

SOCIAL ACTION

A Quarterly Review of Social Trends

Quality Education And Building Social Capital

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- ❑ Quality Education in Tribal/Adivasi Areas: Experiences of Southern Hill Area in Manipur
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Barnali Sarma
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Jyoti Dalal

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Quality Education and Building Social Capital

Education is an important component of human development and it is recognized as a basic need for every human person. The United Nations has recognized education as an important development goal to be achieved by all nations in the world. In the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, Goal 2 focused on achieving universal primary education by 2015. This resulted in an increase enrollment of children in primary education across the globe, especially in developing nations. In the Sustainable Development Goals of 2015, Goal 4 focusses on ensuring inclusive and quality education for all by 2030. It recommends free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education to all children leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. It also recommends affordable quality technical, vocational and higher education for all women and men. Quality education goes beyond academic development as it focusses on the overall personality development, such as social, emotional, mental, physical and cognitive development of each student. It is key to liberating intellectual capacities and unlocking the creative potential of a child. It aims at developing a balanced set of capabilities of children so that they enhance individual well-being, become economically productive and contribute to peaceful and democratic societies. This involves building human capacities as well as social capital of individuals. Since every human person is a social being, relationships in social networks often influence the trajectory of the development of the person. Therefore, building social capital is an essential ingredient of quality education.

Since Independence, India has largely focused on access to education and improving literacy rates. The literacy rate rose from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 73 per cent in 2011. In 2019-20, 3.85 crore students were enrolled in higher education institutions. The number of Universities have also increased from 799 in 2015-16 to 1043 in 2019-20. The Indian Government appointed several commissions and introduced several policies, schemes and legislations in order to achieve universal access to education in India. One of the flagship programmes is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was aimed at achieving universal primary education in India. In addition, the Mid-day Meal (MDM) scheme tried to ensure nutritious food to children coming to school. A large network of primary schools and upper primary schools have significantly improved access to primary education. In addition, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education 2009 made education a fundamental right of every child. It required all private schools to reserve 25 per cent of seats to poor children who could not afford an education. While greater attention was paid to improving access

to education, less attention was paid to the quality of education.

Quality education is available only for the elite in society, who can afford to pay higher fees in private schools. Better quality education is also imparted in Government-aided private schools and some Government schools such as Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Similarly, in spite of the growing number of universities, quality education has been limited to a few universities and institutions, some of whom are recognized in the rankings of universities in the world. Therefore, there is a need to expand access to education as well as improve the quality of education in India.

In 2020, the Indian Government announced the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in order to improve the quality of education. It aims to recognize, identify and nurture the unique capabilities of each student to promote his/her holistic development in academic and non-academic spheres. It hopes to promote creativity and critical thinking that fosters innovation. However, in addition to these noble fundamental principles of NEP 2020, the quality of education will also depend on the capacity of educational institutions to build social capital through its networks based on shared human values and not based on narrow identities of gender, caste, class, race, ethnicity, religion, region or culture.

This issue of Social Action has articles that explore the prospects of quality education in the context of the promulgation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. It also explores ways in which social capital can influence the quality of education in India. The article by Alex Akhup and Kimnei Salviana Leivon titled “Quality Education in Tribal/Adivasi Areas: Experiences of Southern Hill Area in Manipur” argues that the tribal communities at the local level have been actively negotiating with the formal education system for ensuring opportunities and autonomy for tribals. The authors present an indigenous perspective where quality of education is monitored by local governing bodies with community ownership which could be a model for an inclusive and equitable quality education. The article titled “Building Social Capital for Sustainable Education during the Pandemic: A Study on Social Support for Social Work Students” by Jaimon Varghese and Pradeep Jare highlights the challenges faced by students during the pandemic to access quality education due to the closure of educational institutions and the shift to education on virtual platforms with digital learning resources. The author argues that building social capital to get social support is a key strategy to ensure sustainable and quality education during difficult situations like the pandemic. The article titled “Universalizing the Indian Education System: The Journey

