

A STUDY OF THE EDUCATION, POLITICS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG THE SCHEDULED TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

After independence the Indian Government has devoted its special attention to the uplift of the specially weaker sections of the Indian society and therefore it has instituted through planned action a number of welfare schemes and programmes for their betterment.

The government is right in paying special attention to education as a key factor, to bring about social and economic change in the tribal society. It allocates more in developing special educational institution for them. They are the most neglected section among the weaker sections in our society. The tribal population in India constitutes is about 84326240 which is 8.2 per cent of the total population (census 2001).

Now that the Government is providing special encouragement to open Adivasi schools particularly in rural areas, a study like the proposed one is necessary to evaluate the scholastic achievement of the tribal students in relation to those schools which already exist side by side. It is also likely to reveal many facts hitherto unknown and provide guidelines to develop programmes of education that may accelerate the process of change in the tribal society. The present study attempts to focus on the present position of the ST people with reference to the education, politics and social mobility in West Bengal.

Key words-Scheduled Tribes, Education, politics and social mobility

Introduction

There is an acute controversy over reservations. Many people complain that the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) have enjoyed these facilities for long. They demand that these castes now be required to stand on their own. They want to stop reservations. A few still appreciate the need to provide special protection but feel that the present policies and programmes for education of the SCs and STs do not help them in the real sense. Others want to put these reservations on the basis of economic backwardness only. They want to replace caste by class.

In rural areas, like Bhatar block in West Bengal, school-going for the village children is very difficult. It is a luxury to the scheduled castes which they can hardly afford. Even after 60 years of implementation of the reservation policy for the SCs and STs in educational institutions, one finds very few graduates among the scheduled Tribes in Bhatar block. It is because of acute poverty that the scheduled Tribes children are not able to use the schools. Their children,

instead of going to school, go to the fields to render help to their parents who have been working under landlord for many years. They feel that if their children are sent to the school, only one earning man will not be able to feed the whole family. Another reason for this is that the wages, they get are very meager. In Bhatar block, still the scheduled tribes get only wages between Rs. 100.00 to 150.00 per day. But because of incentives given by the government, some of them do send their children to the schools. Now some STs children are going to schools. Most of them get some amount as stipend and other facilities. Since their socio-economic status is very low, they are not able to buy subject-books. For this they have to go to the field to earn extra for their survival and if possible for purchasing books. In fact, they do not get time to study seriously for their final examination.

Though the whole Tribal population of Bhatar Block was treated as the universe of investigation, yet it was not possible, due to paucity of time, energy, and resources to have census enumeration of all the relevant elements. Therefore, 200 Tribal respondents were selected on the basis of simple random sampling method.

Bhatar has a total population of 236478 consisting of 120943 males and 115535 females. The scheduled Tribes (according to 2001 census) are 21539 which is 9.11 per cent of the total population. Bhatar block consisting of 104 villages. It was decided to reduce the number to 20 villages which were selected on the basis of simple random sampling method.

The age distribution is about 54% of the respondents are within the age group of 21-40. Within this range the proportion of respondents in 26-30, 31-35 and 36-40 do not vary too much. In other words, the sample is predominantly made of young and middle aged respondents.

The Scheduled Tribes in general are economically not well off. There are very few STs having little or small land holdings. Even if they have got the land, they are not able to cultivate it, because of the lack of proper equipments and funds. There are also few tractor drivers. Only a few have succeeded in getting loans even under 20-point programme. The developmental programmes are so difficult and complicated for them that illiterate persons from STs Families are not able to do all the required formalities.

***Literacy and education**

Literacy and education	Frequency	Percentage
Class I-IV	58	29
Class VI-X	33	16.5
Class XI-X	22	11
Graduate	02	01
Illiterate	85	42.5
Total	200	100

It is evident that 42.5% of all the respondents are illiterate. Of all the respondents 57.5% come within the broader category of literate. Out of 57.5% literate respondents 29 % went to school for class I-IV. Only 16.5 % were in class VI-X. There is gap of 38% between those who went up to primary school and Class X pass.

The concept of ‘social mobility’ has already been empirically defined along with variables coming there under. Social mobility has been assumed in the in the co text of Bhatar Block, as an independent cluster or a set of variables gradually leading towards political participation. Participation by the people in various political activities is generally considered to be the central concern of all democratic political systems. In fact, inputs into the political system, such as demands and support, political socialization, recruitment, interest articulation etc. are functions of political participation. All outputs, in direct or indirect manner, are related to it. Participation contributes a lot toward outputs as well as feedback, including persistence and development of political system.

