

Awareness and Utilization of Government Welfare Schemes among Tribal Communities in Tripura: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

Government welfare schemes constitute an essential component of India's development strategy for promoting educational inclusion, social justice, and socio-economic empowerment among Scheduled Tribes. Over the past several decades, the Government of India and various state governments have implemented numerous educational, financial, livelihood, housing, healthcare and skill development programmes to improve the quality of life of tribal populations. Despite these initiatives, disparities in educational attainment, access to public services, and socio-economic development continue to persist, particularly in geographically isolated and economically disadvantaged tribal regions.

The present study examines the level of awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura using primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. The study analyses respondents' awareness of various welfare schemes, major sources of information, utilization patterns, perceived benefits, administrative challenges, and barriers that hinder access to government programmes. Descriptive statistical techniques were employed to analyse the collected data, while the findings were interpreted within the broader context of tribal educational development and public service delivery.

The study reveals that although a majority of respondents possess moderate awareness of government welfare schemes, actual utilization remains constrained by procedural complexities, documentation requirements, inadequate institutional support, and limited knowledge regarding eligibility criteria and application procedures. Educational scholarship programmes exhibit relatively higher levels of awareness compared to livelihood and community development schemes.

Keywords: Government Welfare Schemes, Scheduled Tribes, Tribal Education, Educational Empowerment, Awareness.

1. Introduction

Education has long been recognised as one of the most powerful instruments for promoting social transformation, reducing inequality, and expanding opportunities for historically marginalised communities. Among India's diverse population, Scheduled Tribes continue to experience multiple forms of educational and socio-economic disadvantage arising from historical exclusion, geographical isolation, limited infrastructure, economic vulnerability, and unequal access to public services. Although considerable progress has been achieved since Independence, significant disparities continue to exist

between tribal and non-tribal populations in terms of literacy, educational attainment, school completion, employment opportunities, health outcomes, and access to development programmes.

The Government of India has consistently acknowledged these developmental challenges and has introduced a wide range of constitutional safeguards, legislative provisions, educational policies, and welfare programmes aimed at promoting the socio-economic advancement of tribal communities. Constitutional provisions under Articles 15(4), 16(4), 46, 275(1), 338A, and the Fifth and Sixth Schedules collectively provide a framework for affirmative action, educational support, economic assistance, and protection of tribal rights. Successive Five-Year Plans, the National Policy on Education (1986), the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009), the National Education Policy (2020), and numerous centrally sponsored schemes have further strengthened the government's commitment towards inclusive tribal development.

In the field of education, various scholarship programmes, residential schools, hostels, coaching assistance, digital learning initiatives, and financial support mechanisms have been implemented to reduce educational inequalities among Scheduled Tribe students. Programmes such as the Pre-Matric Scholarship for Scheduled Tribe Students, Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme, National Scholarship Portal (NSP), Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), PM POSHAN, and various state-specific tribal welfare initiatives seek to improve enrolment, retention, academic achievement, and higher educational participation. Beyond education, schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), and tribal livelihood programmes aim to strengthen household economic security, which indirectly influences educational outcomes.

The state of Tripura presents a particularly significant context for examining the effectiveness of welfare programmes among tribal communities. Scheduled Tribes constitute approximately one-third of the state's population and comprise diverse indigenous communities, including the Tripuri, Reang (Bru), Jamatia, Noatia, Halam, Chakma, Mog, Uchoi, Kuki, and several other groups. These communities possess distinct cultural traditions, languages, and socio-economic characteristics. While many tribal areas have witnessed improvements in educational infrastructure and literacy over the past few decades, disparities remain evident between urban and rural areas, remote villages and administrative centres, and between different socio-economic groups within tribal society.

The Government of Tripura, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and various central ministries, has implemented numerous welfare initiatives targeting tribal education and socio-economic development. These interventions include scholarships, free textbooks, bicycles, hostel facilities, skill development programmes, financial assistance, livelihood promotion schemes, and infrastructure development projects. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these programmes depends not only upon their existence but also upon the ability of intended beneficiaries to access, understand, and successfully utilise them.

