

Educational Scenario of the Dudh Kharia People in West Bengal: A Socio-Educational Analysis

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Abstract**Original Research Article**

Dudh Kharia are a sub-group of the Kharia community living in various parts of West Bengal, especially in East Midnapur district. Although various steps have been taken by the government to improve the education of Scheduled Tribe students, the educational status of the Kharia community is relatively backward. The objective of this study is to thoroughly study the educational status of the Dudh Kharia community in West Bengal. To carry out the study, the researcher has collected data primarily from census reports, academic journals, and various secondary sources on tribal communities. The study analysed literacy levels, school participation, and dropout factors among the Dudh Kharia tribe in West Bengal. Also, poverty, educational lack of infrastructure, Linguistic barriers, gender discrimination, and socio-cultural factors are explored. Finally, to improve the educational status of the Dudh Kharia community, various educational policies, mother-tongue education, improved socio-economic conditions, and the recognition of the imperative of government action were recognised.

Keywords: Dudh Kharia, Tribal Education, West Bengal, Literacy, Tribal Communities, Educational Challenges.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the main backbone of society and the nation. Education plays an important role in building a progressive society by enhancing individuals' knowledge, skills and social awareness (Shamsoddini *et al.*, 2024). After independence, various committees, commissions, and policies have emphasised the need to ensure education for all, but in a diverse country like India, providing equal educational opportunities for all is an important challenge, especially for tribal communities (Ottaplackal & Anbu, 2022).

The 'Kharia' tribe is one of the 62 tribal communities listed in the Constitution (Orissa) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment), 1976. According to previous studies, 'Kharia' are mainly divided into three sub-categories: Hill Kharia, Dudh Kharia and Dhelki Kharia (Nayak *et al.*, 2024). The Kharia people are predominantly Austro-Asiatic-speaking tribes. Most of the Kharia tribes live in West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Odisha (Dash, 2020). Dudh Kharias are a sub-division of the Kharia tribe mentioned in the previous study, who mainly live in the East Medinipur district of West Bengal (Nayak *et al.*, 2024). Also, their

settlements can be observed in Purulia, Bankura and West Medinipur of West Bengal. Dudh Kharias mainly earn their living by farming and collecting forest resources.

According to the 2011 census, tribals constitute 8 per cent of India's total population, numbering 104,281,034. Of this total population, 11.3 per cent live in rural areas and 2.8 per cent in urban areas. Among them, the Kharia population was about 7,53,000 across India, according to the 2011 census. Studies have shown that Dudh Kharias are better educated than other Kharias. But due to economic problems, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers, their educational potential is reduced. As a result, many children are forced to drop out of school to contribute to the family income. (Biswas & Sharma, 2022) Moreover, girls in these communities often face barriers to education due to gender inequality, which increases their chances of dropping out of school (Biswas & Sharma, 2022).

Initially, the parents of the Dudh Kharia community were not very interested in their children's education. Later, they were motivated to educate their

children through various awareness programs and developmental government initiatives. (Nayak *et al.*, 2024) So, in West Bengal, knowing about the education system of the Dudh Kharia community is a very interesting subject for researchers. The present study looks at the educational status of the Dudh Kharia community living in West Bengal. Besides, various government initiatives and schemes aimed at the educational development of the Dudh Kharia children of West Bengal have also been registered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tribal Education in India

Educational advancement of tribal communities is a major consideration for researchers and policymakers in India. Various studies show that the literacy rate in tribal communities is relatively low compared to the national average, as they suffer from economic deprivation, geographical isolation, and cultural differences (C, 2023). Even today, educational disparities between rural and urban populations in India persist, especially in underdeveloped rural areas, where the educational facilities are fewer (Pradhan & Sahoo, 2014). Because they face various barriers, including linguistic diversity between the home and school environments in tribal communities, an unplanned curriculum and a lack of infrastructure in underdeveloped areas.

Educational Status of the Kharia Community

Several studies have shown that the Kharia community is educationally backwards due to socio-economic problems, and research on the Kharia tribe is relatively less than other tribal groups (Pal & Mitra, 2023). Nayak *et al.* (2024) surveyed the Kharia tribes in Purba Medinipur district to find that the Kharia population is economically and socially deprived and has limited educational resources, as they belong to marginalised communities. Various studies have identified significant reasons for early dropout among Kharia students, including poverty, lack of nutritious food, and an unhealthy environment (Nayak *et al.*, 2024). Bhui *et al.* (2025) conducted a study on Kharia communities in Purulia district. The researchers found that Kharias' economy is largely dependent on agriculture and forest resources, which often hinder educational progress.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are;

- i. To study the educational status of the Dudh Kharia tribe in West Bengal.
- ii. To analyse the literacy level and gender disparity in education.
- iii. To explore the socio-economic impact and cultural factors of educational participation.
- iv. To know about the educational development strategies of the Dudh Kharia community.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the educational status of the Dudh Kharia community in West Bengal, the researcher has primarily conducted qualitative and descriptive research using secondary data, including census reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, academy papers, and government reports on tribal education. In previous studies, the researcher collected data purposively through a survey to examine the educational and socio-economic status of the Kharia community (Nayak *et al.*, 2024).

Demographic and Socio-Economic Background of Kharia Community

The Kharia community is spread mainly across rural districts of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Odisha, and other areas, whose main livelihoods are agriculture, harvesting of forest resources, and wage labour (Bhui *et al.*, 2025). According to census data, the literacy rate of the Kharia community in a rural area, such as a village in Birbhum district, is 74.22%, with male literacy at 80.27% and female literacy at 68.99%. This statistic confirms that men and women in tribal communities, gender discrimination in education is observed.

