

Educating a Nomadic Tribe: The Problems and the Prospects

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INTRODUCTION

The Central Himalayan region of India comprising hill districts of Uttar Pradesh State, known as Uttarakhand or Uttaranchal, is inhabited by about six million people, mostly belonging to Hindu Castes. However, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes constitute nearly 15.96 and 3.54 per cents of the total population, respectively (Samal et al., 1996a). Five tribal communities who inhabit the region are the Tharus, the Jaunsaries, the Buxas, the Bhotias and the Rajis. The Rajis are socially, educationally and economically, the most under-developed tribal community of the region. They were recognized as a scheduled tribe in 1967 and as a primitive tribe in 1975 by the Government of India.

The Rajis numbering to 531 in 1997 are distributed in 9 settlements in the district Pithoragarh, 1 settlement in the district Champawat and 1 settlement in the district Udham Singh Nagar. However, about 85 per cent of the total population were found in three subdivisions (Tehsils), viz., Dharchula, Didihat and Kanalichina of district Pithoragarh, which is strategically a very important district of India bordering Tibet and Nepal. They are reported as the oldest race of Didihat. They are also described as Van Rawats (king of forest), Van Raji (royal people of forest) or Van Manush (wild man or man of forest) who claim themselves to be Rajputs and the original inhabitants of Central Himalaya, though anthropologically they belong to Tibeto-Burman family. Their average stature is 159.42 cm. which is the upper limit of the short type (Singh, 1994). They are believed to be the descendants of Kirata who were ruling over these areas in prehistoric time (Pande, 1991). The Rajis are also considered as a living link between Kiratas of somewhat Tibetan physique and the Khasas of equally pronounced Aryan form and habits (Atkinson, 1981). According to Traill (1823) the Rajis represent themselves as descendants of one of the aboriginal princes of Kumaon. Crooke (1896) was of the opinion that they were

servants of the king Kutpur, who expelled them. The Rajis were complete nomads about three to four decades back, lived under temporary huts or in caves and frequently moved from place to place amidst the forests of the border district Pithoragarh. It is worth mentioning here that a considerable population of this tribe are residing in Nepal and there is also strong social and affilial relations between Rajis of India and Rajis of Nepal.

The Rajis are multilingual. They speak a language, which belongs to the Himalayan group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. They also speak the Indo-Aryan language, Kumaoni, with others. Very few among them speak also Hindi (Singh, 1994).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was carried out between January 1997 to June 1998 stretching over a period of about a year and six months by an interdisciplinary team of researchers. All the 11 settlements covering the entire population of 531 distributed in 123 households were covered in the study. The entire village was taken as the universe of study. Efforts were made to interview the head or in his/her absence the seniormost member of the family and also female respondents. The birth & death record, maintained by the head of the village council, was used to confirm the age of the family members and to identify the head/ seniormost member of the family.

Primary data on demographic issues including levels of literacy, economic structure and others, were collected using a structured Household Schedule. Data on quality of life and socio-cultural milieu were collected qualitatively using memory ticklers, while some information on these was also collected by Household Schedule. Interview (focused) and observation (participant and non-participant) were also other tools for primary data collection. In the process of interview, out of the 123 respondents, about 28 (23%) respondents were females. Data on the

schools, i.e., educational infrastructure, quality of life of the teachers, etc., were collected by inspecting and interviewing teachers. Secondary data about the schools and their management aspects were collected from sources like Block Development Officer, head of Village Council and also from existing data from libraries, and other government departments.

