

## **Myths and Realities of Tribal Education: A Primary Study in Similipal Area of Odisha**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The objective of the paper is to analyse the status of tribal education in Mayurbhanj district in general and Similipal forest area in particular. The study is based on primary data collected from tribes in 13 villages inside Similipal forest area of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. There are 62 tribes in Odisha with 22.21 % of the total population of the State. Odisha is a state with acute problems to be addressed in the field of tribal education. Mayurbhanj is one of the tribal dominated districts of Odisha, which has been declared as the fully Scheduled district of the State. Out of 26 Blocks, the tribes are more concentrated in Udala, Khunta, Bijatala, Jamda, and Baripada Blocks where the population varies from 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total population of respective Blocks. The study reveals that the status of education in Similipal area is much less i.e. 12.62 % out of which female literacy percentage is 5.00 % whereas the literacy rates of Mayurbhanj district, Odisha and India are 51.91 %, 63.08 % and 64.8 % respectively. The gender wise comparison of literacy rate in study area states that the literacy rate of male is 80 % and that of female is 20 % out of total literate in the studied villages. As per survey, the overall literacy rate of surveyed villages is 12.62 % with 20.20 % male literacy and 5.0 % female literacy, which is much below the national average. The literacy rate is maximum 40.87 % in Kabatghai village and whereas lowest literacy rate 3.75 % is observed in village Bakua. The physical location of the village, economic condition, attitude of the parents, village education committee, and teacher related problems are various critical issues in the study area. Relevant study materials in local languages, appointment of local teachers, changes in perceptions and outlooks of teachers, tribe specific learning arrangements, and establishment of more residential schools are suggestions provided in the paper to improve tribal*

**KEY WORDS:** *Development, Education, Literacy, School, Tribes*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Literacy and educational attainment are powerful indicators of social and economic development among the backward groups in India. Currently, the tribes lag behind not only the general population but also the Scheduled Caste population in literacy and education. This disparity is even more marked among Scheduled Tribe women, who have the lowest literacy rates in the country (Maharatna, 2005). The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the scheduled tribes is significant. For several historical, economic and social reasons the scheduled Tribes have remained economically backward and socially retarded which is true with respect to their educational levels. In recent years, sustained and high levels of economic growth provide a unique opportunity and momentum for faster social sector development. Investing in education plays a key role in meeting the World Bank's social development objectives, which support inclusive growth, social cohesion, and accountability in development. Professor Amartya Sen recently emphasized education as an important parameter for any inclusive growth in an economy. The policies have to focus on inclusive rather than divisive growth strategies. Education is in fact, an input not only for economic development of tribes but also for inner strength of the tribal communities. It also helps them in meeting the new challenges of life. In this context, this paper is an attempt to analyse the status of education in Mayurbhanj district in general and Similipal forest area in particular. It examines issues concerning school access and equity for Scheduled Tribe communities and also highlights their unique problems, which may require divergent policy responses.

### **II. TRIBAL EDUCATION IN INDIA**

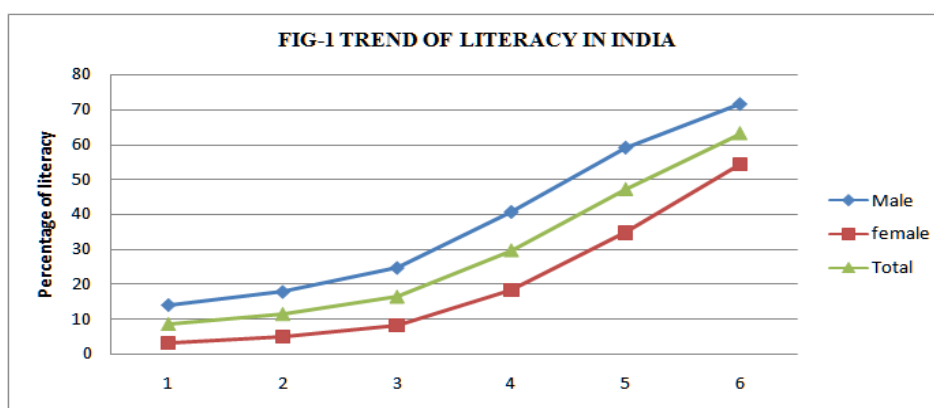
India is moving towards inclusive growth but lack of education, skills development and transparent governance are a few hurdles in progressing towards it at a faster pace. The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically impoverished and marginalized groups in India. There are over 500 tribes (with many overlapping communities in more than one State) as notified under article 342 of the Constitution of India, spread over different States and Union Territories of the country, the largest number of tribal communities being in the State of Odisha. Although Scheduled Tribes are a minority, they constitute about 8.2 % of the total population in India. About 93% of the tribal people live in rural areas and are engaged in agricultural pursuits. Nine States like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, and West Bengal which together account for more than four-fifths of the total

tribal population in India. The trend of literacy of tribes in India from 1961 to 2001 is shown in table – 1. The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 % in 1961 which has increased to 47.10 % in 2001. But female literacy among tribes is only 34.76 % compared to male literacy of 59.17%.

