

Unveiling Challenges: A Systematic Examination Of Problems Faced By Tribal Girl Students In Higher Education, Mayurbhanj District

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Abstract

This study investigates the multifaceted challenges confronting tribal girl students pursuing higher education in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha. Through a systematic examination, the research uncovers the myriad obstacles hindering their educational endeavours. Drawing upon a quantitative analyses, based on a survey among 400 tribal girl students, the study identifies financial constraints, unsupportive familial environments, language barriers, academic pressures, resource inadequacies, cultural hindrances, limited career opportunities, and lack of supportive policies as significant challenges faced by these students. By shedding light on these issues, the study aims to inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders about the pressing need for support measures and strategic mechanisms to empower tribal girl students in accessing and thriving in higher education.

Key Words: Tribal Girl, Higher Education, Empowering Students, Descriptive Survey

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I. Introduction

Mayurbhanj district, located in the eastern region of Odisha state, stands as one among the 30 districts within the state. It holds the distinction of being the largest district in Odisha in terms of geographical area. The administrative hub of the district is situated in Baripada, complemented by other notable towns like Rairangpur, Karanjia, and Bahalda. As per the 2011 census, Mayurbhanj ranks third in population among Odisha districts, following Ganjam and Cuttack. The district boasts a total population of 2,519,738 individuals, with 1,256,213 males and 1,263,525 females. Mayurbhanj exhibits a population density of 241 persons per square kilometre, experiencing a growth rate of 13.06% between 2001 and 2011. The district has a relatively higher sex ratio of 1006 females for every 1000 males, along with a literacy rate of 63.98%, slightly below the Indian average. Urban dwellers account for 7.66% of the total population, numbering 192,896 individuals, comprising 98,637 males and 94,259 females. The majority of the population, however, resides in rural villages, encompassing 92.34% of the total populace, with 2,326,842 individuals. Within these rural areas, there are 1,157,576 males and 1,169,266 females. The demographic makeup includes 7.33% Scheduled Castes and 58.72% Scheduled Tribes. The Sadar and Kaptipada subdivisions, characterized by extensive rice cultivation and proximity to the fertile coastal plains, host a significant portion of the population. A notable segment of the populace in Bamanghat is engaged in agriculture and industrial activities.

The Odia people constitute the majority of the population in the district, particularly prevalent in the Kaptipada subdivision and surrounding blocks of Sadar. Scheduled Castes among the Odia population account for 7.32%, distributed across various communities without any single community dominating. The largest demographic group in the district is the tribal population, comprising 58.72% of the total populace. Among them, the Santal people form the largest tribe, with many of them immigrating from what is now Singhbhum during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Santals, known for their practice of shifting cultivation, constantly sought forested and uncultivated land to accommodate their expanding population. Over time, the Santals who settled in Mayurbhanj gradually improved their proficiency in Odia while retaining Santali as their primary language for internal communication.

The Ho people constitute the second-largest tribal group, followed by the Bhumij tribe as the third largest group. Each of these tribes speaks a language belonging to the Munda language family, distinguishing

them from the nearby Indo-Aryan languages such as Odia and Hindi. However, the Bhumij tribe has largely transitioned to speaking Odia, although 40% of them still retain their native language. Additionally, other tribes in the region, such as the Sounti, Kharia, Bathudia, Bhumia, and Gonds, also speak the Odia language. The status of tribal population in Mayurbhanj district after Independence based on census data is depicted in table 1.

Table 1
Total Population and ST Population in Mayurbhanj District

Year	Total Population	ST Population	Percentage of ST Population
1951	1,028,825	504679	49.10%
1961	1,204,043	729764	60.61%
1971	1,434,200	839853	58.56%
1981	1,581,873	912320	57.67%
1991	1,884,580	1090626	57.87%
2001	2,223,456	1258459	56.59%
2011	2,519,738	1479576	58.72%

