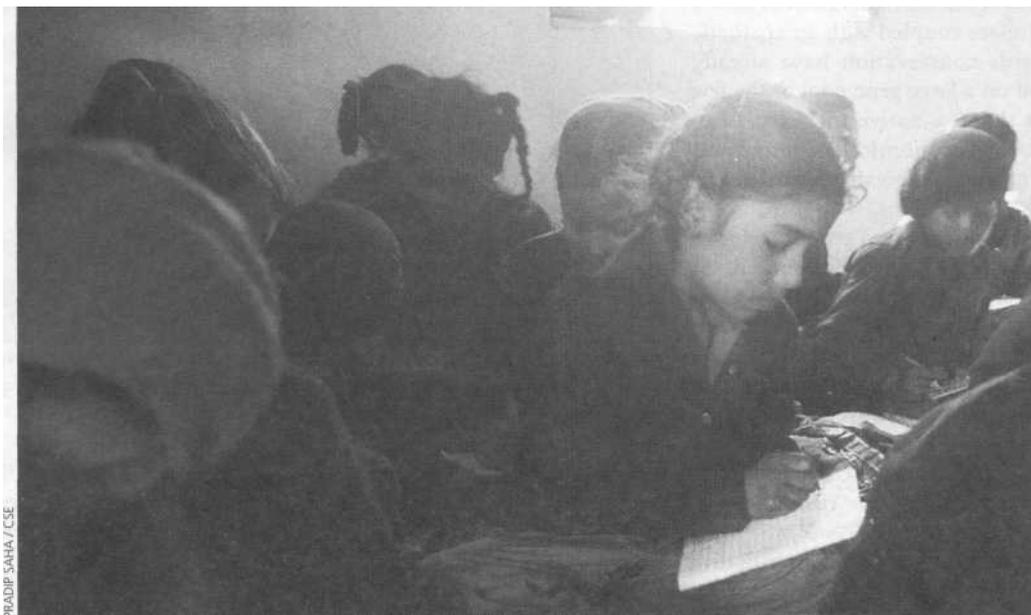


# Educating the underprivileged

A review of our educational and training policy is desperately needed to educate tribals, the backward classes and the poor



NEERU NANDA

THE goal of universal education eludes india even though there is now a primary school in practically every village. The rate of dropouts continues to be over 50 per cent. The greatest casualty in the failure of our education system has been the girl child — whether in terms of enrolment, retention rates in primary school or even participation in higher education relative to the overall enrolment rate.

## The residential schools

When it comes to effective education of children from the backward, rural or tribal areas, special efforts within the present system have been invariably geared towards the residential school pattern. State governments have set up a large number of tribal hostels and ashram schools for tribal children in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Navodaya Vidyalayas, set up in almost every rural district in the country, constitute the latest government venture in this field.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) have set up high-quality renowned residential schools for tribal and backward rural areas such as the Ramakrishna Mission in Along (Arunachal Pradesh) and Deoghar, Bihar, the well-known girls boarding school, set up by the Sarda Mission, for tribal girls of Tirap district (Arunachal Pradesh), 18 Vivekanand Kendras, also in Arunachal Pradesh, Christian Missionary schools in the tribal belt of Chotanagpur and Banasthali Vidyapeeth, Rajasthan. The Christian missionaries have done yeoman service in educating tribal girls in the north-eastern states. Banasthali girls are today doing well in many spheres in that region.

The ground reality of the average elementary school in rural, tribal and backward areas is grim. A close look at a case study of a tribal district in Andhra Pradesh can help us understand the problem.

## The Andhra experience

The state of education in the Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh, 30 years

after Independence, offers a unique message. The state government has made commendable efforts to educate Gonds by setting up ashrams (boarding schools). Investment has also been very high. In 1979, Furer Haimendorf — who has written the book, "Tribes of India" — did a survey of all the tribal areas in Andhra Pradesh. He found 399 ashram schools (26,746 students), about 2,000 primary and upper primary schools, (about 40,000 students), 75 high schools (about 3,630 students) and six junior colleges (305 students). The annual budget in 1978-79 was Rs 56,340,000. Yet, 36 years later, only five Gonds and two Pardhans had obtained University degrees. In the village Marlavai, after being 34 years in operation, this system has produced only 11 literate adults among the villagers.

