



Pedagogy of Ashram Schools in Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

This abstract briefly summarises the discussion of Ashram schools' pedagogy concerning Adivasi communities. Residential educational institutions known as "ashram schools" are situated in rural areas to close the educational disparities that marginalised tribes, particularly Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes, endure. The educational attributes of Ashram schools are examined in this abstract together with their empowerment, cultural preservation, and guidance practices. Understanding and analysing the pedagogy of Ashram schools in the context of Adivasi communities is essential to addressing educational inequities and promoting inclusive, culturally sensitive education. The residential model, in which students reside on school grounds for the duration of the academic year, is part of the pedagogy of Ashram schools or educational components. This theoretical framework simplifies engaging in extracurricular activities, community involvement, and purposeful learning. This paper examines the function, nature, and pedagogy of Gujarat's ashram schools in relation to tribal education. In the context of education in Gujarat, the study focuses on the relationship between students and teachers. The pedagogy of the Ashram Schools was finally identified in this article as being teacher-centric rather than student-centric.

Key Words: Adivasis, Tribes, Education, Ashram Schools, Pedagogy

Introduction

Education is an essential element in human development. It promotes individuals' and groups' economic, social, and political growth. Education is a need without which an individual's survival becomes difficult. It encourages individuals and tribes to enhance their living situations. Schools have an important part in influencing one's behavior and career. Education is a key means of improving the indigenous people's economic and social conditions. It gives a potential and an opportunity for an individual's social inclusion, yet education was and still is not easily accessible to the poor and individuals from backward towns and tribes.

The issue of tribal education is one that is debated both in the Indian context and beyond. There are several educational institutions, many of which support the growth of indigenous education. Ashram schools are those that are designed exclusively for the education of indigenous people. The research shows the need for studies at ashram schools, particularly in Gujarat. Consequently, the pedagogical concerns of ashram schools in tribal education are the focus of this paper.

Adivasis of Gujarat

According to the 2011 census data, Gujarat's overall population is 6,04,39,692 and the tribe's total population is 89,17,174, accounting for 14.8% of the state population. The tribes of Gujarat are divided into various communities, each with its lifestyle, way of life, economic activity, marital customs, languages, food, etc. (Census report, 2011).

Tribes of Gujarat are primarily found in forested and hilly areas. They rely mostly on the forest to meet their basic requirements but exchange products with other families to fulfill their needs. Most of the members of these tribes work in agriculture or do manual labour at other people's farms. Most tribal members migrate seasonally in search of economic employment in nearby cities. Gujarat's tribal areas are mostly located in the eastern, northern, and southern regions.

Gujarat's entire tribal region can be classified into three regions: the south, the center, and the north. The majority of Gujarat's tribal population, approximately 53%, may be found in the southern region of the state, in the major tribal belt that includes Dang, Valsad, Navsari, Surat, Bharuch, and the Narmada. 36% of Gujarat's total tribal population is in the central zone's Dahod, Panchmahal, and Baroda districts. Sabarkantha and Banaskantha districts, representing 8% of Gujarat's tribal population, are located in the northern region of the state. In the remaining districts of Gujarat, there are still 3% of tribal people¹.

¹ The data on tribal demography have been taken from the official website of Tribal development department of Gujarat to visit <https://tribal.gujarat.gov.in/tribal-demography-of-gujarat>

Adivasi, often known as a tribe, is a contentious concept. The word 'tribe' is derived from the Latin word "Tribus," which signified "the poor or the masses," accords to the Oxford English Dictionary. The term "tribe" is used to refer to a variety of groups, including "backward Hindus" "Kalla," "indigenous people," "Adivasi," and "Scheduled tribes" as defined by Article 342 of the Indian Constitution (Pathy, 2005; Ghurye 1963:205; Xaxa 1999:1519). They are also referred to as tribal, aboriginal, indigenous, and other terms.

