

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 9 | Issue 3

2026

© 2026 International Journal of Law Management & Humanities

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlmh.com/>

Under the aegis of VidhiAagaz – Inking Your Brain (<https://www.vidhiaagaz.com/>)

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities at VidhiAagaz. It has been accepted for inclusion in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities after due review.

In case of any suggestions or complaints, kindly contact support@vidhiaagaz.com.

To submit your Manuscript for Publication in the International Journal of Law Management & Humanities, kindly email your Manuscript to submission@ijlmh.com.

From School to University: Challenges of Higher Education Enrolment in the Tribal Region of Bastar

DR. RASHMI DEWANGAN*

ABSTRACT

Higher education is a key instrument of social transformation, employment generation, and human development, yet access remains unevenly distributed across social groups in India. Tribal communities, particularly those in remote regions, continue to be underrepresented in higher education institutions. This paper examines the factors responsible for low higher education enrolment among tribal students in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh and analyses the structural inequalities affecting tribal learners. Drawing on All India Survey on Higher Education data, Census of India figures, and published studies, the paper shows that the Gross Enrolment Ratio of Scheduled Tribe students, though improving, remains well below the national average, and that the transition from school education to university education is especially weak in tribal-dominated districts such as Bastar. Poverty, first-generation-learner disadvantage, gender inequality, geographical remoteness, an inadequate number of institutions, the digital divide, and language and cultural barriers emerge as the principal constraints. The paper argues that while government interventions have widened access to some extent, sustainable progress requires long-term investment in infrastructure, inclusive educational planning, and community-centred approaches, and it offers a set of recommendations toward that end.

Keywords: Tribal education, Bastar, higher education enrolment, Scheduled Tribes, educational inequality, Gross Enrolment Ratio.

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is widely recognised as an important instrument for social transformation, employment generation, and human development. Access to universities and colleges improves economic opportunities and strengthens social inclusion. In India, the expansion of higher education has increased overall enrolment over the past decade; however, regional and social disparities persist (All India Survey on Higher Education [AISHE], 2023). Tribal communities,

* Author is an Assistant Professor of Management at Shaheed Mahendra Karma University, Bastar, Chhattisgarh, India.

especially those living in remote regions, remain underrepresented in higher education institutions.

The Bastar region of Chhattisgarh is one of the most tribal-dominated areas in India. Although school-level enrolment has improved because of government educational schemes, the transition from secondary schooling to university education remains considerably low. According to AISHE data, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribe students in higher education remains significantly below the national average (AISHE, 2023). Studies indicate that tribal students face multiple barriers, including poverty, poor infrastructure, linguistic disadvantages, geographical isolation, and digital inequality (Nayak & Alam, 2022).

The objective of this paper is to examine the major factors responsible for low higher education enrolment in Bastar and to analyse the structural inequalities affecting tribal learners.

II. EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF THE BASTAR REGION

Bastar is characterised by dense forests, scattered settlements, and a predominantly tribal population. Scheduled Tribes constitute nearly two-thirds of the district population (Census of India, 2011). Major tribal communities include the Gond, Maria, Muria, Halba, and Bhatra.

According to Census data, literacy rates in Bastar remain lower than both state and national averages: the overall literacy rate is approximately 54 per cent, the male literacy rate approximately 65 per cent, and the female literacy rate approximately 44 per cent (Census of India, 2011). Low literacy levels directly influence higher education participation, because many students discontinue education during secondary schooling. Educational disadvantages are particularly severe among girls and students from economically weaker tribal households.

The educational conditions in Bastar are affected by geographical remoteness, poor transportation facilities, a shortage of higher educational institutions, economic insecurity, and low educational awareness.

III. STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLMENT

India has witnessed significant growth in higher education enrolment in recent years. According to AISHE (2023), the overall Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education increased steadily across the country. However, Scheduled Tribe participation remains comparatively low. AISHE reports indicate that the GER for Scheduled Tribe students in higher education was substantially lower than the national GER throughout the past decade (AISHE, 2023).