**TABLE- 1:** Literacy Trends for Scheduled Tribes in India from 1961 to 2011(In Percent)

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



Realizing the need to improve the overall status of tribes, their education has emerged at the forefront of recent development efforts. The literacy rates of tribes in rural and urban area in India are shown in table – 2 for understanding status of tribal education. Total female literacy of tribes in Odisha is very low at 23.37% as compared to male literacy of 51.48%. Bihar has the lowest tribal literacy where as Kerala has highest literacy among the tribes.

**TABLE – 2 Urban & Rural Literacy Rates of St in Selected States by Gender (In Percent)**

State	Rural Male	Rural Female	Urban Male	Urban Female	Total Male	Total Female
Odisha	50.35	22.07	69.80	45.77	51.48	23.37
Bihar	37.57	13.30	74.18	55.28	39.76	15.54
West Bengal	56.60	27.88	68.57	48.20	57.38	29.15
Madhya Pradesh	52.51	27.24	67.47	45.89	53.55	28.44
Gujarat	58.06	34.60	71.01	51.78	59.18	36.02
Maharashtra	64.52	39.88	82.98	64.70	67.02	43.08
Rajasthan	61.23	25.22	75.74	42.97	62.10	26.16
Uttar Pradesh	46.71	18.34	60.61	39.54	48.45	20.70
Andhra Pradesh	46.09	24.48	66.16	45.99	47.66	26.11
Kerala	70.20	57.28	84.96	77.70	70.78	58.11
Himachal Pradesh	77.18	52.50	92.03	81.15	77.71	53.32
<b>India</b>	<b>57.39</b>	<b>32.44</b>	<b>77.77</b>	<b>59.87</b>	<b>59.17</b>	<b>34.76</b>

Source: Annual Report. Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India

Despite the education initiatives, there is disparity among the states in terms of tribal literacy rates. Low enrolment coupled with soaring drop-out rates in primary schools exacerbates the problem, which has its origin in a gamut of inter-related cultural and socio-economic variables. Adivasis are associated with a certain stigma and behavior, which can be partially tackled through a change in mindset among non-tribes.

### III. TRIBAL EDUCATION IN ODISHA AND MAYURBHANJ

The Scheduled tribes constitute the most backward group among the weaker sections in Odisha. There are 62 tribes in Odisha with 22.21 % of the total population of the State. Odisha is a state with acute problems to be addressed in the field of tribal education. Out of 30 administrative districts of Odisha, 6 districts like Koraput, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh are declared as fully Scheduled districts. Mayurbhanj is one of the tribal dominated districts of Odisha, which has been declared as the fully Scheduled district of the State. Out of 26 Blocks, the tribals are more concentrated in Udala, Khunta, Bijatala, Jamda, and

Baripada Blocks where the population varies from 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total population of respective Blocks. The tribes constitute 56.6 per cent of total population of the district, though the population of Mayurbhanj is only 6 per cent of the State's total population. With a population of 22 lakh 23 thousand, this district has 2374 primary schools, 478 high schools, 80 colleges and a university. Despite all these infrastructure available for education, the literacy rate of scheduled tribe and scheduled caste population is only 39% and 53% respectively. The tribal literacy rate of Mayurbhanj district is 38.80% out of which male literacy is 54.11% and female literacy is 23.51%. There are 2941 primary schools, 795 middle schools, 442 secondary schools, and 98 general college (Govt. and Aided). Out of 61 villages, 13 villages are surveyed and the population of the village found to be 2210 having male 1109 and female 1101 and the percentage of male and female are 50.18% and 49.82% respectively. The study reveals that the status of education in Similipal area is much less i.e. 12.62 % out of which female percentage is 5.00 % whereas the literacy rates of Mayurbhanj district, Odisha and India are 51.91 %, 63.08 % and 64.8 % respectively which can be seen in table – 3.

