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BARRIER OF SCHOLARSHIP ATTAINMENT AMONG ETHNIC STUDENTS: A STUDY IN JHARGRAM DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Education builds knowledge and critical thinking that supports human development. It depends on educational enrollment and active participation, which reflect different levels of development across several communities. Education accelerates across all levels of society with government support, including several scholarship programs. Merit-cum means (MCM) scholarship is a significant financial support, which measures the active and quality education of students. This study presents the educational achievements and obtained of merit-cum means scholarship of ethnic students of Jhargram district. 184 class IX to graduate students are surveyed from 170 families among different ethnic communities. The significance of the obtained merit-cum means scholarship is measured using a regression model with the variables of awareness about scholarships of respondent family (FA), educational level of mother (ELM), educational level of father (ELF) and student's residence in study session (SR). Regression result shows that FA, ELM, and SR have a significant effect on receiving the merit-cum-based scholarship at 0.05 significance level. 12.5 percent of the students received Merit-cum Means scholarship, and 77.64 percent missed their scholarships due to low eligibility marks. Awareness level is high among highly educated families, and hostel and paying guest (PG) staying students. Although the Government of India implements a wide range of scholarship programs to enable educational access and financial support for ethnic students, but students' active participation and academic excellence have yet to meet a satisfactory level.

Keywords: Educational achievement, Merit-cum Means scholarship, Ethnic groups, Regression

INTRODUCTION

Education is a significant pre-requisite tool for all-round development of an individual and the nation all together. The human resource significantly depends on the nature of education provided and the level of participation to it. In India, the scheduled tribe communities are educationally, socially and politically marginalized. The constitution of India emphasizes "the educational and economic development of weaker sections of the society through articles 45, 46, 15(4) to promote the economic and educational interest of marginalized communities. Government adopts an integrated approach in the implementation of the various centrally sponsored schemes, following the principle of the National Policy on Education (NPE), to achieve Universal Elementary Education (UEE) and to ensure the equitable quality of education for all human resources potential (Mete, 2019). Scholarship program in education is a significant scheme for enhancing access to quality education and strengthening human capital. The Central and the State governments of India and many NGOs provide a range of scholarships for meritorious students, Schedule Caste and Scheduled Tribe students, economically weaker section, and minority communities. The scholarship program supports students by offering financial support, encouraging academic excellence, fostering career development, promoting innovation and research and advancing equality and accessibility in education as a whole. Scholarships are offered in various fields including education, sports and different specialized disciplines and are classified into merit-based, need-based, student-specific and location-specific. Merit-based scholarships are awarded to students based on excellent academic performance, extracurricular activity or other achievements. Popular merit-based scholarships for West Bengal domicile students are the National Means-Cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS) **sponsored by the Central Government and the Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship (SVMCM) sponsored by the Government of West Bengal.** Need-based and student-specific scholarships are targeting a particular demographic group to provide financial support to students or their families based on gender, race, family's economic



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background or minority status, etc. The examples of these scholarships are pre-metric and post-metric scholarships. Location-specific scholarship is designed to support students from a particular geographical area.

Various scholarships are provided by the Government of India for students from ethnic groups, which are given below:

- Pre-Metric and Post-Metric Scholarships
- National Overseas Scholarship (NOS) Schemes
- Rajiv Gandhi National Scholarship
- Central Sector Scheme of Up-gradation of Merit of SC/ST Students
- National Means-Cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS)
- Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum Means Scholarship
- Kanyashree Prakalpa etc.

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Popular scholarships of West Bengal in detail:

1. Pre-Metric and Post-Metric Scholarships

(i) Pre-Metric Scholarship for SC/ST students

- a) Target students: Class IX and X.
- b) Eligibility: Student must be SC/ST community and parental income limit 2.5 lakh per annum.
- c) Purpose: To support parents from disadvantaged groups towards education, reducing dropout rates and improving academic performance at the elementary to secondary education.