At the time of the Indian invasion, Adivasis were perceived as a group of various communities scattered out across the subcontinent. In the process, they established an ideological alliance that the Adivasis were never a part of. Those who were single tended to dwell in more remote highlands and forests, where they had made a living through substantial hunting and gathering or primitive agriculture. They were known as "aboriginals" or "early tribes" and were identified for their clan-based kinship structures and "animistic" religious beliefs, among other things. They occasionally made it clear where they resided by referring to themselves as "jungle tribes" (Hardiman, 2006).

The conceptual understanding of tribes by Xaxa and the International Labor Organization is more satisfactory. International Labor Organization defines indigenous people as those who have their own cultural languages, customs, and institutions; they have their societies that distinguish them from other parts of the society. ILO has also mentioned that indigenous and tribal people are also known by national terms like; native peoples, aboriginal peoples, first nations, Adivasi, janajati, hunter-gatherers, or hill tribes. ILO has given the difference between the indigenous peoples and tribal peoples.²

Additionally International Labor Organization (ILO) "An indigenous person means those populations who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of the conquest, colonization or establishment of present state boundaries. And they keep some or all their own social, economic culture and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status". Further, Adivasi is those "Tribal peoples, those who have their social, cultural and economic conditions differentiate them from other sections of the national community. And their status is regulated wholly or practically by their customs or traditions or by special laws or regulation" (ILO).³

When the Adivasi Sabha was established in Jharkhand in 1938, the phrase "adivasi," which can be translated as "original inhabitants," was first used in a political setting. (Hardiman, 1987, p 15). The concept of 'tribes,' i.e., 'Adivasis,' remains a point of contention among researchers. It is challenging to discern a definite meaning or definition of Tribes. Tribes are defined differently by different researchers. Ghurye, for example, uses the term tribes to refer to 'aborigines' (Ghurye, 1963). Xaxa refers to 'indigenous people of India' as tribes (Xaxa, 1999). However, distinguishing the characteristics and socio-cultural lives of tribes is challenging because experts have differing viewpoints on the subject (Purkayastha, 2016:02). This term first appeared in print in the sixteenth century, when "the term 'tribe' referred to groups/communities that lived in primitive and barbarous conditions of living" (Xaxa, 2005:1363).

Many scholars have researched tribes and the varied conceptions presented by them, making it difficult to understand the concept of tribes (Purkayastha, 2016:02). The tribes believe in their ancient dignity and the chief's power. In this regard, Nadeem Hasnain has borrowed from the Oxford dictionary: "A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development who acknowledge the authority of a chief and usually regard themselves as having a common ancestor" (Hasnain, 1991:32).

In this environment, researchers debate tribal identity and religion. According to Virginia Xaxa, "tribes are Hindus," which has become a common mantra among right-wing Hindu social and political activists. The Sangh Parivar relentlessly reiterates and articulates this perspective in its discourse on tribes in India" (Xaxa, 2005: 1365). Ghurye has justified such arguments by referring to them as "backward Hindus." He classified them into three groups: those who are loosely associated with Hinduism, those who are fully associated with Hinduism, and those who are just indirectly associated with Hinduism (Ghurye, 1963: 10-22).

Tribes have a distinct religious structure and ancestral connections from others. Purkayastha found that Indian tribes hold to blood relations and other elements, that they have their own cultural institutions, and that they believe in paranormal abilities, magic, and spells. These are regarded as an essential part of tribal life. Their economy is based on hunting, fishing, and agriculture (Purkayastha, 2016: 2-3). However, he later cites Nirmal Kumar Bose's views that they relied on metaphysical or supernatural power, but that following the spread of Christianity and Buddhism, Indian tribes switched to these religions, and some tribals joined Hinduism as well (ibid: 4-5).

There are significant differences between the tribal community and Indian society as a whole. Xaxa saw that tribes that were not part of civilization increasingly contacted other Indian societies, causing changes in the tribal community. As a result, tribes began to integrate into wider Indian society. The major quandary is whether tribes should be classified as Hindus because of their similarities and differences with Hindu religious traditions. He contends that there are two types of major similarities between tribal and Hindu cultures: one is the effect of Hinduism on tribes, and the other is that both are inclined to natural religion to varying degrees. If the tribal community adheres to Hindu caste, the tribe cannot be a tribe; tribals cannot adhere to Hinduism and tribal culture at the same time for fear of losing tribal identity (Xaxa, 2005:1365).

