

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION: NORTH EAST INDIAN TRIBAL STUDENTS IN NON-NATIVE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to elucidate various social adjustment problems faced by tribal students while migrating to cities away from their native state for the first time for higher education. Through this study, the researchers envisage comprehending the social adjustment problems of tribal students while being confronted by the changes due to a non-native urban environment. The adjustment problems range from adapting to non-native culture to acquiring workable knowledge in the vernacular. Indeed, it is time-consuming and can be strenuous for many. Here, an attempt is made to assess the social integration problems among tribal educational migrants qualitatively. The researchers have adopted a case study approach in this social investigation. Tribal students enrolled in Pondicherry University from states other than Puducherry were chosen for this study. Twelve cases were selected through purposive sampling. Data collection involved in-depth interviews based on an expressly designed interview guide. Thematic analysis of the transcripts yielded a catalogue of highlighted themes that helped arrive at a few conclusions. The researchers made recommendations based on the knowledge generated and recognized the scope for further investigation.

Keywords: Tribal community, Educational migrant, Non-native, Urban, Hosteller, Tribal Youth

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a significant role in the individual's overall development, which is also an excellent instrument for empowering them with greater awareness of a better position in society. These hold for the scheduled tribes in India. The Scheduled Tribes (ST) are notified in thirty states and union territories. The ST population's literacy rate in India increased from 8.53 per cent in 1961 to 58.96 per cent in 2011. While India's higher education has made significant strides over the recent decades, even after many years of independence, the literacy of the STs and other disadvantaged groups has been a significant concern. This is even though many nationally-funded tribal development programs are linked to higher education. Higher education enhances an individual's quality of life and allows them to broaden their knowledge

and develop their understanding of the world and their culture. According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) report (2019), Scheduled tribal students constitute 5.5 per cent of the total enrolment in the year 2018-19. The estimated Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for Scheduled Tribes is 17.2%, whereas overall Higher education in India is 26.3% (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019). Most of the tribal students are started studying for their higher education in major cities of our country.

As students enter an academic institution, they come from diverse backgrounds with their standards and values, while their standards and values reflect the institution's vision, purpose, and core values. To fit into the educational institution's setup, students would then need to mould their actions and beliefs of the educational institution (Robinson, 2009), which has been recent exposure and adjustment issue for ST students coming to the urban setting first time. The degree of adjustment of each student varies from the other, based on the development of the ST student. Adjustment is essential to achieving an individual's goal and harmony (Brady-Amoon & Fuertes, 2011). Newly joined students in the university-bound to undergo an adjustment phase with their own pace of development (Dyson & Renk, 2006). In the process, students need to maintain a good relationship with their environment because the individual needs to deal with psychological issues for their needs. The environment and the individual are the two critical factors of the adjustment process (Julia & Veni, 2012). According to Crede and Niehorster (2011), the adjustment has four components: social adjustment, personal emotional adjustment; academic adaptation; and institutional commitment. Social adjustment is an essential part of any individual's socialization and the social environment (Packiaselvi & Malathi, 2017; Son, 2011), and it includes coping with new standards and values for individual acceptance.

The social adjustment might be influenced by interpersonal relationships, family environment, and self-regulation (Park & Park, 2017; Wariso et al., 2016). Lapsley and Edgerton (2002) reported that students do not successfully manage these new challenges at the university and, consequently, are more vulnerable to anxiety and depression. A tribal student may face challenges during the transition from college to university life in their lifestyles, environment and academic settings.

Pondicherry University is a central university in India with many students enrolled from integrated to post-doctoral degrees in various disciplines. All the students come from different countries with different socio-economic, cultural, religious and academic backgrounds. Three hundred and sixty-six ST students were pursuing degrees of different academic levels at Pondicherry University as of 1st January 2020. Therefore, studying the social adjustment of ST students at Pondicherry University is suitable. The study's main objective is to understand the social adjustment problems of scheduled tribal students of North Eastern India enrolled on the Postgraduate programme at Pondicherry University.