THE PEOPLE

Three to four decades earlier, the Rajis were completely nomadic, pursuing a life of hunter-gatherers taking shelter in caves or temporary huts. Their occupation and material culture are also changing. From hunter-gatherers they have taken to agriculture but are highly dependent on forests and wage labour and about one-fourth of the populace are still practicing nomadism. Few decades back, they used to avoid going to habitations of other communities, used to hide away in forests from people of the Kumaon and the only relationship they had with the other people was through barter of wooden implements and utensils. The Rajis were famous for the unique practice of invisible trading and were known as the traders of the night (Pande, 1991). During nights they disguised themselves under barks and skins of animals and went to nearby settlements of other communities carrying wooden implements and utensils, bamboo baskets and other forest produces. They used to keep these material at the gate of the house or at door steps and disappear. These articles were collected and replaced by foodgrains, salt, sugar and other essential material by the household, which were collected by the Rajis in the next night again. Also, like the African primitives, earlier, the Rajis usually kept the forest produces as well as wooden utensils at selected places and hide themselves at a distance in the forests or behind the bushes. The local traders or people, acquainted with this practice, would visit the place and replace these products with articles of this peoples' need, i.e., cloth, foodgrains, etc. which the Rajis collected afterwards. This trade of this nomadic people was completely based on mutual belief and trust. With the introduction of stringent forest laws restricting and often prohibiting use of forest wealth, the Rajis were compelled to

change their economic pursuits and occupation. Through welfare schemes of both the state and union government of India, they have been allotted land for agriculture in addition to many other benefits. These have resulted in changing lifestyle and the community is gradually adopting to sedentary agriculture. About 52.35 per cent of the populace constituted the main workforce at the time of survey. Out of it, 44.60 per cent were agriculturists, 37.40 per cent were wage labourers, 16.90 per cent were engaged in forest produce while the rest 1.10 per cent were in service. But what was interesting to note that nearly 50.46 per cent of the total income for the year 1995-96 was from wage labour, 27.78 per cent was from forests and only 12.55 per cent was from agriculture in contrast to the largest workforce in agriculture. Almost all the families were below poverty line taking into account the India Government's consideration of a family with less than Rs. 11000/ per annum below poverty line which was based on price index of 1992. The average annual income per family was estimated to be Rs. 6188. For the same year also, maximum expenditure was on food (73.76%), followed by clothing (10.77%), while the least expenditure was on health and medicine (0.72%) preceded by education (1.24%).

The tribe has a sex ratio of 818 which varies in different age groups. Low sex ratios at early age groups, i.e., 716 for the age-group 0-7 and 707 for the age group 8-15 were the reflections of high female infant and child mortality. More than 65 per cent of the populace were below the age of 30. From 1971 to 1981 the annual growth rate for the tribe was 3.39 which has declined to 3.31 during 1981-1991 and very disturbingly this has sharply declined to 1.24 from 1991-1996. The tribe is divided into a number of exogamous patrilineages like Pal, Chand, Byom, Sah, Bisht, Kunwar, etc. The tribe is monogamous and the modes of acquiring mates are elopement, intrusion, exchange and negotiations. Widow remarriage is prohibited while levirate, sororate and cross cousin marriages are practiced. Bride price is more prevalent than dowry. Mean ages at first marriage for male and female were 21.8 and 17.28, respectively. About 5.4 per cent of the females were married below the age of 13 while 38.80 per cent were married at the age of 13-16

and 36.93 per cent were married at the age of 17-20. About 8.5 per cent of the females were below the age of 16 at the first pregnancy while about 60 per cent of the females were between the age 16-21 at their first pregnancy. Average number of pregnancies for an ever married female (EMF) was 4.28 and the number of children born for an EMF was 3.88. The general fertility rate (GFR) of the tribe is about 198 against India's 145.2 and the total fertility rate (TFR) is 6.6 against India's 4.0. Crude Birth Rate of the tribe was 49.42 against India's 30.3, Crude death rate for the tribe is 24 against India's 10.2 and infant mortality rate (IMR) for the tribe was 192 against India's 98 (Samal et al., 1997). The Nuclear family dominates (78.45 %) followed by the extended type. The rule of inheritance is male equigeniture. Oldest male member of the family is the head of the household. The life cycle rituals of the community were extremely simple in the past, which are gradually becoming elaborate and complex under acculturation. The tribe is becoming more Hinduised acculturating more cultural traits of the Caste Hindus, particularly of neighbouring Rajputs of the Kumaon. The community has its family deities like Chuchurmal, Malayanath, Gananath, Kholiya, Khudai and Malkan Jan. However, they worship Hindu deities like Mahadev, Parvati, Ganga, etc., as well as spirits like Masan and Bhutas, goblins and defied persons, in addition to all aspects of nature. They celebrate the Hindu festival Nandadevi and also perform Jagara (spirit possession seance). Formerly they use to bury their dead, but at present they have taken to cremation.

