Chapter VI

PROBLEMS AND PERCEPTIONS

This chapter intends to throw light on the problems in tribal education with special emphasis on Ashram high schools and the perceptions of various categories of respondents, i.e. students, parents, teachers, drop-outs and officials with regard to several aspects of tribal education. In the preceding chapters we have discussed the socio-economic background of the respondents, their value orientations, socio-cultural perceptions and the academic life in Ashram schools. Further, the attitudes, aspirations and awareness of the respondents are also analysed in the light of their socio-economic and ethnic background. This chapter focuses on some crucial problems with respect to Ashram high schools. These problems are identified after analysing the responses of respondents and field observations. The perceptions of various categories of respondents on these problems are analysed to get broader view of the issue.

1. No uniform procedure in admission

As elsewhere, the problems in education for tribals start at the time of admission itself. The teachers working in these schools state that there has never been a systematic and uniform admission procedure over the years. According to them, 'Admission Test' though mandatory as per
the policy, is practiced as a formality. The admission procedure changes every year with a new project officer for ITDA at the helm of affairs. Every succeeding project officer used to have his/her own ideas on education for tribal children. One Headmaster expresses (case P1):

"Officials have different perspectives... no systematic pattern - it's according to the whims and fancies of the officer concerned. Officials insist that we must admit everyone and this resulted in overcrowding in class V, VI and VIII".

Another Headmaster narrates the inconsistency in officials' perceptions (case P2):

"The previous project officer told us, 'you open your gates. No tribal child should wait at the gate for seat. Don't insist on certificates.' The new project officer now asks us, 'why did you admit so many, what is your personal interest in admitting so many'? The quality can't be ensured if you take so many".

Most of the teachers expressed similar views on the inconsistency in bureaucratic perceptions. The result is overcrowding in some classes and variations in the academic competence of students. This could also be due to their background in primary and upper primary schools.
2. Weak foundation at primary and upper primary levels

Respondents who are studying in Ashram high schools had their primary and upper-primary education at various tribal welfare and government/local schools. As mentioned earlier, only 34.4% of the respondents had their pre-high school education in the same schools, where they are studying for high school classes. Majority of the respondents i.e. 65.6% have come here for only high school. It is observed that the students, who expressed difficulty in following the lessons taught at the high school level, are mostly those who had their primary and upper primary education in other schools. The students reasoned that they can not follow the lessons taught at high school level as they are not good at basics like grammar, spellings and calculations.

While responding to the same question on students' performance in the class room, the high school teachers also express similar views, and attribute this to the low quality of education being imparted at primary and upper primary schools. It is observed by many respondents, both students and teachers, that the primary and upper primary schools which exist in Agency area under various managements (Tribal Welfare Department, Government Schools, Mandal Parishad and private) are imparting education with low standards. Their main focus is on 'quantitative progress', in terms of enrolment and results. Further, there are several hundreds of single teacher schools which can not ensure child-
centred, activity based, quality education at primary school level. Many of these primary and upper primary schools are facing basic problems such as insufficient infrastructure, lack of supervision, absence of accountability of teachers, meager budgetary allocations, and more importantly, they lacked community backup.

The primary and upper primary schools in Agency area are playing vital role in enrolling tribal children and in introducing them to the primary education. However, they could not improve the academic performance of their students to such a level which is a pre-requisite for high school education. Most of these schools do not have qualified and trained teachers in subjects like Science, Maths, Hindi and English. The result is that many students at high school level did not achieve minimum levels of learning, by the time they are admitted into high schools. The policy of automatic promotion upto class VII and official pressure on results at class VII saw many students passed out of upper primary schools and enrolled themselves in the high schools. It is found that several students are dropped-out from the system despite automatic promotion at various stages of schooling due to many reasons. It should be mentioned here that those students who could come up to the high school level are considered as 'cream' despite the fact that they lacked basics. It is observed that many students studying in class X express difficulty in solving simple mathematics,
correct spellings in all the three language subjects (Telugu, Hindi and English), grammar and understanding science subjects.

A Science Assistant at one of the high schools remarks (case P3):

"They (students) can't understand science. The syllabus is too heavy for their background. Most of the words and concepts we use in the class are beyond their comprehension. Now they are improving slowly with their own efforts and because of supervisory study. The knowledge should be gained gradually from lower classes. You can't teach photosynthesis directly to class X. They should have been taught in class VI that plants need sunlight etc. We find it tough, because all the basics are to be imparted to the students again, when they join here for classes VII or VIII".

One Hindi teacher points out (case P4):

"Many upper primary schools don't have Hindi teachers. It's almost like starting the subject here afresh. Most of the teaching posts which are reserved for scheduled tribes and scheduled castes have fallen vacant, as there are no eligible candidates for Science, Mathematics and Hindi from these categories".

A Telugu pandit explains (case P5):

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Elementary schooling is the foundation for a child. Without that, mere emphasis on high schools is useless. Officials stress on good results... many students have pronunciation problems and spelling mistakes. Moreover, Telugu is not their mother tongue.

Another teacher at Kinchumanda points out that the selection of teachers from scheduled tribe category with qualifications of SSC or Intermediate has reduced the quality of education at primary level (case P6):

"Due to single teacher schools the quality of education has come down. Scheduled tribe candidates with SSC qualification were recruited and posted as single teachers. If the government wants to provide them jobs, they could have been taken into other departments like forest, police or agriculture as per their qualifications but why as teachers. They spoil their own community children".

Reacting to the above comments, an officer of ITDA argues (case P7):

"Providing teaching jobs for scheduled tribes has several advantages like better student-teacher relationship, involvement of parents, gaining community confidence in education etc. Moreover, they stay even in the villages unlike the non-
scheduled tribe teachers”.

To obtain a holistic picture, a few teachers (9), who are working in “Tribal Welfare Primary Schools” in the Agency area are interviewed. All of them belong to scheduled tribe category and have qualifications of SSC/Intermediate fail. All of them are having “Secondary Teachers Training Certificates”. A brief account on the status of these primary schools is given below as stated by the teachers.

