

FACT SHEET

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Editorial

Dalits and Education

Education plays a vital role in the development of an individual's personality. The personality of an average individual in a society reflects the progress that a society has made. In modern societies, education plays a much more important role in helping the individual acquire self-esteem. Denying education to an individual, therefore, amounts to denying him/her the basic source for self-esteem and dignity. Yet, this has been the fate of Dalits in India from time immemorial. (The term Dalit can be used in two ways. One in the narrow sense of referring to ex-untouchable group, and the other in the broader sense by including Adivasis or tribes because of their serious backwardness in Indian society. In some respects, tribes rank higher in terms of backwardness compared to Dalits. Henceforth, by Dalits here we mean ex-untouchable groups or Scheduled Castes and by Adivasis we mean primitive tribes or Scheduled Tribes.) Many attempts by Dalits to educate themselves have been thwarted by non-Dalits in Indian society. This was done in order to maintain the exploitative social order of caste in society. A complex set of cultural (religious) means were employed to deny education to Dalits, and to justify this social order. In this system, the self esteem of the individual is determined by the social esteem of the group, which in turn is determined by the caste status. Apart from denying social esteem, the caste system is also used to exploit Dalits, economically. It is in the interest of non-Dalits that Dalits remain silent and ignorant of their social exploitation. Education, as we all know, is a great means through which a person or a group not only learn to express themselves but also become aware of their social condition.

Adivasis (tribes), unlike Dalits, have a different story in relation to education. (Here, we are referring to Adivasis or the Indigenous People). Their exclusion from mainstream society has been voluntary. For their self-esteem is based on standards that are internal to the culture they belong. But with modernization of society they are forced to assimilate themselves into mainstream society into which some groups, among these, voluntarily like to integrate, but some resist. However, since they do not have a choice of excluding themselves, they have to catch up with other mainstream groups in terms of education, and as latecomers, they face serious disadvantages in an education system, which is largely dominated by the mainstream upper caste groups. Once they try to interact with this mainstream society they are treated similarly like Dalits as untouchables.

Dalit students too are segregated from the rest and mistreated by the upper castes teachers. A demeaning image of themselves is constantly portrayed by these teachers, and this results in a very low self-esteem on the part of Dalit students. Calling caste names and verbal abuse is a common practice in these schools. This is one of the major reasons for high drop-out rates among Dalits.

The point this fact sheet attempts to make is that we are dealing with special groups, the denial of education to whom has been a great weapon in the hands of the upper castes for subjugating and exploiting Dalit over the ages. Therefore, to assess their educational status as a group is vital in understanding the Dalit predicament.

Educational status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

There are over 300 million illiterate persons according to the 2001 Census. Of these, SCs constitute about 62 million approximately or about 20 percent. This is far in excess of their share in population. And according to the latest NSSO data STs constitute almost fifty percent of the illiterate population. Literacy is defined as an ability to read and write in any language. This concept of literacy is applied to a population index of 7 years and above. Literate population, therefore, includes all those who have acquired literacy through the means of formal education or otherwise irrespective of the stages of education. Let us first look at the Educational status of Dalits (SCs) in depth.

First striking feature in terms of the literacy is that there is a significant gap between the SCs in comparison to non-SCs (excluding STs). We have to also keep in mind that when we talk of non-SC and ST we include the OBC population which has also been deprived of education by the upper castes. Therefore, we can imagine that the gap

between the upper castes and Dalits (SCs). The gap would be much higher if we exclude the OBC population. Compared to the 1961 data Dalits seem to be catching up a little bit by 2000. This can be observed from data given in the following table 1, which presents the decadal changes in the literacy rates of the SCs and the Non SC/ST population.

Years	Non SC/ST	SC	GAP ¹
1961	27.91	10.27	17.64
1971	33.80	14.67	19.13
1981	41.30	21.38	19.92
1991	57.69	37.41	20.28
2001	68.81	54.70	14.11

Source: The Census of India, 1961-2001.
¹ Percentage point difference between the Non SC/ST and the SC population.

One feature common to both in SCs and STs is the internal gap between genders. In case of SCs the gender gap is about 24%. In comparison with the non SCs and STs counterparts the SC females lag behind by 16.3%.