EDUCATION: EMERGENCE OF THE PROCESS

The traditional economy of the Rajis was primarily built around the forests. Bringing the forests and their resources under systematic management of state was the prime factor that forced these nomads to change their lifestyle. The traditional forest rights of the Rajis and of tribes elsewhere in India which were considered as 'rights and privileges' in the Forest Act of 1894 of India became 'rights and concessions' in the Forest Act of 1952. India's war with China

in 1962 ushered development of infrastructure, particularly of roads, in the region inhabited by the Rajis. Since they were compelled by stringent Forest Acts to look out for alternate livelihood, wage labour in construction activities served as an immediate and prize alternative. They, gradually are coming out of their isolation. India's planning process which was just taking shape through Community Development Programme in 1952 found the changing lifestyle of the Rajis as perfect time to settle them by providing houses and agricultural land. The tribe gradually started shedding its nomadism and tended to settle having permanent dwellings. The present 11 settlements are outcome of this changing way of life of the Rajis.

The credit for initiating the process of education among the Rajis goes to a voluntary organization called Raji Vikas Samitee. This organization opened a kind of elementary educational institution, called Bal Sanskar Kendra in few villages of the Rajis between 1965-1970 (Joshi et al., 1996). Initially, cultural apprehensions inhibited the parents in sending their children to the schools. It was an experience of its kind for the members of the NGO to pursue and convince the parents and equally for the parents to come out of the cultural shock and send their children to the schools. The NGO was also handicapped financially which resulted in closing-reopening-closing the schools in some of the villages until 1978 (Joshi et al., 1996). In 1983, renewed efforts of another Voluntary Organization Semant Anusuchit Jati-Janjati Seva Sansthan in collaboration with U.P. Directorate of Social Welfare, Government of Uttar Pradesh saw re-opening of schools in villages inhabited by Rajis and by 1986 there were about 8 schools to serve then existing 8 villages. To motivate the parents and children, incentives like Rs. 30/- to parents, mid-day meals, school uniform, reading material and scholarships to children were provided (Joshi et al., 1996). One teacher and one attendant were attached to each school which was run in a single-room building. The supervision of the functioning of the schools was jointly done by the NGO, Department of Primary Education and Zila Samaj Kalyan Vibhag. The schools worked very well and almost all the children of school going age in the villages enrolled in the

schools. In 1988, the NGO handed over the schools entirely to Dept. of Social Welfare and in 1989 incentives and facilities provided were withdrawn resulting in drop in attendance (Joshi et al., 1996). This situation was aggravated by non-payment of salaries to the teachers and the entire educational process among the Rajis was gradually getting paralyzed.

The Impact

The outcome of the entire exercise and efforts in educating this nomadic people, notwithstanding the late management problems, was commendable. The effective literacy (population above age of 7) rate was 35.06, being 50.68 for males and 16.66 for females by the first quarter of 1997. The crude literacy (entire population) rate was 26.74 recording 38.01 and 12.97 for

males and females, respectively. This achievement was significant for a tribe which was complete nomad about 3-4 decades back and which had less than 4.0 per cent, of its population, literate about three decades back. Nearly 84.52 per cent of the total literates were below the age 25 while all the female literates were below this age, i.e., 25 years. Also the negative impact of management on education was quite apparent as highest percentage of literates (27.47) were in the age group of 11-15 against 21.13 per cent in the age-group of 7-10 (Table 1).

However, a look at the level of literacy at village level revealed that only 2.11 per cent of the literates passed 10th standard and 11.27 per cent passed 7th standard (Table 2).

