

## Social Status of Tribal Women in West Bengal

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**Abstract:** In the multidimensional social set up of India, empowerment of women more specifically of the tribal women need to be addressed to conceptualise the growth of the Indian societies. Empowerment includes various parameters including Education. In this review work, the educational status, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Gender Parity Index, Educational age and Literacy levels of tribal women have been compared with their male counterpart as well as with the non-tribal women community. The relevant literatures from three districts of West Bengal have been reviewed in this study. The review report indicates huge inequality in educational status of the tribal women which in turn reflected in their low standard of living, poor health condition, low socio-economic status and marked discrimination in the ownership of productive resources. In the end some empowerment approaches for the tribal women have been recommended which could be implemented by the policy makers, local self-government as well as the tribal families at the individual level to promote tangible growth in the empowerment and rights of tribal women.

**Key points:** Tribal women, Society, Education, Empowerment, Socio-economic status, Autonomy, Women's security, Rights.

### Introduction

Empowerment is a complex concept and it is interpreted in multiple ways. It comes from the term 'empower' which means 'to give power or authority and to enable or permit. The idea of women empowerment refers to the redistribution of power that reduces unwanted male dominance and establishes equal rights of women in the society. According to social activist and researcher, Madhu Sarins, "The empowerment means the ability to make informed choices the ability to participate in informed intervention and peoples' strategies for management." According to Srilatha (1994) "Empowerment is a process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining power control over sources of power." Karl (1995) says that empowerment of women incorporates the interrelated and mutually reinforcing component, collective awareness, capacity building and skilled development, and decision-making power and action to bring about gender equality.

Education is the first step to bring about empowerment. It is truer for the Indian society which is characterized by profound discriminations in terms of caste, creed, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status (Thorat. S, & Motilal, M., 2005). Progress in such a society is impossible without education specially for the marginalised ethnic tribal sections of it. These ethnic communities have been enumerated as scheduled tribe (ST) population since 1951 following the constitution (Scheduled tribe) order, 1950. They are the aboriginal or Adivasi or early settler of India. They are marked as the most backward groups in India. According to census 2011, nearly 8.6% of the country's population and 5.50% of State's population of West Bengal are comprised of tribal and

indigenous ethnic groups respectively. There are 574 tribal groups who have been identified as schedule tribes in India.

Education is the best instrument to ensure continuous, inclusive, and non-discriminatory economic growth and sustainable development of tribal women, the long-awaited marginalised section in the Indian society. Considering the importance, education has been placed in the priority list of the development agenda of India. However, its meaningful implementation is only possible if it can include the weaker and marginalised section of the society like the tribal women. It is only education can ensure the empowerment of the tribal women by providing them economic independence, social equality, justice, and human rights like the privileged sections of the society. On the other way, education can also bring the empowerment of the tribal women by helping them acquire the power within. Thus, from above views empowerment of women implies control making process, both personal and cooperative control by the tribal women over their basic needs of food, shelter, health, education, income as well as social needs of culture, decision making, life style, possession of wealth, political rights; hence human rights.

### Objectives of study

1. To study social group percentage of females in tribal population.
2. To study social group percentage of literate tribal women.
3. To compare gender wise social group percentage of literates in tribal society.

### Research questions of the study

1. What is the status of study for social group percentage of females in tribal population ?
2. What is the status of social group percentage of literate tribal women ?
3. What is the comparative status of gender wise social group percentage of literates in tribal society ?

### Literature reviews

*Sinha, A. (2015), It is dynamic and epitomized to Learn in ancestral networks. Physical and tangible parts, for example, contact, smell, seeing and hearing advise the educational work on regarding backwoods focused ancestral life and thus, learning is figured out not just concerning perusing and composing. Subsequently, schooling in the ancestral setting includes "gustatory" terms of substantial learning. Danda, A.K. (2002), A monstrous group of ceremonies and oral customs as well as participatory workmanship practices, for example, dance, music and execution rule the ancestral lifestyle as well as shape their perspective, verifiable and social recollections and development of their aggregate self through 'erotic grant'. Dutta, S., and Sivaramakrishnan, L. (2013), Mukherjee, R. (2014), The people group improvement programs contain horticulture, creature farming, participation, provincial ventures, country designing (comprising of minor water system, streets, structures), wellbeing and sterilization including family government assistance, family arranging, ladies government assistance, kid care and sustenance, instruction including grown-up training, social schooling and education, youth government assistance and local area association. Panda, S., and Adak. A. (2014) and Sethi, A. (2016)., In every one of these areas of improvement there are a few projects, plans and exercises which are added substance, growing and tightening covering the all out local area, a few fragments, or explicit objective populaces, for example, little and peripheral ranchers, craftsmans, ladies and overall individuals beneath the destitution line.*