Residence	Total	Male	Female	M/F Gap
Non SC / ST Population				
Total	68.8	78.7	58.2	20.50
Rural	62.6	74.3	50.1	24.20
Urban	81.8	87.6	75.3	12.30
Urban-Rural Gap	19.2	13.3	25.2	
SC Population				
	Total	Male	Female	
Total	54.7	66.6	41.9	24.70
Rural	51.2	63.7	37.8	25.90
Urban	68.1	77.9	57.5	20.40
Urban-Rural Gap	16.9	14.2	19.7	
Non SC/ST-SC Gap				
Total	14.1	12.1	16.3	
Rural	11.4	10.6	12.3	
Urban	13.7	9.7	17.8	

Source: Census of India, 2001

Very few people can manage to get literacy by informal means. The percentage shown in the figure spells out that of all ages maximum 4.10 percent of Dalits only manage to become literates by other means. When it comes to technical education the figure shows an admissibly low level of achievement. Not only that, in continuance with the general education, even those who become graduates are strikingly less in percentage. The contrast between the non-SC/ST populations may not necessarily seem to be striking because a huge chunk of population of OBC category gets dissolved into a much more strikingly visible contrast of the non-OBC upper caste population in terms of education.

At graduates and above and post graduate degrees (as shown in table 4) levels the male female difference in terms of achievement is respectively four percent, approximately for the non SC/ST population; whereas as against such a huge number of population, the difference between male female in terms of their achievement at graduate level is 2.4%. But at the same time shows an almost equal track record for both male and female at postgraduate level. Technical degrees are important to show the difference of representation of male and female. Both in non SC/ST population and SC/ST population there exists a significant difference between male/female

Levels of Education	SC Population					
	7 to 9	10 to 14	15 to 19	20–24	25+	All ages
Literate without formal education	1.2	1.1	2.5	4.1	7.0	4.10
Up to Primary	98.80	87.5	41.0	37.3	49.5	61.2
Middle	0	10.4	30.2	22.4	17.2	16.3
Secondary	0	0	20.8	17.0	13.5	10.4
Higher Secondary	0	0	5.2	12.5	5.9	4.5
Under Graduate	0	0	0.2	1	0.6	0.4
Technical Diploma	0	0	0	0.1	0	0
Non-technical Diploma	0	0	0.2	0.9	0.6	0.4
Graduate & Above	0	0	0	5.7	6.3	3.1
All Literate & Educated	68.00	78.50	73.50	63.00	39.60	54.70
Non SC / ST Population						
Literate without Formal Education	1.18	1.1	1.5	3.25	4.47	3.36
Up to Primary	98.81	84.07	29.95	27.2	36.64	49.54
Middle	0	14.82	28.82	18.66	16.11	16.21
Secondary	0	0	29.07	20.09	18.5	15.12
Hr Secondary	0	0	9.59	17.82	9.99	7.32
Under Graduate	0	0	0.41	1.49	1.24	0.8
Technical Diploma	0	0	0.04	0.13	0.12	0.08
Non-technical Diploma	0	0	0.37	1.36	1.12	0.72
Graduate & above	0	0	0	11.47	12.72	7.64
All Literate & Educated	73.22	83.86	82.12	77.17	62.74	68.8

Source: Census of India, 2001

representations in technical education and thereby proves to be a difference between male and female in terms of professional choice which becomes clearer when it comes to teaching. The over trend in professional streamlining in itself, clearly talks about the plight of the individuals according to their gender identity. Since technical degrees are undoubtedly the prime determinant deciding social as well as business opportunities, the difference between the SC/ST and the non SC/ST becomes so crucial a matter to be taken note of.

Performance in attending educational institution, being an overall general figure, shows the irreconcilable difference between SC/ST and non SC/ST population. As we move up from age group from 6 right up to 15-19 the difference increases in a linear progression. Although the age group of 20-24 does not fall into the same sequence, the difference is substantially high.

