

Integration of Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices among the Sabar Community for Promoting their Education

Shaktipada Mahato^{1*}, Dr. Laxmiram Gope²

¹Research Scholar, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha-University, Purulia, West Bengal, India

²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha-University, Purulia, West Bengal, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2026.v10i04.004>

| Received: 19.02.2026 | Accepted: 13.04.2026 | Published: 16.04.2026

*Corresponding author: Shaktipada Mahato

Research Scholar, Department of Education, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha-University, Purulia, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Education is a prominent weapon for nation-building. No nation can move forward without quality education among its people. In India, several commissions and committees have been established, and numerous recommendations have been made to spread equal educational opportunities among all sections of society. It indicated that education is the means of promoting inclusivity within society with respect to casts, creed, gender, and geographical constraints. But it is a very pathetic and sorrowful situation that many indigenous communities are lagging in education, especially the 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group', or PVTG (previously known as a primitive tribal group). Their educational status is very low, and their condition is inferior, deprived, and increasingly endangered and marginal. Thus, it was evident that educational opportunities are not equally distributed. The tribal community has still not benefited much from education. The Sabar community is one among them. They thought education was a luxury for them. Under the guise of education, it's merely time-wasting, with no practical application or connection to real-life situations. The tribal community is fed up with this modern education. They do not show interest in this education system. As a marginalized tribal group, the Sabars have their own culture, knowledge system, and tradition, which affect their education. Their storytelling, folklore, rituals, daily life experiences, and lack of education are significant. Education through these programs helps increase their social cohesion, motivation, and life skills, among other benefits. The objective of this research is to identify and analyze the indigenous pedagogical practices among the Sabar community, and this work also highlights how indigenous cum cultural context pedagogy helps them to bring mainstreaming in education. Keeping the above objectives in mind, the researcher employed an ethnographic research design and collected data through participatory observation, focus group discussions, and field notes. This article shows that, in its cultural context, indigenous pedagogy has the potential to promote education among the Sabar Community. So, it's our responsibility to identify their informal ways of knowing and incorporate them into the modern educational process, allowing them to find their culture and ways of living within the institutional framework.

Keywords: Education, Indigenous Pedagogy, Communities, Sabar.

Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is often seen as the mainstay of progress, a must-have for the creation of robust societies. But its importance goes beyond simply informing people. It is a major social changer, an instrument that can give people the power and close the gap of long-standing inequalities. One of the key things Gandhi stressed was education that developed the whole person — body, mind, and spirit — so that each person could make a significant contribution to their community. This is a fundamental concept for a country like India, which has many different cultures and where education is not

only a way to address problems caused by caste, class, and geographic origin but also to integrate the country.

Post-independence India has made education its top priority by launching various programs and reforms to achieve universal and inclusive education. The government, backed by landmark commissions and policies such as the Kothari Commission and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, has been very consistent in its stand that education is a primary right and the main source of social justice.

The fact that such a huge gap still exists is what the story tells us most loudly. Not everyone has had equal access to the benefits of these policies. Indigenous peoples and tribal communities have been marginalized the most. The literacy rate among Scheduled Tribes is a good example of this situation. It is only 59% (2011 Census), which is well below the national average of 74%. This is indicative of a constant obstacle to real educational inclusion.

The tribal groups most at risk of being left behind are the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). The government formally recognizes these communities based on criteria such as decreasing population and pre-agricultural source of income. Ordinarily, they reside in secluded, wooded areas, leading self-supporting, culturally rich lives that are profoundly interrelated with nature. Nevertheless, the society at large in which schools exist has mostly been unable to understand their distinctive world. Not only that, but the syllabus hardly ever takes their languages, values, and learning methods into consideration. As a matter of fact, a study conducted by researchers revealed that one of the main reasons for the cultural gap is that education has often left these communities feeling estranged and has led them to oppose it, thereby creating a vast knowledge, training, and potential gap.