One of the persistent challenges in public policy implementation is the distinction between availability, awareness, and utilization. A welfare programme may be available within a community, yet eligible beneficiaries may remain unaware of its existence. Similarly, individuals may possess basic awareness of a programme but lack adequate information regarding eligibility conditions, documentation requirements, online registration procedures, deadlines, or institutional processes necessary for obtaining benefits. Consequently, awareness should not be interpreted as a binary condition but rather as a continuum ranging

from superficial recognition of a scheme's name to comprehensive understanding of its objectives, procedures, and entitlements.

The relationship between awareness and utilization is particularly significant because it reflects the effectiveness of public service delivery systems. While awareness campaigns often focus on disseminating information regarding available schemes, actual utilization depends upon multiple interconnected factors including educational attainment, household income, administrative responsiveness, institutional support, geographical accessibility, political representation, social capital, and individual capabilities. Therefore, evaluating welfare programmes requires moving beyond simple measures of awareness to examine whether intended beneficiaries are genuinely able to access and derive meaningful benefits from government interventions.

Existing studies on tribal welfare in India have primarily focused on educational outcomes, poverty alleviation, livelihood enhancement, or policy evaluation. Comparatively fewer empirical investigations have examined how awareness, information dissemination, institutional barriers, and administrative procedures collectively influence the utilization of government welfare schemes at the community level. Moreover, studies specifically focusing on tribal communities in Tripura remain relatively limited despite the state's demographic significance and extensive implementation of tribal welfare programmes.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura using primary survey data. Unlike studies that focus solely on educational achievement or policy implementation, this research explores the entire continuum of welfare access from awareness and sources of information to utilization patterns, administrative challenges, and barriers experienced by beneficiaries. By analysing these dimensions together, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how welfare programmes function at the grassroots level.

The findings are expected to contribute to both academic scholarship and public policy. From an academic perspective, the study enriches the literature on tribal education, public administration, and welfare governance by providing empirical evidence from Tripura. From a policy perspective, it identifies specific institutional weaknesses that limit effective implementation and offers practical recommendations for strengthening last-mile delivery, improving awareness strategies, simplifying administrative procedures, and enhancing the responsiveness of welfare institutions.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of government welfare schemes cannot be measured solely by the number of programmes introduced or the financial resources allocated. Their true success lies in whether eligible tribal households are able to access these opportunities without unnecessary procedural barriers and convert public support into meaningful educational, social, and economic advancement. Understanding this relationship between awareness and utilization therefore represents an essential step towards achieving inclusive and equitable development among tribal communities.

2. Statement of the Problem

Over the past several decades, substantial public resources have been invested in designing and implementing welfare programmes intended to improve the educational and socio-economic conditions of Scheduled Tribe communities. Despite these efforts, evidence from national surveys, government reports, and field-based studies continues to indicate that many eligible beneficiaries either remain unaware of available schemes or encounter significant obstacles during the process of accessing them.

Consequently, the existence of welfare programmes does not automatically translate into effective utilization or improved developmental outcomes.

In Tripura, where tribal communities constitute a significant proportion of the population and where multiple educational and welfare schemes are operational, limited empirical research has examined whether beneficiaries possess adequate awareness of these programmes and whether such awareness results in actual utilization. Existing studies have largely concentrated on educational attainment, literacy, or socio-economic indicators, while comparatively little attention has been paid to the administrative, informational, and institutional factors that influence access to welfare benefits.

The present study therefore seeks to investigate the extent to which awareness of government welfare schemes influences their utilization among tribal communities in Tripura and to identify the principal opportunities, challenges, and institutional barriers affecting effective implementation.

3. Literature Review

Government welfare schemes constitute one of the principal instruments through which governments attempt to reduce socio-economic inequalities and promote inclusive development among disadvantaged populations. In India, numerous welfare programmes have been implemented to improve educational attainment, healthcare access, livelihood opportunities, housing security, social protection, financial inclusion, and human development among socially and economically marginalized communities, particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), women, minority groups, and unorganised workers. However, the effectiveness of these programmes depends not merely on their existence or financial allocation but on the extent to which eligible beneficiaries are aware of their entitlements and are able to access available benefits.

