

## **EMPOWERING AND SKILLING YOUTH FROM MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES THROUGH VOCATIONALISATION OF EDUCATION AND OPEN SCHOOLING IN INDIA**

**Dr. Sukanta Kumar MAHAPATRA**  
National Institute of Open Schooling  
INDIA

### **ABSTRACT**

Youth constitute the highest percentage of working population in India but the youth, who are considered as the strength behind the growth story of the future India, are largely, not only unemployed but unemployable. The proportion of youth being unemployed and unemployable among disadvantaged communities such as scheduled tribes is higher than general categories of population. Thus, the youth employment gap, because of inequitable access or lack of quality vocational training and education in disadvantaged regions, not only deters the disadvantaged communities to gain from the pressing developmental policies and programmes and deepens the problem of deprivation and social exclusion but also widens the socio-economic gap between different communities. Given the enormity and urgency of this growing problem, it is important for practitioners to understand the key challenges and opportunities related to youth livelihood development particularly in the disadvantaged area. While it has been impossible for the youth from disadvantaged communities to benefit to its fullest extent from the formal vocational education system provided the cost and affordability of time and absence of public and private providers in education and training, it is desirable that open schooling systems should evolve as a quality option to meet the demands of these stakeholders for the sustainable development of the communities and also to meet the growing demand of skilled manpower at the global level. Accordingly, there is a need to strengthen the vocational education system for marginalised groups such as tribes at the balance side of both local knowledge and globalism with incorporation of social and cultural elements and indigenous knowledge prevalent in the rural and tribal set-up. Underlying the current discourse, the paper explores number of quality alternatives based on the examination of successful policies and practices from developed and developing nations.

**Keywords:** Vocationalisation, Open School, NIOS, Skill Development, Youth, Marginalized

### **INTRODUCTION**

The skilled workforce as an important determinant of social and economic progress has been well recognized in the research and policy documents. (World Bank, 2001). A youth population with strong and balanced academic and vocational skills not only strengthens the economy and productivity of his own community and society, but also raises the productivity of the nation. Nations with more skilled workforce have the advantage to prosper and gain from the process of globalization which is largely characterized by the high demand of skilled labour rather than traditional resource base and migration of labour and transfer of knowledge and information services across the time and space. Therefore, the eleventh plan has proposed for generation of productive and gainful employment with descent working conditions, on a sufficient scale to absorb the growing labour force. No doubt, India has the natural advantage of having high proportion of young population in the world and has the possibility to gain from the process of aging in most of the developed and developing countries but the high rates of unemployment and lack of employability among youth as one of the manifestations

will possibly impede the growth of the country in the future. On the other hand, there is a sharp edge of employment gap between the urban and rural youth, more particularly in tribal areas, due to low attainment of education and lack of gainful employment opportunities.

Research has shown that Scheduled Caste (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) are more engaged either as self-employed farmers or casual labourers unlike the general group of population. They have minimal non-farm self-employment. SCs have been remained restricted to their caste-based occupation like cleaning and sweeping both in rural and urban areas. The earning average of SCs and STs also found to be less than general caste workers in all occupational categories, with earning gap being higher in white collar occupations (Das and Dutta, 2007). On the other hand, agriculture and allied activities, which is the main source of livelihood for these marginal communities, fail to absorb the growing rural workforce also failed to sufficiently support the food requirement of the families. Therefore, they are compelled to depend on alternative means of livelihood in the nearby areas or recourse to the process of migration. But the process of migration also doesn't sufficient their livelihood due to lack of employability skill and low education. Thus, increasing casualization of labour has been the found as a result of structural shifts taking place in the rural areas. There is a shift in trend from 'agriculture to non-agricultural occupation' such as construction, trade and services, which generally offers better earnings than agriculture. But these employment opportunities being of temporary and casual nature largely affect the livelihood pattern of the family and their community. Thus, it alienates the rural youth not only from himself and his own community and also results in poor conditions of work, low earnings and lack of employment and social security. Therefore, it is important that new and creative solutions need to be designed catering to the needs and requirement of the youth from marginal communities for sustainable development as a whole.

