# TRIBAL EDUCATION IN INDIA: TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND STRATEGIES

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## *Abstract*

*The present paper deals with the current status of tribal education in India, challenges, and barriers that distinctly hamper the access of education by the tribal people. About 700 different tribes inhabit in India, accounting for approximately 8% of the total population, representing a distinct cultural heritage, language, and tradition. While the government has been sincerely attempting to implement various educational schemes, the issues of geographical isolation, insufficient infrastructure, cultural disconnectedness in curriculum, and socio-economic disparities have remained deterrent factors to participation at schools. Trend analysis of GER on schedule tribes over the recent years presents continuous participation at primary and upper primary levels, while the GER drastically declines at the secondary and higher secondary levels. This study identifies major barriers to the educational access among tribal people, which include linguistic and cultural complexities, economic pressure, and gaps in policies apart from inadequate availability of teachers and irrelevant curriculum. The paper discusses several strategies for overcoming these barriers, including promoting mother tongue instruction, localization of curriculum, enhancement of teacher training, and encouragement of community engagement for better educational outcomes and social integration.*

*Keywords: Tribal Education, Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), Localized Curriculum*

## INTRODUCTION

Emplaning tribal education in the context of India greatly holds a decisive role in enabling other marginalized communities in terms of their educational, economic, cultural, and social empowerment. (Naik, Majhi, & Dansana, 2021). Of course, accelerating or providing education to them fosters their socio-economic and other developments. In India, there has been quite an outstanding strata of them with over 700 distinct tribes and approximately 8% of the country's population, tribal communities, all of them having unique cultures, languages, traditions, values, beliefs, unique attitudes, etc. Nevertheless, they encounter bunches of difficulties in retrieving quality education, life, food, freedom, etc., which are indeed essential for their overall progression and general integration into mainstream society. (Kumar & Sharma, 2023). Let us discuss major common issues in the context of India.

Even after escalating various governmental policies and suggestions intended at promoting education in tribal areas and their empowerment, it seems significant obstacles continued. The majority of them include as local isolation, insufficient infrastructure, cultural dissonance in the curriculum, acceptance in the society, and their high dropout rates in the field of education. Nevertheless, economic and social dynamics, such as poverty, inequality, injustice, health issues, etc. obviously aggravate the challenges faced by tribal folks and exclusively students section from their communities. Furthermore, there is probably less awareness of their educational rights and how to use available resources within these communities.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To understand enrollment trends among tribal students across various educational levels.
To identify challenges affecting educational access for tribal communities in India.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed in this paper is qualitative and the data used are secondary in nature. This study extracts data from the sources like UDISEPlus, reports from the Ministry of Education, and other related scholarly articles to comprehend the recent enrolment trends relating to scheduled tribes in primary, secondary, and higher secondary schools. In addition to analysing enrollment data, this study reviewed a range of literature to identify

the common challenges in educational access among the tribal population. The sources include government policy documents and journal articles.

**Enrollment Trends of Tribal in India:**
An overview of the gross enrollment ratio for various educational levels among Scheduled Tribes in India for the years 2020-21 and 2021-22 is given below representing trends and progress of their enrollment in education from primary to higher secondary level.

| Table-1: Gross Enrollment Ratio in Education among Schedule Tribes in India | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Primary (1-5) | Upper Primary (6-8) | Secondary (9-10) | Higher Secondary (11-12) |
| 2020-21 | 106.7 | 95.8 | 78.6 | 45.2 |
| 2021-22 | 106.5 | 97.95 | 78.6 | 52.02 |

**Source:** UDISEPlus, Dept. of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, GoI

The above table represents gross enrolment ratio (GER) for different education levels among scheduled tribes (ST) in India for the years 2020-21 and 2021-22. In the year 2020-21, the enrollment ratio in primary education was 106.7% which indicates a high enrolment rate. The GER for upper primary education in the 2020-21 was 95.8% that shows a high level of participation close to the total group population. For secondary and higher secondary education, the GER was 78.6% and 45.2% respectively which reflect a moderate enrolment at secondary level and less participation of students at higher secondary level.

In 2021-22, the GER for primary education slightly decreased to 106.5%, but remained high compared to last year whereas the enrollment in upper primary education increased to 97.95%, showing slight improve from the year 2020-21. The GER for secondary education remained unchanged while higher secondary enrollment rose significantly to 52.02%, demonstrating notable progress in this stage. Overall, the data highlights consistent high enrollment at lower education levels and a positive trend towards increased participation in higher secondary education.

## CHALLENGES TO ACCESS EDUCATION

**Geographical Barriers:** Geographical barriers are one of the major concerns for accessing education and many tribal dwells in remote regions so it is difficult to reach schools in their areas. They have problems with Infrastructure deficits at home or in their accompanied arenas. (Ottaplackal & Anbu, 2022). They always encounter a lack of proper school buildings where they reside, transportation facilities from their home to school, and a lack of basic amenities that are required to fulfill compulsory needs every couple of stuff which they never have often leading to their lower enrollment rate in the educational institutions.