(ii) Post-Matric Scholarship for SC/ST students.

- a) Target students: Class XI to professional courses (including undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees).
- b) Eligibility: Student must be SC/ST community and the parental income limit 2 lakh per annum.
- c) Purpose: To provide financial support to students from economically weaker sections to pursue higher education and reduce the economic burden on their families.

2. Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum Means Scholarship

- a) Target students: Class XI to professional courses (including undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees).
- b) Eligibility: Students from West Bengal pursuing higher secondary, undergraduate, postgraduate, diploma, or doctoral courses may benefited from this scholarship. Students who secured at least 60% marks in Secondary, Higher Secondary, and Graduation level, and 55% marks in the post-graduation examinations, are eligible to apply for the scholarship.
- c) Purpose: Financial assistance for higher education in West Bengal
- d) Amount: Monthly Rs. 1000

3. Kanyashree Prakalpa: Kanyashree Prakalpa for girl students, launched by the Government of West Bengal offers in different ages.

- a) Target students:
 - i. Annual Scholarship (K1): 13 to 18 years old, unmarried students
 - ii. One-Time Grant (K2): 18 to 19-year-old unmarried students
 - iii. Post-graduate scholarship (K3): Post-graduate unmarried girl students
- b) Eligibility:
 - i. Annual Scholarship (K1): Enrolled students in class VIII to XII in a recognized school.
 - ii. One-Time Grant (K2): Higher education enrolled students after schooling.
 - iii. Post-graduate scholarship (K3): Applicants are required to be registered beneficiaries under K2 and must have secured undergraduate degree with 45 percent marks.



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- c) Purpose: Promote school and higher education enrollment, reduced dropout rate of female students and delayed marriage until 18 years age.
- d) Amount:
- i. Annual Scholarship (K1): Rs.1000
 - ii. One-Time Grant (K2): Rs. 25000
 - iii. Post-graduate scholarship (K3): Rs. 25000.

In Jhargram district, 2,156 primary schools, 481 SSK (Sishu Sikshya Kendra), 62 MSK (Madhyamik Sikshya Kendra) and 138 higher secondary schools are spread across 18 educational circles (DISE, 2023). 10 general degree colleges are affiliated to Vidyasagar University and newly established Sadhu Ramchand Murmu University. There are five Teachers Training Colleges and Technical Degree Colleges respectively. West Bengal has a 5.8 per cent tribal population. Most concentration is found in the Jungle Mahal region. Jhargram district accounts for 29 percent of the tribal population. The major tribal groups include Santal, Bhumij, Kora, Mahali, Sabar, Lodha and Munda communities. Among them, Sabar and Lodha are the most deprived, followed by other communities, particularly in education and economic aspects. The academic achievement of ethnic students is comparatively low.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many ethnic communities continue to face challenges related to access to education, healthcare and employment categories (Negi & Dutta, 2022). Ethnic communities often have their own languages, customs, rituals, festivals, and art forms, and they live in remote areas. They enjoy living apart from mainstream society. In 1986, the Government acknowledged that English was not an effective language for integrating the ethnic population into the mainstream culture. Language barrier in the curriculum often limits the performance of ethnic students.

Economic hardship affects the student's ability to meet basic educational requirements; many ethnic families prioritise daily wage for subsistence over schooling, reducing opportunities to meet scholarship eligibility criteria such as regular attendance and academic performance (Nambissan, 2000).

The academic achievement level of ethnic students is low to average. (Das, 2021)

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Ethnic students and their families show a lack of awareness of available scholarships, eligibility conditions, document requirements, and application procedures. (Sujatha, 2002).

An ethnic-dominated area shows the deficits of inadequate school infrastructure, irregular teacher attendance, lack of qualified teachers and poor learning environments, which negatively impact learning outcomes, and significantly affect the scholarship attainment due to performance-based criteria. (Jhingran, 2005).

