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शिक्षा एवं शिक्षण शास्त्र विषय की पूर्व समीक्षित शोध पत्रिका

Bridging the Gap: Educational Disparities and Challenges Faced by Tribal Communities (With Reference to Uttarakhand State)

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ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand, the state popularly known as Dev Bhoomi has a multiethnic population spread across two geo-cultural regions: Garhwal and Kumaon. The state is said to be the home of five tribal communities namely Bhotiyas, Buksas, Jaunsaris, Rajis, and Tharus, which were enlisted in the scheduled tribes by the Indian constitution back in 1967. As per government records, the maximum tribal population resides in the state's rural areas whereas a few of them are settled in urban areas. This community constitutes nearly 2.9% of the states total population with a literacy rate of 73.9% as per census 2011. The residential areas of the tribal groups make them ethnically very rich but in terms of literacy they come across many challenges to gain quality education. Despite many constitutional and legal safeguards provided by the government, the community still faces many struggles in their day-to-day life which prohibits them from connecting with the mainstream areas of life, especially education. Thus, this paper brings to the forefront various obstacles in the path of accessing quality education by the scheduled tribes of Uttarakhand. It also highlights the government policies and framework for the betterment of the tribal students of the state. Considering the importance of tribal education, the paper also outlines a few recommendations which can help in providing quality education to the marginalized section of the society.

Keywords: Uttarakhand Tribal communities, Ethnicity, Diversity, Demography, Language.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful weapon that upgrades our personality by molding us mentally, spiritually, and intellectually. It is a critical factor for personal and societal growth because when each individual is educated, the whole society gets educated. Post-independence, the government of India focused on literary missions by covering each section of the society to fulfill the assumptions of the directive principles of state policy. The constitutional provisions of India have been very insightfully designed to protect the tribal communities from all forms of injustice and exploitation. The Indian constitution enlists various educational, cultural, economic, social, and political safeguards for the scheduled tribes. Where Article 342 gives power to the President to specify which tribal communities should be considered under Scheduled tribes in a state, Article 46 mandates the state to promote the educational and economic interests of STs. Article 15(4) makes provision for reservation in educational institutions proving education to be a determining factor in the socio-economic empowerment of human society.

Uttarakhand, the northern Indian state, is home to several tribal communities who are known for their bewildering diversity in the population, habitat, modes of livelihood, languages and dialects etc. Considering the richness of their heritage and ethnicity, the centre as well as the state government have framed many schemes and constitutional safeguards to connect these people with the mainstream societal norms. In spite of the efforts made by policy makers, the tribal community continues to struggle for educational achievement compared to the general population. As per census 2011, the literacy rate of the Scheduled tribe of Uttarakhand is 73.9% (male-83.6% and female - 63.9%) which determines the possibility of improvement in female literacy. The UDISE+2024-2025 statistics and AISHE 2021-2022 report reveal that the tribal community has shown a growth in educating their children but still there is a long way to go. The government surveys and research studies prove that the tribal communities of Uttarakhand can be seen struggling with notable discrepancies in every sphere of life. So, it is where education can play a pivotal role in bringing such backward, underprivileged, and depressed classes of the society into the forefront and help in improving their conditions. Thus, this paper intends to investigate the root causes of the disparities and also propose actionable solutions to bridge the gap.

History of Tribals

The historical analysis mentions that, the term tribe was introduced in India by the colonial rulers, whereas "Adivasi" is a term coined in the 1930s by some political activists for indigenous people living in naturally isolated regions which are generally hilly and mountains. The term "tribe" has administrative and legal connotations in India. The word 'tribe' was originally used by British census officers, who also served as anthropologists, to define social categories in India between the years 1881 and 1931. The term 'backward tribe' was first used in the Government of India Act 1935. The Indian Constitution has retained the terminology; however, it has made a slight

