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Primary Education Among Tribal People in Jharkhand - An Analysis

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Abstract: ***Education is one of the most powerful instruments for driving development and social transformation. It is an activity and a continuous process that improves people's immediate living conditions—social, economic, political, human, cultural, and environmental—and also enhances their potential for a better future. Education plays a vital role in providing tangible benefits by developing people's skills, expanding livelihood opportunities, and increasing earning potential. As a result, it contributes significantly to reducing poverty.***

One of the major contributions of education is in skill formation and skill enhancement. Amartya Sen has strongly emphasized that faster development in India is possible only when primary education is strengthened. He believes that the vast state machinery can be made accountable only when people are educated enough to regularly assess and question it. In this context, education becomes a decisive factor in empowering citizens and promoting development. Despite recognizing that true development of under-privileged tribal communities is impossible without improving literacy and raising educational standards, the promotion of universal primary education among tribals has received limited attention from both the state and central governments.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although several schemes and programmes have been launched by the State Government and the Ministry of Tribal Affairs—such as the establishment of Ashram Schools in tribal sub-plan areas, construction of boys' hostels and girls' hostels for Scheduled Tribes, and special schemes for the development of Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)—very few of these initiatives have actually reached the tribal population or benefited them in any meaningful way.

A major reason for this limited impact is that many programmes were not designed in accordance with the local context. Regional, geographical, cultural, and physical differences were often ignored, resulting in schemes that did not align with the realities of tribal life. Additionally, lack of political will, corruption, and the overall low priority given to development in tribal areas further restricted the benefits from reaching the intended communities.

Jharkhand is home to thirty-two different tribal groups, who together constitute 26.3 percent (6.6 million) of the state's total population. Unfortunately, more than sixty percent of these tribal people continue to live below the poverty line, making the need for effective educational intervention even more urgent.

The average literacy rate of Jharkhand is 54.13 percent, but among several tribal groups—especially tribal women—the literacy rate is shockingly low, in some cases as low as 10 percent. Although the overall literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the state increased from 27.5 percent in the 1991 Census to 40.7 percent in the 2001 Census, this improvement is still far below the national literacy rate for all STs, which stands at 47.1 percent. In Jharkhand, the literacy rates of tribal men and women (54 percent and 27.2 percent, respectively) remain significantly lower than the national averages of 59.2 percent for males and 34.8 percent for females.

II. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Literacy is one of the most fundamental indicators of a successful democratic governance system. However, the educational statistics of Jharkhand present a very discouraging picture, particularly with regard to primary education among tribal communities. According to the 2001 Census, five major tribal groups—Bhumij, Ho, Lohra, Santhal, and Kharwar—have overall literacy rates that are lower than the national average for STs. In contrast, the Oraon and Kharia tribes show relatively better performance, with more than half of their population aged seven and above being literate. The Munda community has a literacy rate almost equal to the national average for all Scheduled Tribes.

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Table 1. Literacy Rate among tribes

Literacy rate	All STs (state)	Oraon	Kharia	Munda	Bhumij	Ho	Lohara	Santhal	Khatwar
Persons	40.7	52.5	51.0	47.9	41.5	39.2	38.9	33.4	29.6
Females	27.2	40.8	42.2	34.9	24.0	23.9	25.0	19.5	13.9
Census of India. 2001. Source: Office of the Registrar General, India									