In the context of scheduled Tribes, political participation has been treated as a dependent variable. It was proposed that where there is greater social mobility, there would be greater political participation which would lead to share in political power. Similarly lesser social mobility would result in lesser political participation. In the absence of greater political participation, nothing can be said about social mobility. However, knowledge about the extent of association between these two cluster-variables depends on empirical data to be gathered from the field.

Out of 200, 37 respondents replied that they were the members of some party but 163 did not belong to any political party. They are apathetic to them from the point of view of membership.

***Membership of a political party**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
yes	37	18.5
No	163	81.5
Total	200	100

While asking about the 20-point programme, out of 200 respondents, only 52 said that they know about the 20-point programme. But 148 persons said that they do not know anything about it.

***Knowledge about 20-point programme**

Response	Frequency	Percentage
yes	52	26
No	148	74
Total	200	100

Again on asking about the implementation of 20-point programme, out of 200 respondents 8 said that if the official work honestly, there will be upliftment of STs. Approximately, 134 persons receiving loans or funds under the programme. In fact, they could not differentiate between what the Government was doing in a normal manner and what was being especially done under 20-point programme. There was no change in the occupations of their close relations, such as, brothers and sisters.

In case of Scheduled Tribes, for attaining 'social mobility', education comes next to caste-status. Education contributes a lot of social mobility. So do other variables like occupation, income, communications and others. But education triggers off a social chain reaction. In case of scheduled tribes under the prevailing circumstances, it determines individual's occupation. Though the linkage between these two variables education and occupation is far more pronounced in industrial and economically advanced societies, yet its role is not insignificant even in the agricultural or developing societies. The occupational structure of an industrial society is much that it demands special kind of knowledge, skills and training. For this one has to go for prolonged and intensive training imparted through various institutions. The more you are educated the more you are expectations attainments in the field of job. Thus every industrial advanced societies; education plays a crucial role in social mobility.

However, access to education itself may also be determined by the existing economic conditions of the individual and of the society. In adverse conditions, mobility itself may be circumscribed by or under a given social structure with little or no opportunity for circulation between strata. But educational opportunities can come independently from other sources also.

In Bhatar block the Govt.- both central and state , since independence, have placed great emphasis on education in the programme designed to raise up the condition of the scheduled communities. It has been repeatedly done and would be for the next time when the Govt. of India has designed a National Policy on Education. In the constitution itself there are numerous special provisions which allow various types of reservations, concessions and facilities for education to these people. Govt. of India continues to increase or allocation of funds for these communities. Every year special grants are made to them.

In certain cases, education may prove dysfunctional also. After getting education, a scheduled tribe student may find himself in conflict with the members of his family or community whose ways of thinking can run counter to his own. As a changed person, he may find difficult to adjust himself in rural areas, where the opportunity of living and employment commensurate with his education will not be available. He would move to urban areas where he may find environment, more congenial to his aspirations. As a result of migration to urban areas, he may be able to change his social position in the society.

Conclusion:

Present investigation of the scheduled tribes of Bhatar block in West Bengal, it relates to the poor, illiterate and culturally backward members of the society living in predominantly agricultural rural areas. Such people do not have any political party of their own and suffer from lack of their own leadership. As they live among upper and middle caste majorities, they remain dependent on them for social intercourse, livelihood, economic advancement and participation in decision-making process. These findings relate to the areas where upliftment of the scheduled tribes, inspite of 65 years of state aid and reservation policy, has been taken up in a half-hearted manner.

However, it can be observed that the task of upliftment of the scheduled tribes in India is not easy. It is a long process of socio-economic transformation to be conducted in a democratic, peaceful, cooperation and collaborative manner. The speed of transformation is slow, the path is rugged and the end is distant. The state has been able neither to actualize its super-imposed politico-legal structure nor provide economic and cultural support to it at least at the level of

these communities. Sixty years of reservation policy, privileges and concessions, on the other hand, have created a pampered section of society which may revolt whenever these extra facilities are taken back, on the other, they have motivated non-scheduled communities to fight against the present discriminatory arrangement and obtain in their turn what has been given to the scheduled tribes. Therefore, some steps should be taken on an urgent basis to save the polity from bursting into pieces.

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