

EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN WITH RESPECT TO THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Education is the cornerstone upon which the entire structure of action & thought of a nation is based. The society is claimed to be more civilized only when it has literary development. Tribal recognized the extraordinary significance of education. Education has a vital role to play in the socio-economic life of the people. Amongst the population of India 15 to 20 per cent of people are living under poverty line in other than the Tribal community, whereas in Tribal community nearly 50 per cent of the people are living under poverty line. The Tribal educational system of the medieval period served the changing socio-economic and political needs of India for over six centuries become so irrelevant in the contemporary times. The introduction of modern education in India effected revolutionary changes in the socio economic and political life of Indian people. It brought rationalistic ideas and non-religious values among the Indian masses. As a result of their progress of education and improved economic condition the Tribals began to derive the utility of the modern household things and equipments. The spread of modern education has increased the average marriage age of the Tribal boys and girls. Previously girls got married in the age of fifteen or sixteen and boys in the age of twenty. Even though the Tribals of these regions are economically backward but when compared with their previous condition they are in a better status now; this credit goes to the spread of education among them only. However, it will help one to have a clear idea when pertinently examine the packages of rights that Tribal grants to the Tribal women. Although Tribal grants women a comprehensive package of rights, ignorance of Tribalic tenets and lack of education and insistence of the society on using outdated non-Tribalic and discriminatory cultural practices has led to the oppression of Tribal women.

Keywords: Education, Socio-Economic, Tribal Community, Missionaries, Tribal, English Education, Enlightenment, Dargha, Government, Scholarship, Examinations, Ulemma, Mohammedan, Professional

INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone upon which the entire structure of action and thought of a nation is based. Society is claimed to be more civilized only when it has literary development. Tribal recognized the astonishing implication of education. Education has a vital role to play in the socio-economic life of the people. A discussion on the socio-economic changes took place in India. In a plural society such as that of India, the State generally faces stress from various castes, tribal, religious and gender groups for social Justice. Amongst such groups in India, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes are treated as deserving castes for concessions for historical reasons and on this, a national consensus has emerged. Next to these schedule castes and scheduled tribes, the most deserving group of people deserving such concessions is Tribals, because of their educational and economic backwardness.

Amongst the population of India 15 to 20 percent of people are existing under the poverty line other than the Tribal community, whereas in the Tribal community nearly 50

percent of the people are living under the poverty line. Moreover, in India, the Tribal population has converted mostly from the backward classes of people only (Aziz, 1964). The reason that can be laid for the less literacy rate among the Tribals at par with the Christians can be attributed to the Missionaries whose vision and mission helped the Christians to rise amidst all odds in life. The people who converted to Tribal or Christianity belonged to the same Indian stock. There are no such missionary activities as found in the Christian community, in the Tribal community to uplift their creed. Those missionaries not only educate them but also made the Christians follow the culture and style of living of the Englishmen. But Tribals had a strong hatred to English education because of the fear psychosis that this education may teach them activities against their religious faith and fervour. They were patriotic too because of their denial to imitate or follow the Englishmen, as they wanted to stick to "Indianism" & "Tribalism". If there had been such activities of the missionaries among the Tribal community, then it would have been a major turn among the Tribals and the literacy rate sure would have surely increased as it has in the Christian community. Therefore the Tribals' educational and economic development should be placed at par with social Justice Groups. Generally, education has got its social and economic significance (Imtiaz, 1973). Any society, however backward, always possessed some scientific knowledge and technological advancement. Likewise, Tribals also had such background, but it was not so developed like that of the Westerners (Imtiaz, 1989).

Tribal Educational System

The Tribal educational system of the medieval period served the changing socio-economic and political needs of India for over six centuries (1206-1857) become so irrelevant in contemporary times. First of all, the Tribals' basic misconception of the Westerners should be removed and that was achieved because of the introduction of the English language. On reading the far advanced English literature, the Tribals developed a fashion and passion for reading. The British thought that the introduction of English education was the best way to introduce Western culture. But it was a wrong belief. One cannot give up his faith and his culture just because of reading English. This misbelief was also in the minds of the Tribals, which made them refuse western education (Basu, 1971). The social and historical factors speak about the Tribals' attitude towards Modern education based on religious ground and the Tribals of India were not an exception to this. The objective of a young Hindu was to obtain an education, which would fit him for a Government job or a professional career whereas a young Tribal on the other hand was not allowed to turn his mind to the secular instruction until he had acquired sacred learning of Quran. Therefore, a Tribal boy enters school later than the Hindu boy (Chitnis, 1976). But this practice among the Tribals was modified by the efforts taken by the elites and the educationists of the society. This is a turning point in the educational development of Tribals. The educational development of the Tribals in India has not only given shape to their political, socio-economic, and cultural institutions but also moulded their character and outlook on life (Farquhar, 1967).

