

## Study of Challenges of Tribal Girl's Participation in Higher Education

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### Abstract

Tribal community has its own identity and culture and live isolated both geographically and socially. In spite of sincere initiatives for their development, they are by large economically and socially marginalized. When compared to other social groups, disparity exists in all social and economic sectors but that in education has attracted attention of all since it is now established that education is the main driving force behind development. Even more glaring and matter of concern is the gender discrimination that exists among tribal communities in all levels of education. Though female work participation rate among tribal's is high compared to other communities, the tribal girls are mostly employed in jobs requiring low skills and hence command low payments. Also lack of higher education forces them to seek employment in unorganized sector. Providing higher education to tribal girls is a significant challenge and requires the analysis of underlying forces. Based on extensive literature review, the study focuses on four important factors which influence the tribal girl's entry into higher education. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) has been used to analyze the data collected for the study. The outcome of the study shows that social, economic, government initiatives and psychological factors significantly influence the entry of tribal girls into higher education. The findings and suggestions of this study will provide greater insights into the problem and will also be helpful in formulation of suitable plans and programs in order to improve their socio-economic condition and foster women empowerment among tribals .

**Keyword:** Gender disparity, higher education, tribal girl's, women empowerment

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## **Introduction**

Education is not only one of the most important socio-economic factor that is known to significantly influence individual behavior and attitudes, educational attainment is a fundamental indicator of a country's level of human capital development influencing its economic development. Education thus promotes individual development and at the same time is also a major prerequisite for economic development. Education stimulates economic growth (Rani, et. al., 2011) and improves people's lives through many channels mainly by increasing the efficiency of the labor force, by fostering democracy and thus creating better conditions for good governance, by improving health, by research and development activities and by making use of national and international advantages, to name a few. In India, low levels of education together with educational disparities in gender, caste, class, region, and religion are observed. Gender disparity in tribal education deserves special mention. Schedule tribes having distinct traits, life style and culture, have been known to live in isolation. Due to government initiatives in developing their capacities and potentials they are joining the mainstream. Education has played the most crucial role in this transformation. At the time of independence, India inherited a colonial education system where mass education was never a priority. It is praiseworthy that the planners realized the pivotal role of education in development and provisions have been made in the constitution (Article 45) and the five year plans. The 42nd amendment to the constitution in 1976 brought education into the concurrent list, making it a responsibility of both the Union and State governments. The 73rd and 74th amendments placed a greater role on local bodies and the 86th amendment in 2002 made it a Fundamental Right. Several policy statements (NPE, 1968, and 1986 and revised Plan of Action, 1992) laid down specific goals and targets and plan of actions for the education sector. With the right to education bill enforced since 1st April 2010. Higher education is the main instrument for the development and social transformation of a nation (Puhan, et. al., 2013). A university is both a center of culture and academic excellence. The objective of a university is not only the acquisition, preservation, dissemination, and extension of knowledge but also promotion of scientific temper, inculcation of moral values, and cultivation of the principle of togetherness. India possesses a highly developed higher education system which offers facilities of education and training in almost all aspect of human creative and intellectual endeavors. In India, Gender disparities in education are changing in the favor of girls in both participation and performance (Jha and Kelleher, 2006). The present approach towards higher

education is governed by the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986 and plan of action (POA) of 1992 which were based on two landmark reports namely, the University Education Commission of 1948-49 (Radha Krishnan Commission), and the Education commission of 1964-66(Kothari Commission) The NPE 1986 translates the vision of the two commission into 5 goals for higher education, for which programs are directed in POA, 1992. They are 'greater accesses, 'equal accesses, 'quality and excellence', 'relevance' and 'promotion of social values'. Of these, the first three are most important. In recent decades it has been theoretically and empirically proved that women's education is of greater importance than man. Research worldwide shows that in general, the economic benefits from investing in female education calculated as the economic-rate-of-return to education, is comparable to those from men's education whereas the social benefit from investing in female education is for greater. (Kingdon, 1997,Stephen & Francesca, 2003). Also, as there is declining marginal returns to education, equality in education would boost the overall economic performance of any nation (Knowles et al 2002). In ancient India, women enjoyed very high status with equal education opportunities, but in the later stage during the Sultanate and Mughal dynasty, a decline was observed. It is heartening to note that so far as gender disparity in literacy is concerned, recent decades show a encouraging picture.

