

Higher Education and Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes in India – An Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose : This study made an effort to examine how crucial postsecondary education is to the empowerment of India's scheduled tribes. The scheduled tribes (STs) have experienced partial deprivation of jobs, healthcare, and education since independence. Therefore, education is the most effective path for the STs' socioeconomic development. Using secondary data, the goals were to examine the state and patterns of the gross enrollment ratio of STs in higher education and assess education's role in empowering scheduled tribes in India.

Methodology : Based on secondary data sources, including volumes, journals, articles, reports, and e-sources, this study was descriptive and analytical. Additionally, trustworthy data from the All India Survey of Higher Education, conducted from 2011–2012 to 2019–2020, has been included.

Findings : Higher education raises STs' standard of living, lowers poverty, and strengthens their ability to think critically, according to the research. Though there was a significant difference compared to general categories, the gross enrollment ratio of STs in higher education grew with time. Thus, raising awareness of educational programs was imperative to strengthen STs.

Practical Implications : The results obtained from this research will be beneficial in developing and executing a successful policy that can strengthen the viewpoint on tribal literacy and empowerment. For the trained and skilled tribal people, the labor market and industry would also present additional job chances.

Originality : This special investigation is the outcome of the research project. It's expected to support policymakers in creating reasonable policies to empower further.

Keywords : education, higher education, scheduled tribes, gross-enrollment ratio

JEL Classification Codes : I21, I23, I28

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India has registered the second-highest tribal population in the World. Since independence, the Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been denied access to jobs, healthcare, education, and empowerment (Velusamy, 2021). STs have poor socioeconomic conditions because of inadequate educational opportunities (Ramachandran & Deepan, 2017). Education progressively enhances tribal societies, raises earnings and well-being, develops people's potential, and removes development-related obstacles (Sahu, 2014). Hence, education is an important device to augment the socio-economic development of STs. For a long time, the tribal community has not realized its potential due to low levels of education (Das & Majhi, 2019). The central and state governments have designed

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and implemented various policies and programs to improve the educational status of STs ever since independence. The results are unsatisfactory despite the policies and programs (Punnaiah, 2018). The primary and higher educational institutions and government play a pivotal role in promoting the weaker sections of society. But still, the STs women are missing the attainment of primary and higher learning at various levels of education (Sivasubramanian et al., 2021). They were deprived of education due to illiteracy and ignorance (Rupavath, 2023). Education in the modern day, particularly higher education, is crucial to the mainstream development of those who are disadvantaged (Report on Higher Education Vision, 2020). Education is, therefore, the most important component in empowering STs. The current study examines the value of empowering India's STs through higher education.

Review of Literature

A few earlier research have been examined to learn more about the subject. Therefore, it is essential to carefully review the existing literature to discover knowledge gaps and add to the body of knowledge.

Sahu (2014) pointed out that access to quality education leads to economic empowerment and strengthening of tribes, mitigating the challenges to their livelihood and expanding the opportunities for the tribal community. She also discovered that the primary barriers to tribal education include the village's location, the language used, the economy's state, and the parents' attitudes. She recommended that the government offer unique grants to students pursuing postsecondary education, focusing on medical, engineering, and vocational programs. She concluded that sufficient funding for tribal education should be included in the budgets of the federal and state governments.

Alexander and Conlon (2011) observed that higher education institutions develop human skills, knowledge, intellectual capital, and capacity building. Poverty in disadvantaged communities is decreased by expanding access to higher education. They also found that middle-class people have difficulties finding resources for higher education. Bhukya (2014) said that Andhra Pradesh's STs are more illiterate and lack socioeconomic resources than the mainstream population. Indigenous women's literacy percentage is quite low when considering women in general. Despite the various policies and programs for the educational development of indigenous people since independence, Daripa (2017) claimed that the evolution of education among this population has not progressed more quickly. The enrollment of tribe members in postsecondary education has not improved as expected. Poor economic conditions, illiteracy of parents, language problems, and lack of infrastructure facilities are the main challenges of tribal education. Khatri (2016) examined how education fits into the larger picture of socioeconomic development and how it might help reduce inequality. The genuine and efficient implementation of policies at the grassroots level is lacking in India. Growing literacy and education levels are associated with improved health, nutrition, economic growth, and the empowerment of the weaker groups. Zoie and Rashid (2017) found that scheduled castes and STs in India belong to the lower rung of society and are deprived of opportunities for higher education, training skills, and decent life due to lack of education. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education, about 10.2% of SCs and 4.4% of STs enrolled in higher education institutions. Long-standing upper caste, conventional lower caste, and lack of accessibility for SCs and STs have all been cited as contributing factors to this education.

