

## **Educational Disparities and Opportunities: A Study of Scheduled Tribes of Northwest India**

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### **Abstract**

*Education occupies a very important place in shaping the development process of a country. It is the only means by way of which we can bring those belonging to backward, disadvantaged and underprivileged communities to the forefront and improve their overall well-being. The constitutional and legal provisions have been very insightfully designed to safeguard their interest and protect them from injustice and all forms of exploitation. As a directive the government has also initiated a number of educational programs and schemes for the underprivileged and encouraged them by providing facilities like scholarships, freeships, book grants, hostel accommodation etc. This present paper mainly based on secondary sources makes a modest attempt to understand who tribals are? What is their demographic configuration and how they are distributed spatially? This is done with the aim to get a larger understanding of size and composition of the Scheduled Tribe population. The second part of the paper focuses on the educational disparities and opportunities of the tribals by analysing the educational participation and attainment of the tribal population in the educational process, the school educational statics available under U-DISE and U-DISE + have been used extensively for the same. Along with a close examination of existing government initiatives in the form of policies, programmes and schemes that focus on the growth and expansion of the Scheduled Tribes at large. The paper also analyses the demographic and educational attributes for the tribals living in the North-Western States that include Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Jammu and Kashmir.*

### **Introduction**

The socially disadvantaged and backward communities face many challenges mainly due to limited access to basic services like education, health and economic security. This further leads to social exclusion and isolation due to discrimination, lack of representation and

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poverty which is further perpetuated with lack of resources and social support systems. These challenges need to be dealt with in a systematic manner and those belonging to the socially disadvantaged communities' need to be given equal opportunities and resources in order to create a more inclusive and equal society for all. Education, therefore occupies a very important place in shaping the development process and reducing development gaps. As, it is the only means by way of which we can bring those belonging to backward, disadvantaged and underprivileged communities to the forefront and improve their conditions. In this direction article 46 of the Constitution States, 'the, state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections people and in particular of scheduled caste and schedule tribes and shall protect them from injustice and all forms of exploitation'. It was the objective of the framers of the Constitution that through education new leadership would arise from the depressed classes which would help in leading their own community out of the present backward condition and bring them up to the level of the rest of the population (Bose, 1971). To fulfil this constitutional direction in the field education the government has initiated a number of educational programs for the scheduled tribes and encouraged them by providing facilities like scholarship, freeship, book grants, hostel accommodation etc. In an attempt to assess the effectiveness of these government initiatives and also identify existing gaps, this paper explores the focused educational development initiatives taken by the government for the scheduled tribes of India. The paper also explores the educational disparities and opportunities through, participation patterns and trends amongst the ST to get and understanding of their achievements over the past years. This would help gain insights into their progress and identify any existing gaps that exist in their educational achievements. The findings will help in evaluating the impact of the government's initiatives and also support in formulating future strategies and policies to further enhance the educational development initiatives for the scheduled tribes of India.

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## Who are Tribals in India

At the outset it is important we understand who exactly are '*Tribals*'. Tribals are the original natives or indigenous people who have distinct social, cultural, religious and sustenance practices. They live in the forest Hills and naturally isolated regions known as a rule by different names meaning the people of forest of Hill or the original inhabitants. Tribals are also known as '*Adivasi*' and '*Anusuchit Janjati*', Scheduled Tribe is the constitutional name for the tribal people of India (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1977). They have rich cultural heritage and are known for their traditional knowledge, skills in agriculture, and close connection to nature (Rani, 2009). Understanding the diversity and uniqueness of Tribals is crucial to address their specific needs and challenges for their overall development and well-being. Tribals are also regarded as the autochthones of a country, they cleared the forest and made these habitable. They converted available lands into agricultural fields and in course of time we pushed them back into deep forest and Hills. Some of these were rulers and some were warriors. They have contributed a good deal in developing the present composite culture of India. But today most of them stand dropped of their land and forest their confidence and dignity and even of their truthfulness (Badgaiyan, 1994).

The term "tribe" has administrative and legal connotations in India. The word 'tribe' was originally used by British census officers, who also served as anthropologists, to define social categories in India between the years 1881 and 1931. The term 'backward tribe' was first used in the Government of India Act 1935. The Indian Constitution has retained the terminology, however it has made a slight modification by substituting schedule for backward. However, the term has no precise definition in the Constitution. One of the most accepted definitions in the Indian context is given by Professor Majumdar (1937) "A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous with no specialisation of function, ruled by tribal officer, hereditary or otherwise, united language or dialect, recognising social distance from tribes or

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castes, but without any stigma attached in the case of caste structure, following tribal traditions believes and traditions, above all conscious of a homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration” (Pg. no. 14).

