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Perception of Tribal Girl Students of Himachal Pradesh about the Difficulties Faced by them in Pursuing Education

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Abstract : *Tribal areas in Himachal Pradesh include Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts in their entirety along with two tehsils and one sub-tehsil of Chamba district. There could be no denying that the rate of literacy among the tribal population in Himachal Pradesh has grown significantly over the decades. However, there is still a wide gap in literacy rate of the men and the women population. This gives a clear indication that, like in other fields, the relatively backward tribal women population cannot take the equal advantage of the state sponsored development initiatives. The present paper aimed to investigate different problems faced by girl students in pursuing their education as well as seeking views and perception of students on issues related to dropout among girls in tribal areas. The findings of the study disclosed that ill health, household work load, distant school and lack of physical facility are the major reasons of irregular attendance. Girls face difficulty in co-education like eve teasing; hesitate in expressing their views freely and feel uncomfortable in sitting with boys in a classroom. Unfriendly treatments like made fun of weakness in studies, abusive language against family and character assassination etc. at school add to their difficulties. The perceived crucial reasons behind the incidence of dropping out are the failure in class, household work load, poverty, lack of interest in studies and insecurity on the way to school.*

Keywords: *Tribal Girl Students, Literacy, Attendance, Drop Out*

Introduction

The tribes occupy a significant position in Indian population. The 2011 census put the number of persons belonging to scheduled tribes in India at 104.3 million which is 8.6% of the total population. The tribes have distinct cultures, religions, social practices and dialects leading to different levels of socio-economic development. Tribal have lived mainly in forests, hills and inaccessible terrain for centuries. They have remained isolated from the mainstream population. This centuries old isolation has lead to their backwardness in all socio-economic development. Central and state governments have undertaken a number of steps in the form of schemes, programmes for their upliftment which

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have improved their socio-economic life and educational attainment to a large extent. However the improvements have not reached to the desired level. There is a wide gender gap particularly in the field of education. Every society has different norms and values which hinder women to enjoy equality and freedom. Tribal women remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitious, social evils and many other cultural factors. Lack of education is largely responsible for exploitation and pitiable plight of the tribes (Awais, Alam and Asif 2009). In the tribal communities, which are living on the fringe of the society, one could easily notice educational backwardness and large scale gender discrimination (Roy 2005). Even in 21st century atrocities, exploitation and discrimination against women is there in all societies. Government cannot be successful or it will take long time unless norms and values related to tribal women will change. But with most effective instruments i.e. education we can achieve this fast. Education imparts knowledge, and knowledge of self identity and human environment will infuse a sense of confidence, courage and ability among the weaker sections of the society to know and overcome their problems associated with exploitation and deprivation, and avail socio-economic and political opportunities extended to them (Pradhan 2011). Women education deals not only with entire female realms but with the future of family and nation; as there is a saying that 'a literate mother will never have an illiterate child' child' thus educating women means an educated tomorrow. Female education and economic growth are correlated aiding independence and equality with men counterpart (Chakraborty 2013). The main aim of education is to change the norms related to tribal women so that they can enjoy freedom and understand their rights and responsibilities towards nation development (Rani, Rajani and Neeraja 2011). For scheduled group in India, gender equality should be conceptualized as an integral part of the development process (Dunn 1993).

After the grant of statehood in 1971 the tribal areas in Himachal Pradesh were specified by the Scheduled Areas (Himachal Pradesh) Order, 1975 (Constitution order 102) dated 21 November 1975. The tribal areas include Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts in their entirety along with two tehsils and one sub-tehsil of Chamba district. The schedule tribe population of the state as per 2011 census comes to 3,92,126 persons forming 5.7% of the total population. The schedule tribes of the state include (i) the gaddi, (ii) the kinnaura, (iii) the gujjar, (iv) the jad/ the lamba/ the khampa, (v) the bhot or bodh, (vi) the pangwala, (vii) the lahaula and (viii) the swangla (Tribal Sub-Plan 2010).

Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts are remote areas which remain snowbound for over six months in a year, one of India's most in-accessible districts. Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti have larger number of tribal population in Himachal Pradesh. Despite a series of efforts by the government, there exist numerous problems related to women education. This problem is more pronounced in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. Hence, the study reports on the exploratory analysis of women education in the selected tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. Literacy is powerful indicator of social and economic development. There has been a continuous increase in the literacy rate of Himachal Pradesh. Overall literacy increased from 31.96% in 1971 to 63.86% in 1991 and 83.78% by 2011. The female literacy rate of the state 20.23% in 1971 improved to 76.60% in 2011, a jump of four times approximately. The gap in male and female literacy rate dropped down gradually from 22.96% in 1971 to 14.23% in 2011 with the exception of 1991 where it showed slight widening of this gap.

Similarly the overall literacy rate in district Kinnaur gradually increased from 27.7% in 1971 to 37.02% in 1981, showed a remarkable increase to 80.77% by 2011. The gap in male and female literacy rates which was 32.74% in 1971 decreased to 30% in 1991. It showed a considerable improvement from 30% to 17.03% during two decades of 1991-2011.

Table 1: Progress of literacy (in percentage)

Year		Himachal Pradesh	Kinnaur	Lahaul-Spiti
1971	Males	43.19	43.09	41.68
	Females	20.23	10.35	9.39
	Total	31.96	27.70	27.15
1981	Males	53.19	51.45	43.50
	Females	31.50	20.78	15.40
	Total	42.48	37.02	31.30
1991	Males	75.36	72.04	71.78
	Females	52.13	42.04	38.05
	Total	63.86	58.36	56.82
2001	Males	85.30	84.30	82.76
	Females	67.40	64.40	60.94
	Total	76.50	75.20	73.17
2011	Males	90.83	88.37	86.97
	Females	76.60	71.34	66.50
	Total	83.78	80.77	77.24

[Source: Handbook of Educational and Allied Statistics (1994); State Statistical Abstract of Himachal Pradesh (Various Issues)]

In case of district Lahaul-Spiti the overall literacy rate of 27.15% in 1971 increased to 77.24% in 2011. The gap in male and female literacy rates was 32.29% as compared to 22.96% of H.P in 1971 improved to 28.1% in 1981. This gap narrowed down from 33.73% to 20.47% during the period of two decades i.e. 1991 to 2011. Female literacy rate which was 09.39% in 1971 improved to 15.4% in 1981. It progressed impressively to 60.94% during 1981-2001 showing an improvement of about 22% in each decade. During the next decade it reached the 66.5% mark but still 10% below their counterparts of the state.

There could be no denying that the rate of literacy among these two tribal districts i.e. Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh has grown significantly over the decades. However, there is still a wide gap in literacy rate of the men and the women population. This gives a clear indication that, like in other fields, the relatively backward tribal women population cannot take the equal advantage of the state sponsored development initiatives.

Review of Literature

To understand the factors affecting girls' education it would be useful to base our understanding of tribal education on the vast research literature that is available. An attempt has been made to present an overall comprehensive analysis of the outcomes of studies and articles that have been reviewed. Ghosh (2007) analyzed the gender gap in literacy and education among the scheduled tribes of Jharkhand and West Bengal. The data were primarily obtained from the survey conducted in 2000-01 by the Council for Social Development, New Delhi on SC and ST in Jharkhand and west Bengal. The gender disparity in most cases tends to increase from elementary level to secondary and senior secondary level. The analyses of factors responsible for dropout of girl students are numerous. As majority of the parents are involved in agriculture their daughters are required for number of agriculture operations. This leads to their irregular attendance in classes finally leading to dropout. Majority of children

