

# **FACTORS AFFECTING TRIBAL GIRLS' EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS IN UTTARAKHAND**

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**Abstract:** Education is an essential factor for growth and development. Education not only improves prospects of economic development but also promotes self-confidence and helps in acquiring skills to meet challenges in achieving social change. Various studies highlights that through education, women can acquire knowledge, confidence and can bring change in her position. An educated woman is empowered and is pillar of strength for her family. The holistic development of country is possible when its women will be educated. In India, scheduled tribe is one of the disadvantaged sections of the society. The scheduled tribe women are therefore faced with double disadvantage. Development is moving with a very slow pace among scheduled tribes in the country. There is a high dropout rates and low retention of the scheduled tribe children in the schools. The participation of girls in education is still low as compared to boys.

With this background, the present paper attempts to highlight challenges faced by tribal girls when getting formal education and their status in household decision making. The study has been conducted in two tribal villages in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand. Exploratory research approach has been adopted and information has been collected using two major tools of qualitative research such as Interview schedule and Focus Group Discussion. The major findings of the study shows low participation of tribal girls at school level, greater engagement in economic arena with majority of girls working on field, engagement in household chores, high awareness levels but dearth of knowledge and information about women rights and career goals.

**Keywords:** Education, Scheduled Tribes, Women Education, Women Empowerment.

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**Introduction:** Education is an essential factor for national development. It is regarded as a powerful instrument of social, economic, political and cultural changes. The role of education is to impart knowledge, develop skills and to infuse the right type of attitude, values and interest. In over six decades since the attainment of independence, India has made a steady progress in the economic and social development. This has led to a substantial development in the quality and standard of people's life. However, the spread of such improvement has been uneven amongst the people, where women are at the lowest levels of development. The situation is more marginalised among women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes group.

The holistic development of society is not possible without social and economic development of its women. A large and growing literature provides evidence that women's schooling is one of the main ways of acquiring human capital. Women's education has emerged as an important determinant of child mortality, having a stronger impact in many cases than income (Mensch, Lentzner and Preston 1986, Schultz 1993). Many studies also find that women's education has a strong impact on children's health and nutrition (Behrman and Deolalikar 1988, Behrman and Wolfe 1984, Strauss and Thomas 1995). Several researches shows that mothers' education is an important determinant of children's schooling, usually having a stronger impact than fathers' schooling (Schultz 1998, Behrman 1997, Montgomery, Arends-Kuenning and Mete 2000). World Bank policies take a human capital approach to women's education. This approach is essentially instrumentalist, viewing human capital as an input to production. Growth-oriented development economists advocate investments in women's education because it adds to human capital. Human capital is an input into a productive process, and enhancing human capital increases the commodities that a society is able to produce (Todaro 1997).

Apart from human capital, we have another approach which has been propounded by Sen and Nussbaum. Sen and Nussbaum advocate women's education because it enhances women's capabilities. The capabilities approach "focuses on the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have." (Sen 1997, p. 1959). In the capabilities approach, women's education has a value beyond acquisition of human capital. Encouraging women's education is good policy because it enhances women's capabilities. Capabilities imply that women are aware of choices and are free to act upon them and lead us to ask the question, "What is a woman able to do and be?" (Nussbaum 2000; Sen, 1999). The capabilities most directly linked to education are the capabilities to live a long life, to enjoy bodily health, to develop one's senses, imagination and thought, to develop one's practical reason, to enjoy affiliation with others, and to have control over one's environment. Educated women tend to live longer and to enjoy better health than uneducated women. Nussbaum includes basic literacy and numeracy under the capability of senses, imagination and thought. Women obtain increased control over their environments when they have the ability to earn income and increased bargaining power, both of which are enhanced by education.

Under the background of human capital and capability approach, the present study attempt to understand participation of girls in school, extent of education among them, parents perception about education of their girl child and decision making power of girls at household levels. For the study, purposively girls belonging to Bhotia tribal group and their parents have been selected. In Uttarakhand there are total five tribal groups, out of which Bhotias are most developed in terms of literacy and economy but still lag behind non-tribal population. Therefore, attempt is made to assess the educational status of girls belonging to Bhotia tribal group.

**Scheduled Tribes:** Scheduled Tribes in India constitute 8.6% (Census 2011) of the total population and they have been scheduled in constitution. These tribal groups are different from each other in terms of socio-economic and cultural aspects and are spread across the country and reside in different geographical conditions. There are 570 tribal groups spread among many states and UTs.<sup>1</sup> Nine states- Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and west Bengal – together account for more than four-fifths of the total tribal population in India.