Educational level	Non SC / STs		SCs	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1. Graduate & Above	8.8	4.6	3.4	1.0
2. Graduate Degree other than Technical	68.2	67.5	69.6	70.0
3. Post Graduate Degree other than Technical	17.3	21.0	18.6	18.9
4. Technical Degrees				
a) Engineering & Technology	8.6	4.0	5.1	3.6
b) Medicine	2.2	1.9	1.4	2.1
c) Agriculture & Dairying	0.4	0.1	0.3	0.1
d) Veterinary	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.0
5. Teaching	3.3	5.5	4.4	7.1
6. Others	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2

Source: Census of India, 2001

Type of Educational Institutions	Age-groups/Social groups									
	< 6		7 to 11		12 to 14		15 – 19		20 – 24	
	Non SC/ST	Sc	Non SC/ST	Sc	Non SC/ST	Sc	Non SC/ST	Sc	Non SC/ST	Sc
All Educational Institutions	12.1	10.0	78.9	73.9	74.8	67.7	46.3	36.9	14.7	10.1
School	12.1	10.0	78.9	73.9	74.8	67.7	39.2	33.3	4.0	3.8
College	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	2.9	9.6	5.3
Vocational Institutions	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8	0.4	0.7	0.3
Other Institutions	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.1
Literacy Centre	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4

Source: Census of India, 2001.

As regards the sex ratio of school attendance, the national average of the non SC population in the year 1987-88 is 17.6 whereas the SC population is: 16.7. But a reversible trend can be seen in 1993-94. The considerably advantageous position of SC population in terms of attendance of females was slackened significantly. The ratio among the non SC population was reduced by 13.9; on the contrary, among SCs the same was widened upto 18.1 (refer table 6).

State	1987-1988*				1993-1994			
	SCs		Non SC/STs		SCs		Non SC/STs	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
India	49.8	33.1	63.4	45.8	64.3	46.2	74.9	61.0
Andhra Pradesh	55.1	32.1	63.9	42.3	64.4	44.5	71.7	56.0
Assam	69.9	70.5	63.2	58.7	75.4	70.8	75.9	71.7
Bihar	24.1	9.3	46.9	27.3	46.0	22.5	63.5	44.1
Gujarat	70.3	48.6	68.1	53.9	77.5	65.3	78.6	62.6
Haryana	63.1	49.0	76.9	54.9	76.6	56.6	65.0	71.7
Himachal	76.5	89.6	83.9	69.3	87.6	82.1	91.8	83.9
Jammu & Kashmir	70.2	53.4	63.3	40.9	87.5	63.9	85.0	75.7
Karnataka	47.5	29.4	62.5	50.8	65.7	40.5	76.2	67.6
Kerala	86.1	81.9	89.7	87.5	96.0	88.5	92.9	94.0
Madhya Pradesh	48.2	25.7	63.0	34.0	57.6	37.0	70.4	52.5
Maharashtra	66.0	43.1	77.1	62.5	83.8	72.8	86.4	76.7
Orissa	46.7	30.9	66.1	51.5	67.9	43.9	76.5	68.0
Punjab	50.5	41.3	76.3	69.3	68.6	59.2	88.4	83.6
Rajasthan	49.8	12.3	65.5	27.9	58.1	21.5	76.8	41.1
Tamil Nadu	72.4	58.1	79.6	63.7	76.9	71.2	85.6	76.6
Tripura	65.7	63.0	70.6	68.8	87.9	83.2	86.7	86.6
Uttar Pradesh	43.6	15.1	57.0	33.6	59.7	31.5	69.9	49.4
West Bengal	47.3	39.0	56.6	52.4	67.9	56.9	71.1	65.9

Source: NSS, 43rd Round, July 1987-June 1988 and 50th Round (Report No. 412), Government of India
* Excludes Neo-Buddhists of Maharashtra.

In state wise consideration Kerala consistently shows the highest track record of achievement during both the periods under consideration. But states like Rajasthan do not show any positive sign of growth either in the achievement of SC population in general or regarding the sex ratio among those who attended school.

As far as dropout rates are concerned, non-SC communities have been able to substantially reduce it over a period of 20 years. But in the case of SCs, the rate is not much against the target of 10th standard (see table 7).

Although gradual growth rate is shown every domain over ten years, making inroads to technical education is not on par with the achievement in rest of the fields. Let us have a look at the state wise representations of SCs in both higher education and technical education (refer table 8).

We can see that the states Bihar and Orissa lagging behind other states both in Higher Education and Technical Education. Let us now have a look at status of STs (refer table 9).

