Educational Empowerment of Tribal Community of Mana Village Uttarakhand – An Attempt To Achieve Equality With 'Others'

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Abstract

Education Empowerment is the process of equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, and confidence to take control of their learning and life choices, fostering independence and societal progress. It promotes critical thinking, breaks cycles of poverty, and drives gender equality by providing access to quality, inclusive learning opportunities from foundational to higher levels. This paper attempts to explore empowerment of Bhotia community of Mana Village through education and specially Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) to provide quality education to the Tribal community in remote areas such as Mana village located 4 KM from Shri Badrinath Temple to enable them to avail of opportunities in high and professional educational courses and get employment in various sectors. Employment paves the path towards integration of tribal community with the national culture and main stream politics. A total number of EMRS institutions has grown from 123 in 2013-14 to 477 by 2024-25. These schools are CBSE affiliated setting high academic benchmark for tribal youth. New age skills are also being prioritize. Initiatives like that "Amazon Future Engineers" program and the TALASH platform launched in collaboration with UNICEF are preparing students for careers in coding, AI, and skills. These schools provide a holistic education to the community and shaping aspirations and futures, strengthening the foundations of Vikshit Bharat and empowering tribal communities with knowledge, dignity, and equal opportunity.

Key Words: Education, Eklavya, Schools, Tribal Community, Empowerment, Opportunity, Transformative.

I. Introduction

Education plays an important role in fostering the development and empowerment of tribal communities. Education empowerment and skill development among the indigenous populations removes socio-economic disparities and restore cultural preservation of the community. Tribal communities often confront marginalization, socio-economic disparities, and cultural erosion. In the pursuit of sustainable development and social justice the role of education emerges as pivotal. Integration focuses on the interconnectedness of culture, society, and education. In this paper attempt has been made to focus on the tribal educational scheme in Mana village of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand recognized as India's first village by our government. Efforts have been made to support socio-economic development of Bhotia tribal community particularly as the region transitions to a key tourism hub. The necessity for improved education is driven by the need for better economic opportunities, infrastructural development, and preservation of local culture. The aim was to tribal development and modernization ensure economic opportunities through tourism, preservation of heritage overcoming geographical barriers and alignments with national standards that is realignment of education with national curricula, aim to bridge the gap between rural education and national standards enhancing opportunities for students. Overall education is recognized as a key driver for personal development and economic advancement for the people of Mana.

II. Benefits of Education for Tribal Development

- Socioeconomic Empowerment: Education equips tribal individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to access economic opportunities, thereby reducing poverty and dependency on external aid. The transformative potential of education in enabling tribal communities to participate in market economies while retaining their cultural identities (Moore,1965:2).
- Cultural Preservation: Education serves as a vehicle for the transmission and preservation of indigenous knowledge, languages, and traditions. Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith emphasize the importance of culturally relevant education in revitalizing indigenous languages and fostering pride in cultural heritage among tribal youth (ibid).
- Equality and self-sufficiency: Education empowers tribal individual to advocate for their rights, challenge social inequalities and participate in decision-making processes that affect their communities. Education also fosters self-determination and sovereignty among indigenous peoples. Effective educational policies for tribal development should be grounded in principles of cultural sensitivity, community participation, and holistic development. Decentralized and culturally appropriate educational models that empower tribal communities to shape their own educational systems based on their unique needs and aspirations. Further more investment in teacher training, infrastructure development and culturally relevant curriculum development is essential to ensure the success of educational initiatives in tribal areas (ibid).

