Primary Education in Tribal Areas:
A Study of Community Participation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

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“Most parents do not know that a VEC exists, public participation in improving education is negligible … the existence of committees, by itself, cannot be an effective tool for change, if people are unaware of the existence of these committees, do not know their responsibilities, the resources that are available and how decisions can be made”

It is said that one of the important functions of education is to bring about social change in the society. It is more particularly for the Scheduled Tribes who have remained relatively isolated from the surrounding society and predominately engaged in agriculture. It is through education that the tribals expose themselves to the outside world providing with information about several matters relevant to life. Emphasizing the importance of education for Scheduled Tribe, Ghanshyam Shah very rightly observes that, “Learning is a prerequisite for social transformation in a welfare state. Education also opens an avenue which enables them to enter the non-agricultural sector for earning the livelihood”. In all the aspects it is observed that education makes life better in general and tribals’ life in particular. It is also believed that education is a tool for overall development of a county.

In this context Rudolf C. Heredia said that "Development of modern society included three processes of revolutionary structural changes: the Industrial Revolution, the Democratic Revolution and the Educational Revolution". The fourth process of revolutionary change for the development of modern society is that the cybernetic revolution in electronic communication and automation. Within these four revolutionary changes education, which plays a crucial role for development in modern society, is still being a fundamental problem for certain sections of the people. The imbalanced development in education among different sections of the society including among states, between male and female, between urban and rural has been a striking social phenomena since India's independence.

Considering the importance of education, the Constitution of India ensured various provisions to serve the interests of citizens. It also includes few opportunities to overcome social disparity among different sections of society. Moreover, several special schemes have been launched by central and state governments to ameliorate socio-economic disparities and

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1 These finding are quoted from a study on community participation in school related activities in a rural district of Uttar Pradesh undertaken by Abhijit Banerjee, et. al, ‘Can Information Campaigns Raise Awareness and Local Participation in Primary Education?’, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLII, No. 15, April 14, 2007, p. 1365.
5 Ibid.

Despite constitutional provisions and many special plans, projects, schemes and programmes launched by the government for educational development of Scheduled Tribes, no significant progress is observed in this sphere even today. Poverty, unemployment, migration and disinterest towards education have multiplied educational backwardness of Scheduled Tribes. Their deprivation in education is resulting into various forms of exploitation and the violation of human rights.

1. Tribal Education Policy in India: A Brief Account

Sita Toppo believes that the tribals in India have remained backward mainly for two reasons, their long isolation from the general society and their exploitation by the non-tribals specially the zamindars, the money lenders, contractors and others who have been grabbing their land.6

When India attained independence special care was taken to ameliorate the conditions of the tribals through the constitutional safeguards. Article 29 says that no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them7 and Article 30 says that (i) All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice (ii) The state shall not, in granting aid to educational institutions, discriminate against any educational institution on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language8 of the Indian Constitution protect the interest and rights of the minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. In respect to education, Article 45 of the Directive Principles of the state policy directs the state to endeavor to provide free and compulsory education to all the children up to the age of 14 within ten years of the adoption of the Constitution.9 The Article 46, as a part of Directive Principles of State Policy, says that "the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and

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6 Sita Toppo, Dynamics of Educational Development in Tribal India, Classical Publications, New Delhi, 1979, p. 110.
8 Ibid.
9 Kusum K. Premi, ‘Access, Equity and Equality in Education with Focus on Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Girls’, a paper presented at the National Seminar on Implementation of Education Policy in India, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), New Delhi, March 11th 2000.
in particular the Scheduled Castes and tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation".10

Three major Commissions were set up by the Government of India to suggest reforms in education. The first Commission was set up on higher education under the Chairmanship of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in 1949. The second important Commission was set up in 1951 to suggest reforms at secondary level, which gave its recommendations in 1952. The third major Commission was set up under the Chairmanship of Dr. D. S. Kothari in 1964. And this Commission submitted a comprehensive report covering the entire education system. Recognizing the continuance of the inequalities in the system, the Education Commission (1964-66) devoted a whole chapter on Equalization of Education covering Scheduled Tribes along Scheduled Caste and Other Backward Classes.11

The first National Policy on Education, which was based on the recommendations of the Education Commission (1964 -66), was prepared and passed by the Parliament in 1968. However this Policy Resolution could not be implemented by all the states for the simple reason that the education was on the state list. Thereby keeping this fact into consideration, in 1976, with an amendment to the Constitution of India, the education was brought under the Concurrent List.12

