

Access to Education, Transition and Learning of Tribal Students in Kerala: A Human Rights Perspective

Dr. Ambily P*

Introduction

Durkheim perceived education as a part of social system in which it exists and presumed that it corresponds accurately to the system in which it exists¹. In this context, education need to be observed as a sub-system of the society which is inter linked with other sub systems such as economy, religion, political etc². Education, undoubtedly, is a significant device of social reform that helps the society to advance in tune with the changing times and also helps people to be proactive in attaining a better quality of life.

Tribal or indigenous people are seen as a distinct group of society that maintains its distinctiveness in culture, but lacks positive traits of the modern society. It is also characterised as simple, illiterate and backward society³. These elements of backwardness may be eradicated by virtue of education and societal upliftment. However, a universal pattern of intervention into the indigenous society is not a practical and feasible one. The pertinent reason is

* *Assistant Professor in National University of Advanced Legal Studies (NUALS), Kochi*

¹ Amy S. D'aprix, Katherine M. Dunlap, Eileen Abel, Richard L. Edwards . (2004) Goodness of fit: career goals of MSW students and the aims of the social work profession in the United States. *Social Work Education* 23:3, pages 265-280.

² Flecha, R., Gómez, J., & Puigvert, L. (2001). CHAPTER 1: Society as a System of Subsystems. *Counterpoints*, 250, 7–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42977864> at p. 8.

³ Virginius Xaxa. (1999). Tribes as Indigenous People of India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(51), 3589–3595. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408738> at p. 3589.

the peculiarity of the indigenous society as an isolated ethnic group⁴. They are the original settlers of a geographic location. In spite of them being referred as marginalised, they intend to maintain their distinctiveness such as their identity, language, culture and other aspects and stay isolated from the mainstream society as much as they can⁵. Thus keeping in mind the understanding on typical nature of the society, there is a need to identify appropriate intervention methods for the advancement through education and other progressive measures to be adopted by the state.

For any indigenous group, education is the key catalyst and the pivot of their advancement. Owing to ignorance out of illiteracy, the group is not able to utilise their resources for economic development. In the post-Independence period, many joint efforts were made for the educational reforms of tribal population. Studies on tribal education suggested that policy framers hardly paid attention to culturally linked education⁶. This led to disturbing statistics of drop outs and thus had a detrimental impact on educational status. The educational growth is highly scattered among indigenous communities of Kerala. Majority of tribal communities are suffering from severe educational backwardness in the literacy rate at the grass root level itself⁷.

⁴ Preet, S. (1994). TRIBAL PROBLEMS: A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE. *Indian Anthropologist*, 24(2), 29–38. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41919746> at p 32.

⁵ Virginius Xaxa. (1999). Transformation of Tribes in India: Terms of Discourse. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 34(24), 1519–1524. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408077> at p. 1524.

⁶ T. BRAHMANANDAM AND T. BOSU BABU, Educational Status among the Scheduled Tribes: Issues and Challenges, ISSN. 0972 – 8406, *The NEHU Journal*, Vol XIV, No. 2, July-December 2016. Pp 69-85, at p.75.

⁷ Johny, Sabu. (2019). Government Initiatives and Educational Disparity among Tribal Communities in Kerala.09. 134-138 at p. 136.

Undoubtedly, scheduled tribes is the utmost socially and educationally disadvantaged group of our society. Their historical background of social and economic deprivation and its underlying causes of their educational marginalization is notably distinct. United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) representation of Human Development is considered as the standard basis for any discussion on development⁸. The study on scheduled tribes in India attempts to reveal the indices of the scheduled tribes on a comparative basis with other social groups in India. Human Poverty Index (HPI) and Human Development Index (HDI) are 30% lower than the corresponding all India indices. It is also indicated in this comparative study that India being an emerging world power, within India there is a world of deprivation of the scheduled tribes in all perspectives⁹. Improvement in education is a key factor as it lead to the growth of other indices such as health, economic development and quality of life¹⁰. The term double disadvantage is aptly used to describe the socio-economic and spatial marginalization of Scheduled Tribes in India¹¹.