Source: Census data, 1961 to 2011

The educational progress of Mayurbhanj district, predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribes facing various socio-economic challenges, lags notably behind other regions. According to the 2011 Census, Odisha state reports a literacy rate of 72.9%. In rural areas, this figure stands at 70.2%, contrasting with 85.7% in urban locales. While rural women exhibit a literacy rate of 60.7%, their male counterparts demonstrate a higher rate of 79.6%. Conversely, in metropolitan areas, male literacy reaches 90.7%, while female literacy stands at 80.4%. In Mayurbhanj district, the average literacy rate is recorded at 63.17%, with males at 63.22% and females notably lower at 45.53% (Census India, n.d.). Out of the total literate population of 1,220,428 individuals, 713,913 are male and 506,515 are female. These rates fall significantly below the national averages of 74.04% for total literacy, 82.14% for male literacy, and 65.46% for female literacy. Thus, it's evident that Mayurbhanj district trails in educational development compared to both national standards and the average educational achievements of Odisha state. The multifaceted underdevelopment of the district can be attributed to its large rural population, with a majority belonging to Scheduled Tribes. Rural inhabitants encounter numerous obstacles to education, stemming from economic, socio-cultural, and health-related challenges.

Educational Standards within Tribal Communities

Raising the standard of education is a challenge as many tribal communities like the Hill Kharia still continue their traditional way of life relying on forest produce for their sustenance (Tudu & Mohapatra, 2021). The existing educational framework often clashes with tribal cultural norms, leading to a significant dropout rate among students unable to reconcile the two. Despite a positive inclination towards educating tribal youths, many teachers encounter obstacles stemming from inadequate training, a scarcity of resources in tribal languages, and a dearth of appropriate textbooks. Concerns also arise regarding the social dynamics within schools, particularly interactions between tribal and non-tribal students. Both parents and students express a desire for increased governmental support, including the establishment of residential schools and the deployment of tribal teachers in local educational institutions (Behera, 2015).

Tudu (2018) highlights several challenges facing tribal education in Mayurbhanj district. Language barriers hinder comprehension, as tribal children struggle with languages other than their dialects. Geographic constraints pose difficulties in school attendance due to remote village locations and physical barriers. Economic constraints often compel tribal families to prioritize child labour over education. Additionally, parental priorities lean towards immediate economic gains rather than investing in their children's schooling, resulting in limited parental involvement. Soren (2016) identifies additional obstacles impeding the educational advancement of tribal children in Mayurbhanj district, including tribal views on enjoyment, ethnic stereotypes, traditional learning approaches, difficulties in learning English, reading challenges, academic and administrative hurdles, psychological barriers, and limited access to healthcare services.

Another obstacle hindering the advancement of tribal communities is the displacement from their traditional lands. This displacement is often driven by factors such as the presence of mineral resources, which are crucial for the state's development and predominantly located in tribal-inhabited areas. The establishment of mineral-based industries in these regions has resulted in widespread eviction of tribal populations from their ancestral lands, necessitating resettlement and rehabilitation efforts (Behera, 2015).

Higher Education in Mayurbhanj District

In recent years, the higher education scenario in Mayurbhanj district has witnessed significant enhancements in infrastructure, faculty quality, and research facilities. The establishment of numerous higher education institutions has expanded opportunities for students to pursue their academic aspirations. With over

70 colleges now offering courses across various disciplines, access to higher education has improved notably. A crucial milestone in the district's educational advancement was the establishment of Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University (formerly North Orissa University) by the Government of Odisha in 1989. Situated in Takatpur, Baripada, the university serves as an affiliating institution, offering graduate and postgraduate programmes along with efforts to promote vocational education and skill development. To further facilitate access, the district administration and educational authorities have implemented initiatives to boost enrolment and provide financial aid to deserving students through scholarships and other assistance Programmes.

Despite advancements, barriers to higher education access persist in Mayurbhanj district. The district's literacy rate falls below the state average due to factors like low income levels, economic backwardness, and reliance on forest-based livelihoods. Certain areas, such as Similipal, exhibit alarmingly low literacy rates, particularly among females. Many students, especially those from tribal backgrounds, encounter obstacles including financial constraints, limited transportation options, language barriers, parental attitudes, attachment to traditional occupations, and lack of awareness about educational opportunities. Tribal communities, comprising the majority population, face particularly pronounced educational disparities, with few tribal students progressing to higher education due to low secondary education completion rates.