Most of these primary schools are having children from class I to class V but some of them have only classes upto III. All the teachers expressed difficulty in handling five classes single-handedly. Nearly 90% of the children enrolled in these schools have one of the tribal dialects as mother tongue, but not Telugu. Teachers of these primary schools stated that they are having a tough time teaching children without insufficient teaching aids and blackboards. One teacher has to teach all the subjects of all the classes upto 5th. They were to teacher children whose mother tongue is other than the medium of instruction. Absenteeism is more in these schools as reported by the teachers and community leaders. The total strength of these schools ranged between 30 to 60 which include all the classes. For instance, a primary school visited by this researcher at Karanjiguda, 17 km away from Araku valley, had a total strength of 54 students. Around 18 students used to attend the school regularly and 9 students had already dropped out, as
reported by the teacher and community leaders. Similar situations are observed in the other primary schools visited by this researcher personally. The teachers working in tribal welfare primary schools blame the parents for lack of motivation and students for irregularity. The teachers said that they have to go to every house and pick up students every morning. Some parents insist on the teachers to let off their wards early so as to send them for cattle-grazing. However, some of the positive aspects of these primary schools are:

a) the teacher belongs to same ethnic background,
b) the teacher can speak the tribal dialect and can explain the students in that dialect,
c) the teacher usually sets up his family in the same village/hamlet which facilitates better interaction with the parents,
d) the teacher as one of the members of the same community can become a 'role model' for others to emulate.

Inspite of the above mentioned advantages, the teachers who are interviewed found not sufficiently qualified or trained to teach the children of various standards single-handedly. Some of these teachers are themselves weak in subjects like Science, Maths and English. Most of these teachers have obtained either second or third division in their qualifying exam i.e., SSC.

Thus, it is obvious that the foundation laid at primary
and upper primary levels is not up to the expected standards, as discussed above. This has been a serious problem for many students studying in Ashram high schools, as they find the syllabus and subjects as difficult. Moreover, teachers at primary and upper primary levels, show an 'evasive attitude' with respect to the academic standards of the students.

3. **Medium of instruction**

As mentioned earlier, the medium of instruction and the language used for the textbooks made the academic life of Ashram school students problematic. Fifty percent of the respondents have stated one of the tribal dialects as their mother tongue and the remaining 50% speak their tribal dialect and Telugu at home. Students as well as teachers hold that the Telugu, as the medium of instruction, has halted the academic progress of tribal students. Further, the textbooks which are being used for these students are the same which are used in other Government and private schools throughout the state. Common education and common textbooks would definitely help to integrate these students of tribal origin into mainstream, and also help them to go for higher education in the long run. However, in view of the above background the students are facing difficulty in reading, writing and understanding even at high school level, because the medium of instruction and their home language are different. This is stated by many students and teachers as
One of the teachers at Araku says (case P8): "...our academic standards are high for tribal children and they find it difficult to understand as their mother tongue is not Telugu. Moreover, the way of speaking at home is different from what we do here..."

It has become inevitable to have the state language as the medium of instruction and for textbooks since it helps in integrating various communities into one. Even the students of tribal origin studying in high schools could come upto that level despite the difficulties with the language. However, almost all of them did face this problem at primary and upper primary levels of schooling; this placed them at a disadvantageous academic position when compared to the children from non-tribal background.

4. Involvement of parents

As discussed earlier the parents of the students studying in Ashram schools are not sufficiently involved by the Ashram school system. Lack of interest and initiative among the teachers to involve the parents and the differential socio-economic and cultural background of the parents hinder active participation of the parents in the system. Though the concept of Ashram school education for tribals emphasises the involvement of parents and community, in actual practice, they are distanced from the school.
Several studies on tribal education in the past have suggested the formation of parents' committees which would monitor the facilities in the school as well as the academic progress of the children.

In agency area also, where this study is undertaken, the parents committees have been formed for each Ashram high school. However, the experiences show that the committees meet once in six month and deliberate as a formality. Not many parents attend these meetings and they never participated in the discussion. The Headmaster explains what the staff have been doing and, as the teachers put it, "the parents do not understand what the headmaster says".

During these meetings, the teaching staff mainly focus on 'indiscipline' of the students and the teachers feel that the parents are not bothered. One teacher comments (case P9):

"When we complain on indiscipline of their wards, parents do not take any responsibility and in turn they say, 'we have entrusted children to you, you take care of our children'. Further, when we inform the parents on deviant activities of their wards such as theft, movie going, sexual advances, smoking etc., they feel this freedom is not wrong and they don't bother much about these complaints".

These kinds of complaints on parents from the teachers are
very common. This is mainly due to the 'differential value system' and the normative pattern of these two categories of respondents due to their socio-cultural background.

Further, the teachers feel that the parents involvement and responsibility have been less because the education is provided at no cost. One Headmaster points out (case P10):

"When we say 'free education' its losing value. Parents do not bother to know what is happening at school. Even among students the laziness and negligence are visible... There should be some monetary contribution from parents... these people have become dependents on government for everything"

Though the teacher has told this in anger and displeasure, there is a valid point in this comment. Experiences in 'Developmental Administration' show that the success in any Government backed development programme lies in the active people's participation and some contribution either in the form of cash or kind from the community. Noticing this aspect, the ITDA took initiative to start primary schools upto class III with community participation. These schools are named aptly as 'Mabadi' (our school). The officials identified some hamlets where there was no school, and asked the parents to contribute Rs. 5/- per child towards honorarium of the voluntary teacher, who is again identified by the community. The community was also asked to raise a
hut and a compound which could be used for conducting classes. A village committee has been formed which would supervise the activities of the 'Mabadi'. If the volunteer does not come regularly, the village committee can remove him/her.

There were 394 Mabadies under ITDA Paderu agency area during 1994-95, and 40 of them were imparting education with Oriya as medium of instruction. The students who have completed schooling up to class III would be taken into Ashram schools. Apart from parents' contribution, the ITDA gives Rs. 150/- per month to the voluntary teacher. ITDA also provides the education material such as black board, charts, textbooks, slates and slate pencils for Mabadis. It is observed that the experiment is giving good results in many villages, where the village committees played their expected role. Further, the parents are showing lot of interest, as they have a stake. One of the ITDA officials in-charge of developmental activities observes (case P11):

"The parents are showing a lot of interest in their children's academic progress. During our visits, we ask the children to recite some poems or songs. All the parents gather around and encourage the children to sing/answer the question being put to them"

It is observed that the achievement in these community schools depends on the interest shown by the volunteer. Some
voluntary teachers take interest in making charts and some teaching aids for activity based learning. However, they are considered as a success because the parents are participating in the teaching process. Needless to say that such an active participation of parents or community could not be achieved in single teacher primary schools or upper primary schools and high schools. The Ashram high schools are visibly deprived of the involvement of parents. Unless the parents are involved in the process of education and made aware of their ward's problems and progress, the outcome of Ashram school education would be qualitatively inferior, and culturally away from the tribals.

