

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES - A CASE STUDY

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I

The present study is undertaken as part of a major project study on 'Education and Tribal Development in India'. The major study explores the status of tribes, while identifying their various socio-economic and cultural problems in relation to other communities and the impact of educational development programs on their lives. The present study makes use of some of the data being collected for the above purpose while focusing its attention mainly on vocational education and related aspects so as to assess its impact on the development of the indigenous communities. The field data for this purpose has been collected from the selected respondents of two districts (Warangal and Khammam) of the State of Andhra Pradesh. About 110 respondents out of the total of around 1200 of those tribes who had completed various vocational courses from different districts of Andhra Pradesh and secured employment in these two districts had been chosen for the study. No specific sampling design method has been applied except randomly choosing the respondents from those who are first available during the field visits. These respondents represent three major tribal communities (Koya, Konda Reddy and Lambada) and drawn from different vocations. Since the present study is part of a different study and not specifically conducted for this purpose alone, it has got its own limitations to provide an 'integrated focus' on the problem chosen. However, care has been taken to fill up the gaps in the data from various secondary sources of information and further discussion with some of the respondents.

The study thus specifically focuses its attention to deal with the following issues:

1. Vocational education at the secondary school level in the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh State.
2. The socio-economic background of the parents of the sample respondents and the 'study environment'.
3. The experiences of the respondents about various issues relating to the vocational courses which they have undergone, their subsequent employment and its impact on their lives.
4. The suggestions made by the respondents for various steps to be taken towards improving the prospectus of tribal education in general and vocational education in particular.

A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents. Apart from this, other general data relating to the vocational education, tribal education and the general

conditions of tribal development etc., had been collected from different sources and analyzed for the purpose of the study.

II

India has about 68 million tribal population, the largest concentration of indigenous people in the world (Vikalp 1995). An amalgam of 450 and odd tribes and sub-tribes, the tribal population constitute around 8 per cent of the total Indian population spread over 26 states and Union Territories in about 20 per cent of the geographical area. 'Scheduled Tribe' is an administrative term envisaged to reflect the criteria of geographical isolation, distinctive culture, primitive traits, shyness of contact with the community at large and a low level of economic development (Bijay CR 1999). The tribes thus by their very nature and mode of living are known as indigenous people.

Around 55 per cent of these people live in the central region, 28 per cent in western and 12 per cent in north-east region of India, constituting 50 per cent or more of the total population in around 300 revenue sub-divisional areas. Around 90 per cent of these indigenous people live in rural and remote areas and 90 of these people depend on agriculture and forests for their livelihood. These tribal areas are rich in resources with some 90 per cent of India's coal mines, 80 per cent of minerals and 72 per cent of its forests and other natural resources. Over 3,000 hydel projects are located in these areas. Hence these area play a vital role in development of the Indian economy.

The Scheduled Tribe population in Andhra Pradesh (from which the study areas are drawn) is about 4.2 lakhs (0.42 million) constituting 6.31 per cent of the States' total population spread over 10.8 per cent of the total geographical area (30,028 Sq.kms) of the State. As many as 33 ST communities has been identified in the State and the largest being the 'Koya' community. Tribal areas are characterized by utter poverty and very low level of economic activity. No wonder that among the tribes, there is a very large percentage of people living below the poverty line compared to the other disadvantaged or weaker sections of the society. Paradoxically the political and economic systems along with the path of nation-building adopted have progressively further marginalized these communities. This is despite the fact that the constitution of India specifically guarantees certain from various kinds of exploitation.

