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**SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGES OF TRIBAL  
COMMUNITY IN NASHIK DISTRICT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The standard variety of Marathi language is not spoken by all the people of the state of Maharashtra. It is usually the language spoken by majority of the people in Maharashtra. It is also intelligible to those who speak non-standard variety of Marathi. But the variety of Marathi spoken by many tribal people differs largely from the standard variety in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Although the tribal people understand the standard variety of Marathi language, they are not competent and comfortable enough to use it effectively for the educational purposes. So the major research problem of the present study is that the tribal people are not deficient in Marathi language but they have mastered a different variety which is different from the variety which used in education. This results in marginal participation of tribal students in educational process. The students keep themselves aloof from the class room interactions due to their inferiority complex about the variety of language they speak. It leads to their isolation from classroom activities, discussion and debates. As a result they do not acquire the skills required in actual life and consequently lose the opportunities of social and economic mobility. The modification of linguistic policy in education and acceptance of their variety in at least a few domains of educational process can enhance their participation in learning process which may lead to academic, social and economic growth of tribal students.

**Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching**

Sociolinguistics is defined as 'the study of language in relation to society', implying (intentionally) that sociolinguistics is part of the study of language. Thus, the value of sociolinguistics is the light which it throws on the nature of language in general, or on the characteristics of some particular language. The basic premise of sociolinguistics is that language is variable and ever-changing. As a result, language is not uniform or constant. Rather, it is varied and inconsistent for both the individual user and within and among groups of speakers who use the same language. People adjust the way they talk to their social situation. An individual, for instance, will speak differently to a child than he or she will to their college professor. This socio-situational variation is sometimes called register and depends not only on the occasion and relationship between the participants, but also on the participants' region, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, and gender.

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**Standard Language**

It is probably fair to say that the only kind of variety which would count as a 'proper language' (in the second sense of 'language') is a standard language. Standard languages are interesting in as much as they have a rather special relation to society - one which is quite abnormal when seen against the context of the tens (or hundreds?) of thousands of years during which language has been used. Whereas one thinks of normal language development as taking place in a rather haphazard way, largely below the threshold of consciousness of the speakers, standard languages are the result of a direct and deliberate intervention by society. This intervention, called 'standardisation', produces a standard language where before there were just 'dialects' (in the second sense, i.e. non-standard varieties).

**Tribal Communities in India**

In a democracy such as India, where people are divided in terms of religion, language, caste, race, culture, and socio-economic factors, one of the tasks of the framers of the Constitution of India was to devise safeguards for the country's different minorities. In addition, a very large number of other cultural and linguistic groups, could be distinguished within the population and often demanded to be recognized as scheduled tribes. The tribal communities in India deserve special mention. According to the 2011 census, the population of the scheduled tribes was 51,628,638. The census listed 613 different tribal communities using 304 tribal mother tongues (mother tongues not claimed by non-tribal communities), which were reduced to 101 distinct identifiable languages. What makes the linguistic scene so complex is that fact that most of the tribal communities are linguistically heterogeneous in their mother tongue, and some are ethnically heterogeneous. This is obvious from the difference between the number of tribal communities and the number of tribal mother tongues. This is due to the fact that either (a) the geographical boundary of a tribal community living contiguously may have more than one dominant language around it, or (b) a tribal community may live non-contiguously in the midst of more than one dominant language.

**Medium Policy in instruction**

For a nation such as India with a multilingual and federal structure, education is made a responsibility of the states. The constitution of India provides full freedom to the states to choose a language or languages in a region as 'official' language(s) (Article 345). It also allows linguistic minority groups to receive education through their mother tongues and to set up institutions of their choice for this purpose (Article 30). Hence, one finds wide variations in different states as far as the medium, content, duration, and nomenclature of educational stages are concerned. There is inevitable flexibility in the weightage assigned to different languages in the total educational programmes, the framing of language curricula, the prescribing of textbooks, etc. A national policy of education emerges out of a consensus arrived at among the states constituting the federal policy. The role of the Union Government is, therefore, largely confined to promoting the national policies through seeking mutual accommodation from individual states, coordination of institutions for higher education and research, and for vocational and technical training, persuasion of language-elites, and offering incentives of resources at its command for specific programmes. At present in the field of education, all states provide for teaching students of major Indian languages through their mother tongue or through their language of formal communication up to the school-leaving stage. Many universities now provide instruction in the medium of regional languages at the undergraduate and graduate stages in arts and commerce faculties; but English still continues to be the principal medium for higher education, particularly in law, science, and technology faculties. A number of regional languages are being used as media of instruction at different stages of education. A large number of them are used only as preparatory media at the primary education stage before a student switches over to any major language as the medium at the secondary education stage. Some tribal languages, spoken by smaller populations, are also promoted as elementary media by private institutions.

