

Teaching, learning and Traditional Knowledge of Tribe of India: A study

*Dr. Sinchini Kundu

Assistant Teacher, Karandighi High School, Uttar Dinajpur

ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization and modernization when modern technologies and tools aggressively devour the essence of human life and bring changes in the natural environment, it is very much important to know about the traditional knowledge of the tribal people and their primitive educational method i.e. how they acquire their knowledge and how they apply it for living. Tribes, the ecological component of their native land, gradually loses their value-based culture and ethics to the inclination of modern education. In India, as per census 2011, 58.96% tribes are literate. Due to their inability to read and write, we have a prejudice that they are totally uneducated and ignorant of the natural life. But education is a gradual process which brings positive changes to human life and behaviour. In this context, it is very much important as well as relevant to reintroduce the tribal educational method for sustainable Development. As the human population grows rapidly and natural landscape decline gradually, the modern so-called civilized people annihilate recklessly the natural environment with the objective of preparing cultural landscape. They fulfill their desire, neglecting the nature by their modern education and technologies. So, it is very much important to know the process of acquiring indigenous knowledge and its application in modern education. It is also necessary to behave with environment in a frankly manner for sustainability.

Keywords: *Globalization, modernization, sustainable development, Traditional Knowledge*

Article Publication

Published Online: 17-Jan-2021

*Author's Correspondence

Dr. Sinchini Kundu

Assistant Teacher, Karandighi High School,
Uttar Dinajpur

© 2021The Authors. Published by *Research Review Journals*

This is an open access article under the CC
BY-NC-ND license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

We know that education is the process of facilitating learning, and the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs and habits. Education brings in positive and long lasting changes in life reasoning, and ability to achieve the targeted goal and it facilitates people to investigate their own considerations and thoughts and makes it ready to express it in various shapes. In tribal region education frequently takes place under the guidance of educators or predecessor. However, learners can also educate them and education can take place in non-formal setting. Any experience that has a formative effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts may be considered educational. As they live in isolation in inaccessible natural landscape, they learn from nature directly and their knowledge which is mainly based on it is environment friendly.

2. Objectives:

- To find out the tribal learning method.
- To find out the importance of Tribal Ecological knowledge and their education.
- To find out the educational method for sustainable development of tribes.

3. Hypotheses:

- Most of the tribes are illiterate, but are not totally uneducated.
- Education and environment, both are correlated.
- There is a symbiotic relationship between tribes and nature.

4. Discussion and analysis:

Education and Environment are the two most important pillars of human civilization on which the existence of human civilization thrives. Here, the researcher wants to convey two types of environment; the natural environment and the man-made environment or cultural environment. India is the land of various ethnic, multi-cultural indigenous people that brings diversity in the cultural environment. Due to the diversity of the natural environment, many changes have occurred on human culture on the basis of regional changes. The tribal community who are the most backward and marginalized section, consists of 8.6% of the total population, i.e. 10.3 million people as per 2011 census. Most of them live in various ecological and Geo-climatic conditions ranging from plains and forests to hills and inaccessible areas. While some tribal communities have adopted a mainstream way of civilized life by losing their unique tribal identity, on the other end, certain scheduled tribes, 75 in number, known as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal groups (PVTGs). In the period of globalization, when the modern world is much more connected through internet with social media, these endangered people are firmly connected with nature and the natural environment. Due to the symbiotic relationship with nature, they gain ecological knowledge, ethical values which are reflected in their behavior, culture and lifestyle. Nature has always been our inspiration down the ages. Men acquire knowledge from nature and relationship with it- how to face challenges of life, motivations, failure and success. While fighting for existence in the Geo-climatic condition most of the tribes learn from nature and the natural environment and they can educate themselves through their perception of their ecological approaches. While describing the term 'intentional education', the great educational philosopher, Dewey, define education in a narrow sense and it is consciously acquired by people through any formal institutions. In the modern world this type of formal education gets more important than non-formal education.

