environment is completely divorced from the school setting in which they are. It is really very difficult to maintain the interest of such children who do not see an immediate purpose in the knowledge and understanding of alien culture.

A teacher says: These children have no culture at which could instill academic or high school related habits or encourage them for learning. Students feel uncomfortable at home while doing his homework because his family culture expects him to engage in family related work. In the high school these children therefore lag behind other students. The ST students feel shy and less social with other children. Most of the ST students feel shy and less interactive in the high school classroom as compared to their non-tribal counterparts. These students are tried to form sub-groups in the classroom, making it difficult for teachers to transact uniformly with the high school classroom. This tendency seems to be more intense among boys than girls. ST students tend to have a feeling of inferiority as compared with their counter parts.

A teacher says: The ST students are not as active as other children; they usually occupy backlines in the classroom. Teacher has to do a lot to make them respond in classroom. A group of three or four of these like minded students, usually among boys, part themselves from rest of the class. Which creates problems for the teachers? Parents expect their children to share their farm work during working hours of school Parental attitude is among the major limitation in the way of teaching ST students. Most of the ST students' parents undervalue the educational activities of their children. What came out as an important finding in this study is that absenteeism is not the only problem in ST student's education, but the students bunk class work with or without teacher's permission for helping their parents at work, even when they are present in the high schools. They fail to recognize the rules of formal schooling education.

Like they will demand their children for few hours during the working hours for doing their farm work or taming animals as well as snake. This significantly influences their academic performance and psychological behaviour. This is a regular process here. Bright students and financially improve students move to private schools, one of the serious problems is that the parents both ST and general whose children are bright in their academic work usually prefer to admit their children in private schools. Some of the well-off families among ST family prefer to admit their children in nearby private schools. This creates serious problems like it lowers the diversity of classroom, few bright students in the high school classroom makes the whole classroom dynamic, motivates both the teachers and students.

This process leaves Government schools to constitute only those students who are usually slow learners or low in

intelligence, making it uphill task for teachers who are usually less trained to tackle such children. Most of active students in such a high school classroom are likely to show retrogression than progression. This is a sort of brain drain from Government or Government sponsored high schools to private schools.

A teacher says: "Most of bright students we had, moved to private schools, this really discourages the best teachers; we have been left to teach only backward children, whose interest in learning is least. If you see our annual results are poor and this is the main reasons. Most of the high schools teachers are trained to teach and tackle things in these kinds of situations. Most of these children fell inferior and lack interest because of this process because most of their friends are in private schools." Students teacher ratio should be low; most of the respondents interviewed showed a high concern for unmanageable student teacher ratio. Teachers face a lot of problems when pupil teacher ratio is high in classroom. Teachers have to tackle special problems and challenges teaching tribal children. Therefore, parameters set by Govt. for other schools should be revalidated in their relevance in the high schools.

A teacher says: Relative to most of the general schools, pupil teacher ratio in our schools should be less, because we have to deal with different type of children in the native area of Nadia district, W.B. We have high people teacher ratio in our schools. The pupil teacher ratio prescribed under SSA does not apply to transfer of teachers. It is sometimes very difficult to teach even few of these students. We have children with different interests.

Difficult to maintain discipline in the school Discipline literary means obeying rules, while most claim that it is difficult to maintain discipline, when you have tribal children in classroom. But looking more closely it emerges that it is not discipline problem but a problem of failure to understand culture of ST students. Like these children are not used to wear uniforms. This is seen as a crime in school, but this is just a difference of culture. These people are not used to these things. This situation leads to create problem in high school most of the times.

A teacher says: To keep these students to motivate is really a challenge. These children are very difficult to handle, like motivating them to wear uniforms, which they rarely wear. A teacher cannot punish them every day. We face lot of this kind of problems this is just an example. Language problem and curriculum does not obey. The medium of instruction of is Bengali in these schools as the prescribed text books by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education are written in Bengali language. Teachers reported about facing difficulties transacting both the content and form of the curriculum. They reported about lack of interest among students towards the content of the curriculum. Teachers themselves are not satisfied with the curriculum and face problems teaching in Bengali. ST students are not able to understand well in Bengali.

A teacher says: The books designed by West Bengal Board of Secondary Education are not up to the mark, it is difficult to teach with such textbooks, one needs a lot of training and experience for that. ST students are not able to get the concepts because of Bengali language to which they have least exposure. Lack of cultural sensitivity among the high schools teachers. Most of the teachers in ST areas under study showed a less sensitivity towards the tribal's culture. Most of them lacked the knowledge that ST students have different culture than general children. They simply viewed tribal culture as backward, uneducated, even some of them use the word Gujjar pejoratively.

A teacher says: These children fail because of their backward culture at home; these people have no knowledge of how important education is. They are using their children for taming animals/ snakes. They sometimes come schools with same dress as at home, they have no discipline.

#### **4. Discussion**

The findings of this study are in line with Muthukumar & Tamilenth, (2013) which also highlights the academic problems of the ST students with regard to content, teacher behavior, school resources and home conditions, which may significantly block their academic performance. This study claims a uniqueness of challenges and problems faced by teachers for teaching ST students, same sort of argument has been put forth by Mishra, (2008) and Sujata, (1994). Kumar (1983) claims that best way to improve the educational status of ST students in India is by making proper representation of tribes in curriculum and next by changing the attitude and orientation of teachers towards ST children.

Inappropriate curriculum emerged as one of the core problems of ST school education, with the present curriculum not able to develop quality interests among ST. The study claims that various forms of constraints in teaching ST students children are directly or indirectly a consequence of cultural inadaptability of tribal students in formal institutions dominated by non-tribal personnel and nontribal cultural traits or institutions. The reason for this inadaptability is various forms of institutional structures, text books, teaching methods, instructional

mediums etc. Which create problems of cultural mismatch?

This study reveals that non-tribal teachers working in tribal schools predominantly lack an understanding and sensitivity towards tribal culture, same sort of problem was found by Mukharjii (2009), Kabeer, (2006) and Ramachandran, (2004). Problems of discipline maintenance, shyness of students, lack of proper feasible academic culture' home, un-due expectations of parents, can be categorized as internal constraints of tribal education. While as language and curriculum problem, Pupil teacher ratio problem may be categorized as external constraints of tribal education (Sujata 1994).

#### 4. Conclusions

The study highlights some important problems of teaching tribal children. This study can have important implication for formulating policies for upliftment of tribal education. These findings can be very useful for DIET's and SIE's for arranging training programs for teachers engaged in teaching in these areas. Like this study reflects the need to inculcate cultural sensitivity among teachers. This can also be beneficial for teachers to self-reflect on their attitude towards tribal children. The study takes a very specific area of teaching and pedagogy, new studies can focus on management problems, problems of developing school community relations.

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#### 6. Authors' Contributions

*Pran Krishna Sarkar*: study design, scientific reading, data organization, article writing, corrections, submission and publication.

#### 7. Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest.

#### 8. Ethics Approval

Not applicable.

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