The Sabar community is facing a significant challenge in Purulia district, West Bengal. Due to being grouped as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), their hardships are not only financial, but also the profound alienation from the new school system. Sabras who have been dependent on the forest for a semi-nomadic way of life have learned through their life activities. So, in their opinion, nature is the school. By storytelling under the sky, songs carrying the wisdom of the rishis, sacraments, and apprenticeships, they hand over to younger generations not only survival skills but also moral codes. This naturally occurring educational community is an impeccable mirror of their existence.

Anyway, the arrival of formal, mainstream education has turned into a wall rather than a bridge in most cases. Many Sabar families regard the organized, book-based classroom studies as completely irrelevant because they have nothing to do with their lives or the knowledge they have.

The issue at hand is a discrepancy between two educational cultures. If the education provided does not take indigenous knowledge into account, it will end up losing these students rather than empowering them. In UNESCO's words, indigenous knowledge is not something from the past, but a living, changing system that is very important to a person's identity and sustainable learning. By admitting and incorporating this diverse knowledge into the regular school system, we can very well revolutionize student engagement, retention, and—what is more critical—cultural pride.

Through this research, we attempt to achieve this very goal. It aims to thoroughly understand and document the pedagogical practices of the Sabar community and the possibility of their integration into the contemporary educational system. We will conduct in-depth field research, interacting with people, hearing their stories, and drawing on their experiences. This is the philosophy behind the practice, and it is a stepping stone toward educational integration, which recognizes the inexhaustible value of diverse learning methods. In the end, the aspiration is to create a school system where the Sabars are not forced to choose between their culture and their future, but one that acknowledges and respects both, thereby equipping them to succeed without abandoning their identity.

2.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Indigenous education has been a global concern in the context of sustainable development and cultural preservation.

According to UNESCO (2019), indigenous knowledge systems are integral to community resilience and lifelong learning. Tripathy (2014) emphasized that tribal education in India must incorporate local language, culture, and traditions to be effective. Kumar (2017) highlighted those indigenous pedagogies, based on oral traditions and experiential learning, strengthen learners' cultural identity.

In West Bengal, Gope (2020) found that tribal learners face linguistic, cultural, and social barriers in formal education. Despite government schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Kanyashree, the gap between policy and practice persists.

Thus, recognizing and integrating community-based learning into the formal system becomes a significant step toward inclusive education.

3.1 Objectives of the Study:

- a) To identify the indigenous pedagogical practices among the Sabar community in Purulia district
- b) To analyze how these practices promote education and social cohesion among the Sabar Community

4.1 METHODOLOGY

4.1.1 Research Design

The study adopted an ethnographic research design, emphasizing cultural immersion and observation to understand the lived educational experiences of the Sabar people.

4.1.2 Locale of the Study

The research is conducted in selected Sabar-dominated villages in the Purulia district, West Bengal,

known for their distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics.

4.1.3 Participants

Participants included community elders, traditional storytellers, parents, local teachers, and students belonging to the Sabar tribe.

4.1.4 Data Collection Tools

- **Participatory Observation:** The researcher observed rituals, storytelling sessions, community learning, and children's play activities.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Conducted among youth, elders, and women to understand indigenous teaching-learning methods.
- **Field Notes:** Detailed ethnographic notes were maintained throughout.

5.1 Data Analysis

The researcher collected data through door-to-door observation and interviews in various marginal Sabar villages of Purulia district. The main objective of this study was to determine the educational status of the Sabar community, their attitude towards education, and the relationship between their socio-economic status. Detailed data were collected on various aspects of Sabar education, including school attendance rates, teachers' roles, the impact of government assistance, and parents' awareness.

The daily lives of the people in this community are mainly dependent on labor. They live depending on their daily earnings; they have no habit of saving. They have no plan or vision for the future. By ten in the morning, almost everyone in the family goes out to various jobs to earn a living. As a result, not much attention is paid to the children. Parents are not very aware of whether their children are attending school or how much interest they show in their studies.