5. Motivation of teachers

The teachers working in the Ashram schools are found to be less interested, insufficiently motivated and not rightly oriented. Most of them are pessimistic in their attitude. The teachers working in Ashram schools consider their job as a 'punishment'. Most of them complained on the climatic conditions of the agency area. This could be partly due to their feeling of alienation in the Agency Area. One science teacher remarks (case P12):

"This place creates dullness in us. We have become inactive over the years... earlier we used to be very active. You can see this dullness among the tribals also. We, sometimes, scared that our
capabilities will come down if we continue to stay here. Our children are also becoming less active"

Further, the teachers feel that the educational betterment of their children and job prospects for their family members have been suffered due to their posting in the agency area. One of the teachers at Munchingput says (case P13):

"There is a vast difference between plains and agency area. The children in plains have more facilities, exposure and opportunities. There are no good schools for our children. Many of our colleagues work in the plains, send their children to the convents... our children are denied of this opportunity".

The teachers also express their dissatisfaction on the facilities available in the agency area. One teacher working at Kinchumanda school explains (case P14):

"We don't have any quarters for teachers here. There are no private houses also to hire... all thatched huts around. I am living in a semi-pucca rented house. There is no lavatory, nor water connection in this house. We don't have privacy also as there are only one room and a kitchen. Other teachers also live like this. Earlier we never used to have electricity also. There is no service available in case of any emergency. We don't get any provisions or vegetables in this
place. Once a week we go to a town nearby and purchase"

Further, the teachers could not digest the fact that they will have to work in agency area throughout their service. Almost all the teachers express their resentment and anger for the fact that they will have to work there permanently. A teacher working at Munchinput expresses his anger (case P15):

"It's like a punishment for us to work permanently in agency area. I have been working here for the last 14 years... all other government officials like project officer, tribal welfare office, police, forest and engineering staff work for one or two years and go back to plains - only the teachers have to stay here throughout. Its easy for anyone to say that we must work for and render service to scheduled tribes. We don't mind working for them but it should be for a specific period".

Another teacher adds to the above feeling and says (case P16):

"You can't expect me to have same interest and skills for ever... now all the teachers in this school are in the young age group, we are doing our job despite all odds. If we continue like this, we'll not have this much interest in future;
we won’t take any initiative. Nobody could expect initiative from me when I am myself disinterested.
We should be transferred to plains area for a few years and make it compulsory for other teachers to work in agency area for a few years”.

Even one teacher belonging to scheduled tribe expresses his desire on similar lines. He says (case P17):

“I was born here and brought up in this area. Now I am working in the same place. I would like to spend some years in some town outside agency area and get exposure both for me and for my children”.

The teachers feel that they should be given additional facilities, allowances and some benefits for their children, like giving them preference in residential schools, admission in professional courses, etc.

However, the officials consider the demands of the teachers as over-ambitious. They say that these teachers are recruited specifically to work in Ashram schools in agency area. At the time of joining itself, they knew very well that they would have to work in this area throughout their service. The officials inform that the teachers working in Ashram schools have been provided several allowances like Special Compensatory Allowance (SCA), Bad Climate Allowance (BCA), and Compensatory Allowance (CA) which is 10% of their basic pay. One of the ITDA officials remarks (case P18):

“They know that they were recruited for ITDA...
their demand is not rational... basically they
don't feel responsible to their job".

Another official reacts to the teachers' demands and says (case P19):

"Their interests are self-centered. They come and
stage dharnas for their demands. Did they ever
fight for the betterment of schools? They are
given extra allowances to compensate their stay in
the agency area. It is basically, they lack
motivation and interest, - all their grievances
are to cover up this."

While the administrators hold the above views on additional
allowances already being enjoyed by the teachers, the latter
express that these allowances do not match with their
hardships. The teachers felt that they are paid on par with
other government and Mandal Parisahad school teachers
working in the agency area. The teachers feel that because
of their additional responsibilities they should be treated
on par with the A.P. residential school teachers or with the
teachers working in residential schools for Primitive Tribe
Groups (PTG). One of the high school teachers explains (case
P20):

"The Ashram school teachers are working for 10-12
hours in a day like those in A.P. Residential
School. We have to conduct supervisory study in
the evening for 3 hours... but we are getting
salaries and allowances on par with other teachers in day schools who work from 9 am to 4 pm... This is highly unjust. We have represented to the government several times but no response. There is no residential accommodation for teachers at many schools... no facilities".

Another teacher express his anger as follows (case P21): "Many teachers in government schools don't take classes; they can go home by 4 pm or even earlier. They'll also get same salary as we get. Why should we take extra burden? I am ready to go on voluntary retirement if they give permission for me to do so for 15 years of service. Here are no rules for service and promotion so far".

The above discussion and the reaction of the respondents clearly show that the teachers are feeling monotony for working in the environment for several years and having no basic facilities for their families. Further, the teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction with less monetary incentives, the apathy of government regarding their service matters and for not being elevated to the higher position. All these factors definitely weaken their initiative, motivation and interest in rendering their services. Moreover, they are feeling relatively deprived by comparing with other teachers working in towns and cities.

When we asked the teachers on the quality of education
they said that the fault lies with the administration. The teachers inform that there has never been a systematic approach which continued consistently for a longer period. They believe that a policy should continue for atleast 3 to 5 years, to see any qualitative change in the education system. Teachers have complained, unanimously that the project officers and tribal welfare officers try to boss over or impose on teachers. As one teacher says (case P22):

"We don't have any standardised and consistent policy as such. We have only one policy i.e. the will of the project officer. Each one will come and impose some new procedures and rules. They impose their own ideas according to their interest - no proper scheme or plan of action".

Most of the teachers resent higher officials' intervention in their teaching domain. They said: "We won't have any voice in front of the project officer who is usually an I.A.S. officer. These officers try to start something new to gain publicity but it will collapse within months after they are transferred. The new officer starts the process again. However, teachers also praise a few officers who have introduced some innovative ideas but were transferred soon.

