

Participation of Tribal Women in Higher Education in India

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ABSTRACT

Tribal people are marginalized even today in our society in many respects. Provisions made in the Constitution have brought about changes in their position but still they are confronted with a number of challenges. Status of tribal women in terms of education, employment and health is low not just compared to tribal men but also in comparison to women belonging to the general population. Education system should make an individual better suited to the needs of the ever changing dynamic world. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women have missed education at different stages and in order to empower them there is a great need of providing opportunities so as to enable them to assume leadership qualities for economic self-reliance and even social transformation. The purpose of this theoretical paper is to find out the participation of tribal women in higher education in India, and the obstacles they face in the path of their education.

Key Words: Tribal women, higher education, obstacles.

INTRODUCTION

Education forms an important component in the overall development of individuals, enabling them to greater awareness, better comprehension of their social, political and cultural environment and also facilitating in the improvement of their socio-economic conditions. The importance of education in the process of economic, political and social change has been widely recognized and well documented all over the world. Education now considered as one of the crucial inputs to human capital formation (Puhan, *et. al.*, 2013).

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In India women are discriminated due to several historical, religious and other reasons. A girl child is suppressed from the movement she is born in terms of personal development. She is made to undergo the feelings of being inferior and feeble. She is denied the prospects for personal expression (Bhasin, 2007). Education is a powerful agent of social change today. It unlocks the door to modernization. It also paves a sure road to economic modernization and progress (Rani, *et. al.*, 2011). The framers of the Constitution took note of the fact that certain communities in the country were suffering from extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of age-old practice of untouchability and certain others on account of

this primitive agricultural practices, lack of infrastructure facilities and geographical isolation, and who need special consideration for safeguarding their interests and for their accelerated socio-economic development (Oraw and Toppo, 2012). These communities were notified as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as per provisions contained in Clause 1 of Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution respectively. In India, there are 574 tribal groups who have been identified schedule tribes. They have been described as 'Aborigines', 'Aboriginal', 'Primitives', 'Adivasis', 'Vana-jatis', etc. 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. Out of the total tribal population, tribal women add up to almost half. Like all other communities, development of status of tribal communities also to a large extent depends on the upliftment of the status of tribal women.

India is the second populous country in the world with 6.77 crores of tribal population. Most of the tribal people are poor, illiterate and inhibited in inaccessible forests and hilly areas. They lag behind in all spheres of life in comparison with other sections of the population. The government of India has launched a number of schemes for the promotion of education and welfare among the tribes in general and different new initiatives for the women section in particular. In spite of these efforts, the rate of literacy has not improved. In case of the primitive tribes, it is very poor and among women, it is very low. Literacy is the key for socio-economic development of any section or region, and this is the reason that the tribal community all over India have subjected to various forms of deprivation such as alienation from land and other resources. Especially, the tribal women though they are away from the main stream of national life, they are not kept away from the impact of socio-economic changes effecting the society in general. Therefore, this study will try to find out the participation of tribal women in higher education (i.e., graduation and above) in India, and the obstacles they face in the path of their education. The present study is based entirely on secondary sources of information, mainly drawn from various research studies conducted in this field.

TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

The Constitution of India, Article 366 (25) defines Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be the scheduled Tribes (STs) for the purposes of this Constitution". In Article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is prescribed. However, it does not contain the criterion for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. An often used criterion is based on attributes such as:

- Geographical isolation- they live in cloistered, exclusive, remote and inhospitable areas such as hills and forests.
- Backwardness- their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a low-value closed economy with a low level of technology that leads to their poverty. They have low levels of literacy and health.

The tribal community all over India has been subjected to various forms of deprivation such as, alienation from land and other forest resources since the British rule. Women by nature have greater ability to organize people, resources and work. They have greater perseverance

adaptability and attitude for discipline and cleanliness. To utilize their creativity, adaptive and organizational ability and to motivate them to participate in education, development of their own group is actually required (Rani, *et. al.*, 2011). Lack of education which is a crucial requirement for the sustain growth of a developing society is largely responsible for the exploitation and pitiable plight of the tribes.

Tribes too have son preference but do not discriminate against girls by female infanticide or sex determination tests. Boys and girls do not have similar inheritance laws. Tribal girls do not inherit land, except in matrilineal societies or under special circumstances. Nonetheless they are not abused, hated, or subjected to strict social norms. Girls are free to participate in social events, dancing and other recreational programmes. There is no dowry on marriage. Among tribes, the father of the bridegroom pays a bride price to the father of the girl. Widowed or divorced women are free to marry again. As incidence of child labour is high among the tribes, girls are no exception. Girls care for younger siblings, perform household jobs and work in the fields along with their brothers. This leaves no time for education of girls; consequently there is gender gap in education. Both boys and girls are equally exposed to hazards, infections and undernourishments. Infant and child mortality among tribal is high due to poverty and its related malnutrition for both boys and girls. However, all household members are heavily involved in agriculture and subsistence tasks, and that all family members contribute long hours each day to the household economy (Bhasin, 2007).

