

# Education and the Mech Tribe : A Conspectus

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**Abstract:** Education is crucial or development of an individual which enhance one's power to become self-reliant. It is considered as one of the prime determinants of change in the position of an individual in a society. This paper is an attempt to deal with the extent of educational situation among the Mech Tribe . The study was based on primary data collected through field survey. The study was conducted in the Uttar Simlabari village located in the Community Development Block Alipurduar I under Alipurduar district of West Bengal .The study highlights that there has been development and change in educational situation of Meches in present day generation compared to their parents' generation. Better education is evident among young age generation of present day Meches. Meches are now more aware about positive role of education and its necessity in today's modern competitive society. The study recommends that the continuance of withdrawal of "pass and fail" policy may be reconsidered and an in-depth study on the impact of such policy of 'pass and fail' withdrawal particularly among the students of the Mech community.

**Key Words:** Mech , Tribe, Literacy , Education , Constraints , Drop-out , Pass and Fail .

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Education is one of the important means by which individuals can improve personal qualities, build capacity levels, overcome hindrances , compete by expanding opportunities for overall improvement in their well - beings . Education is one of the primary agents to transform tribes towards development . It plays not only as an input for economic and social development of tribal population, but also helps to build their inner strength to face the new challenges of present day modern, competitive and complex life as well as to deal with outsiders on equal term. Although the state and central government have made some sincere efforts for the overall development of Scheduled Tribes , yet they are still behind in almost all the standard parameters of development . Studies show that many of the tribal communities of this country are unaware of the programmes and policies specifically meant for their development . For example, there are various education policies and government initiatives to improve the literacy rate of the tribal communities , but the tribal people are still lagging behind from the development mainly in the education arena (Rupavath, 2016)<sup>1</sup> . Under this circumstance, the present study attempts to investigate the extent of present day educational situation among Meches of North Bengal .

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There is a substantial amount of literatures on the condition of tribal education in India. A very brief review may be worthwhile with a view to highlight some of the recent studies on tribal education. A number of scholars have attempted to investigate and studied the slow progress in tribal education and the increase in drop-out from school among tribal children , for instances, Bapat (1994)<sup>2</sup>, Burman (1996)<sup>3</sup>, Srivastava (1996)<sup>4</sup>, Lal (2005)<sup>5</sup>, Sahu (2014)<sup>6</sup>, Basu and Chatterjee (2014)<sup>7</sup>, Haseena and Mohammed (2014)<sup>8</sup>, Brahmanandam and Babu (2016)<sup>9</sup>. These studies identified several factors like the mode of instruction in the school and course curriculum not apposite to their culture .

## 3. OBJECTIVE:

The present study intends to investigate the educational situation of the Mech tribal populations inhabiting in Uttar Simlabari village of Alipurduar district in the state of West Bengal .

## 4. MATERIAL AND METHODS:

### *Selection of Mech Tribe and the Study Area*

The Mech, is a scheduled tribe population living mainly in Alipurduar district of North Bengal region of the state of West Bengal , India . Meches live mingled with other communities in the villages . For the purpose of the study, Uttar Simlabari village located 25 km. away from Alipurduar district town was selected. This village is under the jurisdiction of Alipurduar Police Station and Alipurduar sub-Division of Alipurduar district .Information collected by interviewing a member each of all the 43 Mech households living in the

village who were aged 16 years and above. Moreover, the informal discussions with the school teachers and some Mech members were also done to elicit additional information on issues related to the present day educational situation in the village.

## 5. TRIBAL SCENARIO:

Total Scheduled Tribe population in India is 10,42,81,034, comprising 8.6% of total population of India. In West Bengal state, total population of Scheduled Tribe is 52,96,953, comprising 5.8% of total population of the state (Census of India, 2011)<sup>10</sup>. Scheduled Tribes in the state predominantly reside in rural areas (91.7%). There are 40 numbers of different Scheduled Tribe communities in West Bengal including Mech Tribe. According to Census of India (2011), Meches are numbered only 41,242 comprising 0.8% of the total tribal population in West Bengal. Main concentration of Mech tribal group is in the northern parts of West Bengal, namely North Bengal (98.3%). In North Bengal, majority of them (91.5%) are concentrated in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri districts.

## 6. EXTENT OF EDUCATIONAL SITUATION AMONG MECH TRIBE:

Education has been prime indicator and crucial for individuals' development to enhance their power of capability towards becoming self-reliant. It is one of the prime determinants of change in the position of an individual in a society. It influences the direction of behavior and action of an individual, which in turn influences the social position of that individual. Therefore, literacy, educational attainment, necessity of education, educational aspirations, their problems and prospects are part and parcel of popular hopes for assured career and future of a person as well as the educability of children in a family. Taking above, attempts are made in the successive presentation to visualize the extent of prevailing educational scenario among Meches of Uttar Simlabari village.