including girls are engaged in survival tasks. Economic hardship, care of siblings, household chores are equally pressing factors for dropout of children particularly girls. Lack of interest in studies, non-availability of schools within easy access posing the security problem, poor quality education, lack of proper toilet facilities for girls, non-availability of female teachers are the other reasons for dropout of girl students from their schools. Sabar (2010) conducted study on schooling among girls of Chuktia Bhunjia tribe of Naupada district of Orissa. Interview schedules were used to gather data from 45 dropout girls and their parents. A questionnaire was used to gather data from eight school teachers. The researcher concluded that there is a wide gap existing between boys and girls. The culture factors of pre-puberty marriage and puberty are the major factors of their dropouts. Language factor is also found to be the factor for dropout. Culture barriers, poverty, household work, ignorance of parents, feeling of insecurity, teacher's behavior, early marriage etc. have been considered the other reasons of high dropout among girls of Chuktia Bhunjia tribe. Puhan, Gamango and Malla (2013) conducted a study to understand the present status of tribal women education in tribal areas of Rayagada district of Odisha. Descriptive method was used to explore the level of parents participation and role of government in eradication of ongoing barriers of tribal education. The findings of the study revealed Majority of teachers stated that parents do not understand the importance and influence of their role at home for the proper education of their girls. Poor economic condition, illiteracy and ignorance about Government incentives of parents have a bad impact on their girl's education. The problems of drinking water, school buildings, transportation are severe in tribal areas. Non-availability of sufficient number of female teachers and language teachers are the other two factors inhibiting the growth of tribal girls' education in the districts.

A synthesis of the findings of the literature review done makes it evident that literacy rate has improved but there is wide gender gap in education where women are lagging behind men. In tribal areas dropout and irregular attendance are higher in case of girls as compared to the boys. The major reasons behind these incidences are household workload, socio-economic status of family, distant schools and apathy of parents towards girls' education. Lack of female teachers discourages parents and girls for attending the schools. Irrelevant curriculum and medium of instruction other than the mother tongue are perceived as the other reasons behind the girls' educational backwardness. Infrastructure facilities are neither adequate nor based on gender requirement. Hence there is enough of empirical evidence that there are number of socio-economic problems which are hindering the progress of education among tribal women. An understanding of these factors would provide the insight to make proper changes to meet the need of girl students from tribal areas so as to foster equitable access to education. There is a need to make great efforts in enhancing equalization of educational opportunities and address to the problem of gender discrimination of girls in education.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To identify the problems faced by girl students in the process of receiving education.
2. To identify the causes of drop-out among girls at school level in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.

Research Questions

The present research focused on some pertinent questions in the context of women education in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh.

1. What are the reasons for irregular attendance at school?

2. What are the unfriendly treatments faced by girls students in schools?
3. What are the difficulties faced by girl students due to co-education?
4. What is the perception of the girl students on the reasons of dropout among girls?

Methodology

The study was evaluative in nature to investigate the educational problems among girl students in Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. Descriptive research was undertaken to seek different problems faced by girl students in pursuing education as well as seeking views and perception of students on issues related to dropout among girls in tribal areas. Purposive sampling was used for the study. The district of Lahoul-Spiti and Kinnaur has three sub divisions each. Out of these sub division 24 schools were randomly chosen by giving due consideration to the population and remoteness aspects of location. To make the sample representative from each selected schools students of grade 8th, 10th and 12th were randomly chosen and thus 502 students of these grades constituted the sample for the study. While selecting students due consideration was given to the number of girl enrolment in middle, high and secondary level. The researcher developed a questionnaire for the students to collect the data. Data were collected individually and personally by the investigator. In accordance with the objectives of the study, the statistical techniques used were the calculation of frequencies and percentage of response, for each item, in the questionnaire were made.

Results and Findings

Reasons for Irregular Attendance at School

School attendance is essential for educational success. Absenteeism leads to low standards of academic achievement which results in lack of interest and finally dropout. Students were asked to give information and insights on attendance issues, including the clarification of factors which have been shown to affect the attendance of girl students. The views are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for irregular attendance at school

Reasons	Percentage of responses
Household work load	31.27
Illness	30.88
Distant school	15.54
Lack of physical facility	11.95
Fear of getting punishment at school	9.96
Do not understand what teachers teach	8.76
Lack of interest in studies	7.97
Poor teaching	7.17

Note-: Total value exceeds 100 as there are multi responses

Girls contribute their maximum in carrying out household work. 31.27% of the students perceive this as the reason for their irregular attendance. Illness as one of the reasons for irregular attendance at school has been stated by 30.88% of the students. In tribal areas distance of the schools from the home of the students affects their regular attendance. 15.54% have stated this as one of the reasons. 11.95% of the students blame on lack of physical facilities in a school as one of the cause of their irregular attendance. Fear of getting punishment at school discourages them to be regular has been opined by

9.96% of the students. Do not understand what teachers teach forces them to remain absent has been stated by 8.76% of the students. 7.97% and 7.17% of the students attributed lack of interest in studies and poor teaching respectively, as the other reasons for irregular attendance.

