

Research Article

## Inclusive Role of Residential Schools in the Development of Education among Sholaga Tribe of Tamil Nadu

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### ABSTRACT

Education for tribal communities has become one of the prime focuses in the planning and is considered as an integral part of socio-economic development of schedule tribe (ST). Since independence, the state has taken efforts in every planning session to incorporate the tribal welfare as one of their main agenda. However it is unfortunate to say that the level of tribal education until today remains marginal. This paper will focus on the impact created by the presence of a government tribal residential (GTR) school, set up within the tribal area of *Sholaga of GeddasaI, Erode* district of Tamil Nadu. It will also emphasise the interventions incurred on the literacy level of the tribe. In the recent years, there has been some improvisation in the mechanism of stake holders in providing the education for the tribal communities. One of the major initiatives among them is the implementation of a tribal residential school to ensure the increase in the literacy rate of tribal children. The bottom line of the residential schools is the provision of the accommodative facilities for students coming from far-off villages and a system of free meals. More eventually, the villages near-by this school benefit the most in-terms of availing the formal education. But apparently, there are flaws that need affirmative action to be taken in involving the participation of tribes themselves in their overall development.

**Keywords:** Tribal Education, Empowerment, Residential Schools, Inclusive Policy, Sholaga, Tamil Nadu Tribe, Development

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### INTRODUCTION

The overwhelming impact of globalisation is not only affecting the economy of the indigenous people but also their socio-cultural ties. Today, tribes in India are

standing at the verge of extinction and are in search of identity from the globalised and nationalist forces. Their social and geographical isolation makes them more vulnerable. Adding to that is the age-old exploitation pattern of India and suppression from the non-tribal state administrators. All these factors have excluded them from the main stream of socio-economic development in the country. Poverty, unemployment, migration and disinterest towards education have multiplied the educational backwardness of schedule tribes (STs). Their deprivation in education results into various forms of exploitation and is the violation of human rights (Pradhan, 2004). The tribal population constitutes 8.2% of Indian population. The overall areas inhabited by the tribal population constitute a significant part of the underdeveloped areas of the country. About 90% of the tribal people live in rural areas (Census of India, 2011) and are engaged in agricultural pursuits. Hence, most of the tribes are living in rural and remote regions; the isolation itself has been the main reason for the under development beyond other major reasons.

Education is the basis for the development of any community, social thinkers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Paulo Freire viewed education as the key factor for the social emancipation. Paulo Freire considered education as a liberation process; he viewed it as an instrument to build a free and equal democratic society (Gadotti and Torres, 2009). The suggestion of universal declaration of human rights states, 'Everyone has the right to education, education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages, elementary education shall be compulsory'. Incorporating the Human Rights declaration, the constitution also laid down several provisions that direct state policy pertaining to communities identified as SC/ST. Many anthropologists and sociologists have put emphasis on the importance and need for tribal education and the pattern in which it has to be enacted. Certain parts have been taken as a role model by the government in recognising the tribal education. Articles 15(4) and 46 of the Indian constitution constitute the promotion of education among STs. Article 15(4) is an exception to the fundamental right of the people of equal treatment irrespective of religion, caste, race or sex granted under Article 15(1). These provisions relate itself towards the administration, protection and development of the tribal communities. Foremost importance has been given to the development of human resource; especially, its educational component has been recognised as vital in developing nations because contribution by human resource in economic growth is more significant than in any other factors of production. Crucial to educational development, the constitution of India Article 46 directed state to promote 'with special care the educational interest of the tribes'. The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker section of the people, and in particular the schedule castes (SCs) and tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and from all forms of exploitation.

## **EDUCATION FOR TRIBES**

Education of tribe is one such aspect whereby the development could enact and ensure the empowerment of them. While planning for the educational development of a tribe or any community the ideology of the Paulo Freire stands as a guideline. Freire insisted that education for development must be identified with scientific methods and process; and it should orient people in their lives, it should help people reflect about their ontological vocation as subjects and that makes it possible for people to fearlessly discuss their problems (Gadotti and Torres, 2009). This type of scientific education is even not rendered to the mainstream society. The national policy on education 1986 mentions educational development of STs and their equalisation with non-scheduled tribes population at all stages and levels of education. In the Dhebar commission report of 1961, recommendations have been made to allow the tribes to develop according to their own 'genius' and imposition of values has been discouraged (Vidyarthi, 1978). But both these aspects are never incorporated at the ground level, Government policies and understanding are not allowing the tribe to develop in their own nor through the model developed for the general people. Education in tribal areas has in the traditional sense always been something more than literary and was largely confined to cultural accomplishments. Hence, formal education in tribal areas should have taken into consideration the utilisation of traditional tribal institutions to impact education in order to have a holistic approach towards education in such areas.

