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TRENDS AND DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG SCHEDULED TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS FROM 1961 TO 2011

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Abstract:

Education is one of the most important indicators to shape a country's growth and to develop people's condition. Swami Vivekananda (1894) rightly said, 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' Education stands as one of the foundation pillars of a developing society. As an integral part of society, tribal people need to be educated for the development of the community as well as the overall development of the region. The study aims to analyse a comparative educational status of the various tribal groups of West Bengal on a temporal basis and spatial context with the help of indicators like educational access, attainment, reason for dropouts and how the policies are working for the development. The data is gathered from various secondary sources, focusing primarily on census reports from 1961-2011. The analytical purpose is fulfilled by a detailed study, compilation of data and its representation through cartographic techniques. The study shows a comprehensive analysis of the educational status of major and popular tribal groups of West Bengal from post-independence till 2011.

Keywords: Educational Status, Tribes, West Bengal, Census Data.

1. Introduction

Along with the mainstream society, there are groups of people who are alienated, underdeveloped, less literate, economically weaker and vulnerable who have also formed a different section of the society termed as 'aboriginals' or 'tribals'. India holds the second-largest population of tribal communities after Africa. (PIB, GOI,2022). Compared to developed countries, this number is quite high. The word 'tribe' is described as a distinct social group based on social and developmental conditions. According to the anthropology dictionary, "a tribe is a social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity and unifying social organisation" (Banerjee,1994). Educational status is a potent indicator of social and economic development, which also reflects the condition of tribal communities. Tribal development has been a significant concern of the government, voluntary organizations, NGOs, and social reformers and should not be studied in isolation. In West Bengal, according to the 2011 census, the tribal population is 5296963, which constitutes 5.8% of the state's total population. The state experienced 10.3% growth in 1961 to 69.4% in 2011(Census of India,1961-2011). Though Santhals are the most popular tribe of West Bengal still there are more than 40 notified tribal communities (Mangal,2012). For the study purpose, popular tribes of West Bengal are taken into consideration and their status of education has been explained over several decades to analyse their present condition.

2. Objective

To explore educational access and attainment levels among different tribal groups, identifying trends, gaps and disparities in literacy and school enrollment, as well as factors affecting educational progress among tribal populations.

3. Methodology

This study is based on secondary data sources. Relevant secondary data and information have been collected from books, research articles, Census of India, 1961-2011, Human Development Reports and the reports provided by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt of India, West Bengal Tribal Welfare Department. After extracting data primarily from Primary Census Abstracts for different years and compiling them, the analytical part is supported through various cartographic techniques, and a conclusion is drawn based on this information.



4. Results & Discussion

Education is one of the major components of the Human Development Index (2001, 2011), with literacy rate and enrolment ratio as key indicators. In India like other countries, education is a key factor for development. The population of West Bengal is composed of diversified social groups. The tribal population is also diversified from north to south and east to west (Fig.1.). To study and analyse the educational dimension of different tribal groups, the entire state's educational attainment of tribal groups is taken into consideration for its vast spatial nature. For a better understanding of major tribal groups (Table 1), on the basis of popularity and numbers have been considered and a temporal and spatial analysis are done on the basis of certain parameters.

4.1. A Brief Introduction to the popular and numerically major tribal groups of West Bengal

Table 1. Region-wise major tribes with their characteristics

Tribes	Region of concentration	Characteristics
Bhumij	Purulia Midnapore, Bankura, 24 parganas.	Agricultural tribe is also known as Munda. Speaks Bhumij language.
Bhutia including Sherpa, Toto, Dukpa, Kagatay, Tibetan, Yolmo	Darjeeling, Kalimpong	Tibetan ethnic native, called the people of the rice valley, speaks Dzongkha.
Kora	Birbhum, Bankura	Famous for traditional skills and engagement in various earth works. They speak Kora language or Bengali.
Lepcha	Darjeeling, Kurseong, Kalimpong	They are called Rongkup, son of mountain Kanchenjunga. Writing is called Rong or Lepcha script.
Lodha, Kheria or Kharia	Pashim Medinipur, Jhargram	Divided into Lodha Hindus and Muslims. They are called Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) by GOI. They mostly speak Lodhi, Bengali and Odiya.
Mahali/Mahli	Birbhum, Bardhaman	Belongs to Munda group. Mostly speaks Mahali. Their deities are Solar deity, Mountain deity.
Mal Pahariya	Bardhaman, Bankura, Murshidabad	Practitioners of Shifting agriculture, speak Malto language.
Munda	Jalpaigudi, Pashim Medinipur, North 24 Parganas	An agricultural tribe. Their Deity is called Singbonga. They have Mundari Language.
Oraon	Jalpaigudi	Forest and Farm Dwellers. They speak Kurukh. Traditionally they are nature worshipper (Sarnaism).
Santal	Medinipur, Bankura, Purulia	They form an egalitarian society, they speak Santhali. Followers of Hinduism and Sarnaism.



Note. Data compiled from *Census of India (2001)*, Office of the Registrar General and Census Operations, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi; *Fried (1975)*; and *Backward Classes Welfare Department, Government of West Bengal (2001)*.