Table 2. Literacy in Tribals in Jharkhand

Sl. No.	Tribe	Population	Share in Tribal Population (%)	Literacy Rate within Tribe (%)
1	Asur	7,783	0.13	10.62
2	Baiga	3,553	0.06	4.22
3	Banjara	412	Lowest	12.38
4	Bathaudi	1,595	0.03	16.93
5	Bedia	60,445	1.04	10.82
6	Bhumij	1,36,110	2.35	16.45
7	Binjhia	10,009	0.17	14.52
8	Birhor	4,057	0.07	5.74
9	Birjia	4,057	0.07	10.50
10	Chero	52,210	0.09	17.30
11	Chick Baraik	40,339	0.69	20.17
12	Gond	96,574	1.66	20.00
13	Gorait	5,206	0.09	16.61
14	Ho	5,36,524	9.23	17.71
15	Karmali	38,652	0.66	13.30
16	Khariya	1,41,771	2.44	24.86
17	Kharwar	2,22,758	3.83	17.22
18	Khond	1,263	0.02	15.99
19	Kisan	23,420	0.40	13.41
20	Kora	33,951	0.58	9.28
21	Korwa (Lohar)	21,940	0.38	6.14
22	Lohra	1,69,090	2.91	12.71
23	Mahali	91,868	1.59	12.74
24	Mal Paharia	79,322	1.37	7.58
25	Munda	8,45,887	14.56	22.16
26	Oraon	1,048,064	18.05	23.28
27	Parhaiya	24,012	0.41	15.30
28	Santhal	2,060,732	35.47	12.55
29	Sauria Paharia	30,269	0.68	6.87
30	Savar	3,014	0.05	9.55
31	Unspecified	6,660	0.10	3.94
	TOTAL	5,810,867	100.00	16.99

Source: http://www.gumla.nic.in

Census 2001 also shows that among the total tribal literates, 33.6 percent are either without any educational level or have attained education below primary level. The proportions of literates who have attained education up to primary level and middle level are 28.6 percent and 17.7 percent respectively. Persons educated up to matric / secondary / higher secondary constitute only 16.5 percent.

Table 3. Levels of Education among the major Scheduled Tribes

Names of Scheduled Tribe	Literate Without Educational Level	Below Primary	Educational levels attained Middle	Matric / Secondary	Higher Secondary / Intermediate	Technical & Non-technical Diploma	Graduate & A
All STs	3.0	30.6	28.6	17.7	16.5	0.1	3.5
Santhal	3.5	34.3	30.0	17.0	13.2	0.1	2.0
Oraon	2.4	26.9	25.3	18.5	20.8	0.2	5.9
Munda	2.8	27.9	29.6	18.9	17.1	0.1	3.7
Ho	2.4	26.4	28.4	19.9	19.7	0.1	3.1
Kharwar	5.5	38.2	32.3	11.3	10.8	0.1	1.8
Lohra	3.5	35.5	30.5	16.1	12.5	0.1	1.9
Bhumij	2.9	36.1	32.8	15.7	11.1	0.0	1.4
Kharia	2.0	26.0	26.5	18.3	21.4	0.1	5.6

Census of India. 2001. Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

The data show that the proportion of tribal literates decline sharply in higher level of education as the percentage of students after matriculation drops down to almost one third in higher secondary level. Out of the total 19.8 lakh tribal children in the age group 5 - 14 years, only 8.5 lakh children have been attending school constituting 43.1 per cent. Alarmingly, as many as 11.3 lakh (56.9 per cent) children in the corresponding age group have not been going to school. The table below shows that among the major STs, Oraon, Kharia and Munda have more than 50 per cent school going children where as Santhal, Ho, Lohra have 36 – 47 per cent children attending school.

Table 4. Percentage of school going children in the age group of 5-14 years

Age Group	All STs	Oraon	Kharia	Munda	Bhumij	Lohra	Ho	Santhal	Kharwar
5–14 years	43.1	55.0	53.3	50.1	46.6	44.1	37.6	36.3	28.6

Census of India. 2001. Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

The literacy rate in Jharkhand is only 54.13 percent (2001) and female literacy rate is still lower at 39.38 percent. Literacy rate among the tribal population (38.10 percent) is less than the literacy of the general (54.13 percent) population in Jharkhand. Primitive tribes have the lowest literacy rates ranging from 4.22 to 7.58 percent. Thus, schedule tribes have very little share in the overall percentage of literacy rate in Jharkhand. The reasons for this arevaried.

Although the State has a network of government and privately run schoolsin cities and urban centres with varied standard of teaching, the benefits of these schools are mostly reaching to urban people and tribal exposed to these cities while 91.7 percent of the scheduled tribes are primarily rural,residing in villages. Despite the government's claim that the state of Jharkhand has reduced the number of out-of-school children, it is unfortunate that most of the schools, colleges and institutions which are addressing the need of general population and tribals are still marginalized. At school, the experiences of tribal children range from discrimination to a sense of complete alienation. Students from ST communities encounter a series of obstacles including commuting long distances to school in hostile environmental conditions, abuses and discrimination from teachers and fellow students from non-tribal backgrounds, difficulty in comprehending the language of instruction and negotiating space for themselves which they had been denied historically.

