

Household Educational Level and its Determinants among Kora Tribes of Malda District of West Bengal, India

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Abstract

The household educational level (HEL) of tribal people is a critical determinant of socio-economic development and empowerment, particularly in marginalized and underdeveloped regions. This study explores the educational level and its key determinants among Kora tribal households in the Malda district, West Bengal, India. Both quantitative household surveys and qualitative interviews were conducted in selected villages within one of the tribal-dominated blocks named Gazole in Malda district. The study analyzed the educational status across age groups and genders. It investigated the influence of factors such as household income, educational status of parents, occupation, women status in the family, household size, and other social norms. For achieving the proper educational level, factors like economic constraints, engagement in agricultural or wage labour, early marriage, and limited access to educational infrastructure have emerged as major obstacles to the tribal people of the study area. To find out the crucial factors for HEL, multiple regression technique has been applied. Findings reveal that three factors such as household income, women status in the family, and occupation come out as the most significant elements determining the HEL. These have the direct and positive relation with the HEL. The study reveals the urgent requirement for targeted policy involvement to improve educational infrastructure, expanding financial aid, enhancing community awareness, and promoting culturally sensitive curriculum. It concludes that holistic development strategies integrating education with livelihood support is requisite to uplift the educational status of the Kora tribal community in Malda district.

Keywords: Kora tribe, Tribal Education, Household, Occupation, Household Educational Level

Introduction

Education is broadly recognized as a powerful tool for socio-economic transformation and human development (Misra, 2013). It enhances individual capabilities, promotes social mobility, and serves as a catalyst for reducing poverty, inequality, and marginalization. Household Educational Level (HEL) is an important social norm of a household that affects the whole community. India has a vast and diverse population groups in which education is especially significant for historically marginalized groups, such as the Scheduled Tribes (Brahmanandam & BosuBabu, 2016). As per Census of India, 2011, the tribal population in India constitutes approximately 8.6% of the total human population (Census, 2011). Despite constitutional safeguards and targeted development initiatives, many tribal communities continue to face socio-economic disadvantages among the various dimensions of social well-being

(Kapur, 2018). Among the multiple dimensions of deprivation faced by tribal groups, low educational attainment is particularly persistent and concerning. Almost all writers, researchers, and social scientists consider the tribal people as the Indigenous people inhabiting India from the pre-Vedic era (Ratnagar, 2003). They are named variously, like; 'Avibasi,' 'Banajati,' 'Aboriginals,' 'Anusuchit janajati,' etc. According to D.N. Majumder, a tribe can be defined as a cohesive unit comprising families or groups sharing a common name. These families inhabit the same territory, communicate through a shared language, and adhere to specific taboos regarding marriage, profession, or occupation (Majumdar, 1937).

The term 'Kora' has a noteworthy denotation as it relates to earth digging. The Kora community is well recognized for their skill in various tasks, including tank digging, road construction, and general earthwork (Goswami, 2019). Now the profession associated with the Kora community is primarily linked to agriculture. Risley opined that earlier the Koras were divided into sub groups named Dhalo, Malo, Shikaria, Sona Rekha etc (Kumbhakar, 2024). In the first census of India in 1872, the district of Malda had not a single Kora tribe people. However, the first trace of 232 peoples of the Kora tribe was enumerated in the next census of 1881 in the Malda district. Presently (2011), they have a substantial population of 7105, occupying 2.26% of the tribal population in Malda. Kora, according to Risley, is an offshoot of the Munda tribe and a Dravidian race of origin (Risley, 1915). Now they are mainly cultivator and are found in various parts of Chotanagpur, the western and middle parts of Bengal, mainly in the districts of Singhbhum, Manbhum, Purulia, and Bankura district. The Kora people are found mainly in the Gazole block of the Barind region of Malda district. The Kora is divided into four sub-castes, namely Dhalo, Molo, Sikharia, and Badamia, and each claims that they have come from a different segment of Chotanagpur'. However, they migrated to Malda along with the other tribes during the last half of the nineteenth century when they felt a shortage of work or an increase in their number. They entered through the passage of Rajmahal Hill and settled down over parts of Barind tract in Malda. West Bengal, located in eastern India, is home to a considerable tribal population (5.8%), particularly concentrated in districts like Purulia, Bankura, Jalpaiguri, Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda (Ghosh, 2019). The Malda district, though better known for its mango production and strategic location, also has pockets of significant tribal presence, especially in the blocks of Habibpur Gazole, Old Malda, and Bamangola (Mandal, 2019). In the district of Malda, 39 tribal communities consisting of 7.87% of the total population are dwelling. The dominance of the Santal community among the tribal population in Malda is noticed. Gazole block is marked by rural isolation, poor infrastructure, low economic development, and limited access to quality education and health services. The tribal communities of the district are mostly belonging to the groups such as Santhal, Mahali, Munda, Oraon, and Kora. They face unique challenges in accessing formal education systems due to both structural barriers and cultural isolation (Mandal, 2019). Educational attainments among tribal populations are influenced by a complex interaction of economic, social, cultural, and geographic factors (Suresh and Rajasenan, 2015). Factors like household income, occupation, educational level of parents, availability of schools, distance to educational institutions, and medium of instruction collectively determine the level of educational attainment in a tribal household. In addition, language barriers, where tribal dialects differ significantly from the mainstream language used in schools (usually Bengali in this region), further hamper the ability of tribal children to perform well academically, often resulting in disinterest, absence, and dropouts (Mohanty et al., 2009). The Kora households in Katna, Dhaochi and Paharivita villages of the Gazole block of Malda district are located predominantly agrarian and engage in subsistence farming, daily