India, a land of diversity accounts for the largest number of people living with varied racial and ethnic identities. Many of those belonging to scheduled Caste and Tribes. According to the National commission for Scheduled Tribes (2023), there are over 700 tribes, spread through several States and Union Territories of the country, have been notified under Article 342 of the Indian Constitution (with overlapping communities in several States). In reference to the State of Orissa, the greatest number of traditional tribal communities, where 62 communities has been identified. With the exception of Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Pondicherry, all States and Union Territories have Scheduled Tribes listed.

### **Demographic Distribution of Scheduled Tribes in India**

India, a predominantly rural country, with 65% (Economic Survey, 2021-22) of its population living in rural areas and they lack basic amenities such as access to basic education, proper healthcare, and other infrastructural amenities. This deficit and a slow pace of development have resulted in limited opportunities for growth, further leading to widespread poverty along with wide range of social and economic disparities. The challenges faced by those belonging to marginalized social groups like the tribals is even more pronounced, as they not only struggle with basic needs but also face social discrimination and exclusion. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the overall development and upliftment of the tribal communities, as it will not only improve their quality of life but also contribute to the country's progress as a whole. The rural demographic composition is very varied with the Scheduled Tribe mainly living in geographically challenging locations. Taking a closer look at the share of the tribals to our total population the 1951 Census represented 6.23 % for the total country, the

proportion increased to 6.87 percent in 1961, which further increased to 6.94 percent in 1971, to 7.58 percent in 1981, and to 8.08 percent in 1991 and 8.20 percent in 2001. The highest ever share was reported in the 2011 census i.e., 8.6 percent tribal people lives in 15% of the total country's different geographical terrain ranging from plains to forests, hills and inaccessible areas. According to the same census year, scheduled tribes' population is 104 million persons and 98 percent of these lives in rural areas. In terms of distribution, the scheduled tribes accounts for 11.3 percent and 2.8% of rural and urban areas of the country. (ORGI, 2011).

The population growth rate amongst the tribals have always been slightly higher, when compared to the national trend. It was at 31.6 percent between Census 1981 to 1991 whereas the total population growth was at 23.5 percent in between 1991 to 2001, and between 2001 to 2011 census, growth rate was 23.7 percent, as compared to the national growth rate of 17.6 percent. It must also be noted that the decadal growth rate for the scheduled tribes in urban areas was higher than that for the rural areas i.e., 49.7 percent and 21.3% respectively.

The distribution of tribal population at the sub-national level represents a varied picture, with Lakshadweep having the highest share of tribal population at 94.8 percent, followed by Mizoram at 94.4 percent and Nagaland at 86.5 percent. On the contrary the states of Uttarakhand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh had less than 3 percent tribals as compared to Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry that did not have any tribal population. The Northwestern states of India like Himachal Pradesh comprised of 5.6 percent tribals, Rajasthan 13.5 and Jammu and Kashmir (before division) 11.9 percent.

The largest concentration of tribal communities in the world next to Africa is in India. The tribal scene in India presents an extremely complex and intricate pattern, on the one extreme are the Gonds whose number is more than 50 lakhs persons. On the other extreme are the

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Onges, numbering only about a few hundred, and the Great Andamanese are handful in numbers i.e., 19. In total there are 573 different tribal groups most of which are divided into several groups. Among them nine tribal groups namely Bhil, Gond, Ho, Khond, Mina, Munds, Naga, Oran and Santhals have the highest share. The Bhils and Gonds with their sub tribes together constitute one fourth of the total tribal population.

The gender composition forms an important element in understanding the social setting of a community. The sex ratio has been taken as the indicator to examine the same, and represents a better picture for the scheduled tribes at 990 females per 1000 males as compared to 943 females per thousand males as national average of the country.

The tribal literacy rate has always been the lowest amongst the different social groups, mainly owing to their social and physical setting. They were dismally low at 8.53% in 1961 with female literacy rates being 3.16% for the same. They gradually etched close to the half mark at 47.1% in the 2001 census. The latest available census of 2011 reflects the tribal literacy rate at 68.5%, even after many years of planned development initiatives taken by the government, the female literacy rate in 2011 could not even cross the half way mark i.e., 49.4% at the national level. Within the states barring a few North Eastern states the literacy rate in most of the states for the tribals is below the national average. The female literacy rate in the state of Rajasthan (37.3 %), Jammu and Kashmir (39.7%), Telangana (39.4%), Andhra Pradesh (40.9%), and Odisha (41.2%) were extremely low. The government needs to identify the underlying factors that is contributing to such low levels of literacy by undertaking researches and based on empirical support tries to bring program and policy interventions to transform the various social and economic indicators including the overall literacy levels in the tribal dominated districts and States.

