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Enrollment and Retention of SC/ST Girls in Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT— The participation of Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) girls in secondary education remains a significant challenge in India despite various policy interventions and educational schemes. This paper explores the enrollment and retention patterns of SC/ST girls in secondary schools through a comprehensive literature review and primary data collection via a structured survey. The findings reveal that although enrollment rates have improved over the years, retention remains low due to socio-economic constraints, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and infrastructural deficits.

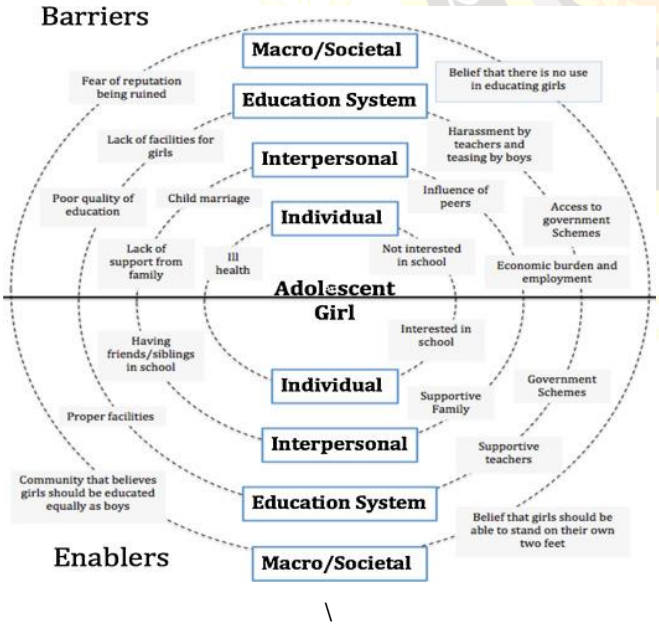

Fig.1 Enrollment and Retention of SC/ST,Source([1])

The study identifies key factors influencing dropout rates and suggests practical interventions for enhancing participation, such as conditional cash transfers, provision of residential facilities, and gender-sensitive school environments. This research contributes to the growing discourse on inclusive education by highlighting the need for targeted and community-based approaches to ensure educational equity for SC/ST girls.

KEYWORDS

SC/ST girls, secondary education, enrollment, retention, dropout, inclusive education, gender disparity

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of human development. In India, while significant strides have been made to universalize primary education, secondary education presents new challenges, particularly for marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Girls from these communities face a dual burden of caste and gender, leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates in secondary schools. The persistence of social hierarchies, poverty, lack of access to transportation, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural norms continue to hinder their educational progress.

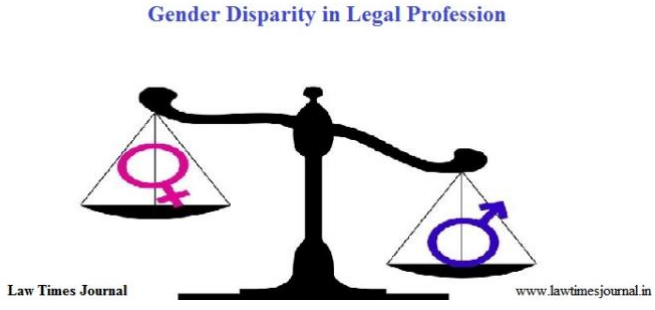

Fig.2 Gender disparity,Source([2])

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The Right to Education (RTE) Act, though transformative, does not fully cover secondary education. As a result, SC/ST girls remain vulnerable to systemic exclusion. This paper aims to analyze the current trends in enrollment and retention among SC/ST girls in secondary education and examine the socio-cultural and economic barriers they encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have explored the educational marginalization of SC/ST communities. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011) emphasized that while primary school access improved, retention in secondary education remained problematic for girls from disadvantaged communities. Dreze and Sen (2013) highlighted the intersectionality of gender and caste as a significant barrier in educational attainment.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and UDISE reports from recent years point to steady improvements in enrollment figures but stagnation or decline in retention rates. Nambissan (2010) pointed out that school environments often reproduce social inequalities, making them unwelcoming for SC/ST girls. Further, Tilak (2015) argued that financial constraints, rather than lack of aspiration, are the leading causes of school dropout among SC/ST girls.