wage labor, or seasonal migration for work. These economic obstacles often compel children to supplement family income or engage in household work. It leads to the interruption or discontinuation of their education (Taufique & Hoque, 2017). Additionally, girls are disproportionately affected, with early marriage and domestic responsibilities being major causes of drop-outs (Nayak & Kumar, 2022). From the very beginning of Independence, the government of India made an effort to elevate the socio-economic conditions of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) people. To implement the constitutional provisions for STs, a number of schemes, along with a reservation system for them, were initiated. Government initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), mid-day meal schemes, tribal hostels, and free textbook distribution, pre and post-matric scholarship have had some impact, but the gaps in implementation and localized challenges have limited their overall effectiveness (Ramachandran & Reddy, 2022). As a result, the literacy level of the tribal people is disappointing.

The existing literature on tribal education in India has largely focused on macro-level data and general trends at the national or state level. However, micro-level studies that capture ground realities, especially in lesser-studied blocks like Gazole, are limited. However, most studies focus on overall tribal communities located in the western districts of West Bengal and micro-level analyses from northern districts like Malda and specially the Kora tribes are scarce. There is a critical need to conduct area and community-specific analysis that takes into account the local socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural context that can provide a proper understanding of the barriers and opportunities at the tribal education level. Such research is crucial for ensuring that no region or community is left behind to achieve the proper educational level. This study is an attempt to fill this research gap. It aims to examine the current status of educational attainment among Kora households in selected villages of Malda district and to identify the key factors that influence this attainment. The focus is not only on formal indicators such as literacy rate, school enrollment, and dropout rates but also on qualitative aspects such as community perceptions and cultural attitudes toward education. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

- What is the current status of educational level among tribal households in Gazole blocks of Malda?
- What are the primary socio-economic, cultural and infrastructural determinants influencing household educational level of Kora tribal community?
- What are the community's perceptions of education and the barriers they face in achieving and continuing education?

To find the answer to these questions, the study selects a mixed-methods approach where both quantitative household surveys and qualitative interviews were conducted in selected villages within the Gazole block. Data was collected from Kora households representing varied socio-economic backgrounds. The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to frame policies and implementation of the same. By identifying the key variables and barriers to educational development in the Kora tribal households, the researcher provides proper recommendations for governments and policymakers.