In the recent years, any planning done by the state and central government has not missed out to concentrate and plan on the issues and problems in the livelihood pattern of the tribes. So, since independence, a special consideration has been given by the government on tribal education. The welfare measures like social welfare hostels and residential schools are especially targeting children of SC/ST communities. Unfortunately, most of the development programmes are approaching the physical objects and it is not constructed according to their cultural perspective. Simply, they are been imposed on them like anything including the education system too which is also alien to their culture. Hence, the literacy rate among the tribes is very low (58.95%) and poor compared with that of their non-tribal counterparts; specifically the literacy of tribal women is very lower (49.36%) than that of the men (68.51%). Not surprisingly, a majority of the working children belong to SC/ST communities of which a significant proportion is of girls (Jandhyala, 2004).

Many of the eminent scholars viewed that, 'Controlling of dropout ratio among the tribes is the important work in the tribal education' (Nambissan, 1994). The official drop-out figure of tribal children at primary level is 64.50% as compared to 47.90% of general category students. While analysing the poor response of

tribal children to formal schooling, scholars tend to emphasise the economic marginalisation of these communities, their illiterate home environments, inadequate facilities for education and, culturally, the alien nature of the school system. Data from the All India Education Surveys reveal that primary schools in rural areas have a relatively poor infrastructure. The most of the schools do not have proper building, adequate number of classrooms and other basic amenities such as drinking water and toilet facilities within the premises. However, as compared to rural areas in general, tribal habitations are relatively poorly served with facilities for schooling. Primary education as well as continuation of education in high schools in the rural and remote areas has always suffered due to lack of institutional facilities, non-availability and absence of teachers (Mahanti, 2004).

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF TRIBAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS**

The residential schools or ashram schools are fare better as the students are provided with hostel and diet facilities. However, the residential schools also insist on teachers living within the campus and hence some kind of regular teaching is available to the children. Even though 50% of the primary and residential schools at tribal areas are inoperative due to various reasons, the contribution of residential schools in the educational development of tribes is considerably important. Overall sense, the many of the scholars felt that residential schools are having better impact on the education development of tribals. This paper too intended to explore the role played by the government run residential schools in development among the tribals by illustrating the case of government tribal residential (GTR) school in Geddadal of Erode district.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The prime objective of this article is to discuss about the education development among the tribals which is imparted by the residential schools. The argument in this paper is based upon the data collected among the Sholaga tribe of Geddadal settlement in Erode district. The data was collected in two phases in 2008 and 2014. The data gathered from the GTR School is the backbone of the argument.

### **TRIBAL SITUATION IN TAMIL NADU**

The 36 tribes of Tamil Nadu represent 1.03% of the state population and among them six are notified and given the status of *particularly vulnerable tribal group* (PTG). There are even other tribes, which are still at a vulnerable position. There is a wide gap among the standards of social development between tribes and non-tribes of Tamil Nadu (Dhal, 2008). The plight of the STs is more tragic than that of SCs. Educational status of STs in Tamil Nadu is worse than that of other states of the country. Comparatively, Tamil Nadu is placed third in overall literacy rate,

while in case of ST (46.32%) it is still lower than the general sections (80.33%) of the society.

The government of Tamil Nadu has adopted various policy measures for the educational development of these groups through the years. The schemes such as free education, free text books, uniforms, reserved seats and hostel facilities were provided for SCs and STs. During the first five year plan, importance was given to the expansion of facilities and provision of schools and teachers in the remote areas. In the fourth five year plan, the scheme of economic incentives was started. In the fifth five year plan, the major thrust was to offer equality of opportunities as part of overall plan of ensuring social justice and improving the quality of education imparted. A landmark in the sixth plan was the inclusion of education of SCs and STs as one of the major programmes under the overall programmes for the development of SCs and STs in Tamil Nadu. The seventh five year plan was visualised to restructure the educational programme without any gender bias. Similarly the 8th and 9th plans also planned to stress the upliftment of the backward and marginalised sections of the society. Yet over the past 50 years, the improvement in the socio-economic status of majority of STs in Tamil Nadu has only been tardy.