from Inclusion to Exclusion” by Namrata Shokeen presents a socio-spatial analysis of dirt to explore the exclusionary practices in the Indian education system against students belonging to households associated with ‘unclean’ occupations. The author argues that exclusionary practices act as ways to maintain the social order and a state of purity that tends to displace the so-called ‘dirt’ out of the education system. The article by Louie Albert on “Enhancing Quality Education by Building Social Capital of Sri Lankan Tamil Refugees” analyses the issue of educational care access and the concern for quality education in Sri Lankan Tamil refugees living in camps in Tamil Nadu. The author presents various social capital building strategies to enable the refugees to improve their basic and professional education. The article on “Implementing Outcome Based Education (OBE): Case Studies in a College and School Setting” by Jasmine Sarah Alexander introduces outcome based education (OBE) as a pedagogical innovation and as a fresh educational planning and evaluation paradigm. The author presents a few practical guidelines for OBE implementation related to identifying, defining and measuring outcomes and traces the OBE journey of two institutions as an illustration. The article titled “Locating Reforms in Higher education in India: A Special Focus on NEP 2020” by Zeba and Ravi Kant traces the history of educational reforms in India and the challenges in the education system, such as low enrollment rates of marginalized groups, inequality in access to quality education and diminishing quality of education. The author also analyses the educational reforms proposed in NEP 2020, especially the proposed digitalization of education to improve the quality of education. The article by Barnali Sarma on “The Liaison between Quality Education and Social Capital” explores the liaison between quality education and social capital as well as leadership from a community psychology perspective and argues that social capital and quality education are mutually and intricately correlated. The article “In the Name of Quality Education: Breaking the Mirage” by Jyoti Dalal is a critique of the global obsession with quality in education. The author argues that quality is at the cost of equality and the goal of quality education represents and serves the interest of a market dominated discourse.

As India is undertaking reforms in its education system through the implementation of NEP 2020, it is hoped the debates and issues raised by the authors in their articles may be taken seriously by policy makers and educationists so that our education system becomes more affordable, accessible, inclusive and equitable. It is also hoped that building social capital becomes part of the curriculum and pedagogy of the education system. □

Denzil Fernandes

Quality Education in Tribal/Adivasi Areas: Experiences of Southern Hill Area in Manipur

Alex Akhup*
& Kimnei Salviana Leivon**

Abstract

A renewed attempt has been made through the NEP 2020 to address the persisting educational issues of 'socially and economically disadvantaged groups' suited to the Indian cultural ethos. The policy makes a commitment to revamp the system, curriculum and pedagogy to achieve the desired quality education. Given this, this paper attempts to understand the emerging trends and practices in formal school education. Through a case observation of tribal/hill areas of Manipur bordering Myanmar and substantiated by available data, it argues that tribal communities at the local level have been actively negotiating with the given formal education for ensuring opportunities and self-determination. To this end, this paper contributes to knowledge of policy and practice for inclusive and equitable quality education.

Keywords: Quality education, tribal-advansi-indigenous perspective, opportunities, self-determination, tribal areas, education policy

1. Introduction

Given the context of tribal/Adivasi societies in India (8.6% of the population, Census 2011), the question of inclusive and equitable quality education can hardly be exaggerated. Education serves the purpose of not only creating agencies and opportunities for individuals in the cognitive-social-pragmatic framework (Jean Piaget and John Dewey model) and/or holistic-spiritual (Vedic Model) sense but directly relates to self-determination (tribal-advansi-indigenous model) of the communities. Being spatially isolated, culturally different and in risk of being marginalized by the national development projects and majority cultural communities, education to them means catalyzing community capabilities and opportunities as a matter of their survival and autogenous development. Participation in education

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creates possibilities for them to exist and coexist with others without the fear of being marginalized and exploited.

