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Editorial

Gradually people are realizing the existence of two institutions viz. traditional institution and panchayati raj institution within the Adivasi community, with overlapping features. From time immemorial, the social affairs of the Adivasi Communities are dealt by the traditional institutions with different nomenclature for different groups. With the introduction of panchayati raj institution, another group has been assigned with the job to usher in development process in these communities. On one hand, the official institutions are there with the approval of competent authority whereas the traditional institutions are without the same. There is a common fear that these social/traditional institutions would become redundant and over a period of time they may become a thing of the past. When social institutions are not linked or integrated with the administrative process nor receive recognition and support, these will be struggling for their existence.

Till to date, the responsibility of running a society/community lies with the traditional institution in the Adivasi community who are still adhering to the age old norms, practices and customs. When opportunity to become a part of administration opened up in the form of panchayati raj system, people have a choice to switch over to the new system where required authority and compensation/ remuneration are in place. Whereas the community/society is left with very few society loving people who are managing to continue with the traditional panchayat system. Both the systems though sound similar giving an impression that both are contributing towards development of the community. But common perception is that the new system has been introduced without taking the cognizance of age old institution. The government should have empowered the existing institutions so that the traditional institutions would have become official institution.

There is a general fear that with the continuation of both the systems, one will give way to other. In this scenario, it is anticipated that traditional

system has to give way for the other one to flourish. Under this circumstance, it will be very difficult to revive the deteriorating traditional system. It will be even more difficult to convince people about the usefulness of this system. As a result, the institutions, which have shown path to the respective communities from one generation to another, will be destroyed.

Now the emerging concern is how to safeguard the interest of these institutions. One formula could be to consider and recognize these traditional institutions as a substitute of the panchayati raj institutions. Another one could be to extend similar support to these institutions like the panchayati raj institutions. One fact remains to be demonstrated before the concerned authorities about the usefulness of these institutions in the development process. Traditional institutions need to prove that they have a definite role to play and are the actual agent of change in the community and as such they be given additional responsibility in place of the panchayati raj institutions.

It is easier said than done. The preparedness of the respective community to stake claim in this regard is still at formative stage. Necessary or adequate groundwork is yet to be carried out and the issue is at the discussion level. Moreover, the traditional institutions are not in a position to collectively pursue their case. In their endeavour, full support from the people will enhance their confidence in making their case strong and relevant. The onus is not only with the selected members of that system, but equally lies with the people at large. Considering their present plight it will be too much to expect from them to fight for this cause. They are largely illiterate or semi literate. They cannot defend the interest of the community before the concerned authority, as some of the educated mass may like it to be. There is a pressing need of emergence of an able body/group who would spearhead this genuine claim. Let us not ignore this vital reality.

Position Paper

National Focus Group on Problems of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Children

Source: National Council of Education Research & Training (NCERT)

{Continued from January 2008 issue}

Implications of Recent Hindu Cultural Nationalist Influences on Curriculum

In the recent past a serious concern has been the 'Hinduisation' of the curriculum, its adverse implications for all children but most particularly to religious minorities and SC/ST. A deliberate policy move towards Hinduisation of the school which occurred at the behest of neoright national government's policy meant its specific framing within Vedic values and thought. However, even prior to that when there was no overt intent of curriculum or text to be grounded in dominant religious culture, the fact that most educational action teachers are Hindu made curriculum Hinduised (Ilaiyah, 1996). It influenced the manner in which annual days or other school events are celebrated. Breaking a coconut and lighting incense at the base of the flag pole on Republic or Independence Day is common practice. Additionally, distinctive Scheduled Tribe names are changed to standard Hindu names (Sundar, n.d.; Lobo, personal account).

IV. HIDDEN CURRICULUM AND SC/ST CHILDREN

The term "hidden curriculum" is used to mean the tacit teaching of dominant cultural norms, values and disposition towards maintenance of ideological hegemony (Apple, 1979). Within the Indian school scenario, the concept might actually be a misnomer because processes of cultural domination and caste class, tribe and gender relations that shape school organisation, culture and classroom interaction are all too visible.

In the school and in classrooms, teacher-pupil interaction is central to teaching and learning processes. Teacher's social background (caste, religion, language), affect their interactions with students. Middle class higher caste teachers are very unhappy with the environments of schools for the poor and are poorly motivated to teach children of the poor, particularly of SC/ST background, who are 'derogatorily' categorised as uneducable.