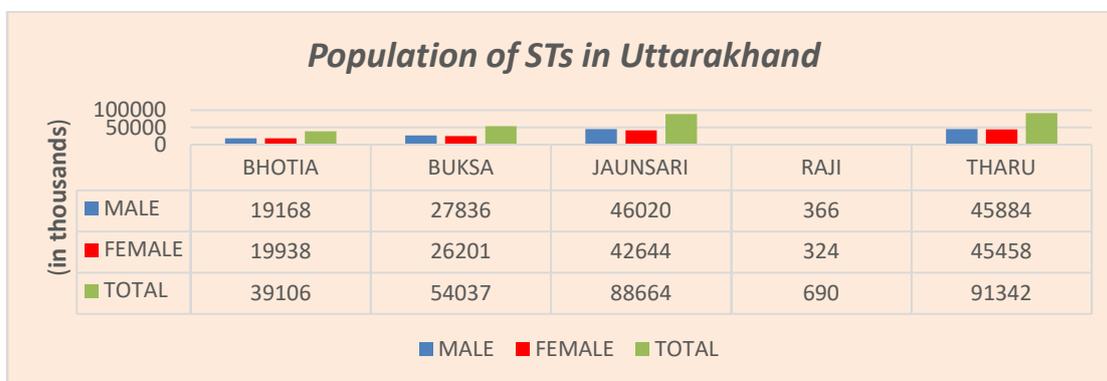
modification by substituting schedule for backward (Negi, 2024). The previous studies indicate that officially the indigenous people of India were designated as Scheduled Tribes (STs) and that the term “Depressed Classes” was also used for them during British reign in the Indian subcontinent. But in the modern literature we often find the term “Adivasis” referred to the Scheduled Tribes.

Demography of Scheduled Tribes of Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand, located in the foothills of the Himalayas is a habitat for the notable ethnic group including Bhotias, Buksas, Jaunsaris, Rajis, and Tharus. According to some historians, the tribal communities of Uttarakhand are the earliest settlers of the region, having their distinctive culture and traditional ways of life. These communities are concentrated in the hilly and rural areas of the state and their language is mostly influenced by Hindi and Nepali. The five tribal communities of Uttarakhand have been scheduled in the Indian constitution back in 1967 (The Constitution- Uttar Pradesh-Scheduled Tribes Order, 1967 –C.0.78-24.06.1967). According to the Census of India 2011, this community constitutes 2.9% of the state’s total population and 0.3% of the ST population of India, which numerically counts to 2, 91,903 people. The report also illustrates that ST population residing in rural areas (264819), is more than the population residing in urban areas (27084).

All the tribal groups have some distinct features which make them easily noticeable and identifiable from other population. The Bhotiyas are the semi nomadic pastoralists whereas the Buxas, the Jaunsaris and the Tharus are agriculturalists and the Rajis are basically gatherers and hunters. These tribes are scattered all over the state but are mainly concentrated in the Jaunsar-Bawar areas of Dehradun district and the hilly areas of Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Uttarkashi, Uddham Singh Nagar districts. As per the available literature, Bhotiyas, Buxas, Rajis and Tharus depict the mongoloid racial characteristics in them while Jaunsaris have their roots in Mediterranean race. Buksas and Rajis are also enlisted in Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) due to their lagging in major aspects of life.

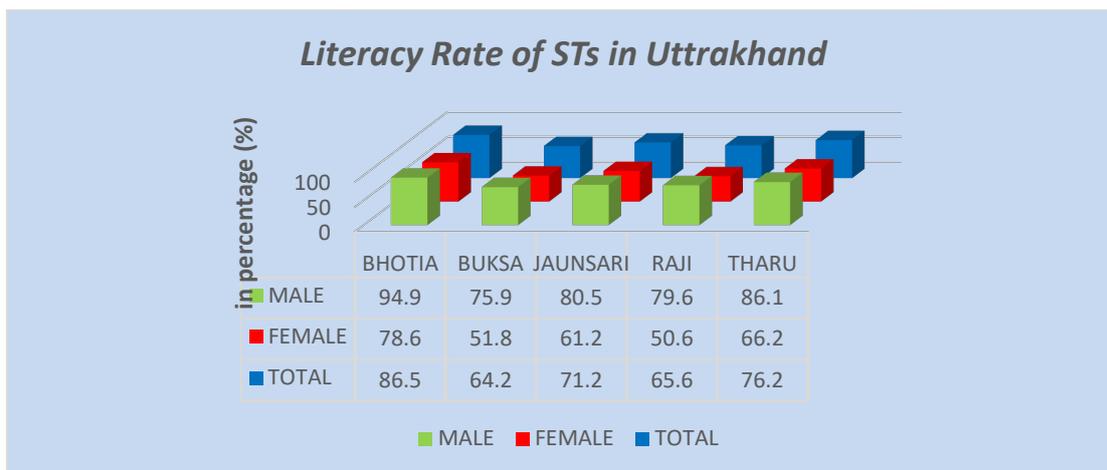
Fig. 1. Demographic status of Scheduled Tribes of Uttarakhand.



