

Mishra, M. K., *Erai Erai: Multilingual Education in Tribal Schools of India: Voices from Below*. Manak Publication Pvt. Ltd., 2024, ISBN 13: 9789391897949

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Erai Erai Multilingual Education in Tribal Schools of India: Voices from Below is a profound experiential account that delves into the intricate realities driving policy formulation and implementation in the realm of multilingual education (MLE) in the tribal regions of Odisha and other areas like Chhattisgarh. The book, authored by an experienced practitioner, who offers a rich narrative of the challenges and successes encountered in the quest to make education meaningful for tribal children.

This book is divided into nine chapters. The first two chapters trace the evolution in educational policies in language and literacy education from post-independent times and its impact on tribal children. They also talk about the prejudices and resistance that the author and his team experienced in taking the ideas of MLE forward. The book offers due value and recognition to the languages spoken by the Scheduled Tribes, thus subverting the dominance of the language of power. Though there are multiple arguments in favour of using a child's home language in the classrooms for making learning contextual and meaningful, the book reveals that the tribal community looks at these as efforts to restrict their social mobility. Therefore, the book with its critical lens deliberates upon the efforts that wish to acquaint the people in power from these communities with the rationale of MLE.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to addressing the need for sensitizing teachers to the cultural and linguistic contexts of their students through comprehensive training programmes designed to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the challenges of classrooms in tribal areas. The work was not limited to training the teachers in tribal areas, but also to developing a primer with thirty-two lessons. These primers represent a practical application of the training and prove to be crucial tools in making education more accessible and relevant to tribal children.

The next two chapters inform us about the demographic realities and associated diversities, and how MLE gives space to the community

knowledge in the classroom. Folklore, plays, arts and crafts, songs, etc. are elaborated as resources that can be used in teaching of various subjects. A detailed account of the Srujan programme that welcomes storytellers and community leaders is also highlighted. The classroom becomes more learner-centric, as these become the forum for learners to engage with their experiences, emotions, creativity, and imagination. In chapters seven and eight, we see how the teaching-learning strategies from MLE in Odisha are integrated in diverse subjects and topics. The aim was to develop a learning community that was not limited to teachers and learners, but involved the parents, community members and officials of the state as well. This made learning “a joint productive activity.”

The book acknowledges the debate around the language of the children and the medium of instruction. It is also imperative to understand the social conditions and the learning environment of the child. As the book notes, every chore and activity the tribal communities engage in, has inherent utility value. This deeply ingrained connection to their everyday tasks makes traditional schooling, which often detaches them from their native languages and cultural practices, seem unnatural and alien.

The narrative begins in Odisha, where a linguistic survey conducted two decades ago revealed critical insights into the language barriers faced by both children and teachers. For the children, the language of the school was alien, and for the teachers, the language of the child’s home was equally foreign. This mutual alienation created a hostile and ineffective learning environment. So, the book takes us through the process of addressing the ethnic stereotypes and biases that teachers often harboured, which lead to the creation of a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

One of the striking aspects of the book is its emphasis on the practical discourse that the author and his team experienced during the planning and implementation phases of MLE programmes. While the book does not shy away from discussing the theoretical underpinnings of MLE, it is the practical insights and real-world experiences that make it particularly valuable.

Overall, this book is an invaluable resource for scholars, teachers, teacher educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in language

and literacy education. Its rich narrative, grounded in practical experience, offers a realistic portrayal of the challenges and successes in implementing MLE policies in tribal areas. This book showcases how various stakeholders in education can come together to defeat the culture of silence in the classroom. By focusing on MLE, the book highlights that the curriculum should be tailored to the needs of the children, thereby fostering an inclusive and empowering learning environment.

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