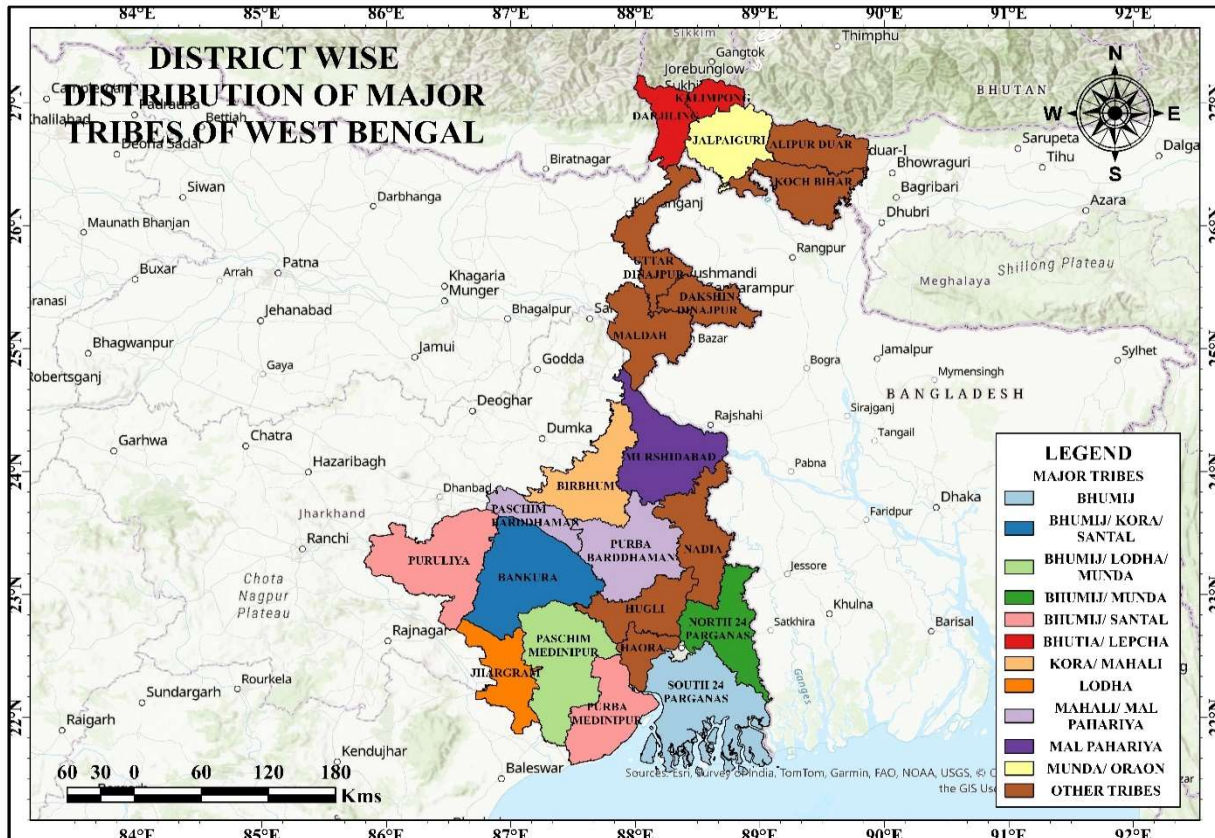


Fig.1. Distribution of Major and Popular Tribes of West Bengal

Information Source: District Census Handbooks (DCHB)1961,1991,2001 & 2011, West Bengal

4.2. Trends and Gaps in Literacy

The present study is based on secondary data, which is being extracted from Primary Census Abstracts, Census of India, District Handbook Reports, 1961 to 2011, for the state of West Bengal. All the data sets are analysed by using Microsoft Excel 2021. Literacy growth rates are computed based on the following formulae (Dutta & Bisai, 2020):

$$\text{Literacy Growth Rate} = \frac{\text{Present Literacy Rate} - \text{Previous Literacy Rate}}{\text{Previous Literacy Rate}} \times 100$$

Table 2: Literacy Growth Rate of ST Population from 1961-2011

Year	Present LR	Previous LR	LGR
1961	10.3	-	-
1971	33.2	10.3	22.2
1981	40.9	33.2	23.19



