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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TIWA COMMUNITY: BARRIERS, STRUGGLES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the difficulties the Tiwa community in northeastern India faces in trying to improve education for their people. The Tiwa's, an indigenous group, confront significant obstacles that make it hard to provide quality education to their children. These challenges include living in remote areas with poor infrastructure, economic struggles, and the need to balance their rich cultural traditions with formal education. As a result, many Tiwa children have limited access to schooling, and those who do often face an education system that doesn't fully resonate with their way of life. This article emphasizes the urgent need for solutions that respect and incorporate Tiwa culture while improving educational opportunities, ensuring that the community can thrive without losing its identity.

KEYWORDS: *Tiwa community, Assam, Education Development*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental process through which individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary for personal development and participation in society. It typically occurs in formal settings like schools and universities, as well as through informal means such as family, community, and self-directed learning. In modern times, formal education has become increasingly important. Efforts have been made to integrate the Tiwa community into the broader education system, aiming to improve literacy rates and educational outcomes. This includes establishing schools in their areas, offering scholarships, and promoting educational awareness. The Tiwa community, also known as the Lalung (Senapati, 2020), is an indigenous ethnic group primarily residing in Assam, India. They are one of the many ethnic groups in the state and are predominantly found in the Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts. In recent years, education within the Tiwa community has seen notable progress, though it continues to face distinct challenges. Historically, the Tiwa people relied on oral traditions and informal methods to pass down knowledge and cultural practices. Despite these advancements, educational attainment levels within the Tiwa community often lag behind broader regional averages.

Education is very important for community development as it empowers individuals with knowledge and skills, fosters economic growth, and enhances social cohesion, ultimately contributing to improved quality of life and societal progress. It plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting indigenous languages, traditions, and cultural practices, ensuring that tribal heritage is maintained (spiel et al., 2017). The Tiwa community has unique language, cultural traditions, festivals, and customs distinct from those of other ethnic groups in Assam (Doloi et al.,2024). Social integration is essential for creating a peaceful and harmonious environment within communities in assam. It helps build mutual respect and understanding among diverse groups, reducing conflicts and enhancing overall community cohesion. Education facilitates cultural exchange and understanding, enriching the community with diverse perspectives and traditions (Hussain, 2017). Education promotes social integration by bridging gaps between tribal and mainstream communities, which can reduce discrimination and enhance social cohesion.

OBJECTIVE OF THIS STUDY

a. To identify and analyze the primary barriers to educational development in Tiwa areas, including geographic, socioeconomic, and infrastructural challenges.
b. To evaluate the specific struggles faced by the Tiwa community in accessing and benefiting from educational opportunities, including issues related to enrollment, retention, and quality of education.
c. To explore potential opportunities and strategies for improving educational outcomes in Tiwa areas, including community-led initiatives, government programs, and partnerships with NGOs.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This paper is both descriptive and analytical approach relying on secondary data collected from a variety of reliable sources. The data has been gathered from a wide range of sources including various books, academic journals, and other scholarly publications.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Sreenivasulu (2013) mentioned that education is crucial in the modern era, as it not only enhances intellectual skills and knowledge but also plays a vital role in the growth and development of the Indian economy. He emphasized that the education system should focus on nurturing students into learners, innovators, scholars, researchers, and trainers.

Various studies indicate that the Tiwa community faces significant barriers to accessing education, particularly in rural areas. Geographic isolation and inadequate infrastructure are often cited as major challenges. According to a study by Boruah et al.(2019), these barriers contribute to lower enrollment and retention rates among Tiwa children, especially at the secondary and higher education levels.

Akhtar and Deka (2016) highlighted the significance of higher education in enhancing the well-being of a community. Their study focused on examining the involvement of the Karbi community in higher education within the district. They found that participation in higher education is notably higher in urban areas compared to rural areas.

Goodarzparvari and Bueno,2018) discusses how integrating Tiwa language and cultural practices into the curriculum can help maintain the community's heritage while also improving educational engagement.

Sar & Ghosh (2021) argues that education equips tribal populations with the skills necessary to participate in the broader economy, thereby reducing poverty and improving living standards. Additionally, education facilitates access to better healthcare and government services, which are often limited in tribal areas.

Finally, Linda et al. (2020) highlight that higher levels of education among tribal populations lead to better health outcomes and increased political participation, thereby enabling these communities to advocate for their rights and interests more effectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Tiwa community, like many other indigenous groups in India, has traditionally had a literacy rate lower than the national average. However, obtaining precise and current literacy figures for the Tiwa community can be difficult, as data for smaller ethnic groups is not always separated in national statistics. Over the years, the Tiwa community's literacy rate has been gradually increasing due to better access to education and various government initiatives aimed at improving literacy in tribal regions. Both government and NGO efforts have contributed to this progress by establishing schools and educational programs in areas where the Tiwa community resides.

The 2011 Census report on the Tiwa community indicates a literacy rate of 61.8%, implying that 38.2% of the Tiwa population is illiterate. Among the literate members of the Tiwa, 72% are male are literate whereas 38% male are illiterate, while 51.6% are female are literate whereas 48.4% female are illiterate. This data highlights a significant gender disparity in literacy, with a higher rate of illiteracy among females compared to males in the Tiwa society.

Barriers to Educational Development

Barriers to educational development in Tiwa community areas of Assam can be explained as below-

1. **Geographical Isolation and Poor Infrastructure:** The Tiwa community mostly lives in the rural and hilly regions which have poor school infrastructure. Lack of transport and other basic facilities makes it difficult for children to be in school most of the time.

2. **Economic Struggles:** Most of the Tiwa families are poor, they engage in farming and other traditional activities that do not yield much income. This is because the need for children to contribute towards the labor force in the house often supersedes education hence high dropout rates.