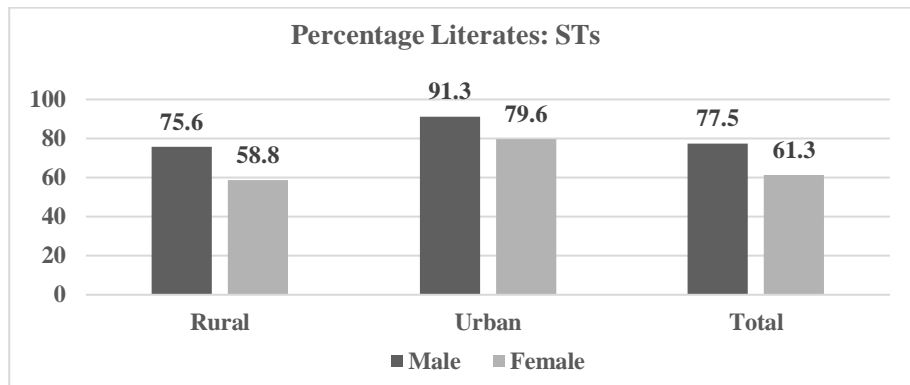
**Table 1: Literacy Rates**

Year	Total Population			Scheduled Tribes		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
<b>1961</b>	28.30	40.40	15.35	8.53	13.83	3.16
<b>1971</b>	34.45	45.96	21.97	11.30	17.63	4.85
<b>1981</b>	43.57	56.38	29.76	16.35	24.52	8.04
<b>1991</b>	52.21	64.13	39.29	29.60	40.65	18.19
<b>2001</b>	64.84	75.26	53.67	47.10	59.17	34.76
<b>2011</b>	73.00	80.90	64.60	59.00	68.50	49.40

*Source: Office of the Registrar General, India*

Apart from the 2011 Census data the NSSO in its 75<sup>th</sup> round captured the literacy data from its household survey, that indicates a significant rise in the literacy rates for the tribal population. The rates for females saw a larger increase at 61.3 per cent and male literacy at much higher rate i.e, 77.5 percent. A significant increase in the educational participation among the community, could be mainly due to increase in demand for education owing to the benefits that it brings to the tribals along with significant push through policy initiatives to establish schools and other facilities in tribal areas.

**Fig. 1. Percentage Literates: Scheduled Tribe-India**



*Source: NSSO, 75<sup>th</sup> Round, 2017, MoSPI. Government of India.*

### **Demographic Attributes of the Tribals of North-West India**

The States and Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir, Chandigarh, Ladakh, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh together comprise of the North-Western States of India. It must be noted that Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh do not have any native tribals, although the other States and UTs have a sizeable tribal population. This section with focus of the theme attempts to look into the demographic attributes of the native tribals living in these North Western states and UTs of India. With the help of the 2011 Census (the latest available) the demographic attributes for the three states Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir (as one unit including Ladakh), have been examined. This is done with the aim to understand the composition and distribution of the tribal population in these States, wherein select demographic attributes for the different tribal groups residing in these states have been examined. The tribes in the state of Himachal Pradesh: Gaddis, Gujjars, Khas, Lamba, Lahaulas, Pangwala, Swangla, Beta, Beda Bhot, Bodh. The tribes in the states of Jammu and Kashmir: Bakarwal, Balti, Beda, Gaddi, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Sippi, Changpa, Gujjar. The tribes in the state of Rajasthan: Bhils, Damaria, Dhanka, Meenas(Minas), Patelia, Sahariya, Naikda, Nayaka, Kathodi.

**Himachal Pradesh:** The mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh has been the legendary abode to some of the most ancient tribes of India. The tribal belt of Himachal Pradesh is located in its north and north east and its spread over the districts of Kinnaur, Lahul and Spiti and Pangi and Barmaur Sub-divisions of Chamba district. The total share of the state ST population comprises of 5.7 per cent of its total population. The backward and far-flung districts of Lahul and Spiti (81.4%), Kinnaur (58%) and Chamba (26%) contributing a huge share, as compared to the districts of Hamirpur (0.67%), Shimla (1.07%), Mandi (1.28%) and Una (1.65%) having smaller share of native ST population (ORGI, 2011).

