

Problems of Education of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes: A Case Study in Kolkata and Surroundings and Medinipur and Surrounding Areas

Bhola Nath Ghosh

Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata, India

Education is an important aspect of human resource development. Imparting of education leads to the improvement of understanding, perception, attitude and efficiency of working population. Education has been considered as a lever to raise one's position in the society as well as a tool to fight against poverty and ignorance. Since the independence of India, several constitutional measures have been taken for educational enlistment of the SC (scheduled castes) and ST (scheduled tribes). Though educational achievement is open to all, it is not smoothly achievable as have been felt by the students. This paper highlights some of the constraints faced by SC and ST communities and it asks for urgent attention of the planners and policy makers to eradicate the constraints of the students of SC and ST. If this cannot be done, at least some discussion to draw attention to the fact may bring the issue at large. The main feature of the study is that it is based on empirical data. But the focus of the study is to show the problems of education of SC and ST.

Keywords: education, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and human resource development

Introduction

The goals of education may be defined in many contexts, but the most appropriate would be the goal as envisaged by Gandhiji (1927): "The goal of education is to establish a non-violent and non-exploiting social and economic order". Gandhi's views on education is as follows: Given Gandhi's values and his vision of what constituted a truly civilized and free India, it was not surprising that he developed firm views on education. Education not only moulds the new generation, but reflects a society's fundamental assumptions about itself and the individuals which compose it. His experience in South Africa not only changed his outlook on politics but also helped him to see the role education played in that struggle. He was aware that he had been a beneficiary of Western education and for a number of years, while he was in South Africa, he still tried to persuade Indians to take advantage of it. However, it was not until the early years of this century, when he was in his middle thirties, that he became so opposed to English education that he could write about "the rottenness of this education" and that "to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them... that, by receiving English education, we have enslaved the nation". He was enraged that he had to speak of home rule or independence in what was clearly a foreign tongue, that he could not practice in court in his mother tongue, that all official documents were in English as were all the best newspapers and that education was carried out in

English for the chosen few. He did not blame the colonial powers for this. He saw that it was quite logical that they would want an elite of native Indians to become like their rulers in both manners and values. In this way, the Empire could be consolidated. Gandhi blamed his fellow Indians for accepting the situation. Later, in his life, he was to declare that “real freedom will come only when we free ourselves of the domination of Western education, Western culture and Western way of living which have been ingrained in us... Emancipation from this culture would mean real freedom for us” (Gandhi, 1970).

Much reflection and wisdom had gone into this pithy statement, which is as relevant today as it was in his time or even more so. This is the purpose of education in a modern democratic society.

Education helped raising the quality of leadership of an individual, who earned the ability to guide the others in his/her group (Ghosh & De, 2002).

The universal education for both male and female has received due importance in countries like India for the development of society and constituent individuals. The advantage in literacy for general caste has improved and is still going up but the growth of literacy for SC (scheduled castes) and ST (scheduled tribes) has not at par with that of the general caste. In every census report, this caste disparity in terms of education has been evident.

Problems of SC, ST population along with the problems of their education have been referred in the works of the scholars in different areas in India. The poor socio-economic condition of the SC and ST does not allow many students to continue study or further continuation of the study. That is the reason why drop-outs at the school level occur due to economic crisis and sometimes students also take part in agricultural production in order to supplement the family income. This participation is a welcome step but at the cost of education: There are many books and writings on SC and ST, especially their difficulties, problems and educational constraints. It has been also said that they face a lot of problems related to education, which can be solved if there is good will and an effort to fulfill their aspiration in the educational area.

While studying the educational problems, one can notice that backwardness in terms of economy, culture and poverty makes them disturbed and their disturbance does not bring them as a whole to the educational success. Clamor for red politics, which is cultivating the seeds of Brahmanism again and again, has made them the path of money but not education. Of course, what is the true essence of education is yet to be known, but variation of education according to socio-political system can also be noticed due to privatization of educational system alongside the existence of government run educational system.

