



Higher Education in India: A Study on Marginalised Community

¹Charu Singhal, ²Dr. Pravesh Lata

¹Research Scholar

²Associate Professor of Education SOLA, GD Goenka University.

Email Id:charusinghal.ps@gmail.com

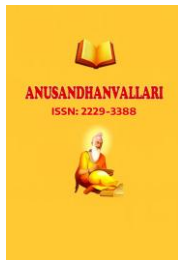
Introduction

Indian education has a long history of being exclusive. Boys who were Brahmin were taught to read and write by a Brahmin instructor, and their traditional Hindu education was adapted to their requirements. India was ruled by the British from the 1700s until 1947, and during that time, the education policies there strengthened the aristocratic inclinations already there by linking progress in government service to academic knowledge, Cheney, (G. R., Ruzzi, B. B., & Muralidharan, K. (2005). (Public Report of Basic Education, 1999.) Higher and more affluent castes have always had their interests served by post-primary education. Post-primary students in the nineteenth century were predominantly Brahmins; British educational systems favored them because of their long-standing commitment to study. 2 Public Report of Basic Education, 1999. Most children who go to high school are still from upper-class, middle-class, and high-caste families living in metropolitan regions. It is not unexpected that India has the highest percentage of illiterate individuals in the world given this historical barrier and the post-independence concentration of the educational system on secondary school rather than basic education (compared to the number of students in each category). Moreover, one in three Indian people (including 16.9% including male and female) are illiterate, according to the NSSO report 2022. Despite being a difficulty, the difference in illiteracy rates between men and women is narrowing: men are 25% less likely than women to be illiterate. The rates of literacy in various States vary greatly as well. Although the government has put more of an emphasis on primary education, The present inefficiency in delivering public services in education, marked by substantial teacher absenteeism of 6 percent and limited teaching engagement even when teachers are present, is expected to continue to hinder educational attainment levels in the coming times. A student must pass the senior secondary test administered by the state or the federal board of school education in order to enroll in a higher education program in India. Three years are spent on the first degree's general education requirements in the arts, sciences, and business, followed by two years of master's degree-level coursework and three to five years of doctorate study in the area of interest. According to current statistics, 37% of students are majoring in the arts, 19% are majoring in science, 18% are majoring in commerce, and 61% are majoring in engineering. Compared to other developing nations, this represents a major advancement in the area of higher education. After independence, the higher education system in India saw incredible growth and became the biggest in the world. In 900 institutions throughout India, more than 25 million students are enrolled in higher education, according to a recent MHRD study. Additionally, there are 40026 colleges that provide degrees. 1800 of them are all-female institutions. About ten state universities for women exist. About 11669 freestanding institutions exist. This presents a tremendous opportunity for the nation's research and development to advance quickly.

After India gained independence in 1947, the Constitution of India introduced provisions to uplift Scheduled Castes, including women, through affirmative action policies such as reservations in educational institutions, government jobs, and political representation. However, the situation for SC women remained challenging due

to entrenched social prejudices and deep-rooted discrimination. Rani, S. (2018, July 1). Over time, various governmental and non-governmental organizations have initiated programs and policies aimed at empowering SC women. These initiatives have focused on education, healthcare, skill development, employment opportunities, and legal rights to address the specific challenges faced by SC women. Organizations advocating for women's rights and social justice have also raised awareness about the intersectional issues faced by Scheduled Caste women, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address their unique concerns. Despite these efforts, SC women continue to confront significant hurdles, including limited access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and disproportionate vulnerability to various forms of violence and exploitation. Intersectional discrimination based on caste and gender remains a critical issue that needs concerted efforts from both governmental and non-governmental entities to ensure the comprehensive empowerment of Scheduled Caste women in India. Micheni, B. M. (2020).