**TABLE-3 Comparison of Literacy Rate among St by Gender**

Name of county / state / District / Sample villages	Total Literacy			Literacy rate (%)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
India	336533716	224154081	560687797	75.3	53.7	64.8
Odisha	11992333	7844722	19837055	75.35	50.51	63.08
Mayurbhanj	616003	348857	964860	65.76	37.84	51.91
Sample villages	224	55	279	20.20	5.00	12.62

Source: Field Survey

Out of the literates in Similipal study area, 62.5 % of the students left the school after primary level. During interaction with the villagers, it is found that the Government machinery proposing educational schemes basing on mathematical calculation without studying the following factors for which the education level of the area falls to such an extent though the problem is no doubt, a gigantic and complex in nature. So it is not possible for the tiny children to cross such a distance of 3-4 k.ms or more to go to schools.

**TABLE- 4: Schools/Colleges in Similipal Study Area**

No. of EGS school	No. of Primary school	No. of High School	Ashram School running by Tribal Welfare Deptt.	College
17	19	02	07	Nil

As per survey the overall literacy rate of surveyed villages is 12.62 % with 20.20 % male literacy and 5.0 % female literacy, which is much below the national average. The literacy rate is maximum 40.87 % in Kabatghai village and whereas lowest literacy rate 3.75 % is observed in village Bakua. The following table shows the gender wise literacy rate. With comparison to the literacy rate of India, it is found that the literacy rate of the sampled villages is 12.62 % with 5 % and male 20.20% which is much less than the union literacy rate 64.8 % having female percentage of 53.7 % and male 75.3 % .The gender wise comparison of literacy rate (gender wise) studied in Similipal area( Table – 5) and found that the literacy rate of male is 80 % and female 20 % out of total literate in the studied villages.

**TABLE - 5 Gender Wise Literacy Status In Surveyed Villages**

Name of the village	Total Population			Total no. of literate			Literacy rate %		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Bakua	36	44	80	3	0	3	8.33	0	3.75
Kabatghai	55	60	115	41	6	47	74.55	10.00	40.87
Jamnagarh	45	51	96	7	1	8	15.56	1.96	8.33
Jenabil	74	71	145	12	1	13	16.22	1.40	8.97
Alhapani	59	54	113	8	2	10	13.56	3.70	8.84
Barehipani	227	246	473	28	6	34	12.33	2.44	7.19
Bilapagha	130	137	267	23	9	32	17.69	6.57	11.99
Gopinathpur	113	104	217	18	10	28	15.93	9.61	12.90
Jamtolia	58	49	107	20	2	22	34.48	4.08	20.56
Kukurbhuka	69	78	147	14	4	18	20.29	5.13	12.24
Lanjighosora	45	40	85	5	2	7	11.11	5.00	8.24
Nigirdha	33	27	60	3	1	4	9.09	3.70	6.67
Nawana	165	140	305	42	11	53	25.45	7.86	17.38
Total	1109	1101	2210	224	55	279	20.20	5.00	12.62

Source – Field survey

Out of the total literate as found by the survey nearly 12.62 % literates. The literates have studied up to Primary level is 62.5 %, Middle class level 18.16 %, High School level 13.88 % and College level is 5.46 % (Table-6). People are now realizing partially the need of education but due to poverty, inaccessibility and lack of basic facilities, still local tribal people in the villages are much below in the education standard.

**TABLE-6:** Education Level of the Respondents inside Similipal Area.

Primary (%)	Middle (%)	High School (%)	College (%)
62.5	18.16	13.88	5.46

The paper attempted at mapping the existing primary facilities inside the villages as well as it attempts to summarize some of the significant findings of the education situation of children in the area. About 50 % of the villages under survey have Schools. Few villages namely Nawana, Barheipani, Alapani have hostel facilities in Schools.

**TABLE-7** The Total Number of School/College Going Boys and Girls in Sample Villages

Total villages	Total number of Boys and Girls	No. of school / college going boys and girls		
		Total	Male	Female
13	630	207	152	55

**TABLE-8** Student Dropout During The Year 2009 And 2010.

Gender	In the year 2009			In the year 2010		
	Class 8 <sup>th</sup>	Class 9 <sup>th</sup>	Class 10 <sup>th</sup>	Class 8 <sup>th</sup>	Class 9 <sup>th</sup>	Class 10 <sup>th</sup>
Boys	21	34	36	18	30	31
Girls	15	13	12	12	10	6
TOTAL	36	47	48	30	40	37

Source – Field data

The comparison between male and female drop out students in the year 2009 and 2010 shows that out of the drop out male student is 69.47 % and female student is 30.53 % in the year 2009. In the year 2010, the dropout male student is 73.83% and female student 26.17 %.