Awareness represents the first stage in the welfare delivery process. Individuals who are unaware of available schemes are unlikely to apply for or benefit from them, regardless of programme quality or financial investment. Consequently, awareness functions as a prerequisite for effective utilization and serves as an important indicator of the efficiency of government outreach mechanisms. Existing literature consistently demonstrates that inadequate awareness significantly reduces programme effectiveness, particularly among socially and geographically marginalized populations.

Several empirical studies have documented substantial variations in awareness levels across different categories of welfare schemes. Bartwal et al. (2016) reported that awareness of the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) among rural elderly in Uttarakhand was exceptionally high (97.3%), yet awareness of other welfare provisions including banking benefits, railway concessions, and income tax rebates remained extremely limited. Similar findings were reported by Goel et al. (2003), Lena et al. (2009), Chandwani et al. (2011), and Maroof et al. (2016), who observed that although certain flagship welfare programmes achieved moderate recognition, awareness of many complementary welfare benefits remained inadequate. These findings suggest that beneficiaries often possess fragmented knowledge, with familiarity confined to highly visible schemes while remaining unaware of the broader spectrum of government support.

Research involving other marginalized populations reveals similar patterns. Qasim and Daniel (2021) found only moderate awareness of welfare provisions among beedi workers in Uttar Pradesh, with relatively higher awareness of medical and maternity benefits but substantially lower awareness of housing and educational assistance. Likewise, Gayathri and Sangeetha (2025) observed that workers in the unorganised sector exhibited high awareness of politically prominent welfare initiatives but demonstrated

very limited knowledge of labour welfare boards and associated social security benefits. Such findings indicate that visibility, frequency of public communication, and direct interaction with implementing agencies strongly influence awareness levels.

Women and minority groups have also been found to experience limited awareness of welfare programmes. Niyaz et al. (2021) reported that minority women in Karnataka exhibited consistently low awareness across thirty-six government welfare schemes, resulting in poor participation in programmes designed to promote education, employment, entrepreneurship, and social empowerment. Similarly, Babulu and Devi (2023) found that rural women in Manipur perceived government welfare programmes as inadequately accessible due to limited awareness, insufficient institutional guidance, and weak community-level support. These studies collectively suggest that awareness deficits disproportionately affect groups already experiencing social and economic marginalisation.

Educational welfare programmes appear to demonstrate comparatively higher awareness than many other categories of welfare interventions. Sasikumar and Balaji (2020) reported that government school students showed high levels of awareness regarding free textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, and midday meal programmes, although perceptions of accessibility were comparatively weaker. This finding indicates that educational institutions can function as effective channels for disseminating information regarding welfare schemes, particularly among younger populations.

The literature further suggests that awareness is not distributed uniformly across socio-demographic groups. Studies consistently identify education, literacy, income, occupation, gender, age, and geographical location as important determinants of awareness. More educated individuals generally possess greater capacity to obtain information, interpret eligibility criteria, and navigate administrative procedures than less educated populations. Likewise, communities with stronger institutional connectivity and better access to communication technologies tend to exhibit higher awareness levels than geographically isolated populations.

An equally important observation emerging from the literature concerns the role of information channels. Formal communication through government departments is often supplemented—or even replaced by informal networks such as family members, neighbours, teachers, community leaders, self-help groups, and local organisations. Goswami et al. (2019) found that friends and neighbours served as the principal source of information regarding social welfare schemes among elderly beneficiaries, while Bogam et al. (2023) demonstrated that community health workers and village-level meetings significantly enhanced awareness following targeted interventions. These findings highlight the importance of decentralised and community-based dissemination strategies, particularly in rural and remote areas where official communication mechanisms may be limited.

The relationship between awareness and governance has also received increasing scholarly attention. Khera (2011), Dandekar and Ghai (2014), and Bhowmik (2012) argued that even well-designed welfare programmes frequently underperform because governments devote greater attention to programme formulation than to effective communication and implementation. Weak institutional coordination, inadequate monitoring, bureaucratic complexity, and insufficient frontline engagement reduce the visibility of welfare programmes among intended beneficiaries. Consequently, awareness should not be viewed solely as an individual characteristic but also as an indicator of institutional performance and administrative effectiveness.

