

Implementation of National Education Policy, 2020 amongst Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in India: A Critical Study

*Vijoy Kumar Sinha*¹

Abstract

In today's technologically evolved and scientifically advanced society, education is not a luxury exclusive to some privileged class. Instead, it is a fundamental and basic human right that everyone may exercise, regardless of caste, colour, race, sex, religion, or place of birth. When education is recognised as a human right, it means that the right to education is guaranteed to everyone without any discrimination on any ground whatsoever, that the state is under a legal obligation to respect, protect, and provide access to education, and that the state is subject to legal accountability when the right to education is violated or when access to education is denied. The National Educational Policy 2020 is the third educational policy that the government of India has introduced. The goal of this policy is to implement significant reforms in the education system of the nation in order to raise the literacy rate. Tribal people have their unique way of life, characterised by extreme disadvantages such as poverty, lack of education, and a lack of knowledge. They make their homes in the hills, often wholly or partially isolated from the rest of civilization. The Dhebar Commission designated the least-developed indigenous communities as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) in 1973. The government of India rebranded the PTGs as the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in 2006. Most PVTGs have common characteristics, such as a relatively small population, a lack of written language, a lack of complex technology, a slower pace of development, and a lack of urban centers. Despite the government's best efforts, many students cannot benefit from the educational schemes available to them. This paper aims to study the potential impact of the new education policy on the education of PVTGs.

Keywords: *National Educational Policy 2020, Dhebar Commission, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, Education, Human right.*

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Law, University of North Bengal, West Bengal, India.

I. Introduction

Education entails learning about and comprehending the many different areas that will be important in our everyday lives. It is important to remember that the word “education” encompasses the formal education we get in schools and the informal learning and life experiences we have had. Learning alters the way we see the world. Our education begins in the family when we are young and continues right up to the moment we die, and maybe beyond if there is an afterlife. Knowing one's rights and responsibilities to one's family, community, and nation may be significantly aided by this resource. This broadens one's perspective on the world and strengthens one's will to oppose evils such as injustice, corruption, violence, etc. It is well-known that this tool is the most powerful for enhancing our lives now and in the future. A person's self-assurance is boosted as a result, which is crucial to his or her future success.

Education is a vital human right and a crucial component of the development of a country. It is widely accepted that development objectives should be pursued so that socio-economically backward individuals can get rid of poverty and fully participate in the country's development like other citizens. Numerous international treaties on human rights have confirmed this, which includes the “United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (1960) Convention Against Discrimination in Education, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1976)”. Since 2000, the United Nations has also been implementing the Millennium Development Goals to guarantee universal primary education for everyone at free of cost, irrespective of ethnic origin. The 2010 Education for All report indicates that the target has been met. Throughout India, education is offered by both the government and private sectors at three levels: national, municipal and state. Additionally, various institutions that provide vocational education have been established to address schooling demands.

Education and literacy are significant indications of tribal societies' socio-economic growth and their internal strength. Professor Amartya Sen emphasized the critical role of education in achieving equitable economic prosperity. The development of all segments of society is critical. It is critical to bring together society's underprivileged, excluded, and weaker segments. Free and compulsory education is guaranteed as a fundamental right to all children aged between six to

fourteen under different provisions of the Indian Constitution. Among all the accredited primary schools currently running in India, around 80% of them are either sponsored or managed by the government.² However, despite such efforts from the government, the tribal communities of India are still lagging behind the Schedule Caste community and the General population in matters of literacy and education.³

The Indian Constitution identifies Scheduled Tribes (STs), which constitute around 7% of the country's total population, for special consideration concerning some ethnic minority groups traditionally referred to as tribes or Adivasis.⁴ In almost every state of the country, there are 573 STs.⁵ Most of these communities have languages other than those spoken in their country of origin. Over 270 such languages are available. One of the characteristics of ST is that most people live in dispersed dwellings located in the country's interior, remote, inaccessible hills and forests.⁶

Tribal communities are often characterised by primitive characteristics, a unique culture, geographical isolation, reluctance to interact with the larger population, and backwardness. In addition, some tribal communities exhibit characteristics such as reliance on hunting and gathering for sustenance, pre-agricultural levels of technology, zero or negative population growth, and an exceptionally low level of literacy. These tribes are known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (hereinafter PVTGs).

² Amol Arora, *Education for all: A step by step guide to open a school in India*, HINDUSTAN TIMES (Dec. 09, 2019), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/education/education-for-all-a-step-by-step-guide-to-open-a-school-in-india/story-TJxPAzV7ydkGzvfi3YEz8K.html>.

