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## Government Initiatives for Tribal Education

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### Abstract:

The adivasis or tribals of India are a huge part of the Indian population with a very rich heritage. Every state in India accounts for a certain percentage of its respective population to be tribal. The tribals have distinct mannerisms in their cuisine, their dress, their belief systems, and other aspects of their daily lives. They are closely connected to land and nature. Sadly, despite their rich cultural heritage, the tribals of India have not prospered the way they should have due to a number of reasons that they face. They have been displaced in many areas and are therefore not socio-economically strong; there is a lack of proper health sensitization and amenities among them, and the most glaring of problems is access to good and proper education. On top of all these issues, there has been huge displacement for many due to loss of land and other forms of exploitation due to globalization and urbanization.

There is no doubt that education brings about a change. However, the government of India has had to face many challenges in providing access to good education for the tribal community throughout the nation. The government has undeniably sought to address these gaps through specialized interventions aimed at creating access to quality education among the tribals. The initiatives taken by the government of India are the establishment of Eklavya Model Residential Schools and Ashram Schools, along with enforcing the reforms envisioned under the National Education Policy 2020 for the betterment of the scheduled tribes of India.

### Introduction:

The Eklavya Model Residential Schools were started in 1997-98, and modelled on the Navodaya Vidyalayas to provide education in the middle and senior secondary levels to tribal children in remote and rural areas. The government targeted not only the mainstream subjects but also emphasized on preserving and taking forward the respective tribal culture of the area, a focus on sport as well as vocational skills. These schools are completely residential and are focused on closing the gap between rural and urban by providing all necessary requirements. The government aims to create EMRSs at every possible area where needed so that tribal children receive the much-needed education and dropout levels fall. The initiative was welcomed with much anticipation and applause, but there are major challenges like teacher availability, culturally relevant pedagogy, retention of students, and language barriers, which

definitely require systemic attention.

Ashram Schools, on the other hand, have been around for a longer period of time and have been based on a complete holistic development gleaned from the Gandhian approach to education. These schools were also established to educate tribal children to become self-sufficient through not only mainstream subjects but also character development, moral education, and vocational studies too. These schools are also residential. This initiative has been instrumental in providing education in tribal areas, yet these schools have not been able to reach the potential they were intended to, due to a lack of proper infrastructure, poor quality of teaching, and limited to no integration of tribal culture into the curriculum. Still, the Ashram Schools play a vital role in the education of tribal children.

The NEP or National Education Policy 2020 is a very ambitious attempt of the government to bring about the much-needed changes in the education system of our country so as to keep pace with the global educational scenario. The emphasis on equity, inclusion, and a multilingual approach in these schools aligns with the specific and pointed needs of tribal children. The provision of instruction in the mother tongue is also a huge step forward in the direction of development in the foundational years. The flexibility in the curricular design, the vocational exposure from the early years itself, instruction in the mother tongue, and other attempts to improve the approach to education for tribal children are a ray of hope on the horizon of the emerging educational changes for this important section of the Indian population. All of this aims at increasing the opportunity for an education and reducing the dropout rate among tribal children.

This paper discusses the productivity and success of the EMRSs and Ashram Schools along with the policies of the NEP 2020, for the advancement of the country's tribal children against the obstacles that the government faces in the implementation of the vision. To mention some of these obstacles that the government faces are poverty of the tribals themselves, displacement due to urbanization, lack of proper infrastructure, lack of technical prowess, lack of teacher training and capacity building of teachers, lack of availability of cultural pedagogy, and the inability to source teachers who are actually rooted and grounded in their own culture. Apart from these hindrances, the government has to face a lack of accountability and corruption right from the grassroots level of the whole structure, leading to red tape barriers for those trying to implement this robust vision.

Therefore, by delving into and analysing the hide and seek between the robust and ambitious initiatives of the government and the inability to implement them to their fullest, the attempt to better the opportunities for a better life for the adivasi children, we can appreciate that this vision is spectacular. However, findings underscore the necessity of a multi-pronged strategy that balances the imperatives of modernization with the preservation of cultural identity. Ultimately, the paper concludes that government initiatives like EMRSs, Ashram schools, and the NEP can significantly transform tribal education, but only when supported by holistic, context-sensitive implementation that places tribal voices and aspirations at the center of the educational discourse.

