

ACCESS, INCLUSIVENESS AND EXCELLENCE: UNIQUE EXPERIMENT OF TRIBAL EDUCATION AT KISS, ODISHA

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Abstract - The Indian Parliament introduced Education as a Fundamental Right in 2002. The Right to Education (RTE) Act was introduced in 2009. While the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of students has improved considerably, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2016 brings out the poor learning outcomes and increasing gravitation towards private schooling. The paper brings out public policy on education over the years. It highlights unique experiment of a social entrepreneur to usher holistic education to the alienated tribal students of Odisha. Bereft of any public funding, the unique model has ensured all round excellence of students in academics, sports and skilling, has done away with gender discrimination, brought dignity to the girl child and inculcated life time skills through intense vocational training. The paper also brings out the myriad international collaboration KISS has with UNICEF, UNFPA and the US State Department. The corporates are also extending their support through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) has become a light house of hope for the most deprived children of Odisha. The paper exhorts the government to extend requisite financial assistance to such laudable Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) initiative so that inclusive growth can have an All India footprint. The constitutional mandate of promoting socio-economic justice for all the citizens would also be promoted in a significant way.

Keywords - RTE, GER, ASER, CSR, KISS, UNICEF, UNFPA

I. INTRODUCTION

The RTE Act 2009 set the footprints for universal access to primary education from the age of six till fourteen to every Indian child. The independent finding of Pratham, a reputed NGO, corroborates the fact that almost 96% are enrolled into school during 2016. The ASER Survey (2016) however, brings out the disturbing trend of increasing preference for private schools over public schooling and poor academic outcomes and alarming infrastructural deficits in government schools. The marginalized sections of the society like the tribals, who are also alienated from the mainstream, are particularly deprived from the growth momentum which universal literacy should have ideally spurred. The state of Odisha, which is a home to nearly 96 lakh tribals, constituting around 23% of the total population, has been witness to violent movement by the tribals, as they get deprived from their forest produce rights, and get displaced from their land due to the land acquisition for mining by the MNCs. Police brutality, coupled with scant concern to comply with the PESA Act, has made the tribal belt of Odisha, a tinder box of violence, seething neglect and endemic illiteracy.

In such a scenario, an imaginative social entrepreneur has established a school, christened Kalinga Institute of Social Science (KISS), which is a beacon of hope to nearly 25000 tribal children. They are handheld from infancy to adulthood, with gift of life long skills which finds them meaningful jobs later. This has helped them to become part of the mainstream and

lead a life of dignity and equality. This paper attempts to bring out (a) India's education policy over the years, (b) impact of the RTE Act on access, and learning outcomes, (c) the experiment in KISS to realize holistic education for tribal children and (d) the way forward.

II. INDIA'S EDUCATION POLICY OVER THE YEARS

The Kothari Commission in 1966 put Science and Technology on the front end for generating good employment opportunity. It advocated that allocation to education should be increased to 6% of GDP of India. The subsequent National Commission reports of 1986 and 1992 largely reiterated the Kothari theme while emphasizing the primal need for greater access and equity amongst different sections of the society. India opted out of the path of state socialism and has increasingly been adopting free market economics. This has brought in the private sector in a big way into education. Several commissions constituted by government of India (2000-2012) underwrite this spirit.

The Birla-Ambani report (2000) suggested creation of a society based on knowledge by fostering greater competition. The report advocated giving financial grants to economically backward sections and extending liberal loan schemes. The report emphasized the need for greater flow of foreign direct investment into areas like science, technology and research. The report wanted the government to play

the role of a facilitator rather than a provider. The Knowledge Commission (2009) recommended that the number of universities should be substantially increased to 1500. It strongly advocated that role of the UGC should be replaced by setting up a regulatory body for higher education. The commission was of the view that universities should have freedom to decide on student fee levels, and that the government should provide land and facilitate financing.

The Narayan Murthy report (2012) suggested that the universities should be autonomous in terms of finance, academic & administrative aspects. It should spur collaborative research with work class institution. There should be flexibility to get accreditation from reputed accreditation agencies. This will facilitate Indian institutions being considered at par with the best in the world. It proposed enhanced funding for research in doctoral programs, set-up technology parks and developing new knowledge clusters. It suggested to the government to up-graduate at least seventy five top class universities. It encouraged public private partnership with a five year investment of Rs.40000/- crore in which government and corporates have 50:50 share. It suggested that a Council for Industry and Higher Education should be created to function as a nodal agency.