Study Area:

Malda is situated in the north-middle part of West Bengal, covering a geographical area of 3733 square kilometres (1441.3 square miles), and concerning its geographical area, it ranks 11th within the State (Fig 1). The district lies between 24°40'50" to 25°32'10" North latitude and 87°46'30" to 88°28' East longitude. Malda district is bounded by an international boundary of 165.5 kilometres with Bangladesh

in the east, Santal Pargana district of Jharkhand and Purnea district of Bihar in the West, Dakshin Dinajpur District in the North, and Murshidabad District in the South. Malda has fifteen community development blocks. Two municipalities, namely Old Malda and English Bazar, and twenty-seven Census Towns are developed within the district. The district has three distinct physiographic divisions namely Tal, Diara and Barind. The selected sample villages for the study are Katna, Dhaochi, and Paharivita, where the Kora tribe is found. These villages are located in the Gazole block which is covering an area of approximately 513.65 Sq. Kms, and is located in the Barind region of Malda district. The block stands 1st within the district in terms of its geographical area. The Mahananda is the main river of the district. Other important rivers of the district are Ganga, Tangan, Kalindri, and Punarbhaba. The natural vegetation cover of the district is very little. At present, only 20 square km of area is covered with forest, which is 0.54% of the total geographical area of the district.

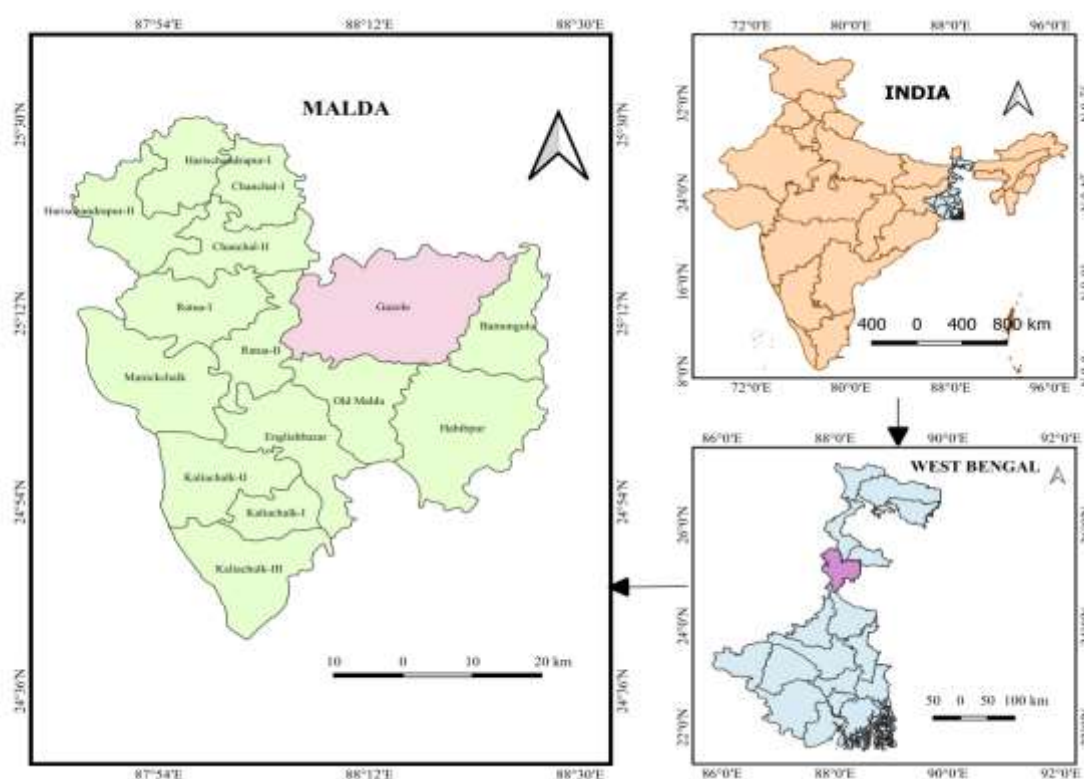


Fig.1 Study Area

Data and Methods

To collect the primary data from the Kora tribe household, a purposive random sampling technique was adopted. The block Gazole was selected from the district purposively as the block has sufficient numbers of the Kora tribe along with other tribal communities. Three tribal villages named ‘Paharivita,’ ‘Dhaochi,’ and ‘Katna’ were selected to comprehensively assess both the quantitative patterns and qualitative dimensions of educational attainment among tribal households. From the three specified villages, 120 Kora households were purposively selected at random to collect the household-level socio-economic data. A structured questionnaire was made for the same, and data was collected in the month of November 2024.