Only few children made progress beyond the fifth standard (see graph: *Growing down*).

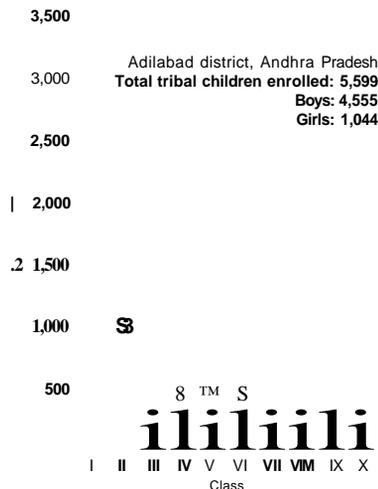
Due to the inability to cope with exams, most of the students have failed to get admission to colleges. Even for

training in mechanical skills, this programme was a failure. Though job reservations for tribals exists, the qualified manpower is limited or is unavailable. In 1977, altogether six tribals were enrolled in the district Industrial Training Institute (in) though Singarem Collieries operated there and regularly imported labour for skilled jobs from other districts. While in 1977 there were 17 vacancies for ITI certificate holders in the employment exchange, there were only two tribal candidates available.

What are the reasons for this failure? suggests that the problems lie in the web of socio-economic backwardness in which these tribes have historically been invested. However, unwilling non-Gondi teachers, uninte-

## Growing down

*The dropout rate of children rises dramatically after the first class*



rested in the pupils and the social milieu to which they belong, have also largely contributed to the lack of success of tribal schools and high dropout rates among Gondi children.

Schools in Adilabad district have very poor infrastructure, poor transport facilities, no residential quarters for the teachers, and there are no houses available for hire. In fact, the disincentives for non-rural and non-tribal teachers are so high that large scale absenteeism has to be accepted as part of the educational scenario in these tribal districts.

## The hope of enlightenment

Let us take two extreme cases — that of the Afro-American child in an inner city

## The greatest casualty has been the girl child — whether in terms of enrollment or higher education

school in an urban metropolis in USA and a Gondi child in a remote poverty-stricken village in Adilabad. The common dilemma shared by the children of these apparently dissimilar systems is that the school holds out no hope or prospect for the underprivileged child in both. The social systems offer no hope for the child, there are few or hardly any occupational models for success and often a negative image of the child as a slow learner, indisciplined or otherwise "unteachable" is also projected in the teaching community. This image gradually percolates to the mindset of the child. The medium for this percolation is the teacher who acts as a bridge between society and the child, a sort of a conduit who interprets the child's future in relation to the child's present.

### The Adilabad experiment of 1943

Haimmendorft developed a scheme where he sought to educate tribals by picking up all the few available semi-literate Gonds who were systematically trained to teach. They were taught the three 'R'. For Gondi to be taught in the first two classes, simple primers were developed in the Devangari script. Since teachers had no formal qualification, stress was laid on in service training (the fashionable slogan of the New Educational Policy today). All the teachers had to undergo an annual one month training course. Supervision was

close and constant.

By 1951, the Marlavai Training Centre which began with the training of five semi-literate Gonds had produced 95 teachers, five village officers, one revenue inspector, five clerks and seven forest guards. Sadly, this system was superseded after Independence, not only by the introduction of Telugu, but more importantly by the enforcement of teachers training degrees as an eligibility condition which ensured that no tribal could be selected to teach his own people. Only non-tribals could come and teach the illiterate Gond with little success, given the barriers of language, social and cultural milieu and utter backward condition of the area.

In 1977, when Haimendorf made his second research on the benefits of education for the Gonds, he found only 37 tribals of Adilabad district had received enough education to enter government service. Of these, only three had managed to complete BA/BSC, while three failed in BA/BSC. Not a single one was a government teacher. A majority of them had just managed to pass the secondary school certificate. And this was not recognised as a qualification for teaching. Had these 26 Gonds of Adilabad district been given an initial and ongoing intensive investment in training they might have done wonders for educating Gondi youngsters, even within the parameters of isolated

**High dropout rates among tribal children is because of poor infrastructure, poor transport facilities and lack of residential quarters for teachers**



JHABUA DISTRICT AUTHORITY

schools with poor facilities and leaking roofs. Besides the obvious basic advantage of sharing a common socio-cultural milieu, these young men would have been symbols of hope for the children, role models whom they could emulate and strive to follow.

