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HIGHER EDUCATIONAL STATUS IN OF INDIA

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Abstract

Education is considered to be an important element in developing individuals in a sustainable manner, exposing them to greater awareness, better compensation of their socio-cultural environment and improving socio-economic conditions through higher education. Education has also helped the Scheduled Tribes in India to improve their socio- economic status in the country. This paper focuses mainly with the status of higher education in North East Region of India, emphasizing on the problems, policies and programmes at the same time.

Introduction:

The Constitution of India has identified certain ethnic minority groups by giving them special considerations, and these groups are traditionally named as the Scheduled Tribes (STs). They constitute around 8 per cent of the total population of the country. According to Census 2011, there are 573 Scheduled Tribes residing in different parts of the country¹, most of them having their own languages different from the language spoken in the state where they are located, of which there are 270 such languages found in the country (Sahoo 2019). The tribal languages in India have predominantly originated from major language families like the Austric, Tibeto-Chinese, Dravidian, etc.

Majority of the Scheduled Tribes live in scattered habitations located in interior, remote and inaccessible hilly and forest areas of the country. Almost 22 per cent of tribal inhabitations have less than 100 population and more than 40 per cent have less than 100 to 300 people, while others have less than 500 people (Sujatha 2000). Despite the fact that, the tribal community constitute only 8 per cent of the total Indian population, they are in majority in several states and union states. They form an overwhelming majority in states such as Mizoram (94.75 per cent), Lakshadweep (93.15 per cent), Nagaland (87.70 per cent). However, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan constitute for 83 per cent of the total tribal population, even though the fact that non tribal population form the majority in these states (Census 2011).

Literacy Rate of Total SC and ST (1961-2011):

Literacy rate is defined as the percentage of literates among the population aged seven years and above (Census 1991). Although the literacy levels of STs have improved over the years, the difference between the literacy level of male and female has not been bridged yet. The Scheduled Tribe population of India has risen from 28.30 per cent in 1961 to 72.99 per cent in 2011, while the literacy level amongst the STs has risen from 8.53 percent in 1961 to 58.96 per cent in 2011². However, the literacy rate of both men and women of STs has all along been lower when compared to SCs and total population. The male-female gap in literacy rate fir the STs has decreased from 24.41 percentage points in 2001 to 19.81 percentage points in 2011.

India has an average literacy rate of 58.96 per cent for ST population. Among states, the highest literacy rate for STs is found in Mizoram and Lakshadweep, whereas the lowest is found in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh (Census 2011). Throughout the country, out of 152 districts (with more than 25 percent of ST population), 28 districts have ST literacy below 50 percent and 9 districts have female ST literacy rate below 30 percent (Statistics of School Education 2010-2011 2012).

¹ https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/scheduled_castes_and_scheduled Tribes.aspx

² https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_And_You/scheduled_castes_and_scheduled Tribes.aspx



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Policies and Programmes:

In the race of development, the STs have not been able to keep up with the pace of other communities due to which they are amongst the most deprived and marginalized sections of the society. Thus, in order to achieve a comprehensive development of the scheduled tribes, the central government of India has panned out a varied range of public welfare and developmental activities. The tribal sub-Plan approach has been taken into consideration for the development of the tribes which emerged as the main strategy from the Fifth Five Year Plan. According to the sub-Plan approach, priority has been given to the education sector.

The Elementary Education has been given priority as it is an important input for the overall growth and development of tribal communities, majorly to boost their confidence so that they can deal with the non-tribal community on equal terms. Since Elementary education was accorded priority, a detailed and broad policy framework for higher education has to be adopted in the North East Region, which would ensure equal importance to quantitative and qualitative aspects of education.

Another development in the policy of tribal education came with the recommendations of the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986(National Policy of Education, 1986, Ministry of Human Resource Development, GOI). According to the policy, the following provisions are included:

- Priority to be given to setting up of new primary tribal schools in tribal areas
- Curriculum and devise instructional material in the tribal languages needs to be developed in the early stages with provisions for converting into regional languages.
- Encouraging the youths belonging to the ST category to take up teaching in the tribal areas. This would be very beneficial for the tribal community as it will ensure development to the tribal youth as well as educational facilities to the children of the backward classes.
- Establishing large number of residential schools in tribal areas for facilitating comprehensive education for the children. This would encourage their families to send their children to school.
- Certain specific incentive schemes will be formulated keeping in view the needs and wants of the Scheduled Tribes, so as to help them lead a decent life.

The policy recognised the heterogeneity and diversity of the tribal areas and demanded to remodel the traditional framework of primary education while focusing on improving access in tribal areas. The policy also focused on instructing in the mother tongue for effective teaching and emphasized on incorporating content and curriculum that are relevant to local. Moreover, it also demanded of production of books in local dialects. As per these recommendations, the guidelines for setting up of schools in tribal areas were modified so as to cater to the accessibility to education for everyone. For example, Madhya Pradesh has slowly decreased the population size in order to open schools in habitations with 200 population (Sahoo 2019). Similarly, the government of Andhra Pradesh has established schools in areas where there are even twenty school-age children. However, despite the government implementing such relaxation of norms, many tribal areas do not meet the prescribed criteria and are thus, devoid of schools and education.

Progress in Literacy:

Literacy is considered to be a vital and fundamental parameter of educational development. The data on literacy from 1971 to 2011 show that literacy rate for STs has increased from a low of 11.30 in 1971 to as high as 58.96 in 2011 (Registrar Census of India 2010-11). However, this increase in the literacy rate does not insinuate the holistic growth of educational standards. Over the years, the gap between STs and non-STs has also increased. Despite states like Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu being educationally developed and having higher general literacy rates, they are lacking behind in the smaller and tribal-concentrated states in terms of tribal literacy rates. Disparity among various states in terms of tribal literacy rates is very high, ranging between 82.27 per cent Mizoram and 17.16 percent in Andhra Pradesh (Statistics of School Education 2010-2011 2012). The data reveal that the degree and level of educational development have been quite uneven among various states and among different sections of population within any given state. The data further reveals that north-eastern



states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Meghalaya who have a higher concentration of tribal in relation to their total population have done exceptionally well in terms of higher literacy rate. But in mainland states such as Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh which are inhabited by a overwhelming number of tribal when compared to the north-eastern states, the tribal literacy is recorded to be very low. The growth of literacy rate between 1971 and 1991 was steady but it increased significantly post 1991 and now stands at 58.96 per cent. As per 2011 Census, the literacy rate is highest in Mizoram (91.33) followed by Tripura (87.22) and Sikkim (81.42).

Table 1. Educational Status in North East Region

State	Population	Male	Female	Sex Ratio	Literacy
1	2	3	4	5	6
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	713,912	669,815	938	65.38
Assam	31,205,576	15,939,443	15,266,133	958	72.19
Manipur	2,570,390	1,290,171	1,280,219	992	79.21
Meghalaya	2,966,889	1,491,832	1,475,057	989	74.43
Mizoram	1,097,206	555,339	541,867	976	91.33
Nagaland	1,978,502	1,024,649	953,853	931	79.55
Sikkim	610,577	323,070	287,507	890	81.42
Tripura	3,673,917	1,874,376	1,799,541	960	87.22

Source: Census of India 2011

Higher Education in North East Region:

The Northeast Region of India comprises of the former British province of Assam and part or all of the former princely states of Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim. There are plain areas in the modern State of Assam, but otherwise the region is mostly hilly or mountainous. This region is home to a wide range of tribes and has the largest proportion of scheduled tribes in the country (Ali and Das 2003).

The population of Northeast India is 46 million with 68 percent of that living in Assam alone. Assam also has a higher population density of 397 persons per km² than the national average of 382 persons per km² (Secretariat 2015). The literacy rates in the states of the Northeast region, except those in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, are higher than the national average of 74 percent. As per 2011 census, Meghalaya recorded the highest population growth of 27.8 percent³ among all the states of the region, higher than the national average at 17.64 percent; while Nagaland recorded the lowest in the entire country with a negative 0.5 percent.