As one Headmaster opines (case P23):

"It would be better to keep the same project officer who has an aptitude and interest in tribal education for a longer period. This would help the
authorities to evolve a specific plan of action to improve quality”.

In general, the teachers feel that the officials insist on several new approaches without realising the problems in the school and local conditions. Moreover, they feel that everyone finds fault with the teachers only, nobody blames students or parents for their negligence. One teacher narrates (case P24):

"Once an Assembly Committee for S.C., S.T. and B.C. welfare visited our school; the members had less knowledge and limited vision on education for tribals... they visited and blamed teachers for everything. After they left, the project officer scolded all of us. The officials always threaten us with transfers".

The administrator in-charge for school education, reacts to the teachers' dislike of intervention by the officials and frequent visits (case P25):

"Education system has become adhoc, visit and inspection oriented. Teacher considers every visit of an officer as an accident... he'll suffer for sometime and then remain unchanged afterwards. Teachers should be aware that they are under check and responsible... each visit of an official would bring some improvement."

Further, the teachers working in Ashram schools complain
that the bright students from these schools are being sent to A.P. Residential schools, while they are placed in charge of average students. This made them lose job satisfaction and moreover, it always appears as if they don't have any good students. The headmaster of one school explains (case P26):

"Every year we receive circular from the project officer to identify the intelligent students and send them to A.P. Residential Schools. All our bright students have gone to those schools... we've to take care of the remaining students who are academically poor. The officials insist on bringing out good result at the time of exams. How can we show good result with these students? We require some brilliant students in the school to be 'role models' for others. We've to admit whoever comes for admission - but other residential schools conduct entrance exam and take meritorious students... officials compare us with other residential schools in terms of results".

There are several complaints from teachers, working in Ashram high schools and single teacher primary schools, on insufficient infrastructure for teaching. Many Ashram schools do not have a sufficient number of black boards. Except those Ashram high schools at Paderu, Araku and Chintapalli, all others do not have laboratory equipment,
science charts, and materials. As per the existing syllabus, the provision of laboratory is essential for even upper primary schools but many Ashram high schools lack in this.

Further, several teaching posts are still vacant due to non-availability of qualified candidates in certain subjects. Most of the Government jobs in the agency area are reserved for scheduled tribes. There are only 17 qualified teachers for Mathematics in the entire ITDA area, that means only the high schools have Mathematics teacher but none for upper primary schools. Similar condition exists for Science and English subjects. This situation forced the existing teachers to take extra burden and this resulted lowering the quality of education imparted to the students. All the above discussed problems of teachers and administration, led to deterioration of the quality of education in Ashram schools.

6. Monitoring - Evaluation

It was observed that the Ashram high schools are yet to evolve systematic mechanisms for monitoring of the teaching and learning processes, and evaluation of teachers and academic achievement of the students. Here again, there is some confusion between official and teaching community with regard to the monitoring of teaching and learning. It is learnt that the monitoring systems adopted by the Ashram schools are the same as the regular Government schools, with
'supervisory study' for students being an exception.

The teachers do not have a systematic and detailed 'lesson plan'. Except one or two teachers, all others are 'routinized' in the process and are having unwritten lesson plans in their minds. There is no emphasis on activity based teaching. The time table of all the Ashram high schools have eight period schedule allocated to all the subjects. Like in many regular Government schools, the periods are mainly used for teaching. There are no periods for discussion, feedback, demonstration etc. Teachers explain that they ask the students to come out with doubts and clarify routinely.

The officials who visit the school would first go into the kitchen and inspect whether the cooking is done as per the menu fixed, and verify the stock and issue registers. Less attention is paid by the officials to the teaching and learning processes in the school. This is stated by several teachers interview. Only a few officials in the past enquired into the academic problems. During the review meeting of teachers at the school, and of Headmasters at ITDA office, the main issues being discussed are indiscipline of students, budgetary problems, problems related to supply of materials including textbooks and notebooks, and allegations against teachers/wardens/headmaster. The review meetings called by the Tribal Welfare Officer and Project Officer also focusses on statistical information brought by the Headmasters.
It is observed that the Ashram schools are conducting a 'supervisory study' for students in the evening after school hours. The students are expected to bring their books and study silently. Though it is intended to clarify doubts and to understand the problems of students in learning process, in practice it became a formality. The children are found sleepy after a hectic eight hour schedule, the teachers sit at one corner to chat and all of them remain silent throughout. The teachers are visibly irritated for the fact that they have to sit for extra hours at the school. The main concentration is on class X students. Here also the teachers do not guide or explain the lessons to students - the students are merely given imposition of writing or reading.

The teachers conduct monthly tests, quarterly, half-yearly and annual examinations as usual. These are the formalities for all the schools. The main difference is that the progress of the students studying in other Government and private schools have to be informed to the parents through progress cards; whereas in Ashram schools the progress reports are not required to be sent as many parents are non-literate. Thus, the parents are kept out of the monitoring and evaluation process. An official reacts to these observations as (case P27):

"Each school should evolve its own self-evaluation mechanisms, even teachers should adopt self
evaluation. They should not wait for our evaluation and recommendation".

One must wait for such a situation where every school and teacher critically evaluate themselves and better their efforts.

7. Absenteeism

Several studies on tribal education done earlier, have pointed out that 'absenteeism' was rampant in Ashram schools. Needless to say that the Ashram schools in agency area of Visakhapatnam district are also facing this problem. An attempt is made to find out the extent of absenteeism in these schools. The attendance registers are the standardised source of information to find out the rate of or extent of absenteeism. However, it was realized that the attendance registers could not be relied upon as most of the students are marked 'present' even though they are absent. The reasons for this are as follows:

i) As one of the Headmasters was explaining that the students could not be promoted to higher classes if they are not given minimum days of attendance. Teachers said that they give attendance to help the students and warn them not to repeat this again.

ii) Official pressure on maintaining good strength throughout the year to show progress of the schools.

iii) There was a widespread belief that the headmaster and
the warden in-charge, manipulate attendance to show full strength for the hostel so as to swindle the quota of the absentees, as the Ashram high schools are usually residential. In many such cases the officials behave hand in glove.

iv) In some cases parents bring the students who was short of attendance and request the headmaster to give attendance.