### Research Methodology

The present study is based on secondary data. The pertinent secondary data has been gathered from research papers, academic books, Census of India, 2011, Human development reports and the Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribe provided by Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt of India, and the Govt of West Bengal etc. The collected data was analysed, tabulated, and presented in the following sections.

## **Analysis and interpretation**

### ***Vulnerability of Tribal Women in the society***

In West Bengal and India as a whole, people of the tribal communities, especially tribal women are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the society. They are lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health, and economic empowerment etc. According to Prof. Amartya Sen (2001) there are seven types of gender inequalities that tribal women face in India, the mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facilities inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality, ownership inequality and household inequality. In tribal communities, the women work harder in and out of the family than their male counterparts. In addition to carry out day and night household works, child rearing, these women are forced to collect minor forest produce or to work as laborers in industries, households, and construction, to contribute to their family income despite exploitation by contractors and managers in most of the cases. The problem rises many folds due to violence against tribal women both at the community levels and domestic level. It is the grim reality that the customary laws in the tribal societies are mere symbolic expressions of the gender inequality that establishes powerful patriarchal controls not only over education, health, properties, and knowledge, but also on individual's choice, freedom, decision-making and sexuality of women across the tribal society. Some instances are as follows: 1. Women in various tribal communities are perceived as misfortune. Their entry is prohibited into "sacred" places like kitchen room, cowshed, forest etc. and participation in "auspicious" community occasions during the menstrual spell. 2. They are engaged in different economic assets of tribal households but they are often deprived of wages and social rights.

### ***The Government Initiatives***

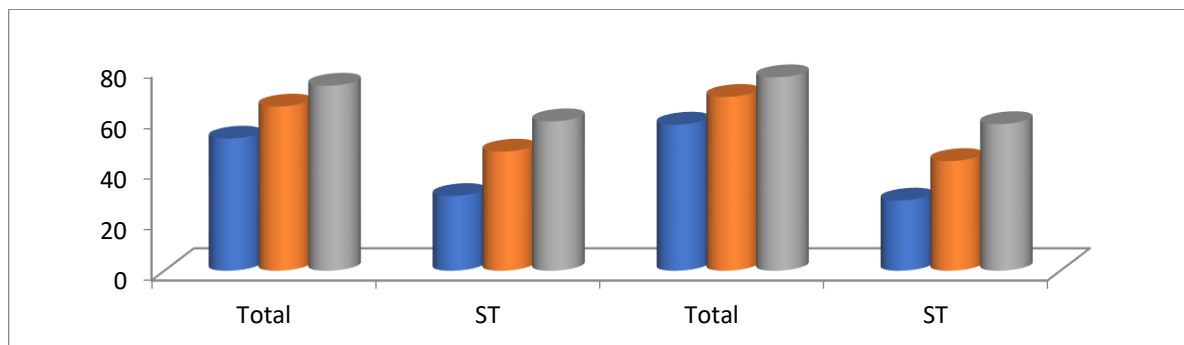
In order to restore the social position of the weaker sections of the society, the Govt of India made some special provisions time to time in the form of articles 46, 275, 330, 332, 335, 338, 340 etc. of the Constitution. The aim of these constitutional provisions is to take care of the interest of schedule tribes (ST) and shield them from social injustice and exploitation (Orav. D and Toppo. D, 2012). There are several policies and programmes have been launched both by the Central government of India and the State Government of West Bengal following the constitutional provisions for the upliftment of these indigenous ethnic groups. Some of such projects like, Right to Education Act, Sarva Shishya Avian (SSA), up gradation of Primary Schools under SSA, setting new Residential Girl's High Schools, Teaching in Tribal Language, Bicycles of ST Girls, etc deserve mention. The purpose of these projects is to win the barriers laid down on the path of education and to upgrade the standard of living of the tribal communities without any gender biasness.

