

Trends in West Bengal's Scheduled Tribes' Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT: *The enrolment of ST students in higher education is essential for achieving educational fairness and social equality. Enhancing higher education opportunities for ST communities can play a role in reducing the educational disparity and promoting socio-economic progress. This study aims to analyze the trend of the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of scheduled tribes in West Bengal. It also compares the GER of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal with the national GER of the same group in India. This study utilizes the 5-year AISHE report, covering the period from 2016-17 to 2020-21. We observed a decrease in the gap between GER of ST students and all categories of students in higher education in India, from 9.8 in 2016-17 to 8.4 in 2020-21. In West Bengal, there has been an increase in GER from 8.4 in 2016-17 to 9.7 in 2020-21. We saw a decline in the enrolment of ST students in higher education in 2020-21.*

KEYWORDS: *Gross enrolment ratio, GER, higher education, Enrolment, Scheduled tribe.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

As per the Indian Constitution, the indigenous groups of people in India are known as Scheduled Tribes. They constitute more than 10 crore or 8.6% of the total population of India and are divided into 705 distinct ethnic groups (Census of India, 2011). Central and Northeastern India are the two main geographic regions that the STs mainly live in. Madhya Pradesh (14.69%), Chhattisgarh (7.5%), Jharkhand (8.29%), Andhra Pradesh (5.7%), Maharashtra (10.08%), Orissa (9.2%), Gujarat (8.55%), and Rajasthan (8.86%) comprise the majority of the population of Scheduled Tribes in Central India (Census of India, 2011). Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Sikkim, and the Northeast constitute the other unique areas. They are socially, economically, and politically isolated from the rest of society (Behera, 2015). Scheduled tribes in our country are the most vulnerable and marginalized people, who have not been able to develop much in the 21st century.

Education plays a crucial role in the growth and advancement of a nation. According to Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Higher education has numerous benefits for individuals, including expanding their knowledge base and career opportunities. Additionally, it plays a crucial role in advancing society through innovation, research, and the development of skilled individuals. It serves as a pathway to social mobility, encourages lifelong learning, and plays a vital role in the overall development of individuals.

Therefore, higher education can play an important role in improving the socioeconomic condition of the Scheduled Tribe in India. Higher education plays a significant role in promoting social equity within society. Based on the 2011 census, while the national literacy rate was 73%, the literacy rate for Scheduled Tribes (STs) was only 59%. In 2020-21, ST student enrolment in higher education in India rose to 24.1 Lakh from 21.6 Lakh in 2019-20 and 16.41 Lakh in 2014-15, according to the AISHE 2020-21 Report. This study aims to present the enrolment status of West Bengal's Scheduled Tribe in higher education.

Review of Literature

Das (2015), attempts to study enrolment status in higher education of West Bengal. Based on the AISHER 2016-17 report, this study found that there is no noticeable difference in the growth of higher education between West Bengal and the rest of India. Higher education enrolment rates for both men and women in West Bengal have been increasing steadily, in keeping with the national trend. However, there is a gender gap in higher education in both West Bengal and India.

Prasanna (2022), The purpose of the study was to compare the level of equity and inclusion in higher education across the five southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. More

work needs to be done in Karnataka to increase the ratio of female enrolment. The state of Tamil Nadu needs to have unique plans for raising GPI when it comes to STs. Kerala can be seen as a model of GPI for other states to follow.

Pattnaik (2017), paper aims to explore the structural and functional issues involved in the low enrolment of tribals in higher education and envisage an accommodative framework for their inclusion.

Chandel et al. (2023), The paper addresses the problems and developments facing ST students pursuing higher education and the specifics of government policies and initiatives. It plans about Madhya Pradesh's ST students' higher education. Due to various problems and obstacles, almost 95% of students who decide not to pursue higher education drop out of school or college before enrolling in HEIs.

