

Educational Experiences of the Mising Tribe Learners of Majuli

An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

The Mising Tribe, an Indo-Mongoloid group in Assam, dominates the socio-cultural landscape of Majuli island. The educational status of the Mising Tribe was discouraging, compared with the rest of the population. This research study aimed to explore the educational experiences of learners from the Mising community and the factors influencing their experiences. The study used a qualitative paradigm. The participants from the Mising community of fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth standards from Assamese vernacular-medium government secondary schools were selected through incidental sampling. The sampled teachers were interviewed with the highest density of Mising Learners from the Uttar Kamalabari cluster and Madhya Majuli Cluster to gather data for the research. The parents who gave their consent were also interviewed. The findings revealed that the learners from the Mising community in Majuli face significant barriers to education due to flooding disruptions, lack of mother tongue instruction, inadequate school infrastructure and socio-economic hardships. Limited awareness of government schemes, gender biases and low parental support further hindered their consistent attendance and academic progress.

Keywords: Educational Experience, Mising Tribe Learners, Exploratory Study

Introduction

The multicultural and multilingual nature of Assam was home to a large number of ethnic tribes, who have infused spectacular diversity into the cultural fabric and identity of the region. Since its

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inception, the indigenous people of Assam have been the nucleus of the rich history that was deeply rooted in the region. With their fascinating traditions and customs, these indigenous people of Assam have been successfully displaying the very essence and synthesis of Assam. They had played a vital role in shaping the social fabric and contributing to the state's overall development. According to the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (2024), the 'Economic Survey Assam, 2021–22', Assam—a region with a rich history and diverse ethnic tribes, has a significant per cent age of tribal people (38.84 per cent) compared to the rest of the nation (8.6 per cent). The Mising Tribe, also known as the Mishing Tribe, is the second largest tribe in Assam and a significant ethnic group in northeast India. The name 'Mising' was derived from the words 'man of the water' and 'mi' (man), and refers to the River People (Doley and Kar, 2022). One of the largest indigenous communities in Assam, Mising tribe is recognised as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) under the Constitution of India. They were commonly known as 'Miri' to outsiders and locals of Assam. They were originally a hill tribe that migrated to the Brahmaputra valley from the Eastern Himalayan foothills in the 13th or 14th century (Pathori, 2017). According to the 2001 census, the Mising community covers 17.8 per cent of the tribal population of Assam. The total population of the Mising community is 5,87,310, and was found mostly in districts like Majuli, Dhemaji, North Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat of Assam (Narah, 2019). The Mising Tribe, originally a hill tribe, relocated to the Brahmaputra valley in the 13th or 14th century (Pegu, 2020). The largest number of the Mising tribe was concentrated on Majuli island. Although the literacy rate of Majuli was 73.92 per cent, combining both tribe and non-tribe, the number of people attaining higher education is very low. Considering the Mising tribes in Majuli, the literacy rate is generally low. Furthermore, as compared to other progressive indigenous communities, the number of highly educated or highly competent persons in the Mising Community was very few (Narah, 2021).

According to the Census India (n.d.) report of 2011, the literacy percentage of the Mising Tribe in Assam is 69.27 per cent (Kaman, 2018). The Mising tribes residing in Majuli face several challenges in education. Even though universal free and compulsory education for children from the age of 6 to 14 was a fundamental human right to education, literacy rates in rural Majuli were exceptionally

low and the gender gap was considerable. The educational status of the Mising tribes in Majuli was very discouraging as compared to the rest of the population. Although the literacy rate of Majuli was 78.56 per cent, the percentage of learners from the Mising community completing school education and pursuing higher education was very low. The Mising community in Majuli faces a challenging educational landscape, with only 48.7 per cent of learners from Classes III to V, were able to read Class II text fluently and perform basic subtractions.

Similarly, 73.9 per cent of learners from Classes VI to VIII could read Class II clearly and fluently, while 32.2 per cent could do divisions (Bhargava, 2022). Many tribal and non-tribal learners, including Mising learners, eventually cannot continue with their school education, as the system fails them (Mising Autonomous Council, n.d.). Without practical knowledge and skills, they often return to subsistence farming, remaining behind in the race for development (Verma Borbora and Tamuli, 2021). Despite being one of the indigenous tribes in Assam for decades, the Mising community has not experienced significant growth in recent years. Many learners from the Mising community failed to complete their education and were unwilling to pursue further studies, leading them to work in low-wage jobs on the district island (Borah and Doley, 2020). It raised a pertinent question as to why, even after the establishment of RTE, such a culturally rich community is still trailing behind in terms of education. Numerous factors contributed to the Mising community's inability to embrace contemporary education, allowing them to lag behind the mainstream population in Majuli and Assam as a whole. As a result, the researcher attempted to investigate the educational experiences of Mising community learners and the many circumstances that impede these learners' access to school education.

