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People's Plan for a Samarth Bastar

1 Education

1.1 Current Status of Education in Bastar

1. The literacy rate of Bastar district was 53% as per the 2011 census. A modest improvement is expected over the decade.
2. Number of graduates in the district is around five percent of the literate population.
3. There are over 2100 primary and higher primary schools reported, with over 1,03,000 students. This appears to be a high figure considering there are 595 villages in the district. The average number of students per school works out to 48. In comparison with the primary schools, the number of high schools is 77 and higher secondary schools is 99.
4. There are 103 Ashram shalas with 7400 students.

1.2 Potential and Possibilities

It has been found that wherever requisite facilities for education with teaching of good quality have been provided in regions excluded from such facilities earlier, students have done well and proved that given adequate opportunities, academic merit can be achieved even by first generation learners. The social returns on investment in education would always be high, provided the investment is well spent and efforts are well directed.

It is possible to bridge the current gap between members of scheduled tribes and the rest of the population in terms of social and economic development primarily through provision of education. There is a belief amongst a section of the population that education is the most crucial sector on which the development efforts have to be focussed.

It is possible to develop school curriculum and pedagogical tools customised for the students from the forest dwelling communities so that they do not have to learn the concepts using examples and references which are not within their immediate sphere of experience. This could facilitate better understanding and quicker learning.

Skill building of the youth and others could provide them with better opportunities for livelihoods. The skills could be for the traditional sectors such as agriculture (e.g. producing bio-pesticides or compost, animal husbandry including fisheries, processing of produce etc.) or the non-traditional skills such as driving, use of computers, retail and catering services etc. Discussions with officials of the local Chamber of Commerce and Industry and with local businessmen revealed that there is a need for youth trained in relevant skills in computerised accounting, basic computer operations, retail trade etc. The hospitality sector also has a need for trained youth. It is possible to have customised training modules addressing the

needs of the local business enterprises. Moreover, the upcoming steel plant at Nagarnar would increase the demand for workers and service providers with a variety of skills. An inventory can be made of such skills which would be required and training provided well in advance to the local youth.

An area of promise is the innate competence of the tribal youth in athletics and sports. Due to the lifestyle requiring exceptional physical stamina and engagement in variety of physical activities in day to day life, they are could excel in sports and athletics with the provision of coaching and requisite facilities. Specially designed schemes could be implemented to train tribal youth in these areas.

1.3 Existing schemes and arrangements

As mentioned, a good network of schools has been established throughout the district. Ashram shala or residential schools have also been established, though there is need for more of such schools. As per government statistics, almost all schools have been provided with infrastructure and facilities such as school building, toilets and drinking water facilities. A majority of the schools have also been provided with electricity.

Other facilities such as mid-day meals, provision of uniforms and school text books, provision of bicycles to some of the students etc. are also being provided.

However, there appears to be considerable scope for improvement in the quality of education and the provision of facilities. Teacher training methods and their competence also could be paid attention to besides improving monitoring mechanism.

There are some other organisations besides government departments which are running schools (mostly aided by government) in tribal areas. Christian missionaries, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram etc. also run schools. One of the noteworthy initiatives is that of Mata Rukmini Sewa Sansthan, founded by Shri Dharampal Saini, which runs 37 schools in the district and in some of the neighbouring areas. Ramakrishna Mission also runs a school in the neighbouring district.

1.4 Reasons for under-achievement of the potential

1.4.1 Pattern of Control

The local people, who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of the system of education, do not have a say in deciding the type of education they would prefer and the manner in which it has to be provided; nor do they perhaps have a complete understanding of what would be best for them. In fact, this is a question whose answer has eluded many experts. However, the tribal people do have some suggestions about the education given to their children. The most common is about the language of instruction. There are various languages and dialects used by different scheduled tribes such as gondi, halabi, bhatari etc. The medium of instruction is generally in Hindi and there are no text books available in the local languages. Of course, this an issue which cannot be resolved easily since there could be difficulties in the roll out of text books in various languages, especially in small numbers in each language. It is also said that the subjects are taught to the rural and forest dwelling children with examples and references from an environment with which they are not familiar. To give the simplest example, the symbols or pictures used for introducing the alphabet could be from the local environment with which the child is familiar. The urbanised context of the examples is foreign to the rural and tribal students. Concepts would have to be taught based on

references to objects and flora and fauna of the local environment. It should also be recognised that they would generally not have adequate access to laboratory equipment, computerised or web-based learning tools etc. or exposure to many gadgets or appliances in the neighbourhood. The pattern of holidays of the school system which is uniform for all schools also adds to the difficulties since the festivals of the local students are not taken into account. Similarly, it may become difficult to rural students to attend schools during monsoons and some flexibility may have to be provided.

The system of education is not designed to take the specific features of the local population into account and is standardised without considering local aspects. The educationists or the authorities do not seem to have taken cognisance of the need to innovate. The parents are perhaps not equipped to realise the importance of such context specific teaching and are also not aware that they could voice their views if they have any.

The local people also do not appear to have any apparent control on the regularity of attendance of teachers. As quite a few students are first generation learners, their parents would most probably not be in a position to judge the quality of education etc. In the area of skill-development the local people could be made aware of the various skills and the scope for work after which their preferences could be ascertained.