³ MONA SEDWAL AND SANGEETA KAMAT, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL EQUITY WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION 17 (2008)

⁴ T. Brahmanandam and T. Babu, *Educational Status among the Scheduled Tribes: Issues and Challenges*, THE NEHU JOURNAL, Jul.-Dec. 2016 at 69.

⁵ Sujatha, K., *Education among scheduled tribes*, (Jan. 12, 2023, 10:00 AM), http://www.doccentre.net/docsweb/Education/Scanned_material/analysis_Tribals.pdf

⁶ KUMAR, K., CHOUDHARY, P.R., SARANGI, ET. AL., 2005. A SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND LEGAL STUDY OF SCHEDULED TRIBES' LAND IN ORISSA 1-88 (Unpublished Study Commissioned by World Bank Washington 2005).

II. Right to Education

Since independence, the Indian government has created a number of commissions and committees to evaluate different elements of education and recommend steps to adapt education to the country's evolving needs and aspirations. The ongoing emergence of difficulties and opportunities compelled commissions and committees to conduct periodic examinations of India's national education system.

Given that the ST is one of the most marginalized and deprived sectors of Indian society, some social and economic support and development measures have been initiated. In this regard, the tribal sub-plan approach, which was created as the primary five-year plan strategy, must be referred to in particular. In the tribal sub-plan approach, primary education was prioritized along with core economic sectors. Primary education is considered essential to the comprehensive development of tribal communities, mainly to increase trust among the tribe to treat externals on equal terms because of a constitutional obligation and as crucial input.

The Constitution of India is a social document and the country's supreme law. To ensure socio-economic justice, the Constitution's founding fathers incorporated a Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) in Part IV of the Indian Constitution. The DPSP is not a catalogue but a principle for good governance. It requires the State to play an active role in the creation of a welfare state. The DPSP guides state officials in how to achieve the constitutional vision. One of the essential directives is the State's obligation to provide free and compulsory education to all children till the age of 14.⁷

As early as 1978, the Supreme Court of India has expanded the scope of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. The Court stated that "the right to education flows directly from the right to life" as "the right to life and dignity of an individual cannot be assured unless it accompanied by the right to education".⁸

⁷ INDIA CONST. Art. 45.

⁸ INDIA CONST. Art. 21.

In Mohini Jain⁹ and Unnikrishnan case¹⁰, the Supreme Court recognized education as an implicit fundamental right. As per the court, education is closely linked to life, environmental protection, the eradication of intolerability, children's prostitution, and other related rights. The National Commission on the review of the constitution also endorsed a similar view. Consequently, by the 86th constitutional amendment in 2002, the parliament included Article 21A of the Constitution¹¹. As per this amendment, every parent or guardian must provide their children with good educational opportunities. On 1st April 2010, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE) was passed by the parliament.¹² The Act addresses several aspects, such as the teacher's appointment, curriculum, standards, infrastructure, community participation, and the State's responsibility for primary education.

III. Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)

The Government of India introduced a new category, PVTGs with the objective of ameliorating the situation of those communities with very low development indices. In 1960-61, Dhebar Commission¹³ reported that there were disparities in the pace of progress among Scheduled Tribes. In the fourth five-year plan, a new sub-category was introduced under Scheduled Tribes to identify those tribes to have a lesser degree of development. In a later stage, according to the Dhebar Commission report and other investigations, a new sub category was established as "Primitive Tribal Groups" (PTG). To identify these groups, certain characteristics were also mentioned to include them in this sub-category. The characteristics are a pre-level of technology, a deficient level of literacy, a declining or stagnant population, and a subsistence level of the economy. If any groups are satisfied with any one of the criterion will be considered as PTG. Later, 52 communities were identified as PTG, which was made on respective state government recommendations. In the sixth five-year plan, another 20 groups were

⁹ Mohini Jain v. Union of India, AIR 1992 SC 1858.

¹⁰ Unni Krishnan J.P v. State of Andhra Pradesh & Ors, 1993 AIR 2178.

¹¹ INDIA CONST. art. 21A, amended by The Constitution (Eighty Sixth Amendment) Act, 2002

¹² The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, No. 35 of 2009, Acts of Parliament, 2009 (India).