Research Question

- What were the reasons and common challenges faced by learners from the Mising Community in Majuli that hinder their ability to complete their schooling?

Objectives of the Study

The present research was an attempt to explore the educational experiences and constraints faced by learners from the Mising

community in the pursuit of education on the island of Majuli. Therefore, the objective of the study was framed as follows—

1. To explore the educational experiences of the learners from the Mising Tribe during the annual occurrence of floods.
2. To explore the factors influencing the learners' educational experiences from the Mising Tribes in Majuli.

Methodology

The research study was exploratory because of the nature of the problem selected, and the type of data that is required to answer the research question of the study and fulfil the objectives. The study was qualitative and grounded on an interpretive paradigm, both in terms of data collected as well as the data analysed.

Population

The population for the present study comprised of all the learners from the Mising community in Majuli. The present study includes of Classes 5, 6, 7 and 8 learners situated in the Majuli district of Assam.

Sampling

The research was designed to be carried out in government-owned Assamese vernacular-medium schools and Mising medium government schools in the Majuli district of Assam. Learners from Mising community of the primary and upper primary stage, from Assamese vernacular-medium schools, were taken as a sample for the study. At least, five (5) Assamese vernacular-medium government schools, with the highest density of Mising community learners, were selected on an incidental sampling basis from the Uttar Kamalabari cluster and Madhya Majuli Cluster. For the interview, a total sample of 226 learners from the Mising Tribe were selected through incidental sampling from the school, as both the Mising Tribe (learners) and Mipak (non-tribe learners) studied together. Similarly, thirty six (36) teachers were interviewed through incidental sampling from five (5) sample schools with highest density of Mising community learners in the Uttar Kamalabari Cluster and Madhya Majuli Clusters to gather data for the research. Incidental sampling was also used to interview parents, based on their availability at home. Mostly fathers of the learners remain unavailable as they work as skilled labourers. In the Uttar Kamalabari cluster, a total of 30 parents of the learners from Mising community were interviewed. Similarly, in the Madhya Majuli Cluster, a total of 20 parents from the learners of the Mising community were interviewed.

Tools of Data Collection

The following tools were constructed by the researcher for the purpose of this study and data collection—(i) a structured interview schedule for students, (ii) a structured interview schedule for the teachers, and (iii) a structured interview schedule for the parents of the Mising community learners. The tools were validated by the two experts in the field of inclusive education. On the basis of the discussion, changes were made in the tools. The researcher as a non-participant observer tried to observe the learners from the Mising community in their school settings, the inter-relationship between teachers, learners and parents, and the immediate surroundings that influence the educational experience of the learners from the Mising community.

Data Analysis

For the research study, primary data was collected with the help of a structured interview schedule and through observation. The data collected from the sample participants with the help of interview and observation tools from the Mising Tribe learners, teachers and parents were analysed qualitatively. The data obtained through a structured interview schedule was analysed by assigning numerals and percentages, and presented in paragraph form with thick descriptions and narratives. The data obtained through observation was analysed thematically and presented to give an insight into the field.

Findings of the Study

In the capacity of a non-participant observer, the researcher attempted to document the Mising community learners in their educational environments, the dynamics between instructors, learners and parents, and the surrounding environment's impact on the learners' educational journey in Majuli. The data obtained through observation and a structured interview schedule from the learners of the Mising community, parents and teachers were presented through the given thematic analysis—

1. Challenges of Educational Continuity During Flooding in the Mising Community

During flooding, access to education for learners in the Mising community residing in the upper Sonowal hamlet of the Uttar Kamalabari cluster becomes difficult. When learners were asked to share their school experience during the annual

occurrence of floods, one learner said, “During the monsoon months, when the school grounds are inundated by flood water for a few days, we were relocated to the adjacent LP School, where our teachers teach us in a classroom for a few days. Desk and benches are carried from our school to the school, situated on the other side of the road”. When the teachers were asked how they covered the syllabus of their subject during the flooding days, the teachers stated that, “We make provisions for continuing classes by relocating learners to nearby schools and satras (Vaishnavite Monastery in Majuli) for uninterrupted instruction, many learners cannot attend due to inundation in their villages. Desks and benches are transported to the nearby schools and satras, where arrangements were made for classes”. When asked to the students whether remedial classes were conducted regularly for the learners who could not attend classes, learners stated that, “While remedial classes were conducted post-flooding, they are not held regularly for those, who couldn’t attend classes during the floods”. Schools that could not implement such provisions remain closed until the flooding recedes.