Despite seriousness in the effort of the government and policy makers, very little progress has been made to raise the educational quality of the SC and ST students. Quite a large number of studies have reflected their backwardness, optimism and aspirations. They have their own way of understandings, cultural values and social aspirations of participating in the achievement of social goals. Though they are mostly a part of India, they are deprived of many rights.

The study on the educational problems of the SC and ST students revealed that they came from different places of locality and used different modes of transports and vehicles to reach the institutes of learning. In the place of learning, they are polite, gentle and delightful in their manners. However, they are not docile but highly pragmatic and calculative in meeting their demands.

Among the SC, there is sub-division, which is based on occupational divisions. But in general, they are the cultivating castes and hardworking in nature. Among them, some are masonry workers, fisherman, while some are teachers. But with the shifting of occupations over the generations, they have shifted from one occupation

to another and even have turned to tradesman in the locality.

However, we can deal with the nature of residence of SC and ST, so as to comprehend the socio-economic character of the people under discussion.

The place of residence is one of the indicators of affluence among the students' families (see Table 1). There are divisions among the students on the basis of rural and urban localities. It may be supposed that who hail from rural areas are comparatively poor than urban students. If these assumptions are not valid, the further study can be made with larger sample both in urban and rural areas.

Table 1

Place of Residence of SC and ST Students

Place of residence	SC			ST		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
Rural	81 (76.42)	25 (83.33)	106 (77.94)	22 (81.48)	46 (97.87)	68 (91.89)
Urban	25 (23.58)	05 (16.67)	30 (22.06)	05 (18.52)	01 (02.13)	06 (08.11)
Total	106 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	136 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	74 (100.00)

Notes. A = Kolkata and adjoining area; B = Medinipur and adjoining Area.

The study on SC and ST students deals with another aspect of their measurement on backwardness. This measure of backwardness has been estimated on the pattern of house; the students of SC and ST live in. There are various types of houses for the families of SC and ST to inhabit. Some live in their own houses, some live in rented house and again some live in government houses. There may be some confusion, but the types of houses vary according to the type of materials available and capacity of earning, which vary from mud built with thatch to pucca-house. Hence, the pattern of houses has been thought as another crucial factor for assessment of the condition of the students' families.

The ownership of houses is an important index of household and reflects its potentiality to send students to the educational institutions. Data furnished in Table 2 reflects the preponderance of students from their own houses rather than government houses or rented houses. From the data, it is revealed that most of the students of SC and ST are well settled in their own houses. As they have their own houses, they have more confidence to advance their studies. The rented houses are slightly cumbersome as disputes very often occur centering the tenant owner relations.

Table 2

Patterns of Houses of SC and ST Students (Graduate & Post-Graduate)

House ownership	SC			ST		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
Own house	101 (95.28)	28 (93.34)	129 (94.85)	21 (77.78)	45 (95.74)	66 (89.19)
Government house	3 (02.83)	1 (03.33)	4 (02.94)	5 (18.52)	1 (02.13)	6 (08.11)
Rented house	2 (01.89)	1 (03.33)	3 (02.21)	1 (03.70)	1 (02.13)	2 (02.70)
Total	106 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	136 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	74 (100.00)

Notes. A = Kolkata and adjoining area; B = Medinipur and adjoining area.

From Table 2, it may be observed that most of the students of both SC and ST in Calcutta and adjoining area come from their own houses. So they have some confidence of ownership. Similarly, the ST of both Calcutta and adjoining area have their own houses and they also have more confidence as ownership which

generates more confidence unlike nomadic. Here one thing is to be noted that for discussion, we have referred to Calcutta and adjoining area as “A” type, and Medinipur and surrounding area has been denoted as “B” type. So from data preponderance of owned houses, students of SC and ST students continue their studies. Similarly, we need not mention again the confidence level emanating from ownership holding. A comparison of rented houses and owned houses may be fruitful, if the success rate of students is gauged.

Types of Houses of SC and ST Students

Two types of houses have been found are the residences of students of SC and ST (see Table 3). They are Kutchha and Pucca. Kutchha houses are thatched or mud built and Pucca houses are brick built whose roof type concrete is made.