Development index statistics of STs in Kerala is presented as only 74.44 percent, which is much lower than the average literacy of the state which is

⁸ R.Ramachandran , V. Deepan Educational Status of Scheduled Tribes in India, International Journal of Technical Research & Science, ISSN No.: 2454- 2024 (online) p. 2.

⁹ Sandip Sarkar, Sunil Mishra, Harishwar Dayal, & Nathan, D. (2006). Development and Deprivation of Scheduled Tribes. Economic and Political Weekly, 41(46), 4824–4827. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4418927> at p. 4825.

¹⁰ Bagavandas, M. Development of multifactor index for assessing quality of life of a tribal population of India: multilevel analysis approach. BMC Public Health **21**, 383 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10338-2>

¹¹ Sujatha, K, Education among Scheduled Tribes, In Govinda, R. (ed.), India Education Report: A Profile of Basic Education. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002.

high as 93.91 percent¹². The distribution of age on illiteracy states that 2546 children between the age group of 06-14 are illiterates which constitutes 2.59 percent of the total illiterates in the state. This further reveals the bleak outcome of the endeavour to provide education to all children belonging to the marginalised section of the society. In the age group of 18-29, the illiterates constitutes 10.41 percent and in the group of 30-59 it escalates to 60.96 per cent. It is also a well-known fact that even among the literates in the community, education is only below 10th grade and this demonstrates that many tribal children have not attained the level of education as an expected outcome in spite of the fact that there are 4475 graduates and 822 post graduates among them. It may be stated that the status has not been reasonably well reflected according to the overall proportion of the tribal population¹³.

No. of students enrol in pre-school institutions such as anganwadies is also very low. It is a disturbing fact that 12,342, children have not enrolled for primary schooling. Thus pre-school education is beyond reach to 76 per cent of children. The statistics is worst in districts in Kerala such as Malappuram, Kasaragod, Palakkad and Wayanad. These 5 districts together account for approximately 80 per cent of the tribal students. District wise the rate of non-enrolment of children is 87.27 per cent in Malappuram District, 85.39 per cent in Kasaragod, 85.27 per cent in Palakkad and 84.31 per cent in Wayanad¹⁴. The students in primary classes constitute 70.64 per cent and those in secondary and higher secondary level are 14.91 per cent and 7.49 per cent

¹²Scheduled Tribes of Kerala, REPORT ON THE SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS, Scheduled Tribes Development Department, Government of Kerala 2013 at https://www.stdd.kerala.gov.in/sites/default/files/inline-files/surveyd_2008.pdf

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Wayanad District has the largest number of students (33071), followed by Idukki (10901), Palakkad (10442), Kannur (7430) and Kasaragod (10267).

respectively. Only 3.81 per cent of students are in graduation and post-graduation courses. The students for professional courses are much below as only 0.35 per cent¹⁵.

The major concern in the present scenario is the dropout of students from schools. The average rate of dropout is 36.73 per cent¹⁶. The reasons such as financial constraints, failure/detention, family problems, and inaccessibility to institutions, and sense of alienation so on are attributed for the huge dropout of tribal students. Poverty and financial problems in the families have contributed for the discontinuance of the studies¹⁷.

It is pertinent to note that education is the only effective instrument by which society can enhance its competency, overcome barriers and enlarge its prospects for the well-being of its members. Government has been making constant efforts towards this goal by extending special educational facilities thorough constructive educational policies in all aspects. However, the various perspectives adopted for tribal community fail to address the disadvantages pertaining to the tribal population in an adequate manner. Tribal education system is inherently flawed with lack of adequate infra structure, human and economic resources and other inherent problems within. Hence it is compelling to consider the need to improve tribal education holistically with a focus on their inclusive growth.

¹⁵ *Supra n. 13.*

¹⁶ Altogether 12,874 children have discontinued their studies at the secondary level while the strength of students in secondary classes is 13,552.

