

Educational Scenario of Tribal Women in Dooars and Terai

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Abstract

In Dooars and Terai of North Bengal, Adivasi women have been suffering from illiteracy due to lack of proper education. The article focuses on the status and condition of their educational scenario and the hurdles faced by them in doing so. It is surveyed that the maximum number of women in tribal families are engaged mainly in tea garden. It also looked that they do not have interest in education and the Government facilities are not sufficient too to support their society. So, the gap between the general communities and the Scheduled Tribes in Dooars and Terai region in terms of low literacy may be attributed to different issues and the tribes remain illiterate in comparison to other societies.

Keywords: Tribal, Women, Education, Dooars, Terai

Introduction:

India has the largest tribal population in the world. According to the 1991 census, India has a tribal population of 67.8 million which constitute 8.08 percent of the total population of the country. The tribal groups inhabit different ecological and geo-climatic conditions in different concentrations throughout the country. The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health, and fertility as well as the roles they play within the family, the community, and society (Ghosh, 1987).

Tribal women occupy an important place in the socio-economic structure of their society. In traditional tribal economics, the role of women was substantial and crucial. As a result, their opinion mattered a lot in decision-making. Their social status was also satisfactory since tribal women enjoyed more freedom than their non-tribal counterparts. So, the wide gap between the general population and the

Schedule Tribes in terms of low literacy may attribute to various factors. The main causes of low literacy are:

1. The poverty of the parents
2. Medium of instruction
3. Contents of education
4. Inadequate infrastructure and supporting service
5. Absenteeism
6. Lack of education policy
7. Socio-Cultural factors

Review of Literature:

“Education in Tribal India: A study of West Bengal” (Duary, 2010), the book deals with educational development among the tribals in West Bengal, which is one of the vital issues in modern India. The study was carried out among four tribal communities that belong to different traditional economic types namely the Lodha-gatherer hunter, Mahali-bamboo artisan, Kora-earth worker, and the Santal-settled agriculturist in a tribal populated area in the Paschim Medinipur District of West Bengal. The studied people live in the same ecology enjoying almost the same educational privilege in the pursuit of their education.

“Primary Education in Tribal India: Experience from the Eastern India States” (R.P, 2009), this book as a pioneering piece of work attempts to focus on the strategy of functioning of primary schools established in tribal areas by the government and non-government agencies. It has highlighted how this school performs.

“Ignored Claims A Focus on Tribal Education in India”(Nanjunda & Kurane, 2008), The main and vital objective of this volume is to make the book represent some of the most worthwhile contributions to the knowledge of tribal education issues with special reference to India. It emphasizes concept principles and applied aspects and has tried promptly to concentrate more on the combination of social and technology-related components in the advancement of tribal education in India.

“Tribal Development in India” (Chandra, 2006), is a collection of 13 articles on little-known tribal movements in India, featuring case studies covering all the

major issues concerning tribal populations including political autonomy, the struggle for resources, minimal social opportunities, and basic social responsibilities. The specific movements discussed include Dalitism in Jharkhand, the Kamtapur separatist movement in North Bengal, and land struggles in Uttar Pradesh and Kerala.

“Tribal's and the Indian Constitution”(N.K., 2006), is based on the empirical study and has extensively reviewed the impact of various legislations and regulations enacted for tribal development in Orissa in the past. Besides presenting an anthropological understanding of the tribal development along with a brief account of tribal development programmes being implemented in the country, it also explains the state of the vulnerable tribal population in Orissa.

Scope of the study:

India is a large country with over the billion population, various communities are available, one of them is the tribals. In North Bengal, Dooars and Terai region the Tribal women are backward in education. The study analyses the tribal development programs, namely, Government educational programs, youth programs, various awareness programs related to the tribal women. The health programs, the women awareness programs on cleanliness, various diseases and their treatment, child health etc. may be further studied.

Objective:

To find out the educational status among the Adiavasi women in Terai and Dooars in North Bengal

Methodology:

The study used stratified random sampling, field survey, and interview methods to collect the data and information regarding their education.

This article highlighted the educational condition of the Tribal women in the Dooars and Terai region.

