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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND TRENDS IN TRIBAL ENROLMENT

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Abstract

The study aimed to analyze the educational participation of tribal students at the elementary stage of school education in district Ganderbal, Jammu and Kashmir. The study emphasized the enrolment of tribal students at various Grades (I, V, VI, VIII) at different points of time; compare the enrolment shares on a gender basis, and assess the change in patterns of enrolment shares from the initial Grade i.e., Grade I to terminal Grade i.e., Grade VIII of the elementary stage of school education. The study is descriptive. The official enrolment records and figures of tribal Gujjar and Bakarwal students were accessed through the concerned educational offices of the district. The investigators developed the information blank to seek Grade wise (I, V, VII, VIII) enrolment records of overall and tribal students. To analyze and visualize the collected enrolment data, tabulation, percentage statistics, and graphical representation was used. The study concluded that tribal share in overall enrolment comprises a significant portion at various Grades (Grade I 36.61 %, Grade V 34.51 %, Grade VI 31.57 %, and Grade VIII 27.74 %) of the elementary stage. The results indicate decline and gender disparity have been observed in tribal enrolment. At the elementary stage, i.e., from Grade I to Grade VIII, the tribal enrolment shares declined by -8.87 percent (Boys -8.27 percent; Girls -9.25 %).

Key Words: Bakarwals, Elementary Education, Enrolment Decline, Gujjars, Gender Disparity, Trends in Enrolment.

Conceptual Background

The contribution of education in transforming society and developing nations is noteworthy. Education enlightens, empowers individuals, and helps them achieve economic independence and individual and social well-being. Since 1950, India envisioned realizing the Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) by 1960 and made significant efforts by launching numerous intervention projects and welfare schemes. But, even after the 74th year of independence, the goals of UEE remain unachieved. In a diversified and stratified Indian social system, the expansion of formal education to diverse social groups, genders, and remote corners of the country is hampered by multifarious forces and inequalities. The inequalities prevailing in society threaten the goal of universalizing education, leaving behind a large portion of marginalized and disadvantaged tribal populations. Even today, many areas are without the provision of schooling, forcing children of these areas to remain outside school, unenrolled and illiterate. Even if they enrol, they fail to complete the basic elementary education cycle. Schooling provision, accessibility, enrolment, and retention for tribal areas

across India have been a major challenge in the education of tribal and other disadvantaged social sections. The elementary stage is the basic structure of India's education system. Children's participation in the elementary stage is highly essential, as they are the only hope for the future and potential resource that the nation possesses. The knowledge, skills, experiences, and attitudes gained at the elementary stage of education act as the basis for success in advanced learning stages of education. Education achieved during the initial years of life essentially predicts the success in school education (**Bourdieu, 1973**). **Khan (1991)** stated that universalizing education is a utopian dream in Jammu and Kashmir, especially at the elementary stage, due to the lack of political will.

District Ganderbal is habituated by diverse ethnicities/social groups, viz., Kashmiri, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Pahari, Pakhtoon, Sikhs, Bodh's, etc. Gujjar and Bakarwal communities were given the status of scheduled tribes via ST Amendment Act, 1991. The population of district Ganderbal is 2,97,446, and tribals constitute 20.53 % (61070) of the population of district Ganderbal. The Gujjar population in the district is dominant and highest, followed by Bakarwals. Gujjar and Bakarwal domesticate animals, especially sheep/goat/cow/buffaloes, transitioning from summer pastures to winter pastures and vice-versa. Their seasonal mobility mainly relies on the availability of fodder for their domesticated cattle, which is seasonally available in summers in the green pastures of the Kashmir division, particularly in Ganderbal and in areas of the Jammu division in winters. Both communities are distinct from dominant communities as far as their language, attire, culture, occupation; lifestyle is concerned (**Bhat & Khan, 2020**). Educationally, both tribal communities are backward, and the tribal literacy rate of the district is low (43.6 %) in contrast to the aggregate literacy rate of the district (58%). These two tribal communities are mainly habituated in difficult remote locations, on the slopes of mountains, amid forests, where access to basic facilities is hardly available. Access to education or basic schooling in these isolated hilly slopes is limited (**Bhat & Khan, 2022**). These tribal groups are highly affected by poverty. They are landless and rely on forest resources for food and fodder for their animals. Usually, their hereditary lifestyle and occupation make them wander day in and day out with their cattle, and they hardly have time to participate in educational pursuits.

