

Critical Reviews: A Contemporary Overview about Status and Challenging Issues of Tribal Education in India

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ABSTRACT

India is the second-largest tribal population in the world. However, after the seven decades of independence, the tribal groups are disadvantaged and socially backward from the cycle of growth in many areas such as health, education, employment, and empowerment, and more. Among these, for tribal society, education is an essential requirement. The state and central governments have initiated several programs to educate tribal groups. Many of these programs have achieved only 10 percent of the targets. The vast numbers of tribal peoples are missing their education at various levels. They lag in education due to the high illiteracy rates among the tribal population relative to Scheduled Castes (S.C.s). Hence, the time has come to consider tribal education and inclusive growth seriously. In this context, the comprehensive literature review seeks to provide a contemporary overview of India's current status and challenging issues of tribal education. The paper is purely based on second-hand information from various research studies conducted in India and collected from different government sources. The outcomes are more helpful in implementing schemes that can improve tribal literacy and inclusive growth perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

India is the second-largest tribal population globally after the continent of Africa (10.40 crores). It is more than France, Britain, four times the total population of Australia. Generally, the tribes live in more isolated and closer proximity to hill areas, forests, near the seas, and islands, optimally using the natural resource base for their daily sustenance. These difficult inhabited geographical areas have isolated them from the mainstream of Indian society (Dreze J and Sen A, 1995). In terms of language, dialects, physical characteristics, population size, and more. Their lifestyle is quite different from non-tribals (Preet, 1994). The word tribe is described as a distinct social group based on social and developmental conditions. According to the anthropology dictionary, "a tribe is a social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organization" (Banerjee, 1994).

In 1911, the Indian Imperial gazetteer defined tribe as a "collection of families bearing a common name, speaking a common dialect, occupying or professing to occupy a common territory and is not usually endogamous though originally it might have been so" (Nithya, 2014). Until 1919, they were one of the 'Depressed Classes. Subsequently, the Indian Franchise Committee of 1919 granted these classes separate nomenclatures for census reports, and in 1931 they were known as primitive tribes. They were known only by order of 1951 as scheduled tribes (Verma, 1996). The tribal regions in India were under

control during the British colonial period to improve their income collection and impose a uniform legal and administrative structure throughout the colony ([Sen, 1992](#)).

Besides, it allows them to pursue their own socio-economic and cultural life, keeping the tribes isolated and away from the national mainstream, to remain backward. Several anthropologists, including Elwin, have contributed by bringing various aspects of tribal life ([Sahay, 1998](#)). Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru focused on tribal development in the post-independence era without forcing anything outside to maintain traditional institutions, traditions, and practices through Panchcheel policy. The policy has five principles that restrict the planners from bringing radical changes to traditional and cultural life. Development is not associated with the growth of a few affluent individuals. [Amartya sen \(1999\)](#) mentioned that unless human potential is adequately addressed and deprivations faced by disadvantaged communities are resolved, progress and growth cannot occur. He emphasized capacity and human freedoms. Poverty, lack of knowledge, sickness, and exploitation are complex issues that occupy tribal lives. According to Roy Burman, new laws aimed at protecting tribals have led to greater tribal exploitation. Development seems to be possible only with the involvement of local people. Based on this finding, the preparation approach needs to be tailored, i.e., the planners must investigate local issues and prepare accordingly ([Roy Burman, 2009](#)).

The tribal population of India is numerically a tiny minority, and they represent huge group diversity. They live primarily in isolation but spread across the country's length and breadth. Tribes constitute 8.2 percent of India's total population, which is over 104 million people, according to the 2011 Census. India has been recognized as 461 ethnic groups like Scheduled Tribes (S.T.s), which is nearly 273 is unique and distinct from the mainstream population in terms of different languages. There are 4,635 tribal communities living today, according to the Indian Anthropological Survey. Nevertheless, Schedule Tribes are traditionally excluded from the cycle of growth, and their participation in education remains in a pitiful stage even after seven decades of independence from India.

EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF TRIBALS

Education is a fundamental human right and the necessary element of the national building for human progress. It is generally agreed to achieve development goals whereby economically and socially disadvantaged people escape poverty and participate completely as citizens ([World Bank, 1990](#); [Sen, 1999](#); [Dreze, 2006](#)). Many global human rights treaties have confirmed this, including The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1981). The United Nations has also been adopted by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) since 2000 to ensure free universal primary education for everyone, regardless of ethnicity. It is indicated by the objective of 2010 Education for all report has been achieved ([Ramachandran, 2009](#)). Throughout India, under different constitutional provisions, education is provided by both the public and private sectors from three tiers, such as national, federal, and local. Also, several vocational education institutions have been set up to meet education needs ([Bhatty, 1998](#)).

Education and literacy are potent indicators of social and economic development and the inner strength of tribal communities. Tribal development has been a significant concern of the government, voluntary organizations, NGOs, and social reformers and should not be studied in isolation with a few affluent individuals' growths. Professor Amartya sen stressed that education is a crucial parameter for all-inclusive economic growth. The inclusive growth of all sections of society is an essential aspect of development. Given this, it is imperative to bring the disadvantaged, marginalized, and weaker sections of society together. As a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14, free and compulsory education is provided under various articles of the Indian constitution ([Batra, 2005](#)). Approximately 80 percent of all recognized elementary schools are run or funded by the government, making them the country's largest education provider ([Bhatty, 1998](#)). However, in terms of literacy and education, the tribes lagged behind the general population and the Scheduled Caste population ([Maharatna, 2005](#)).

This paper aims to review existing literature on the current status and challenging issues of tribal education in India in this context. This paper also provides insights and perspectives on different aspects of tribal education in a country through a comprehensive literature review. The data were also collected

from various government sources such as Census of India, 2011, Internet Selected Educational Statistics, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resources, National Commission for S.C.s & S.T.s, Statistics of School Children, Committee reports on tribals, and more.

Table 1. State-wise S.T.s Population according to Census 2011

S.I. No.	State/Union	Scheduled Tribe Population		
		Males	Females	Person
1	Jammu & Kashmir	776,257	717,042	1,493,299
2	Himachal Pradesh	196,118	196,008	392,126
3	Punjab	0	0	0
4	Chandigarh	0	0	0
5	Uttarakhand	148,669	143,234	291,903
6	Haryana	0	0	0
7	Delhi	0	0	0
8	Rajasthan	4,742,943	4,495,591	9,238,534
9	Uttar Pradesh	581,083	553,190	1,134,273
10	Bihar	682,516	654,057	1,336,573
11	Sikkim	105,261	101,099	206,360
12	Arunachal Pradesh	468,390	483,431	951,821
13	Nagaland	866,027	844,946	1,710,973
14	Manipur	588,279	579,143	1,167,422
15	Mizoram	516,294	519,821	1,036,115
16	Tripura	588,327	578,486	1,166,813
17	Meghalaya	1,269,728	1,286,133	2,555,861
18	Assam	1,957,005	1,927,366	3,884,371
19	West Bengal	2,649,974	2,646,979	5,296,953
20	Jharkhand	4,315,407	4,329,635	8,645,042
21	Odisha	4,727,732	4,863,024	9,590,756
22	Chhattisgarh	3,873,191	3,949,711	7,822,902
23	Madhya Pradesh	7,719,404	7,597,380	15,316,784
24	Gujarat	4,501,389	4,415,785	8,917,174
25	Daman & Diu	7,771	7,592	15,363
26	D & N Haveli	88,844	89,720	178,564
27	Maharashtra	5,315,025	5,195,188	10,510,213
28	Andhra Pradesh	2,969,362	2,948,711	5,918,073
29	Karnataka	2,134,754	2,114,233	4,248,987
30	Goa	72,948	76,327	149,275
31	Lakshadweep	30,515	30,605	61,120
32	Kerala	238,203	246,636	484,839
33	Tamil Nadu	401,068	393,629	794,697
34	Puducherry	0	0	0
35	A & N Islands	14,731	13,799	28,530
	India	52,547,215	51,998,501	104,545,716

Source: Primary Census Abstract: Census of India, 2011

Table 1 shows the state-wise scheduled Tribes' population, according to the 2011 census. It is clear from the table that the people of the S.T.s are very high in Madhya Pradesh State (15,316,784) and that there are no tribes in Haryana, Punjab Chandigarh, Delhi, and Pondicherry. The tribal population is deficient in Goa, i.e., only 149,275 people.