The draft education policy report (2016) brings out a slew of government reforms, required quality assurance and internationalization. It highlights the urgent imperative to invest in faculty development, research & innovation and earmark at least 6% of the budget to education. Some of the initiatives proposed in the governance reforms are for creating an Education Commission to assist Ministry of HRD in identifying new areas of knowledge, pedagogy, curriculum & assessment reforms, integrating UG, PG and doctoral study, with faculty teaching concurrently, creation of an Indian Education Service, and separate education tribunals to deal with disputes pertaining to the education sector. The real watershed moment for the education sector has been the RTE Act 2009. Its impact is enumerated below.

III. IMPACT OF RTE ACT (2009)

The Supreme Court in the Unni Krishnan vs State of Andhra Pradesh Case (1993) observed universal primary education is for Freedom of Life inescapable for Right to Life to be meaningful. This prompted the central government to incorporate Article 21A as a new fundamental right to education in 2002 and pass the RTE Act in 2009. This has been a real watershed moment in India's constitutional history. This act has underscored the value of equity, social justice through provision of universal elementary education for children from the age 6-14.

The ASER report (2016) brings out how the RTE has been a resounding success in terms of expanding the reach of elementary school education across the country. The enrollment now stands around 97%. Despite the near universal access in primary schooling, the ASER report presents a disquieting picture of learning outcome. Only 54.8% students in III – IV grade are able to read at the first grade level and 39.7% of the students are able to perform basic arithmetic functions like subtraction. These trend of learning have been reiterated by others studies by Education Institution (EI) and the Programme for Student Areas (PSA).

The impact of the RTE Act in terms of overall literacy rates, and that general category, as compared with SC & ST is brought in the table below. The trends are also plotted graphically

Literacy	1981	1991	2001	2011
All India Rural	36.01	44.69	58.74	68.91
All India Urban	67.23	73.08	79.92	84.98

Source: Census of India: 2011
 Table 1: Overall Literacy Rates in India

It would be seen from the above that both in rural and urban India, literacy rates have improved significantly over a period of thirty years. However, there is still a huge gap between rural India where 66% live and urban India. High level of literacy has a significant impact on Human Development Index (HDI), where India's score is only 0.609, as compared to 0.8 in many emerging market economies as per Human Development Report (2016). Further, a study of the trend of literacy over the last four decades for the general category of population, vis-à-vis is SC&ST who constitute 23% of the population reveal the following.

Category	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
General	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.80	73.00
Scheduled Tribes	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.95
Scheduled Castes	14.67	21.38	37.41	54.69	66.07

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development Reports
 Table 2: Trend of Literacy Rates of General, SC & ST (in %) in India

It would be seen that there has been significant improvement in literacy levels in all categories, through the gap between the general category and SC/ST is quite significant.

3.1 Impact on Learning Outcomes

Based on a survey of 17473 villages, 3.5 lakh households and 5.62lakh children, the ASER survey (2016) brings out the detailed learning outcomes. The all India findings for rural sector which constitutes 66% of India's populations is brought out below.

Parameter	Percentage
Improvement in reading (Standard III)	42.5%
Two digit Subtraction (Standard III)	27.7%
Improvement in Reading English (Standard III)	32%

Source: Annual Status of Education Report, 2016
Table 3: All India Findings (Rural): Reading & Subtraction

It would be clearly seen that in terms of basic numeracy skills and reading English, the learning outcomes are very poor. The survey also highlights the position on basic facilities, like mid-day meal to children, drinking water, usable toilet for girl, library facilities and availability of computer. The position is as under-

Parameter	2010	2014	2016
Mid-Day Meal	82.1	88.1	89.7
Drinking Water	72.7	75.0	74.1
No Girls Toilet	31.2	18.8	12.2
No Library	37.4	21.9	24.5
No Computer	84.2	80.4	80.0

Source: Annual Status of Education Report, 2016
Table 4: School Facilities (%): Trends

While provision of mid-day meal has been a commendable government initiative, non- availability of usable girl's toilet and lack of computers are big constraints in rural schools. The national goal of Digital India would be hamstrung by such critical deficits in provision of computers.

IV. IMPACT OF KISS ODISHA ON INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Dr. Achyuta Samanta started with mission of "Educate, Enable and Empower" for tribal students by providing food, shelter, quality education and enabling environment. The Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences started with just 125 students in 1993. It has now become the largest institute of the world housing nearly 25000 tribal children. Some of the distinctive impact of this remarkable initiative are enumerated below.