Ethnic girls faced early marriage due to household responsibilities, safety concerns, mobility restrictions etc., which limit educational attainment and access to scholarship opportunities.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study aims -

1. To know the attainment of various scholarships among ethnic students in Jhargram district.
2. To examine the constraints of students in obtaining merit-based scholarships.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative research design utilising survey data to examine the attainment and pattern of scholarship among the students from the ethnic communities of Jhargram district. The questionnaire survey and face-to-face interview were carried out on 170 families of different ethnic communities with the help of stratified random sampling. The participants in this study include 184 students, studying from class IX to Graduation. They were 57, 28, 23, 26, 9, 12 and 29 from Santal, Bhumij, Kora, Mahali, Sabar, Lodha and Munda community respectively. To examine the relevance of merit-based scholarship, a multiple regression model is used, which illustrates the functional relationship and influence of one or more factors in obtaining merit-cum means scholarship among ethnic students.

$$MCMS = f(FA, ELM, ELF, SR)$$

Where, MCMS refers to merit-cum means scholarship; FA refers to awareness about scholarships of respondent family; ELM is educational level of mother; ELF is educational level of father and SR stands for student's residence in study session. The above-mentioned equation is associated with the following functional form-



$$y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 \dots + e$$

Where, ‘y’ refers to Merit-cum Means scholarship and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, n, \dots$ are the independent variables, which include awareness about scholarships of the respondent family, educational level of father, educational level of mother, student’s residence in study session and e indicates the error terms.

RESULTS

Table 1: Educational attainment among students from the respondent’s family belongs to different ethnic groups

Ethnic Groups (Number of Families)	Class	No. of Students with academic performance			
		1st Class	2nd Class	Failed in Class	Total
Santal (55)	IX	2	10	0	12
	X	2	7	2	11
	XI	2	9	0	11
	XII	2	8	2	12
	Grad	2	9	0	11
	Total		10	43	4
Bhumij (27)	IX	0	5	0	5
	X	1	4	2	7
	XI	1	6	0	7
	XII	1	4	2	7
	Grad	0	2	0	2
	Total		3	21	4
Kora (23)	IX	0	5	2	7
	X	0	4	1	5
	XI	0	2	1	3
	XII	2	1	0	3
	Grad	2	3	0	5
	Total		4	15	4
Mahali (24)	IX	0	7	0	7
	X	0	3	2	5
	XI	3	5	0	8
	XII	0	2	1	3
	Grad	3	0	0	3
	Total		6	17	3
Sabar (7)	IX	0	2	0	2
	X	0	1	1	2
	XI	0	1	1	2
	XII	0	1	0	1



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	Grad	0	2	0	2
	Total	0	7	2	9
Lodha (8)	IX	0	2	1	3
	X	0	3	0	3
	XI	0	1	0	1
	XII	0	2	1	3
	Grad	1	1	0	2
	Total	1	9	2	12
Munda (26)	IX	0	4	0	4
	X	0	7	2	9
	XI	0	6	2	8
	XII	0	5	0	5
	Grad	1	2	0	3
	Total	1	24	4	29
Total (170)		25	136	23	184
M= Male, F=Female, Grad=Graduation					

Source: Field survey, 2022-2023

Table no. 1 presents the distribution of academic performance of students from different ethnic groups. Out of 184 students from 170 families, 25 students secured first-class results, which includes 10 Santal students among 57 students, 3 students out of 28 students from Bhumi community, 4 students among 23 students from Kora community, 6 mahali students among 26 students, only one student each from Lodha and Munda community among 12 and 29 students respectively. No one secured a first-class result among 9 students from Sabar community. 136 students achieved second-class result, including 43, 21, 15, 17, 7, 9, 24 students from Santal, Bhumi, Kora, Mahali, Sabar, Lodha and Munda communities respectively. Two students from Kora community and one student from Lodha community failed in class IX. Among Santal and Bhumi communities, 2 students from each class X and XII failed in their class. One student each from Kora and Sabar communities and 2 students from Mahali and Munda community each failed in class X. One student from Kora, Mahali and Lodha communities failed in class XII. One student from Kora and Sabar each and two students from Munda community failed in class XI.

