

# Development Initiatives and Tribal Education in India

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## Abstract:

The disadvantaged communities that have mostly stayed on the fringes of development make up India's Scheduled Tribes. Since education is viewed as the sole way to help these marginalized communities, the government's decades-long efforts have paid off, as seen by the educational achievements amongst tribals. In order to empower these communities and provide a better future for coming generations, the government has made significant investments in educating the Scheduled Tribes. The government's major efforts to assist the tribal's educational growth, which further lead to economic progress has been examined in this paper. The paper found that the government's investments in education have significantly improved the academic performance and opportunities for the Scheduled Tribes. By providing access to quality education, the government has helped empower these communities to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization. As a result, the future looks brighter for the tribal people, with increased prospects for economic and social advancement. While there has been progress, there are still barriers and challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that all individuals have equal access to quality education.

**Key Words:** Tribals, Education, Development, Central Schemes

## Education and Tribals:

Home to more than 142 billion (UN, 2023) people, India is one of the biggest low-middle-income countries with a 104.2 million tribal population thus accounting for 8.6% (2011) of the total population of India. Tribals in India account for over a quarter of the country's poorest people. Although these groups have seen considerable progress over the years, poverty among tribal groups declined by more than a third between 1983 and 2005 but nearly half the country's Scheduled Tribes population remains in poverty, due

to their low starting point (Kumar, Pathak, Ruikar, 2020). 'Tribals', as we understand them, are unique in their socio-cultural setting and are largely disadvantaged. They display deprivation from key elements of development, education being one of them. It is also well understood that education's value as an instrument of social and economic change is enormous. By providing quality education to tribals, we can empower them to break away from isolation, discrimination, poverty, and exclusion. Because, education will not only equip them with basic required skills and

knowledge but also inculcate self-esteem, confidence, and assurance, enabling them to actively participate in the development of their communities. Therefore, focusing on the education of tribal is the need of the hour and a step towards building a more equitable and advanced society. Even with the government's best efforts to enhance their quality of life through development initiatives and welfare programs, many tribal communities continue to struggle with issues like access to education, healthcare, and work opportunities (Nagi, 1998). Ensuring inclusive growth and reducing poverty in India requires policymakers to persistently attend to the particular needs of these marginalized groups. Education is the only instrument that has brought about a change in the tribal way of life in the past and the present, it will also determine what lies in the future (Ambasht, 1970) This paper in this light with an objective to understand the growth and expansion of tribal education and also explores the development initiatives taken by the government for the welfare of the tribals in India through education. The main aim of this is to see the inputs made by the government have yielded desired results.

### **Policies and Programmes Focusing on Tribal Development:**

Regulations supporting tribal people's educational development have been

established by the government through provisions in the constitution. Article 46 of the Indian Constitution says that "the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the people and in particular of Schedule Caste and schedule tribe and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation". Makers of the Constitution took special note of the condition in which these disadvantaged sections lived and provided several safeguards for the promotion of their interests including education. A special mention in his connection must be made of article 47 of the Constitution to promote with special care inter alia the educational interest of weaker sections in the people, particularly the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. Article 30 of the Constitution provides the right to the tribal to establish education institutions based on only religion, clan, caste language, or based on any one of them (Patel, 1991). Apart from the Statutory provisions, many development initiatives have been taken by the government over the years, such as free education, incentives facilities, and concessions to motivate and support their economic hardships (Sujata, 1994). This paper will only focus on the educational schemes and programs initiated for tribal advancement and make a modest attempt to evaluate their impact

with the help of the available secondary database.

**i). National Educational Policy 1968:** The National Education Policy, 1968 was the first Policy of Independent India drew a lot of its strengths from the Report of the Education Commission 1964-66 (Report of the Education Commission 1964-66), and laid special emphasis on the equalization of educational opportunities to the backward or under-privileged classes. It highlighted the importance of educational inputs and facilities that should be provided in schools, with a special focus on rural schools and schools in backward areas. The policy specifically endorsed the requirement of a more intensive effort to develop education among the tribal people along with an emphasis on the education of the girl child across communities.

**ii) National Education Policy 1986:** This policy with a focus on reducing disparities and equalizing educational opportunities to all came as a landmark initiative towards the development of the education of tribals. The policy gave several recommendations specifically related to the education of Scheduled Tribes where priority was accorded to opening primary schools in tribal areas and construction of buildings on a priority basis. The policy placed the spoken language as a distinctive characteristic of

the scheduled tribes, therefore underlining the need to develop the curricular and diverse instructional materials in tribal languages at the initial stage with an arrangement for switching over to the regional language.