**Table 1. Gender Disparity Index in India**

Serial No.	Year	Disparity Index
1	1901	1.236
2	1911	1.0248
3	1921	0.8517
4	1931	0.7495
5	1941	0.5591
6	1951	0.5134
7	1961	0.4529
8	1971	0.3555
9	1981	0.3195
10	1991	0.2625
11	2001	0.2142
12	2011	0.1788

**Source: Khitiar, Shiv Prakash,' Gender disparity in literacy in India'(2016), Social Change, February 17, 2016**

Despite repeated theoretical and empirical evidence of the fact that women's

disadvantage in education is economically inefficient, it prevails in most parts of the world, at varying degrees. Female deprivation of education is particularly acute in developing countries like India with high levels of poverty. Even within the country, education levels vary from region to region and state to state and also across religions, castes, communities, and sex, economic status, etc.

### **Tribal isolation, marginalization and constitutional Provision for their education**

India has the largest number of indigenous people in the world. Constituting 8.08% of the total population of the country, the tribal's are spread over 26 states and union territories, living in about 20% of the geographical area. About 80% of them live in rural areas and around 90% of them depend on agriculture and forest for their livelihood. Though 70% of tribal's own some land, they are unable to produce sufficient for themselves (Xalxo aiman, 2002).

Tribals, largely backward and poor, have their separate identity. It is a community with unique culture, religion, social-economic, and political structure handed down from generations. They practice subsistence farming and forest produce is important part of their livelihood Nature environment and ecology play the most important role in the chores of tribal girls since childhood, and as they manage it efficiently, the need for educating them is low. High work participation with low levels of education is a predominant feature of tribal girls.

70 % of out of school girls come from socially excluded groups- tribal, linguistic ethnic, rural, or poor groups that are discriminated against in their own countries (Lewis and Lockhead 2007). It is important to study the extent of gender disparity in education, particularly higher education which equips tribal girls to take jobs of high position and also be in a position to frame and enact the policies and programs for upliftment of their community as a whole.

**Table 2: Literacy Trends for S.T. in India (1961-2011) in percent**

Year	ST Male		ST Femal e		Total		Female to Male literacy Ratio
	R	U	R	U	R	U	

1961	13.37	37.09	2.90	13.45	8.16	22.41	0.228
1971	16.92	37.09	4.36	19.64	10.68	28.84	0.275
1981	22.94	47.60	6.81	27.32	14.92	37.93	0.328
1991	38.45	66.56	32.44	59.87	27.38	56.60	0.447
2001	57.39	77.77	49.90	70.30	45.02	69.09	0.587
2011	68.5	83.20	49.40		56.90	76.80	

*Source: Data collected from censusindia.gov.in*

Table2 shows that whereas female literacy rates are lower compared to male in the rural as well as urban areas, the gender gap is declining as observed from the rising female to male literacy ratio over the years.

### **The Rationale of the Study**

In developing countries, there are high inequities in access to higher education by gender, caste and religion. The present paper focuses on the gender differential in higher education of a particular group—the the scheduled tribes, who have a special identity of their own, but most of them belong to below poverty line and isolated from the mainstream of the society. The level of education among them is very low especially and for the females, it is below the national average.