### **Non-formal Education: the post 1986 scene**

It goes to the credit of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that as a part of his continual efforts to modernise India, he forced the bureaucracy to take a serious look at the failures of the educational infrastructure. This in itself was a great achievement of the New Education Policy of 1986, and the best strategy adopted was to open up the system to voluntary effort so as to provide room and scope for innovation in the hope that flexibility will lead also to new systems.

Non-formal education (NFE) is an accepted bureaucratic jargon in the ministry of human resources development. But the break with the past has yet to come. Greater importance needs to be given to the NGOs who are working in this field. Proper documentation is the need of the hour and a concise and comprehensive evaluation of their performance has yet to be undertaken. Institutions undertaking non-formal education projects could absorb and benefit from a higher level of funding. The best project executed by the Rajasthan Government has been jointly funded by the Government of India and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

The Rajasthan state government has taken a pragmatic and measured view of the special problems of state schools in poverty-stricken areas where teacher absenteeism is rampant and village responses to the schools apathetic. The blueprint drawn up for the Shiksha Karmi Scheme is almost identical to the Gondi experiment of 1946 in Adilabad. It also has a parallel in the extremely successful strategy devised by Bunker Roy for night schools run by the Tilonia School of Social Work in Rajasthan for school dropouts and children of grazers and peasant families.



*Girls have a higher dropout rate than men*

In Tilonia, school dropouts who have passed only the eight or 10th grade are employed as barefoot teachers. They are trained to generate social awareness towards the village environment and rural issues amongst the students by involving every possible resource in the village—policepersons, postmaster, nurse, patwari, bank manager, village head who explain how systems work (or do not work) for them.

## **Though job reservation for tribals exists, the qualified humanpower is limited or is unavailable**

The Shiksha Karmi scheme has now completed a decade since its inception, covering about 2,000 village primary schools in over 70 blocks spread over 29 districts of Rajasthan. Taken both in terms of economy of investment as well as the spread of beneficiaries, this scheme is far more effective than residential schools would have been for the spread of primary education.

While the Navodaya Vidyalayas have an annual student population of over one lakh students in the whole country, the Shiksha Karmi project benefits about 1,20,000 children in a single state.

In the sphere of non-formal education the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is the largest and most efficacious example of world-wide fame operating 30,000 non-formal schools, manned by hand-picked teachers (most of them women) who have just passed the eight or 10th grade and are selected from the community and are intensively trained and supervised in their posts.

While BRAC spends more than government on supervision, the overall expenditure is the same since village resident teachers can be paid less and they also derive satisfaction from the status with which the post is invested. The achievements of the school dropouts in terms of minimum levels of learning are quite remarkable, particularly when these are compared with the standard of instruction and student achievement in the state primary schools often located in the same village.

Quite in contrast to the general feeling in government circles in India that schools need proper infrastructure for optimum functioning, the BRAC schools are run in thatch huts in one or two rooms rented or offered by locals.

### **Teach for America**

A remarkable experiment has recently been started in USA by a highly motivated young woman, Wendy Kopp.

The Teach for America programme specifically aims at recruiting brilliant undergraduate students who will be motivated to give two years to teaching in the worst and least privileged schools of America. Thus it operates within the existing educational set-up of state schools and seeks to improve them from within, basically by attracting teachers with motivation and a passion to teach.

So far the Teach for America programme has succeeded in placing 3,700 motivated young persons in schools, only because many American states accept non-licensed, untrained teachers.

### The pitfalls of 'trained' teachers

Do we really need graduate BEd qualification or 12+2 years training for teaching at the primary school level? The Gond Education Scheme, as far back as 1946, demonstrated impressive levels of student achievement which are not being matched by the Shiksha Karmi programme and BRAC. In both cases the teachers selected have not gone beyond class ten. Both schemes operate in a very large area.