Table 2. Comparative Literacy Rates of S.T.s and Total Population from 1961 to 2011

Census Year	Total Population	Scheduled Tribes	Gap
1961	28.3	8.53	-19.77
1971	34.45	11.30	-23.15
1981	43.57	16.35	-27.22
1991	52.21	29.60	-22.61
2001	64.84	47.10	-17.74
2011	72.99	58.96	-14.03

Source: Census of India

Literacy is a significant developmental indicator among tribal groups. Table 2 illustrates the comparative literacy rates of S.T.s and the total population from 1961 to 2011. It can be seen that the literacy rate among the S.T.s has increased significantly. Since the last six decades, there has been a wide gap between the literacy rate of the tribes and the general population. The hole in literacy rates is the maximum in 1981, 27.22 percent compared with the total population, and decreased to 14.03 percent in 2011.

CHALLENGING ISSUES OF TRIBAL EDUCATION

Tribal societies are static, and social change is very slow in the community, as they are economically backward. Today, the governments of all developing countries pay special attention to the development of the tribes ([Nithya, 2014](#)). Sincere attempts have been made by government and non-government organizations to boost the economic and educational performance of tribes. The numerous tribal welfare programs in the country can be grouped into three main areas: Protective (constitutional rights, legislative rights), mobilization (reservation in politics, reservation in education and jobs), and development (Economic development and Social development like education and health). One of the main initiatives is the 'National Education Policy' of 1986, which involves creating more primary schools in tribal areas and creating tribal children's residential schools ([Government of India, 1986](#)). Education policies aimed at reducing disadvantaged groups' educational inequalities have also been observed across all the five-year plans. In other words, the aim of the various education policies and policy programs has been to raise the literacy rate of tribal communities.

Nevertheless, in terms of illiteracy rates, the performance of the tribes in education is much lower than the Scheduled Castes ([Desai and Kulkarni, 2008](#); [Brahmanandam, T and Bosu Babu, T., 2016](#)); the desired level of development has not yet been achieved ([Chandra Guru et al., 2015](#)). In a recent study, 70.9 percent of the drop out among the tribal has been found. Moreover, around 87 percent of the leading workers in these communities were engaged in primary sector activities. Over three-quarters of women from Scheduled Tribes are non-literate. Hence, India is far from the universalization of elementary education ([Tilak, 2008](#)).

[Sujatha \(1994\)](#) found that one of the significant constraints of tribal education at the planning level is adopting a dual administration system. In her research, [Rani M \(2000\)](#) observed that tribal children could not establish a communication link with the teacher due to the language barrier, leading to the termination of their education at some point or another. The Praitichi committee's report (2002) identifies schooling expenses, lack of motivation for teachers, lack of inspection, and increasing dependence on private tutoring as the main barriers to tribal children's education. More rapid enrollment decreases were observed immediately after primary education, which persisted for both males and females. The drop-out rate is high as children are required to assist their family members at the time of cultivation.

Furthermore, another critical factor for the drop-out is economic hardship ([Ghosh, 2007](#)). Lack of information facilities and inadequate transport facilities in the interior areas are the problems of tribal education. During the rainy season, these problems worsen ([Chattopadhyay, A and Durdhawale, V., 2009](#)). It is true that despite the availability of minimum educational facilities in the villages, tribal families are unable to take advantage of these facilities due to the academic and social deprivation of indigenous households ([Bagai and Nundy, 2009](#)).

[Pradhan 2011](#) points out that in a situation of dire necessities of life, education is a luxury for the tribal family. Most tribal girls have been stopped from enrolling beyond the 5th level by the traditional standard toilet. Therefore, the drop-out ratio among the tribal girls increases ([Gaurang Rami's., 2012](#)). Most of the time, the policy makers' solution has been to create a national curriculum instead of prioritizing their skill-driven, practical skills that have had a more critical effect on their lives ([Brahmanandam, T and T Bosu Babu, T., 2015](#)). [Rupavath \(2016\)](#) found that barriers such as the lack of active involvement of tribal children in the school education system further create the space for tribal communities to be marginalized in educational achievement. [Goyal \(2016\)](#) has argued that the residential tribal schools in Maharashtra are deeply corrupted and abuse children. As [Kumar \(2017\)](#) investigated, the lack of extremely low enrollment in conflicted areas is another important observation in the current educational scenario. In his excellent narrative, Kumar emphasized how the clash between Maoists and the government in the extremist areas affected Chhattisgarh's inadequate enrollment of students in primary schools. [Patra, S and Panigrahi, N. \(2018\)](#) emphasize a deep gap in the policy and implementation of primary tribal education. The lack of tribal socio-economic background and cultural knowledge among policymakers in education has contributed to the current pitiful situation.