**The Relation between Tribal Students and Teachers**

Among the various important factors of tribal education that influence integration into the national mainstream of life are the students and their teachers. Tribal students have different backgrounds from their

non-tribal schoolmates and even the teachers, who are normally outsiders, do not understand the tribal students. To the teachers, tribal students appear untidy, reinforcing their biases against tribals. These biases are expressed in various forms of discrimination.

### **Tribal Festivals, Freedom and Youth vs. Education**

The educational schedule - the school year, daily classes and holidays - is organized with little understanding of tribal cultures. Tribal festivals and celebrations and the seasonal pursuit of agriculture and gathering are not taken into consideration in planning educational timetables. All too often teachers hold classes as they would in cities or towns, ignoring the daily or seasonal habits of tribal pupils.

### **Educational Institutions**

The schools and their surroundings shape the minds of the children who frequent them. Most tribal schools do not blend well into the tribal environment. They are alien and often ugly structures in tribal villages. Shortly after schools are opened, they acquire the look of neglected and dilapidated buildings. Even after tribal youths' educations are completed and they find employment, negative attitudes fostered in the classroom remain a real social hurdle. They do not belong in their tribal culture, nor in the national culture.

### **Content and Method of Tribal Education**

The content and the method of tribal education must be objectively evaluated. Tribal youth have unique historical and social backgrounds but need special attention and orientation in their attempts to bridge two cultures. Many school and college curricula which tribal youths encounter are either irrelevant to them and/or offer only negative views of tribal societies. While national and state governments, in theory, offer many benefits, concessions and facilities to tribal students, few of them reach the intended recipients.

### **Education of the Tribal Communities**

Educationally the tribal population is at different levels of development but overall the formal education has made very little impact on tribal groups. Earlier Government had no direct programme for their education. But in the subsequent years the reservation policy has made some changes. There are many reasons for low level of education among the tribal people: Formal education is not considered necessary to discharge their social obligations. Superstitions and myths play an important role in rejecting education. Most tribes live in abject poverty. It is not easy for them to send their children to schools, as they are considered extra helping hands. The formal schools do not hold any special interest for the children. Most of the tribes are located in interior and remote areas where teachers would not like to go from outside.

The dialects of the tribal communities are not the part of education process hence the tribal students naturally face the disadvantages of written and oral communication. The evaluation of students is done on the basis of the standard Marathi language for almost all subject except the other languages. The speakers of tribal languages are alienated in the process of learning and hence result into big drop out and low academic performance of the tribal students. These problems of the tribal students in general and in particular in Nashik district can be resolved or eased by introducing certain policy reforms at the level of language.

### **Problems of Tribal Education**

There are many critical issues and problems in the field of tribal education. They are as follows:

- i. *Medium of language* – Language is one of the important constraints of tribal children which prevents them access to education.
- ii. *The Location of the Village* - The physical barriers creates a hindrance for the children of a tribal village to attend the school in a neighboring village.
- iii. *Economic Condition* - The economic condition of tribal people is so poor that they do not desire to spare their children or their labour power and allow them to attend schools.

- iv. *Attitude of the parents* - As education does not yield any immediate economic return, the tribal parents prefer to engage their children in remunerative employment which supplements the family income.
- v. *Teacher Related Problems* -In the remote tribal areas the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon and this affects largely the quality of education.
- vi. *Lack of Proper monitoring*- Proper monitoring is hindered by poor coordination between the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department.

