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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF TRIBAL EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF BIRBHUM DISTRICT IN WEST BENGAL



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ABSTRACT

The present paper discusses the status of tribal education in Birbhum district of West Bengal. The tribal areas and the tribal people in our country lag woefully behind others in development and the tribal continue to be among the weakest and the most exploited section of the society. Education of Tribal children is considered important, not only because of the Institutional obligation but also as a crucial input for the total development of tribal communities. Education is in fact, a tool, not only for economic development, advancement of capacity but also for the inner strength of the tribal communities. The physical and social isolation, poor economic condition,

attitude of the parents, teacher related problems are various crucial issues in the study area. Relevant study materials in their mother tongue or home language, the appointment of tribal teachers, emphasis on tribal history and culture, learning based on their conception and establishment of more residential schools are suggestion provided in this paper to improve tribal education.



KEYWORDS: Tribes, Development, Exploited section, Economic development, Tribal education.

I. INTRODUCTION:

India is a pluralist country, with rich diversity, reflected in the multitude of cultures, languages, religions and racial stocks. The Indian population includes different castes, communities, and racial groups. A social group is usually identified by a common territory, dialect, cultural-homogeneity, social and political organization. It may include several sub-groups. The term 'tribe' is derived from the Latin

word 'tribes' meaning the 'poor or the masses'. In The English language, the word 'tribe' appeared in the sixteenth century and denoted a community of persons claiming descent from a common ancestor. In India, a tribe becomes Schedule Tribe only when it is notified as Schedule Tribe under Article 342 of Constitution of India. According to the 2011 Census, Schedule Tribes constitute 8.61% of the total population of the country, numbering 104.30 million. In West Bengal, Schedule Tribe constitutes 5.80% of the total population while in Birbhum district it constitutes 4.58% of the state population.

Education is the most important instrument for regional development and human resource development. Education is widely accepted as the essential tool for the attainment of the developmental goals and leads to political consciousness, awareness of rights and duties among the people of a nation and it is the most important instrument for human resource development and has a great significance in the context of developing countries. Currently Schedule Tribes lag behind not only the general population but also the Schedule Caste population of the country in literacy and education. This disparity is even more marked among tribal woman, who have the lowest literacy rate in the country. The male-female gap in literacy and educational attainment among the Schedule Tribes is a matter of concern for the planner. This historical backwardness is partly due to the still continuing socio-economic barriers and partly due to the inadequacy of the Government programmes in reaching these disadvantaged groups, still find themselves in difficult to compete with other sections of the society. According to 2011 Census, the literacy rate of Schedule Tribes of India is only 58.96% against the National literacy rate of 74.04%, which is improving. In West Bengal and Birbhum district, the literacy rate of Schedule Tribes is 77.08% and 61.5% respectively. Realizing that the Schedule Tribes are one of the most backward, exploited and marginalized groups with respect to education, a host of policy and programmes have been initiated ever since the independence of the country. Education of Schedule Tribe is important not just due to a Constitutional obligation to equality to its citizen, but because it is a significant input in the nation's strategy of total development of tribal communities.

II. STUDY AREA:

The district of Birbhum is situated at the central-western part of the state of West Bengal. It is surrounded by the state of Jharkhand, erstwhile Santhal Parganas district of Bihar, in the north and west, the district of Murshidabad in the east and by the district of Bardhaman in the south. It extends between 23°32'30"North and 24°35'00"North latitude and 87°05'25"East and 88°01'40"East longitude. The geographical area of Birbhum district is 4,545 square kilometres and it is the 9th largest among the 19 districts in the state and has shifted from its 8th position in 2001 census because of the division of Medinipur district and creation of two new districts, both having the larger area. The district comprises three Sub-divisions: namely, (1) Rampurhat, (2) Suri Sadar, and (3) Bolpur. Each Sub-division is again consists of a number of Community Development Blocks (CD Blocks) as well as Police Stations. There are 19 CD Blocks and 18 Police Stations in the district distributed among the Sub-divisions. The Rampurhat Sub-division includes 8 CD Blocks namely i) Nalhati-I, (ii) Nalhati-II, (iii) Murarai-I, (iv) Murarai-II, (v) Mayureswar-I, (vi) Mayureswar-II, (vii) Rampurhat-I and (viii) Rampurhat-II. There are 7 CD Blocks falling in Suri Sadar Sub-division. These are (i) Mohammad Bazar, (ii) Sainthia, (iii) Dubrajpur, (iv) Rajnagar, (v) Suri-I, (vi) Suri-II and (vii) Khoyrasol while the CD Blocks under Bolpur Sub-division are- (i) Bolpur-Sriniketan, (ii) Labpur, (iii) Nanoor and (iv) Illambazar. Suri is the district headquarters.