Collectively, the literature establishes that awareness constitutes the foundation upon which successful welfare delivery is built. Although awareness levels have improved for several flagship programmes,

particularly those receiving sustained governmental attention, significant informational disparities continue to exist across population groups, welfare sectors, and geographical regions. These disparities are especially pronounced among populations characterised by low literacy, economic deprivation, social exclusion, and geographic isolation.

Despite this growing body of evidence, relatively little research has examined awareness of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in the North Eastern region of India, particularly in Tripura. Existing studies have largely focused on elderly populations, women, minority communities, or unorganised workers, while empirical investigations addressing tribal beneficiaries remain limited. Considering the distinctive socio-cultural characteristics, geographical remoteness, and educational challenges experienced by tribal communities in Tripura, there is a clear need for context-specific research that examines awareness patterns within this population. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how effectively government welfare initiatives reach tribal beneficiaries and for identifying strategies to improve equitable access to welfare services.

4. Objectives of the Study

The present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of awareness of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura.
2. To identify the major sources through which tribal communities obtain information regarding government welfare schemes.
3. To identify the major administrative, institutional, and socio-economic barriers affecting access to government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura.

5. Theoretical Framework

The present study examines awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura. Since the study investigates not only the existence of welfare programmes but also the processes through which individuals become aware of, access, and benefit from them, no single theoretical perspective is sufficient to explain these multidimensional relationships.

Accordingly, the present research adopts an integrated theoretical framework comprising the Capability Approach and Information Asymmetry Theory. These perspectives collectively explain how awareness, institutional processes, and individual capabilities influence the effective utilization of government welfare schemes.

5.1 Capability Approach

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is the Capability Approach, developed by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen. Unlike conventional welfare theories that evaluate development primarily in terms of income, economic growth, or material resources, the Capability Approach argues that development should be understood as the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and opportunities to lead the kind of life they value.

According to Sen, individuals differ considerably in their ability to convert available resources into meaningful achievements. Simply providing financial assistance or government services does not automatically improve people's well-being. Rather, individuals must possess the capability to utilise available resources effectively. In this context, capability refers to the genuine opportunities available to individuals, while functioning refers to the actual achievements realised through those opportunities.

Applied to tribal welfare, this distinction is particularly significant. Government scholarship schemes, hostel facilities, livelihood programmes, educational incentives, healthcare assistance, and financial support constitute valuable public resources. However, these resources produce meaningful outcomes only when beneficiaries are capable of accessing, understanding, and utilising them. Consequently, the effectiveness of welfare programmes depends not merely upon their availability but upon the expansion of beneficiaries' capabilities.

Within the context of this study, awareness functions as an essential capability. Individuals who are unaware of available schemes cannot exercise their entitlement to government assistance. Similarly, respondents possessing only superficial knowledge of welfare programmes may remain unable to complete application procedures or fulfil documentation requirements. Therefore, awareness should not be viewed merely as access to information but as a capability that enables individuals to convert government opportunities into educational and socio-economic achievements.

The Capability Approach therefore provides an appropriate theoretical lens for interpreting why respondents with similar eligibility for welfare schemes may experience substantially different outcomes depending upon their awareness, institutional support, and individual capabilities.

5.2 Information Asymmetry Theory

While the Capability Approach explains why individuals require opportunities and capabilities to utilise welfare schemes, it does not fully explain why information itself often becomes a barrier to accessing government programmes. This dimension is addressed through Information Asymmetry Theory.

Information asymmetry exists when one party possesses significantly greater information than another, creating unequal opportunities for decision-making and access to resources. In the context of government welfare programmes, administrative agencies generally possess comprehensive knowledge regarding eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, application procedures, deadlines, and programme benefits. Potential beneficiaries, however, frequently possess incomplete, inaccurate, or fragmented information.

This imbalance often results in eligible individuals failing to receive benefits despite meeting all eligibility requirements.

Within tribal communities, information asymmetry may arise due to several interconnected factors:

- Limited dissemination of official information.
- Dependence upon informal communication networks.
- Low digital literacy.
- Language differences.
- Geographical isolation.
- Limited interaction with government officials.
- Inadequate awareness campaigns.

The findings of the present study support this theoretical perspective. Although a large proportion of respondents reported that they were aware of government welfare schemes, many simultaneously indicated difficulties related to documentation, application procedures, approval delays, and understanding eligibility criteria. This suggests that awareness of the existence of a scheme does not necessarily imply possession of complete operational information.