1991	42.2	40.9	3.17
2001	59	42.2	39.81
2011	69.4	59	17.62

Source: Census of India, 1961-2011

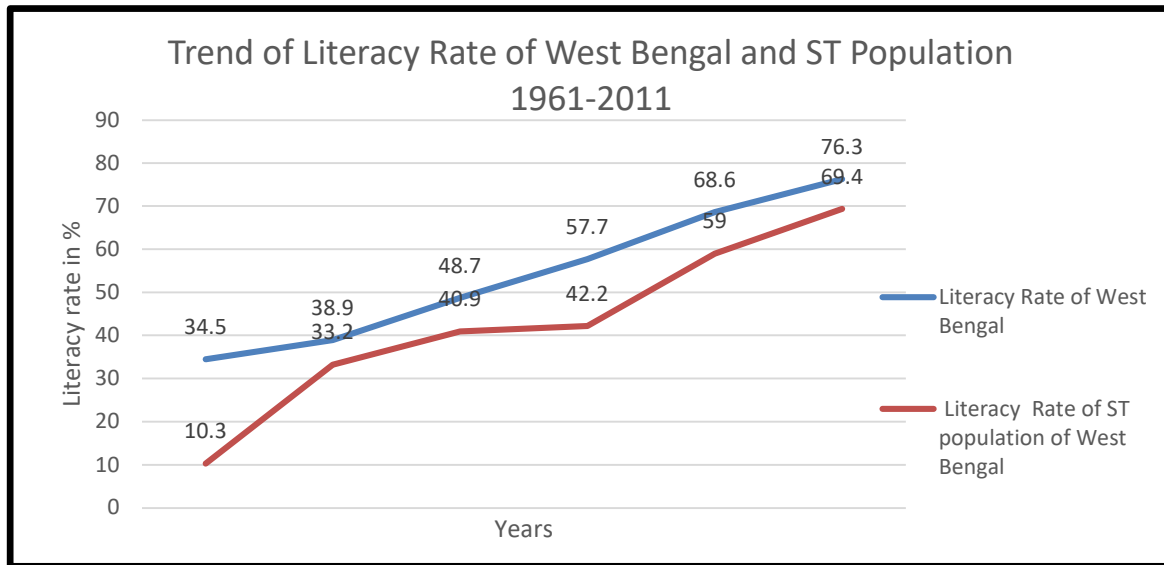


Fig.2: Literacy Trend of Scheduled Tribe Population in Respect to West Bengal, 1961-2011

Source: Census of India, 1961-2011

The literacy rate of the tribal population has increased over the decades, considering the time frame from 1961 to 2011 (Table 2). It has been drastically upward from 1961 to 1971, which is 10.3 to 33.2 percent. However, maintaining a stabilised literacy rate from 1971 to 1991 and again a rising trend has been seen from 1991 to 2011 (Fig.2), perhaps due to development and modernization. The human development indicator suggests education as the prime factor which is for all irrespective of caste, creed and community. Though the tribal population is less in number, still these communities hold a major part of the society and need to be uplifted from their primitive status. Hence, education stands as the primary component to accelerate the growth process, which has been seen from the post-independence period.

4.3. District-wise educational status of ST population from 1961- 1971

Post Independence period, since 1961-1971 time period, literacy rate among tribal people in West Bengal (Fig.3 & Fig.4) has shown a tremendous growth rate compared to other decadal growth rates. Having a major tribal population in the northern part of Bengal, it has shown a remarkable growth rate in literacy among the popular tribes. However, the Bhutias and the Lepchas both have higher concentrations in north Bengal. Regions close to the urban periphery, like Haora, Hugli, and Twenty-Four Parganas, the literacy growth rate is high. The lower growth rate shown in the Gangetic floodplain region as the concentration of tribal communities are lower in this region. Compared to southern and northern regions, the educational growth rate of tribes is lower in western parts perhaps due to its continuation to the Chota Nagpur plateau region. This area is considered underdeveloped due to the proximity of tribal people to nature and their unwillingness to adopt changes. District-wise development in literacy rate for 1961 and 1971 is not very different as far as the data sources are concerned. Among the various tribal groups, apart from the two major tribes of North Bengal, tribes like Santhal, Oraon, Munda Bhumij of Jalpaiguri, Medinipur have shown a better educational progress. Contrary to that Kora, Lodha, Mal Pahariya of the extreme western region, due to its extreme detachment from the growth process literacy rate is lower. However, as far as the sex composition scenario in literacy rate among various tribal groups is concerned, female literacy



rates are extremely low among all the tribes except Lepchas and Bhutias. The reasons for such a low literacy rate among females may be cited as their male-dominated society and poverty-driven conditions, where males are the major breadwinners. Even the early age of marriage is one of the major reasons for their lower literacy rates.