3. **Cultural and Language Barriers:** The education system that is formally provided is normally not relevant to the Tiwa's lifestyle, language or culture. This disconnection hinders the Tiwa children from identifying with the curriculum hence low interest and poor performance.

4. **Lack of Educational Resources:** The schools in Tiwa areas are most of the times poorly equipped, especially in terms of qualified teachers, textbooks, and other teaching aids. This makes the quality of education drop and parents to are not motivated to ensure that their children attend school.

5. **Gender Disparities:** Girls in the Tiwa community have it worse because of the traditional norms of gender roles and expectations. Boys are usually privileged in cultural practices and therefore, girls' education is less valued hence low enrollment and high dropouts.

6. **Limited Government Support and Policy Implementation: T**here may be various government schemes aimed at improving education for indigenous communities, the implementation of these programs is often ineffective in remote Tiwa areas. Corruption, bureaucracy, and a lack of political will further exacerbate the situation.

Struggles faced by Tiwa community

Tiwa students in northeastern India face several struggles that affect their educational experiences and outcomes. These struggles include-

1. **Language Barrier and Cultural Differences:** Many of the students from hills background face problems with the language which is used in the school system. This

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results in a barrier in understanding lessons and puts them at a disadvantage in their interaction in class. Moreover, the education system fails to incorporate cultural values, hence students cannot find any form of association with the curriculum hence they are likely to disengage from learning and therefore low academic performance.

2. **Distance and Accessibility Issues:** This is a major challenge facing Tiwa students since it is very difficult to cover the distance between home and school. The long distance that the students must travel to school and back is often very long and sometimes they must cross some rough terrain meaning that the students may be forced to skip classes or even drop out of school completely.

3. **Economic factors**: As much as there is a challenge of early marriage, economic factors compel the Tiwa children to drop out of school and work. Most students are forced to contribute to farming or other chores that are in the households, thus limiting the time they spend on their books. This economic pressure coupled with the cost of education leads to high dropout rates and low levels of education.

4. **Discrimination and Social Stigma:** Discrimination may be evident in schools and peers as well as from the teachers they interact with. This social stigma can make the learning environment very uncomfortable and in addition, it worsens their academic performance and self-esteem. This kind of discrimination is usually because of cultural diversity and low status of the Tiwa community.

5. **Gender Inequality:** Girls of Tiwa are socially disadvantaged and are forced to drop out of school to stay at home and take care of the family. Early marriage and cultural norms result in girls dropping out of school at an early age thus restricting their education and employment prospects.

6. Health and Nutrition Issues: Poor health and malnutrition, common in economically disadvantaged communities, also affect Tiwa students. Malnourished children are more likely to experience difficulties in concentration, reduced energy levels, and lower academic performance, further contributing to the cycle of poverty.

Opportunities

1. **Community Engagement and Advocacy:** Developing a curriculum that integrates Tiwa language, culture, and traditions could make education more relevant and engaging for Tiwa students. Community-led initiatives, supported by government and NGOs, could play a vital role in promoting education and addressing the specific challenges faced by the Tiwa people.

2. **Promoting Gender Equality:** Encouraging the education of girls through awareness campaigns, scholarships, and gender-sensitive policies is critical for addressing gender disparities in Tiwa areas. Providing safe spaces and resources for girls, such as separate sanitation facilities in schools, can also help improve retention rates.

3. **Financial Assistance to Families:** The government and non-governmental organizations could assist Tiwa families by providing them with scholarship, free uniforms, and school materials so that they do not have to struggle financially to support their children's education. Measures that helped parents to find sources of income would also reduce the pressures on children to work so that they could attend school.

4. **Teacher Training and Suppor**t: Training teachers to be culturally responsive and sensitive to the needs of the Tiwa students is very important in enhancing their performance. Ensuring that the teachers in Tiwa areas receive professional development and support on a continuous basis would assist them in being better teachers and in making their classroom environment more friendly to students with disabilities.

5. **Community Engagement and Advocacy:** The Tiwa community must be involved in the formulation and enforcement of educational policies as a way of making sure that the policies that are set are appropriate to the community. There is a need for the government and Non-Governmental Organizations to support the community-based education for the Tiwa people and address the problems faced by them.

6. **Protecting the Girl Child:** Through awareness creation, scholarships, and gender-sensitive policies, the education of girls should be encouraged to help reduce gender inequalities in Tiwa areas. Other ways include offering safe and appropriate facilities and structures to girls like separate toilets in school to reduce dropout rates.

Even though some of the opportunities mentioned above are already available, their implementation and effectiveness remain limited. Various government initiatives and programs aimed at improving education in indigenous communities have been needed for proper development in those areas.

CONCLUSION

The educational development of the Tiwa community of the north-eastern part of India has a lot of problems like geographical barriers, economic constraints, lack of cultural relevance and discrimination. Still, there are also potentialities for change that may be capitalized to enhance the learning environment and make it more egalitarian. In this regard, it is possible to improve the accessibility and quality of education for Tiwa students and to

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support culturally appropriate and community-based approaches to learning, which will help maintain the cultural integrity of Tiwa people. Thus, for enhancing the access and quality for the Tiwa students, it is imperative to implement strategies that are barrier-free and culturally sensitive to the community. The use of community participation in learning encourages the parents, the community leaders and the students themselves to take pride in the education systems. Since the incorporation of Tiwa language and culture into the educational programs can make the learning process more meaningful, it will be possible to enhance the learners' involvement and attention. The development of sustainable education programs requires collective effort of government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and members of the community. Therefore, through building partnerships that involve the sharing of resources, knowledge and practices, the Tiwa community can help in achieving a more equitable and efficient education system. The application of such specific educational policies and programs is vital to enable the Tiwa people to live in today's world while preserving their cultural values.

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