Education plays a pivotal role in promoting equality among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India. It serves as a potent tool for empowerment, breaking the cycle of discrimination, and fostering social change. Here's how education contributes to promoting equality among Scheduled Castes, SC communities have faced barriers in accessing quality education due to various socio-economic factors, discrimination, and lack of resources. Efforts to provide equal access to education through government initiatives like scholarships, reservation quotas in educational institutions, and outreach programs have significantly increased enrolment among SC students. Singh, Y. (2023, May 15). Even though, Education empowers individuals by providing knowledge, skills, and awareness. Educated individuals from SC communities are better equipped to understand their rights, challenge social norms, and participate actively in societal matters, contributing to their own and their community's upliftment. Education opens doors to better employment opportunities. With access to quality education, SC individuals can break the cycle of poverty, gain skills for higher-paying jobs, and contribute to economic development, thereby reducing socio-economic disparities. Nakamura, T., & Murayama, Y. (2011, September). Education fosters understanding and empathy, reducing prejudices and discriminatory practices against SC communities. It helps in creating an inclusive environment where individuals are respected regardless of their caste background. Educated individuals from SC communities are more likely to participate in political, social, and economic spheres, leading to increased representation in decision-making bodies. This representation can advocate for policies that further promote equality and address the specific needs of SC communities. Education is especially crucial for empowering SC women. Educated women are more likely to challenge gender and caste-based discrimination, make informed choices about their lives, and participate in social and economic activities, leading to overall community development. Education equips SC individuals with knowledge about their legal rights and entitlements. This awareness helps in accessing government schemes, protections against discrimination, and asserting their rights in various domains. However, challenges persist in ensuring equal and quality education for SC communities. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, socio-economic disparities, lack of quality teachers, and deep-rooted prejudices need to be addressed through sustained efforts from the government, civil society organizations, and communities themselves. A comprehensive approach that focuses on not just access but also quality education is essential to bring about lasting equality among Scheduled Castes through education. Education plays a pivotal role in promoting equality among Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India. It serves as a potent tool for empowerment, breaking the cycle of discrimination, and fostering social change. Here's how education contributes to promoting equality among Scheduled Castes. Chakravarty, D., & Shinde, G. (2022, December 31).



Government Policies and Initiatives

The government has also launched a number of scholarship initiatives targeted at women from underprivileged communities. Under the Pragati Scholarship Scheme, which assists girls pursuing technical education, around 20,000 girls get financial help annually (AICTE, 2022). Despite the fact that the effort has increased the number of individuals signing up for technical courses, raising awareness is challenging in rural areas where cultural barriers still prevent participation. Verma (2022) The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao movement is another significant effort to reduce gender disparity in education. It was initially established to prevent the sex ratio from declining, but it subsequently expanded its goals to include encouraging female education and discouraging child marriage. According to a Ministry of Women and Child Development research, the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao movement has contributed to a little increase in the percentage of females enrolling in school in some areas (2021). The program's strong focus on basic and secondary education, according to critics, limits its impact on higher education (Basu, 2021).

Scholarships & Financial Assistance

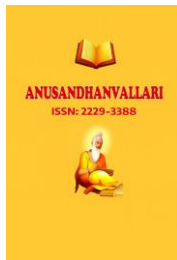
Financial barriers still severely restrict women's access to higher education, particularly for those from low-income families. Financial assistance and scholarship schemes have been established by the Indian government and various non-governmental organisations to alleviate the financial load on women who wish to pursue higher education. The Post-Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child offered by the UGC is one initiative that aims to persuade families to take their daughters to education beyond secondary school. In rural regions where patriarchal ideas continue to underestimate the significance of women's education, the scholarship's influence remains small, even when it helps urban single daughters enrol in college (Sharma & Patel, 2021).

According to N.Sukumar, The departure of more than 2,400 students from the 23 Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) over the past two years reveals a noteworthy trend, with a majority originating from the general category. This data, presented by the Ministry of Human Resource Development in Parliament, indicates that 1,290 students from the general category and 1,171 students from the SC, ST, and OBC categories collectively comprise the dropout numbers. The majority of these dropouts have been observed in the older IITs, with Delhi recording the highest at 782, followed by Kharagpur with 622, Bombay with 263, Kanpur with 190, and Madras with 128. This data underscores the enduring presence of significant caste-related disparities within higher education institutions.

Barriers to Higher Education Access for Scheduled Castes Women:

Social exclusion, cultural norms, and poverty were the three main issues that affected Scheduled caste women's access to higher education, according to the findings. To go on to the next level, a girl and her family must deal with social isolation, cultural standards, and poverty at each step. Along with this many studies shows that, believing that higher education was just for affluent people and excluding themselves from it. They would thus be less inclined to look for information on assistance for higher education.