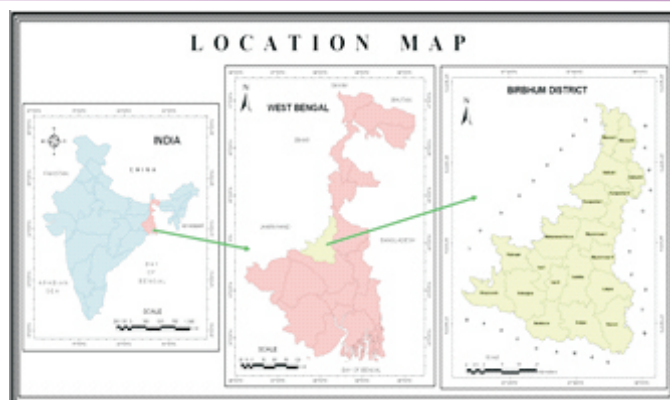


Fig -1: Location of Study Area

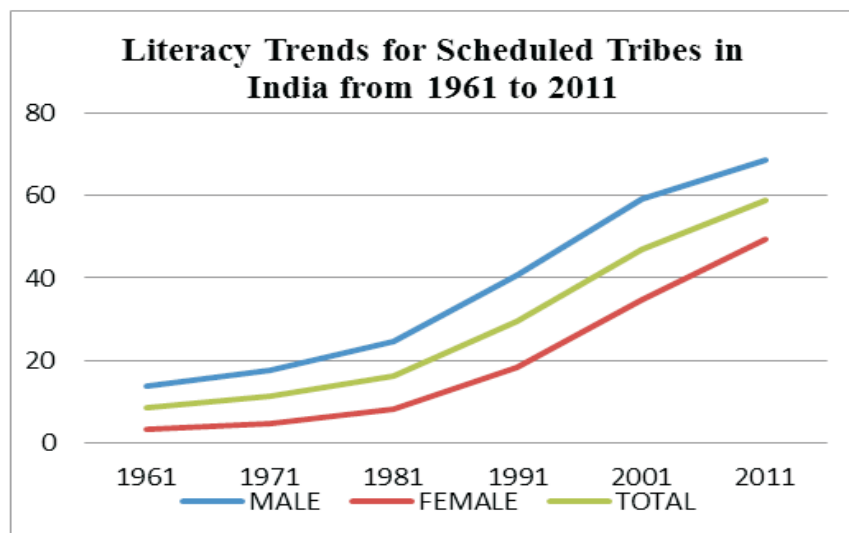
III. TRIBAL EDUCATION IN INDIA:

The Scheduled Tribe population represents one of the most economically backward and marginalized groups in India. There are 705 (Census 2011) individual tribal groups with diverse socio-cultural life who are at various levels of social and cultural spread over different States and Union Territories of the country. Most of the tribal communities have their own languages and culture different from the language spoken in the state where they are located. There are more than 270 such languages. Although Scheduled Tribes are a minority, they constitute about 8.61 % 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 2011 is shown in table –1. The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.54 % in 1961 which has increased to 58.96 % in 2011. But female literacy among tribes is only 49.40 % compared to male literacy of 68.50%.

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	59.20	34.80	47.10
2011	68.50	49.40	58.96

