

Education and Ethnic Communities: Towards an Inclusive Framework

K.H. AMITHA BACHAN*, SWETHA G** AND MAYA MOHAN***

ABSTRACT

Inclusive framework to education aims to reorient curriculum to address the learning styles and needs of students coming from diverse backgrounds. The vulnerabilities for the children to take advantage of educational opportunities may be because of their race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender or ability (Vittlo and Mithaug 1998). The issue becomes graver in the case of marginalised sections. This paper tries to look at the issue of inclusive education in the context of the educational experiences among an ethnic group Kadar in the state of Kerala, South India. The main arguments of this study are based on the experiences from the preparation and distribution of a locally contextualised education material prepared for 'Kadar' and other rural children by Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation (WGHF).

Introduction

Education as a basic right of children has been accepted as a principle globally. Yet, a large number of children who remain out of the schooling system compel us to think about issues of inclusion. An inclusive system framework of education addresses the learning needs of all pupils within an educational system. The basic tenets of inclusive education are grounded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are mainly two perspectives on inclusive education. The first perspective revolves around pupils having Special Education Needs (SEN) and it aims to enrol all children in regular schools (UNESCO, 1994). On the other hand in the developing countries, the issue is slightly different. The 1994 UNESCO World Conference recognised the issues faced by disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic population, children from linguistic, ethnic,

* Research Director, Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation.

** Teacher, Poorna Learning Centre.

*** Assistant Prof. Dept. of Sociology, Christ University, Bangalore.

or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalised areas and groups in accessing education. The international perspective on inclusive education advocated by the UN aims at fostering strategies to increase the participation and learning of children who experience marginalisation or exclusion within the educational settings. The vulnerabilities for the children to take advantage of educational opportunities may be because of their race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender or ability (Vitulo and Mithaug, 1998).

When we look at the issues of exclusion there are two levels of barriers. The external barrier can be the location of schools and the economic condition of students. The lack of schools in the locality is a key hindrance for students living in remote inaccessible areas to avail education. The social stigmatisation is another factor. A child from a poor family will find it too difficult to get enrolled and adjusted in a private school even if it is with the backup of the public policy interventions like the provisions in the Right to Education Act in India that rejects the possibility of a child being rejected from a private school. The internal barriers for a child from the marginalised section include the curriculum, pedagogy, medium of instruction as well as the examination pattern. The issues will be graver in the case of a first generation learner. Educational reforms have been mooted at international, national and regional levels to address these diverse barriers and to make education truly inclusive.

Scholars who looked at inclusive education from educational reform perspective (Ainscow, 1999; Ferguson, 1996; Mitler, 2000; Thomas et al., 1998) describe inclusion as a process through which the schools aims to reorient its curriculum and strategies to address the learning styles and needs of the students coming from diverse background. Sebba and Ainscow (1996) observe that this process would help the school to build capacity to accept all children from the locality and reduce instances for exclusion.

The idea of education is not merely to impart knowledge to the students in certain subjects but to develop in him/her those habits and attitudes with which they may successfully face the future and at the same time preserve the traditional values which will safeguard future further. But can we look at the current education system after all the educational reforms and innovations as capable enough to make sure that none of the children would feel 'orphaned out' or isolated from his/her self and society during the course of

education? This paper tries to look at these issues in the context of the educational experiences among an ethnic group Kadar in the state of Kerala, South India.

Kerala is a land of religious, ethnic, cultural and geographical diversities. There are 35 tribal communities among which five are primitive tribes, 51 Scheduled Caste communities and 81 backward communities. With such a heterogeneous geographic and demographic nature of the state, can the present educational curriculum addresses the need of all? Is it flexible enough to accommodate the differences?

All these heterogeneous communities and people from different geographical regions are following same syllabus and curriculum. A primitive 'Kadar' tribal child born in a temporary hut made of bamboo and reeds, near a streamside in the rainforest of Anamalais in the Western Ghats, a child from the fisher folk community born near the seashore in a small shelter thatched with coconut palm leaves and a child living in the slum of urban metropolitan city have to depend on a single syllabus and more over they have to use the same curriculum material. What is the result? Most often those who have cultural independence and courage to be true to our basic instincts will opt to go out of the system first, definitely the tribal child and sooner or later the other two go out of the so called 'education' system and in our terms we identify them as 'drop outs'. Otherwise, they will lose their inner spirit and become ready to end up as an employee in the government sector, or at the most they will learn some technical skills and opt to export their skills and life to earn more money.

A child between the ages of 10 to 14 is so conditioned and seems determined to become an engineer without even knowing the meaning of 'engineering' and the parents and the society are proud that the child has an aim in life. We think it as a result of the achievement of education. On the other hand, there are reports of alarming rates of drop outs among the marginalised sections including the tribals. What does it mean? Is it that all the children of the marginalised community in the state have serious problems with their intellectual, physical and mental condition? Or is there some serious problem with the education?

