

Empowerment of Tribal through Education and Sustainable Livelihood: A KISS Model.

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It is unfortunate that despite sixty years of independence, Scheduled Tribes continue to live in seclusion in difficult terrains devoid of even the basic necessities of life. Tribal development has been identified as a major field for spearheading development efforts to improve the livelihood of this particular weaker section of society. By all norms of measurement, the success achieved in this direction has been far below the goal targeted in terms of socio-economic development of this vulnerable section of society.

According to the 2001 census, 81.6 per cent of the main workers from the tribal communities were engaged in primary sector activities in India. The problem of tribes is compounded further by higher drop-out rates in formal education, resulting in disproportionately low representation in higher education. Not surprisingly, the cumulative effect has been that the proportion of Scheduled Tribes below the poverty line is substantially higher than the national average.

The tribal people also suffer from poor health conditions. This is the result of under nourishment compounded by several other factors which include incidence of chronic endemic diseases such as Malaria, Filariasis, Tuberculosis, Leprosy etc. While the Scheduled Tribe population below the poverty line in the rural areas stands at 47.2 per cent, in urban areas it is 39 per cent according to the Planning Commission's report in 2005-2006.

Most of the problems of the tribal people are caused by the lack of a sustainable livelihood. The sustainable livelihood is linked with education in which tribal people lag behind. The present system of education in tribal areas is unsatisfactory due to several factors. This can be categorized as: teacher absenteeism; the growing gap between teachers and the taught; apathy of the teachers; unsuitable school schedules; and the lack of participation of parents in the management of schools etc. Along with education, forests and trees have customarily played a critical role in the livelihoods of the poor tribal people. The majority of this group depends fully or in part on forest resources to meet their subsistence needs. The tribal population thus has an organic link with forests as they depend on forest resources almost throughout the year. Forest-based activities which provide substantial employment opportunities for the tribal people have been threatened due to ongoing deforestation.

A proper analysis of the facts at hand suggests the reason for the sorry state of affairs of the tribal people is the lack of education among them, which causes many problems. Education holds the key to tribal empowerment and sustainable development.

With the strong conviction of Dr. Achyuta Samanta - the founder of the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) - that "poverty creates illiteracy and literacy drives away poverty", KISS, the largest residential institute for 12,000 tribal students, is a centre of learning for the poorest of the poor with a focus on sustainable livelihood, education and scope for all round development.

KISS students are drawn from the remote tribal pockets of Orissa and other states. As a matter of policy, the student should belong to a Scheduled Tribe and remain below the poverty line. KISS provides the opportunity for the tribal students to be within the mainstream of society.

For some, language is a road to upward mobility and for others it is a barrier to even the marginal life of choice and dignity. Educational failure of linguistic minorities all over the world is primarily related to the mismatch between the home language and the language of formal instruction. Slow shift to the mainstream language can be seen as a determinant of access to resources to alleviate extreme poverty and hunger. In order to address the language barrier, the tribal students are first introduced to the senior students of the same community at KISS. This is a kind of socialization in which the child learns the Oriya language. A gradual shift to learn English and Hindi languages takes place through instruction. KISS teachers follow different teaching and communication approaches and instruments in making the tribal

children learn in the medium of formal instruction; thereby taking the advantage to carry on to higher studies.

KISS students have done well in both academic and non-academic fields. On the one hand, students have shown 100 per cent results in matriculation and in three streams: humanities; science; and commerce at the intermediate level. On the other hand, they have excelled in sports and cultural events. Past students of KISS have joined engineering and medical courses. They have also joined different industries as both skilled and unskilled workers. In sports, especially in rugby, they have shown unprecedented achievement in winning the Under 14 World Cup in London. Barring sports and academics, students are expected to undergo vocational training in trades of their choices. This lays the foundation for future employment of the student. Consequently KISS addresses the holistic development approach for its students in which sustainable livelihood is a paramount component.