

From Exclusion to Empowerment: Government Initiatives for Tribal Girl's Education in Rajasthan

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Abstract

The education of tribal girls in Rajasthan reflects a complex intersection of poverty, gender, and social exclusion. Despite constitutional safeguards and state-led interventions, tribal girls continue to face multiple barriers such as early marriage, geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural prejudices. This paper examines the journey from exclusion to empowerment, highlighting how government initiatives—including Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), Ashram schools, scholarship programs, and residential hostels—have contributed to bridging educational gaps. Using secondary data from UDISE+, NCERT, and DISE statistics, along with a review of existing literature, the study explores the progress and persisting challenges in enhancing access, retention, and quality of education among tribal girls in Rajasthan. The findings suggest that while significant strides have been made in terms of enrolment and literacy, structural issues such as teacher shortages, safety concerns, and cultural resistance remain pressing. The study argues that sustained, localized, and community-driven interventions are essential to transform access into empowerment, thereby enabling tribal girls to contribute meaningfully to Rajasthan's socio-economic development.

Keywords: Tribal girls, Education, Rajasthan, Exclusion, Empowerment, Government initiatives, KGBV, Ashram schools, UDISE+.

Introduction

Education is recognized globally as both a human right and a critical pathway to empowerment. In India, marginalized communities—particularly Scheduled Tribes (STs)—have historically been excluded from mainstream educational opportunities due to structural inequalities. Rajasthan, with its significant tribal population concentrated in

districts such as Banswara, Dungarpur, Udaipur, and Pratapgarh, provides a compelling context to examine the barriers and opportunities in tribal education. Tribal girls in Rajasthan face a "double disadvantage"—both as females in a patriarchal society and as members of economically and socially marginalized communities.

Although post-independence policies emphasized universal access to education, tribal girls' participation remained limited for decades due to high dropout rates, low enrolment, and minimal transition to higher levels of education. Government initiatives such as the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Ashram schools, and scholarships targeted this gap by providing residential facilities, free education, and incentives. Yet, empowerment cannot be measured solely through enrolment; it also requires quality learning, life skills, and socio-economic integration.

This paper critically analyzes government initiatives for tribal girls' education in Rajasthan and reviews existing literature to highlight the challenges, progress, and future directions for inclusive empowerment.

Review of Literature

Cheruku (2022) examined the trajectory of tribal education in Rajasthan and argued that government interventions such as residential schools and targeted scholarships improved access, though benefits remain uneven across districts.

Shanti (1995) focused on the tribal girl child in Rajasthan, showing how patriarchal social norms, early marriage, and poverty created barriers to schooling. This early research highlights the cultural roots of exclusion that current interventions must counter.

Meena (2024) studied educational migration of tribal young women from Rajasthan and found that while government programs created opportunities for mobility, many girls still faced identity struggles and limited empowerment at higher levels.

Acharya and Meena (2023) assessed the functioning of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) in Rajasthan and found improved enrolment of tribal girls, but also noted gaps in infrastructure, teaching quality, and transition to secondary education.

The NCERT (2024) evaluation of KGBVs reported that while enrolment of marginalized girls improved, retention and learning levels remained low. This connects to the need for strengthening academic support alongside access.

Khan (2024) employed a phenomenological approach to explore the exclusion of tribal females and identified lack of safe hostels, gender-sensitive infrastructure, and cultural restrictions as major causes of dropout.

Rana and Devi (2017) provided a state-level review of the educational status of Scheduled Tribes in Rajasthan, noting literacy gains but continuing gender gaps. They concluded that empowerment requires community sensitization along with government schemes.

A study published in IJCRT (2025) highlighted case studies of KGBV schools in Rajasthan, demonstrating that the scheme succeeded in creating first-generation learners among tribal girls, yet most struggled with retention at the secondary level.

Neemar (2024) analyzed district-level literacy patterns among Scheduled Tribes in Rajasthan and revealed stark disparities between tribal-dominated districts such as Banswara and the state averages, showing the need for localized interventions.

Devajana (2023) evaluated Ashram schools and found that while they increased access for tribal children, they suffered from declining quality and neglect in Rajasthan, undermining their role in empowerment.

Jojo (2013) also documented the decline of Ashram schools in India, including Rajasthan, and linked the issue to governance failures, stressing the necessity of sustained government commitment.

Salpekar and Kundal (2024) studied Ashram schools and found that while residential schooling created safe spaces for tribal girls, inadequate monitoring and weak teacher accountability hampered effectiveness.

Thamminaina and Bhatia (2020) systematically reviewed barriers and opportunities for educating tribal girls, stressing that empowerment requires holistic interventions including health, safety, and livelihood opportunities alongside education.

Research published in Space and Culture India (2018) studied women's empowerment in Rajasthan's tribal societies and found that education was strongly linked to fertility reduction and economic participation, connecting education with wider empowerment outcomes.

Finally, UDISE+ (2023) provided statistical evidence on enrolment and retention of Scheduled Tribe girls in Rajasthan, showing a steep decline in enrolment beyond elementary school, which confirms the fragility of empowerment without secondary-level support.

Methodology

This study is based on secondary research. Data has been sourced from official statistics including UDISE+ (2023), NCERT reports (2024), and earlier DISE data, supplemented by peer-reviewed journal articles and government policy documents. A qualitative content analysis approach has been employed to synthesize findings from literature, focusing on themes of access, retention, quality, and empowerment. The research also contextualizes government schemes in the specific socio-cultural setting of Rajasthan's tribal regions.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of UDISE+ (2023) data shows that while Rajasthan has achieved near-universal enrolment at the primary level, dropout rates among Scheduled Tribe girls spike after upper primary. Districts like Banswara and Dungarpur exhibit some of the highest dropout figures in the state. Cultural norms such as early marriage, combined with economic hardships, contribute significantly to exclusion.

KGBVs have emerged as a powerful instrument of inclusion, offering residential facilities and free education to girls from marginalized communities. However, multiple studies (Acharya & Meena, 2023; NCERT, 2024) highlight concerns about infrastructure, quality of teaching, and lack of transition to secondary education. Similarly, Ashram schools, once seen as a backbone of tribal education, are now criticized for declining standards and governance failures (Jojo, 2013; Devajana, 2023).

Scholarship schemes and free uniforms/textbooks have reduced the financial burden on families, but they remain insufficient in the face of systemic issues. Safety concerns, inadequate hostels, and lack of female teachers hinder retention (Khan, 2024).

The findings suggest that while government initiatives have opened doors of education for tribal girls, empowerment remains partial and fragile. Empowerment must extend beyond mere literacy to include confidence, economic independence, and social mobility. Localized strategies—such as community awareness campaigns, recruitment of tribal women teachers, and culturally responsive curricula—can bridge this gap.

Summary and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that tribal girls in Rajasthan have transitioned from historical exclusion to greater inclusion in education, largely due to government initiatives like KGBVs, Ashram schools, and scholarships. Yet, empowerment is not fully realized. Retention remains a challenge, learning outcomes are uneven, and socio-cultural barriers persist.

The path to empowerment requires a multi-pronged approach: ensuring quality education, addressing gender-based violence and early marriage, and linking education with livelihood opportunities. Policy interventions must be district-specific, given the disparities across tribal regions of Rajasthan. Community participation, especially involvement of tribal women as teachers and mentors, is critical to sustaining progress.

Thus, while Rajasthan has made commendable progress in expanding access, true empowerment of tribal girls through education will depend on holistic, sustained, and context-sensitive interventions.

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