

## ASHRAMSHALA'S FOR TRIBAL EDUCATION – A STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

Ashramshalas are a major tool of the government to address the educational concern of the tribal students. They are educational entities which are exclusively for the education of the tribal children and are located in tribal-density populations. They intend to cater to the special cultural and educational needs of the tribes. The deficiencies in tribal education, in the form of ashramshala's, are due to the mainstream society following a school-education model that caters only to the urban mainstream culture, not matching the xenocentric tribal culture. The government and private aided patronage school systems with their infrastructure and academics militate and alienate the tribal children from their own culture, occupational patterns, language and identity. Ashram schools' overall academic and administrative quality; Access and Participation; Enrollment; Retention; Language of Instruction; Curriculum Content; Teachers and Pedagogy; Community Participation and Ownership are some of the important issues that need to be addressed for improvement in tribal children's education. A comparative study of the academic performance of tenth standard students in government and private aided schools reveals that a lot needs to be done by the government, mainstream society and parents to raise the standards of tribal education overall.

**Key Words** – *Ashrams alas; tribal education; access; language of instruction; curriculum*

### **Genesis of the study**

The tribal's are the most socio-educationally isolated, neglected and alienated communities of our society. Surviving on forest produce and moving about in urban areas doing menial jobs or selling small utility products. Most tribal's live in forest areas, and so not exposed to urban culture, others are mobile so not able to reside permanently and settle for prosperity. Their xenocentric cultural identity and general alienation by the urban and rural elites, drives them into isolation from the mainstream. In the process the biggest casualty is education.

Ashramshalas are a major tool of the government to address the educational concern of the tribal students. They are educational entities which are exclusively for the education of the tribal children and are located in tribal-density populations. They intend to cater to the special cultural and educational needs of the tribes. This study studies the comparative educational performance of the ashramshala's run by government agencies directly and by private aided ashramshala's.

### **1.3 Need of Research Study of the Scheduled Tribes (STs)**

The scheduled tribes are at the bottom of the socio-economic and educational ladder of development in our society the literacy levels of the tribes people are the lowest in the society. The registration attendance and school drop-out rates of the tribal children are the worst in the society.

All these deficient parameters are due to the mainstream society following a school-education model that caters only to the urban mainstream culture, not matching the xenocentric tribal culture. Such patronage school systems with their infrastructure and academics, militates and alienates the tribal children from their own culture, occupational patterns, language and identity. This is no justice, even to the Constitution of India, which gives the fundamental rights of protection and preservation of language, culture and religion to all communities of the society.

And further, with this mismatched school system our tribal children shall never pass through their education, leading to youth, who are unemployed or underemployed and those who may hurt the law, order and peace of our society.

The ashramshala's are run by the government agencies under Tribal sub-plan and other ashramshala's are run by private aided trusts. This study goes into the comparative study of these ashramshala's based on the academic performance of the tenth standard students in both types of schools. The government administrative functioning and educational concern for tribal education vis-à-vis private efficiency and profit concerns may show their characters in this comparative study.

This grim situation warrants a research project to find the tribal socio-educational status and suggest changes to the traditional school system to suit the culture and identity of the tribal.

### **Present Educational Status of STs:**

Between 1961 and 2001, the literacy rate of STs increased 5.32 times, while that of total population increased 2.69 times. However, the gap between the literacy rates of STs and of the general population

continued during the three decades between 1971 and 2001 almost at the same level of 17.70% and above, but with marginal variations.

**I) Drop-out Rates, 2004-05 – ST (Provisional)**

Year	Sex	Classes I to V			Classes I to VIII			Classes I to X		
		All	ST	Gap	All	ST	Gap	All	ST	Gap
2004-05	Boys	31.8	42.6	(-)10.7	50.4	65.0	(-)14.6	60.4	77.8	(-)17.4
	Girls	25.4	42.0	(-)16.6	51.3	67.1	(-)15.8	63.9	80.7	(-)16.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>(-)13.3</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>(-)15.1</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>79.0</b>	<b>(-)17.1</b>

*Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2004-05 of India, MHRD.*

The dropout rate is a critical indicator reflecting lack of educational development and inability of a given social group to complete a specific level of education. In case of tribal, dropout rates are still very high 42.3% in classes I to V; 65.9% in classes I to VIII; and 79.0% in classes I to X in 2004-05.

About 4.34 Lakh ST students were studying at different levels of higher education as on 30 September, 2004.