The challenges that the government of India faces for the successful implementation of the above-mentioned initiatives are highly conspicuous. The vicious cycle of poverty that the tribals are stuck in creates a dilemma for parents: whether to send their children to school or to earn a daily wage, which is more lucrative in the short run. Sending the child to school is a long-term goal that the parents are unable to sustain when there are many mouths to feed.

Lack of proper and safe infrastructure to run a school is another huge barrier. There is a huge lack of amenities like clean drinking water, clean and separate gender specific washrooms, various scientific and other academic laboratories, a library with curriculum-specific and culturally specific books, playgrounds, etc. A school cannot function with just four walls and a roof. On the same lines, when the infrastructure of the school is mostly in such a deplorable state, the provision of the EdTech initiatives in the NEP 2020 is far from reachable due to a variety of reasons, such as rough and tough terrain, lack of internet connection, lack of technical prowess, and support. Corruption is a major, if not one of the most awful, deterrents to put a spoke in the wheel of success for the implementation of these initiatives. There is no proper accountability in the line of hierarchy when it comes to every aspect of monitoring the flow of work in the respective organization.

Another major glaring problem that the government faces in bringing about the educational changes that it wants to implement for the tribal communities of the country is the lack of trained teachers for the specific task at hand. Teacher training is not adequate, and finding teachers who are actually culturally aware and able to execute the curriculum using the mother tongue is difficult, if not next to impossible.

Another deterrent to the success of such initiatives is the lack of involvement of the tribal community in the running and governance of the schools. Parents would be more enthusiastic to send their children to a place where they were involved, especially a place where their wards were being educated. The inclusion policy of the NEP 2020 should not be only for children but for parents as well.

## **Literature Review:**

### **1. Policy and Governance Perspective**

Government initiatives such as the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) and Ashram Schools were a step in time to bring about better opportunities for tribal children in the area of education. The government acknowledged the fact that in the long run, for a better and stronger future of the nation, the children of the nation had to be educated, and therefore the introduction of the said initiatives.

The initiatives were extremely ambitious and very good to start with but the lack of proper implementation has not seen the outcome that the government hoped for. Lack of strong, stable infrastructure, delay in the release of funds, and mismanagement of the same due to lack of accountability and insufficient and no correct documentation in government audits have not seen the type of success that the government was hoping for. For instance, the *Comptroller and Auditor General of India (2017)* found extensive diversion and underuse of funds in Maharashtra. Similarly, the *NITI Aayog (2021)* evaluation of EMRS (Eklavya Model Residential Schools) highlighted grave teacher shortages, with vacancies in some states exceeding 40%. Weak monitoring mechanisms and limited community participation in governance further exacerbate these challenges (Xaxa, 2014). Thus, due to the above-mentioned barriers and hindrances, the government has not been able to make much progress in the education of the tribal children.

### **2. Socio-Cultural Perspective**

The socio-cultural situation of tribals also plays a huge role in the receiving of education for the tribals. One huge deterrent to a huge number of enrolments in the schools is the language barrier. The schools use English or the state language as the medium of instruction, whereas most tribal children speak indigenous mother tongues. According to *UNESCO (2019)*, the dropout rate is high because there is a lack of understanding among the children because of the medium of instruction being what it

is.

Tribal children find the mainstream curriculum non-connecting because it does not cater to their tribal traditions, livelihoods, and indigenous knowledge systems. (Srivastava, 2020). For girls, it is even more difficult as they have to take care of the household chores and are often married off at an early age. Thus, education does not mean much to them. Also, for tribal girls, the way things are, it is quite unsafe for them due to the lack of good infrastructure in school hostels.

The above evidence therefore shows that education for tribal children is not really relevant because it does not make a connect with them.

### 3. Equity and Access Perspective

Even after having created Eklavya Model Residential Schools and Ashram Schools, the participation of tribal children in these schools is not what it should be because of the geographical perspective. Tribal people often live in remote, difficult-to-access terrain, far from towns and cities, and therefore, it is difficult for them to go to school easily. The *Planning Commission (2013)* noted that secondary schools remain sparse in tribal areas, forcing children to move away to faraway hostels, which also causes them to lose family ties to a large extent. Poverty is a huge deterrent for these children to go to school because education is a long-term goal, whereas earning a daily wage is faster and easier when there is a lack of resources and many mouths to feed. Girls disproportionately face dropouts due to domestic responsibilities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, inequities worsened: An *Azim Premji University (2021)* survey revealed that over 60% of tribal children lacked access to smartphones or reliable internet, leaving them excluded from online learning opportunities, whatever there were.

