

# Educational Disparities Among Scheduled Tribe Girls in Karnataka State: A Gendered Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper examines the educational disparities experienced by Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in Karnataka state through a gendered analytical framework. Despite various governmental initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive education, ST girls continue to face significant challenges in accessing and completing formal education. The objectives of this research paper are threefold: (1) To assess the current status of educational attainment among ST girls in Karnataka, (2) To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their educational progress, and (3) To explore the intersectionality of gender and tribal identity in shaping educational outcomes.

The research study adopts a mixed-methods approaches, combining secondary data analysis from sources such as the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Census of India, and District Information System for Education (DISE), with primary qualitative data collected through field interviews and focus group discussions in selected tribal-dominated districts. The findings reveal persistent gender-based inequalities in enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes among ST students, with girls particularly disadvantaged due to early marriage, household responsibilities, inadequate school infrastructure, and deep-rooted patriarchal norms.

This research paper highlights the need for targeted, gender-sensitive educational policies and grassroots interventions that address the specific needs of tribal girls. The study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity, social justice, and the empowerment of marginalized communities in India.

**Keywords:** Education, Disparities, Gender,

## Introduction:

Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India, constituting approximately 8.6% of the national population, represent one of the most historically marginalized and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. In Karnataka, STs account for nearly 7% of the state's population, predominantly inhabiting forested, hilly, and rural regions with limited access to public services and infrastructure. These geographical and economic constraints have long contributed to a cycle of poverty, poor health outcomes, and educational exclusion. Within this already disadvantaged group, girls face dual marginalization first as members of tribal communities and second as females in a patriarchal society. The intersection of gender and tribal identity creates compounded barriers that restrict their access to and success in education. Factors such as poverty, cultural norms, gender-based division of labor, and early marriage converge to form formidable obstacles to educational attainment for ST girls. Often, their educational journey is prematurely curtailed due to

expectations around domestic responsibilities, lack of nearby schools, absence of female teachers, inadequate sanitation facilities, and concerns about safety during commutes.

Despite constitutional guarantees and several government schemes designed to promote educational equity such as the Right to Education Act, Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship schemes for ST students, and the establishment of Eklavya Model Residential Schools the educational outcomes for ST girls remain far below national averages. High dropout rates, low literacy levels, and poor transition rates to higher education remain persistent challenges.

Education is universally acknowledged as a critical enabler of empowerment and socio-economic mobility. For ST girls, education is not only a fundamental right but also a transformative tool that can help break intergenerational cycles of poverty and exclusion. However, achieving this goal requires more than just policy frameworks; it demands a nuanced understanding of the complex realities faced by ST girls and the implementation of gender-sensitive, community-driven solutions.

This paper seeks to explore the extent and nature of educational disparities faced by ST girls in Karnataka through a gender-sensitive analytical lens. It aims to unpack the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their educational progress and examine how the intersection of gender and tribal identity shapes their access to quality education.

### **Objectives of the study:**

1. To assess the current status of educational attainment among ST girls in Karnataka.
2. To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers that hinder their educational progress.
3. To explore the intersectionality of gender and tribal identity in shaping educational outcomes.

### **Literature Reviews:**

The educational marginalization of Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in India has been the subject of extensive academic and policy discourse. The literature reveals that while various policies have aimed at inclusive education, they often fall short in addressing the specific and intersectional disadvantages experienced by tribal girls.

Nambissan (2000) observes that educational policies frequently treat tribal populations as a monolithic category, overlooking the layered vulnerabilities that ST girls face due to the intersection of gender and tribal identity. This lack of differentiation results in interventions that do not cater to the nuanced needs of tribal girls, who are often doubly disadvantaged. Building on this, Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) critique mainstream educational frameworks for failing to recognize the cultural and linguistic diversity of tribal communities. The use of unfamiliar languages and culturally alien content in school curricula further alienates tribal girls, reducing their engagement and retention in the school system. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2015) provides empirical evidence showing that enrolment rates for ST girls drop significantly after primary education. The report highlights key contributing factors such as early marriage, child labour, and poor school infrastructure. These issues are exacerbated in rural and tribal areas, where schools are often located far from home and lack basic facilities like toilets and transportation, which are particularly crucial for girls. Bharat and Sahoo (2014) point to entrenched gender norms within tribal communities, where girls are expected to undertake domestic responsibilities from a young age. This significantly limits their time and energy for academic pursuits. Additionally, the lack of female teachers and role models in schools acts as a further deterrent for parents

