

Female Education in the Tribal Society of Tripura : Past and Present

(A Case Study of Jamatia Community)

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I

The level of education is often viewed as an indicator of the progress of any community. J.S. Mill¹ included under it everything which "helps to shape the human being"; and with some poetic licence, we can speak of the education of a people or even of the whole human race. But essential elements in it are the idea of deliberate direction and training. In ancient India, only the upper three varnas had a right to study the religious scriptures, and as such the shudras, barring few exceptions, did not get any opportunity to obtain any education under the Ashrama system. Although women had an equal right to education², and we do come across several instances of learned women, women in general remained, by and large, outside the mainstream of the educational system. During medieval period, the aim of education became the combination of sacred and secular type of knowledge. It was considered imperative for a Muslim child to learn some portions of Kuran. Akbar established madreshas for Hindus which imparted instructions in Hindu religion, philosophy, literature and Persian. However, no special efforts were made to spread education among lower castes or aborigines; and education was, by and large, a privilege of middle and higher castes. Women in general did not get any education; only some girls belonging to the rich or the royal families could obtain some education from private tutors.

In brief, lower castes, tribals and women in general did not have any opportunity for education; no special efforts were made to educate them. Describing the state of education until the establishment of the British system of education in India, M.S.A. Rao states that "...literary education was not a significant factor in following an occupation of one's choice. Oral communication and hereditai skills

played a significant part in preparing the individual for earning a livelihood, ... literary education was more open to males than to females.³ Thus, formal education was not necessary for a majority of the common people, and less for the forest dwellers, to earn their livelihood; and whatever it was necessary it was generally opted by men. This indicates not only indifference but also prohibition to education of women. During the British rule, acquisition of education became a privilege of the rich and upper-middle classes or higher caste groups. Education became a status symbol and instrument for job acquisition of higher types. English being the medium of instruction at all stages except primary, a huge mass of population was prevented from having access to education. The state of female education, until the first half of the 19th century was very deplorable. The support for female education was received first from the missionaries and later on from the British government. In spite of all the efforts for the development of female education, a majority of the rural population, including the tribal population, was the least affected section of the society in this regard.

The traces of education among the weaker sections, especially the aborigines, can be seen in the early efforts of the Christian missionaries. Prior to 1854, the Company did not provide for the education of the backward classes in its official schools.⁴ In spite of certain facilities, such as establishment of special schools, free schooling, award of scholarship to tribal children, the progress in the field of tribal education, till the beginning of the 20th century, was not impressive. It will be appropriate to state that the development of education among tribals, and particularly among tribal women, was the least among all sections of the population.

The written record regarding educational condition in Tripura dates back to the late 19th century, the state being known as 'Hill Tipperah'⁵ at that time. Despite keen interest of the kings of Tripura for the development of education, the female education could not see the light of the day. The education was confined among the Rajkumars, Thakurs, Manipuris, Reangs, Kuki, Chakma and Lushai.⁶ The Administrative Reports of Tripura and other sources are silent about the educational attainment of Jamatias who hold third position in respect of numerical strength among the 19 tribes of Tripura.⁷ Needless to say about the female education among the Jamatia community before

independence. The post independence Tripura witnessed the development of male and female tribal population of the state to an appreciable degree but the case of Jamatia women do not tell the same story. Whatever the causes, it is admitted fact that the Jamatia women are still lagging far behind from the male population of this community. The question arises why?

II

The main objective of this paper is to assess the general educational condition among the Jamatia community in general and women of this community in particular. Their participation in the primary educations and nature of its development will also be assessed. The factors which prohibit the Jamatia women to avail the fruits of higher education will be an analytical part of this paper. By comparing the past education of Jamatias with the present one, the educational transition among the female population of this community will be highlighted.

III

The present paper is a historical cum sociological study. Hence all the available archival source materials, government records, reports and books have been consulted and by adopting field survey method which constitutes interviews, questionnaires and data analysis the whole problem of the paper has been analysed scientifically and rationally by counter checking it with contemporary sources.

