

Reorientation of Ashram School Education in Odisha

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Before India attained independence, Adivasis were dubbed as aborigines or tribals. During the foreign rule no attempt was made to elevate the status of these sons of the soil in the society. They were always kept as drawers of water and a hewer of wood. The word 'Adivasi' connotes the idea of originality in all respects. It can denote inception and development of life in human society. The present day society must have emerged out of the society existing from the days of human existence by way of evolution and revolution. In order to achieve results in different aspects of Adivasi life required of the progressive and dynamic society Tribal & Rural Welfare Department has been created under the constitution.

The Tribal and Rural Welfare Department of Government of Orissa took a pioneer step in the field of tribal education by establishing Ashram or residential schools in the tribal areas. Dating back from 1947-48, when the first Ashram School was established by the Erstwhile Backward Class Department at Nuagaon in Phulbani district, it received the blessings of no less a person than Thakkar Bappa. Since then new schools of this type are being established every year and at present there are schools spread over the districts. Out of these the school for girls which are known by the name Kanyashram receives grants-in-aid from the Central Government and are administered directly by the district welfare authorities.

The name Ashram School originated from the conception of ancient type of education where the teachers and pupils lived and ate together shared common difficulties, and education was imparted by direct means. The curriculum consists of general education, craft education, gardening and spinning. Students and teachers live in the premises of the institution. The school has a Headmaster or Head-mistress assisted by Assistant teachers, craft teachers, and agriculture teacher. Food is cooked by students themselves, sometimes assisted by attendants. There is provision for cattle, sheep, goat, poultry to which the students are expected to attend

For the first five or six years of establishment of Ashram Schools the prevailing emphasis was on the crafts and gardening while the general education was also imparted. The basic aim was to equip the tribal boys with crafts education and gardening along with general education, as the tribal boys were expected to settle down as craftsmen, farmers and husbandry-men, if they could not pursue their studies further. Generally about 20 acres of land are attached to each institution in which various vegetables and crops were grown. From 1957 the emphasis was changed to general education with the crafts playing a

secondary role. In the schools the boys and girls are provided with free fooding and lodging in addition to reading and writing materials and clothing and stipend awarded to Scheduled tribe and Scheduled caste boys. In 1957 also clay scholars from among the non-tribal residents of the locality permitted to read in the school.