The National Policy on Education 1986, the major policy on education after 1968 education policy, has given "unqualified priority to universal primary education"13 to all children. The Policy resolved that "all children by the time they attain the age of about 11 years will have had five years of schooling, or its equivalent through the non-formal stream, and likewise it will be ensured that free and compulsory education up to 14 years of age is provided to all children by 1995".14 A whole section of the document is devoted to Education of Scheduled Castes / Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Sections, and says that "the central focus in educational development of SC/ST is their equalization with the non SC/ST population at all stages and levels of education".15

A Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) Committee under the chairmanship of Shri N. Janardhana Reddy, the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, was set up in 1991 by

11 The Chapter VI of the Education Commission (1964-66) as 'Towards Equalization of Educational Opportunities' from page 97 to 129 deals with 'Education of Scheduled Tribes' along with other backward sections.
12 D. D. Basu, 1995, op. cit., p. 460. - Through the 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 education has been brought under the Concurrent List as 25th item.
14 Ibid., p. 5.
15 Ibid., p. 55.
the Government of India to review the National Policy on Education, 1986. The Committee submitted its report in 1992. The review committee in its review of NPE was guided by the four main principles, which are concerned with, equality and social justice, decentralization of educational management at all levels, creation of an enlightened and human society and empowerment for work. The aspect which was considered as an important from the viewpoint of social justice in education is the concern for the educational needs for SC/STs. By giving a separate Chapter on Education of the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Sections, the Committee stressed the importance for the schools, curriculum, remedial coaching, and recruitment of SC/ST teachers, Special Component Plan and Tribal Sub-Plan of ST habitations.

2. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Community Participation

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is the national flagship programme of Government of India which aims to provide useful and relevant elementary education to all children in the 6 to 14 age group by 2010 and bridge social, regional and gender gaps. It assigns the greatest importance to systematic mobilization of the community and creation of an effective system of decentralized decision making. In keeping with the vision of the Constitution (Seventy-third and Seventy-fourth Amendment) Act, 1992, National Education Policy (NPE) and recommendations of Committee on Decentralized Management of Education, the Village Education Committees (VEC) were constituted. These committees are renamed and restructured as School Education Management Committees (SEMCs) in Andhra Pradesh. The members in these committees are parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers. The SEMC has assigned a greatest role to monitor the school functioning at the village level. The process has been reinforced under SSA as funds for the programme flow through these bodies for all school related expenditure. In view of this, the present thesis focused on involvement of the SEMC members/community in the management of primary education in tribal areas during the implementation of the first phase of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. Almost all states/UTs have constituted VEC/PTA/SDMC/MTA/SMC/VEDC etc. under SSA. However, the nomenclature for the community level structure varies from state to state including the size, tenure as well as its pattern. Community based monitoring in specific issues like enrolment, retention, education of girl child and other disadvantage groups, utilization of various grants and construction is important and helps to ensure attainment of the programme objectives. These community

17 Ibid., pp. 9-11.
18 The name of the Village Education Committee (VEC) was renamed as School Education Management Committee (SEMC) by Government of Andhra Pradesh through the G. O. Ms. No. 95 dated 02/12/2006 during Congress party in power.
level structures play a key role in micro-planning, especially in the development of Village/Ward Education Plan and School Improvement Plans. Under SSA the Annual Work Plan and Budget is prepared by participatory planning process through these communities and they take into account the local needs and specificity.

In view of strengthening community members for effective management of school related activities, SSA provides for training/capacity building of members of Village Education Committees, School Management Committees, Parent-Teacher Associations etc. The community members in SMC are generally sensitized and oriented on their role and functions in the light of various interventions of SSA like gender, civil works, procurement procedures, Inclusive Education etc.\(^{19}\)

The present study carried out by the researcher *Primary Education in Tribal Areas: A Study of Community Participation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* is aimed to study the community participation in education related activities during the implementation of the first phase of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in tribal area of Rampachodavaram in East Godavari district. This study may fill the gap in the existing literature since much literature is not available.

### 3. Importance of the Study

Education implies that equal opportunities should be provided to all citizens, irrespective of their class, caste, or gender. The attention is drawn towards the weaker sections of our society who have been placed in the category of tribal and who form a bulk of India's population. It is felt by the major education policies that decentralization of primary education at grassroots level would enhance the overall educational development of the tribal community. In this context the study is aimed at understanding the participation of tribal community in primary education programmes that are implemented in decentralized manner.