¹⁷ *Id at n.17.*

Human Rights Perspective

Scheduled tribes is the most socially disadvantaged group in India, who are backward in all aspects such as educationally, economically, socially and culturally in comparison to the society as a whole. Lack of education is regarded as a major factor for the same. The Constitution of India guarantees all children certain rights such as right to free and compulsory education for all children between 6-14 years of age¹⁸. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) is a binding international document that sets out the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of every child irrespective of any differences¹⁹. The convention elaborates on rights of children and imposes obligations on state parties to work together to ensure that every child enjoys the rights. It also requires the governments to take necessary efforts to meet their basic needs and help them in achieving the full potential of their rights. India ratified the UNCRC, in 1992. The convention inspired our country to enact progressive legislations and frame policies to address the pertinent human rights issues relating to child. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 is one of the key legislation enacted with an objective of protecting rights of children. The Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005 provides to set up the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) which was set up in March 2007. The directive of Commission is to ensure the reach of all Laws, Policies, Programmes, and Administrative Mechanisms and to ensure that it is in consonance with the constitutional rights perspective and also in the UNCRC.

¹⁸ Art. 21-A, Constitution of India.

¹⁹ <https://www.savethechildren.in/news/importance-of-uncrc-for-children-in-india-and-the-way-forward/>

Further, for promotion of educational goals of scheduled tribes, the constitution also included an article in the directive principles of the state policy which states that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people in particular of SCs and STs. It is also part of the direction that the state shall protect them from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. Article 46 says that the state shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years. Further, under Article 350A, affirms that every state must provide adequate facilities for instruction of pupils in their mother tongues²⁰.

Challenges to Tribal Education

Assessment studies based on quality of life of Indian tribal populations, though limited are increasing steadily by all means. These studies uses deprivation index relating to education and inferred that deprivation in terms of housing, basic amenities, and overall economic status is high in comparison with the general population²¹. However, the development index of scheduled tribes in Kerala exposes many severe disparities. The low statistics on literacy rate is indeed a serious threat to Indian educational scenario. It is significant even to Kerala, the state with highest literacy rate. Though performance of Kerala in comparison with other states and other developing countries

²⁰ Art 350 A: It shall be the endeavour of every State and of every local authority within the State to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups; and the President may issue such directions to any State as he considers necessary or proper for securing the provision of such facilities.

²¹ Thara ET, Sajini B. Nair. Quality of life of tribal population in Kerala, *Artha Vijnana*. Gokhale Inst Pol Econ. 2013;55(4):437–52.

demonstrates a promising picture but huge disparities also persist among the social groups both in terms of both quantitative and qualitative indicators²².

There exists a point gap of 14 per cent between the literacy rates of the STs and the rest according to the 2011 census. Nearly 80% of them stop education when they are in grade X i.e. only 20% appear for the high-school examination. The quality of education imbibed by this group of students in educational institutions also seems to be below par. Studies reveal that there are many reasons for the inherent drawbacks of the educational system²³.

Language as a barrier

Scheduled Tribes are distinct with peculiar and distinct kind of lifestyle, unique custom and tradition, language and belief system distinct from the mainstream society. However, the mainstream schooling is instructed in the language of the mainstream society was identified as the major barrier in attaining access to education of their children. As the primary instruction to the tribals is given in an unfamiliar language according to them, they fail to understand the same. Some people among them are bilingual, some speak tribal dialects almost exclusively. When a tribal child, being inducted in school system is suddenly expected to follow the language of the society in which they do not belong. This is considered as a major hurdle for the children to feel the sense of inclusiveness in the educational system. In this regard, substituting the foreign language with that of native language as the medium of instruction may be considered. Moreover, the 1986 National Policy on

²² K.K. George, Higher Education in Kerala: How Inclusive is it to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes?, Working Paper Series, Vol 1, No. 4, 2011 at p. 3.

²³ Supra note 6.

Education and the more recent revised National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) also recommend the use of local language for the purpose of instruction in education. However it is to be noted that there has been no genuine attempt to correct the inherent defect of the system²⁴. Education system designed for tribal children need to be conciliated to this basic problem and embrace life situations of the community.

One of the best practice in this regard was initiated by the state of Odisha in 2007. The system incorporated the use of mother-tongue, multi-lingual education in grades I to V. The mother tongue was exclusively used for instruction from grades I to III, followed by other dialects and other appropriate languages in higher grades. The official language of the state, Odia, is introduced in grades II and III. After grade III, Odia is adopted as a medium of instruction and English language is also introduced in this stage. This program is currently running as a success story with an inclusiveness of almost 21 tribal languages. This pedagogy seem to have lessened the anxiety of schooling among the children and have strengthened participation in the system and helped them gain many learning achievements²⁵.