Despite of all these endeavours and initiatives, the tribal women are lagging in all walks of life including, health care, social position, economic independence, gender equality and political participation even in the local governing body. In order to locate the origin of problem, the poor educational status of tribal women along with low enrolment ratio, high rate of drop out, poor rate of literacy have appeared from the review of literature. The literature survey has been made on relevant research works done in West Bengal, specially, in three districts of Paschim Medinipur, Purulia and Jalpaiguri where the population distribution of tribes is highest in the state. The data found in West Bengal has been compared with the similar data obtained from India to address the issue, poor educational status is the root cause of un-empowerment of tribal women.

The Data obtained from three consecutive census report (1991-2011) has been displayed in table 1. It shows, literacy rate of the general population of West Bengal is higher in all cases than the overall data of India. However, the literacy rate of tribal population in all the cases is low in West Bengal rather than India.

**Table 1: Literacy rate of total population and Scheduled Tribes Population in India and West Bengal**

Year of Data	Literacy rate (%) in India		Literacy rate in West Bengal	
	Total	ST	Total	ST
1991	52.2	29.6	57.7	27.8
2001	64.8	47.1	68.6	43.4
2011	73	59	76.3	57.9

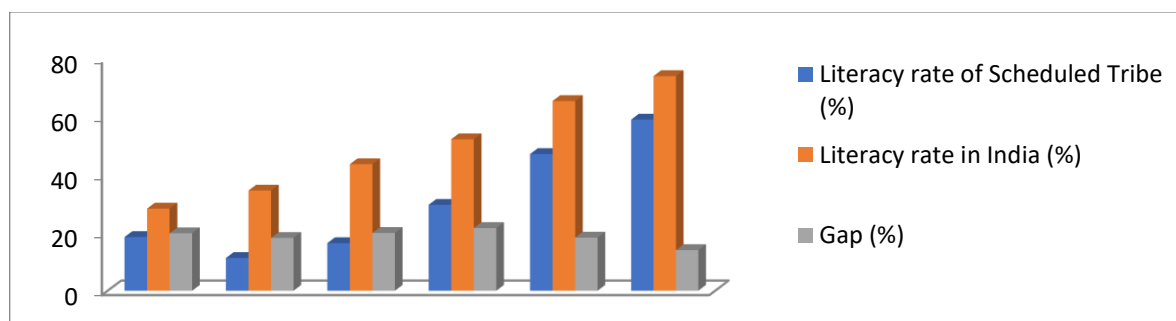


*Source: Census of India 2011, Statistical Profile of Tribal Women 2013*

The Data in table2 shows, the total literacy rate of India has been increased smoothly after independence, butthe literacy rates of tribal population have been increased comparatively at a slow pace. It is found that in 1991 the gap between overall literacy of India and Scheduled Tribe literacy is very high. However, after industrial liberalisation on 1991 and due to different types of developmental initiatives by the government, student enrolment among tribes has increased. Hence, the literacy gap has decrease continuously which is a positive side for the tribal education.

**Table 2: Decade wise literacy rate of Scheduled Tribe in India**

Year	Literacy rate of Scheduled Tribe (%)	Literacy rate in India (%)	Gap (%)
1961	18.5	28.3	19.8
1971	11.3	34.5	18.2
1981	16.4	43.6	19.9
1991	29.6	52.2	21.6
2001	47.1	65.4	18.3
2011	59.0	74.0	14.0



Sources: Census of India, 2011

The data in the table 3: depicts Gross enrolment ratio of ST boys and ST girls in West Bengal. The gross enrolment ratio is higher in class I to V which is 120.4 for ST girls and 122.3 for ST boys. It is 108.0 and 115.0 respectively for girls and boys in class VI to VIII. But it declines to 43.7 (ST Girls) and 48.5 (ST Boys) in class XI-XII. It implies that the tribal enrolment declines significantly (more in girls) as they proceed to higher classes.