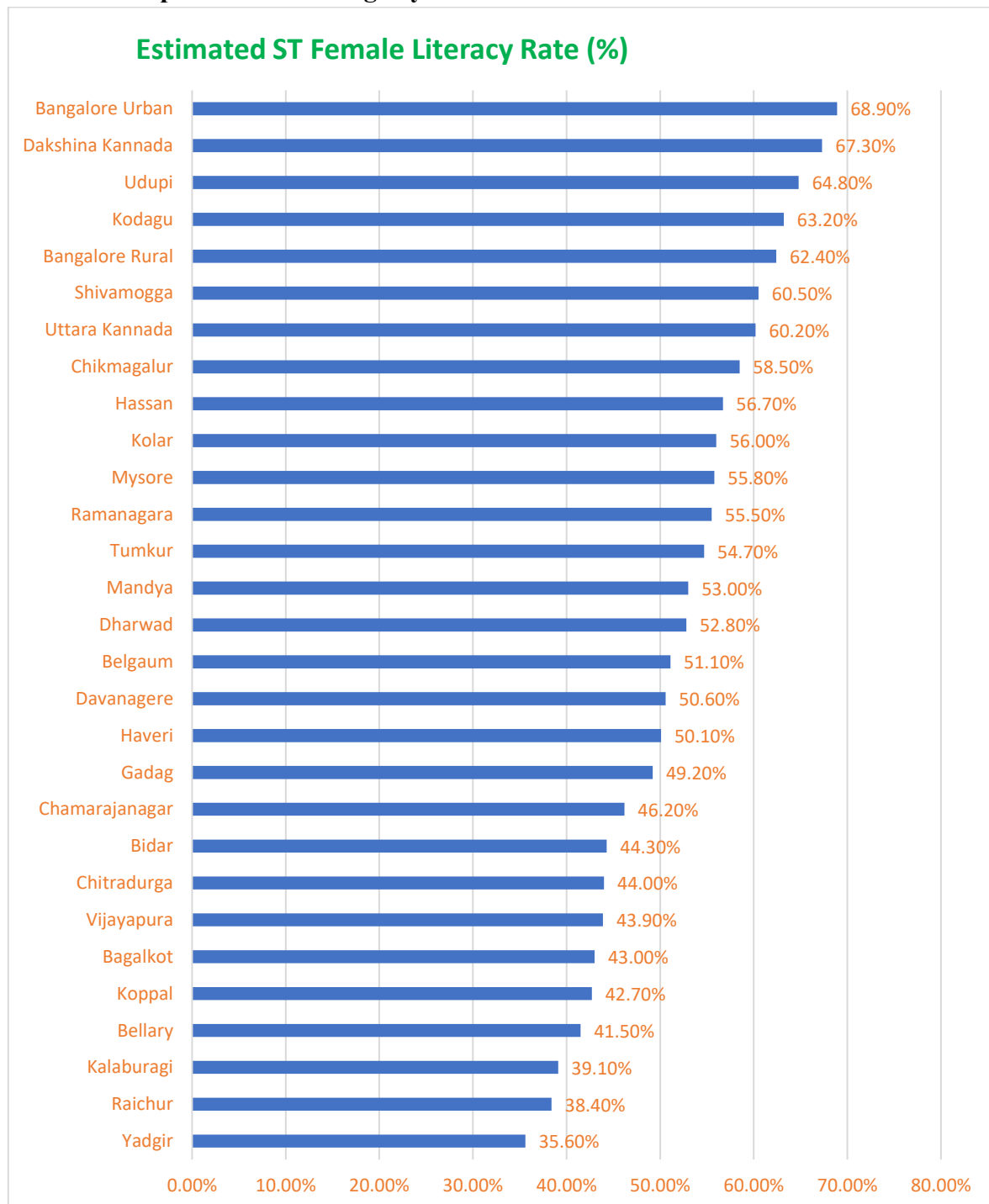
who may otherwise consider sending their daughters to school. Kumar (2018) critiques flagship educational schemes such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act for their one-size-fits-all approach. While these schemes have expanded access to education, they often fail to address ground-level gender and cultural dynamics. Financial incentives and infrastructure development, though important, are insufficient without community engagement and efforts to shift social attitudes. On a global scale, UNESCO (2020) echoes similar concerns regarding indigenous girls, asserting that their educational exclusion stems from structural inequalities and a disconnect between indigenous knowledge systems and formal education. The report advocates for localized, participatory approaches to curriculum design, teacher recruitment, and school management to ensure that indigenous and tribal girls are not left behind. Together, these studies emphasize that educational disparities among ST girls are deeply embedded in socio-cultural and institutional frameworks. Addressing them requires not only access-oriented interventions but also context-specific, gender-sensitive, and culturally relevant educational policies and practices.