Analyzing Tools: At the beginning of the methodology, the household educational level (HEL) is deter-

mined by adding the educational level of individual member in years and dividing the sum total years by the number of family members. Here the children below six years of families are excluded from the calculation.

$$HEL = \frac{\sum Sy}{N}$$

Where, HEL = Household Educational Level, Sy = Year of schooling of the individual household member, N = Total member in a household (Excluding < 6 years old member). Microsoft Excel and word are used to prepare the tables and figure. The map of study area has developed with QGIS software.

To determine the contribution of certain selected variables to HEL of Kora tribe families, the next part of the methodology involves with multiple linear regression analysis. The chosen variables are drawn from the social and economic profiles of ST households, and their corresponding notations can be found in Table 1.

Table:1 Independent variables (X₁-X₈)

Sl. No.	Explanatory variables	Symbol
1	Monthly Income	X ₁
2	Amount of Landholdings (Acer)	X ₂
3	Working status of the household head	X ₃
4	Number of dependent in the household	X ₄
5	Family Size	X ₅
6	Sex of household head	X ₆
7	Occupation of the household	X ₇
8	Women Status in the family	X ₈

Source: Author's selection of variables.

The following is the equation for the multiple linear regression models:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \dots + \beta_8 X_8$$

Here, Y stands for the dependent variable, which is the Household Educational Level (HEL). The equation also includes a constant or intercept, represented by β_0 , and regression coefficients or slopes for each independent variable, represented by β_1 - β_8 . The independent variables themselves are denoted by X₁-X₈. Here, for the dummy variables (X₃, X₆, and X₇), 0 and 1 are fixed.

Result

Socio-economic and demographic statistics of Kora people from the sample household are laid in Table 2, where we can find a very low overall literacy rate (60.4%). Female literacy rate (52.1%) is a matter of concern. The sex ratio among the tribes is generally high, and the trend is applicable also to the Kora tribes, where the sex ratio is 1017 females per 1000 males. The average amount of landholding states that most of the farmers are small and marginal. Average monthly household income is very low in the present context of high prices. The occupational structure shows that the largest number of people is staying on agriculture and the allied sector. Huge numbers of workers go outside the state (mainly Delhi, Punjab, Bangalore, and Kerala) for jobs (Peter et al.2020). The percentage of government employees is microscopic among the Kora tribe.

**Table 2 Socio-Economic and demographic features of Kora tribe
(Sample household 120)**

Sl. No.	Socio-Economic and demographic features		Statistical figures
1.	Average Household size		4.6
2.	Total number of people surveyed		552
3.	Average age of household head		46 years
4.	Sex ratio		1017
5.	Total literacy rate		60.4%
6.	Male literacy rate		68.7%
7.	Female literacy rate		52.1%
8.	Average amount of farming land (acre)		0.87
9.	Dependency ratio		1: 1.62
10.	Average monthly income per household		11200 (Rs.)
11.	Occupation	Farmer	36.97%
		Agricultural Labour	12.32%
		Migrant labour	21.32%
		Labour in other sector	29.38%
		Government Service	0.014%
12	Caste structure	Scheduled Tribe (Kora)	100%

Source: Field Survey

The Kora households are classified based on their attainment of educational level for illustration of the community's educational status. As per the data collected from the Kora household, it has been found that the majority (72.5%) of the households fall within the category of low and very low category. High educated families are found only 6% and 1.6% of families are educated well. In the present globalized era, where education is a key factor of societal development, 2.5% of Kora households in the survey sample are found to be totally illiterate (Fig. 2).