Tribal education has been an integral part of the national agenda for welfare, development and social integration as specified under Article 46 of the Constitution of India. The National Policy on Education 1968 initiated the first attempt to incorporate this agenda based on the Dhebar Committee Report 1961. Towards this, Indian social workers and missionaries played crucial roles in reaching education to varied tribal areas across the northeast and peninsular regions referred to as 'scheduled areas' and 'tribal areas' under Constitution Article 244 (clauses 1 and 2) respectively. As regards to the peninsular region, A. V. Thakkar, who began welfare work for tribes in 1919, took the initiative to introduce the Gandhian model of education (Jojo, 2013 and Bara, 2016). The idea of Ashram schools and/or residential schools as practiced across the scheduled areas today is rooted in this initiative. This model of education also converged with the attempt to create a swaraj (self rule) model of indigenous education that pitches against the colonial model (Narullah and Naik, 1943). In the post-independence period, Ashram Shalas and/or basic schools were incorporated as Government strategy under Grant-In-Aid of Tribal Welfare Department which today are anchored under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. Simultaneously, missionaries were actively engaged in tribal education in many parts of Chotanagpur and northeast regions. They took initiatives to set up schools in remote tribal areas and committed themselves to teaching tribal children as part of their evangelizing work. Although Ashram Shala model and missionary schools converged in their perspective of 'civilizing tribes' considered to be the primitive, adimjati or aborigines, they differed on matters of caste and religion in working for tribal communities. While christian model schools, which have become models of quality education today, progressed alongside the spread of the christianity in tribal areas, Ashram school model envisioned to create a condition for social integration of tribal societies to 'Hindu mainstream' society (as indicated in Oommen, 2011 and Bara, 2016). Simultaneously, tribal education was further reinforced by assimilation (Ghurye, 1959) versus isolation development discourse (Elwin, 1957), and subsequently streamlined as a state approach for integration for national development and growth since the post-independence period. In particular, Jawaharlal Nehru's strategy for development emphasized integration of tribes without disintegration of their social distinctiveness (Elwin, 1957). In the light of this, Dhebar Committee (October 14, 1961) for the first time, made an affirmative report on tribal education advocating recruitment of tribal teachers for tribal

schools. This eventually got followed up in New Education Policy 1986 and Plan of Action 1992 without much policy rigour. Moreover, since the later part of the 1980s, there has been a shift of approach from welfare to rights to respond to the emerging privatization and market model of education. This process, also referred to as neoliberal, has given rise to the understanding of how education can lead to further marginalization and exploitation, especially in those areas having rich natural resources. This critique strengthened the rights based approach, which subsequently came under Constitution Article 21 (A) - 'education as fundamental right' and the Right to Education Act, 2009. In fact, the Right to Education Act in the context of tribes necessitated inclusion of the principle of equity taking into consideration the intensity of cultural difference, geographical isolation and the likelihood of being marginalized. On a similar line, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan was institutionalized to implement free and compulsory education upto class VIII in 2001. The latest further attempt has come with the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which aims to address the persisting issues in the spirit of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 - 'inclusive and equitable quality education' in the Indian Context.

As an indication towards the current status in tribal areas, the Eighth All India School Education Survey points out that 68.87 per cent in all habitations and 89.64 per cent within 1 km reach have schooling facilities in tribal areas across the country (AISES Report, p.11). This is also substantiated by the positive trend shown in enrolment rate of Scheduled Tribes (102% in the elementary stage in 2016-17, Annual Report of Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2020) with an indication of a different trend in the northeast as enrolment rate in private schools is greater than the enrolment rate of government schools (ASER, 2020). Besides, there is also an observable variation in literacy rate between the tribal regions of the northeast and other parts of India (Mizoram with 91.33% in Census 2011). In general, the literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes in the elementary stage and above showed increase from 59 per cent in 2011 Census to 71.3 per cent in 2018, (Ministry of Tribal Affairs Annual Report, p.33) and dropout rate (60.98 per cent for Assam and 46.77 per cent for Manipur in 2005-2006) continue to be a national concern. In fact, educational challenges of scheduled tribes had persisted over a period as indicated in the Indian Council of Social Science Research, Delhi survey reports in the 1970s and the Report of the High Level Committee, Ministry of Tribal Affairs headed by Professor Virginius Xaxa in 2014. The Xaxa Report in particular observed that the government's efforts have had a positive impact on the educational status of scheduled tribes, although the gap is still there between tribes and India

as a whole (58.97% against 72.99%). As a national response, the New Education Policy 2020 has identified them as a ‘socially and economically disadvantaged group’ for targeted emphasis in achieving quality education.

Given this scenario, this paper attempts to reaffirm tribal-Adivasi-indigenous (the concept is coined to include the diversity within) perspective of quality education (also indicated in Dhebar Committee, 1961; Kundu, 2003; Tripura, 2014; Xaxa, 2016 and Kumar, 2020) in the light of NEP 2020. In particular, the paper, through field observation conducted in May 2018-19 in remote southern tribal/hill areas of Manipur bordering Myanmar attempts to understand how tribal communities are negotiating with access to quality school education to create opportunities and self-determination. In the second section of the paper that follows, the findings and interpretations highlighting the emerging trends and practices are presented. To this end, the last part gives a concluding discussion focusing on the possibility of centering tribal-*adivasi*-indigenous perspective in the New Education Policy 2020.

