

Status of Tribal Education in Ladakh: A study of Dard Tribe

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Abstract

The article examines the status of tribal education in Dard tribe of cold desert Ladakh and explains the reasons of high school dropouts and non-enrolment among tribal children as well as to identify the determinants responsible for the poor quality of educational infrastructure. Educational achievements between males and females in tribal social groups vary significantly. The literacy rates among tribal population are not only low but also shows higher level of gender disparity. Even today, the tribal literacy falls below national average. In addition to this, there are problems of low levels of learning achievements, lower participation of girls among tribes. Drop-out rate has been high among tribal groups than overall child population in elementary education. Based on a sample of 600 respondents selected from the thrust areas of Dard tribes from Ladakh (India), the study uses a descriptive research design and multi-stage sampling technique. The findings showed that the Dards of both clusters of Ladakh present a dismal picture of education.

Keywords

Tribal Education, Status, School Dropouts, Reasons, Dard Tribe, Ladakh

1. Introduction

India has the largest concentration of tribal population in the world next to Africa. As per 2011 census of India, total population of schedule tribe is 10.42 crore, of which 1.04 crore live in urban areas. Schedule tribe constitutes 8.6 percent of total population; 89.97 percent of them live in

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rural areas and 10.03 percent in urban areas. The decadal population growth of the tribal 2001 to 2011 has been 23.66 percent against the 17.69 percent of the entire population as per census report 2011. The sex ratio among Scheduled tribes was 990 females per 1,000 males; a significant increase from 978 in the 2001 Census.¹ Inequalities in education are inherent in Indian society. Educational achievements between males and females and between different social groups vary significantly. The literacy rates among tribal population are not only low but also shows higher level of gender disparity. Even today, the tribal literacy falls below national average. In addition to this, there are problems of low levels of learning achievements, lower participation of girls among tribes². Drop-out rate has been high among tribal groups than overall child population in elementary education. While the drop-out rate has been 45.90% for overall population, the drop-out rate counts to 62.54% for tribal groups (SES, 2007-08)³. Though there have been number of developments towards the augmentation of the education system in tribal communities, but the tribal individuals are experiencing setbacks. There are number of problems and challenges that are overwhelming tribal communities, these are, poverty, illiteracy and deprivation. Due to the occurrence of problems, they remain in a secluded and backward state. The tribal communities have their own traditions, customs, cultures, norms and values, on the basis of which they carry out their daily life routine. One of the major problems that the tribal communities experience is the problem of language. Due to differences in language, it is difficult to communicate with the tribal population. In schools too, the tribal students are unable to neither communicate nor acquire an efficient understanding of the academic concepts and the primary cause of this are the differences in language^{4,5}. Tribes are usually educationally and economically backward and have been discriminated in the past. *Dards* of Jammu and Kashmir are markedly underdeveloped as compared to the non-tribal or other groups of people. Their livelihood is based on primitive agriculture, a subsistent economy based on low level of technology. Their socio-economic structure is generally dictated by forest produce and agriculture etc. The absence of technological aids is another structural feature of their economy⁶. Despite constitutional provisions and safe guard with various government initiatives and programme, educating tribal children is still a major concern for the government. There are so many socio-cultural, economical, geographical, and administrative obstacles⁷. There is a vast sociological literature on the transmission of economic disadvantage from generation to generation, and especially on the degree of mobility in

education and occupational status (Bjorklund & Jantti 2000⁸; Erikson & Goldthorpe 1992⁹; Goldthorpe 1980¹⁰; Halsey, Heath & Ridge, 1980¹¹).

The available literature clearly underlines that in spite of constitutional guarantees and persistent efforts, tribal communities continue to lag behind the general population in education. The reasons for this can be categorized as external, internal, and socio-economic and psychological. The external constraints are related to problems and difficulties at levels of policy, planning, implementation, and administration. Internal constraints refer to problems associated with the school system, content, curriculum, medium of instruction, pedagogy, academic supervision, monitoring, and teacher-related problems. The third set of problems relates to social, economic, and cultural background of tribal's and psychological problems of first-generation learners¹².

2: Research Methodology

2.1: Universe and Sampling Design of the Study

The universe of the present study includes two research universes, scarcely scattered across a vast area of Ladakh with the lowest population density (8 persons per square kilometer as against 59 at the state level). At the first stage, a list of Dard villages from two districts: Kargil and Leh were drawn. Kargil universe (major cluster-A) of Dards consists of well-demarcated village settlements in Drass valley on the left bank of the Suru river. The Leh district universe (major cluster-B) of Dards consists of half a dozen hamlets grouped in five revenue village settlements, on lower gorges of the Indus River. The main consideration for the selection of clusters is that these clusters are exclusively inhabited by Dard tribes. Multi-Stage Cluster Sampling Method was deemed to be the most appropriate sampling procedure. The total sample chosen for the study was 600 respondents. The sample subjects were drawn based on the district, block, village, and household clusters. It was the most appropriate to select two blocks-Kargil-Drass, Khamtsi-Leh, and three village clusters from each district with due consideration to the demography and representative traits of the sample.

