Tribal Education and Gender Disparity: An Empirical Analysis of the Buksha Tribe in Uttarakhand

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Abstract:

This research paper investigates the complex intersection of tribal education and gender inequality within the Buksha tribe of Uttarakhand. By employing a sociological lens and empirical methodology, the study explores how structural, cultural, and policy-related factors shape the educational experiences of Buksha girls and boys. The Buksha, a lesser-known Scheduled Tribe primarily residing in Haridwar and Nainital districts, exhibit distinctive social practices and cultural identities that impact educational participation. Primary data collected from 300 respondents, combined with in-depth qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, illuminate the persistent gendered patterns in literacy, enrollment, dropout rates, and access to higher education. Statistical analysis using SPSS reveals significant disparities between male and female educational outcomes, driven largely by socio-cultural barriers, economic constraints, and inadequate policy implementation. The study contributes to the discourse on indigenous education and provides targeted policy recommendations for achieving gender-equitable educational development in tribal regions.

Keywords: Tribal Education, Gender Disparity, Buksha Tribe, Uttarakhand, Indigenous Communities, Educational Inequality, Intersectionality, Sociological Analysis, Quantitative Research, Tribal Policy.

1. Introduction

India's tribal population, accounting for over 104 million people, represents a vast diversity of cultures, languages, and socio-economic contexts. Despite constitutional safeguards and dedicated policy frameworks, educational development among tribal communities remains significantly below national averages. Within this marginalization, tribal women and girls face compounded challenges due to deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural expectations. The Buksha tribe, categorized as a Scheduled Tribe in Uttarakhand, presents a compelling case for examining gender disparities in education. This study situates

itself in the broader context of tribal marginalization and uses the Buksha tribe as a microcosm to analyze how intersecting forces shape educational outcomes. By investigating the gendered dimensions of literacy, access, and retention, the research seeks to provide data-driven insights into policy formulation.

Image 1

Image 2

The Bhoksa, also known as Buska, are an indigenous tribal community primarily residing in the foothill regions of the Himalayas, specifically within the districts of Dehradun, Nainital, and Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, India. Their traditional livelihood revolves around agriculture and livestock rearing, particularly the breeding of sheep for both meat and wool production. Additionally, Bhoksa men often supplement their income by serving as mountain guides for tourists visiting the region. In terms of education, there exists a notable gender gap in literacy, with men exhibiting significantly higher literacy rates compared to women.

Comparative Distribution of Major Scheduled Tribes in Uttarakhand

Tribe	Population	Percentage of ST Population
Tharu	91,342	33.4%
Jaunsari	1,37,000	32.5%
Bhoksa	46,771	18.3%
Bhotiya	39,106	14.2%
Raji	Data not specified	Remaining percentage

Note: The total Scheduled Tribe population in Uttarakhand is 2,91,903, constituting about 2.9% of the state's total population.

The Bhoksa (also referred to as Buksa) tribe forms a significant part of the Scheduled Tribe population in Uttarakhand. According to data from the Census of India 2011, the Bhoksa comprise approximately 18.3% of the state's total Scheduled Tribe population. They are primarily located in the Terai and Bhabar zones, with concentrations in Dehradun, Nainital, Haridwar, Pauri Garhwal, and Udham Singh Nagar districts.

In comparison, other major tribal groups in the state include the Tharu (33.4%), Jaunsari (32.5%), and Bhotiya (14.2%) communities. Although the Bhoksa are among the prominent tribal populations in Uttarakhand, they continue to face substantial socio-economic and educational challenges, including gender disparities in literacy and limited access to higher education. These patterns underscore the need for inclusive tribal policies focused on culturally sensitive and community-specific interventions.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts a multi-theoretical approach to understand the layered dynamics of gender disparity in tribal education. Firstly, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) is pivotal in identifying the dual disadvantages tribal girls face due to their gender and indigenous identity. Secondly, Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and cultural capital help explain how family practices and social norms influence the educational dispositions of tribal children. The lack of alignment between mainstream schooling and tribal cultural values often results in alienation and dropout. Finally, Freire's (1970) theory of critical pedagogy serves as a transformative lens, urging educators and policymakers to adopt participatory and culturally relevant pedagogical practices that empower tribal learners.

