



Educational Problems Of The Mishing Tribe Of Assam

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Abstract

Education is a vital instrument of socialization and social change, particularly for marginalized communities. Despite various governmental initiatives aimed at achieving universal education, tribal communities in Assam continue to face significant educational challenges. This paper examines the educational problems of the Mishing tribe of Assam with special emphasis on enrolment patterns, dropout rates, and the socio-economic factors responsible for educational backwardness. Based on secondary sources and field observations, the study reveals that poverty, geographical isolation, lack of educational infrastructure, parental illiteracy, and occupational compulsions are the major obstacles to educational attainment among the Mishings. The paper argues that while policy interventions have improved literacy levels, sustained efforts are required to address structural inequalities and ensure inclusive educational development.

Keywords: Mishing Tribe, Tribal Education, Dropout Rate, Assam, Educational Backwardness

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most significant agencies of socialization in human society. In a broader sense, education refers to the social process through which individuals acquire knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes necessary for effective participation in society. It is a planned and deliberate process designed to ensure systematic learning rather than accidental acquisition of knowledge.

As Shipman (1971) observes, education is that part of the socialization process which is consciously organized to ensure learning. Through formal institutions, education transmits technical knowledge as well as moral and cultural values essential for social continuity and change. In developing societies like India, education plays a crucial role in reducing social inequalities and uplifting marginalized sections, particularly tribal communities.

According to the Census of India (2011), Assam has a total population of 31,169,272, of which 3,308,570 persons belong to Scheduled Tribes, constituting about 12.4 percent of the state's population. The decadal growth rate of the Scheduled Tribe population during 2001–2011 was 15.1 percent. Assam is home to 23 recognized Scheduled Tribe communities.

Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts are the major tribal concentration areas, each having more than 50 percent tribal population. The overall literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes in Assam stands at 62.5 percent, which is higher than the national average for Scheduled Tribes (47.1 percent). Among the tribal communities, the Sonowal Kacharis record the highest literacy rate at 81.4 percent.

However, a significant gender gap persists. While male literacy stands at 72.3 percent, female literacy is only 52.4 percent, reflecting a gap of nearly 20 percentage points. Moreover, only 2.3 percent of the Scheduled Tribe population has attained graduate or postgraduate education, indicating limited access to higher education.

The dropout rate among Scheduled Tribe students in Assam remains alarmingly high. At the primary level (Classes I–V), the dropout rate is 57.12 percent, which is higher than neighboring Arunachal Pradesh (45.61 percent) and comparable to Manipur (51.5 percent). Girls' dropout rates are higher than those of boys, particularly at the primary and secondary levels.

The Mishings constitute the second largest Scheduled Tribe community in Assam. Ethnically, they belong to the Mongoloid stock and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Mishing language is widely spoken, and efforts have been made in recent decades to develop its written form.

The Mishings are mainly concentrated in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia, Golaghat, and parts of Upper Assam. Traditionally, agriculture is their primary occupation, and they usually inhabit riverine areas along the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Frequent floods and soil erosion severely affect their economy, making livelihood insecure.

Socio-economically and educationally, the Mishings remain backward. A large number of children are either not enrolled in schools or drop out at early stages, particularly between primary and secondary levels and again between secondary and college levels. This situation arises from multiple structural and cultural factors.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are:

1. To examine the relationship between teacher appointment and teacher–student ratio in village primary schools.
2. To identify the reasons for student dropout between primary and secondary levels and between secondary and college levels.

Government Initiatives in Tribal Education

To ensure universal education and reduce dropout rates, the Government of India has adopted a multi-pronged approach. The Department of School Education and Literacy has implemented several flagship programmes, notably the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the PM-Phosan Programme.

These programmes aim to enhance enrolment, retention, and nutritional support for children from disadvantaged communities, including Scheduled Tribes. Despite these initiatives, the desired outcomes have not been fully achieved among the Mishing population.

6. Findings and Analysis

Education is a crucial variable for social awareness and social change. It supplies skilled human resources and fosters attitudes conducive to planned socio-economic development. Since Independence, education has been used as a tool to reduce social disparities and uplift weaker sections of society.

The findings reveal a sharp decline in student numbers from primary to secondary and from secondary to college levels. One major reason for dropout is the absence of schools and higher educational institutions in or near Mishing villages. Economic constraints further restrict access to higher education.

Parental illiteracy and lack of awareness regarding the long-term benefits of education also contribute significantly to non-enrolment and dropout. Many children are compelled to assist their parents in agricultural activities or household work to supplement family income. Girls often remain at home to take care of younger siblings, while boys engage in cattle rearing and farming.

Although tribal students receive stipends under Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDP), these incentives are insufficient to offset deep-rooted poverty. Most families depend solely on cultivation for income, which limits their capacity to support

children's education.

Interestingly, the older generation, despite being deprived of educational opportunities, shows a positive attitude toward educating their children. However, financial limitations often prevent them from realizing this aspiration.

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the educational problems of the Mishing tribe of Assam within a broader tribal context. Despite improvements in literacy rates, the community continues to face serious challenges related to enrolment, retention, and access to higher education.

Poverty, inadequate infrastructure, geographical isolation, and parental illiteracy emerge as the major factors behind low educational attainment. Therefore, strengthening the economic base of rural tribal households is essential. Simultaneously, expansion of educational infrastructure, awareness programmes, and targeted enrolment drives are necessary to achieve inclusive and sustainable educational development among the Mishing tribe.

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