### 6.1. Scenario of Tribal Literacy:

Taking the comparative trend of tribal literacy from 1991 to 2011, the overall percentage of literacy is comparatively higher among Meches than that of all Scheduled Tribes average in the years of 1991, 2001 and 2011 at all India and West Bengal state level. Similar trend is visible even in case of female literacy. Apart from these, percentage of literacy is comparatively more higher among males than that of females in both cases of Mech tribe and all Scheduled Tribes (Table 1.1). Percentage gaps in total and female literacy are significantly low among Meches than that of all Scheduled Tribes in 2011 (Table 1.1).

### 6.2. Comparative Educational attainment of Meches and other Scheduled Tribes in Uttar Simlabari Village:

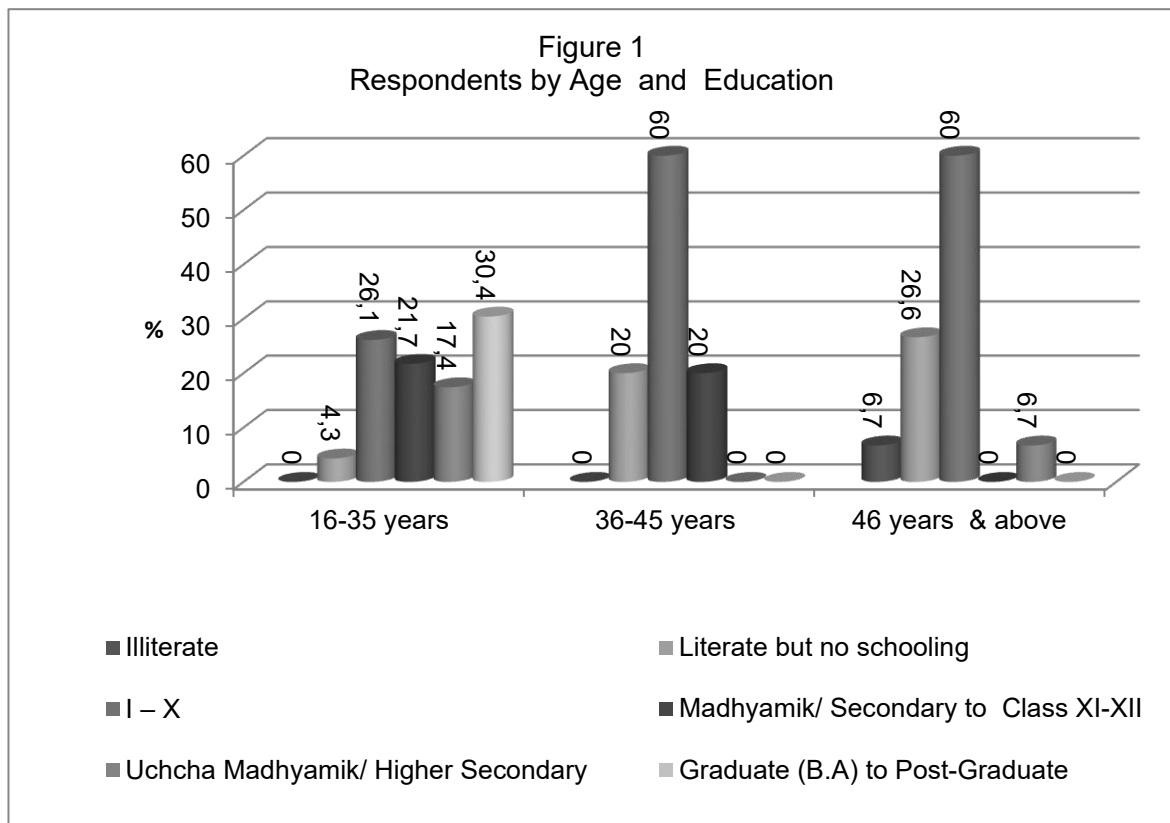
Enumerated data of 43 Mech and 48 other tribal population indicates that the illiterates as a whole is less among Meches as compared to other Scheduled Tribes in the village. Sex-wise, illiterates are more among females than that of males in both cases of Meches and other Scheduled Tribes. Male illiterates is much higher among other Scheduled Tribes than that of male Meches. Similarly, percentage of female illiterates is much higher among other Scheduled Tribes as compared to female Meches (Table 1.2). Educational level from Madhyamik to Higher Secondary is comparatively more among Meches as compared to other Scheduled Tribes. Graduate/Post-Graduate is found among Meches and no one found among other Scheduled Tribes (Table 1.2).