Area of the Study:

Dooars and Terai region in North Bengal is the study area, under the Dooars districts of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. It was taken in four blocks: Malbazar and

Metiali under the Jalpaiguri district, Kalchini and Madarihat-Birpara blocks under the Alipurduar district. The majority of Adivasi people are living in these four blocks. The area of Terai is under the Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts, i.e. the Dabgram-Fulbari block in Jalpaiguri Sadar Sub-division and Khoribari, Naxalbari, Matigara, and Phansidewa blocks are under the Siliguri sub-division. The study covered the Matigara, Phansidewa, and Naxalbari blocks in the Terai region. The survey of the study is carried out in one village from each block. The survey included 56 female respondents from seven blocks and 8 respondents were in each village.

Dooars Region:

Dooars was originally a strip of land located at the foot of the Himalayas and to the east of the river Teesta. Jalpaiguri district is divided into two sub-divisions, Jalpaiguri Sadar and Malbazar sub-division (Blocks- Jalpaiguri Sadar, Malbazar, Metaili, Nagrakata, Dhupguri, Maynaguri, Rajganj, and Banarhat). Alipurduar district sub-division is Alipurduar Sadar (Blocks-Alipurduar1 and Alipurduar2, Kumargram, Falakata, Madarihat-Birpara, Kalchini). So the Dooars are covered under the 14 blocks.

Terai Region:

Terai of North Bengal refers to the 50 to 300 km East-West circle of wetlands; grassland is Shabana and forest, especially in the foothills of the Darjeeling Himalayas. This Terai region includes a land region in Southern Nepal and Northern India. The flat area is flanked by the foothills of the Himalayas at an altitude of 100m in the north to 80m at the southern border. In Terai, the majority of tribal people work as tea garden labourers like Oraon, Mundas, Santhals, etc.

The Dooars and Terai region of North Bengal is inhabited by number of tribes. Some tribes are aboriginal, like Toto, Rava, Mech, etc. The Rava is found in Kalchini block, Toto in Madarihat block, and Mech in Kumargram block. However, many tribal inhabitants have migrated to this region from other parts of West Bengal, other states, and mostly from Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya

Pradesh, and Chotanagpur (Ghosh, 2014). They had been brought out here as tea plantation workers by the British Government. For that time, most of the Dooars were enclosed with dark jungle. They were brought in to clear all those places, and they had settled for a generation, like Oraon, Mahali, Chikbarik, Santhal, Munda, etc., are notable. The several socially important tribal groups in this region belong to the Mongoloid racial stock like Bhutia, Lepcha, etc.

Educational Status of Adivasi women in general:

The general picture of female literacy in our country is depressing enough but the still lower literacy rates amongst Schedule Caste/ Schedule Tribe females is quite jarring notwithstanding higher rates amongst a few tribes. While in two decades' general female literacy increased from 12.95 percent in 1961 to 24.9 percent in 1981, SC females achieved an increase from 3.29 percent to 10.93 percent and ST percent to 8.04 percent during the same period.

There is no uniformity in the enrolment ratios among the states and there is wide variation when the primary and middle schools are compared. There is always much less enrolment in middle schools as compared to primary school, instead of increasing the enrolment ratios, over the years it has been on the decrease in many of the states. It can also be inferred that girl's education has been neglected mostly at the Middle School level due to various reasons.

Table-1: Literacy Rate of General and ST Population during 1961-2001

Year	General	ST
1961	24.02	8.53
1971	29.45	11.30
1981	36.23	16.35
1991	52.2	29.60
2001	64.8	47.10

Source: Census of India 2001

The literacy rate of the total general population is 24.02 percent and the rate of literacy among the tribal people is only 8.53 percent. In between 1961 to 2001, the literacy rate of STs is 8.53 to 47.10 and the general literacy rate is 24.02 to 64.8. The rate of literacy of the total general population is 40.78 percent whereas

the literacy rate of tribal people is 38.57 percent. It clearly shows that the literacy rate of the general population has increased more than the tribal population.

Census 2011 shows that there is a wide gap in terms of the percentage of literacy in respect of the ST males and females' vis-à-vis the literacy among the males and females of the population which as indicated below:

Table -2: Literacy Rate of Male and Female of ST population in India

Year	Male	Female	Total
2001	59.2	34.8	47.1
2011	68.5	49.4	59.0

Source: Census of India 2011

The above figure does indicate a wide gap between male and female population of society. It is distressing to note that literacy is very low. As for the tribal who are mainly rural based low level of literacy is a matter of serious concern. (Verma, 2017)

Educational status of Adivasi Women in Dooars and Terai Region:

In this region after long demand and pursuance, the 2009 Left Front Govt. of W.B. implemented the question papers in Hindi for Hindi Schools in Madhyamik and Higher Secondary Examinations. For tribals, the medium of instruction in the school has been largely responsible for their low literacy. This have been forcing tribal children to drop out of the primary school. Another big reason behind this, is that there are no High Schools inside most of the tea gardens. Some tea gardens have a few Primary Schools, but their infrastructure is not good and another problem is the shortage of the Hindi Medium School in this region. So the children are taught by Bengali Medium teachers, most of the Adivasis' children cannot go to high school after finishing primary school education, because the High Schools are far away from the garden areas. So for the girl child communication is another serious problem. Due to this condition, various superstitions are seen in their society, like the *Dayni (witch)*, child marriages, etc.