2. Emerging Trends and Practices in Quality Education - Southern Tribal Areas of Manipur

The southern hill area of Manipur, presently coming under the Churachandpur and Pherzawl districts, is part of the hill area of Manipur protected under Article 371C of the Constitution of India. This region is a contiguous part of the hill areas constituting 90 per cent of the landscape and contributing 40 per cent Scheduled Tribe population (Census 2011) of Manipur state in the farthest eastern side of the north-eastern region of India sharing international boundary with Myanmar. This hill area is originally the homeland of linguistic cultural diversities (Tibeto-Burman) and village polity, which came under the influence of larger politics in the formation of the state from the British time onwards. The region was historically exposed for the first time to the other world regions during the first and second world wars. In fact, it is famously known for the Kuki rebellion against British recruitment of tribal men for the labor corps during the first world war during 1917-19 (Lal Dena, 1991). The village polities usually headed by chiefs are bounded by land territoriality and customary practices which came to be recognized as a unit of administration since the British period. The village land is their homeland which provides them belonging, livelihood and survival. However, the tribal population being a minority within the state context (having 19 elected representatives to the state Assembly of 60 members) goes through a complex political process

as an outcome of state integration. The integration process has given rise to varied and complex hill politics involving generic ethnic mobilizations and homeland politics that constantly negotiate with the centralizing tendencies of the state, even causing conflicts within. Besides, the hill area within the state has also eventually emerged as a distinct political unit, a shared space of tribal communities within the state of Manipur. The constitutional protection given for the hill area (Article 371C), and recognition of customary practice (Article 243M) through the Village Authority Act 1956 and District Council Act 1971 has provided them a political tool to bargain for their autogenous development and self-determination (Akhup, 2020).

The southern region having relatively high percentage of literacy rate (82.78% in Census 2011) is predominantly inhabited by around 14 tribal communities (recognized as scheduled tribes) who have linguistic affinity (chin-kuki-mizo linguistic group) and share cultural and state territorial boundary with Chin hill of Myanmar in the east, Mizoram in the south and Assam on the western side. It is bounded by Chandel District in the northeast, Tamenglong in the west and Bishnupur and Kangpokpi districts in the north and connected to Imphal city, the capital of Manipur through a national highway 102B. Churachandpur tribal town locally named Lamka is approximately 60 kms from Imphal.

a) Roots of Literacy and Formal Education

The experience of the southern hill region of Manipur has been shaped by their exposure to literacy education after the political circumstance created by the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826, and Anglo-Manipuri war in 1890. Education became part of the struggle of the people in the region for development, social and political empowerment. Every village and parent eventually became aware that children should have access to quality education as part of building job and employment opportunities, and community social capital for self-determination.

After initial resistance to the British administration, post the Kuki rebellion (1930s), there was growing awareness among the village chiefs and tribal communities of the need to invite missionaries to come to their villages and establish schools for the children. The first instance of formal education in reading and writing began at Senvawn, a Hmar village in 1910 (Lal Dena 1991). The activity of reading, writing and speaking English was initiated by the Arthington Welsh Mission led by Robert Watkins who came from Mizoram. A mission compound was established where a formal school for learning reading and writing got initiated. This centre became the first site

for communities and villages to meet and get exposure to christianity. It also provided conducive space for the missionaries to begin to take an active role in missionary work and teaching of the children. The schooling process further led to community conscientization and gave rise to active participation of the village chiefs and the youth of the village. It provided space for strengthening their struggle, where local chiefs and leaders began to take active part in community work and empowerment. The literacy education gave them Roman script and exposed them to new thinking paving the path for cross village interaction and community mobilization. Reading the Bible, prayers and singing christian hymns took root into the worldview and cultural practices of the people. Roman script was adopted by the people and gradually people developed writing traditions in their own dialects.

In fact, due to the circumstance that emerged arising out of the state policy of giving support to Baptist missionaries as a whole in Manipur, a process was created in which the Mizoram missionaries left the region but created the space for the local based church organizations to take ownership of education. Speaking on this, (late) Mr. Thuamson, the first Thadou speaking Government retired officer born in 1938, completed graduation in 1963 and MA Political Science in 1968 indicated,

‘In Churachandpur, there was a wave of change coming over the people and tribal villages driven by both first and second world wars and colonial administration. It heralded a drastic change in terms of politics, religion and education. Among them, education took momentum across the region. People realised the importance of education as the main option for living a better life. The idea of learning in terms of reading, writing and counting in Roman script took villages and children en masse and this became a very important part of the lived experiences of the villages, people and children (as cited in Leivon, 2019, p.138).

Simultaneously, British administration under various Political Agents began to lay a foundation of school education in the state and the tribal areas after the 1890s. In fact, taking the Education Mission (1882), the British officers took an active part in initiating formal education to tribal people of Manipur with the support of Missionaries. The Welsh Aborigines Mission led by William Pettigrew, who came under American Baptist Church, Guwahati took major responsibility for bringing schools in the hill area of Manipur. Supported by the political agent of Manipur, Pettigrew for the first time

started a mission school at Ukhrul in 1894 and at Kangpokpi in 1917. Many tribal leaders were trained from these centres and contributed to the formation of the state as well as in supporting the spread of christainity in the hill area.

b) State Response to Tribal Education - A Government-Private Conundrum

In the post-independence period, the Manipur state based on the Constitution took over the responsibility of mass education. Education system under the Ministry of Education became the main stakeholder in establishing schools across the districts. The schools in the tribal areas came to be administered under the Department of Education, Manipur having hill department. Each hill district was identified as an Educational Zone under the Directorate of School Education, Imphal. Besides, in line with the Central Government's attempt to bring education among the tribal areas, Council schools were established for the tribal areas with financial support of the Tribal Welfare Department. The Council schools in policy were envisioned to reach the remote areas of tribal villages making it possible for schools to be located in the village and owned by the people. To this effect, today (as stated in Guite, 2013) there are 2 Government run higher secondary schools, 38 high schools, 37 junior high schools, 27 upper primary schools, 26 primary schools and 75 SSA schools. There are 3 high schools, 25 junior high schools and 39 primary schools under the category of aided schools. Besides, there are 7 higher secondary schools, 44 high schools, 34 junior high schools and 23 primary schools under the category of unaided/private schools. The district also has 5 schools under Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs), Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) or Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) affiliates. In fact, U-DISE data, 2017-18, records 590 educational institutes (private, aided, government schools, missionary schools, etc) covering all the sub-divisional blocks of the district.

Moreover, the ground reality of Manipur and tribal areas in particular has also given rise to the emergence of strong private schools mainly inspired by the missionary schools. In fact, private schools today have taken over the Government schools in terms of student enrolment (ASER 2020). At present, private schools in Manipur (around 927 schools registered under Board of Manipur School Education) are actively contributing to the cause of inclusive and equitable quality education. In particular, the private schools run by missionaries namely Don Bosco, Nirmalabas and Little Flower in Imphal were the first examples which demonstrated quality education since the 1950s. These schools, including other private

schools that have emerged in the region today, are known for all the quality requirements as mandated by NCERT 2006 on matters of social infrastructure, curriculum and pedagogy, and school environment along with quality boarding/hostel facilities. They also are able to inculcate a spirit of secular and liberal values, and contribute to the formation of good and resourceful citizens, who are capable of becoming leaders in society. Besides, these schools have been responsible in building capabilities for job and employment. However, private schools are mainly town and urban based and have accessibility and affordability issues especially for those children who are from remote/poor areas with parents who have no financial resources.

Albeit, the Government schools which are the primary stakeholders of quality education for all are still yet to make their presence felt among people as indicated also in the poor enrolment rate in the government schools (ASER, 2020). On policy and record, the Government schools managed under the Education Ministry are governed by a professional and accountable system in relation to teacher qualification and recruitment, training and monitoring, curriculum contextualization and learning without barriers. On the ground, people still do not have faith in government schools. Even after Manipur being a full-fledged state for 50 years (1972 statehood), the government doesn't have schools that can be identified as a model school to provide inclusive and equitable education for all.

In fact, ample opportunity with the support of the central scheme has been given to the Government education system to perform as quality schools. Manipur state in fact was quick to establish the Right to Education Regulation in 2010. In particular, implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and RMSA schemes created possibilities for building qualified teachers and establishing schools across villages with provision of midday meals, free uniforms and books. It also introduced periodical school surveys, training of teachers and communities, and maintenance of school report cards in the Unified District Information System of Education (UDISE).

As indicated by the Board of Secondary Education, Manipur (2015), some realization has come to the present government in the light of NEP 2020 educational reforms. The government has launched a 'School Phagathensi Mission', a mission to bring quality in government schools in 2019. In this mission, the first phase covered four schools of the southern districts namely Rengkai High School Churachandpur, Kangvai Secondary School Hengleb, Sagang High School Saikot and Singngat High School Singngat.

The second phase of this initiative was launched in 2020 in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic which includes four government schools in Churachandpur namely Vimala Raina High School, Gandhi Memorial High School, Ningthiching High School and Tuaitenphai High School. How far these initiatives could create an impact in raising the quality standards of Government schools will depend on whether the government has the will, resources and corruption free mechanism.

c) Local Governance and Inter-departmental Convergence - A Possible Path

The tribal villages (596 in number as given in District Handbook of the Directorate of Census Operations Manipur, 2014) being the primary administrative units in this region, the establishment of village schools had become an important strategy towards achieving the national agenda of tribal education and meeting the needs of the people. The village schools have emerged as examples of viable models to address the issues of cultural difference and geographical isolation for inclusive and equitable quality education. The village schools also reaffirmed the village as an administrative unit (defined by Village Authority Act 1956) and strengthened democratic governance at the local level. It activated the process where the chiefs of the villages who are the guardians of the village land, village authority and District Council have been given responsibility of management of around 170 schools catering to upto class V under the District Council Act 1971 (raised to class VIII in 2008 amendment) under grant-in-aid of Tribal Welfare Department. In this context, it is noteworthy to mention that the implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in the region in 2004-2005 gave further hope for revival of village schools. The SSA scheme gave possibilities for building new village schools and strengthening of the available schools under the Zonal Education Office, the primary stakeholder of District Education, Directorate of School Education, Manipur. The scheme further enhanced the democratic governance of elementary education through the convergence of the Zonal Education Office, District Council, School Management and Development Committee (SMDC) instituted under Right to Education Regulation 2010, Manipur. In particular, the scheme intended to respond to the issues of out-of-school, girl child education and dropouts. It generated a process of a joint effort of the SMDC, local body, Zonal Education Office and District Administration to govern and provide quality education with facilities of midday meals, free uniforms and teaching learning materials (TLMs). The scheme also supported construction of schools, improving teaching materials, setting

up SSA schools and appointing teachers, building capacities of teachers and institution of SMDCs across villages and establishment of monitoring formation system (U-DISE).

Given this initiative, the southern hill area experience in education has given rise to possibilities of two types of tribal village schools namely remote village school and the neighbourhood school (semi urban). While the remote village schools provide opportunities for children in the lower age group to be schooled in their own environment, the neighbourhood schools have emerged in the vicinity of the tribal town and created possibilities for quality education with greater number of child enrolment and indicating a good practice. The Seilal Upper Primary School and Misao Lhahvom Upper Primary School can be cited as examples of good practice in neighbourhood schools. These schools have enrolment of about 300-400 children and are observed to be functioning fully well with proper trained teachers. Moreover, they have been provided with teacher quarter facilities with financial support of the Ministry of Development of Northeast Region.

d) Community Ownership and Initiatives

The practice in the region also indicates the trend in how the leaders and youth of the area are actively taking part in the struggle for quality education. Through initiatives undertaken by these community stakeholders, there is a model of school education emerging that implies community ownership and responsibility to provide compulsory and free quality education for all. In fact, these initiatives have come as a response to the social issues emerging in the region. Worthy of mention in this context is the circumstance of ethnic conflict in the 1990s that gave rise to the need for catalyzing community peace and growth through education. For example, the Siamsinpawlpi, an organization of the local youth and educated men of the community, made an exemplary initiative to respond to the ethnic conflict of 1996-97 through the establishment of the Siamsinpawlpi residential school under the grant-in-aid support of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Delhi. This school, which was established to protect children and help conflict affected families, opened up a new space for reaffirming peace and harmony among ethnic groups in the region. Besides, it is also noteworthy to mention about the SSA residential school run by a local leader in Churachandpur town. This residential school was established to provide quality education with hostel facilities to out-of-school and poor/remote village children. On the whole, these residential schools follow CBSE syllabus and portray a high degree of commitment and professionalism in quality education (Leivon, 2019).

3. Centering Tribal-Adivasi-Indigenous Perspective - A Discussion

The experience of the southern hill region of Manipur in relation to quality education stands out as an example for tribal-*adivasi*-indigenous model of education. It provides an alternative framework of inclusive and equitable quality education to ensure opportunities and self-determination of the communities in tribal and scheduled areas. This perspective (suggested in Jojo, 2013; Kundu, 2013; Tripura, 2014; Bara, 2016; Xaxa 2016 and others) also implies the need to make a shift to contexts in the question of quality education. The contextualization process demands to move beyond the 'given' quantity-quality management tools (stated in NCERT 2006 and National Curriculum Framework 2005). It suggests that the matter of quality education has to factor in the local contexts - histories, cultures, worldviews and lived experiences of the people.

The tribal-*adivasi*-indigenous perspective proposed in this paper also suggests possibilities to expose assimilative and regressive worldviews (also suggested in Kumar, 2020) that attempts to criminalize and infantilize tribal societies. It challenges framing of quality education on 'assimilation-isolation' and 'mainstreaming' approaches, and strongly re-affirms the policy framework that includes diversities and differential governance arrangement as enshrined in the Constitution of India. It assumes that in mediating quality education through tribal-*adivasi*-indigenous framework, a space can be created for a positive recognition of the reality of diversities and 'relationality' (suggested in indigenous studies) in the attempt to reimagine quality education that is holistic and suited to the cultural ethos of India.

The practice in this tribal region also indicates the possibilities to move beyond government-private binary discourse. It not only recognizes the responsibility of the state on quality education for tribal people but also suggests the importance of building partnerships for quality education. The government schools, as the main stakeholders, have the resources to bring free and compulsory education for all. Nevertheless, the private schools are also emergent partners as institutions of quality education. Therefore, it is imperative that government-private binary should be reframed through the experience of the people and the challenges confronting quality education. The need to challenge the emerging inequalities in the region should be the overall concern for building quality education. The question of affordability is real to children in the region. Many of the children who go to private

schools have to depend on parents who have a meagre income - a condition that has given rise to a structural division of the rich-poor, literate-illiterate parents and rural-urban.

The study also indicates that the differential governance arrangements given to tribal areas within the state gives possibilities for local management and ownership of the schools in the region. In fact, the movement towards strengthening the local governance system resonates with the principles of self-determination. The local governance, although given limited power (Akhup, 2020), gives possibilities towards negotiating with quality education for self-determination. This emerging practice suggests the importance of a convergence model of governance at the local level where the state department should have a corruption free and professional mechanism to actively catalyse local government departments and communities, around the unit of village and the neighbourhood schools.

In conclusion, it could be stated that the commitment of government and people, availability of resources and contextualized mechanisms designed for centering tribal-*adivasi*-indigenous reality and perspectives in NEP 2020 would be critical in achieving the national agenda of tribal education. The suggested 'target approach' of NEP 2020 - 'socially and economically disadvantaged groups' should qualify education that reassures opportunities and self-determination in tribal and scheduled areas. In the standpoint of tribal areas, policy without the principle of 'equality with equity' and differential arrangement (Article 244) can lead to further marginalization. In particular, the question of how quality education in Ashram and Village schools are addressed through the principle of equity will make a difference for tribal children. The new educational system (5+3+3+4) and repackaging of the earlier schemes into 'Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan' should address issues of equity in tribal and Scheduled areas seriously. The attempt to address educational issues through identification of the 'Special Education Zone'(SEZ) should be accompanied with a mechanism that would involve appointing tribal teachers and placing quality education in the hands of the communities. Moreover, considering the tribal social structure and realities, the village school (duly recognised in the Right to Education Act, 2009 and SSA) should continue to be nurtured as a site for inclusive and equitable quality education where children at least in the lower age-group are entitled to a 'homemade' learning and growth. □

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