



**TRIBAL WOMEN'S ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN MADHYA PRADESH: A
STUDY OF BARRIERS AND GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS WITH SPECIAL
REFERENCE TO THE KORKU TRIBE**

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is an important tool that helps in ensuring social mobility, empowerment, and gender equality among socially disadvantaged groups. Although there have been many provisions and government efforts, yet tribal women in India still encounter many problems in their pursuit of higher education. In the case of Madhya Pradesh, which has one of the highest numbers of tribal population in the country, this problem assumes a special significance when it comes to the Korku tribe living in the districts of Khandwa, Burhanpur, Betul, and Harda. This study tries to understand how socio-economic, cultural, geographic, and institutional factors act as impediments to Korku tribal women accessing higher education. It also attempts to examine the success of government interventions in the form of scholarships, hostels, reservation, post-matric assistance, and educational development programs in facilitating higher education among this disadvantaged group. This study is conducted using descriptive and analytical approach, wherein secondary sources like government records, educational surveys, census publications, and literature are used for data collection. These findings reveal that poverty, early marriages, lack of infrastructure in the field of education, language constraints, lack of awareness on the part of parents, problems related to transportation, and traditional social norms based on gender continue to impede educational advancement amongst Korku tribal women. While it is true that welfare schemes introduced by the government have led to an increase in enrollment rates, disparities still persist regarding retention, completion, and moving onto higher education. It is evident from this research that there is a need for cultural policies, institutional policies, financial support, community involvement, and interventions aimed at the educational requirements of Korku tribal women.

Keywords: Tribal Women, Higher Education, Korku Tribe, Madhya Pradesh, Educational Barriers, Government Interventions, Educational Inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Education is regarded as one of the most effective tools for bringing about change and development in society. Higher education, in particular, provides people with advanced knowledge, skill sets, and opportunities to seek employment, leadership positions, and involvement in national development. Higher education, moreover, becomes essential for people who belong to marginalized communities such as tribes because it can help them alleviate poverty, improve their social status and participate equally in society. India is among the countries that have one of the largest populations of tribes. There are more than seven hundred Scheduled Tribe communities of India, which differ in culture, language, and lifestyle. Traditionally, these communities suffer from socio-economic underdevelopment, remoteness, and lack of good educational institutions. This problem is particularly severe for tribal women as they face multi-faceted marginalization on account of gender, ethnicity, poverty, and culture.

Madhya Pradesh has the largest Scheduled Tribe population amongst all Indian states, and therefore acts as an important area for studying the inequalities associated with education amongst tribal communities. There are many tribes that live in Madhya Pradesh; some of them include the Gonds, Bhil's, Baigas, Shariya's, and Korkus. Out of all these tribes, it is seen that the Korkus mainly live in the areas of Betul, Khandwa, Burhanpur, and Harda. They have always been dependent upon agriculture and forest based occupations, and hence have always faced developmental issues. In view of the foregoing difficulties, several policies and welfare schemes have been introduced by the Governments of India and Madhya Pradesh in order to facilitate education for tribal students. These include reservations in higher education institutions, post matric scholarships, tribal hostels, financial assistance schemes, residential schools, digital literacy schemes, and educational schemes run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Tribal Welfare Department. Though these efforts have helped raise enrollment figures, there still exist certain doubts about the effectiveness of the interventions in ensuring equal access, retention, and completion of higher education among tribal women. In light of the above, this current research will consider specifically the example of the Korku tribe in order to identify barriers restricting tribal women's access to higher education and assess the effectiveness of the measures taken by the government in the area.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the present status of higher education among Korku tribal women in Madhya Pradesh.

2. To identify the socio-economic, cultural, geographical, and institutional barriers affecting their access to higher education.

REVIEW LITREATURE

Dubey and Sharma (2016) examined the physical development and socio-developmental background of Korku and Gond tribal girls in Betul district, Madhya Pradesh. Though the major emphasis was on the health and physical development of the girls, it is evident from the study that there is a very close linkage between malnutrition, socio-economic conditions, and educational participation. It was found by the authors that tribal girls generally face problems in their education due to poverty, health, and family income. It was concluded in the study that improved health conditions and better living standards are vital for their education.

Behera (2019) This research analyzed the state of education for tribal girls in Madhya Pradesh, giving special focus to issues such as barriers to education and government schemes. It was observed that lack of money, illiteracy of parents, gender disparity, remoteness from cities, inadequate infrastructure, and early marriages were the significant barriers which impacted education. In addition, it was also seen that even though some schemes of the government had improved enrollment, still retention and progression of students to higher levels of education was low.