There were lot of efforts and reforms that took place in Kerala, starting from early 1990s following the national policies to ensure 'Right of Education'. National Education Policy of 1986, its Programme of Action (1992), the Minimum Learning Level

programme and the Operation Blackboard scheme etc. were the initial ones, followed by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) 1994, and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan SSA (2001). Despite some achievements like increase in the enrolment of more students, change into grade based assessment system, decentralised administration, logistical supports for schools, child centered thoughts etc., we are far away from the real 'inclusion', in terms of a right based and locally contextualised education.

This lack of contextualisation has been recognized as one of the shortfalls in the current education system, where the individuals' different concepts, understanding of their surroundings (subjects and the objects or symbols they are dealing with in their daily lives) i.e. 'worldview' has not been considered. Here we'd like to reflect upon this shortfall of present educational programmes and its implication on education, learning, language diversity, culture, knowledge and environmental consciousness, especially of the marginalised communities. In this paper, for our arguments, we use experiences from a decade long conservation oriented education with various groups of people, interaction with 'Kadar' tribal communities and experiments based on a locally contextualised education material prepared for 'Kadar' and other rural children by Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation (WGHF).

The materials were prepared for the Anganwadis of the Athirapally panchayat in Thrissur district of Kerala. It seemed to address the need for a curriculum that is relevant to the culture of the tribal child in order to make the classroom experience relevant. The materials have incorporated Kadar, Malayalam and English languages as part of their books.

Contextualisation of Curriculum

Contextualising the curriculum for the learner is always considered as a good concept. But practically, that has never been the case. It is very important that one is cognisant about the environmental changes that occur in one's premises and is able to actively participate in the process of conserving what is left over. Contextualisation can be understood as 'the activity of making a concept meaningful in a given context' (Weelie & Wals, 2002). The concept of "world view" can help to have a basic understanding of the requirements of 'contextualisation'. It means the conceptions of the world that a student holds "prior to formal instruction may, in part, be a result of traditional practices and beliefs that exist in their

communities and to which the students are committed” (George, 1999). According to Cobern (1991), the term ‘World view’ refers to the “culturally-dependent, generally subconscious, fundamental organisation of the mind. This organisation manifests itself as a set of presuppositions or assumptions, which predispose one to feel, think, and act in predictable patterns”. World views help people ‘to conceptualise what reality should be like and to understand and interpret all that happen day by day in this framework’ (Kraft, 1974).

It was Kearney who introduced the notion of ‘world views’ in 1984 which proposes that there are different ‘world views’ by which people make sense of the world and act upon it. The content and structure of the ‘world views’ are the essential components that can be used to differentiate world views. Cobern (1991) brings it to the field of science education by defining world views as ‘foundational beliefs i.e. presupposition about the world that support both common sense and scientific theories’. He contends that it is important to understand such world views which will influence the learning of the child.

A school going child becomes a mere recipient of irrelevant facts if what is provided is not relevant to him/her. Relevance can be defined as the relation of the knowledge content provided inside the classroom to the immediate physical environment of the child and the child’s cognition levels. The matter of relevance, apart from learning what a school wants the child to learn should also let the child appreciate his/her natural environment, understand it and develops a relationship with it. In order to do this, contextualisation of curriculum is important. The aspect of relevance and contextualisation needs to be understood in terms of the content as well as the mode in which it is transacted—primarily the language aspect.

The main reason for high dropout rates in present education system or its ineffectiveness is the lack of ‘contextualised’ curriculum that suits one’s region or community. The present education system which is a product of the historical events of the colonial era has been insensitive to the local and marginalised groups in India. Studies on the education of tribal children (Nambissan, 2007) continuously draw us to this fact. Result of such an educational system is the marginalisation of the already marginalised communities. This is not far better in the case of Kerala, the most ‘literate’ state, where ethnic groups are a minority (1.10%; 3,21,000, Govt. of India, 2011),

and there is no such curriculum in the state to accommodate the linguistic, geographical and cultural diversities of any particular group of the population. For a primitive community, their culture, tradition and living is closely related to their environment/nature and they will have their own ways to practice real conservation. The extinction of such knowledge, culture and practice will be the adverse outcome of following a universal mode of education.

There have not been many curriculum materials that address the regional or local language, symbols or objects that we come across in daily life representing the tradition, practices and culture in Kerala. When we take the case of the marginalised communities, although our National Curriculum Framework (NCERT, 2005) emphasises on contextualisation of curriculum for those 'marginalised from the mainstream', it is far away from reality. It demands for contextualisation of curriculum, the need for specific syllabus and textbooks by incorporating the diversities in each region and for that NCF is a guiding document to set general standards of education. DPEP and SSA are also oriented towards developing contextualised education materials. Primary education materials in Irula, Mudhuga and Kurumba languages by KIRTADS (Mini, 2013) and pre primary education packages prepared by Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation under CEPF-ATREE Western Ghats Small Grants programme including Kadar and Muthuvan languages (Bachan et al., 2012; The Hindu, 2012) are the few experiments in this regard.