2.0 METHODS AND MATERIALS

The current study is qualitative and intended to study the social adjustment problems of scheduled tribal students of North Eastern India. They have enrolled on Postgraduate programmes and staying for the first time in the hostel at Pondicherry University. The convenience sampling method was adopted in the selection of the participants. For this purpose,

tribal students from the north-eastern states of India were informed about the research, and the students who volunteered to participate in the study were recruited. Verbal consent was obtained from the subjects who recruited in this study. The case study method was adopted in this study. Research participants were interviewed face to face by the researcher and protected human subjects and qualitative interviewing techniques. Twelve cases representing the characteristics of typical North Eastern Tribal Students participated in the study. Based on an interview guide, the case studies included in-depth interviews. The interview guide was composed of open-ended, semi-structured questions. All interviews conducted within the scope of the research were recorded with the participants' permission. The interviews recorded were transcribed, and texts were analyzed line by line. Few conclusive remarks have been drawn from the thematic analysis of the cases, and some direct quotations were included.

3.0 RESULTS

The results were drawn from the participants' findings, which are the participant's socio-demographic details and social adjustment.

Table 1: Research Participants Socio-Demographic Details

Case	The native state of the respondent	Age of the respondent	Gender of the respondent	Course of Study
1	Meghalaya	23	Female	MSc
2	Nagaland	21	Male	MA
3	Assam	23	Male	MSW
4	Assam	22	Male	MSc
5	Mizoram	24	Male	MA
6	Assam	22	Male	MA
7	Manipur	21	Male	MSc
8	Manipur	26	Female	MA
9	Meghalaya	21	Male	MA
10	Manipur	20	Male	MA
11	Assam	21	Male	MA
12	Assam	22	Male	MA

The twelve participants represented five states in north-eastern India, and two were female. The research participant's ages varied from 21 to 26 years; all were postgraduate students, and most belonged to humanities, and social science steams.

3.1 Social Adjustment

The results were categorized into five themes based upon the thematic analysis, i.e., cultural accommodation, discrimination as outsiders, financial constraints, poor academic performances, and less socialization.

3.2 Cultural Accommodation

Adjusting to contemporary culture is the most challenging issue tribal student's face when choosing higher education. Leaving tribal culture is a challenging move for tribal students. The decision to relocate affects their connections with friends, community spirit, and fear of outsiders, belief in traditional gender roles, and religious belief. Being in a non-native environment, the student often struggles to adapt to the local culture. Accommodation and assimilation into local culture take a long time. Students often experience severe psychological distress during their initial days of being in an outside environment.

"On those days, I wanted to go home. It was a horrible period in my academic life. But I had no way but to remain...." (Case 2, Male)

"Everything is different here, language, food, clothing, greeting and even the gestures and reactions of people." (Case 11, Male)

Tribal students frequently feel unfamiliar, unsure, and tense. They assume these sentiments are the product of their various cultural, social and economic capital. Most students in urban areas come from top universities that allow them to obtain cultural capital—knowledge in arts, music, theatre, dance, literature, sports, decoration, lifestyle and recreational activities. They have increased involvement in organized activities, games, and musical groups and a better experience with professionals and social hierarchies that most tribal students lack.

"I felt myself inferior while comparing to the caliber of my friends. They had better schooling, and many hailed from rich families" (Case 8, Female)

University life, traffic, and leisure activities are all facets of urban life that vary considerably. The urban people's lives are usually very different from those in tribal areas. Life is straightforward in the tribal areas, expressed in how people live, dress, and eat.

"I come from a quiet place; we do not have good roads or market, but here there is much traffic, rush, and people are busy in their engagements" (Case 5, Male)

3.3 Discrimination as outsiders

Residents have also discriminated against students from North East India. As cultural outsiders, they are also quickly recognized. North-East was often used to group people from the regions, regardless of their various cultures, states and societies. The importance of the eight states forming the so-called North-East is thus undermined. In this context, the Northeast gradually obtains an ethnic nature sometimes related to Mongoloid Indians.

"Instead of asking from which state I am hailing, people refer as I am from the northeast. Your state or language identity is not at all considered important." (Case 1, Female)

"While in public transport, some people feel uncomfortable to sit with me. They keep on staring at us throughout the journey" (Case 11, Male)

Mongoloid Indians are still being oppressed by Chinese labels. The use of such terms is a racial provocation. Mainland India habitually uses the Chinese racial slur to categorise a person with an East Asian physical structure. This use is an ideological mechanism to identify an unclassified community that has become the nation's people but does not share its genetics, historicity, and cultural values in the country's common imagination.