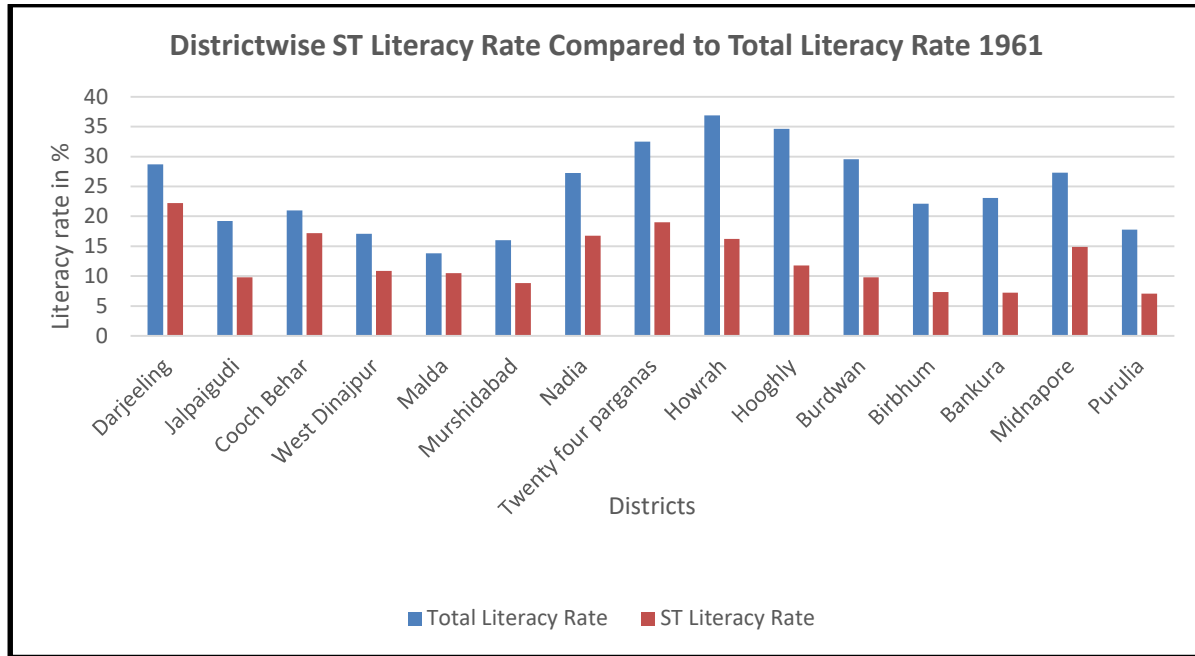


Fig 3: District-wise Comparison of Literacy Rate of ST Population,1961

Source: Census of India, 1961

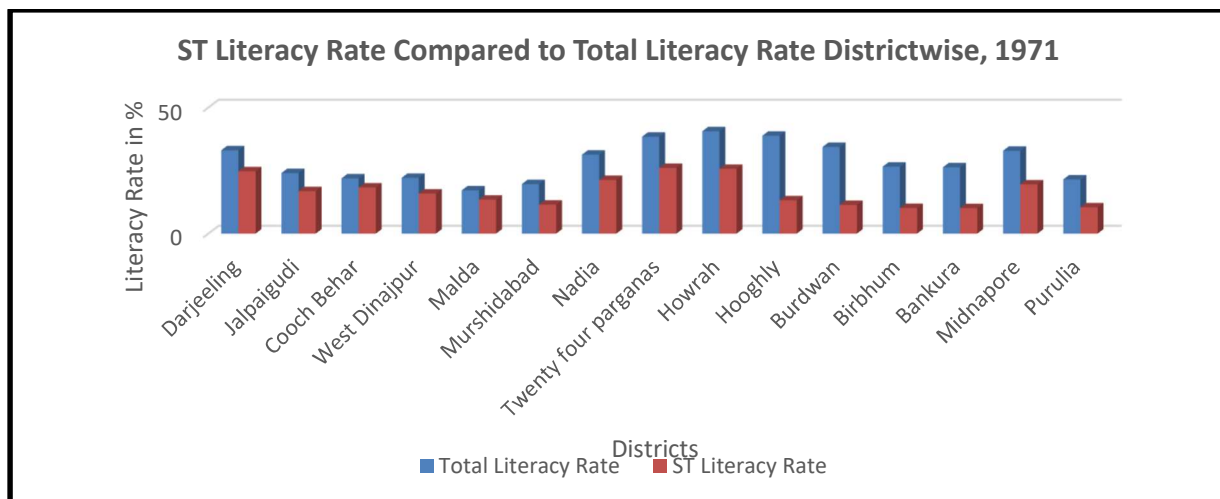


Fig.4: District-wise Comparison of Literacy Rate of ST Population,1971

Source: Census of India, 1971



4.4. Educational status between 1981-1991 of various tribal groups

After showing a steady rising growth rate in literacy rate from 1961 to 1981, the literacy growth rate among tribal people stabilized from 1981 to 1991 and onwards. Though the absence of much information and data for the year 1981 creates a barrier in the proper analysis of the scenario of tribal education, still, the gathered information for growth rate and trend depicts a clear picture. The population explosion due to the development of medical sciences also triggered the need to educate people. The comparative study between various tribal groups for the year 1991 shows (Fig.5.) that the most developed tribe of West Bengal is the Santhal tribe compared to other tribes. Santhals have a higher rate of educational attainment, starting from the primary level to the graduate level to the post-graduate level. Whereas, other tribes of western and northern Bengal showed lower rates of education, even in primary and secondary levels. However, the Bhumij Oraon and Munda tribes have also shown a progressive attitude towards higher education in the light of development, when the rest weren't able to attend even basic levels of education.

