

# Scheduled Tribes in Higher Education: Problems & Perspectives

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## Abstract

Education is a key indicator of the human development index. The basic need of life is not only food, clothe, and shelter but also education. The tribal community also has a right to life with dignity, and the dignity comes from education. After seven decades of independence, the tribal community is still considered a marginalized section of society, which makes a big question mark on our development system. The tribes are the country's indigenous people, with a large population that contributes 8.6 percent of the nation's population. (Census, 2011). Under the flagship program of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the Government of India and the Tribal Welfare Department of different states launched many programs and schemes such as scholarships, fellowships, education at abroad, reservation of sheets, coaching for competitive exams, hostels, etc., for the educational upliftment of the tribal students but still, the high dropout rate, high number of school dropout, low GER in school, collages and other higher education institute found within the tribal community. A smaller number of students enrolled in higher education, and the dropout rate is increasing with increased schooling. Tribal students face many problems in higher education institutes. This paper will discuss the issues and changes of ST students in higher education and the facts and figures of the government policies, programs, and schemes for the higher education of ST students of Madhya Pradesh.

**Key Words:** Higher Education, Issues, and Challenges, PVTGs, Scheduled Tribes, Tribal Education.

## Introduction

Education is usually characterized as formal education in schools and higher educational institutions. Education is a key indicator of human development. Now the basic need of human beings is not only food, cloth, and shelter but also education. Kothari Commission said, 'The destiny of India is being shaped in its classroom.' India is the world's most populated country (World Population Review, 2023), having different religions, cast, cultures, and social groups. Tribes are the indigenous community of the nation. According to the census of India 2011, the scheduled tribal population is 10.42 crore, constituting 8.6 % of the country's population. The tribal community is still considered a deprived and marginalized section of society. The tribes are socially and culturally rich but have low economic status, lack of infrastructure, low literacy, etc. The literacy rate of the scheduled tribes is 59 %, whereas the country's general literacy is 73 % (Census, 2011).

India's entire higher education comprises around 1113 Universities and 43796 colleges. Out of 1113 universities, 657 are government or govt. Supported universities, out of 43796 colleges, 9372 are government colleges. (AISHE report 2020-21). According to the Ministry of Education, total enrolment in higher education was more than 4.13 crore in 2020-21. Only about 5.8% of ST students pursue higher education, compared to the national average of around 27.3%. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education for the academic year 2020-21 is estimated to be 27.3 % for the age group 18-23 years, GER of STs Students is 18.9 %. The constitution of India provides equal and special opportunities to promote tribal education in the form of various schemes, despite the situation of their education status reported to be dismal. Since the inception of independent India, there has always been a special emphasis on their education in the form of model schools, residential schools, ashram schools, etc.

The present paper is an attempt to explore the issue and challenges with particular reference to higher education institutions. This paper focuses on graduation and post-graduation level of education. This paper largely depends on secondary data. The data obtained from various sources such as reports of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, and AISHE reports, besides some of the field experiences and findings field also taken into consideration to enrich the study. The whole paper is divided into eight parts, each section presents and represents various issues related to tribal education.

### **Status of School Education among STs:**

This section mainly focuses on the education status of STs and the efforts of the union and the tribal-dominant state government have made many efforts to improve the status of school education among the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India. According to the Census of India 2011, the literacy rate among STs is 59.5%, much lower than the national average of 74.04%. The number of enrollments of ST students (Primary to Higher Secondary) is increased from 2.49 crore in 2020-21 to 2.51 crore in 2021-22, which is 9.81 % of the total enrollment of the country (UDISE+ Report. 2022). In terms of enrollment in primary and secondary schools, the gap between STs and the national average is even more comprehensive. Dropout rates among ST children are also higher than the national average, further exacerbating the problem. The government has implemented several programs, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, to improve the quality of education and increase enrollment among STs. Non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations have also promoted education among ST communities. Despite several government and NGO initiatives and programs aimed at promoting education among the ST population, the overall enrollment and literacy rates among STs are lower compared to the national average, and low enrollment and high dropout rates exist among STs. Several factors contribute to the low enrollment and high dropout rates among STs. These include poverty, lack of access to schools, cultural barriers, social status, economic condition, Family business activities, absenteeism of teachers, and inadequate support from the government, etc. (Soni, 2017). In many rural areas, ST children face discrimination and are often forced to drop out of school to engage in manual labor or household chores. A study conducted by Chatterjee, P. (2016) on the education status of tribal communities of Madhya Pradesh, finds the reason for the low literacy of STs of the state and suggests for implementation of area-based schemes, the government should increase the number of educational institutes in rural tribal areas.