With the changing time, investment in education has been manifold but India is still beyond the reach of universalization of elementary education apart from the goal of universalization of secondary education. No doubt, the profile of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has seen visible changes and improvement on the indicators of education. Yet the number of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes attending higher education counts to be less than that of general group of population. On the other hand, the individuals attending engineering and professional institutions are also less due to the cost and time involved in it. Underlying these assumptions, it is desirable that best and successful practices related to vocational education need to be streamlined in the schooling. While the focus of this section is to provide a brief background of how vocational education is important for the marginal youth, second section provide a background of the education and employment profile of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in India. The third section argues whether vocational education separately or in integration with academic courses be provided to marginal groups and fourth section deals with how open schooling system is a viable option for mainstreaming youth from marginal communities in education and employment. Fifth section discusses various policy options for integration of vocational education with academic and how it can benefit large section of marginalised youth. The final chapter concludes various challenges and issues involved in it.

### **Youth, Marginalization and Labour Market in India**

Youth has been the backbone of a nation's economy and the likelihood of finding a descent job for a youth largely depend on the quality of education and training received before they join the workforce. But it is one of the universal features in most of the developing and underdeveloped nations, most of the youth are disadvantaged in labour market due to deficit in skill and lack of quality education. In India, most of the youth belonging to such communities are more found among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are educationally backward than other communities, comprising of respectively 15% and 8% of the total population in India. Education has been considered as indispensable for the sustainable development of a nation. Therefore, planners and policy makers in India has emphasised for special incentives and provisions for educational development of

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Still SCs and STs are the groups with low educational attainment in India. Statistics reveal that the proportion of households without any literate adult (15 years and above) member or without any literate adult female member was much higher among the households belonging to the STs and SCs compared to the OBCs or others category households in both rural and urban India. About 34 per cent people of India were illiterate. The literacy rate was the highest among the others (78 per cent) category of people, followed by the OBCs with a gap of nearly 13 percentage points, and the lowest among the STs (52 per cent) (NSSO,2004-05).At the higher level of education, SCs and STs also perform very poor than other group of population. The end result is that these marginal groups have low employment opportunities.

No doubt, the work participation ratio is found to be higher among SCs and STs but the quality of employment is very low than other groups. Unlike the general group of population, Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes have very low representation in regular employment. There is employment gap of 16.9% and 10.2% respectively between SCs and general group of population and STs and general group of population in regular employment. On the other hand, high percentage of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes are engaged in casual labour and self-employment that adds a very less earnings than that of regular jobs.

**Table1: Percentage distribution of workers across social and religious groups by status of employment**

	ST	SC	OBC	Minority	Others
Casual	39.4	47.6	26.6	25.5	12.6
Regular	6.7	12.4	12.2	12.6	23.6
Self-employment	53.8	40.0	61.3	61.8	63.8

(Sources: NSSO, 2007-08)

There is also huge gap in average earnings between SCs, STs and other group of population. But the gap is more pronounced in regular jobs, more particularly in the urban settings between marginal groups like SCs, STs and other group of population (Table: 2).

**Table 2: Average Daily wages/Earnings (in Rs) across Social Groups in India.**

	Rural		Urban	
	Males	females	Males	Females
Casual				
STs	45.63	33.33	62.69	42.49
SCs	54.92	36.06	72.35	44.31
Others	56.05	34.35	74.98	46.57
Regular				
STs	130.38	78.04	207.02	123.06
SCs	120.53	59.00	147.95	93.56
Others	178.67	113.37	240.04	197.36

(Sources: NSSO, 2007-08)

Labor market opportunity largely depends on the education received by the individuals. Individual with low educational attainment has very low possibility of getting regular job. Only 4.33% of the illiterate have regular employment against high percentage of graduates entering the regular job (Table-3). However, any significant differences accessing employment arise only after middle or secondary education.

**Table 3: Percentage distribution of workers with different levels of education by employment status**

Education levels of workers	Self-employed	Regular	Casual
Illiterate	56.11	4.33	39.56
Primary	56.03	8.86	35.11
Middle	58.94	11.88	29.18
Secondary	60.34	15.75	23.91
Higher secondary	62.33	25.08	12.59
Graduate and above	49.45	46.29	4.26

(Sources: NSSO, 2007-08)

In fact, the low attainment of educational qualification among Scheduled Tribes and the large extent of drop-out in secondary education among scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the challenges before policy makers and practitioners to address the skill gap between the marginal communities and rest of the population (SES, 2007-08). Therefore, recommendation of Kothari Commission. For vocationalization of secondary education is highly relevant today not only for the development of skilled population and productivity of the economy but also addressing the skill gap of the future in India. The concept of vocationalization, as stated by the Kothari Commission, means to provide a strong vocational bias to secondary education, it does not mean that general and vocational education should be segregated, rather the two should be galvanized to deliver the goods. The Kothari Commission (1964-66) was set up by Government of India to examine the different aspects of the education system in India.