Due to geographical isolation, tribes in India have remained aloof from the process of development particularly in the field of Education. Since independence various policies and plans have been adopted for the development of scheduled tribes in India in order to integrate and to bring them into the fold of development. However, as development is moving with a very slow pace among scheduled tribes in the country, there is a high dropout rates and low retention of the scheduled tribe children in the schools. The status of girls is further marginalized among scheduled tribes. A study of schools in Andhra Pradesh found high absenteeism among tribal children who were enrolled. (Sujatha, 1994). Medium of instruction, curriculum and poor facilities are important factors for high absenteeism and dropout of tribal students.

The important factor behind high dropout rate and low retention of scheduled tribe children is that education is still not a priority for tribal communities. The lack of a favourable atmosphere towards education, poor infrastructure at home and economic constraints force their children out of schools at the primary and early secondary stages to support the household financially. Girls get engage with household activities and odd manual works (Sengupta & Ghosh, 2012). Children are crucial workers in the tribal economy which includes agriculture, cattle grazing, labour work on construction sites, collecting firewood.

**Methodology:** The study focuses on the participation of girls in school, extent of education among them, parents' perception regarding education of their girl child and decision making power of girls at household levels. The study is undertaken in two tribal villages - Jauljibi and Nigalpaniin in Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand state. Exploratory research approach has been adopted and information has been collected using two major tools of qualitative research- Interview Scheduled and Focus group discussion. Detailed information has been gathered by using these two tools. The present study is the part of field

survey conducted in the year 2016-17 towards PhDthesis work of researcher. In total two schools from two villages were covered to interview girls. Further, extensive interview was done with parents of tribal girls along with Focus Group Discussion with the tribal parents including father and mother. Further, detailed interview was conducted with teachers to understand the participation of girls in classroom and school. The data analysis was done through coding using Microsoft excel.

**Major Findings:** The constitution of India has various provisions for the educational advancement of Girls. To spread the education among the marginalized sections of the society especially in the case of girls belonging to the tribal groups has been a difficult task in India. According to SSA, two main challenges in education of tribal girls are physical access to schooling at upper primary level and diverse socio-cultural context.

**Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors Affecting Education of Girls:** Responses were collected from girls studying in Government schools. Sample size includes total 80 respondents, 40 respondents from Jauljibi village and 40 respondents from Nigalpani village. All girls belonged to Bhotia tribal group. Interview Schedule was used to collect data from girls studying in grades V, VI, VII and VIII.

Questions were asked to girls about factors affecting their regular attendance in school. In village Jauljibi and Nigalpani, most of the girls were helping their parents in fields and in cattle rearing. They were also found helping in household work like cooking, cleaning, fetching water, collecting wood from forest and sibling care. Another factor for their absenteeism from school was festivals. During festivals, they need to do extra work at household as relatives visit and stays. Therefore, it is difficult for them to attend schools during festivals like Diwali, Rakhi and Holi. Sometimes, they remain absent from school for 15-20 days. Often, they need to visit relatives in nearby village and accompany their parents, which directly make them absent from school. Similar question was asked to teachers regarding children absenteeism which gave us further information. Teachers from Jauljibi and Nigalpani village said that during harvesting time and during festival time, majority of girls remain absent from school. As per teachers, during harvesting season girls work as labourer in the fields and earn extra money. Some girls work on their own fields and give assistance to their parents. During harvesting time, whole family works on fields, and especially girls' remain absent from school, stays at home and take care of fields, household, and siblings.

Further question was asked to teachers about their view on household atmosphere of tribal families. Majority of teachers in village Nigalpani believed that there is lack of congenial atmosphere in tribal household. According to one teacher, tribal parents remain engage in household and economic work and don't give attention to study of their children. As per teachers, they don't take girls education seriously. They think by admitting their children in school they have done their duty. In village Jauljibi, teacher believed that environment of tribal household is not favorable for children who want to study. One teacher mentioned that liquor consumption is rampant in tribal household. Ladies of Bhotia family openly consume liquor. Even in absence of male member of the family, they consume it and don't give attention to their children. Since they openly brew liquor at their home, it is easily available in their houses. They make liquor by using wheat and Barley and always produce surplus. Liquor brewing is source of income for Bhotias.

