

TRIBAL EDUCATION - CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Tribal education is the litmus test of the social sector welfare role of the state. The tribal stay outside the urban and rural fringes and live with social-cultural values that are distinctly different to the mainstream society. It is a cruel joke that people who can produce some of India's most exquisite handicrafts, who can distinguish hundreds of species of plants and animals who can survive off forests, the lands and the streams sustainably, with no need to go to the market to buy food, are labeled as unskilled. And we the mainstream urban consider ourselves to be skilled and superior. We in the mainstream are superior knowledge and skill, no doubt about it. But it is superiority to attest to the highest call of development that is sustainable development.

We, the mainstream, are pursuing the parameters of globalisation in pursuit of global material life reflecting in our education especially higher education. The tribal education can be assessed on the following issues - Separate Ashramshala schools for tribal children; Medium of instruction; Teachers at school; Our school curriculum; Right to education and the tribal children.

Keywords – Tribal education, Ashramshala, Medium of Instruction, School Curriculum, Right to Education



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Tribal education is the litmus test of the social sector welfare role of the state. The tribal stay outside the urban and rural fringes and live with social-cultural values that are distinctly different to the mainstream society. Over centuries the tribal's have evolved an intricate convivial custodial mode of living. Tribals belong to their territories, which are the reasons of their existence; the abode of the spirits and their dead and the source of the science, technology, way of life, their religion and culture.

Our socio-culturally hierarchically stratified system made sure that the tribals stayed at the bottom of the social system and there was little accommodation and acculturation between the tribal's and the rest of the social sections of the society. The tribal's depended on hunting,
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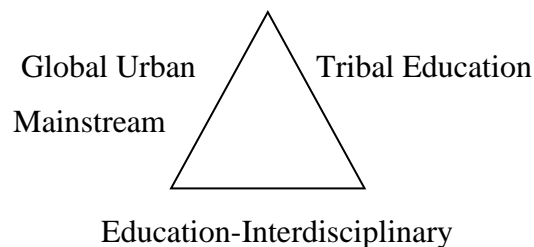
gathering and traditional agriculture and so also remained self-reliant with the bare needs of survival. It is a cruel joke that people who can produce some of India's most exquisite handicrafts, who can distinguish hundreds of species of plants and animals who can survive off forests, the lands and the streams sustainably, with no need to go to the market to buy food, are labeled as unskilled. And we the mainstream urban consider ourselves to be skilled and superior. We in the mainstream are superior knowledge and skill, no doubt about it. But it is superiority to attest to the highest call of development that is sustainable development.

We, the mainstream, are pursuing the parameters of globalisation in pursuit of global material life reflecting in our education especially higher education. We are ready to adopt the best practices of globalisation of work culture, healthy competition, non-discrimination, equality of opportunity etc.

But we are divided on caste and religion, our economy runs on crony capitalism and education system is divided in the Sciences and Social Sciences without employability skills and professional courses leading to employment. On the other hand the tribal's had/have their own guilds to learn their vocational trade without discrimination, no cost or class discrimination, no gender bias, community living and community life conducive to sustainable development.

All this analysis of the social-cultural background of the three entities - global society, mainstream society and isolated tribal society was because the three have evolved from one common platform.

We can imagine our education system in a triad as follows -



We assess the globally inspired urban mainstream educational setup on the left Axis from the tribal education on the right and the two ends meeting with the best as the

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interdisciplinary in education. Now we can analyze the various parameters of education on this graph.

a. Separate Ashramshala schools for tribal children - This concept reeks of the highest form of patronage of the urban society on tribals. The tribals to be taught in isolation, it also reeks of mentality of prevailing social stigmatization of the tribal's. Globally cosmopolitan schools are prevailing in urban as well as in rural areas. We need the tribal children to be exposed to an urban socio cultural milieu and vice-versa. It is necessary for an increased understanding, accommodation, acculturation and reduced alienated feeling. The Government of Maharashtra has recently declared on the intention to create mixed schools. And as a byproduct even teachers transferred to tribal schools shall not feel punished if they were to work in relatively less isolated and cosmopolitan school. Their participation of interest and convenience is an important tool of improvement in quality of tribal education.

b. Medium of instruction - with cosmopolitan school instead of isolated tribal school the issue of medium of instruction becomes tricky. But this can be solved by putting all the tribal students in one division for class and employing a teacher who has been trained in the local dialect of tribal students or train tribal teachers for the purpose. We should create such a positivism about tribal language that other non-tribal students feel like learning tribal languages the same way we appreciate tribal arts and handicrafts. It is a question of creating an environment of positivism and putting up tribal languages as the French Italian or Japanese languages are put up for students consumption. Then it becomes a win-win situation with the all- round understanding and acculturation on the rise.

c. Teachers at school – Teachers in tribal schools are generally are more unhappy and frustrated lot. They think their posting in a tribal school is a punishment and a social stigma. Sadly, officially also an errant teacher is transferred to a tribal school as a punishment posting. It is not taken as a challenge but a temporary unwanted destination. This attitude is a sure recipe for disaster. A disaster for the quality of education the tribal children receive. The teachers are more often not trained with the local tribal dialect. There is simply no connect of substance between the teacher and the students. The students cannot fully understand the teacher's urbane dialect and the teacher simply carry out the choirs of teaching with disinterest and even disdain. Only greater financial incentive, quality training and

cosmopolitan schools with tribal's placed in lesser isolated areas are the only solution for teachers to take greater interest in improving tribal educational quality. These are paradigm shifts and shall need great political will and greater financial provisions.

d. Our school curriculum consists of maths, commerce, science, social studies, languages and some vocational or socially useful activities with little playtime. This is the same in tribal Ashram schools not with notwithstanding their distinct needs and socio-cultural values. What our education system does is it gives extraordinary weightage to the sciences and mathematics. The performance of which at the secondary and higher secondary level is counted to get admission in professional and other courses leading directly to employment. The social sciences and social studies as also other technical and vocational skills are neglected or just carried along. The maths and sciences are abstract and technical and need to be taught well through practical's and simplified processes. The tribal teachers are simply not trained enough and motivated to do this. Secondly, these subjects simply do not count in the day to day life and vocational activities of the tribal's. This raises the question of relevance. Relevance to a practical current and future life. The curriculum needs to also take in tribal activities that are agriculture, handicrafts, basic forest knowledge and medicine and mould the abundant physical energy of tribal students towards sports activities. The curriculum also needs to include modern vocations like computers and foreign languages to catch the interest and imagination through films and other educational tools and devices. The non-tribal children should be encouraged to take up tribal art as also agricultural activities right in the field. This challenge enthuse all children and make them value all skills and knowledge creating a kind of respect for tribal culture. This will be the foundation of quality tribal education.

e. Right to education and the tribal children- This is great news especially for the tribal children. Compulsory and free education is a greater boon for the poor tribal's. The shall learn in cosmopolitan schools but shall find acculturation and social acceptance difficult. But with their isolated living it shall be a challenge for the administration to spot and enroll all tribal children into schools. The tribal's are also not in a position to seek redressal.

The administration and schools shall have to take suo motto action to bring all tribal children into the education system. The comprehensive and continuous assessment method of

evaluation shall be the greatest challenge for tribal children. This will require greater confidence, educated family background and resources to excel what with its reliance on group activities, project making, social interaction and bonding.

Ultimately our education system should be geared towards sustainable development with virtue for excellence. For this we shall need to define the development model we shall pursue. A model based on quantity leading to massification, alienation and individual breed or one of quality leading to excellence, equitable distribution and sustainable development. We definitely have a thing or two to learn from the tribal's' natural, peaceful and sustainable way of life.

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