Residential schools, including Ashram schools, were established on a large scale. Incentive schemes were also formulated for Scheduled Tribes, keeping in view their special needs and lifestyle. Scholarships for higher education emphasized technical professional and para-professional courses. Anganwadis, Non-formal, and Adult Education Centres were opened in areas inhabited by scheduled tribes. Educated and promising scheduled tribe youth were further encouraged to teach in tribal areas. The policy overall focused on providing basic education to tribals by strengthening educational access provisions. Incentives and schemes to accelerate educational participation were streamlined. Language which came as the biggest barrier in educating tribal children was reduced with the provisioning of mother tongue and local teachers as means for instructions. Norms for opening primary schools in tribal areas were relaxed to improve access, however, despite such relaxation of norms many tribal localities are still

without schools as they do not meet even the relaxed criteria (Sujata, 2008). This has resulted in a lack of education opportunities for children in these areas.

**iii) National Education Policy 2020:** The NEP 2020 like the previous policies focuses on the overall development of backward communities and disadvantaged groups. The policy points out that gaps still exist even after decades of planned interventions between the different social category groups in educational participation and a sharp decline is visible between grades. The policy also identifies the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) that have a concentration of SC and ST populations, these SEDGs along with the Aspirational Districts and Educationally Backward Blocks (EBBs) will be provided special focus with higher resource allocations to improve the overall educational development across states. The policy stresses the need to make special mechanisms to ensure that children belonging to tribal communities receive the benefits of these interventions. Within SEDGs and the overall policy points, special attention will be given to reducing the disparities in the educational development of Scheduled Tribes.

To facilitate the entry of talented and deserving students from all SEDGs into higher education, the policy includes efforts to increase participation in school education, special hostels in designated regions, bridge courses, and financial assistance through fee waivers and scholarships. These measures will be extended to a larger population, particularly during the secondary stage of education. Additionally, ECCE will be gradually implemented in all forms of alternative education as well as in Ashramshalas, which are located in areas where tribes predominate.

The government established an independent Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) in 1999, which stemmed out from the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. To ensure the socio-economic development of Scheduled Tribes, the MoTA sought to bring together the fragmented approach to tribal welfare and development under a single ministry. With a focus on the welfare of tribal people, MoTA reformed its development and execution mechanisms, increased financial resource allocation, and brought efforts closer together to ensure the development of education. Educational schemes gained greater priority and more concentrated

attention, some of the key schemes have been discussed below.

***Public funding through Scholarship Schemes:***

It is understood that most of those belonging to the tribals groups are poor and disadvantaged, therefore any nature of monetary support to students across all levels of education in the form of scholarships, fellowships or coupons would not only support their education but would encourage them to perform better and further continue their studies. The government, through its various initiatives has made extra efforts to support the education of tribal students. Scholarships and fellowships for those belonging to marginalized communities have been provided at both School and Higher Education levels. This section summarizes some of the government's financial programs for ST students over the years. These programs are designed with the educational attainment of the target population in mind, as well as the need for funds to allow students to finish their coursework and advance their financial situation. Additionally, research demonstrates that there has been a beneficial impact of these schemes, only demonstrating that the government's financial programs are not only beneficial for individual students but also contribute to the overall success of ST communities.

To achieve set policy goals the government has also initiated several schemes to support educational participation and learning among the Scheduled Tribes. Moving forward, it will be crucial for policymakers to continue investing in these programs to ensure that ST students have equal opportunities for academic and financial success.