**Data and Methodology:**

This study is based exclusively on secondary data and employs a quantitative research design to analyse the educational disparities faced by Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in Karnataka. The analysis draws on data from three major sources: the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21), the Census of India (2011), and the District Information System for Education (DISE). These datasets provide comprehensive state- and district-level statistics on literacy rates, enrolment ratios, dropout rates, and other indicators of educational attainment disaggregated by gender and social group.

To examine the relationship between socio-demographic variables and educational outcomes among ST girls, the study uses correlation analysis to identify the strength and direction of associations between variables such as literacy rate, school infrastructure, household income levels, and dropout rates. Further, regression analysis is applied to determine the impact of key predictors such as parental education, access to schools, and economic status on school attendance and completion rates among ST girls. This data-driven approach enables the identification of statistically significant patterns and structural determinants of educational inequality, providing an evidence-based foundation for targeted policy recommendations.

## Scheduled Tribe Population Percentage by District in Karnataka :



Source: Census of India (2011)

Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in Karnataka continue to face substantial barriers in accessing and completing education. Despite improvements in national and state-level education initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Right to Education Act, the educational attainment of ST girls remains below the state average. Factors such as poverty, social exclusion, cultural norms, lack of female teachers, unsafe school environments, and inadequate infrastructure (especially toilets and hostels for girls) hinder their ability to pursue schooling. In many tribal areas, early marriage and household responsibilities lead to high dropout

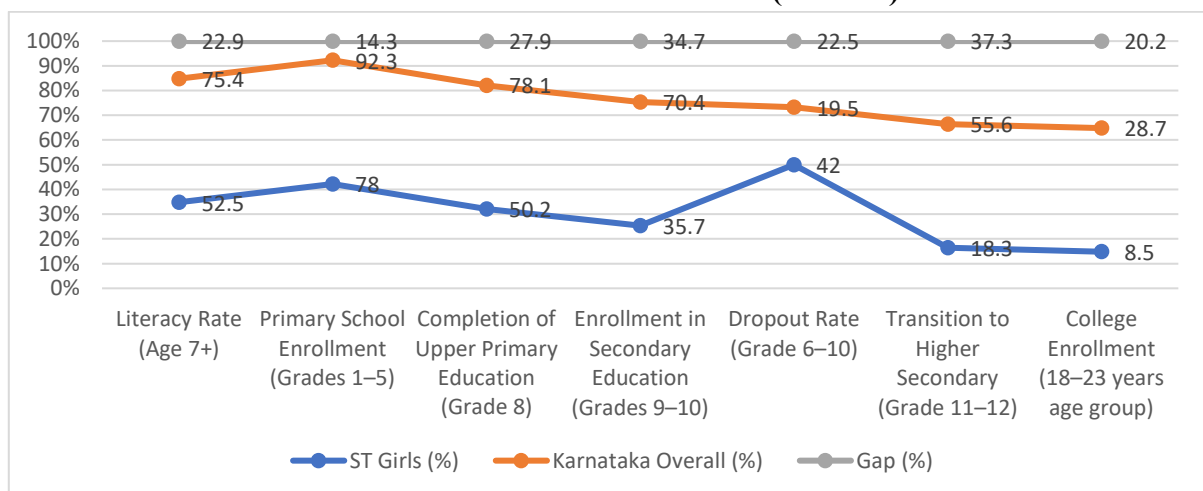
rates among girls after the primary or upper primary stages. Moreover, linguistic barriers and the remoteness of tribal settlements further discourage sustained schooling. This educational disadvantage has a long-term impact on the social and economic mobility of tribal girls, limiting their opportunities in employment and leadership.