In their primitive days, the traditional method of education among tribes mainly based on trial and error method, and occasionally by oral method. They had learnt from their predecessors who shared their own experiences orally and the knowledge was generally transmitted from one generation to another generation. They also learnt from their traditional folklore. At present, they educate themselves by formal education gradually losing their natural environment based education and also adopted modern culture. It is found that many families send their children to the formal educational institutes for education. In the formal educational institutes, more and more emphasis is given on formal knowledge rather than on their traditional knowledge; as a result their traditional knowledge is on the verge of extinction. In the modern era when the globalized earth is much more connected through internet with social media, some tribes still now live in the dense forest area and are very much connected with nature. They learn from nature, learn with nature and learn about nature. Due to their direct dependency on natural environment they show their ethical values towards it. The modern people think themselves more educated as per their formal education than tribal people and try to educate the indigenous people in their own way. Though the literacy rate is one of the important indicators of human development index that helps to understand all round development of a region and according to modern thinkers, literacy is not only the ability to read and write but also mark the all round development of people. The development of a nation is directly related to the accessibility and opportunities to avail educational facilities by the people. Since the attainment of a nation's independence special attention has been paid to provide education to the people, but unfortunately, even after the elapse of seventy four glorious years of independence, it has always been a great challenge for the government to provide education to all tribal communities.

Article 46 of Indian constitution lays down that, the state shall promote, with special care, the educational and economic interests of weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe. The government has taken several programs to promote education among the tribes and some institutions also have been built up to cater their formal education. Unfortunately, no such initiatives have been taken by the Government to acquire and preserve their primitive knowledge of the tribal people. As per census 2011 the total literacy rate among tribal people is 58.96% where the percentage of literacy of others is 72.99% and the gap is 14.03. It is quite evident that tribes fail to keep up pace in every sphere of life in comparison with non-tribal communities. It is also found that the year wise enrollment of scheduled tribe students in primary, upper primary and secondary is very low. But it cannot be said that they are totally uneducated. In the broad sense of education, according to the great philosopher Mackenzie the most of the part of education is acquired by human being unconsciously while dealing with nature. According to this philosophical concept the tribal people acquire most of their education by facing challenges in their life and unconsciously they become educated in non-formal settings. But though they are not able to read and write most of the people of the modern world have a concept that they are totally uneducated.

Table 1: Comparative Literacy Rates of Schedule Tribes and Total Population (%)

Category/Census Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total population	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	72.99
Schedule Tribes	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96
Gap	19.77	18.15	19.88	22.61	18.28	14.03

Source: Statistical profile of scheduled tribes in India 2013

Table 2: Percentage Enrolment of Schedule Tribe students in all categories

Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary
1998-99	9.6	6.7	5.1
1999-2000	9.4	6.9	5.0
2000-01	9.7	7.2	5.4
2002-03	9.7	6.9	5.4
2003-04	9.8	7.5	5.6
2004-05	10.5	8.1	5.6
2005-06	10.6	8.5	5.7
2006-07	10.8	8.5	6.1
2007-08	10.8	8.2	6.3
2009-10	11.2	8.6	6.3
2010-2011	11.0	8.7	6.4

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, M/HRD, 2010-11

Educational method of tribes: The general principles and management strategies of tribal people which they use for their lifelong non-formal education is known as their educational method and it is found by the researcher that the indigenous communities use so many methods for their non-formal education. Such as:

Oral method or story telling method: In tribal communities of the world, there are some beautiful traditional stories about their origin and culture and these stories are transmitted from generation to generation. The age old persons generally narrate the stories to their next generation and in this way they try to preserve and keep alive their traditional values. As, for instance; a mythological story of Khasi tribes is U Blei Trai Kynrad (God, the Lord Master) had originally distributed the human race in 16 heavenly families (Khadhynriew Trep). However, 7 out of these 16 families are stuck on earth while the other 9 are stuck in heaven. According to the myth, a heavenly ladder resting on the sacred forest, mountain area (located in the present-day RI-Bhoi district) enabled people to go freely and frequently to heaven whenever they pleased until one day they were tricked into cutting a divine tree which was situated at Lum Diengiei Peak (also in present-day RI-Bhoi district), a grave error which prevented them access to the heavens forever. This myth is often seen as a metaphor of how nature and trees, in particular, are the manifestation of the divine on Earth and destroying nature and trees means severing our ties with the Divine. This knowledge is non-sentential and often not well documented in the modern sense rather it is transmitted to generations orally and through practice and gradually perfected by tradition. Now the traditional knowledge is in danger of extinction and its disappearance would not only cause the loss of people's capability to keep and pass on the artistic and natural heritage. (Kumar A: 2003).