In pursuance of the directives of the constitution of Indian Union, special provisions have been made available to the development of scheduled tribes. The special provisions include reservation of jobs, political participation through reservation of seats and special facilities in the field of education in the shape of providing scholar ships, freeships, stipends etc. Literacy and universalization of elementary education have been conceived to be the basic foundations for the overall development. In order to achieve literacy in the country as a whole the Indian constitution provides for free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14 years. However, some efforts were there

towards the development of education in tribal areas till the end of Fifth Five-Year Plan. Emphasis was given only with the starting of Sixth Five-Year Plan, to raise the literacy level of tribal communities, by setting the target to enroll all children in the age group of 6—14 years as a time-bound program. It was proposed to achieve the objective in two stages i.e., 95 per cent of enrolment in the age group 6—11 and 50 per cent in the age group 11—14 by 1985, and universal enrolment in the age group 6—14 by 1990. The Seventh Plan has paid much attention to revitalize the education system by including vocational courses, suitable curricula, strengthening the infrastructure and introducing more Ashram Schools. It has also envisaged building up teacher cadres, encouraging the tribal educated youth to take up teaching jobs in tribal areas, and involve the teachers in the local management committees for the proper functioning of schools. The New Education Policy (1986) has laid much emphasis on opening of primary schools, Anganwadis, non-formal adult education centers, and starting of Residential including Ashram schools on a, large scale, developing curricula and devising instructional material in tribal languages at the initial stages, encouraging the educated youth to take up teaching jobs and formulating incentive schemes for the tribal parents keeping in view their special needs and life style. The eighth and ninth plans further emphasized the need for promoting vocational education and additional grants had been allocated for this purpose.

Vocational education was introduced in tribal areas mainly with a view to relating education to the world of work and allow students to imbibe proper skills, values, attitudes and dignity of labor. Eleven courses were offered to start with in 105 schools at 8th class level in seven districts of Andhra Pradesh in the year 1994, but later the same has been reorganized to expand the vocational education to cover every mandal. Presently more than 15 courses are being offered to more than 2 lakh people of whom around 15 percent are tribes. No matter, within a short span of time vocational education has attracted a large number of tribal people because of its additional advantages.

It is generally agreed that problems of education in tribal areas have to be viewed in different context and not in terms of the general and average situation as obtaining in the country. Education should be suited to the needs of tribal people, otherwise it will be detrimental to their well being. If properly planned and invested, educational effort for the Scheduled tribes has to be somewhat different from general mass. In non-tribal areas (rural and urban) demand for education is already there, establishment of an educational institution itself is sufficient to attract the children from the advanced communities, because the parents in these areas have already developed interest in education. This is not the case with STs. The message of formal education has not yet reached the more backward tribal areas where the people are not very much aware about the practical utility of education. Unless they experience it directly they do not believe that this will do something good for them.

III

The field study

A situation normally alien to the tribes has gradually transformed to become friendly and cooperative. An illiterate tribal still treat the modern society as 'an alien system', always exploitative and extracting but an educated tribal finds it something that of a friendly by virtue of the constitutional guarantees and special development program. In view of this, several of those tribes who were personally interviewed for the purpose of study had volunteered to give more and more information about the system without any prejudice and malice towards none. Since all the respondents are government employees and working in different vocations are relatively free and not dependent on others, there was a sense of satisfaction and self-confidence and this has been precisely due to their vocational study and subsequent gainful employment. Table-I provides a basic information about the respondents.

Table-I: Vocation, Gender and Regional Background of Respondents

	Agriculture		Engineering & Technology		Health & Para-Medical		Home Science		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Warangal	12	8	6	-	10	6	1	2	29	16
Khammam	20	12	10	-	12	8	1	2	43	22
Total	32	20	16	-	22	14	2	4	72	38

Table-I indicates the gender and district background of the respondents along with the vocation that they have chosen at the time of their higher secondary studies to build their career. Majority of the male respondents preferred agricultural based vocations followed by health and Para-medical vocations, preferred generally by female learners. It may be observed that though the tribal students had a choice of vocations available to them, there is however restriction of place of learning since all vocational subjects are not offered in all schools. Some are available in some places only and those who are interested to pursue their choicest course may have to move to other districts if they are available. Since there was mobility of students to join other places, it may be observed that they are 'selective' in choosing their 'choicest' course available to them within the limitations.