#### **IV. PROBLEMS AND CRITICAL ISSUES OF TRIBAL EDUCATION**

On the basis of field experience in the tribal areas, there are many major issues and problems in the field of tribal education. They are as follows:

##### **4.1 The Physical Location of the Village**

The tribes inhabit in the forests in a scattered manner. So, it becomes impossible to open up separate schools in each village where the required students strength is not available. On other land, tribal habitations remain segregated from each other by some physical barriers like rivers, nalas and forests. So these physical barriers create a hindrance for the children of a tribal village to attend the school in a neighboring village.

##### **4.2 Economic Condition:**

The tribes depend on forests for 8 months and on agriculture for 4 months. The children of 4 to 6 age group are found to be helping their parents in collection of forest products. In this situation, parents do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.

##### **4.3 Attitude of the parents:**

Tribal parents are basically illiterate. Their illiteracy does not permit them to understand the long term values of education. As education does not yield them any immediate economic return, they prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income and strengthens the family economy. Further a few parents who have become aware of the values of education, fail to accord education to their children as they cannot afford finances for it.

##### **4.4 Village Education Committee:**

In Odisha, VECs have been constituted to preserve and monitor the functioning of the schools. Till now tribes are not aware of the role of the VECs. Neither the villagers nor the members of the VECs take any active interest to enhance enrolment and attendance of tribal children in primary school.

#### **4.5 Teacher Related Problems**

In tribal villages, villagers have virtually no relationship with the teachers. Teachers do not get any accommodation facility in the village, which makes them irregular which hampers the normal routine of a school. Further, the apathetic attitude of the villagers and the appointment of untrained teachers in tribal areas diminishes the values of education.

### **V. SUGGESTIONS**

From the field study and discussion with tribes, the following suggestions are put forward for improving educational status of tribes.

#### **5.1 Relevant study materials in local languages**

It is strongly suggested for use of the mother tongue or home language as medium of instruction in early stages of education. From the perspective of language, it is desirable to have a local teacher from the same tribal community.

#### **5.2 Appointment of Local teachers**

The acceptance of teachers by the community as one of them is critical for increasing schooling participation in tribal areas. An understanding of and respect for tribal cultures and practices and some amount of familiarity with the local language are important for teachers to gain this acceptance. Hence it is suggested to appoint more tribal teachers in these areas.

#### **5.3 Changes in perceptions and outlooks of teachers**

Teachers must be sensitized to the cultural and behavioral strengths of tribal children and motivated to do their best for them in schools. Incentives should be initiated to attract effective teachers to work in tribal schools and to retain them there. Only such motivated teachers are likely to generate interest among tribal children towards schools education.

#### **5.4 Tribe specific learning arrangements**

Various tribal groups in India have different cultures. Various tribes within one State differ so much from each other in terms of ethnographic features that it is impossible to develop a learning system for them. Therefore there is a need to have tribe specific learning arrangements which make full use of tribal culture and tribal traditions.

#### **5.5 Stipends and various scholarships**

Hostel facilities should be provided for tribal children away from their families is usually perceived as an additional stipend. Another important provision in the form of merit-scholarships, stipends and other attendance scholarships should be implemented.

#### **5.6 Residential schools**

Another special educational input for tribal education is residential schools widely known as Ashram schools in India. Since such institutions are very special efforts in the direction of tribal education and they really had positive impact on enrolment, retention and achievement of such children. So more residential schools should be established in tribal areas.

### **VI. CONCLUSION**

Education is an important avenue for upgrading the economic and social conditions of the Scheduled Tribes. This paper shows that generalizations regarding the educational and literacy attainment of tribes in Odisha who fail to capture the differential human capital attainment of and obstacles to schooling. The cognitive qualities of tribal children have to be viewed and evaluated taking into consideration their ecological and cultural contexts. A related and more important lesson is that tribal children are neither culturally inferior nor cognitively less competent than the children of other groups. A programme of schooling, which does not pay attention to the ecological, cultural and psychological characteristics of tribal children is highly unlikely to make any significant impact. The educational system of the dominant non-tribal population is of very limited value in the tribal cultural milieu because it does not match with the lifestyle of individuals and the needs of the tribal community. Linking school education with life in general and the needs of the tribal communities in particular is a most important step that requires serious attention. Tribal children have very low levels of participation and success in school education programmes. A clear policy for local language use in schools is necessary for inclusive growth. Development of primers in the tribal dialect involving content from the local context will go a long way in ensuring children's active participation in the learning process in schools.

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