In the light of above discussion it is also made clear that the School Education Management Committee (SEMC) is one of the important education committees at the village level.\(^{20}\) It comprises of total seven members including chairman and convenor. Out of seven, four parents of the school going children and one panchayat ward member act as members, school head master or senior school teacher as its convener and panchayat president as its chairman. The prime objective of the committee is that it “shall review the functions of the school once in every month and shall take all such steps necessary to fulfill the goals and objectives set forth in the Andhra Pradesh School Education Act (Community Participation) 1998”\(^{21}\). In

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\(^{19}\) ‘Overview on Community Mobilization under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan’, an Unpublished Paper.

\(^{20}\) Government of Andhra Pradesh, G. O. Ms. No. 95, issued by Education Department dated 02/12/2006.

other way it is meant for enhancing the community participation in school related activities at the village level.

The review of literature shows that enormous research work has been done on the different aspects of tribal life. Though lot of progress has been made but lot has to be done in this direction. The present study is aimed at examining various policies on tribal education particularly primary education and also to see why the education programmes for school children are not successful among tribals. The real difficulties for tribal development in education have been "one existing inside and the other outside. Because of the traditional way of life and concept of magic oriented notions, the tribals have always resisted any reformation, education, and trans-culturisation, purely in a feeling that any such importation of thought is a challenge to their existence. The outside difficulty is that on account of peculiar way of thinking of the tribals any organizations including the state have not properly appreciated which is the right side first to tackle for the development".22

In the light of above discussion it has been clear that the tribal education for development depends upon both the inside views, which is tribal traditional way of life, and the outside view which is the responsibility of any organization including the state. Is it possible for the state to make education policy by balancing the tribal traditional way of learning? Or is it really necessary to protect the tribal traditional way of learning? These are the fundamental questions for any researcher to ponder over. In this connection Rudolf C. Heredia says that to redress tribal minority status the mobilization not just to preserve their cultural autonomy but to make them to participate in their own development where education will have a necessary and crucial role to play.23 It is the responsibility of both the people and the state to fill the gap between tradition and policy making.

In this connection, the present study on Primary Education in Tribal Areas: A Study of Community Participation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan made a focus to review various education policies focusing on community participation with reference to Scheduled Tribes and to study the impact of community participation in education related activities in tribal areas while implementing the first phase of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme.

Abstract

4. Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study are as follows;
1. To review various policies on primary education with reference to Scheduled Tribes at macro level.
2. To understand community participation in primary education in India.
3. To make an in-depth overview of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.
4. To understand the socio-economic background of the respondents in the tribal area.
5. To study the extent of tribal participation in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Andhra Pradesh.

5. Research Strategy
The study is based on primary as well as secondary sources. Various policy documents, commission reports and existing literature are referred for critical examination of various policies, and community participation on primary education, and also to gain an overview of the programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The study also adopted the strategy of conducting a survey to collect primary data from 345 respondents in 26 villages of 3 mandals in Rampachodavaram agency area of East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh, where the programme of SSA has been implemented. The techniques adopted for primary data collection were structured questionnaire, unstructured interviews, focused group discussions, observation and verification of school records. The structured questionnaire is used separately for each category of the respondents i.e. parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers in SEMC, parents in PTA and students in primary education.

6. Methodology
6.1. Selection of the Mandals
Rampachodavaram is an agency area in East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. The agency is one of the backward areas in terms of literacy levels of tribal population in the district. It consists of seven mandals: 1) Addateegala, 2) Devipatnam, 3) Gangavaram, 4) Maredumilli, 5) Rajavomangi, 6) Rampachodavaram and 7) Y. Ramavaram. Out of these seven mandals, three mandals namely Y. Ramavaram, Gangavaram and Maredumilli are selected for the study lowest literacy has been reported as per the 2001 census. The total literacy of the district is 65.5 percent while the literacy rate of these three mandals is 37.4 percent, 42.5 percent and 52.4 percent respectively.

24 Mandal is a revenue division in the district, which earlier was called Tehsil.
25 Usage of ‘Agency’ is the legacy of the colonial government which identified the areas of tribal concentration as ‘Agency areas’. The agencies were administered with different policy formulation.
6.2. Selection of the Villages
A total of 26 villages are selected following the systematic sampling method from the above three selected mandals at 10 percent of the total number of villages in each mandal. The list of villages is accessed from the list available in 2001 census reports.

6.3. Selection of the Respondents
The respondents for the study consist of members in School Education Management Committee (comprising of parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers) members in Parent Teachers Association and students. About 345 respondents are selected following simple random sampling method from 26 sample villages. The criterion for selection of each category of the respondents is explained below.