²⁴ Mona Sedwal & Sangeeth Kamat, Education and Social Equity: With a Special Focus on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Elementary Education, CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS Research Monograph No 19, 2008 at file:///C:/Users/USR107/Downloads/Education_and_Social_Equity_With_a_Speci.pdf

²⁵ State / UT wise overall population, ST population, percentage of STs in India / State to total population of India / State and percentage of STs in the State to total ST population at <https://tribal.nic.in/ST/Statistics8518.pdf>

Another issue in this context is the shortage of teachers who know both native and mainstream languages. This is clubbed with another issue of lack of trained teachers. Thus it becomes a need to hire language instructors or teacher assistants from the tribal community itself. It is obvious that they do not have the adequate qualification and training for the profession. Thus schools will have to depend on people from other social groups to teach subjects. These issues are documented by the Government of Odisha²⁶.

A study outcome from a field-work in selected schools in the Gajapati district in Gujarat may be referred. The local tribal language, 'Soura'²⁷ is used as the first medium of instruction in the primary grades(L1). But this language is distinct from Odia. For practical reasons, students have to learn Odia, English and Hindi. It is noted that when L2 and other subjects are taught by teachers who have no knowledge of L1, it affects the learning outcome of students. Hence, it is important for students to get proficiency in other languages but the scarcity of teachers who know L1 and other languages, and who can also teach other subjects like mathematics, aggravates the challenges in schooling. Thus each particular community exposes different sets of issues with respect to the medium of instruction.

²⁶ V Santhakumar and Amarendra Das, Development Path for Indigenous People: Lessons from India and Brazil at <https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/development-path-for-indigenous-people-lessons-from-india-and-brazil/>

²⁷L 1: Language 1

Remoteness of Access to schools

Educational planning of tribes is done by non-tribes in India, who are not aware of their actual problems. The long experience of tribal education leads us to realize that its implementation process has to be changed or replaced. In many instances, it was identified that the distance from home many of the children were discouraged from going to school. The societal and educational setting of the tribal children, family and neighbourhood circumstances and other factors need to be considered in addressing the issue. The educational institutions and policies must ensure that students have adequate and equitable opportunities to take complete advantage of the resources. Accessible education is referred as the process of establishing schools within workable distance from their place of residence. It is also pertinent to appraise on developing a pedagogy to meet the unique needs of people from different backdrops and abilities. Thus schools need to provide other services or address the issue of any actual or potential barriers preventing students from equitable participation in education²⁸. Presently, these are extended by providing school buildings, teachers, free text books, and at selected places, free boarding and lodging facilities and mid-day meals. A participative educational system need to be developed by taking into account many factors

²⁸ Jojo, Bipin and Bhoi, Dhaneswar, Scheduled Tribe Children and their Educational Accessibility: Evidences from Maharashtra School Education in Ideas, Peoples and Inclusive Education in India at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352751121_Scheduled_Tribe_Children_and_their_Educational_Accessibility_Evidences_from_Maharashtra_School_Education_in_Ideas_Peoples_and_Inclusive_Education_in_India/citation/download

such as family background, occupation and educational status of parents, parent's attitude towards education and their choices and preferences²⁹.

Teacher-student relationship

The barrier on language leads to another area of concern which is the fear of children towards their teacher. This may be attributed to their inability to establish a smooth communication channel with the teacher. This issue may be tackled to a considerable extent by using the regional language as the medium of instruction. This simple strategy is not adopted on the grounds of credibility and potentiality of inducting teachers who can manage the specific language problem. Eligible teachers from within the community is indeed required to be identified and trained accordingly. Teachers need to be given training for an adaptable pedagogy to suit the distinct needs of the student community. From the perspective of pedagogy, it has been identified that if the formal school system is rigid which emphasize discipline and cliché norms and administer class room interaction focussing on the teacher children demonstrates a strong tendency to be wary of school³⁰.