### **The Objective of the Study**

The study based on multidimensional approaches is an attempt to throw light on the issues and challenges in higher education of tribal girls. The main aim of the study is to show the extent of gender disparity in higher education of tribals and also to identify the causes so as to help in framing policies for promoting higher education among tribal girls.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

H1: Economic factors significantly influence higher education of tribal girls

H2: Social factors significantly influence higher education of tribal girls

H3: Psychological factors significantly influence higher education of tribal girls

H4: Government related factors significantly influence higher education of tribal girls

## **1. Literature Review**

In order to identify the causes gender discrimination in higher education of tribal's , a review of available literature revealed that there are four broad categories of causes- economic, social, psychological and those related to role of government..

### **Economic factors:**

Most of the tribal families remain isolated and are economically marginalized. In such cases, the tribal girls usually forego higher education and do menial jobs to support their parents in earning money (Chatterjee, 2014). The poor economic and social condition creates psychological pressure among tribal girls and demotivates them to attain higher education (Srivastava, 2004). Most of the tribal girls are expected to help their parents in earning money and hence are unable to further pursue their education (Pandey.2013).

### **Social factors:**

Social and cultural barriers have been identified as the important cause of gender disparities among the tribals (Oraw and Toppo, 2012). Rani (2011) identified that lack of social support and motivation is an important barrier for the higher education of tribal women. Similarly, Raja and Krishna Veni, (2019) observed that some customs and restrictions based on gender creates a barrier for higher education among tribal girls. Beside it, the problem of language and communication also slows down the educational attainment of tribal girls (Mahajan, 2012). Sometimes family issues like illness of family members are the main reason for the discontinue of higher education (Jha and Jhingram, 2002). Early marriage and childbearing (Susuman, 2006,) is the important reason for tribal girl's lower education level. Historically, gender relation in tribal community is balanced and equitable but due to interactions with nontribals, it is changing. Initially they are reluctant to send their children especially girl child (Singh & Revolo) but now the attitude is changing (Sarkar,1979).

### **Psychological factors:**

Psychological factors play an important role in the promotion of higher study among

tribal girls. Srivastava (2004) in his study identified that the narrow mental outlook of tribal girls plays the key role in her higher study and this is because she is denied the liberty of personal expression (Bhasin, 2007). Tribal girls need to interact with others in their group in order to utilize their full potential and participate in higher education (Rani, *et. al.*, 2011). Sometimes parents are reluctant to send their girls to study due to their preconceived psychology (Chatterjee, 2014).

### **Role of Government:**

Lack of sufficient infrastructure and facilities is an important hindrance in promoting higher education among tribal girls (Rami, 2012). Tribals are geographically isolated and rely on primitive agricultural practices. They lack in finance, technology and infrastructure thus necessitating special considerations by government for their socio-economic development (Oraw and Toppo, 2012). Calder and Huda (2013) identified the main impediment to be lack of availability of sufficient infrastructure and skilled teachers who understand and appreciate tribal value system and language (Mahajan, 2012). Government should design different programs according to need of rural and urban women so that they can enrol in higher education (Majumdar and Sikdar, 2017). Besides the government initiated programs to promote the participation of tribal women in higher education, fifth and sixth schedule of the Constitution also envisages to give the special preferences to empower them (Xaxa, 2005).

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **Sample design and Data collection**

Exploratory research was done using primary data collected from sampled rural households in different villages of Ranchi and Dhanbad districts of Jharkhand in the period spanning January to March 2020. The respondents were tribal girls who were either pursuing higher education or were eligible for the same and intended to enter higher education. Judgemental sampling method was used to select 220 respondents from households having tribal girls in the desired category. Structured Questionnaire method was used before the survey, respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study and also assured about the secrecy of their identity. 189 respondents agreed to participate out of which 169 questionnaires were found to be filled without missing values and were hence useable for structural equation modeling analysis.

### **Data Analysis and Finding**

The researcher has used the partial least square (PLS) model using Smart PLS 2.0 (Ringle et al., 2005) software to estimate the parameters of the model (Henseler et al., 2009). It determines the association of constructs economic factors, social factors, psychological factors and government related factors with the dependent variable participation of tribal girls in higher education. It also assesses the effect of each construct on the dependent variable. It also estimates the statistical significance of factor loading and path coefficient.

