

Impact of COVID-19 on the Right to Education of Labour of Tea Gardens in India: A Study on Western Duars Region

Anil Kumar Biswas

Department of Political Science, The University of Burdwan, Burdwan, India

Email address:

bappa_anil@rediffmail.com

To cite this article:

Anil Kumar Biswas. Impact of COVID-19 on the Right to Education of Labour of Tea Gardens in India: A Study on Western Duars Region. *Science Journal of Education*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2022, pp. 39-48. doi: 10.11648/j.sjedu.20221001.16

Received: January 5, 2022; **Accepted:** January 24, 2022; **Published:** February 16, 2022

Abstract: Human society is facing serious challenges due to outbreak of COVID-19. Education is one of the basic human rights, paralyzed due to the feared situation. 1.6 billion students across world were forced to confined home and 25 crore students from 15.5 lakh schools in India have been affected due to the pandemic. Students from vulnerable communities especially tribal people those who are working in tea gardens as labours are immensely affected. Tribal poor labours of tea garden of western duars region are badly affected due to the adverse situation; although government has taken initiative for online education. In this context the main objects of the paper are to analysis the impact of COVID-19 on the Right to Education of labour of tea gardens in India in general and western duars region in particular and also analysis whether the existing governmental arrangements is able to combat the situation. The empirical study funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, India, under IMPRESS scheme based on primary and secondary data. The researcher purposively selected thirty-six tea gardens from 145 as sample and eighteen primary and upper primary schools where students of the gardens are studying. Primary data collected from the students, teachers, guardians and garden management by using structured questioners. As secondary sources researcher consulted with published books, journals, newspapers and government records. Content analysis also followed for the completion of research work. After collection of primary and secondary data researcher used simple statistical tools for drawing findings. The major findings of the research are education rights of the children of labour of tea gardens are totally paralyzed in the pandemic situation, due to the poor socio-economic condition children from the tea gardens cannot able to receive the facilities of online mode of education. In conclusion it is say that there is need to special attention to the children of labours of tea gardens in particular and tribal children in general. Participation of garden management, NGO's, local government and civil society will be able to protect and promote the education rights of the communities.

Keywords: Right to Education, Tea Garden, Labour, Online Education, COVID-19, Pandemic, Civil Society, NGO

1. Introduction

Human society across world facing serious challenges since late 2019 in every aspects of their life due to the outbreak of COVID 19. Human society across world is now fighting an unequal fight against the foe of civilization using by their full capability and intellectuality. Not only underprivileged countries; privileged countries also are facing serious crisis from this pandemic. The situation is more and more serious in underprivileged countries; like as south Asia, Africa and Latin America. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh of South Asian region and Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Chile from Latin American region and entire African region

are badly affected. In this adverse situation education system across world suffering badly. Education is one of the basic human rights; but it is totally paralyzed due to the pandemic situation across world. About 60 million students across world are forced to confined home due to the situation during February March 2020 and it is increasing into 1.6 billion day by day. In India almost 25 crore students from 15.5 lakh schools have been affected due to the nationwide shutdown of educational institutions since March 2020 on the outbreak of COVID-19. Students from vulnerable communities are immensely affected due to the pandemic across world. Tribal communities in India are badly affected. Tribal people in India especially those who are depended on tea industries as

labours for their livelihood are badly affected in every aspect of their life in the pandemic situation. Children of tea tribal communities always staying outside the arena of education due to their vulnerable situation since very early day; the pandemic situation cement another serious challenge to their existing vulnerable living condition. The western duars region, foothills of Himalaya is demarcated eastern side by Sankosh river and western side by river Tista; the northern part of West Bengal popularly known for famous tea. But this pandemic situation badly affected the industry and the dependents of the industry. In the adverse situation government has taken policy for online education in all level of educational institutions for continuing learning from home. But children from tribal communities are not equipped to continue their learning through the mode of education. In this context the paper has trying to analysis the emerging situation in education system in India due to COVID-19; analysis the situation suffered by the children of tribal communities especially children of labours of tea gardens of western duars region of West Bengal and also analysis the existing governmental arrangements to continue the education from home by combating the situation. Hope this study able to be making an understanding on the educational status of the tribal communities in general and tribal labours working in tea gardens in particular in the amidst of COVID-19.

Research Questions of the Study

The study is trying to broadly answer the following questions:

- i. whether the education sector of the country is suffering due to COVID-19?
- ii. Whether education of vulnerable communities especially children of tribal tea workers are badly paralyzed due to COVID-19 outbreak in India?
- iii. Whether governmental arrangement for education at the time of COVID-19 outbreak helping the children of workers in tea gardens?
- iv. Whether children of vulnerable communities are equipped for online education?

2. Methodology

2.1. Design

The empirical study funded by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, India, under IMPRESS scheme based on primary and secondary data.

2.2. Selection of Sample

The western duars region comprising Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar district having 145 organized tea gardens. The researcher purposively selected thirty-six tea gardens as sample across region and eighteen primary and upper primary schools where students of the gardens are studying.

2.3. Procedure of Data Collection

Primary data collected from the students, teachers,

guardians and garden management by using structured questioners. Researcher framed four types of structured questioners for interviewing with students, guardians, teachers and officials of tea gardens. Data collected during 2019-2021 for completion of the work. As secondary sources researcher consulted with published books, journals, newspapers and government records. Content analysis also followed for the completion of research work.