When asked whether the teachers can collaborate with learners through an online platform during flooding, one teacher stated, “We could not collaborate with learners through online platforms or any digital mode of instruction because the flood-hit villages lack the essential infrastructure for technological connectivity. Electricity in these villages is suspended until the flood is under control. Moreover, many learners come from economically weaker families and cannot afford an Android phone. Therefore, classes resume after the flooding and we conduct extra classes on holidays, extend class hours after school, or visit learners’ homes during their free time on holidays to compensate for the loss of instruction during the flooding. Remedial classes are conducted post-flooding for learners, who could not attend classes during the flooding days”. Teachers added that, “As there was no official mandate to keep schools closed during flooding, we must be present at school and maintain contact with the learners. We were also under constant pressure to cover the syllabus during these months. We have to rush through the content to complete the syllabus”. Since remedial instruction and extra sessions

were offered to bridge the learning gap during floods, no exemptions are given in assessments for learners.

2. Lack of Awareness and Support Hindering Education Opportunities for the Mising Tribe Learners

It was found through interviews that the majority of the Mising Tribe learners, as well as parents, were unaware of the schemes and scholarships offered by the government for the education of the ST. One parent stated, “My child has cleared the Chief Minister’s special scholarship scheme talent search examination test and has been awarded a scholarship amount of ₹5000 through term deposit receipt by Bank for 5 years along with a certificate”. Parents during the interview also stated that their children applied for the scholarship but were rejected. One parent said, “The principal of the school has informed me that the form is rejected and my child will have to apply again by uploading the correct documents”. The school authority also fails to provide proper orientation and guidance to the parents regarding the documentation process of the pre-matric scholarships for ST. Many times, Mising learners’ online applications for ST scholarships got rejected owing to improper documentation throughout the online procedure, which delayed the distribution of the scholarship amount. It was found that many of the learners fail to receive free books and uniforms on time.

3. Challenges in Implementing Effective Teaching Strategies in Mising Community Schools

Although a majority of teachers had received orientation and training on the usage of Teaching-Learning Material (TLM) and preparation of TLM, the latest methodologies and strategies of teaching conducted by State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), the teachers rarely implement these in their classroom instruction. The schools were equipped with teaching-learning materials (posters and charts). However, only a limited number of teachers (one or two) utilise TLM-based learning, group discussions, or hands-on exercises in the educational process to enhance motivation. The majority of them employ the lecture method, or more precisely, the chalk-and-talk method, to transmit curricular knowledge to the students. The teaching means and methods weren’t geared to the learning needs and styles of each Mising Tribe

learner. One of the teachers stated during the interview that, “Few teachers were vested with official tasks apart from teaching, as a result, they couldn’t take regular classes”. This impacts the educational experiences of the Mising learners. Moreover, Gunotsav was carried out every year by the Government of Assam to evaluate the quality of education imparted in government schools in the state. However, the teachers interviewed stated, “Gunotsav had also created substantial pressure on us due to workload, accountability demands and insufficient staffing”.

4. Challenges in Mother Tongue Education for the Mising Learners

The Constitution of India, under Article 350A, affirms that every state must provide adequate facilities for the instruction of students in their mother tongues. Despite such a constitutional guarantee, learners from the Mising Community do not have facilities for instruction in their mother tongue in the Assamese vernacular-medium government schools. Although there were a few Mising vernacular-medium government ME schools in Majuli, where instruction was carried out in the Mising language, this was not the case in Assamese vernacular-medium government schools. One teacher stated, “We need teachers from the Mising community, who could teach these learners in their home language. The teachers appointed through TET were from different towns, who mostly stayed for some time after appointment to take mutual transfers to their nearby schools near their homes. The learners had no choice but to learn to negotiate with the Assamese language as a medium of instruction. Since instruction is given in a regional language, Assamese, the Mising learners understand and assimilate very little. Consequently, their response to our instruction is poor”.

