

Gender Disparity In Tribal Literacy and Education: A Study About Marginalized Communities of Jharkhand

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Abstract

Gender disparity in India is ingrained in patriarchal social division, economic inequalities, enduring cultural norms, and political spheres. Although considerable progress is achieved, persistent gaps in literacy, education, and employment opportunities demand more inclusive, prolonged, and intersectional policy efforts—especially for marginalized cohorts such as tribal women, who contend with double discrimination arising from socioeconomic disadvantage and gender. Despite notable efforts in the implementation of educational policies and outreach initiatives, gender disparity in literacy and educational access remains a salient challenge among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India.

This research paper scrutinizes the dynamics and extent of gender inequality in literacy and school education among tribal communities in Jharkhand—a state with a significant indigenous demographic and persistent socio-economic adversity. Utilizing the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) as a key indicator, the paper analyses enrollment trajectories across primary, middle, and secondary school stages, thereby revealing significant disparities between tribal boys and girls. While national and state-level initiatives such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education (RTE) Act endeavor to advance the universal education, ground-level disparities persist driven by factors including poverty, social norms, precocious marriage, and insufficient educational infrastructure in tribal regions.

This investigation also highlights alarming dropout rates among tribal girls, particularly pronounced during the transition from primary to upper primary and secondary education, thereby impeding efforts toward inclusive development and gender equity in education. By analyzing disaggregated data and identifying critical impediments, this study underscores for more targeted, culturally attuned, and gender-responsive policy interventions to bridge the educational divide among Jharkhand's marginalized tribal communities.

Keywords

Gender Disparity, Tribal society, Literacy, Education, Barriers.

Introduction

In India, gender disparity in education persists as a manifestation of deep-rooted structural inequalities, wherein women—particularly those from marginalized and tribal communities—are systemically degraded to subordinate positions. Despite notable developments in educational outreach and policy reforms, the divide between male and female literacy and school participation remains significant in both urban and rural landscapes. These inequalities are further exacerbated in traditional, patriarchal domains where gender roles are strictly enforced, resulting in curtailed access to education for girls due to early marriages, domestic obligations, and entrenched socio-cultural norms.

India's pursuit of universal education is embodied in its Constitution and reinforced through major educational policies, including the *National Policy on Education* (1986, modified in 1992), the *Right to Education Act* (2009), and the contemporary *National Education Policy* (NEP) 2020. While these frameworks articulate a vision of inclusive and equitable quality education, continuous ground-level disparities—especially among the Scheduled Tribes (STs)—underscore a substantial disconnect between policy intent and implementation.

In tribal-prevailed states like Jharkhand, gender disparity in education attainment is particularly acute. According to the 2011 Census, Jharkhand's (FIG.1) overall literacy rate was 66.4%, but the literacy rate for the Scheduled Tribe population was significantly lower at 57.1%, accompanied by a stark gender gap: 68.2% for ST males versus only 45.8% for ST females. Among major tribal communities like the Santhal, Oraon, Munda, Ho, Kharia, and Birhor, exhibit persistently lagging female literacy due to both structural exclusion and layered socio-economic obstacles. The

dropout rates among tribal girls surge at the middle and secondary levels, beckoning a critical disruption in the progression of education.

This paper undertakes a critical analysis of gender disparity in literacy and educational fulfillment among Jharkhand's tribal communities, with a particular focus on enrollment trajectories, dropout dynamics, and the causes of educational discrimination. Utilizing data from the 2011 Census, educational datasets, and contemporary policy documents, this study provides a nuanced, disaggregated perspective of how gender and tribal identity intersect to limit educational outcomes. Furthermore, it evaluates the effectiveness of national and state-level initiatives, such as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas* (KGBV), and *Eklavya Model Residential Schools* (EMRS), in addressing these disparities. Ultimately, the aim is to identify persistent gaps and propose recommendations for more gender-responsive and culturally contextually tailored interventions to foster the educational empowerment of Jharkhand's tribal women and girls.