Report of the **National Seminar on Tribal Education in India (1967)** stated that though there is an increase in enrolment of tribal students at the primary stage yet, there is the likelihood of elevated wastage as well, as many of them fail to pass primary school examination. The report further highlighted that 20-30 students are enrolled in tribal schools on an average. **Naidu (1999)** stated that tribals of Andhra Pradesh possess meager enrolment rates and elevated dropout rates compared to tribals of other three states (Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka). **Malik & Bhat (2006)** stated that only 11.9 % of Gujjar and Bakarwal tribal students were found in aggregate enrolment of the district Kupwara (Jammu and Kashmir). The tribal boys contribute 13.37 %, and girls contribute 10.17 %. Non-tribals comprise dominant majority of 88.10 % (boys 86.60 %; girls 89.83 %). The study found only 60 % (9924) of Gujjar and Bakarwal students were enrolled at the elementary stage against 16363 tribal children in the district. **Ghosh (2007)** found a sharp enrolment decline of tribal students (male and female) of the Jharkhand post-primary stage and a low enrolment ratio of tribal girls. **Reddy (2000)** found poor enrolment, more wastage, non-attendance, and poor quality of education in tribal communities. **Duraisamy (2001)** stated that the tribal and Scheduled caste (SC) students face

social disadvantages, resulting in significant differences in their completion of school education. Gujjar and Bakarwals are under privileged, deprived, lag behind in literacy and education (**Bhat, 2008**). **Sedwal & Kamat (2008)** found variations in literacy rates and GER of tribals. The tribal GER of numerous states (Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar, Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand) is shown high in official data records contradicting with low tribal literacy rates. Bihar tribal GER stands at 79.2 percent, contradicting a literacy rate of 28 percent. The empirical data display the failure of tribal children to retain in the educational process and continue till the elementary school education stage is completed. **Andrabi & Ahmed (2014)** analyzed tribal enrolments in Jammu and Kashmir from 2007-08 to 2010-11 and found persistent decline and gender disparity in their enrolments. **Gul & Ganai (2017a)** in their study stated tribal enrolment in general and girls' enrolment in particular in Jammu and Kashmir at school education is generally low. Disparity and decline in aggregate, tribal, and female enrolment widen with each passing stage. **Bhat & Khan (2021)** stated that a declining trend had been observed in overall enrolment growth in Jammu and Kashmir from 2012-13 to 2018-19 in school education (Grade I to Grade XII). The overall enrolment fell by -6.54 (-9.21 % I-V, -9.37 % VII-VIII). The tribal enrolment also fell by -2.83 % Grade I-V and -2.29 % Grade VI-VIII; the boy's enrolment decline was high, contrary to girls at the first two stages. However, enrolment growth of boys has shown promising signs after the elementary stage.

To uplift downtrodden ethnic communities, education is the only viable instrument. Therefore, participation or enrolment of children of these communities in school education is necessary. Empirical studies cited above clearly state tribals in general and Gujjars and Bakarwal, in particular, show less participation in school education across India and Jammu and Kashmir. The investigators tried to study the enrolment patterns of tribal Gujjar and Bakarwals of district Ganderbal, trends (Incline/Decline) in enrolment share over time across various Grades of school education.