2.4. Analysis of Data

Primary data collected from field through interview method with structured questioners and informal interview and secondary data from various secondary sources. After collection of data researcher formalize the data through tabulation sheet for drawing findings.

3. Result

3.1. Major Education Policies in India

‘The modern education system of British raj was first developed in three presidencies (Bombay, Calcutta and Madras)’ [1]. In 1937 Gandhiji, has raised his voice in favor of universal education. After independence Kothari Commission (1964-1966) was set up to formulate a coherent education policy for India. The Kothari Commission pointed out the need for making work experience and social and national service as an integral part of education; urgent need for providing equal opportunities to achieve social and national integration. The commission also recommended increasing the expenditure on education from 2.9 per cent GDP to 6 per cent. ‘On the basis of the recommendation of Kothari Commission, former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi announced a new education policy, National Policy on Education (NEP) in 1986’ [2]. Under this New Education Policy more than 90 per cent of the country’s rural population was within a Kilometer of schooling facilities and more states had adopted a common education structure. In order to ensure quality education to all following initiatives have been implemented time to time. Operation Blackboard, Restructuring and reorganization of Teacher Education (1987), Minimum levels of learning (1991), National Programme for Nutritional Support to Primary Education (1995), District Primary Education Programme (1993), District Primary School Council (DPSC), (West Bengal) was set up in 1990, Sarva Shikha Abhijan (SSA) (2001). The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shikha Abhijan (RMSA), designed by Ministry of Human Resource Development on the lines of SSA, is expected to bring in the desired investments in Secondary Education and facilitate the process of universalizing secondary education in the country. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) set up a committee on decentralized management in 1993 to formulate the guidelines on decentralization reforms in education in the context of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution. The Village Education Committee (VEC), the lowest at the village levels committee on elementary

education. Right to Education Act (2009) is a landmark initiative of Government for strengthening education system in India. The Right of Children to free and compulsory education came into force in April 2010. Under 'Right to Education' Act now education is fundamental rights of every citizen residing across country. The main aims of the act are to inclusion of all children in elementary education and strengthening the monitoring system for continuing the education up to elementary level. In 2017, 'Ministry of Human Resource Development has appointed a committee headed by K. Kasturirangan for preparing draft of 'National Education Policy' [3]. The main aim of 'National Education Policy' for elementary level is to ensuring quality learning outcomes in elementary level, reinstallation of detention policy in elementary level for maintaining quality. For promoting quality, the policy gives importance on teacher education, inclusion of new knowledge, pedagogies and approaches for teaching of science, mathematics and technology in school education to improve learning outcome of every students.

3.2. A Profile of Tribes in India

Tribal people constitute roughly 8 per cent of the country's total population. The main concentration of tribal population is in central India and in the North-eastern states. Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andra Pradesh and West Bengal together account for about four-fifths of the total tribal population of the country, but the tribal percentages of these states' population vary from 5.5 per cent to 31.8 per cent. On the other hand, several smaller states, notably in the north-east of the country, have much higher percentages from 64 per cent to 95 per cent, but account for a small proportion of tribal people in the country. As per 2011 census 10,42,81,034 tribal people are living across the country. Out of them, more than 10 crore population 5,24,09,823 are male and 5,18,71,211 are female. Most of them are living in rural areas and only 10.3 per cent are living in urban and semi-urban areas. They are the disadvantaged and vulnerable section of society by means of all aspects of their life. Some major tribes of India are Aka, Dalfa, Miri, Gurung, Apatani, Mishmi, Khamti, Singpho, Naga, Kuki, Lushai, Kashi, Garo, Lepcha, Tharu, Bhoksa, Khasa, Bhutia, Raji, Bodo, Adi, Apatani, Monpa, Nocte, Deori, Karbi, Kamba, Mising, Mukup, Padam, Phake, Sherdukpen, Singpho, Tangsa, Tani, Wancho, Toto, Savara, Gadaba, Borido, Juang, Kharia, Khond Bhumji, Munda, Santhal, Oraon, Ho, Birhor, Katkari, Kol, Bhil, Gond, Koraku, Agaria, Pradhan, Muria, Kadar, Kanikkar, Malvadam, Malakuravan, Toda, Badaga, Kota, Jarwa and Onge. The tribal communities of the country are disadvantaged and vulnerable section of society by means of all aspects of their life such as education, health and other socio-economic indicators. These disadvantaged communities are called Scheduled Tribe declared by the government of India. They are lagging behind the rest of the population of the country in terms of various developmental indicators such as social, economic and political. The

definition of Scheduled tribe is not clear in the Constitution itself. President of India is empowered to draw up a list in consultation with the governor of each state, subject to revision by parliament. 'The President has made orders, specifically the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the different states in India, which have since been amended by acts of Parliament' [4].