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic and political structure of her society. They exercise free and firm hand in all aspects related to their social and economic life. But it is still important to emphasize that the tribal woman is in herself exactly the same as any other woman with the same passion, love and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and to children. Though the tribal women are away from the main stream of national life, but they are not kept away from the impact of socioeconomic changes effecting the neighborhood or society in general. In the process of change, the tribal woman is forced to adhere to certain norms which may even take away her freedom, her control over the traditional productive system, her house, family and children and even her own life. The process of such alienation has an impact on the tribal women.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

In India, Higher Education had its roots in early time as well. In the 5th century BC Taxila was the earliest recorded centre of higher education in India although there is a debate with its status – whether it was university or not. In the modern sense of the term “University”, the Nalanda University was the oldest University system of education in the World. With the establishment of the British Raj in India, the western education became ingrained into Indian society. But in the pre-independence era there was very limited access to Higher Education. From the year 1883 till the independence both the number of colleges and the enrollment of students in India were found to be very low. Table - 1 shows the picture of Higher Education in India from pre-independence to post independence.

Table. 1: Higher Education in India from pre-independence to post independence

Year	1883	1928	1947	1961-62
No. of Colleges	139	307	591	2282
No. of Enrolment	16,088	90,677	2,28,881	11,77,245

Source: [http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/n/2j/3j/2J3J0201.h tm p](http://www.education.nic.in/cd50years/n/2j/3j/2J3J0201.htm); 1 of 4

India occupies an important position in respect of Higher Education. Comparing with other countries in the world, India’s position in the field of Higher Education system is third after the United States and China. After independence numbers of both the Higher Educational Institutions and number of students have been increasing. (UGC report, January 2011).

PARTICIPATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Education is a fundamental right that provides opportunities for socioeconomic uplift. In India the female education has its roots in the British Regime. In 1854 the East India Company acknowledged women’s education and employment. Initially this education was limited only to primary school level education and only the richer section of the society enjoyed this facility. Thus, as it was confined only for a small section of people in society so the literacy rate for women increased from 0.2% in 1882 to 6% only in 1947. It is very unfortunate to say that for centuries higher education for women has been neglected. (U E C, 1948-49).

Literacy is an important indicator of development among tribal groups. The trend of literacy of tribes in India from 1961 to 2011 is shown in the table-2.

Table. 2: Literacy trends of Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011(%)

Year	Male	Female	Total
1961	13.83	3.16	8.54
1971	17.63	4.85	11.39
1981	24.52	8.05	16.35
1991	40.65	18.19	29.60
2001	59.17	34.76	47.10
2011	71.70	54.4	63.1

Source: Literacy Trends of Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011,

National Commission for SCs & STs, Fifth Report & Census, 2011.

The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 per cent in 1961 which has increased to 63.1 per cent in 2011. But female literacy of tribes is only 54.4 per cent compared to male literacy of 71.7 per cent. During the post-Independence period, the Indian government implemented legislation and allocated funds to facilitate access to enrollment in primary education (grades I-V) in India. As a result, both literacy rates and gross enrollment ratios of boys and girls across the general population have increased substantially during the past 50 years.

Gross enrolment ratio of ST boys is more than ST girls in all classes. The gross enrolment ratio is higher in class I to V which is 137.2 for ST boys and 136.7 for ST girls but it is only 90.7 and 87 in class VI to VIII. It implies that the tribal enrolment declines significantly in higher class.

Table. 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

Classes	ST boys	ST girls
Classes I – V (6 - 10 Years)	137.2	136.7
Classes VI - VIII (11 - 13 Years)	90.7	87
Classes IX – X (14 - 15 Years)	57.1	49.1
Classes XI – XII (16 - 17 Years)	32.7	24.8
Classes I - XII (6 - 17 Years)	96.8	92.8

Source: Statistics of School Children. (2010-2011). Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi.

The participation of tribal women in higher education, i.e., graduation and above, is quite low in relation to their participation in school education .

Table. 4: Percentage of gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education in all over India (18-23 years)

Year	ST Male	ST Female	Total
2006-07	9.5	5.5	7.5
2007-08	12.4	6.7	9.5
2008-09	11.6	6.7	9.2
2009-10	13.1	7.5	10.3
2010-11	12.9	9.5	11.2
2011-12	12.4	9.7	11.0
2012-13	12.4	9.7	11.0
2013-14	13.3	10.6	12.0

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education. (2013 - 2014). Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi., Ch. 2.