One of the senior teachers stated, “As there are no official state mandate rules or policies for teachers in Assamese vernacular-medium government schools to learn the tribal dialects and language, except for a few teachers, whose home is in Majuli, others show no interest in learning the Mising language. However, I have learned the Mising language from one educated Mising Tribe elder, when I was appointed as a teacher in this school”. One of the students from Class 8 said, “Our Science teacher used a

few words in Mising language while teaching. However, most of the teachers teach us in the Assamese language". Furthermore, the teacher interviewed stated, "No initiative has been taken so far to provide orientation and training to the teachers in the use of tribal languages and dialects for their instruction. The textbooks and other materials were also printed in the Assamese language without any provision for supplementary reading materials in the learner's home language". The lack of inclination of learners towards schooling essentially draws these school-related factors. This acts as a barrier for the learners of the Mising community to learn effectively and move ahead in their pursuit of education. It was the sole responsibility of the school system to make the experience pleasant and interesting to the children.

5. Challenges in Providing Quality Education to the Mising Community

Quality education can only be imparted in a quality infrastructure, as the schools and their surroundings shape the minds and consciousness of the learners. The schools, where the learners from the Mising community were enrolled lack basic facilities for good quality education. Teaching-learning materials and other learning resources, like a good library, were rarely available in these state board-run government schools, where Mising learners come to study. The government of Assam had introduced Dr Banikanta Kakati, Computer Literacy Programme, to provide comprehensive computer education in all higher secondary schools.

However, most schools had separate computer rooms for digital literacy. Despite a dedicated lab, it was observed in two sample Assamese vernacular-medium schools that computers were inoperable. One of the students said, "We don't have computer classes according to our routine". Internet access was not available in all schools and only a few schools offer ICT instruction twice a week, no online lessons were provided to learners from the Mising community or those unable to attend classes during floods. One of the students said, "The teachers do not take online classes or share materials through mobile phones during flooding when we cannot attend school".

The schools located in flood-prone areas, lack the basic infrastructure of a classroom and look more like a make-shift room with tin walls parted into compact classes with desks and benches not in good condition. The classroom environment was not clean and congenial for the education of the learners. In terms of sanitation and hygiene, it was found that schools that were impacted by flooding do not have proper sanitation facilities. Those schools do not have well-maintained toilets for both girls and boys with proper water facilities for the toilets. One of the parents as well as teacher stated, “Due to poor sanitation facilities, many girl students of Mising Tribe remain absent from classes for a week or so during their monthly period”.

Moreover, it was ironic that although teachers had received training and orientation on female menstruation health and hygiene, they were not able to put it into practice because of a lack of resources. Drinking water facilities lack minimum hygiene as they were close to the toilets and were neither clean nor properly maintained. All these variables directly or indirectly impact the educational experiences of these learners who belong to Mising tribal community.

6. Non-Alignment of the Curriculum to the Cultural and Immediate Context

The curriculum does not prepare the learners from the Mising community for the challenges they encounter outside of the classroom as it wasn't tailored to their day-to-day struggles. There was a representation of the Mising community in a few chapters of textbooks on different subjects of the curriculum but it was very superficial. Moreover, a uniform common curriculum pattern and textbooks were followed across the state by all the state board (SEBA) government and private schools. One of the teachers from the sample school said, “Although the textbooks have been updated, the selection of content and curricular transaction process was not contextualised to the contexts and living conditions of the learners of the Mising community living by the side of the road. Failure in tuning the schooling processes according to the needs of the learners has resulted in a propensity among the learners to discontinue education”.

Moreover, there was a high possibility that the learners might complete schooling but barely learn putting them at

a high risk of moving ahead in education, especially silent victims of exclusion, who participate physically without cognitive benefit. One teacher said, “Every alternate Saturday, we organise cultural activities at our school, where students from Mising communities as well as other students engage in a variety of cultural activities. We also provide certificates for good performance”. One learner stated, “During our school’s cultural weeks, we had to showcase our cultural norms, religious practices and activities linked with the Ali-Aye-Ligang and Dobur festivals, as well as dance and sing our Mising dance and Bihu. Cultural events were organised during the Ali-Aye-Ligang festival after the 4th period, and guests and parents were invited”. No doubt, teachers and school institutions try to integrate the rich experiences of the learners from the Mising community, but integration only through cultural activities wasn’t sufficient to address their cultural needs in education.