**Table 1: Educational Attainment Indicators of ST Girls in Karnataka (2023-24)**

| Educational Indicator                           | ST Girls (%) | Karnataka Overall (%) | Gap (%) |
|---|--------------|-----------------------|---------|
| Literacy Rate (Age 7+)                          | 52.5         | 75.4                  | 22.9    |
| Primary School Enrollment (Grades 1–5)          | 78.0         | 92.3                  | 14.3    |
| Completion of Upper Primary Education (Grade 8) | 50.2         | 78.1                  | 27.9    |
| Enrollment in Secondary Education (Grades 9–10) | 35.7         | 70.4                  | 34.7    |
| Dropout Rate (Grade 6–10)                       | 42.0         | 19.5                  | 22.5    |
| Transition to Higher Secondary (Grade 11–12)    | 18.3         | 55.6                  | 37.3    |
| College Enrollment (18–23 years age group)      | 8.5          | 28.7                  | 20.2    |

Sources: UDISE+ (2023-24), Karnataka State Education Report, NSSO

**Educational Attainment Indicators of ST Girls in Karnataka (2023-24)**



Sources: UDISE+ (2023-24), Karnataka State Education Report, NSSO

The educational indicators clearly highlight the significant disparities between Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls and the general population in Karnataka. The literacy rate among ST girls is just 52.5%, considerably lower than the state average of 75.4%, reflecting early exclusion from formal education and a lack of foundational learning opportunities. Although primary school enrollment is relatively better at 78.0%, it still trails behind the state average of 92.3%, indicating that many tribal girls are not even entering the education system at the foundational level. The situation worsens at higher levels of education. Only 50.2% of ST girls complete upper primary education (Grade 8), compared to 78.1% overall, and secondary school enrolment (Grades 9–10) drops sharply to 35.7% for ST girls, as opposed to 70.4% for the broader student population. This suggests that as schooling progresses, tribal girls face increasing challenges such

as domestic responsibilities, early marriage, and inadequate school infrastructure. The dropout rate among ST girls during the upper primary to secondary level (Grades 6-10) is alarmingly high at 42.0%, more than double the state average of 19.5%. Furthermore, only 18.3% of ST girls transition to higher secondary education, compared to 55.6% of all students, pointing to deep systemic and cultural barriers that limit their educational journey. College enrolment among ST girls is also very low at just 8.5%, compared to the state average of 28.7%, revealing a lack of access to higher education and limited opportunities for social and economic mobility. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both gender and tribal-specific barriers such as girl-friendly school infrastructure, scholarships, residential facilities, and community-based awareness programs to ensure inclusive and equitable education for tribal girls in Karnataka.

## 1. Socio-Economic Barriers:

### A. Poverty and Livelihood Pressure

Poverty remains one of the most significant barriers to educational attainment among Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in Karnataka. According to the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011, over 45% of ST households in the state fall below the poverty line, which limits their ability to afford even basic educational expenses such as uniforms, books, transportation, and examination fees. In rural and tribal areas, economic vulnerability forces children especially girls to contribute to household income, often through unpaid domestic labor, agricultural work, or participation in marginal employment sectors like beedi-making and livestock rearing.

This early entry into the labor market reduces time and energy available for schooling, leading to irregular attendance and eventual dropout, particularly after primary level. A field study conducted by the Karnataka State Tribal Research Institute (2021) in Yadgir, Kalaburagi, and Chamarajanagar districts found that over 38% of ST girls aged 10–16 were involved in some form of household or wage labour. Furthermore, with over 68% of ST households lacking stable wage employment, education becomes a secondary priority in the face of daily subsistence needs.

The poverty trap is reinforced by seasonal migration, especially among tribal communities engaged in informal sectors like construction and brick kilns. Girls from migrant families often drop out mid-year and fail to re-enroll. This persistent economic insecurity not only hinders retention but also erodes aspirations, particularly for secondary and higher education.