Higher Education of Tribal Girls

Education poses a significant challenge for tribal girls in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, given its substantial tribal population. Their educational underdevelopment stems from socio-economic barriers like poverty and limited access to basic amenities, hindering families, particularly girls, from pursuing education. Cultural norms further exacerbate the situation, with many tribal communities adhering to traditional practices that impede girls' education due to discriminatory beliefs. These cultural constraints deter parental investment in their daughters' schooling, perpetuating educational disparities among tribal girls in the region.

The lack of educational facilities significantly contributes to the educational disparities faced by tribal girls in Mayurbhanj district. Many schools in tribal areas lack basic infrastructure, hindering regular attendance for girls. Moreover, the shortage of trained teachers, particularly female educators, further compromises the quality of education available to them. In response, both governmental and non-governmental entities have initiated various Programmes aimed at improving educational standards for tribal girls. These initiatives encompass free education, scholarships, and hostel facilities for economically disadvantaged girls. Additionally, efforts to enhance school infrastructure and increase the recruitment of trained teachers in tribal areas are underway. However, more comprehensive measures are necessary to ensure equitable access to education, particularly higher education, for tribal girls in Mayurbhanj district, thus preventing their exclusion from educational opportunities.

II. Significance Of The Study

Education stands as a crucial catalyst for the advancement of tribal communities and the nation at large. Mayurbhanj district, ranked as Odisha's third most populous after Cuttack and Ganjam, has a significant tribal population of 58.7%. However, the literacy rate among tribal girls lags behind that of boys, presenting a stark gender disparity. In this district, the dropout rate among tribal girls in higher education remains alarmingly high due to several factors including parental and societal unawareness, entrenched social norms, geographical barriers, early marriages, gender biases, and financial constraints. Despite governmental efforts to promote girls' education, the educational status of girls in Mayurbhanj remains dismally low, with a literacy rate of only 37.84%. Several studies indicate the backwardness of tribal population in Mayurbhanj district. Kerai (2017) observed that though there has been progress in increasing literacy rates in Mayurbhanj district, there are still significant gender gap in educational level and literacy rate. Every year there are incidents of 'girls drop out' at the primary or secondary school level. According to Hansdah and Abhilash (2020) the dropout rate is higher in the age group of 15-16 years (secondary level), as compared to 6-14 years (primary level). Tribes like Hill Kharias have severely underdeveloped members who are behind in modern civilization due to a lack of adequate education, awareness, and nourishment (Tudu & Mohapatra, 2021).

The analysis of prior research reveals a notable gap in studies addressing the higher education status of tribal girls in Mayurbhanj district. It is imperative to delve into the infrastructural, administrative, academic, cultural, and attitudinal barriers hindering their education to enhance the higher education landscape for this demographic. Consequently, the researcher aims to investigate the educational challenges faced by tribal girls, particularly in higher education, as a focal point of this study. This examination into the status, obstacles, and potential of higher education for tribal girls can facilitate the identification of contributing factors and the proposal of remedial strategies. By concentrating on this specific group, the study endeavours to explore how education can elevate their socio-economic standing and foster gender equality. The evidence gleaned from this research can guide the development of policies and interventions aimed at advancing higher education opportunities for tribal girls in Mayurbhanj district.

III. Objective Of The Study

- To identify the problems of tribal girl students at higher education in Mayurbhanj district
- To propose recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges and enhancing the higher education opportunities for tribal girl students in Mayurbhanj district.

IV. Methodology

The current research was designed to focus on a district-level exploration. Given the nature of the study, a descriptive survey design was employed to gather primary data. The population of this study comprised tribal girl students enrolled in higher education institutions located in Mayurbhanj district. The sample for this study consisted of undergraduate tribal girl students from higher education institutions in Mayurbhanj district. Data were collected from a total of 400 tribal girl students, selected using random sampling methods. To collect the necessary data, the researcher developed a questionnaire aimed at identifying the challenges faced by tribal girl students. Data collection involved personal visits to all selected higher education institutions, where the designed tool was administered to the sample. Subsequently, the collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, and interpretations were drawn accordingly.

