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EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL CONDITIONS OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES IN TELANGANA: A STUDY OF LITERACY, SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES

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Keywords	Abstract
Tribal Education, Telangana, Scheduled Tribes, Literacy, Ashram Schools, Girls' Education, Tribal Welfare, Educational Facilities.	Education occupies an important place in the social, cultural and economic development of tribal communities. The educational conditions of tribal communities in Telangana have historically been characterized by low literacy, inadequate access to schools, low enrollment of girls, absenteeism, stagnation, dropout and inadequate educational infrastructure. The educational facilities provided by the government included primary schools, upper primary schools, Ashram schools, hostels, scholarships, mid-day meals, free books, stationery, clothing and teacher-training centres. In 1961, the literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in the State was 4.41 percent compared with 21.2 percent for the State as a whole. In 1971, the corresponding figures were 5.34 percent and 24.6 percent. The educational situation varied considerably among tribal areas and communities. The establishment of Ashram schools attempted to provide residential educational facilities to children living in remote and scattered settlements. District-wise data show considerable variation in the number of schools, student strength and literacy rates. Female educational participation remained particularly low. The 1991 data show that female literacy was considerably lower than male literacy in almost all districts of the Telangana region. The educational



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	facilities and welfare measures discussed in the paper indicate the efforts made to promote education among tribal communities, while the available data demonstrate the continuing difficulties of educational access, enrollment and retention.
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1. Introduction

Life has multifarious facets, including mental, physical, moral, social, religious, economic, cultural and political dimensions. Education is an important means of developing these different facets of life and contributes to the development of an individual's personality in harmony with society. Education is therefore presented as a fundamental prerequisite for social and economic development. The promotion of the educational interests of Scheduled Tribes has been a responsibility of the Central and State Governments. Since independence, various facilities have been provided for the educational advancement of tribal communities. These facilities included school buildings, studentships, free books and stationery, boarding and lodging facilities and mid-day meals. During the earlier plan periods, Rs. 55.6 lakhs was spent for the promotion of education among Scheduled Tribes of the State. By 1971, there were 1,176 primary schools established for Scheduled Tribes and 195 primary schools functioning for Denotified Tribes. The 1,176 primary schools were managed by the Government, Samithi and voluntary aided organizations, with 212, 585 and 379 schools respectively.

Despite these efforts, the literacy gap between Scheduled Tribes and the general population remained considerable. According to the 1961 Census, only 4.41 percent of Scheduled Tribes were literate, whereas the corresponding figure for the State was 21.2 percent. The enrollment of Scheduled Tribe students was also disproportionately low in relation to their population.

2. Educational Position of Tribal Communities

The tribal child occupies a distinctive position in relation to formal education. Traditional tribal education developed through community life, ancestral knowledge, community elders and practical life skills. The educational process was connected with survival, including overcoming hunger, pain and fear. Education was therefore closely associated with everyday life and the acquisition of skills necessary for community existence.

The movement towards mainstream education created new educational requirements for tribal communities. The educational condition of tribal children became associated with their capacity to overcome exploitation, harmonize internal and external environments and maintain dignity. The transition to mainstream educational institutions also created difficulties because tribal children lived in different geographical and social conditions.

The State subsequently assumed responsibility for providing educational facilities to tribal children. The educational programmes included primary schools, Ashram schools, hostels, scholarships, teacher-training centres and other support facilities. The educational measures were intended to address illiteracy and encourage tribal children to attend schools.



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3. Literacy among Tribal Communities

Literacy remained one of the most important indicators of the educational condition of tribal communities. The literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in the State was 4.41 percent in 1961 and 5.34 percent in 1971, while the corresponding State literacy rates were 21.2 percent and 24.6 percent respectively. In the project area, the Scheduled Tribe literacy rate was 5 percent compared with 18.5 percent for the district.