Objectives

- To study the enrolment of tribal Gujjar/Bakarwal students at various Grades (I, V, VI, VIII) at different points of time.
- To compare the enrolment shares of tribal Gujjar/Bakarwal students on a gender basis.
- To assess the trends/change in patterns of enrolment shares from the initial Grade, i.e., Grade I to Grade VIII of the elementary stage of school education.

Methodology

The study relied on the descriptive survey method. Official enrolment records and figures of tribal Gujjar and Bakarwal students were accessed through the concerned educational offices of the district. The information blank was developed by the investigators to seek Grade wise (I, V, VII, VIII) enrolment records of overall and tribal students. The enrolment records were confined to government schools managed by the school education department in the district Ganderbal offering education from Grade I to Grade VIII. To analyze the collected enrolment data, percentage statistics were applied, and data tabulation and graphical representation were used to make the results transparent.

Results

Table 1. Showing enrolment share of tribal students at Grade I, V, VI, and VIII to overall enrolment.

Grade (Year)	Overall Enrolment	Tribal Enrolment	Tribal Enrolment share (in percentage)
Grade I (2011-12)	3261	1194	36.61 %
Grade V (2015-16)	2625	906	34.51 %
Grade VI (2016-17)	2330	731	31.37 %
Grade VIII (2018-19)	2065	573	27.74 %

Note: *Enrolment of government elementary schools only.*

In 2011-12, the overall enrolment of district Ganderbal in Grade I stands at 3261; among them, 1194 were tribal (Gujjar & Bakarwal) children, comprising 36.61 % of overall enrolment. In 2015-16, the overall enrolment was 2625, and tribal enrolment stands at 906, comprising 34.51 % of overall enrolment. In 2016-17, the overall enrolment was 2330, and tribal enrolment stands at 731, comprising 31.37 % of overall enrolment. In 2018-19, the overall enrolment was found to be 2065, and tribal enrolment stands at 573, comprising 27.74 % of overall enrolment.

Table 2. Showing enrolment share of male tribal students at Grade I, V, VI, and VIII to overall male enrolment.

Grade (Year)	Overall Enrolment Male	Tribal Enrolment Male	Tribal enrolment shares males (in percentage)
Grade I (2011-12)	1626	622	38.25 %
Grade V (2015-16)	1228	419	34.12 %
Grade VI (2016-17)	1090	363	33.30 %
Grade VIII (2018-19)	977	293	29.98 %

In 2011-12, the overall male enrolment of district Ganderbal in Grade I stands 1626; among them, 622 were tribal (Gujjar & Bakarwal) males, comprising 38.25 % of overall enrolment. In 2015-16, the overall male enrolment was 1228, and tribal male enrolment stands at 419, comprising 34.12 % of overall enrolment. In 2016-17, the overall male enrolment was 1090, and tribal male enrolment stands at 363, comprising 33.30 % of overall male enrolment. In 2018-19, the overall male enrolment was 977, and tribal male enrolment stands at 293, comprising 29.98 % of overall enrolment.

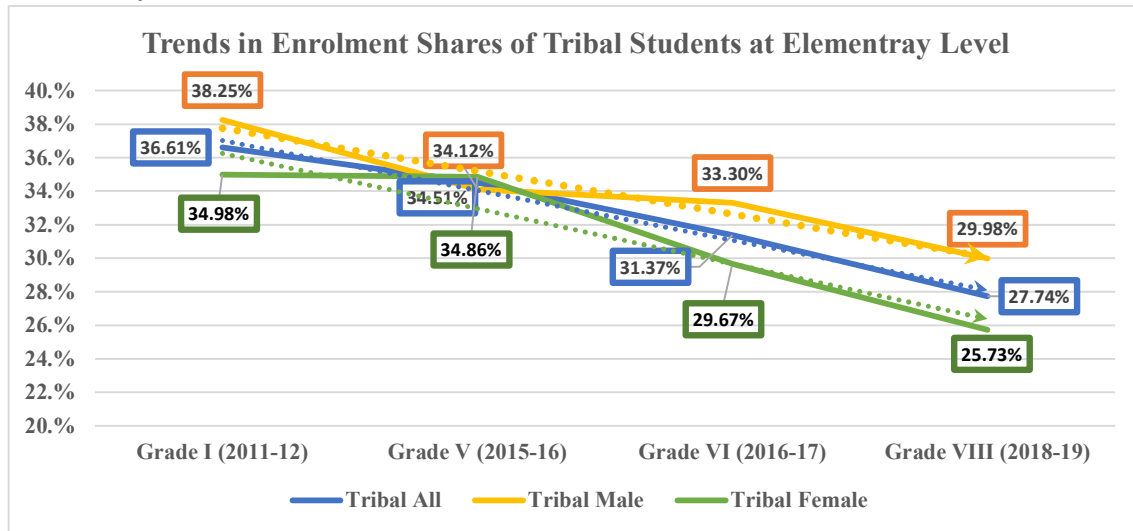
Table 2. Showing enrolment share of female tribal students at Grade I, V, VI, and VIII to overall female enrolment.