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Most teachers in schools in ST areas are non-STs who tend to view tribal language, culture and social practices as being inferior to theirs. Psychologically, this has a strong negative impact on children, which again contributes to their dropping out of school.

Extending the system of primary education into tribal areas and reserving places for tribal children in middle and high schools and higher education institutions are central to government policy, but efforts to improve tribal educational status have had mixed results. The major challenge and concern with this type of drive is that they are mostly concentrated in the urban areas. To address some of these disparities, recently the state government has launched a mammoth enrolment drive "School Chalein Hum – Abhiyan 2006" with UNICEF,which is a good initiative but there is also a need to understand that the children who are currently out-of-school are those belonging to socially and economically weaker communities and groups. This also includes linguistic and religious minorities and tribal groups.

living in habitations scattered over hills and forests. Past experiences indicate that some of these earlier drives have met with limited or no success.

Some of the obstacles in achieving universal primary education in tribal areas are lack of infrastructure, functional deficiency, Ignorance, poor socio-economic conditions and gender discrimination. Inadequate educational infrastructure and services, lack of resources - in terms of material and manpower, shortage of teachers and schools makes things even worse in tribal and forest areas. Some remote areas either have no schools at all or if the schools do exist then poor roads and lack of transportation make them inaccessible. The condition ofmost ofthe schoolsis pathetic. Eitherthey are being run from dilapidated structures or at some places there is no structure or shelter for children and they even lack basic amenities such as blackboard, chalk, chairs, desks or floor mats, and clean drinking water. Acute shortage of trained and qualified teachers, high absenteeism among teachers further worsens the situation. Classroom environment is not very conducive and student-teacher ratio is very high. Ignorance and lackadaisical attitude towards education of parents is another important challenge. Poor socio-economic conditions is a major constraint to educational access, impossible for marginalised households to make investment in education in the form of school fees, costs of books, uniforms, meals and transportation. Children from poor families contribute to family income either directly by working as labour or indirectly by contributing in doing household chores.

Another challenge in addressing and providing primary education to tribals is geographical location. Most of the primitive tribes still live in hills, dense forest with difficult terrain and many a times,it is difficult to reach them because oflack ofroad and transport facilities.It is a challenge to provide education to tribals and setting up school and institutions in small, scattered and remote tribal habitations. The majority of the tribes live in sparsely populated habitations in the interior and in inaccessible hilly and forest areas. At the time of creation of Jharkhand, there were about 12,000 revenue villages/inhabited tolas that did not have a primary school within 1 kilometer radius. Under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan/Gram Shiksha Abhiyan, nearly 11,500 alternate schools have been opened since August 2002 but now there is a need for qualitative improvement, in terms of infrastructure, staff allocation, provision of books and other facilities.

It has been seen and quoted in many studies (See, Vinoba Gautam, 2003) that high school drop-out rate among tribals is one of the main reasons for their lagging behind ineducation.Manyschools enrollingtribal population are plaguedbyhighdrop- outrates.The survey conducted by different agencies and compiled by the Jharkhand Education Project Council (JEPC), carried out among 25,703 school dropouts in the age group of 6 to 14 years, reports that compulsion to earn a livelihood forces hundreds of students to leave schools. According to the survey, 26.39 percent studentsleave schools as they have a compulsion to earn, 25.44 are engaged in household work, 12.25 percent lack interest in studies and over eight percent drop out due to socio-cultural reasons. The Jharkhand government has taken some initiatives to arrest the dropout rate. Despite the variousstepstaken by the State governmentsto check drop out, including free distribution of books and stationery, scholarship, reimbursement of examination fee, and mid-day meal, etc., it has shown very little impact. Teacher absenteeism is high in schools in tribal areas, primarily because when appointments are made at the district level, the candidates who are selected are normally from in and around the district headquarters and do not want to go to the interior areas. Since schools as institutions and teachers as critical agents have remained fundamentally unchanged, the school atmosphere is not very conducive to accept and retain tribal children in schools. Tribal children's school experience is an important variable which determines whetherthe child continuesto be in school or decides to drop out. Generally, children attend primary school for first three to four years and gain a smattering of knowledge, only to lapse into illiteracy later. Few who enter continue up to the tenth grade, ofthose who do,few manage to finish high school. Even the Ashram schools (residential schools for tribal boys and girls) started by the Government in 1990- 91 are poorly maintained and sometimes lack even the basic facilities. The performance of the state in providing matching grant and maintenance of service and management of hostels is not encouraging. The pace of construction of hostels has been very slow and the basic amenities provided therein are substandard. Given the low levels of literacy among the ST population, several children from these communities happen to be 'first generation learners'.