The condition of literacy was particularly poor in isolated tribal settlements. In the project area, 127 inhabited villages, representing 16.24 percent, had zero literacy, while 94 villages, representing 12.02 percent, had literacy below 2 percent. Several low-literacy areas were characterized by inadequate transport facilities and difficult geographical conditions.

The low-literacy pockets of Bhadrachalam and Kunavaram included villages inhabited predominantly by Koyas and Konda Reddis. In some villages, literacy was zero despite the presence of primary and Ashram schools. The geographical isolation of villages, sparse population, lack of transport and communication facilities and difficulty in establishing schools affected educational access.

Table 1. District-wise Literacy Rate in Telangana Region, 1991

District	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Total Literacy (%)
Adilabad	45.04	20.60	32.96
Nizamabad	45.15	19.25	32.41
Karimnagar	50.97	23.37	37.17
Warangal	51.98	26.08	39.30
Khammam	50.04	30.53	40.50
Hyderabad	78.90	63.56	71.52
Medak	47.33	21.35	34.18
Ranga Reddy	60.43	36.91	49.07
Mahaboobnagar	40.80	18.03	29.58
Nalgonda	50.53	24.92	38.00

Source: Ananda, G., *A Comparative Study on Tribal Ashram Schools, Among the Chenchus and Sugalis of Andhra Pradesh*, National Council for Education Research & Training, New Delhi, 1995, p. 14.

The table shows a substantial difference between male and female literacy in the Telangana region in 1991. Male literacy was higher than female literacy in every district listed. Hyderabad recorded the highest total literacy rate at 71.52 percent, followed by Ranga Reddy at 49.07 percent and Khammam at 40.50 percent. Mahaboobnagar recorded the lowest total literacy rate at 29.58 percent, followed by Nizamabad at 32.41 percent and Adilabad at 32.96 percent. Female literacy was particularly low in Mahaboobnagar, Nizamabad and Adilabad.



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The literacy data also show that female literacy remained considerably below male literacy. In Adilabad, male literacy was 45.04 percent compared with female literacy of 20.60 percent. In Warangal, the corresponding figures were 51.98 and 26.08 percent. Khammam recorded 50.04 percent male literacy and 30.53 percent female literacy.

4. Primary and Village Schools

The government made efforts to expand primary education in tribal areas. Sixty-nine village and primary schools were initially opened, followed by 55 new schools during the First Five-Year Plan. By the end of the First Five-Year Plan, 120 village and primary schools had been established in Scheduled Areas. The schools were opened according to tribal culture and environment.

The district-wise primary school data demonstrate variation in educational facilities.

Table 2. Primary Schools and Enrollment in Selected Tribal Areas

District	Number of Primary Schools	Enrollment
Adilabad	269	12,120
Warangal	75	5,583
Khammam	573	31,903

Source: *Education Sub-Plan for Tribal Areas of Andhra Pradesh*, Tribal Welfare Department, Hyderabad, 1978, p. 16.

The table shows that Khammam had the highest number of primary schools as well as the highest enrollment among the three districts. It had 573 schools with 31,903 students. Adilabad had 269 schools with 12,120 students, while Warangal had 75 schools with 5,583 students. The difference in the number of schools and enrollment reflects the variation in the provision of primary educational facilities in the three districts.

Upper primary educational facilities were comparatively limited. Adilabad had 10 upper primary schools, Warangal had 5 and Khammam had 70. The total number of upper primary schools recorded for the State was 115, of which 85 were in three ITDPs of the Telangana region.

5. Ashram Schools

Ashram schools formed an important component of tribal education. The system was associated with the idea of self-reliant education in which teachers and students lived together. Along with formal teaching and learning, students were provided opportunities to acquire practical skills in agriculture and crafts. Ashram schools were generally residential institutions providing boarding and lodging facilities. They were intended to function as inter-village schools and were to be established in areas where regular schools could not be set up. The most disadvantaged tribal groups were to be included. Children from villages situated five kilometres or more from schools were admitted as boarders, while local children could attend as day scholars.