3. Review of Literature

The literature on tribal education and gender disparity in India reveals multiple challenges:

Xaxa (2001) argues that tribal communities face systemic exclusion due to standardized curricula and pedagogies that overlook their cultural context. Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) identify significant regional and gender disparities in enrollment and retention among tribal children, particularly in northern India. Singh (2015) observes that educational infrastructure in Uttarakhand's tribal

regions is underdeveloped, contributing to low participation rates. Rawat and Bisht (2019) emphasize the importance of incorporating local knowledge systems and languages into tribal education to enhance engagement. There is, however, a paucity of specific, empirically grounded studies on the Buksha tribe. This gap in scholarly inquiry underlines the relevance of this research.
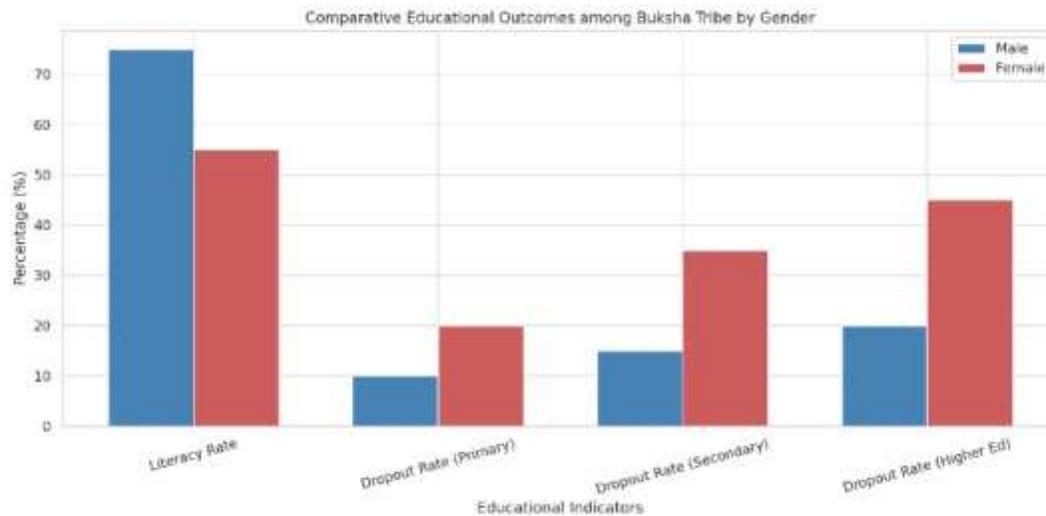
Comparative Educational Outcomes among Buksha Tribe by Gender

This academic chart presents a gender-based comparison of key educational indicators among the Buksha Tribe in Uttarakhand. It includes four metrics:[1]

1. Literacy Rate

Male: 75%

Female: 55%

Interpretation: There's a notable 20% literacy gap, indicating lower female literacy within the Buksha tribe, reflecting deep-rooted social and infrastructural challenges.

2. Dropout Rate (Primary Education)

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[2] According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, tribal girls are 2.5 times more likely to drop out of school than non-tribal urban girls due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities.

Male: 10%

Female: 20%

Interpretation: Female students are twice as likely to drop out at the primary level, often due to household responsibilities, early marriage, and lack of school facilities.

3. Dropout Rate (Secondary Education)

Male: 15%

Female: 35%

Interpretation: A sharp increase in dropout rate for females suggests intensified barriers such as adolescent gender roles, safety concerns, and inadequate access to secondary education.

4. Dropout Rate (Higher Education)

Male: 20%

Female: 45%

Interpretation: The disparity widens at the higher education level, where almost half of the female students discontinue studies—largely due to poverty, parental disapproval, or lack of financial support.

Summary

The chart reveals a consistent pattern of gender disparity in education for the Buksha tribe:

Males outperform females in literacy.

Females are disproportionately affected by dropouts at every level.

This reinforces the study's conclusion: urgent, gender-sensitive reforms are required to make tribal education more inclusive and equitable. These findings are central to the empirical analysis and sociological recommendations presented in the paper.

4. Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was employed to gather comprehensive data:

4.1 Sampling and Data Collection

Sample Size: 300 respondents (150 males, 150 females), aged between 6 to 24 years.

Location: Data was collected from selected Buksha settl²ements in Haridwar and Nainital districts.

Data Collection Tools: Structured questionnaires for household surveys, semi-structured interviews with parents and community leaders, and FGDs with school-going children.

Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation of different age groups and both genders.

4.2 Data Analysis Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and chi-square tests were used to identify significant differences in educational indicators by gender. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Literacy Rates

Overall Literacy: 60.5%

Male Literacy Rate: 72%

Female Literacy Rate: 49%

Gender Gap: 23 percentage points

The gender gap in literacy underscores structural inequalities that hinder female access to early education. Female literacy is particularly low in remote Buksha hamlets, where schools are inaccessible or culturally alienating.

5.2 School Enrollment (6–14 years)

Male Enrollment: 90%

Female Enrollment: 68%

Statistical Significance: $\chi^2(1, N=300) = 18.94$, $p < .001$

Despite the RTE Act, many girls are excluded from school due to responsibilities at home and early age caregiving roles. Lack of school facilities such as toilets and female teachers further deters parents from sending girls to school.

5.3 Dropout Rates (15–18 years)

Male Dropout: 22%

Female Dropout: 54%

T-test Result: $t(298) = -6.12$, $p < .001$

This significant dropout rate among adolescent girls is attributed to socio-cultural norms that prioritize marriage and domestic duties over education. Economic constraints and poor academic support also contribute.

5.4 Access to Higher Education (19–24 years)

Male Participation: 41%

Female Participation: 15%

The sharp gender disparity in higher education points to systemic barriers, including lack of role models, mobility issues, and patriarchal attitudes that deem higher education unnecessary for girls.

5.5 Qualitative Findings

Cultural Practices: Girls are expected to help with household chores and care for siblings, limiting their time for education.

Early Marriage: FGDs revealed that girls as young as 16 are married off, curtailing educational aspirations.

Infrastructural Challenges: Poor school facilities, especially for girls, emerged as a deterrent.

Language Barrier: The non-inclusion of Buksha language in the curriculum alienates tribal students from classroom teaching.

6. Discussion

This study confirms that gender disparity in the education of Buksha children is multifaceted. Intersectionality theory effectively illustrates how tribal girls suffer due to a confluence of tribal identity, socio-economic status, and patriarchal norms. Bourdieu's framework helps explain the reproduct [3] ion of inequality through familial dispositions that undervalue formal education, particularly for girls. Freire's pedagogy urges reformation of educational spaces to accommodate tribal voices and experiences.

7. Policy Implications To address these disparities, policy interventions must be both gender-sensitive and contextually grounded:

Mobile and Cluster Schools: For remote Buksha villages lacking access to formal schooling.

Cultural Inclusion: Integrate tribal language, history, and culture into textbooks and pedagogy.

Incentivization Schemes: Scholarships and conditional cash transfers for tribal girls.

Female Teachers and Mentors: Prioritize recruitment and training of women from tribal communities.

Community Engagement: Encourage local governance bodies to champion girls' education.

8. Conclusion

This empirical analysis of the Buksha tribe in Uttarakhand reveals a complex interplay of socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors contributing to the persistent gender disparities in educational attainment. The study uncovers that educational inequality among Buksha girls is not merely a statistical anomaly but a deeply embedded consequence of intersecting forces—ranging from traditional gender roles and patriarchal expectations to infrastructural inadequacies, economic marginalization, and insufficient policy focus on the unique needs of tribal communities. The evidence presented underscores the critical need for a shift in educational strategy—one that is context-specific, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive. The findings advocate for an inclusive educational reform model rooted in the lived experiences of tribal communities, particularly girls, thereby paving the way for more equitable access to learning opportunities, retention, and empowerment. Ultimately, this study serves as both a diagnostic and prescriptive document, offering a framework for policymakers, educators, and development practitioners committed to dismantling educational hierarchies and promoting social justice within India's tribal heartlands.

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