¹³ National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, *First Report 2004-2005 & 2005-2006*, https://ncst.nic.in/sites/default/files/documents/ncst_reports/first_annual_report_of_ncst/PART%20I%20-%20Ist%20Report%20NCST%202004-20059484175791.pdf.

included, two more in the seventh five-year plan and one more group in the eighth five-year plan, making 75 in total. In 2006, the Government of India renamed PTGs as “Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups”.

In India, 7 percent of the overall population is comprised of tribal people. 15 percent of the country's land area is inhabited by tribal people.¹⁴ They inhabit a variety of habitats, including plains, woodlands, hills, and inaccessible regions. Geographically, PVTGs are dispersed across the nation. The population of the PVTG according to the 2001 census was approximately 27,68,322.¹⁵

PVTGs rely on many means of subsistence, including food collection, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP), hunting, cattle husbandry, shifting agriculture, and artisanal activity. Their primary source of income is derived from the forest. The forest is their source of life and income. They harvest honey, gum, amla, bamboo, shrubs, fuel wood, dried leaves, nuts, sprouts, wax, medicinal plants, roots, and tubers, among other NTFPs. They collect the majority of NTFPs for consumption and sell the remainder to middlemen. The gathering of NTFPs, however, is becoming more difficult as a result of diminishing forests, environmental changes, and new forest preservation rules. PVTGs have been abused by middlemen due to a lack of understanding about the value of NTFP products.

Health is a necessity for human growth and a fundamental element of the well-being of humanity. A community's health issues are impacted by a variety of elements, including social, economic, and political considerations. Multiple factors, including “poverty, illiteracy, lack of safe drinking water, poor sanitary conditions, difficult terrain, malnutrition, poor maternal and child health services, lack of health and nutritional services, superstition, and deforestation, have contributed to the poor health status of PVTGs”. In PVTGs, the average illiteracy rate ranges from 10 to 44 percent, indicating a very low state of education.

¹⁴

Overview, <https://tribal.nic.in/WriteReadData/CMS/Documents/201305031210162373115overview.pdf>.

¹⁵ Recommendations of the National Advisory Council, *Development Challenges Specific to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)*, <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/OtherReport/NACRecommendationsforPVTGs.pdf>.

Table 1: List of PVTGs in India¹⁶

State / UT Name	Population (2001 Census)¹⁷	PVTGs Name
Andhra Pradesh and Telangana	3,34,144	1. Bodo Gadaba 2. Bondo Poroja 3. Chenchu 4. Dongria Khond 5. Gutob Gadaba 6. Khond Poroja 7. Kolam 8. Kondareddis 9. Konda Savaras 10. Kutia Khond 11. Parengi Poroja 12. Thoti
Bihar and Jharkhand	3,98,231	13. Asurs 14. Birhor 15. Birjia 16. Hill Kharia 17. Konvas 18. Mal Paharia

¹⁶ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Scheme of Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), , Government of India, <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/NGO/Latter-Notice/14.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Supra* note 14.

		19. Parhaiyas 20. Suda Paharia 21. Savar
Gujarat	1,06,775	22. Kathodi 23. Kohvalia 24. Padhar 25. Siddi 26. Kolgha
Karnataka	45,899	27. Jenu Kuruba 28. Koraga
Kerala	20,186	29. Cholanayakan 30. Kadar 31. Kattunayakan 32. Kurumbas 33. Koraga
Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh	7,85,720	34. Abujh Macias 35. Baigas 36. Bharias 37. Hill Korbas 38. Kamars 39. Saharias 40. Birhor
Maharashtra	4,08,668	41. Katkaria (Kathodia) 42. Kolam 43. Maria Gond

Manipur	1,225	44. Marram Nagas
Odisha	68,745	45. Birhor 46. Bondo 47. Didayi 48. Dongria-Khond 49. Juangs 50. Kharias 51. Kutia Kondh 52. Lanjia Sauras 53. Lodhas 54. Mankidias 55. Paudi Bhuyans 56. Soura 57. Chuktia Bhunjia
Rajasthan	76,237	58. Seharis
Tamil Nadu	2,17,937	59. Kattu Nayakans 60. Kotas 61. Kurumbas 62. Irulas 63. Paniyans 64. Todas
Tripura	1,65,103	65. Reangs
Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand	52,653	66. Buxas 67. Rajis
West Bengal	85,983	68. Birhor

		69. Lodhas 70. Totos
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	816	71. Great Andamanese 72. Jarawas 73. Onges 74. Sentinelese 75. Shom Pens

IV. Drop-Out Rates in School Education

The below table represents the drop-out rates in school education for scheduled tribe students as we can see from the below table that in every year from 2015-16 to 2019-20, the overall dropout rates are getting higher when the students are getting promoted from primary to upper-primary and upper-primary to secondary level. Secondly, the dropout rates are high in girl students compared to boys, irrespective of their classes.