Information asymmetry also explains the increasing importance of educational institutions, social media, teachers, and peer networks as alternative channels of information dissemination. Where official

communication mechanisms are weak, informal information networks frequently become the principal source of knowledge regarding government programmes.

Reducing information asymmetry therefore requires more than increasing publicity. It demands transparent communication, simplified procedures, multilingual information dissemination, community outreach, and continuous guidance throughout the application process.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design supported by primary survey data to examine the awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura. A descriptive design was considered appropriate because the study seeks to investigate existing conditions regarding awareness levels, utilization patterns, information sources, administrative barriers, and perceived effectiveness of government welfare programmes without manipulating any variables. The research further incorporates an analytical approach by examining the relationships among awareness, accessibility, and utilization of welfare schemes within the broader context of tribal educational and socio-economic development.

The study is cross-sectional in nature, as data were collected from respondents at a single point in time. The cross-sectional design enables me to capture prevailing perceptions and experiences regarding government welfare programmes while providing a snapshot of the existing implementation scenario.

5.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the state of Tripura, located in the North-Eastern region of India. Tripura is one of the constitutionally recognized tribal-majority states in the region and possesses considerable ethnic and cultural diversity. Scheduled Tribes constitute nearly one-third of the state's population and include communities such as the Tripuri, Reang (Bru), Jamatia, Noatia, Halam, Chakma, Mog, Uchoi, Kuki, and several other indigenous groups.

The state has implemented numerous educational and socio-economic welfare programmes through the Department of Tribal Welfare, Department of Education, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Rural Development, and other governmental agencies. Despite the expansion of these programmes, variations continue to exist in awareness, accessibility, and utilization across tribal communities.

Tripura therefore provides an appropriate empirical setting for examining how government welfare schemes are understood and utilized by tribal beneficiaries.

5.3 Population of the Study

The target population comprised members of tribal communities residing in Tripura who were eligible to receive or had the potential to benefit from government welfare programmes. Respondents included students, employed individuals, unemployed youth, self-employed persons, and other community members possessing varying educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The diversity of respondents enabled the study to capture a broad range of experiences relating to awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes.

5.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

The present study is based on 540 valid responses collected through a structured questionnaire. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed for selecting respondents. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study specifically required respondents belonging to Scheduled

Tribe communities who possessed knowledge or experience relating to educational and welfare programmes. The respondents were selected to ensure representation from different age groups, educational backgrounds, occupations, and socio-economic conditions. Although the sample size does not permit broad generalization to the entire tribal population of Tripura, it provides valuable empirical evidence regarding awareness, utilization patterns, and implementation challenges experienced by beneficiaries.

6. Results

The findings presented in this section are based on primary data collected from tribal communities in Tripura. The analysis focuses on respondents' awareness of government welfare schemes, knowledge of specific programmes, sources of information, utilization patterns, administrative barriers, and perceived effectiveness of welfare interventions. The results provide important insights into how government schemes are experienced at the grassroots level and identify the factors that facilitate or hinder their effective utilization.

6.1 Socio-demographic Profile of Respondents

The respondents represented diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, thereby providing a broad perspective on awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities. The survey included respondents with varying levels of education, occupations, household income, and family backgrounds.

The diversity of the sample is important because awareness and utilization of government schemes are often influenced by socio-economic characteristics. Educational attainment, occupation, household income, parental education, and access to information all shape an individual's ability to identify, apply for, and benefit from welfare programmes. The socio-demographic profile also enables the subsequent analysis of how these characteristics influence awareness levels and utilization patterns through cross-tabulation and inferential statistical analysis.

6.2 Awareness of Government Welfare Schemes

Awareness constitutes the first step in the successful utilization of government welfare programmes. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate their level of awareness regarding government schemes intended for educational and socio-economic development.

The analysis revealed that awareness levels were generally encouraging. Among the 540 respondents, 42.6% reported that they were aware of government welfare schemes, while 37.0% described themselves as somewhat aware. Only 5.6% indicated that they were very aware, whereas 14.8% reported having no awareness of such schemes.