3.3. Major Tribes of West Bengal

As per 2011 Census, the total population of West Bengal is 9,13,47,736. Out of them 4,69,27,389 are male and 4,44,20,347 are female. Out of them, tribal people's share is only 52,96,963 which is 5.8 per cent of the total population of the state and 5.08 per cent of the country's population. Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, Jhargram, Paschim Medinipur Darjeeling, Kalimpong are the highest tribal populated districts. There are 40 Scheduled Tribes are in the state. Major tribes of the state are Santal, Oraon, Munda, Bhumiji, Kora, Lodha, Mahali, Bhutia, Tamang, Subba, Bedia, Savar, Asur, Baiga, Sherpa, Toto, Dukpa, Kagatay, Tibetan, Yolmo, Birhor, Birjia, Chakma, Chero, Chik Baraik, Garo, Gond, Gorait, Hajang, Ho, Karmali, Karwar, Khond, Kisan, Korwa, Lepcha, Kheria, Kharia, Lohara, Lohra, Magh, Mahli, Mal Pahariya, Mech, Mru, Nagesia, Parhaiya and Rabha. Out of these communities Santal are the highest tribal population of the state followed by Oraon. Santal community comprising more than 51.8 per cent of total tribal population of the state and Oraon shared 14 per cent of total tribal population of the state. On the other hand, '3 communities namely Lodha, Birhor and Toto have been declared as primitive tribes' [5] by the Government of India due to their vulnerabilities in every aspect of their life. The total populations of these three communities are 57,186; where 'Totos are shared only 1358 population as declared a smallest tribe in state as per census report 2011' [6]. Most of the tribal communities are living in hilly regions, forest areas and tea gardens of the state. All the tribal communities of the state are disadvantaged and vulnerable in respect of their livelihood activities. They are lagging behind the other communities in respect of education, health, others socio-economic parameters and political participation.

3.4. Tribes of Western Duars Region and Their Life

Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda districts are comprising North Bengal the northern region of West Bengal state. Out of these districts Alipurduar, Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Uttar Dinajpur comprising the tea belt of West Bengal. Out of these Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Kalimpong are covering maximum number of tea gardens of the state. Darjeeling and Kalimpong located in Himalayan region produced world famous tea till date. On the other hand, Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri situated in the foothills of Himalaya is also produced good quality and large amount of tea since early British era. Alipurduar district has a

population of about 17 lakh and area about 3383 Sq. Km. Tribal population of this district is 325082. There are 61 organized tea gardens in Alipurduar district. 'Jalpaiguri is said to have derived its name from olive trees, 'Jalpai' in Bengali' [7]. Total population of this district is 23,81,596 as per 2011 Census report. Out of them 731704 are tribal people. Most of the tribal people are living in forest and tea garden areas. There are 84 tea gardens in the districts. Most of the labours of tea gardens are tribal; they are living in the tea gardens and its adjoining areas. Major tribal communities those who are working as workers in tea gardens in the tea belt of the state are 'Santal, Munda, Oroan, Asur, Ho, Birhor, Kisan, Lodha, Tamang, Yolmo, Kharia, Bhumiji, Mahali, Sherpa, Chik Baraik, Mal Pahariya, Lohara, Lepcha, Mahali, Lohra and Rabha. Out of these tribes Santal, Munda, Oroan are the major suppliers of the labours in the tea industries since early British era' [8]. The major tribes engaging as tea workers in the tea gardens are mostly forced migrated from Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa in early British period by European planters. 'Expansion of tea plantation and industry in British period attracted immigrant labours from Madhya Pradesh, Chotonagpur, Santal Paragana and Orissa' [7]. Since than the immigrant people are living here in various tea gardens of this region for working as labour in tea gardens. Key of tea production kept by the communities since very

early period of plantation; but till date socio-economic status of the tea workers is very pitiful. They have been living below minimum standard of living since the very beginning. They are mostly illiterate and their children, mostly if not always do not receive even the basic elementary education.

3.5. A Brief Literacy Profile of Tribal People in India

Right to Education Act passed in parliament in 2009 and it came into force in April 2010. Since than education is a fundamental right of every citizen in India; it mandated that it is duty of the guardian of children to send them to school for education. Completion of education up to upper primary is compulsory for every child and it is absolutely free for all. India is a country comprising people from various stratified section of society; tribal people are the most vulnerable ethnic communities living across country till date lagging behind all aspect of living standard. Educationally they are most backward compared to other communities in the country. Literacy data of government of India since independence showing that the tribal people are more backward compared to national level literacy rate. Census report since 1961 indicates that literacy rate of the tribal population of the country is much lower than other communities.

Table 1. Average literacy rate and literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in India (1961-2011).

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Over all literacy rate in per cent	28.3	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	72.99
Literacy rate of ST's in percent	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	58.96

Source: Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribes in India 2011.

Above table indicates that literacy rate of the tribal population of the country is much lower than national average literacy rate. The 1961 census data showing that the overall literacy rate of the country was 28.3 per cent; whereas literacy rate of the tribal people was only 8.53 per cent. In 1971, literacy rate of overall population was 34.45 per cent and tribal literacy rate was only 11.30 per cent. In 1981 census report indicates that the rate of national average was 43.57 per cent and tribal literacy rate was 16.35 per cent; in 1991 tribal literacy rate was 29.60 per cent against national average of 52.21 per cent. Tribal literacy rate was 47.10 per cent in 2001 against 64.84 per cent national average and the ratio of tribal literacy was 58.96 per cent against 72.99 per cent national average in 2011. Above table showing that the literacy rate of the tribal population is always much lower than national average. Literacy rate of tribal population increased from 8.53 per cent to 58.96 per cent during the period of 1961 to 2011. Literacy rate among the tribal people increased gradually during the period; but till date 41 per cent people are illiterate. Imbalance of literacy among tribal

people also another feature of education profile of tribal people. Those who are living in urban area are more literate than those who are living in rural hilly and forest areas. Near about 90 per cent tribal people are living in rural India; only 10 per cent are living in urban areas and urban tribal peoples mostly are came from rural areas for seeking jobs, so literacy rate among urban tribal people is too high compared to rural dwellers.