Difficulties faced due to Co-Education

Co-Education means the teaching of both boys and girls in the same school and without any distinction. This system of education has both merits and demerits. In this regard students were asked to give their views on co- education. The views are tabulated in table 3.

Table 3: Difficulties faced due to co-education

Difficulties faced	Percentage of responses
No difficulty experienced	43.23
Eve teasing	28.29
Hesitation in expressing views freely	19.92
Uncomfortable in sitting with boys	10.76

Note:- Total value exceeds 100 as there are multi responses

In response to difficulty faced due to co-education 43.23% stated that they face no difficulty on account of the school being co-education. Eve teasing as one of the difficulties faced has been stated by 28.29% of the students. Hesitate in expressing their views freely in front of boys. This difficulty has been shared by 19.92% of the students. Feel uncomfortable in sitting with boys has been reported by 10.76% of the students.

Unfriendly Treatment Faced in Schools

The school is the place where the children spend daily a part of their time. During this duration the students come across with number of situations. Some of the situations have negative effect on the personality of a student. It is important that such issues should be quickly recognized and addressed. To comprehend the seriousness of problem views of the students were taken and are tabulated in table- 4.

Table 4: Unfriendly treatment faced in Schools

Unfriendly treatment Faced	Percentage of responses
Clubbing of name with others	35.26
Making fun of weakness in studies	19.32
Abusive language used against family	15.34
Character assassination	13.74
Passing comments on physical appearance	12.55
Looking with evil intention	11.15
Harsh Punishment causes embarrassment	6.57
Making fun of one's language	6.17

Note:- Total value exceeds 100 as there are multi responses

Clubbing of name with others has been stated by 35.26% of the students as the unfriendly treatment faced by them. 19.3% of students stated that being weak in their studies others make fun of them. 15.34% reported that abusive language is used against their family. Character assassination as the other unfriendly treatment is faced by 13.74% of the students. Passing comments on their physical

appearance has been reported by 12.55% of the students as the other unfriendly treatment in the schools. Looking with evil intention at the girl students has been stated by 11.15% of the students. A harsh punishment in school causes embarrassment as reported by 6.57% of the students. They feel hurt when they are made fun of because of their language as stated by 6.17% of the students.

Reasons for Dropout among Girls

The net enrolment figure has shown improvement but the problem of retention is still continuing. The views of the girl students regarding reasons for dropout among girls are tabulated in table 5.

Table 5: Perception regarding reasons of dropout among girls

Reasons	Percentage of responses
Failure in class	35.06
Household work load	26.49
Parents inability to bear expense of schooling	25.70
Lack of interest in studies	23.90
Feeling of insecurity on the way to school	15.34
No guarantee of employment even after getting education	13.74
Inability to understand the lesson	12.95
Distant school	10.36
Lack of transport facilities	9.36
Lack of physical facility in schools	7.17
Co-education	6.77

Note-: Total value exceeds 100 as there are multi responses

Eleven parameters in Table 5 have been taken into consideration as perception regarding reasons for drop out among girls. Failure in class leads to dropout among girls in these tribal areas has been perceived as one of the significant causes by 35.06% of the students. In rural areas girls contribute their maximum in carrying out household work and devote most of their time in these routine jobs. These activities force them to discontinue their studies. 26.49% of the students perceive this as a cause of dropout. Parents are unable to bear expenses of schooling as they have to spend on lodging and boarding facility of their daughters. 25.70% of the students opine that inability of bearing expenses by some parents force the girls to dropout. The lack of interest in studies was found to be a major cause of dropout among girl students. 23.90% of the students have attributed lack of interest in studies as the leading cause of dropout. Students either have to walk few kilometers through isolated areas or avail limited transport facilities to reach the schools leading to insecurity on the way to school. This has been attributed as a cause of dropout by 15.34% of the students. Since there is no guarantee of employment for the educated this was perceived as a cause of dropping out of the girls students from the schools in between. 13.74% of the students perceive this reason as one of the causes of dropout. Inability to understand what is taught in the classroom is considered as one of the reasons for dropout by 12.95% of the students. In the tribal areas distance of the schools from the homes forces the girls to discontinue their studies as shared by 10.36%. Lack of transport facilities in the hilly region, particularly the tribal areas discourages girl students to continue their studies. This has been shared by 9.36% of the students as one of the causes of dropout among girl students. Lack of physical facility is one of the causes of dropout of girl students has been attributed by 7.17% of the students. Co-education system as one of the reasons for dropout has been perceived by 6.77% of the students.

