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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR TRIBALS WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO CHHATTISGARH STATE

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Abstract

The state of Chhattisgarh, which was formed in 2000, is home to a significant tribal population, particularly in regions like Bastar. Despite being rich in tribal culture and heritage, these communities face numerous challenges in English language education. This paper highlights the obstacles that hinder English language acquisition among tribal students in Chhattisgarh. These challenges include social circumstances, political indifference, poor school infrastructure, illiteracy, poverty, and the impact of Naxal violence. Understanding the importance of English as a global language, the paper aims to analyze these issues and shed light on the difficulties faced by tribal students in acquiring English language skills in the state.

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Introduction:-

Chhattisgarh, a state known for its diverse tribal communities, has been grappling with significant educational challenges, particularly in the realm of English language education. The tribal populations residing in regions like Bastar and Surguja have encountered numerous hurdles in their quest to gain proficiency in English. These hurdles encompass a wide array of issues, including a lack of access to quality education, a shortage of qualified teachers, the dominance of regional languages, and deep-rooted cultural factors. This paper delves into these challenges, aiming to provide a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles that hinder the English language acquisition of tribal students in Chhattisgarh.

The state of Chhattisgarh came into existence in the year 2000 when it detached from its previous identity of undivided Madhya Pradesh. With the existence of the new state lot of development plans came into floor that mainly focused and targeted the most under developed areas of the state mainly the tribal regions. Out of the total state population 77% of population lives in the urban and 23.24% live in rural area, out of which 12.82% are SC and 30.62% are Scheduled Tribe. The Constitution Fifth Amendment Bill 2022, has formulated Bhuniya, Bhuiyan and Bhuyan as the synonyms of the Bhariya Community and also includes three Devnagari versions of the Pando community. The tribal communities comprise 30% of total population in Chhattisgarh which is mainly concentrated in the regions of Bastar and Surguja. India is a home to indigenous population and communities who are living in remote areas in forests and are untouched by modernization, industrialization and technological advancements. The tribes are facing numerous challenges on multiple fronts. In his book G S Ghurye 1963, mentions that the scheduled tribes are neither called the Aborigines nor the Adivasi and nor they are treated together with scheduled caste, but further envisaged as the group of backward class. Among the various problems faced by the tribes in Chhattisgarh state Educational problem is something that needs to be highlighted at the utmost level because this is a major issue

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that prevents them from coming in pace with the mainstream and entitle themselves as the citizens of the globe equipped with the advancements in the field of Science, technology and Modern education. Education is important for the overall development of a nation and its citizens, so if people are illiterate and inefficient in language skills to communicate their thought and ideas well, it is a big hurdle in the path of development. The local language skills are well developed in the tribal areas and the tribes are well versed in their language but as English have gained the status of global exchange of ideas almost all education at higher levels take place in English language only.

As a part of the colonial footprints English language is used as a second language for official exchange in Commonwealth countries of the world due to which gaining efficiency in English language skills has become a must for the one who foresees his future beyond the state, national and international boundaries. The power of expression in English has grown in years after Independence due to the impact of the convent schools and its culture that promoted English as the language of Sahibs. However with the idea of breaking mental chains of linguistic slavery one finds comfort in speaking in native or local language however, with time English does not stand purely as a colonial language and almost majority of the countries in the world adopted English as a mode of verbal exchange. In its evolutionary part English also adopted and enriched itself by loan words borrowed from different countries of the world and with time it became more and more expressive to become everyone's language. Through the evolution and wide use of pidgins, creoles and hybridity in English it became more and more expressive and relevant to various countries of the world and their culture. As per the records the overall literacy rate in Chhattisgarh is 60.21% in, with the SC literacy rate of 59.81% and ST with 50.03% which reflects that the literacy rate in Chhattisgarh needs lot of improvement with more investment in the educational sector and development of its infrastructure. The major problems in the tribal areas include many among which the basic problem of tribal parents to send them school is the major one. On account of the distance, reach ability, forests, lack of approach roads and bad conditions of transportation during rainy season are mainly observed. According to The Indian Express August 19,2018, "Tribal Students urge Government to give them Better Facilities for Quality Education" by PTI

"Sometimes, we have to fetch water from nearby wells. Very often students fall sick and return home, as there are no proper medical facilities available for us," Lata Soren, a tribal student from Chhattisgarh, said. The organisers claimed that because of the "flawed" policy framework of the government which is detached from the ground reality, "Adivasi children cannot sustain their education". A Conservative mindset of the tribes is another factor ruling the language teaching among tribal students, especially English. There is a lack of realization of what wonders education can do and what major changes it can bring about in the community which is a de-motivation for tribal children. They are more prone to their native and local language. However with the advancement of technology the reach ability of mobile phones and its use has made them more susceptible to English language yet with Google translation they can comfortably chat in Halbi and Gondi versions, which also prevents them from compulsion of learning English. At the alarming dropout rates of the students in the tribal dominated districts of Chhattisgarh, which included Bastar, Dantewada, Sukma, Bijapur and Kondagaon the state dealt the problem seriously and in this perspective a Dantewada based teacher, Sikander Khan came up with a solution.