Table 2: Scholarships Obtained by Students

Scholarships	Students of obtained scholarships	
	Frequency	%
Oasis Scholarship	127	69.02
Merit-cum means Scholarship	23	12.5
No Scholarship	34	18.48
Kanyashree Scholarship (only Girls Students)	93	100

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

The ethnic students are aware of two scholarships, OASIS Scholarship and Swami Vivekananda merit-cum means scholarship. Pre-metric and post-metric scholarships are known as OASIS scholarship in West Bengal. Swami Vivekananda merit-cum means scholarship is a merit-based scholarship in West Bengal. Table no. 2 shows that 69.02 percent of students have received the Oasis scholarship, 12.5 percent have been awarded the merit-cum means scholarship, and none of the



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students have applied for any national scholarships. However, 18.48 percent of students are not receiving any scholarship. all girl students received Kanyashree Scholarship.

Table 3: Reasons for not receiving the Merit cum Scholarship

Cause	Frequency	%
Failed in class	23	14.29
Result obtained is not eligible	125	77.64
Do not know	2	1.24
Date is Expired	1	0.62
Mobile Number Change	10	6.21
Total	161	100

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

There are different reasons for not receiving the merit-cum means scholarship. The study shows that 161 students did not receive the scholarship out of 184 students. 14.29 percent of students did not qualify due to failure in their class and 77.64 percent of students did not secure the eligible marks. 1.24 percent of students are not aware of it and missed their scholarship. 0.62 percent was unable to apply within the given time, and 6.21 percent of students could not apply because of a change in their registered mobile number. Table no. 4 shows 30.98 percent of respondents' families are not familiar with the MCM Scholarship for their children's education (Table 3 & 4).

Table 4: Awareness about Merit cum Scholarship among respondent family

Having Awareness	Frequency	%
Yes	127	69.02
No	57	30.98
Total	184	100

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

Table 5: Educational level of the mother of the respondent family

Educational level	Frequency	%	Scholarship obtained by the student	
			Frequency	%
Illiterate	23	12.50	1	4.35
Primary	70	38.04	7	10.00
Upper Primary	76	41.30	8	10.53
Secondary	11	5.98	4	36.36
Higher Secondary	3	1.63	3	100.00
Graduation	1	0.54	1	100.00
Total	184	100	23	

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

12.50 percent of mothers of ethnic students are illiterate and, in those families, 4.35 percent of children are awarded in MCM scholarship. 38.04 percent of ethnic mothers have primary education and 41.30 percent are educated up to upper primary level and around 10 percent of children have achieved the scholarship. 5.98 percent of mothers have secondary education, and 36.36 percent of children received this scholarship. 1.63 percent of mothers have higher secondary education and 0.54 percent graduated, and all their children were successfully awarded in merit cum based scholarship. There is a strong correlation between mothers' education and children's scholarship awards. The aware and educated mothers take initiatives in timely supplication and proper monitoring of the process. For illiterate mothers only 4.35 percent children get scholarship whereas that percentage become 100 for higher secondary and graduate mothers.



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Table 6: Educational level of father of the respondent family

Educational level	Frequency	%	Scholarship obtained student	
			Frequency	%
Illiterate	15	8.15	1	6.67
Primary	58	31.52	5	8.62
Upper Primary	75	40.76	2	2.67
Secondary	18	9.78	6	33.33
Higher Secondary	12	6.52	5	41.67
Graduation	6	3.26	4	66.67
Total	184	100	23	

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

8.15 percent of fathers of ethnic students are illiterates and from those families, 6.67 percent of children got merit-cum means scholarship. 31.52 percent of ethnic fathers have primary education, 40.76 percent upper primary, 9.78 percent secondary education, 6.52 percent higher secondary education, and 3.26 percent graduate, and from their families 8.62, 2.67, 33.33, 41.67, and 66.67 percent of children become successful in obtaining the scholarships, respectively (Table 6).