Table 1 sets out the Gross Enrolment Ratio in higher education for national and Scheduled Tribe students, compiled from AISHE reports (2017–18 to 2021–22), Ministry of Education, Government of India.

The table shows that the Gross Enrolment Ratio of Scheduled Tribe students in higher education increased steadily from 13.5 per cent in 2014–15 to 21.2 per cent in 2021–22. During the same period, the national GER increased from 23.7 per cent to 28.4 per cent. Although the educational participation of Scheduled Tribe students improved significantly over the decade, a substantial gap between tribal students and the national average persisted. The data further indicate that this gap gradually declined from above ten percentage points in 2014–15 to about seven percentage points in 2021–22, suggesting moderate progress in educational inclusion.

Academic Year	National GER (%)	ST GER (%)	Gap Between National and ST GER
2014–15	23.7	13.5	10.2
2015–16	24.5	14.2	10.3
2016–17	25.2	14.8	10.4
2017–18	25.8	15.3	10.5
2018–19	26.3	16.4	9.9
2019–20	27.1	17.0	10.1
2020–21	27.3	18.9	8.4
2021–22	28.4	21.2	7.2

However, Chhattisgarh remains among the states with relatively low tribal GER levels in higher education (Barman, 2024). Further, tribal-dominated and geographically remote regions such as Bastar continue to face barriers, including poverty, limited institutional access, weak secondary school completion rates, and socio-cultural constraints that restrict higher education participation.

Table 2 presents the estimated transition from school education to higher education among tribal students, compiled and estimated from AISHE (2023), Census of India (2011), and published studies on tribal education in central India.

Category	Estimated Percentage (%)
Students enrolled in secondary school	100
Students completing higher secondary education	58
Students applying for higher education	28
Students entering colleges/universities	18
Female tribal students entering higher education	12

The table demonstrates that a large proportion of tribal students discontinue education between secondary schooling and university enrolment. Female participation remains particularly low because of socio-cultural barriers, financial constraints, safety concerns, and limited access to nearby colleges and hostels.

IV. SOCIO-ECONOMIC BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

The major socio-economic barriers to higher education enrolment, particularly in the context of the Bastar region, are set out below.

A. Poverty and financial constraints

Poverty remains one of the major barriers to higher education participation in Bastar. Many tribal families depend on agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and daily-wage labour. Students often discontinue education because of an inability to afford college fees, transportation costs, hostel expenses, and educational materials. Although scholarship schemes exist for Scheduled Tribe students, a lack of awareness and administrative difficulties reduce their effectiveness.

B. First-generation learner challenges

A significant number of tribal students in Bastar are first-generation learners. Parents with limited educational backgrounds often cannot provide academic guidance or educational support. Consequently, many students experience low academic confidence, weak career awareness, and poor preparation for higher education entrance requirements.

C. Gender inequality

Gender disparity is another major challenge. Female students face problems of early marriage, household responsibilities, safety concerns, and mobility restrictions. Low female literacy directly affects university participation rates among tribal women. Studies indicate that economic hardship, early marriage, and the absence of local role models increase the likelihood that tribal girls discontinue schooling before completing their education, which in turn depresses their transition to higher education (Nayak & Kumar, 2022).

V. GEOGRAPHICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Certain geographical and institutional difficulties also affect higher education enrolment, as discussed below.

A. Remoteness and transportation problems

Many villages in Bastar are geographically isolated and lack proper road connectivity. Colleges and universities are concentrated in urban centres such as Jagdalpur, making access difficult for

rural students. Long travel distances and transportation expenses discourage students from pursuing higher education.

B. Limited availability of higher educational institutions

The number of higher educational institutions in tribal regions remains inadequate. Although institutions such as Shaheed Mahendra Karma Vishwavidyalaya have expanded educational opportunities, institutional access remains uneven in remote tribal areas. Many students lack access to libraries, laboratories, coaching facilities, and career counselling services.