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In the absence of State support for helping them cope with studies,many children drop the schools. Therefore, very few are eligible to attend institutions of higher education, where the high rate of attrition continues. For example, members of agrarian tribes like the Gonds often are reluctant to send their children to school, because they need their children to work in the fields.

Another reason behind high drop-out rates is medium of instruction or language constraint where most of the tribal children do not understand the textbooks, which are generally in the regional language. The non-tribal teachers in tribal children's school are another problem where teachers do not know the childrens'language. Thiswas also found in the study conducted by the Janshala Programme. The Commission after commission recommended that atleast atthe primarylevel students should be taught in their native language but recruitment of qualified teachers and determination of the appropriate language of instruction has always remained troublesome. Recently (July 2003) the State Government has decided to ensure teaching in the mother tongue from Class I in tribal languages (Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Kurukh) and regionallanguages(Khortha,Kurmali) but the need is to develop teaching-learning material in these languages and to train/redeploy the teachers.

Figure 1. School drop outs

The issues and challenges in tribal education can be categorized as external, internal, socio-economic and psychological. The external constraints are related to issues at levels of policy, planning, and implementation while internal constraints arewith respect to education system, content, curriculum, pedagogy, and medium of instruction, et cetera. The third set of problems relates to social, economic, and cultural background of tribals and psychological aspects of first generation learners.

It is important to note that tribals in Jharkhand are at different levels of socio- economic and educational development. To address some of these challenges, the National Policy on Education (NPE), 1986 emphasized tribal education and recommended opening of primary schools in tribal areas on priority basis; developing curricula and devising instructional material in tribal languages; and encouragement of tribal youths to take up teaching in tribal area.

Deprived Eduction because	Poverty No money to pay fee or buy books
	School atmosphere is not very conducive
	Schools are poorly maintained and lack basic facilities
	I need to work in the fields.
	Medium of instruction or language Difficulty in comprehension
	I do not understand the textbooks in the regional language
	Teachers do not know and understand my language
	Non-functionalschool

and incentive schemes for the tribals, keeping in view their special needs and lifestyle. The National Programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which aims to achieve Universal Elementary Education (UEE) also emphasised special focus on education of the tribal children. Tribal children were identified asthe Special Focus Group (SFG) under SSA. One of the main goals of SSA is to "bridge all social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary stage by 2010". It is good and commendable that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) recognizes the varied issues and challenges in tribal education in viewofthe heterogeneous structure of tribal population in the country.

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III. CONCLUSION

There is immense need to understand the context, and background of education system in Jharkhand to address the question of providing equal access of education to tribals. Tribal communities in the state have been historically denied access to resources and opportunities. The present efforts of the government to bring these children into formal schools fail at two levels. Firstly, it is not able to enroll all tribal children and provide good quality functional schools. Secondly, even when tribal children are enrolled into schools, the education system besides doling out some incentives does not do much to improve the school environment to treat these first-generation learners with respect and dignity. Instead, tribal children are made to put up with an offensive and insulting climate that continuously discriminates and alienates. For such historically deprived communities, providing access to education is simply not enough, the government has to take a proactive role in creating overall conditions and opportunities that will facilitate their transition and breaking of the inter generational cycle of poverty and illiteracy. A sensitive cadre of teachers and bureaucracy is definitely required to make the difference. At another level, educational deprivation must be seen in the context of overall deprivation of the community and hence emphasis must be placed on improving the situation of tribal communities in general.