### 6.3. Educational attainment by Age Groups:

It is evident from Figure 1 that youth age groups (16-35 years) are having better educational level taking from Secondary to Post-Graduate level as compared to other age groups. While, respondents of next other higher age groups onwards, they are having low educational level including literate but no schooling/illiterates. So, it may be said that as a whole better education is discernible among youth age generation of Meches.

### 6.4. Educational attainment by Respondent and Respondents' Parents:

Education of parents i.e. both mother and father is very important for better educability of children. A comparative analysis of educational attainment of respondents and their parents shows that educational level of the respondents are comparatively better to a extent than that of their parents' educational level (Table 1.3).



### 6.5. Knowing Computer Application:

Of the total respondents, about 21.0% know the computer application and can use computer as per requirements. It may be taken as a positive change among the present day Mech generation as compared to their parents' generation who did not have such access to computer and knowledge.

### 6.6. Constraints faced during Schooling/ Education Career

It may be the fact that various constraints are used to be faced by students during their schooling / educational career . In this context , it is observed that “Financial problem and the poverty” was the main constraint which they faced during their schooling / educational career. Moreover , it is also reported by them that “Long distance of Schools / Colleges from residence, non-availability of Private Tuition problem and Transportation problem” were important constraints during their schooling / educational career. Such constraints were more crucial for education of females in the area .

### 6.7. Withdrawal of “Pass and Fail” in Educational System

Since 2011 , system of “Pass and Fail” in schooling particularly from Class I to Class VIII was withdrawn as a policy matter in view to curb the school dropout rate and its eradication . In this context , majority (81.4%) have opined the policy of such “Withdrawal of Pass and Fail system” is not good and favourable for students . The reasons behind as reported are , as follows .

- As there is no system of “Pass and Fail” in schooling from Class I to Class VIII, the students usually avoid to read book and learn properly.
- Withdrawal of “Pass and Fail” creates the lack of interest and sincerity among students to read class curriculum and learn it properly.
- Withdrawal of “Pass and Fail” have resulted into less attendance in regular classes as students usually skip regular classes in school .
- Overall, it contributes towards deviation of students from aspiration to pass in examination from one to another classes and to go for higher education and career , while they are usually more inclined to waste time by playing, gossiping , roaming and also otherwise.

### 6.8. Educational Environment in Schools:

In fact , extent of educational environment in schools is very important for the educational career of students . In this context, 72.0% opined that educational environment in school for educational career of students is good . At the same time , 11.5% viewed it negatively and commented as ‘ not good’ in present days. Moreover, 14.0% did not make any opinion in this regard .

### 6.9. Extent of Dropout from Schooling:

It may be relevant to point out the informal views of the school teachers who pointed out that the prevailing dropout from school is mainly due to changing of school from one to another, and the rate of dropout from schooling is negligible in present days. Moreover, Mid-Day-Meals for students in Schools is also important reason behind the negligible rate of dropout from schooling. It is also pointed out by them that the main problem in schooling nowadays is less attendance of students in regular classes of school in the area. Even among those students who attend the regular classes, the attendance of girl students are more than that of boys. Experience and informal opinion of teachers reveals that the reason behind the irregular attendance of students in classes is rooted in primary classes. Because of withdrawal of "Pass and Fail" policy, students in primary classes are promoted from one to next higher classes even without proper learning of class curriculum from Class I to Class IV. As a result, students after getting admission in higher classes from Class V onwards, they are usually not in a position to adapt and cope up with learning materials (curriculum) of successive higher class standard. This ultimately creates the lack of interest and motivation among students to attend regular classes. Because the students know the very fact that even they do not attend regular classes, do not read and learn class curriculum properly, they would be promoted to next higher classes successively. This in turn affect adversely the interest and motivation of students to read and learn the class curriculum properly in turn adversely affect their educational aspiration.

### 6.10. Necessity of Education

Almost all of the respondent cases have agreed and viewed that education is necessary for men and women both in the society. Besides, they have reported the following reasons behind the necessity of education.

- The educated person can get better job both in Government as well as in Private sectors.
- The educated one can look after his children more in a better way, can teach and guide them more in a better way for educational career.
- Education make the person self dependent and self reliant in turn more independent in the society.
- The educated person can have more exposure and interaction with outside world that can make them more confident and thereby can have more experience to survive in a better way at par the necessity of the prevailing modern society.
- Educated one can maintain the family expenses in a well fashion and can do the financial planning and management for the family.
- The educated person can do the necessary official work easily by applying /attending /interacting properly like various officials of Government and other Offices as well as interact with the people more in a comfortable manner and can face the problem more confidently for its solving.