Objective of study

The principal aim of this study is to critically assess the extent and dynamics of gender disparity in literacy and formal schooling among Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in Jharkhand by systematically analyzing the patterns of enrolment, retention, and dropout rates of tribal boys and girls, with an emphasis on structural, socio-cultural, and economic circumstances that hinder educational access and achievement—particularly for tribal girls. Through a granular evaluation of disaggregated tribe-wise and gender-wise data, this research seeks to illuminate intra-community variations and assess the effectiveness of government interventions intended to promote gender-inclusive education and targeted scholarships in tribal regions. The ultimate objective is to generate insights that can demonstrate more equitable, context-specific educational initiatives.

Review of Literature

Persistent Gendered Educational Gaps in Tribal India

The issue of gender disparity in education among tribal communities has garnered sustained academic and policy-oriented attention over the past two decades, reflecting its significance as a site of intersecting inequalities. Scholars widely acknowledge that the confluence of gender, ethnicity, and geography marginality acts as a powerful axis shaping educational outcomes for tribal populations in India. According to *Govinda and Bandyopadhyay* (2010), while national educational initiatives—such as *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* and the *Right to Education Act*—have augmenting nominal access, they often fail to account for the intricate socio-cultural, linguistic, and economic configurations characteristic of tribal learners, especially girls. This gap between policy architecture and ground-level perpetuates entrenched disparities in enrolment, retention, and literacy.

Multidimensional Obstacles to Tribal Girls' Education

Empirical and institutional studies by the *National Council of Educational Research and Training* (NCERT) and *UNICEF* highlight that Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls are positioned in the confluence of interconnected disadvantages, including aboriginal poverty, domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and the spatial unavailability of nearby schools. Such factors are amplified by infrastructural deficits and the absence of female teachers; attenuate the probability of educational progression beyond the primary level. *Mehrotra* (2006) argues that the disfranchisement of tribal girls from educational facilities derives not only an outcome of economic deprivation but also of acute cultural dissonance, since mainstream curricula and educational systems often ignore tribal languages, traditions, and knowledge systems thereby eroding local relevance and engagement.

Empirical Evidence on the Gendered Pathways of Academic Success and Failure

Advanced quantitative analyses by *Desai et al.* (2010) and *Jha & Jhingran* (2005) further substantiated by the *Annual Status of Education Report* (ASER, 2018) and contemporary data, unveil that although aggregated enrolment indices among ST children have exhibited some improvement owing to state-driven initiatives such as the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (SSA), gender disparities persist with prominent severity in rural and remote regions, predominantly tribal jurisdictions. Data consistently indicate that tribal girls are show heightened risks of attrition at transitional stages—namely transitions from primary to middle school, and from middle to secondary school—primarily due to restrictive socio-cultural constraints and logistical impediments and the deteriorating quality of educational engagement. Furthermore, the *Annual Status of Education Report* (ASER, 2018) and follow-up state assessments for 2023 substantiate confirms that tribal girls and women lag behind in foundational literacy and numeracy skills, exemplifying gaps not just in access but also in learning outcomes.

Role of Culturally Responsive, Community-Driven Interventions

A burgeoning corpus of research emphasizes the remedial potential of community participation, local agency and culturally anchored education in mitigating these challenges. For instance, investigations by Vasavi (2003) and Subrahmanian (2002) along with recent praxis-based interventions in Jharkhand highlight the substantive gains of localized interventions, such as residential schools and mother-tongue-centric instructions and enduring development in tribal girls' educational engagement. Nevertheless, such models remain largely circumscribed in both scale and systematic incorporation and most importantly - inconsistency in implementation.

Jharkhand's Intractable Gendered Literacy Divide

Within Jharkhand's context - which has a significant and dense tribal population - state-oriented studies combined with government reports reveal an entrenched pattern of low female literacy and high dropout rates among ST communities. Research by Mishra (2015) and Ekka (2012) demonstrates that districts with higher concentrations of tribes such as Santhal, Ho, and Savar show stark educational disparities between boys and girls, highlighting both the stubbornness and complexity of the challenge. These empirical observations underscore the inadequacy of uniform policy approaches and the need for adaptive, tribe-sensitive strategies stimulated by recognition of contextual heterogeneity and cultural specificity.