6.3.1. Selection of SEMC members
The SEMC, in each village, consists of 7 members with a composition of four parents of the school going children and one panchayat ward member as its members, school head master as its convener and panchayat president as its chairman. It implies that the SEMC has representation from parents, school teachers and PRI members. Among these three categories of the representation in each SEMC, two parents out of four, one PRI member (either panchayat president or panchayat ward member whoever is available) and all school teachers/head master (in the study area most of the schools are single teacher schools or maximum with two teachers) are covered in 26 villages for the study. These respondents are, as said above, selected following simple random sampling method. The list of the parents and school teachers in SEMC is obtained from the school records from the respective schools in the sample villages, whereas the list of PRI members is collected from the panchayat secretary in the office of the respective panchayat samithis.

6.3.2. Selection of PTA members
The parents of the school going children and school teachers are the members in PTA. Among the total parent members in PTA, five of them are selected from each PTA in 26 sample villages. These sample respondents in each PTA are selected using simple random sampling method. The list of these members is obtained from the school records from the respective schools in the sample villages.

6.3.3. Selection of Students
The sample of the students is selected from primary schools located in the 26 sample villages. Among the total number of students in each school, four of them are selected for the study and their education varies from Class-I to Class-V. These students are selected based on simple random sampling method. The list of them is obtained from the school records from the respective schools in the sample villages.
7. Sampling Design

A multi-stage sampling method has been employed for the selection of mandals, villages and respondents for the study as shown in Table 1.6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Name of the Mandal</th>
<th>Total Villages</th>
<th>Sample Villages</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEMC Members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents of the School going Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y. Ramavaram</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gangavaram</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Maredumilli</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>262</td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>47</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Socio-Economic Background of the Respondents

Tribal population is more than the non-tribal communities like the Scheduled Caste in these villages in the area. Nearly one-third of the sample villages are found at a distance of 20-40 kilometers from the mandal headquarters and nearly 20 percent of the villages are also found at the distance of more than 100 kilometers. The socio-economic background of the respondents revealed that more than 58 percent of the respondents belong to the Konda Reddi community named as Primitive Tribal Group (PTG) followed by Valmiki, Konda Dora, and Konda Kammara.

Nearly one-third of these tribal communities depend upon podu cultivation for their livelihood and a few of them are agricultural labourers. The income of these tribal groups varies and more than 90 percent of these tribal groups earn Rs. 5001 to Rs. 15000 per year. Most of them are seasonal workers, and remain without any work during October to June in a year. In terms of ownership of land, more than 60 percent of the respondents possess 1 to 2.5 acres of land while 20 percent of the respondents were landless. Their education background too varies. The collected data gives a clear picture that more than 20 percent of the respondents are illiterates, while nearly 30 percent of them have studied upto primary and upper primary education.

9. Findings

The data reveals that 60 percent of the respondents in SEMC (parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers) and PTA were unaware of what Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan meant and 90 percent of them did not have a fair understanding about Micro Level Planning (MLP). 95 percent of the respondents from these categories reported that they had not participated in the preparation of MLP. More than 80 percent of the schools in the
selected villages did not have copy of these plans with them. The teachers in these schools gave not so very pertinent responses for not having these micro level plans in their schools. Most of the teachers revealed that they did not know how to prepare these plans.

The policy document on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan had made it clear in no uncertain terms that MLP is an important official document for the school, which contains the details of enrolment, drop-out, teachers, resources, committee members etc. It is supposed to be prepared by the community members and teachers together at the beginning of each academic year. In the case of school teachers some of them were aware and possessed some level of understanding on MLP. However, the selected villages were very remote areas and not easily accessible. This could be the reason for their lack of understanding about MLP. Moreover, these schools located in these interior villages did not have basic facilities like drinking water, separate toilets for girls and boys, playing items, play ground, electricity, television, teaching-learning material etc.

With reference to members in SEMC (parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers) and PTA the data reveals that low levels of participation and involvement in the school related activities. Nearly two-third of these respondents did not have a fair understanding as to how many members SEMC consists of. Only one-third of them (parents of the school going children, PRI members and school teachers in SEMC) reported that SEMC consists with seven members. In the case of school teachers alone, 64 percent of them do not have knowledge of the composition of the SEMC. With reference to their membership in SEMC, half of them were unaware that they were members in SEMC. In the case of PRI members it stood at 57 percent and interestingly 53 percent of school teachers responded that SEMCs did not exist in their schools. The field survey reveals that caste wise analysis of awareness of the respondents on their own membership in SEMCs Konda Reddi and Paragi Porja community is more aware than Valmiki community. In terms of literacy wise analysis of awareness of the respondents on their own membership in SEMCs, it indicates that educational background has no influence on their awareness of membership in SEMCs.

