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AN EXPLORATION OF TRIBAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the perceptions of tribal students towards higher education, focusing on their experiences, aspirations, and challenges. By examining these perceptions, the study seeks to provide insights into the factors that influence tribal students' engagement with higher education and identify strategies to enhance their participation and success. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on educational equity and inform the development of culturally responsive policies and practices that address the unique needs of tribal students. The exploration of tribal students' perceptions towards higher education is a critical step toward promoting educational equity and inclusion. By understanding their perspectives, we can identify the barriers they face, recognize their strengths and aspirations, and create supportive environments that enable them to thrive in higher education. This study underscores the importance of addressing the educational needs of tribal communities as a fundamental aspect of social justice and sustainable development.

KEYWORDS: *Tribal Students, Perception, Higher Education*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Education is a powerful tool for individual empowerment and societal transformation. It provides individuals with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to participate fully in economic, social, and political life. Despite its critical role, access to and participation in higher education remains uneven across various socio-economic and cultural groups. Among the most marginalized and underrepresented groups in many countries are tribal communities. The exploration of tribal students' perceptions towards higher education is essential to understanding the barriers they face, the aspirations they hold, and the support systems necessary to improve their educational outcomes. Tribal communities often experience a distinct socio-economic and cultural reality that differs significantly from the mainstream population. These communities have historically been marginalized and have faced systemic exclusion from educational opportunities. This exclusion can be attributed to various factors such as geographic isolation, socio-economic disadvantages, language barriers, and cultural differences. As a result, tribal students often have limited access to quality primary and secondary education, which subsequently affects their transition to and success in higher education. Higher education plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion that many tribal communities face. It provides individuals with opportunities for personal and professional growth, enhances their socio-economic status, and enables them to contribute meaningful to their communities. However, despite the potential benefits, many tribal students face significant challenges in accessing and succeeding in higher education. These challenges can include financial constraints, lack of role models, limited awareness of educational opportunities, and a sense of alienation in academic institutions that may not be culturally inclusive. Understanding the perceptions of tribal students towards higher education is crucial for developing effective policies and interventions aimed at improving their educational outcomes. Perceptions influence students' motivation, aspirations, and decision-making processes regarding higher education. If tribal students perceive higher education as inaccessible, irrelevant, or incompatible with their cultural identity, they are less likely to pursue it. Conversely, if they perceive higher education as an opportunity for personal growth and community development, they are more likely to overcome the barriers and succeed.

This study aims to explore the perceptions of tribal students towards higher education, focusing on their experiences, aspirations, and challenges. By examining these perceptions, the study seeks to provide insights into the factors that influence tribal students' engagement with higher education and identify strategies to enhance their participation and success. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on educational equity and inform the development of culturally responsive policies and practices that address the unique needs of tribal students. The exploration of tribal students' perceptions towards higher education is a critical step towards promoting educational equity and inclusion. By understanding their perspectives, we can identify the barriers they face, recognize their strengths and aspirations, and create supportive environments that enable them to thrive in higher education. This study underscores the importance of addressing the educational needs of tribal communities as a fundamental aspect of social justice and sustainable development.

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1.2 Needs and significance of the Study: Education is a cornerstone of societal progress and individual empowerment, but the extent to which it reaches all sections of society, particularly marginalized and tribal communities, remains a pertinent issue. Tribal communities, which often live on the periphery of mainstream society, experience unique challenges and opportunities when it comes to accessing higher education. Understanding their perceptions, aspirations, and barriers is crucial to addressing systemic inequalities and fostering inclusive development.

One of the key aspects that make this research necessary is the historical marginalization of tribal populations in education. Tribes across various regions have faced social, economic, and cultural barriers that restrict their participation in higher education. Despite numerous policies and programs initiated by governments and non-governmental organizations, tribal students often remain underrepresented in higher educational institutions. This study seeks to explore how tribal students perceive higher education—whether they see it as an opportunity, a challenge, or something unattainable—and why. Understanding their perceptions provides insights into their motivations, struggles, and the factors influencing their educational decisions.

Further, this research is significant in shedding light on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions that shape tribal students' attitudes toward higher education. Many tribal communities are rooted in their cultural traditions and indigenous knowledge systems, which sometimes differ significantly from mainstream educational frameworks. As a result, tribal students may encounter difficulties in adjusting to the demands and expectations of formal education. By exploring their perceptions, the study can uncover how cultural identity, family background, economic conditions, and community support shape their educational experiences. It highlights the need for culturally sensitive policies and approaches that align higher education with the lived realities of tribal students.