**Table 3: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribe Girls and Boys in West Bengal**

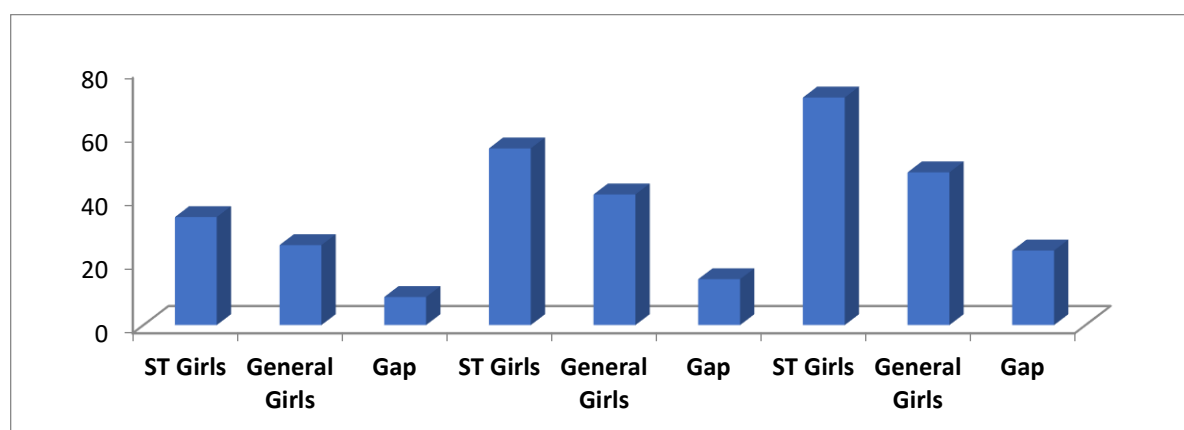
<b>Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of ST Girls vs ST Boys in W.B.</b>					
<b>Classes I-V</b>		<b>Classes V I-VIII</b>		<b>Classes XI-XII</b>	
Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
120.4	122.3	108.0	115.0	43.7	48.5

Source: Census of India 2011

The table 4: displays drop -out rate among ST girls and the girls of general population in West Bengal. It is evident, that, in I-V class the rate of drop-out of ST girls is 33.9 % and that of general girls is 25.1 %.It is higher (55.4%)in ST girls than in general girls (41.0%) in class standard VI-VIII.The drop-out rate is even greater among ST girls in classes IX-XIIthan the general girls (47.9%) at same standard. There is noticeable increase in drop-out rate of ST girls compared to the girls of the general population.

**Table 4: Drop-out rate (%) among ST girls and the girls of general population in West Bengal**

<b>Dropout rate among ST Girls and Girls of general population in West Bengal</b>								
<b>Classes I-V</b>			<b>Classes VI-VIII</b>			<b>Classes IX-XII</b>		
ST Girls	General Girls	Gap	ST Girls	General Girls	Gap	ST Girls	General Girls	Gap
33.9	25.1	8.8	55.4	41.0	14.4	71.3	47.9	23.4

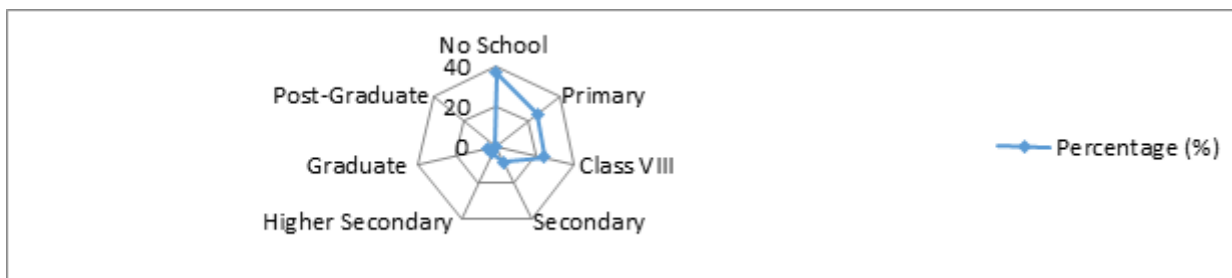


Source: Census 2011. Office of the Registrar General, India. Statistics of School Education 2010-2011

In Table 5, it is found that in case of educational attainment of the respondents of tribal women, 36.5% of them belong to no school category, 26.1% had knocked the door of Primary Education, while 24.4% attended the school up to 8th standard. Secondary and Higher Secondary stages were reached by 8.4% & 3.7% respectively, whereas .7% and .2% of respondents had touched the boundary line of Graduation & Post-Graduation respectively.