D.N. Majumdar argues; that a tribal is a social group that has restricted or owned land of their own and practices mating with a specific ethnic group. They typically refuse to interact with people and prefer to stay on their own turf. They also have their own officers, linguistic system, tribal traditions,

² The definition of indigenous people is taken from the website of the International Labor Organization. For details see <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/indigenous-tribal/lang-en/index.htm>.

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beliefs, and customs. They maintain a social distance from other tribes and castes while maintaining no relationship with them. They believe in different ideas from extraterrestrial sources and maintain great homogeneity consciousness among themselves (Majumdar, 1937, pp. 86-92).

Educational Discourse

The word 'education' is derived from Latin Words such as *Educatum* (To train, or act of teaching or training), *Educere* (To lead out, to draw out), and *Educare* (To mould/to bring up, to raise, to educate) (Rather, 2004: 1). Education is a never-ending life, a protracted process. It is an essential virtue of human life. It is a process of becoming. Gradually, education became the right of the privileged class only and the common people became marginalized from the mainstream. It can be defined as a consequence of establishing the Ashram schools in India. Besides, education became common to all, especially for a disadvantaged section of society. Gradually, it became the *sine qua non* of every civilization (Rather, 2004: 1).

The ancient Indian concept of education is 'Shiksha' derived from the Sanskrit word 'shas' which means to discipline, teach, instruct, or control. 'Vidya' (Education) is derived from the Sanskrit word 'vid', which means to know. Thus, 'vidya' means knowledge. According to Gandhi, "by education I mean drawing out the best in child - body, mind and soul" (Rather, 2004:2), and for Rabindranath Tagore, "education means enabling the mind to find out that ultimate truth which emancipates us from the bondage of dust and gives us the wealth, not of things but of inner light; not of power but of love, making truth of its own and giving expression to" (ibid).

There have been several debates about education, which is a critical component of progress. The purpose of education, according to Mark Smith, is to discover the fact and possibilities. It can also be described as the faith's wise, cheerful, and polite nature of learning. Nonetheless, John Dewey considers it a social process in which one can observe the cycles of living, but not the training for future living. According to Thomas Grey, education is defined as follows; "If there is a core theme to the formal position it is that education is about passing on information; for formalists, culture and civilization represent a store of ideas and wisdom which have to be handed on to new generations. Teaching is at the heart of this transmission, and the process of transmission is education" (Thomas, 2013: 25-26).

Dewey and Thomas Gray have addressed the issue of separating formal education from informal education. The issue emerges in formal education when people are viewed as tools to be used, whereas in progressive or informal education, the experience's shape is casually neglected (Dewey 1938, p. 25). Gandhi's concept of education emerged during the anti-imperialist struggle. Furthermore, his vision of educating future generations of free India was proposed in his Constructive Programme and Hindu Swaraj to abolish inequities (social, economic), emancipate, and total development of individuals. Gandhi views education simply as "knowledge of letters". All student education must include ethics and morality. Primary education is highly essential to him for character development. Additionally, he discusses and highlights the value of adult education. In the context of Hind Swaraj, he stated that true adult political education is through word of mouth (Gandhi, 1968, pp. 120-125).

Gandhi's concept of education also aims to transform and lift the individual and society. His philosophy of education is based on innovative, revolutionary, and focused on skill development and social needs. For Gandhi, just giving formal education was not enough. There should be power of analyzing conditions, with logic and knowledge. Education should be applicable for both personal and societal growth. It is a way of life that helps to achieve goals. Gandhi (1968) argued that with the basic education of children, there should be adult education for our own Swaraj. People can achieve Swaraj if they are aware of the current political education. To provide political education, one should be fearless. To get such positions in the system, people should be aware of all Indian regional languages, in along with Hindi. This can replace the position of foreigners and remove their rule (Gandhi, 1968: 238).