Education is a critical input in human resource development and is essential for the country's economic growth.

Though the major indicators of socio-economic development such as, the growth rate of the economy, birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate (IMR) and literacy rate, are all inter-connected, the literacy rate has been the major determinant of the rise or fall in the other indicators. There are enough evidences, which show that a high literacy rate, especially in the case of women, correlates with low birth rate, low infant mortality rate (IMR) and increase in the rate of life expectancy. The recognition of this fact has created awareness on the need to focus upon literacy and elementary education programmes, notsimply as amatter ofsocial justice butmore to foster economic growth, social well-being, and social stability.

The State had set for it self the goal of achieving universal primary education by 2005 and achieving 85 percent literacy by 2010 which requiresfar reaching changesin policies and rules, tremendous efforts in community mobilization and continued innovations in teaching methodologies. The state promises, initiative and commitment need to be translated on ground, especially in the case of marginalized and tribal population. The paper shows that education of tribals has not received whole hearted support of the state and focused effort in this area is still awaited.

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[1] Governmental indifference and lack of political will are largely responsible forthe callousstate of affairs. The unutilized amount for tribal welfare for the years 1998-2001 for all the states combined was Rs. 40546.46 lakhs. States with high proportion of ST population also had high amounts of unutilized funds with Bihar (Rs. 8113.26 lakhs), Jharkhand (Rs. 4742.62 lakhs), Madhya Pradesh (Rs. 4721.61 lakhs) and Gujarat (Rs. 3721.72 lakhs) topping the order.

[2] Indigenous communities of India are commonly referred to as tribal or adivasi communities and are recognised as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution of India. Although the Constitution does not define Scheduled Tribes assuch, it designatesthese communities asthose which are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. According to Article 342 of the Constitution, the Scheduled Tribes are the tribes or tribal communities or part of or groups within these tribes and tribal communities which have been declared as such by the President through a public notification. The criteria followed for specification of a community, as scheduled tribe are indications of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with the community at large, and back wardness.

[3] The tribal constitutes 26.3 per cent of total population of Jharkhand. Jharkhand has remained a home to a number of tribal communities. In some of the districts of Jharkhand, the tribal population predominates, the non tribal one. Jharkhand has a population of 26.9 million, consisting of 13.88 million males and 13.06 million females.The sex ratio is 941 females to 1000 males. The population consists of 26.3% tribals,11.8 % Scheduled Castes and 60 % others. The literacy rate in Jharkhand is only 54.13 % (2001) and female literacy rate is still lower at 39.38 %.

[4] Female literacy is considered as significant indicator of educational development within any social group. Research studies have shown the importance of female literacy and education in uplifting the socio-economic parameters of a given society. In the context oftribal women in Jharkhand, illiteracy isso highly prevalent that their engagement with the mainstream society is seriously limited.

[5] Jharkhand – Data Highlights: The Scheduled Tribes. Census of India. 2001. Source: Office of the Registrar General,India (web:

[6] www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_jharkhand.pdf)

[7] The state (Jharkhand) has made remarkable progress in reducing the number of out-of –school children in the5-14 age groups by bringing them into the fold of education.The measures taken to promote education have resulted in the reduction of out-of-school children from 1.3 million in 2000 to .38 million in 2006 (Government of Jharkhand).

[8] The idea is that this drive will focuse specially on children who have been out of school, who have reached the school-going age, and those who are going from the primary to middle levels and girls.

[9] Vinoba Gautam. 2003. Education of tribal children in India and the issue of Medium of Instruction: A Janshala experience.