Table-II : Social background of respondents

Service	Marital Status		Place of Work		Parental Occupation	
	Unmarried	Married	Within 30 Kms from native place	Above 30 Kms from native place	Agricultural	Non-agricultural

Up to 1 year	08	42	02	02	41	-
Above 1 & less than 2 years	12	19	04	04	20	-
Above 2 & less than 3 years	11	14	08	12	11	-
Above 3 & less than 5 years	01	03	12	20	12	06
Above five years	-	-	-	46	06	14
Total	32	78	26	84	90	20

Table-II indicates that majority of the respondents were married as early marriages are still in practice in tribal areas. In some cases some students seem to have got married while they were in their high school studies. Generally tribes prefer to work in their vicinities and nearby places where their community makes a living. However, a large majority of respondents had little choice in this matter and found to be working as far as above 30 Kms away from their native villages. A large majority of learners had agriculture as the main source of living of their families. This may be one of the reasons for more people preferring agriculture based vocations.

**Table-III : Educational Background in relation to their family occupation
(Cumulative response)**

	First Generation Learners			Second Generation Learners		
	From the Family	From the Tribe	From amongst all the tribes of the village	From the Family	From the Tribe	From amongst all the tribes of the village
Landless laborer	38	21	06	-	-	-
Near landless / agricultural labor	15	04	01	04	02	-
Small farmer	10	05	02	10	06	02
Medium farmer	02	-	-	07	05	02
Non-agricultural Occupation	12	07	03	11	04	01

Table-III reveals that a large majority of respondents belong to landless labor or near landless labor families. Only a few tribal students had the privilege to be brought up from small farmer and medium farmer families. It is significant to note that a large majority of respondents were 'first generation learners' from their families, and even from their tribes and other tribes of their villages. No one in their families earlier seem to have had any formal schooling. And others were second generation learners', revealing the fact that some of their family members already had education.

Table-IV: Distance between the residence and the school

	GVVK/Primary		Upper Primary		Higher Secondary	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Same Village	31	27	19	12	06	04
With in 3 Kms	24	08	23	18	13	09
Up to 10 Kms	12	03	13	06	21	14
Up to 25 Kms	04	-	16	02	12	06
Up to 50 Kms	01	-	09	-	06	04
Up to 100 Kms	-	-	02	-	08	01
Above 100 Kms	-	-	-	-	06	-

Table-IV indicates the hardships the students faced while pursuing their studies. They had to go long distances to pursue their education. It may be significant to note that even now tribal villages had no primary school with in 2 Kms of their villages. It would further mean that they go to schools mostly on foot by tracking from 3 Kms to 10 Kms. even girls also had to face such hardship. However most of the upper primary and high school students stay in the hostels provided by the Government and go to their places on weekends.

Table-V : Gap in studies in relation to their fellow learners' completion rate

	GVVK/Primary Schools				Upper Primary Schools			High Schools studies		
	Upto 10%	Upto 20%	Upto 30%	Upto 5%	Upto 10%	Upto 20%	Upto 2%	Upto 5%	Upto 10%	
Break in studies	08	28	15		11	08	05	04	03	02
No break in studies	06	11	09		17	12	09	19	11	06
Total	14	39	24		28	20	14	23	14	08

Table-V indicates that not all students had a smooth sailing in completion of their studies. Several of them had dropped out for some time in the middle and came back to the schools sometimes at a later stage. It is very serious matter of concern to note that a large majority of their fellow learners could not complete their studies and even completely dropped out at different stages. Only a few students fulfill their educational goals as there was as much of 70 to 90 per cent dropouts in the primary school itself and in majority cases only from 2 per cent to 10 per cent seem to have completed their higher secondary studies. This would imply that tribes had socio-economic constraints and their parents in majority of cases still consider that education may not be immediately useful to them since they prefer to send them to work at an early age. This is despite the fact that

education is entirely free including food and accommodation during the period of their studies. These concessions seem to have not properly motivated the parents to retain their children in schools and the employment facility available to them immediately after their studies was also no morale booster.