3.6. A Brief Literacy Profile of Tribal People in West Bengal

West Bengal is a state where 5.8 per cent tribal people are living as per 2011 census report. Tribal people are living across state; although some districts like Darjeeling, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Kalimpong, Dakshin Dinajpur, Bankura, Purulia, Panchim Medinipur, Jhargram are highly tribal concentrated districts. Census data of 2011 showing the literacy rate of tribal population compare to average literacy rate of other communities in district wise.

Table 2. District wise tribal people's share and their literacy rate and average literacy rate of the state of West Bengal as per 2011 Census report.

Name of District	Tribal People (Per cent)	Average Literacy Rate (Per cent)	Literacy rate Tribble People (Per cent)
Darjeeling undivided	21.52	79.56	74.26
Jalpaiguri undivided	18.89	73.25	58.70

Name of District	Tribal People (Per cent)	Average Literacy Rate (Per cent)	Literacy rate Tribale People (Per cent)
Cooch Behar	0.64	74.78	66.89
Uttar Dinajpur	5.41	59.07	43.76
Dakshin Dinajpur	16.43	72.82	57.02
Maldah	7.87	61.73	46.86
Murshidabad	1.28	66.59	51.34
Birbhum	6.92	70.68	47.48
Bardwan Undivided	6.34	76.21	54.74
Nadia	2.72	74.97	57.75
North 24 Paraganas	2.64	84.06	64.78
Hooghly	4.15	81.80	60.67
Bankura	10.25	70.26	59.37
Purulia	18.45	64.48	53.86
Howra	0.31	83.31	70.86
Kolkata	0.24	86.31	82.06
South 24 Paraganas	1.19	77.51	59.72
Parchim Medinipur	14.88	78.00	59.56
Purba Medinipur	0.55	87.02	64.77
Total	5.8	77.08	57.93

Source: Census data 2011.

Above table indicates that literacy rate among tribal people across state is lower than the average literacy rate of the state. Average literacy rate of the state is 77.08 per cent whereas literacy rate of tribal people is 57.93 per cent. The gap between the literacy rate of tribal people and other communities is 19.15 per cent. Literacy data of every district indicates that literacy rate of tribal people much lower compared to other communities. Only Kolkata, Darjeeling and Cooch Behar showing lower gap between the tribal and other communities in respect of literacy rate. The census data indicates that only 0.24 per cent tribal people are living in Kolkata, 0.64 per cent living in Cooch Behar and 21.52 per cent tribal people are living in undivided Darjeeling; Darjeeling is the highest tribal populated district in the state. Data indicates that literacy gap of Kolkata is 4.24 per cent, undivided Darjeeling is 5.30 per cent and Cooch Behar is 7.90 per cent. Gap of literacy of other districts is more than 10 per cent and the range is between 10.63 per cent to 23.20 per cent. Highest literacy gap 23.20 recorded from the district of Birbhum; where 6.92 per cent tribal people are living. Literacy gap of Kolkata district is lowest because tribal people of the metropolitan city mostly are migrated from various districts for government jobs. They are higher strata of the community, so the district showing lower literacy gap. Cooch Behar also lower tribal populated district and Cooch Behar has a golden history since the native raj. History says that princely Cooch Behar state was one of the education hubs in British India; so, researcher viewed that it may be one of the causes behind the low literacy gap between tribal communities and other communities. Moreover, undivided Darjeeling is the highest tribal populated district in the state and people of the communities also much literate compared to national literacy rate. The national literacy rate is 72.99 per cent in general and 58.96 per cent for tribal people; whereas tribal literacy rate of the district is 74.26 per cent, which is higher not only national level tribal literacy rate but also national level overall literacy rate. Darjeeling since British period was a modern European education hub; due to this reason and newly emerging education hubs at Siliguri is

helping the much literacy among the tribal people residing within the district. On the other hand, undivided Jalpaiguri now Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri indicates another scenario of literacy rate among the people of tribal communities and others. Literacy gap between tribal people and other communities in undivided Jalpaiguri is 14.55 per cent; it is higher in the tea belt of West Bengal. There are 145 organized tea gardens and 45.88 per cent of total land of the district is covered by forest area. 18.89 per cent population of the district is belonging to tribal communities; they are mostly living in forest villages and tea gardens. Due to depended on tea gardens and forest collection for their livelihood; their literacy rate is much lower compared to other areas of the tea region in the district.