The tribal subplan was started in Tamil Nadu since 1976–1977; the basic objective of this plan is to ensure the flow of fund allotted for tribal subplan from the state annual plan outlay at least in proportion to the tribal population for their development. Currently, there are 301 tribal residential schools in Tamil Nadu, 31,899 students make use of it, and there are about 40 tribal hostels and 2135 students are staying there as inmates (Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, 2013). By the tribal subplan, one special vocational guidance centre is functioning at Uthagamandalam, Nilgiri district. Eklavya model residential schools are built by the grants under Article 275(1) of the Constitution of India. The two centres of Eklavya schools are found in Villupuram and Salem. Students from these centres have passed with good percentage.

There are many special provisions provided by the state government for the educational development among the tribes, especially for the school education. Every year, plastic slates are distributed free of cost to all students studying in 1st standard in the schools run by this department. All students studying in I to XII standards in Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Schools will be supplied with four sets of uniforms free of cost from 2012 to 2013 onwards. For the development of girl's education, state government is providing a scholarship of Rs. 500 per annum for girls from III standard to V standard so as to reduce the tribal girl's dropout, and from VI standard onwards the government pays Rs. 1000 per annum. This scheme is applicable to all districts of Tamil Nadu other than Chennai. To reduce

the dropout beyond X standard, government has been providing financial assistance of Rs. 230–550 per month for day scholars, and Rs. 380–1200 per month are given as allowance for hostellers whose parents or guardians income does not exceed Rupees two lakhs (Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department, 2012).

## **SHOLAGAS**

Sholagas is one of the tribes living in the Western Ghats, primarily in the Erode district of Tamil Nadu and also at the neighbouring districts in Karnataka. They are traditionally hunter gatherers, later adapted to agrarian pursuits during the past few decades. In the present context, they evolved as a complete agrarian community indulging in the cultivation of beans, potato, ragi, etc. Honey collection and non-timber forest produce collection have now become a secondary source of income. Most of the young Sholagas are migrating to nearby towns like Erode, Tiruppur and Coimbatore for working as unorganised labour in textile industry. Sholagas are having their own dialect, which is a combination of Tamil and Kannada. They know to speak Tamil and Kannada fluently.

The total population of Sholaga in Tamil Nadu is 3853 in that males are 1908 and females are 1945, which constitutes the 0.6% of total tribal population of the state. Literacy level among Sholaga is 36.6% which is lesser than the overall tribal literacy (41.5%) of the state. The formal education system was introduced to these people from the last three decades. Still complete provision of school education for the Sholaga is not succeeded. The number of individuals who enter the higher education is very minimal due to less opportunities and awareness among them.

Geddesal is an isolated settlement situated in the interior forest between the mountains of Thimbam range of Satyamangalam forest. There is no frequent transportation to this settlement, no *Reinforced Cement Concrete (R.C.C)* houses are found, a very few are tiled and the remaining are thatched in traditional way. Only a few houses were found with electrical supplies. This village is still away from the mainstream society due to limited communication and transportation. It is a homogenous settlement with the representation of Sholaga tribe with a population of 370 individuals in which males are 182 and females are 164 (primary data collected during 2008). The Sholagas in Geddesal have a literacy rate of about 61%; it is much higher than the overall Sholaga literacy rate of 36.8% and competing with the overall tribal literacy rate of Tamil Nadu which is 41.53%.

## **GTR SCHOOL IN GEDDASAL**

The GTR school in Geddesal settlement was a single teacher school when it was started in 1969, later it was upgraded to middle school in 1998 by the Tribal

Welfare Department. The aid from the Tribal Welfare Department and minimal support from the local non-government organisations (NGOs) helped to build the concrete building for tribal residential school with a new hostel facility in 2007. Now the school has good building while earlier it was a cement sheet roofed building. Later in 2012, this school was upgraded as high school. This school has a prominent role in the development of literacy level among the Sholagas of Geddasal and nearby villages.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE, CURRICULUM AND EDUCATION**