1.4.2 Institutional Capabilities

It is true that a wide network of schools has been established in all villages. It is also true that school enrolment is on the rise and various schemes have been launched such as mid-day meal scheme or bi-cycles to girl students etc. However, limited attention is being paid to the question of quality of education, capabilities of teachers, contextualisation of concepts while teaching etc. The infrastructure also needs upgradation in some schools. The adequacy of number of teachers, their aptitude and abilities, regularity of attendance and their suitability to teach in such locations are some of the issues which need to be paid attention to. It is common to see one teacher teaching four classes from the first standard to the fourth standard simultaneously, sometimes in one room.

As mentioned earlier, the system of education for tribal or rural students from remote areas has to be designed after taking into account the specific environment in which they live. This aspect does not appear to have been given any significant consideration in the policy discussions. It would be necessary to study the experiments in other places, invite some of the people who have tried out various innovations and introduce some of these in the education system in Bastar so that it becomes more relevant and the students could relate better with what is taught to them.

As regards skill-building, an elaborate system is well-developed with a good network for training in various skills under the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Kaushal Vikas Yojana (DDU-KVY). A Livelihoods College has also been established at Adawal. However, the employability of such youth or the percentage of trained students getting work is not possible to be verified easily. It would be useful to survey the needs of the local businesses and customise training accordingly, as mentioned earlier.

As regards sports, there are various events held from time to time. Some of these are with local initiative of people. The authorities at the school run by Mata Renuka Sewa Sansthan at Dimrapal have encouraged girl students to play football and represent the school at inter-state events. Some other schools or establishments have also promoted sports. However, there is no institutionalised arrangement, either by the government or through public efforts, for the promotion of sports.

1.4.3 Adequacy of financial provision

If the school infrastructure is to be improved, funds for capital expenditure on the schools would be needed. Similarly, if the number of teachers is to be increased or if their capabilities have to be enhanced after training – including exposure visits to other places – these would entail additional expenditure. Moreover, the need for making the pedagogical tools and textbooks etc. relevant to the local context has been mentioned in the earlier sections. Such contextualisation would require investment of considerable funds in research, assessment of current methods, scouting of similar experiments elsewhere, consultancy from experts etc. Pilot testing of the innovations and launching after training of teachers would also entail additional cost. The funds currently being spent by the government on education may not be adequate to adopt such measures.

1.5 Steps suggested

Most of the schools in the district are run by the government or are aided. Any suggestions, therefore, for improvement in the system would be directed more towards action by government authorities. This is in fitness of things and also a part of the system in a democratic society. However, two points need to be considered in this aspect. First, most of the suggestions which would be made to the government would already be known to the authorities who would, in fact, be knowing much better about what needs to be done. While suggestions, and at times demands, should certainly be made, it should be realised that there also would be some constraints. It would be better if the efforts of the people, while demanding accountability, would also be to explore areas where government action could be supplemented by people's supportive action. Secondly, it has to be recognised that certain areas such as innovations and customisation in pedagogical tools etc. are better experimented by civil society than the government authorities, though support and consent of the government would be required. In view of these two points, the following sections would be more from the point of view of what can be done by people (including making demands on government):

- i. Train groups of people in towns and groups of villagers to monitor the status of infrastructure in the school, attendance of teachers and students, regularity of classes being held and subjects taught, availability and quality of mid-day meals, provision of other facilities etc. and approach the school authorities or the government in case of any dereliction of duty or any other adverse feature. Ideally, it should be members of the School Management Committees (SMC) in each school who should perform this function but in case of any limitations for the SMC or in case of a non-functional SMC, the group could be of panchayat members, members of some of the SHGs, or groups newly formed for this purpose in villages who could approach the authorities for redress of grievances. In towns, this could be any group of concerned parents or citizens. The idea is to train citizens to come together, monitor and demand delivery of services from the authorities.
- ii. Members of the groups mentioned above may not be in a position to assess the quality of teaching, especially in villages. An independent group could make occasional visits to villages and interact with the students and teachers to make an assessment. Such interaction itself would help in making the teaching staff alert in the performance of duties.

- iii. Identify people with interest and aptitude to work on education and teaching methods and also get information about various experiments elsewhere for more context specific and customised pedagogical methods. The suggestions could be presented to the government. The government could take the lead in this and organise meetings, invite experts from elsewhere and also organise exposure visits to teachers and others to schools in other places where such experiments have succeeded.
 - iv. Since adequacy of the number of teachers and their regular availability as well as their capability or interest are areas needing improvement, it would help to provide schools with computer-based aids to learning. The government department may possibly be persuaded to provide funds for the same. However, it may be practically difficult to get teachers who could put such digital tools to use. There may be a need for volunteers from urban areas who, with due consent and directions from the department, could help the students learn through computer-based learning tools. Regularity and consistency would have to be ensured.
 - v. To make skill-building more relevant, an inventory could be made of needs of local businessmen. The potential demands after the steel plant commissioning could also be assessed. The government department could be liaised with for suitable modifications in their training content, if necessary.
 - vi. An institutionalised set-up with a network of various centres could be set up for development of sports and athletics. While this would have to be done by the government, citizens can organise various events and coaching camps. They could also help in spotting talent and help them the players to get access to the official bodies. Both government and citizens should help the youth realise their potential and especially develop the innate skills of the tribal youth. While the government has to provide the necessary facilities, infrastructure, funds etc. and help develop an ecosystem, citizens could identify one or two sports which are popular as also some athletic skills, and organise events etc. to develop a culture of playing these sports and see that the district excels in these sports and skills.
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