Training is one of the important aspects for enhancing capacities of an individual. On enquiry about details of training received on their roles and responsibilities, 46 percent of the SEMC members responded that they had not received any kind of training. In the case of school teachers, the corresponding percentage stood at 36 percent. It reveals that most of the community members were not trained on their roles and responsibilities. Some of the respondents however were trained by CARE-STEP, an NGO which had worked in the area during 2002-2007.
The data presented in the study also reveals that the respondents were not actively participating in the monthly SEMC meetings. It is very interesting to note the variations in the participation of different categories of the respondents in SEMC monthly meetings. In the case of parents of the school going children in SEMC, only 17 percent of them reported in affirmative, whereas in the case of PRI members in SEMC it stood at nearly 27 percent and in the case of school teachers in SEMC at nearly 47 percent. It reveals that school teachers have better participation more than the other two categories of the respondents. It was also revealed that more female respondents were participating in the meetings than male respondents. Despite being members in various education committees most of the respondents did not know about the financial resources of school. Most of them reported that they never discussed about the utilization of these grants in the SEMC monthly meetings.

The school teachers, who are called change agents at village level, did not possess much understanding on community participation. Most of them were not trained and possessed only one to three years of experience. It was observed that more than half of the schools in the sample villages were not visited by the school education officials during the academic year 2007-08.

The data also reveals that nearly half of the schools did not have regular teachers in the tribal area. Instead of regular teachers, ‘vidya volunteers’ were working on temporary basis. Some of these ‘vidya volunteers’ were not even qualified to teach in schools. The respondents also gave suggestion for improvement of community participation in tribal area. The suggestions include creating awareness among the community members, providing training on their roles and responsibilities, conducting regular SEMC meetings, closer co-ordination of teachers with the community etc.

It is also interesting to note that most of the PTA members did not know that the PTA exists in their villages. More than two-third of them expressed this view and 67 percent of them did not know that they were members in PTA. It is also interesting to note that 34 percent each of the respondents from the category of illiterate and those who studied upto primary education said that they knew about their membership in PTA. Whereas in the case of highly qualified respondents it was much lower indicating that educational background did not influence the awareness of the respondents on their own membership in PTA.

The results presented with reference to students and teaching aids and other facilities available to them in their schools revealed that most of the schools lack proper drinking water and toilet facilities. The students responded that they use community hand pump or they go to their houses to have drinking water and for toilet they use the open space in the nearby canal or bushes. This is an indication of absence of basic facilities in the schools. Most of the
villages in tribal areas do not have the basic facilities in the schools. It is observed that most of the teachers treat students well and they use Teaching and Learning Material (TLM) while they teach. In some cases, as per the responses of the students, teachers beat the students in the classroom.

It is also revealed from the data that nearly 97 percent of the students responded that their schools provide mid-day meal to all the students daily. In terms of quantity, they expressed that it was not sufficient for them. Overall, the entire analysis of data presented about community participation in primary education during the implementation of the first phase of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan reveals that participation of different categories of the respondents in SEMC and PTA in school development activities have not made much impact in the tribal area.

The study reveals that school teachers possess some understanding on MLP, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and functioning of SEMC and PTA when compared to other respondents in education committees. Community participation and their ownership in the tribal areas in implementing education programmes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have lagged much behind the expectations.

The overall findings in the entire study reveal that even though the provisions in policy and constitutional guarantees are ensured for better implementation of education programmes in the tribal areas, it has lagged behind in the implementation of these programmes at grassroot level. Prior to the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, there existed education programmes which were implemented with the coordination of community as the main actors and these had succeeded in achieving good results across India. Nonetheless, in the case of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, particularly in the area of where the disempowered communities like Scheduled Tribes are present, the community participation leaves much to be desired during the implementation of its first phase.

The lack of participation of tribal community could be overcome during its second phase of the implementation by creating more awareness among the tribal communities on their roles and responsibilities as members in various village education committees such as School Education Management Committee (SEMC) and Parent Teachers Association (PTA). Improved awareness among members on their responsibility and accountability to monitor their village education can ultimately ensure the availability of infrastructure facilities in school, quality of education, utilization of financial grants of the schools and thus realize the goal of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE).