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National Human Rights Commission

Minutes of the meeting of the Open House Discussion on 'Tribal Education in India: Problems, Policies and Perspective'

An Open House Discussion on 'Tribal Education in India: Problems, Policies and Perspective' was held on 29th August 2024 at Manav Adhikar Bhawan, New Delhi. The meeting was chaired by Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani. The meeting was attended by Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar, Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary and other officials of the Commission. A distinguished gathering comprising representatives from various ministries, tribal welfare departments of various states, non-governmental organizations (NGO), Vice Chancellors and Professors from various Central and State Universities and other eminent subject-matter experts attended the open house discussion and participated in the discussions.

2. The Concept Note including the Agenda Note was circulated in advance. The Agenda of the Open House Discussion was 'Tribal Education in India: Problems, Policies and Perspective' with sub-themes:

- i.) Identifying Gaps and Challenges in Tribal Education
- ii.) Analyzing Existing Policies and Programs
- iii.) Exploring Perspectives and Way Forward



[Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, NHRC briefing the participants about the Agenda of the Open House Discussion](#)

3. At the start of the meeting, Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary, warmly welcomed all attendees and introduced the agenda centered on "Tribal Education in India: Problems, Policies, and Perspectives." He emphasized the need to address the unique educational challenges faced by the tribal communities, underscoring the NHRC's role in ensuring access to quality education for marginalized groups. Noting the high dropout rates and declining Gross Enrollment Ratios among tribal students, Shri Nim called for targeted interventions and a

comprehensive discussion to identify gaps, analyze existing policies, and explore diverse perspectives. He called for active participation and insightful contributions to shape a more inclusive educational system and ensure a brighter, equitable future for tribal education in India.



Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General, NHRC delivering opening remarks to the participants

4. In his opening remarks, Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General of the NHRC, highlighted the gaps in tribal education and emphasized the need for targeted interventions to enhance and uplift educational outcomes in these communities. He highlighted that lower literacy rates and higher dropout rates in tribal areas are often linked to specific challenges, such as inadequate access to quality education, the lack of culturally relevant curriculum, poor teacher-student ratios, and insufficient educational infrastructure. He underscored the importance of addressing these gaps to ensure equitable and inclusive education, so every tribal child has an equal opportunity to succeed. He also stressed the need to improve tribal representation in higher educational institutions like IITs and IIMs, advocating for targeted scholarship programs, mentorship, and preparatory courses to bridge the educational divide and help tribal students excel in these prestigious institutions.



Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson, NHRC delivering inaugural address to the participants of the meeting

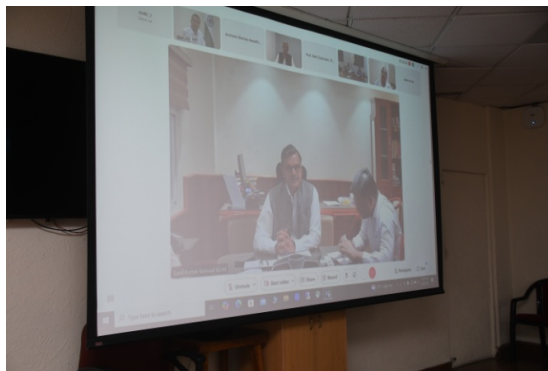
5. During the inaugural address, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi, emphasized the transformative power of education in empowering tribal communities and advancing societal progress. She highlighted the persistent barriers—such as geographical isolation, language differences, poverty, and early marriage—that continue to hinder educational access for tribal populations despite substantial progress and various government initiatives. Smt. Bharathi called for a

culturally sensitive education system that integrates and respects the diverse heritage of tribal communities, underscoring the need for collaborative efforts among governmental bodies, NGOs, and tribal groups. She outlined the NHRC's critical role in ensuring quality education for all, advocating for the assessment of current programs, and addressing gaps to promote inclusivity and equitable development in tribal education.