Table 2. Enrolment Level in Higher Education in NER

States	Phd Male	Phd Female	Ph D Total	PG Male	PG Female	PG Total	UG Male	UG Female	UG Total
Arunachal Pradesh	773	278	1051	2740	1906	4648	21215	16551	37766
Assam	1162	721	1883	19331	21697	41028	232534	232623	465151
Manipur	429	375	804	3042	2170	5212	43715	49276	92993
Meghalaya	355	413	768	2120	2675	4695	21255	27302	48557
Mizoram	57	71	128	1873	1606	3479	11805	10393	22198

³ <https://www.dharmadispatch.in/history/insurgencies-of-the-north-east-introduction>



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Nagaland	75	110	185	9554	1416	10970	17475	15443	32928
Sikkim	0	0	0	3983	1274	5257	8036	7780	15816
Tripura	128	104	232	4702	3668	8370	24147	15637	39784
NER Total	2979	2072	5051	47345	36312	83657	380182	375007	755189
All India	51362	33143	84505	1841695	1539304	3380999	12257778	10297064	22554842

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12 Population

Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India

The total Gross Enrolment Ratio is higher than the All India average (19.4) except Assam (13.4), Meghalaya (17.5) and Tripura (13.6). Similarly, all States except Tripura (6.3), the ST Gross Enrolment Ratio is higher than the all India average (11.2).

Table.3 Gross Enrolment Rate in Higher Education (18-23 years) in NER 2011-12

State	Male	Female	Total	SC Male	SC Female	Total SC	ST Male	ST Female	Total ST
Arunachal Pradesh	33.6	19.5	26.9	100.0	66.0	100.0	24.3	16.1	20.1
Assam	13.3	13.4	13.4	10.4	12.2	11.2	13.5	13.2	13.4
Manipur	38.5	33.3	35.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	44.6	34.4	39.5
Meghalaya	15.3	19.6	17.5	35.3	32.1	33.9	12.9	17.2	15.1
Mizoram	22.0	21.1	21.6	100.0	100.0	100.0	21.4	19.5	20.4
Nagaland	25.8	16.9	21.5	-	-	-	15.9	15.6	15.8
Sikkim	26.0	22.2	24.2	12.4	11.3	11.8	16.4	22.2	19.3
Tripura	16.0	11.0	13.6	11.7	8.4	10.1	7.9	4.9	6.3
All India	20.8	17.9	19.4	14.6	12.3	13.5	12.9	9.5	11.2

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education, 2011-12 Population

Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt of India

Problems of Tribal Education:

Although several guarantees by the government and persistent efforts, the tribal communities of the country, especially in the north east continue to lag behind the non-tribal population in education. The reasons are internal, external, socio-economic and psychological, some of which have been described briefly below:

External Constraints:

The policies adopted for the development of education among the tribal communities are not adequate enough to fight against the disadvantages typical to the tribal population. For example, the population and distance norms that the government had initiated have proved to be futile for the tribal areas because of their sparse population and isolated residential patterns. Moreover, both the tribal welfare department and the educational department failed to understand the complex realities of tribal life and the expectations of tribal from the system while formulating the policies and programmes for tribal education. The kind of policy and guidelines that have been panned out for the North east have not worked out in their favour. Secondly, the governing bodies have adopted a dual system of administration as far as planning is concerned. The department of Tribal Welfare looks into tribal life and culture and governs the developmental work at the local level, including education. But the tribal welfare department does not possess the expertise in planning and administration of education and academic supervision. But on the other hand, the Education department essentially deals with the planning of education development in the state level. It incorporates the instructions and guidelines related to curriculum, textbooks, appointment of teachers, etc. This department prepares uniform policies for the entire state. To take the example of school



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calendar, where the holidays are prepared and adjusted according to the formal school set up in a non-tribal context, with very little consideration for the locals and their festivals.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Constraints:

The central cause of lack of educational development amongst the tribal can be attributed to their poor economic conditions. So, factors such as social customs, poor economic conditions, lack of awareness for the value of formal education, cultural ethos, etc have played a significant role in shaping their socio-cultural status. The main occupation of tribal is agriculture, done either by shifting cultivation or terrace farming, which has low productivity.

Conclusion:

Short term policies entirely will not furnish the purpose of the educational development of the North East region. It is equally important to incorporate long term plans that would involve a more robust meaningful policy framework. The primary focus should be more on quality and equity as in providing quality higher education that would make them efficient and independent in the long run. Second, the school curriculum and calendar should be formed as per the requirements of the local communities in the tribal context. This would make the local communities develop a sense of belongingness resulting in more participation in the higher education Process. Third, provisions to provide locally relevant materials to tribal students should be incorporated. Moreover, building a partnership between the community and the government would make education a lot more effective and sustainable. Such a partnership would also ensure supervision and monitoring of educational development. And lastly, measures to develop skill, competency and teachers' motivation are required for strengthening and sustaining the higher education system in the North East region.

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