**Design of Study**

**Study Area**

The government – run and government aided Ashramshala’s constitute the universe of this research project.

Four Ashramshala's including two government-aided and two run by private trust but aided by government have been selected for this study.

### **Sample**

The sample consists of Ashramshalas, students and teachers. Four Ashramshalas were selected as sample for study. Fifteen teachers were selected. Thirty parents, a couple from each school, were selected for study. And total of One hundred and twenty one students, including 47 girls and 74 boys complete the sample size of our research study.

The schools have been selected from Junnar, Khed and Ambegaon tehsils of district Pune. The schools were selected on the basis of tribal population of the taluka.

### **Data Collection**

Both primary as well as secondary data were collected. The primary data was collected by the field associate after orientation regarding data collection. The main activities included fieldwork and the collection of all relevant information.

### **Tools and Techniques**

The required information was collected through the use of types of schedules meant for parents, teachers and students.

The tools of data collection included teachers' schedule, student schedule and parents' schedule.

### Analysis of Data

The data thus collected was qualitative and quantitative. Coding of the data was done to facilitate data entry. All the data was analyzed and tables were prepared. Observed data was carefully edited before being incorporated in the report.

#### Data Analysis

The Research sample for the Ashram Schools study includes teachers, students and parents.

We shall consider the main findings of the academic performance of the tenth standard students of the government run ashramshala students and the students of the private aided schools.

ii) Whether Std. 10 students could name their subjects- Govt and Private Aided Ashram Schools

Sr. No.	Kind of School	Subject taught in the school	Able to tell / not tell	Number	% Age
1	Govt.	Marathi, Hindi, English, Maths / Geometry, Sciences, 1,2 History-Civics, Geography / Economics, Social Service, Physical Education, Value Education, General Knowledge	Could tell	57	47.10
			Could not tell same	1	0.82

			subjects		
2	Private Aided	Marathi, Hindi, English, Maths / Geometry, Sciences, 1,2 History-Civics, Geography / Economics, Social Service, Physical Education, Value Education, General Knowledge	Could tell	56	46.29
			Could not tell same subjects	7	5.79
		Total		121	100

Seven students from private aided ashram school could not tell all subjects. This is indeed a sad reflection on the private aided Ashram Schools.

**iii) Is Vocational Education given to Standard 10 student of Govt and Private Aided Ashram Schools**

Ren o.	Kind of School	Name of Vocational Education	Yes / No	Number	% Age
1	Govt.	No vocational education given	Yes	0	0.00
			No	58	47.93
2	Private Aided	Computer , General Knowledge	Yes	32	26.45

	No Vocational Education given	No.	31	25.62
	Total		121	100

The private aided Ashram Schools are catering to the students with computer courses and general knowledge and are better than the govt. Ashram Schools.

38 percent students in Govt. Schools do not understand the teachers language and teaching and it is worse off with 60 per cent in private schools.

Over 90 percent of the students in both the Govt. and Private aided schools have demanded vocational courses such as Computer, General knowledge, Sports, Agriculture, Industrial Training, Yoga, Soil analysis, Music, Painting etc.

Over 44 percent in Govt. and 47 percent students in private aided Ashram schools allege that they get socially sensitive treatment from the teachers and other staff. This is a very serious issue and demands halt of isolated tribal schools and creation of cosmopolitan schools.

Infrastructure wise both the Govt. and Private aided Ashram Schools have a more than satisfactory position in case of class-rooms, play ground, school building, seating facility, drinking water, toilet for boys and girls, library, books, annual work plan, health camp, annual budget and learning devices are available in all schools of the government and private aided.



**iv) The 1999 to 2004 SSC (10<sup>th</sup> Std.) results of all the four schools of Govt. ( Two ) and Private aided (Two ) of Ashram Schools**

Sr.No.	Year	Examinees			Number Passed			% age
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	1999-2000	21	8	29	7	3	10	37.3
2	1999-2000	15	13	28	11	5	16	57.4
3	1999-2000	28	11	39	12	2	14	35.39
4	1999-2000	23	3	26	6	1	7	26.92

Sr.No.	Year	Examinees			Number Passed			% age
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	2000-2001	10	12	22	5	5	10	44.55
2	2000-2001	16	15	31	12	12	24	77.41
3	2000-2001	22	8	30	6	1	7	23.33
4	2000-2001	25	9	34	11	3	14	41.17