Role of Teachers

Role of teachers in education is very crucial as they have a chance to intervene and mould the curriculum, whatever it is, towards the real goal of education. Personal experiments of many teachers are the key for better performance of many 'Anganwadis' in Kerala, especially in tribal and rural areas. Most of them will have their own dictionary of the local dialect, objects and example, thus, a 'locally contextualised curriculum' may get developed through their own personal experiences. A non-tribal Anganvadi teacher in Vazhachal area speaks of the kind of acceptance, she has amongst the new children when she speaks to them in their language (Kadar) which she has picked up over the years. She differentiates the Kadars and Malayar children by saying that the Malayars understand the 'nātubhāsh' (Malayalam) better but the Kadars do not.

There is also the case where the teachers seem to be unprepared to use many of the teaching aids, e.g., the flashcards and workbook. In one of the Anganvadi, the teacher had stuck the flashcards onto a large sheet of paper and put it up on the wall. On being asked why she did that, she said that she did not know what else to do with it. On suggesting that she could use those to develop some kind of a game with which the children can play with as well as learn from it, she said, 'we want people like you to tell us how to do this. We did not have such things in school and we don't know how to use it'. One cannot really blame the teacher since he/she has been exposed to traditional ways of learning by rote the given content and not to other ways where the learner is actively involved in the process and learns through observation, analysis, experimentation, trial and error etc.

We have repeatedly asked a question to teachers of various grades from Anganwadi to higher secondary during various interactions and classes i.e., 'which letter would you prefer to start with while teaching letter to the children?' More than 90 per cent of the teachers reply that 'we should start with 'A' for English or 'Aa' for Malayalam. It was a great realisation for them to know that we can start from any letter familiar to the children and the ultimate aim is to understand the full set of letters. Since, the teachers are not provided with an insight into the culture of children through the curriculum material or otherwise, most of the pre-primary and primary teachers are doing or have to do more experiments to deal with the curious young chaps (is "learners" a better word?) in the classrooms.

Many of the recent interventions in the learning and teaching, such as DPEP and SSA, have resulted in redefining the role of a teacher as a guide and facilitator rather than a universal encyclopaedia. A teacher with a comprehensive knowledge of the symbols and objects of the local environment—to communicate—can make the students better understand what he/she speaks about. But, still, most of the teachers find it difficult to find suitable materials for local contextualisation. The universal nature of the curriculum, questions and fixed answers for them without much flexibility, lack of opportunity for a multi-lingual approach and tight schedules bind them to traditional way of teaching.

One of the teacher expressed that the incorporation of poems from the Kadar folk culture has resulted in a certain acceptance amongst the students where they could 'recognise the song as having

heard from their grandmothers'. There is also a tone of satisfaction when the teacher says, 'when it used to be the Malayalam poems they used to merely recite it for the sake of it, but now this is a language that they understand and so they are more excited to sing the songs from the new books'. The multi-lingual text has in a way sensitised the teacher to be indiscriminating towards languages (and cultures). At times, the multiplicity of roles played by an Anganvadi teacher (some other works assigned by government for community empowerment) leaves less than sufficient and quality time to be spent inside the classroom.

Content: Known to Unknown through Comprehension

The actual process of learning and education is a journey from known to unknown. The 'known' is to begin; it varies from individual to individual, place to place, community to community. The local objects are the key to unlock the curiosity and it plays an equal or much better role than local languages do which evoke the imagination inherent resulting in creative experimentation, aiming at infinite, far beyond the boundaries of the arithmetic and logic. One who wanders around limited boundaries designed by other can only become good manager of the known things. But a 'childish' attitude to experiment and go beyond boundaries is another key to the unknown. Here we have the real questions about our classroom teaching curriculum. Does it accommodate local objects, symbols and languages including various dialects? Do they have enough flexibility to adopt them? Do they provide freedom for students to choose what they requires for learning? Is it possible for a class room to provide diverse objects and interactive tools better than we have outside in the 'Nature' (Bachan, 2010)?

An evaluation of SSA in Haryana indicated, "Out of 100 students of Class-II, all were able to spell out orally A to Z alphabet, count 1 to 20 numbers completely whereas to narrate alphabet of local language, 44 (44.0%) were able to completely narrate. In case of ability test of English language of class-II students, only 7 students out of 100 students were able to read correctly 5 words of English language. 17 (17.0%) students were able to write 5 words out of 5 correctly whereas 83 (83.0%) students were not able to write these words correctly. In case of class-VI students, in an ability test for English paragraph, about 30% of the students were found to be able to read and write the paragraph of English completely while the rest 70% were not able to read and write the

English paragraph (GOH, 2009). One wonders, what the point is if they can write letters of the alphabet but can't use the same letters independently to read or write? It suggests that there is a lack of comprehension of phonics and the configurations of a language.