Study Area

West Bengal is a state in eastern India, located along the Bay of Bengal. It has a population of 9.13 Cr. people living in an area of 88,752 km² as per 2011 census. West Bengal is the thirteenth-largest state by area in India and the fourth most populous state overall. It shares borders with Bhutan and Nepal in the north, and Bangladesh in the east. Additionally, it has borders with Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Sikkim, and Assam in India. It is located between 21°25'N and 27°13'N latitude and 85°50'E to 89°50'E longitude. West Bengal's main river, the Ganges, splits into two branches. While one branch flows through West Bengal as the Hooghly River, the other branch enters Bangladesh as the Padma.

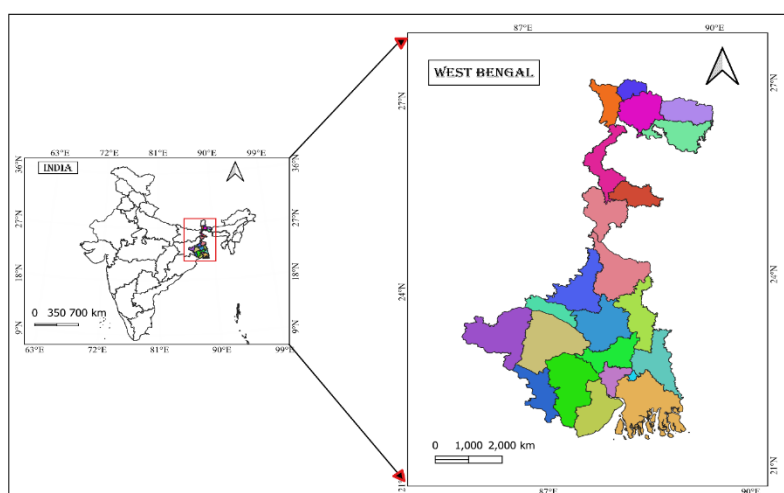


Figure 1: Study area map

According to the 2011 Census, there are 5,296,963 tribal people residing in West Bengal, which is approximately 5.8% of the state's total population. West Bengal is home to around 5.1% of all tribal people in the country. Districts such as Bankura, Purulia, Dakshin Dinajpur, Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, and Darjeeling have a higher concentration of tribal population compared to other areas. The literacy rate of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal is 57.9%, whereas the overall literacy rate is 76.3%. This indicates a gap of 18.4% in West Bengal.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the trend of gross enrolment ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal State.
2. Comparing the gross enrolment ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal with the national GER of the same group in India.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary data. The Department of Higher Education in India publishes the AISHE report annually since 2011-12. This study uses the AISHE 2020-21 report and the previous four years' reports. For demographic data which is collected from the census of India 2011. A gross enrolment ratio (GER) is a statistical metric used in the education sector that is primarily used to ascertain the number of students enrolled at various levels, including elementary, middle, and high school (Mardolkar & Kumaran, 2020). The term 'higher education' in India refers to tertiary education. After completing 12 years of primary and secondary education, students can pursue higher education in colleges and universities. Higher education offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is calculated as the number of students enrolled in higher education divided by the total population in the 18-23 age group multiplied by 100. A high GER indicates a high level of participation, regardless of age group (Ghara, 2017).