Modern Education

The introduction of modern education in India affected revolutionary changes in the socio-economic and political life of the Indian people. It brought rationalistic ideas and non-religious values among the Indian masses. The introduction of western medical service, population control, growth of technical education, industrial development, agricultural development and growth of trade and commerce were some of the benefits of the introduction of modern education in India. It checked the backward ideas of the conservative and orthodox Hindu and Tribal people. The changes affected due to the introduction of Modern education among the Hindus apply to the Tribals also, except for one or two exemptions. The very introduction of Modern education was a revolutionary one because it was introduced against the will of the Ulema and the conservative Tribals (Robinson, 1964). It put an end to the domination of the Ulema in the socio-economic and educational activities, opened new vistas of life and

initiated modernization in the life of the Tribals. Regarding the socio-economic changes as a sequel to the spread of Modern education among the Tribals are concerned, a very useful comparative analysis of the conditions present some 50 years ago with the conditions prevailing now has been made. The spread of modern education has brought an appreciable change in the lifestyle and status of the Tribals of India, contrary to that of prevailing three decades ago. Their dress and manners got refined. One could see distinctly the difference between an educated Tribal and an illiterate Tribal in his way of approach and behaviors. Most of the Tribals in India are seeking their fortunes in foreign countries mostly as petty shopkeepers and menial servants. Government jobs were not preferable among the Tribals of these regions. Apart from this majority of the Tribal people are working in farms, tanneries, 'beedi industries and other industries as labourers. In coastal areas, the Tribals engage themselves in the fishing profession also. Due to their poverty, the Tribals even work on a daily wage basis and do all sorts of works. Some 30 years back illiteracy was widespread among Tribals. The Tribal parents considered that it was a sin to send their daughters to schools and colleges for learning. It was very rare to see a girl with an eighth standard qualification and a boy with S.S.L.C qualification. Their economic condition also was very poor. Thanks to the efforts taken by the elites and the philanthropists of India, modern education has gradually spread among the Tribals and brought many changes in their life. The common Tribal people also understood the indispensability of Modern Education and began to learn it. In due course, they very well realized that without education, the future of their children will be miserable and the illiteracy prevailing among them will jeopardize their socio-economic & political activities.

Impact of Modern Education

As a result of their progress in education and improved economic condition, the Tribals began to derive the utility of modern household things and equipment. The spread of Modern education has increased the average marriage age of Tribal boys & girls. Previously girls got married at the age of fifteen or sixteen and boys at the age of twenty. Now the educated girls and boys do marry only after their studies, at the age of twenty and twenty-six respectively. Because of their education, the young generation of India received enlightenment regarding the male and female relationship. As a consequence, the dowry evil has considerably declined. An educated girl is most preferred to an uneducated girl in the marriage market. Some twenty or twenty-five years back the Tribal parents considered that it was a sin to send their daughters to schools and Colleges after attaining the age of puberty. Now, this opinion has tremendously changed; most of the parents are sending their daughters to schools and colleges for learning. Now only they have understood that an educated woman could look after her family in a better way than an uneducated woman. Once the Tribals thought that tribal education alone was enough for their children. This attitude has been changed now; they realized the indispensability of modern education and sending their daughters to educational institutions even outside their locality. Several Tribal women enthusiastically expressed that their life became more meaningful after getting an education.

They also said that wide propagation through educational conferences and seminars is to be conducted to make Tribal women understand the importance of education. Even though Tribal is a rational religion, somehow or other irrational beliefs and practices crept into the Tribal community in the name of religion. 'Dargha' (tomb of saints) worshiping cult is one of such un-Tribal practices developed among the Tribals. This Dargha cult is against the monotheism of Tribal. This practice is very common in India. As a result of the spread of the Modern education, scientific thinking and right religious understanding has sprung up among the educated youth and they began to question the authenticity of the Dargha cult. Because of the opposition raised by the educated mass and well-learned religious scholars, nowadays the Dargha worship is getting unpopular among Tribals. They have successfully drawn the attention of the political parties and the State Government towards them and their demands. Thus a

political awakening has been evolved among Tribals especially among the young generation. This is one of the impacts of the spread of Modern education (Thurston, 1909).