2.2: Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the present study is to know the status of tribal education in Dard tribe of cold desert Ladakh. The study is also an attempt to examine the reasons of school dropouts among the Dard tribal's as well as to identify the determinants responsible for the poor quality of educational infrastructure.

2.3: Research Question and Hypotheses

The research question to be answered was “why Dard tribal’s have poor educational and what are the reasons for their poor educational infrastructure”? The major hypotheses of the present study are:-

1. Dards have low educational status as compared to other tribal’s groups of the region;
2. Lack of minimum educational infrastructure and also lack of educational awareness are significantly co-related to poor quality of life in the Dard tribe.

3: Analysis and Discussion

3.1: Educational profile of sample subjects

Table 1: Showing educational profile of sample subjects, n= 600

Primary Cluster	Illiterate	Primary	Secondary	Graduate	Post Graduate	Profession	Civil Services	TOTAL
Cluster A	39 [13.00]	67 [36.00]	108 [22.33]	50 [16.67]	27 [9.00]	8 [2.66]	1 [0.33]	300 [100.00]
Cluster B	72 [24.00]	136 [45.34]	69 [23.00]	22 [7.33]	0 [0.00]		1 [0.33]	300 [100.00]
TOTAL	111 [18.50]	203 [33.84]	177 [29.5]	72 [12.00]	27 [4.50]	8 [1.33]	2 [0.33]	600 [100.00]

Source: Based on fieldwork, 2018 carried in Ladakh Division of J&K

As is observed in the above table, the study attempts to collect the data pertaining to level of education (formal schooling) of the respondents selected for the study. It was observed that most of the respondents 203, i.e. (33.83%) had education up to primary level followed by 177 (29.5%) at secondary level. The sample included 72 respondents, 27 graduates and post-graduates, respectively which account for 12% and 4.5% of the sample selected for the study; 8 professions; doctors, engineers, vet specialists and 1 civil service officer (1.33) and (0.33) completes the educational profile of Dard tribal’s in two primary clusters of Kharboo, Shimsha, Thasgam Drass block of Kargil and Dah, Hanu Yokma and Hanu Thang clusters of Khamtsi Block Leh, Ladakh. It is further observed that a significant number of sample subjects 111 (18.5%) were illiterate. In this category 72 (24%) illiterate belong to primary cluster B as against 39 (13%) are from cluster A. Except primary category where respondents of cluster B number higher than cluster A; i.e. 136 against 67 (45.33-22.33) correspondingly. In higher secondary, graduation and at post-graduate levels the former are far behind with 69, 22 and 0 in comparison to 108, 50 and 27 of the later. There is no post-graduate in Dard tribal respondents

of cluster B no and civil service officer. On the contrary, 27 respondents had post-graduation and 7 out of 8 had professional education while as there is only professional degree holder from cluster B.

Kharboo, Shimsha and Thasgam were traditionally developed in terms of educational facilities; besides economic pressures, their proximity to urban centre of district headquarter and their location. On the most and only strategic one way Zojilla highway, their relationships trade, religious affinity and continuous contacts with comparatively developed communities of Kargil and Srinagar etc., were other factors to develop themselves educationally. Their fellow ethnic brethren from Gurez, Bandipora (Kashmir) fared well in Kashmir administration and police apparatus and were always a role model for achieving success through educational achievement. Above all educational achievement was considered a gateway to get a govt. service which in turn guaranteed a constant monthly flow of cash, blockade or no blockade, crop success or crop failure.

Dah, Hanu and Thang hamlets still remains a restricted and therefore, isolated from developmental measures. However, recently for their tourist attraction some elementary developmental measures are increasingly showing their impact on education and socio-cultural milieu which for centuries had minimal human interference. Their housing patterns are found a steep mountain slopes usually nearest to the small terrace type fields. Developmental measures in the fields of agriculture, education and other amenities are quite a recent phenomenon as observed in educational profile. Their demography and cultural practices no doubt carried them for a long time and were content with their self-sustaining, subsistent-traditional and agro-pastoral life style. On the contrary, being isolated and with dwindling numbers had no clout in socio-political and developmental spheres of the state administration. Now educational sector is given first priority by LHDC Leh and commendable efforts are done by his holiness Dalai Lama through Janmgyal Educational Institute, Leh. They have provided boarding and free education at Leh. They catch them young at the very village sites in consultation with the Goba (village head) parents and village councils.