Comprehension instruction is often disregarded in primary education, where the focus is on learning how to decode (Pearson and Duke, 2002). Prior knowledge/discussion, reading related texts on the same topic, and most of all discussions are ways of developing focus and independence in reading. It is evident that, in spite of concerns about reading comprehension, classroom practices can inadvertently weaken the process of comprehending. It is important to attend it right from the early primary years and include prior knowledge activation, instruction of reading strategies, and theme based discussions in the reading classroom (Sinha, 2012).

It is obvious that we need to start from a 'known' thing to lead to the unknown and it is not possible to understand an 'unknown' from another 'unknown'. In most of the exercises without a locally contextualised curriculum or exercise, the children will be learning by rote retain it for some time, use it awkwardly without an understanding or comprehension just for writing an examination and soon it will be lost from the learner forever. Unfortunately this is the system most of the people follow in the classrooms.

Inclusion of Language

Individuals are marked by many identities. Language and ethnicity constitute important ones. It is desirous for any culture to survive, to keep its language alive for that is the only way to pass on the knowledge gained over centuries. So, acknowledging language as a medium of worldly engagement rather than a mere tool of communication would help us to be more sensitive to the demands of the linguistic minorities that are ever increasingly marginalised and furiously neglected by the policies and policy makers. This view of inclusion should then take note of the marginalised languages and work towards empowering them through meaningful education that not only respects their language but also give them the other languages—in this case Malayalam and English—so that they can speak for themselves in demanding their rights and the means to access them.

Not all languages in India enjoy the same status. English rules the place with Hindi coming in next and the regional languages with its Sanskritised version taking prominence over other slangs, the other less spoken languages are nearly forgotten. The children of the Kadar tribe were taken by surprise when during an interview were asked to name different plants and animals in their language, because someone outside their community happened to acknowledge their language. This apart from being an appeal to having a more inclusive system also demands to take note of the classroom practices that have been shaped by various forces into becoming a monolingual space. The survey conducted by NCERT shows that there has been a steady drop in the number of languages used in schools. In 1970, there were 81 different languages used at the primary level and it stood at 41 in 1995, and stands at 33 according to the survey in 1998.

For example in stories, the word which is usually used to refer to the grandmother is “Muthassy” but in the real life this word is only used very rarely. Instead of it, the common words used to call grandmother is “Ammamma”. It may vary in style according to the place but the common usage is basically the same. This shows that there is much difference in the print language compared to that of the vernacular use of language. The print language used, makes it difficult for the tribal student to understand the usage of words. This is because they use words entirely different from the everyday usages.

An experiment with an educational package composed of various thematic books, puzzles and flashcards in the ‘Kadar’ native language, regional language ‘Malayalam’ and English shows the need for an inclusive education through contextualisation. It was observed that since the spoken language of the child at home (Kadar) is not the same as the language of instruction (Malayalam) in the classroom, the child finds it hard to comprehend which in turn results in a high drop-out rate. So the incorporation of the tribal language is to help make them feel comfortable with the process of education. The emphasis on the spoken language at home is for them to acquire the knowledge with clarity and the inclusion of the official language (Malayalam) is just also important, “for their integration into mainstream schools and the society at large” (The Hindu, 2010).

Including songs and stories from the Kadar folk culture has seen better acceptance amongst children because of their familiarity with the content.

Language Endangerment

India is home to at least 400-700 distinct languages or tongues and most of them are at the risk of dying out. The effect could be devastating. Each language is a key that can unlock local knowledge about medicinal secrets, ecological wisdom, weather and climatic patterns, spiritual attributes, artistic and mythological histories etc. (Mallikarjun, 2012). So, the death of a language will also kill with it large treasuries of knowledge. It is important that each child is given the right to use his/her language. Having a flexible curriculum that is sensitive towards giving each language and culture its space is one way of ensuring equality for all linguistic groups.

There were only 114 languages in India according to the 1991 census, and these have become 234 during 2001 census (Kidwai, 2008). But raw data collected of languages names shows they are 10,400 in India (Mallikarjun, 2012). The role of language in education and other functional domains is decided by the privileged class or community. The dogmatic rigidity in claiming privileges and parity of their language selection is also responsible factor for language death (Khubchandani, 1984). Language being the basic means of reflection of whole aspects of the life, culture of a community, the inclusion of the language is an important component towards inclusiveness of education.

Unilingual to Multilingual

It is evident that students those already fluent in a non-English (native) language, when enter in English medium schools face an outright threat even in English speaking countries. "The twelve years of schooling functions to rob students of their language and replace it with academic English" (Yana, 2010). Recent researches show that Bilingual to Multilingual models have found effective at teaching English than English only. Also no research recognises the validity of teaching language by reducing the language to specific aspects of grammar (Ray, 2012; Yana, 2010).