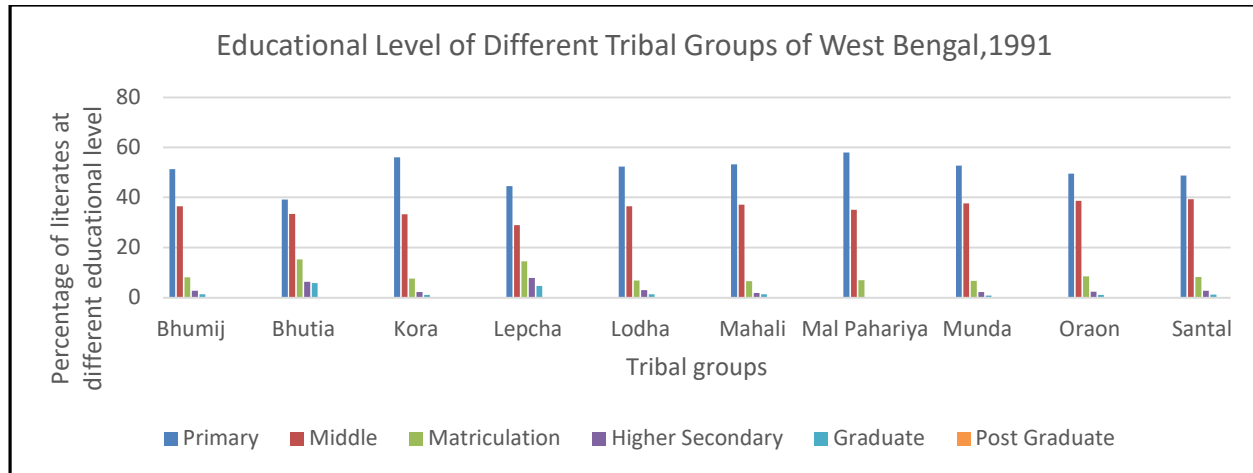


Fig.5: Educational Level of Different Tribal Groups of West Bengal, 1991

Source: Census of India, 1991

4.5. A comparative study of the district-wise status of education of tribal communities between 2001-2011

Millennium onwards, as the country entered the process of globalization, an overall development in the country's Human Development Index became a matter of concern. The situation has changed since then and the development process has been accentuated in every sphere. The overall scenario of West Bengal has also improved concerning development parameters. In developing tribal groups and backward class people, policies are being changed and various government schemes are being introduced. Concurrently, health and education are taken as major indicators for people's development. Earlier decades showed a growth rate of the literate population. From 2001 onwards, the rise has been smooth and it has been growing upwards since then. The data derived from the census 2001 and 2011 show a more or less similar picture of the scheduled tribe's literacy aspect. From 1991 to 2001, there is a tremendous growth rate in literacy of about 39 % which in all decadal changes from then onwards, a stable rate of growth has been seen. Comparing the literate ST population of West Bengal between 2001 to 2011 shows a similar kind of change in the concentration of literate ST population. The district of Midnapore has the highest literacy rate of the ST population since 2001 and remained the same for 2011. Considering the percentage of literate tribal population to total population, it can be found that in southern Bengal, tribal people are more literate than the northern part of West Bengal, except Darjeeling district. It can be said that the influx of migrant populations from neighbouring countries for the British plantation economy can be the reason for this. The concentration of literate ST population increased at a higher rate from the year 2001 to 2011 in the case of Jalpaiguri district. Considering population concentration, Malda district has shown improvement in tribal literacy rate from 2001 to 2011. The



concentration of the literate population is higher in districts of Purulia, Bankura, Bardhaman, and Darjeeling as compared to others because the number of tribal groups and communities are also high in such districts. Maps for 2001 and 2011 (Fig.6 & Fig.7) clearly indicate the development process concerning education among tribal people. Literacy rate is steadily growing and districts which are considered as underdeveloped are also showing remarkable growth in the education of tribal communities. The districts of southern Bengal, like Murshidabad, Haora, Hugli, and 24 Parganas, all have a lesser tribal population in terms of number and types so the number of illiterates is also low and literates are high compared to the northern and western parts. There are multiple factors responsible for tribal literacy in West Bengal. Sparsely distributed tribal population in various districts compared to the mainstream population, poverty level, access to educational facilities, distinctive cultural traits and lack of awareness regarding development and education. The districts which have improved in literacy rate still have not reached a higher level which indicates education is not accessible to everyone, irrespective of gender, family conditions, socio socio-economic status. Sometimes, government schemes are failing to attract students to the school and generate awareness among the parents. Education can bring them into the light and a rising trend of literacy rate and literate population is a hope for the coming generation of population belonging to such a community.