Years	All Communities			SCs		
	I-V	I-VIII	I-X	I-V	I-VIII	I-X
1980-1981	58.7	72.7	82.5	60.2	76.8	86.9
1985-1986	47.6	64.4	77.6	52.5	72.5	81.4
1990-1991	42.6	60.9	71.3	49.4	67.8	77.7
1995-1996	42.1	58.8	69.6	45.7	67.0	77.7
2000-2001	39.0	54.6	66.0	45.2	60.7	72.1

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, 2001-2002

Stages of Higher Education	Courses/Streams	1991		2001	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Total Higher Education		9.0	4.5	11.1	8.8
Research & Post-Graduate		8.9	2.2	13.4	9.3
Graduate General/Non-technical		9.4	4.9	14.0	8.2
	BA/BA Honours	13.6	5.6	16.6	9.4
	B.Sc./B.Sc Honours	6.6	4.6	11.0	8.6
	B.Com/B.Com Honours	5.8	3.6	11.5	4.9
	B.Ed/B.T.	11.0	5.0	15.2	11.0
Graduate Technical/Professional		6.4	6.9	7.4	13.6
	B.E./B.Sc Engineering/B.Arch	5.7	5.5	7.4	7.5
	M.B.B.S	8.9	8.1	11.0	10.8
Others		NA	NA	16.1	16.1
Post-Matric Diploma		10.9	3.8	10.6	12.2
	Polytechnic	8.7	8.5	10.2	11.4
	Teachers Training Schools	14.3	1.4	17.0	14.2
	Technical & Industrial Crafts	12.0	12.5	10.2	11.7

Source: Selected Educational Statistics, 1991 & 2001.

Educational Status of Tribals in India

STs constitute about 8% of the total population and their population ration has been rising over the last fifty years. This can be seen from the table below.

A large majority of tribals in India are landless and do not have a reliable source of their sustenance. According to the 1991 Census figures 42.02 percent of the Scheduled Tribe population worked as main workers (those who were employed for more than 183 days in the preceding year). Of whom 54.50 percent were cultivators and 32.69 percent agricultural labourers. Thus, about 87 percent of the main workers from these communities were engaged in primary sector activities. A majority of those employed do not receive even the statutory minimum wages. Tribal women are paid even less than the tribal men. This shows the penury and destitution prevalent among tribal population in India.

Though the overall levels of poverty for tribal population have reduced between 1993-94 to 1999-2000 from 51.94% to 45.86% among rural tribal population and 41.14% to 34.75% among the urban tribal population, the rate of decline in poverty among the STs is much lower than that among the general population and secondly, the gap between poverty rates among tribal and general population is widening. A number of Scheduled Tribes living below poverty line have been provided economic assistance to enable them to rise above the poverty-line. The assistance that has been provided by government has decreased from Rs. 9.98 lakh during 1999-2000 to 8.81 lakh during 2000-2001. After this short introduction we are now prepared to understand the educational status of Tribals.

A review of literacy rates among ST population in comparison with that of the general population indicates a

State	Participation in				Coefficient of Equality			
	Higher Education		Technical Education*		All Higher Education		Technical Education	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
India	7.43	10.29	6.47	7.23	0.45	0.64	0.40	0.45
Andhra Pradesh	11.29	13.90	10.08	12.13	0.71	0.86	0.63	0.75
Assam	7.45	8.80	5.46	10.72	1.01	1.28	0.74	1.55
Bihar	NA	5.58	NA	3.42	NA	0.36	NA	0.22
Gujarat	7.24	15.23	5.26	5.38	0.98	2.14	0.71	0.76
Haryana	5.65	9.45	16.95	3.93	0.29	0.48	0.86	0.20
Himachal	7.33	12.55	13.32	8.96	0.29	0.51	0.53	0.36
J & K	NA	0.00	NA	0.00	NA	0.00	NA	0.00
Karnataka	NA	12.74	3.96	5.89	NA	0.79	0.24	0.36
Kerala	6.41	9.63	6.75	6.52	0.65	0.98	0.68	0.66
MP	7.27	8.99	10.20	6.34	0.50	0.59	0.70	0.42
Maharashtra	8.25	9.85	5.73	1.72	0.74	0.97	0.52	0.17
Orissa	6.36	9.34	9.22	8.53	0.39	0.57	0.57	0.52
Punjab	11.75	12.07	18.55	7.80	0.42	0.42	0.66	0.27
Rajasthan	NA	10.34	NA	19.17	NA	0.60	NA	1.11
Tamil Nadu	12.93	18.62	10.01	10.98	0.67	0.98	0.52	0.58
Tripura	11.45	15.79	15.80	16.97	0.70	0.91	0.97	0.98
UP	11.61	14.08	4.80	22.03	0.55	0.67	0.23	1.04
West Bengal	7.49	11.70	5.94	8.04	0.32	0.51	0.25	0.35
Delhi	5.76	10.28	11.27	8.74	0.30	0.61	0.59	0.52