**Table 2 : Economic Status and Educational Impacts on ST Girls in Karnataka**

| Indicator                                       | Value         | Source  |
|---|---------------|---|
| ST households below poverty line                | 45.2%         | SECC 2011                                       |
| ST households with irregular wage income        | 68.4%         | Karnataka State Tribal Research Institute, 2021 |
| ST girls (10–16) engaged in labour (any form)   | 38%           | Field Study in 3 Tribal Districts (2021)        |
| Average monthly per capita income (ST families) | ₹1,200–₹1,500 | NSSO 2017–18                                    |
| ST dropout rate after primary education         | 32–35%        | UDISE+, NFHS-5                                  |
| ST girls in migrating families (school age)     | ~22%          | Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020                |

Source : SECC 2011, NSSO 2017-18, NFHS-5

## B. Low Parental Education

Low levels of parental education significantly affect the educational progress of ST girls in Karnataka. According to NFHS-5 (2019–21), over 60% of ST parents in the state have not completed primary education, and in remote tribal areas, this percentage is even higher. This widespread educational disadvantage among adults leads to a lack of awareness about the long-term benefits of schooling, especially for girls. Parents with little or no formal education are less likely to prioritize their daughters' academic advancement and are often unable to provide guidance, help with homework, or engage in school-related decisions.

In many ST households, illiterate or semi-literate parents tend to view education as non-essential, particularly beyond the primary level. Instead, girls are expected to take on domestic responsibilities or prepare for early marriage. Moreover, first-generation learners, who are not backed by parental academic experience, face multiple challenges including poor academic confidence and limited home-based support. This creates a cycle of intergenerational educational deprivation. Studies have also shown that in households where mothers are literate, school attendance and academic achievement among girls are significantly higher, suggesting that maternal education plays a pivotal role in improving girls' educational outcomes.

**Table 3: Impact of Low Parental Education on ST Girls' Schooling in Karnataka**

| No table of figures entries found.Indicator             | Value / Description                           | Source                                       |
|---|---|--|
| ST parents without primary education                    | 60.4%   | NFHS-5 (2019–21)                             |
| ST mothers who are illiterate                           | 57.8%   | NFHS-5                                       |
| ST girls in households with both parents' illiterate    | 46% school dropout after Class 5              | Field Study – Yadgir & Chamarajanagar (2021) |
| Likelihood of school attendance (if mother is literate) | 2.3 times higher than if mother is illiterate | UNICEF Study, 2020                           |
| ST households with no educational materials at home     | 71%   | ASER Rural Survey, 2018                      |

Source : NFHS-5 ,UNICEF 2021

The educational disadvantage faced by Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in Karnataka is closely linked to the educational background of their parents, particularly their mothers. According to NFHS-5 (2019–21), a staggering 60.4% of ST parents have not completed primary education, and 57.8% of ST mothers are illiterate. This lack of parental education significantly affects children's learning environment, with limited academic support at home. A field study conducted in Yadgir and Chamarajanagar districts in 2021 found that 46% of ST girls from households where both parents are illiterate drop out of school after Class 5. This early dropout trend highlights the critical role of parental education in sustaining girls' education, especially beyond the primary level. Supporting this, a UNICEF study in 2020 found that the likelihood of school attendance is 2.3 times higher for children whose mothers are literate compared to those whose mothers are not. Furthermore, 71% of ST households lack basic educational materials at home, such as books, stationery, or learning aids, according to the ASER Rural Survey (2018). The absence of such resources further hampers the learning process and contributes to poor academic performance and

disengagement from school. Together, these indicators paint a clear picture: without improving adult literacy—especially among mothers—and ensuring a supportive home learning environment, efforts to retain ST girls in the education system may remain ineffective. A holistic approach addressing family literacy, home learning conditions, and intergenerational educational deprivation is essential to breaking the cycle of educational exclusion among tribal communities.

### **C. Inadequate Learning Environment at Home**

The quality of the home environment plays a critical role in shaping a child's learning outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups like Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls. In Karnataka's tribal regions, the home environment is often constrained by poor housing conditions, overcrowding, lack of electricity, and absence of a dedicated study space, all of which undermine academic focus and motivation. According to NFHS-5 (2019–21), only 58% of ST households in remote tribal areas have access to electricity, which severely limits study time—especially during evenings. In many cases, children must study under dim kerosene lamps or are forced to abandon studies after sunset.