4. Discussion

4.1. COVID 19 and Its Effect on Human Civilization

Presently new serious challenge before the human civilization is COVID- 19. The world is now suffering from this serious challenge. 29,55,59,926 people across the world are affected by 'Coronavirus' and death toll 54,73,605 across the world as on 5th January 2021. All countries and territories across the world reported that they are affected by this dangerous threat. United States of America, Spain, Italy, Germany, India, France, China, Iran, United Kingdoms, Turkey, Switzerland, Belgium, Netherlands, Canada, Austria, Portugal, Brazil, South Korea, Israel, Sweden, Australia, Pakistan, Brazil, Peru, Chile, Mexico, South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Algeria- all the countries are badly affected by the microscopic foe. 5,80,40,720 'Coronavirus' positive cases identified and recorded 8,51,439 death cases till 5th January 2021 in the United States of America; which is the highest affected number in the world. India is now in the second position with 3,50,11,990 positive cases followed by the USA. Highest death recorded in number is 8,51,439 from the USA in the same period and second-highest 6,19,426 death cases recorded from Brazil. World Health Organization

declared this disease as a pandemic by which people around the world suffering regardless of rich and poor, religion, caste, class and creed. 'The first case of pandemic traced at Hubei province in China on 17th November 2019 in a 55-year-old person. One doctor of Wuhan of Hubei province in China identified the dangerous virus in December 2019' [9]. Since then the disease spread across the world and taking pandemic nature affecting more and more people daily. Chinese authority suspected in the early stage that the virus of the disease stemmed from something sold at a wet market in Wuhan city. But scientists suspected in the early stage that this 'Coronavirus', SARS-COV-2, is originated in a bat and somehow hope to another animal, from which it entered in the human body. But there are no pieces of evidence in favour of their claim. Now Scientists across the world engaging in research to find out the remedy of the mass diseases. People across the world now helpless before the pandemic. Leaders across the world now also forceless before the microscopic enemy; they are trying their best to combating the virus, but they are also directionless. Socio-economic life of the people across world totally paralyzed due to the brutish virus. Socio-economic life of the developing countries is highly affected due to the outbreak of virus. Education of every countries across world badly affected due to the shutdown of educational institutions since the outbreak of the pandemic. India is the second largest populated country and largest public education system across world after China is now badly affected due to the pandemic. Educational institutions totally shutdown in India since March 2020 for the protection of health of the children and young generation of country. Educational institutions started to reopen for learners since September-October 2021; but due to the outbreak of new variant of Corona virus institutions are again closedown from January 2022. So, education rights of people especially vulnerable communities are badly affecting under the situation.

4.2. Education Sector of India in the Amidst of COVID-19

'India is a second largest populated country in the world after China comprising more than half of her population is under below 25 years age' [10]. India is a population of more than 135 crore country; where above 60 crore population below the age of 25 years need a largest educational system. 15.5 lakh schools across country making arrangement for education of 25 crore students below the age of 18 years. School as a base of education has playing important role; but due to the outbreak of COVID-19 government of India declared shutdown of every educational institution like schools, colleges, universities and others since early March 2020. The situation forced to confined 25 crore students of 15.5 lakh schools in home. At that time globally 1.6 billion students are forced to confined in their home. This situation making huge disorders in the education sector not only in India also in across world. For combating the situation world going on online mode of education. India also follow the same pathway for continuing the education of her huge learners. In the context of online mode of education for India

Novel Laureate Abhijeet Benerjee told to the Indian Express on 6th May 2020 that "my prediction is that many more people will now take online classes..... One good news for people in India is that this kind of education model extremely scalable. What had constrained education until now is the need for physical proximity" [11]. Novel laureate also stressed that online education is one of the 'good one' still the situation. He rightly pointed out that the online education is a good alternative mode of education for continuing the education in the pandemic situation. But India as a country where more than 20 percent population living below the poverty line; where near about 70 percent people are living villages and depended on agriculture and related activities; 'many villages till date discarded from modern world by roads connectivity, communication, electricity and other means of communication'[12]; near about 'half of the population working in unorganized sector where uncertainty risk is high'[13]. More than 8 percent of total population of the country are most vulnerable for their every aspect of socio-economic life; they are living mostly remote villages across country. This vulnerable tribal communities educationally lagging behind the other communities. Till date 'literacy gap between the tribal people and others is more than 14 per cent in India' [14]. The subject is more and more worsened in the case of tea tribes; tea tribes are those who are depended on tea gardens as labours for their livelihood. A long journey as workers in tea gardens the communities educationally staying far behind compared to other communities. Literacy gap of tribal people living in duras, depended on tea gardens and forests is 14.55 per cent; which is more than the national gap. The children of labour of tea gardens are worst affected by education due to the outbreak of COVID-19. Labours of the tea gardens across country especially from duars region are educationally backward due to their nature of job. Planters before independence not given due importance to the development of the socio-economic life of the plantation labours. After independence government has taken some initiatives by amending plantation labour law for the protection of basic rights of plantation workers. But since independence the industry is suffering for lot of problems; so, the owners of the plantations never showing more interest to protect the interest of the workers. After the initiation of new liberal economy, the sector of India tea industry worsens day by day. In duars region many tea gardens were lockdown since the last decade of the last century. Due to this reason workers are losing their works and living in a vulnerable condition. The pandemic creates another serious challenge to the industry and depended of the industry. This adverse situation forced people to change their usual mode of education towards online mode. In this situation children of tea labours are badly affected due to their unequipped condition. Most of the labours have not smart phone, internet connection; low voltage electricity is not also comfortable to learning on online mode of education. Poverty, illiteracy of the parents in tea gardens making hinderances to learning through online mode of education.