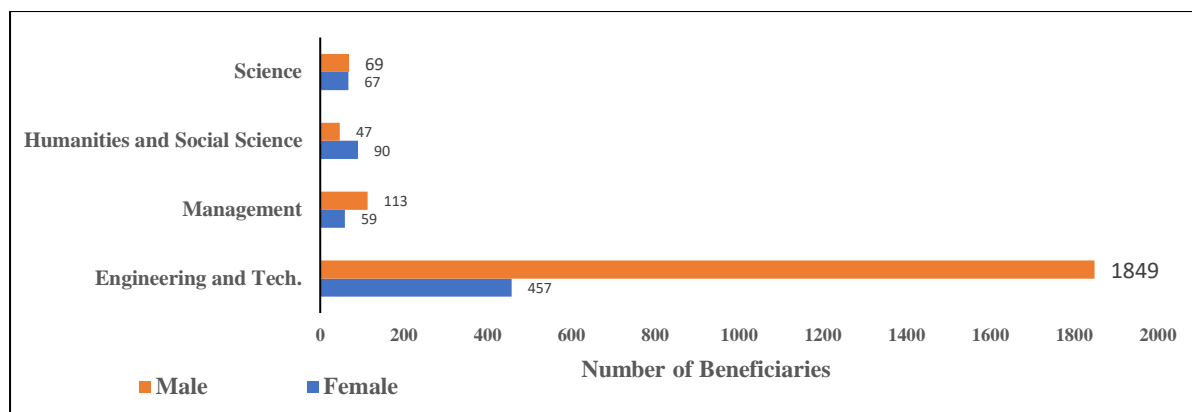
*i). Pre-Matric Scholarship Scheme:* The scheme was introduced in July 2012, for both SC and ST students studying at the secondary level in grades IX – X, by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and later taken by the MoTA. The main reason for introducing this scheme was to encourage students to continue and not dropout during the transit phase between the upper primary and secondary levels of schooling. The scholarship amount of Rs. 225/ per month is paid to day scholars and Rs.525/- per month is paid to hostelers. The scholarship duration is 10 months in a year and only those children whose household income from all sources is less than Rs.2.50 lakhs per annum are eligible. The government spent Rs. 219.43 crore, between 2012 and 2014 under this scheme and 21.3 lakh students benefitted till 2014. The grant has seen a huge rise in the allocated share which increased to Rs. 265 Crore for the FY 2017-18 of which Rs. 220 Crore was pent the

amount further grew substantially to Rs. 400 Crore for FY 2021- 22 of which Rs. 394 Crore has been spent and 5.27 lakh students had benefitted (Annual Report, MoTA, 2022).

*ii). Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme:* Like the pre-matric scholarship, the scheme provides minimal financial assistance to enable eligible Scheduled Tribe students to undertake quality education from post-matric to Graduate level (MoTA, 2022). Grade X graduates, enrolled in any recognized course from a recognized institution are eligible for this scholarship. Wherein the scholarship is offered in two phases, in the first phase a part of the fees and institutional charges are paid for. In the second phase, the students get an amount ranging from Rs. 230 – 1200, depending on the course they are pursuing. Looking into the financial allocations for this scheme it is observed that the grant over the years has increased significantly. The total grant allocated by the government for this scheme in 2009-10 was Rs. 217.8 Crore, which increased to 1347 Crore in the FY 2017-18 and further saw a close to 60 % jump in the FY 2020-21 at Rs. 2258 Crore and 22.2 lakh students had benefitted.

*iii). National Scholarship Scheme for Higher Education:* To bridge gender and social gaps prevalent in our society, this scheme caters to those ST students who

wish to pursue their higher education in any discipline. Offering scholarships in specific disciplines, encourages ST students to excel in fields where they have historically been under-represented, fostering inclusive growth and development. All ST students are eligible, but preference is given to girls and those belonging to Divyang and PVTGs, with a household income not exceeding Rs 6 lakh through all sources. Based on their performance in grade XII, 1000 first-year students are selected and awarded this scholarship, which continues till the end of the course that the students have selected. The scholarship amount covers living expenses, books, and computer expenditures in addition to tuition. Based on the data for the FY 2021-22, a total of 2,751 beneficiaries had been awarded this fellowship counting to Rs. 35.2 crores. Males received 69 % of the grant as compared to 31 % share received by females. Engineering and Technology, Management, Humanity, and Social Sciences and Sciences were the four broad streams for which students were awarded this scholarship. The Figure 1 represents the distribution of streamwise beneficiaries by gender. Males accounts for a higher number of beneficiaries in engineering and technology as compared to females who had a higher percentage of share of scholarships only under humanities and social sciences.