Source:-Census 2011, Office of the Registrar General, India.

The above figure clearly depicts that Tharu and Raji tribes contribute to the maximum (91342) and minimum (690) tribal population of the state. It also shows that maximum male population is of the Jaunsari tribes (46020) while Raji males (366) are the least in terms of population. Also, Tharu females (45458) and Raji females (324) compose the maximum and minimum female population of the state.

Fig. 2. Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes of Uttarakhand



Source:- (Census 2011), Statistical Profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2013.

The figure (2) illustrates that Bhotia tribe shows the maximum literacy rate (86.5%) while Buksa are the least literate (64.2%). The graph also proves that the males (94.9%) and the females (78.6%) of Bhotia tribe are most literate ones while Buksa male (75.9%) and Raji females (50.6%) account for least literacy rates of the state.

Fig. 3 (a) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by level of education of Uttarakhand Scheduled Tribes

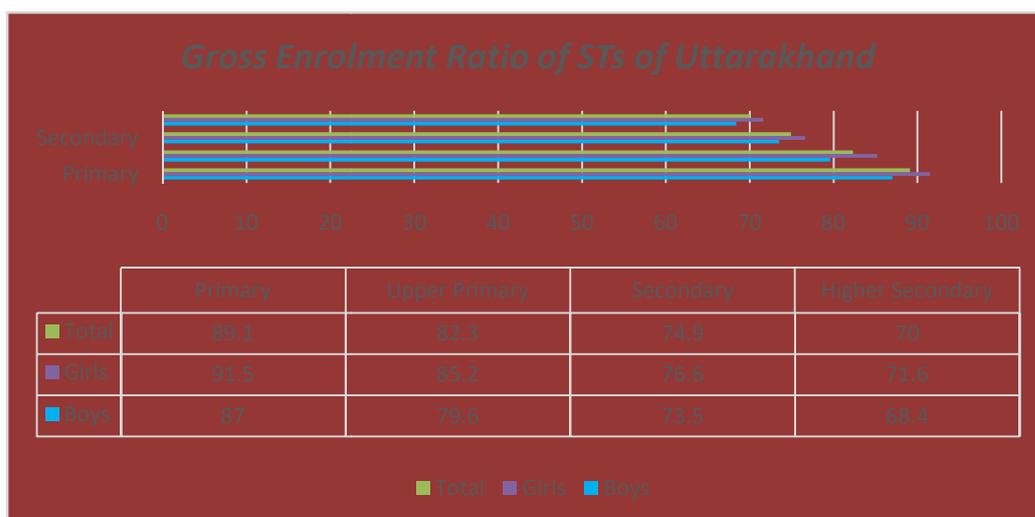
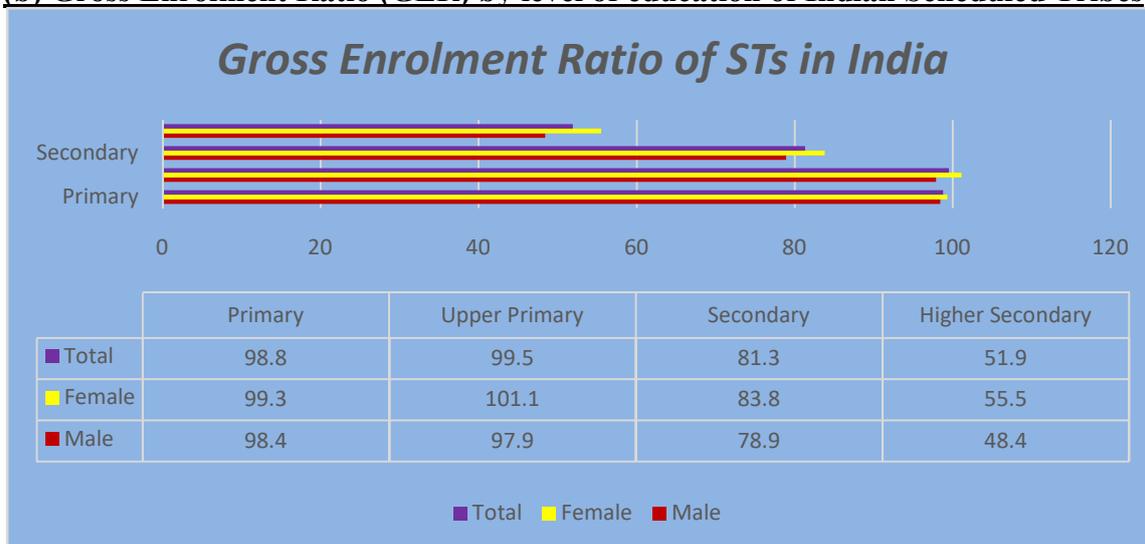