Due to the above mentioned reasons, the information available in the attendance registers are found to be unreliable for research purpose. However, this study attempted to find out the reasons for absenteeism from various categories of respondents - teachers, students, parents and officials. The responses are analysed as follows:

a) Most of the teachers state that the tribal children have lot of attachment with their family members. Even their family members are also very affectionate towards children. Due to this the children frequently go home, spend time leisurely and come back to school after 10-15 days. Sometimes parents bring them back to school.

b) The parents are generally non-literate and do not give much importance to education. This encourages the students to go home frequently. In this case parents don't bother to warn the students nor bring them back to school voluntarily.

c) During agricultural season the tribal communities require assistance of all family members including the
children, as they depend mainly on non-mechanised agricultural implements. Many of them still practice 'shifting cultivation' (Podu). So the children who are studying in the schools have to bunk classes and involve in agriculture. One of the students of class VIII explains (case P28):

"I was at home for one month before my quarterly exams... my parents asked me to come as we were sowing that time".

To supplement this, one of the Headmasters says (case P27):

"From June to December we find many students being irregular for classes... they go home and take part in agricultural activities. Parents also encourage this and the tribal children are mostly interested in such activities. Even children in primary classes also become irregular during that period as they have to take care of younger siblings when parents go to the fields."

d) In some cases the children are also being engaged in daily wage activities along with the parents. It is observed that when children of this variety go home due to some reasons and settle there for a few days, the parents take them along with to work, instead of they being idle at home. This process continue for some days. Later on either parents or children on their own realise and attend the school. One father of a student in class X belongs to Nooka Dora,
explains (case P30):

"My son is not interested in studies. He comes home quite often. We scolded him... do they listen grown up boys. When we go for work he also accompanies us. If we say no, he would waste time with children in the village".

e) Tribal people are fond of celebrating festivals. Apart from the main festivals they do celebrate occasions of marriage, puberty, birth and death (refer chapter two). Whenever such occasions are being celebrated at home the parents come and take their children home. The celebration of these occasions go on from two to seven days. Many students take this opportunity and extent their stay at home. Students and teachers who are interviewed cited this as one of the important reasons for absenteeism. Belief in pollution due to death, has been observed by most of the tribal communities in this region as discussed in chapter two. Students who go to their villages on such occasions do not come until the period of pollution is over.

f) Health/ill-health is also mentioned as an important reason for absenteeism in Ashram schools by most of the respondents - students, teachers and parents. Many students complain of health problem. Sometimes it is a real health problem but in most cases the reason is not genuine. For them it is a reason to get out of the school. When teachers refer them to doctor these students do not show interest
instead they go home. Many other reasons such as boredom, homesickness, etc. influence them to show ill-health as cause and go home. Some of these students have a belief that some body tried black-magic 'shillangi' on them to become unwell.

It is observed that the students in these schools have lot of fascination for movies, dramas and dance programmes. This has been explained in the previous chapters also. The teachers also accept that many students bunk classes and go for these cultural activities anywhere within a radius of 5 km from the school. Mostly grown up boys in high school classes venture into this. After coming back from these shows, they would tell that some relative of theirs had come or that they had gone to see relatives nearby etc., usually these students bunk classes after lunch and come back in the night. Otherwise they are present during morning sessions. Even those students who reported to have girlfriend/boy friend and those who are having bad habits also come under this category. They may not absent themselves from school for several days continuously, but every afternoon session is a bore for them.

Many students of this variety go home frequently and insist for money. They used to give reasons of buying books, pens, charts and use teacher's name with the parents. If the parents don't give money they stay back. The moment they get the money they come back to school and continue their other
interests. Since the parents are not aware of their activities, many of them give some fake reasons to get money.

h) Some teachers point out that the difference in the food being served in the hostel and the food they had been habituated at home is also one of the reasons for absenteeism. So the students feel like going home whenever they get bored with the hostel stuff. As one teacher observes (case P31):

"Many of them like non-vegetarian, the tribal people eat non-vegetarian food prepared with beef, pork, birds etc., on several occasions. Some students go home whenever they feel like having change. They don't tell us this reason while going, we come to know this only during informal chat".

No wonder, many students have complained on the quality of the food being provided to them in the hostel. However, this is also a reason for absenteeism, cited by the respondents.

i) For younger children who are studying in classes upto VIII, the reasons reported for absenteeism are, domestic work, and taking care of their younger siblings. The single teachers working in tribal welfare primary schools and teachers in Ashram high schools have emphasised on these two reasons for absenteeism apart from homesickness, adjustment problems and distance from school to home.
j) Interestingly, some respondents from all the categories observe that the school atmosphere role of teacher and facilities in the school also determine the extent of absenteeism. The students have reported that some of their classmates were absent for long time in view of the class tests. It was noticed that many children are sacred of class tests and examinations. The teachers punish the students while announcing the marks after evaluation. There is a general complaint from students that the teachers, not all, beat them or abuse them harshly. Most of the children of tribal origin are observed to be very sensitive to these issues and many of them try to avoid such situations by escaping from the school. One teacher explains (case P32):

"The students are very sensitive. Tribals don't take the abuses lightly... they get offended soon. Some teachers habituated to beat or abuse the children and children run away from school".

Further when children are asked to buy some notebooks etc., which were not supplied free or cost by the government, some of them go home and do not come back. The teachers stated that the tribal children do not like such a formal system with time bound daily schedule and they like free life - roaming around, playing and any other work other than classroom study. It was observed that the students felt very happy to work in the mess, to assist the head cook for three days when there were no supporting staff. In School-two, the
students were helping the kitchen staff in fetching drinking water. In School-one, horticulture had been taken up by the school children where they show more interest in growing plants than in the classroom. All these instances are given here to emphasise the point that the children like information whereas the Ashram schools formal in appearance and their activities like any other Government schools. This formalism also caused absenteeism in several cases and this is always an implicit factor with respect to irregularity in attending school and for drop-out.

The above discussed are the main reasons for absenteeism prevalent in Ashram schools. The school system could not develop any effective mechanisms to attract the students and to reduce the incidence of irregularity.