Thus, these inequities—geographical, economic, and digital—must be addressed through targeted interventions such as transport facilities, scholarships, and digital inclusion programs to ensure equitable educational opportunities; otherwise, all planning and investment into the creation of opportunities for an education for tribal children goes south.

### 4. Long-Term Impact Perspective

Due to the government initiatives like the Eklavya Model Residential Schools and Ashram Schools, success stories do exist. However, success the way it should be is still a long way to go because the hindrances and barriers are way more than the provisions. It is still a long short before the tribal children will be able to make a connect with education the way the government envisions. The interventions need to be really robust and intentional before a change can really be expected. There are stories of tribal children going in for higher studies due to the provision of secondary and higher secondary level education, but sadly large-scale outcomes still remain inconsistent. The *Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2018)* reported that dropout rates among tribal children are higher than the national average, particularly at the secondary and higher secondary levels. Many students discontinue despite free residential facilities due to cultural alienation, parental disengagement, and challenges in adapting to mainstream curricula. Thus, without intentional interventions, these educational systems risk becoming redundant rather than empowering. A sustainable model must therefore emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy, greater community participation, and continuous teacher training. Only then can Eklavya Model Residential Schools and Ashram Schools evolve into transformative spaces that empower tribal children while respecting their cultural identity.

Recommendations:

**Geographic Expansion of Schools:** To begin with, there should be an expansion

of such schools over a larger geographic area so more students can enrol and gain access to an education.

**Enhanced Transportation:** Apart from the geographic expansion, transportation too should be enhanced where own transportation is not possible so that children can reach schools easily.

**Increased School Capacity & Community Sensitisation:** Another suggestion is that the capacity of every residential school should be increased so that access to education for tribal children is better. Apart from building larger residential schools, community sensitisation should also be a part of the larger picture for a larger enrollment of students.

**Teacher Training and Capacity Building:** Teacher training and capacity building of teachers should be a priority for all such schools for better outcomes. When a teacher is well-trained, her teaching will inevitably be better and will be able to deliver good lessons.

**Contextualized Curriculum:** The government should create a contextualized curriculum based on tribal folklore, folk songs, tribal art, and history so that apart from the mainstream subjects, the children feel a connect to what they are learning. This enhances learning and is a step towards better teaching-learning interactions, with real learning happening.

**Financial Management and Incentives:** The government should provide a full-bodied monitoring system in place to ensure that there is transparency in the use of funds, and these funds too need to be released on time so that work is not hindered. Financial incentives for teachers should be provided to boost their willingness to work. Additionally, recruiting tribal staff brings about cultural relatability not only for the students but teachers as well, ensuring teaching-learning happens with conviction.

**Student Retention & Mentoring:** Dropout rates should be handled by creating buddy systems so that no child feels lost and slips through the cracks of the system. A system of mentoring and overlooking each other is a good way of stopping attrition from the schools.

**Cultural Integration & Holistic Implementation:** Cultural integration, transparent financial transactions, and timely release of funds should happen so that work is not hindered. Proper cultural integration, building teacher capacity, robust transportation, and sharp technology in place are also ways that will bring about success, and tribal children will gain a meaningful education.

**Safe Environment for Girls & Vocational Training:** Girls should be made to feel safe with proper and clean sanitation facilities. Female role models should be provided so that naturally shy tribal girls have an incentive to learn better. Vocational training provisions of the NEP 2020 should be put to full use so that there are sustainable opportunities for students even after they graduate from school.

**Full Utilization of NEP 2020 Provisions & Collaboration:** Every provision in the NEP 2020, related to technology, vocational training, and community participation in the running of the schools, should be put to use so that there is seamless cooperation and growth for all sundry, and tribal children have an equal chance at a better life. Initiatives should also be complemented by CSR initiatives, NGOs, and higher education institutions.

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