

Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on Education among Jharkhand's Janajati Populations

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Abstract:

This study examined the impact of socio-cultural factors on educational outcomes among Jharkhand's major Janajati populations, including Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Kharia, Birhor, and Bedia communities. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through household surveys, interviews, and secondary sources to assess literacy rates, dropout patterns, and the influence of cultural, economic, and gender-based variables. Results indicated that cultural beliefs, gender roles, language barriers, early marriage, child labor, and seasonal migration significantly contributed to educational inequality. Statistical analysis revealed positive correlations between dropout rates and both child labor and early marriage prevalence, with marked gender disparities in school participation. Comparative analysis with global and national studies highlighted similarities in structural barriers faced by indigenous populations worldwide, while also underscoring region-specific challenges in Jharkhand. The intersection of poverty, tradition, and policy gaps emerged as a critical determinant of sustained educational disadvantage. The study concluded that addressing educational inequality among Janajati groups required culturally responsive pedagogy, targeted poverty alleviation, and gender-sensitive interventions.

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1. Introduction:

Education has been widely acknowledged as a critical driver of social transformation, economic development, and individual empowerment across the globe. Globally, marginalized and indigenous communities have been found to experience significant educational disadvantages due to socio-cultural, economic, and linguistic barriers (UNESCO, 2021). Studies have indicated that indigenous populations in regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia have faced systemic exclusion from mainstream education systems, often resulting in lower literacy rates, reduced school attendance, and limited access to higher education opportunities (Anderson & Collins, 2019). Cultural norms, traditional livelihood patterns, and geographical isolation have further contributed to the persistence of educational inequities.

In the Indian context, Scheduled Tribes (STs) have been identified as among the most socio-economically disadvantaged groups, having been subjected to historical marginalization and cultural exclusion (Ministry

of Tribal Affairs, 2020). Although educational initiatives such as the Right to Education Act, mid-day meal schemes, and tribal residential schools have been implemented, substantial gaps in literacy rates, school retention, and academic performance between tribal and non-tribal populations have persisted (Chaudhary & Sharma, 2021). In states like Jharkhand, where Janajati communities constitute a significant proportion of the population, education has been shaped by complex socio-cultural factors, including traditional belief systems, early marriage practices, subsistence-based economies, and linguistic diversity. Such factors have been observed to influence parental attitudes toward formal education, student attendance, and dropout rates. This study has been aimed to examine the impact of socio-cultural factors on the educational attainment and participation of Janajati populations in Jharkhand, with a focus on identifying barriers and potential strategies for inclusive educational development.

2. Theoretical Framework

The educational experiences of Jharkhand's Janajati populations have been shaped by a complex interplay of socio-cultural factors, which have been rooted in historical, economic, and cultural contexts. To understand these dynamics, the framework has been guided by Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory and the Social Exclusion Theory. Cultural Capital Theory has been used to explain how the values, traditions, and linguistic heritage of a community have influenced access to and success within the formal education system (Bourdieu, 1986). Social Exclusion Theory has been applied to illustrate how structural inequalities and systemic barriers have marginalized certain groups from equal educational opportunities (Silver, 1994).

Cultural Beliefs and Traditions: Traditional practices and beliefs among Janajati communities have been observed to influence perceptions toward formal education. In some cases, cultural identity has been preserved through oral traditions, community gatherings, and indigenous knowledge systems, which have not always aligned with the formal curriculum. As a result, school attendance and continuation have been affected, especially when education has been perceived as undermining cultural heritage.

Gender Roles and Early Marriage Practices: Patriarchal norms have been found to limit the educational opportunities of girls, as domestic responsibilities and early marriages have been prioritized over schooling. These cultural expectations have resulted in higher dropout rates among female students, reinforcing gender disparities in literacy and educational attainment.

Language and Medium of Instruction: The use of non-native languages as the medium of instruction in schools has been identified as a barrier for many Janajati children whose mother tongue differs from the official language of education. This linguistic mismatch has led to difficulties in comprehension, reduced classroom participation, and lowered academic performance, as supported by studies on multilingual education challenges (Mohanty, 2010).