**Table 5: Educational Status (%) of Tribal Women in West Bengal**

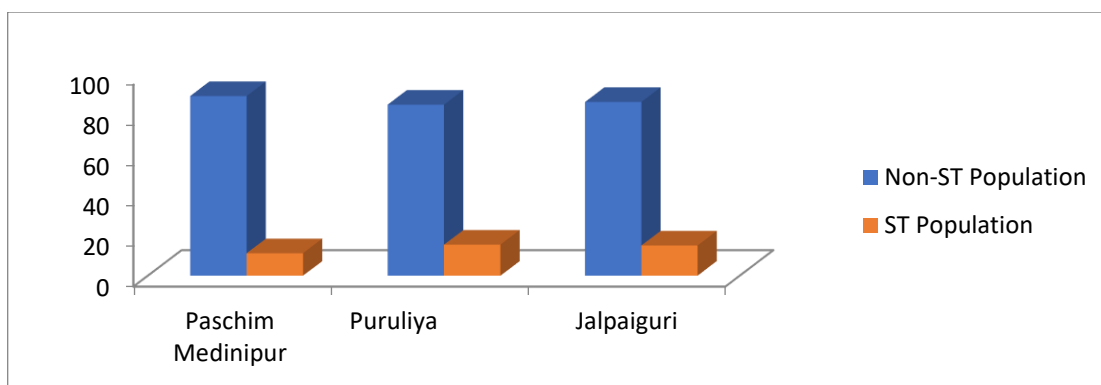
<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>No School</b>	36.5
<b>Primary</b>	26.1
<b>Class VIII</b>	24.4
<b>Secondary</b>	8.4
<b>Higher Secondary</b>	3.7
<b>Graduate</b>	3.7
<b>Post-Graduate</b>	0.2



It is evident from table no6, that social group percentage of literate population of non-ST under Medinipur (88.88) is greatest than Puruliya (84.62) and Jalpaiguri (85.96) whereas the percentage of literate ST population in Paschim Medinipur (11.12) is lowest than that in Puruliya (15.38) and Jalpaiguri (14.96) districts in west Bengal.

**Table 6: Social group percentage of literates in Paschim Medinipur, Puruliya and Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal**

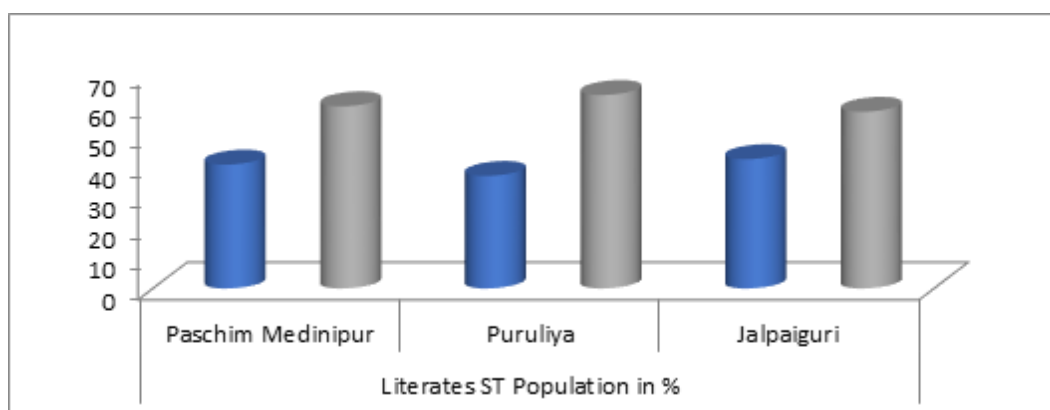
Social group	Percentage of Literate Population of Three Districts, W.B.		
	Paschim Medinipur	Puruliya	Jalpaiguri
Non-ST Population	88.88	84.62	85.96
ST Population	11.12	15.38	14.96



It is evident from table no 7, that in gender wise social groups, the highest percentage of literate ST Male is found in Purulia (63.22%) followed by Paschim Medinipur (59.52%) and Jalpaiguri (57.74%) but social group of literates ST Female under Jalpaiguri (42.26%) is highest than Paschim Medinipur (40.48%) and Puruliya (36.78%).