4.3. Some Emerging Serious Challenges in Education Sector in India Amidst COVID-19

Due to outbreak of Corona virus education sector across world badly halted for long time. Education sector of India is a largest one for her largest population and people of India till day depends on public education system. But the pandemic situation immensely affected this largest education system in India. Continuing the education from home by combating the situation countries across world going on online mode of education. Mostly developing countries across world are suffering in implementation of online mode of education. India is a largest education system facing serious challenges to implementation of online mode of education for all, amidst COVID-19.

Following are some major challenges of online education to all facing in India; not only in India but also across developing countries:

- 1) Online classes are started by most of the countries for continuing their education system in the pandemic situation; but a large number of students always staying outside the facilities because of their vulnerable socio-economic condition. A large number of students in every standard in India staying outside the ambit of education for their vulnerable position. Students from tribal communities especially students from tea gardens are badly suffering by the crisis due to their worst socio-economic condition. Right to Education act implemented for inclusion but online education amidst COVID-19 started now exclusion.
- 2) Private Schools across India started full fledged online education; where education is treated as goods and students are come from higher strata of society. But till date large population of the country depends on public schools for education; but till date public schools are not able to operationalize on line mode of education due to their infrastructural weakness. Poor people, vulnerable communities are depending on the public school; so, education rights of their children is facing serious challenge and increasing gap between the students of common people and elite people by the inclusion of elite mode of education in school, college and university level.
- 3) Unstable electricity and lack of highspeed internet connectivity creates another serious challenge to the online mode of education. Under 'Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana' and 'Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana' every villages in India are connected to the power grid; 'but till the day many rural households staying outside the projects' [15]. At the same time low voltage is reality in villages across country which creates challenge to the inclusion of every students in online education. Internet connectivity in India till the day an ongoing project; many villages and remote areas till not connected through highspeed internet. So, due to lack of highspeed internet connectivity students of rural areas especially vulnerable communities are not able to

participate in online classes. Till the day everyone has not smartphone, but this is the precondition of participation in online mode of education. Due to these consequences students from vulnerable communities losing their education rights in the amidst of COVID-19.

- 4) 'In India 'Midday Meal' scheme running since 1995 as a nutritional scheme for increasing enrolment and minimizing dropout rate before the completion of elementary level of education' [2]. Due to the pandemic situation the nutritional scheme is stopped and students from vulnerable families are facing nutritional crisis.
- 5) In India, education falls in concurrent list; every state is not equipped infrastructurally to providing online education in their schools. So public schools run by state government in most of the state is not able to start online education till the day; whereas private run schools are started online education. Central government run various schools across country started online mode using various methods for the aims of inclusion of every child in the mode. As a multi lingual country students from various state-run schools those who are learning through their mother tongue as medium of instruction are not able to access facilities from central governmental initiatives. This type of policies creates serious challenges and increasing gap between the students of state government run and central government run schools.

4.4. Impact of COVID-19 on Education Right of Children of Tea Garden Labours of Western Duars

Human society is facing serious challenges due to outbreak of Corona virus across world. Every aspect of human life is under serious threats due to this pandemic. On that situation education sector across world suffering badly. Students from vulnerable tribal communities are immensely affected in the situation. Tribal people in India especially those who are depended on tea industries are badly affected. Children of tea tribes always staying outside school due to their vulnerable condition since very early; the pandemic situation cement another serious challenge to their life. The western duars and hilly region of northern part of West Bengal is popular for its famous tea. But this pandemic situation badly affected the industry and the dependents of the industry. In the adverse situation government has taken policy for online education in all level of educational institutions. But 'children from vulnerable communities are not equipped to continue their learning through online mode' [16].

4.5. Some of the Pandemic Induced Problems Are as Follows

- 1) The children did not have optimal access to the internet. Most of the children of the tea plantation workers discontinued their education, because they do not smart mobile phones which support internet connectivity. Families of students who own mobile phones most of the time could not even afford to recharge their phones

with high-quality internet data packs. Some 'students used their parents' phones to attend online classes' [8], but that was problematic too because when their parents went off to work they took their phones along with them.

- 2) Students of the tea gardens are facing the problems of online learning. Online classes have several disadvantages; limited student-teacher interaction is one of them. When classes were held in offline mode, the teachers tried to explain the students in their mother tongue, but this was not possible in online classes due to unstable internet connectivity, low proficiency of teachers on local languages and lack of time.
- 3) Most of the children of the tea plantation workers stay in remote places where internet connectivity is not available. They had to travel to the nearest point from where the internet connectivity was available.
- 4) There is no internet connectivity in a vast area of tea gardens in the region. So, children of tea garden's labours used to walk to nearest point to get network connectivity. Long walking for net connectivity has losing their reading hours and also they are facing threats from wild animals.
- 5) During lockdown, demonstration classes were given and aired in by several media channels. But due to lack of television set in every labour quarter they are not able to receive the facilities.
- 6) Dry ration for mid-day meals were distributed among the parents of the children in the pandemic situation. But workers were losing their day due to the collection of materials under midday meal scheme. This also creates another problem among the poor labours of tea gardens.
- 7) Sharing of ration with other family members creates another serious nutritional problem among the school going children.
- 8) Children missing from education is increased in the region in this pandemic situation.
- 9) Child trafficking especially girl child trafficking is increased in the region in this pandemic situation.