Over 70% of ST families in tribal hamlets live in single-room or thatched dwellings, where multiple family members share limited space. This makes it difficult for girls to concentrate on their studies, particularly when they are also expected to help with household chores. Additionally, lack of reading materials, unavailability of furniture, and noise from overcrowded environments further inhibit a conducive learning atmosphere. Without a quiet, well-lit space, many ST girls fall behind academically, contributing to higher dropout rates at the upper primary and secondary levels. The compounded effect of physical and infrastructural deprivation in the home environment significantly erodes the quality and continuity of education for tribal girls.

## **2. Cultural and Gender Norms :**

### **a. Early Marriage and Childbearing**

Early marriage remains a major cultural barrier to the education of ST girls in Karnataka. As per NFHS-5 (2019–21), nearly 30% of ST girls are married before the legal age of 18. Among them, a significant proportion discontinue their education either at the time of marriage or shortly thereafter due to pregnancy, household duties, or restrictions imposed by in-laws. In many tribal communities, marriage is viewed as a rite of passage and a social expectation once girls attain puberty, regardless of their educational status. This prematurely ends their schooling trajectory, especially beyond upper primary or secondary levels.

### **b. Patriarchal Norms and Gender Roles**

Gender norms in tribal societies, though sometimes more egalitarian than in mainstream society, still often relegate girls to domestic and caregiving roles. From an early age, ST girls are burdened with tasks like fetching water, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of siblings or the elderly. These responsibilities limit their time and energy for schooling, homework, or extracurricular learning. Many ST parents—especially those with little or no formal education—believe that basic literacy is sufficient for girls, reinforcing the idea that investing in girls' higher education is neither necessary nor beneficial.

### **c. Language and Identity Barriers**

Language barriers also serve as a subtle yet powerful form of exclusion. Many ST communities in Karnataka, such as the Soliga, Jenukuruba, Betta Kuruba, and Koraga, speak indigenous dialects that are not used in formal schooling, which is primarily delivered in Kannada or English. This linguistic disconnect causes learning difficulties, low classroom participation, and poor comprehension, especially in the early grades. For first-generation learners unfamiliar with the school language, the education system

often feels alien and disconnected from their cultural identity, leading to alienation, disinterest, and dropouts.

**Table 4 : Cultural and Gender Norm Barriers Impacting ST Girls' Education (Karnataka)**

| Indicator   | Value / Status                                 | Source                              |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| ST girls married before age 18                                  | 29.8%  | NFHS-5 (2019–21)                    |
| ST girls dropping out after marriage or childbirth              | ~65% of those married before 18                | Field Study – Karnataka TRI, 2021   |
| ST girls involved in daily domestic chores (ages 10–16)         | 74%  | ASER Rural 2018; Tribal Survey 2021 |
| Tribal groups speaking indigenous dialects as mother tongue     | >40 tribal groups (e.g., Soliga, Betta Kuruba) | Census 2011; TRI Karnataka          |
| Schools with multilingual instructional support for ST children | <10% (mostly pilot programs only)              | SSA Karnataka, 2020                 |

Source: NFHS-5 ,Census 2011

### 3. Institutional and Structural Barriersa.

#### a.Lack of Access to Secondary Schools

Geographical isolation is a key reason why many ST girls in Karnataka are unable to continue their education beyond the primary level. In tribal belts—particularly in districts like **Chamarajanagar, Kalaburagi, and Yadgir** secondary schools are often located **more than 3–5 kilometers** from habitations (UDISE+ 2021–22). With **limited or no public transport**, poor road infrastructure, and concerns over safety, parents are hesitant to allow adolescent girls to commute such distances alone. This leads to a **sharp drop in enrollment** at the secondary level, particularly among girls.

#### b. Inadequate School Infrastructure

Even when schools are present, many suffer from inadequate infrastructure. According to **UDISE+ 2021–22**, only **68% of schools in tribal areas** have **functional girls' toilets**, which is a critical determinant of girls' attendance and retention, especially after the onset of menstruation. Many schools lack **safe drinking water, boundary walls, separate classrooms, and electricity** factors that collectively create an **unwelcoming and unsafe learning environment**, contributing to absenteeism and dropouts.

#### c. Absence of Female Teachers

The presence of female teachers has been shown to improve **school attendance, comfort, and performance** among adolescent girls. However, in remote tribal schools, there is a **serious shortage of female teachers**. Many do not prefer postings in isolated locations due to lack of housing, safety concerns, and poor infrastructure. As a result, parents often **refuse to send older girls to schools where only male staff are present**, citing concerns over safety and propriety. The **lack of female role models** in educational institutions further reduces aspirations for higher education among tribal girls.