7. The Socio-Economic Condition of the Parents

The devastating flood of 2018 destroyed the Mising Tribe villages of Kaniyajan, Upper Sonowal, Nam Sonowal and Hokonomukh, which were located at a distance of 5 km away from the sample school impacted by annual flood. During the interview, one teacher stated, “Most Mising community learners studying in schools in Uttar Kamalabari Clusters were from these villages, except the school in Gormur in Madhya Majuli Cluster. The devastation caused by the flood had forced those Mising Tribes to abandon their agricultural fields, poultry and shelter, making them homeless and forcing them to relocate and live on property managed by the Public Works Department (PWD), Government of India. The Mising Tribe family, who live on government land on both sides of the major road, were impoverished and fought every day to keep a roof over their heads”. Following interviews, it was clear that the majority of the families are uneducated and poor, struggling to make the ends meet. They make a livelihood as skilled labourers or daily wage labourers, while a few were agriculturists. They don’t have the basic infrastructural facilities for online classes for their children. Some houses do not have proper electrification and during flooding times, electricity was completely suspended in those villages till things came back to normalcy.

It was observed that many of these Mising Tribe households, from which learners come to study in these sample schools, don't have a study table. They manage to keep their books and other educational items on their beds or inside their beds. Their parents cannot afford their basic educational needs. Some learners coming from these villages were also first-generation learners, who except for their teachers could not expect educational advice and guidance from their parents. For some learners, shoes mean luxury which they can't afford to wear in school, so they either come barefoot or wear a pair of slippers. The socio-economic status of learners in the Mising community significantly impacts their educational experiences. Parents, who were economically weak and non-literate, struggled to provide educational and mental support to their children. Due to their work schedules, they were unable to maintain contact with teachers and are not concerned about their children's education. This negligence leads to learners abstaining from classes and roaming in their neighbourhood. The grinding poverty of these families hinders their ability to prioritise their children's education.

8. Attitude of Mising Tribe Parents towards the Education of their Wards

The attitude of parents towards the education of Mising community learners also affects their educational experiences. When a teacher was asked to cite any case or experience where learners from the Mising community had to give up schooling due to the impact of flooding and other causes, the teacher stated, "A girl from the Mising community comes late for class, and sometimes she remains absent. When I came to school from home many times, I have seen her sometimes doing dishes or busy washing a heap of small clothes, maybe of herself and her siblings in the morning. It was apparent that when she had to be in school, she was occupied with household chores, and ultimately, she would not cope with her studies if she continued to remain absent. Eventually, she will drop out of school".

Similarly, another teacher during the interview added, "Most parents of the Mising Tribe learners were illiterate and ignorant and do not understand the value of education. They prefer to engage their children in household work, domestic

ceremonies and looking after their younger siblings at home, or involving them during the cultivation season without thinking about their education. Consequently, many learners from the Mising community remain absent during the cultivation season, and during ceremonies and functions at home or in their neighbourhoods. As a result, they lag in their courses, and frequent absences condemn the learners to many days of virtual idleness. This, in turn, develops a tendency among learners to not come to school”.

9. Gender Inequality in Education among the Mising Community

During the interview, teachers stated, “The Mising community parents were indifferent to educating girls, as they expect them to take on the role of their mother and be efficient in domestic chores”. One of the parents stated, “Girls will eventually play the role of their mothers, and no formal education is required for house maker. Boys’ education was more important because they would look after their parents in their old age”. This gender differentiation could decrease girls’ inclination towards schooling and education, as they were expected to take care of their younger siblings and perform daily household chores.

Discussion

Education in a place like Majuli was filled with diverse experiences. Multiple factors impact the educational experiences of learners. The policy and programmes in the state have a positive role to play in providing access to learners in areas that were not accessible or had geographical challenges. The lack of transportation and resources, along with limited awareness of government scholarships, poses significant barriers to education for tribal individuals (Anbuselvi et al., 2015). Similarly, the Mising community residing in the heart of Majuli can access the provisions, however, the people living in remote areas had challenges, and their level of awareness about those provisions was very limited. Only a few parents had shown any knowledge about government schemes and provisions. The teachers in the schools were aware of some of the provisions, but there was an evidence of the lack of coordination among parents and teachers regarding the access to these provisions for the learners of Mising community. The physical distance to schools, socio-economic conditions, and parental attitudes further hinder literacy and social

inclusion, especially since many parents were non-literate and lacked motivation for their children's education (Probe, 1999; Erigala, 2012; Daripa, 2017). This issue varies across different regions and states (Sahu, 2014), highlighting the need for improved support and resources for tribal students (Kerai, 2017; Behera, 2014; Hansdah, 2016). The challenging conditions in which Mising community lives influence the parents' aspirations and motivation related to the education of their children.