According to the census 2011, 3.92 lakh tribals lived in Himachal Pradesh, examining the distribution, these tribals comprised of 10 sub-groups that included the Bhot/ Bodh, Gaddi, Gujjar, Jad, Lamba/Khampa, Kanaura / Kinnara, Lahaula, Pangwala, Swangla, Beta, Beda, Domba, Gara and Zoba tribal groups distributed mainly the districts of Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul and Spiti. Examining the distribution in the state the Gaddi community comprised of 45 per cent of the total tribals followed by the Gujjars at 23.6 per cent and the Kanaura, / Kinnara at 13 per cent.

The Swangla tribals of Lahul and Spiti had the lowest share at 2.5 per cent followed by the Pangwala tribals of Chamba with 4.4 per cent of the total tribal population. The overall literacy rates for the different tribal groups were low in the state with the highest number of illiterates being among the Gujjar community, where 43 per cent of the population was still illiterate in 2011. This was followed by the Beta / Beda community at 38.94 per cent. On the contrary, the highest literacy rates were seen among the Lahula (76.5%) and Kanaura, / Kinnara (74%) tribes.

**Table 2: Scheduled Tribal Communities in Himachal Pradesh**

ST Name	Total Populatio n	% Tribal		Illiterac y Rate	% Difference in Male Female Literacy Rate
		Population to total State Population	Sex Rati o		
Bhot, Bodh	27,191	6.93	1,02 8	27.43	14.33
Gaddi	1,78,130	45.43	1,01 4	35.84	16.98
Gujjar	92,547	23.60	945	43.19	15.59
Jad, Lamba, Khampa	1,974	0.50	871	27.56	10.13
Kanaura, Kinnara	50,994	13.00	1,06 2	25.75	13.98
Lahaula	2,886	0.74	1,02 8	23.46	14.81
Pangwala	17,562	4.48	985	36.75	19.48
Swangla	9,630	2.46	994	28.93	17.95
Beta, Beda	226	0.06	852	38.94	11.59
Domba, Gara,	231	0.06	662	31.60	10.71

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Zoba

**All Schedule**

**3,92,126**

**999**

**Tribes**

**35.36**

**16.00**

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*Source: Office of the Registrar General, India. 2011*

**Jammu and Kashmir:** The northern most state of Jammu and Kashmir, relatively has a higher share of scheduled tribes as compared to its neighbours, almost 11.9 percent of its total population (Census 2011). There were a total of 12 tribal communities in the state that included the Bakarwal, Balti, Beda, Bot, Boto, Brokpa/ Drokpa, Dard, Shin, Changpa, Gaddi, Garra, Gujjar, Mon, Purigpa and Sippi tribal communities. The total tribal population comprised of 14.93 lakh persons, of which gujjar's accounted for 65.7 per cent of the share in the state followed by the Bakarwal with 7.6 per cent share of the total tribal, together accounting for 73 percent of the total ST share. These two tribals groups mainly comprise of Muslims and are found everywhere except the Ladhak region. Other tribal groups such as Beda, Changpa, Garra, Mon and Sippi had less than 1per cent share of the tribal population in the state.

**Table 4: Scheduled Tribal Communities in Jammu and Kashmir**

ST Name	Total Population	% Tribal Population to total State Population	Sex Ratio	Illiteracy Rate	% Difference in Male Female Literacy Rate
Bakarwal	1,13,198	7.58	899	74.69	14.45
Balti	51,918	3.48	961	39.65	19.84
Beda	420	0.03	944	43.57	15.36
Bot, Boto	91,495	6.13	1,020	37.47	15.13
Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin	48,439	3.24	919	44.85	19.90
Changpa	2,661	0.18	964	50.51	17.65
Gaddi	46,489	3.11	953	55.93	24.52
Garra	504	0.03	833	38.49	21.49
Gujjar	9,80,654	65.67	920	63.13	16.01
Mon	829	0.06	983	39.57	16.11
Purigpa	39,101	2.62	943	42.58	19.73
Sippi	5,966	0.40	947	57.46	21.71
<b>Total STs</b>	<b>14,93,299</b>		<b>924</b>	<b>59.71</b>	<b>16.48</b>

*Source: Office of the Registrar General, India. 2011*

**Rajasthan:** The Scheduled Tribes comprised of 13.48 per cent of the total population in the

state of Rajasthan and this accounted for 9.23 million persons, the highest within the states in India. There were 12 notified tribal groups in the state as per the Census of 2011. *Mina* community had the highest share among the tribals in Rajasthan and accounted for 47 per cent of the population. This was followed by the *Bhils* with 43 per cent share, the other 10 tribals communities made up for the remaining 10 percent of the share. Examining the educational status of the Scheduled Tribes in the state, the *Garasia* and the *Kothadi* communities represented the lowest levels of literacy, with only one fourth of the population being literate and the *Dhanka/ Tadvil/ Tetaria/ Valvi*, *Koli / Kolcha* and the *Minas* had the highest proportion of literates.