Most of the houses are Kachcha and that belongs to ST and SC. They are true for Calcutta and adjoining area, and Medinipur and adjoining area. Pakka houses are relatively less in number among both SC and ST, which is nearer to reality.

That is the reason why educational facilities locate in the urban areas mostly, which is not accessible unless a family has wealth of money to send their children to urban educational institute. That is the reason why rural well-off families can only send their children to urban schools for higher studies. As most of the SC, ST and OBC (other backward classes) families are having less access to wealth connected to educational services, we find that they get more involved in trade and agricultural occupations suitable (see Table 4). Here, caste, class and education relations may also give more insight to the readers.

Table 3

Type of Houses of SC and ST Students (Graduate & Post-Graduate)

Type of house	SC			ST		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
Kachha	64 (60.38)	21 (70.00)	85 (62.50)	19 (70.37)	43 (91.49)	62 (83.78)
Pakka	42 (39.62)	9 (30.00)	51 (37.50)	8 (29.63)	4 (08.51)	12 (16.22)
Total	106 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	136 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	74 (100.00)

Notes. A = Kolkata and adjoining area; B = Medinipur and adjoining area.

Table 4

Type of Houses of SC and ST Students (Graduate & Post-Graduate)

Occupation of the guardians	SC			ST		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
Government service	27 (25.47)	8 (26.67)	35 (25.74)	6 (22.22)	7 (14.89)	13 (17.57)
Agriculture	59 (55.66)	13 (43.33)	72 (52.94)	13 (48.15)	27 (57.46)	40 (54.05)
Business	10 (09.44)	3 (10.00)	13 (09.56)	1 (03.70)	3 (06.38)	4 (05.41)
Professional	7 (06.60)	6 (20.00)	13 (09.56)	1 (03.70)	3 (06.38)	4 (05.41)
Wage laborer	3 (02.83)	0	3 (02.20)	4 (14.81)	7 (14.89)	11 (14.86)
Occupation less	0	0	0	2 (07.42)	0	2 (02.70)
Total	106 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	136 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	47 (100.00)	74 (100.00)

Notes. A = Kolkata and adjoining area; B = Medinipur and adjoining area.

Different Types of Occupations of the Guardians

Does occupation have a bearing on the education of the students of SC and ST? Perhaps the answer is very

difficult to obtain, because nowadays the report of newspaper flashes news about the success stories of the wards of the vegetable sellers or rickshaw pullers in the H.S (higher secondary) or Madhyamik examination. But how far they can continue the study without the support of the government or other agencies is of hundred-dollar question. In fact, our experience in Calcutta is that to continue studies, one has to obtain a fellowship to achieve a foreign degree. But how many students of SC and ST can achieve such scope is yet to be proved. In fact, to become a foreign national one has to be courageous and has less attachment with the native land. But the ST and SC are more attached to the land as they claim to be son of the soil. So, they generally cannot see the fruits of foreign education. They tend to be satisfied with what education is available locally as they are more tradition bound. But to become a foreign national and foreign degree holder, one has to achieve the requisite qualification from any national university.

Six categories of occupational patterns have been found which are government services, agriculture business, professional, wage laborer and finally some occupation less people. In Calcutta and its suburbs, 25.47% of households are service holders in government departments. Fifty-five point six six percent or a large section of SC depends on agriculture. So, primary dependence on agriculture as occupation is still prominent. The incidence of wage laboring is increasing or decreasing among the SC and ST, which is a matter to be proved so that they can change and improve their positions in the society. Proper methodology regarding should be devised.

Dependency Ratio in the Families of SC and ST

Dependency factor is important in order to know the conditions of the families of SC and ST. The forms of dependency have been found with 1-3 heads, 4-6 heads and 7 and the above heads (see Table 5). General notion is that if the dependency ratio is high then families with more members will incline to economic activities with immediate return than education, which generally produces less result and more investment in the present context given the privatization of educational system. So people cannot be blamed for apathy towards education. This is a reality that when people do not get full square meal in the village then the super structural dream like education is a distant goal. Among the SC, the prominent pattern is restricted between 4-6 heads and 50.74% of SC families and 43.24% of the ST families have such dependency ratio. This dependency ratio is followed by 1-3 heads dependencies, which is prevalent among 31.80% of families in "A" type and in 53.33% of families in "B" type areas in case of SC. One thing is to be noted here that 1-3 heads dependency is more conspicuous among the ST. But this observation needs further scrutiny and should be matched with investigation in family structure of given areas.