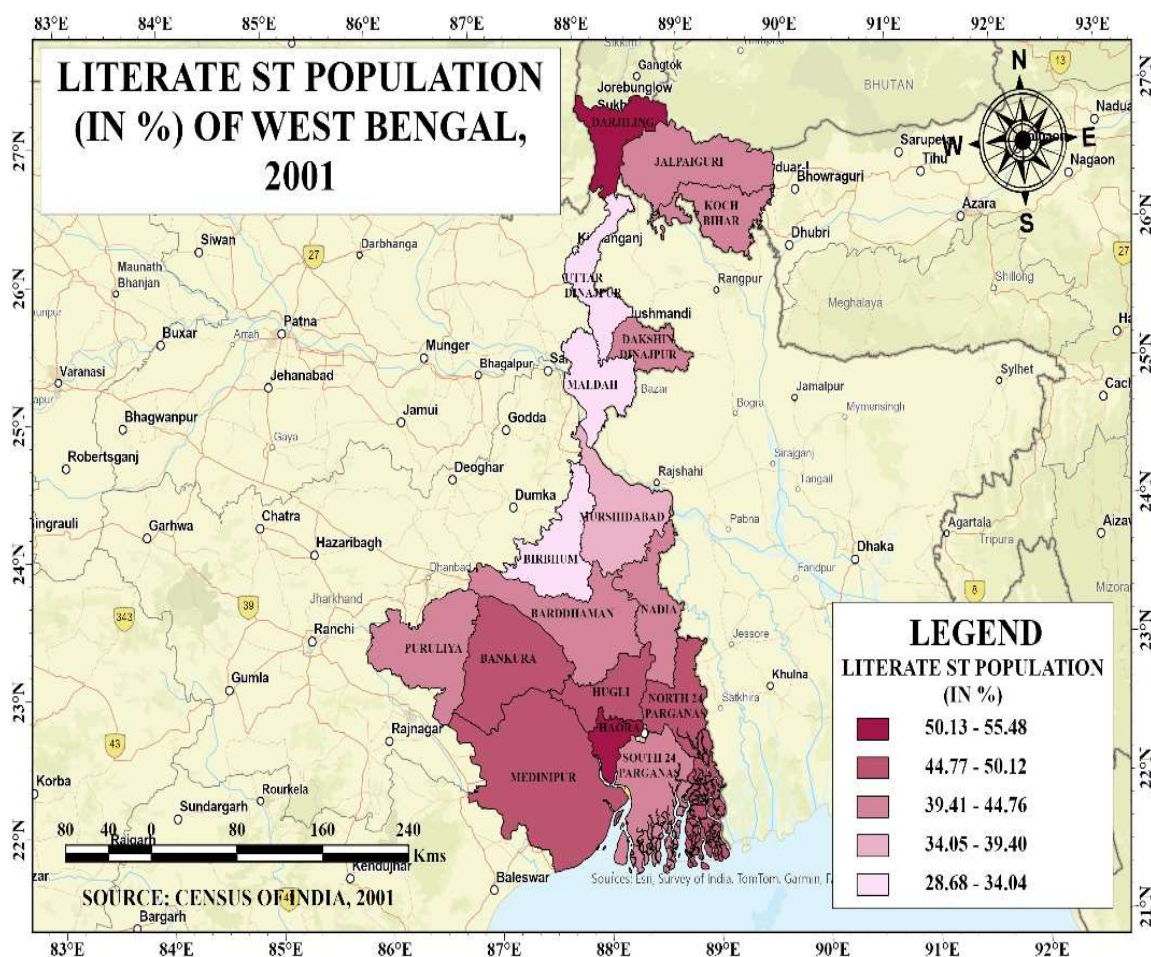


Fig.6: Literate Tribal Population of West Bengal for the year 2001

Source: Census of India, 2001

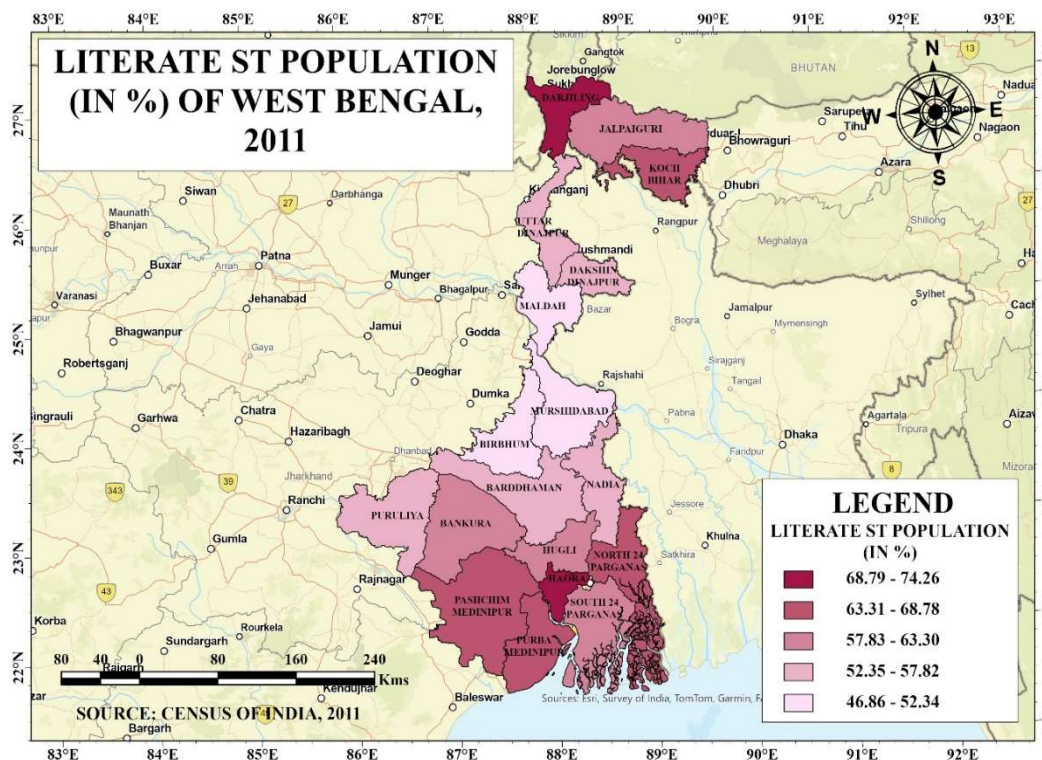


Fig.7: Literate Tribal Population of West Bengal for the year 2011

Source: Census of India, 2011

4.6. Trend of growth of literate population of major tribes of West Bengal from 1991-2011

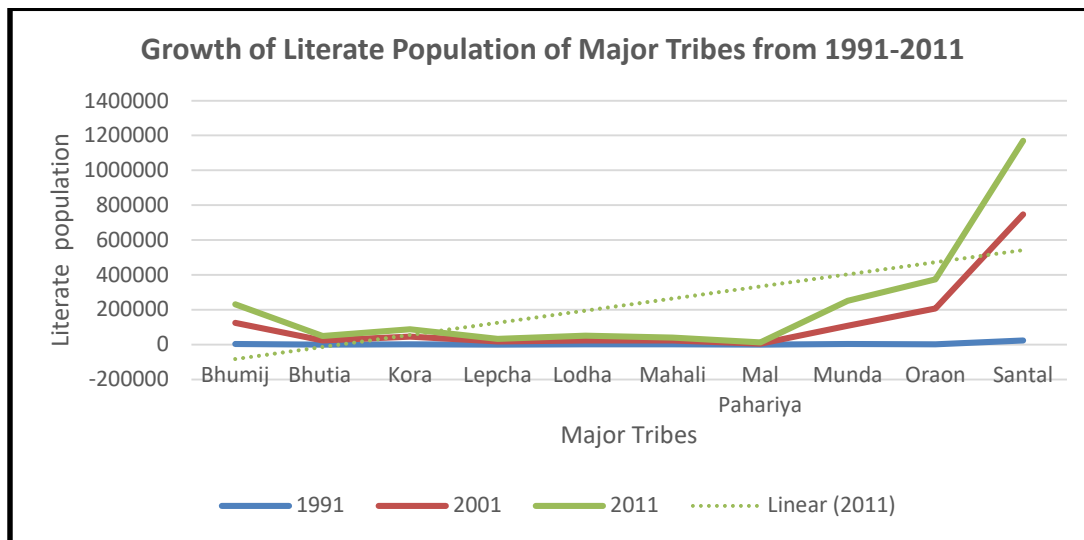


Fig.8: Growth of Literate Population of Major Tribes from 1991-2011

Source: Census of India, 1991, 2001, 2011



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The growth and changes in education level among the tribal groups can be analysed from the available data from the census for the decadal years 1991 to 2011(Fig.8). However, the unavailability of proper data for previous decadal years constrained proper analysis. Still, there are certain trends and the nature of growth of the literate population of major tribes can be seen and analysed. The trend shows that after Independence, while the Bhumij, Bhutia, and Lepcha tribes confined to the North Bengal region have shown a greater literacy rate whereas in the later period from 1991 onwards, the literacy rate among tribes has lowered, perhaps due to the cultural influences, supremacy of other communities and mixing of cultures. Contrary to that Munda, Santal, and Oraon tribes of western and southern Bengal have shown a surprising rise in literacy rate. The twentieth century has opened new development opportunities, and has given better access to education to such tribal groups. Later on, their development as a whole has increased because of the modern educational system and better access to education.

4.7. Factors affecting educational progress among tribal populations

The major factors affecting the educational progress of tribal people of West Bengal are discussed with various perspectives.

4.7.1. Absence of inclusiveness

The tribal population of West Bengal are mostly concentrated in the rural parts of the state compared to urban areas and they still have their own niche which is different in the social sphere. They are finding difficulties adjusting to mainstream society which creates a lack of security among them to adapt to society.

4.7.2. Language acts as a barrier

The tribal people are the indigenous group who have different linguistic families, which are different from major formal language families. While the curriculum is mostly set on regional language or international language, having a vast gap and improper knowledge about language creates barriers to studying.

4.7.3. Poverty-stricken family

Poverty is a contributing factor to the lack of education among tribal folk. West Bengal tribal people are mostly from rural villages and hamlets of the western, northern and southern parts. Some are under extreme poverty compared to the BPL and APL groups. Tribal people of bordering neighbouring states and countries are in utter despair as they fail to meet basic necessities. Their notion towards education and knowledge is far from sustainability.

4.7.4. Locational constraints for educational institutes

Lack of proper educational institutes in different tribal parts of the state is one of the major constraints for tribal people's education. Most of the tribal villages have primary and upper primary schools, which stop them from accessing secondary and higher secondary levels. Even the absence of a proper communication system in educational institutes creates problems for education.