Overall, the literature affirms that gender disparity in tribal education is a very impenetrable, multilayered issue shaped by structural, economic, cultural, and policy-related factors. Notwithstanding, the recognition of the problem at the national level, the consistency of gender gaps among tribal community calls for more context-sensitive, inclusive, and participatory educational frameworks.

Main Text

Literacy and Educational Landscape

According to the 2011 Census, India's literacy profile shows incremental progress juxtaposed with persistent gender and social disparities. Nationally, about 74 percent of Indians aged seven and above are literate, with men (81 percent) markedly exceeding women (65 percent), a conspicuous gap of nearly 16 percentage points. Among Scheduled Tribes, the literacy rate is lower at approximately 59 percent—this divide widens: tribal men achieve around 69 percent literacy compared to just under 50 percent for tribal women, highlighting both geographic isolation and socioeconomic barriers. In Jharkhand, where tribal communities make up over a quarter of the population, the overall literacy rate (66 percent) falls below the national average, and women lag even further behind men (77 percent vs. 55 percent, a gap of 22 points). Tribal literacy in Jharkhand is particularly low—fewer than half of all tribal adults can read and write, and female literacy hovers near 46 percent.

Table: 1: Literacy status of Jharkhand compare to India

Country/State	% of Literacy (Total)		GDI	% of Literacy (Rural)		GDI (Rural)	% of Literacy (urban)		GDI (Urban)
	Male	Female		Male (Rural)	Female (Rural)		Male (Urban)	Female (Urban)	
India (General)	80.9	64.6	0.80	78.6	59.4	0.76	89.7	80.9	0.90
India (ST)	68.5	49.4	0.72	65	44.8	0.69	82	69.5	0.85
Jharkhand (General)	76.8	55.4	0.72	72.9	48.9	0.67	88.4	75.5	0.85
Jharkhand (ST)	68.25	46.41	0.68	67.63	44.78	0.66	83.23	68.12	0.82

Gender Disparity Index

While analyzing the literacy and education landscape, significant gender disparities arise in literacy rates across both general and Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations not only at national level but also within Jharkhand. Nationally, the general populace records a male literacy rate of 80.9% versus 64.6% for females, reflecting a gender gap of over 16 percentage points. This disparity is even wider among the ST population, where male literacy stands at 68.5% and female literacy at 49.4%. In Jharkhand, the scenario is more concerning, especially among ST communities. Where general male literacy in the state is 76.8%, it drops to 68.25% for ST males, and further down to 46.41% for ST females, revealing the widest gender gap. Rural areas consistently lag behind urban regions, with rural ST females in Jharkhand recording the lowest literacy rate at

44.78%. The *Gender Disparity Index* (GDI) authenticates these trends, with the highest value in urban general population (0.90 for India) and the lowest among rural STs in Jharkhand (0.66). Overall, the data clearly indicates that tribal women, especially those leaving in rural Jharkhand, face the most acute educational disadvantages, reflecting deep-rooted gender and social inequalities.

This gender gap is evident across most tribal groups, with the Kora (male: 68.04%, female: 45.07%) and Santal (male: 66.12%, female: 43.51%) communities revealing marked disparities. However, some tribes such as the Bedia (54.22% female literacy) and Oraon (49.86%) perform relatively better in narrowing the literacy gap. A useful parameter to assess such disparities is the Gender Disparity Index (GDI), which measures the extent of inequality between males and females. It is defined as the ratio of female literacy to male literacy. A GDI value closer to 1 indicates more gender parity, while lower values denote wider disparities.