Geddesal residential school has a well constructed building with hostel facilities. Both male and female children stay in the hostel, with separate boarding facilities. The basic amenities like water and toilet are available within the campus, which are built during the last five years. There is enough space for play ground with a compound wall. The Sholaga students are provided with food, uniform and free study material. The school still lacks the basic amenities like class rooms, furniture and library facilities. Most of the tribal hamlets do not have schooling facility. Thus, the state should strive to provide a high school to every panchayat. The availability of primary or middle school is itself a highest provision that prevails in most tribal villages. The Geddesal settlement has education facility up to high school, which is recently upgraded from the middle school in 2012. This had created a positive impact on the increase in enrollment of tribal children in school, especially, the girls had the opportunity to access to it within their settlement. Earlier, for secondary and higher secondary schooling, the children in this village have to travel a distance of 15 km, which reduces the number of students availing secondary school education to a minimal. After upgradation to secondary level, the number of students availing secondary education has proportionally increased. But still the students joining in higher secondary grade are very minimal.

During the initial days of school establishment in Geddasal, Sholaga children went to the school for the purpose of free meals provided at the school. It is the general scenario all over Tamil Nadu when schools were opened and midday meals scheme was introduced. But the attitude has changed over the period of time and now the school children as well the parents are having some concern towards the education.

The number of teachers in this school is very limited; there are only five teachers in the place of seven teachers for the primary school, and two teachers in the place of three high school teachers. In total, three posts are vacant in the school; hence, available teachers have to bear with the work load. The maximum of the school teaching time is spent on giving writing works and assignments. It is a rare occasion that we can hardly find all the teaching staff present in the school. Every

time half of the staff is on leave, this trend is a result of mutual co-operation between them. Maybe, it is because the staff is non-tribes and obviously has to come from nearby districts. And most of them are residing in the nearby town called Sathiyamangalam. A psychological barrier restrains them from their daily presence since they do not relate themselves with the local conditions. Comparing to other GTR schools in Tamil Nadu, the performance level of Geddesal GTR school is better. The warden must stay within the school premises, earlier school head master himself was the hostel warden and he stayed within the school. Sometimes, the teachers make adjustments between themselves and stay in school alternatively. Now due to the upgradation of the school, the number of teaching positions has also increased. It helps them to adjust the work among them. The current arrangements are somewhat better than the earlier, now the warden in charge is taken by a women teacher, who is married and her husband also works in the same school. So they both remain inside the premises itself. The teachers in most of the residential schools are always attempting to get transfer to settle down in a school situated in the towns, so it is nothing wrong in addressing the Geddesal case in positive approach.

The national curriculum framework for school education is less achieved especially in tribal areas (Sarangi, 2008), because the syllabus incorporated in the curriculum is not relevant to the integrated development of the tribes. Great blunder has been done for five long decades by providing them a futile education with a system having a blanket approach, mainly satisfying the needs of urban lifestyle and providing lesser justice to rural and tribal areas. (Mahati, 2004). Desperate changes are needed in their education system and policies, since it is more focused towards the mainstream societal needs. They found themselves alienated with the present education system and unfortunately all their teaching faculties being non-tribals. The non-tribal teaching regime lacks cultural, environmental and value orientations and the tribal student community has become a mere spectator of this age long blunder.

Due to the introduction of the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan scheme, the annual assessment process has changed and there is no failure of students up to 8th standard. Even pupil evaluation process is essentially based on measuring memory based content knowledge. Teaching and learning processes are mostly oriented towards examination, and vocational education has given less importance. There is no activity oriented education, the Activity Based Learning (ABL) materials are kept as showcase materials in the headmaster's room. All these materials are given to students only at the time of inspection by the district education department officials. But the scene has changed considerably due to the introduction of Samacheer Kalvi and ABL was noticed in the recent visit.

The medium of instruction in the school has been a serious issue for the tribals. They cannot understand the actual meaning of the subject, and there is a need to change and frame the curriculum in the concern dialect. The Article 350(A) of the Constitution has provisioned for the better development of the linguistic minorities by providing education in their own language (Verma, 1994). These recommendations are accepted and are in process for a few tribes in India, and the tribal school teachers are also incorporated from the same group. For instance, in case of Sholaga tribe, the few of the educated youngsters can be given the job of teacher in the tribal residential schools. Through this job opportunity, interest towards accessing education may emerge among the community. And obviously a tribal teacher can handle the subject in such a way that the tribal children can easily understand.

### **ROLE OF GTR SCHOOLS ON GEDDASAL SHOLAGAS**

Sholagas in this settlement get access to formal education first after the introduction of the school in this settlement. Table 1 shows that the illiteracy rate is more among the women, and men are at a better position than women.