### Scale validity reliability

Researcher has conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) which includes convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity suggests that if the value of outer factor loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) is greater than .50 in both the cases explained variance is greater than the measurement error (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Lin and Ding, 2006), the resultant value of factor loadings lies between 0.69 to 0.88 and for AVE the values lie between 0.66 and 0.82 (Table3)

**Table 3 Construct and observable Items**

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach Alpha
<b>Economic</b>			0.76	0.92	0.89
	Family financial condition plays an important role in higher education.	0.88			
	Educational loan is easily available for higher education.	0.83			
	I prefer to earn money for my family than taking higher education.	0.88			
	Government Scholarship motivates me for higher education.	0.86			
<b>Social</b>			0.66	0.88	0.83
	Higher education will give me a social affiliation.	0.79			
	Cultural condition plays a role in higher education.	0.85			
	family responsibilities demotivate me to enter into higher education	0.83			
	Support from the family, relatives & neighbors motivate me to enter into higher education	0.76			

<b>Psychological</b>			0.67	0.88	0.84
	Higher education can change the socio-economic condition.	0.86			
	The attitude of parents is important in the higher education of the girl.	0.81			
	Higher education will improve the quality of life.	0.85			
	Higher education will open new opportunities in life.	0.69			
<b>Government</b>			0.82	0.92	0.89
	Government schemes inspire me to enter into higher education.	0.87			
	Awareness by government agencies motivates me to enroll in higher education	0.86			
	I have sufficient Infrastructure support to complete my higher education.	0.88			
<b>Higher education</b>			0.78	0.87	0.74
	I always think to enroll myself in higher studies.	0.85			
	I motivate other girls to enroll in higher education.	0.88			

Source: Own calculation based on primary data.

Discriminant validity requires that the value of the square root of AVE should exceed the construct correlations with all other constructs (Fornell and Larcker (1981)) (Table 4).

**Table 4 Latent Variable Correlation**

	Economic	Social	Psychological	Government	Higher Ed
Economic	<b>0.87<sup>a</sup></b>				
Social	0.403	<b>0.81<sup>a</sup></b>			
Psychological	0.322	0.353	<b>0.81<sup>a</sup></b>		
Governmental	0.232	0.377	0.251	<b>0.9<sup>a</sup></b>	
Higher Ed.	0.421	0.415	0.367	0.376	<b>0.88<sup>a</sup></b>

Note: <sup>a</sup>Diagonal elements are squared AVE

Source: Own computation based on primary data.

The value of composite of composite reliability (CR) and cronbach alfa is calculated to find out the internal consistency which must be above the .70 for both (Nunnally, 1978). The resulted value of composite reliability lies in between the .83–.98 and for Cronbach's alpha, the values lie in between .71 and .97 (Table 3) which reflects good construct validity and reliability.

To overcome the multi co-linearity affects on the result, the values of tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) have been carried out with the help of IBM SPSS 20 software The calculated values of latent variable scores used as input for multiple regressions to get the values of tolerance and VIF (Table 5), which should not exceed 5 for VIF (Variable values < 4.297) and for tolerance level it should be > .2 (Grewal et al., 2004; Hair et al., 2011). So, the result shows that there is no multi co-linearity between the independent variables.