**Language and Cultural Barriers:** The recent declaration of The UN General Assembly is attractive in the sense that the period from 2022 to 2032 is the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and designed a global mission force under UNESCO. (United Nations General Assembly, 2019). Medium of instruction is the major concern. The teachers who are trained to speak English always seem to fail to deal with the tribal child. In most schools we see in India in north Hindi or English are being used whereas in southern states there is English and their state language, which may not be the mother tongue of tribal children. It badly affects their understanding of the content, comprehension of the knowledge and finally learning will be a great concern for them. Cultural Sensitivity is witnessed in this tribal education field dominantly. Educational content and the theme and topic that are referred to for students always undermine cultural sensitivity and often fail to reflect tribal culture and values, beliefs, communal harmony, and communication etiquette.

**Socio-economic Condition:** Economic pressures and income sources are usually the key concern for their dropout from schools. Especially our Indian tribes find their families depend on children for labor. Therefore, it leads to high dropout rates, particularly in higher grades. Social issues related to their family-affiliated concerns such as their early marriage system and lack of consciousness about the prominence of education can also lead to dropout rates.

**Inadequate Policies:** On the part of the government, inadequate policies are a big deal. Although, there are policies intended to improve tribal education like-Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, establishments of Ashram Schools, and Eklavya Model Residential Schools. However, these policies and establishments failed in their implementation due to a lack of resources and observation. What we see in the area of bureaucracy is that it is full of corruption and mismanagement on the part of government officials that can hinder the effective allocation of funds and resources.

**Shortage of Teachers:** Teacher Shortages often cause major catastrophes for having quality education. Even if teachers are available, there would be concerns about their lack of understanding of local languages, culture, community behavior, social etiquette, etc. When we encounter a lack of qualified teachers for teaching the tribal

students who never understand the local language and culture, the situation becomes even more complex and challenging, hindering their educational progress and overall development. (Vijaysimha, 2019).

**Curriculum Relevance**: More often than not, it is always found that the available standard curriculum and syllabus may not be relevant to the lives of tribal students. It leads to disinterest and eventually makes them disengage and eventually drop out of school. (Santoshini, 2023). This lack of alignment between the curriculum and the students' experiences can create a significant barrier to learning, as it fails to connect with their cultural context and aspirations.

**Awareness and Advocacy:** Most of the tribal don't have proper awareness of health and hygiene that is why they become the victim of malnutrition. Poor health and nutrition can badly affect their cognitive and mental development and school attendance will be a big question mark. (Verma, n.d.). The hygienic food and dress are a dream for most of the tribes in India. In addition to this, their lack of awareness on accessing higher education is also creating problems to them in enhancing their education from primary to university education. Moreover, many tribal communities seem to be hardly aware of their educational rights and available government schemes hindering their ability to access and benefit from these opportunities.

**Strategies to Overcome the Issues**

**Government Interventions and Policy Reforms:** Effective government interventions in the forms of policies and schemes are essentially required specially for the tribal areas to overcome the situations. However, in recent years we have witnessed a couple of significant incentives and schemes and there has been some transformed prominence on the concern of tribal community. India's New Education Policy, proposed in 2019, underscored the usage of the pupil's mother tongue as the medium of instruction at least until grade five. Adopting this, a couple of Indian states have proclaimed to make efforts to teach indigenous students in their languages, and quite awesomely they have developed textbooks, teacher-training resources, and digital teaching lessons to that effect. (Press Information Bureau, 2021).

**Engaging tribal leaders and communities:** To engage tribal leaders and communities in decision-making processes and involving them in relevant school festivals and celebrations of significance days can improve trust and participation in education initiatives and can address some of the barriers to education (UNESCO IIEP, 2000). Additionally, traditional ceremonies and family workshops can strengthen cultural connections and community ties.

**Localized Curriculum and Syllabus:** Integrating our education with tribal culture, languages, and histories probably is one of the outstanding strategies to be adopted while framing the curriculum and syllabus. (Ministry of Education, 2023). To enhance teaching effectiveness, it is crucial to provide training for teachers on:

- Culturally sensitive pedagogies
- Awareness of local culture and behavior
- Empathetic and motivational teaching approach
- Providing learning opportunities in the form of field trips and surveys.
- **Cultural competence and inclusivity**
- Relationship building and interpersonal skills

# CONCLUSION

Educational challenges faced by tribal communities in India requires a multi-dimensional approach. It requires amalgamation of both government initiatives and grassroots efforts. Although, significant progress in enrollment rates, persistent issues such as geographical isolation, cultural barriers, and inadequate infrastructure continue to hinder access to quality education. An effective policy implementation will not only be a solution of the problems. In order to overcome these problems and bring some positive changes, an active community engagement with tribal communities and local organizations is also required. Moreover, incorporating tribal languages and cultures into the curriculum, improving teacher training, and enhancing community awareness about educational rights are critical.

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