Ms Archana Sharma Awasthi, Joint Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy highlighted the efforts of the ministry to enhance tribal education in India

6. **Ms. Archana Sharma Awasthi** highlighted that current efforts to enhance tribal education in India are supported by a combination of policy interventions and targeted schemes. The Right to Education (RTE) Act of 2009 has been pivotal, with initiatives like uniform distribution designed to reduce educational barriers and ensure access for all children, including those from tribal communities. State-run programs such as Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Schools address the specific educational needs of girls and students in tribal areas, offering residential education and focusing on holistic development. Additionally, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana plays a crucial role in promoting financial inclusion, which indirectly supports educational access by providing economic stability to marginalized families. The ministry has observed a significant increase in tribal student enrollment over the past three years, alongside a decrease in dropout rates, reflecting positive trends in educational access and participation. Ongoing efforts include strategies to re-enrol students who have dropped out, further enhancing the overall educational framework for tribal communities.



Shri Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Additional Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education

7. **Mr. Sunil Kumar Barwal** discussed the focus on tribal-centric education and research within the higher education sector. Three tribal universities have been established in Andhra Pradesh and Amarkantak to address the specific educational needs of tribal communities. One of the primary challenges is to increase the gross enrollment ratio in higher education, particularly in tribal areas, with a national goal of reaching 35%. Beyond merely providing access, there is a pressing need for research into tribal-focused areas, as much of this field remains unexplored. The ministry is also addressing the unique needs of tribal regions, emphasizing the development of skill education facilities tailored to these areas. Special attention is given to the northeastern regions, where budget allocations are directed towards research focused on tribal education. Universities are encouraged to concentrate on tribal areas and populations to ensure that the enrollment rates of tribal students surpass those of other demographic groups in the country.

8. **Prof. Alok Kumar Chakrawal** emphasized the critical need to establish a solid foundation for supporting Scheduled Tribe (ST) students. He highlighted a proposal recently submitted to the state government for the development of hostel facilities with a capacity of 500 beds. These hostels are intended to provide comprehensive guidance and resources for competitive exams such as UPSC, TOEFL, and computer training. By offering dedicated accommodation, this initiative aims to significantly improve educational opportunities and higher education prospects for ST students, ensuring they receive the necessary support to excel in their academic and professional endeavours.



[Prof. TV Kattimami highlighted the critical need for skill-focused training](#)

9. **Prof. T V Kattimami** highlighted the critical need for skill-focused training and education in tribal areas, emphasizing the importance of leveraging the unique strengths in art, culture, and talent inherent in these communities. The goal is to integrate these skills into the educational framework to enhance learning outcomes. To achieve higher education objectives, an integrated system is necessary, which includes incorporating teachers from various regions and providing them with opportunities to contribute to the development of local curricula. Additionally, there is a call for implementing a tribal education policy that reflects the diverse needs and perspectives of different tribal communities, ensuring a more inclusive and effective educational approach



Mr. Ajeet Kumar Srivastava, Commissioner, National Education Society for Tribal Students

10. **Mr. Ajeet Kumar Srivastava** addressed the need for a multifaceted approach to education for tribal populations, focusing on four distinct groups: inaccessible tribal groups, those in rural areas, semi-urban populations, and urban tribal communities. To ensure quality education, a policy-based intervention is essential to cover overlooked areas and address issues such as high dropout rates and inadequate residential schools. Despite government efforts, challenges persist, including poor infrastructure, limited internet connectivity, and insufficient community engagement, which affect school education and student enrollment. Efforts are underway to elevate the standards of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) to align with those of Navodaya schools, though career guidance remains limited. Collaborations with UNICEF and the education department are aimed at enhancing students' skills and addressing teacher commitment and local language resource needs. Additionally, there is an initiative to improve teaching materials by broadcasting STEM content in tribal languages through the Eklavya channel and promoting nutritional support and skill development through Poshan Vatikas and school programs.

11. **Mr. Narendra Kumar Dagga**, highlighted the significant concern of high dropout rates among tribal students, primarily caused by a shortage of hostel seats, which restricts access to education for many. To address this, there is a proposal to increase the number of hostel seats to accommodate more students and reduce disruptions in their education. The state has also taken proactive measures by sponsoring seats for UPSC coaching, encouraging tribal students to aspire to and prepare for competitive exams. Despite these efforts, accommodation remains a critical barrier, with many students struggling to find a place to stay, impacting their academic pursuits. Additionally, language barriers exacerbate the problem, as the lack of instruction in local languages hampers students' engagement with the curriculum. The shortage of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in regions with less than 50% tribal population further limits access to quality education, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to enhance educational infrastructure and resources in tribal areas.