When Dalit women successfully navigate the obstacles to getting higher education, they continue to face significant barriers in their subsequent journey. Many studies reveal that within the institutions there is a slew of hurdles that hinder their degree completion, (Sangole, 2017) study shows that concepts of biases and discrimination are not far away from the Indian society we have a slew of data which shows that most of the Dalit women face caste discrimination, minority biases (as women) and so on, just because they are Dalit as well as women, Dalit women face triple discrimination in the Indian society. Education is only the best way to



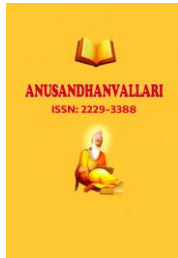
uplift their status. (Kumar, 2019) The data indicates that nearly 48% of students acknowledge caste conflict as a significant challenge confronting Indian society.

Vivek Kumar (2021) "Nature and Dynamics of caste discrimination on higher education campuses" Department of sociology, author claims, many teachers and students are being exploited in university campus so that they are not able to complete their degree on time, which can be expressed low interest for their study and feeling of social stigma As we see, this will negatively affect the gaining social status in the society. In fact, the study conducted by N. Sukumar (2016) revealed that social stigma not only affected natively on social status it is also forces for suicide. Undoubtedly, there are many hindrances for Dalit women to achieve social status in the society. World development report (2018), shows that "More than 260 million individuals globally experience caste discrimination. Caste-based discrimination has hindered educational advancement across all societal segments.

Shailaja Paik (2014) The statement suggests that Dalits often face challenges within their household environment, characterized by poor living conditions that are not supportive of education. Persistent issues related to survival and indebtedness contribute to a home environment that lacks the resources to address challenges concerning homework or school-related matters. There are many evidence shows that conditions of Dalit girls for accessing the secondary and higher secondary education are very poor so that, there are all evidence are supporting that we need to figure out education status of Dalit women in higher education. Many scholars, drawing inspiration from French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, have formulated theories emphasizing the significant role of education in shaping students' careers. Scholars like Reay et al. (2001) and Ball et al. (2002) introduced the concept of institutional habitus, illustrating how institutions influence students' career aspirations. Institutional habitus, as defined by Reay et al. (2001, p. 2), refers to the intricate blend of agency and structure, representing the impact of cultural groups or social classes on an individual's behavior within an organization. Similar to individual habitus (Bourdieu 1990), institutional habitus influences and is influenced by its primary clientele. Bourdieu (1990, 1994) contends that human practices are neither solely dictated by rules nor solely by conscious rational decision-making. The concept of habitus, signifying a mental and cognitive structure ingrained in individuals, aims to transcend the dichotomy of structure and agency. This paper intends to investigate the educational status of Dalit women in higher education. Higher education has apparent advantages, but a number of obstacles restrict women's ability to make decisions in their homes and communities. Gender biases, cultural norms, and the legacy of patriarchy continue to influence how much decision-making authority educated women have. Although women are empowered by higher education, deeply ingrained cultural attitudes frequently prevent them from fully participating, according to research by Patel (2020).

Women education among Tribal Community in India

In India's varied social and cultural scene, tribal communities have often been overlooked, and women in these groups deal with double discrimination - being part of indigenous communities and also facing challenges as women in a male - dominated society (Parveen & Imran, 2023). Even though the Constitution of India guarantees equal rights for everyone and provides special support for Scheduled Tribes in Articles 15(4), 46, and 275, there are still significant gaps in education, especially for tribal women (Gangwar, 2023). Education is seen as a powerful way to empower people, helping them to better their economic situations, make their own choices, and get involved in improving society. For tribal women, education goes beyond just learning to read and write; it opens doors for them to rise socially, achieve gender equality, and embrace their culture (Chandra & Kumar, 2023). However, Rajak and Chauhan (2023) point out that these women are still not well represented



in formal education because of several reasons like financial struggles, being in remote areas, cultural biases, poor facilities, and not having enough political voice.

Education is not only a fundamental right but also a vital catalyst for socio-economic progress. In India, however, tribal women continue to encounter substantial obstacles that restrict their access to quality education. Although the government has implemented numerous policies and initiatives to promote educational opportunities for tribal communities, the educational attainment of tribal women remains significantly lower than that of their non-tribal counterparts. As emphasized in UNESCO's report *"Learning: The Treasure Within"* by the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, education represents an indispensable asset for achieving peace, freedom, and social justice, as well as for addressing the challenges of the future. It serves as a cornerstone for both individual empowerment and holistic societal development (Damor Parthvee R and etal., 2024).

