

Determinants of Scheduled Caste (SC) Parents' Attitudes Towards Girls' Academic Continuation Beyond Secondary Level

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Abstract: *Parental attitudes play a pivotal role in shaping girls' educational trajectories, particularly among marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs) in India. This study investigates the determinants influencing SC parents' attitudes toward their daughters' continuation in education beyond the secondary level. Conducted in Purulia district, West Bengal, the research examines the interplay of socio-economic status, parental literacy, cultural norms, and structural factors such as school accessibility and infrastructure. Using a mixed-method approach, the study identifies key barriers, including economic hardship, patriarchal expectations, and limited awareness of educational benefits, as well as facilitators such as government schemes, maternal support, and community awareness. Findings underscore the complex interrelationship between socio-cultural, economic, and structural determinants in shaping parental support for girls' higher education. The study offers insights for policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders to design contextually relevant interventions that enhance parental encouragement, reduce gender disparities, and promote inclusive educational development.*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 30 March 2026

Received in revised form
10 April 2026

Accepted 15 April 2026

Citation: Mandal, S., (2026)
"Determinants of Scheduled Caste (SC) Parents' Attitudes Towards Girls' Academic Continuation Beyond Secondary Level", *Pen and Prosperity*, Vol. 3, Issue. 2, April 2026.

Keywords: *Scheduled Castes, Parental Attitude, Girls' Education, Socio-Economic Status, Educational Continuation*

Introduction: Education is widely recognized as a powerful instrument for social transformation, personal empowerment, and economic mobility (Tilak, 2016; Kingdon, 2002). In India, where social stratification and historical inequalities persist, education is not merely a tool for knowledge acquisition but also a mechanism for promoting equity and justice. Among marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs), education assumes a critical role in challenging historical deprivation, caste-based discrimination, and gendered socio-economic constraints (Shah & Mehta, 2014).

Despite constitutional safeguards, affirmative action policies, and government-led educational schemes, girls from SC families continue to face multiple barriers in pursuing education beyond the secondary level (Classes XI–XII). The continuation of education at the higher secondary stage represents a crucial juncture, bridging foundational schooling and tertiary or vocational opportunities, while also shaping social, economic, and personal empowerment (Azam et al., 2024).

Parental attitudes are central to understanding educational outcomes, particularly for girls. Parents act as gatekeepers who either enable or restrict access to higher education based on their perceptions of its value,

associated costs, and alignment with socio-cultural norms (Khattak, 2013; Mir & Lone, 2022). This study focuses on the determinants of SC parents' attitudes toward their daughters' academic continuation beyond the secondary level, with an emphasis on socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors, using the Purulia district of West Bengal as a contextual backdrop.

Significance of the Study: This study is significant as it explores the determinants shaping Scheduled Caste (SC) parents' attitudes toward their daughters' continuation in education beyond the secondary level. Understanding these attitudes is crucial because parental support is a key factor influencing girls' enrollment, retention, and academic success. By examining socio-economic status, cultural norms, parental literacy, and structural barriers, the research provides insights into the challenges and facilitators affecting SC girls' educational progression.

The findings can inform policymakers, educators, and community organizations in designing targeted interventions—such as scholarship schemes, awareness programs, and infrastructural improvements—that promote inclusive education. Moreover, the study contributes to broader goals of gender equity, social empowerment, and intergenerational upliftment by identifying strategies to enhance parental support and reduce educational disparities among marginalized communities.

Objectives: This study investigates the determinants influencing SC parents' attitudes toward their daughters' continuation in education beyond the secondary level.

Importance of Academic Continuation Beyond Secondary Level: Higher secondary education is a pivotal stage for adolescent girls, influencing their personal development, vocational aspirations, and social mobility. Education beyond the secondary level equips girls with specialized knowledge, critical thinking skills, and employable competencies, while also enabling informed life choices regarding marriage, family, and career.