Table 2: Tribe-Wise Literacy Rates and Gender Development Index (GDI) among Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand

Tribe	Male % of Literacy	Female % of Literacy	Persons % of Literacy	GDI
All STs	68.17	47.71	57.94	0.700
Bedia	72.52	54.22	63.37	0.748
Bhumij	70.69	48.11	59.40	0.681
Kora	68.04	45.07	56.56	0.662
Mahali	66.31	43.63	54.97	0.658
Mal Pahariya	49.1	36.5	42.80	0.743
Munda	67.18	48.31	57.75	0.719
Oraon	68.14	49.86	59.00	0.732
Santal	66.12	43.51	54.82	0.658
Savar	49.87	31.25	40.56	0.627
Ho	65.2	43.25	54.23	0.663
Lodha	54.61	36.21	45.41	0.663

The GDI values presented in the table underscore the existing gender inequality in educational attainment across different tribal communities. Tribes such as Bedia (GDI: 0.748) and Mal Pahariya (GDI: 0.743), though not ranking highest in absolute literacy rates, demonstrate relatively better gender parity. In contrast, tribes like the Santal (GDI: 0.658), Kora (0.662), and Savar (0.627) exhibit substantially lower GDI scores, indicating wider gender disparities and persistent structural barriers to female education. The Savar tribe is particularly marginalized, with merely 31.25% of females being literate, and an overall literacy rate of just 40.56%. These pronounced disparities reveal the influence of cultural norms, socio-economic marginalization, and limited educational access on tribal women's educational outcomes. Therefore, targeted educational policies, that prioritize female empowerment, are essential to reduce the gender gap and nurture inclusive development in these marginalized communities.

Source: Census data, 2011

Gross Enrolment Ratio:

Data from the 2011 Census and related educational data offer critical insights into gross enrolment dynamics for tribal children aged 7–14 years. These dynamics are intricately linked with socio-economic disparities, gender roles, geographic marginalization, and infrastructural obstacles that vary markedly between rural and urban landscapes.

Table: 3 Sex-wise Gross Enrolment of Students (6–14 years) Among Scheduled Tribes in Jharkhand

ST Name		Total	Gross Enrolment (7-14)			ST Name		Total	Gross Enrolment (7-14)		
		Rural/						Rural/			
		Urban	Persons	Males	Females			Urban	Persons	Males	Females
All Schedule Tribes	Total		1413074	730440	682634	Mal & Kumarbhag Paharia	Total		19421	10329	9092
	%		80.75	82.26	79.19		%		66.66	68.78	64.40
	Rural		1291503	668953	622550		Rural		19160	10192	8968
	%		80.12	81.73	78.47		%		66.47	68.61	64.19
	Urban		120940	60856	60084		Urban		261	137	124
	%		87.53	87.52	87.55		%		84.19	84.05	84.35
Bedia	Total		18752	9429	9323	Munda, Patar	Total		197690	101343	96347
	%		88.16	88.41	87.90		%		81.70	82.98	80.40
	Rural		17050	8530	8520		Rural		188853	97199	91654
	%		87.82	88.02	87.63		%		86.35	87.85	84.82
	Urban		1702	899	803		Urban		20469	10104	10365
	%		91.65	92.30	90.94		%		88.03	88.01	88.05
Ho	Total		140986	74051	66935	Oraon, Dhangar (Oraon)	Total		317472	160652	156820
	%		71.86	74.24	69.41		%		86.81	87.39	86.22
	Rural		127755	67205	60550		Rural		279526	141853	137673
	%		70.91	73.37	68.37		%		86.20	86.85	85.54
	Urban		13231	6846	6385		Urban		37946	18799	19147
	%		82.57	83.94	81.15		%		91.56	91.63	91.49
Kharia	Total		30133	15141	14992	Santal	Total		421516	220606	200910
	%		81.38	81.50	81.26		%		79.89	81.91	77.78
	Rural		27687	13902	13785		Rural		398281	208595	189686
	%		80.68	80.81	80.54		%		79.44	81.52	77.26
	Urban		2474	1267	1207		Urban		23235	12011	11224
	%		91.29	92.08	90.48		%		88.56	89.33	87.76
Kharwar	Total		50449	26007	24442	Savar	Total		1049	611	438
	%		83.43	85.19	81.63		%		62.33	65.84	58.01
	Rural		49514	25538	23976		Rural		909	495	414
	%		83.26	85.06	81.42		%		59.84	61.57	57.90
	Urban		839	425	414		Urban		140	116	24
	%		83.82	84.16	83.47		%		85.37	93.55	60.00
Lohra	Total		35914	18694	17220	Bhumij	Total		31867	16581	15286
	%		80.12	81.52	78.66		%		83.64	85.19	82.02
	Rural		31024	16215	14809		Rural		29636	15422	14214
	%		79.94	81.44	78.35		%		83.79	85.36	82.14
	Urban		4890	2479	2411		Urban		2231	1159	1072
	%		81.31	82.06	80.55		%		81.75	82.96	80.48
Mahli	Total		24496	12734	11762						
	%		81.75	83.45	79.99						
	Rural		21603	11253	10350						
	%		81.33	83.09	79.50						
	Urban		2893	1481	1412						
	%		85.04	86.31	83.75						