The teachers are asked to suggest some steps to reduce the incidence of absenteeism. Nearly 70% of the teachers do not have anything concrete to suggest. Some of them say that the regular roll call would help and others say that such incidence should be brought to the notice of parents. None of them gave suggestions to motivate parents and students or to make learning more attractive or to create a sense of responsibility among students etc. This shows that there have never been any serious attempts to contain absenteeism in Ashram schools.
8. Drop-out

Another important issue which has been causing much worry with respect to the educational advancement of tribals is the incidence of drop-out of students at various stages of schooling. Though the teachers and officials claim that the incidence of drop-out has come down, it is still a major problem to look into (refer Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Drop-out rates among Scheduled Tribe students in Andhra pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class I-V</th>
<th>Class I-VIII</th>
<th>Class I-X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>63.70</td>
<td>84.21</td>
<td>88.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>68.97</td>
<td>90.14</td>
<td>92.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>65.66</td>
<td>90.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is observed that the incidence of drop-out is less at high school level compared to that of at primary and upper primary levels. Again, this incidence of drop-out varies from school to school. In our sample, the incidence of drop-out in School-one is less when compared to the other two schools. Several factors are responsible for the incidence of drop-outs. Some of the more important reasons for the incidence of 'drop-out' are discussed here, based on the views expressed by teachers, students, parents and the drop-outs themselves during the field survey.

a) Continuous absence for a longer period:
It was observed that students who are irregular to schools due to several reasons mentioned under 'Absenteeism', are more prone to discontinue their studies permanently. When the absence is prolonged then the chances of discontinuation of studies are also greater. The respondents mentioned 'continuous absence from school as one of the major factors for the incidence of drop out. A high school teacher at Kinchumanda opines (case P33):

"...once they go home and settle at home, it becomes very difficult for them to continue their studies. They can't cope up with the syllabus covered already and feel shy to repeat the course... they'll loose interest for good".

A drop-out student who was studying in class VIII at Araku high school, now helping her mother in running tea shop explains (case P34):

"I was not well during my class VIII. I was absent for nearly three months. My name was removed from the rolls... Next year I joined at Ashram high school, Paderu but the food did not suit me... so I discontinued".

We can observe here that the continuous absence due to some reason would force them to drop-out of the system. Teachers said that they help some of such students by condoning their absence if they are found really interested in studies. But once they are out, it requires lot of motivation to continue
education again.

b) Students who did not have a required foundation at primary and secondary levels of schooling are reported to have faced difficulty in coping up with the syllabus. It was observed that most of the drop-outs (64%) did not have a good foundation and failed at least once before they quit the school. Many teachers who are interviewed mentioned this aspect. These students, according to the teachers, could not take such a heavy syllabus because of their weak foundation during their previous schooling and run away from the school. Teachers consider them as 'dull students'. One of the teachers substantiates (case P35):

"Due to automatic promotion students gain entry into higher classes... the emphasis on quality is very less in primary and upper primary schools. They find the high school syllabus very tough and cannot cope up. Most of them are dull students and finally they discontinue".

Further, it was observed that students who are not interested in studies but are forced to continue due to parents' pressure also drop-out in the course of time.

Students studying in Ashram high schools are asked to mention the reasons for discontinuation of studies by any of their classmates. Some of them have given the reason that some 'X' discontinued because he/she found difficulty in studies. One girl who was studying class VIII and now
helping her mother in domestic chores narrates (case P36):

"I failed in class VII and passed subsequently. I used to find the syllabus tough, could not follow in the class... my parents also permitted me to discontinue".

c) Another observation is that an early exposure to sex and sexual attractions also results in diverting their attention from studies and ultimately leads to discontinuation of study. As one teacher belonging to scheduled tribe has observed (case P37):

"Most of the tribal families live in huts where there is no chance for privacy and children get exposure to sex at an early age. Sex is considered as a common aspect of life. Parents are also generally not bothered when the grown up children venture into sexual advances with the opposite sex. In the high schools girls and boys get an opportunity to meet on several occasions and the love affair starts. Some guys visit sexual workers; this is also a distracting influence. Some students had to discontinue their studies either because they marry somebody by elopement or because they could not concentrate on studies and failed in the exams. Both girls and boys show this tendency".

One of the Headmasters of Ashram high schools has shown a
bunch of love letters which were censored before they reach the right address. Some of the letters are found with erotic figurines and symbols. The language used in the letters seemed to be influenced by movie songs. Most of the letters are addressed to girls and are written by the boys studying in the same school or outside guys. The headmaster said that he would screen all letters addressed to the students, and if they are not love letters he hand them over to the students. Despite all these measures, teachers remark that the sexual attraction in these schools is more present than in any other schools.

Most of the teachers held that many students who show interest in sex had to discontinue their studies. Such distractions cause serious damage to their studies. However, none of the drop-outs interviewed revealed this reason for their discontinuation. It is understandable that they do not mention this reason openly even if it is a fact. But students studying in schools have revealed a few instances of elopement and subsequent drop-outs during informal conversations.

d) Early marriages are a customary practice of many tribal groups in this area. Additional reasons for the dropping out were the early marriages among the tribals of Agency and the lack of interest in girls' education. The practice of child marriages is still prevalent in the Agency area of Visakhapatnam. However, the number of child marriages among
the tribal communities are coming down due to awareness programmes of Government and the initiative by some educated tribals. The practice is noticed more frequently in the case of Bagatha, Konda Dora and Nooka Dora and less among Valmikis. as informed by the villager leaders and officials of ITDA. Among these tribes marriage age for girls is between 10-15 years and for boys it is between 13-18 years.

As informed by teachers and students, child marriages prevent some students to continue their education. In the case of girls, after the marriage they are forced to stop education, whereas in the case of boys, some are still continuing in schools even after marriage. Most of the girls who dropped out in class VIII and XI are mainly due to early marriage. One student studying in class X, aged 18 years, belonging to Valmiki tribe, and got married when he was in class VIII explains with embarrassment (case P38):

"My parents forced me to get married now I have a son. Once in a week I go to my village and spend some time with the family. My wife goes to the field along with my parents".

When asked whether he is regretting, he says

"There is no use in regretting now. I am happy. If I get a job after class X that'll be enough for me".

To our surprise there are around 20 boys who we are married in the high school sections of these three schools. However,
there is no married girl studying in the schools at the time of this study.

Further, there is a general feeling among the tribal people that higher education for girls would be wasteful and burdensome. Many parents interviewed, are continuing their sons and younger daughters in the schools but withdrew their grown up daughters for various reasons. As one officer has explained there are not many role models for tribal girls or for parents to get motivated for girls education. The continuation of girls beyond class VIII is observed to be doubtful in several cases. One teacher who worked for 14 years in agency area observes (case P39):

"The parents consider the girls education as a waste... most of them join their daughters here because everything is free here. Once they reach the age of 12 or 13, irrespective of the girls' performance in the class, they discontinue studies. It is only now a few parents are showing interest to continue daughters in the school upto class X".