**Table 5 Structure Model Estimates (Path Coefficient)**

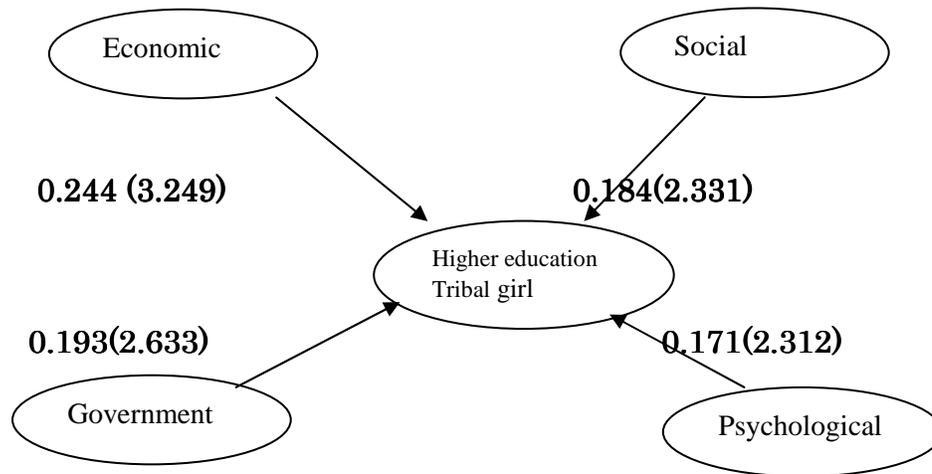
Path	Coefficient	t- value	p-value	Tolerance	VIF	Result
H1:Economic-> higher education	.244	3.249	.001	.799	1.251	Supported
H2: Social -> higher education	.184	2.331	.021	.723	1.383	Supported
H3:Psychological -> higher education	.171	2.312	.022	.829	1.206	Supported
H4: Government -> higher education	.193	2.633	.009	.843	1.186	Supported

Note: Significance level  $P < .05$ , if t-value  $\Rightarrow 1.96$ , based on two-tailed t-test.

*Source: Own computation based on primary data.*

### Main Effects and Path Coefficients

A non-parametric bootstrap procedure with 1000 resemble are presented in Table 5, shows the value of standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) t-value, and the associated significance levels of all relationships. The path coefficient is significant if the t-value is greater than 1.96, with a significance level of 5%, using a two-tailed t-test in IBM SPSS 20 software (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1. Structural Model**

Source: own computation based on primary data

The resulted values for the constructs economic factor ( $\beta=.244$ ;  $t\text{-value}3.249$ ;  $p=.001$ ), social ( $\beta=.184$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.331$ ;  $p=.022$ ), Psychological ( $\beta=.171$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.312$ ;  $p=.021$ ), Government ( $\beta=.193$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.633$ ;  $p=.009$ ), shows positive and significant effect on entry of tribal girls in higher education.. Therefore, the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 were accepted.

### Result and discussion

The outcome of the study shows that economic factors ( $\beta=.244$ ;  $t\text{-value}3.249$ ;  $p=.001$ ), significantly influence the movement of tribal girls towards higher education. Most of the tribes are economically deprived. They belong to the below poverty line category and rely on agriculture and other similar activities. They are struggling for their livelihood. In such a situation girls prefer to work than higher education to earn money to support the family. The weaker economic condition also has a psychological impact on their aspiration of higher study. During the study, it is identified that the availability of finance from the formal sources is also difficult due to rigorous terms and conditions which are not suitable for the tribal.

Government support ( $\beta=.193$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.633$ ;  $p=.009$ ) is shown as the second most influencing factor in enrolment of tribal girls in higher education. Government-sponsored scholarship and infrastructure support help and motivate them to achieve higher education. Awareness programs conducted by the central and state government and other agencies enrich the knowledgebase among tribal girls and it

is found to be useful for motivating enrolment in higher education. However, during the study in rural areas lack of information about government programs is identified which highly influences the aspiration of tribal girls towards higher education.

Social status, culture, and customs ( $\beta=.184$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.331$ ;  $p=.022$ ) are identified as the significant factor influencing higher study among tribal especially girls. Early marriage and family responsibilities are the key factors that demotivate girls to enroll in higher studies. Social resilience and preference given to the study of a son rather than a girl child is the key and common factor among the tribals which highly influences the higher studies among tribal girls. Weak and isolated social conditions and lack of infrastructure was also reported as the important cause of social resilience.