#### **Whither emphasis on integration or special focus on vocational education**

The social, economic and cultural life of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes is altogether different from general group of population. But there is availability of limited literature which focuses upon the participation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in technical and vocational education or Skill gap. Given the limitation of literature, a number of quality options are given based upon the examination of successful policies and practices from both developed and developing countries in the light of Indian social and cultural reality for marginalised groups.

**Assumption 1: High drop-out in secondary level vs. enrolment to vocational education:** Secondary education has been considered as the best preparation for entry into labour markets and further training .But in India high percentage of population more particularly among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe children drop-out due to different push and pull factors(SES,2005-06).While migration can't be entirely stamped out from the life characteristics of the tribal population due to limited work opportunity in the locality, the prejudice and discriminatory attitude and over all doubt over the output of the schooling and high cost of schooling, children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribe drop-out from the school and engaged as manual labour to support their family. Thus, being drop-out from the school and having no option to accumulate the required skill match to the expectation of industry, the cycle of disadvantages fence in scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes throughout their life. Therefore, provision of vocational education with the minimum qualification of secondary education hardly of any significance for disadvantaged group of population since large number of them drop-out before they complete cycle of secondary education. But if the children might be provided with the vocational skills in the secondary level of education, it would have been of great support when they join the workforce.

**Table 4: Comparison of Drop-Out Rates of Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes and General Group of Population from 1996-97 - 2011-12**

		1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2011-12
Elementary Class I-VIII	SC	64.5	63.3	62.2	62.3	60.7	59.9	59.4	57.3	55.17	40.2
	ST	75.2	73.0	72.4	71.9	65.9	68.7	70.1	65.9	63.87	57.2
	General	56.5	56.1	56.3	55.1	54.6	52.79	52.32	50.84	48.80	40.8
Secondary Class I-X	SC	77.6	77.2	74.9	73.4	72.7	71.9	73.1	71.3	70.57	55.3
	ST	84.2	75.8	82.2	81.5	81.2	80.3	79.3	79.0	78.52	65.9
	General	70.0	69.3	66.7	67.0	68.6	66.0	62.58	62.69	61.92	50.3

Source: School Educational Statistics 2011-12

**Assumption 2: Low enrolment in vocational education vs. integration:** Even if the children those who complete secondary schooling and it is expected that some of them would enter into vocational courses, but rare of the students enter into it. (Table-5). Rather they enter into formal education. The Kothari commission's recommendation of putting 25% of the secondary graduates into vocational education is still a dream. On the other hand, there is clear gender bias in preferences for vocational education (figure-1). The enrolment of male is very large than that of female in polytechnic and industrial Training Institute. While there is lack of research explaining the gender gap in enrolment between technical and vocational courses and academic courses, the reason may be attribute to the costs involved in it. But the question arises, if the female at lower level of education aren't provided with the opportunity to access to vocational courses which involve lesser costs than that of Engineering and Medicine courses, how can they earn the skill match to the present day demand of industry and employer driven by technological growth and development(UNESCO,2004). The end result is that either many of them remain unemployed or work as casual labourer (Table:2). Even many of them who enter vocational skills, it is risky for them to back into mainstream education since there is no formalized system in India. Therefore, it may be desirable that vocational skills-oriented courses need to be introduced at secondary level so that the learner graduating from secondary education can earn employable skill before they transit to the workplace.

