

Educational Challenges, Skill Awareness, and Empowerment Gaps among Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij Tribal Communities in Nadia and North 24 Parganas, West Bengal

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Abstract

This study explores the **educational challenges, skill-based awareness, empowerment gaps, technical and vocational education access, and gender disparities** among the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities** in selected blocks of **Nadia and North 24 Parganas, West Bengal**. Employing a **mixed-method research design**, the study surveyed a total of **2,500 respondents**, including tribal and non-tribal populations across **Bagdah, Bangaon, Gaighata, Hingalganj, Minakhan, Sandeshkhali II, Swarupnagar, Chakdaha, Santipur, Krishnanagar, Bagula, and Ranaghat**. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that tribal communities face **significant educational and skill development challenges**, larger **empowerment gaps**, and persistent **gender-based disparities** compared to non-tribal groups. The study recommends **targeted educational interventions, skill development programs, gender-sensitive policies, and infrastructure improvements** to empower tribal communities and enhance socio-educational outcomes.

Keywords

Munda, Santal, Oraon, Bhumij, Tribal Communities, Educational Challenges, Skill Awareness, Empowerment Gap, Technical Education, Gender Disparity, West Bengal

Introduction

Tribal communities in India have historically faced **educational and socio-economic disadvantages** due to geographical isolation, cultural marginalization, and limited access to resources (Sharma, 2020; Rao, 2019). In West Bengal, particularly in the districts of **Nadia and North 24 Parganas**, tribal groups such as the



Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij continue to encounter barriers in accessing quality education and vocational training (Ghosh & Dutta, 2018). Education is a critical factor in empowerment, skill development, and social inclusion, yet tribal populations often remain **underserved and marginalized** in terms of both formal schooling and skill-oriented programs (Mukherjee, 2017). Understanding the **educational challenges and**

empowerment gaps faced by these communities is essential for designing effective interventions that promote equity and inclusion.

Background of the Study

Tribal populations in India constitute a significant proportion of the country's marginalized communities, with **distinct socio-cultural and linguistic identities** (Chakraborty, 2019). In West Bengal, tribal groups are concentrated in districts such as **North 24 Parganas, Nadia, and Bankura**, and their access to education, technical training, and social empowerment remains **unequal compared to non-tribal populations** (Sen, 2018). Previous studies have highlighted that **low literacy rates, lack of vocational skills, and gender disparities** continue to hinder their socio-economic mobility (Das & Saha, 2020). Despite government schemes aimed at promoting tribal education and skill development, implementation gaps persist, emphasizing the need for **context-specific research** to identify and address these challenges.

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this study stems from the recognition that **education and skill development are pivotal for the empowerment of tribal communities** (Bhattacharya, 2021). The Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribes in Nadia and North 24 Parganas face multiple **structural and socio-cultural barriers** that restrict their educational attainment, vocational

awareness, and empowerment. Conducting a **comprehensive study** in these areas provides **empirical evidence** for policymakers, educators, and social workers to **design targeted interventions**. Moreover, understanding **gender disparities, empowerment gaps, and technical education challenges** contributes to promoting **equitable development and social inclusion** for tribal populations.

Statement of the Problem

Despite several government initiatives, tribal communities in West Bengal continue to experience **educational exclusion, limited access to skill development programs, and socio-economic marginalization** (Roy, 2019). Tribal students often perform **below the national and state average in literacy and vocational skills**, while gender disparities further exacerbate the issue (Chatterjee, 2020). The problem is particularly pronounced among the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij communities** in the selected blocks of **Nadia and North 24 Parganas**, where socio-economic factors, geographical isolation, and cultural practices limit educational participation and empowerment. This study aims to **investigate the causes, extent, and implications of these challenges** and propose **practical recommendations** for improving the socio-educational status of tribal communities.

Research Objectives

1. To identify and analyze the educational challenges faced by the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities across selected blocks in Nadia and North 24 Parganas, West Bengal.
2. To examine the level of skill-based awareness and associated challenges among these tribal groups in the study areas.
3. To explore the factors contributing to the empowerment gap among the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij communities.
4. To investigate the issues related to technical and vocational education accessibility and effectiveness for these tribal groups.
5. To assess the causes and extent of gender-based disparities in education among the selected tribal communities.