Psychological factor ( $\beta=.171$ ;  $t\text{-value}=2.312$ ;  $p=.021$ ) like parent's attitude affects enrolment of tribal girls in higher education. The importance of higher studies in improvement in social-economic conditions and overall quality of life is now a day's better understood by everyone. Now tribals are more interested to send their daughters in higher studies but it is limited to some socio-economically advanced families. But still, a large number of tribes from lower economic and social status have biased to send their girl child in higher studies. It is observed that this psychology is strengthening due to poor infrastructure and economic conditions.

Further, both demand and supply factors affect access to school, particularly for girls and disadvantaged groups. Parents and social attitudes are major demand-side sources of gender inequality, but other factors are also important mainly, the child motivation, the household ability to bear the costs of schooling, and the demand for the child labor raising the opportunity cost (Sen, 1992; Dreze & Sen, 1995; Probe 1999; Kingdon 2002). Although government primary schools do not charge tuition, parents must pay for school uniforms, books, and transportation. The cost of these items can be prohibitive in poor households with many children.

Household chores, particularly sibling care in poor families among tribal's are significant factors in girl's non-enrolment, frequent absence, and drop out. As opportunity cost of schooling rises with age, out of school girls on higher education is high. Culture also plays a role. As a girl reaching puberty; they are kept out of school to seclude them. Early marriage is also another prominent cause of education exclusions of girls at higher levels.

In the better off states and cities, another form of gender disparity in higher

education is observed. While boys are sent to private institutions with a good education at higher costs, girls are forced to stay back and complete higher education in state /central institution which charges low fees. The differential treatment of girls in the intra household allocation of resources worsens the gender gap, girl's achievement and future job prospects of tribal.

Both the overt and subtle discrimination from teachers and students of other communities have also contributed to dropout of ST students from institutions. Teachers have low expectation from them and this affects their motivation and performance.

The key supply constraint for scheduled tribes, often living in dispersed habitation in remote areas is the distance to school. These areas also have difficulties in recruiting teachers, especially teachers who can identify with local tribal in culture, language etc. Girls specially do not feel connected to such teachers and absenteeism and dropouts is regular feature. For girls particularly those at puberty, distance deters enrollment because of safety concerns.

### **Conclusion**

Education is one of the key enablers of demographic changes, family welfare and better health and nutrition. The spread of higher education is the key to sustaining the growth of the Indian economy. Independence led to expansion of education system fueled by supply and demand forces. While on the one hand government was making education accessible to masses and public policy towards equity was leading to expansion of education horizontally, an unquenching thirst for knowledge resulted in abnormal rise in social demand for education. There have been appreciable improvements in education with respect to interregional inequalities, and inequalities by gender caste religion etc. during the post –independence period, but inequalities still persist, dampening the very spirit of mass education.

### **Limitation and future scope of the study**

However outcome of the study is significant to the promotion of higher studies among tribal girls but it has some limitation. The study is conducted with a very small sample size with limited demographical and geographical area. A broader geographical area with larger sample size may have different outcome. There is a need to expand the area of study and include representation of tribal girls from other states of India as well in order to draw generic conclusions on higher education of tribal girls. The study considers only four variables however more

variables like cultural, microeconomic conditions, geographical distributions should be included for the better result.

### **Managerial Implication**

Outcome of the study will help in the promotion higher study among the tribals. It will provide a base for strategies formulation and take innovative initiation for the improvement of the enrolment of tribal girls in higher education. Economical conditions are found to be the key influencer in enrolling tribal girls in higher education. Government assistance, support from the financial institution availability of different job oriented training program for the tribal women may helpful to motivate the girl child towards higher education. Not only is the financial but social awareness another important factor which can highly influence the promotion of higher study among tribal girls.

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