* Degree courses only.

growing gap between literacy rates of these two communities. The literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes is abysmally low at around 29.60 percent, as against the national average of 52.21 percent.

It is also important to note, from the above table, that the 1991 literacy rates for STs are almost equal to the literacy rates of the total population in 1971.

Year	Total Population (in millions)	ST Population (in millions)	Percentage of the Total Population
1951	361.1	19.1	5.29
1961	439.2	30.1	6.85
1971	548.2	38.0	6.93
1981	685.2	51.6	7.53
1991	846.3	67.76	8.08

In the context of tribal women in India, illiteracy is so highly prevalent that their engagement with the mainstream society is seriously limited. While more than three-quarters of ST women are illiterate, 77 districts in India have tribal female literacy rates lower than ten percent and 14 districts have less than three percent tribal female literacy rate.

The above data shows that the gross enrolment ratio for Classes 1-5 and Classes 1-8 has declined from 1990-91 to 1999-2000 for the total population, but in the case of ST population it has decreased for Classes 1-5 (except for girls) but has improved for Classes 1-8. But there still remains an almost five percentage point gap between the enrolment of ST girls and non-ST girls wherein less than half of ST girls are not even enrolled in schools. Yet, this large scale enrolment of ST children in schools has been on account of wide scale government efforts to universalize education and a growing demand among the tribal communities to access formal education system, perhaps as a means to achieve inclusion in the mainstream. However, this has had its own ramifications. While schools as institutions and teachers as critical agents have remained fundamentally unchanged, the school atmosphere has not always become conducive to accept and retain these children in schools.

The problem of drop outs persists among all categories of children in India. However, in the context of children studying in Classes 1-10 the gap between the ST and total population in reduction of drop-outs has widened

from 1990-91 to 1998-99. The reduction in the drop out rates could be because of various incentive schemes run by the State Governments for education of ST children such as those providing free books, uniforms and scholarships in government schools. But schemes such as those providing for hostels for ST boys and girls are not implemented fully by the States owing to lack of financial resources and therefore fewer ST children pursue high school education. The policy of reserving special seats for ST students at higher education levels is not widely availed since a large number of ST students do not even reach those levels and drop out at lower levels of school education. Even the Ashram schools (residential schools for ST boys and girls) started by the Government in 1990-91 are poorly maintained and sometimes lack even the basic facilities. Given the low levels of literacy among the ST population, several children from these communities happen to be 'first generation learners' and in the absence of State support for helping them cope with studies, very many children drop out of the schools. This disproportionately low representation of ST children at higher levels of education compounds the existing disparities among Indian society.

Category	1971	1981	1991
Total Population (including ST population)	29.45	36.23	52.21
ST Population	11.30	16.35	29.60
Gap between ST and Total population	18.15	19.88	22.61

Lack of proactive governance in favor of the STs is not linked only to lack of resources. Governmental indifference and lack of political will are largely responsible for the callous state of affairs. The unutilised amount for tribal welfare for the years 1998-2001¹ for all the states combined was Rs. 40546.46 lakhs. States with high proportion of ST population also had high amounts of unutilised funds with Bihar (Rs. 8113.26 lakhs), Jharkhand (Rs. 4742.62 lakhs), Madhya Pradesh (Rs. 4721.61 lakhs) and Gujarat (Rs. 3721.72 lakhs) topping the order.