### Status of Tribal Education

Literacy Trends of tribes in India Literacy is an important indicator of development among tribal groups. The percentage of literacy of tribes was only 8.53 per cent in 1961 which has increased to 59 per cent in 2011. But female literacy of tribes is only 49.40 per cent compared to male literacy of 68.50 per cent. During the post-Independence period, the Indian government implemented legislation and allocated funds to facilitate access to enrollment in primary education (grades I-V) in India. As a result, both literacy rates and gross enrollment ratios of boys and girls across the general population have increased substantially during the past 60 years.

Literacy Rates among ST's and All ( Percentage)						
Year	ALL			Scheduled Tribes		
	Persons	Male	Female	Persons	Male	Female
1961	20.30	40.40	15.35	8.54	13.83	3.16
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	11.30	17.63	4.85
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	16.35	24.52	8.04
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	29.60	40.65	18.19
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	47.10	59.17	34.76
2011	73.00	80.90	64.60	59.00	68.50	49.40

Source : Annual Report 2019, Ministry of Tribal Affairs,GOI, p.no-24

The enrolment ratio of tribal communities has increased satisfactorily during the last five decades. However, the enrolment ratio of scheduled tribes is pretty less with compare to the rest of communities. According to the 2011 census the average literacy rate of all categories is 73.00% whereas it is only 59.00% for Scheduled Tribes. Still there is a long way to achieve the literacy rate of tribal communities. The most of the reasons often noted for the low literacy rate of the tribal communities are social, cultural and economic and linguistic. However, the linguistic barriers in education of the tribal communities are not well documented.

### Gross Enrolment for Scheduled Tribe Students

Year	Secondary 14-15 yrs			Senior Secondary16-17yrs			Higher Education 18-23 yrs		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2014-15	71.1	71.7	71.4	39.4	37.6	38.5	15.2	12.3	13.7
2015-16	73.0	74.4	73.7	43.4	42.2	42.8	15.6	12.9	14.2
2016-17	72.7	74.4	73.5	42.7	42.6	42.7	16.7	14.2	15.4
2017-18	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	17.0	14.9	15.9

Source : Annual Report 2019, Ministry of Tribal Affairs,GOI p.26

The educational picture of tribal students in higher education across the country is quite bleak. The total enrolment of tribal communities in higher education is 15.9%. It shows the exclusion of the said communities from the process of economic and social upliftment.

### Drop -Out Rate in School Education for Scheduled Tribe Students

Similarly the drop-out rate of tribal students from the education process is quite alarming. The following table presents the drop-out rate of scheduled tribes in Class-I to V, Class-I to VIII and Class I to X. The drop-out rate for class I to X shows the worrying position of tribal education across the country.

Year	Class-I-V			Class I-VIII			Class I-X		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2011-12	36.1	34.4	35.3	57.3	57.1	57.2	64.4	67.6	65.9
2012-13	33.3	31.2	32.3	50.6	47.5	49.2	63.2	62.2	62.7
2013-14	31.9	30.7	31.3	49.8	46.4	48.2	63.2	61.4	62.4

Source : Annual Report 2019, Ministry of Tribal Affairs,GOI p.27

### Dropout Rate Scheduled Tribe Students

#### Educational Disadvantages

The educational disadvantages of the tribal communities are often seen in terms of their economic conditions. However, the social and linguistic dimensions of tribal education are relatively less discussed. The tribal communities face social, economic, linguistic and cultural barriers in their educational and overall development.

#### Economic barriers in education

The tribal communities across the country are marginalized from the process of socio-economic development. They have very few resources of economic development and the existing resources of sustenance are shrinking day by day. The social status of the people largely depends upon their economic status. The traditional means of earning from the forests and agricultural land have been reducing due to government policies and growth of population. The traditional means of subsistence are no longer sufficient to fulfil the needs of tribal communities. The enrolment of tribal children in schools further restricts their income and increases the expenditures on education. The socio-economic barriers in the education of tribal students is alarmingly serious and needs to be addressed at the earliest to bring them in the process of development. The central and state governments have already been providing scholarships and hostels to the tribal students. The Maharashtra government has also given special emphasis on the development of tribal communities in Nashik district and hence it has resulted in to educational advancement of tribal communities. However, the still there is a lot to achieve in the field of education of tribal communities.