Radhakrishnan et al. (2018) argued that huge proportions of marginalized communities are not properly utilizing the benefits of educational schemes because of their ignorance about them. Naik et al. (2021) observed that education affects the overall life in society and employment. It plays an important role in the socio-economic and political transformation. There are improvements in the socio-economic conditions of STs. Improvements in the primary level of education were also found due to the various welfare programs. However, the representation of STs in higher education is neglected at a meager 4.2%. Gangele (2019) examined that education is an input not only for the economic development of tribes but also for the expanding opportunities to improve socio-economic

status. Tribals face challenges with policy implementation, planning, and administration; the government should increase funding allocation to promote employment, training, and educational possibilities. In their 2019 study, Rani and Ganesh investigated the gender differences in the literacy rates in rural areas. The primary problems with tribal education include the language of instruction, the state of the economy, prejudice, and a lack of oversight. According to Das and Majhi (2019), indigenous people with more education earned more money than people with only an elementary education. The absence of educational facilities near tribal households and the challenge of pursuing higher education are the two main barriers to the advancement of tribal education.

Majumdar and Sikdar (2017) found that the female literacy rate of STs has significantly increased in a few states. Tribal women's literacy rates are gradually rising in a few states. The proportion of ST girls pursuing higher education has been steadily rising. Nonetheless, many tribal women in remote areas are denied access to education at all levels.

According to Velusamy (2021), the policies have only achieved 10% of the intended improvement after 70 years of planned development. A huge proportion of the tribals are missing their education at different levels. The literacy rate of STs witnessed a gradual increase during the census period. However, the community faced the problems of language, schooling expenses, lack of motivation for teachers, lack of inspection, increased dependency on private tuition, and lack of information facilities. According to Naik et al. (2021), the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan sought to improve equity in higher education by giving the SC/STs and socially and educationally backward classes enough opportunity for higher education. This was a reaction to the inadequate educational circumstances faced by marginalized communities.

Due to government policies and measures, Mehta and Singh (2021) examined how tribals improved their participation in public or formal sector jobs. However, the human capital base of STs is still much lower than the rest of the population. Shrinidhi and Thimmaiah (2021) observed a significant improvement in targets and achievements in educational development programs and increased participation of tribals in government jobs and technical jobs for STs in Karnataka.

Venkateswarlu and Naveen Kumar (2022) pointed out that the literacy rate of tribals is very poor due to low enrollment and high dropout rates as they are living in rural and remote areas, they are unable to understand other languages, and they are engaged in household works, cattle rearing, and labor works.

Panda and Behera (2023) noted that scheduled tribes now have difficulties accessing schooling. The main issues include homelessness, access to clean water, housing, food, transportation, exploitation, issues with education, and a shortage of basic facilities in schools. Several studies have revealed that the reduction of poverty, the empowerment of tribal women, the difficulties associated with tribal education, sustainable development, social inclusion education, socio-economic empowerment of tribes, awareness of educational programs, and the participation of tribal women in higher education, education, and development have all received a lot of attention. However, no research has been done on the relationship between higher education and ST empowerment in India. The current study was conducted to close this research gap and add to the body of current domain knowledge.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of the study:

- ↳ To study the status of higher education of STs in India.
- ↳ To find out the trends in the gross enrollment ratio of STs in higher education.
- ↳ To analyze the importance of higher education for empowering STs in India.

Methodology

The present study is geographically restricted to India. It is descriptive and analytical, and the quantitative research design is based on secondary sources of data, such as books, journal articles, reports, census reports and e-sources. Reliable data were collected from Educational Statistics at A Glance 2018 and the All India Survey on Higher Education from 2011–2012 to 2019–2020 to study STs' empowerment and higher education status. Furthermore, for this study, indicators like the gross enrollment ratio and simple statistical tools like average, percentage, and compound annual growth rate are used to analyze changes in the growth rate of education among STs in this study.