**Table 5: Enrolment in different level of Education by Social Category for the year 2004-05**

	Tech./Industrial, Art & Craft School			Polytechnic Institutes			Class XI-XII		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
SC	101559	7699	109258	29750	7807	37557	3228000	1990000	5218000
ST	50526	3332	53858	9721	3094	12815	1290000	795000	2085000
<b>Total Enrolment</b>	<b>694939</b>	<b>47391</b>	<b>742330</b>	<b>301537</b>	<b>87090</b>	<b>388627</b>	<b>7464620</b>	<b>5280105</b>	<b>12744725</b>

Source: School Educational Statistics (2004-05)

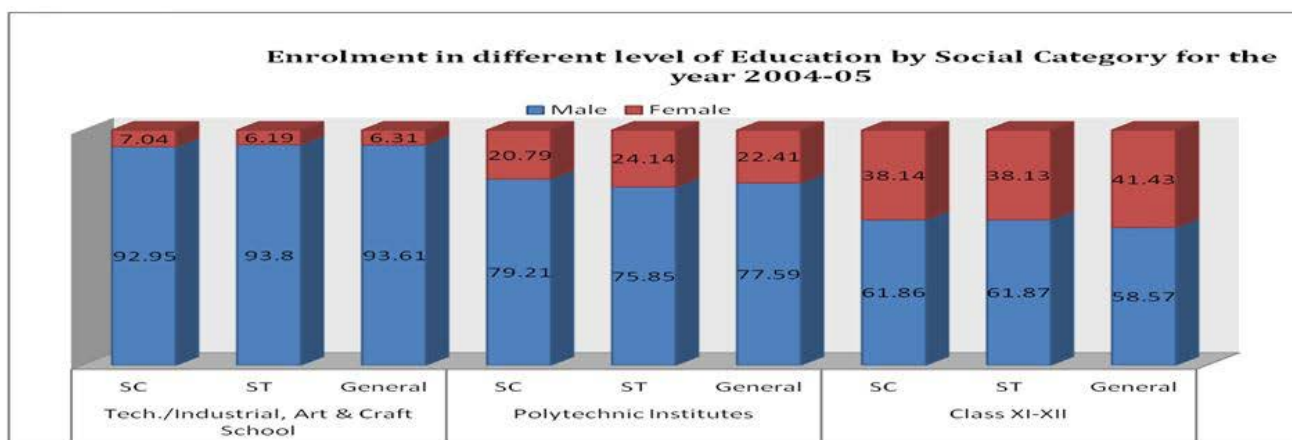


Figure 1. Enrollment in different level of education by social category for the year 2005-05

**Assumption 3: Low enrolment in higher education vs. integration of vocational courses:** The enrolment of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes compared to the total enrolment is very low in engineering, medicine and higher education (SES, 2004-05). It is expected that although the people don't get into vocational education at the lower level, it can be compensated at higher level. But it is disappointing to find that only a small proportion of SCs and STs enter into higher education. Thus, there is a large gap in employment and earnings at present (Table 2) and also can affect the future generation. Lack of employable skills among large percentage of workers strongly highlights the requirement of integrating vocational with academic course in secondary education.

Table 6: Percentage of SC and ST enrolment to Total Enrolment in different Stages of education in 2004-05

Stages of Education	SC	ST
Tech./Industrial, Art and Craft School	14.71	7.25
Polytechnic Institute	9.66	3.29
B.E./B.Sc. (Egg.)/B.Arch.	8.51	3.08
Medicine, Dentistry, Nursing, Pharmacy, Ayurvedic & Unani, Homeopathy etc	11.53	3.71
Higher Education	1.07	0.36

(Source: School Educational Statistics: 2004-05)

**Assumptions 4: Low volume of output from higher education and vocational education vs. integration:** Labour surveys reveal that employable skills in India are still very low than most of the developed and developing countries. Even people enter engineering, medicine and other courses that will link them with employment, several of them fail to match the expectation of the industry. Studies reveal that only 19.6 percent of male and 11.2 percent of female workers possessed marketable skills where as in rural areas only about 10 percent of male and 6.3 percent of female workers possessed marketable skills (Knowledge Commission, 2007). Similarly, a study conducted by an ILO reports that in the states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the percentages of graduates found to be in wage

employment/self-employment upon graduation from ITIs were 16.2 per cent, 41 per cent and 35 per cent respectively. The corresponding percentages for those graduating from ITCs were 21.3 per cent, 22.8 per cent and 35.6 per cent respectively. Given such grim feature, it may be suggested that in order to strengthen employment prospects of the future generation, vocational skills among the graduates from secondary education need to be reinforced from the secondary level.