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

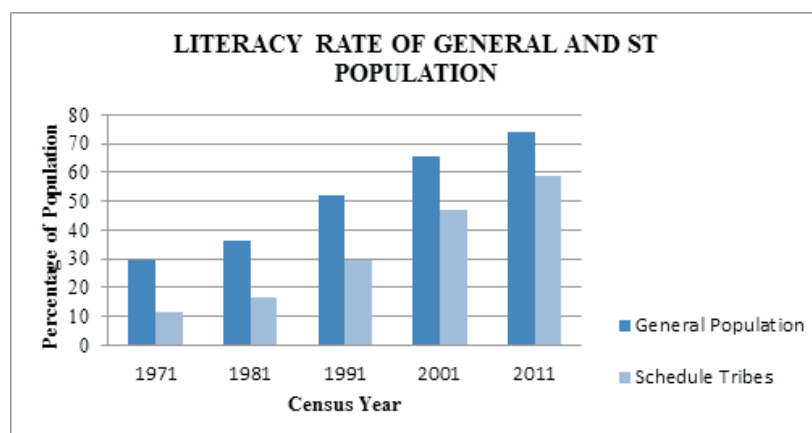


The improvement of literacy rate and the gap in literacy rate between General population and ST population in India from 1971 to 2011 can be verified from the following table (Table-2). The literacy rate of ST remains well below the general population, but the gap has narrowed down significantly. From 1971 to 1991, though the literacy rate of ST was increased but the gap between general population and ST population had also increased. After that the trend is positive and the gap is narrowing (Table-2).

Table-2: Literacy Rates of General and ST Population.

Category	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
General Population	29.45	36.23	52.21	65.38	74.0
Scheduled Tribes	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Gap between STs and the General Population	18.15	19.88	22.61	18.28	15.04

Source: Educational Development of SCs and STs, Department of Education, 1995 and Census of India 2001 and 2011.



IV. TRIBAL EDUCATION IN WEST BENGAL AND BIRBHUM DISTRICT:

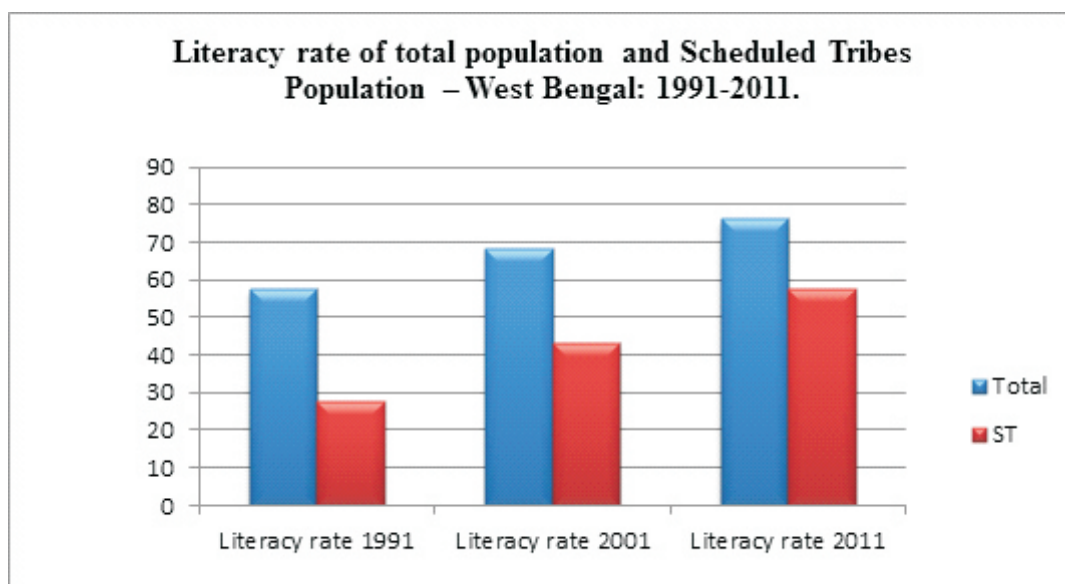
The social stratification system and dominance of one segment over others have ensured that certain segments of the population will remain disadvantaged. In West Bengal, the Scheduled tribes lag

far behind others in terms of social and economic development. The average literacy rate is 76.3% in West Bengal though amongst tribal it is as low as 57.9% (2011). Ten states having Literacy Rates less than country's average (58.96 %) for ST population in Census 2011 and West Bengal placed 10th on that list with 57.9%. Though the literacy rate increased from 43.4% (2001) to 57.9% (2011) it is much lower than the national level. Birbhum is one of the tribal dominated districts of West Bengal. There are 49 tribes in West Bengal with 5.80 % of the total population of the State. West Bengal is a state with acute problems to be addressed in the field of tribal education. Out of 19 administrative districts of West Bengal, 6 districts like Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, Paschim Medinipur, Bankura has more than 10% ST population to the total population.

The improvement of literacy rate and the gap in literacy rate between total population and ST population can be verified from the following table (Table-3).