Apparently, the level of education among this people remained confined, so far, to lower levels though the entire process of education started about 30 years back. This was largely because of socio-cultural, ecological and economic specificities associated with the Rajis and their habitat. The tribe has been very non-enterprising because of its way of life. Secondly, the facility for higher education does not exist in the nearby area/habitat. Thirdly, the tribe does not have a resource base that would support expenses of their children for higher education staying away from their native village. Thus, though, the effort in educating this nomadic people has been successful, the education has not so far been able to give expected direction to better or alternative livelihood as reflected in the their occupational pattern. They are still substantially

Table 1: Literates in various age-groups by gender

S. No.	Age-groups	Percentage of literates in various age-groups by gender		
		Males	Females	Total
1.	0-6	2.70	3.22	2.82
2.	7-10	20.72	22.58	21.13
3.	11-15	23.42	41.93	27.47
4.	16-20	15.30	22.58	16.90
5.	21-25	18.02	9.68	16.20
6.	26-30	9.92	-	7.75
7.	31-35	5.40	-	4.23
8.	36-40	1.81	-	1.40
9.	41-45	0.90	-	0.70
10.	46+	1.81	-	1.40
All Age-Groups		50.68	16.66	35.06

Source: Primary Survey, 1997-98

Table 2: Level of literacy in the entire tribe

S. No.	Settlements	Total literacy %	Percentage of literates in levels to total literates						
			Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V	Class VI	Class VII	Class VIII+
1.	Kimkhola	45.83	22.72	2.28	2.27	40.90	11.36	2.28	18.19
2.	Ganagoan	26.09	26.66	13.33	6.67	33.33	6.67	-	13.34
3.	Chifaltara	27.78	20.00	20.00	40.00	20.00	-	-	-
4.	Madanpuri	31.25	50.00	20.00	10.00	10.00	10.00	-	-
5.	Katyula	21.43	33.33	-	-	-	33.33	-	33.34
6.	Jamtari	38.89	19.05	9.52	23.81	23.81	19.05	4.76	-
7.	Chaurani	16.38	33.33	16.67	16.67	16.67	16.66	-	-
8.	Khiridwari	30.16	21.06	5.26	15.79	42.11	5.26	-	10.52
9.	Altari	26.08	66.67	-	22.22	-	11.11	-	-
10.	Kauli	25.00	66.67	33.33	-	-	-	-	-
11.	Chakarpur	46.67	-	14.28	-	42.86	28.58	-	14.28
		35.06	27.46	8.45	11.27	29.58	11.97	1.42	9.85

Source: Primary Survey, 1997-98

dependent on forests, wage labour, crude farming system and other disorganized sectors. Unlike other neighbouring tribes, Rajis are not being able to take advantage of constitutional privileges. For example, Article 16 of Indian Constitution provides for equality of opportunity in matters of public employment for all citizens irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex, residence, etc. However, equality of opportunity amongst unequals may in effect mean discrimination. Therefore, clause (4) makes an exception and provides for reservation of appointments or posts in favour of backward class of citizens. A specific provision has also been made under Article 335 in respect of services and posts for scheduled tribes. However, only three persons from the entire tribe, so far, are engaged at lower grades in organized service sector.

The Problems

The major constraints associated in promoting the education were socio-cultural, economical, ecological, content of education, structural imbalance, supporting services, quality of personnel and administration of educational system, etc. It is worth mentioning that these factors were identified as constraints in tribal education in 1981 by the National Committee on Development of Backward Areas (Planning Commission, 1981) and are still continuing. For a nomadic people like Raji which lived an isolated and avoided life apprehensive of others for generations, it was natural to suspect the motives of the voluntary organization who initiated the process of education among them. During this initial phase of introduction of education, the tribe was in total turmoil as they were facing the situation of basic conceptual change in relation to property right, ownership of natural resources, i.e., threat to their livelihood based on forests, and were also facing the threat to their tradition and value system under acculturation. It was natural that their traditional habits and value system initially deterred the parents to send their children to schools. It was largely due to lack of awareness, complete non-understanding of importance of education, and illiterate background of parents or guardians, being partially complemented by a life style based on pleasure principle which was incompatible to modernism.