Multilingualism can be considered as a key to creative and comprehensive learning, cognitive growth leading to creative and diverse thoughts and achievements and social inclusion. According to Noam Chomsky, "All humans have a language acquisition device which contains knowledge of the grammatical rules common to all languages" (Shaffer et al., 2009).

Anganwadi teachers, who used the curriculum materials, opined that it has multiple potentials. With the inclusion of Kadar

language, Malayalam and English, it has created a space for a learning experience without fear. The materials work magically well in attracting the kids. It does a great job of getting them to engage with it without inviting their wrath. More needs to be done for teacher education and to make such material available widely.

Considering the cultural diversity of the country, multilingualism is the key to 'inclusiveness' in India. There were some recent developments and demands for inclusion of local languages in education. The tribal activists and organisation demand "Mother tongue based multilingual early childhood education for tribal children" in Odisha. They developed Arunima, study materials, according to ten tribal languages of the state namely Munda, Santhali, Kissan, Oraon, Kuvi, Koya, Bonda, Juanga and Saura which were inaugurated on 14th November 2012 (The Orissa News, 2013). KIRTADS in Kerala has documented and developed book for primary schools using Irula, Kurumba and Muduga tribal languages (Mini 2013). An ethnic community based, multilingual—from Kadar and Muthuva tribal language, Malayalam (language of the state) and English workbook has been developed and distributed to the community by Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation WGHF (Bachan et al., 2012; The Hindu 2012).

Conservation Education and Practice

The need to protect the biodiversity carries along with itself the need to sensitise the masses regarding the environment that they are a part of. Although there is a lot of research on the issues of biodiversity, there is rarely any substantial action taken to sensitise people regarding those issues. Even if there were such programmes, deal with factual 'information', most often without contextualising. 'Information' in one sense is dead unless it is contextualized to day to day experience from the immediate environment. Most of the awareness programmes deal with information that seldom relates with tradition, culture, experience and emotions of a community and region.

The NCF position paper on science education demands for an environmental validity apart from cognitive, content, process, historical and ethical validity. Environmental validity asks for science to be "placed in the wider context of the learner's environment, local and global, enabling him/her to appreciate the issues at the interface of science, technology and society". It is evident that most of the public knowledge on science is actually

gathered outside school. Usually that depend on their personal interest or that is 'known' or 'matter' to them (Nature, 2010).

It is true that learning is real 'practice' of every person to acquire knowledge and achieve immense depth and satisfaction. Class room practices or schooling usually support to adapt to a system of learning designed by 'a group', who have monopoly over economy, society, and resources. Usually, education also becomes a big part of their 'earnings' and business, where the real science or scientists have no significant role. The knowledge acquired by a student, or person is actually a measure of how and to what extent they have de-schooled themselves to immerse into experimentation, practice and problem solving outside, in the real life.

Right Based and Inclusive Approach—implementation

Right Based Approach (RBA) has been evolved after World War II in the international arena as UN initiated various conventions and treaties address global human rights. So is the case of many policy reforms in India following the international declarations towards more 'right' based and 'inclusive' reforms in various sectors like rights of the children, women welfare, planning, and conservation and also in education. Most of these efforts popularly known as 'participatory' are being questioned for their gap between the vision and implementation policy. According to Weiner (2001), "Despite a range of commitments made in the Indian constitution to equally addressing the disadvantage faced by certain groups and universal education, policies on the ground have done little to fulfil the ambitious vision developed at the birth of modern Indian nation-state".

Terms like 'mainstreaming', 'integrated' and 'inclusive' are often used in discourses on education. 'Mainstreaming' is where the decision has been taken by a set of people or authority for a universal syllabus, curriculum, and language. It also includes 'disciplined' ways of schooling and learning without any facilities or support for including the diverse nature of pupils. 'Integrated' is where some facilities are provided for the 'marginalised' students, treating them similar to 'differentially abled' who need to be supported for 'mainstreaming'. 'Inclusive' is where all these communities with diverse dialects, language, experiences and culture as a whole are considered equally part of the system and in the process of teaching and learning. The traditional educational system adopted the early strategy of mainstreaming. However, as

with policy changes, we have adopted an 'integrated' approach to make a shift from exclusive to a more inclusive and 'right based' approach. The concept has been shifted from exclusive 'mainstreaming' to very inclusive and right based approach in the international and national arena. But the differences and gaps in the ideologies, policy and practice show that we are closer to an 'integrated' stage and far away from the real 'inclusive'.