Competency building and skill development need to be strengthened for the purpose of educational development in a holistic manner. The teacher should be made the pivotal of educational transformation and hence must remain the primary facilitator. Teachers should be focussed and trained to provide quality education for the tribal children. Emphasis need to be laid on quality

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Alankrita Gangele, The Tribal Educational Status in India: Galore Challenges and Issues, 2019 JETIR January 2019, Volume 6, Issue 1, (ISSN-2349-5162), p. 3 at <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1901A24.pdf>

rather than quantity unlike it was followed blindly in the past. The primary focus should be on quality education that transforms tribal communities into effective and economically independent. A sociable relationship and interaction between teachers and students is the most crucial factor to enhance meaningful and cordial interaction in classrooms. The important fact that tribal children have dissimilar backgrounds compared to others. Their distinct culture, mannerisms, traditions, languages and heritage of the tribal students need to be respected. It is within the societal obligation of teachers and academic personnel to promote and propagate the wealth of incredible knowledge of tribal community by understanding them better.

Poor Health of student community

Multiple programmes and policies sought to develop the standard of living of tribal communities since independence. Focus was on improvement of their education and overall health. In spite of many sincere efforts, tribal people remain to be the most malnourished component of the society³¹. Poor health is regarded as major impediment in the advancement of tribal children in education. Contagious and infectious diseases like scabies, malaria, and diarrhoea etc are not uncommon in tribal areas. Existence of such diseases may also affect attendance of students in school. Some group of tribal communities are seasonal migrants and this also leads to irregular attendance among their children and makes it extremely difficult for them to effectively benefit from the positive outcome of these policies and programmes. About 40 per cent of children aged below five are stunted and around 16 per cent of them are severely stunted. Tribal children have shown the picture of higher

³¹ UNICEF Programme on Tribal Nutrition, especially for children who suffer from malnourishment, at <https://www.unicef.org/india/what-we-do/tribal-nutrition>

levels of malnutrition and undernutrition striking a contrast with socially and economically advanced sections³².

Flaws relating to planning and execution

A vital limitation of tribal education is the adoption of a dual system of public administration in the planning stage. The tribal welfare department has the scope of duty to deal with tribal life and culture including education and implements development work at the ground level. However the tribal welfare department has little expertise on planning, administration, academic supervision and execution of these programmes. On the contrary, the education department is the exclusive authority for planning and execution of educational development at state level. The education department has the duty to formulate implementation guidelines and guidelines relating to curriculum, teacher recruitment, text books and so on. The department also intends to put together policies for the entire state in a uniform manner. The school calendar is a relevant instance in which holidays cater to the needs of the formal school set up in a non-tribal context. Such a schedule prepared with no regard to tribal community completely disregard tribal festivals and occasions. This clearly showcases lack of sensitivity to their unique identity and altogether fails to understand the social reality. Thus a multitude of problems coupled with erroneous selection process and recruitment of teachers, have altogether resulted in disappointing performance and consecutive absenteeism in schools in tribal areas.

³² *Ibid.*

The Way Ahead

Lack of accessibility to schools may be addressed by establishing residential schools. This is to be executed with the objective of maintaining the child in an environment conducive to the process of learning. However, the extent of its success may be limited as it is not always feasible to disconnect tribal children from their way of living and surroundings. However, such residential schools may not be successful in extending education in the tribal languages as there are only negligible teachers from tribal communities who can speak in their languages. The general language of instruction is criticised on the ground that it may not protect and preserve the cultural and social contexts of the communities. Residential schools are further criticised that children tend to face many other difficulties as they are away from their native environment. This may even lead to psychological trauma among students as they feel they are aloof from their original place. In case of implementation of the system of residential schooling, these factors need to be considered so as to integrate the varied facets of development of child. Despite this, there are few good practices which may be referred to. There were instances where culturally appropriate education was imparted and have ensured positive benefits. If carried well, such an educational system may encourage interaction among different groups of indigenous people and this will definitely enable the community to improve in social and political mobilisation.