Table-3: Literacy rate of total population and Scheduled Tribes Population and Gap in Literacy rate – West Bengal: 1991-2011.

State	Literacy Rate - 1991		Gap in Literacy Rate	Literacy Rate -2001		Gap in Literacy Rate	Literacy Rate -2011		Gap in Literacy Rate
	Total	ST		Total	ST		Total	ST	
West Bengal	57.7	27.8	29.9	68.6	43.4	25.2	76.3	57.9	18.3



V. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF SCHEDULE TRIBES IN BIRBHUM:

The 1991 Census of India had recorded 1, 77,501 persons as the tribal population of Birbhum. In 2001 Census, it has increased to 2, 03,127. According to 2011 Census report, the tribal population of this district has further increased to 2, 42,484. It accounts for 6.92 % of the total population of the district of Birbhum. There are 13 tribal groups in the district, with sharp social and educational differentiation. The major tribes inhabiting in Birbhum are Santal, Oraon, Kora, Lodha, Bhumji, Munda, and Mahali etc. In Bengal, four tribal communities developed their own script out of which two tribal communities inhabit in Birbhum district namely Santal and Munda. Santal is the largest tribe of the

district. They developed their own script 'Olchiki' and have been continuing language movement in Eastern India.

Analysis of the Census report shows that about 90 per cent of tribal people live in villages and only 10 per cent persons live in urban areas. The sex ratio of tribal population of this district is 1:1.

Table-4: Block Wise Distribution of Schedule Tribe Population in Birbhum District, 2011 (in number).

Sl. No.	Block	ST Population 2001	ST Population 2011	Decadal Increase
1	Nalhati-I	9093	10219	1126
2	Nalhati-II	341	522	181
3	Murarai-I	7586	8708	1122
4	Murarai-II	663	1194	531
5	Mayureswar-I	9065	10692	1627
6	Mayureswar-II	7553	9090	1537
7	Rampurhat-I	22029	25815	3786
8	Rampurhat-II	665	1068	403
9	Md. Bazar	26800	31152	4352
10	Sainthia	21747	24019	2272
11	Dubrajpur	9147	9866	719
12	Rajnagar	10524	12457	1933
13	Suri-I	9058	9837	779
14	Suri-II	9753	11682	1929
15	Khoyrasole	2222	2740	518
16	Bolpur-Santiniketan	32997	38614	5617
17	Labpur	7316	9507	2191
18	Nanoor	3834	5211	1377
19	Illambazar	12707	15087	2380

VI. LITERACY AND EDUCATION IN BIRBHUM:

Education is the backbone of any society and regarded as one of the main indicators of human development. The Government of West Bengal has tried their best to develop necessary educational facility in Birbhum district. The Government of West Bengal has set up Sishu Shiksha Kendra, Anganwari centre, Secondary school, Higher Secondary school, Madrasah in almost every corner of Birbhum district along with NGOs. The detailed educational facility provided by the West Bengal Government is shown in the table-5.

Table-5: No. of Institutions, Student and Teachers in Birbhum district for the year 2010-11.

Name of Educational Institution	No. of Institutions	Total No. of Students	Total No. of Teachers
Primary School	2379	267830	8335
Middle School	48	14783	331
High School	210	138737	2474
Higher Secondary School	166	209392	3570
General Degree Colleges and Universities	15	36026	1008
Professional and Technical schools, colleges and Universities	39	6530	483
Special and Non-formal education	5587	234362	6686

Source: District Statistical Handbook

The total literacy rate of the district is 61.63% in the general population and 40.39% of the tribal population. Literacy percentage of tribal male and female are 48.89% and 32.11% respectively. The study reveals that the status of education in Murarai-1 and Murarai-2 are much less i.e. 26.19 % and 29.40 % respectively out of which female percentage are 19.70% and 24.53 % respectively. These two blocks recorded lowest literacy rate as well as lowest female literacy rate across blocks of Birbhum district. The literacy rate is highest in Nalhati-1 and 2, 53.48 % and 50 % respectively, whereas the literacy rates of West Bengal and India are 57.9 % and 58.96 % respectively. The most interesting fact is that if we compare the Census of 2001 and 2011, we find a negative change of percentage points in case of male literacy for three blocks namely Murarai-2, Rampurhat-2 and Khoyrasol. Migration of literate youth for the job is the root cause of such negative change. In the case of female literacy rate, there is positive change across all blocks of Birbhum district which can be seen in the table -6. The gap between male-female literacy also reveals the poor condition and deprivation of tribal woman. As far as the development in female literacy rate is a concern, Nalhati-2 records 25.98 % of positive change, which is appreciable. Block wise variation of ST literacy and decadal change is also noticeable.