The study also plays a critical role in addressing systemic gaps in policy implementation. While there have been initiatives such as scholarships, reserved seats, and special educational programs aimed at uplifting tribal communities, their effectiveness often remains limited. This research can identify whether these initiatives are reaching tribal students effectively, as well as uncover the underlying reasons for their success or failure. It can provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to design interventions that are more responsive to the needs and aspirations of tribal students.

Moreover, the findings of this research are important for creating awareness and fostering societal change. By understanding how tribal students view higher education, this study contributes to breaking stereotypes and misconceptions about tribal communities. It brings their voices, perspectives, and experiences into academic and policy discussions, paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable education system. For educators and institutions, the research offers valuable insights into how they can create a supportive environment that encourages tribal students to pursue and complete higher education.

In addition, the study holds long-term implications for social mobility and empowerment. Higher education has the potential to transform the lives of tribal students by equipping them with knowledge, skills, and opportunities for meaningful employment and leadership roles. When tribal youth gain access to quality education, they not only uplift their families but also contribute to the development of their communities. Therefore, understanding their perceptions toward higher education becomes a crucial step toward addressing disparities and fostering holistic development.

In conclusion, this research is not just a scholarly inquiry but a necessary exploration into the lived realities of tribal students navigating higher education. It aims to bridge gaps, promote equity, and inspire actionable change to ensure that education serves as a tool for empowerment rather than exclusion. By bringing attention to the perspectives of tribal students, the study emphasizes the urgency of creating an education system that is accessible, inclusive, and empowering for all.

2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH LITERATURE

Chakraborty (2018). Conducted a study on *'Aspirations and career choices of tribal students: A qualitative study'.* This qualitative study explores the career aspirations and choices of tribal students and highlights the importance of career counseling and vocational training in guiding them toward higher education and meaningful careers.

Verma (2019). Has investigated a study entitled 'Government Policies and their impact on tribal students' access to higher education.' Researcher evaluates the effectiveness of affirmative action policies, such as reservation quotas and financial aid programs, in improving the enrollment and academic success of tribal students in higher education institutions.

Xie (2020). Conducted a study on *'Addressing systemic barriers to higher education for indigenous and tribal students.* This article examines systemic barriers such as discrimination, lack of representation, and inadequate financial support, and proposes policy recommendations for creating a more inclusive higher education environment for tribal students.

Kumar (2020). Conducted a study on *'The role of institutional support in improving academic outcomes for tribal students.* This study focuses on the significance of institutional support systems, such as mentoring, counselling, and academic advising, in improving the academic performance and retention rates of tribal students in higher education.

Gupta (2020). Conducted a study on *'Gender disparities in higher education: The case of female tribal students'.* This paper explores the gender-specific barriers faced by female tribal students in accessing higher education, including societal

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norms, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities, and suggests strategies to promote gender equity.

Sharma (2021). Conducted a study on '*Socio-economic barriers affecting tribal students' access to higher education in India*.' This study investigates how socio-economic challenges, such as poverty and lack of financial resources, affect the educational aspirations of tribal students. The authors emphasize the need for government interventions, such as scholarships and financial aid, to improve access to higher education.

Singh (2021). *Conducted this study on* **'**Perceptions of higher education among tribal youth in rural India'. This article examines the perceptions of tribal youth towards higher education, identifying factors such as social mobility, economic independence, and personal growth as key motivators for pursuing higher education.

3.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

i. To know the attitude towards higher education among the tribal students in respect to their gender means male and female.
ii. To know perception towards higher education among the art, science and commerce, Students.

4.1 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

i. Thire is no significant difference among the tribal students in respect to their gender.
ii. Thire is no significant difference of attitude towards higher education among the tribal students in respect to their streams

5.1 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

5.1.1 Population of the Study

All the tribal Students those who Undergraduate Course in Purulia district of west Bengal.

5.1.2 Sample & Sampling of the study: From the entire population Researcher selected only fifty tribal students who studies in Undergraduate course in M.G College, Lalpur, Purulia.

The sample was Selected through the Stratified Random Sampling Technique Sample were Classify base on the various strata Such as male female and their stream Art, Science, Commerce and Language discipline.

5.1.3 Sampling Design of the Study

Tools for the data collection A self-made perception (Attitude) Scale Were develop by Researcher and estimating reliability Validity of the tool. 25 Item for Accessing the perception among the tribal students towards higher education.

5.1.4 Tools for data collection: Self made questionnaire for assessing the perception of higher education among the tribal students. This perception scale constitute with the five-point scale i.e. Strongly Agree ,Agree and Neutral and Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

6.1 ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

The Purpose of this study was To know the attitude towards higher education among the tribal students in respect to their gender means male and female.