India has an extensive experience of residential schools, known as ashrams, for the STs. The ashram schools have proved to be successful in extending inclusive education for the community. Since independence, there are enormous programmes initiated by the Central and state governments, with several schemes and policies to educate the tribal population. Programmes

and schemes such as establishment of Ashram Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, scholarship programmes and vocational training centres deserve special mention in this regard. It may be stated from these initiatives and acceptance by the community that it is ideal if the system incorporates their cultural context and enable them to address the challenges of the present day world. It is doubtful about the system of schooling to be reaching out to the community's needs if they fail to connect with the social realities. Thus it may be derived that education system based on inclusiveness and bi-lingual mode of instruction is a significant and progressive step³³.

Some of the experimental projects carried out by non-governmental organisations towards improving education for the STs have focussed on social and cultural contexts. Projects were drawn upon the objective to develop pedagogy and designing curriculum which are suitable to the distinct needs of the community such as use of maths in marketing goods, charting skills for demarcating lands, medical skills to treat common diseases. Such a strategy will definitely enable the community to utilise mainstream schooling at a later stage with an increased level of confidence³⁴. It is to be noted that recognition and incorporation of tribal culture, their distinct language, and coherent strength of the community, curriculum designing and inherent learning ability of the tribal children need to be addressed by policy analysts and educationists.

³³ K. Sujatha, Education among Scheduled Tribes, India Education Report, CED code-B.N21. G1 at

http://www.doccentre.net/docsweb/Education/Scanned_material/analysis_Tribals.pdf

³⁴ <https://practiceconnect.azimpremjiversity.edu.in/schooling-of-scheduled-tribes-in-india/>

The issue of dropout of children from schools is another area of concern. The need to sensitise community people was much emphasised with an aim to reduce the rate of drop-out in tribal pockets. Nurturing leadership qualities among tribal could help to create an environment which enables active participation by the community. This will definitely help in sensitisation of the community on the importance of education. There is also a need to promote intensive participatory community mobilisation for the community, its leaders and its key stakeholders.

There is a pertinent need to revamp the process of execution and planning in development of educational policies. The schools and surroundings have a strong influence on the minds of the students who frequent them. It is identified that many tribal schools do not actually merge with the tribal environment. They continue to exist as alien and untidy structures in tribal areas. However the picture is not as bleak as it appears. Many studies have revealed that against 33,387 students who had discontinued their studies, 18.28% of them are willing to resume education. The highest percentage of children willing to reinstate education is from Wayanad District with a number of 2628³⁵, followed by Kasaragod with 949 students, Palakkad stated 663 students, Idukki and Kannur with 457 & 416 students respectively³⁶. It is noteworthy to understand that few students who discontinued studies from higher education courses are also willing to resume. From the stage of primary education, around 2365 children, from secondary education almost 2521 and 512 from higher secondary stage are also inclined to do the same. Thus it may

³⁵ Dr. Baiju K. Nath, Tribal Education in Wayand, Kerala- A Review, 2020 at file:///C:/Users/USR107/Downloads/Tribal_Education_in_Wyanad_Kerala_A_Revi.pdf p. 10.

³⁶ Dr. Baiju K. Nath, Scheduled Tribes in Kerala and their Education, 2019 at file:///C:/Users/USR107/Downloads/Scheduled_Tribes_in_Kerala_and_their_Edu.pdf p. 5.

be derived that if adequate policies are drawn by the goals of tribal education, the complete participation of all may be ensured and continued.

Good practices and recent developments

International organisations such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been striving towards promoting quality education on marginalised children all over the world. In collaboration with UNESCO, the organisation is supporting the Indian government to ensure education for all children between 6 and 14 years. Significant areas for coordination with UNICEF include reaching out to vulnerable and deprived children as well as adapting international good practices and supporting service providers and community advocates to demand quality education. One of the most assuring enterprise of UNICEF is identified as guiding principles for child-friendly schools and systems (CFSS) which was launched in 2014 and sanctioned by the Union Ministry of Human Resource Development. For a functional accomplishment of CFSS, assistance is extended for tracking tools and incorporation of CFSS into state policies in converting the present system into more child welfare oriented schools³⁷. Tribal representatives have put a demand on the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to request the Government of India to recognise tribal languages as a medium of instruction in schools³⁸. They also placed a request to Indian government to provide opportunities to ensure culturally-appropriate education for their