According to the Sabars, work is more important than studies because wasting time on studies

results in a loss of daily income. They believe that the teaching process and curriculum in schools are not aligned with the realities of the Sabar tribals' lives. As a result, children gradually drop out of school after attending school for a few days in the initial stage. Even after being encouraged a second time, they do not return to school in most cases. There is also a lack of enthusiasm among parents for education. Young children are involved in various labor activities alongside their parents from a young age and gradually move out of the educational system entirely.

To improve the education of the Sabars, it is necessary to develop an education system that is compatible with their culture and lifestyle. School teachers should link education with the nature, culture, and realities of the Sabars, so that it is interesting and meaningful to them. The curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment processes—everything—need to reflect the culture and experience of the Sabar society. Education cannot be forced on them; instead, it must be made enjoyable, experiential, and life-like.

In addition, if the local administration, NGOs, and the education department take the initiative to recruit specially trained teachers, provide mother tongue-based primary education, provide nutritious food, and integrate livelihood skills with education, it may be possible to expand education among the Sabar community. In this way, if education is integrated into their lives, the social and economic conditions of this community will gradually improve.

The people of the Sabar community use a language known as 'Sabari' to communicate with each other. But no script of this language has been found. But almost everyone in the Sabar community in West Bengal knows 'Bangla' as a regional language. Therefore, it would be very beneficial if they were taught in this regional language. Researchers are very excited to introduce each letter of the Bengali alphabet through objects known to the people of the Sabar community. Below is a letter introduction like this:

Bengali Bornomala: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

স্বরবর্ণ	
অ	: অজগর আছ তেড
আ	: আমি আনা খা পেড
ই	: ইন্দুর ছোর ভয় মর
ঈ	: ঈগল উরো পাছে ধর
উ	: উট চল উচি তুডে
ঊ	: ঊ' ট ঝুলে আছ
ঋ	: ঋষি মশাই থান বসে পূজা
এ	: একা গাজ ছুটে যায়
ঐ	: ঐ চা ভাই নাকি ওঠে
ও	: ওল খা নে ধর গলা
ঔ	: ঔষধ খা না কর নে, সুস্থ থাকবি সব সলা

ব্যঞ্জনবর্ণ	
ক	: কাকাতুয়া-র মুড়ু-তে ঠোঁচি
খ	: খরগোস-টা পলায়
গ	: গোক, বাছুর উরি আছি।
ঘ	: ঘুমু চিড়িয়া গাছ-রে ডাকিচি
ঙ	: গোরু হাট-এ লাঙল লইয়া
চ	: চিতা বাঘ-র সরু কাঁড়ি
ছ	: ছাগল পোয়া লাফ দিয়ে চলিচি
জ	: জাহাজ সাগর পানিরে চলিচি
ঝ	: বাউনী হাতে বাবা আসিলে
ঞ	: মিঞা ভাইয়া টান ডাকিচি
ট	: টিয়া চিড়িয়া-র ঠোঁট টা লাল
ঠ	: বুড়া মানুষ শুকনা গাল
ড	: ডাব খাইতে খুশি
ঢ	: ঢোল বাজাইলে আওয়াজ আছে
ণ	: হরিণ বন ধারে থাকে
ত	: তালপাতা পাখা-তে হওয়া ভাল
থ	: থুতু ফেলা নাই, যেখানে-সেখানে
দ	: দাঁড় কাউয়া টা উরি আছি
ধ	: ধান পাকে আশ্বিন মাস-এ
ন	: নৌকা চলায় নয়ন মাঝি
প	: চিড়িয়া-র বাসা হওয়া-এ নড়িচি
ফ	: ফোয়ারা-তে পানি পড়িচি
ব	: বই পড়িলে জান বাড়িচি
ভ	: ভালুক বন ধারে থাকে
ম	: ময়ূর নাচিচি পেখম তুলিয়া
য	: রেগড় ঘুরিচি হাত-র ঘুরণে
র	: রাজহাঁস-র গলা বড়
ল	: লিচু খাইতে অইসো ভাল
শ	: শসা খাইতে মজা
ষ	: ষাঁড় খুশি ঘাস পাইলে
স	: সিংহ বন-র রাজা
হ	: হাতি পিটে চড়িতে মজা
ড়	: গাড়ি-তে ডাং-অন, গুরি-কে নিয়েল-এ।
ঢ়	: আষাঢ় মাস-এ বৃষ্টি ভাল
য়	: পায়রা টা উরি আছি
ৎ	: মাছ ধরি জাল ফেলিয়া