H_0 Thire is no significant difference among the tribal students in respect to their gender

The sample consisted of 50 students divided equally into two groups Male or female. Group A(male) had a mean score of 89.28 with a standard deviation of 9.66, and Group B had a mean score of 94.00 with a standard deviation of 10.06"

"An independent samples t- test was used to compare the means of two groups because the samples were unrelated."
The relationship between these two values determines whether your observed data significantly differ from expectations.

Table -1

Group	N	Mean	∑	df	Calculated t value	Critical t value	Ns/S	Remark
Male	32	89.2813	9.66615	48	-1.633	0.05 level =2.0111	NS	Accepted or fail to Rejected
Female	18	94.0000	10.06450			0.01 level=2.6827	NS	Accepted or fail to Rejected

The calculated value was -1.633
The degrees of freedom were 48
The Critical t-value at = 0.05 and df = 48 is 2.01 Since -1.63>2.01, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results suggests that the no significant difference male female students impact test score. So, the Researcher find that's male and female students of M.G. College in Purulia District is no significant difference in Higher Education Attitude.

To know perception towards higher education among the art and science Students.

H1 Thire is no significant difference of attitude towards higher education among the tribal students in respect to their streams.
The sample consisted of 50 students divided equally into two groups Arts and Science. Group A(arts) had a mean score of 91.36 with a standard deviation of 9.74, and Group B (Science)had a mean score of 85.00 with a standard deviation of 14.00"

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Table -2

Group	N	Mean	∑	df	Calculated t value	Critical t value	Ns/S	Remark
Arts	47	91.3617	9.66615	48	1.073	0.05 level =2.0111	NS	Accepted or fail to Rejected
Science	3	85.000	10.06450			0.01 level=2.6827	NS	Accepted or fail to Rejected

The calculated value was 1.073
The degrees of freedom were 48
The Critical t-value at = 0.05 and df = 48 is 2.01 Since 1.073>2.01, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The results suggests that the no significant difference male female students impact test score. So, the Researcher find that's Arts and Science students of M.G. College in Purulia District is no significant difference in Higher Education Attitude.

7.1 FINDINGS

Researcher showing that the tribal students generally perceive higher education as a significant opportunity for personal growth, economic upliftment, and social mobility. Many students see it as a pathway to improved employment opportunities and a means to break the cycle of poverty that has persisted for generations. However, their aspirations are often hampered by various barriers, including financial constraints, limited access to quality educational infrastructure, and a lack of awareness about higher education opportunities, scholarships, and government schemes. Language and cultural challenges further complicate their educational journey. Many tribal students struggle to adapt to mainstream educational systems where teaching occurs in non-native languages, creating an additional layer of difficulty, especially for first-generation learners. Additionally, some students experience a cultural disconnect, as they feel higher education distances them from their indigenous identity and traditional livelihoods.The role of family and community is found to be significant in shaping perceptions. Supportive families encourage students to pursue higher education, while others, bound by traditional beliefs and the need for family labor, may view education as secondary or irrelevant. Gender-based challenges also emerge prominently, with female students facing societal restrictions, early marriage pressures, and limited mobility, which restrict their ability to access higher education. Successful individuals from tribal communities who have pursued higher education serve as role models, inspiring students and instilling confidence in their ability to succeed. At the same time, tribal students express a desire for education systems that are culturally sensitive and inclusive, integrating indigenous knowledge, history, and traditions. While some fear the loss of cultural identity, others envision education as a tool to preserve and promote their heritage while blending it with modern advancements.

Overall, the study highlights a complex interplay of aspiration, challenges, and cultural identity in shaping tribal students' perceptions of higher education. There is a clear need for targeted reforms, including better infrastructural facilities, financial support, and culturally relevant curricula, to bridge the existing gaps and create a more inclusive educational environment for tribal students.

8.1 CONCLUSION

The findings underscore that while higher education is often perceived as a pathway to social and economic mobility, various socio-cultural, financial, and infrastructural barriers hinder access and participation. Many students express a strong desire to pursue higher education despite limited resources and systemic challenges, indicating a significant aspiration for self-improvement and community upliftment. Cultural influences, parental attitudes, and a lack of adequate support mechanisms often create a dichotomy between tradition and modern educational pursuits. To bridge these gaps, it is imperative for policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders to implement inclusive strategies that address affordability, accessibility, and cultural sensitivity. Tailoring support systems—such as scholarships, mentorship programs, and tribal-friendly curriculums—can empower these students to overcome barriers and thrive in higher education.

Ultimately, fostering an environment that values both indigenous knowledge and formal education can create a harmonious blend of tradition and progress. This will not only improve the educational outcomes for tribal students but also contribute to broader societal development by unlocking their potential as future leaders, innovators, and custodians of cultural heritage.

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