Table. 5: Percentage of state/UT wise Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (18-23 years)

States/UTs	ST Male	ST Female	Total
Andaman & Nicobar Island	2.6	5.1	3.8
Andhra Pradesh	24.7	17.7	21
Arunachal Pradesh	30.7	29.7	30.2
Assam	16.2	16	16.1
Bihar	12.2	9.8	11.0
Chandigarh	-	-	-
Chattisgarh	8.8	7.1	7.9
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	5.1	3.7	4.4
Daman & Diu	19.6	12.1	15.9
Delhi	-	-	-
Goa	15.5	19.6	17.5
Gujarat	12.5	11.7	12.1
Haryana	-	-	-
Himachal Pradesh	21.2	20.7	21.0
Jammu & Kashmir	9.5	7.7	8.7
Jharkhand	6.4	7.7	7.1
Karnataka	16.3	13.8	15.1
Kerala	13.5	17.0	15.3
Lakshadweep	1.8	5.7	3.7
Madhya Pradesh	7.9	5.6	6.7
Maharashtra	12.8	7.3	10.1
Manipur	24.0	24.4	24.2
Meghalaya	12.7	16.8	14.8
Mizoram	23.4	21.8	22.6
Nagaland	11.9	13.1	12.5
Odisha	7.7	5.8	6.7
Puducherry	-	-	-
Punjab	-	-	-
Rajasthan	17.0	10.6	13.9
Sikkim	13.0	16.3	14.7
Tamilnadu	37.8	23.7	30.6
Telangana	34.2	24.4	29.2
Tripura	9.5	5.6	7.4
Uttar Pradesh	26.2	24.0	25.1
Uttarakhand	41.9	49.5	45.7
West Bengal	9.4	6.6	8.0

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education. (2013 - 2014). Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi., Ch. 2.

The above table shows that female participation among tribal people in higher education is quite dissatisfactory. In Uttarakhand the female enrolment is highest (49.5%) which is a good sign. The percentage is below 10% in Andaman & Nicobar Island, Chattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Lakshadweep, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Tripura, and West Bengal.

OBSTACLES FACED BY TRIBAL WOMEN

Most tribal faces a number of challenges which they need to overcome in order to improve their status in society. Various literature studies reveal that although work participation among tribal women is higher compared to scheduled caste and general population but the livelihoods of the tribal people are neither permanent nor fixed. Most of them do not have a regular source of income, and they live below the poverty level. (Status and Role [Online]. Available from <http://download.nos.org>).

Most of the tribal women work outside their homes and are engaged in various activities. They work in order to earn money for their family. The women's work involves daily labour, agricultural work. Even young children and girls go for work along with their mothers. Most of the time they do not go to school regularly or become drop outs from school. Even the parents in very poor families don't always want to send the children to school because then their helping hands in work would be reduced. Effect of patriarchy could be strongly seen in most tribal groups and so whatever money women get from their work they give it to their husband and the husband very often spends the money on activities like drinking. Household works are done by the female members of the family. The young girls who are studying in primary level in schools hardly learn anything in school and they don't study at home also. The government has announced free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years, which nowadays encourage parents to send their children to schools with the hope that if their children receive proper education, then their conditions will improve. The children are given free school uniforms, books and mid day meals. However, the girls don't continue school at a stretch. Sometimes they go to school, some other times they do not go to school and stay at home and go to work with their mothers and help their mothers at household work. As a result, they tend to forget what they have learned in school. After the girl child attains teenage the parents stop sending them to schools.(Chatterjee, 2014).

The problem of insufficient number of teachers has been compounded by the problem of lacking skilled, committed and gender sensitive teachers (Calder and Huda, 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.

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 effects girls 'attendance (Calder and Huda, 2013) etc. are common feature of those schools.

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).

CONCLUSION

International Conference on Social Science and Humanity (2011) conducted a seminar on An Analysis of Tribal Women's Education in India and conclude with the findings Education to women is as essential as to men. It makes women to find the right way to development. Education is the single most important means by which individuals and society can improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome barriers, and expand opportunities for a sustained improvement in their well-being. It is not only applicable for man but for tribal women also. In the context of tribal women education, finding a balance between man and women the attitude of tribal families should modify positively and govt. should take different steps to ensure a tribal women's success not only in mainstream school education but in higher education.

The main aim of education is to change the cultural norms and patterns of life of tribal women to make them economically independent, to organize themselves to form strong groups so as to analyze their situations and conditions of living, understand their rights and responsibilities and to enable them to participate and contribute to the development of women and the entire society. The population of STs is very high in some states and in some states there are no STs. With regard to the literacy rates, female literacy has raised considerably in the past four decades both in urban as well as rural areas. Moreover the percentage of Schedule Tribe girls in higher education has been gradually increasing. The fact remains that a large number of tribal women in rural areas might have missed educational opportunities at different stages and in order to empower them varieties of skill training programmes have to be designed and organized. The skill could be for assuming political leadership or for economic self-reliance or even social transformation.

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