Sikander Khan aka Dada Jokal

Having been born and brought up in the Jagargunda village of Sukma district, Sikander throughout his life has communicated with the tribal community in both professional and personal fronts. He could successfully identify the learning gap present in between the tribal students and the Hindi English language. He developed an alphabetical chart in English - Hindi to Halbi- Gondi and vice versa in which each alphabet had a representative image which was in connection with the surroundings and culture of the tribal kids. As many of the tribal students have not seen Apple do in this case A for Apple does not connect to them rather A for some regional fruit or object connects to them with which they could easily acquire the language. Though English has been claimed as a second language by the countries of the Commonwealth, still in the tribal context of the state the language stands at the third or fourth place after the native and local language. According to a report presented by Sushmita Mitra, Ashok Pankaj and Antara Borah in Status of and Barriers to school Education in Chhattisgarh with special reference to Sukma and Bastar Districts, the number and quality of teachers appointed in these areas also plays a crucial role in education and taking these teachers as the role models. The average number of teacher appointed is less than the state average which also varies from one block to another.

It is quite conflicting to notice that majority of teachers place themselves at the headquarters at Jagdalpur and large number of schools in the remote areas do not even have a single teacher with competent qualification to teach the

tribal children. Similar is the condition of the language skills as they are more prone to the local language and Hindi therefore English is in a dejected state counted to be as the last option which is the biggest factor responsible for least English language acquisition levels. The study reveals as under: "The figure is as high as 39.2 percent in Bastanar Block of Bastar District and 36 percent in Konta Block of Sukma District. Out of the 60 sample teachers from 20 schools 43.33 percent of them were not having any training in teacher education. Interestingly, a number of them were having higher educational qualifications, like post-graduate degree, but without training in education. Most of the teachers are on contract."

The disappointing gesture of State government for appointing teachers at the regular basis is the most crucial reasons for school dropouts and lack of education in the tribal areas. Moreover an appointment based on the temporary or ad-hoc generates a sense of job and future insecurity among the teachers due to which they either do not wish to take up jobs in the remote areas where they are needed the most, or they simply resign in few months looking for better options.

The contract teachers also known as the Panchayat teachers have varying pay scales and those working since long time hardly have any benefit scheme reaching their door. The teachers are poorly trained and have no information about the latest updates in curriculum, teaching methods and aids and technological tools. The schools lack necessary infrastructure like desks, benches, fan, light, blackboard and modern teaching aids. The students are taught in impoverished state and basically parents send children to schools for getting the midday meal so that their prime necessity of hunger is at least satisfied. According to Census 2001 it has been concluded that the rate of literacy among the scheduled tribes is extremely low and 'many parents just can't even afford to send their children to schools' Elwin 1963, 1984.

"Education was always a struggle in Bastar , the Pandemic made it impossible" published in *The Wire*, by Shubham Tigga, August 27, 2021 reflects the status of Mohalla classes that were introduced by the Chhattisgarh government during the Pandemic to continue with the school education in backward areas. As told by Goukaran Pradhan, the Gond village Headmaster to *The Wire* in the context of school teachers in Antagarh :

"As this is a conflict area and the terrain is hilly, no non-Adivasi person wants to teach here. First they take the job and later they apply for transfers, which creates vacancies for teachers. I and the rest of the teachers have faced a lot of problems treading this risky path for years," Pradhan told **The Wire**. "Two years ago, I was pulled into the river while crossing it but somehow survived; many times I have also had to face a bear while climbing the hill. The **kachha** road was built just last year, during the pandemic." Due to lack of online facilities and technological awareness the school children during the Pandemics had a hard time . A scheme called PadhaiTuhar Para was launched as the Mohalla Schools by the Chief Minister as an alternative to online education in tribal areas. During the Pandemic times it was reported by the World Economic Forum that only 13% of people surveyed by the NSSO could use the Internet in rural areas and the number happens to be likely lower for the tribal areas in this respect.

Besides there is a great problem threatening the life and chastity, particularly of the girl students as posed by the Ashram Schools in the tribal areas. Discussing the unpleasant experiences and the efforts to endeavour the Adivasi culture both by the missionaries and Ashram schools, there also have been cases reported with minor girls Yogesh Nuruti, an activist with the Koya Bhumkaal Kranti Sena speaks. Nuruti says, "Girls are often tortured in the ashram schools; a few years ago, at least 11 minor girls were allegedly raped by a teacher and a warden in Jhaliyamari village of Kanker. After that case, the government started imposing guidelines for the safety of girls and started recruiting a female 'nagar sainik' and other employees."