Table-VI : Study Environment in their respective Higher Secondary Schools

School	Favorable environment	Unfavorable environment	Total
Ashram/Residential School (both Upper Primary and High School)	21	43	64
Vocational School (High School)	14	18	32
Other Schools	06	08	14
Total	41	69	110

Table-VI reveals that the 'study environment' was not that favorable to majority of students and they had to complete their studies under many odd circumstances. This may be one of the reasons for students dropping out from studies in the middle. Lack of proper infrastructural facilities in the school, lack of trained staff, lack of audio visual aids, insufficient number of lab and practical hours, staff absenteeism, lack of professionalism, lack of personal care, indifferent attitude towards tribes, substandard faculty, lack of proper study material etc., were some of the reasons mentioned indicating the unfavorable learning environment. Due to some of these reasons most of the tribal students were found unable to complete their studies. The pass percentages varied between 2 to 10 per cent as indicated in Table-V. Though jobs are available to those who completed the vocational courses, the reduced pass percentage had reduced their opportunity for better jobs.

Table VII indicate the length of time taken to secure employment after completion of the studies.

Table-VII: Time taken to secure employment after the studies

	Agriculture		Engineering & technology		Health & Para-Medical		Home Science		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Immediately after completion	06	08	04	-	06	06	-	-	16	14

Below three months	09	08	06	-	09	07	-	02	24	17
Above three & below six months	09	04	03	-	04	01	02	02	18	07
Above six and below nine months	05	-	01	-	03	-	-	-	09	-
Above nine months and below one year	03	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	04	-
Above one year	-	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	01-	
Total	32	20	16	-	22	14	02	04	72	38

Table -VII reveals that in 30 per cent of cases successful candidates got their jobs immediately after the completion of their studies. Among the vocations, agriculture and health and para-medical services had offered early employment in relation to others. Only fourteen candidates had to wait for the jobs for more than six months after completion of their studies. However, the respondents seem to have very much happy for having chosen vocational education at their higher secondary level of education. Table- VIII indicate that more than 80 per cent of the respondents were extremely happy with their decision to join vocational education.

Table-VIII: Post-Completion impressions about vocational studies

Response	Male	Female	Total
Extremely satisfied with the decision to join vocational course	59	38	97
Not fully satisfied	11	-	11
No specific answer	02	-	02

It is significant to observe that all the female respondents had unanimously said that they were happy with their decision to join the vocation course as they could secure employment. However, small percentage male respondents had expressed their displeasure and lack of full satisfaction about their decision. Further probing indicated that they have chosen wrong 'vocational subject' due to non-availability of their choicest course. Due to this they do not find complete job satisfaction, which they can not help it now.

Majority of the respondents had expressed that their contemporary schoolmates who took conventional subjects could not be absorbed in any of the jobs and most of them were envious about

them. A large majority of the respondents were very much optimistic about the vocational courses and their utility. They discussed wide range of issues relating to the continued importance of these courses in development of skills and application of new knowledge at the production level. Majority of the respondents were enthusiastic to discuss how it was useful to them. The following are some of their expressions:

1. It helped them not only get educated but education along with gainful employment.
2. It included development of not only academic skills and information but also development of specific occupational skills.
3. It provided an excellent foundation for an employment career in addition to preparation of an entry-level job.
4. It provided an opportunity of a lifelong set of learning experiences ranging from occupational exploration and preparation to on-the-job development.
5. It helped them to rediscover themselves of their potentialities and personalities useful for future progress and development.
6. In the circumstances of parents complaining about the 'conventional school education' as irrelevant and wasteful, vocation education could influence them change their attitude and opinion about the whole lot of education system.
7. Since vocational education combined needed skills useful for the emerging economy, it helped promote competitive character-formulation and also a different understanding of what 'education to be' than what 'education may be'.
8. It was something linked to the job, since his father wanted to send him for a 'manual job' and not to any school as his elder brother could not get a job even after finishing school education and his struggle with his father to allow him to go for schooling proved to be correct and realistic. His father was happy about the whole episode now.
9. Whatever they had learnt may not be of greater technical value in relation to 'higher technical courses' but it really helped them adopt new tools, new methods and promoted an altogether new thinking about the production processes. It helped them reorganize their family occupations and improve their agricultural production.

10. It helped them join the mainstream of education and employment as they were, in reality for quite a long time 'isolated and segmented' and being alienated from the production processes as has been 'deprived' of all assets over the years. Within its own limited value, it has revolutionized the concept of work, workmanship and attitude towards work while helping them discover what has been lost all these days.