III. Constitutional Provision of Tribal Education

The Indian Constitution has several provisions to protect and promote the rights (http://dpt.gov.in) of tribal communities – including:

- Scheduled Tribe Recognition: The President can notify tribes as Scheduled Tribes under Article 342, after consulting with the governor of the state.
- National Commission for Scheduled Tribes: Article 338A establishes a national commission to safeguard the interests of scheduled tribes.
- Anti-Discrimination: Article 14 ensures no person is discriminated against on any ground.
- Reservation in Public Employment: Article 15 provides for reservation in public employment although its more accurately Article 16 that deals with this matter.
- Special Protection: The Sixth Schedule includes special provisions for tribal communities in Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, and Meghalaya while states like Odisha have their own protection acts. These provisions aim to provide the welfare and development of tribal communities (ibid) addressing their unique needs and challenges.

IV. Barriers to Education for Tribal Communities

Barriers to education for tribal communities are multifaced, stemming from geographical isolation, socio-economic disadvantages and deep rooted cultural disconnects. Key challenges include a lack of accessible schools, language differences between home and classroom, teacher shortage, poor infrastructure, language difficulty in communication, poor infrastructure, and the necessity for children to work, leading to high dropout rates and low literacy (http://dstcpr.niser.ac.in).

- Geographical and Infrastructure Constraints: Schools are often located far from tribal habitation particularly in remote or hilly areas making communication difficult. Schools in these areas often lack basic amenities like electricity, drinking water and functional toilets.
- Language and Cultural Gaps: Shortages of qualified teachers' high absenteeism and the lack of teachers from the tribal community hinder effective instruction.
- Socio-economic Factors: High poverty rates compel families to rely on child labour or involve children in household work and agricultural activities, prioritizing survival over education.
- Teacher related Issues: Shortage of qualified teachers, high absenteeism, and a lack of teachers from the tribal community hinders effective instruction (ibid).
- Gender-specific Challenges: Tribal girls face greater obstacles including safety concerns, lack of female teachers and higher domestic responsibilities.

- Administrative Apathy: Poor governance, lack of awareness of rights, and low community involvement in school management exacerbate the issues. Addressing these challenges requires a shift towards culturally responsive pedagogy, multilingual education (teacher in the mother tongue), improving economic incentives for families to keep children in school (ibid).

V. Need for Educational Empowerment of the Tribal Community

- Education as a Conserver of Tradition: We may say that the function of educational institution is to train the intellect, transmit what is permanently worthwhile in the cultural heritage and adjust the young to society as it shapes the minds of the youths. Intellectually the youths could realize the political society as defined by Durkheim (Durkheim,1956:71) and hence education will prepare him to adjust with the society and could integrate in better way.
- Education as an Agent of Social Change: Education can rebuild society by inculcating in the programmes for social change. The broad social change must be planned rationally and executed firmly so that reactionary pressures can be eliminated and specific goals may be achieved. The cultural pattern of the society moulds the reasoning and rationality of the people example industrialization and reformatory programme may influence the intellect of the community where both possibilities like it may alienate the community from his 'own culture' or integrate with the 'national mainstream'. Hence as an agent of social change, education must determine the rate and direction of techno-economic changes through holistic educational system and not be determined by pervasive educational structures. Educational institutions despite battle grounds of conflicting group interests should take positive educational means for dissemination of new knowledge. Hence for tribal community Ekalavya model holistic institution was set up to provide holistic education to the youths made them eligible for jobs so that they could integrate better to Indian society and prosper economically (Hutchins,1953:52-53).
- Education as a co-operative force in social Change: In today's changing world education system performs the function of conservation hence adjust with the societal change to suit the new needs. Education in some cases inculcate technical and social skills instead of intellectual knowledge for dealing with social changes (Dewey,1937:235-237). Today education act as a co-operator in social change to made the youths adjustable. Education (Warner,1944:143) can produce changes in culture and society only under orders of whom are in power. Education left three choices to the educators – they may adjust to newer educational pattern, or they may observe the newer forces that produce change in educational system or ally with the new schools and education as intelligently conservative (Dewey,1937:235-237).