DR Jayadeb Sahoo (Ref) in his article highlights the challenges in teaching English language with reference to the tribal students in Kalahandi district of Odisha. He reflects that the absence of learner favourable environment is a crucial factor in this respect as the tribal population is detached from the mainstream living in the remote forest areas where technology and modernization have zero reach. The lack of connectivity with the cities is also a factor making them exist in their forest microcosm with limited sharing of thoughts, languages and values. More prone and rigid to their customs and traditional values they resist changes in their surroundings; as a result they remain illiterate and underdeveloped. The conservative environment and shy nature prevents them to adopt modernity and global mannerisms. Apart from the above social factors the

medium of instruction is also a major factor as the tribal people learn from four to five languages which includes their mother tongue, the local dialect, the tribal language and

Hindi or English comes in their last preference. Even though when English has been declared as the second and official language of the country, the predicament of the tribal students mainly lies in the unfavourable linguistic development atmosphere for Hindi and English due to which the students find it quite burdensome to learn it. Dr Sahoo has following findings based on the interview with High school students in which following reasons came up for poor English language skills. The reasons almost sound universal for all tribal children and their hurdles in English language acquisition:

The students are unable to understand English words and their pronunciations, hence they do not know how to read and write in English. The syllabus remains incomplete and the teaching continuity is broken due to absence of teachers in the classroom. There are no drills and repetitions in the class, no doubt clearing sessions. Children are afraid to ask and clear doubts from teacher on account of being reprimanded and insulted on their caste and background. Parents being illiterate do not guide and motivate students at home for learning English language. A misconception about English language prevails in the mind of the parents and community people which believes that children may leave their native culture and values once they learn English and are transformed as Gentlemen. It may transform their extremes into moderates regarding cultural and religious norms of the community.

The attitude of the teachers, their qualification, experiences and innovative thoughts to do something new or find a solution to the problems persisting is negative. They take least interest in teaching the tribal students and deriving methods to find the learning gaps among students. The teachers are not trained and so they still work on the traditional methods of language teaching which is not applicable and efficient enough for the tribal circles. Lack of AV Aids, basic language learning infrastructure, modals and interesting games devised for word making and learning English language is also one factor. The theoretical mode of teaching is followed which is an old school method rather than the conversational mode of teaching to develop connection with the language learnt and world around. The theoretical method is boring and burdensome for the students to learn a new language and its desired skills.

Thus a revolutionary change in the teaching learning methods needs to be devised to overcome the hurdles related to English language skills. The learning alphabetical chart by Sikander Khan has been a milestone in the process but still more innovative and creative ideas and techniques need to be developed so as to make the tribal student efficient in global skills. The idea of teaching entirely a foreign language to multicultural and multilingual students is a great challenge and the ways are opened to develop new approaches in language teaching in coming days. As per the locale and surroundings the teaching techniques also change area wise and region wise therefore the teaching methods followed in the urban and city areas are completely inefficient in teaching the tribal students, hence they do not cater their needs of language learning. They are even inaccessible to the internet and advanced technology which also makes them socially and technologically aloof in the context of language learning.

Gautam V 2003 focused his studies upon language acquisition and learning of the tribal students and he concluded that the appointment of the teachers who are foreign to the local dialect and native language of the region are inefficient to develop the English language skills among tribal students due to vast gap created by language barriers. The tribal students only understand their mother tongue. Gautam reveals that in India the appointment of non tribal teachers in the tribal areas and schools is highly disadvantageous as both the teacher and learner are unable to understand each other. Hence the barrier needs to be overcome by developing special strategies for the teachers in tribal areas.

The language of instruction being the most basic problem in the tribal areas in which even the elementary education seems to be difficult. As compared to the non tribal children whose mother tongue happens to be the language of the text read, the tribal children have to struggle on four fronts of language skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening in the foreign language to which they are totally unfamiliar. The inefficiency in the teaching learning bridge due to language barrier between the teachers and learners therefore becomes the major cause of increased dropout levels and cognitive problems. "Virginus Xaxa also supports this view by stating that

language is one of the most serious handicaps before tribes to get the benefits of the preferential treatment policy as compared to even the Scheduled group such as Scheduled Cast (Xaxa, 2008).”

Conclusion:-

This paper underscores the formidable array of challenges that confront tribal students in Chhattisgarh, notably within regions like Bastar, as they strive to acquire proficiency in the English language. These challenges encompass a dearth of accessible quality education, a chronic shortage of well-qualified educators, deeply ingrained cultural factors that prioritize regional languages, and the persistence of socio-economic disparities. Despite the increasing global relevance of English, tribal students grapple with these obstacles, often resulting in hindered educational attainment. Moreover, the paper emphasizes that addressing these issues is not just a matter of linguistic empowerment but also an essential step toward reducing disparities and ensuring that tribal students are well-equipped to participate fully in the interconnected global landscape. Efforts are required not only to bridge the linguistic divide but also to bring about equitable access to quality education, thus enabling the tribal communities of Chhattisgarh to break free from the cycle of underdevelopment and engage in the wider world with confidence and competence.

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