These findings indicate that approximately 85 percent of respondents possessed at least some level of awareness regarding government welfare programmes. This suggests that government initiatives, educational institutions, and informal communication networks have contributed to disseminating information about welfare schemes among tribal communities.

However, the relatively small proportion of respondents who identified themselves as very aware indicates that awareness remains largely superficial for many beneficiaries. Awareness of the existence of a programme should not be equated with complete knowledge regarding eligibility criteria, required documentation, application procedures, or programme benefits. Consequently, although basic awareness appears widespread, functional awareness required for successful utilization remains limited.

6.3 Difficulties in Accessing Government Welfare Schemes

One of the central objectives of the study was to determine whether respondents encountered difficulties while accessing welfare programmes. The findings reveal that 72.2% experienced difficulties during the application or utilization process, whereas only 27.8% reported no significant problems.

This finding represents one of the most significant outcomes of the study. Although awareness levels are relatively high, nearly three-fourths of respondents continue to encounter barriers while attempting to access government welfare programmes. This demonstrates that awareness alone is insufficient to ensure effective utilization. The findings support the theoretical argument presented earlier that administrative accessibility constitutes an essential determinant of welfare effectiveness.

7. Discussion

The present study sought to examine the level of awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes among tribal communities in Tripura, with particular emphasis on identifying the opportunities created by these programmes, the challenges encountered during implementation, and their implications for public policy. The findings provide valuable insights into the functioning of welfare delivery systems at the grassroots level and demonstrate that awareness alone is insufficient to ensure meaningful access to government benefits. Instead, effective utilization depends upon the interaction of individual capabilities, access to reliable information, and the efficiency of administrative institutions.

One of the most significant findings of the study is that a majority of respondents reported being either aware or somewhat aware of government welfare schemes. At first glance, this suggests that government efforts to disseminate information have achieved a reasonable degree of success. Educational institutions, social media platforms, teachers, and community networks appear to have contributed substantially to increasing awareness among tribal communities. This reflects the expanding reach of digital communication and educational outreach in rural and tribal areas of Tripura.

However, a deeper examination of the findings reveals an important contradiction. Although respondents demonstrated relatively high levels of awareness, nearly three-fourths reported experiencing difficulties while attempting to access government welfare schemes. This apparent inconsistency highlights the distinction between general awareness and functional awareness. Knowing that a scheme exists does not necessarily imply understanding its eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, application procedures, deadlines, or grievance mechanisms. Consequently, awareness should be understood as a multidimensional concept that extends beyond simple recognition of a programme's name.

This finding strongly supports the Capability Approach adopted in the present study. According to Amartya Sen, development is achieved not merely by providing resources but by enabling individuals to convert those resources into valuable functionings. Government welfare schemes constitute important public resources, but respondents can benefit from them only when they possess the capability to access and utilise these opportunities effectively. In this context, awareness represents an essential capability that must be accompanied by adequate education, institutional support, digital literacy, and administrative guidance. The study therefore suggests that expanding tribal capabilities requires more than increasing the number of welfare programmes; it also requires strengthening the conditions that enable beneficiaries to make effective use of them.

The findings also align closely with Information Asymmetry Theory. Although many respondents knew about the existence of government schemes, they reported limited understanding of procedural requirements and frequently depended upon informal communication channels for information. This

indicates that a significant information gap continues to exist between implementing agencies and intended beneficiaries. Administrative authorities generally possess complete information regarding programme eligibility and application procedures, whereas beneficiaries often rely on fragmented or second-hand information obtained through friends, relatives, or social media. Such information asymmetry can result in eligible individuals being excluded from welfare benefits despite meeting all formal eligibility conditions.

An important contribution of the study lies in identifying the changing pattern of information dissemination within tribal communities. Social media emerged as one of the most influential sources of information, followed closely by schools, colleges, teachers, and community networks. This finding reflects the increasing digital connectivity of younger tribal populations and demonstrates the growing importance of online platforms in public communication. Nevertheless, dependence on social media also raises concerns regarding the reliability and completeness of information. Unlike official government portals or welfare departments, informal digital platforms may not always provide accurate guidance regarding eligibility, documentation, or application procedures. Consequently, strengthening official digital communication channels remains an important policy priority.