Subrahmanian (2003) points out, "Social control, discipline and order are central framing tenets of education and its institutions, and centralisation of the management of the content of education has been a common feature of education worldwide. 'Education for all' has been interpreted in policy terms as a race of numbers, rather than as a shift towards the creation of the kind of education system that can embrace education to diverse groups and acknowledge and address economic constraints that limit education participation". Little has been done to alter in a meaningful way the relationship between state administrators, elite village leadership, teachers and the poorer, low caste groups within their communities (Subrahmanian, 2000).

Effectiveness of a Geographically, Culturally Contextualised Multilingual Curriculum Material

Education can, and should be meaningful for all, whether it is for the child of a wealthy aristocrat or for the child from a lesser privileged socio-economic background or for a child from a community of forest dwellers isolated from urban civilisation. The first step is to produce a more appropriate set of teaching-learning materials by contextualising it to the child's environment. It does a great job of getting them to engage with it without creating fear, misconceptions and disinterest in the subject matter.

The experience has been quite an enlightening one in the manner that it was possible to get a bird's eye view of the many factors and processes that are involved in the effective implementation of an education material, the nature of children and the ground level difficulties of Anganvadi teachers. It seems that this curriculum has multiple potentials. With the inclusion of Kadar language and Malayalam and English it has created a space for an experience that the children appreciate without fear.

The materials produced are centered on biodiversity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, and are child-centred. Books, beyond a certain point cannot do as much as a teacher can,

especially in a scenario where the age of the children is 3-6 years and are expected to be inside a classroom, learning certain set of things that will 'help' them to be more successful in schools. It is the teacher who is in control of the place for various reasons and hence it is also important to involve them in the process right from the time of conceptualising it. Instead of looking at them as waiters who serve cooked food, they must be involved right from the beginning. It is not fair to expect them to understand a child-centered pedagogy when they themselves have been through a traditional teaching-centred classroom.

Teacher empowerment would be crucial for the success of such an enterprise. In the absence of a program to help the teachers realise the importance of this kind of a curriculum, it makes it hard for them to understand its full potential. It would also be helpful for the teachers to have a forum for sharing their experiences where each one can work towards a beneficial professional and personal satisfaction.

The development of the new learning materials being an attempt to provide a more meaningful education for the tribal children, to take a step forward would be to abstract principles on which such a curriculum is based and what its objectives seem to achieve. DaanVanWeelie and ArjenWals (2002) propose to visualise a curriculum for environment education in terms of three perspectives (1) ecological literacy, (2) personal growth and development, and (3) an understanding of the socio-scientific dispute character of environmental issues.

Conclusion

Education reforms in India have undergone revolutionary changes in the policy level from exclusive to inclusive and right based. But the inadequacies in the planning and implementation have to be addressed to reach a really inclusive education system. Contextualisation of education in an inclusive manner is the need of the hour and inclusion of language and content of all the ethnic, marginalised and local communities is very important.

The recent experiments in the educational sector in Kerala did some advancement in 'mainstreaming' the culture of education into little more inclusive 'integrated' approach. Children studying in class four under the DPEP performed remarkably better than those in the non-DPEP sector. The former's standard of efficacy showed that they were equal to the eighth standard conventional

class (The Time of India, 2001). Change in the education system (through programmes like Sarba Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)) to strengthen teachers to think, work collectively and develop innovative programmes in a decentralised manner did progress in the learning process. Former Education Minister of Kerala opined that, “Our experience shows that marginalised children are capable of learning and achieving results if the right conditions are created for their engagement in learning. Trusting the teachers and giving them decision-making freedom opens the way for professional development. It is interesting to note that the participation of the collectives strengthened and sustained quality education initiatives through decentralised decision-making” (Baby, 2008). Evaluation of SSA by Planning Commission (GOI, 2010) indicates that the quality of education imparted to children is a major concern under SSA. But many of the cited achievements are not related to quality and drawbacks point towards the real needs. According to the report, “there has been moderate improvement in Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR), availability of infrastructure facilities and awareness among parents regarding SSA, there are still some outstanding issues, which need to be addressed such as shortage of upper primary schools in both rural and urban areas, mainstreaming of ‘out of school children’ and ‘dropouts’, seasonal migration, weak monitoring and supervision linkages and quality of education imparted”.

Economic marginalisation, poverty and early entry in work for children are realities that impinge on their schooling. However there needs to be a sociological approach to education based on an understanding of the tribal context and how it mediates pedagogic, curricular and institutional processes (Nambeesan, 2007). Issue of inclusion of language is one of the big challenges in education. Securing livelihood along with Right to Education is another challenge. Striking the right balance between formal and informal science education will never be easy, but the answer is not to focus exclusively on the small fraction of people’s lives spent in school. Policy-makers need to start looking at alternative models (Nature, 2010).