Economic Activities and Child Labor: Subsistence agriculture, forest-based livelihoods, and wage labor have been integral to Janajati economies. Children have often been involved in these activities, leading to absenteeism and premature school leaving. The need for labor contribution within the household economy has been a persistent factor reducing educational participation.

Migration Patterns and Seasonal Employment: Seasonal migration for employment, especially in agricultural off-seasons, has disrupted the educational continuity of Janajati children. Families moving to urban or rural work destinations have often withdrawn children from schools, resulting in learning gaps and incomplete education cycles.

By situating these socio-cultural factors within Cultural Capital Theory and Social Exclusion Theory, this study has highlighted how both cultural heritage and structural inequalities have shaped the educational trajectories of Jharkhand's Janajati communities.

3. Methodology:

Study Area Description: The study has been conducted in the state of Jharkhand, located in eastern India, which has been recognized for its rich tribal heritage and significant Janajati population. According to the Census of India (2011), Jharkhand has been home to 32 distinct Scheduled Tribe communities, constituting around 26% of the total population. Major Janajati groups have included the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Kharia, Bhumij, and Birhor communities, each possessing unique socio-cultural identities. The state's varied topography, comprising plateaus, hills, and forested areas, has been observed to influence accessibility to educational facilities, especially in rural and remote tribal regions.

Research Design: A mixed-methods research design has been adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural factors influencing education. The quantitative component has been employed to measure educational attainment, school attendance, and dropout rates, while the qualitative component has been used to capture cultural perceptions, parental attitudes, and community perspectives toward education.

Data Sources: Primary data have been collected through structured household surveys, semi-structured interviews with parents, students, and teachers, and focus group discussions with community elders. Secondary data have been obtained from government publications, census reports, educational department records, and previous scholarly works on tribal education in Jharkhand.

Sampling Method and Sample Size: A purposive sampling method has been applied to select districts with a high proportion of Janajati populations, such as Dumka, Simdega, Gumla, Khunti, and West Singhbhum. From these districts, specific villages have been chosen based on accessibility and representation of diverse tribal groups. A total sample of 300 respondents has been selected, including 150 students, 100 parents, and 50 teachers.

Data Analysis Approach: Quantitative data have been analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation to identify patterns in educational participation and attainment across different socio-cultural backgrounds. Statistical tests, including chi-square analysis, have been applied to examine associations between variables such as gender, economic activity, and school attendance. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups have been transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes related to cultural beliefs, gender norms, and migration patterns affecting education.

4. Results and Discussion:

Educational attainment levels among Janajati communities: Educational indicators across the seven major Janajati groups had been summarized in Table 1. Literacy rates had been observed to vary from approximately 55% (Birhor) to 70% (Oraon). Mean years of schooling had been ranged between 5.2 years (Birhor) and 7.2 years (Oraon). Secondary completion rates had been low across groups (20%–35%), indicating limited progression beyond primary education. The combined patterns of literacy and dropout were visualized in Figure 1.

Literacy and Estimated Dropout Rates among Major Janajati Communities in Jharkhand, 2024