III. RESULTS

Higher Education Enrolment of Scheduled Tribes in India

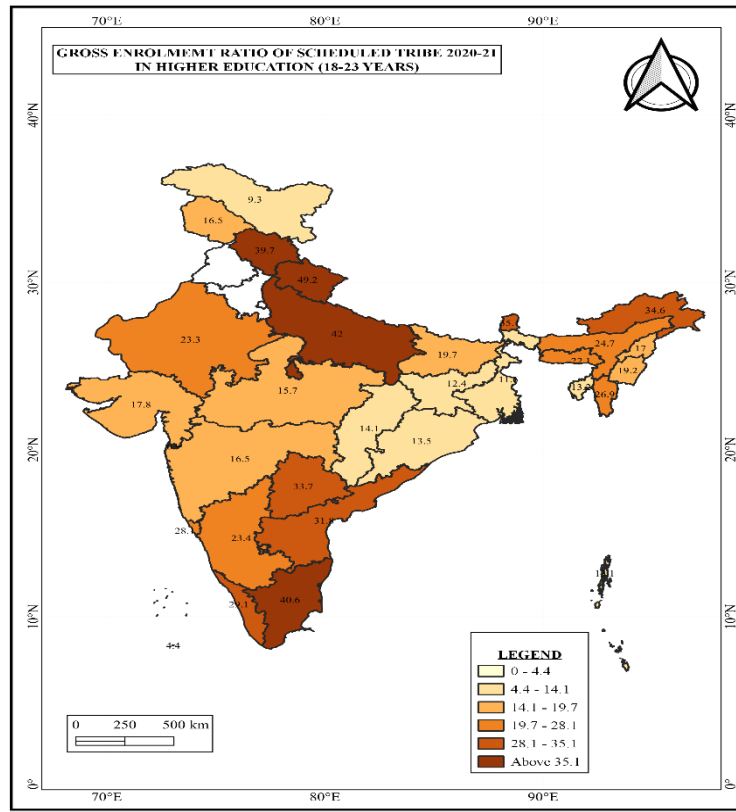


Figure 2: GER of Scheduled Tribes in Higher Education in India

Based on the AISHE 2020-21 report, the gross enrolment ratio for all India's Scheduled Tribe population is 18.9. Highest Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education among scheduled tribes is in Uttarakhand (49.2%), while the lowest is in Lakshadweep (4.4%). Scheduled tribes in higher education: states with GER above 35 are Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, and Sikkim. West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Tripura, Ladakh, Andaman & Nicobar Island, Lakshadweep, and Dadra and Nagar haveli and daman Diu are among the states with GERs of scheduled tribes in higher education that have less than 15. (Figure 2)

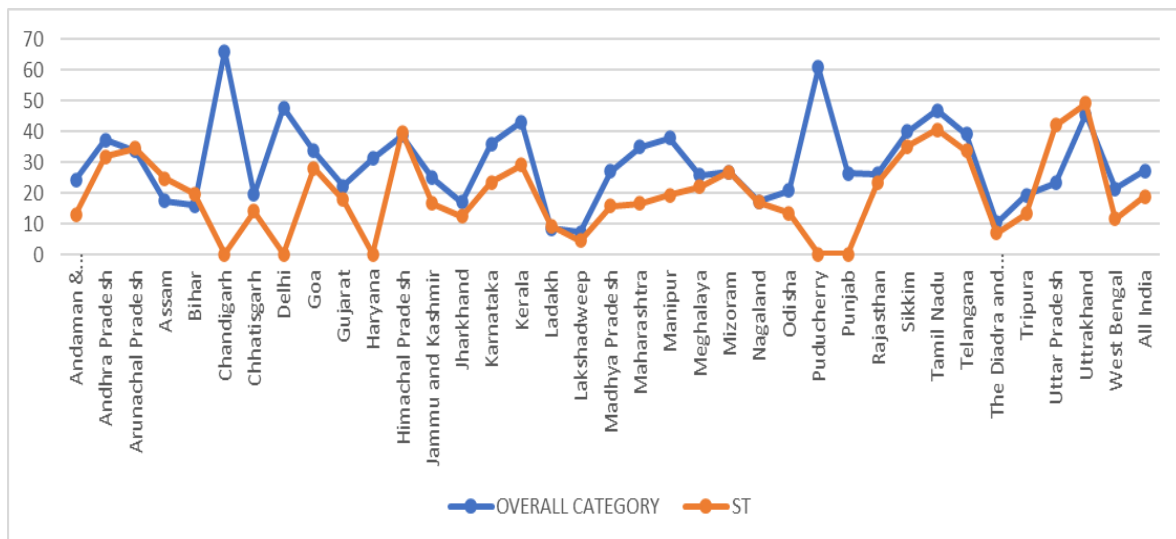


Figure 3: State-wise ST and overall category GER in Higher Education in India (AISHE 2020-21 report)

According to the AISHE 2020-21 report, there is a significant gap between the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of Scheduled Tribes and the overall category in India. The overall category has a GER of 27.3, while Scheduled Tribes have a GER of 18.9. There is no Scheduled Tribe population found in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Puducherry, and Chandigarh. This is why there is much fluctuation seen in the graph. Huge gaps exist between the GER of overall and scheduled tribes' categories, except for Assam, Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh, Mizoram, Uttar Pradesh, and Uttarakhand in India. (Figure 3)