Experiment and observation method: In many tribal communities, continuous acute observation and experiments with nature over thousands of years has resulted in a profound attachment to the subtle cues of the nature and the natural world. So they easily learn sophisticated hunting, tracking, husbandry techniques, etc. Generally they use eco-friendly techniques for building construction depending on their surrounding materials. Such as when so many houses were severely damaged by a severe earthquake in 2001, in Gujrat, the houses of Bhonga tribes remained almost intact. They use cylindrical shaped one-story buildings of which structures are symmetric, and the configuration provides high resistance to earthquake forces as well as high degree of resistance to wind forces since the area are highly cyclone-prone.

Trial and error method: The different skills, techniques and knowledge which the tribes use in their lives, not only are acquired by observation and experiment but also learned through trial and error method. Due to the direct dependency of nature the tribes are very much conscious about nature and always show their ethics and values towards nature. Development of such skills, techniques and knowledge are not only the testament of their creativity and extraordinary ability to get adapted, but also the recognition of their value-based education.

Table 3: Difference between educational characteristics of indigenous people and modern people:

Educational characteristics of Indigenous people	Educational characteristics of modern people
Non-formal	Formal
Do not able to read and write	Able to read and write
Mainly Natural Environment based	Mainly Cultural Environment based
Learned by a predecessor	Learned by Teacher
Long cherished knowledge transmitted from generation to generation	Knowledge transmitted mainly from books.
Evaluated by experiment, observation, trial and error method	Evaluated by Examination
Educational institutes absent	Learn from institutes.
Assumed to be truth	Assumed to be a good approximation
Sacred and secular together	Secular only
Teaching through story telling	didactic
Oral or visual	Written
Integrated, based on a whole system	Analytical, based on a whole system
Subjective	Objective
Experiential	Positivist
Qualitative	Quantitative
Moral	Sometimes value free

There is a huge difference between the educational characteristics of tribal people and the educational process of modern people and these are as follows: tribal people learn in non-formal settings where educational institutions are totally absent and their education is mainly depends on natural environment where modern education is completed by formal settings in educational institutions and mainly cultural environment based. Most of the tribes have no capability to read and write, but the students of formal institutes are able to read and write. Tribes learn from their predecessors and long cherished knowledge transmitted from generation to generation and evaluated by experiment, observation, trial and error method where as in formal education pupils learn from teachers and knowledge is mainly transmitted from a book and evaluation is done by different examinations. This is assumed to be truth, sacred and secular, subjective, experiential, qualitative and moral whereas the modern education is assumed to be a good approximation, Secular only, analytical, based on a whole system, objective, positivist, quantitative and Sometimes value free. The primitive teaching process is done through storytelling and it is visual or oral where as modern education is didactic and mainly written. Tribal education based on their ecological knowledge has, over the years played a significant role in solving several major social-ecological problems like climate change variability, and environmental sustainability. Due to the symbiotic relationship and direct dependency on nature, they observe the circumstances around them and often first to identify and adapt to any changes. The tribe has acquired knowledge of the appearance of certain birds, mating of certain animals and flowering of certain plants and this traditional knowledge is important to understand the Geo-climatic changes. They have also the ability of identification of wild fruits and tree roots as food, identification of medicinal plants for treatment which may use in the medical field. The prediction of natural disasters, including earthquakes, droughts, and tsunamis, heavy rains, and floods, through ITK (Indigenous Traditional Knowledge) are also the part of their education. Worship of natural aspects, sacred grooves are not only the characteristics of their culture, but also the instances of value based education which teaches us to show respect toward nature. When the modern advanced society uses modern tools and technologies which are the causes of environmental degradation, sustainability of the earth faces great challenge whether the tribes are totally uneducated or are the modern people are totally educated. In most cases education is only verified by literacy rate and educational qualification. In our country, Government emphasizes effort to literate tribal people through a mechanical education system. But due to the pressure of modern educational system, gradually tribes try to be literate by losing their own knowledge because in a modern educational system, there is no such field to apply their own knowledge or enhance their own value based education.