**Table 4: Scheduled Tribal Communities in Rajasthan**

ST Name	Total Population	% Tribal Population to total State Population	Sex Ratio	Illiteracy Rate	% Difference in Male Female Literacy Rate
Bhil, Bhil Garasia, Dholi Bhil, Dungri Bhil, Dungri Garasia, Mewasi Bhil, Rawal Bhil, Tadvil Bhil, Bhagalia, Bhilala, Pawra, Vasava, Vasave	41,00,264	44.38	975	64.46	21.77
Bhil Mina	1,05,393	1.14	982	58.07	21.26
Damor, Damaria	91,463	0.99	987	56.70	21.64
Dhanka, Tadvil, Tetaria, Valvi	96,737	1.05	926	40.40	19.80
Garasia (excluding Rajput Garasia)	3,14,19	3.40	978	74.63	20.14

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Kathodi, Katkari, Dhor Kathodi, Dhor	4,833		977		
Katkari, Son Kathodi, Son Katkari		0.05		72.46	17.05
Kokna, Kokni, Kukna	361	0.00	870	53.74	17.50
Koli Dhor, Tokre Koli, Kolcha, Kolgha	1,535	0.02	907	41.43	23.39
	43,45,5				
Mina	28	47.04	919	48.81	27.24
Naikda, Nayaka, Cholivala Nayaka, Kapadia	8,355		908		
Nayaka, Mota Nayaka, Nana Nayaka		0.09		59.45	18.87
Patelia	797	0.01	824	53.83	25.95
	1,11,37				
Seharia, Sehria, Sahariya	7	1.21	966	61.66	22.16
	<b>92,38,5</b>				
<b>Total Tribes</b>	<b>34</b>		<b>948</b>	<b>56.91</b>	<b>24.49</b>

*Source: Office of the Registrar General, India. 2011*

### **Educational Disparities and Opportunities: A comparative perspective**

Educational development amongst the Scheduled Tribes has seen great amount of progress in the last few decades. This progress is visible across different levels of education from primary to tertiary levels. The regional disparities across states and districts for the tribal groups have reduced, but when compared with the forward areas and other dominant social groups the tribals have a long way to go in achieving desired targets. This section attempts to examine the educational development amongst the ST with attributes related to available secondary information related to their participation, efficiency and outcome related

indicators. Although it must be noted that the institutional data available for the Scheduled Tribes students is not very in-depth. Limited attributes pertaining to the participation levels and outcomes are available on the public domain, which again is not offered at disaggregated levels. This comes as a big challenge for the purpose research in general.

The Ministry of Education, Government of India collects the UDISE + data from schools on an annual basis. Indicators related to participation, efficiency and outcomes from the latest round of the UDISE + (2021-22) has been analysed to get a basics understanding of educational development amongst the ST at the school education level. The All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2020-21) has been used to examine the participation amongst the ST in higher education. These indicators have been discussed with characteristics related to gender, level of education, management etc.

**Enrolments- School Education:** The enrolment rates represent the reach of an education system as it reflects the direct consequence to the initiatives taken by the state. This section focuses on the Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) at the four levels of schooling. in the three North western states. Although the share of those enrolled over the years has seen a drastic increase in the last two decades, the participation post primary has witnessed a greater rise with the GER at 101.1 per cent for ST in 2000-01 to 106.5 % in 2021-22 at the primary level and from 60.2 per cent to 98% at the Upper Primary level for the same period. The GER at the Secondary and Senior Secondary level of schooling represents the highest rise from 37.2 per cent at the secondary and 17.2 per cent at the senior secondary level in 2004-05 to 78.1 per cent and 52 per cent in 2021-22 for the same level, with gender gaps in participation also declining across levels of schooling.