#### d. Scholarship and Policy Gaps

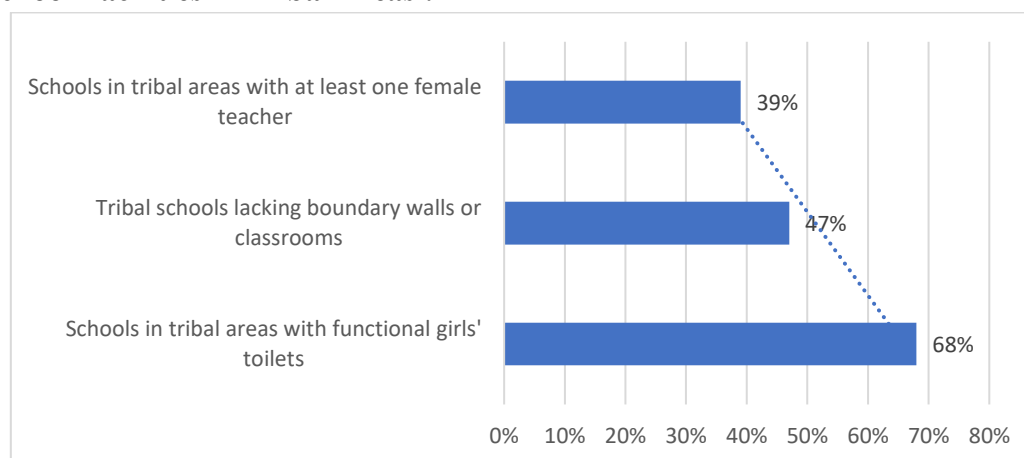
Although there are government scholarships like the **Pre-Matric and Post-Matric ST scholarships**, access remains limited. Many ST families are **unaware of these schemes** or face difficulties in applying due to **bureaucratic red tape, language barriers, and lack of digital access**. Even when applications are submitted, **delays in disbursement and documentation issues** often discourage continuation in

schooling. In some cases, families **withdraw girls from school** due to the unaffordability of indirect costs like uniforms, exam fees, and transportation, in the absence of timely financial support.

**Table 5 : Institutional Barriers Impacting ST Girls' Education in Karnataka**

| Indicator   | Value / Status                               | Source                               |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| Secondary schools >3 km from tribal villages                | >62% in remote areas                         | UDISE+ 2021–22                       |
| Schools in tribal areas with functional girls' toilets      | 68%  | UDISE+ 2021–22                       |
| Tribal schools lacking boundary walls or classrooms         | 47%  | SSA Karnataka, 2021                  |
| Schools in tribal areas with at least one female teacher    | 39%  | Karnataka Education Department, 2020 |
| Eligible ST students receiving Pre/Post-Matric scholarships | ~54% (with regional disparities)             | Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021     |
| Common issues in scholarship access                         | Lack of awareness, delays, document mismatch | Tribal Welfare Department Reports    |