Table 7: Residence of ethnic students in study sessions

Type of Student's residence in the study session	Frequency	%	Scholarship obtained student	
			Frequency	%
Home	146	79.35	4	2.74
Hostel	31	16.85	15	48.39
PG (Paying Guest)	7	3.80	4	57.14
	184	100	23	12.50

Source: Field survey, 2022-2025

Table no. 7 shows a major part of ethnic students (79.35 percent) are staying in their home during the study session and out of them only 2.74 percent received merit-cum means scholarship. 16.85 percent of students stay in hostel, 3.80 percent stay as Paying Guest, and out of those categories, 48.39 percent and 57.14 percent of students are successfully awarded the scholarship.

Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment: Analysis using Multiple Regression Model

Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment of ethnic students was analyzed using a multiple linear regression model. Merit-cum Means scholarship (MCMS) is the dependent variable. Awareness about scholarships of respondent family (FA); educational level of mother (ELM); educational level of father (ELF) and student's residence in study session (SR) are the independent variables.

Table 5 shows that the regression model is statistically significant with a 0.05 significance level (0.000 level), so the result is acceptable. The regression table shows that awareness about scholarships of the respondent family (FA) is significantly correlated (0.000 level) with Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment of ethnic students. Educational level of mother (ELM) significantly affects the children's Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment and the educational level of father (ELF) does not. Student's residence in study session (SR) positively affects (0.000 level) Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment.



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Table 8: Regression result on Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment among ethnic students

Independent variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Level of Significance
(Constant)	0.959	0.130		7.400	0.000
FA	0.310	0.059	0.390	5.227	0.000
ELM	0.050	0.024	0.132	2.100	0.037
ELF	0.011	0.020	0.037	0.544	0.587
SR	-0.140	0.030	-0.319	-4.629	0.000
Dependent Variable: Merit-cum means scholarship (MCMS)					
R Square			0.466		
Adjusted R-Square			0.454		
Significant Level			0.05		

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal that institutional enrollments of students are highest among Santal community and comparatively lower in Sabar and Lodha communities. Santal students perform moderately well in successfully passing their classes among the ethnic communities. Second class result is most common outcome among all community students, indicating steady academic performance across the levels. Several cases of failure are reported in classes X and XII. About 46% of ethnic students' academic achievement levels were below the average academic achievement level. (Das, 2021)

A majority of ethnic students received OASIS scholarship and 18.48 percent of ethnic student did not receive any scholarship. A minimum number of students are awarded in Merit-based scholarships due to low academic achievement and they are not aware of national scholarships. Many students cannot complete their eligibility criteria and are unaware of deadlines, which results in missed opportunities for financial support. Most of the parents have upper primary education, higher educated parents take care of their children's education and are aware of achievements and awards for their children. Student staying in hostels and paying guest (PG) are more successful and aware of education and achievements (scholarship) among the ethnic students. Merit-cum Means scholarship attainment of ethnic students depends on the academic achievement of the student and on the awareness of students. Due to low academic achievement, students missed their academic scholarships.

CONCLUSION

Ethnic students face multiple barriers in attaining scholarships, which significantly limit their educational opportunities. Lack of awareness about available scholarships, complex application procedures, inadequate guidance, and limited access to digital and administrative resources are major challenges. Socio-economic disadvantages, language difficulties, low levels of parental education, and insufficient institutional support further reduce students' participation. These challenges highlight the need for simplified scholarship processes, better information dissemination, and stronger institutional and community support to ensure that ethnic students can fully benefit from educational opportunities and achieve equitable academic progress.

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