Government schemes like the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV), National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education (NSIGSE), and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao have been partially successful. However, Mehta and Singh (2017) note that poor implementation and inadequate monitoring mechanisms dilute the intended outcomes of such initiatives.

The literature underscores that educational outcomes among SC/ST girls are shaped by a complex interplay of household characteristics, community perceptions, and school-level factors. However, there remains a gap in understanding the lived experiences of SC/ST girls in secondary education, particularly through primary data-driven analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-method approach, with a primary emphasis on quantitative survey-based research supported by qualitative observations.

Objectives of the Study:

- To assess current enrollment and retention levels of SC/ST girls in secondary schools.
- To identify key factors influencing dropout or discontinuation.
- To analyze the effectiveness of government interventions.

Sample and Data Collection:

A survey was conducted across 10 secondary schools in rural and semi-urban areas of Tamil Nadu and Jharkhand, regions with substantial SC/ST populations. A total of 200 respondents were selected—150 SC/ST girl students currently enrolled, and 50 dropouts identified through school records and Anganwadi workers.

Tools Used:

- Structured questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions.
- Interviews with teachers, parents, and dropout girls.
- School infrastructure observation checklist.

Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were used to interpret survey results. Thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative responses to identify recurring issues.

RESULTS

4.1 Enrollment Trends

Out of the 150 enrolled girls surveyed:

- 60% were from SC communities.

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- 40% were from ST communities.
- 90% were enrolled in government or aided schools.
- Only 25% reported ever attending private coaching or tuition.

Most respondents indicated that mid-day meals and free textbooks/uniforms were motivators for initial enrollment. However, a majority still lacked access to functional toilets and transportation facilities.

4.2 Retention Challenges

Among the 50 dropout respondents:

- 52% cited financial reasons.
- 34% left due to family responsibilities.
- 26% mentioned early marriage.
- 18% were discouraged by poor infrastructure or safety concerns at school.

Some respondents cited the lack of female teachers or role models and experiences of caste-based discrimination as reasons for their disinterest in continuing education.

4.3 Impact of Government Schemes

While all schools surveyed were aware of NSIGSE and KGBV:

- Only 38% of eligible girls received direct benefits.
- Several schools lacked counselors or support staff.
- Residential facilities were present in only 3 of 10 schools.

4.4 Teacher and Parent Perspectives

- Teachers acknowledged high absenteeism during agricultural seasons.
- Parents valued education but often prioritized male children.
- Many parents were unaware of scholarship opportunities beyond primary education.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that while initial enrollment rates among SC/ST girls have improved due to awareness campaigns and incentives, systemic barriers hinder their sustained participation. The persistence of traditional gender roles in SC/ST households translates to early dropouts among girls, especially during adolescence.

The disconnect between policy and implementation is evident from the partial coverage of schemes and poor school infrastructure. Lack of hostels, absence of career counseling, and poor public transport facilities are structural limitations that need urgent redressal.

Social stigma around menstruation, caste-based exclusion, and the absence of gender-sensitive pedagogy contribute to a non-inclusive school environment. Bridging the educational divide requires not just infrastructure and incentives, but also transformative social change and community engagement.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that enrollment and retention of SC/ST girls in secondary schools remain pressing concerns for India's inclusive development agenda. While there has been notable progress in primary education access, secondary education reveals gaps in both policy and practice. Financial constraints, domestic labor, early marriage, and infrastructural deficits are leading causes of dropout among SC/ST girls.

To mitigate these challenges, the study recommends:

- Strengthening implementation of targeted government schemes with better monitoring.
- Providing residential secondary schools for SC/ST girls in remote regions.

- Involving community members in school management and awareness initiatives.
- Ensuring gender-sensitive training for teachers and curriculum developers.
- Improving infrastructure with a focus on sanitation, security, and transportation.

Ultimately, a multi-stakeholder approach involving educators, policymakers, communities, and civil society is vital to ensure that no girl is left behind in India's journey toward educational equity.

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