**Table 7: Gender wise Social Group of Literate ST population under Paschim Medinipur, Puruliya & Jalpaiguri districts.**

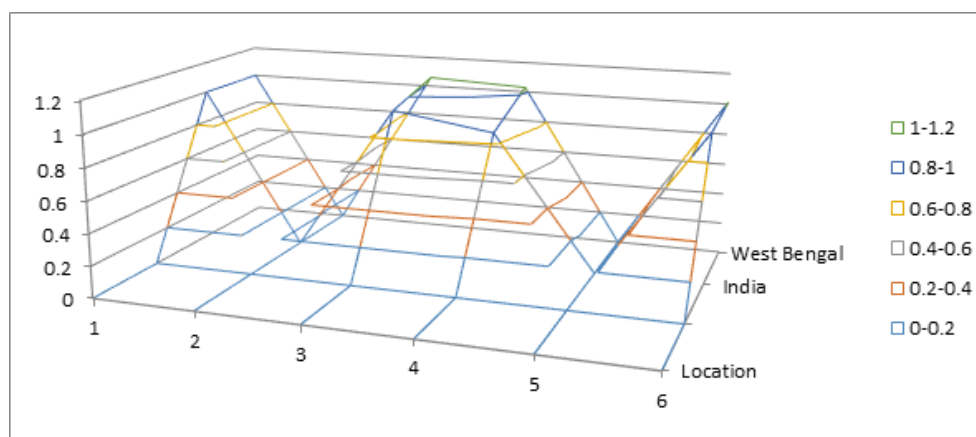
Gender wise social group	Literate ST Population in %		
	Paschim Medinipur	Puruliya	Jalpaiguri
ST Female	40.48	36.78	42.26
ST Male	59.52	63.22	57.74



The data in the table 8 shows the Gender Parity Index (GPI), a socio-economic index. It was obtained from the report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013 (Govt. of India). The report reflects the enrolment of girls in school or access to education in comparison to boys. The data shows that the Gender Parity Index (GPI) of Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal is same with India in Class I- V which is 1. The GPI values are higher in class VI-VII, class IX-X and Class XI-XII, which are 1.06, 1.03 and 1.01 respectively in comparison to average India. Although most of the data in this study reflects negative educational status of tribal girls but table 8 is evident of no gender discrimination in educational attainment of ST girls in West Bengal.

**Table 8: Gender Parity Index (GPI),**

Location	Gender Parity Index			
	Classes I-V	Classes VI-VIII	Classes IX-X	Classes XI-XII
India	1	0.96	0.86	0.96
West Bengal	1	1.06	1.03	1.01

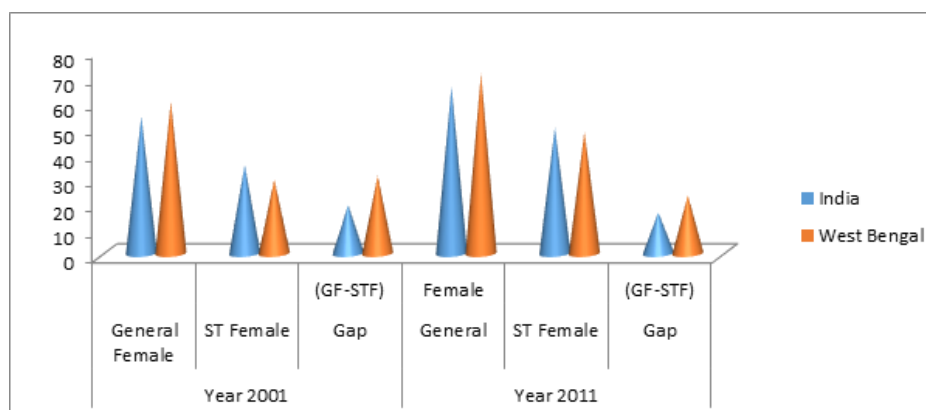


*Source: Report of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013*

The data in the table 9, on literacy rate of ST females has been compared with the general females in the perspective of India and West Bengal following the census reports of 2001 and 2011. The gaps in literacy rate between the general females and tribal females were found more in West Bengal than India in both the reports.