Source: Census of India, 2011

The data on gross enrolment rates among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Jharkhand for children aged 7–14 presents as a comprehensive picture of educational inclusion and persistent gender disparities across tribal communities. At the aggregate level, the overall enrolment rate for all STs stands at 80.75%, with males slightly ahead (82.26%) of females (79.19%), reflecting a 3.07% gender gap. Enrolment is notably higher in **urban areas (87.53%)** than in rural areas (80.12%), and this urban–rural divide is particularly pronounced in female participation.

Within individual tribes, substantial variations emerge. For instance, tribes such as **Bedia (88.16%)**, **Munda (81.70%)**, and **Oraon (86.81%)** exhibit relatively high enrolment rates, whereas tribes like **Savar (62.33%)**, **Mai & Kumarbhag Paharia (66.66%)**, and **Ho (71.86%)** lag significantly behind. The Savar tribe records the lowest enrolment, accompanied by a substantial gender gap of **7.83%** between boys (65.84%) and girls (58.01%), highlighting extreme marginalization in education. The **Mai & Kumarbhag Paharia** group also demonstrates worrying enrolment levels, particularly among rural girls (64.19%). In contrast, urban enrolment is uniformly higher across all tribes, often by over 5%, suggesting that better infrastructure, accessibility, and awareness in towns help mitigate the barriers to education, especially for girls.

Among larger tribes, enrolment is relatively encouraging but still exhibits gender disparity. For example, the **Santhal** tribe, one of the most populous, has a total enrolment of **79.89%** (males: 81.91%, females: 77.78%), with a 4.13% gender gap, slightly above the average ST gender disparity. **Oraons**, on the other hand,

demonstrate comparatively equitable enrolment with only a **1.17% gender gap**. Interestingly, tribes like **Munda, Patar** show consistent performance in both rural (86.35%) and urban (88.03%) settings, indicating their better integration into formal schooling systems. Smaller tribes such as **Mahli (81.75%), Bhumij (83.64%),** and **Kharia (81.38%)** have also demonstrated promising trends, but gender differences persist, albeit moderately. Notably, in urban areas, several tribes such as **Ho, Kharia, Lohra, and Mahli** register over 80% enrolment, and even some like **Munda and Oraon** exceed 90%, indicating that urban tribal populations are benefitting from better schooling access. This urban advantage, however, masks the continued educational deprivation in tribal hinterlands. Female enrolment in rural areas is particularly vulnerable across tribes, and addressing this requires localized, culturally sensitive interventions. The data underscores that while Jharkhand has made progress in enrolling tribal children in schools, substantial **gender and spatial inequalities remain**, calling for focused policy efforts to bridge the gap between boys and girls, and between rural and urban tribal populations.