An attempt has also been made to look the participation rates for the three North-Western states in this section. This is done with the aim to get a comparative perspective on

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participation of ST in these states. Overall lowest participation was seen in the UT of Ladhak across all levels of education among the ST children, the STs in Jammu and Kashmir also represented a lower GER than the national average with 42.5% GER at the Senior Secondary level and 16.5% GER for the Higher Education level. Rajasthan represented better performance than the national level, but overall, the participation rates were highest in the hill state of Himachal Pradesh wherein 95.3 % ST students being enrolled at the senior secondary level and 39.7 % were enrolled for higher education, way higher than the national average for ST students. This could mainly be attributes to higher levels of socio-economic development in the state and a higher regard for education among the tribals.

**Table 5: Gross Enrolment Ratio for Scheduled Tribe Students 2021-22**

States /UTs	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary
<b>Rajasthan</b>	108.6	102.3	76.8	71.2
<b>Himachal Pradesh</b>	103.9	98.6	90.9	95.3
<b>Jammu and Kashmir</b>	131.9	71.9	56.3	42.5
<b>Ladhak</b>	80.6	67.5	61.5	52.6
<b>India</b>	<b>106.5</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>78.1</b>	<b>52</b>

*Source: UDISE +, Ministry of Education, 2021-22.*

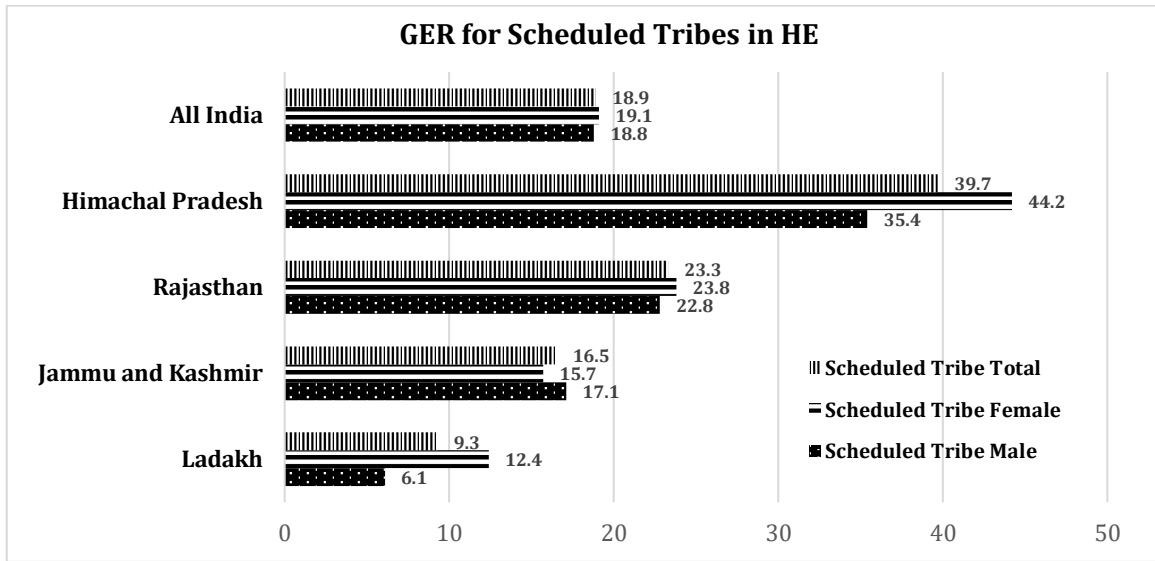
**Higher Education:** According to the most recent statistics on higher education available (AISHE, 2020–21), there were 2.88 million more students enrolled overall in 2019–20 than there were in 2019–20, or 41.3 million. Based on the breakdown, 5.8% of the students were from ST, 14.2% were from SC, 35.8% were from OBC, and the rest 44.2%

are from other communities. The AISHE Report additionally indicates that the total number of ST students enrolled increased from 21.6 lakh in 2019–20 to 24.1 lakh in 2020–21. Compared to the growth of 4.3% in the year before, this increase of 11.9% is noticeably greater. Additionally, there was a 47% total increase in ST student enrolment from 2014–15. The increase in the share could be attributed to the efforts made in various programmes initiated by the government from the lower educational levels, further impacting the higher education level. Although the base share may run in millions due to the large demographic base that India holds.