**Table 9: Literacy Rate among the population of ST Female and General Females in India and West Bengal**

Social Groups	Year 2001			Year 2011		
	General Female	ST Female	Gap (GF-STF)	General Female	ST Female	Gap (GF-STF)
India	53.67	34.76	18.91	65.46	49.35	16.11
West Bengal	59.64	29.15	30.49	70.54	47.71	22.83



*Sources: Census reports of 2001 and 2011.*

## **Findings of study**

The present study indicated marked disparity in literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio of tribal women comparative to their male counterpart in the tribal society. The literacy rate of tribal women is also very poor comparative to that of general women of the state and India as well. Education being the first step towards eradication of poverty, hunger and crime, and establishment of social justice and equality, the poor standard of education of the tribal women appears the root cause of present condition of disempowerment of ST women in the state of West Bengal.

The power or authority by empowering tribal women can only be achieved through establishment of proper education system, improving the gross enrolment ratio of tribal girls, and reducing the rate of drop-outs throughout the state. Emphasis on education of tribal females in the state is also necessary for the improvement of their health facilities, nutrition level, sanitation system, hygiene, and mental health.

It deserves mention here, despite several policies and initiatives by the central and the state governments and efforts of many NGOs, the issue of empowerment of tribal women has not been resolved satisfactorily even after seventy-five years of independence.

## ***Problems of tribal women***

There are many critical issues and problems have come across in the field of education of tribal women in West Bengal. They are as follows: constraints of tribal children, specially, the girl children which prevents them access to education. In many cases, the distant location of the village and inadequate transport facilities act as the physical barriers for the children of a tribal village to reach the school on regular basis.

The economic condition of most of the tribal families is so poor that they prefer to send their children in factory or in firm to work as labour which supplements the family income than sending them to school for education and empowerment. Another problem is the attitude of the parents and old members of the family towards girls' education. They consider girls as the commodities of the marriage market, early marriage of the female members is a kind of relief of the family over sending them to school for long time. Apart from that, there are many remote tribal areas where the teacher absenteeism is a regular phenomenon which in turn affects largely the quality of education. Lack of Proper monitoring by the Tribal Welfare Department and School Education Department often act as the hindrance on the path of smooth implementation of the government policies for education and empowerment of girls in tribal society. Last but not the least, lack of awareness about the benefits of women education in tribal society appears as the immediate problem to empowering women through education.

## ***Suggestion & Recommendation***

Considering the need of education for empowerment of tribal women, some suggestions have been made in this section: 1. It is necessary to establish an effective awareness campaign to raise understanding of the common people about the importance of education. An extensive literacy drive can be made in the tribal dominated districts of the state in order to literate the tribal girls as well as the adult women as a matter of priority. 2. The attitudes of tribal parents toward girls' education must be improved by providing them with appropriate counselling and coaching. 3. Circulation of relevant study materials in local languages could be effective in spreading the knowledge among the new learners in the tribal society. 4. Extensive mass campaign by street drama, meetings etc. on the association of education with good physical health, hygiene, mental health needs to be expressed in organised and planful way. 5. The local self govt like panchayat, should come up to eradicate social evils like early marriage, negative impression towards education of tribal girls and to invite tribal women in decision making and empowering in the political system. Since higher education among the tribes is less, special ST scholarships should (Ref; Tribal Health.pdf-IJDR) be provided to the tribal students pursuing higher education particularly in medical, engineering, and other vocational streams; though there are various scholarships and incentives available for the tribal children but either those are not updated properly or there are lacunae in implementation.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, the govt must launch proper monitoring system to materialize all the policies and endeavours made in favour of educational enhancement, economic growth, social equality, justice, and political decMore residential schools should be established in each state and districts and extended up to PG level in tribal areas. Social security- Social security of students, especially of adolescent girls is of great concern in residential schools. Proper Monitoring - Higher-level officials should check the functioning of schools frequently relating to the teaching methods, working hours, and attendance registers. It is making to establish empowerment of the marginalised tribal women in the society. In conclusion it can be said, the transformation of 'Ek Bharat' into 'Shrestha Bharat' would remain fruitless until and unless the needs of the marginalised and deprived sections of the society like the tribal women are carefully addressed and their due social status is restored within the inclusive set up of education and socio-economic culture of India. In the contemporary world, no other means but education would act as the most powerful instrument to bring about empowerment of the tribal women by restoring their socio-economic stability, inner strength, and capacity to overcome barriers, and expanding opportunities for sustained improvement in their well-being.

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