VI. Governmental Initiatives for Tribal Empowerment

Tribal children deserve education that reflects their culture, language and traditions, promoting academic success and preserving their identities. This requires schools to incorporate tribal perspectives into their curriculum and provide quality resources. Tribal schools often face significant resource challenges, including outdated materials, limited technology access and inadequate infrastructure which hinder educational opportunities and perpetuate inequities. Providing sufficient resources to these schools is crucial for supporting tribal children's academic success (http://www.pib.gov.in).

Tribal children deserve a safe and inclusive learning environment, free from discrimination and bias, where they feel valued and supported. Schools should provide cultural competency, training for educators to better understand and meet the unique needs of tribal students. Tribal children with disabilities deserve equal access to education through individualized support and services. Schools should provide necessary resources and accommodations to help these students success.

Tribal students should have access to extracurricular activities like sports music and arts to support overall development. Schools and communities must address barriers like funding and transportation to ensure equal opportunities. Tribal children need access to proper nutrition and health care to support their well-being and academic success. Schools should address their basic needs to create a supportive learning environment (ibid).

Protecting tribal student's education rights is crucial for their success, cultural preservation, and well-being. This requires policy-makers and educators to provide inclusive education, resources, and support. Limited

access to quality education perpetuates poverty and restricts opportunities for tribal children, impacting their well-being and community development.

Education protects tribal children from exploitation and abuse, while lack of it exposes them to risks like child labour and trafficking. A holistic approach addressing socio-economic cultural barriers is necessary to ensure access to quality education. Tribal children's education should incorporate their cultural heritage and languages to boost engagement and pride. Collaboration between governments, NGOs and local communities is crucial for providing equitable education (ibid).

The Indian government has launched various *educational initiatives* (http://tribal.nic.in) to uplift tribal education and welfare, including:

- Ashram Schools: Residential schools providing education to tribal children in a boarding setup.
- Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya: Residential schools focused on girl's education, although specific details about its implementation for tribal girls were not mentioned in this paper. However, schemes like strengthening education among ST girls in low literacy districts aim to bridge the literacy gap between general female population and tribal women.
- Ekalavya Model Residential Schools: Providing quality education to tribal students in remote areas with 728 schools sanctioned and 477 functional.
- Pre - matric and Post Matric Scholarship: Financial support for ST students, benefiting around 33-35 lakhs students annually.
- National Fellowship for ST students: Supporting tribal students pursuing higher education.
- Skill India Mission: Training tribal communities through skill development centers and institutes.
- Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram: Training and development of value chain components for minor forest produce.

Tribal Welfare Programme includes:

- Development of particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs): It is a comprehensive development plans for the most vulnerable tribal communities (ibid).
- Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN): This programme reduces gaps in social infrastructure, health, education, and livelihood development.
- Cultural Preservation and Promotion: Adivasi Mahotsav and Cultural Festivals showcasing tribal heritage and promoting economic empowerment (ibid).

Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs): It preserves tribal culture, languages, and traditions. Additionally, initiatives like Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan aim to address critical gaps in tribal villages, while Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas honors tribal heroes and promotes awareness about their contributions (ibid).

VII. Demography of Mana Village

Mana the village with religious specificity is in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, about 4 kilometres from Badrinath and close to the Indo-Tibetan border is surrounded by snow-capped peaks and ancient caves. Known as the first Indian village by Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on the northern frontier, it is situated at an altitude of around 3200 meters. This culturally rich Himalayan village is a popular tourist spot and places like Vasudhara Falls and Satopanth Lake attracts the trekkers. Mana holds deep mythological significance with sites like Vyasa Gufa, Ganesh Gufa, and Bhim Pul, Saraswati River connected to Mahabharata legends. It is believed that sage Ved Vyas stayed here to write the Mahabharata and Lord Ganesha wrote it down inside Ganesh Gufa. The Pandavas is also said to have passed through Mana on their way to heaven ('swargarohini path), crossing a stone bridge called Bhim Pul. These stories make Mana special for both its history and spiritual value. Mana also serves as the last road-accessible point on NH-7. Home to the Bhutia community, the village offers a glimpse into local life, spiritual heritage, and scenic beauty. Mana has officially marked as 'First Indian Village' by the Indian government. Mana is a medium sized village located in Joshimath block of Chamoli district (Uttarakhand) with a population of 1568 according to Gram Panchayat Data (2024) of the village with high rate of literacy. Mana is home to the Bhutia tribe who are of Indo-Tibetan origin. They live in stone houses, follow