V. Analysis And Discussion

1. The Problems of Tribal Girl Students at Higher Education in Mayurbhanj District

To investigate the challenges faced by tribal girl students in pursuing higher education in Mayurbhanj district, a questionnaire was distributed among a random sample of 400 tribal girl students. The questionnaire was prepared as a five-point instrument with response choices: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire covered eight aspects of higher education, including financial constraints, resources, academic pressure, family environment, language and cultural barriers, lack of career opportunities, and absence of supportive policies. Each aspect comprised seven statements. Responses were scored as follows: strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Total scores for each aspect were calculated for every respondent, with higher scores indicating greater severity of the issue. Aspect-wise average scores reflecting the problems faced by tribal girl students in pursuing higher education in Mayurbhanj district are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Aspect-Wise Average Scores Related to Problems of Tribal Girl Students in Pursuing Higher Education

Sl. No.	Aspect	Statement Nos.	Average Score	Standard Deviation
1.	Financial Constraints	1-7	30.475	2.806
2.	Resources and Infrastructure	8-14	27.667	3.981
3.	Academic Pressure	15-21	26.240	6.031
4.	Family Environment	22-28	24.477	4.876
5.	Language Barriers	29-35	22.705	6.033
6.	Cultural Barriers	36-42	19.620	4.822
7.	Lack of Career Opportunities	43-49	23.435	3.258
8.	Lack of Supportive Policies	50-56	23.552	3.803
Total		56	198.172	25.409

Table 2 displays the Aspect-wise average scores concerning the challenges encountered by tribal girl students in their pursuit of higher education in Mayurbhanj district. Each aspect has a maximum score of 35 (7×5) indicating the highest severity of problems, a middle score of 21 (7×3) representing average severity, and a minimum score of 7 (7×1) suggesting minimal problems. As the average scores for most aspects exceed the middle score of 21, it suggests that tribal girl students in Mayurbhanj district encounter significant challenges in their higher education pursuits.

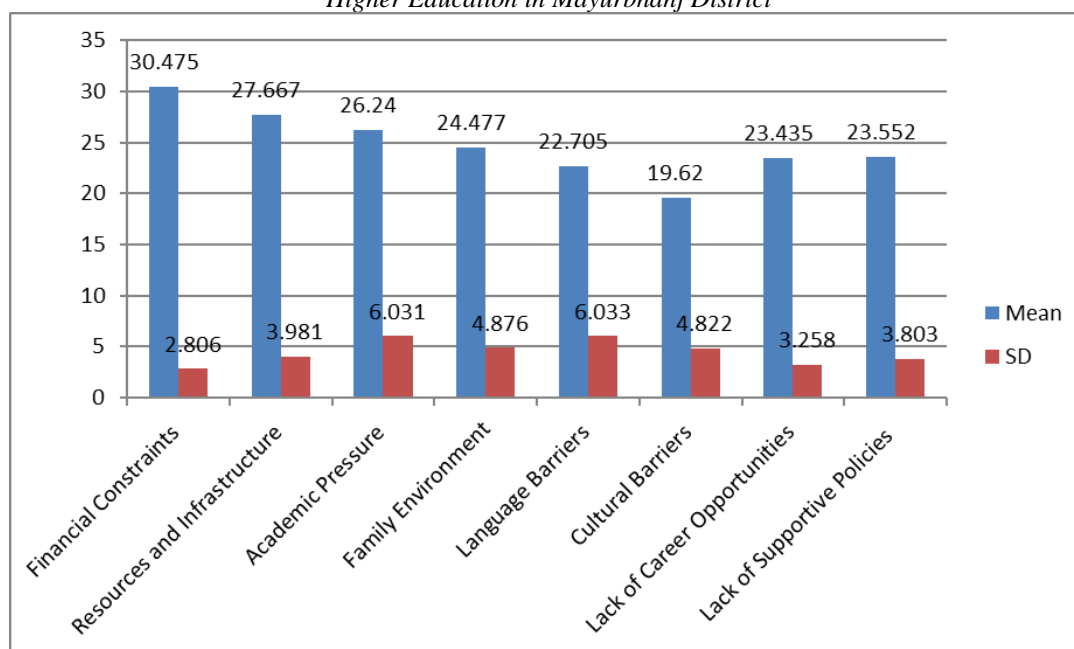
The analysis of aspect-wise average scores reveals distinct challenges encountered by tribal girl students in their pursuit of higher education. Financial constraints emerge as the primary obstacle, with an average score of 30.475 (SD= 2.806), highlighting the significant impact of economic factors on their educational pursuits. Following closely, issues related to resources and infrastructure rank second, with an average score of 27.667 and standard deviation of 3.981, indicating serious barriers in accessing necessary resources and infrastructure. Academic pressure, represented by an average score of 26.240 (SD= 6.031), stands as the third-highest concern, underscoring the substantial challenges these students face in meeting curriculum demands and coping with academic pressures. The family environment, with an average score of 24.477 (SD= 4.876), emerges as the next notable factor influencing tribal girl students' educational endeavours, highlighting the impact of familial context on their educational choices and planning.