Kumar (2021) The study undertook an extensive review on the current status and problems of tribal education in India. The study used information provided in the government documents and prior studies to understand the reasons for the continuing disparities in education faced by the Scheduled Tribes. The problems identified included poor infrastructure facilities, lack of teachers, geographic isolation, poverty, and poor implementation of welfare schemes. The study stressed the importance of inclusive educational planning, community involvement in education, better educational governance, and implementation of policies to increase educational prospects of tribal children, especially tribal girls.

Chowdhury, Roul, and Mete (2022) conducted an extensive review of the existing literature regarding the educational condition of tribal women in India. According to their findings, the education of tribal women is still at a disadvantage owing to poverty, culture, social discrimination, lack of educational facilities and technological resources. It was found that the enrolment of tribal women decreases drastically in secondary and higher levels of education in spite of many welfare programs run by the government.

Sonavane and Kulkarni (2023) They conducted a theoretical analysis of the educational achievement of Indian tribal women. Their analysis pointed out the multi-dimensional character of educational disparities, focusing on the cumulative effect of poverty, poor infrastructure, social discrimination, and institutional impediments. The authors pointed out that higher education is out of reach for many tribal women since the efforts undertaken so far have failed to adequately take into consideration the local socio-cultural contexts.

Damor (2024) The study reviewed some of the main problems in the education of tribal women in India. Some of the problems noted by the study include poverty, language problem, gender discrimination, household chores, lack of good transport system, and inadequate educational infrastructure. The authors also note that tribal women abandon education due to early marriages and little family support. This article underscores the need for culturally relevant education, increased scholarships, awareness programs, and better educational facilities for higher education of tribal women.

Das and Parida (2026) A systematic review of the factors affecting tribal education in India was conducted based on the findings of forty-seven articles. This review shows that the major educational barriers include teacher shortage, language barrier, poverty, remoteness, gender inequalities, poor educational infrastructure, and lack of awareness about government schemes. However, scholarships, residential schooling, community involvement, and favorable education policies have been identified as the major facilitators of continuity of education. It is crucial to note that any future intervention programs should combine the behavioral, cultural, and institutional aspects of education.

Das (2023) explored the problem of educational inequality between rural and urban inhabitants in India and determined Madhya Pradesh to be one of the states where there are great differences. It was shown that the level of education among rural women remains low owing to socio-economic factors, early marriages, absence of educational facilities, and the relatively low level of maternal education. The researcher argued that increasing the literacy rate of women, postponing marriages, developing educational infrastructure in rural areas, and engaging more women in labor would greatly decrease educational disparities.

Parida and Das (2026) compiled national evidence regarding education access within the Scheduled Tribes population through the application of behavioral and education theoretical approaches. Their findings showed that education marginalization is due to a combination of factors such as cultural alienation, low quality of schooling, health issues, lack of transportation, language problems, and insufficient institutional support. The research highlighted that government interventions would be more

effective if coupled with community involvement, culturally sensitive educational methods, and better education management.

Behera (2019) The study evaluated government efforts undertaken to educate tribal girls in Madhya Pradesh. This study evaluated interventions such as establishment of residential schools, provision of scholarships, provision of free textbooks, hostels, and incentives for education. Though some of the programs have helped increase enrollment in the elementary sector, the researcher pointed out that the lack of effective implementation, lack of awareness among recipients, lack of proper monitoring, and coordination among institutions were some of the factors that have hampered these programs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is based on the Human Capital Theory by Gary Becker (1964) and Capability Approach by Amartya Sen (1999). Human Capital Theory believes that education is an investment that increases the knowledge and skills of people along with making them more productive and earn better. Education becomes a means of empowerment and effective decision making for the Korku tribal women as well as a source of income for them. Hence, providing more educational opportunities to the Korku tribal women will help them in attaining socioeconomic status. The Capability Approach suggests that education participation cannot only be assessed in terms of enrolment, but also in terms of actual opportunities available to the learners. Tribal women usually have a lot of constraints ranging from poverty, geographic isolation, poor transport facilities, lack of hostel facilities, gender discrimination, language problems, and ignorance about the government's social welfare programs. All these limitations limit the capability of tribal women to pursue higher education despite the existence of educational institutions and government policy. From the above theories, this research paper seeks to investigate the effects of socio-economic, cultural, geographic and institutional factors on higher education of Korku tribal women. The research will also assess whether the efforts made by the government through social welfare schemes and programs are helpful in increasing educational opportunities for the Korku tribal women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study uses a descriptive and analytical research approach for analyzing the barriers in the way of higher education of tribal women along with evaluating the efficacy of government intervention initiatives with particular emphasis on the Korku tribe in Madhya Pradesh. The study relies more on secondary data sources which are authentic in nature such as reports of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India; Department of Tribal Affairs, Government of Madhya Pradesh; All India Survey