Fig. 3

(b) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) by level of education of Indian Scheduled Tribes



Source:- UDISE + 2024-25

Figure 3(a) and Figure 3 (b) depicts the gross enrolment ratio of the STs of Utrkhand and All India. From the graphs it can be clearly seen that the GER of Utrkhand STs (Primary =89.1, Upper Primary=82.3, Secondary=74) is less that GER of India’s STs (Primary = 98.8, Upper Primary = 99.5, Secondary = 81.3) at these three educational levels. Further, the GER of females at all educational levels (Primary =91.5, Upper primary = 85.2, Secondary= 76.6, Higher secondary= 71.6) is better than GER of males (Primary = 87.0, Upper Primary = 79.6, Secondary = 73.5 and Higher Secondary =68.4) of Uttarakhand.

Fig. 4 (a) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (18-23yrs) of Utrkhand

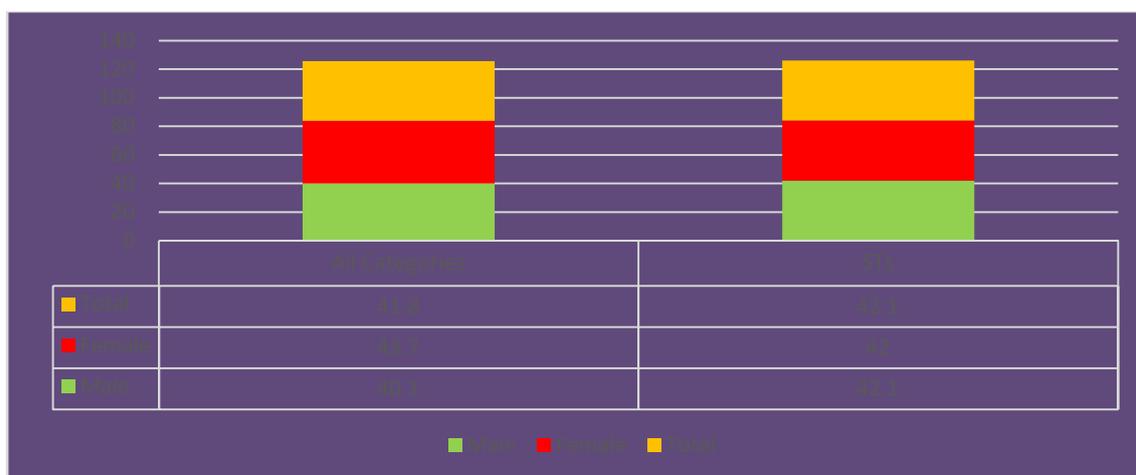
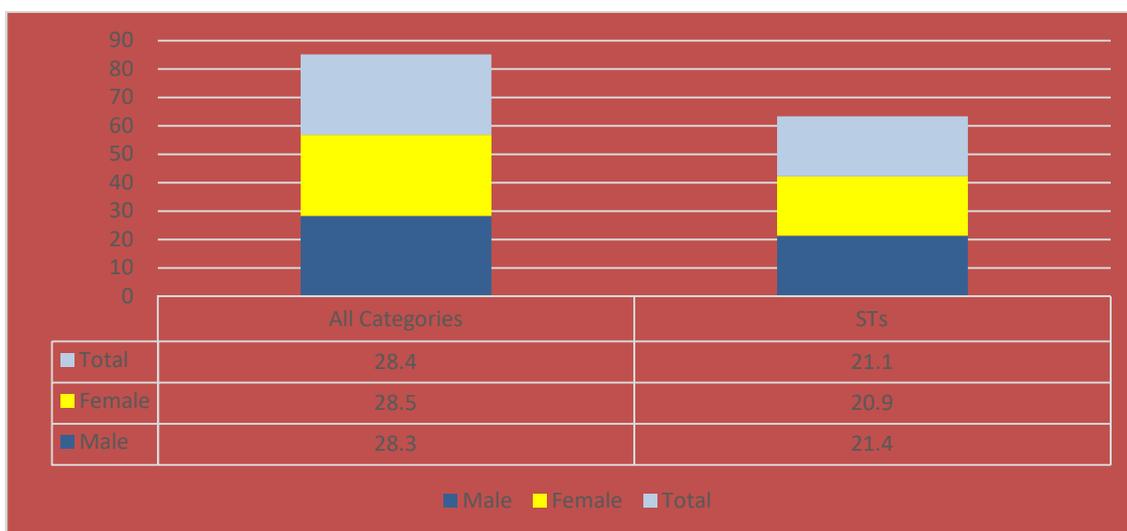


Fig. 4 (b) Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (18-23yrs) of India

Source:- AISHE 2021-2022

From the above figure, 4 (a) and 4 (b) it is seen that the GER of male STs of Uttarakhand (42.1) is more than males of STs in India (21.4), and GER of Uttarakhand female STs (42.0) is more than ST females of India (20.9). It is also observed that there is no considerable difference in the GER of male (42.1) and female (42.0) of Uttarakhand STs. The graph proves that GER of ST females (42.0) of Uttarakhand is less than the GER of all the females (43.7) of Uttarakhand, whereas ST male (42.1) Uttarakhand show more value than males (40.1) of the state.

CHALLENGES FACED BY TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN EDUCATION

Historically the tribal communities have had limited access to education due to cultural isolation and systematic negligence. The colonial era aggravated this problem by designing the formal education systems without considering the tribal contexts. Although many policies were framed post-independence by the government of India which promised for an inclusiveness in every sphere of life but often fell short in implementation. The New Education Policy 2020 clearly specifies that children from scheduled tribes face discriminations at various levels due to geographical and historical factors. It also mentions that children belonging to tribal communities often find their school education to be insignificant both academically and culturally.

The challenges faced by scheduled tribe students of Uttarakhand in the path of education are as follows:

Language and cultural barriers:

Tribal children often speak their native language whereas for study instructions the official or provincial dialects are used which are not perceived by the students at an essential level. Also, the curricula of mainstream education do not align with the

cultural practices and linguistic contexts of tribal people which often makes tribal children feel alienated from the educational system. Furthermore, the education system that do not reflect tribal ethnicity can make schooling irrelevant to these students.

Gender disparities:

Girls belonging to tribal communities confront with additional challenges in the path of access to education due to numerous societal norms. Empirical evidences from the field highlights the lack of parental support, financial problem and household responsibilities to be major factors limiting the access of females to education.