Gandhi believed that a child develops naturally through his or her daily experiences rather than through textbooks. His objectives were to help children feel a connection to their surroundings and to align their education with India's current socioeconomic situation. According to him, not every child can receive an equal education from a single curriculum or textbook because their needs can vary. As a result, he emphasized getting knowledge from his natural surroundings. Because, Students can acquire knowledge from their own practices' habits, cultures, and societies in this way. As a result, he would not feel like it was being forced upon him and there shouldn't be much of a distinction between learning and doing. Additionally, this method of teaching would result in scientifically sound learning. Children who have a strong connection between their physical environment and their schooling develop all of their moral virtues and become fundamentally less violent and aggressive. This actually encourages them to choose the paths of morality, justice, and peace (Gandhi, 1988).

Greek educational philosophy, which examines education in terms of knowledge, virtue, and ethics, has also been connected to educational theory and practice. Hegel, for instance, believed that education should be 'on a practical and professional level.' It displays his perspectives on the significance of experiential learning, school discipline, the nature of the teacher/student interaction, curriculum design, and teaching and learning styles. The educational philosophy of Hegel is relevant "to those involved in education, particularly those concerned with the divide and the dialectical relationship between theory and practice, and between teacher and pupil" (Tubbs, 1996, p. 182). To add to the argument, the dialectical educational method should avoid reminding and memorizing. Because spoon-feeding and stuffing are constant parts of the learning process. Self-awareness and profound ideas on their subject learning are essential. As a result, in the educational approach to teaching, Hegel's pedagogical method is related to abstract, dialectical, and speculative thinking (ibid).

Teaching through photostories (a strip cartoon with photographs) in the classrooms develops students' critical abilities and questioning attitudes. Faigin also applied these generative themes to teach students and rightly reported that "Freire's ideas provide a philosophical support and forward impetus, a motivating framework that is good pedagogy" (Faigin, 1985: 84). The role of pictures that could produce themes for the students' discussion and negotiation is an aim of using generative themes in the classrooms. Some of the ashram schools are using the pictures to understand students' critical

thinking, which was not implemented effectively everywhere. Pictures are integral in literacy since the students can converse about what comes to their minds before codifying the pictures. Shanon also used this theory to teach graduate students and reported that “most participants and I struggle toward our individual and collective liberation from the limitations of our earlier thoughts, work, and lives. Our efforts during these courses demonstrate, at least to me, that there is hope” (Shanon, 1990: 387)

Students can learn concepts more quickly with this teaching strategy. Students might gain a deeper understanding by compiling words and phonemes from their local area. Freire had a firm belief that if pupils could spell these words, they could relate to them and spell other words as well.

Methodology

The nature of the ashram school has been analysed based on Paulo Freire’s concepts included in his pioneering book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire creates a theory of education tailored to the requirements of the marginalized and alienated citizens in capitalist nations. The book provides a critique of oppression and an ideology of liberation by fusing political and educational philosophy. According to Freire, the status paradigm in society’s social, political, and economic spheres is maintained by the powerful by supporting their domination. Education must be changed to motivate and support the oppressed in their fight for freedom to combat the oppression that is inherent in an oppressive society. To further humanize everyone, this innovative educational approach emphasizes interaction, cooperation, and consciousness-raising between instructor and student (Freire, 1970).

Pedagogy of the Oppressed instigates with an introduction in which Freire emphasizes the standing of consciousness-raising among students and attacks the traditional banking education concept in which students are passive receptacles for wisdom. By contrast, he encourages a problem-posing system that enables students to contemplate and cooperate with their teachers to acquire knowledge. As per Freire, other groundbreaking concepts such as praxis, culture circle, generative knowledge, and codification have been the emphasis of revolutionizing the educational system.

The "Dialogical System," which Paulo Freire devised, was a critical component of his transformative teaching. The dialogical system is an educational paradigm that emphasizes thoughtful deliberation, collaborative and interactive instruction, and group problem-solving. It differs with the educational "banking" system, which deposits information into inattentive students.

Ashram Schools Approach

The term “ashram school” originated from the word “ashram,” which was the origin of education in ancient India. Investigating the evolution of the ashram school at the time of independence, the leaders figuring out tribal concerns brought out different outcomes and measurements to improve their lives. Among the many such schemes, ashram schools are being considered for tribal educational upliftment.