4.6. Governmental Arrangement for Online Education in India

In India, there was an infrastructure of virtual education since before the COVID-19 outbreak. One report mentioned that enrolment for various online courses was 1.6 million in 2016; and was expected on that time it will be growth 9.6 million in the end of 2021. Truly it is increasing more and more than expected number due to the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 in India; although the arrangement of online mode of education expanding in the field of higher education. Digital India initiatives of the government now benefited the education sector nicely. As a part of digital India initiatives colleges and universities across country offer online correspondences much before the COVID-19 outbreak; which now helping large number of students in the pandemic. Following major initiatives are taken by the government for

strengthen online education in India:

4.6.1. Implementation of 'Shagun' Scheme

'Shagun' is an online junction under which the Department of School Education in the Government in India and all states and Union Territories have launched several e-learning platforms. 'The name of the scheme 'Shagun' is derived from two different words i.e. 'Shala' and 'Gunvatta' [14]. The word 'Sala' means school and the word 'Gunvatta' means quality. So, the meaning of 'Shagun' is quality education in schools. The primary aims of the scheme is to facilitate both teachers and students with a platform where they can interact, however through digital medium for further learning. There are three e-learning platforms under the scheme; i) National Repository of Education Resources (NREOE); ii) Diksha; iii) E-path Sala.

- 1) *National Repository of Education Resources (NREOE)*: Approximately 16,000 registered users are using the platforms where 14,527 e-learning resources are available. The platform is exposure to e-libraries, e-books and e-courses for users. Under constructive repository there are 2779 documents, 1345 interactive, 4664 audios, 2586 images and 6153 videos are available for users.
- 2) *Diksha*: The Ministry of Human Resource Development has launched National Digital Infrastructure for teacher's portal to equip teachers from class I to XII into the world e-learning. Teachers and students both are facilitated by the portal. There are 80,000 e-books are available which help the students of XII standard of CBSE and NCERT students of states and Union Territories.
- 3) *E-Path Shala*: E-Path Shala is one of the important portals which help the students to participate in online mode of education. Through the web portal students from class I to XII is able to access 1,886 audios, 2,000 videos, 696 e-books. The digital repository has been made available by NCERT to make sure that the students do not miss out on any important concept to be taught in the case. It also available in several languages.

4.6.2. Swayam

Swayam the meaning 'self' is a Hindi acronym that stand for "study webs of active learning for young aspiring minds" is an Indian massive online course platform. The initiative taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India for the students perusing education from class IX to XII, graduate and post graduate level. Swayam facilitates study material at one destination. Students can access study material in the form of video lecture, reading materials, self-assessment tests, online discussions and doubt sessions. The portal is connected to national coordinators such as AICTE, NCERT, IGNOU, UGC, NPTEL, NIOS, IIMB, for delivering updated quality contents. Students registering the courses at Swayam need not pay fee as the course is free of costs, however, to get the certification registration is required for which a minimal fee has to be paid. This platform is plying an important role in the pandemic situation to provide virtual education.

4.6.3. *Swayam Prabha*

Swayam Prabha is an effective tool of learning launched by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India for the students those who do not have internet access at their home. Swayam Prabha is a group of 32 DTH channels which telecasting of high-quality educational programmes on 24x7 basis using the GSAT-15 satellite. Everyday new contents of at least 4 hours duration is flatted on the website which is 5 times in a day. Students of I to post graduate levels can take facilities. The programme is available in DD free dish, set top Box, Antenna and now it extended on other private channels for combating the pandemic situation. This type of initiative helping the students across country.

Except these initiatives' government has taken other important measure to strengthen the online mode of education. Such initiatives are National Academic Depository, National Digital Library, Virtual Labs. National Academic Depository is a national database; initiative taken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India to hold academic awards issued by academic institutions in an electronic form. National Digital Library is a project under Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has given free access to the National Digital Library of India, where over 3,82,00,000 books and periodicals are available. In the lockdown period peoples are benefited from the online library. Virtual Lab is an initiative of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India under the National Mission on Education through ICT aims to provide remote access to lab in various disciplines of Science and Engineering. These types of governmental arrangement helping the learners at the time of COVID-19 outbreak in India.

But the learners of the vulnerable communities can not able to be utilizing such facilities in the pandemic situation. Especially the children of tea garden labours can't able to access such facilities due to their vulnerable conditions. Maximum projects are for the enhancement of higher education sector; there are only few for the students of school levels specifically for elementary level. Students of elementary level are across country are seriously deprived by the pandemic. Medium of instruction in elementary level is an important issue; due to the causes students from tribal communities especially those who are depends on tea industry cannot able to access the online facilities. So, it is truly said that the education right of the vulnerable communities especially tribes of tea gardens totally hampered due to the outbreak of the COVID-19.