C. Digital divide

Digital inequality became highly visible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tribal students in Bastar experienced difficulties in participating in online education because of poor internet connectivity, a lack of smartphones, irregular electricity supply, and low digital literacy. Evidence from developing countries indicates that unequal digital access deepens educational exclusion among marginalised communities during periods of remote learning (World Bank, 2021), and studies of tribal youth in central and eastern India during the pandemic confirm that infrastructural and socio-cultural constraints reinforced this exclusion, especially for tribal girls (Nayak & Alam, 2022). Digital barriers also affect online admission processes, scholarship applications, digital learning, and access to educational information.

VI. LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

Most tribal students in Bastar grow up speaking local languages such as Gondi and Halbi. However, higher education institutions primarily use Hindi and English as mediums of instruction. This linguistic transition creates learning difficulties for students entering colleges and universities. Many students struggle with academic writing, comprehension, communication skills, and classroom participation. The absence of culturally contextualised curricula further increases feelings of alienation among tribal students.

VII. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTIONS

The Government of India has introduced several initiatives to improve tribal participation in higher education, including post-matric scholarships, tribal hostels, reservation policies, and financial assistance schemes. The Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Tribe students, administered by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, provides fee reimbursement and maintenance allowances to support ST students pursuing education beyond the secondary level (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.). The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises equitable access to higher education for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Ministry of

Education, 2020). The policy advocates multilingual education, digital learning, institutional expansion, and inclusive educational frameworks.

Programmes such as the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and tribal welfare educational schemes have attempted to strengthen higher education infrastructure in backward regions. However, implementation challenges remain significant in Bastar because of infrastructural and administrative limitations.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following measures may improve higher education participation in Bastar: expanding colleges and universities in remote tribal areas; improving transportation and hostel facilities; strengthening digital infrastructure and internet access; providing career counselling and mentorship programmes for first-generation learners; increasing scholarship awareness among tribal communities; promoting multilingual and culturally inclusive education; recruiting qualified teachers in tribal institutions; developing gender-sensitive educational support programmes; offering digital literacy training for rural students; and encouraging community engagement in higher education awareness campaigns.

IX. CONCLUSION

Higher education enrolment in Bastar remains affected by deep-rooted socio-economic, geographical, institutional, and cultural inequalities. Although school enrolment has improved over time, the transition from school education to university-level education remains critically low among tribal students. Poverty, remoteness, gender inequality, digital exclusion, and language barriers continue to limit educational mobility in the region. While government policies have improved educational access to some extent, sustainable progress requires long-term investment in infrastructure, inclusive educational planning, and community-centred approaches. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for educational development but also for social justice and inclusive growth in tribal regions.

X. REFERENCES

- All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). (2023). *All India Survey on Higher Education 2021–22*. Ministry of Education, Government of India.
- Barman, S. (2024). Trends in Scheduled Tribe gross enrolment ratio in higher education in India. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 13(5), 90–95.
- Census of India. (2011). *District census handbook: Bastar district, Chhattisgarh*. Government of India.

Ministry of Education. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs. (n.d.). *Post-matric scholarship for Scheduled Tribe students*.

Government of India. Retrieved July 2, 2026, from <https://tribal.nic.in/ScholarshiP.aspx>

Nayak, K. V., & Alam, S. (2022). The digital divide, gender and education: Challenges for tribal youth in rural Jharkhand during Covid-19. *Decision*, 49(2), 223–237.

Nayak, K. V., & Kumar, R. (2022). In pursuit of education: Why some tribal girls continue and others dropout of schools in rural India? *Journal of Human Values*, 28(2), 129–142.

Open Government Data Platform India. (2023). *Category-wise AISHE gross enrolment ratio data*. Government of India.

Shaheed Mahendra Karma Vishwavidyalaya. (2025). *AISHE cell and higher education statistics*.

World Bank. (2021). *Remote learning during COVID-19: Lessons from developing countries*. World Bank Publications.