Under Gandhi’s guidance, Amritlal Thakkar (Thakkar Bapa) and Indulal Yagnik established the Ashram school model in Gujarat in 1921-22. To promote the Social as well as economic advancement of the aboriginal people, Thakkar Bapa had the idea to educate tribes for the freedom movement. Using Dahod and Zalod talukas as experiment-based, Thakkar Bapa and Indulal Yagnik began educating the tribes with the assistance of the local population. Thakkar Bapa was a social reformer who took the initiative to educate the tribes. After his experiment was a success, he decided to stay and aim to teach them in the same place. To educate the indigenous students, it was later implemented in Maharashtra, Orissa, and Bihar (Mishra, 2005).

While looking at the need for education for Adivasi and the role of Ashram schools, which work for tribal education, the Government of Bombay made a special Ashram schools’ scheme in 1953. At that time only primary education was made available in ashram schools and after this scheme, Uttar Buniyadi Ashramshalas were started in 1953. Only three Ashramshalas were started by the government and voluntary agencies started the other nine Ashramshalas. After the separation of Gujarat State from Bombay State, there were 41 ashrams working in Gujarat. Afterward, many Ashramshalas were opened in the tribal area. Ashram schools did not get all kinds of facilities. But after 1986, when the review committee was formed under the presidentship of Bhagat Dave, a government grant was recommended to provide all the facilities. In Gujarat, there were around 365 Ashram schools working for tribal education (ibid).

The Government of Bombay established a special Ashram schools’ scheme in 1953 after considering the necessity for education for Adivasis and the function of Ashram schools to facilitate tribal education. Only elementary education was offered at the time in ashram schools, and following the implementation of this program. Only three Uttar Buniyadi *Ashram shalas* were established by the government, while the remaining nine were established by nonprofit organizations. 41 ashrams were operating in Gujarat after the state's separation from Bombay. Subsequently, other *Ashramshalas* were established in the tribal region. Ashram schools did not have access to all kinds of facilities (Mishra, 2005).

In Gujarat, there are three levels of Ashram Schools: Primary, Secondary, and Higher Secondary Schools. The total number of Ashram Schools in Gujarat is around 520 including all the types of schools such as Ashram Schools, Uttar Buniyadi, and Uchchar Uttar Buniyadi Ashram Schools in Gujarat. There are 413 Ashram schools, 97 Uttar Buniyadi Ashram schools, and 10 Uchchar Uttar Buniyadi Ashram Schools. Presently there are several Uchchar Buniyadi Ashram Schools established in Gujarat. Some of the schools are working on the same campus while some of the Secondary and Higher Secondary Schools are on another campus. Higher secondary schools have an only arts background.⁴

⁴ This data has been taken from the Tribal Development Department, Government of Gujarat. <https://tribal.gujarat.gov.in/ashramshalas-grant-in-aid>

The concept and objectives of ashram schools are the same across all states, although each has a different administration structure and arrangement. Regulations governing school location and educational level differ from one state to another. The ashram schools must be established to achieve several goals. However, the fundamental issue with the ashram school has been how their curriculum and study plan relate to these objectives. The tribal children at the ashram school are significantly differentiated from one another by the academic program and curriculum. Several scholars have emphasized the importance of a flexible, decentralized, and appropriate pedagogy and curriculum for ashram schools, as current conditions in ashram schools are incompatible with tribal social environments (Ratnaih, 1978).

The goal of the ashram school is to provide education along with other learning aspects, such as personality development of students, leadership and decision-making skills, vocational and craft-based education, various cultural activities (related to tribal culture), and to provide a single location where students and teachers can live together and learn different kinds of work.

Pedagogy of Ashram Schools in Gujarat

Freedom can be realised through a revolutionary transformation. Pedagogy is a means of liberation where the dialogical relation between the subject and object is transformed in a revolutionary way to communicate with the people. The development of critical consciousness is very important to understand oppression and exploitation (Freire, 1996:25-31). Subsequently, through this pedagogical transformation, the relationship between student and teacher is being realised as a means of freedom and justice.