Although a majority of the students were interested in going to school, their parents were not able to guide them or support their education because they were mostly occupied with dealing with their challenges. Socio-economic barriers also play a role, as many families live below the poverty line and prioritise immediate financial needs over education, resulting in high dropout rates (Narah, 2021). The teachers were also aware of the situation. According to them, they try to motivate the parents and engage the learners for active participation.

However, when observations were made, it was evident that not all the learners were engaged in the process. Some of the teachers had also mentioned that they engage the Mising community learners using their native language. Research highlights factors contributing to low literacy rates among scheduled tribe children in India, such as language barriers in government schools, where the medium of instruction is often unfamiliar and hinders communication and long-term educational engagement (Joji Ottaplackal and Anbu, 2022). This highlights the major issue of education in Majuli for learners from Mising community. Language-related challenges were visible from the responses of the students as well as from the observations. Efforts to provide additional resources or translated material were also not there in the system, especially for the Assamese vernacular-medium government schools. The NEP 2020 emphasises mother tongue instruction at least until Class 5, but preferably till Class 8 and beyond, and a multilingual mode of education for children belonging to tribal communities (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The education of tribal children is the focus area under NEP 2020, and it emphasises improving the quality of education in tribal-dominated areas, and also aims to bridge gender and social inequalities in all levels of school education. Through Special Educational Zones (SEZ), proactive initiatives would be taken to address the educational challenges as well as uplift the educational standards of Socio-Economically Deprived Groups

(SEDGs) through affirmative actions (Ministry of Education, 2020). The textbook and overall curriculum do not have much scope to be culturally responsive. However, effective implementation required strengthening coordination among parents, teachers and authorities, increasing awareness of scholarships and schemes, and addressing infrastructural and socio-economic constraints to fully realise NEP 2020's vision for tribal education in regions like Majuli.

Conclusion

The findings related to the educational experiences of the Mising community in Majuli, Assam, reveal a multitude of challenges that hinder their access to quality education. During flooding, the lack of continuity in education due to inundation poses a significant barrier, exacerbated by the absence of technological infrastructure for online learning. Like (Minz and Tyagi, 2023) the findings also demonstrate, an inadequate supply of educational facilities, a language barrier, the location of the tribal village, economic conditions, the attitude of the parents and insufficient teaching materials were acting as obstacles to the faster progress of literacy levels among the tribal population.

Similarly, the findings also revealed that at the institutional level, the language of instruction caused barriers for the ST in the way of pursuing education. The government schools taught in the state's official language, which the young learners of tribal villages do not understand, making the learning difficult (Joji Ottaaplackal and Anbu, 2022). The Assam government had introduced Mising language as a medium of instruction in the foundational stage of education, aligning with NEP 2020. The approach should be expanded and strengthened to ensure better learning outcomes for Mising community children.

Furthermore, the lack of awareness about government schemes and scholarships, ineffective teaching strategies, denial of educational rights through non-appointment of Mising Tribe teachers and inadequate school facilities, all contribute to the educational struggles faced by the Mising community. In essence, those challenges underscore systemic issues that impede the educational development of the Mising community. Addressing those issues required a comprehensive approach that involves improving infrastructure, enhancing awareness about available opportunities, implementing culturally relevant teaching methods, ensuring linguistic inclusivity and providing essential resources for quality education.

As Dewey (1916) stated, “In Education, what was taught is inextricably linked to how it was taught”. Teachers should embrace indigenous pedagogies, recognising cultural constraints and leveraging knowledge from diverse tribal societies (Nichol, 2011; Holmes, 2023). Ethnographic methods could help teachers better understand students, families and communities (Nichol, 2012). Villegas (1991) suggests that a culturally responsive pedagogy builds on the premise on how people are expected to go about learning may differ across cultures. Instructions that attempt to build on tribal students’ cultural knowledge are an essential component of a culturally responsive pedagogy (Bartolome, 1995; Villegas, 1991).

Furthermore, a pedagogy of relation allowed tribal learners to bring their culture to the classroom, promoting acceptance and legitimacy of their knowledge, contrasting traditional classrooms that prioritised teacher culture, and assume cultural homogeneity (Villegas and Torres, 2022). To mediate the effect of historical inequality on marginalised cultures, one needs to provide a ‘humanising pedagogy’ in which an instructor values the tribal students’ background knowledge, culture, and life experiences and creates a context in which power is shared by students and teachers (Bartolome, 1995). By addressing those critical areas, meaningful progress could be made towards overcoming the educational disparities faced by the Mising community in Majuli, India.

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