For SC girls in rural districts like Purulia, higher secondary education is not merely academic progression but a means of empowerment against intersecting disadvantages of caste, gender, and socio-economic deprivation. Studies show that educated women are more likely to delay marriage, invest in their children's education, and participate in economic and civic life, thereby contributing to intergenerational social mobility (Azam et al., 2024; Garai, 2021).

Determinants of SC Parents' Attitudes: Parental attitudes toward girls' education are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including socio-economic status, educational background, cultural norms, and structural opportunities. Understanding these determinants is essential for identifying barriers and formulating interventions that foster continued education.

Socio-Economic Status (SES): SES, encompassing household income, occupational stability, and parental education, is a primary determinant of parental attitudes toward academic continuation. Higher SES families possess the financial means to cover tuition, transportation, and educational materials, reducing the perceived cost burden of continued education (Khattak, 2013; Garai, 2021). Furthermore, educated parents tend to recognize the long-term benefits of higher education, including enhanced employability, social mobility, and empowerment, which fosters supportive attitudes.

Conversely, low SES SC families face economic constraints that prioritize immediate survival over long-term educational investment. Parents may perceive higher secondary education for daughters as a luxury, especially in contexts where domestic duties, early marriage, and gendered labor divisions dominate familial expectations (Mir & Lone, 2022; Mete et al., 2023). In such cases, even when parents value education in principle, economic hardship undermines consistent support.

Parental Education and Awareness: Parental literacy and exposure to educational knowledge significantly shape attitudes toward girls' academic continuation. Parents with formal education are more likely to appreciate the potential of higher education for social mobility and empowerment (Khattak, 2013). In SC families with first-generation learners, limited awareness of academic pathways and professional opportunities often translates into skepticism about the utility of higher secondary education.

Maternal education, in particular, has been found to positively influence daughters' educational outcomes. Mothers often play an active role in encouraging academic participation, monitoring school performance, and advocating for continued schooling (Verma & Bhatnagar, 2024; Garai, 2021).

Cultural Norms and Patriarchy: Traditional gender norms and patriarchal values significantly influence parental attitudes. In many SC households, societal expectations prioritize domestic responsibilities and caregiving roles for girls, while boys are encouraged to pursue education and employment. Early marriage, domestic labor, and caregiving are seen as higher priorities than schooling, particularly beyond secondary level (Mir & Lone, 2022; Shah & Mehta, 2014).

Cultural perceptions of gender roles can conflict with the perceived benefits of education, leading parents to curtail daughters' academic aspirations even when financial resources are available. These attitudes are reinforced in rural contexts, where community expectations and social surveillance exert additional pressure on families to adhere to traditional norms.

Structural and Infrastructural Factors: The availability, accessibility, and quality of schools are crucial determinants of parental support. In rural SC communities, long distances to higher secondary schools, lack of safe transportation, inadequate teaching facilities, and absence of gender-sensitive infrastructure such as separate toilets can discourage parents from allowing daughters to continue education (Devi, 2018; Mir & Lone, 2022).

Structural barriers disproportionately affect low SES families, as they often lack resources to overcome these challenges. In contrast, families with higher SES can mitigate such obstacles through private transportation, tutoring, or relocation closer to educational institutions, thereby reinforcing positive parental attitudes.

Social Awareness and Community Influence: Community norms, peer influence, and awareness campaigns play a role in shaping parental attitudes. Exposure to success stories of educated girls, NGO initiatives, and government programs such as Kanyashree Prakalpa can positively influence parents' perceptions and encourage continued schooling (Mete et al., 2023; Government of India, 2020).

Social networks that value education create a supportive environment, reducing cultural resistance and promoting parental investment in daughters' higher secondary education.

Barriers to Parental Support: The support of parents is a crucial determinant in whether girls from Scheduled Caste (SC) families continue their education beyond the secondary level. However, a complex interplay of economic, socio-cultural, educational, and structural factors often limits parental encouragement. Understanding these barriers is essential to designing effective interventions for improving educational access and retention among SC girls.