Adivasis, or tribal communities, constitute about nine percent of India's population, accounting for nearly 87 million people. These groups are primarily concentrated across several states in the country. Over time, the education system for tribal communities has evolved, with a strong focus on primary education and the introduction of various measures, programs, and strategies to enhance educational access and quality. Additionally, teacher training initiatives have been implemented to strengthen educators' ability to effectively teach tribal students (Bagai & Nundy, 2009) c.f. (Damor Parthvee R. and etal., 2024).

Thakur (2009) highlights the economic, social, and physical disadvantages faced by tribal communities, particularly women, who are often marginalized and viewed as secondary. This calls for targeted efforts to improve their social status and livelihood opportunities. Arya (2012) points out that the existing educational development approaches in tribal societies often overlook unique challenges such as low population density, scattered settlements, and the lack of context-specific programs or policies for tribal education. Similarly, Velusamy (2021) emphasizes the persistent educational gap between tribal and non-tribal populations in India, despite various government interventions.

Issues and Challenges among Tribal women

Difference in language and culture: For tribal students, language and culture are major obstacles to education. Their livelihood options are influenced by their distinct cultures, traditions, norms, beliefs, and philosophies. Language differences hinder effective communication with teachers and fellow students, making it difficult for them to understand academic concepts and adapt to other cultures, norms, and principles.

Socio-Cultural Constraints and Patriarchal Norms A major ongoing issue is the social and cultural system that shapes tribal life. Even though India's tribal communities are culturally diverse, traditional gender roles usually keep women confined to home duties, which restricts their presence and independence in education. In many tribes, traditional beliefs still make it hard for girls to get a proper education, especially after elementary school. These beliefs are often supported by things like getting married young, having to take care of the house, and not having much say in their own lives, especially for married women (Manna, 2024; Mohd Rafi Paray, 2019, c.f Priyanka and Kumar, 2024)

In tribal communities, the idea that girls' education is less important than boys' is made worse by a long history of not being able to read and write, language differences, and a reluctance to adapt to the formal education system. In areas where tribal women are crucial for the economy and rely on forests for their livelihoods, their influence is still missing when it comes to choices about education and being involved in the community (Manna, 2024, Priyanka and Kumar, 2024).



Lack of facilities and learning materials:

Tribal schools lack essential facilities and amenities, such as teaching materials, technology, furniture, heating and cooling equipment, clean drinking water, restrooms, library, laboratory, playgrounds, and extra-curricular activities. These deficiencies hinder the effective implementation of job duties, causing problems for teachers, staff, and students, leading to unsatisfactory academic outcomes and an increase in student dropout rates. Tribal students often struggle with obtaining sufficient learning materials due to poverty and financial constraints. These materials, including textbooks, technologies, and internet, are crucial for understanding academic concepts and achieving academic goals (Damor Parthvee R. and etal., 2024).

Without these resources, students face challenges in acquiring education. School authorities should ensure libraries and laboratories are well-equipped with books, materials, and technology to promote organized learning. Poverty: One of the primary challenges is poverty. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2018), many tribal families live below the poverty line, making it difficult to afford educational expenses such as school fees, uniforms, and books. The opportunity cost of sending children, particularly girls, to school is often too high for families who rely on every member to contribute to the household income through labor. Rao and Narain (2010) argue that this economic strain often forces families to prioritize immediate survival needs over long-term educational investments.

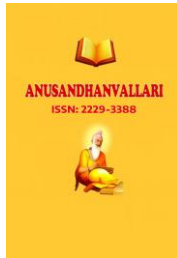
The Gendered Nature of Tribal Educational Disadvantages

Education is widely recognized as a powerful means of empowerment, yet women in tribal communities continue to face unique challenges due to their social and economic circumstances. Many tribal girls are often withdrawn from school to assist with household responsibilities, enter early marriages, or contribute to family income (Parveen & Imran, 2023; Singh, 2024). As Singh (2024) notes, low literacy levels, financial barriers, and traditional cultural norms remain major hurdles that restrict access to education for tribal women, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and social exclusion across generations. Padmavathi and Devi (2024) further emphasize that tribal women lag behind in key educational indicators such as the Gender Parity Index and Gross Enrolment Ratio. High dropout rates and a lack of motivation—largely stemming from systemic inequality and economic hardship—continue to hinder their educational progress. This aligns with Gangwar's (2023) findings, which reveal that tribal girls face a higher risk of dropping out due to persistent neglect and inadequate educational infrastructure that fails to address their gender-specific needs.