Educational Status of the Dudh Kharia Community

a. Literacy Rate

Although Kharia communities in rural areas have limited educational infrastructure and economic facilities, their literacy rate is slowly increasing; however, it remains relatively low compared to other communities in West Bengal (Dutta & Bisai, 2020). Due to gender disparity in the Kharia community, the literacy rate of males is higher than that of females (Barman & Roy, 2022). As a result, the Kharia community is lagging behind in terms of education (Biswas & Sharma, 2022)

b. School Enrolment

Various government educational initiatives and programs, such as the mid-day meal scheme and the provision of free primary education, have increased the enrolment rate of Dudh Kharia children, but their participation in education has not always been consistent. Many children enrol in primary education institutions, but due to social and economic constraints, they face various difficulties in sustaining their education (Santha & Das, 2025).

c. School Dropout

Studies indicate that the significant problem of educational backwardness of the Kharia tribe is school dropout (Bhat, 2025). Poverty and financial weakness, lack of nutritious food and poor health, parental indifference towards education, lack of adequate school facilities, etc., are reported to be the main reasons for most Kharia students dropping out of school (Bhat, 2025). Due to these problems, most parents force their children to do domestic or wage work rather than send them to school (Bhat, 2025).

Major Challenges in Tribal Education

a. Poverty and Economic Constraints

The Dudh Kharia community faces economic problems due to poverty, as a result of which they lag behind in education. Many Kharia families make a living by farming or harvesting forest resources, which may not provide them with sufficient financial security. Due to economic instability, most Kharia children are forced to drop out of school to support their families and earn income, without completing their primary education (Bhui *et al.*, 2025).

b. Language Barriers

Kharia tribal children face various difficulties due to linguistic discrimination (Paul & Roy, 2026). Kharias have their own language and are more comfortable speaking it. But differences between the Kharia's own language and the school's language can be observed. Generally, the use of Bengali or Hindi as the medium of instruction in schools reduces Kharia participation in education (Jabbar *et al.*, 2024).

c. Lack of Educational Infrastructure

Students in tribal areas face various educational difficulties, including shortages of teachers, classrooms, and educational materials (S., 2024). This infrastructural disadvantage severely affects the quality of education, leading to problems in the education sector (Sahu *et al.*, 2020).

d. Cultural and Social Factors

Tribal culture, customs, and habits affect students' participation in education (Mahipal, 2010). In some cases, due to economic constraints, families send their children into various professions rather than primary education.

Government Initiatives for Tribal Education

The Government of India and the Government of West Bengal have implemented various programs to improve education in tribal communities, including the Mid-Day Meal Scheme, the Scholarship Scheme for Scheduled Tribe students, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Provision of Hostels for Tribal Students, and Residential Tribal Schools. The main objectives of these programs are to increase school participation among tribal students, reduce the dropout rate, and improve literacy rates among tribal communities.

Suggestions

- a. **Improve Access to Education:** Establish good-quality schools for students in the Dudh Kharia tribal area; improve school infrastructure (classrooms, clean toilets, drinking water); recruit an adequate number of teachers; and improve the transportation system for students from remote inhabited areas.
- b. **Promote Mother Tongue-Based Education:** People of the Kharia community are more

comfortable speaking their mother tongue. If we want to bring Kharia students back into the mainstream, their primary education should be taught in their mother tongue, i.e., Kharia. The textbook should be written in Kharia. As a result, their early learning comprehension and learning outcomes can be improved.

- c. **Increase Awareness and Community Participation:** To bring Kharia students back into education, Kharia parents' awareness of the importance of education must first be raised. Kharia's parents should be encouraged to participate in various school activities and events.
- d. **Financial Support and Incentives:** The government should provide various scholarships, free books, uniforms, and mid-day meals to students from tribal families to continue their education. Various scholarships and financial assistance can reduce students' dropout rates in education.
- e. **Teacher Training and Recruitment:** Adequately trained tribal teachers should be appointed to teach tribal students.

Policy Recommendation

1. Implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy specifically targeting the tribal community, including the Dudh Kharia community.
2. The Government of India should properly implement Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan to advance education in tribal communities.
3. If tribal students are to be brought into the mainstream, reservations must be made. Competitive examinations should be arranged so that they can proceed to higher education.
4. For girls from tribal communities to participate in education, girls need proper security and hostel accommodation.

CONCLUSION

A detailed discussion of the educational status of the Dudh Kharia Community in West Bengal reflects the larger problems still faced by many tribal communities in India. Despite various government initiatives, historical deprivation, socio-economic inequality, and linguistic barriers, structural problems in the education system still persist.

A significant aspect of this research is that education is not only an institutional issue for Dudh Kharias but also reflects a cultural and social picture. Poverty, indifference to education, seeking livelihood instead of primary education, and ignorance of parents towards the mother tongue in the education system result in student aversion to education and increased dropout rates. As a result, the Kharia community is still largely deprived of quality education.

Although the NEP 2020 has given importance to inclusive education and teaching in the mother tongue, its practical implementation has not yet been possible. The main reasons for this are infrastructural indifference, lack of adequate teachers and lack of practical implementation. Also, gender discrimination is a major obstacle in the Kharia community, where girls are forced to marry at an early age and do housework and child rearing instead of receiving a minimum primary education. Therefore, according to the NEP 2020, it is very important to place special emphasis on the education of girls.

However, there is a possibility of some progressive attitudinal changes. Gradual improvement is being observed through government initiatives, the development of institutional infrastructure, increased public awareness, the development of the scholarship system, and parental participation. For the educational development of the Dudh Kharia community, an inclusive and integrated approach is needed, one that is not confined to school education but also encompasses socio-economic development, cultural recognition, and community empowerment. It is through such various efforts that education can become an effective tool for their social development and progress.

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