The gap between real inclusion and right based education appears to be perishing even after many experiments like DPEP, SSA and the RTE act. Even after changes into child centred education system and redefining the role of teachers to a particular extent, the present education system is far away from complete contextualisation and comprehension. It has resulted in the

marginalisation and drop out of ethnic and local communities from education and the cultural/traditional institutions and the state institutions run parallel resulting in social exclusion and endangerment of language and culture. Exclusive and mainstreaming nature of education and learning narrows down the scope for development and progress of regional languages and immense knowledge associated with great diversity of culture and traditions in our country.

Examination of multilingual pedagogy developed by incorporating 'Kadar' ethnic community language, Malayalam and English points out 59 odd words out of 148 not related to 'Malayalam' or Tamil; about 44 are related to Malayalam and very few are real Malayalam words. Many of the word names are really organic, e.g. "Kootupambu" meaning the "Snake which makes nest" for King Cobra, where as its Malayalam is 'Raja Vembala' meaning King Cobra. But it is the only nest making snake in our region (Bachan et al., 2012) and hence, it is more appropriate to call it Kootupambu. The basic instinct to conserve their own knowledge and language of ethnic communities are inherent in every aspect of their life and that is why such languages have not become extinct in this world of 'mainstreaming'. Naming 'Giraffe' an animal the Kadars see only in pictures as 'Gopura Kazhutha' (Gopuram = tower, Kazhutha = donkey) where there is no name in Malayalam is one of the example where the Kadar language shows progress and growth through developing new words. Looking into this, one can imagine what could be the results of inclusion of all the tongues and languages of the indigenous and local communities in education, planning and development.

So inclusion of diverse languages and dialects, materials and themes native to diverse indigenous and other marginalised communities, diverse pedagogy providing great freedom for the students and an inclusive diverse curriculum connecting to the universal syllabus is still a dream. Many of the innovations of the NGOs based on 'community participation' are accepted or neglected by the Government systems without clear analysis of what these models offer and what insight they provide into developing localised education strategies based on community ownership (Subrahmanian, 2003).

A study evaluating SSA in Haryana, points out the lack of an appropriate, qualitative and effective teaching learning material and teacher training as major drawbacks (GOH, 2009). An evaluation

of EVS teaching in Kerala also points out at lack of integration of different subjects even if that is envisaged in the syllabus (Dogra, 2013). This is due to lack of knowledge or material related to the 'world view' of the students and it could become very serious when it comes to indigenous communities. Vigilance against the imposition of narrowly refined conceptions of education can only be maintained and strengthened through the opening up of the spaces for the citizens, particularly those who are outside the education system, to express their views and perspectives on the nature and shape that education should take to realise their fullest aspirations and freedoms (Subrahmanian, 2003).

In the background of RTE Act, alternate and parallel education that contributed a lot for the education contextualisation finds a hard way ahead. Focus should be given to development of diverse, contextualised supplementary curriculum materials addressing 'worldview' of each and every indigenous and marginalised community, at least under district level SSA. This could be applied to different natural communities and geographical regions and developed as a support material helping the teachers and students for integration and comprehension. Any attempt to contextualise education to the needs of the marginalised communities must look into the failures in the major experiments to bridge the gap in the extent of contextualisation. Contextualisation of education should focus on—1. Content to start from known to unknown to accommodate everyone's 'world view'. 2. Language to be indigenous; flexible to accommodate multilingual ranging from indigenous, local, regional to universal 3. Should result in effective decentralised and inclusive pedagogy; flexible enough to provide high degree of freedom to choose. 4. Method of teaching and evaluation should be comprehensive rather than prescriptive and 5. The role of the teachers should be as facilitators to enable pupil to comprehend, travel from known to unknown through pursuits of creativity, problem solving using information, rather than act just as a knowledge centre or information provider.

Acknowledgement

The Authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Jack Tordoff, Director CEPF, Dr. Bhaskar Acharya, Coordinator and other members of ATREE and CEPF-ATREE Western Ghats Small Grants; Prof. Indira Vijayasimha of Azim Premji University, Dr. Babu Ambat, Director and other staff of CED, Thiruvananthapuram. Also grateful to

Ms. Resmi P.C., Aneesh C.S. of WGHF, Ms. Geethalakshmi P.V., Supervisor ICDS, Ms. Geetha and other Anganwadi teachers of Athirapilly Gram Panchayath and Maniakkaraj, Senthil, Rama, Nalini and all members of 'Kadar' ethnic group.