**Table 1: Literacy level among Sholaga tribe (primary collected during 2008)**

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Illiterate	46	84
Primary	77	54
6–8th	43	13
9–12th	9	6
Graduate	1	0

The survey results clearly pinpoint the illiteracy problem in India, the women illiteracy rate also shads over 60% in this settlement also. There is only one graduate in this settlement till now. In the current scenario too, no other individual from this settlement has became graduate. By analysing in general, the women education rate is very low in every category. It reflects the general picture of the women as in non-tribal society.

Among the childrens, there are totally 57 students pursuing education, of them 46 were enrolled in the GTR middle school in 2006–2007 batch, out of it 24 are males and 22 are females, six students are at secondary level in Hasanoor village and two completed secondary schooling. The enrollment percentage is on an increase in the recent years. Eventually, the trend has been on an increase with the upgradation of schooling level, the result showed some positive effect of the

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**Table 2: Age and class-wise details of education among Sholaga of Geddadal**

Education Age (Year)	Not joined		Primary		6–8th		9–12th		Graduate		Illiterate	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
0–6	18	19	8	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
7–12	–	–	10	11	6	5	–	–	–	–	–	–
13–19	–	–	5	7	15	4	4	5	–	–	1	2
20–39	–	–	39	26	17	4	3	1	1	0	19	42
40–59	–	–	14	4	5	0	2	0	0	0	14	29
60 and above	–	–	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	11

increase in percentage which was confirmed through the data in Table 2. As the age category reduces from the 20–39 towards 7–12 years, the number of students pursuing middle school and secondary education is increasing and the number of illiterates is reducing. Especially, in the age category of 13–19 years category the number of people pursuing middle and secondary education is high. This data clearly shows that the provision of the middle school with in the village helps the Sholaga in Geddadal to continue the education up to middle school level. At the same time, the number of students above the middle school is very minimal.

The Geddesal residential school from 2012 onwards has upgraded with high school status. It is a good opportunity for the Sholagas in Geddadal as well as other nearby villages. After introduction of the high school, the first batch of students passed SSLC is now in pursuit of higher education. There are total 12 students who have passed IX standard and proceeded to SSLC, but seven of them are discontinued from school. The reason for the dropout is very important. But the remaining five students who have appeared for the board exam all of them have passed. Even though the percentage of marks secured by them is below than average, but still it is an important contribution in their life.

It is already mentioned that the number of students continuing education beyond 8th standard has increased after the introduction of high school in Geddadal. In the academic year of 2012–2013, a total of 17 students are passed out around from ninth standard and five students are passed SSLC. This one year record itself equal to the total number of SSLC produced from this Geddadal village from the past 30 years.

## CONCLUSION

Affirmative action results in the empowerment of marginalised communities. In the case of STs, the impact of policy on protective discrimination in removing the disabilities suffered by them is very minimal because of the elitist approach of the

state. Development can be referred to betterment in ways that local population understand, accept and value (Nolan, 2002). But many of the schemes introduced by government were formal in nature, planned and designed according to the cultural context of the non-tribal population. The implementation has been done in a mechanical way through government bodies and NGOs. The interest of the administrators with regard to tribal development is in the way such as the amount of money spent and the number of schemes implemented. But the basic problem is not held with budgeting for schemes or in case of allocating money, instead it is with the very approach for the tribal welfare.

In spite of all these factors, there are some notable changes in the tribal education scenario. The study among the Sholagas revealed that whatever may be the development it must be implemented, within this unfavourable social and administrative setting they must utilise the special provisions to empower themselves. Residential schooling system has been the crucial factor in playing inclusive role to take part in education, it has playing important role in the increase in education access among the Sholagas. Wherever residential school facilities are available, the performances of the school are satisfactory (Sarangi, 2008). The opportunities to access education up to secondary school grade have become higher in the settlement. The residential schooling system had played a major role in increasing the literacy rate of the Sholaga community. The lack of higher secondary school has directly reflected the decrease of higher secondary education among Sholagas. Provision of free study materials, food, uniforms, and residence is the main reason behind the educational empowerment of this tribe. Even though the implementation of developmental schemes for deprived section is name sake (or) not fully fledged, it has created some impact. If the state has taken enough measures to ensure attaining maximum efficiency in implementing the developmental schemes, then the real empowerment is possible.

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