Table-6: Literacy rates and decadal changes (2001-2011) in literacy of Tribal people across blocks of Birbhum district.

Block	2001			2011			Change		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
Murarai-1	21.72	32.70	10.97	26.19	32.75	19.70	4.47	0.05	8.73
Murarai-2	27.25	37.94	16.73	29.40	34.16	24.53	2.15	-3.78	7.80
Nalhati-1	40.02	56.19	23.80	53.48	62.39	44.99	13.46	6.20	21.19
Nalhati-2	25.57	35.48	16.67	50.00	58.44	42.65	24.43	22.96	25.98
Rampurhat-1	31.67	44.65	18.80	39.33	48.74	30.48	7.66	4.09	11.68
Rampurhat -2	38.84	50.74	27.24	39.33	45.00	33.94	0.49	-5.74	6.7
Mayureswar-1	28.08	39.24	16.65	35.10	42.55	27.91	7.02	3.31	11.26
Mayureswar-2	26.47	37.90	14.88	36.11	45.12	26.93	9.64	7.22	12.05
Md. Bazar	29.17	42.11	16.33	35.35	43.72	27.21	6.18	1.61	10.88
Rajnagar	31.17	45.44	17.09	40.34	48.71	32.33	9.17	3.27	15.24
Suri-1	33.69	45.10	22.06	42.85	50.09	35.94	9.16	4.99	13.88
Suri-2	32.66	47.42	17.48	41.23	48.88	33.47	8.57	1.46	15.99
Sainthia	34.05	47.72	20.44	43.26	52.92	33.81	9.21	5.20	13.37
Labpur	32.04	44.10	18.99	42.22	51.45	33.40	10.18	7.35	14.41
Nanoor	22.35	31.95	13.17	31.87	39.15	24.65	9.52	7.20	11.48
Bolpur-Santiniketan	32.23	45.29	19.35	44.81	53.49	36.31	12.58	8.20	16.96
Illambazar	29.55	43.05	15.53	43.78	52.74	34.76	14.23	9.69	19.23
Dubrajpur	28.10	40.92	14.69	36.68	45.33	27.77	8.58	4.41	13.08
Khoyrasole	38.65	53.00	22.02	38.65	47.84	29.56	0.00	-5.16	7.54

VII. PROBLEMS:

Although there is a positive change with a very healthy percentage of decadal change, in female literacy is recorded across blocks of Birbhum district, it is still lagging behind. In almost all blocks male literacy rate is way ahead than female literacy rate. But it is interesting to note that there is no significant improvement in male literacy, rather negative change is found in three blocks which is

alarming.

Because of their different way of thinking, joyful attitude towards learning, tribal children found themselves in confined position in a general schools classroom. That is why tribal children are often irregular and therefore fall back in what is happening in class; ultimately drop out from school. Various reasons are responsible for this.

1)Extreme Poverty: Tribal people are basically marginal and poor people. Due to poor economic condition, tribal people cannot afford finances for education and give priority to the income rather than education.

2)Indifferent Approach of Parents: Due to illiteracy tribal parents do not understand the value of education. Tribal children act as labor power helping their parents in collection of forest products and household activities. Such situation leads to the lower attendance and high drop-out rates.

3)Linguistic Problems: Since in Government schools the medium of instruction is the regional language (in this case, Bengali), it is difficult for tribals to understand especially for the children. As a result of this low enrolment, low attendance and high drop-out rates are widespread among these communities.

4)Seasonal Migration: Tribal people are basically agricultural laborer. During the rainy season they are hired by the rich farmers for paddy plantation. This type of migration may be inter or intra-district. When the parents are away from home, children have to take household responsibility. Hence learning process is hampered.

5)Teacher Related Problem: 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 the acceptance among students. So, it is difficult for a teacher belongs to other than tribal community to understand their cultural and esthetic preferences.

6)Social Isolation: Tribal people are generally resided at inaccessible areas like remote areas or forest areas. Hence, such physiological and social isolation are the root cause of their economic and educational backwardness.