4.7.5. Absence of proper infrastructural facilities

The tribal belt of West Bengal is mostly confined to the rural areas and there is insufficient access to institutions as well as infrastructural facilities. Most schools are formed by the government and with minimal infrastructure. The ratio of teacher to student is low, a lack of books and other associated materials, improper classroom facilities, lack of willingness for development create barriers for education.



4.7.6. Less access to resources due to regional disparities

West Bengal, due to its locational factor and political situation, is not able to get proper funding for tribal development, emphasizing education and health parameters. However, the state government's policies are working in favour of development, but some political turmoil is always hindering proper development. Even the lack of transparency for policy implementation is one of the major causes of development in education.

4.7.7. Untimely and improper implementations of schemes and policies

To quote the words of Haimendorf (1985), who narrates the predicament of unsuccessful tribal graduates: "tribal students who read up to tenth standard but fail to pass the final examination have few chances of employment in government services? Yet more than ten years at school have given them the ambition to find an occupation other than ordinary farm work for which they are no better qualified than their illiterate contemporaries." (Haimendorf, 1985). That means that tribal people are not provided with a proper setup where their interest in studies can bloom (Dey,2023). Though there are multiple schemes or policies for backward people's educational upliftment (Table 3) but none of them have been properly executed or are running smoothly, except 'Kanyashree' for girls' education.

4.7.8. Uneducated parents and lack of support

Socio-cultural attitude, extreme poverty conditions, first generation learners all unanimously created a severe unwillingness among the parents of the children to send them to school or push them to study higher (Dey, 2023). Living in a backward society, a lack of awareness regarding educational benefits acts as a major barrier for parents' support for children to have formal education.

4.7.9. Higher level of dropouts due to multiple factors

Various census reports (1961-2011) depict students who are engaged as agricultural labourers and cultivators, sometimes as industrial workers. As most households have low family income therefore it is hard to meet daily livelihood expenses. So, to them, it is a burden for educational expenditure. As most of the parents are illiterate and not educated properly, they are not aware of the impact of education and they are unable to motivate their children to continue higher education, as the data from 1961 to 2011 shows the lowering rate of higher studies. Child marriage is very much prevalent among the rural tribal people. Sometimes the distance of the school acts as an impediment to children attending the school.

4.8. Policies and Schemes for the educational development of the Tribal population

Table 3: Various schemes initiated by the Government of West Bengal for the development of the education of tribal people

Name of the Schemes	Objectives
Shikshashree	to provide financial assistance to improve their participation in the pre-matric stages and minimize the incidence of drop-out.
Pre-matric Scholarship	to provide financial assistance to improve their participation in the pre-matric stages and minimize the incidence of drop-out.
Post-matric Scholarship	financial assistance to scholars for higher studies
Merit Scholarship	encourage students to perform well in their studies so that they can be inspirations for other students



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Hostels	economic support and boarding facilities to scholars belonging to Schedule Tribe so that their essential education is not hampered.
Unclean Occupation	This grant gives emphasis to the children of persons engaged in occupations like manual scavengers, rag-picking, etc.

Source: Backward Class Welfare Development and Tribal Development, Government of West Bengal, 2001
<https://malda.gov.in/bcw-td-department-under-govt-of-west-bengal/>

5. Limitation of work

While doing the work, certain constraints exist from analytical perspectives. Proper representation of the temporal and spatial trend and gaps for the education scenario of scheduled tribes of West Bengal is hampered because of the unavailability of data sets for the year 1981. Even while the primary census abstracts of 1961 and 1971 are not properly maintained while analysing gender gender-specific literacy rate, literate population of various tribal groups of West Bengal. While the literacy growth rate of various decades is taken into consideration, there are anomalies in the rate of growth in census abstracts. On the availability of decadal data, the work has been done keeping all these in mind.

6. Conclusion

In the Indian context, caste stories and systems have a unique nature of telling a country's scenario in almost all human development parameters. Various census reports have tried to keep on track of population composition based on gender and caste and always differentiated multiple circumstances of changing conditions. Even the origin of various indigenous people of India and their cultural traits have all been recorded over various time spans. However, in India, Government policies acted to uplift the backward classes and indigenous people. West Bengal, once being Capital of the country from facing partition to influx of population, has survived various political turmoils still it has a history of co-existence of various tribal communities. Being the homeland for more than forty indigenous groups with their diversified cultural traits, this state of India has shown progress in educational attainment. The specific development programme designed for improvement in the education of the tribal community has played an important role in uplifting the backward classes. District-wise monitoring of policy implementation for education and keeping track of school goers, dropouts, creating opportunities for higher education sectors and including them in mainstream learning are such ways of educating these communities. The detailed analysis from 1961 to 2011 has shown an overall development of such communities in literacy rates, drop-out cases, and the number of literate populations, gender wise. The role of government has also been observed and the implementation of several schemes has also been studied and interpreted. Efforts have been made from both the front communities and the government to create a common platform for all. The journey from primitive society towards the light of education has changed the situation of various tribal communities of West Bengal.

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