Grade (Year)	Overall Enrolment Female	Tribal Enrolment Female	Tribal enrolment shares of females (in percentage)
Grade I (2011-12)	1635	572	34.98 %
Grade V (2015-16)	1397	487	34.86 %
Grade VI (2016-17)	1240	368	29.67 %
Grade VIII (2018-19)	1088	280	25.73 %

In 2011-12, the overall female enrolment of district Ganderbal in Grade I stands 1635; among them, 572 were tribal (Gujjar & Bakarwal) females, comprising 34.98 % of overall female

enrolment. In 2015-16, the overall female enrolment was 1397, and tribal female enrolment stands at 487, comprising 34.86 % of overall female enrolment. In 2016-17, the overall female enrolment was 1240, and tribal female enrolment stands at 368, comprising 29.67 % of overall female enrolment. In 2018-19, the overall male enrolment was found to be 1088, and tribal female enrolment stands at 280, comprising 25.73 % of overall female enrolment.

Figure 1. shows a trend in enrolment shares of tribal students (Male, Female) at the elementary level.



At the elementary level, the enrolment shares of tribal students (Male, Female) declined by - 8.87 percent after seven years, i.e., drifted from 36.61 % in Grade I (2011-12) to 27.74 percent in Grade VIII (2018-19). Similarly, enrolment shares of tribal males also declined by -8.27 % at the elementary level, i.e., from 38.25 % in Grade I (2011-12) to 29.98 % in Grade VIII (2018-19). The enrolment shares of females fell by -9.25 percent at the elementary stage. Female enrolment shares in Grade I (2011-12) was 34.98 percent of the total enrolment of the district Ganderbal, which declined to 25.73 % percent after seven years.

Discussion

Tribal enrolment constitutes a significant portion (36.61 %) of aggregate enrolment at the entry stage of elementary level, i.e., Grade I. This is mainly due to numerous intervention and educational and accessibility measures taken to bring tribal children to schools like SSA, NPEGEL, schools (KGBV, Residential, Mobile, Ashram), seasonal camps, economic assistance, grant, and fellowships, and special hostels for tribal children in schools. The schools were established keeping within the tribal vicinities to increase their access to education. Special schools like Bahks, seasonal camps, and Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) were also established to increase school accessibility of mobile tribal pastoral communities. The fruits of these initiatives, welfare, and interventional schemes are observed by looking at the considerable share in enrolment.