Empowerment and Education – Theoretical Framework

Amartya Sen used the capability approach concept and emphasized people's freedom to achieve well-being and opportunities (Alkire, 2005). The Middle Range of Community Empowerment idea was co-developed by Eugenie Hildebrandt and Cynthia Armstrong Persily. Promoting communities to improve their understanding, aptitude, and decision-making abilities has been prioritized (Smith & Lierhr, 2018). Inclusive education has focused on the learning requirements of all children, adults, and early learners, emphasizing the underprivileged and excluded members of society (Kohama, 2012). Education is vital in empowering and developing the poorer segments of society (Bhukya, 2014).

Literacy and Educational Status of Scheduled Tribes in India

The literacy rate indicates the level of empowerment in the country. Increasing the literacy rate helps to gain employment opportunities. The educational and literacy rates of STs have shown improvements since independence. The literacy rate increased from 8.53% to 63.10% during the census from 1961 to 2011. The gap between STs and the general population was narrowed to 10.94% from 19.77% in this period. About 13.9% and 4.9% of all students are enrolled as SCs and STs, respectively. It was roughly 33.75% in the case of OBCs. Within the same time frame, the national literacy rate grew progressively from 18.32% to 74.04% (Musthafa & Stephen, 2019).

Status of Higher Education among Scheduled Tribes in India

Gross enrollment is a measure of empowerment; increases in the STs' enrollment rate in postsecondary education facilitate their access to meaningful work, raise their income levels, and enhance their socioeconomic standing. Table 1 displays the changes in ST and all category enrollment in higher education.

It is clear from the data in Table 1 that there has been an improvement in India's Gross Enrollment Ratio for Scheduled Tribes at the higher education level between 2011–2012 and 2019–2020. The STs' gross enrollment ratio grew from 11.0% to 18.0%, with males' percentages rising from 12.4% to 18.2% and females' percentages rising from 9.7% to 17.7%. The general population increased from 20.8% to 27.1%, of which 22.1% to 26.9% were males and 19.4% to 27.3% were females. It is observed that the gross enrollment ratio of both male and female ST categories in higher education has found an increasing trend. Still, compared to the rest of the population, the gap is widening from 9.8% to 9.1% during the above period. The CAGR value of STs was higher than 5.62% than that of the General population, i.e., 2.98%, indicating a positive sign of enrollment for STs in this period.

Table 1. Trends in Gross Enrollment Ratio of Scheduled Tribes in Higher Education (%)

Year	All Categories of Students			Scheduled Tribe Students		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2011–12	22.1	19.4	20.8	12.4	9.7	11.0
2012–13	22.7	20.1	21.5	12.4	9.8	11.1
2013–14	23.9	22.0	23.0	12.5	10.2	11.3
2014–15	25.3	23.2	24.3	15.2	12.3	13.7
2015–16	25.4	23.5	24.5	15.6	12.9	14.2
2016–17	26.0	24.5	25.2	16.7	14.2	15.4
2017–18	26.3	25.4	25.8	17.0	14.9	15.9
2018–19	26.3	26.4	26.3	17.9	16.5	17.2
2019–20	26.9	27.3	27.1	18.2	17.7	18.0
CAGR%	2.21%	3.87%	2.98%	4.36%	6.91%	5.62%

Source : 1. Educational Statistics at a Glance (2018). Department of School Education & Literacy, Government of India, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of School Education & Literacy Statistics Division, New Delhi. 2. All India Survey on Higher Education 2011–2012 & 2019–2020.

Enrollment of Scheduled Tribes and All Categories in Higher Education

Empowerment is typified by a rise in the percentage of ST students enrolled in higher education. This is seen in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the trends in ST and all category enrollment in India from 2011–2012 to 2019–2020. It is found that the enrollment of STs increased from 1,310,261 to 2,156,109, and the enrollment of both males and females