Thus, it is observed that the early marriages and lack of interest in girls' education prompt many students to discontinue their studies.

e) After analysing the responses of drop-outs, students and teachers, it was observed that there are some 'pull factors' due to the conditions at home, which
ultimately led to discontinuation of students from the school. The 'pull factors' include poor financial status of family which requires additional earning hands, death of earning members in the family, ill-health of parents, old age of parents and the like. Many drop-outs who are interviewed have reported that one of the above mentioned factors forced them to discontinue their studies. Interestingly, all the above mentioned factors also forced them to get married immediately after they discontinued from the school. Some of them expressed that minus these factors they would have continued in school and pursued higher education. But those students who dropped out due to 'other distractions' also mention the reasons of 'family condition' for their discontinuation of studies. It is obvious that many respondents who dropped out of the system due to 'other distractions' do not reveal them as main reasons but merely mention 'family condition'.

Teachers and officials point out that the 'family condition' is not the only reason. According to them, disinterest in studies, sexual attractions, lack of encouragement from parents and continuous absence are the main reasons for drop-out.

f) There are some other factors which should be considered when we deal with the problem of drop-out. These factors mainly emerge out of the school system and the outcome of the schooling. One of the important factors under this
category is the "excessive formalism" in the schools. The formal relations between teachers and students, time bound daily routine, continuous and lengthy periods of teaching/studying with less practical exercises, monotony in school life and the subsequent boredom - all these factors lead to absenteeism and drop-out.

It is a fact that the tribal people in general like to live in freedom. They can not tolerate restrictions and confinement. As a few teachers and officials observed the tribal children do not like the formalism in the schools and due to which some students run away from school and never come back. Even while interviewing the students, on drop-out issue, it was revealed by them that some of their classmates ran away from school, but the respondents added a stereotyped factor i.e. 'family condition' as reason for the discontinuation. Teachers who have given reasons of 'other distractions', 'could not adjust', 'could not cope up with the syllabus' etc., for discontinuation of studies by the students, also added in their responses that the children like free life and are habituated to tend the cattle or play.

Further, there is a general pessimism among the tribals on the outcome of the education. When interviewed a few village leaders and parents, they expressed that there are several youth who studied upto class X and are unemployed - they are neither trained in the traditional occupations nor
got into Government employment. These students, they say, do not take small jobs as they feel shy. It appears that this feeling on the outcome of schooling also discourages many parents to discontinue their wards in the school. However, it is observed that most of the SSC passed tribal youth are provided employment by the Government and some of the drop-outs are covered under self-employment programmes.

Another important factor observed is that the stagnation after failing in class X and permanent discontinuation of studies in case of many drop-outs. Once the students fail in the class X public examination, many of them can never come out of that web. Because as private candidates it becomes all the more difficult to pass the exam. One of the drop-outs who studied at Ashram high school located at Borra, belonging to Konda Dora tribe, explains (case P40):

"I failed 10th class in Maths and English. I tried twice as a private candidate but could not pass the exam. I got married. I am now looking after the agriculture".

One project officer of non-formal education was comments (case P41):

"When they write exams as regular students, the school teachers help them to pass SSC because there is official pressure on results. They have an understanding school 'A' students get school
"B" as exam centre and vice versa. The headmasters and teachers come to an understanding. This helps the students to pass; but as private candidates it's their own responsibility once failed they never come up..."

Thus, all the above mentioned factors force the drop-outs to discontinue their studies from the school. Some of the factors are outside the school and some factors within the school; in some cases it is voluntary decision and in others it is imposed decision. However, it is observed that neither the schools nor the administration have evolved a concrete strategy to prevent the drop out rate in Ashram schools. When asked what steps should be taken up to prevent the drop-out rate, most of the teachers say that 'the parents should be motivated'. But the question is - who should motivate the parents? And again, can the problem be solved with just parental motivation? What about the conditions existing in the Ashram schools which force the students to discontinue studies?

9. Cultural differences - adjustment problems:

The field work observations and the analysis of responses reveal a significant aspect of the interactions within and outside the school setting. It is observed that there are several adjustment problems among teachers and students, students and parents and in between parents and
teachers' owing to their cultural background and differences. As discussed in the previous chapters, the interaction between teachers and the students is not harmonious. There exists a mutual distrust between these two categories. There are wide differences in the cultural background of teachers - who are mostly educated in urban areas and belong to dominant castes like Brahmin, Velama and Kapu and the students, needless to say, come from poor families with no educational background and belong to the ethnic communities live in forests (refer chapter three). Their differences in perceptions are analysed below:

A) **Teachers' perception**

1) critical about the life styles of tribal people and the students,
2) consider that the tribals have less brains and can only take physical strain,
3) students habits, distractions due to movies, sex etc., are viewed as bad habits of tribals, but do not consider that the confinement in school also a possible reason for such distractions,
4) education for tribal children and the facilities provided for them are considered as 'charity',
5) lack confidence on the character and integrity of the students,
6) critical about the environment and fear that it would make them dull and lazy like tribals,
7) blaming students for all the negative aspect of schooling like failure, absenteeism, drop-out etc.,
8) considering their job itself as punishment.

B) Students' perception
1) consider the teachers as non-cooperative and that they do not encourage them,
2) consider that the teachers do not like their cultural activities and encourage them to present only when officials visit,
3) hesitate to take teachers' help as they consider teachers would scold them,
4) believe that the teachers feel superior to them culturally, when teachers abuse,
5) lack confidence in teachers, particularly they are suspicious about wardens and feel that the wardens swallow their quota,
6) feel that they are backward and poor and aware that their communities are educationally far behind which leads to deprivation,
7) consider that they are looked down upon by the teachers with their behaviour.

The above mentioned are only a few instances to show the differences in perception of teachers and the students owing mainly to their differences in cultural background. Such divergent perceptions do not help in developing good interaction in daily school routine between teachers and
students. This is also an important issue to be considered while attempting to improve the school system.

Further there are differences in the perceptions of parents and students which of late creating inter-generational problems.