Social Changes

The most appreciable social change brought by Modern education is the literacy of women folk. Some twenty or twenty-five years back it was very rare to see a girl with eighth standard qualification. An educated young female generation with a scientific and rational approach towards day-to-day life has come up now. Social awareness about education has developed among Tribal women. The Tribal students who studied in Schools and colleges have brought laurels to their institutions. Many Tribal students got a Russian Government scholarship, went to Russia and did their M.D., in medicine. To our surprise, two ladies studied medicine and became Doctors, this state of affairs is unimaginable some twenty-five years ago. Thus, social awareness about education has noticeably increased among Tribals is proved without any iota of doubt. The reasons for the dropouts from schools and colleges are due to ignorance, religious reason, attaining the age of puberty, housework, early marriage and poverty. Among the above-said reasons, poverty remains and stands first and foremost cause for the discontinuation of the students from the schools and colleges. In our survey, the people expressed that a college for women with affordable expenses would induce and increase more families to educate their daughters.

Economic Changes

As far as the economic changes are concerned the spread of education has got its special impact. Even though the Tribals of these regions are economically backward but when compared with their previous condition they are in a better status now; this credit goes to the spread of education among them only. Once the Tribals of these districts were working in foreign countries for a meager salary, which varies from Rs.5000 to 8000/-. Now, their educational and professional qualifications gave them a raised economic status. Previously most of them went to Gulf and southeast Asian countries as contract laborers. But now they are going to Western countries like the USA, Canada, England and Australia to seek their fortunes because of their professional and technical qualifications. The young educated people who are well settled in foreign countries have developed among them farsightedness, philanthropic attitude and social responsibility. The Tribal students who obtained technical qualifications have become industrial owners and they are using modern technical development in their industries and can give employment opportunities to hundreds of young people. The industries especially the tanneries owned by the Tribals once had old methods of production. But after gaining modern technical know-how, their industries got modernized and the production increased so that their economic status has improved a lot. Some 20 or 25 years ago only very few Tribals are working in the government departments. Previously the Tribals had a dislike for the Government service. The education has changed their attitude and now the Tribals have developed a liking for Government jobs and they are competing in equal terms with others in public service examinations and occupying key administrative posts and high ranks in the police department too. The credit goes to the efforts of the philanthropists, Government attitude and in consequence of the spread of education.

There are Engineering colleges and polytechnics established by Tribals all over the country. These developments and philanthropic munificence show that the Tribals have come up from their old beliefs and began to make use of their wealth for the cause of education. In the political field also Tribals make their claims for the due place. Political awareness has aroused among Tribals in recent years due to the spread of education. Educated Tribal youth rallied under their leadership demanding reservations for the Tribal community in Government jobs, Legislative assembly and Parliament. For a long time, the Tribals had a wrong notion on the Family-planning scheme of the government. The educational progress has made them

understand the advantages of small family norms and nowadays they are co-operating and at the same time not deviating from the Tribal principles with the government. For the last two decades as derived from the rough estimate of the records of the Town Panchayat and Directorate of Census Operations, the birth rate has decreased but at the same time, the death rate has also decreased because of the advancement of medical facilities, due to this the population has increased.

Women Education & Empowerment

The planned economic development envisaged around socio-economic progress without showing disparity to anybody. However, gender inequality and gender bias continue to exist in society especially in the Tribal community. But Tribal protects the rights of womanhood by giving economic liberty and other privileges to them. Inequality syndrome further manifests itself in the form of social indicators like sex ratios, low literacy, female infanticide, morbidity and mortality amongst a girl child, all these things bring down the status and the empowerment of women. The propriety of making literacy was the soul test of education. It would be a monstrous error to consider Tribal womanhood as uneducated because they were not allowed for a long time to get educated themselves, so it is right to call them uneducated. When a man got an education, the illiteracy in him is eradicated whereas when a woman got an education the illiteracy in her and of her family is eradicated (Hampton, 1947).