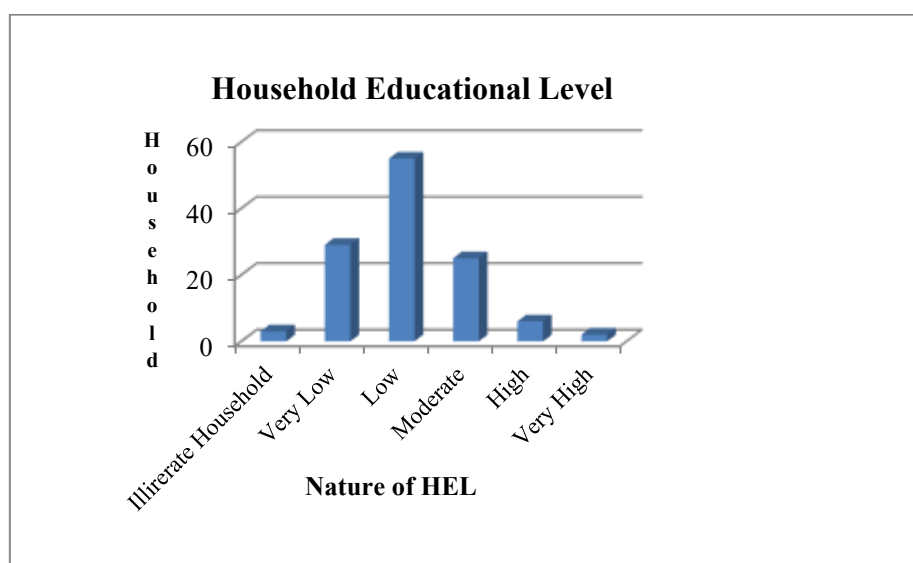


Fig 2 Household Educational Level of Kora Tribes.

The result of multiple regression analysis is laid down in Table 3 to portray the impact of various socioeconomic and demographic variables on Kora households. It finds the significant variable for the HEL. The sample size is 120. The value of R square is 0.6, which signifies the model is fitted well and there is a decent explanation of the dependent variable in the light of independent variables. It also exhibits that 61% of the dependent variable (HEL) can be explained with the help of independent variables, and independent variables have good strength to explain the dependent variable. It must be noted that there may be other independent variables that can explain the remaining portion of the dependent variable. The table shows that the ANOVA (F) value is < 0.05 , exhibiting the model is significant at a 5% level and is valid for the present study.

Out of the eight selected variables, three stand significant. The Monthly Income of the household (X_1) has a coefficient of 0.171 and a P value of 0.000, which tells that the variable has a positive impact on the HEL, and it is significant concerning statistics at a 5% level. The variable occupation (X_7) of the family head also has a significant contribution in predicting the HEL. Women's status in the family (X_8) is the third significant variable having a positive impact on the Household Educational Level.

Discussion

The first variable (X_1) is the Monthly Income of the Kora household. It is significant in the regression analysis and it has a positive influence on the HEL. There lies varying expenditures of taking education in schools and colleges. In West Bengal, as well as in India, elementary education is provided free of cost in government and government-aided schools. Moreover, the West Bengal government provides school uniforms, shoes, Books, copies, and school bags for the students free of cost. Beyond these items, there is some extra expenditure that sometimes the Kora family is unable to bear. A household with a high family income can push their child for higher education, but low-income families are bound to push their sons into work to earn. Nowadays, tribal youths tend to migrate to the outside state for work. So, the higher educational level in the Kora tribal families is very limited

Table 3. Multiple regression analysis of Independent variable (X_1 - X_8) and Dependent variables

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.775
R Square	0.601
Adjusted R Square	0.572
Standard Error	1.213
Observations	120
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ANOVA	
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	<i>Significance</i>
	<i>F</i>
<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
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Regression	8.000
Residual	111.000
Total	119.000
245.472	30.684
163.188	20.871
408.660	0.000
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<i>Independent</i>	<i>Coefficients</i>
<i>Standard</i>	<i>t Stat</i>
<i>P-</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Lower</i>
<i>Upper</i>	<i>Upper</i>

<i>variables</i>		<i>Error</i>		<i>value</i>		<i>95%</i>	<i>95.0%</i>	<i>95.0%</i>
Intercept	1.675	0.667	2.510	0.014	0.353	2.997	0.353	2.997
Monthly Income	0.171	0.026	6.516	*0.000	0.119	0.222	0.119	0.222
Amount of Landholdings (Acer)	-0.120	0.131	-0.911	0.364	-0.380	0.141	-0.380	0.141
Working/Dependent	0.107	0.313	0.343	0.732	-0.513	0.728	-0.513	0.728
No. of Dependent	0.126	0.149	0.841	0.402	-0.170	0.421	-0.170	0.421
Family Size	-0.168	0.115	-1.461	0.147	-0.395	0.060	-0.395	0.060
Sex of household head	0.251	0.267	0.941	0.349	-0.278	0.780	-0.278	0.780
Occupation	1.089	0.287	3.801	*0.000	0.521	1.657	0.521	1.657
Women Status in the family	0.400	0.139	2.872	*0.005	0.124	0.676	0.124	0.676