During this initial phase of education, i.e., in early seventies, the school going children were the first generation learners. Their parents or elders neither had any education nor did they appreciate the value of education (Joshi et al., 1996). The required support and encouragement for the child in getting education were never accruing from such a family background. The process of education also demanded higher degree of discipline both from the parents and the children which was not easy to come because of a life-style based on generations experience of pleasure principles. Further, more than 25 per cent of the families are still practicing nomadism. They do not prefer to settle at one particular place. Superstition and beliefs also play roles as Raji families practice to abandon a house after death of a person, even if the deceased is a child. This hampers in a child's education.

The tribe lived a hand to mouth condition and still is continuing living this life though it has taken to agriculture. During the period of initiation of education, the tribe was largely dependent on forests for a living. The children also accompanied the parents to the forests and supplemented to the collections from the forests. The parents were not sufficiently convinced to send their children to schools and suffer direct economic loss. At present more than 50.46 per cent of the total income of the tribe comes from forest. Almost all the families are below poverty line and the average annual income per a family is about Rs. 6188. Major portion of the income, i.e., nearly 73.76 per cent, is spent on food. This reflects about the non-existing accumulated resource base that should be envisaged to support expenses for higher education. This is the reason why higher education still remained a distant dream.

Besides the economy, the lack of infrastructure, particularly physical infrastructure, affected to the education. It is to be admitted that infrastructure, both physical and institutional, paves the way for the growth and development of any community and the area. There are no higher educational institutions like higher secondary schools and colleges near to the settlement of the Rajis. The villages are located in or around forests at altitudes ranging from 800m to 2000m. Leaving 3 settlements, the rest of the settlements

are also located ranging a distance of 3-15 kms from the road. Considering the inhospitable terrain conditions of the Himalaya, a distance of 3 km to be covered on foot by a child is not an easy task. Further, to reach the nearby higher educational institution, the child has to cover still many km more either after reaching the road or trekking many kilometre through forests and rugged terrains. This strenuous task poses challenges, both physical and mental, particularly for a female child.

The educational system among the Rajis was an extension of the general educational system highly laden with urban orientation. Though, in theory, it is argued that learning in the elementary classes should be organized in the form of exploration by the child leading to its higher levels from what he had already picked up from his home, community and environment, in practice this is never followed (Planning Commission, 1981). The content of the education among the Rajis never took into cognizance the socio-cultural and environmental backdrop and were rather incompatible from the point of view of language, model curricula, text books, etc. The content has also no relevance to the immediate environment and towards enhancing their productive sectors, which are primarily the forest and the agriculture. Education in the practiced form is more or less a kind of mechanism to promote economic advantage and security attaching least or no significance to its qualitative value which is more in the line of argument of Thompson and Warburton (1985) that "not let your child's schooling interfere with its education". Unscrupulously ignoring to its qualitative aspect, education had not promoted quantitatively either as evidenced. The negative contributions of the present education among the Rajis have been reflected in the form that the little knowledge is dangerous. It had led to growth of unemployment and dissatisfaction among the little educated Raji youths resulting in non-adherence and disregard to culture and tradition, loss of confidence in self and authority.

Like elsewhere in tribal areas of India, provisions like no fees from the students, free reading material, scholarships to meritorious students, incentives to parents in the form of cash, etc., were made available to the Rajis initially.

They were withdrawn later in 1989 resulting in drop of attendance. Also there were delays in the grants and payment to the teachers which had led the teachers to resort to agitation. Non-payment of salaries to the teachers is still prevailing leading to partial or complete closure of many primary schools. For example schools in three settlements are closed while in another three settlements they are partially closed. In addition, the schools are run in a single room building which accommodates classes from one to fifth. Only one teacher has to teach the entire five classes. The schools also lacked minimum infrastructural facilities. The single teacher in the school, generally recruited from outside, was neither educated enough nor was trained to teach the students.