Children learn the language of their parents. They know and understand everything in their mother language. But when they go to get an education, engaging with another language (like Bengali) can feel both uncomfortable and unattractive. As a result, there is a high chance of dropping out. Therefore, it is necessary to give them education in their own language, according to their own preferences. The researcher outlined above how the Sabar children should be taught first-word knowledge and introduced to letters.

Imagine a little boy, let's call him 'Chotu'. The child has spent his entire life in Purulia, where he has experienced the red earth, the gentle sounds of Sal trees,

and the musical patterns of Kurukh, which his Sabar heritage speaks. The language of his childhood consisted of the lullabies his mother sang, the forest stories his father told, and the hidden words he shared with his friends. On his first day of school, he is led into a concrete room where a stranger speaks in a rapid, unfamiliar torrent—Bengali. The letters on the board are not just symbols he doesn't understand; they are the gatekeepers to a world that has silently declared his own world invalid. He feels a knot in his stomach. He is not silent because he is shy, he has been made speechless. This is the reality for countless Sabar children.

At first, you will see a hint of fear in their eyes, a flicker of recognition returning to its place. A child, once known as the epitome of anxiety, will gradually sit up straight. They will confidently raise their hands to answer the questions. The classroom will no longer be an unfamiliar, intimidating place, but will feel like an extension of their home (a familiar environment)—a place for learning, certainly, but also a place to feel a sense of belonging.

The sound of their own language in the formal setting of a school will send a powerful, unspoken message: “Your heritage is not an obstacle to education; it is its foundation. Your identity is welcome here.”

A. Language of a bridge:

This isn't about keeping them in their language; it's about using their language as a bridge. I. From the known to the unknown: A teacher can explain the concept of “*root*” by starting with the core layer collected from the forest. Children understand its reality, its purpose. From that concrete knowledge, it becomes easier to grasp the abstract concept of “*root*” in mathematics or grammar. Their vast traditional knowledge of plants, animals, and ecosystems currently classified as “*non-academic*” will thus serve as the foundation for their science and environmental education studies.

- i. The joy of participation: Instead of memorizing meaningless words, learning becomes an act of discovery. They eagerly participate in storytelling sessions, not just to hear Bengali folk tales, but to share their own stories in Kuruk, building pride and verbal skills. The classroom is filled with lively, human sounds of conversation and laughter, not the silence of confusion.
- ii. Partnership with parents: Today, a Sabar parent, who may have a wealth of practical knowledge but is illiterate in Bengali, cannot help their child with homework. They feel disconnected from their child's education. If primary education is in Kuruk, a parent can sit with their child and ask them in their shared language, “What did you learn about the moon today?” The parent becomes a partner, not an outsider. The sacred bond of family and knowledge is strengthened, not broken.

6.1 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed several indigenous pedagogical practices prevalent among the Sabar community:

6.1.1. Oral Tradition and Storytelling:

Storytelling is a primary educational tool among the Sabars. Folk tales, myths, and ancestral stories convey moral lessons, community values, and problem-solving skills. These oral traditions function as informal

educational institutions that transmit knowledge and ethics.

6.1.2 Learning through Observation and Participation:

Children learn through observing elders during hunting, farming, craft-making, and ritual performances. This *experiential learning* emphasizes imitation, practice, and correction—a natural form of apprenticeship.

6.1.3 Songs, Dance, and Ritual Pedagogy:

Songs and dances are not mere entertainment but vehicles for teaching history, ecology, and spirituality. Participation in cultural festivals fosters unity and collective learning.