Conclusion and Discussion of Results

The literacy rate in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh has increased almost three times from 1971 to 2011 and the state has been successful in reducing the gaps in literacy level between general and scheduled tribe. But still the gap in literacy rate between male and female is still a matter of concern.

Although government started many schemes like mid day meal, free books, free uniform etc. even then girls face problem in attending school on the regular basis. Ill health was the main reason cited for irregular attendance. A child who misses school because of ill health might find it difficult to catch up with the studies. Girl children do several kind of work at home. They assist their mother with the house work and look after their siblings. Farmers often send daughters for work in the field. Under such circumstances with such a tremendous workload, girls face problems in coping with studies and make excuses not to go school. In tribal areas with very limited and poor transport facility students have to walk 2-5 kilometer daily to reach their schools. This problem gets more aggravated during winter season when the temperatures are sub zero and the area is covered with snow. Apart from these factors poor teaching, fear of getting punishment and inability to understand the lesson and lack of interest in studies also contribute to their irregular attendance.

Co-education is prevalent in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh. Both boys and girls are given academic education together. The study clearly reflects that girls face difficulty in co-education system of education. They shared eve teasing as one of the difficulties faced. Beside this, girls admit that they hesitate in expressing their views freely in front of boys and feel uncomfortable in sitting with boys in a classroom. Hence the lack of separate schools for boys and girls also seems to be a barrier for girl education.

Some of the more common problems faced by the students are unfriendly treatment in school. Peers, teachers and administrative staff are held responsible for such unwanted treatment. If unfriendly treatments are not picked up and addressed earlier, they can have significant, long term consequences. Unfriendly treatment like clubbing of their name with others, making fun of weakness in their studies, abusive language used against their family, character assassination, comments on their physical appearance, looked with evil intention, harsh punishment by teachers leading to embarrassment and making fun of their language might contribute to poor self-esteem and also lead to an increased risk of dropping out. These factors may force girls to avoid school and breed less interest in attending the school.

In district Kinnaur during the year 2012-13 dropout rate among girls in primary, middle, secondary and 11th was 3.83%, 7.30%, 14.21% and 17.63% respectively. Similarly in district Lahaul-Spiti at primary level girl's dropout was 74% in 2012-13. In middle, secondary and 11th it was 1.29%, 14.26% and 10.16% respectively (U-DISE 2012). These incidences of dropout emerge as the most critical problem for education system. Girls often enroll in primary education and then they dropout, due to the burden of work at home which does not permit regular attendance. In case she attends classes, she cannot spare time at home to study or to finish her home work. As a result she falls behind in the class, fails to pass at the end of the year and ultimately dropping out. The reason could be that either because she has developed a dislike for school or because her parents are already critical about the value of girl's education because of poor performance in the school. Lack of guarantee after getting education, lack of transport facility to go to school and parent's inability to bear the expenses of schooling compels children to give up studies. Distance of schools from home, ill health was also the reasons mentioned by the respondents. Small percentage of students attributed insecurity on the way to school,

lack of physical facilities in school, inability to understand the lesson. Girls face difficulty like eve teasing and feel uncomfortable in sitting with boys and this becomes the reason for their dropping out.

Constitutional provisions, special schemes and programmes have brought about many positive changes in tribal education. The expansion of schools have somewhat mitigated the problem of accessibility of school facility to tribal children. But at the same time educational inequality among tribal is a matter of concern. A great deal needs to be done to deal with the severity of the problems of education among girls. To tackle with this problem a positive outlook towards girl's education needs to be encouraged. It is only through the combined effort and new vision the educational and other problems of girls can be minimized and rooted out.

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