The study confines within the area of Shilghati village in Matabari Block of Udaipur Sub-Division of Tripura. This village has been taken as a sample for analysis because it is a Jamatia dominated village from numerical point of view. Secondly this village is situated near the road which connects Udaipur and Melagarh and the avenues of modern life-pattern i.e. water supply, electricity, school/market etc. have reached the village which brings the status of village as semi-urban village. The study of women education in such a village will give new dimension. There are 708 households in this village, the area being 1126.73 hectares and total population of village is 3996.⁸. The complete picture of this village has been shown

in Table I which reflects that the females are lagging behind from males in literacy rate. Here, 100 families as a sample has been selected at random basis for studying the ducational scenario of Jamatia women. A Questionnaire having 25 questions have been put for survey from various family heads (male and female). Table II shows the Literacy rate among women in general and tribal in particular. While doing survey work, Shilghati High Schol (Primary Unit) has been selected for evaluating the participation of female Jamatia population in the primary section. For this, the Annual Statement of School Attendance Register from 1991 to 1995 has been taken. The detailed analysis has been shown in Table III and Table IV separetely for boys and girls. After going through the data and school reports of the Scheduled Tribe boys and girls, the following observations have been drawn.

Observations

- (a) From literacy point of view, the Jamatia women, too, like others, are lagging behind the male population,
- (b) From 1991 to 1995, there has been a decreasing trend of female strength in primary section. In 1991, the total Jamatia girls enrolled in Primary Unit was 141; it became 127 in 1992 and trend remained gradually downward with the passage of time. Same scenario was observed in the boys attendance in the school. Through interviews and data analysis two factors are well discenrnable. Firstly transfer of students for better schools and secondly dropout case. It has been seen that service holder and well-to do family prefer to send their wards in the English and boarding schools. But the cause of dropout lie in the socio-economic climate of the family.
- (c) The percentage of illiterate population, among Jamatia say male or female is very meagre which indicates the keen educational interest of the parents. it has been also observed that girls are at par with boys in educational achievements in the primary section. All respondants expressed that girls are not weaker in their studies. In some cases they are doing well in the classes and some cases it has been also observed

that girls are at par with boys in educational achievements in the primary section. All respondents expressed that girls are not weaker in their studies. In some cases they are doing well in the classes and some cases it has been narrated that girls are dull and mentally slow, particularly from less educated male respondents.

(d) Out of 100 respondents, 90% respondents opted mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the Primary Unit of the school. 5% opted English as a medium of instruction and rest gave the mix responses. But in reality, the students of Shilghati Primary School learnt two languages at a primary level, i.e. Kok-borok and Bengali. There is instruction from the government, as uttered by Headmaster of the School, that the students can opt either. There are 13 teachers in the school and 4 are the kok-borok Assistant teachers. Less number of language teachers are compelling Jamatia boys and girls to study in bilingual which increases the burden on the part of students.

(e) Most of the respondents desired in negative to send their daughters to the boarding schools, reasons being the insecurity for the girls, gender problem and less hygienic food. Economic inability seemed less responsible factors than the social one, for the education of females.

(f) 90% respondents expressed that their daughters are very much fond of modern dresses, 60% traditional ornaments and 40% modern ornaments. The 'Rignai' has been the lower garment of the girls of Jamatia community which is being discarded by the educated girls gradually. This trend shows that the impact of education has changed the life-pattern of the Jamatia women. The concept of continuity and change can be seen in the Jamatia society, seeing the above facts.

(g) 92% respondents said that their family income are not sufficient enough to bear the burden of educational expenditure, for their sons and daughters. Despite lot of government initiatives in the way of scholarship, reservations, loan, coachings, and other steps, the lot of Jamatia women has

changed to a greater extent. In Shilghati Primary School, out of 13 teachers, 8 are women (Jamatias) and out of 5 male teachers, 3 (three) were the male teachers of this community.

- (h) All respondents expressed the similar statements that the family customs and traditions do not impede the educational growth of the state. In this regard, some female respondents expressed that gents or males came home taking heavy drinks, and created chaotic condition. The environment of family under drunkard phase distorts the education of family.
- (i) 95% respondents have given the consent that girl performs the family work more in comparison to boys. It reflects that girls become less enthusiastic in grasping the school assignments due to tiredness. The role of mother in engaging their daughters for family matters deprives them the fruits of education.