## Status of School Facilities in Tribal Areas :



Source : Karnataka education Department 2020, SSA Karnatak 2021, UDISE 2021-22

## Gender and tribal identity in shaping educational outcomes

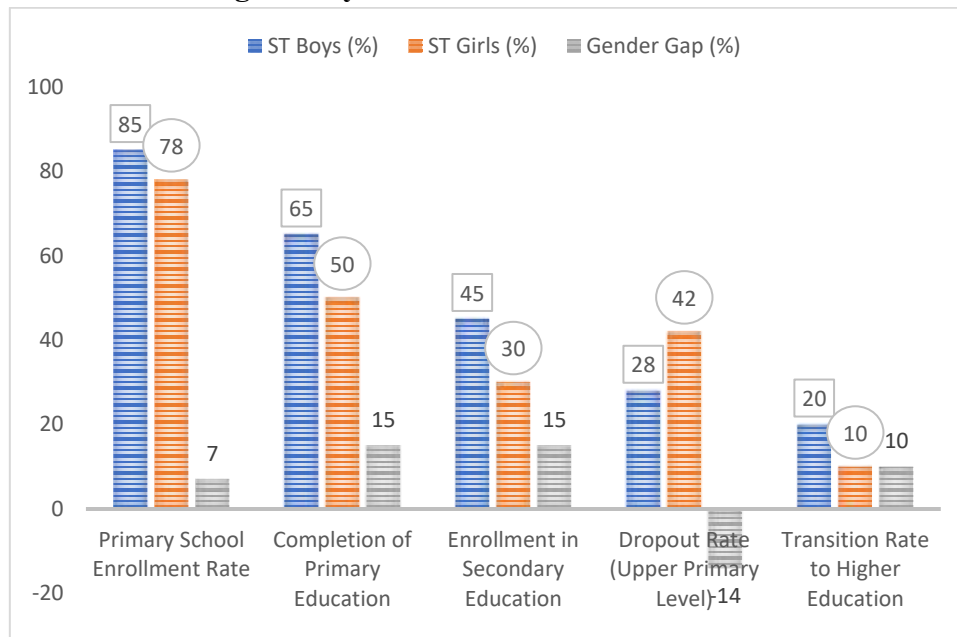
The intersectionality of gender and tribal identity significantly influences educational outcomes among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India, particularly in states like Karnataka. Tribal girls face compounded disadvantages due to both their social identity and gender, resulting in lower enrolment, higher dropout rates, and reduced transition to higher education levels. Cultural norms, early marriage, household responsibilities, and limited mobility contribute to the gender gap in education within tribal communities. Additionally, the remoteness of tribal habitations, lack of female teachers, inadequate sanitation facilities in schools, and safety concerns further restrict educational access for girls. While some tribal boys may also face barriers like poverty and labor responsibilities, tribal girls bear a disproportionate burden due to their dual marginalization.

**Table 6 : Gender-wise Educational Indicators among Scheduled Tribes in Karnataka**

| Indicator                           | ST Boys (%) | ST Girls (%) | Gender Gap (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| Primary School Enrollment Rate      | 85          | 78           | 7              |
| Completion of Primary Education     | 65          | 50           | 15             |
| Enrollment in Secondary Education   | 45          | 30           | 15             |
| Dropout Rate (Upper Primary Level)  | 28          | 42           | -14            |
| Transition Rate to Higher Education | 20          | 10           | 10             |

Source : Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India

## Educational Attainment Among ST Boys and Girls in Karnataka



Source : Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India

The gender-wise educational indicators among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Karnataka reveal significant disparities between ST boys and girls at various stages of the education system. **Primary school enrollment rates** are relatively high for both genders, with **85% of ST boys** and **78% of ST girls** enrolled. However, the **7% gender gap** at this early stage indicates an initial disadvantage for girls. This gap widens substantially in the **completion of primary education**, where only **50% of ST girls** complete their studies compared to **65% of boys**, reflecting a **15% gender gap** and pointing to issues such as early dropout, domestic responsibilities, or socio-cultural barriers.

The trend continues in **secondary education**, where enrollment drops further to **45% for boys** and **just 30% for girls**, maintaining the **15% gender gap**. Alarmingly, the **dropout rate at the upper primary level** is much higher for ST girls (**42%**) than for boys (**28%**), resulting in a **negative gender gap of -14%**, highlighting the disproportionate challenges girls face in continuing their education. Finally, the **transition to higher education** remains critically low for both genders, but the gap is more pronounced, with **only 10% of ST girls** making the transition compared to **20% of boys**, creating a **10% gender disparity**.

These indicators collectively underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address gender inequality in education among ST communities, especially focusing on reducing dropout rates and

encouraging continued education for ST girls through supportive infrastructure, incentives, and community awareness.

### Conclusion:

The educational journey of Scheduled Tribe girls in Karnataka remains fraught with significant challenges, shaped by a complex web of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional barriers. This study reveals that despite ongoing efforts, ST girls continue to experience lower educational attainment compared to their peers, a disparity intensified by the intersection of gender and tribal identity. These overlapping disadvantages limit their access to quality education and curtail opportunities for social and economic advancement. To break this cycle, it is imperative to design and implement holistic, gender-responsive policies that address both economic hardships and socio-cultural constraints. By fostering inclusive, supportive educational environments and empowering ST girls through targeted interventions, Karnataka can move closer to achieving educational equity and unlocking the full potential of one of its most marginalized communities. This not only benefits the girls themselves but also strengthens the social fabric and long-term development of the state.

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