REFERENCES

- BABY, M. A. 2008. Quality Education as the Pupil's Right of an innovative experience in inclusive school education in Kerala. 2006-07 Education Policy. <http://www.eledu.net/node/416>.
- AMITHA BACHAN K. H., T. S. BANESHBABU, K.T. ANITHA AND P. K. FASILA. 2012. *Learn from our surroundings: A nature workbook for preprimary education based on language and knowledge of Kadar Primitive tribe.* CEPF-ATREE SG 2011, Western Ghats Hornbill Foundation, CED Thriuvananthapuram & ICDS, Athirapilly Panchayath, Kerala.
- AMITHA BACHAN. 2010. Comments to the editorial "Learning in the wild" Nature 464, 813-814 (8 April 2010) | doi: 10.1038/464813b; Published online 7 April 2010.
- COBERN, D. W. 1989. Worldview theory and science education research: Fundamental epistemological structure as a critical factor in science learning and attitude development. Manhattan: National Association for Research in Science Teaching.
- DHANKAR, R. 2003. *The Notion of DPEP Pedagogical Interventions.* Education Dialogue, 1, pp. 5-34.
- DOGRA, B. 2013. Challenges and Issues in Environmental Studies (EVS) Teaching at the Primary Stage. *Indian Educational Review*, 51 (2), pp. 27-42.
- GEORGE, J. 1999. World view analysis of knowledge in a rural village: Implications for science education. *Science Education*, pp. 77-95.
- GOH, 2009. Evaluation Study of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Department of Economic and Statistical Analysis, Haryana, Chandigarh.
- GOI. 2011. Census of India. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/
- GOI. 2010. Evaluation report on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Programme of Evaluation. Planning Commission, Govt. of India. New Delhi.
- KAUL, R. 1988. Disorders in education: Private enterprise and the state. In. S. Shukla and R. Kaul (eds.). *Education, Development and Under development.* Sage Publications, New Delhi.
- KHUBCHANDANI, L. M. 1978. Distribution of Contact of languages in India. In J.A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in the Study of Societal Multilingualism.* The Hague. Mouton.
- KIDWAI, A. 2001. *The Marxist*, XXIV (2), April-June 2008.
- KRAFT, C. H. 1979. *Christianity in Culture.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books.

- KUNICHOFF, Y. 2010. *Speaking in Tongues: Bilingual Education and Immigrant Communities*. Truthout Report.
- MALLIKARJUN, M. 2012. Language endangerment: the fate of indigenous languages (a theoretical approach). *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics*, 41 (2), pp. 81-102.
- MINI, P. V. 2013. (unpublished) Athigeevanam Thedunna Gothrabhashakal, KIRTADS, Calicut.
- NALINI, J. 2003. 'Constitutional Amendment to make Education a Fundamental Right: Issue of follow- up legislation. Occasional papers. NIEPA. New Delhi.
- NAMBESAN, B. G. 2007. Education of Tribal Children in India: Sociological Perspectives. In Nature 2010. "Learning in the wild" *Editorial Nature*, 464, pp. 813-814 (8 April 2010) | doi: 10.1038/464813b; Published online 7 April 2010.
- NCERT. 2000. *National Curriculum Framework for School Education*. NCERT, Publications Division, New Delhi.
- ONG, W. J. 1982. *Orality and Literacy*. London. Routledge.
- PEARSON, P. D. AND N. K. DUKE. 2002. Comprehension instruction in the primary grades. In C. C. Block, & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension instruction*. NewYork: The Guilford Press. pp. 247-258.
- POPOVA, M. 2013. How Children Learn: Portraits of classrooms around world. Brain pickings.
- RAY, S. 2012. Using Language in the Community for Enhancing Communication Skills. *Language and Language Teaching*, 1, pp.12-17.
- SARANGAPANI, P. M. 2003. Indigenising Curriculum: Questions Posed by Baigavidya, 39 (2), Special Number (27): Indigenous Education: New Possibilities, Ongoing Constraints. *Comparative Education*. pp. 199-209.
- SHAFFER, D. R. ET AL. 2009. *Developmental psychology: Childhood and adolescence*. (Third Canadian Edition). Toronto: Nelson.
- SINHA, S. 2012. Reading without Meaning: The Dilemma of Indian Classrooms. *Language and Language Teaching*, 1, pp.22-26.
- SUBRAMANIAN, R. 2000. Co-producing universal primary education in a context of social exclusion, Households, community organisation and state administrations in a district of Karnataka, India. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- SUBRAHMANIAN, R. 2003. Right to Education: Opportunities and Challenges. *Education Dialogue*, 1, pp.76-96.
- THE HINDU. 2012. Lessons through their language. <http://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/article3657900.ece>
- THE ORISSA NEWS. 2013. Odisha Adivasi Manch demanded Mother tongue based early childhood education. 8th August 2013.

- THE TIMES OF INDIA. 2001. Study gives play & learn high marks, 13 December 2001. http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2001-12-/india/27226310_1_dpep-environmental-studies-primary-education.
- WEELIE, D.V. & ARJENWALS. 2002. Making biodiversity meaningful through environmental education. *International Journal of Science Education*, 24 (11), pp. 1143-1156.
- WEINER, M. 2001. The struggle for equality: Cast in Indian Politics. In Atul Kohli (eds.) *The Success of India's Democracy*. Cambridge University Press.