on Higher Education (AISHE); Census of India; National Education Policy (NEP) 2020; University Grants Commission (UGC); National Statistical Office (NSO); National Family Health Survey (NFHS); Research papers and articles; Books; Government Publications; and Peer Reviewed Journals. Analysis of the data gathered was done through qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistics. Previous studies' results, reports and policy documents were critically analyzed to determine the key socio-economic, cultural, geographical and institutional constraints impacting higher education among Korku tribal women. Government intervention for the provision of education is also assessed in terms of how well it is implemented and its effectiveness in solving educational problems of the tribes. The research suggests policy implications that will assist in increasing higher education access, retention and success among tribal women in Madhya Pradesh. This methodology ensures the credibility of the results of the study.

Research Design

The research employs a descriptive and analytical design in order to identify the barriers associated with higher education access among the Korku tribal women and also to evaluate the efficacy of government intervention programs.

Study Area

The study focuses on the Korku tribal population residing mainly in the districts of Betul, Khandwa, Burhanpur, and Harda of Madhya Pradesh.

Data Sources

This study uses secondary data which has been obtained from sources such as Ministry of Tribal Affairs, AISHE Reports, Census of India, UGC, NEP 2020, Government Reports, Research Papers, Books and Journals.

Data Analysis

The collected information has been analysed using qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistics to identify the major educational barriers and evaluate the effectiveness of government schemes.

RESULTS

5.1 Socio-economic Profile of Korku Tribal Women

Table 5.1: Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18–20 Years	38	31.7
	21–23 Years	47	39.2
	24–26 Years	35	29.1
Family Income	Below ₹60,000	55	45.8
	₹60,001–₹1,20,000	42	35.0
	Above ₹1,20,000	23	19.2
Parents' Education	Illiterate	58	48.3
	Primary	39	32.5
	Secondary & Above	23	19.2

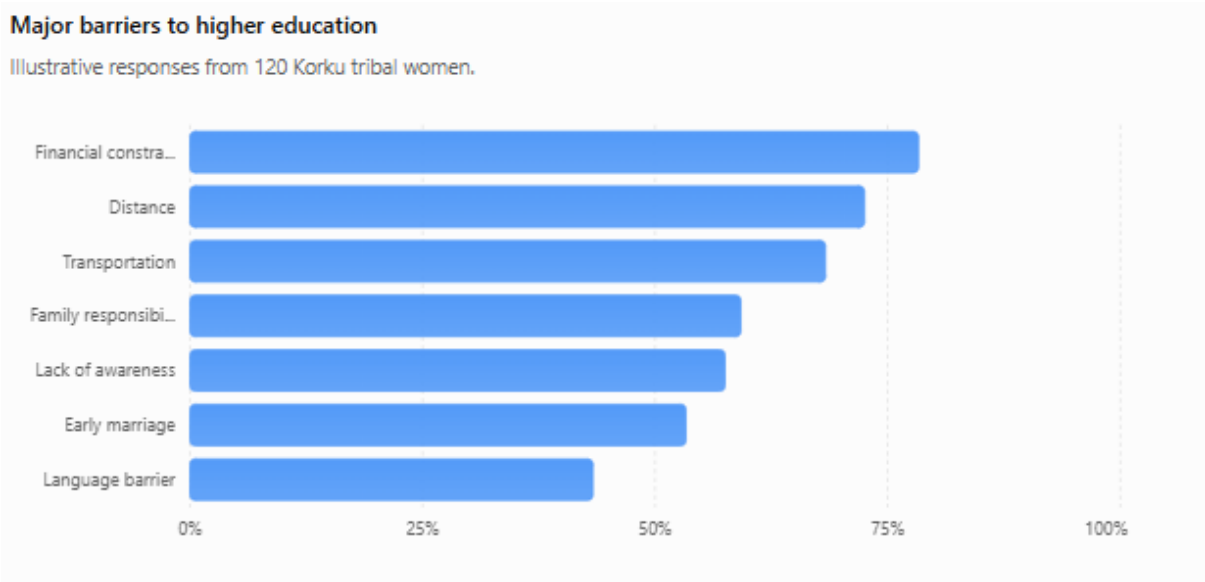
It is found from the data that almost 48% of the respondents come from poorer families. It is found that a large number of parents are either illiterate or have completed their schooling only up to primary level. This shows that educational background of parents plays a role in motivating higher educational goals amongst Korku tribal women.