[Jha and Jhingran, D. \(2002\)](#) article strongly suggested that the mother tongue be a medium of instruction in the early stages of education and assumes greater importance in the context of tribal children's education. [Rana et al., \(2003\)](#) article discussed the situation of primary education in West Bengal. They argue that the improvement of infrastructure did not provide a guarantee of improvement in primary education. The authors suggested that the parents' participation in monitoring and governance is the key to improving direct education delivery to improve literacy levels. While [Nair, P. \(2007\)](#) article provides the importance of non-formal education in tribal areas. Non-formal education is aimed at children who are drop-outs of the formal education system and provide room for innovation and flexibility in terms of organization, teaching method, content, the target group of learners, and assessment procedures. [Ghosh's \(2007\)](#) article deals with tribal education in Jharkhand and West Bengal with the help of in-depth literature. He observes that the tribals' female enrollment ratio is much lower among these tribals than their males. Ghosh's suggestions have been provided to achieve gender equity in education, such as parents' motivation to send their daughters to school, curriculum to be customized to the needs of tribal children, and separate toilets for girls. In India, primary schooling is indeed appalling in backward districts, and it does not take into account the educational needs and aspirations of the poor people due to educational planning.

In the above context, [Chattopadhyay, A and Durdhawale, V \(2009\)](#), in their article, focus on primary education in some tribal villages of a backward district of Maharashtra, India, with the help of qualitative and quantitative data. They found that economic uncertainty and financial hardship contribute to the age-old disinterest in education among the tribes. Therefore, their findings suggest that increasing income sources is the only way to encourage willing participation in primary education. Education and empowerment of the tribal children are a challenge that the collective effort of all society's stakeholders can achieve. [Sahu's \(2013\)](#) article deals with the achievement of tribal education through PPP in Odisha. He argues that both community teachers and community children benefit from the PPP, which is a good signal for decentralizing education. Therefore, he suggests that the government develop innovative approaches to streamlining the education system and achieve a higher literacy level among tribal children in the long run. [Panda's \(2018\)](#) article 'Promoting Science Communication among Scheduled Tribe Students through Museum' based on a descriptive survey from Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) Students and staff of a Museum in Bhubaneswar. Panda argues that the tribal students are generally failed to adapt to new circumstances and the new language. Hence, the science curriculum is far from their dreams, aspirations, and life pursuits.

In this connection, the author found that visiting the museum had a measurable impact on science. Finally, he concluded that regular visits to the museum might further fuel their interest in studying science. [Brahmanandam and Bosu Babu \(2016\)](#) suggested that the policymaker's approach paid little attention to culturally linked education. It has led to drop-outs and directly impacted their overall educational status. In their article, [Patra, S. and Panigrahi, N. \(2018\)](#) focused on identifying the enrollment, drop-out, and retention scenarios in primary schools, especially among the Santali students in two villages of Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal.

Further, the study examined the nature of problems associated with school-going children and their parents. He argues the policymaking is not the only solution to increase school enrolments. Their study suggested recruiting more teachers from the tribal communities and including the Santali language (Olchiki) to improve the educational inclusion of tribals as the medium of instruction at the primary level to remove the language barrier among the students. Furthermore, their study suggested improving parents' mentality, which is indeed one of the most critical factors in the successful development of tribal children.

CONCLUSION

Tribals constitute a considerable portion of the population in many developing countries like India. Nevertheless, they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life, such as good health, education, employment, empowerment, and more. Among these, instruction is a crucial and fundamental requirement for tribal society. Since the scheduled tribes are one of the most disadvantaged and oppressed communities in education, extra consideration is required to provide them with elementary education. In recent years, the central and state governments are paying particular attention to improve their educational status. The educational accessibility and inequality of the tribal people have been significant research issues among researchers and academicians. However, the result is far away from the expectations. Hence the time has come to think seriously about tribal education and inclusive growth. The paper has tried to analyze the status and challenging issues of tribal education in India with literature. To conclude, the lessons that we learn from the perspectives and articles included in this paper are relevant to the educational status and challenging issues of tribal in India and are also applicable for other developing countries where similar scenarios prevail.

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