Poor educational infrastructure:

This is a significant barrier that hampers the basic right of the tribal children from being educated. Since tribal schools are located in far flung areas, they lack basic amenities like drinking water and toilets. The lack of basic schooling provisions and the required infrastructure (adequate classrooms, qualified teachers, study materials) aggravates the already existing education gap among scheduled tribes.

Geographical isolation:

The rough, bumpy and uneven locations of Uttarakhand as well as natural disasters like landslides make the establishment and maintenance of educational structure and transportation services a challenging task. It worsens the access to schools because most of the tribal children have to pass through hazardous conditions to gain education, thus resulting in less enrolments and more dropouts.

Socio-economic barriers:

Poverty creates a big hindrance in many families who are unable to afford educational expenses. Most of the families find it difficult to satisfy their fundamental requirements compelling children to contribute to household income through traditional economic activities, such as agriculture and labour.

Uneducated parents:

The illiteracy of the parents and their unawareness towards the importance of education plays a major role in less enrollment of the tribal students. The earlier people find it unworthy to be educated, because of their heritage which promises them a good economic status earned through their traditional works.

Discrimination and biasness:

Tribal students may face bullying and exploitation from their peer group leading to a hostile learning environment. This behavior or biasness can lower the self-esteem and academic performance of the tribal children discouraging them from continuing their basic education.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Indigenous community or the scheduled tribes of Uttarakhand face numerous challenges in accessing quality education. With the support of various education schemes, the central as well as the state government aims to unlock the potential of these communities. Key government schemes running in the state for providing equal opportunities to empower indigenous students to achieve academic success includes:

Pre- matric scholarship scheme:

The scheme provides financial assistance to the scheduled tribe students studying in class 9 and 10. It covers expenses such as study materials and tuition fee etc for the students who fit under certain eligibility criteria.

Post- matric scholarship scheme:

The scheme supports all those ST students who want to pursue their studies beyond class 10th. It covers tuition fees as well as maintenance allowance only for those ST students who fulfill the criteria of the scheme.

Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS):

The meritorious students belonging to scheduled tribes of Uttarakhand can take admissions in such schools. At present 4 EMRS are being operated in the state out of which, 2 are in Dehradun and 2 in Uddham Singh Nagar districts. These schools focus in holistic development of a child and offer free education from class 6 to 12.

Hostels:

For the upliftment and educational development of scheduled tribe students, the state at present is running girls hostel under the scheme 'Kasturba Gandhi Residential Girls' Hostel. Also recently Prime Minister Modi laid the foundation stones for the construction of 3 hostels under the Dharti Aaba Tribal Village Excellence campaign at Mana Ghingran in Chamoli, Kwansi in Dehradun and Jhankhat of Uddham Singh Nagar.

ITI institutions:

To enhance the skills of scheduled tribe unemployed youth, the state government is operating 3 ITI institutes. The 2 institutes are situated in Goolarbhoj and Khatima tehsils of Uddham Singh Nagar and 1 in Chakrata tehsil of Dehradun. The institutions train their students in professions like electrician, diesel and motor mechanic, welder, suing, cutting, etc.

Coaching for competitive exams:

Coaching cum Guidance Centre which have been established under Directorate of Training & Employment, Uttarakhand, provides free coaching and free training in typing and shorthand to the candidates belonging to Scheduled Tribe students to enhance their skills and prepare them for job market. At present, the CCGC being run in

the state are: CCGC Almora, Bageshwar, Chamoli, Champawat, Dharchula, Dineshpur, Haldwani, Haridwar, Kotdwar, Pithoragarh, Rudraprayag, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun.

Nishulk Ganavesh Yojana

This is a scheme under Samagra Siksha Programme which aims to provide free uniform to all the girls and boys belonging to Scheduled Tribes studying in Classes 1 to 8 of government and government aided schools.