Table 1: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (18-23 Years) in India

Years	All Categories	Scheduled Tribe	Gaps
1016-17	25.2	15.4	9.8
2017-18	25.8	15.9	9.9
2018-19	26.3	17.2	9.1
2019-20	27.1	18	9.1
2020-21	27.3	18.9	8.4

Source: (AISHE Report 2016-17 to 2020-21)

From Table No. 1, we can observe that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) has increased for all categories and Scheduled Tribe categories from 2016-17 to 2020-21. The gaps in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) between them are slowly decreasing.

Higher Education Enrolment of Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal

Table 2: Male Female Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (18-23 Years) in West Bengal

Year	Overall Category			Scheduled Tribe		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
2020-21	20.3	22.3	21.3	11.5	11.8	11.6
2019-20	19.8	21.4	20.6	11.3	11.5	11.4
2018-19	19.4	20.2	19.8	10.7	10.3	10.5
2017-18	19.4	18.8	19.1	10.7	9.5	10.1
2016-17	19.2	18.3	18.8	11.2	9.4	10.3

Source: (AISHE Report 2016-17 to 2020-21)

According to the AISHE report 2020-21, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education for the age group of 18-23 years in West Bengal state is 21.3. For the same year, the ST category GER is 11.6. The trend of GER in West Bengal has been increasing over the last five years, from 18.8 in 2016-17 to 21.3 in 2020-21. Similarly, the GER for ST category students in West Bengal has also shown an increase from 10.3 in 2016-17 to 11.6 in 2020-21.

Furthermore, the Gross Enrolment Ratio of female students in West Bengal is increasing at a higher rate than male students. The same trend is observed for the ST category students as well.

Table 3: ST and All categories Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher Education (18-23 Years) in West Bengal

Years	All Categories	Scheduled Tribe	Gaps
2016-17	18.5	10.1	8.4
2017-18	18.7	9.9	8.8
2018-19	19.3	10.2	9.1
2019-20	19.9	11.0	8.9
2020-21	21.3	11.6	9.7

Source: (AISHE Report 2016-17 to 2020-21)

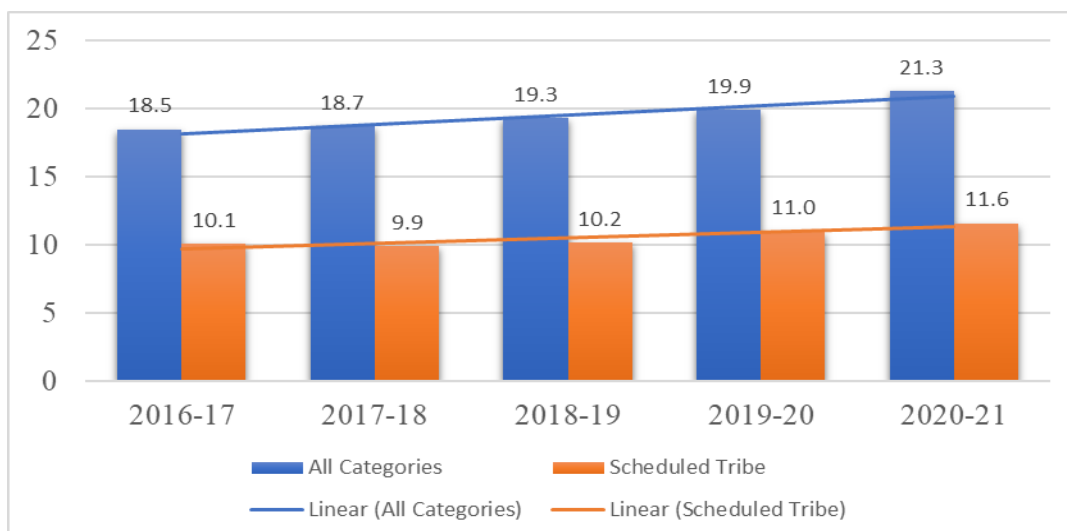


Figure 3: Trend of Overall and ST category GER in West Bengal

We can analyze the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) trend in higher education in the West Bengal state and observe the differences in GER between ST students and overall category students over the last five years of AISHE data. The GER gap for ST students in higher education has increased from 8.4 in 2016-17 to 9.7 in 2020-21 when compared to the overall category of students. (Table 3 & Figure 3)