Prof. Ravindra Ramesh Patil, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi presenting findings of a 2018 study on Ashram Schools in Maharashtra

12. **Prof. Ravindra Ramesh Patil** presented the findings of a 2018 study on Ashram Schools in Maharashtra, managed by both government and non-governmental organizations. The study revealed several critical issues, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of basic amenities, and insufficient water and toilet facilities, which contribute to problems like open defecation. Health and safety concerns were significant, with instances of snake bites due to insufficient safety measures. Classroom conditions were substandard, with no separate classes for different groups, and food facilities were poorly managed. Low enrollment rates highlighted the need for enhanced support and outreach. Prof. Patil emphasized the need for a comprehensive policy for tribal education that addresses linguistic barriers, the encroachment of private schools, and the class system among tribals and capacity building programs for the teachers. The absence of School Social Workers in these institutions was also highlighted as a significant concern.

13. **Mr. Vijesing Vasave** provided statistics on Ashram Schools in Maharashtra, noting that the Government of Maharashtra's Post-Metric scholarships have significantly improved dropout rates among students. These scholarships have played a crucial role in supporting students' continued education. In addition, he discussed the integration of skill development initiatives alongside these scholarships, emphasizing their importance in enhancing students' overall prospects and career readiness.

14. **Mr. Kripanand Jha** highlighted several key issues in Jharkhand, particularly the challenges of teaching tribal students in their mother tongues, due to the lack of qualified teachers for tribal languages. To address these challenges, Multilingual Education Programme has been introduced, along with community training for teachers. He also pointed out the lack of integration of tribal systems and traditions into the broader Indian education framework, as well as the neglect of students' emotional and mental well-being, which has led to increased stress levels. Mr. Jha also emphasized the need to incorporate the National Health Programme into schools to address these issues. Government interventions such as the Savitri Bai Phule Kishori Samridhi Yojna, which provides bicycles and financial support to tribal students, were discussed. Additionally, scholarship schemes for studying abroad and the need for enhanced skill development and vocational training were

addressed. The meeting concluded with a call for the expansion of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and Ashram Schools to better support tribal communities.

1 5 . **Mr. Satyakam Joshi** reviewed the development and current state of Ashramshalas in Gujarat, tracing their evolution since 1975, including shifts in the Nai-Talim educational pattern. The current Ashramshala structure includes Primary education (Grades 1-7) and Uttam Buniyadi (Grades 9-12). Key issues identified were problems with water supply, inadequate vocational and science education, lack of computer education, and a shortage of teachers. Additionally, there is significant disparity among various tribal groups, highlighting the need for more targeted support and development within the Ashramshala system.

1 6 . **Mr. Apoorva Oza** discussed the gap between local and mainstream languages, noting that teachers predominantly come from mainstream society, which affects tribal students' performance, particularly in passing the 10th standard. Disparities in science and math education across districts were also noted, with ongoing issues like student bullying despite various programs. He emphasized the need to create role models for tribal children and improve last-mile connectivity in tribal education. A special-purpose vehicle was suggested to address these issues, with a strong focus on enhancing digital education for tribal students.

17. **Prof. Vandana Saxena** focused on field-based case studies highlighting key issues in tribal education. She pointed out that the school curriculum lacks inclusivity and fails to adequately represent tribal identities, perpetuating stereotypes. Adjustments in school practices are needed to ensure inclusivity, particularly addressing the impact of surname representation and bullying by non-tribal students. The need for institutional mobilization to tackle these challenges and to address discrimination faced by tribal doctoral students was emphasized. She also highlighted the importance of community sensitization programs and resource mobilization to enhance the educational experience for tribal students.

1 8 . **Mr. Surat Singh** elaborated on the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes' efforts toward the upliftment of tribal communities across India. He explained that the Commission conducts surveys to identify challenges and deficiencies, including issues related to teachers and infrastructure. Reports are compiled based on these surveys, highlighting the gaps and making recommendations for further action to address these issues and improve the conditions for tribal communities.