5. Conclusion

Education is a basic human right of every citizen across world. But the outbreak of COVID-19 creates serious threats to the rights. Educational institutions across world shutdown since the outbreak of the pandemic. About 1.6 billion students across world forced to detained in home for their

health safety. In India educational institutions were shut down since March 2020 due to the outbreak of corona virus across country. As a result, students of school levels are badly affected. 25 crore students from 15.5 lakh schools forced to confined in their home for the safety of their health; if learners of upper level are included than the figure will be increased too. 'In West Bengal, 20,57,787 students of various standard from pre-primary to standard XII are learning in 93,108 schools across state are confined home due to outbreak of the pandemic. One report mentioned only 10 per cent to 15 per cent students are participate in online mode of education in school levels. Online education in elementary level is not started in the state' [17]. 'Right to Education' act 2009 was launched in 2010 for ensuring education of everyone, but the outbreak of coronavirus ceased the rights of people. People of vulnerable communities in the state especially people of tea gardens are badly affected and lost their basic rights in the pandemic situation. Neither the management of the gardens nor the government has taken special initiatives for to continuing the education of the children in tea gardens. So, education rights of the learners from labours in tea gardens are totally hampered in the situation. For the vulnerable condition of the learners of tea gardens; they are not able to take facilities from the existing arrangements of online education providing by the government. So, there is need to special policy formulation and need to give special attention for the learners of vulnerable communities specially learners of tea garden workers. Participation of garden management, NGOs and enhancement of the role of government especially local government will be able to protect the educational right of the learners of tea garden labours by combating existing threats.

6. Recommendations

Following are the recommendations based on the findings of the research:

1. There is need to special educational policy for the inclusion of children of most vulnerable communities, particularly the children of tribal workers of tea gardens.
2. Need to special attention for the learners of tribal communities in general and tea tribes in particular.
3. Participation of tea gardens management in education will be ensured the quality education of children of workers.
4. Participation of NGO's in rural remote areas will be ensured the education of vulnerable communities.
5. Engagement of rural local government will be ensured quality education for children of vulnerable communities.
6. Civil society participation is to be needed.
7. Need to improve physical infrastructure by improving connectivity of villages through road, electricity and internet.
8. Need to special attention to tea industry.

Acknowledgements

The paper titled “Impact of COVID-19 on the Right to Education of Labour of Tea Gardens in India: A Study on Western Duars Region” is prepared from the outcome of major research project titled “Impact of Right to Education Act (2009) on Tribal People in Tea Gardens of Western Duars Region: A Study of Selected Tea Gardens from Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar District of West Bengal”, sanctioned by Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi under IMPRESS scheme, sanctioned file No. IMPRESS/P410/SC/228/18-19/ICSSR, Dated 20.03.2019. I thanks to Indian Council of Social Science Research for the support.

References

- [1] Biswas, A. K. “Universalization of Education”, *Kuruketra*, 59 (7), 2011.
- [2] Biswas, A. K. “India’s Education Policies: An Evaluative Study”, in Paul, S. K. (ed.), *Development of Education*, Arpan Publications, Delhi, 2017.
- [3] The Newspaper Report, [https://www. Business Standard Com](https://www.BusinessStandard.Com).
- [4] Basu, D. D. *Introduction to the Constitution of India*, Wadhwa and Company Law Publishers, Nagpur, 2006.
- [5] Majumder, B. *The Totos*, Academic Enterprise, Calcutta, 1998.
- [6] Biswas, A. K. *Socio-Economic Profile of Toto Tribe*, Aayu Publications, New Delhi, 2019.
- [7] Kusari, et al. *West Bengal District Gazetteers Jalpaiguri*, Government of West Bengal, Kolkata, 1981.
- [8] Biswas, A. K. & Sinha, V. ‘Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education and Tribal Tea Workers in India: A Case Study of Western Duars Region’ in Karmakar, A & Mukherjee, P. (e.d.), *Exploring Contemporary Issues in Asian Politics*. Kolkata: Avenel Press, pp. 138-162, 2021.
- [9] Bryner. J. “1st Known Case of Coronavirus Traced Back to November in China”, <http://www.live Science Com>, 2019.
- [10] Agarwal, A. et al. “Population Aging in India: Facts, Issues and Options”, *Population Change and Impacts in Asia and the Pacific*, Springer, pp. 289-311, 2020.
- [11] The Newspaper Report, *The Indian Express*, 6th May 2020.
- [12] Asher, S. & Novosad, P. “Market Access and Structural Transformation: Evidence from Rural Roads in India”, *Manuscript*, Department of Economics, University of Oxford, 2016.
- [13] O’keefe, P. & Palacios, R. “Strengthening Employment and Social Security for Unorganized Sector Workers in India”, *Globalization, Labor Markets and Inequality in India*, Routledge, pp. 283-314, 2020.
- [14] Biswas, A. K. “Digital India Initiatives and online Education System in India Amidst COVID 19 Pandemic”, *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam*, 3 (3), pp. 118-124, 2021.
- [15] Maity, S. et al. “Panoramic View of Digital Education in COVID-19: A New Explored Avenue”, *Review of Education*, 9 (2), pp. 405-4023, 2021.
- [16] Biswas, A. K. “Right to Education of Vulnerable Communities Amidst of COVID-19 in India: A Study on Tea Tribes of West Bengal” in Adawal, S. & Behera, B. (e.d.), *The Novel COVID-19 The Human Rights Issues in India*. Delhi: Academic Excellence, pp. 384-402. 2020.
- [17] The Newspaper Report, *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* in Bengali, 29th June 2020.