Gender Discrimination:

Gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in many tribal societies. Traditional gender roles often prioritize boys' education over girls', viewing education for girls as unnecessary since they are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities and marriage. This cultural norm significantly limits the educational opportunities available to tribal girls. Rani (2014) notes that challenging these deep-rooted gender biases is crucial to improving educational access for tribal women (c.f. Damor Parthvee R. and etal., 2024)

Early Marriage: Early marriage is another prevalent issue. Many tribal communities practice early marriage, which often results in girls dropping out of school at a young age. Once married, girls are expected to take on household duties, leaving little to no time for education. Kumar (2016) argues that addressing the issue of early marriage is essential to ensuring that tribal girls can continue their education.



References:

- [1] Chakraborty, S. (2013). Empowering the Tribal Women through Education: Issue of Social Justice with Reference of West Bengal. *Afro Asian Journal of Anthropology and Social Policy*, 4(1), 24. <https://doi.org/10.5958/j.2229-4414.4.1.005>
- [2] Chandra, S., & Kumar, A. (2024). Opportunities and challenges in empowerment of tribal women in India. In S. Kumar (Ed.), *New vision for tribal empowerment in India: Strategies, opportunities and challenges* (Vol. 1, pp. 42–45). Paragon International Publishers. studies.
- [3] Dutta, G. (2012). Education of Tribal Women in India: Opportunities and Challenges. 1(2). <http://www.ijacp.org/ojs/index.php/ISG/article/view/152/300>
- [4] Gangwar, R. K. (2024). Challenges of tribal women education in India. In S. Kumar (Ed.), *New vision for tribal empowerment in India: Strategies, opportunities and challenges* (Vol. 1, pp. 182–184). Paragon International Publishers.
- [5] Javed, S., & Singh, P. (2024). Social and educational development of women in scheduled tribes. In S. Kumar (Ed.), *New vision for tribal empowerment in India: Strategies, opportunities and challenges* (Vol. 1, pp. 215–219). Paragon International Publishers.
- [6] Padmavathi, K., & Devi, M. R. (2024). An Analysis of the Empowerment of Indian Tribal Women through Education. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(XVI), 91–98. <https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2024.816sco007>
- [7] Parveen, L., & Imran, M. (2024). Tribal women in Indian society: Major confronts and its measures. In S. Kumar (Ed.), *New vision for tribal empowerment in India: Strategies, opportunities and challenges* (Vol. 1, pp. 121–124). Paragon International Publishers.
- [8] Rakshita, P. (2024). Empowering tribal women: Navigating the landscape of Indian politics. In S. Kumar (Ed.), *New vision for tribal empowerment in India: Strategies, opportunities and challenges* (Vol. 1, pp. 112–119). Paragon International Publishers.
- [9] Sarangi, S. B. P. (2024). Tribal Women in India: a framework of empowerment. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 13(2), 1766–1773. <https://doi.org/10.21275/sr24228124813>
- [10] Singh, R. (2024). Socio-Economic development of Tribal Women through Education. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i06.34335>.
- [11] Ghosh, S. (2015). Challenges of tribal education in India: A policy perspective. *Social Change*, 45(1), 76–84. Kumar, K. (2016). Tribal education in India: Issues and concerns. *Journal of Educational Research and Review*, 4(2), 12–18. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. (2018). Report on the status of education among Scheduled Tribes in India.
- [12] Mutharayappa, R., & Bhat, P.N.M. (2008). Gender, caste and schooling in rural India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43(32), 55–63.
- [13] Rani, U. (2014). Education and empowerment of tribal women in India. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 28(1), 45–61.
- [14] Rao, N., & Narain, K. (2010). Education of tribal children in India. *Indian Journal of Social Development*, 10(2), 271–289. Thakur, D.T.D. (2009). Tribal education. Deep and Deep Publications. Vol (8). V. Rajkumar Velusamy, (2021). A Contemporary Overview about Status and Challenging Issues of Tribal Education in India IJAE <https://doi.org/10.46966/ijae.v2i2.96> ISSN: 2722-859.
- [15] Damor Parthvee R. and etal., (2024). Challenges Faced by Tribal Women in Acquiring Education in India: A Brief Review, *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 12 (3)