All this would only go to prove that a one-time degree in education can be matched, if not bettered, by lesser duration in service training supervision which is ongoing and continuous. Hence, it would be a misrepresentation of either the non-formal BRAC, Shiksha Karmi model or even that of Teach for America to consider it as anti-teacher education. What is being questioned is not the need for teacher training but the conditions under which it is imparted and the exclusivity that has crept into the system.

The fact that the teacher and the teaching profession is a real role model for tribals can be proved. When a manpower resources survey was undertaken in the Adilabad district in 1977 by the Cultural Research and Training Institute, Hyderabad, tribal students in various boys hostels were asked for career preferences.

It emerged that a significant major-

## The 50th year of Independence is for us a year of soul-searching and serious evaluation

rity of 64 per cent wanted to become teachers, and about 83 per cent hoped for employment in Adilabad district, preferably near their home villages. This is a very strong motivation which we could not encash because of our faulty policies, our emphasis on long duration teachers training, BEd (after graduation) or two years basic teacher's training after plus two.

Arunachal Pradesh started with a policy of employing every matriculate/higher secondary student in the territory either as a teacher or as a village level worker. The absence of the colonial heritage and the special protection accorded these territories under the constitution again worked in their favour.

Due to absence of political clout, the adivasis of other tribal areas could not derive similar benefits in their states, where the infrastructure is dominated by better educated non-tribals who benefit most by recruitment strategies. These districts thus get non-tribal teachers who do not want to teach tribal students. The tribals are willing to learn but cannot come up because the system rejects them and with them, the hope and future of their brethren.

### What is to be done?

Education for tribal people and remote rural areas will really start looking up when the National Council for Teachers Education and CBSE work out a vocational training course of two years duration, so as to qualify young persons to teach in elementary schools after the plus two exam (12th grade).

In Italy, a course called the School Magistrale gives a four-year elementary teachers training to students who have completed eight years of compulsory schooling. The NCTE or National Council for Teacher Education recognises and plans for a plus-two vocational course for pre-school teachers even though no such course has so far been started. But it is a recognised qualification for pre-school teaching only. During the writer's tenure as Director, Navodaya Vidyalayas, this option was considered and dropped because there would be no job prospects for the students in their home districts. Anganwadis workers in tribal areas and villages get a pittance of Rs 250 which is not a living wage for tribals students who have managed to complete plus two. Hence, while NCTE provides the qualification for job of pre-school teachers, the job market does not exist in the rural areas where the students belong. (This kind of mismatch is true of practically all the vocational courses offered so far at the plus two level).

The 50th year of independence is for us a year of soul-searching and serious evaluation. There is still a great deal to be done for the poorest of the poor whom Mahatma Gandhi never lost sight of, for whom, in fact he wanted the whole structure of government to be tailored. Though we are nowhere near that ideal, significant numbers of educationists, managers and bureaucrats have already moved ahead on new paths in this direction in alliance with dedicated NGOs. The time has come to break out of the colonial mindset and to think, not radically, but pragmatically, to plan with passion and to dare to deviate. •

## Spreading wisdom

### *The success story of Arunachal Pradesh*

The success story of education in Arunachal Pradesh has been narrated by Furer Haimendorf. The socio-economic and political strength which Arunachal tribes enjoy has no doubt been the rock on which the edifice was founded and on which it subsequently grew. The strategy they adopted was based on the residential school pattern (for middle and secondary and higher secondary level).

However, the Arunachal model was low cost, and suited the socio-culture matrix of tribal society. Stipends for mess fees were paid directly to the students and it was left to them to get together and manage the mess by sharing all the duties of the kitchen (including the task of fetching firewood from the jungle). This was a purely indigenous and pragmatic strategy that saved the state administration a lot of bother, not to mention the saving in establishment costs.

Arunachal Pradesh has always been a protected area since Independence while it was also spared the colonial intrusions of the past. Political power vests with the tribals. Hence, the average tribal child in Arunachal Pradesh has a future to look forward to. On the other hand, the average Gondi child so far has little to look forward to except for the bleak, bitter struggle to survive.

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