1 9 . **Prof. Madhukarbai S. Padvi** emphasized the importance of providing education in local tribal languages and improving network and connectivity facilities for tribal students, as most of them belong to remote areas. Better network facilities would enhance access to education. He also highlighted the need for digital education and called for transport/travel concessions to increase accessibility to educational institutions.

2 0 . **Dr. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra** reiterated the importance of delivering

education in tribal students' native languages. While acknowledging existing government schemes aimed at tribal education, he stressed the need for effective ground-level monitoring of these schemes. He also underscored the need for increased financial provisions and improved hostel amenities for tribal students.

21. **Mr. Mahesh Sharma** emphasized the need for education that respects and integrates tribal knowledge and environment. He advocated for education that fosters all-round development and further highlights the importance of practical education, like laboratories in schools. He called for a curriculum that supports native intelligence and respects linguistic and cultural diversity, ensuring that tribal youth can thrive both within their communities and in broader society.

22. **Mr. Yogesh T. KAS** endorsed the need to impart special training for teachers involved in educating tribal children. Such training is crucial for helping both teachers and students overcome language barriers, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of tribal education.



Smt. Sadhana Rout, Special Monitor NHRC

23. **Ms. Sadhana Rout** highlighted the need for a collective vision and a research-oriented action plan to address existing gaps in the tribal education sector. She stressed the importance of integrated education as it would boost tribal education while preserving tribal culture. While appreciating the progress made and initiatives taken toward tribal education, she said that a well-rounded, comprehensive policy would help address the issues and reconcile the existing gaps in this segment.

24. In his closing remarks, Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General of the NHRC, emphasized the critical need to address and eliminate gaps in tribal education. He highlighted the importance of understanding the current status and progress of tribal education to effectively tackle existing challenges. Shri Bharat Lal stressed the need to address high dropout rates and discriminatory practices affecting tribal children. He reaffirmed the NHRC's commitment to acting on these issues through strategic partnerships with NGOs, HRDs, and ministries according to the intended goal and reaching their full potential.

The meeting ended with a formal vote of thanks proposed by Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General of the NHRC.

List of participants

National Human Rights Commission

1. Smt. Vijaya Bharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Acting Chairperson
2. Shri Bharat Lal, Secretary General
3. Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation)
4. Shri Joginder Singh, Registrar (Law),
5. Shri Devendra Kumar Nim, Joint Secretary
6. Dr. (Ms.) Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research)
7. Ms. Purna Hasija, Junior Research Consultant

Participants from Ministries and other Organisations

1. Shri Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Additional Secretary, Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education
2. Smt. Archana Sharma Awasthi, Joint Secretary, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education
3. Shri Surat Singh, Director, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes
4. Shri Ajeet Kumar Srivastava, Commissioner, National Education Society for Tribal Students
5. Shri Kripanand Jha, IAS, Secretary, Department of Scheduled Tribes, Jharkhand
6. Mr. Vijesing Vasave, Joint Secretary, Tribal Development Department, Maharashtra
7. Shri Yogesh T. KAS, Director, Scheduled Tribes Welfare Department
8. Shri Narendra Kumar Dugga, Commissioner, Tribal & Scheduled Caste Development Department, Chhattisgarh
9. Prof. Alok Kumar Chakrawal, Vice Chancellor, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalayas, Koni, Bilaspur
10. Prof. (Dr.) Madhukarbhai S. Padv, Vice Chancellor, Birsa Munda Tribal University, Gujarat
11. Prof. T.V. Kattimani, Vice Chancellor, Central Tribal University of Andhra Pradesh;
12. Prof. Ravindra Ramesh Patil, Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi
13. Dr. Vandana Saxena, Professor, University of Delhi

14. Dr. Gauri Shankar Mahapatra, Associate Professor, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak
15. Dr. Satyakam Joshi, Acting Director & Professor, Veer Narmada South Gujarat University
16. Shri Apoorva Oza, Director, Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, India
17. Shri Mahesh Sharma, Social Activist, Founder Shivganga Jhabua
18. Smt. Sadhana Rout, Special Monitor NHRC