Although the number of those enrolled may be in millions, what is more important is the proportion of those enrolled in relation to the actual demographic size. The Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) for higher education examined to for Scheduled Tribes Students stand at 18.9 per cent for the total population. The increase in the STs between the current and previous years is notably significant of 1.9 percentage points is observed. This increase is even more significant when compared with the GER for the ST in 2016-17 which was 14.8 percent. Taking a closer look at the gender wise participation it is pleasant to report that number of females (19.1) enrolled are higher when compared to males (18.9).

Within the Northwestern region, the state of Himachal Pradesh had one of the highest GER for STs not only in the region but also in the country at 39.7 per cent. Ladakh (9.3 %) followed by Jammu and Kashmir (16.5 %) has the lowest GER in the region. The female GER also followed a similar trend, with the participation level among female ST students was higher in Ladakh as compared to males.

**Fig.2 :Gross Enrolment Ratio for Scheduled Tribe Students 2020-21**



Source: AISHE, Ministry of Education, 2020-21.

**Gender Parity Index:** While discussing the participation of a marginalised communities like the scheduled tribes it is important to look into the gender differentials in participation of this communities. This section briefly looks into the variant gender wise participation of ST student into the education system. Although the general understanding maybe that the girl child is often more vulnerable or marginalised in a disadvantaged community, ironically educational participation amongst gender groups shows a varying picture. The GPI across all levels of education indicates an equal or higher participation of females. Within the North-western states Ladhak at the elementary levels shows a higher proportion of boys enrolled as compared to the secondary level where a higher proportion of females were enrolled. The GPI for at was less than one for the secondary level of schooling in the sates of Rajathan, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kasmir. At the higher education level the Ladhak has a GPI of 2.01, as compared to a national level GPI of 1.02. Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan represented a higher Female participation with GPI above 1 as

compared to 0.92 for Jammu and Kashmir. Overall, it can be concluded that the gender gaps in participation amongst the STs have declined over the years.

**Table 6: Gender Parity Index (GPI) for Scheduled Tribe Students 2021-22**

Level/ Year	Primary	Upper Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	HE*
Rajasthan	1.005	0.945	0.941	0.942	1.044
Himachal Pradesh	1.031	1.013	1.012	0.982	1.249
Jammu and Kashmir	0.949	1.054	0.924	0.762	0.918
Ladhak	0.878	0.931	1.026	1.095	2.033
<b>India</b>	<b>1.003</b>	<b>0.992</b>	<b>1.028</b>	<b>1.061</b>	<b>1.016</b>

*Source: UDISE + 2021-22 and \*AISHE (2020-21), Ministry of Education.*

**Dropouts:** Leaving the schooling cycle without completing it may have related consequences on the education system, on the household and on the student himself. Examining the dropouts for the STs becomes even more significant owing to their vulnerability. Although it must be noted that there is limited data and information pertaining to the same. Taking the national level dropout rates for the schooling cycle it can be noted STs have the highest proportion of dropouts at 16.62 per cent. The number of those who dropout increases with the level of education. The dropout rates are higher for boys as compared to girls. Within the North West states Jammu and Kashmir had the highest proportion of students leaving the schooling cycle at an average rate of 14.17 per cent for the school cycle followed by Rajasthan at 9.34 per cent. Within the states females had higher dropout rate than the males.

States need to take cognizance of the same and work towards identifying the pockets where there are higher proportions of those dropping out and also find out the reasons and work out interventions to lower dropouts.

**Table 8: Dropout Rates for ST Students 2021-22**

Year/ Classes	Class I-V			Class VI-VIII			Class I-X		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Rajasthan	3.75	3.56	3.66	6	5.08	5.57	10	8.58	9.34
Himachal Pradesh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.16	0
Jammu and Kashmir	2.57	4.12	3.31	3.35	6.87	5.02	10.55	19.05	14.17
Ladhak	7.31	5.34	6.35	1.51	0	0.58	2.31	4.52	3.47
India	3.04	2.60	2.83	6.35	5.70	6.03	17.87	15.33	16.62

*Source: UDISE + 2021-22*

Data from the 75<sup>th</sup> round of the NNSO (2017) was used to examine the educational participation among those in the age group 3 to 35 years for the social groups. This was categorized by gender for those who have never enrolled or enrolled with the present status. The results are interesting as 14.7 per cent of the STs males had never enrolled as compared to 7.8 per cent general population, with a higher share for females at 22.4 per cent. Of those who were currently attending, males represented a higher share as compared to the females. This data in also throws light on the reality that the ST are more vulnerable to overall access to educational opportunities and further a higher probability of dropping out of the system before completing the educational cycle as compared to the other social groups.