Remoter hamlets have been so far at a disadvantage to measures of development so far as education is concerned. The problem is aggravated by virtue of connectivity and sparse population. Opening of schools at primary or secondary level has been determined more by concentration and population density of a particular area than connectivity and accessibility. Till recently, education of the child in clusters B1.2.3 was more a luxury than a factor for social development.

The Drass Muslim Dards defy established norms of crude birth rate (27.17) that despite understanding the needs and benefits of small families, conducive for availing health, family welfare and above all educational facilities, have less adopted large family size, than Dards of Dah and Hanu. Although being exclusively an agro-economy with almost a non-existent non-farm sector, the family sizes are small and crude birth rate is lower than other ethnic groups of Ladakh at state and national level. Although it couldn't be definitive as this section of sample subjects is educationally, economically and socially at the lowest ebb of development as compared to Muslim Dards, Bots, or other ethnic groups, have even no idea of benefits of small families, contraceptive measures even then they opt for small family pattern. Chronic inbreeding and polyandry practices for a long time might have been responsible factors, in addition to remoteness, the small isolated terraced land-holdings, and the dispersed settlement patterns, which reinforced individualism rather than collectivism.

3.2: Number of educational institutions in sample clusters

Table 2: Depicts number of educational institutions in sample clusters

CLUSTER	Common primary school	Common middle school	Common high school	Common higher Secondary school	Girls primary school	Private school	Total
Cluster A	6	4	3	1	3	4	21
Cluster B	2	2	2	0	0	0	6
Total	8	6	5	1	3	4	27

Source: Fieldwork, 2018 carried in Ladakh Division of J&K

The table reveals a significant variation so far as availability of education infrastructure is concerned. As compared to cluster A which boasts of 6 common primary schools, 4 common middle schools, 3 common high schools and a higher secondary school; Cluster B holds 2 common primary, 2 common middle schools and high schools. In addition, cluster A has 3 girls' primary and one girl's middle school, besides 4 private schools with the respective cluster villages. Private schools for cluster B fall at 52 km and 70 km from the cluster and higher education institute like college, and university at 152 and 170 km at Leh. The overall education scenario of cluster B is dismal. Comparatively, sample villages of cluster A are better at levels of education reflected more in their job profile. Not only the traditional subjects but professional and technical

courses are preferred. On the other hand, common middle school at Dah was upgraded after two decades. Some NGOs and LHDC have taken serious initiatives to address this issue. For example, the initiative of Jamyang School at Leh was established by the support of households. The Dalai Lama Trust in 2008 has done a commendable job to lure poor Dard children from Dah Hanu and put them in boarding at impressive campus. Besides, poor admission in the elementary classes at pre-primary and primary level, the remoteness of the area was infested with the absenteeism and dropout rate. The teachers at Dah and Hanu took their postings as a punishment. Living in a typical culture 'although Buddhists' had many cultural practices far removed and contradicting Buddhist way of life; teachers mostly complained about communication barrier in primary classes as the enrolled infants spoke their mother tongue (Brokshast) archaic Shina unintelligible for the instructions. At the same time instructions in Ladakhi or English medium fell on deaf ears. It was fruitless and frustrating for both teachers and the taught. As a result there is a high rate of dropout. In absence of locals as teaching staff, non local used to be posted. Some NGOs had engaged some local boy's way back in 1999-2000 to bridge the gap of communication between non-local teacher and local pupil at Dah Middle School. These too are first generation learners. Ironically only half of the number of total local teachers is posted out of Dah and Hanu villages. As was observed Dah male folk appears to be merry making and lethargic lot by nature. The burden of economic activity (especially farming and marketing of farm produce) falls on Dard women's folk. Except goat and sheep rearing and occasional labour in MES, they are usually idle and chronic alcoholic.

The primary objective of Jamyang institution was to isolate the young buds from an atmosphere which they thought was significantly discouraging for imparting education to them. In boarding, the pupils are under the constant supervision of teaching staff and provided with the best quality education and upbringing free of cost.

There are any constraints in universalization of primary education in these remote clusters. Though tireless efforts have been made through various NGOs and institutions yet there is neither supply push nor the requisite community demand for new schools or up-gradation of the established ones in cluster B1.2.3. For its inertia, lack of awareness and poor literacy rate; education seems to be a luxury from this traditional community. They are settled agriculturists and pastoralists and their archaic cultural practices, low levels of technology and skill, the worldview shaped by mythology and a distinctive lifestyle qualifies these Dard settlements for primitive tribe category. The lowest socio-economic development and a mindset averse to change owes more to remoteness

and isolation cut-off from the main arteries of communication and a simple self-sustaining economy maintained through socio-cultural mechanisms of polyandry and monkhood.