At the terminal stage, i.e., Grade VIII, the enrolment shares declined, implying a significant chunk of tribal students dropped out, thereby discontinuing education before completing the cycle of elementary education. Tribal dropout stems from numerous factors (personal, familial, cultural, occupational, health, nutrition, parental, and school efficiency). The school

rationalization, merging, inadequate access to post-primary education, shift to private school, educational transactions (Pedagogy, Curriculum) in a language other than mother tongue, seasonal mobility, cattle rearing & grazing, child labour & marriage, poor parental economic & educational status, rigidity, prejudice towards tribal communities, low scholastic achievement of tribal students, school closure in tribal areas, teachers from other communities, teacher absenteeism, maladjustment with the school environment and academic calendar, poor mental and physical health, households chores, sibling care, collecting forest resources, pony riding, uninterest in education, large family, a high number of children and displacement due to political conflict largely contribute to tribal dropout. The gender disparity in enrolment and enrolment shares of tribals males and females has been found. The tribal male enrolment shares in Grades I, VI, and VIII were higher than female enrolment shares except in Grade V, where tribal female enrolment shares were higher. The high male enrolment shares in Grade I is because parents of tribal communities enrol their children in the schools close to their habitations to adapt to the school environment; parents remain stress-free as they can watch their children at any time. The high proportion of male enrolment share in Grade VI and VIII is because, in tribal areas, schools offering post-primary education are remotely located, which is feasible for the education of boys rather than girls. The male students can walk/travel distances through hilly locations compared to female students. We have observed that parents enrol their male wards in Grade I, and next year or in following years, male children are shifted to private institutions, and female students are left to study in government schools. Parents display prejudiced behaviour towards the education of female children. The disparity in the decline of enrolment and enrolment shares was also observed. The fall was more in the case of tribal female students than tribal male students. Though tribal areas have access to primary schooling within their habitations, they lack school access post-primary stage, which restricts tribal female students from attending upper primary schools as the schools are either not available within localities or they had to travel longer high/low altitude distance to reach school. Walking or traveling a lengthy distance to school is risky, and parents raise objections or restrict them from attending. Tribal female students are usually involved in household chores, sibling care, collection of the forest resource, traverse through seasonal migration with family, wed early as 13 years of age, are considered property of others, and are at the risk of marrying via elopement thereby bringing shame to family status and name. The reasons cited above are greatly responsible for low enrolment shares and declining female enrolment shares in post-primary education. Male are culturally conditioned to support families and involved in rearing, herding & grazing cattle, child labour, pony riding, agricultural activities, aiding father in economic and hereditary occupation, seasonal movement, tribal male children are also wed early, shift to religious education or private educational institutions, clash of the academic calendar and seasonal migration schedule of tribals.

Mehta (2021) also found enrolment (Grade I to XII) declined by -0.4 percent in schools managed/aided by the government at all India level and elementary stage; it also decreased by 3.32 million in 2018-19 of which share of government schools was 95 percent. He also found variations in enrolment of boys and girls. Mehta attributed the decline in the number of educational institutions managed by the government, school merging, rationalization, preference for the education of a male child in schools operated by private enterprises, and an increase in the number of private schools. **Bhat & Khan (2021)** also found similar results;