"I am a practicing Hindu, a Gaudiya vaishnavite from Assam; despite being from the same religion, people stare at me if I go to local temples. I don't understand the language, but they often say Chinese, which hurts me greatly." (Case 12, Male)

"Referring to us Chinese is the greatest racial insult" (Case 10, Male)

3.4 Financial constraints

Finance was a significant obstacle for ten out of twelve respondents to attend and remain in college. The financial condition of students has influenced their college experiences in several ways. First, students identified the financial condition of their parents as an obstacle to college attendance. Second, students reported the debt burden as a continuous element in their college years. Students depend on grants and financial assistance to make college financially viable. If scholarships are withheld, tribal students suffer severe financial distress.

"Sometimes, there is a delay in getting scholarships. I spend every single rupee with caution and try maximum not to ask money from any of my friends or family members" (Case 11, Male)

"I try to reduce travels, as going home requires a lot of money and effort" (Case 7, Male)

All respondents reported spending considerable money on their university tuition, food, lodging, supplies and everyday expenses. The financial restriction is the biggest obstacle that tribal students face as they transfer to the city for university. All respondents said that cities are more expensive than tribal areas. The budget given to them by their families cannot cover their daily expenses. Most respondents mentioned obtaining a room at the university hostel rather than renting a room outside to reduce expenses.

"I cannot adjust to the food served at the hostel. I want to stay outside and cook food myself. However, that may incur a greater cost..... whatever I choose to continue to stay in the hostel itself." (Case 4, Male)

3.5 Poor academic performance

Adaptation of students is positively connected to academic achievement. Well-adjusted students can balance their classroom environment and skills. Students who have not been able to adapt often encounter some academic struggles. Since joining the university, they were shocked to find that they were much less academically prepared than their urban peers and that their learning abilities did not meet their expectations.

"It is all tight competition here. I have to improve my knowledge and skills greatly to get on par with the caliber of many of my friends.... I am trying hard" (Case 2, Male)

Alcohol is also a readily accessible product in the region. Tribal students in their native locations are also already subjected to the temptations of alcohol. While being at the center of alcoholism, it is easy for more and more students from tribal areas to become addicted. Tribal students consumed alcohol at higher rates than non-tribal students, potentially harming their academic performance, as expressed by one student in the interview.

"I tried maximum to reduce alcoholism, but it always fails. but I firmly believe, if I could reduce alcoholism, I would be able to better concentrate in my studies." (Case 3, Male)

3.6 Less socialization

When they first arrived in the city, many of our respondents found it difficult to make friends. Eight out of twelve of our respondents reported feeling like an outsider when they started college. They began to feel awkward. There are several kinds of people in the city; they couldn't say who was excellent or wrong or who they could be friends with when they first encountered fresh faces.

"When friends came to my room for visit frequently, I had a fear as I didn't know whether the person was good or bad...I tried maximum to avoid visitors to my room" (Case 3, Male)

Language is one of the main problems faced by tribal students. As in south India, students from northeast India find it difficult to communicate even basic ideas. The language barrier often hinders them in social connections. Timid students find it very difficult to communicate their basic ideas, which are essential for daily living. The language also makes them difficult to travel beyond the limits of the college environment. Acquisition of basic language skills takes time.

"When I first came to the university, I found it difficult even to pay the money. I used to show my mobile dial pad and asked them to type the amount to pay" (Case 6, Male)

"The only phrase which I knew was... 'sapteengala....'" (Case 11, Male)

However, almost all the interviewed students believed that they made a wise decision to come and study at the university. They were stuck under the limitations of their community life, unknown to the larger population. However, now, there are more opportunities to be a part of the greater society.

"In my hometown, I was stuck all these years.... But now I feel that I am doing something better with my life" (Case 1, Female)

Three of our respondents said they lived alone, influenced their physical and emotional well-being. They must live far away from their families and be independent, which is a novel challenge. Most of our participants indicate that living alone in the city is tough. They must feed themselves, care for their own houses, and step away from their families and peers.