Table 2. Enrollment of Scheduled Tribes and all Categories in India

Year	All Category			Scheduled Tribe		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2011–12	16,173,473	13,010,858	29,184,331*	7,28,074	5,82,187	1,310,261*
2012–13	16,617,294	13,535,123	30,152,417	7,32,065	5,88,296	1,320,361
2013–14	17,495,394	14,840,840	32,336,234	8,08,804	6,77,708	1,486,512
2014–15	18,488,619	15,723,018	34,211,637	8,93,511	7,47,298	1,640,809
2015–16	18,594,723	15,990,058	34,584,781	9,16,917	7,87,544	1,704,461
2016–17	18,980,595	16,725,310	35,705,905	9,83,778	8,68,597	1,852,375
2017–18	19,204,675	17,437,703	36,642,378	1,001,989	9,11,875	1,913,864
2018–19	19,209,888	18,189,500	37,399,388	1,052,121	1,015,627	2,067,748
2019–20	19,643,747	18,892,612	38,536,359**	1,072,646	1,083,463	2,156,109**
CAGR[^]	1.4%	2.7%	2.01%	2.81%	4.54%	3.62%

Note. ^ Represent Calculated Value, *(Total All category – Total ST in 2011) 29,184,331–1,310,261 = **27,874,070** and **38,536,359 (Total All category – Total ST in 2019–2020)–2,156,109 = **36,380,250**.

Source : All India Survey of Higher Education 2018–2019 & 2019–2020.

Table 3. Category-Wise Enrollment Ratio of Scheduled Tribes (%)

Year	General	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Other backward classes
2012–13	51.6	12.8	4.4	31.2
2013–14	49.9	13.1	4.6	32.4
2014–15	48.8	13.5	4.8	32.9
2015–16	47.4	13.9	4.9	33.8
2016–17	46.1	14.3	5.2	34.4
2017–18	45.9	14.3	5.2	34.7
2018–19	43.3	14.9	5.5	36.3
2019–20	42.7	14.7	5.6	37.0
CAGR	-2.34%	1.75%	3.06%	2.15%

Source : All India Survey of Higher Education, 2018–2019 and 2019–2020.

significantly increased during the same period. In all categories, it increased from 29,184,331 to 38,536,359, and for males and females, it also increased. The gap between the STs and all categories increased from 27,874,070 to 36,380,250, respectively. Enrollment in all categories increased by 9,352,028 in the period mentioned above. It shows that the enrollment of STs exhibited an increasing trend during the period, but compared to all categories, there is a huge gap. The CAGR value of the general category is 2.01%, whereas STs is 3.62%, indicating an increased participation of STs in higher education during the period.

Category-Wise Enrollment Ratio of Scheduled Tribes

The detailed enrollment of various categories is presented in Table 3. Table 3 shows that during 2012–2013 and 2019–2020, respectively, the enrollment of SCs climbed from 12.8% to 14.7%, and that of STs increased from 4.4% to 5.6%. Over the same period, OBC enrollment increased from 31.2% to 37.0%. Compared to the whole population, the enrollment ratio dropped to 42.7% from 51.6%. The data shows that fewer STs are enrolled than in any other category. STs have a higher CAGR value (3.06%) than all other groups.

State-Wise Highest and Lowest Enrollment Ratios of STs

Uttarakhand State has the highest rate of ST enrollment (45.8%), followed by Tamil Nadu (40.7%), Himachal Pradesh (39.5%), Uttar Pradesh (39.0%), and Arunachal Pradesh (35.2%), according to statistics from the All India Survey of Higher Education, 2019–2020. The lowest enrollment registered in the Union Territories is Lakshadweep at 4.8%, Dadra & Nagar Haveli at 5.0%, Ladakh at 8.5%, West Bengal at 11.0% and Chhattisgarh at 11.8%. Sikkim had the highest enrollment rate (75.8%) for the general population, followed by Delhi (40.8%), Himachal Pradesh (40.8%), Kerala (38.8%), and Chandigarh (52.1%). During this period, the lowest enrollment ratios were 6.1% for Daman and Diu, 7.5% for Lakshadweep, 7.9% for Ladakh, 9.4% for Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and 14.5% for Bihar (All India Survey of Higher Education, 2019–2020).

Empowerment of Scheduled Tribes – Role of Higher Education

Education is an important parameter in achieving the empowerment process. Empowerment is the outcome of increased socio-economic development and decision-making of Tribals. Ensured security access, the right to their assets, the right to access forest and water resources for their well-being, and increased all security rights.

Hence, empowerment is the active participation of tribal communities in local governance. Higher education helps tribal communities develop analytical skills and capacity building.