Prospects

Primarily, the possible solution to socio-cultural problems is confidence building in the parents first, which could be achieved through adult education and creating awareness. Adult education will serve as an end in itself and a pre-condition of better education for the next generation (Joshi et al., 1996). The tyranny of discipline could be avoided by reworking the schedule of teaching which would be more suitable and acceptable to them rather than they feeling being dictated. The limitations in acquiring higher education could be solved, to certain extent, by providing scholarships to Raji children. This has been a strategy of the Union Government of India as well as provincial governments. However, the approach to strategy continues to remain non-effective and the real target groups have failed substantially in taking advantage of such privileges (Samal et al., 1998). Apparently, education for Rajis, as was advocated by the National Committee on Development of Backward Areas (NCDBA), should not be uniform and the contents of education should be more oriented from the perspectives of environment, culture and aptitude. The curriculum should be suitably restructured so as to have elements of agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, cottage industry and so on.

Though there are eight primary schools among the 11 settlements of Raji, there is not a higher secondary school to strengthen the

educational structure. Therefore, a higher secondary school of residential nature need to be established as a feeder institute to the primary schools. This school should teach various subjects in various languages and make the basement for the children to wider exposures. To overcome the quality of personnel in the primary schools, the viable solution is either recruitment of the teacher, preferably a female, from the nearby area of a Raji school or a trained well educated teacher who should be paid handsomely. The schools became ineffective after the management was transferred from the Semant Anusuchit Jati-Janjati Seva Sansthan, the NGO to Department of Social Welfare, Government of Uttar Pradesh in 1988. In 1989, the administration discontinued the provisions, earlier were provided, resulting in non-functioning of the schools. It reflects the adhoc decisions and actions taken by the administration. Considering the ecological specificities, the supervisory and administrative control point should have been near to the schools or through able local representatives as was suggested by the National Committee on Development of Backward Areas (NCDBA) in 1981.

CONCLUSION

The problem of educational development among this nomadic tribe has been very complex. On the lines of observations of NCDBA (1981), uniformity in the reading material at elementary level with the central production of text books, and guide books contained material which were unfamiliar to the Raji child. Curriculum, adopted was uniform as elsewhere in the advanced areas, did not suit to the prevailing ecological and cultural conditionings. Further, the language of the text books was in Hindi which is different from the vernacular language of the Rajis belonging to Tibeto-Burman family. Learning in this situation with no relevance to the environment was felt by the tribe as an extra burden on them. A large number of children could not proceed beyond primary education. Lacks of opportunity for higher education and its application in promoting the quality of life particularly from point of view of economy has made both the parents and children indiffer-

ent to even primary education. Non-effective administration and organizational failure, as apparent, were major factors in the deterioration of education among the Rajis. Lacks of basic infrastructure in the school, trained teacher and other supporting learning facilities are not promoting education.

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KEY WORDS Central Himalaya, Raji Tribe, Nomadism, Tribal Education, Constraints and Prospects.

ABSTRACT This article discusses the efforts directed in educating the Rajis, a nomadic tribe of the Central Himalayan region of India, the outcome of the efforts and the impacts, the constraints and the prospects associated with the process of education. Efforts to promote education are being made by the Provincial and the Union Government of India to develop this numerically reducing and underdeveloped nomadic tribe. The tribe has achieved an effective literacy percentage of 35.06. However, a wide gap galores between male (50.68%) and female literacy (16.66%). Moreover, the problem of educational development among this nomadic tribe has been very complex. Uniformity in the reading material subscribing text books, and guide books containing material unfamiliar to the child; ecologically and culturally incompatible curriculum, unfamiliar language of the text books, etc., imposed a learning on this people with no relevance to the environment. Lack of opportunity for higher education and its application in promoting the quality of life particularly from the point of view of economy, non-effective administration and organizational failure, non-cognizance of significance of ecological and socio-cultural specificities, etc., were major factors in the non-promotion of education among the Rajis. It was also observed that Non Governmental Organizations were being more effective in promoting education.

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