**Table 9: Percentage of persons of age 3 - 35 years by status of enrolment by social group**

social group	never enrolled	ever enrolled		never enrolled	ever enrolled	
		currently not attending	currently attending		currently not attending	currently attending
	Male			Female		
ST	14.7	42.3	43.1	22.4	40.4	37.2
SC	13.4	43.2	43.4	20	39	41
OBC	11	41.3	47.7	17.5	41.2	41.2
others	7.8	45.1	47	9.4	47.5	43.1
all	11	42.7	46.4	16.6	42.2	41.3

*Source: NSSO, 75<sup>th</sup> Round, 2017, MoSPI. Government of India.*

The long-drawn debate between government and private schools is limited to urban areas or the privileged groups. But the share of those belonging to marginalized groups attending private fees charging schools is also growing. In total the 15.4 percent of the ST went to private schools with a higher proportion of boys (17.1%). None the less their share was also the highest for those attending the government schools.

**Table 10: Enrolment by School Management**

School Management Type	Total Enrolment			ST Enrolment		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Government	49.54	55.71	52.50	70.47	74.67	72.50
Government Aided	11.12	11.18	11.15	10.41	10.06	10.24
Private	36.13	30.02	33.19	17.12	13.59	15.41
Other	3.22	3.09	3.15	2.00	1.68	1.85

*Source: UDISE, NIEPA 2017-18*

### **Challenges in Tribal Education**

Although the government has made several efforts in supporting educational development of scheduled tribes, we still have a long way to go before we achieve desired targets. The NEP 2020 clearly points out that “tribal communities and children from Scheduled Tribes also face disadvantages at multiple levels due to various historical and geographical factors. Children from tribal communities often find their school education irrelevant and foreign to their lives, both culturally and academically” (NEP 2020, Para 6.2.3). The policy makes it clear that there are issues at hand and that, although there are a number of programmatic interventions in place to help raise the status of children from tribal communities, special measures must be taken to guarantee that these children actually benefit from the interventions. Owing to its social and physical setting there are many challenges that still exist. First being the barrier of language (Shantakumar and Das, 2017) as most of these tribals groups comprise of smaller sub-tribes who speak multiple dialects. Teaching in the mother tongue may be encouraged through various policy initiatives, but finding teachers in the relevant language / dialect comes as a challenge. The NEP also emphasizes on the introduction of language in education

policies by the states to address the linguistic rights of the tribal communities living in the states.

Empirical evidences from the field clearly highlight financial problems, household responsibilities, lack of parental support in academic activities, language and cultural differences along with low levels of motivation in some of the key household level challenges in the development of education. The other challenge that comes in the way of educating the tribals is the lack of required infrastructure and other basic schooling provisions in the schools located in the tribals areas. Without adequate infrastructure the teaching learning process as well as the overall experience of a school and education for the tribal child gets hampered. Evidence shows that due to lack of infrastructure along with these schools being located in far-flung areas, many qualified teachers refrain from working in such schools, further aggravating the already existing education gap among tribals. Therefore, such areas across states need to be identified along with other existing problems with the support of research and area specific studies and area specific policies and programmes need to be developed for an overall transformation of the tribal areas and communities.

### **Concluding remarks**

Educational development of tribals has come a long way, but we still have many miles to go before we educate and empower all. Although we have to keep in mind that transformations are not an easy process to encounter as they bring along enormous changes on the tribals as individuals, as households and as a community at large. This is even more particular in a traditional country setting like India, where ethnicities date back to thousands of years and tribals in particular still live in geographically isolated locations and have primitive ways of living. Therefore, we cannot expect them to change entirely in the name of development and push modern reforms in an attempt to mainstream them.

The value that education holds to empower tribals is enormous, but this empowerment should not come at the cost of losing their traditions, identity and ways of living. Therefore, as stated in the NEP 2020 education needs to factor in aspects that safeguards their culture and distinctiveness. The curriculum therefore should be designed in way that the tribal children can identify with and feel included. Further the classroom transactions should be carried in the local dialect or mother tongue to make learning an enjoyable process for the children. Education is important, but for them to live in their habitat and in their tribal way of life holds significance. In addition to recognizing the importance of understanding the sensitivity of who tribals are and their unique requirements, governments must also acknowledge the significance of involving them in the policy-making and program implementation processes. By actively including tribals in the planning and decision-making for their own development, governments can foster a more inclusive and cohesive approach towards tribal development. This collaborative effort would not only ensure that the needs and aspirations of the tribal communities are met but also empower them to actively participate in shaping their own future.

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