³⁷<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/governance/education-for-tribals-bottlenecks-and-the-way-forward74751>

³⁸ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/mandated-areas1/education.html>

children, in addition to financial and technical support³⁹. These issues were raised by the Indian Confederation of Indigenous and Tribal People (ICITP) and St John's Mission at the UN Forum held in New York⁴⁰. Education of female children was also emphasised. Optional use of mother language in all competitive examinations was another prominent demand from the community. Sensitising the administrative authorities at various levels to cater to the needs of indigenous children was another point of suggestion. It was highlighted that use of mother language may be popularly adopted as medium of instruction in primary years to facilitate the child's ability to understand the subject. In order to ensure an inclusive education system the overall content and methodology of tribal education need to be objectively evaluated. There need to be a sincere attempt to bridge two cultures of indigenous people and mainstream society. Most of the curricula designed for tribal children are irrelevant. There need to be an overall reconstruct of the present system to ensure a comprehensive and pursuing development of the education system.

It is indeed required to collaborate for a strategic discourse between the policy makers, organisations and institutions and address the pressing needs of the tribal community in the context of education. Allocation of adequate funds from the appropriate government's budget for tribal education also need to be considered. This must definitely focus on long term strategies and plans to improve their educational status. More emphasis is to be paid for the adoption

³⁹<https://www.telegraphindia.com/jharkhand/mother-tongue-plea-for-tribal-education-un-intervention-sought-to-help-indigenous-people-join-national-mainstream-and-preserve-culture/cid/817634>

⁴⁰ <https://www.thehindu.com/society/children-from-tribal-communities-are-being-corralled-into-mass-schools-that-are-wiping-out-cultures/article33818793.ece>

of tribal culture in all respects. Such an inclusive strategy will have to definitely look into the bio diversity and cultural diversity aspects⁴¹.

United Nations General Assembly in its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples issued a report on the 107th & 108th Meetings in 2007. The initiatives by India is well highlighted in this report. The Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples sets out rights, both individual and collective, for the world's 370 million indigenous peoples. It calls for the maintenance and strengthening of their cultural identities and accentuates their right to follow development strategies by preserving their distinct needs and goals. India had always favoured progressive steps towards protection of indigenous peoples' rights. Any such strategy is to be initiated from the perspective of education of the indigenous. Only by acknowledging tribal culture, their language, cognitive strength of the community, curriculum based on all these factors we can enhance inherent learning ability of their children.

It is the need of the hour to improve their present system of education. If it remains unaddressed, the gap in the development index may rise bigger than the present scenario. It is highly difficult for them to protect and lead their own societies if we continue to alienate them culturally and socially. In this context, Gandhian principles that education is the key to all problems may be applied⁴². The present method of education is highly discriminating.

⁴¹ Are Mega Residential Schools Wiping out Adivasi culture?, Feb. 16, 2021, The Hindu, at <https://www.thehindu.com/society/children-from-tribal-communities-are-being-corralled-into-mass-schools-that-are-wiping-out-cultures/article33818793.ece>

⁴² Munmun Sen, Gandhian Perspective on Tribal Development in India, International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Topics Volume 2, Issue 9, September 2021 <https://www.ijramt.com> | ISSN (Online): 2582-7839, p. 4 at file:///C:/Users/USR107/Downloads/IJRAMT_2_9_5.pdf

Education should be related to tribal habitat and symbolism⁴³. To assimilate the merits and special need of tribal education, tribal youth should be encouraged to come to the forefront and promote education amongst children in their community. Role of social workers may also be emphasised in this regard. To empower tribal children, regular motivating sessions and follow up of student activities and regularity in attending school may be reviewed. Conducting counselling and organising life skill development programmes may be effectively implemented under the able leadership of social workers. Thus an integrated and coordinated efforts of all the mechanisms of the society will definitely support in the upliftment of the tribal children and their future generations.

⁴³ Preet, S. (1994). TRIBAL PROBLEMS: A GANDHIAN PERSPECTIVE. *Indian Anthropologist*, 24(2), 29.