The distribution of Ashram schools varied among districts.



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District	Number of Ashram Schools	Student Strength
Adilabad	65	7,312
Nizamabad	—	—
Karimnagar	8	748
Warangal	31	5,095
Khammam	65	7,312
Hyderabad	—	—
Medak	2	158
Ranga Reddy	3	350
Mahaboobnagar	11	1,107
Nalgonda	2	1,280

Source: Ananda, G., *A Comparative Study on Tribal Ashram Schools, Among the Chenchus and Sugalis of Andhra Pradesh*, National Council for Education Research & Training, New Delhi, 1995, p. 17.

The data show that Adilabad and Khammam each had 65 Ashram schools with a student strength of 7,312. Warangal had 31 schools with 5,095 students. The remaining districts had considerably fewer Ashram schools. Nizamabad and Hyderabad are shown without Ashram schools in the table.

Ashram schools were intended to provide educational opportunities to tribal children living in remote and scattered settlements. However, the distribution of these schools was uneven. The educational facilities were more concentrated in Adilabad, Khammam and Warangal, while other districts had fewer institutions.

6. Education of Tribal Girls

The educational participation of tribal girls remained particularly low. The available data indicate that girls' enrollment in primary schools in ITDP areas was below 50 percent, while in the Telangana region the percentage was below 32 percent. The figures for Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam illustrate this condition. In Adilabad, total enrollment was 4,661, of which 937 were girls, representing 20.10 percent. Warangal had total enrollment of **4,162**, with 861 girls, representing 20.69 percent. Khammam had total enrollment of 10,022, with 3,146 girls, representing 31.39 percent. The available explanation in the paper identifies the involvement of tribal girls in housework and agriculture as an important condition associated with their low school enrollment. Girls often accompanied their parents and helped in different activities. Separate girls' residential schools were also established. Six girls' residential schools were opened in the State, and one such school in Khammam had an enrollment of 990 students. Girls' hostels were also established in Khammam, Warangal and Adilabad, and the enrollment of girls in hostels was 9,231.



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7. Hostels and Residential Educational Facilities

Hostels were established to provide boarding and lodging facilities for tribal students. In 1954–55, two hostels were opened, one at Yellandu in Khammam district and another in Adilabad. Additional hostels were planned in Warangal, Boorghampahad and Karimnagar. Each hostel was designed to accommodate 25 tribal students and provide boarding and lodging free of cost. The hostel system subsequently expanded across the Telangana region. The available district-wise data show 46 hostels in Adilabad with 4,037 students, 40 in Warangal with 5,384 students and 46 in Khammam with 4,037 students. Nalgonda had 36 hostels with 6,242 students. Hyderabad had seven hostels with 717 students, while Ranga Reddy had 11 hostels with 1,041 students. The hostels provided food, clothing and books to tribal students. These facilities were intended to support students from both primitive and plain-area tribal communities and to facilitate their continuation in education.

8. Teacher Training and Educational Personnel

Teacher training was another component of educational development among tribal communities. Teacher Training Centres were established at Marlavai and Ginnadhari in Adilabad district, Todvay in Warangal district and Suddimall in Khammam district. These centres were intended to train young tribals as teachers and post them in schools opened by the Department. Sixty candidates were trained during the First Plan period. Teacher availability remained an important issue in tribal educational areas. In Adilabad, the ITDA had 1,146 sanctioned posts for Secondary Grade Teachers and 123 posts for Primary School Head Masters. Of these, 965 SGTs and 115 PSHMs were in service. The available material also records a high number of unqualified teachers in Scheduled Areas because of relaxation of recruitment norms. In Khammam, 820 teaching posts were sanctioned in the Ashram schools, of which 736 were filled, leaving 84 vacancies. The educational infrastructure also had deficiencies in water facilities, kitchens, toilets and accessibility facilities.