wherein tribal enrolments decline in Jammu and Kashmir from 2012-13 to 2018-19. The enrolments of the tribals fell by -2.83 and -2.29 at primary and upper primary stages. The disparity in decline in tribal enrolments was observed wherein male enrolments declined by -3.60 % (Primary) and -4.19 % (Upper primary) compared to female (-1.98 Primary and -2.29 % Upper primary). The found 2406 schools were merged since 2015 in Jammu and Kashmir; besides the failure of the educational system to retain tribal in schools, cultural, social, and occupational forces greatly contribute to the decline in enrolments shares of tribal Gujjar/Bakarwals as they pass through stages. Tribal students are emotionally unstable, insecure, and possess a low level of autonomy, mental health, adjustment, and social intelligence compared to students from non-tribal groups (**Khan & Lone, 2017; Lone and Khan, 2018**) due to low exposure, awareness, persistent isolation lagging basic provisions and education. **Lone and Khan (2019)** stated that the need achievement of tribal students was low compared to non-tribal due to their inability to recognize their abilities, fear of failure, low ego ideal, low perseverance, lack of guidance, weak determination, and low motivation. **Gangele (2019)** also found a decline in tribal GER from 137 at the primary stage to 119.7 at the elementary stage during the year 2010-11 and pedagogic and communication issues, unique physical and home environment, unawareness, unaccountability, uninterest in studies, unsuitable teachers and absenteeism of tribal students were forces behind such apathetic picture of tribal education. Gender gaps and decline were also found in tribal enrolments at various stages of school education in J&K. The enrolments share in the case of girls was comparatively low and further elevated in forthcoming stages (**Gul & Ganai, 2017b**). **Mishra (2015)** also found gender disparity in enrolment share at Grade VIII from 2012-13 to 2014-15. The share of tribal girls was meager compared to males in government high schools in Raibol, Dhenkanal (Odhis). Disinterest in studies, household work, sibling care, parental bias, and the high cost of schooling were reasons for enrolment decline. The tribal enrolments differ as far as gender and school management type is concerned in tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh and Chattisgarh. Girl's enrolments were high in government-managed schools, and the enrolment of their counterparts was high in privately managed schools (**Bandyopadhyay, 2012**). **Sujatha (1999)** also found a disparity in State and provincial enrolment ratios of tribals of Andra Pradesh. Tribal groups residing in Vishakhapatnam district were very much behind (71.83) compared to the aggregate enrolment ratio (1997-98) of tribal of Andra Pradesh (85.43).

Conclusion

The results showed that tribal enrolment comprises a significant portion of overall enrolment. However, the tribal students fail to continue and complete the elementary education cycle. Their shares decline while reaching the terminal Grade of the elementary stage compared to their enrolment at the initial Grade. The study concluded that gender disparity in enrolment, enrolment shares, and decline in enrolment/enrolment shares at different Grades has also been found. The share of female students in enrolment is low, while their declining percentage is more. Keeping in view the findings, we suggest future research in the areas of enrolment decline, exploring internal efficiency of school education department, accessibility, personal, familial, geographical, occupational, economic, and cultural forces stopping tribal children from completing the elementary stage of education.

Inferential Suggestions/Recomendations

- Mobile schools/ seasonal camps meant for tribals' education should be functional and accountable. The number of mobile schools should be increased and extended to unreached/isolated tribal areas.
- School rationalization and merging should be done within a reasonable distance, and enrolment and local constraints shall be kept in mind in tribal areas. Tribal areas have scattered habitations, low population density, hilly terrains, hill locks, and slopes, and traveling small distances in such areas costs enormous time. Attending extended distanced schools regularly and enrolling children in such schools is problematic for tribals.
- The mass community sensitization about the benefits and ill effects of schooling via different forums is required in tribal areas having rampant illiteracy.
- Parents of tribal children need to be sensitized about the detrimental effects of child marriage, child labour, and seasonal migration on children's general well-being and education continuity.
- Bias towards the education of female children should be removed in tribal communities, and the community should be made aware of the necessity of educating both genders. The religious saints, leaders, and Khatibs (persons delivering Friday sermons or religious lectures) from the tribal communities should enlighten tribal people that even religion permits education of both genders.
- Child labour/marriage acts should be made stricter and more enforceable. Strong vigil and banning of child labour at tourist destinations and religious pilgrimages are required.
- Establishment of alternative schooling opportunities for transhumant tribal children engaged in daily cattle rearing, grazing, and seasonal mobility.
- Establishment of pre-primary schools for tribal children under five years, so elder siblings did not leave education due to sibling care.
- Post-primary education should be accessible by establishing a large quantum of upper primary schools in tribal vicinities.
- Tribal indigenous knowledge system, language, and curriculum should be incorporated into education, and local community teachers should be appointed and posted in tribal areas.
- Child tracking should be done regularly to identify tribal dropouts and students who have continued education in private or religious institutions.
- The district administration must enforce education as a fundamental right in letter and spirit. The regular inspection of schools and monitoring of attendance of teachers/students on a real-time basis should be prioritized in tribal areas.

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