4.1 Gender Equality: One of the major goals of the Millennium Development Goals (1995) was to do away with gender inequality in schooling. The following table would bring out how gender equality has been substantially achieved in KISS.

Grade	Total	Boys	Girls	% of Girls
School	19314	10100	7714	40
+2	2430	1019	1411	58
+3	1992	886	1106	56
PG	732	347	385	52
Professional Course	840	538	302	36
Total	25308	12890	10918	43

Source: KISS Report, 2016
Table 5: Breakup of KISS Students

It would be seen from the above that the overall gender ratio is 43%. Hearteningly it is more than 50% for graduate and post graduate students.

4.2 Academic Performance: The students from KISS have been performing better than those in schools run by state board schools and high schools meant for SC/ST. The performance of students in Commerce & Science streams shows very high level of academic achievement. Table below shows the contrast between KISS, state run schools and schools under the aegis of ST/SC department.

Examination	State Run Schools		SC&ST Deptt. High Schools		KISS Odisha	
	2014	2015	2014	2015	2014	2015
CHSE- Science	70.13	76.75	83.44	83.58	90.37	86.95
CHSE- Commerce	64.14	69.48	86.70	81.34	99.56	96.95

Source: SC&ST Department, Government of Odisha & KISS
Table 6: Comparative Educational Performance

It would be seen from the above that in science and commerce stream, the performance of students is better than both state run schools and schools run by SC/ST department. Their result is particularly striking in the commerce stream, helping them to get jobs and to pursue professional courses like Chartered Accountancy.

4.3 Performance of Students in Science & Maths: In case of science and maths, special coaching is being imparted to students in KISS. The Xth standard results (2016) reveal the following trends.

Type of School	Math	Science
Tribal School	70	70
CBSE (Govt. School)	75	75
International Private School	91	89

Source: KISS, CBSE, International School
Table 7: Comparative Scores in Maths & Science: Class X

It would be seen from the above that the average score of the tribal students is almost at par with government run CBSE schools, which is commendable.

4.4 Vocational Training: KISS makes an effort to improve productivity of each child through intense vocational training in 50 trades. The skills imparted help them to become successful entrepreneurs to get employment. A novel feature of the scheme is that students "earn while they learn". A case in point is painting where nearly one thousand students are actively associated. The sale proceeds from this



activity is around Rs.1/- crore per year; of which around 20 lakh is earned as profit. Each student is given one thousand per month out of such profit. This is indeed a unique approach to financially empower the disadvantaged, while they are studying.

4.5 Health Care: Social ills like early marriage, high infant mortality, and maternal mortality are rampant amongst the tribal community. The girls are married off early. They are unfamiliar with reproductive practices. This often leads to high maternal mortality rate and infant mortality rate. Since the girls study at KISS, the pressure from society to get married early is not there. The girls also get counseled with aspects like reproductive health, which leads to lesser MMR.

4.6 Nutritious Food & Health Care: Nutritious food and health care are some of the best features of KISS. Each child is provided three nutritious meals every day. Many of them had acute pangs of hunger before they came to KISS. Many of them were also affected by diseases like Kwashiorkor, Tuberculosis and hookworm. Lack of adequate vitamin and pronounced protein deficiency is also rampant. The school ensures that they are provided with a diet which is balanced and rich in vitamins, proteins and minerals.

4.7 Infrastructure: The KISS has 25000 sqft. Of library building with 3 state of art kitchen servicing wholesome food to the children. It has a Wi-Fi campus with four state of art computer labs to seat 2000 students at a time. It has a solar heating system, reverse osmosis drinking water plant, bio gas plant and 200 bedded in-house medical facility.

4.8 Funding: The society running tribal education does not depend on any governmental grant or for its sustenance. The employees of the university contribute voluntarily 3% of their salary for this laudable mission. The Art of Giving mission, spurs many international organizations, corporate houses and individuals to make contribution to KISS. The total expenditure for this humungous setup is around Rs.76/- crore during 2016-17. The per capita expenditure per student is around Rs.3000/- per month, which is far less than the per capita expenditure in government run schools, which is nearly Rs.6000/.

V. INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION WITH KISS

Various international organizations are helping students in multilingual skills, life skills education and for promoting the building block for policy making. The Bernard Van Leer Foundation started the Childhood Development Program. This program provides multilingual learning based on mother

tongue. This promotes a centre of excellence where mother tongue is given primacy of place.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA): The United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) is carrying at a project on "Empowering young people with life skills through building institutional capacity, imparting life skills, education and broadening research base for Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) and Life Skill Education (LSE)".