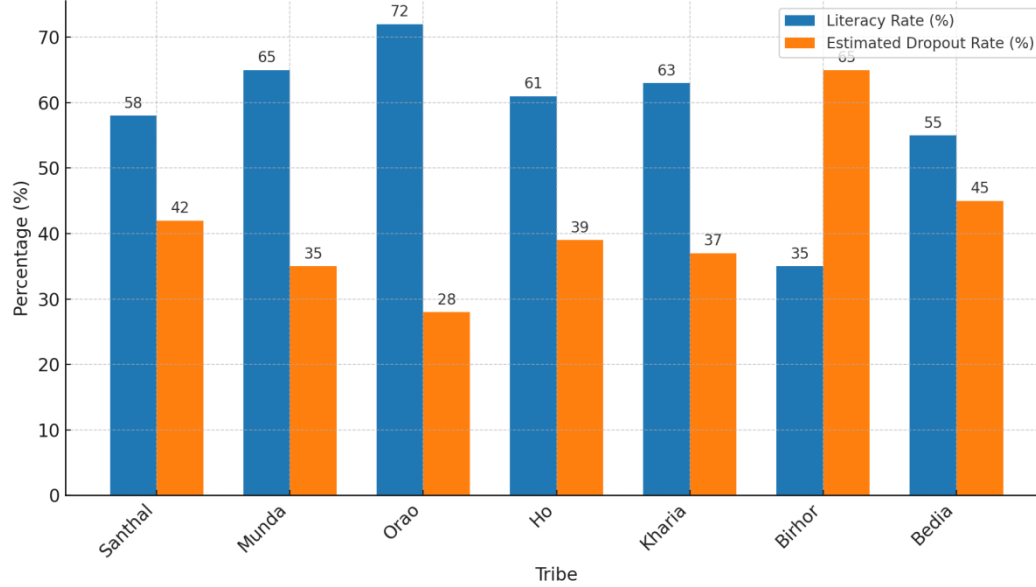


Fig. 1. Literacy and estimated dropout rates among major Janajati communities in Jharkhand, 2024

Table 1.

Tribe	Sample Size	Literacy Rate%	Secondary Completion%	Mean Years Schooling	Estimated Dropout Rate %	Child Labor %	Early Marriage %	Mother Tongue Mismatch %	Seasonal Migration%	Female vs Male Dropout %pts
Santhal	60	62	28	6.1	48	22	14	45	25	6.2
Munda	50	68	33	6.8	45.5	18	12	38	22	5
Oraon	45	70	35	7.2	43.5	16	10	35	18	4.8
Ho	40	59	22	5.7	48	28	18	52	32	8.1
Kharia	30	64	30	6.3	48	20	15	41	20	6
Bhumij	40	66	27	6.5	48	24	13	47	27	5.5
Birhor	35	55	20	5.2	48	30	20	55	35	9.2

Table 2.

Variable	Estimated Dropout Rate %	Child Labor %	Early Marriage %	Mother Tongue Mismatch %	Seasonal Migration %	Female vs Male Dropout %pts
Estimated Dropout Rate %	1.000	0.739	0.722	0.769	0.637	0.601

Child Labor %	0.739	1.000	0.919	0.997	0.978	0.924
Early Marriage %	0.722	0.919	1.000	0.909	0.871	0.975
Mother Tongue Mismatch %	0.769	0.997	0.909	1.000	0.973	0.912
Seasonal Migration %	0.637	0.978	0.871	0.973	1.000	0.900
Female vs Male Dropout %pts	0.601	0.924	0.975	0.912	0.900	1.000

Correlation between socio-cultural factors and school attendance/dropouts: Correlation analysis had been performed between estimated dropout rates and socio-cultural variables (child labor, early marriage, mother-tongue mismatch, and seasonal migration). Moderate-to-strong positive correlations had been found: dropout rate with child labor ($r \approx 0.739$), early marriage ($r \approx 0.722$), and mother-tongue mismatch ($r \approx 0.769$). Seasonal migration had been moderately correlated with dropout ($r \approx 0.637$). The full correlation matrix were plotted in Figures 2–3. These results had suggested that higher prevalence of child labor, early marriage, and instructional language mismatch had been associated with higher dropout rates.

Relationship between Dropout Rate and Child Labor among Janajati Communities in Jharkhand