### **Status of Higher Education among STs:**

The status of higher education among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India is a matter of concern. Despite some progress in recent years, ST students' enrollment and completion rates in higher education institutions still need to be higher than the national average. According to the Ministry of Education in India, only about 5.8 % of ST students pursue higher education, compared to the national average of around 27.3 %. A total of 41380713 students are enrolled in HEIs, where 2412069 students belong to the STs Category. Here the notable point is that the gender distribution in enrollment in HEIs for all categories is 51.32 % for males and 48.67 % for females, on the other hand, in Scheduled Tribes, 49.37 % of males and 50.62 % of females are enrolled in HEIs (AISHE, 2020-21) this represents the strengthening of the female of scheduled tribe community in higher education. (Table-1). This disparity is due to several reasons, including the lack of financial resources, limited access to quality schools, and a need for more awareness about the benefits of higher education.

**Table 1: Total Number of Enrollment STs and All Categories Students.**

Sl. No.	State	All Categories			Scheduled Tribe		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	Madhya Pradesh	1374036	1224525	2598561	140698	153701	294399
	All India	21237910	20142803	41380713	1191037	1221032	2412069

Source: - AISHE Report 2020-21, Ministry of Education, GoI

The enrollment rate of scheduled tribes' students in HEIs is twice that of all categories' enrollment rates in science from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The year-wise enrollment rate increment for all categories is 2.56 % in 2017-18 from 2016-17, 2.02 % in 2018-19, 2.95 % in 2019-20, and 6.87 % in 2020-21 for all categories, simultaneously the enrollment rate increment of schedule tribe students in HEIs is from 2017-18 to 2020-21 is 3.21 %, 7.44 %, 4.09 %, 10.61 % respectively. The present data show that the enrollment increment of ST students is better than overall enrollment in HEIs.

**Table 2: STs and overall students Enrolment during 2016-17 to 2020-21 in India**

Year	All Categories			Scheduled Tribe		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
2020-21	21237910	20142803	41380713	1191037	1221032	2412069
2019-20	19643747	18892612	38536359	1072646	1083463	2156109
2018-19	19209888	18189500	37399388	1052121	1015627	2067748
2017-18	19204675	17437703	36642378	1001989	911875	1913864
2016-17	18980595	16725310	35705905	983778	868597	1852375

Source: - AISHE Report 2020-21, Ministry of Education, GoI

### The Central Government Initiatives

The Indian government has launched several educational initiatives over the years to improve access to all and the nation's education quality. However, the gap between the target and the reality of these initiatives is a matter of ongoing debate and discussion. The journey of higher education starts with

school education. The high enrollment and completion of school education may ensure a high enrollment rate in higher education institutions (HEIs). Some government initiatives made a drastic change in the education of the nation. The SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA), a flagship program to universalize primary education, RashtriyaMadhyamikShikshaAbhiyan (RMSA) aims to improve its quality and enhance access to secondary education. Another initiative launched by the government is the RashtriyaUchcharShikshaAbhiyan (RUSA), which aims to support higher education institutions to improve the quality of education and research. Education is an integrated subject of development, many ministries have initiated schemes and programs for school education and higher education and also for the empowerment of tribal and tribal education.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is nodal for the development of tribes and tribal education. At the same time, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is nodal for education and allied activity, along with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the Ministry of Rural Development, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is also working for education and tribal development. The program has made significant progress in terms of increasing enrollment and reducing the dropout rate. In contrast, although the initiative has made some progress in terms of increased funding and resources for higher education, there are still many issues and challenges which need to be addressed, such as the lack of access to quality institutions for students from marginalized communities and a lack of adequate infrastructure and facilities in many higher education institutions.

### **Ministry of Tribal Affairs initiative for the higher education of STs Students**

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) has launched several higher education initiatives to improve access and the quality of higher education for tribal communities in India. However, the gap between the target and the reality of these initiatives is a matter of ongoing debate and discussion. One of the key initiatives launched by the MoTA is the National Fellowship for Scheduled Tribe Students, which provides financial support to ST students pursuing higher education. The initiative has helped many ST students access higher education. The Indian Universities, Colleges, and other HEIs registered under sections 2(f) and/or 12(B) of the UGC Act 1956 are eligible to receive grants-in-aid from UGC. The budget allocation for FY 2021-22 is 150.00 crore.