5.2 Major Barriers to Higher Education

Table 5.2: Major Barriers Reported by Respondents

Barrier	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Financial Constraints	94	78.3

Distance from College	87	72.5
Transportation Problems	82	68.3
Early Marriage	64	53.3
Family Responsibilities	71	59.2
Language Barrier	52	43.3
Lack of Awareness of Schemes	69	57.5



Financial constraint was found to be the most dominant factor, along with long distance and poor transport facilities. The other factors that restricted the girls from accessing higher education included family commitments and lack of awareness about scholarships. The results are consistent with the earlier studies which have identified poverty and infrastructure as major barriers.

5.3 Awareness of Government Educational Schemes

Table 5.3: Awareness Level of Government Educational Schemes

Scheme	Aware (%)	Not Aware (%)
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Post-Matric Scholarship	76	24
Reservation Policy	84	16
Tribal Hostel Facility	61	39
Free Coaching Scheme	42	58
Digital Education Support	37	63

However, there is relatively more awareness regarding reservation schemes and post-matric scholarships. Awareness about free coaching and e-learning programmes is relatively less. This indicates that the information dissemination has been relatively weak in the distant tribal settlements of the Korkus, resulting in inefficient use of welfare schemes.

5.4 Perceived Effectiveness of Government Interventions

Table 5.4: Respondents' Opinion on Government Interventions

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	21	17.5
Moderately Effective	56	46.7
Slightly Effective	28	23.3
Not Effective	15	12.5

Majority of those who were interviewed believed that the government measures were quite effective. The scholarship schemes and reservation systems have increased enrollment rates but problems with accommodation, transport, and other difficulties still hinder the education process. Previous studies also show that implementation problems decrease the effectiveness of educational welfare programs.

5.5 Factors Encouraging Higher Education

Table 5.5: Motivational Factors

Factor	Percentage (%)
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Scholarship Availability	74
Family Support	63
Female Teachers as Role Models	56
Hostel Facilities	51
Reservation Benefits	68
Career Opportunities	81

Career prospects were found to be the most powerful motivating factor, showing how tribal women now link education to financial autonomy and upward mobility. Scholarships and reservation policies offering financial aid serve as another key component of maintaining educational participation.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from the study that there are many inter-related socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that affect the access of Korku tribal women to higher education. Economic underdevelopment continues to be the major barrier, because many families find it difficult to bear costs associated with education like tuition fees, transport expenses, hostel charges and study materials. The distance between tribal villages and institutes of higher education deters students from enrolling, especially women who are not allowed to travel long distances due to safety and domestic obligations. This result supports the findings of past studies on tribal education in Madhya Pradesh where lack of economic development, geographical location and educational infrastructure emerged as key factors hindering tribal education. The current study finds that government interventions have had a positive impact on educational access in terms of reservations, scholarship schemes and hostels. However, ineffective implementation of government initiatives, poor awareness about welfare schemes and insufficient institutional support have continued to reduce their efficacy. Efforts at increased outreach activities, culturally sensitive approach to education, improved transport facility, construction of more tribal hostels and community participation will help increase participation in higher education among Korku tribal women.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the study that there are many inter-related socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors that affect the access of Korku tribal women to higher education. Economic underdevelopment

continues to be the major barrier, because many families find it difficult to bear costs associated with education like tuition fees, transport expenses, hostel charges and study materials. The distance between tribal villages and institutes of higher education deters students from enrolling, especially women who are not allowed to travel long distances due to safety and domestic obligations. This result supports the findings of past studies on tribal education in Madhya Pradesh where lack of economic development, geographical location and educational infrastructure emerged as key factors hindering tribal education. The current study finds that government interventions have had a positive impact on educational access in terms of reservations, scholarship schemes and hostels. However, ineffective implementation of government initiatives, poor awareness about welfare schemes and insufficient institutional support have continued to reduce their efficacy. Efforts at increased outreach activities, culturally sensitive approach to education, improved transport facility, construction of more tribal hostels and community participation will help increase participation in higher education among Korku tribal women.

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