The actual educational condition of Adivasi people in Dooars is analyzed with the help of following tables:

Table-3: Literacy Rate of ST Population in Jalpaiguri District, 2001

Year	Total Percentage of Literacy	Percentage of ST Literacy
2001	62.85	32.16

Source: Statistical Abstract-2008 Govt. of W.B (West Bengal)

In Jalpaiguri district, the tribal literacy growth is compared with the literacy growth of total population which is low, as shown in Table 3. It is clear that educational condition of the tribes is not good because of the lack of educational facilities in this area.

Table-4: Block wise

Educational Qualification of Women in Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Alipurduar District

Name of Blocks	Illiterate & Percentage	Class I-IV & Percentage	Class V-X & Percentage	Class XI-XII & Percentage	Graduate
Matigara	7, 12.5%		1, 1.8%		--
Phansidewa	1, 1.78%		6, 10.7%	1, 1.8%	--
Naxalbari	3, 5.35%		4, 7.14%	1, 1.8%	--
Malbazer	2, 3.6%	1, 1.78%	5, 8.9%		--
Metaili	2, 3.6%		1, 1.8%	5, 8.9%	--
Madarihat-Birpara	8, 14.28%				--
Kalchini	4, 7.14%	4, 7.14%			--
Total	27, 48.21%	5, 8.9%	17, 30.35%	7, 12.5%	--

Source: Statistical Abstract-2008 Govt. of W.B (West Bengal)

The data of field survey analysed in Table No. 4, it is very clear that out of 56 women under the age group 18 to 60 year, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Darjeeling in the three districts under seven blocks 27 are illiterate which means a majority of them do not go to school, 5 women have just completed their primary

schooling, 17 are completed their high school, and only 7 women are completed their twelve class. The survey also followed that there were no graduate women in seven blocks.

Conclusion and Suggestion:

It is very easy to understand from the above discussions that the educational condition of the tribal women in this region is not satisfactory. Possibly that the *Adivasi* women look for earning and from a very early age they seek to earn a minimum amount to run the family smoothly.

Adivasi have traditionally lacked the light of education for obvious reasons. The *Adivasi* women in North Bengal are still deeply rooted in the darkness of education because the Government efforts are highly neglected in tribal areas. The lack of schools and colleges in tribal areas are one of the main reasons for the educational backwardness of *Adivasi*. It is a common fact that unless and until education from the primary to university level is achieved at a greater percentage, the *Adivasi* cannot come at par with other community.

The tribes in this region that have been lagging behind in respect of female education, the isolated pockets in far-flung tribal areas where women literacy is at the lowest shall have to be identified. After identification of the tribal communities as well as the region's most backward isolated pockets, a scientific study by an interdisciplinary team of social scientists should be made to ascertain the actual causes of the low level of literacy amongst the tribal women.

In West Bengal, tribal education is controlled by the Departments of Education, Tribal Welfare, and Social Welfare, and they implement the education programs for Schedule Tribes and operate the facilities for scholarships. The Constitution of India enjoins upon the State to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. Article 38(2) of the same Part also enjoins upon the State to minimize inequities in income and to endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.

The Central Government provides schemes include Pre-Matric Scholarship (PMS), Post -Matric Scholarships, Top Class Education Scheme in Higher Education, the National Fellowship scheme for pursuing higher studies leading to M.Phil., PhD, National Overseas Scholarships, hostels, coaching, and Allied Scheme. Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and Ekalvy Model Day Boarding Schools have been started in the year 1997-98 to impart quality education to ST children in remote areas in order to enable them to avail of opportunities in high and professional educational courses and get employment in various sectors. The schools focus not only on academic education but on the all-round development of the students. But, due to a lack of educational development, incapability to complete a specific level of education and lack of awareness among the tribal women in the Dooars and Terrai, they cannot benefit from such schemes.

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