Source: Computed by author

*variables are significant at 5% level of significance

From the government end (both central and state), the endeavor is visible, but still, the literacy rate among Scheduled Tribe (58.9%) is considerably lower than the national average of 74%. Female literacy among STs is a matter of concern, standing at 49.4% compared to 64.6% among ST males. So, the economic condition of the Kora households determines the level of education of the same. Occupation of the household (X_7) is an important variable that comes out as significant in the regression model. Here, agriculture and services in the government sector were assigned 1 and otherwise 0. It is found that the Kora household, which has stable occupations like agriculture and service, has a higher educational level. It has also been noticed that the farmer do farming in their field in the cropping season, and for the rest part of the year, they choose some other mode of earning. But the family which has higher number of migratory labourer or agricultural labourer in agriculture or other sector has the low HEL.

One of the key determining factors of HEL of Kora tribe is the women's status in the family (X_8), which has a positive contribution to the education of the family. To determine the women's status in the family, four criteria have been set. These are: is she an earning member? Does she have ownership of the property? Does she hold a bank account? Has she played a positive role in decision-making in the family? For each question, if the answer is positive, 1 is assigned; otherwise, 0. As per the individual scores, the status of the women is decided. It is seen that when the status of women is high in the family, the literacy level of the same is high. The mother is a real well-wisher of their child. They care, nourish, look after and become the first teacher of the children primarily. In the Kora household, the male member often stays outside of the home for their work. In this situation, the female member should be conscious about the education of their child. So, the mother who has the decision-making capacity in the family and earns some money to satisfy the expenditure for their son and daughter, the educational level of the family becomes higher.

The amounts of land holdings (X_3) in the households do not affect the HEL at all. This means that the household educational level is unaffected, irrespective of the amount of landholding possessed in the family. The fourth variable (Working status of the household head) is also insignificant with respect to HEL. This means that HEL is unaffected whether the head of the family is working or dependent. The

HEL is also not influenced by the number of dependent members in the family (X_4). The average family size of the Kora household (X_5) is 4.5, and it is another insignificant variable with respect to HEL. The sixth variable is the sex of the household head (X_6), which has no significant impact on the household's educational level.

Major Findings

- Literacy rate among the Kora tribe (60.4%) is very low.
- Female literacy level is significantly low (52.1%).
- Student enrolment is average but school attendance and dropout rate is high among them.
- The educational background of parents emerged as a significant influence of HEL.
- Attainment of higher education among the Kora people is very little.
- Over all household educational level is low among the Kora community.
- Key factors determining the HEL are monthly income, Occupation of the household, and women status in the family.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The tribal people lie at the lowermost section of Indian society. They are economically depressed and culturally isolated. Kora people of Malda district do not show the exception. Their literacy level is very much lower than the overall literacy of the society. Female education is exceptionally low. Participation in higher education is very low among the Kora tribes. The recent trend of tribal education is rising, but the low parental educational level drops the total educational status of the Kora tribe.

Though, the Government of India has implemented various schemes to improve tribal education, such as Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Ashram Schools, Pre- and Post-Matric Scholarships, and Mid-Day Meal Scheme, educational attainment of the Kora tribal people is not at the mark. In these circumstances present research recommend the followings:

Government should support and encourage the development of cottage, and agro-based enterprises to provide job to the local tribal community so that their economic condition may rise high. School infrastructure and transport facilities are to be strengthened in remote tribal areas. At least in early primary grades mother-tongue instruction to be promoted in the schools. Parental literacy and community engagement through adult education is to be strengthened. Moreover timely and transparent delivery of government educational benefits is to be ensured to the tribal students. Residential facilities and special scholarships for tribal girls student have to be provided. Lastly, the local tribal participation in school governance and monitoring has to be encouraged.

Limitations and future scope of the study

The study was limited to only one block in Malda district, which may affect the generalizability of findings to other tribal regions. Seasonal migration of tribal families affected the availability of some respondents, potentially influencing household data. Future scope of the study in this field would lie incorporating the tribal household of other blocks even of other district data of the state where extensive study may explore more about the education as well as the socio-economic scenario of the Kora people.

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