Uttarakhand Tribal Sub-plan:

Uttarakhand Scheduled Castes Sub-plan and Tribal Sub-Plan (planning, allocation and utilization) act, 2013 was framed to ensure the targeted allocation of funds for the development of scheduled tribes. This program covers many areas and one of them is on improving educational infrastructure, providing scholarships etc. to bridge the gap between tribal and other communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educational challenges faced by scheduled tribe students can be solved out through the help of the following recommendations:

Improve access and quality:

It must be ensured by the state government and local authorities that ST students take full advantage of the Centrally sponsored and Central sector schemes like Pre metric, post-metric scholarships, National Fellowship and Scholarship for Higher education of ST students and Scholarship to the ST Students for studies abroad. Also the infrastructural requirements should not be neglected and a proper investment in building and maintaining schools in tribal areas should be made. The schools should be furnished with all the modern facilities which could attract the students for education and increase the enrolment rate.

Establishment of residential schools:

State Government should establish more residential schools and colleges and also work for co-education school in tribal areas to connect them with the mainstream of the society. This will also give fair chances to female students to get educated in a safe environment. It must be taken into account that the establishment of EMRS (Eklavya Model Residential Schools), funded by central government under Article 275(1) of the Constitution should be properly utilized and that the tribal students get benefit from it.

Incorporate local languages:

The local languages should be incorporated at the primary level to improve learning and comprehension. The curricula that incorporate cultural contexts and tribal languages should be developed. Teaching and learning in local languages will develop the interests

of the students for the education. Article 350 which speaks about giving instruction in mother tongue should be implemented properly.

Recruitment and training of teachers:

The recruitment of local teachers who have a good understanding of tribal culture should be encouraged and implemented. This will be beneficial for both the students and the teachers as extra work would not be done to understand each other. The teachers working in tribal schools should be trained at regular intervals to make them well-versed in the languages and cultures of the tribal communities. This would not only help the teachers but also the students in their exchange of thoughts and communication.

Develop a monitoring system:

The state government should create a strong monitoring system that can ensure the effective implementation of the programs meant for scheduled tribe students. The monitoring system should also ensure the protection of these students from various kinds of social injustice and exploitation.

Promote cultural preservation:

The Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) works under the centrally sponsored scheme "Support to Tribal Research Institutes" which aims to strengthen these institutes in their research and documentation needs. The funds are allotted to these institutes for the promotion of their unique cultural heritage through tourism and festivals. Therefore it must be ensured that the funds allotted to such institutes are being utilized for the upgradation of tribal communities through regular records.

Conduct awareness campaigns:

Programs such as street drama can create a massive impact regarding the upliftment of tribal communities and hence, they must be encouraged by local governments. Just like medical and other camps being run in the country, educational awareness campaigns should be organized at a large scale to make the suffering community aware of their fundamental rights.

Trust of tribal parents:

The central government provides grants to different NGOs being run in the state through online ne application portal. Therefore with the help of such organizations, the state government can make efforts in contacting the tribal parents and making them aware of various schemes being run in the state for their welfare and upliftment without harming them.

Community involvement:

Community participation should be encouraged in school management to ensure responsibility and cultural relevance. The tribal parents should be given a fair chance to speak up for their needs and upliftment. The tribal students should actively participate in the ongoing programs at all educational levels to promote their traditions and culture.

CONCLUSION

This research paper aspires to provide an encompassing review of the educational challenges faced by tribal communities in the state of Uttarakhand. It also highlights the background, demography, educational status, and government initiatives for improving tribal education. Although the educational development of scheduled tribes of Uttarakhand has come a long way, but still some loopholes exist which must be worked upon to empower this community. One and all must understand that transformation is not an easy process, especially in the case of the marginalized section, so we have to work very diligently and patiently in this field. The policymakers should also be aware that we cannot compel them to opt for modern reforms at the cost of losing the ethnicity for which they are known.

Since the future of the nation depends on the shoulders of the youth, every individual must participate in this initiative. Addressing the causes of low literacy rates and the difficulties tribal students face while mingling with other communities can help them become more confident and vocal about their needs and rights.

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