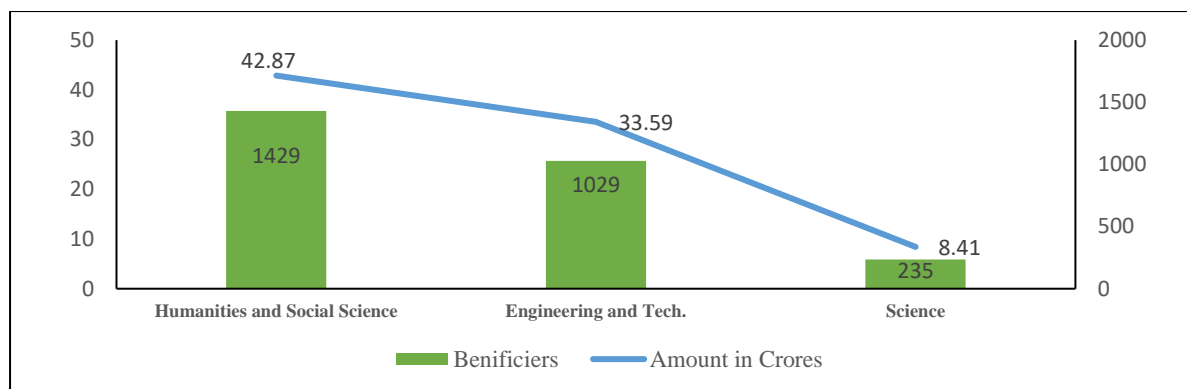


**Figure 1: Gender-wise number of Beneficiaries of National Scholarship Scheme for Higher Education: 2021-22**

(Source: MoTA, 2021-22)

iv). *National Fellowship Scheme for Higher Education (NFSHE)*: This is another financial incentive scheme for supporting research in higher education for students wanting to pursue their M.Phil and Ph.D. This scheme was earlier called the Rajiv Gandhi Fellowship Scheme and was later renamed. Based on the marks received in their post-graduation, ST students are annually selected for this fellowship. Girls, Divyang, and those belonging to PVTGs are given priority. The fellowship is awarded to a selected number of students for the length of the chosen course of study. An amount of Rs. 25,000 for M.Phil scholars and Rs.28,000 for Ph.D. scholars enrolled in recognized government institutions are awarded on a monthly basis. The scholars are eligible for HRA and

contingency grants under the scheme. Taking a closer look at the allocation of the fellowship over the last few years it is evident that the government has increased the share substantially from Rs. 40 crores in the FY 2009-10 to Rs. 120 crores in FY 2017-18 and further increased the grant allocation Rs. 150 crore the financial year 2021-22. Figure 2, below represents the distribution and total beneficiaries for this scheme, and it is clearly evident that 50% of the fellowships were received by ST students belonging to humanities and social science as compared to the science subjects. It is further observed that a higher percentage of males (55%) received the fellowship as compare to female (45%) counterparts.



**Figure 2: Stream wise beneficiaries and Amount Allocated NFSHE: 2021-22**

(Source: MoTA, 2021-22.)

v). *National Overseas Scholarship*: This is another scheme for ST students who want to pursue their higher education abroad. The scholarship includes the combined tuition fee, USD 15,400 as an annual maintenance stipend, USD 1532 in contingency charges, and other expenses like visa fee, medical insurance, air travel, and incidental travel expenses are also borne by the government. Scholarship funds are distributed by Indian Missions abroad through the Ministry of External Affairs. 20 students are selected every year based on interviews conducted by an expert committee, of which 3 scholarships are awarded to those ST students belonging to the PVTG. Students can apply to pursue programmes like Post Graduation, Ph.D, or Post-Doctoral studies. From its inception in 2017-18 up to 2021-22, a total of 46 awards amounts to Rs. 4.95 crores were distributed of which 28 (51%) were given to males and 18 (39%) to females. The students who were selected represent 42 universities in

India. Of the total 46 beneficiaries, 28 pursued the doctoral programme, 15 Master's degree, and 3 students post-doctoral programme.

vi). *Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)*: To provide quality education to ST children, the EMRS was launched in the late 1990s. The schools were mainly opened in remote tribal-dominated areas, so as to ensure that tribal students are provided quality education along with extra-curricular activities. This was done with the aim of to enable them to access the best opportunities in education and to bring them at par with the general population and further support their economic opportunities. These schools begin from grades VI up to grade XII and focus on the all-round development of the students. As per December 2021, there were a total number of 664 sanctioned schools, of these 367 schools were functional across 28 states of India. Odisha (97) had the highest number of EMRS schools followed by



Jharkhand (86), Chhattisgarh (73) and Madhya Pradesh (67). A total of 1,13,275 students were enrolled in these residential schools which comprised of 50.5 % female students. The financial allocation for these schools has substantially increased over the years with the government's commitment to enhancing the scheme from time to time. The Ministry allocated a grant of Rs. 1000 crores in the FY 2009-10 which increased to Rs. 1419 cores in the FY 2021-22.

Regarding the number of sanctioned EMRS schools when compared to the number of functional ones, it is observed that there is a very high gap. Close to 45 % of the sanctioned schools were not functional (2021-22), to the extent that many states where no EMRS schools exist even after being sanctioned. The government needs to ensure that these schools are made functional on time so as confirm to the main purpose of opening these schools.

