

WITH NEP MANDATE, ODISHA BATS FOR TRIBALS' MOTHER TONGUE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

The new National Education Policy lays emphasis on imparting teaching in mother tongue in primary classes. But when the language-base of Odisha's adivasi communities is as diverse as 21 spoken languages further divided into 74 dialects, the task appears to be quite onerous.

However, Odisha's decade-long experiment in multi-lingual education may come in handy to take up the challenge.

The ST and SC Development Department of the State government has already started working on project called 'Samhati' to address the language issues faced by tribal students in early grades or elementary classes. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) along with the Academy of Tribal Language and Culture (ATLC), Bhubaneswar are implementing the project.

The department manages 1,732 residential educational institutions across the State. More than 4.5 lakh tribal and Scheduled Caste students from primary to secondary level with free lodging, 85 boarding facilities are managed by the department. Now under, Samhati, the department plans to cover approximately 2.5 lakh students in 1,450 primary schools in the State.

In addition, the School and Mass Education department also manages about 1,500 schools in 17 tribal dominated districts where students are taught in tribal languages.

As many as 3,328 teachers and 222 language teachers are in place to impart teaching in tribal languages.

Of the 21 languages, Santhali — the only language which has been included in eighth schedule of Constitution — is taught in its own *ol chiki* script while rest of tribal languages have Odia scripts.

Although it is easy to prescribe mother tongue as medium of instruction up to Class V, it is tough to implement. Odisha is home to 62 tribal communities including 13 particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs), making it the State with the most diverse indigenous communities in India.

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