6.1.4 Nature as a Learning Resource:

The Sabar worldview holds that nature is the ultimate teacher. Forests, rivers, and animals are integrated into their learning processes. This ecological pedagogy enhances environmental awareness and practical knowledge.

6.1.5 Community-based Evaluation:

Learning outcomes are not measured by tests but by observable behavior, cooperation, and contribution to community welfare. Elders play a key role in assessing children's readiness for adult responsibilities.

7.0. Educational Implication:

From the analysis of the above objectives, it was seen that education among the Sabar community remains inferior, and, due to a lack of education, they have become deprived and marginalized.

The researcher drew the educational implications from the above objectives:

Educationally, the Sabar community is deprived, and they do not find any relevance in education from their socio-cultural and economic point of view. If we want to educate them, we must rethink the overall educational paradigm, including the goals of education, teaching methods, curriculum, and institutional shifts, which are urgent for promoting education among the Sabar.

- a. Aims of education and Sabar community: The modern educational goals are far from the reality of life; they only emphasize theoretical execution, without giving enough importance to practical knowledge. It is not meaningful because it is far from life, and what we talk about is not relevant in our lives.
- b. Pedagogical Dimension: Our current teaching learning process only gives importance to the knowledge transformation and knowledge acquisition, not giving importance to being involved in the situation from which they understand and grow from their childhood.

- There is a considerable discrepancy between teaching and understanding.
- c. Curriculum and learning experiences: Current Curriculum is not relevant to the Sabar children, curriculum must be the nature of Sabar people, daily life activities, their tradition etc. and which is link to their life and work.
 - d. Schools' atmospheres: School must be established near to the Sabar hamlet. Sabar culture, Sabar seasonal language, tradition are must be included in the school. No discrimination, no unexclusive existed here.



Figure 1: Educational implication of the study

7.1. CONCLUSION

The indigenous pedagogical practices of the Sabar community demonstrate a holistic and experiential form of education rooted in nature, culture, and community life. Recognizing these informal ways of knowing and integrating them into the modern education system can enhance participation and retention among Sabar children. Education should not alienate learners from their culture but empower them through it. Policymakers, educators, and researchers must collaborate to develop a culturally grounded curriculum that respects indigenous epistemologies.

The indigenous pedagogy education system is highly reflected in the education of the Sabar community. It is related to the daily life, culture and traditions of the Sabar community. Children gain knowledge by observing various daily things, participating in various events, telling stories that are related to the subject. This education will not be limited to the classroom only, but will be taught in the field, within the community, in their forests, etc. As a result, they will be able to survive through education, understand the environment, and manage social responsibilities and cultural values properly.

Creating an education system centered on this community will increase the depth of their intellect and

education will be transmitted smoothly between generations. But the current education does not give importance to this type of education of the Sabar community. As a result, most of the Sabar community ignores the current education and they are becoming isolated. This can reduce their formal student participation and student retention.

Incorporating the Shabar community's teaching practices with the current curriculum will increase participation in education. Cultural identity in education should be strengthened rather than erased. This will build the confidence and respect for education of the Sabar community.

Those working for the education of this community, policy makers, educators and researchers should work towards creating better learning structures by including them. Teacher training programs should be more sensitive to cultural diversity.

REFERENCES

- Census of India. (2011). *Primary census abstract data highlights – India*. Government of India. <https://censusindia.gov.in>
- Gandhi, M. K. (1953). *Basic education*. Navajivan Publishing House.

- Mahato, S. and Gope, L. (2024). Voice towards Education: A Study of the Educational Status of the Sabar Community. *Int. J. Soc. Sci.*, 13(02): 39-45.
- Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.
- Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (2021). *Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in India: A policy brief*. Government of India.
- Singh, A., & Das, S. (2020). Indigenous knowledge and learning practices among the tribal communities of eastern India. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 61(4), 529–548.
- Tripathy, R. (2014). *Education of tribal children in India: Issues and challenges*. Concept Publishing.
- UNESCO. (2019). *Indigenous knowledge systems and education for sustainable development*. UNESCO Publishing.