The comparatively limited role of government officials and tribal welfare departments in disseminating information deserves particular attention. Ideally, implementing agencies should serve as the primary source of authentic and timely information regarding government programmes. However, the findings suggest that beneficiaries frequently obtain information from non-governmental sources before approaching official institutions. This may indicate limitations in outreach activities, insufficient community engagement, or inadequate last-mile communication by implementing agencies. Strengthening institutional communication therefore represents an important step towards improving programme utilization.

Another significant finding relates to respondents' awareness of individual welfare schemes. Educational programmes such as the National Scholarship Portal, Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme, and Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme exhibited considerably higher levels of recognition than livelihood, housing, or integrated tribal development programmes. Several factors may explain this pattern. First, educational schemes are actively promoted through schools and colleges, making them more visible to students. Second, scholarship programmes have direct and immediate financial relevance for learners and their families. Third, educational institutions frequently assist students in completing application procedures, thereby increasing awareness and participation. In contrast, livelihood and development schemes often require interaction with multiple government departments and involve more complex administrative procedures, which may reduce public awareness and participation.

The study further identifies several administrative barriers that continue to impede effective utilization of welfare programmes. Documentation requirements, procedural complexity, approval delays, limited institutional guidance, internet connectivity issues, and digital literacy constraints emerged as the most frequently reported challenges. These barriers indicate that administrative accessibility remains a critical determinant of programme effectiveness. Even well-designed welfare policies may fail to achieve their intended objectives if implementation procedures become excessively complicated or burdensome for beneficiaries.

The findings also have important implications for understanding educational empowerment among tribal communities. Educational welfare schemes contribute not only by reducing financial constraints but also by expanding opportunities for continued schooling, skill development, higher education, and social

mobility. However, when eligible students are unable to access these programmes because of procedural or informational barriers, educational inequalities may persist despite the availability of government support. Thus, improving programme utilization is likely to produce broader developmental outcomes extending beyond immediate financial assistance.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that awareness and utilization represent interconnected but distinct dimensions of welfare implementation. Awareness creates the possibility of access, but successful utilization depends upon institutional efficiency, administrative simplicity, reliable information, digital inclusion, and beneficiary capabilities. Public policy should therefore focus not only on expanding the number of welfare schemes but also on strengthening the mechanisms through which these schemes are communicated, accessed, and delivered.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing literature on tribal welfare by providing empirical evidence from Tripura and by demonstrating that the effectiveness of welfare programmes is shaped by a complex interaction of informational, institutional, and capability-related factors. The findings reinforce the need for integrated policy approaches that simultaneously enhance awareness, simplify administrative procedures, strengthen public service delivery, and expand the capabilities of tribal beneficiaries.

8. Policy Implications

The findings of the present study have significant implications for the formulation and implementation of tribal welfare policies in Tripura and other tribal-dominated regions of India. While the study indicates that awareness of government welfare schemes among respondents is reasonably high, it also reveals a considerable gap between awareness and effective utilization. This gap highlights the need to move beyond the traditional approach of introducing new welfare programmes and instead focus on improving the accessibility, efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness of existing welfare delivery mechanisms. The policy implications discussed below are derived directly from the empirical findings and are intended to strengthen educational empowerment and socio-economic development among tribal communities.

8.1 Enhancing the Role of Educational Institutions

The study demonstrates that schools, colleges, and teachers constitute one of the most important sources of information regarding government welfare schemes. This finding suggests that educational institutions should be formally integrated into the implementation strategy of tribal welfare programmes.

Every educational institution serving tribal students should establish a Student Welfare and Scholarship Facilitation Cell responsible for:

- Disseminating information regarding government schemes.
- Assisting students in completing online applications.
- Verifying required documents.
- Monitoring scholarship applications.
- Providing guidance regarding higher education opportunities.

Teachers may also be trained periodically regarding newly introduced welfare schemes so that they can function as informed resource persons for students and parents.

8.2 Simplification of Administrative Procedures

Administrative complexity emerged as one of the most frequently reported barriers affecting the utilization of welfare schemes. Respondents identified documentation requirements, lengthy procedures, and approval delays as major challenges.

Government agencies should therefore simplify administrative processes by:

- Reducing unnecessary documentation.
- Integrating multiple verification procedures.
- Introducing single-window application systems.
- Providing simplified application guidelines.
- Eliminating duplication of document submission.