Notwithstanding official claims in literacy rate of these Dards, the disinclination of younger generation towards education owes much to the low adult literacy rate and adult education achievement. As a matter of fact in remote area of Dah and Hanu where job opportunities are a few, any reduction in expenditure by way of removing children from the school and any addition to the family income is welcomed at the cost of child's schooling either directly like sending child to Leh or Khaltsi for petty labour or indirectly like relieving an adult for labor if the child takes care of grazing. Although, there is generally no inhibition of co-education and girl education in Dah Dard community, the girl education is the first causality, which looks after siblings and helps in family chores. In a way majority of respondents reported that despite recognizing long term education benefits the cost of schooling appears high, high enough to engage them in grazing cattle and herding livestock which guarantees immediate economic gains.

Dah and Hanu sample subjects generally woefully suffer from ignorance and apathy, regarding available developmental avenues including education. Secondly, absence of employment for dropouts or degree holders depresses promotion of education; unfortunately, the pass outs and degree holders are disinterested in doing casual labour or farm work. For a household which directly or indirectly has invested in a child's education such failures appear to be a total loss and further reduce his inclination towards education. Educational attainment after middle schooling phase suffered due to the lack of institutional facilities, lack of schools and dwindling family assets. To send a child to Leh or Khaltsi for secondary schooling was cost effective and such investment was thought to be risky as there are no guaranteed immediate returns. This tendency is also inflicting Cluster A more strongly as job market for a large number of pass outs as compared to lesser number off pass outs in cluster B is more stifling.

In Cluster A for its relatively less remoteness, as it is situated at the main communication link between Srinagar-Ladakh, the better infrastructure support and the education scenario is far better. It owes more to its historical development specifically its role in Trans Himalayan trade and Silk Route Trade.

Ancestors of Dards of cluster A, Kharboo Shimsha and Thasgam formed a class of transporters and couriers on whom the logistics of the trans-Karakoram trade depended. These were the community of professional potters and pony men who plied between Srinagar to Kargil, Kargil to

Leh and Yarkand (Xingiangi). The occupation benefitted Dards of their region by way of employment opportunities and a high social interaction—a requisite for social networking. In a resource poor environment of Drass valley, the farm produce was hardly enough to cover even subsistence needs, the transportation of men and material essential as well as exotic, across J&K enabled them to not only avoid starvation and enmass migration but also provide subsistence earnings and wider socio-economic contacts resulting in better understanding of worldly affairs. Furthermore, they continuously got exposed to new trends and currents sweeping across a vast region. Through European travelers they got the peep into the modern ways of life during their expeditions. These provided the most necessary logistic support for being habitual to the hardships of the travel on the treacherous mountain passes (See also, Francis Younghusband, Seven Heden, Lord Dunmore, E. Phillipd. Phillip)

This mode of earning through carriage service contributed more to family's survival than farm produce therefore, cattle, pony, sheep and other livestock was more cherished. In summers and winters crossing across Zojila was exclusive reserve of Dards of Drass. Even during winter months Zojila never shuts for foot passengers. Dards continue to cross except during actual snow blizzards. The closure is actually the result of motorable transport. From the very beginning Dards of Cluster A1.2.3 were in know of advantages the formal education carries with it especially, the benefits of getting job and a continuous supply of cash income.

Modern education for these Dards conjured a picture of schools, full of neat and clean children, knowledge of many languages like Urdu and English and a social prestige appended to the educated person. Education attainment in post-1947 period is a success story for these Dards. Besides, many benefits, it meant a new identity— an image of a learned man, distinguishing him from the rest of the community. The study showed that there is not only educational infrastructural improvement but proximity to urban centers of Kargil and Srinagar provides a vast field for quality education private as well as public. Most of the school going children at primary, secondary, college and university levels is third generation learners at an average. Government service professional courses are the latest trend. 28% of school-going children are enrolled in private schools at Kargil, besides almost 50% of 10+2 students attend coaching classes at Kargil, Srinagar, Jammu and Chandigarh for admissions in professional technical courses. It owes more to diversify and differentiated economic system where Xylo taxi and passenger buses have replaced ponies and horses and the success story of parents offer

role models for young ones to excel in education domain. Adult education coupled with access to quality education develops into a syndrome reinforcing progressive tendencies towards development.