**Language:** Language is a vehicle of communication and a means of imparting education from one generation to another. Prominent educationists and various reports on education have recommended that the mother tongue of the child be made the medium of instruction. Especially at the primary stage of education, to attract the children and retain them till the completion of the full school course, language is an important factor. In Tribal areas, teachers face a number of problems in teaching tribal children. This includes non-familiarity with local language; non-exposure to tribal culture and languages in training; lack of simple phrase books for teachers in tribal dialects; home language is different from school language etc.

In Uttarakhand, Bhotia have own dialect which doesn't have any script. Bhotias speaks language which they call Rang. To write in their tribal language, they use Devnagiri script. Earlier Bhotias were nomadic tribes and used to migrate to Himalayas seasonally. But, now they have adopted settled trade practice and live at one place. During past decades, Bhotias had come in contact with non-tribal Hindu people. This process has brought Sanskritization among them. Bhotias have started following rituals, beliefs and festivals of Hindus. Bhotias have adopted Hindi as a medium of communications. Bhotias were found comfortable in speaking Hindi along with their tribal language. Medium of instruction in all the sampled schools was Hindi in which tribal children of Bhotias don't face any difficulty in understanding it. Language has thus become a positive factor in facilitating education of tribal girls in Uttarakhand. Unlike many states in central and eastern states, where language is a barrier in education for tribes, in Uttarakhand it has become encouragement for tribes to receive education without any hindrance.

**Incentives:** To promote participation of tribal girls in schools, government has launched various programs and schemes. There are many central and state sponsored schemes for tribal children (both boys and girls) which includes cash incentives, free text-books, uniforms etc. The response of children regarding incentives in both the villages was same. All children admitted that they are getting two sets of uniform, textbooks and cash incentive. Cash incentive varies from class to class. Higher the class greater is the amount. They get cash incentive annually. Majority of tribal girls said that they give money to parents, especially children studying in grade V, VI. But, few students studying in VI, VII said that some amount they give to parents and some they keep with them for personal expense. In village Jauljibi, girls studying in grade VIII said that for attending grade IX in different government school, government is providing bicycles to every tribal girl. The bicycle facility is available only for tribal girls and not for boys.

Teachers during discussion opined that they distribute textbooks and uniform with commencement of every new session. Generally they get stock of books on time, but when some delay occurs, they get textbooks from their home and start the syllabus and don't wait for the textbooks to arrive. On asking about cash incentives, they said that on the time of distribution all tribal parents come to school for collecting money, even those who have not come to school for an entire year comes for money to collect on behalf of children. They further said that, after distribution of scholarship, attendance of children especially girls reduces and parents don't visit school again.

It was observed that cash scholarship and other incentives are facilitating parents to send their girls to schools, especially tribal parents from low economic background. Incentives are encouraging parents, as they need not to worry about school fees, textbooks, and uniform but also getting cash scholarship for their girls.

**Mid-Day Meal:** National Programme of Nutritional support of Primary Education (NPNSPE) popularly known as the Mid-day-meal (MDM) scheme was formally launched on the 15th August 1995. The scheme envisaged every child in primary school to be provided cooked meal during the school hours with a maximum content of 450 calories and 12 gm of protein each day of school. At present, midday meal is provided to all children (I-VIII) studying in government primary and upper primary school.

Girls in both the villages were asked whether they get midday meal regularly or not. All students in both villages admitted of getting midday meal regularly. But, majority of children said that they don't like the taste. When asked reason, they said every day menu remains same and food is mostly tasteless.

To know the view of parents about midday meal, question was asked to them. In village Nigalpani, majority of parents said that rice is available at our house; we don't send our children to schools for meal, but for education. They further said that children often complaint of tasteless food. In village Nigalpani, people have call government school, Rice eating schools. Similarly, parents in village Jauljibi reiterated the same situation. They said that quality of food is poor and vegetables are not properly cooked and prepared. One tribal parent argued in favor of earlier system when dry ration distribution

was practiced. She said, that was better way of giving ration, through which we used to cook that rice and whole family used to eat. But now, food gets wasted as children hardly eat at school.

Teachers are also not happy with this system. Teachers from Jauljibi village said that already there is shortage of staff, but due to this scheme, one teacher has to take full responsibility of getting ration, vegetables, counting number of children present, giving instruction to cook and so on. This process not only hinders education of children but also create problems in taking class.

Thus, Midday meal scheme seems not to facilitate participation of tribal girls in school. But, still it has assured minimum calorie intake for healthier growth of girls. Though, parents seem unsatisfied with the scheme as Bhotia tribals are economically sound as compared to other tribes, for poor economic families, midday meal scheme has proved success.