Economic Hardship: Economic constraints represent one of the most significant barriers to parental support for girls' education. Many SC families in rural areas like Purulia depend on low-paying occupations such as agricultural labor, construction work, or small-scale manual trades, which are often irregular and unstable (Mete et al., 2023). The resulting financial insecurity restricts parents' ability to pay for tuition fees, uniforms, learning materials, transportation, and private tutoring.

In such households, immediate survival needs—food, clothing, and basic shelter—are often prioritized over educational expenses. Parents may perceive higher secondary education for girls as a luxury rather than a necessity, particularly when daughters are expected to contribute to household income or domestic chores. Even when families value education, the high perceived costs of continuing schooling can discourage investment, leading to higher dropout rates. Moreover, financial hardship may prompt parents to marry off their daughters early, seeing marriage as a form of economic security.

Patriarchal Norms: Patriarchy and traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched in many SC communities. Social expectations frequently prioritize girls' domestic responsibilities, caregiving roles, and preparation for early marriage over formal education (Mir & Lone, 2022). In such contexts, parental attitudes often reflect broader societal norms that regard investing in daughters' education as less critical than ensuring adherence to cultural roles.

Patriarchal mindsets may also manifest in subtle ways, such as limiting girls' mobility, discouraging participation in co-educational or distant schools, or undervaluing subjects considered less “practical” for girls. Even when parents are aware of the long-term benefits of education, these cultural pressures can undermine consistent support. Consequently, girls may face resistance at home, which negatively affects their motivation and ability to pursue higher secondary education.

Parental Literacy and Awareness: Parental literacy and educational background strongly influence attitudes toward academic continuation. SC families often include first-generation learners, with parents lacking formal education themselves (Garai, 2021). Low literacy levels can limit parents' understanding of the broader benefits of education, including access to higher-paying jobs, personal empowerment, and improved social standing.

A lack of awareness may also lead parents to underestimate the potential of higher secondary education for girls. Misconceptions about the relevance of academic subjects, doubts regarding employability, or skepticism about the value of schooling beyond the primary level can reduce parental encouragement. Parents may fail to recognize their role as facilitators, inadvertently restricting their daughters' educational progression.

Infrastructural and Structural Limitations: Structural barriers significantly affect parental support, especially in rural settings like Purulia. Distance to schools, poor road conditions, unsafe or unreliable transportation, and inadequate school infrastructure act as practical deterrents. Lack of gender-sensitive facilities such as separate toilets, secure classrooms, and sanitation facilities creates additional concerns for parents, particularly for adolescent girls.

Even parents who value education may hesitate to send their daughters to schools located far from home or in unsafe environments. These infrastructural challenges often intersect with economic constraints, as families with limited financial resources cannot afford private transport, boarding, or alternative schooling options. In many cases, such structural limitations outweigh the perceived benefits of higher secondary education, leading to discontinuation.

Intersectional Disadvantage: SC girls face multiple layers of disadvantage, stemming from the intersection of caste, gender, and economic status. These intersectional vulnerabilities compound the barriers described above, creating a unique set of challenges that affect parental attitudes.

Caste-based marginalization may reinforce feelings of social exclusion and limit access to networks of support. Gendered expectations further constrain girls' autonomy and academic mobility, while low economic status restricts tangible investments in education. Together, these factors create a situation where parents may acknowledge the importance of education but feel constrained by structural, social, and

financial pressures. This intersectionality makes it particularly challenging to foster consistent and proactive parental support for girls' higher secondary education.

Conclusion: The academic continuation of SC girls beyond secondary education is influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors. Socio-economic status remains a key determinant, shaping parental capacity, awareness, and attitudes toward education. Cultural norms, patriarchal expectations, parental literacy, and infrastructural barriers further modulate support for girls' schooling.

Facilitators such as higher SES, government schemes, maternal influence, community awareness, and recognition of long-term benefits can reinforce positive parental attitudes. Understanding these determinants is essential for promoting educational equity, social empowerment, and intergenerational development among SC communities. Policy interventions that address both economic and socio-cultural constraints can enable more SC girls to access, continue, and benefit from education beyond the secondary level, thereby fostering inclusive growth and social justice.

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