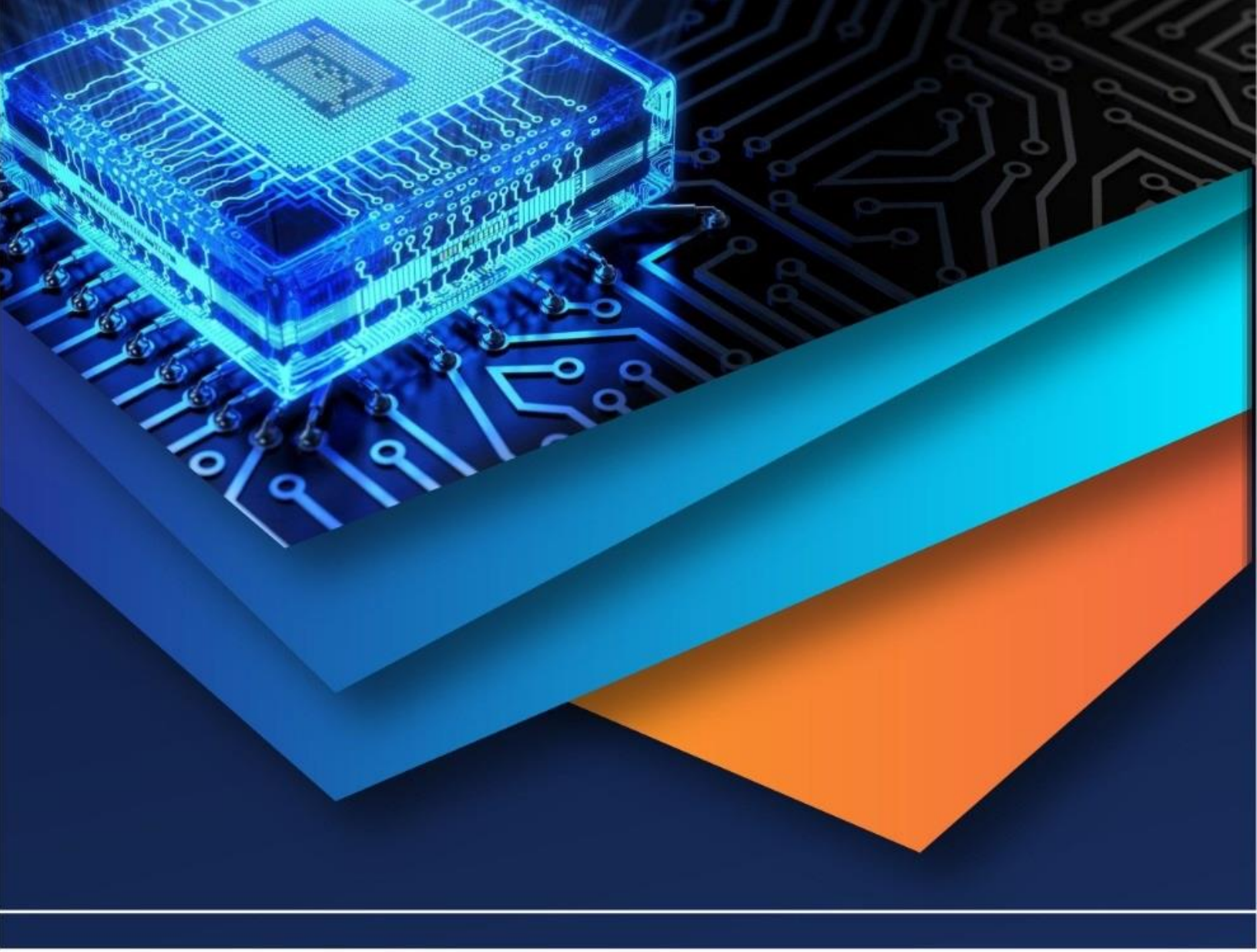
[10] Compulsion to earn forces children to leave schools – Survey. September 10, 2007.Indo-Asian News Service. (Web: http://in.news.yahoo.com/070910/43/6kk3e.html)

[11] The post-metric scholarship Scheme provides financial assistance to all ST students for pursuance of post- metric studies in recognized institutions within India. The Scheme provides for 100% assistance from the Ministry to State Governments and UT Administrations implementing the Scheme, over and above their respective committed liabilities.

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[12] The Ministry under the Scheme provides funds to all the States and UTs having tribal population for establishment of residential schools for STs in an environment conducive to learning near their habitations on sharing basis (50:50) to States and 100% toUTs.
[13] The Janshala Programme was a collaborative effort of the Government of India (GOI) and five UN agencies – UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA – to provide programme support to the ongoing efforts towards achieving Universal Elementary Education (UEE).

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