**Parents View on Functioning of Schools and Teachers:** We find that majority of tribal parents from both villages believe that government schools functions regularly, but regarding teachers attendance they have different view. In Nigalpani village, majority of parents said that teachers are regular in school, and very few of them said they are not regular, whereas in village Jauljibi majority of parents said teachers doesn't come to school regularly. Teacher absenteeism is more in village Jauljibi then in village Nigalpani.

**Parents' Perception about Education of Girls and its Importance:** In provide education, parents play a crucial role. Without their contribution and support child cannot achieve higher goals in life. Scheduled Tribes are considered as disadvantaged people with generally low level of educational aspiration. But, in Uttarakhand, tribes have shown remarkable progress especially Bhotia tribal group.

Bhotia parents were found having awareness about importance of education. Most of the parents from both the villages opine that education is important for all, irrespective of gender. They want to educate their children whether its boy or girl for their better future. One tribal woman said "I couldn't study because my parents were very poor and couldn't bear the expense of education, but I will make sure that my daughter studies. I want her to study and make better future for her". Education is viewed as the way to obtain good, prestigious jobs. A middle-aged woman from Bhotia tribal family expressed this idea colourfully- When people discuss the benefits of education, the most common benefit discussed is the access to jobs and to income. It is also common to speak of self-esteem and prestige. Educated people are admired and looked up to. Uneducated people often describe themselves as being "blind" and knowing nothing. The increase in women's employment has made a strong impact on the two villages, and families perceive that education opens doors to female employment.

Further In the study villages, most tribal parents view women's education as a means to make a good marriage. Parents perceive that the best way to promote their daughters' well-being is through a good marriage, which takes precedence over education. One reason why women's education is valuable in the marriage market is that it is an input into children's schooling. This reason is also one of the main justifications cited by the World Bank for increasing investment in girls' schooling in developing countries-that women's education produces human capital. People in the villages also speak of women's education in terms that are similar to the concept of human capital, because education enhances women's earning power. In important ways, girls' schooling does not enhance their capability to have control over their own environment. Despite the beginning of mass education, girls still have no voice in when or to whom they will be married, which is one of the most important events in their lives. However, some women in the villages who had faced spoke about educating their daughters so that they would be able to "stand on their own two feet". Some respondents in our study also talked about educating their daughters so that they would not have to be completely reliant on their husbands' families for all of their needs. These respondents tended to have experienced problems with their husbands' families and knew the importance of being able to secure income oneself. This might represent the beginning of awareness that women should be prepared to support themselves. Getting an



education in school along with interactions with women who are teaching in the schools exposes girls to the idea that they can have jobs and earn money.

On occupational choice, majority of the tribal parents favoured government jobs for their girls. They said that government jobs are best as they provide security and comfortable life. They further said that since government has given facility of reservation of seats, they want their girls to try for it. Some parents in village Jauljibi also considered private jobs for girls, since it is easy to get and also they pay sufficient, but in village Nigalpani, not a single parent favoured private job. With this information, we realize high aspiration of tribal parents for their girls. Majority of parents want their children to opt for government jobs with some parents favouring private ones.. Indeed, awareness levels of tribal parents have improved considerably and they know that only through education, their children can enter government and private sectors. Thus, the aspiration of parents enables girls to attend schools.

**Aspiration of Girls:** In both the villages, aspiration level of girls was found less and limited. We observe that most of the girls in both the villages just want to study up to class XII. Not a single girl child has aspiration to study in college. This might be because school in both villages is till standard XII and unavailability of higher education institutes and university in village. There is reluctance of parents to send girls outside home for studies. One tribal parent reiterated that it is risky to send girls outside home for studies as they don't have any relatives in nearby town. Therefore, they might enroll their girl in correspondence course once she clears her school. For boys, this is not a problem, as they can manage themselves. Another factor for no aspiration to study in college can be lack of interest in education among girls due to low levels of facilities in school. Secondly, low motivation from teachers can be another factor for low level of aspiration among tribal girls.