To analyse the Pedagogy of Ashram Schools in Gujarat. The study has used the concepts of Freire's pedagogy like Conscientisation, the banking system of education, problem-posing education system, dialogical form of education system, culture circle, praxis, teacher-centric education system, participatory teaching system, curriculum, and learning environment, domination form of education and generative themes and codification of Ashram schools.

Conscientization culture does not exist in ashram schools due to a lack of critical awareness of what they learn. Since most teachers are not from tribal backgrounds and do not comprehend the factual realities of children, the concept of conscientisation does not occur in ashram schools. Consequently, they cannot provide or suggest simple sounds, letters, or words from their own context.

Most Ashram schools are located in rural or remote areas. As a result, many parents are hesitant to enroll their kids in school. Furthermore, there is a dearth of knowledge on the policies and plans relating to education. As a result, such (remote) areas have extremely high illiteracy rates. Since this, some tribal people have been unable to comprehend the current political and educational system. As a result, they often refuse to participate in any development activities because they believe this is their way of life. Conscientization is a technique for teaching that involves examining students' awareness of social reality. It is a process of developing critical consciousness and in-depth knowledge of one's own reality through reflection and action (Freire, 1996).

Furthermore, Ashram schools teach pupils using a system in which teachers begin with a subject from any chapter and students listen, write, and follow what he/she instructs. Following these processes, pupils are instructed to read about the same subject. Students must complete the homework at the end of each chapter once the period is over. As a result, the pupils go home and read that chapter to finish the homework and present it to the teacher. All students receive grades based on that effort. These types of teaching techniques result in the banking system of education, where teachers deposit their subject-matter expertise, which students then passively accept and memorize simply for exams.

Students in the banking education system cannot think thoroughly about what their teachers teach them, and they are uninformed of the current reality. In this situation, ashram schools act like a bank, with students and teachers playing the roles of creditors and depositors. Both students and teachers assume roles of giving and receiving. There have been no changes to the pedagogy of ashram schools up to this point, but this process continues every year.

The concept of problem-posing education develops the atmosphere to discuss and analyse the lived experiences of the learner. Freire extensively talks about the benefits of a problem-posing education system and the demerits of the banking education system. As the banking education system is merely a teacher-centric the problem-posing education system is teacher and students centric. In the problem-posing education system, students can argue with their teacher on a topic related to them. For him, "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1996: 64).

Tribes have distinct regional languages and cultures. Although Ashram schools' function in Adivasi regions, their curricula completely contradict Adivasi culture and thought. As a result, it can be difficult for Adivasi pupils to understand the subject and syllabus. A part of the syllabus must be devoted to their culture and extracurricular activities. The state government creates the curriculum that is used in Ashram schools. There should be some tribes present when creating the syllabus so that it can be relevant to their way of life and thus simple to understand for the oppressed pupils.

Education must include critical comprehension of a subject's relationship to society and beyond along with reading, writing, and knowledge. The dialogue between the teacher and pupils is crucial in this regard. For a better education system, anti-dialogue, banking, and teacher-centric education should be reformed. Additionally, it is important to have an effective curriculum that will aid pupils in developing a deeper grasp of society. To reach the true objective of ashram schools, classroom pedagogy should be student-teacher oriented.

Conclusion

The ashram schools were set up to provide free and qualitative education to Adivasis of their culture and environment. The main objective of ashram schools is to provide quality education following tribal ethos and culture. However, an in-depth study of the ashram schools in Gujarat shows that they have failed to meet these objectives. The teaching of ashram schools causes added difficulties for children because it is irrelevant to their everyday lives. Therefore, education in ashram schools needs to change and develop concepts such as pedagogy, freedom to speak for students, Conscientization, problem-posing education system, a method of dialogue and transformation, culture circle, praxis, and a student-teacher centric education system rather than a teacher-centric education system. Furthermore, the concept of the banking system should be abolished from ashram schools to improve students' futures. Making the curriculum of ashram schools from tribes' social experiences should be the priority to improve the indigenous educational system.

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