Table 4: Enrolment during last 5 years (India ST vs WB ST)

	India	Actual Growth (%)	West Bengal	Actual Growth (%)
2016-17	1852375		66767	
2017-18	1913864	3.32	64960	-2.71
2018-19	2067748	8.04	67170	3.40
2019-20	2156109	4.27	72233	7.54
2020-21	2412069	11.87	73149	1.27

Source: (AISHE Report 2016-17 to 2020-21)

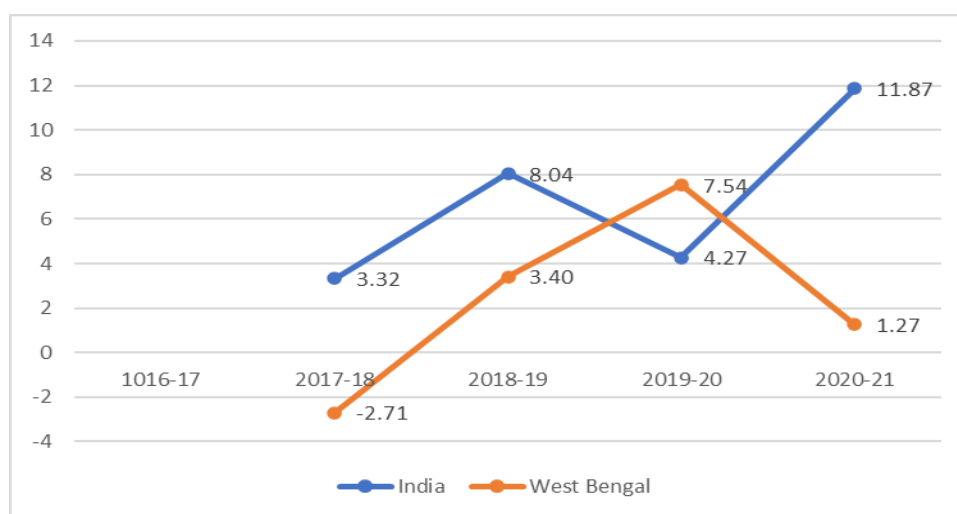


Figure 4: Actual Growth of Enrolment during the last 5 years (India ST vs WB ST)

The number of scheduled tribe students enrolled in higher education in India has been steadily increasing over the past five years, from 1852375 students in 2016-17 to 2412069 students in 2020-21. Similarly, the number of scheduled tribe students in higher education in West Bengal has also been increasing, from 66767 students in 2016-17 to 73149 students in 2020-21. However, the growth rate of scheduled tribe enrolments in higher education in West Bengal is less than the growth rate in India. Specifically, the actual

growth rate of scheduled tribe enrolments in higher education in India increased from 3.32% in 2017-18 to 11.87% in 2020-21, while in West Bengal it increased from -2.71% in 2017-18 to 7.54% in 2019-20 and decreased 1.27% in 2020-21. (Table 4 & Figure 4)

IV. CONCLUSION

After the analysis of the available data, we see that the gaps of GER among ST students as compared to overall categories of students in higher education decreasing in India. But in West Bengal opposite is seen. The gross enrolment ratio of female ST students in West Bengal is increasing at a higher rate than male students. The reason for the high female Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education in the state is the Kanyasree Prakalpa program. This is a special Conditional Cash Transfer initiative that was launched by the West Bengal government in 2012. The program focuses on teenage girls aged between 13 and 19 and provides them with scholarships (Mitra & Ghara, 2019). Education institutions and governments can promote diversity and inclusivity in higher education by implementing specific policies and initiatives. Government policy and initiatives are all necessary for the enrolment of ST students in higher education, but what is most needed is job opportunities and family awareness.

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