### 6.11. Educational Aspiration

It is the fact that positive attitude towards necessity of education and educational aspiration in turn would affect the aspiration level for boys and girls. In this context, it is found that 58.1% of total respondents as a whole have aspired to get their both boy and girl child educated in between Graduate to Ph.D. Degree (Table 1.4).

### 6.12. Inspiration for Education received from Parents

Indeed, parents' guidance and inspiration is very important to motivate their children during their course of schooling. In this context, 27.9% reported that they have received inspiration from mothers' end only, because their fathers could not give due attention to their education. Moreover, 34.9% reported that both of their mothers and fathers together inspired them during their educational career. Besides, 23.3% reported that they did not receive any such inspiration from the parents' end, and cited the following reasons behind the non-receipt of inspiration from parents for their educational career.

- Parents were illiterate and never realised to the necessity of their children's education as well as they were not having any knowledge and exposure to education.
- Lack of financial ability of parents mainly poverty had been the reason behind for not getting admitted in school or compelled to be dropped out, in turn, they were engaged in work for earning only.
- Parents compelled them to get married and also the incidence of love marriage at early age for which they had to be dropped out from schooling, and even after getting admitted in College too.

### 6.12. Education and Early Marriage:

Meches have the tradition of early age marriages. In this context, all have preferred minimum 20 years and above age at marriage for males, and minimum 18 years and above age for females (Table 5).

Such attitudes may be due to day by day growing trend of literacy and education among the Meches in the area. Apart from these they may have now the perception about the ill effect of marriage at early ages which largely affects adversely the educability of an individual besides health hazards. That may be why they now do not prefer early age marriages for both females and males.

### **6.13. Education and Family size :**

Indeed, larger the family size means more involvement of females in performing huge household chores along with males, more expenses for looking after children as well as for their education, in turn more burden that affects educability of children adversely, and impede their overall progress in a society. Apart from other factors, education also may contribute behind motivation of an individual to think positively and thereby the educated one may deviate himself/herself from having large family. In this context, it is observed that 46.5% preferred convenient small family size of having 3 to 4 members, followed by medium size family having 5 to 6 members (39.6%) in a family and 13.9% preferred large size family having 7 members and above in a family.

## **7. CONCLUSION:**

Main concluding points that emerged from findings of the study are, as follows.

- Better education is evident among young age generation of Meches. Some of the Meches even know computer application for its operational use. Generation-wise, education is better among present day generation of Meches as compared to their parents'/forefathers' generation.
- The major constrains of education are financial problem, problem of long distance of schools/colleges from residence, problem of non-availability of tuition and transportation problem which have been faced by Meches during their schooling/educational career.
- Withdrawal of "Pass and Fail" system in schooling from Class I to Class VIII have adverse effects upon students which are evident in terms of their avoidance, lack of interest and sincerity to read the class curriculum for learning it properly. Moreover, it contributed towards deviation of students' aspiration to get promotion by passing properly from one to next higher class. Resultantly, after promotion to next successive higher classes as per policy they cannot cope up with and grasp over the study curriculum of that higher class standard, in turn, results into irregular and less attendance of students in their regular classes.
- Mid-day meal system in schools and also withdrawal of "Pass and Fail" system in schooling have contributed in decline of school dropout.
- As a whole, it can be said that Meches of present day society are now having higher educational aspirations.
- Occurrence of marriages at early age is evident among Meches. In contrast to such marriages, there is now a trend among Meches to prefer minimum 20 years and above age at marriage for males and minimum 18 years and above age for females in their present day society.
- There is the trend evident among the educated Meches who now prefer to have small/medium family size instead of large family.

Finally, it may be concluded that there has been development and change in educational situation of Meches in present day generation compared to their parents' generation. Meches are now more aware about positive role of education and its necessity in today's modern competitive society.

## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The study recommends that the continuance of withdrawal of "pass and fail" policy may be reviewed.

It also recommends an in-depth study on the impact of such policy of 'pass and fail' withdrawal particularly among the students of the Mech community and other Tribal communities.