"I sometimes feel that the most difficult part of university life is living alone..... no one cares for us even when we are sick.... I feel so sad" (Case 2, Male)

"I do not want to live alone, but while thinking of adjusting to the food served at the University mess, I do not have an option" (Case 3, Male)

4.0 DISCUSSION

The current study finds that leaving tribal culture is complicated for tribal students. The decision to move affects their relations with relatives, collective spirit, distrust of strangers, confidence in conventional gender roles, and religious belief. Other studies also indicate that psycho-socio-cultural factors play a more significant predictive role in deciding factors of socio-cultural integration, such as educational goals, faith in others at college, longing for home, pride in school, and equal treatment by others (Motl et al., 2018). An excellent social adjustment can increase the individual's prosocial well-being (Gini et al., 2018). Students frequently experience extreme psychological distress during their initial days in an outside environment, as stated in this research. The tribes feel isolated from others culturally (Ambasht, 1997). The young people who have to move away from their immediate environment and enter a diverse one must adjust to this new one as soon as possible. The higher levels of risk may be likely to develop unhealthy psychological perspectives, leading to adjustment impairments (Day et al., 2015; Prelow et al., 2007). A poor social adjustment can easily lead to addiction, depression, less perceived friendship, problematic behaviours, psychological functioning, low sense of belonging, and maladjustments in academic achievement (Buck & Dix, 2012; Galliher et al., 2004; Sa'nchez et al., 2005; Tian et al., 2020, Waldrip et al., 2008; Van Ryzin et al., 2009). The healthier psychosocial adjustment could improve through an increase of self-efficacy and positive expectations about the future that will lead to a positive outcome in life (O'Neal & Cotten, 2016), and other researchers also found that self-efficacy has a relationship with the psychosocial development of youth (Landon et al., 2007; Muris, 2002).

Residents are also prejudiced against students from North East India. They are often easily referred to as cultural outsiders. The North-East term was also used to group people from the regions, regardless of their diverse cultures, states and communities. The same phenomena are recorded in many studies across various cities in India. A fallacy is a notion that India is a race-less culture. India has a statutory framework that guarantees ethnic equality. Still, no evidence exists that any such legal action has helped stop the continued assaults on North East Indians in India's metropolitan cities (Pulla et al., 2020). As described in this study, the biggest challenge faced by tribal students as they move to the city for university is financial constrain. The participants said that cities are costlier than tribal areas. Family financing and prosperity are valid factors contributing to the dropout of tribal students (Joy & Srihari, 2014). Lack of tribal education funding is a significant challenge even in the developed world (Aitken & Falk, 1983).

It was found that tribal students who could not adapt to the urban culture frequently faced some academic difficulty. In literature, this fact is repeatedly cited. It has been found that tribal students have low motivation and poor expectations (John et al., 2011). Tribal students have a low-income family academic background, so they need proper guidance and advice on their studies (Nayak, 2015). Tribal students have been found to drink alcohol at higher rates than

non-tribal students, which can harm their academic performance. Alcoholism significantly affects human life, especially among disadvantaged and tribal populations (Kumar, 2019). The researchers also observed socialisation problems. This is understood as a consequence of low self-concept. Therefore, these students face isolation, emotional struggles, abuse by other classmates and limited contact with other individuals in society (Amutha, 2019). Many of our respondents found it hard to make friends when they first arrived in the area. Respondents stated that they felt like an outsider when they began college. Understanding cultural differences and changing behaviour to shape culturally diverse friendships is essential for cultural integration among tribal students (Andrade, 2006).

5.0 CONCLUSION

Scheduled tribal students have different traditions of academic, social, emotional and institutional transitions to educational institutions. Cultural variations can also occur in how social and behavioural change contributes to success in education. Assertiveness training may be offered to individuals with adjustment issues, including exercises to facilitate mental, social, and academic and opposite's gender adaptation. This study's findings will motivate university authorities to prioritise induction activities to speed up and promote the transition process. Higher education institutions' teaching management could create a support programme for these students to enhance their sense of comfort and interpersonal relationships to facilitate their social adaptation.

This study was conducted against very little research on India's tribal student population, making it harder to compare its observations with others. The findings are also limited to scheduled tribal students of the study area, which cannot be compared with the whole country's state of affairs. These results could lead to successful strategies to encourage the social adaptation of tribal students. Further scholarly investigations could shed light on issues not addressed in the current study and explore the adaptation problems of scheduled tribe students in India's urban settings.

5.1 Conflict of Interest

The authors also declare that there is no conflict of interest. No specific grant was received in any form from any agency.

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