old customs, and have a deep faith in religion. Most villagers speak Bhutia, Garhwali and Hindi. During the tourist season they sell handmade woollen clothes, herbs, and local tea. Life of the community is simple, peaceful, and deeply connected to nature and faith (http://www.pib.gov.in). People in this village are very polite follows all cultural ethos, festivals are small and focused around Badrinath temple and local gods. The people dwell in stone cottage which are mud plastered and have slate tiled sloping roofs. The houses are built into the hillside and have a kitchen garden in the backyard. Part of their livelihood is to grow spinach, cauliflower and potato and sell this to hotels and guest houses in Badrinath. The women of Bhutia community are excellent in weaving handcrafted shawls, carpets, and woollen items like gudma, thulma, pankhi, pattu, sweater, cap, muffler, scarf, carpet, ashan and pakhi. The community reside here for six months from April to October and come down from the hill and reside in rented houses in either Joshimath or in Gopeshwar for the rest six months due to heavy snowfall. This shift in residence does not hamper the livelihood of this tribal community and they are well adjusted in the adjacent places as they are provided with educational facility, shelter, and economic activities through governmental initiatives. Because of severe winters, the villagers practice seasonal migration and engage in weaving and handicrafts. Most interestingly the researcher came to know from Pitambar Singh Moolpa who is the Pradhan of Mana village that few of the Bhutia people owned property and lands in Joshimath and some are affluent class running Hotels and Homestays in Badrinath or Joshimath and very few are engaged in governmental jobs (ibid). Mana has education facility; health centres and the election were also held in Mana village. Government is trying to empower the community through various economic measures and Mana village has been selected for Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan a key initiative in improving socio-economic conditions of tribal communities across India (ibid).

Table – 1
2024 Mana Panchayat Data

TOTAL NO. OF HOUSES	**562**
POPULATION	1568 (Male- 951, Female - 617)
CHILDREN (0-6 YRS)	107 (Boy - 51, Girl - 56)
SCHEDULE CASTE	84 (Male-57, Female-27)
SCHEDULE TRIBE	887 (Male-415, Female-472)
LITERACY	97.99%
WORKERS	1200 (Male – 732, Female-468)

(Source: - GP Data of Mana Village)

VIII. Educational Initiatives and Empowerment of the Community in Mana Village

Mana village, located in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand and known as the "last village of India," is undergoing significant transformation through initiatives designed to integrate its tribal community with mainstream development while preserving its unique cultural heritage. As of 2024-25, the village has been selected for landmark of tribal development schemes focusing on education, infrastructure, and economic empowerment. Mana village (formerly last and now the first Indian village of border area) is inhabited by the Bhotia community of Indo-Tibetan border and the village is a hub of woollen crafts (shawls, carpets). The village has been selected for the *"Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan"* to enhance infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. This village has high literacy rate of 97.99%. The community here faces challenges related to migration of the younger generation, leaving the village with the older population. The integration of educational empowerment in Mana village referred to India's first village – is a key component of the Viksit Vibrant Villages Program, aimed at transforming border regions into hubs of development, culture and innovation by 2047. As part of this initiative, education is being integrated with technology and community empowerment to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas (http://www.pib.gov.in).