A woman's part in her husband avocation is at best small; and the higher her social rank, and easier her worldly circumstances, the smaller it becomes. The question of women's education was the most serious and pressing problem that has to be tackled by the Tribal community with zeal and earnestness. Tribal gives equal emphasis and importance on the education of both the male and female. One-half of the community consists of women and that they have every right against men, even as men have rights against women. This phenomenon is not fully realized by the Tribal community, even at this late hour. One could not help a suspicion that in many a case a daughter appears in school and returns merely as an advertisement of the liberalism of her parent. Even today, there are some conservative Tribals and Ulemma refused to give higher education to their Tribal girls (Kumar Jain, 1983). The right of women and their empowerment within the Tribal framework is a recent topic. However, it will help one to have a clear idea when pertinently examine the packages of rights that Tribal grants to Tribal women. Although Tribal grants women a comprehensive package of rights, ignorance of Tribal tenets and lack of education and insistence of the society on using outdated non-Tribal and discriminatory cultural practices has led to the oppression of Tribal women (Nurullah, 1951). This state of the condition remains with Tribal women mainly due to the non-education (Gopal, 1959). The Tribal Shariat declares that the women have the right to life and education, right to worship and spiritual development, right to self-respect and kind treatment, right to choose her husband, right to have economic independence, right to make stipulations in her marriage contract, right to retain her identity, right to the consortium, consultation and expression, right to have property, protection against slander and physical abuse, right to shelter as a divorcee and widow's maintenance right and remarriage (Peter, 1972).

Tribal Women Literacy

The female education was for many years, as observed from the sketch history of education, almost entirely in the hands of the various Missionary societies. Regarding the literacy of Tribal women, there was a wrong opinion prevailing. Literacy and education are two different things (Kuldip, 1990). Literacy means not just knowing, English or Western Science alone; it means reading and writing in any language or having knowledge about things through some language. If it is so then there are more people to be considered literate among Tribals, because there is a lot of people who could read 'Quran' (but could not write). Among Urdu-speaking people, some so many women could read and write Urdu. If we consider this point,

then there will be more literate men and women in the Tribal community. The proportion of Mohammedan girls in schools is nearly one-fourth, which is distinctly higher than that of other girls in schools in general, and there has been little variation in this proportion. The tendency of Tribals borne out to female education can be gauged by an instance of an event that occurred in a liberal institution such as Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental Colleges.

Government Efforts

The action of the Government in making available the existing facilities for collegiate education in the Mohammedan College to Tribal women students was a step towards the advancement of women's education, and the Tribal women students were deriving considerable advantage there from, there was no substance in the protests raised against this action; for the simple reason that no one was compelled by Government to resort to a mixed college. But this does not obviate the necessity for a separate college for Tribal women (Ghose, 1971). The government was aware that, while the educated section of the Tribal community was not averse to Tribal women students taking advantage of such of the facilities as are now available in men's colleges for university education, still there was a large body of opinion in the Tribals against the principle of co-education, not only in the high school stages but also in the degree classes. It was inevitable that so far as professional courses were concerned, in the absence of separate facilities, women students must seek admission to men's Colleges, but that was not a justification to refuse to afford wherever possible, separate facilities, which were considered essential for women students from all points of view. It will be conceded that for the healthy development of the mental and moral faculties of women students, a free atmosphere and freedom of movement are most desirable and such a free atmosphere and freedom can be available only in a College exclusively intended for women (Smith, 1946).

CONCLUSION

Education is a composite structure of knowledge of arts, science, customs, traditions and values transmitted from the preceding generation to the succeeding generation. During the medieval period, the system of education of the Tribals remained not merely the seat of learning of the Tribals only but also that of Hindus. But, when conditions changed during the modern period, unfortunately, the transmission of the tribal system of education to the succeeding generation was not possible due to lack of advancement in the field of education. However, education as an indicator of social well-being has increased among Tribals after a long debate, trial and efforts of the Tribal leaders and elites of the community in the twentieth century onwards. In India, the sons of Tribal were remotely removed from the rest of the Tribal world, as they could not keep pace with their brothers outside in material as well as in intellectual advancement. Consequently, their attainments in education were not as high as was expected. During the medieval period, India was in no way lagging behind the West. This condition was reversed only in the modern period because the East had failed to cope up with the Western advancement in science and arts. Moreover, the Tribals have to concentrate more on imparting knowledge to their youth in the field of information technology also. The Tribals do not have proper information about the Tribals Managed Educational Institutions spread all over the country. They are under the general impression that the community is far aloof from advanced education. Hence, an information center like 'Guidance Cell' should be established to supply proper information and counseling to Tribal students. The Tribal community must show itself that it has concluded that Tribals have included education into their agenda and despite their limited resources. If the Tribal intellectuals happen to come in a big way and enthusiastically for the guidance of institutions established for the welfare of the community, it would certainly gear up the educational, social & economical future of the Tribals of India.

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