Simplified procedures would reduce both the financial and psychological burden associated with accessing government welfare programmes, particularly for first-generation learners and economically disadvantaged households.

8.3 Improving Institutional Coordination

Government welfare programmes are often implemented by multiple departments, including the Department of Tribal Welfare, Department of Education, Department of Rural Development, Department of Social Welfare, and various central ministries. Limited coordination among these agencies may result in duplication of efforts, fragmented information dissemination, and administrative delays.

An integrated institutional coordination mechanism should therefore be established to facilitate information sharing, monitoring, and timely delivery of welfare benefits. District-level coordination committees involving representatives from relevant departments could periodically review programme implementation, identify bottlenecks, and recommend corrective measures.

8.4 Establishing Village-Level Welfare Facilitation Centres

The findings indicate that respondents frequently encounter difficulties while navigating application procedures and documentation requirements. To reduce these barriers, village-level facilitation centres may be established in tribal areas.

These centres could provide services such as:

- Scheme awareness and counselling.
- Assistance with online registration.
- Document verification.
- Application tracking.
- Guidance regarding scholarship renewal.
- Information on newly introduced schemes.
- Referral to appropriate government departments.

The evidence presented in this study demonstrates that strengthening tribal welfare requires a shift from a scheme-centric approach to a beneficiary-centric approach. Rather than evaluating success solely by the number of schemes introduced or financial resources allocated, policy effectiveness should be assessed in terms of the extent to which eligible beneficiaries can easily access, understand, and utilise available opportunities.

A welfare system that is transparent, accessible, inclusive, and responsive is more likely to promote educational empowerment, enhance human capabilities, and improve the overall quality of life of tribal communities. Consequently, future policy reforms should prioritise simplification of procedures, institutional accountability, digital inclusion, and community engagement to ensure that government welfare programmes achieve their intended developmental objectives.

9. Conclusion

Government welfare schemes play a vital role in promoting educational equity, social justice, and socio-economic development among Scheduled Tribe communities in India. This study examined the awareness

and utilization of these schemes among tribal communities in Tripura using primary data. It explored beneficiaries' awareness levels, sources of information, utilization patterns, and the barriers affecting access to welfare programmes.

The findings reveal that while awareness of government welfare schemes is generally satisfactory, particularly regarding educational scholarships, utilization remains constrained by procedural complexity, documentation requirements, delays in approval, inadequate institutional guidance, and digital barriers. These results indicate that awareness alone is insufficient unless beneficiaries can easily access and utilize available services.

The study also highlights the growing role of educational institutions, teachers, social media, and community networks in disseminating information about welfare schemes. However, formal government communication and outreach mechanisms require further strengthening to ensure accurate and timely information reaches eligible beneficiaries.

The theoretical frameworks adopted in this study provide valuable insights into these findings. The Capability Approach demonstrates that welfare schemes should be viewed as opportunities to expand educational and livelihood capabilities rather than merely financial assistance. Information Asymmetry Theory explains how unequal access to information regarding eligibility, documentation, and application procedures limits programme utilization. Likewise, the Public Service Delivery Framework emphasizes that effective implementation depends on transparent, accessible, and responsive administrative systems. The study has important policy implications. Strengthening awareness campaigns, simplifying application procedures, improving digital inclusion, enhancing institutional coordination, establishing local facilitation centres, and promoting multilingual communication can significantly improve the accessibility and effectiveness of welfare programmes. Such measures would increase utilization while supporting educational empowerment, social inclusion, and sustainable tribal development.

This research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from Tripura, where limited studies have examined both awareness and utilization of government welfare schemes together. Although the study is based on a modest sample, it offers useful insights for policymakers, tribal welfare departments, educational institutions, researchers, and civil society organizations working to improve welfare delivery.

Overall, the success of government welfare schemes should be assessed not only by the number of programmes introduced but by their ability to expand educational opportunities, strengthen human capabilities, reduce social exclusion, and improve the quality of life of tribal communities. Transforming awareness into effective utilization requires a welfare system that is transparent, accessible, and responsive to the needs of beneficiaries, thereby contributing to inclusive development and social justice.

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