	1990-1991		1999-2000	
	Class 1-5	Class 1-8	Class 1-5	Class 1-8
Total Population	100.1	62.1	94.9	58.8
Boys	114.0	76.6	104.1	67.2
Girls	85.5	47.8	85.2	49.7
ST Population	103.4	39.7	97.7	58.0
Boys	126.8	51.3	112.7	70.8
Girls	78.6	27.5	82.7	44.8
Gap - Total	(+) 3.3	(-) 22.4	(+) 2.8	(-) 0.8
Boys	(+) 12.8	(-) 25.3	(+) 8.6	(+) 3.6
Girls	(-) 6.9	(-) 20.3	(-) 2.5	(-) 4.9

The School Experience

At school, the experiences of tribal children range from discrimination to a sense of complete alienation. Students from ST communities encounter a series of obstacles including commuting long distances to school in hostile environmental conditions, abuses and discrimination from teachers and fellow students from non-tribal backgrounds, difficulty in comprehending the language of instruction and negotiating space for themselves which was denied historically.

Children's denominational identities have always affected their school experiences. Ideally, the school teacher must play a vital role in supporting the struggles of first-generation learners. But it is found that although there is formal inclusion in the mainstream education system in the sense that children are officially enrolled, the teachers

Table 13 Drop out rates (in percent) among ST and Total Population (1990-91 to 1998-99)						
	Classes 1-5		Classes 1-8		Classes 1-10	
	1990-91	1998-99	1990-91	1998-99	1990-91	1998-99
Total	42.60	39.74	60.90	56.82	71.34	67.44
ST	62.52	57.36	78.57	72.80	85.01	82.96
Gap	19.92	17.62	17.67	15.98	13.67	15.52

are often found to question the 'educability' of tribal children, revealing that nothing much has changed in the perceptions held about the 'other' by teachers who are generally drawn from mainstream social groups.

Research shows that tribal children are often subjected to overt discrimination by non-tribal upper caste school teachers who view them as 'slow learners' unable to learn despite several repetitions; as 'unclean' and are therefore given tasks of sweeping and swabbing the schools unlike non-tribal upper caste children who may be asked to fetch water or lock the school. Teachers also demean tribal children by calling their parents 'drunken', with no interest in schools and education. Untouchability is also found to prevail in schools, where upper caste teachers and students refuse to drink water from the same tap as the tribal children before washing it thoroughly. Even play activities and school transactions are sometimes segregated on the basis of these identities. The tribal children are repeatedly subjected to verbal abuse at the hands of upper caste teachers and this has a critical impact on the way these first generation students view themselves as learners.

Since the tribal languages are distinctly different from the medium of instruction in schools (which is usually the respective State language) tribal children find it extremely difficult to cope with their studies and homework. This lack of language skills acts as a serious impediment when the teacher is a non-tribal and makes no effort to link the two linguistic experiences for the child. Aspirations among tribal children are also low considering that there are not many formally educated persons in such communities. The inability to secure jobs amongst tribals who have completed formal education have led some to get disillusioned with the education system and question the utility of spending several years struggling to get educated. Some consider school educated children as unfit to carry out their hereditary occupations thereby rendering them 'useless' in their traditional lives. Yet, the motivation of a large number of tribal children to walk hours to reach school, tolerate the rebuke of teachers and fellow students, their efforts to identify with a language and curriculum that is alien to their own life worlds and their struggles to break free of their historical marginalisation is definitely striking.

Conclusion

Scheduled castes and Tribal communities in India have been historically deprived of access to resources and opportunities, including the opportunity to get educated. The Indian government's effort to bring these children into formal schools has failed at two levels. Firstly, because it is not able to enroll all Scheduled caste and tribal children and provide them access to good quality functional education. Secondly, even when Scheduled castes and tribal children are enrolled into schools, the education system besides doling out some incentives does not do much to improve the school environment which will treat these first-generation learners with respect and dignity. Instead, Scheduled castes and tribal children are made to put up with an offensive and insulting climate that continuously discriminates and alienates. For such historically deprived communities, providing access to education is simply not enough, the government has to take a proactive role in creating overall conditions and opportunities that will facilitate their transition and breaking of the intergenerational cycle of poverty and illiteracy. A sensitive cadre of teachers and bureaucracy is definitely required to make the difference. At another level, educational deprivation must be seen in the context of overall deprivation of the community and hence emphasis must be placed on improving the situation of Scheduled caste and tribal communities in general. Following the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in the country, the gap between the SC/ST and non-SC/ST children is also widening rapidly, thereby further isolating the isolated. Respecting their claims at the outset should set the ball rolling in the right direction.



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☎ 2882 2850 & 2889 8662

Fax: 2889 8941

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