The absence of supportive policies (Average = 23.552; SD = 3.803) and lack of career opportunities (Average = 23.435; SD = 3.258) emerge as significant barriers hindering the higher education pursuits of tribal

girl students. The absence of supportive policies underscores the importance of policy support, suggesting that insufficient policies impede the educational progress of tribal girl students. Similarly, the lack of adequate career opportunities is a notable concern, indicating that limited career options may impact the motivation and prospects of tribal girl students. Language barriers (Average = 22.705; SD = 6.033) present a considerable challenge, suggesting that linguistic factors may hinder their higher educational endeavours. Cultural barriers, with the lowest average score of 19.620 (SD = 3.803), remain significant but are comparatively less pronounced than other factors.

Graphical representation of mean scores related to problems faced by tribal girl students in pursuing higher education in Mayurbhanj district is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1
Graphical Representation of Average Scores Related to Problems Faced by Tribal Girl Students in Pursuing Higher Education in Mayurbhanj District



2. Recommendations Aimed at Addressing the Challenges and Enhancing the Higher Education Opportunities for Tribal Girl Students

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made for enhancing the higher education opportunities for tribal girl students in Mayurbhanj district

1. **Financial Support Programmes:** Implement financial aid programmes specifically for tribal girl students to alleviate economic barriers and ensure access to higher education.
2. **Enhanced Infrastructure:** Invest in improving infrastructure and facilities in educational institutions located in tribal areas to provide conducive learning environments for tribal girl students.
3. **Academic Support Initiatives:** Introduce academic support initiatives such as tutoring programmes and mentorship opportunities to help tribal girl students cope with academic pressure and navigate curriculum challenges effectively.
4. **Family Engagement Programmes:** Develop Programmes to raise awareness among tribal families about the importance of education for girls and encourage parental support for their daughters' educational pursuits.
5. **Policy Revision:** Review existing educational policies to identify gaps and develop new policies that specifically address the needs and challenges faced by tribal girl students in accessing higher education.
6. **Career Guidance and Skill Development:** Offer career guidance and skill development Programmes to equip tribal girl students with the necessary skills and knowledge to pursue diverse career paths and overcome the lack of career opportunities.
7. **Language Support Services:** Provide language support services such as language classes and translation assistance to help tribal girl students overcome language barriers and enhance their learning experience.
8. **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Conduct cultural sensitivity training for educators and administrators to create inclusive learning environments that respect and accommodate the cultural diversity of tribal girl students.
9. **Community Outreach Programmes:** Launch community outreach Programmes to engage with tribal communities and enlist their support in promoting higher education opportunities for girls.

10. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the progress of initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges faced by tribal girl students and ensure accountability and effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes.

VI. Conclusion

Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, with its significant geographical expanse and diverse demographic composition, presents a complex educational landscape characterized by both challenges and opportunities. Despite being the largest district in Odisha, Mayurbhanj struggles with educational development, particularly among its tribal populations. The district faces numerous obstacles, including financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, academic pressure, familial and cultural norms, language barriers, and limited career prospects, all of which disproportionately affect tribal girls. These challenges highlight the urgent need for providing amenities to enhance higher education opportunities for tribal girl students in Mayurbhanj. Addressing these challenges can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive higher education landscape, empowering tribal girl students in Mayurbhanj to pursue their academic aspirations and contribute to their communities' socio-economic development.

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