We have now an appalling body of evidence that suggests that teacher's preconceptions, bias and behaviour, subtle or overt, conscious or unconscious, operate to discriminate against children of SC/ST background¹⁶. Teachers are observed to have low expectations of SC/ST children and girls and a condescending and downright abusive attitude to poor

children from slums. Teachers also have stated or unstated assumptions of "deprived" and "deficient" cultural backgrounds, languages and inherent intellectual deficiencies of SC/ST children.

They follow discriminatory pedagogic practices of labelling, classifying and teaching styles and operate on the basis of "realistic" perceptions of low caste children's limited cognitive capacities and life chances. For e.g. teachers beliefs about Mushar children in Bihar are that they are just not interested in education and that they do not have any 'tension' in life (Kumar, 2004). Such presumptions set effective and in the teachers' view legitimate limits to their teaching effort. Levels of hostility and indifference to dalit/tribal cultural traits and value systems are high. Discriminatory behaviour manifests itself in numerous ways. Teachers perceive dalit and adivasi children in a negative light, see them as unclean, dishonest, lazy, ill-mannered etc. The children could be criticized for their clothes, the dialect they speak, the abhorment of uncouth habits of meat eating and alcohol consumption, the ignorance of their parents and even the colour of their skin! They are punished and shouted at in efforts to discipline and "civilize" them!

Several studies have noted that SC children do not encounter practices related to untouchability in school (Jodhka, 2000, 2002; Shah, 2000). However others point to varied forms of direct and subtle discrimination. For instance, Artis, et al. (2003) find that in village schools of Gujarat, SC children are forced to sit at the back, actively discouraged to participate in class, are subject to food and water taboos. Similar experiences exist for village schools in Karnataka (Eddie Premdas, personal account). Tribal children too are victims of 'caste like' discrimination as a study conducted in the tribal village of Harda (M.P) has pointed out. Teaching Korku children is considered as good as 'teaching cows' by teachers.

Non-adivasi children do not mix with them or drink water from the same tap! (Balagopalan, 2003). In relation to dalits, teachers refuse to correct their notebooks. Complaints to headmaster results in beating of children. Indeed teacher violence against dalit children is widely reported.

Like the children, dalit and tribal teachers also suffer humiliation and discrimination (Jha and Jhingran, 2002; Heredia, 1992; Samavesh, 2003; Jodhka, 2000, 2002).

(To be continued...)

Scheduled Communities: A social Development profile of SC/STs (Bihar, Jharkhand & W.B)

(Source: Planning Commission)

{Continued from January 2008 issue}

Some Inter-State Comparisons : Scheduled Castes

▪ It may be noted that the Dhobi in Bihar are either owner cultivators (45.0 %) or are service holders (55.0 percent). In West Bengal, however, 83.3 percent of their workers are occupied in the non-agricultural sector like service and business etc. The occupational pattern of Dhobi in both these States points to a much better economic status than the rest.

▪ The Chamar is the only caste which appears in substantial numbers in our samples in all the three States. This is followed by the Dom in Jharkhand and West Bengal. The Dhobi, which has been taken as a special case in Bihar, appears in significant numbers in West Bengal.

▪ While the Chamar in Bihar are predominantly agricultural labourers (73.4%), they are largely in non-agricultural occupations in Jharkhand (83.3 per cent) and West Bengal (64.4 percent). However, it may be recalled, in Jharkhand they are all located in Ranchi town. Like Jharkhand, in West-Bengal all the Chamar households (48) are located in Jhargram town which is peripherally urbanised in comparison to Ranchi. Considering this, it is significant that none are in non-agricultural labour but instead, they have a substantial presence as agricultural labourers. However, the majority are in the non-agricultural sector. Finally, the earner status of Chamar fluctuates considerably. It is highest in Bihar (43.7%), lowest in West Bengal (24.7%) and in Jharkhand it is (31.5%).

▪ The Dom in Jharkhand is again entirely urban, with 57.1 percent of workers in service and 28.6 percent as non-agricultural labourers. In West Bengal, the Dom are concentrated in animal husbandry (39.2 %), petty business (21.7 %) and agricultural labour (28.3 %). They do not figure as non-agricultural labourers. The occupational diversification in West Bengal is broad and pervasive, engulfing within its sweep the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Scheduled Tribes, Jharkhand

Having examined the main occupational pattern of Scheduled Castes, let us now examine the same

among the Scheduled Tribes of Jharkhand and West Bengal.

In Jharkhand all the eight tribal communities, with 544 sample households constitute 1451 workers. Of these, 40.3 percent belong to the class of labour (16.9 per cent agricultural labourers, 23.4 percent non-agricultural labourers), 32.9 percent are owner-cultivators and 26.6 percent are in other non-agricultural occupations. Very few are in business (3.0 %) and quite a few are in service (13.5 %). There are hardly any tenant cultivators. The occupational diversification in Jharkhand is to a considerable extent influenced by one-third of the sample tribal households being concentrated in Ranchi.