Sr.No.	Year	Examinees			Number Passed			% age
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	2001-2002	14	17	31	12	5	17	80.55
2	2001-2002	16	10	26	16	10	26	100
3	2001-2002	14	9	23	12	2	14	60.86

4	2001-2002	17	7	24	14	6	20	83.33
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Sr.No.	Year	Examinees			Number Passed			% age
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	2002-2003	14	10	24	14	10	24	100
2	2002-2003	21	7	28	21	7	28	100
3	2002-2003	15	8	23	10	3	13	56.42
4	2002-2003	15	12	27	15	11	26	93.29

Sr.No.	Year	Examinees			Number Passed			% age
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
1	2003-2004	13	11	24	12	10	22	91.66
2	2003-2004	24	14	38	24	14	38	100
3	2003-2004	23	8	31	10	4	14	53.84
4	2003-2004	20	10	30	10	6	16	53.33

The Govt. schools have shown extra ordinary improvement in their SSC results in the last three years of the period 1999 to 2004. This could be due to drastic improvement in the administration, academics and teaching quality or could also be due to mass copying.

These results are open for interpretation. The private aided Ashram Schools have shown steady improvement and consistency. But still it can be said that seeing the overall infrastructure and academic

similarities between the Govt. run and private aided Ashram Schools both perform badly and need structural and quantity changes.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The government of Maharashtra has set up Ashram schools to cater primarily the educational needs of the tribal children. The state has come up with Ashram schools for tribal children with the same structure and content of school in the urban and rural areas. Only the name Ashram school and purpose for tribal children are different not much account of the huge socio-cultural and educational difference between the tribal and other communities is taken care of. The pedagogy is the same as in the process of role-learning and reproducing to be marked in a most dispiriting hierarchical quantification. So there are internal and external factors that affect tribal children's education. The internal factors are intrinsic to the structure of the education system, and can be addressed through appropriate programs. External factors lie outside the education system and are the problems a program, attempts to combat.

We shall focus on major issues of the various aspects of tribal education.

#### **1) Ashram schools or tribal schools.**

The first aspect of an Ashram schools or a Tribal school is if being set-up specifically or primarily to cater to the education of tribal students only. This is a major poser, should the tribal students be educated in isolated tribal peer groups? Or should they be made to study with a peer group of rural and urban culture mix? This isolator tribal education policy of ours reeks of patronage and considers that we do not have anything to learn from the tribals' lifestyle. This seems to be misplaced and wrong. The Maharashtra State

Government has recently decided to increase the quota of non-tribal children to fifty percent in tribal schools.

They want tribal children exposed to urban peer groups and urban life-style. But this is only half the objectives. We, the urban mainstream also need to realize that we to have something to learn from the tribal culture. The importance of primary life-sustenance based on sustainable development, gender-parity, peaceful and humane community living and an overall natural and satisfactory life-style.

The tribal students shall also be exposed to urban life-styles and comforts, technology, tools and gadgets with quality human resources and infrastructure. They should be exposed to the best i.e. urban and developed and in return the urban students should be exposed to the best tribal practices of natural, sustainable and humane living. All this if we have mixed tribal – rural and urban residential schools shall give us a model tribal school protecting their cultural needs and identity and also exposing them to advanced education.

- 2) The Ashram schools are of two types one, that are run directly by the government, under the integrated tribal development programme, and second, that are run by private educational trusts, but fully funded by the government. Both face the same maladies of funding administrative lacunae, administrative and school management corruption, tardy or mismanaged school infrastructure, demoralized and under-trained teachers. And to top if all the curriculum contents that are most inappropriate to tribal culture and employability and teachers who are most disinterested in getting transferred to tribal school postings.

Running these tribal schools with the best tribal interest in heart will need a real political and administrative will of the government. A truly concerned education and tribal affairs minister are prime necessities for the tribal education system to run top-down in a very effective and quality manner.

The basic problem with tribal Ashram schools is that they are given to politicians or their relatives as baksheesh of political power to milk for financial gains. The rut starts here. These politicians or government bureaucrats drain these tribal educational institutions of finances and also misuse the tribal school personnel.

The other problem is that there is accountability but which can be managed by the wrong doers. The tribal's are a poor voiceless lot who are basically not as interested in the school-education dished-out, as it is quite futile for their culture and employability. They are not united, are leaderless and vulnerable to deceit and fallacy. Without any concerted protests, except from the non-government organizations working for tribal education, or media people making news, the tribal education sector is hurtling worse than the mainstream education towards mediocrity or worse towards mal-utility. All this also has to do with tribal leadership being manipulated and bought-over by mainstream political parties losing out tribal interest in the true sense.