#### Cultural gaps

Cultural gap is one of the important reasons for alienation of tribal communities from the process of education. The textbooks are often the products of the dominant culture. The culture of ruling class or dominant communities get reflected in the text books produced for school education. The tribal culture is hardly reflect in the educational materials and the tribal students feel detached in the process of learning. The inclusion of tribal culture, festivals, customs and traditions in education can bring the element cultural participation among the tribal students.

#### Developing Reading

The text books and reading materials available for regional medium schools and colleges are available in standard Marathi language. This does not cause any problems the speakers of standard Marathi speakers. But the tribal communities in different parts of the state and in Nashik often face the linguistic barriers in the learning process. The tribal students speak their tribal dialects which sometimes appear as distinct languages. It creates a kind of alienation among the tribal students. The tribal students find difficulty in oral and written expression. The need of reading material and acceptance of such varieties in education is the need of time in bringing tribal

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students in the process of education. It will necessarily increase their participation in education and make the process of learning enjoyable.

### **Developing Speaking**

The issue whether or not attempts should be made to change the accents or dialects of school children who speak socially disfavoured forms of language has been much discussed by applied sociolinguists. The consensus among them is that teaching spoken standard language is unnecessary, possibly harmful and very probably ineffective. It has been found that noticing and overtly correcting disfavoured speech forms by teachers is too demanding a task to expect teachers to carry out consistently. So instead of expecting them to use standard Marathi language, the dialectal varieties of spoken form can be allowed to explore in interactions among the students and with the teachers.

### **Writing Skills**

The tribal students in Maharashtra and particularly in Nashik district often use their local spoken dialects in their writing as well. However, they are evaluated not by the teachers who teach them and who know their local dialects. Indian school system at matriculation level, junior college and degree level has external assessment pattern. That is the evaluator is unknown and very often from geographically different region. The teachers who assess the answersheets of the students do not take in to account the linguistic variations of the tribal students. Hence they evaluate the performance of the tribal students from the lens of standard Marathi language. The influence of the local dialects is very visible in the written performance of the tribal students. But this sociolinguistic reality is often undermined by the teachers who assess the performance of these tribal students. It negatively results into poor results of tribal students. The high rate of failure and poor grades of tribal students often discourage them from pursuing the further studies.

### **Teaching methods**

The tribal communities in Nashik District speak different varieties of tribal languages like Kokani and Dangi. These languages are considered to be the dialects of Marathi language as they are mutually intelligible. The speakers of these languages can understand Marathi language but they are not able to produce the same variety in spoken or written form. The students from tribal communities face the difficulties of language in education which is the issue often neglected by the policymakers. The difficulties encountered by the tribal communities in terms of language performance are as follows. The students from tribal communities need to be encouraged to use their local languages in education. The teachers can allow the students to use the local languages in informal situations but at the same time they should be introduced with the standard language without creating any inferiority complex among them. The oral communications can take place in local dialects of the students to boost their confidence in the learning process. Once they get the confidence that they learn things in better way, they will willingly try to learn the standard Marathi language.

### **Conclusions**

The tribal communities in India and particularly in Nashik district of Maharashtra constitute a big number of population. The lack of education among them has deprived them of the opportunities available at present time. And along with the social, economic and cultural barriers, the language has been one of the major barriers in their education, social and cultural participation. Addressing the language issues in education will necessarily help in eliminating their educational barriers and help them to reap the benefits of education in different spheres of life. The maximum participation of the tribal communities in the process of education will help them to grab the opportunities available through the constitutional provisions of reservations too. Therefore, the education is the major concern for their development and addressing the language issues in education is the need of time. The tribal communities in Nashik district speak different tribal varieties of languages like Kokani, Dangi, Bhilli, Warli and many other varieties named after the tribal communities. The tribal students use these languages in their communities regularly. These languages are said to be the dialectal varieties of Marathi language but at some occasions they appear to be quite different. The tribal students understand the standard

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variety but they face difficulties in using that variety in oral and written communication. The assessment of the performance of the students is mostly based on oral and written performance by the students and hence language barrier hampers the academic performance of the students Along with economic, social, and cultural disadvantages, the linguistic barrier is proving to be quite significant in the educational advancement of the tribal communities.

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