Dropout:

The analysis of dropout and educational attainment among major Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Jharkhand reveals stark disparities across both gender and educational stages. Girls across all tribes—especially in Korwa, Lohra, and Santhal communities—are more likely to never enter school, with over one-third of them not reaching even Class I. Boys generally have better enrolment rates, but they face higher dropouts during the primary to middle stage (Class I–V to VI–VIII), as seen among Bhumij and Lohra boys (35% and 34% respectively). However, at the middle to matric level (Class VI–VIII to X), dropout percentages stabilize, with both genders showing similar patterns. The overall matriculation (Class X+) completion rates are low for all, particularly for girls in tribes like Korwa and Bhumij, where only 15% complete secondary education, while Oraon boys and girls lead with 29% and 27% respectively. These patterns reflect both early educational disadvantage and later structural challenges in school retention.

Table-4: Dropout and educational attainment among major Scheduled Tribes

Tribe	Gender	Below Primary (Never reached Class I)	Primary–Middle Dropout (Reached I–V but not VI–VIII)	Middle–Matric Dropout (Reached VI–VIII but not Matric+)	Matric+ Completion (Reached Class X or above)
Oraon	Boys	23%	29%	19%	29%
	Girls	27%	27%	19%	27%
Kharia	Boys	24%	30%	18%	28%
	Girls	28%	28%	18%	26%
Munda	Boys	25%	31%	19%	25%
	Girls	29%	30%	19%	22%
Santhal	Boys	33%	32%	17%	18%
	Girls	36%	29%	17%	18%
Ho	Boys	26%	29%	20%	25%
	Girls	31%	28%	20%	21%
Bhumij	Boys	29%	35%	19%	17%
	Girls	33%	33%	19%	15%
Lohra	Boys	30%	34%	18%	18%
	Girls	35%	32%	18%	15%
Korwa	Boys	32%	33%	18%	17%
	Girls	36%	31%	18%	15%

Source: Census of India, 2011

Underlying these trends are socio-cultural and infrastructural barriers: poverty, the need for child labor, early marriage, and long travel distances to schools contribute heavily to dropout—especially for girls. Tribal-language exclusion from curricula further alienates students, reducing their engagement and academic success. Although policies like the mid-day meal scheme and tribal scholarships exist, their coverage and effectiveness remain inconsistent. Tribes like Oraon and Kharia, which show comparatively better outcomes, indicate that culturally responsive education and localized support systems can improve enrolment and retention. To bridge the gap, the state must adopt gender-sensitive and tribe-specific strategies, including expanding access to secondary schools, introducing tribal languages in early education, increasing recruitment of female tribal teachers, and strengthening community engagement to delay marriage and promote girls' education. Only then can Jharkhand's tribal children—especially girls—achieve meaningful educational empowerment.

Structural Barriers to Tribal Enrolment

The structural factors that limit gross enrolment among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Jharkhand are deeply rooted in both systemic neglect and infrastructural inadequacy. Despite constitutional guarantees and targeted programs, education in tribal areas suffers due to poor institutional support, limited reach of government schemes, and ineffective implementation mechanisms.

In rural tribal-dominated districts of Jharkhand—such as Simdega, West Singhbhum, Gumla, and Latehar—schools are often located at significant distances from tribal hamlets. For primary and upper-primary levels, walking distances can range from 2 to 5 km, especially in forested or hilly terrains, which disproportionately impacts younger children and adolescent girls. The lack of transport facilities and safe pathways deters attendance. In many regions inhabited by tribes like the **Savar**, **Mal Paharia**, and **Ho**, schools are non-residential, under-resourced, or irregularly staffed.

Tribal-dominated blocks often face a dearth of trained teachers, especially those who can speak or understand tribal languages like Santhali, Ho, Kurukh, or Mundari. The absence of culturally and linguistically sensitive pedagogy alienates tribal children and discourages regular participation. For instance, among the **Ho** and **Mundari**-speaking populations, dropout rates remain high partly due to this disconnect between home language and classroom instruction.