Table 5

Dependent Members in the Family of SC and ST Students (Graduate and Post-Graduate)

Number of dependency	SC			ST		
	A	B	Total	A	B	Total
1-3	30 (28.30)	16 (53.33)	46 (33.82)	6 (22.22)	28 (59.57)	34 (45.95)
4-6	57 (53.77)	12 (40.00)	69 (50.74)	15 (55.56)	17 (36.17)	32 (43.24)
7 and above	19 (17.93)	62 (06.67)	21 (15.44)	6 (22.22)	2 (04.26)	8 (10.81)
Total	106 (100.00)	30 (100.00)	136 (100.00)	27 (100.00)	47 (100.0)	7 (100.00)

Notes. A = Kolkata and adjoining area; B = Medinipur and adjoining area.

So, in short, it may be said that the nuclearization of families is undergoing even in the rural areas where the joint family is the predominant form. So to understand the problems of education of SC, ST and OBC, one has to consider so many factors right from medium of instructions to dependency ratio as it is stated in the previous tables.

Concluding Remarks

Education is the avenue of promoting one's own development along with socio-environmental development around the individual. An individual uses primary education as a tool to know the society. A society is rich in the sense where large numbers of educated people live in. This does not mean that other economic activities like business are less important, because modern business needs education. In the era of globalization and rapid expansion of high technology, business has been more competitive. The traditional business pattern is under threat. Not only they have to accommodate with the technology and become city centered, but also they have to move to sub-urban or semi-urban places. Similarly, variety of education has brought new opportunities instead of traditional educational system like toll or Guru Griha Siksha karyakram (where the students study at the house of teachers/guru).

Both systems are open to people and it is time to see which system dominate over whom or whether these two systems are co-existing side by side like tradition and modernity. Western education has brought some mind set of the citizen but traditional religion based on education has its root in the villages of Bengal and there were some centers for learning of "Vedas" and "Sastra". The district of Nadia was such a place where such centers of excellence existed before the arrival of western education.

In all countries, education is given prime importance after the fulfillment of one's basic needs. In India, there have been many efforts after independence to raise the literacy levels of people and attempts have also been made to spread basic education. Special drives on the part of the government have been taken in different times and in different phases of planning in India. But these did not have any lasting effects upon the people. Rather education based on socio-religious tradition has more lasting effect upon the people. In the present days, cost of education has been raised to a great extent and poor families like SC, ST and OBC, will be deprived of education or they will remain in the backseat. So, before being educated, one has to understand the socio-cultural tradition existing in the soil and proceed with the type of education to be chosen.

Education is dependent on the historical condition of a given society. Western education has been brought in a society, which has several socio-religious dimensions. The division of SC, ST and OBC is pre- and post-British phenomenon. But all these people under discussion had their own way of living whose socio-cultural tradition has been damaged by the advent of Western education. That is the reason why some contradiction is being felt in the educational system being imposed and education based on tradition. Some folk tradition based on synchronic traditions like Baul, Fakirs, Sufi, Bhajans and Kirtan still play a great role in the society and they have deep rooted impact on people. These folkways and inherent culture had dictate purpose for the people of the society and narratives of those folkways still have impact on the lives of the people in rural areas where SC and ST people generally live in. So, what may appear to be erratic in outer society may have some functional utility in the inner society.

So the acceptance of the education depends on the socio-cultural traditions and the cost of education, and we cannot always blame the SC and ST for their backwardness in terms of education rather differential treatment is responsible to some extent. If the SC or ST do not get proper job after completion of the degree

from any institution recognized by the concerned government, a discouraging message will be conveyed to the society which they belong to. So the right of education will lose the universal appeal. From the utilitarian value, education has to be adjudged instead of judging it from the angle of normative value.

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