C) Parents' perception:
1) feel that the children loosing interest in their cultural way of life and slowly drifting away,
2) doubtful on students performance and other activities,
3) fear that their wards marry some body without their consent,
4) doubtful on future prospects and on the outcome of education,
5) feel that the differences would grow as the children study higher classes,
6) consider education and hostel facilities provided for their children as charity,
7) they are doubtful whether they can continue support to their children for higher education,
8) fear that their children would be misfits.

D) Students' perception:
1) their parents are not educated and do not know about education,
2) aware of parents' fear and shyness to meet the teachers,
3) parents do not scold for having any habits like
smoking, drinking etc.,
4) not so confident about parents' encouragement for higher studies,
5) feel that parents should be responsible because they have joined them in the school,
6) many of them do not believe in magic, superstitions like their parents.

The above points on the perception of parents and students would further help us to understand the widening cultural gap between parents and students, after they are admitted into schools. The widening cultural gap also determine the mutual adjustments at home. Usually, we find, inter-generational gap in perceptions due to variations in their cultural background and the exposure of younger generations to new ways of life. But in the case of tribals the inter-generational gap appears to be wide, as the parents mostly are less educated, practicing traditional occupations, having belief in magic, superstitions and being exploited in many ways. Whereas the younger generations are exposed to modern education in alien language of instruction, aspiring to take up modern occupations, being influenced by the products of civilization and heading towards assimilating themselves with the mainstream culture owing to their education. This tendency is probably created among younger generation by the mainstream curriculum followed in the school and the school setting itself. It is
not to undermine the importance of education for tribals as such but only focusing on the tensions which are likely to emerge in the tribal people with widening gap in two generations due to the modern education being imparted in the Ashram schools.

We would like to make a brief mention here of the cultural gap between parents and teachers. Needless to say that there are several differences in the cultural background, personality and the perceptions on life between these two categories. But here it is attempted to see the impact of the cultural difference between these two categories on mutual interaction as well as on performance of school.

From parents point of view, schools are considered as places of education and also places where their children would get free facilities. Since they know that they are non-literate, they expect the teachers in particular and Government in general, to look after their children 'completely'. They are not found yet, completely confident on the continuance of their children's education for higher courses and also on the outcome of school education - in terms of performance and result. It is found in their responses that they are worried on the widening cultural gap between them and their children. They are not confident yet to meet the teachers and express their inferiority complex. And finally, they are, to some extent, suspicious of the way
of life inside the school.

On the other side, the teachers feel that the tribal people have less 'brains', lazy and parasitic in nature. They view the tribal area as dull and makes one's life lazy and creates health problems. The teachers consider their job as a punishment. These perceptions and attitudes towards tribals, apart from their grievances with the bureaucracy, made them to be formalistic impersonal, routinized, less motivated, less innovative and less concerned in rendering their services and while discharging their duties in Ashram schools. The result, as we discussed earlier, is that the education being imparted to the tribal children in Ashram schools suffers from formal interactions, lack of parents' involvement, demoralised and routinized teaching staff with lessened initiative to motivate the students. Thus the wide gap in the perceptions of students, parents and teachers due to their cultural background is found as another serious problem in tribal education, more particularly in Ashram schools. Further, it is observed that there are wide differences in the native culture, culture within the school and the culture outside the school setting which is influenced by the plains people. These differences in ways of life also create confusion among students studying in Ashram schools. The life in the hamlets, from where most of the students hailed, is observed to be quite different from that of in small towns where the Ashram schools are located.
The life inside the Ashram school is found entirely different from the above two. We feel that such vast differences in ways of life in three locales where the tribal students are regularly interacting, offer them an exposure which may confuse their learning or unlearning in the process.

10. Formalism

The Ashram schools are emerged with an emphasis on non-formalism and with an orientation nearer to the tribals socio-cultural life, having an objective of integrating tribal people into the mainstream through imparting formal education to the children. It is observed that the Ashram schools are far away from their initial orientation and treatment of tribal people while imparting formal education. The Ashram schools are found to be another type of Government residential schools set up elsewhere, for other categories like Scheduled Castes or Backward Classes. One would wonder, why these residential schools are named as 'Ashram schools'. Was it because these schools are located in tribal areas? Or was it because the students admitted into these schools come from tribal ethnic background? The appearance of the school, treatment of students, patterns of interaction, rigid organizational structure, indifference of the staff towards the cause of education for tribals, fixed and rigid daily schedule, the facilities provided under
welfare programme, the formal curriculum and teaching methods, in a word, the context of education in these school, do not make us believe that they are different from any other Hostel schools.

Summary and Analysis:

The main focus of this chapter is on various problems, academic and non-academic, of education in Ashram schools and the perceptions of respondents which include students, teachers, parents, officials and drop-outs. The major problems which are experienced by the respondents and are observed by the researcher are presented under ten subsections in this chapter.

This chapter outlines the problems such as: 1) no uniformity in admission procedure, 2) weak foundation of students at primary and upper primary levels, 3) the problem with medium of instruction, 4) parental involvement, 5) lack of motivation among teachers, 6) inadequate effective monitoring and evaluation systems, 7) absenteeism, 8) incidence of drop-out, 9) adjustment problems due to cultural differences and 10) excessive formalism in Ashram schools.

Analysis of these problems and the perceptions of respondents reveal that most of these problems have emerged within the school system than outside. It is expected that the school system and the teaching staff should attempt to
marginalise the external negative factors, by evolving effective coping mechanisms. As presented in chapter five, the students studying in Ashram schools express high future aspirations and interest in joining the mainstream. Even the parents have become more aware of the importance of educational are showing interest in education. But the main hurdles for their education are seem to be emerging out of the school system itself.

The curriculum of the school, the content of education, teaching methods, inadequate facilities, medium of instruction, less motivated and routinized teaching staff, the 'charity' attitude of teachers towards education for tribals, ill-treatment by the teachers, inadequate efforts of the school to involve parents and more importantly the formalism in Ashram schools - all these factors created the academic and non-academic problems in Ashram high schools.

It is observed that 'formalism' has kept into the Ashram schools in all curricular and non-curricular aspects. One should not understand by this that 'formalism' as bad. The point is 'formalism' has been proved unsuitable for the educational development of tribals. What is required and what was originally planned for Ashram schools is that the formal education should be provided in less formal, congenial and tribal friendly atmosphere.