Functional toilets clean drinking water, and safe classrooms are frequently lacking in rural and remote tribal areas. The absence of separate and hygienic toilets for girls is a particularly acute issue, leading to reduced enrolment and increased absenteeism, especially after the onset of puberty. Many tribal girls from communities like **Mahli**, **Savar**, and **Santhal** drop out during upper-primary levels due to this infrastructural inadequacy.

Most tribal communities in Jharkhand are economically disadvantaged. They rely on subsistence agriculture, wage labour, or forest produce for survival. In households where parents are unable to afford uniforms, books, or midday meals (despite schemes like MDM), children are forced to contribute to the household economy. Girls, in particular, are expected to take on domestic chores or care for siblings, leading to chronic absenteeism and eventual dropout.

Cultural and Socio-Cultural Barriers

The cultural context in which education operates in tribal areas significantly influences enrollment decisions. While some tribes have adopted formal education as a tool of empowerment, others remain suspicious of state-led systems due to historical neglect and cultural alienation.

Patriarchal norms continue to shape educational choices within many tribal societies. Girls are often seen as future homemakers whose primary role lies in domestic life. Among tribes like the **Savar**, **Mal Paharia**, and **Kharwar**, early marriage and household responsibility are prioritized over formal schooling. Cultural preferences for boys' education prevail, contributing to the wide gender gaps observed in enrollment data.

For several tribes, formal schooling is associated with cultural loss. The standard school curriculum—delivered in Hindi or English—often fails to integrate tribal knowledge systems, folklore, or language, which leads to alienation. This tension between preserving identity and participating in mainstream education results in low motivation for school attendance, particularly among tribes with strong socio-cultural traditions like the **Ho**, **Santhal**, and **Oraon**.

First-generation learners face the challenge of little to no academic support at home. In many tribal households, especially among tribes like **Mahli**, **Kharwar**, or **Bhumij**, parental illiteracy leads to poor awareness of school processes, reduced interest in regular attendance, and little capacity to help children with homework or school requirements. This factor particularly hampers girls' education, as parents are less likely to invest in their long-term academic success.

Economic migration, especially for manual labour or agricultural work, is common among tribal families. During peak agricultural seasons, entire families, including children, migrate, leading to long periods of absenteeism or dropouts. Tribes like **Kharwar**, **Lohra**, and **Munda**—found in mining belts or border districts—are particularly vulnerable to this cycle of displacement and disrupted schooling.

Government schemes such as the **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)**, **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)**, and **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**

(SSA) have been instrumental in increasing tribal girls' access to education. However, many of these programs adopt a "one-size-fits-all" model, often ignoring the diversity among tribal groups. As seen in the data, enrollment outcomes vary widely from tribe to tribe; yet most policies are designed without tribe-specific cultural considerations.

Furthermore, top-down education policies often fail to engage tribal communities in participatory planning. For meaningful and sustained increases in enrollment, especially among girls, culturally relevant schooling models—integrating tribal language, history, and values—must be implemented. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's emphasis on multilingual education and community participation holds potential but requires local ownership and long-term commitment.

Conclusion

The findings of the study reveal that gender disparity in tribal education remains a persistent and deeply rooted issue in Jharkhand, with tribal girls significantly underrepresented in literacy and school completion metrics. While certain tribes like Oraon and Bedia exhibit relatively better educational outcomes, others such as Savar, Kora, and Santhal show severe educational exclusion among females. The study identifies multiple barriers—ranging from geographic isolation, poverty, and lack of infrastructure to patriarchal social norms and cultural disconnect between schooling and tribal life. Despite policy interventions, structural inequalities continue to undermine girls' participation in education, particularly at the middle and secondary levels. The research underscores the urgent need for targeted, gender-sensitive, and culturally appropriate educational policies that address the specific needs of individual tribal communities. Strengthening community engagement, improving infrastructure, promoting mother-tongue instruction, and expanding access to residential schools for girls are among the key recommendations. Bridging the gender gap in tribal education is essential not only for empowering women but also for achieving broader goals of inclusive and sustainable development in the region.

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