All these initiatives are well-meaning and have benefitted many ST students, but challenges lie in the way these schemes are run. Issues raised in the evaluation scheme (IIPA, 2019) of some scholarships mainly pertain to the lengthy process of application which many children find difficult to fill out online due to language and other technical challenges. Apart from this delay in the disbursement of the grant leads to the actual beneficiaries not receiving the intended

benefits. Overall, the number of scholarships distributed, to the total size of the population is relatively low, therefore number of scholarships across all schemes should be increased, and in some cases, the grant amount given to students should also be increased from time to time.

### **Educational Performance of Scheduled Tribe Students:**

Education is the only tool that can help people improve the social and economic standing of any community and further lead to the advancement of a nation. In light of this government initiated different educational development schemes for the disadvantaged groups like to schedule tribes primarily as a means to improve their social and economic conditions. After having discussed some of these key schemes it becomes pertinent to further look into some outcome indicators like literacy rates and gross enrolment ratios, which directly reflect on the achievements of these initiatives. The narrowing literacy gaps between the tribals and non-tribals only reflect the intended outcomes of these initiatives. The ST literacy rate was 8.53 % in 1961 and in the last census, it was almost 60%. Similarly, the female literacy rates reflect a faster rate of growth and have increased from 3.2% in 1961 to 50% in 2011.

**Table 1: Literacy Rates for total Population and STs**

Year	Total			Female		
	Total	ST	GAP	Total	ST	GAP
1961	28.3	8.53	19.77	15.35	3.16	12.19
1971	34.45	11.3	23.15	21.97	4.85	17.12
1981	43.57	16.35	27.22	29.76	8.04	21.72
1991	52.21	29.6	22.61	39.29	18.19	21.10
2001	64.84	47.1	17.74	53.67	34.76	18.91
2011	73.00	59.00	14.20	64.60	49.40	15.20

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India

The second indicator that reflects the reach of education is the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), which represents the proportion of the population actually enrolled in an educational institute or participating in the education system. The GER for the elementary level represents a higher proportion amongst ST between 2005-06 and 2021-22. This is primarily because the proportion of overage children is higher among the tribal groups. On the country, the secondary level of schooling reflects a changed picture where the GER was 28.7 % for ST in 2005-06 but increased by nearly 3 times to 78.6 % in 2020-21. This reflects

the positive impact of development initiatives like SSA, RMSA, and Samagra Shiksha to name a few. When examining the GER for higher education, the overall participation within the population is low, further being even lower for the STs. What is worth noticing is the remarkable progress that the share of the tribal population has made in their participation in higher education. It has grown by nearly 65% between 2005 and 2020 (see Table 2) as compared to a 53 % growth within the total population. The overall ST GER was at 18.9 percent and 15.9 percent of them were graduates and above.

**Table 2: GER for total Population and STs.**

Year	Elementary Level			Secondary Level			Higher Education		
	Total GER	ST	GAP	Total GER	ST	GAP	Total GER	ST	GAP
		GER			GER			GER	
2005-06	94.19	106.7	-12.51	40.4	28.7	11.7	12.39	7.46	4.93
2010-11	102	118.4	-16.4	62.7	49.4	13.3	19.4	1.2	18.2
2015-16	69.9	104.4	-34.5	72.6	72.2	0.4	24.3	13.7	10.6
2020-21	99.1	102.7	-3.6	79.8	78.6	1.2	27.3	18.9	8.4

Source: UDISE, UDISE Plus and AISHE. Ministry of Education.

**Conclusions:**

Existing policies and initiatives have given due priority to mainstreaming tribals by formalizing and providing necessary support for developing their education, further leading to economic growth. On the other hand, it also has to be noted that interventions of various kinds have been in place for the longest, and we still have not been able to achieve our desired targets. One of the considerations that need to be made is that development needs to consent with the tribals, for its success and self-sustenance. As pointed out by Heredia (1992) the reasons for the failure of tribal education in India are not just economic settings but the internal constraints and the socio-cultural context that has been neglected. This further leads to a mismatch between tribal life and educational institutions. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of these policies and the need to reorient our approach. Perhaps it is also the time to shift our focus towards addressing the root causes of the challenges faced by tribal communities, through research and focused studies and planning development initiatives for the scheduled tribes with the scheduled tribes. This will help us identify underlying issues and further work towards resolving them in a

more planned manner with the hope of truly empowering and uplifting our tribal populations.

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