Table 2: Dropout rates of Scheduled Tribe Students

Year/Class	Primary			Upper-Primary			Secondary		
	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall	Girls	Boys	Overall
2015-16	4.18	4.29	4.24	9.64	9.70	9.67	26.28	26.27	26.27
2016-17	3.91	3.96	3.94	8.60	8.69	8.64	27.15	27.85	27.51
2017-18	3.48	3.82	3.66	6.14	5.95	6.04	21.36	22.90	22.14
2018-19	5.23	5.72	5.48	6.46	6.89	6.69	23.38	26.40	24.93
2019-20	3.45	3.90	3.69	5.65	6.15	5.90	22.49	25.51	24.03

(Source: Unified District Information System for EducationPlus (UDISE+), Ministry of Education)¹⁸

¹⁸ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Annual Report 2021-22*, (2021-22), <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/AnnualReport/AREnglish2122.pdf>.

V. National Education Policy, 2020

In July 2020, the government announced a new education policy. This is the third education policy that the government brought to raise the education standard of India. The guiding principles of the policy will serve to direct not only the education system as a whole but also the particular institutions by “recognizing, identifying, and fostering the unique capabilities of each student, achieving foundational literacy and numeracy by class 3, there will be no separation between arts and sciences, promoting multilingualism and the power of language, respect for diversity and respect for the local context, full equity and inclusion”.¹⁹

The features of the new education policy are as follows: -

1. The current 10+2 structure will be altered to accommodate a new pedagogical and curricular restructure that will include 5+3+3+4 and encompass students aged 3 to 18. The first stage will be the foundational stage which will be divided into two parts that are 3 years of Anganwadi/pre-school school covering from age 3 to 6 years and the 2 years of classes 1 and 2, both together covering 6-8, which will be total from age 3-8 years. The second stage will be the preparatory stage, from classes 3-5, covering ages 8 to 11 years; the third stage will be the middle stage, from classes 6 to 8, covering ages 11 to 14 years, and the final stage will be secondary stage from class 9 to 12 covering age 14-18 years.²⁰ (Fig. 1)

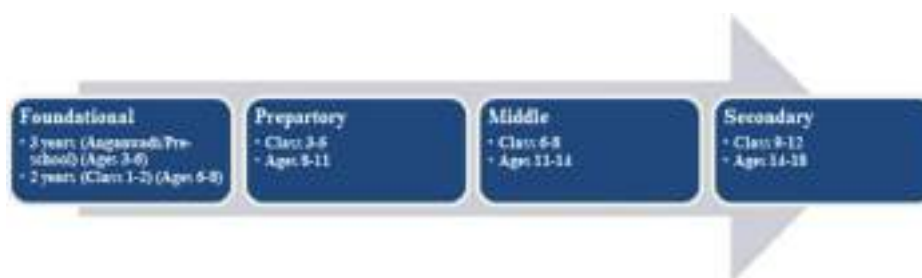


Figure 1: Represents new pedagogical structure of New Education Policy, 2020 from Foundational Stage to Secondary Stage

¹⁹ Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, *National Education Policy 2020*, Government of India, (2020), https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

2. It should be one of the key focuses of our educational system to ensure that all students are enrolled in and regularly attend the schools in which they are placed. There will be two overarching programmes that will be carried out in order to get children who have stopped attending school back to school and prevent further children from stopping attending school. The first step is to provide an infrastructure that is efficient and adequate so that all students, from pre-primary school up to grade 12, have access to an education that is both secure and interesting. The second goal is to achieve universal school participation by constantly monitoring students and their learning levels to ensure that they (a) are enrolled in and attending school and (b) have enough opportunity to catch up and re-enter school if they fall behind or drop out.²¹
3. The school's medium of instruction should be in their mother tongue/home language/regional language till grade 5, but it will be better if they can teach till grade 8 and beyond. Due to this reason, all textbooks, including science, should be made available in their local language. This should be followed in both public and private schools.²²
4. All students must acquire specific topics, skills, and abilities to become good, successful, inventive, adaptive, and productive human beings, even though students must have a great deal of freedom in selecting their curriculum. These skills include "scientific temper and evidence-based thinking; creativity and innovativeness; a sense of aesthetic and art; oral and written communication; health and nutrition; physical education, fitness, wellness and sports etc."²³

A. Issue and Challenges in Implementing New Education Policy with Special Reference to PVTGs

The major problem is that mode of instruction should be in the mother tongue because the children understand better if they are taught in their language. Children who are raised in tribal groups often have the impression that the education they get at school is pointless and unrelated to their everyday lives, both intellectually and culturally. This issue was also raised in University Education

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Commission which was chaired by Dr. Sarvelli Radhakrishnan, who also mentioned in his report that the medium of instruction should be in their mother tongue.²⁴ According to the new education policy, students should also be taught in their mother tongue till class 5. The issue is that we need teachers who can also speak their language and textbooks.