The modern people, who think themselves more educated than tribal people as per their formal education, try to literate them following their own modern traditional knowledge. The researcher also agrees with them about the matter of literacy and digital literacy. But when the matter of their all round development or sustainable development comes it is also necessary to nurture their tribal ecological knowledge (knowledge has been acquired by tribal people since thousands of years) with the modern educational system thus their education will help them to reach the goal of their all round development. Here, the researcher recommends for both way transmission of knowledge in the exchange of one way transmission. It is also necessary to give opportunities in educational field where they can apply and enhance their traditional value based knowledge. Workshops must be arranged by the government to collect their

knowledge and different environment friendly techniques. It must be said that these proposed ideas are very much useful for proper education of indigenous people and their sustainable development.

Reference:

- [1]. Atkinson.T.Edwin, *The Himalayan Gazetteer* Vol. 2, part.1 1884 p 366- 368
- [2]. Aurelius Kyrham Nongkinrih (2002). *Khasi society of Meghalaya: a sociological understanding*. Indus Publishing. pp. 130–131. ISBN 978-81-7387-137-5.
- [3]. Census of India 2012 statistical profile of Schedule Tribes in India. 124-130
- [4]. Census 1871 [wikipedia.org/wiki/1871 India census](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1871_India_census).
- [5]. Darpia Kumar Shyamal (2017), *TRIBAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE AND CHALLENGES*, vol-7 Issue 10. <http://www.ijmra.us>, ISSN: 2249-2496
- [6]. Garison G.A (1909) *Linguistic survey of India, Government of India*, New Delhi Gogoi G, Sengupta, S. Body mass index among the Dibongiya Deoris of Assam, India. *J human Ecology* 2002; 13: p 271-273
- [7]. Gunn. C. Michel. (1980). *Cultural Ecology: A Brief Overview*, volume 5
- [8]. Gupta Ramkrishn (1980). *Tribal contemporary issues Appraisal and intervention: The problematic of tribal identity*, P41-43
- [9]. <http://nehu.ac.in>, Educational Status among the Scheduled Tribes: Issues and Challenges-NEHU.
- [10]. <http://www.ecoindia.com/>
- [11]. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Geographical-location-of-11-sampled-transects-in-Ri-Bhoi-district-of-Meghalaya-The_fig1_269697899
- [12]. India's endangered tribal groups see rise in population. http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-08-25/news/41445973_1_population-tribe-census
- [13]. Kumar A, Ramtek's Water Woes, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(3) (2003) 186-187. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4413093> Accessed: 29/10/2009)
- [14]. Mann Kamallesh, *TRIBAL WOMEN: ON THE THRESHOLD OF TWENTY – FIRST CENTURY*, M D Publications, New Delhi, 1996, ISBN-81-85880-88-3 P-126
- [15]. N. Ridei, Yuliya Rybalko, Yuliya Kycherenko, Svitlana Palamarchuk, 2013: p14-23).
- [16]. *Samaj darshan*, Banarjee publication, Kolkata-9
- [17]. Shakuntala Banaji (1 April 2010). *South Asian media cultures*. Anthem Press. p. 48, ISBN 978-1-84331-842-2.
- [18]. *STATISTICAL PROFILE OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN INDIA 2013*, Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statics Division, Government Of India, www.tribal.nic.in
- [19]. Tiwari S.C. (1980) *population structure and changing subsistence pattern of the Raji – a hunting gathering community of the Indo- Tibetan Border* : Singh I.P. and Tiwari S.C.(eds.), *Man and his Environment*. Concept publishing company, New Delhi, p.251-259.