9. Out-of-School Children, Dropout and Stagnation

The educational condition of tribal children was also reflected in the number of children remaining outside schools. In Adilabad, RVM estimates recorded 2,180 ST children in the 6–14 age group as out of school, 273 dropouts and 330 children who had never been enrolled. The ITDA at Utnoor had 927 Tribal Welfare Primary Schools or GVVKS in 2010–11, with total enrollment of 28,859. Khammam recorded 113,410 ST children in the 6–14 age group within the Bhadrachalam ITDA. Among them, 6,399 children were identified as out of school, while the total number of dropouts was approximately 2,300, comprising around 1,300 boys and 1,000 girls.

Mahaboobnagar also recorded substantial educational difficulties. The ST child population in the 7–14 age group was 68,207. Enrollment declined from 16,457 children in Class I to 4,474 by Class VIII in 2009. The number of ST teachers at the primary level was limited to 504 males and 184 females. The residential education system was associated with lower wastage and stagnation in the comparison presented. The material records a wastage figure of 1.73 percent for non-residential



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schools and 57.92 percent for Ashram schools, together with stagnation indices of 45.75 and 32.85 respectively. The figures are reproduced here as presented in the source material.

10. Educational Facilities and Training Opportunities

The educational programmes extended beyond ordinary schooling. Scholarships were provided to tribal students to encourage enrollment. Students in village and primary schools established by the Tribal Welfare Department received scholarships, while students studying in lower and higher secondary classes received higher rates of assistance. During the First Five-Year Plan, 5,463 students received scholarships at the stated rate. The Tribal Welfare Department also provided opportunities for higher and professional advancement. Reservations were available in public schools and Sainik Schools. A Pre-Examination Training Centre in Hyderabad provided coaching for competitive examinations. Out of 135 students trained, 89 secured jobs. Tribal youth also received pre-service training in public sector undertakings. Thirty-five tribal candidates received unemployment relief, while 50 underwent apprenticeship programmes. Employment-oriented training included 231 village officers, 312 masons and 60 motor drivers. These measures extended educational support beyond elementary schooling and provided opportunities for training and employment-oriented development.

11. Cultural Context of Tribal Education

Education among tribal communities cannot be separated from their cultural environment. Traditional tribal education was connected with community life, practical knowledge, agriculture, crafts, ancestral knowledge and the guidance of community elders. The Ashram school model also incorporated practical training in agriculture and crafts along with formal education. The educational facilities established in tribal areas were also designed, in some cases, according to tribal culture and environment. The primary and village schools established during the First Five-Year Plan were specifically opened in a manner suited to tribal culture and environment. The educational experience therefore involved both traditional forms of community-based learning and formal institutional education. The available material presents this transition as an important feature of the educational condition of tribal communities.

12. Conclusion

The educational and cultural conditions of tribal communities in Telangana were marked by low literacy, limited educational facilities, inadequate enrollment, low participation of girls, dropout, stagnation and geographical barriers. The literacy figures demonstrate a considerable difference between tribal literacy and the literacy level of the general population. The 1991 district-level data also show a substantial gap between male and female literacy.

The expansion of primary schools, upper primary schools, Ashram schools, hostels, scholarships, mid-day meals, free books, stationery, clothing and teacher-training centres represented important educational measures. Primary school data show considerable variation among Adilabad, Warangal



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and Khammam, while Ashram school data indicate greater concentration in Adilabad and Khammam.

Female educational participation remained low. The girls' enrollment figures for Adilabad, Warangal and Khammam remained below 32 percent. The establishment of girls' residential schools and hostels provided additional educational facilities, although the available figures continued to show lower female participation. The literacy data for 1991 show that male literacy was higher than female literacy in every district presented. Hyderabad had the highest total literacy rate, while Mahaboobnagar had the lowest among the listed districts. The educational condition of remote tribal villages was particularly difficult, with several villages recording zero or very low literacy. The paper therefore presents education as an important area of tribal welfare, while the available data show the continuing differences in educational access, literacy, enrollment and educational facilities among tribal communities and districts of Telangana.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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