Additionally, it has increased their self-assurance and capacity to express their viewpoints and interests, which has improved governance and the decision-making process. For this reason, a long-term plan for tribe development is required. This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on higher education. An appropriate policy is therefore required to increase the gross enrollment of STs in higher education. Since tribal art, tradition, culture, language, medicinal systems, customs, forest-based economic activities, and technological advancements related to the natural resources of the tribal areas are all closely related to these, the establishment of tribal universities in large, concentrated tribal states would facilitate the development of highly developed knowledge. In addition, the development of tribal communities, research, and cultural studies are within the purview of the concerned organizations. Furthermore, workshops, orientation programs, and capacity-building initiatives would support the empowerment and capacity-building of tribal groups (Pattnaik, 2017).

Discussion

The aforementioned study highlights the significance of higher education's contribution to the mainstreaming of STs in development. It enhances their quality of life and allows them to overcome obstacles to growth. Access to high-quality education enhances human growth, capacity building, skill development, and opportunity expansion while fortifying tribes. Furthermore, it lessens the poverty of excluded groups and enhances knowledge and intellectual aptitude. It also reveals that indigenous people's educational standing increased over time as a result of government interventions. Still, their participation in higher education is unsatisfactory due to parental ignorance, language problems, and lack of infrastructure. A successful approach would improve tribal people's access to education in India. Thus, better education lowers inequality and advances society as a whole. It is also notable that increased literacy and education improved the weaker sections' health, nutritional status, economic growth, and empowerment. Due to their lower social status, scheduled castes and STs in India have long been denied access to higher education. Because education is traditionally associated with the upper caste, the participation rate of STs in higher education is quite low. Most vulnerable communities do not properly utilize the benefits of educational facilities due to their ignorance. Hence, effective policy, planning implementation, administration, and increased fund allocation would improve tribals' education, training, and employment opportunities.

Furthermore, it reduces the gender-wise disparity in the literacy rate. Hence, education plays a paramount role in the mainstream development of tribals. To some extent, educated tribal households earn more income than lower educational status. It is also evident that there is a significantly improved female literacy rate among tribal women. Implementing Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan improves equity in higher education of SC/STs by providing enough opportunities for higher education. As a result of government policies, the participation of tribals in public sector jobs has significantly improved. Tribes can find more work prospects in the industrial and service sectors by developing their entrepreneurial skills and abilities through higher education. Additionally, educational development initiatives have increased tribal people's participation in government and technical employment and improved their skill sets.

Additionally, it has been observed that a higher education level reduces poverty by improving health and employment and that STs' literacy rates in India have been steadily rising. Compared to official directives, it is far more appreciated. There is a distinction between them and the general population. The government policy toward the inclusion of education shows positive signs of the educational development of STs. Hence, higher education is imperative for the empowerment of STs. Still, STs are facing various issues and challenges in higher education. Hence, the government and the concerned authorities must create more awareness to improve the higher educational status to empower STs in the country as a greater priority.

Managerial and Theoretical Implications

Individuals with higher education have more entrepreneurial skills. The study's findings would benefit the industry by guaranteeing that more experienced and trained workers are used in the production process, increasing output through diverse methods and techniques. The study's theoretical ramifications reveal that as human capital grows, so does the value of output and, eventually, individual income, both of which contribute to a rise in the country's GDP. Therefore, the enhanced human capital of STs takes advantage of increased job openings in the market and industry.

Conclusion

All facets of society are greatly enhanced by higher education. Participation in economic activities and decision-making increases, poverty decreases, disadvantaged groups benefit, and their capacity-building skills are strengthened. In India, STs have poor educational status despite government policies and endeavors. The survey shows tendencies toward a progressive increase in the gross enrollment ratio and the literacy rate of STs in higher education. In contrast to the rest of the population, there is a significant difference. Thus, to improve the status of higher education and to further the empowerment of STs in future India, the government should keep raising awareness about higher education. Tribal universities must also organize orientation, capacity-building programs, workshops, seminars, and conferences with local communities.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study's scope is restricted to India from 2011–2012 to 2019–2020. Additional research on the empowerment of STs through educational initiatives in primary investigation is necessary.

Authors' Contribution

Dr. Ravikumar S. conceived the idea for preparing this research paper, developed the theoretical idea with the quantitative design, prepared this manuscript, set the objectives and methodology, analyzed results, performed the analysis, and used simple tools like percentages and CAGR using secondary sources. Dr. B. Jayarama Bhat, the supervisor and co-author of this paper, made necessary changes, including editing.

Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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