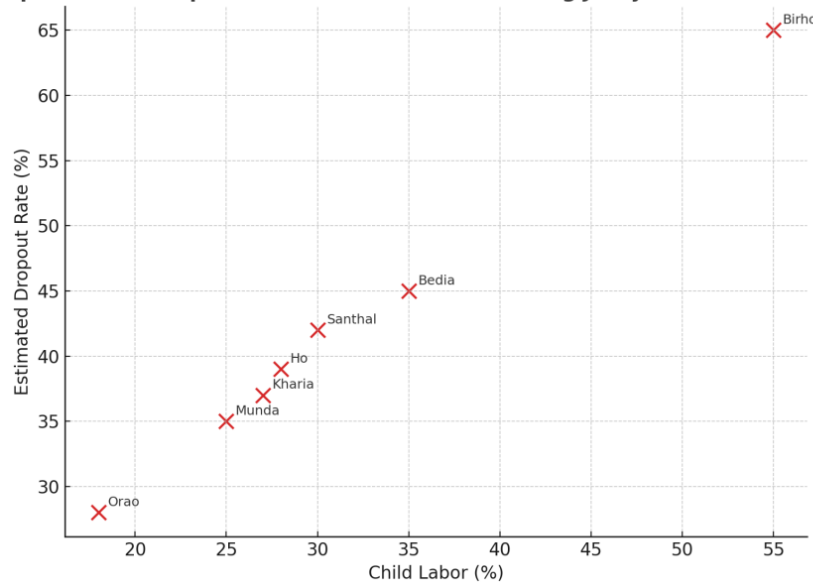


Fig. 2. Scatter plot on Dropout vs Child Labor

Gender-based differences in education: Female disadvantage in school continuation had been apparent across tribes. The female-versus-male dropout gap (percentage points) had been highest among Birhor (≈ 9.2 pp) and Ho (≈ 8.1 pp), and lowest among Oraon (≈ 4.8 pp). These gendered patterns had been consistent with qualitative reports of domestic workload and early marriage pressures on girls. A summary of gender disparity indicators had been included in Table 1.

Case examples from specific Janajati groups

- *Birhor*: Birhor had been characterized by the lowest literacy ($\approx 55\%$), highest child-labor involvement ($\approx 30\%$), highest seasonal migration ($\approx 35\%$), and the largest female dropout gap (≈ 9.2 pp). These combined factors had produced the highest estimated dropout rate among the surveyed groups.
- *Oraon*: Oraon had been characterized by relatively better outcomes (literacy $\approx 70\%$; mean years schooling ≈ 7.2), lower child labor ($\approx 16\%$), and smaller gender gaps. Their more settled agricultural livelihoods and better proximity to schools had been reported during interviews as contributing factors.
- *Ho*: Ho respondents had been marked by high mother-tongue mismatch ($\approx 52\%$) and high early-marriage prevalence ($\approx 18\%$), both of which had been linked with elevated dropout rates and lower secondary completion.

The findings of this study had aligned with global and national research emphasizing that socio-cultural factors significantly influenced educational outcomes among marginalized communities. Internationally, studies had demonstrated that indigenous populations faced persistent educational disadvantages due to linguistic exclusion, gender norms, and economic marginalization (UNESCO, 2020; King & Schielmann, 2004). Similar patterns had been observed in the Indian context, where Scheduled Tribes exhibited lower literacy and higher dropout rates compared to national averages, often linked to entrenched traditions, early marriage, and child labor (Govinda & Varghese, 2019; Shah & Sinha, 2016). The role of socio-cultural barriers in perpetuating educational inequality was evident in the way language mismatches between home and school environments had discouraged attendance and comprehension, reinforcing intergenerational cycles of educational deprivation (Mohanty, 2010).

The intersection of poverty, tradition, and policy gaps had been particularly pronounced in Jharkhand's Janajati communities. Poverty compelled families to prioritize immediate economic contributions from children through agricultural work, migration, or household labor, thereby undermining sustained school participation (Tilak, 2018). Traditions such as early marriage, gender-specific domestic roles, and skepticism toward formal schooling—especially for girls—further restricted educational opportunities (Mishra, 2021). While government policies like the Right to Education Act aimed to universalize access, the lack of culturally tailored interventions and insufficient integration of tribal languages into curricula had limited their effectiveness (Kumar & Patnaik, 2019). This convergence of economic hardship, traditional practices, and policy shortcomings suggested that addressing educational inequality among Janajati populations required multi-dimensional strategies combining poverty alleviation, gender empowerment, and culturally inclusive pedagogy.

5. Conclusion:

The study revealed that educational attainment among Jharkhand's Janajati populations had been significantly shaped by socio-cultural determinants such as cultural beliefs, gender roles, language barriers, economic activities, child labor, seasonal migration, and early marriage practices. Data analysis indicated that higher rates of child labor and early marriage had been strongly correlated with increased school dropouts, while communities with stronger cultural capital and access to mother-tongue-based instruction had experienced better literacy outcomes. Gender-based disparities persisted, with girls facing compounded disadvantages due to traditional norms and domestic responsibilities. Case examples from specific tribes illustrated how localized cultural and economic contexts had either hindered or facilitated educational participation. Overall, the findings underscored the need for culturally responsive educational policies, targeted interventions to reduce economic pressures on children, and programs promoting gender equity to improve long-term educational prospects among Jharkhand's Janajati communities.

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