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has established a Children Development Resource Centre (CDRC). The objective is to promote policy making based on proper evidence, by building up a good knowledge base of research.

English Access Micro Scholarship Programme: The US Department of State has been training students in quality English. This is helping the tribal students to pursue higher studies in careers like Engineering, Medicine, Law and MBA.

5.1 Excellence in Sports & Other Extra Curricular Activities

The tribal students have a natural aptitude for sports. KISS has become a wonderful nursery for them in games like Rugby, Archery and Kho-Kho.

Ranjit Nayak is identified as a potential medal winner in Olympics. Muna Murmu was selected for the Indian Rugby squad for Dubai Asia Rugby. Four girl students were selected to represent India in the India Senior Rugby Women team. Ms. Mandakini Majhi won a gold medal in the 12th South Asian (SAF) games 2016 in Indian Kho-Kho Team. **Dutee Chand completed in 100 meter race in the Rio Olympics.**

Two students have won the Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 awards. Sumitra Nayak shared her ideas in a TEDx event. One of the students also participated in the UN Malala Day in New York.



Ranjit Nayak aiming for 2020 under TOP scheme



A delighted Muna Murmu



VI. MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR

Despite economic liberalization the education sector in India has been facing major challenges as underlined below:

6.1. GDP Share in Education: The Kothari Commission in 1966 had underscored the need to earmark at least 6% of GDP to the education sector. Regrettably even after introduction of SSA (Sarva

Shiksha Abhiyan) in 2009, the total allocation has remained stagnant at 3%. The palpable deficits in government schooling in terms of infrastructure, poor teacher support and learning outcomes are manifestation of low allocation. The draft education policy (2016) has reiterated allocating 6% to education. Incidentally most developed countries and emerging market economies spend 6-10% on education through public allocation.

6.2. FDI Policy: Due to significant liberalization in our FDI Policy, the total inflow of FDI has increased from \$36 billion in 2015-16 to around \$60 billion in 2016-17. However, the education program hardly receives any FDI or collaborative program from reputed foreign universities. This is largely due to the asphyxiating restrictions imposed by the UGC.

6.3. Regulatory Authority for Education: The Knowledge Commission (2009) had suggested that the existing mechanism of UGC needs to be supplanted with a regulatory body viz. IRAHE. The experience of India with similar regulatory bodies for stock markets and telecom sector like SEBI and TRAI have been salutary. There is an urgent need institutional reform needed for improving quality of learning and research work in the universities.

6.4. Allocation to R&D: Prof. Elhanan Helpman had underlined the importance of productivity, education and R&D as the real forerunners of high growth. He brings out how improvement in Mean Years of Schooling by 4 years has contributed 30% growth in output in USA during (1950-90). Besides, a consistent expansion of R&D investment by ½% of GDP has led to 15% growth in output in USA. These experiences hold important lessons for India in terms of allocation to quality education and R&D. As against an allocation of 3% in education and health, most of the high growth countries invest close to 10% of their GDP. Besides, while India spends only 0.8% in R&D, the developed economies spend around 4 - 5% in R&D and innovation.

VII. THE WAY FORWARD

Verrier Elwin, who was closely associated with public policy for tribals, was very critical about the role of the government in respect of the tribals and wanted freedom from fear, want and interference. To quote him “they need to be protected from oppressive landlords and money lenders and from corrupt and rapacious officials”. He also wanted “to bring advantage of modern medicine, agriculture and



education to them, without destroying the rare and precious values of tribal life”.

Dr. Achyuta Samanta has taken these lofty ideas forward by creating KISS as a rare synthesis of modern education with preservation of simplicity and value system of the tribal community. There is a plan afoot to transform this institute into a tribal university and increase its footprint by setting up KISS model school in all districts of Odisha. Many corporate are coming forward to help such institution to come up in districts like Balasore and Mayurbhanj. Giving education to the tribal children is like giving sight to the blind. KISS is a unique experiment in social transformation as it can stem the rising tide of disillusionment and violence that manifest periodically amongst the tribals. This remarkable initiative needs to be fully supported by the government through funding, counseling and knowledge sharing. The model also needs to be replicated wherever there is a tribal concentration in India. The Constitutional promise of socio economic justice for all citizens in the preamble can be realized through such empathetic, inclusive, quality education intervention that KISS (Odisha) has made to the numerous tribal students.

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