- Vibrant Villages Programme: Educational initiatives in Mana village near China border focus on holistic development under the Vibrant Villages Programme. Key efforts include digital literacy, strengthening infrastructure and cultural integration via the *"Meri Maati Mera Desh"* campaign (www.myscheme.gov.in). The government is trying to ensure the delivery of government programmes focusing on the empowerment

of women and youth through connected roads, provision of clean drinking water, 24 hours power to be focused on solar and wind energy, mobile and internet connectivity, tourist centres, health, and wellness centre. Further, co-operatives will be developed at the local level to manage livelihood opportunities including entrepreneurship, agriculture, cultivation of medicinal herbs etc (http://www.pib.gov.in). The government is committed to the all-round development of Border Villages under the Vibrant Villages Programme. It focuses on women and youth empowerment through skill development. VVP is a central government initiative launched in April 10th, 2023 designed to develop infrastructure, enhance connectivity, and create livelihood opportunities in remote Tibetan (|China) border village like Mana. While rebrand it as the 'first village', the VVP seeks to rebrand migration and boost security. As data of 2024, Mana is identified as priority development with the investment plan of Rupees 1.50 crore in 2023-2026. Entire village was electrified development in tourism industry with the establishment of homestays by the community where tourist all over all world visit Badrinath Temple and Mana. The ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) has begun procuring daily essentials (milk, vegetables, eggs) directly from this villages boosting local economies. Government is investing another one crore rupees as a part of VVP-II to make adventure tourism, eco-resorts, homestays, tourist centres to ensure community's economic source (http://www.pib.gov.in). Viksit Vibrant Villages Program is an Experiential Learning Program under 'My Bharat' in collaboration with MHA from 2025 onwards which aims to promote national integration by engaging 50 My Bharat volunteers from Mana where five youth per village will be engaged in community service and cultural exchange. The program includes dedicated activities for skill-building, career counselling and education aiming to empower youth and create "cultural beacons." VVP's goal is to move beyond border villages as "last on the map" and treating them as "first" in the journey towards a developed India – Viksit Bharat.

➢ Eklavya Model Residential Schools: A major EMRS is established in the area to provide top education to the tribal communities from grade 6th to 12th and to enhance employability. These schools offer free education, fostering holistic development and integrating with skill India to bridge the employment gap. There is only one EMRS all the sections in the school. It has smart class rooms provide Tablets to the Tribal Students with Internet facility and career mentorship. These efforts aim to enhance the quality of life of Tribal communities by providing access to education and economic opportunities ensuring sustainable development (http://www.pib.gov.in).

➢ Digital Skills: TALASH (Tribal Aptitude, Life Skills and Self-Esteem Hub) in Mana village is a broader national initiative which provides Digital Platform to the Tribal Students launched by the NATIONAL EDUCATION SOCIETY FOR TRIBAL STUDENTS(NESTS) in collaboration with UNICEF India (ibid).

➢ Community Based Learning Centre: Skill development is a buzzword in India as Union Government has invested a lot of resources in it and when it comes to skilled artisans and that too in remote area like Mana village. Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) worked in Mana village to develop the skill, design development, create infrastructure, and provide marketing linkages apart from several challenges like high altitude of the village, lack of skill and design input, decentralised distribution of inhabitants and the unwillingness of the new generation to take forward their traditional crafts owing to urbanization. Still with a continued efforts of training of 5 months 40 artisans of the village got trained of new product development. These activities were carried out in association with SVHM (Swami Vivekananda Health Mission) in association with Ministry of Textile (Handicraft Development Office) to bring a revolutionary change in traditional items made of raw wool products like 'Pankhi Shawl' under Mana Craft Project which aims in designing the items as per international trends and to develop into high fashion items such as garments and accessories (www.mygov.in). These initiatives will help to bring back the population migrated to cities and increase the local sales as well as exports of handicrafts being produced in this village. To promote the production of this village and to give international exposure to the local artisans EPCH had taken initiative to bring the artisans to participate in the international fair in Delhi with the new launch of traditional woollen garments into modern trendy fashionable items which increases the demand of the products (www.tribal.gov.in).