**Youth, Inclusion and Open Schooling:** Presently, the era of globalization is largely characterised by Freedom and openness and information technology. While India strives to be the superpower in the global economy, it is desirable that population across all social group should have participation at higher level of education. But the grim reality is that there is a huge gap in education. In 2003-04, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) was about 13.22% at overall level. However, there are significant disparities across social groups. The GER is much lower for ST, SC, and OBC as compared with others (that is non-SC/ST/OBC), its being 5%, 7.51%, 11.34% and 24.89% respectively. Thus, the GER for ST was five times, of SC about three times and of OBC about two times less compare with non-SC/ST/OBC population. On the other hand, By national comparison the GER is lower than the national average in state like Tripura (3.2%), Assam (6.6%), Meghalaya (7.2%), Chattisgarh (7.6%), Orissa (8.2%), Jharkand (10.3%), West Bengal (9.7%), Bihar (10%), Sikkim (10.8%), and Rajasthan (11%) in higher education for the population between 19-23 years of age. While social and economic factors impede the representation of marginal groups, the low completion and high drop-out rate at the lower level of education such as elementary and secondary education are the main factors for low GER in higher education. Thus, open schooling having the potency to provide wide coverage to a large group of population can have wide impact in educating these disadvantaged group of population.

Secondly, large percentage of workers engaged as self-employed and casual labors are illiterate and held the qualification of primary and middle qualification (Table-3) and the proportion of workers having low qualification also found more among SCs and STs Population (Table-2). While it might be impossible for them to withdraw themselves from the occupation and enroll in the formal education due to the high opportunity cost and unit cost involved in education, they can be enrolled in the open schooling system. But it is more important that open schooling system should have a value component of skilling the population, who graduate from the secondary level of education.

Thirdly, Open Schooling system has flexibility in time and distance. Large chunk of population from scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes migrate to nearby cities and towns in search of livelihood. Thus, formal education system, which has its limit in time and distance, don't benefit a lot in accessing the adequate knowledge and skills for the SCs and STs. But the open schooling system, which has a great merit in itself using the open and distance technologies can cater to the benefit for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Thus, Open Schooling system can be a great asset not only providing employment opportunities for each and every group of population but also can bridge a skill gap, which has a great rationale for the nation in making for the rising global market.

**Options for strengthening integration of Vocational with Academic for benefitting disadvantaged youth:** As the previous discussion reveals, blending career-oriented and academic courses in secondary education can provide multiple benefits. It could help students avoid premature career decisions, while enabling them to see the practical application of academic subject matter (Oakes & Saunders, 2007). The integration of these courses broadens the choices for students and reaching the widest possible range of young people but the experiences have also shown that the probability of completion of schooling is higher when the courses are integrated than that of providing academic courses in separation from vocational courses Grounding the curriculum in a specific career can be good focus and context to the instruction but should not be cast as a permanent choice, because students often change their plans (Haimson & Deke, 2003). Attention should also given to other forms of skills development ranging from apprenticeships and enterprise training to skills development taking place outside the workplace in non-formal training provided by government and non-governmental bodies.

**Curriculum reforms more particularly competency-based approach should be the central focus:** The desirability to improve quality, learning and open opportunities for lifelong learning through the curriculum reforms should be the centre of all efforts in integrating the courses in schools. The experiences of introducing Competency based training (CBT) approach in countries like Australia, Mexico, Singapore and South Korea has shown promising results not only in accommodating new entrants to labour market and workers seeking to upgrade their skills but it also benefits the workers having the flexibility to enter and acquired skills required by introduction of new technologies and changing labour market requirements. In CBT approach, outcomes are defined in terms of competencies established with advices from industry. Schools and training centers are measured by their success in helping students attain these competencies such as soft skills for communication, problem solving, working in teams and conflict resolution.

**Work experiences programme in secondary curriculum:** Literature confirms that the work experience programme in secondary education has a positive consequence both for employers and the learners. The provision of work experience programme links both employer and future workforce while most of the employer unaware of what is the trend and how they can benefit from the schooling, the students are isolated from actual work experiences and adult social roles. But it rarely happens in India. In USA, many schools award academic credit to students participating in the work experience programme involving jobs with private employers or social service organizations.

**Collaboration with employers, economic institutions and training providers and schools:** It has been a clear trend that Indian education system has been grappling with the lack of adequate funding, which has been figured from the recommendation of Kothari Commission for allocation of 6% of GDP for education. On the other hand, outsourcing can be better option since the trainers being high acquaintance with up-to-date knowledge, expertise and experience may better deal with students. Therefore, the partnership between training providers and school may be an effective option. The experience of Career Academies in USA suggests the benefits of Partnerships between high schools and employers, as well as having the school designate a fulltime staff member to serve as a liaison to employers (Kemple, 2004).