**3) Access and Participation** – Tribal communities normally reside in interior, under-developed and inaccessible areas. Demographically tribal habitations are small in size, scattered and sparsely populated. Because of these problems most of the villages lack basic facilities like transport, communication and basic amenities. In view of the

difficult terrain geographical and ecological barriers in tribal areas the school distance of more than half a kilometer is a difficult proposition for young children to attend school. The distance of one kilometer and above between the school and habitation means that practically these habitations and inhabitants lack access to primary schools given the tribal context.

4) **Enrollment** – is dependent on factors such as availability of school, its regular functioning, regularity of teachers and willingness of parents, their perception of the value of education and their capacity. When compared to others the participation of tribal children in education is very low. However, some of the recent interventions and initiatives like mid-day meal scheme, self-help woman groups, developing partnership between school and village communities in school management have helped in raising awareness levels among tribal's to realize the importance of education.

5) **Retention** – Enrollment has no meaning unless students are retained in the system for prescribed number of years to complete the primary level of education. However, in tribal areas high levels of absenteeism, large scale failure in yearend assessment and high drop-out rate contribute to slow progress of education among tribal's.

6) **Language of Instruction** – State or Tribal Language – As a child's first exposure to education, there is debate around the language used for instruction and communication. Tribal children have limited contact with the state language, and tend to speak in their own local dialect. Government schools use the state language for teaching and communication which is most often not familiar to a tribal child at the pre-primary and primary levels. They are thus

unable to fully comprehend classroom teaching and activities, read in the state language or understand the text properly.

7) **Curriculum Content** – Methods and Materials – Curriculum and content of school syllabus is created by the mainstream urban elites in line with the culture, economy and polity of the mainstream society. This generally does not match with the tribal culture and economy. This is a serious difference leading to disinterest and ultimate drop-out of tribal children from the schooling process.

8) **Teachers and Pedagogy** – The teachers are generally alien to tribal culture and dialect. Training them and motivating them to learn the tribal dialects will go a long way in tribal school education.

9) **Community Participation and Ownership** – Ownership by the community is one of the most complex issues. Often, despite homogeneity, communities are marked by fragmentation and power structures thereby complicating institutional design.

Achieving significant scale and impact in the tribal areas is often problematic and can only be achieved through strong community involvement and improving the culture for education. Incentives for tribal education – Given that a significant section of the tribal population continues to live in abject poverty and struggles to feed, clothe and education their children, the issue of incentives to increase school attendance has been debated over time. Incentives – whether individual or to the school – may be necessary and useful in some situations (especially for first generation learners) but are not sufficient in themselves to enhance children's access to quality education.

**External Factors –**

- 1) **Gender bias** – Tribal communities are more likely to educate boys than girls due to social and economic factors exacerbating this inequality. In many tribal communities parents are minimal importance to girls' education due to economic and social limitations, send them to school only intermittently, or keep the girls sheltered from the outside world. Most frequently, girls apart from taking part in agricultural activities and collection of forest products are engaged in sibling care. They are often forcibly pulled out of schools, and become child laborers, never to return to education.
- 2) **Migration** – Seasonal migration has become a reality in many parts of the country, caused by relentless drought and environmental degradation, and is particularly common in several tribal areas. It has been observed that migrant populations (comprising mainly the landless poor, who have hardly any other assets, skills or education) are overwhelmingly from tribal communities. As a result, education of migrant children in tribal areas becomes a huge hurdle, as a large number of poor rural families are forced to migrate out of their villages for several months every year in search of work, merely to survive. Children tend to accompany their parents, drop-out of school and are forced into hard labor at work sites.
- 3) **Dual Administration System** – One of the major constraints of tribal education at planning level is the adoption of dual system of administration. The tribal welfare department deals with tribal life



and culture and administers the development work at the local level including education. On the other hand the education department is the sole authority for planning of education development at the state level. They formulate implementation guidelines and instructions regarding curriculum, textbook, teacher recruitment, transfer policies and so on. In this, the education department tends to form uniform educational policies for the whole State with little consideration for local context and festivals of the tribal. This lack of sensitivity to the problems and the failure in understanding the tribal social reality coupled with the faulty selection and appointment of tribal teachers in tribal areas have resulted in poor performance and teacher absenteeism among tribal schools and has stunted educational development among the tribal.

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