A majority of respondents also suggested reorganization of education system in tribal areas from the tribal view point while ensuring a 'correct mix' of cultural and vocational education relevant to improve both family economy and market economy. They strongly pleaded that the defects in the existing system to be rectified especially the study environment to be improved to their specific advantage, more information and publicity about the educational activities and employment opportunity to be made available to them.

The Need for Distance Mode of Education in Tribal Areas:

One of the strong suggestions made by a majority of respondents is that they wanted to continue their studies and go for higher education. Since they can not leave the job and join a regular institution, they wanted that an opportunity to be provided to them to go for higher learning through distance mode. In fact, they said that in an emerging tribal situation, high quality of distance education with a different curricula, while combining their cultural values and modern education with flexibility of time, space and pace of learning, wider accessibility with greater scope for interaction etc., may help them enter into a real world of education. Although they were not very sure about how it should be organized they had tremendous clarity of what they want. According to them, distance education will be a boon in their lives provided it is properly organized 'to make it reach all those hitherto unreached' and relevance established.

Summing Up:

Education is no doubt a basic input for structural transformation of an economy, yet it is not the sufficient condition for the same. Moreover, the economic sub-systems in the tribal areas and elsewhere, which together comprise the national system, may have radically different parameters. For example, while the national economy as a whole is labor-surplus and sparsely, the sparsely populated tribal areas have a favorable resource-manpower. Similarly, in the hilly regions, forests are rich and agricultural land is scarce. The big potential of mineral resources also needs to be fully developed. Consequently, the educational input for tribal areas has to be tailored to their needs which may be significantly different from the national norms. (Sharma B.D., 1986)

The educational structure at present is linear in which the primary education is treated basically as a preparatory ground for secondary education and the secondary education that for higher

education. The secondary education aims at upgrading the general professional skills of the people so that the foundations of a diversified national economy can be strengthened. Consequently, vocationalization has been given a high priority. However, only 25 per cent of pupils in the higher secondary schools are expected to join vocational stream. The emphasis of vocational education is primarily on employment even though self-employment has also been referred to in this context. Consequently, agriculture, the major occupation of the people in the country, has not claimed due attention and it has been referred to only in passing. The concern appears to be for the service sector and not for the practicing agriculturist.

This expansion has taken place mainly due to four reasons; the government's attempt to expand facilities for need based education, partly for meeting the manpower requirements of growing and diversifying economy and partly for promoting equity and social justice; the need felt by students to seek relevant education in order to have a competitive edge in the organized job market, the genuine desire to seek education on the part of those segments who had traditionally found it distant for them and who aspired for upward social (and economic) mobility; and the enhanced desire on the part of women to seek their share in education and employment.

The successful implementation of the program will depend upon a number of factors : financial resources that are allocated; preparatory steps that are taken particularly for the preparation of teaching - learning materials and for training of faculty; motivation of students and their parents; speedy action that is taken at the institutional level for introduction of these subjects; administrative arrangements that are made at various levels for implementation of the program; support that employing establishments agree to provide; assistance that institutions concerned with promotion of self employing ventures will provide to these candidates and so on.

Despite the attempts made for their welfare, no desirable improvement has been witnessed in their way of life. Of late, there is a widespread recognition that merely economic measures may not succeed unless the capabilities of tribal himself are built through education. It is only through education that their attitudes can be developed, hidden potentialities explored and talents exploited so as to enable them to perceive the schemes critically of their development. Therefore investment in education will not only be an economic investment for these communities but an investment for building up the society and that investment will help them to maintain their balance in the face of new situation beyond their comprehension. So the need for educational development of Scheduled Tribes is a prerequisite for their socio-economic development. And the experiment of vocational education being introduced in tribal areas is proved to be successful to the extent that more and more people were able to be drawn into its fold. This has created a lot of impact since a large majority of tribal respondents were of the opinion that the program has benefited them. It will further benefit them in case its 'study environment' is improved and it is expanded to cover more and more tribal population in future. It should be supplemented by a provision of distance education which

would further reinforce the educational structures in tribal areas and help fulfill the further and continuing education programs along with strengthening vocational education through distance mode. This will go a long way in helping the tribes join the mainstream of society.

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