Out of 13 teachers of Primary School of Shilghati, 11 teachers belong to Jamatia community. Out of 11 teachers, 8 teachers are female which speaks of appreciable participation of female in the primary education of Tripura. From quality point of view, there are so many lapses. There are dearth of trained teachers in the school. There are not sufficient availability of teaching aids i.e. maps, charts, globe etc. Even there is no arrangement of separate music and games teacher in the school. The appointment of teachers are made through job forms. Hence in some cases it is seen that the candidates having over-age enter in the school for their livelihood. They feel less enthusiastic in imparting the education.

Conclusion

At last, the educational transition can be well understood in the female population of this community. Under patriarchal society of Jamatia, the position of women was subordinate to men, having no financial independence in deciding the future of family. Now education has inculcated in them a sense of self-decision, self-determination and self-dependent. The desire for government jobs, love marriage (though very less), participation in political movements are the output of education. There is certainly transition in the status of women in Jamatia community. Earlier, women spend their whole life

in performing household work. The women were restricted to take part in village council elections. They helped the male in different agricultural activities, such as weeding, harvesting etc. Now they are extending their help to their colleagues in the schools, offices and other sectors etc. Before independence, the Jamatia women were in and around the family and now they are contributing in the economy of the state by service and other ways. The agro and household base status of Jamatia women became the white collar status which signifies a great transition in their life-pattern.

Table 1.
A profile of Shilghati Village, Census of India, 1991

Area of Village	11266,73 hectares	Population of Schedule Tribe	
No. of Household	708 Nos	Total	1373 Nos
Total Population	3996 Nos	Male	688 Nos
Male	1982 Nos	Female	685 Nos
Female	2014 Nos	Literacy Rate of Shilghati	
		Male	1143 Nos
		Female	878 Nos

Table II
Literacy Rate of India and Tripura, Census of India, 1991

Literacy Rate in India		Literacy Rate of Tribal Population in Tripura	
Total	52.2%	Total	40.37%
Female	39.29%	Male	54.45%
Male	64.13%	Female	27.34%
Literacy Rate in Tripura		Literacy Rate in South Tripura District (General)	
Total	60.44%	Total	51.35%
Male	70.58%	Male	62.34%
Female	49.65%	Female	39.75%
Literacy Rate of Schedule Tribe in South Tripura District			
Total	29.47%	Male	41.47%
		Female	17.39%
Literacy Rate of Matabari Block in South Tripura District			
Total	91934	Male	55922
		Female	36012

Table III

Annual Statement of School Attendance (Girls) ST

Year	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Total
1991	21	32	23	45	20	141
1992	23	18	20	35	31	127
1993	9	24	24	27	24	108
1994	21	13	21	20	28	103
1995	25	20	10	22	25	102

Table IV

Annual Statement of School Attendance (Boys) ST

Year	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Total
1991	23	34	30	46	22	155
1992	30	21	33	32	33	149
1993	30	23	24	38	17	132
1994	31	23	25	28	29	136
1995	20	28	25	23	20	116

Notes and References

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 7, London (1951) pp. 964-5.
2. Patel Tara, *Development of Education among Tribal Women*, Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1984, p. 36.
3. Rao, M.S.A., *Education, Social Stratification and Mobility*, 1967, p. 129.
4. Patel Tara, *Op. cit.* p. 41
5. Sur, H.K., *British Relations with the State of Tripura (1760-1947)*, 1986, p. 197.
6. *Administrative Reports* : Tripura State : 1335 T.E., 1346 T.E., 1350 T.E., 1351 T.E., 1352 T.E., 1353 T.E. (Education Chapter)
7. *Census of India*, 1971, pp. 164-165. The Tribes of Tripura, Agartala. Directorate of Tribal Research, Government of Tripura, Appendix 8.
8. The figures have been collected from NIC, wherein CENSUS-91 figures have been compiled and stored in databases.
9. *Ibid.*