It may be noted that the Oraon, Lohara and Munda tribes are almost entirely found in the urban sample of Ranchi. Secondly, due to the tribal homogeneity of tribal settlements, specific tribal communities predominate in tribal settlements.

For example, all our Ho households are located in the sample panchayat in West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, whereas the Mahali and the Santhal are located in Dumka.

If we just take into account the Ho, Mahali and Santhal, who are all rural based, the picture alters. Together they constitute 1095 workers. Of these 21.8 percent are agricultural labourers, 18.1 percent are non-agricultural labourers, 42.7 percent are owner-cultivators and 17.2 percent are in other non-agricultural occupations.

Table 4.15: Main occupation of Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand. (Not reproduced)

• The three tribal communities (Oraon, Munda and Lohara) mainly located in Ranchi, are concentrated in service, business and non-agricultural labour.

• The Oraon and Munda present a similar occupational pattern, with a high percentage of workers in service (Oraon 63.4 ; Munda 54.4).

• In sharp contrast, the Lohara are mainly in non-agricultural labour (54.1 %). This indicates a sharp differentiation between Oraon and Munda, on the one hand, and Lohara, on the other, in the same urban setting.

• The Ho in rural West Singhbhum are predominantly owner-cultivators (68.5%) but also with a significant number of non-agricultural labourers (17.8%).

• Amongst the Santhal, (who like the Ho in our sample are all rural households), agricultural labourers predominate (51.7%). Only 20.6 percent are ownercultivators. In the non-agricultural sector they are visible only as non-agricultural labourers (23.5 %). Thus, nearly 75 percent of the Santhal belong to the class of labour.

▪ The Mahali, who in our sample are in the same panchayat with the Santhal in Dumka, present a picture different from that of the Santhal. There is a unique pattern. The percentage of earners declaring themselves as owner-cultivators is a mere 2.3 percent, yet 46 percent households own land. How can this be explained? This becomes clear when we note that 88.7 percent workers have reported themselves as petty cultivators in their subsidiary occupation.

They are overwhelmingly into the production of bamboo (86.7 %). It will be clear that the Mahali are largely self-employed whereas the Santhal are predominately labourers, although they are located in the same location.

West Bengal

In West Bengal altogether twelve tribes are in 557 households with 1513 workers. As many as 37.7 percent of them are owner-cultivators and a similar percentage belong to the class of labourers (35.7 percent). In the nonagricultural occupations, they figure mostly in service (20.2 %) and hardly much in business (1.7%); and in animal husbandry artisanry etc. they are only 3.1 percent. It is significant that non-agricultural labourers amongst the Scheduled Castes in West Bengal is almost non-existent (0.4%). Whereas among the Scheduled Tribes it is 20.7 percent. This is similar to the tribal population in Jharkhand (23.4%).

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There is another significant difference between the worker participation in `business of SCs and STs in West Bengal. Whereas among the SCs in West Bengal 22.5 percent are in business, among the STs this is only 1.7 percent. Once again the pattern is similar to that of the tribal communities of Jharkhand where only 3.0 percent are in business. These commonalities between the tribals of Jharkhand and West Bengal point to features transcending the distinctions of the two States.

Table 4.16: Main occupation for Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal (Not reproduced)

• Owner-cultivator households among the Scheduled Tribes ranges between 36.6 percent and 52.2 percent with the singular exception of the Lodha (3.9%). The tribes which fall within this range are the Santhal (36.6%), Mahali (39.1%), Munda (42.8%), Oraon (45.7%) and Bhumij (52.2%).

▪ The Oraon, Munda and Mahali are conspicuous by their insignificant presence either as agricultural or non-agricultural labour. It may be noted that the Mahali, Munda and Oraon are concentrated in the Naxalbari region of Darjeeling district and are highly concentrated in service (56.3 percent Mahali, 50.8 percent Munda, 47.8 percent Oraon). It will be useful to keep in mind that this region underwent violent revolutionary agrarian conflicts in the late '60s and '70s. These three tribal communities are also well represented as owner-cultivators.

The Santhal who are largest in our sample, are distributed in districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Jhargram and Burdwan.. Nearly half of the worker population belong to the class labourers (50.8%). As many as 36.6 percent workers are in the nonagricultural sector, of which non-agricultural labour itself constitutes as 26.4%. The rest 10.2 percent are, in service (6.3%), business (1.2%); and in animal husbandry, artisanry, etc. (2.7%). **(To be continued...)**

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