If occupational profile of the sample villages is any reflection, then it can be summed up that the small arid isolation hamlets of Kharboo, Shimsha and Thasgam have been fertile ground for grooming literate and educated, graduates, post-graduates, doctors, engineers, professionals, KAS officers and administrators. The educated class has taken full advantage of being listed as scheduled tribe, in seeking scholarships, subsidies, reservations in the jobs. The educational attainment has enhanced community pressure for better life conditions, good quality education, healthcare and share in power structure and resources. It again reflects through political awareness and political participation.

Other constraints besieging education system in these hamlets are common to any system in the valley of Kashmir and Ladakh; absenteeism, lack of teaching staff and irregular school openings which are chronic. In relative remote tribal area of cluster B, it is mild as the universe is resource rich in local teaching staff and therefore, there is hardly any communication gap between teacher and taught. The content is easily communicable.

Previously, education content was metaphorical and religious and its extent limited to the clergy (Aghas) of the area. It got replaced by modern universal education which is characterized by scientific, rational, liberal and secular content. Besides, it is replete with a pragmatic world view, equality and humanism. So far as the attitudes are concerned, the study subjects reveal a positive approach and high inclination for education, co-education and girls education. The trend cuts across all barriers of sea, age, religiosity and social standing of sample subjects. 85% of Cluster A and 56% of Cluster B reveal that educational attainment is the fundamental prerequisite for social transformation. It holds key for boy and girl education, however, sample subjects strongly agree that modern education makes younger generation critical of traditional practices and tribal customs.

Interestingly, out of 300 respondents 67 respondents of Cluster A consider 'Imamat', and 'monkhood' as the highest virtue and respectable position, however, the respondents reported only 3 cases of induction into monkhood over last 10 years and only 11 persons have send their wards to religious seminaries (Darul Ulooms) for exclusive religious training. Ironically, the reasons for induction into religious institutions were revealed to be more economic; except two boys, all the inducted from both clusters belonged to the lower income group of sample

subjects. The other two boys belonged to the large size families of 6 and 7 children.

The problem of educated unemployment is more pronounced in cluster A because of its larger number of pass outs, degree holders and but they have coping strategies; improved physical mobility, wider social networking and contacts encourage pass outs to move out of native villages and towns to try at state and national level. Secondly, they have started taking advantage of various schemes for self employment and entrepreneurship and skill development. They also explore non-governmental institutions, private institutions and coaching centers, mobile and electronic repairing units, catering and tourism, poultry and sheep breeding etc.

There is a significant correlation observed between parental characteristics and child's education in both clusters. Notwithstanding, a small number of educated mothers in cluster A and cluster B, the father's educational level as well as occupation is observed as a potent factor influencing the education attainment of the children.

That educated parents in cluster A have shown concern for the improvement in the efficiency of the primary education and want an active role of Panchayat in checking absenteeism of teachers and dropout rate. 34% of this category believes that there has been a significant improvement in elementary education; while as 69% reveals a marginal improvement. The same trends are observed in the literate sample subject parents of cluster B. It can be concluded that higher rates of dropout's children belong to illiterate parents as well as marginal farmers and labour households. Midday meal scheme, scholarships, free books and uniform have nevertheless reduced opportunity cost, which is reflected in the reduction of dropouts and attitude change of parents.

4. Conclusion & Recommendation

The study concludes that that the Dard tribals have low levels of education. As the data collected from the study reveals that most of the respondents had education up to primary level followed at secondary level, and a significant portion of sample population was illiterate. Only 8 professions; doctors, engineers, veterinary specialists and civil service officer (1.66)% shows the educational profile of Dard tribal's in two primary clusters of Kharboo, Shimsha, Thasgam Drass block of Kargil and Dah, Hanu Yokma and Hanu Thang clusters of Khaltsi Block Leh, Ladakh. Remoter hamlets have been so far at a disadvantage to measures of development so far as education is concerned. The problem is aggravated by virtue of connectivity and sparse population. Opening of schools at primary or secondary level has been determined more by

concentration and population density of a particular area than connectivity and accessibility. There are many constraints in universalization of primary education in the remote clusters. Though tireless efforts have been made through various NGOs and institutions yet there is neither supply push nor the requisite community demand for new schools or up-gradation of the established ones. It is recommended therefore, that a special drive for educational uplift of Dard tribals should be carried out. There is a need to formulate measures and programs that are necessary to bring about improvements in tribal education. In tribal education, there is a need to bring about improvements in teaching-learning methods, infrastructure, facilities, amenities and the overall environmental conditions of the educational institutions. Apart from acquisition of education, it is essential for the tribal communities to generate awareness in terms of modern and innovative methods to enhance their overall quality of lives.

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