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### Tables

Table: 1 Literacy Trend of All Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Mech Population,1991 to 2011

Year	Communities	Literacy %			Gap in literacy %		
		Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1991	India Total	52.2	64.1	39.3	<b>Gap in All India ST Literacy to India Total Literacy</b>		
	India Total ST	29.6	40.6	18.2	22.6	23.5	21.1
	West Bengal Total	57.7	67.8	46.6	<b>Gap in All ST and Mech Literacy to Total West Bengal Literacy</b>		
	West Bengal Total ST	27.9	40.1	15.0	29.8	27.7	31.6
	West Bengal Total Mech	48.9	58.4	38.0	8.8	9.4	8.6
2001	India Total	64.8	75.3	53.7	<b>Gap in All India ST Literacy to India Total Literacy</b>		
	India Total ST	47.1	59.2	34.8	17.7	16.1	18.9
	West Bengal Total	68.6	77.2	59.6	<b>Gap in All ST and Mech Literacy to Total West Bengal Literacy</b>		
	West Bengal Total ST	43.4	57.4	29.1	25.2	19.8	30.5
	West Bengal Total Mech	65.5	75.6	55.2	3.1	1.6	4.4
2011	India Total	74.0	82.1	65.5	<b>Gap in All India ST Literacy to India Total Literacy</b>		
	India Total ST	59.9	68.5	49.3	14.1	13.6	16.2
	West Bengal Total	76.3	81.7	70.5	<b>Gap in All ST and Mech Literacy to Total West Bengal Literacy</b>		
	West Bengal Total ST	57.9	68.2	47.7	18.4	13.5	22.8
	West Bengal Total Mech	74.2	80.8	67.6	2.1	0.9	2.9

Note : . Excluding 0-6 years population .

Source : . Census of India, 1991, 2001 and 2011, Directorate of Census Operation , West Bengal Region, Salt Lake , Kolkata .

Table : 2.1 Mech and Other Scheduled Tribe population by Educational Attainment

(Percentage distribution)

Education Level	Mech Scheduled Tribe			Other Scheduled Tribes		
	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Illiterate	8.9	20.7	14.4	26.5	34.6	30.1
Literate but no schooling	13.9	17.2	15.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
Class I - IV	3.0	4.6	3.7	18.2	24.0	20.8
Class V - VIII	19.8	21.8	20.7	33.3	16.4	25.8
Class IX - X	13.9	10.3	12.2	12.1	14.4	13.1
Madhyamik/Secondary	7.9	10.3	9.0	6.8	6.7	6.8
Class XI - XII	7.9	2.3	5.3	0.0	1.0	0.4
Uchcha Madhyamik / Senior Secondary	9.9	5.7	8.0	3.0	2.9	3.0
Graduate (B.A.) Student	6.9	2.3	4.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Graduate	6.9	4.6	5.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
Post Graduate	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	N= 101	N= 87	N= 188	N= 132	N= 104	N= 236

- Note : 1. Excluding minor child (0 – 6 years) population who were not admitted in School.  
2. Data based on enumeration of the 91 Tribal households (Mech 43 and other Scheduled Tribes 48 households).  
3. Other Scheduled Tribes 45 households belong to descendants of Chotanagpur Tribes namely, Oraon, Munda and Mahali, who are locally identified as ‘Adibasi’ and 3 Rabha households.

Source : Field Survey , 2017 .

Table : 2.2 Educational Attainment by Respondents and Respondents’ Parents

(Percentage Distribution) (N = 43 cases)

Educational Level	Respondent	Respondents’ Parents	
		Father	Mother
Illiterate	2.3	20.9	53.5
Literate but no schooling	14.0	30.2	18.6
I – IV	7.0	11.6	7.0
V – VIII	23.2	11.6	11.6
IX - X	11.6	16.3	2.3
Madhyamik/ Secondary	7.0	0.0	4.7
XI –XII	7.0	0.0	2.3
Uchcha Madhyamik/ Higher Secondary	11.6	4.7	0.0
Graduate (B.A)	14.0	4.7	0.0
Post-Graduate (M.A)	2.3	0.0	0.0

Note : Respondents including students.

Source : Field Survey , 2017

Table : 2.3 Educational Aspiration of Respondents

(N = 43 cases) (Percentage Distribution)

Educational Aspiration Level	For Self	For Boy Child	For Girl Child
As far as possible according to interest and capability of Child	0.0	32.5	32.5
Madhyamik/Secondary to Higher Secondary/Senior Secondary	20.9	9.3	9.3
Graduate (B.A./B.Com./B.Sc./B.Ed./Engineering)	51.2	39.5	39.5
M.A./ Post-Graduate	7.0	9.3	9.3
Ph. D.	2.3	9.3	9.3
No aspiration	18.6	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	99.9	99.9

Source : Field Survey , 2017