Collaboration with employers also at large facilitates the avenues of employment for learners, more particularly for disadvantaged youth who are being trained by employers particularly when the employers are closely involved in the design and delivery of training. Egypt is a good example of such cases. Mubarak Kohl Initiative-Dual System (MKI-DS) as a pilot project began in 1994 in which Egypt adapted the dual system into its secondary technical schools with support from German Technical cooperation (GTZ). Students from low income families were the main target of the pilot project. Students spent two days each week in school learning theory and four days in a factory where they acquired practical skills. By comparison, students in traditional secondary technical schools spent six full days in school for theory and practice. Employers participating in the program helped set occupational standards, design curricula, provide practical training, and assess student performance. On completion, MKI-DS students received a secondary education degree and a certificate of experience from the private sector. A tracer study conducted in 2009 for the MKI-DS program found that 85% of students completing the program were offered full-time jobs by their employers. The cost of technical education was reduced as practical training took place in the workplace on actual production equipment. Employers showed support by mobilizing additional financial funding for schools and providing students with a training stipend. In 2007, the Ministry of Education institutionalized the program as an option for secondary education (Adams, 2011).

**Voucher system need to be introduced:** Given the challenges of low financial capacity of parents from marginal communities like SCs and STs to fund the education of the children, government can choose the options to provide financing to the end user to choose schools and courses for his benefit instead of financing schools and training institutions. Since SCs and STs Families migrate from one area to other in search of livelihood, the voucher system will provide a good opportunity to access education for their children wherever they migrate. By placing purchasing power in the user's hands, especially the poor, competition by service providers is expected to provide the user with more choices at a lower



cost. Spending may be restricted to certain providers and classes of services and targeted to disadvantaged groups such as displaced workers, rural migrants, or households in poverty. Countries like Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, France, Germany, the U.K., and the U.S have used vouchers for education and training services.

## CONCLUSION

The essential of blending vocational courses into academic for marginal communities can't be ruled out but there is essential of check and balance for optimum benefit for the youth from scheduled and Scheduled Tribe communities. What is really important that strong initiatives need to be taken is to decrease the rate of early school leaving among these marginalised communities otherwise whatever is planned at secondary level of education may go into vain. No doubt, financial investments and incentives are the better options but tracking social and cultural factors for the development of SCs and STs as a policy options need to be addressed.

Secondly, there is a need to standardize the courses and curriculum and, in neither way, it should be overburdened nor deskilled. The platform for educating through vocationalization education should manage diversified category of students including both academically able and children who want alternative options.

Introduction of successful policies and practices to the close of heart and hand is highly desirable for empowerment and skilling of marginal youth. Social and cultural reality and over all the life experiences of marginal communities are far away from the mainstream society. No doubt, industry specific skills as an outcome from secondary graduates is desirable but there is also need to think and rethink of the strategy to modernize traditional skills practiced by these marginal communities especially tribes. Hence, focus should be given on incorporation of these skills in the curriculum. Thus, it not only helps in the preservation of culture and heritage of these tribes but also decrease the extent of migration and leads to sustainable development as a whole.

**Note:** Since the paper is based on a comparable statistic and so the all the comparable data available for a particular year was taken into account.

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#### BIODATA and CONTACT ADDRESSES of the AUHOR



Dr. Sukanta K. MAHAPATRA is Assistant Director (Academic) in National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). He has more than eight years of experience working in Open and Distance Learning mode since 2011. As an academic, he has planned, designed and developed curriculum of many courses in the area of sociology, Gender Studies, Introduction to Law and Disability Studies in Open and Distance Learning. Apart from publishing many papers books and journals, He has also presented papers in more than 30 national and international seminar, conferences and workshops. Dr. Mahapatra has been interested and has developed keen expertise in e-learning, media and virtual reality, ODL for persons with disabilities and curriculum development. He is also the coordinator

of 24x7 SwayamPrabha DTH Channel 30: Gyanamrit in India, which offers NIOS educational Courses in Sign language and bilingual version at Secondary level and Yoga course.

E Mail: [sukanta.dse@gmail.com](mailto:sukanta.dse@gmail.com)