IX. Integration and Socio-economic Empowerment

Integration of the community is clearly visible by empowering the marginalised community. While operating within a traditional social framework, the government provided specific protections for vulnerable groups, including rights for women such as access to property and protection against exploitation. Frontier tribes (atavikas) were given certain rights over natural resources in the areas they inhabited. Improving livelihoods through programs like the *Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Vikas Yojana* and ensuring Minimum Support Price (MSP) for minor forest produce (www.tribal.gov.in). This includes supporting tribal-led eco-tourism and forest-based enterprises. Forest based enterprises are centred around high altitude resources and sustainable community management. These enterprises primarily focus on the cultivation, collection, and processing of rare Himalayan flora. The community engaged in sustainable harvesting of the higher altitudinal herbal plants and rare species for traditional Ayurvedic uses. Utilising local materials like sheep wool and forest sourced fibres, villagers engaged in small scale cottage industries (www.graam.org.in). This includes weaving traditional Bhotiya carpets and garments which are sold to tourists visiting Badrinath. The collection and sale of non-timber forest products such as wild edibles, resins and honey are vital source of economic activities. These provides alternative income reducing dependency on subsistence agricultural products. Local community-led tourism initiatives offer guided treks through the high- altitude forests, showcasing the region's unique bio-diversity. These enterprises are often governed by *Van Panchayats* (Forest Councils) which are community led bodies that manage forest land and ensure equitable distribution of resources. Imparting education through mother tongue in Mana both formal and vocational increases flexibility among the tribal students. Through skill development designed to link educational training with employment-liability ensuring youth for participation in modern economy (www.knowledge.tribal.gov.in). The Viksit Bharat – Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2005 strengthens rural education through classrooms, libraries, laboratories creating safe and functional environments. The initiative leverages Common Service Centres (CSCs) operated by Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs) to provide access to digital education, government services, and digital literacy in Mana village. Plans include using AI-driven tools, virtual reality courses and solar-powered digital classrooms to ensure students in remote villages (http://www.pib.gov.in) have the same opportunities as those in cities like Joshimath or Gopeshwar. Digital platforms like Diksha and Swayam are being used to provide multilingual content with thousands of e-content videos for STEM students of the village. Education both formal and technical or skill based is a path to community -led empowerment. The program like "Youth Leadership" encourages young citizens to document the heritage of border communities fostering a sense of national pride and unity. The initiative like "Empowering Educators" focuses on training teachers and providing them with professional autonomy to improve learning outcomes. All these efforts lead to the integration of the community with mainstream culture by preserving the cultural heritage of their own.

X. Conclusion

Education emerges as a cornerstone for the holistic development and empowerment of tribal communities as viewed through the study in Mana village. By addressing socio-economic disparities, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering empowerment and agency, education plays a transformative role in shaping the future trajectories of indigenous people. Embracing inclusive and community cantered educational methods is a unique feature to realizing the full potential of education as a catalyst for tribal development and social justice. Ensuring educational rights to the community paves the path for their empowerment and a more equitable society. By addressing challenges and investing in their education, we can help them break the cycle of poverty and reach their full potential. Educational empowerment through grassroot organizations is vital for integration of the tribal people – it requires good mentorship, specialized training for the specific tribal areas which help them to succeed the tribal children and youths through education support. Bu the term integration we mean a process of uniting or incorporating people from different caste, culture into a single cohesive and functional whole which fosters harmony such as social integration and unification of culture, heritage norms, practices and all the traits the "people" possess as "His." Education a pivotal theme in development of an individual when imparts holistic, structured, career-oriented technology and skill-based knowledge designed for socio economic empowerment of the community in underprivileged area paves the path for true integration. Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat

Gram Abhiyan (PM JUGA) through Adi Karmayogi Initiative and Vibrant Village Programme makes the dream of Viksit Bharat – 2047 true in real sense.

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