Another point to mention about implementation is in the RTE Act, it is mentioned that till primary education, the language should be in the mother dialect as far as practicable²⁵. However, the subjects are still being taught in the state language, which is the issue of some children coping with the school work, which results in absenteeism, and slowly they lose interest in going to school and becomes dropout. This Act was passed in 2009, and this issue is still not resolved. Then how can we expect that new education policy issues will be implemented.

According to the new education policy, the foundational stage starts from the age of three to eight years, where three years of Anganwadi and 2 years of primary school. Most tribal groups live a migratory lifestyle, which includes moving from one place to another in search of a better livelihood. If they keep changing their locations, how will these get admitted to these schools and Anganwadi for education.

The new education policy lays down that there will be greater flexibility in choosing the “individual curricular, but at the same time, all students should learn certain subjects, skills, and capacities to become good, successful, innovative, adaptable and productive human beings. These skills include scientific temper and evidence-based thinking; creativity and innovativeness; a sense of aesthetic and art; oral and written communication; health and nutrition; physical education, fitness, wellness and sports.” For these things to be implemented, we need a solid infrastructure, which is extremely difficult to offer to schools situated in locations with little or poor road access and not enough room to house the infrastructure. This makes it very challenging for the government to execute these things additionally, how we will give such an infrastructure to the mobile schools.

²⁴ Ministry of Education (1948-49), *The Report of The University Education Commission*, Government of India, New Delhi.

²⁵ The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, § 29 (f), No. 35 of 2009, Acts of Parliament, 2009 (India).

Another issue is that about inclusive education, the policy also states that Children with Special Needs should get the same opportunities for quality education as any other child. The issue is that children with special needs do not have special schools in those villages to obtain a quality education. They do not take admission to those schools because they will not be able to cope with those students, so they have to sit at home without education. To mitigate this challenge, the government also needs to open such schools in those areas to impart education to such children, or they can dedicate one or two classrooms to the same schools already established in their village.

The new education policy states that teachers should be involved in teaching, not in strenuous administrative tasks. The issue is that due to the shortage of teachers in these areas, teachers have to play different roles in their schools, either as teachers or administrators. To resolve such an issue, the number of teachers should be increased, and a proper administrator should be appointed for those schools that only look after the administrative tasks.

VI. Conclusion

The new education strategy will not disrupt the established order of the educational system. Since the PVTG are primarily migratory and stay in isolated places, it will be challenging to implement the new educational strategy concerning them. To educate the tribal people in general and PVTGs in particular, the government has to take unique and additional steps that are not already being done.

Suggestions have been made concerning implementing the new education policy up to the primary level, such as introducing mobile schools in these areas where these tribal people go from one place to another. Like in Bhubaneswar, the State Government has launched School Sanjog Programme for Class 1 to 5 students.²⁶ This initiative programme focuses on continued learning among the children PVTGs areas as an alternative to address the disruption in education during the

²⁶ *PNS, School-in-van to reach out to 40,000 tribal kids as School Sanjog Prog launched in 1,000 villages, THE PIONEER (Oct. 30, 2021), <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/state-editions/school-in-van-to-reach-out-to-40-000-tribal-kids-as-school-sanjog-prog-launched-in-1-000-villages.html>.*

pandemic. After this is accomplished, mobile schools should also be assigned the task of operating Anganwadi centres. This will serve two purposes: first, it will improve education since there will be more teachers on staff, and second, it will relieve the government of establishing Anganwadi facilities. The government must make a concerted effort to hire an increasing number of instructors who can speak and write in their language. The government should also recruit more teachers in those schools so that teachers are only involved in a teaching role. There should also be schools for children with special needs. The government needs to take measures to prepare the literature in their language, and such efforts should be taken immediately. The infrastructure at these schools is so subpar that it must be improved. Most of these schools are in mountainous regions and have the worst infrastructure.