VIII.PROSPECTS:

In India, planning processes are being implemented for over six decades. Many schemes of development were formulated and implemented by both the Central and State Government but failed to achieve the target of upliftment and welfare of the tribal. Consequently, the literacy movement during the 90s and beneficial schemes like MDM, Kanyashree Prakalpa, Sabuj Sathi (distribution of cycle among students of class 9 to 12) and implementation of RTE Act has started to show their positive impact on overall educational system as well as tribal education.

a)LITERACY MOVEMENT:

The last decade of twentieth century can be identified as a decade of literacy movement in India. In Birbhum too such movements were noticed. In the year 1990 the literacy movement got started to convert the illiterate into literate person under the supervision of Birbhum Zila Sarkharata Samity. Various NGOs, political parties, general people also participated in this programme. 254 main trainers, 3,519 master trainers, 70,493 teachers and many other organizations were engaged to fulfill the much-desired goal of 'complete literacy' and finally on 30th June, 1999 the district was declared as a fully literate district. This literacy mission has been able to literate above 80 per cent of total population in the district to claim the status of a 'fully literate district'. This was a remarkable achievement in the social history of Birbhum.

b)IMPACT OF MID-DAY MEAL:

The Government of West Bengal introduced cooked mid-day meal first in 1100 primary schools in five districts and Birbhum was one them. Initially it was introduced in 200 schools in two blocks, viz. Suri-II and Sainthia. After that the programme has been gradually extended to all the blocks. To investigate the impact of the MDM programme, a study was conducted by the Pratichi Trust in 2004 that compared the schools where mid-day meal was introduced with those which were yet to introduce the programme. It was found that the attendance rate in the schools that provided cooked mid-day meal was at least ten percentage points higher than in the schools that did not introduce the programme. This is quite predictable. What is remarkable is that the impact of the programme was much greater on the children belonging to the disadvantaged groups, viz. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and Muslims. The impact has been the maximum on the girls belonging to the scheduled tribes with a massive increase of 25.4% points (Table-7).

**Table-7: Improvement in attendance of ST students
after mid-day meal was introduced**

	Average attendance of children in sample schools that introduced MDM			Average attendance in sample schools w/o MDM
	Before MDM was introduced	At the time of the study	Increase by percentage points	
Boys	55.7	72.6	16.9	53.7
Girls	61.5	86.9	25.4	56.0
Total	57.0	76.9	19.9	55.2

Source: Pratichi Trust

IX.SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION:

After the detailed analysis and interpretation of the educational status of tribal people some suggestion can be proposed to improve the present situation of tribal people.

- 1)To get people interested and involved with education, available schemes have to be taken up effectively to meet the other basic necessities of life.
- 2)Utmost importance should be given to the education of women. Proper care should be given to tribal girls to get enrolled in school.
- 3)Launch special education initiatives in low female literacy tribal pockets.
- 4)Hostel for ST boys and girls at the middle and high school stages and subsidized transport facilities, wherever necessary and possible should arrange in rural area.
- 5)Teach tribal children in their mother tongue. Prepare textbook in tribal languages.
- 6)Give preferences to local and tribal teachers from local Panchayats.
- 7)In tribal area, it is essential that the school schedule should be prepared as per local requirement rather than following a directive from the State. School calendars in tribal areas appropriate to local requirements and festivals.
- 8)Local teacher should be appointed. Special training for non-tribal teachers to work in tribal areas, including knowledge of tribal culture and dialect.

In depth analysis on education backwardness of tribal have inevitably linked it to their poor economic condition and poverty. The main occupation of tribal is agriculture, generally subsistence in nature, practiced through traditional method where productivity remains very low. Consequently,

tribal boys and girls play an important role, contributing directly or indirectly to family income by participating in the family occupation and household works. Even though primary education is deemed free and additional incentives are given to children, in practice, it is not free due to several reasons. The poor economic status of tribal makes even the small amount of private expenditure on buying writing materials, clothing etc. a serious burden on the family. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that education is not given priority. Since education does not provide any visible and immediate benefit, the participation of tribal children in education also becomes limited. Emphasis should be given upon vocational and technical education as well as skill development program. Efforts in these directions will be very helpful in organizing the program of tribal education as well as promoting economic and other aspects of tribal development.

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