Altogether awareness levels of Bhotia tribal Parents were found high. They were aware of various incentives available for tribal children. Parents admitted that their children are getting incentives from school in cash and kind. Bhotias are aware of reservation facilities available in schools and competitive exams. However, not a single tribal parent has heard about RTE (Right to Education) act. But, they knew the importance of education and believed it as an important element. Following are the incentives, which tribal girls and boys are getting from schools:

- Free textbooks: Parents from both the villages told that their children are getting free textbooks from school. Children get textbooks in starting of every academic session.
- Free uniforms: All tribal children (boys and girls) are getting uniforms. They get 2 pairs of school uniform every academic session
- Scholarship: All tribal children studying in government schools are getting scholarship. Amount of scholarship differs for different grades. Students get scholarship on yearly basis. Parents said that scholarship amount is not sufficient for fulfilling schooling requirements. Students studying in primary school give scholarship money to their parents, whereas students studying in upper-primary classes utilize this amount by their own. Few parents said that girls instead of spending scholarship prefer to save it for future requirements.
- School bag etc.: Parents while discussion told that students are not getting school bags from school. They buy bags from markets. Bhotia parents argued that bags should also be provided as it is an important thing which children require daily to attend school.
- Cycles (for students of Secondary school): Tribal students of upper primary classes are not getting cycles. However, girls after passing out upper primary classes gets cycle from school to attend further classes. Boy's students don't get this facility and they reach schools by their own. Bhotia parents want that boys too should get this facility, as high school is bit far from habitation and children cannot go by foot.

**Women's Education and Traditional Social Structures:** Tribal Parents revealed that earlier tribal girls were educationally backward, but situation has changed now. Initially Bhotias were not aware of benefits of education; they were solely confined to their trade and other agriculture work. At present through awareness and knowledge, they have realized the importance of education as it leads to better job opportunity and income; they want to provide quality education to their children. Bhotia parents

admit that now majority of tribals have accepted the role of education in economic development. But, they showed dissatisfaction with regard to educational facilities. As per one Bhotia parent, educational facility is not satisfactory in the village. Government schools are not providing quality education and private schools is available only for primary classes. Those who can afford are sending their children outside the village for better education, but those who are not economically sound are left with no option but to send their children to local schools. However, their dissatisfaction and inclination for private education is only for boys. Majority of tribal parents prefer to send their girls to government schools as its absolutely free, and those who can afford the higher fee, send their boys to private schools. This clearly indicate that despite of awareness and knowledge, preferential treatment to boys exist in this tribal community, where they do not want to incur any cost on education of girls.

**Conclusion:** Education is essential for the human society to enable it to take up their due place in the social, economic and cultural life of modern India and at the same time to maintain their own culture. Various studies highlights that women's education is major way to acquire human capital. If woman in the family is educated, children tend to become healthier and more educated. Women's education has greater impact on children than the education of father. Holistic development of country is not possible without the development of its women. India is a pluralist country where various groups maintain their unique cultural identities, and their values and practices. Some groups like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes have been marginalized in socio-economic spheres. Women belonging to these groups tend to remain backward with less opportunities being available to them owing to various factors like poverty, lack of awareness, and social stigmas. However, various government policies like RTE, SSA, OBB for ensuring minimum levels of education, there has been considerable development in the educational attainment of girls. There has been remarkable improvement in the enrolment of girls at primary and upper primary schools and transition rate has also been increased with low dropout rates. The present study looks into the status of girls in the Bhotia tribal community. Bhotia is most developed tribal group in Uttarakhand in terms of overall literacy rate and female literacy rate (census, 2001). On economic domain Bhotias are doing well. Bhotias are mainly engaged in trade with local people and with cross-border Nepal. Along with trade, they are also engaged in liquor making, which government has declared legal being a part of their culture. The settled economy of Bhotias has facilitated the educational attainment in them. The awareness level among Bhotias was found high. Most of the people in Bhotia community are now aware of importance of education and want to educate their children. They are sending their girls to school and favoring education for them. However, the effort cannot be said to be satisfactory as factors like household work, sibling care, labor work in fields affect the education of girls. Girls are not much encouraged to study beyond upper primary school. If economic condition allows, boys are preferred to send for private schooling but girls are always send to government schools. Further, marriage is considered above the education of girls and education is playing a favorable symbol in marriage market. But, gradual awareness on the part of girls is emerging. They also want to study and take up jobs like their teachers. There is long way to achieve women empowerment in true sense, but the process of educating girls has started in this tribal community which is a major shift from earlier times when girls never used to attend the school. The condition of girls has improved in Bhotia tribes as they are economically sound and earn sustainable income. This is not the case with many other tribal groups. Many tribal groups still don't give priority to girls' education; instead they utilize their labor in fields and household chores. Private partners along with government need to create awareness about importance of girls' education. Unless all communities and parents send their girls to school, holistic development of society is not possible. Women empowerment and decision making power of women seems distant thing, where girls face problem even in attending primary school.

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