Another initiative of MoTA is the Tribal Talent Pool, the aim of this initiative is to development of ST scholars by providing support and promote to participation in the research and development activity of MoTA at central and state levels. More than 3000 research scholars benefit from pursuing M.Phil. and Ph.D. under this scheme. The National Scholarship for Top Class Education of ST Students Schemes aims to provide financial assistance for pursuing graduation and post-graduation education from designated top 246 institutions. This scheme's estimated budget was 150.00 crore for FY 2021-22.

The National Overseas Scholarship (NOS) for ST students provides financial support to the selected ST students for pursuing higher studies in abroad for Master's degrees, Ph.D., and Post Doctoral research programs. The scheme pays student tuition fees, maintenance allowances, contingency and equipment allowances, poll taxes, medical insurance, air, local travel, visa fees, and other education-related expenditures. (MoTA, 2022). To sum up, the MoTA has made some progress in improving access to higher education for tribal communities, there is still a long way to go in closing the gap between the

target and the reality of these initiatives. Addressing the challenges faced by tribal students in accessing higher education will require sustained investment, effort, and collaboration between the government, higher education institutions, and communities. More over a consistent efforts, not only on paper also spirit.

### **Initiatives of ministry of Education the tribal higher education**

Along with the ministry of tribal education, as a key stakeholder the Ministry of Education has implemented several initiatives to improve higher education opportunities for students from Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities in India. These initiatives aim to provide equal access to quality education and reduce the disparities in educational attainment between ST students and their peers.

- i. The scholarship scheme provides financial assistance for college and university students to pursue higher studies to eligible ST students. The scheme provides 10000/- per year for the first three years and 20000/- per year for the fourth and fifth years.
- ii. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment and MoTA jointly launched a National Fellowship scheme for the Higher Education of ST students which the UGC implements under the Ministry of Education. The scheme is to provide fellowships for ST students in the full-time M.Phil. and Ph.D. courses. The fellowship is provided to 750 candidates per year by UGC.
- iii. Post-Graduate Scholarship scheme for SCs/STs students gives financial support to pursue a PG degree in any professional subject from any Indian University/Institution/college. Every year government provides fellowship to 1000 SC/ST applicants.
- iv. The post-Doctoral Fellowships scheme is for ST students' scheme. In this scheme, 100 applicants are selected every year under this scheme. The candidate belonging to Science, Engineering & Technology, Humanities, and Social Sciences stream can get this fellowship for study in any Indian University, Institution, or College.
- v. UGC has launched a coaching facility for ST students and another underprivileged category. The following coachings are launched under the schemes.
  - a. Remedial coaching for ST students along with another under privileged category students of Undergraduate (UG) / Post-graduate (PG) students.
  - b. Coaching for NET/SET.
  - c. Coaching Classes for entry in services.
  - d. Residential Coaching Academics of SCs/STs/Minorities.
  - e. Equal Opportunity Cells to be constituted in the Universities/ Colleges.
- vi. Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy study centers would be established in universities.
- vii. Establishment of Special Cells for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Universities.
- viii. Guidelines for implementation of Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) in University Grants Commission.
- ix. Reservation for Scheduled Tribes in the matter of appointment to teaching posts in Universities/Colleges.

In spite of these initiatives, the truth of higher education for ST students still needs to be better. Many ST students still need help accessing higher education, including a lack of awareness about the available opportunities, limited financial resources, and inadequate infrastructure and facilities in their communities. ST students struggle to complete their higher education due to poverty, lack of support from family, friends, and discrimination at the institution. This results in a higher dropout rate among ST

students than their peers and a lower proportion of ST students pursuing and completing higher education.

### **Budget allocation:**

The Government of India constitutes the Ministry of Tribal Affairs for the welfare of the scheduled tribe community. The ministry spends a considerable amount every year to uplift the tribal community. The MoTA Expenditure of budget is 5285.67 crores in FY 2017-18, 5954.78 crore in FY 2018-19, 7288.74 crore in FY 2019-20, 5461.67 crore FY 2020-21. (MoTA, Annual report 2021-22). The financial year 2019-20 has the highest expenditure, i.e., 7288.74 crore, on the year, the enrollment increment of ST students in HEIs was the highest, i.e., 10.61 % as compared to 2018-19. The allocated budget for the Ministry of Tribal Affairs in the financial year 2023-24 is Rs. 12,461.88 crore, an amount of 256.14 crore has been allocated for the development of 75 PVTGs communities across the country; however, the PVTGs development budget is declined significantly in past few years, the budget was 250 crore in FY 2018-19, the same 250 crore in 2019-20, decline again in FY 2020-21 to 140 crore, 160 crore in 2021-22 and lowest budget in 124.79 crore in 2022-23. (The Hindu, February 23, 2023) (Budget analysis HoE 2022).

The financial allocation on higher education increased in the FY 2022-23 is a significant government move, this would increase the quality of education and enrollment and lead to the social development of the marginalized tribal communities. Further, the budget allocation to the PVTG communities also increased, this would be a sign of optimism and encouragement towards the human resource development of the marginalized communities. In the last five years, the amount has increased significantly for the development of PVTGs. The Ministry of Education has been allocated Rs 1,12,899 crore for FY 2023-24, the highest amount ever among all ministries in FY 2023-24. The education budget increased by 16.5 % from 2022-23. The Department of Higher Education budget increased by 8% over FY 2022-23, and for FY, the budget allocated Rs 44,095 crore, which covers 39% of the Ministry's expenditure. (Union Budget, 2023-24) This huge amount of budget may change the scenario of the education system in India, specifically higher education. It indicates a close connection between the budget allocation and the enrollment ratio. The reports show that due to the higher financial allocation, there is great attention on providing various facilities to the tribal students, such as post-matric fellowships, hostel facilities, and scholarships, Overseas Fellowships, PVTG special schemes such as Conservation cum Development (CCD) plans, nutrition grant scheme, etc.

### **Issues and Challenges faced by ST students in higher education.**

Despite many initiatives, the participation of scheduled tribe students in higher education is very low. Many ST students face cultural and linguistic barriers when entering higher education institutions, which can make it difficult for them to adjust and succeed. There are also concerns about discrimination and bias in the higher education system, which can make it even harder for ST students to succeed. To address these challenges, the government of India has implemented several programs and initiatives to improve the status of higher education among STs. These include scholarships and financial assistance programs, programs to increase awareness about higher education, and initiatives to improve the quality of education in ST-majority areas. However, despite these efforts, much more must be done to ensure all ST students have access to quality higher education. This includes improving the quality of primary and

secondary education, providing financial support and other resources, and addressing cultural and linguistic barriers. The high enrollment and retention rate in schooling leads to the possibility of high enrollment in higher education institutes. The dropout rate is four times more in children from low-income families than in children from rich families (Divya K. (2017). The Constitution of India provides to safeguard and promote the education of Scheduled Tribe students, but the ground reality is different. Constitutional safeguards reflect the social reality of higher education, while the educational policy, programs, and schemes are not dealing with the complexity in this regard. (Chanana, 1993). The researcher has experienced other challenges in the higher education of ST students, such as the poor economic condition of families promoting to engage in the income generating activity and drop out of education. The inferiority complex is also a barrier in the higher education of ST students.

### **The way forward**

An umbrella program should be launched for the complete education of a scheduled tribe student from primary education to higher education. This should be the state's responsibility to ensure the complete education program for each tribal student. A compulsory and strong monitoring system should be developed to implement each scheme and program of higher education for ST students. The third-party evaluation should be made for a particular time interval to ensure proper implementation. The policy should be made based on the need of the ST students and ensure the ground reality of the tribal community. Education is the key indicator for the human development index, but no parameter exists to measure the state's education. Literacy is slightly different from education in the real sense. A parameter should be developed by the educationist, subject experts, and other stockholders so that accurate data on a state's educational rate can be calculated and monitored.

### **Conclusion**

The Ministry of Education's initiatives have made some progress in improving higher education opportunities for ST students, but there is still much work to be done to address the persistent disparities in educational attainment and to ensure that all ST students have access to quality higher education. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has launched several key initiatives for promoting the higher education of ST students, the national scholarship scheme, National Fellowship Scheme, National Overseas Scholarship, talent pool, etc., are the scheme to promote and support ST students. This initiative has greatly impacted ST students' higher education but on a very small scale. More than 95 % of students who do not pursue higher education leave school or college before enrolling in HEIs due to many issues and challenges, these challenges can be categorized into three categories i) Cultural constraints, ii) Administrative hurdles, and iii) Other obligations (Chandel & Ramesh, 2022). Scheduled Tribes students' enrolment has increased from 21.6lakh in 2019-20 to 24.1 lakh in 2020-21. The increment shows approximately 11.9%, which is significantly higher than the increase recorded in the previous year, i.e., 4.3%. Notably, the overall increase in ST Student enrolment since 2014-15 is 47%. (AISHE, 2020-21). But still, the number is very lower. The state should ensure the inclusive development of Scheduled Tribes, and the program should not be made only to fulfill the formalities but also to meet targets needed to achieve in the actual term.

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