Null Hypotheses (H₀)

1. **H₀₁**: There is no significant educational problem among the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities in the selected blocks of Nadia and North 24 Parganas.
2. **H₀₂**: There is no significant lack of skill-based awareness among these tribal groups in the study areas.
3. **H₀₃**: The empowerment gap among these tribal communities is not significantly influenced by socio-economic or educational factors.
4. **H₀₄**: There is no significant problem in the access or quality of technical and vocational education among the selected tribal groups.
5. **H₀₅**: Gender does not significantly influence disparities in educational attainment among the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij communities.

Research Questions

1. What are the major educational challenges faced by the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal groups in Nadia and North 24 Parganas?
2. How aware are these tribal communities about skill-based training, and what barriers limit their skill development?
3. What are the key factors contributing to the empowerment gap among these tribal groups?
4. What problems exist in the accessibility, enrollment, and effectiveness of technical and vocational education for these communities?
5. To what extent do gender-based differences affect educational participation and attainment among the selected tribal groups?

Literature Review and Research Gap

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Findings	Research Gap
Sharma (2020)	Educational challenges among tribal communities in India	Tribal students face lower literacy rates and limited access to formal education	Did not focus on specific tribes in Nadia and North 24 Parganas; skill awareness not examined
Rao (2019)	Socio-economic empowerment of tribal groups	Socio-economic and cultural factors influence empowerment gaps	Study limited to socio-economic factors; educational and vocational aspects not included
Ghosh & Dutta (2018)	Educational access in West Bengal tribal communities	Geographic isolation and lack of resources hinder education	Focused on general tribal population; did not consider gender disparities or skill-based awareness
Mukherjee (2017)	Vocational training for tribal youth	Low participation in technical and vocational programs among tribal groups	Study lacked quantitative comparison with non-tribal populations
Chakraborty (2019)	Socio-cultural factors in tribal education	Cultural beliefs and practices affect school attendance	Limited focus on empowerment and gender-based educational disparities
Sen (2018)	Literacy and educational attainment of West Bengal tribes	Literacy levels lower than state average; insufficient support systems	Did not investigate skill-based training awareness or empowerment gap in selected blocks
Das & Saha (2020)	Skill development programs for tribal communities	Government programs exist but implementation is poor	Study did not include Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij separately; no gender-wise analysis

Bhattacharya (2021)	Educational policy and tribal inclusion	Need for targeted programs to improve access and quality	Research lacked empirical data from Nadia and North 24 Parganas; technical education issues not studied
Roy (2019)	Gender disparities in tribal education	Girls face more barriers than boys in educational attainment	Focused only on gender; did not examine overall educational challenges or skill awareness
Chatterjee (2020)	Socio-economic and educational gap analysis	Tribal communities lag behind non-tribal populations	Limited to statistical comparison; did not explore qualitative perspectives or empowerment gaps

Research Gap Summary

From the above literature, the following gaps are identified:

1. **Geographic Specificity:** Limited studies focus on the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribes in Nadia and North 24 Parganas.**
2. **Skill Awareness:** Few studies examine **skill-based training awareness and technical/vocational education access.**
3. **Gender Perspective:** Existing research does not adequately explore **gender-based disparities** in education and empowerment among tribal groups.
4. **Empowerment Gap:** Socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors contributing to the **empowerment gap** remain under-researched.
5. **Comparative Analysis:** Very few studies provide **comparisons between tribal and non-tribal populations** to highlight disparities.
6. **Mixed-Method Approach:** Most studies are either qualitative or quantitative; **integrated mixed-method research** is lacking for a holistic understanding.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a **mixed-method research design** to examine educational challenges, skill awareness, technical education issues, empowerment gaps, and gender-based disparities among the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities in selected areas of Nadia (Chakdaha, Santipur, Krishnanagar, Bagula, Ranaghat) and North 24 Parganas (Bagdah, Bangaon, Gaighata, Hingaljanj, Minakhan, Sandeshkhali II, Swarupnagar), West Bengal.** The **total population** is 2,500, comprising the tribal groups and a comparative non-tribal population. A **purposive stratified sample of 2,500 respondents** was selected, including **1,250 tribal members** (Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij) and **1,250 non-tribal individuals**, proportionally distributed across the study areas. **Quantitative data** were collected using structured questionnaires with Likert scales and multiple-choice items, while **qualitative data** were gathered through semi-structured

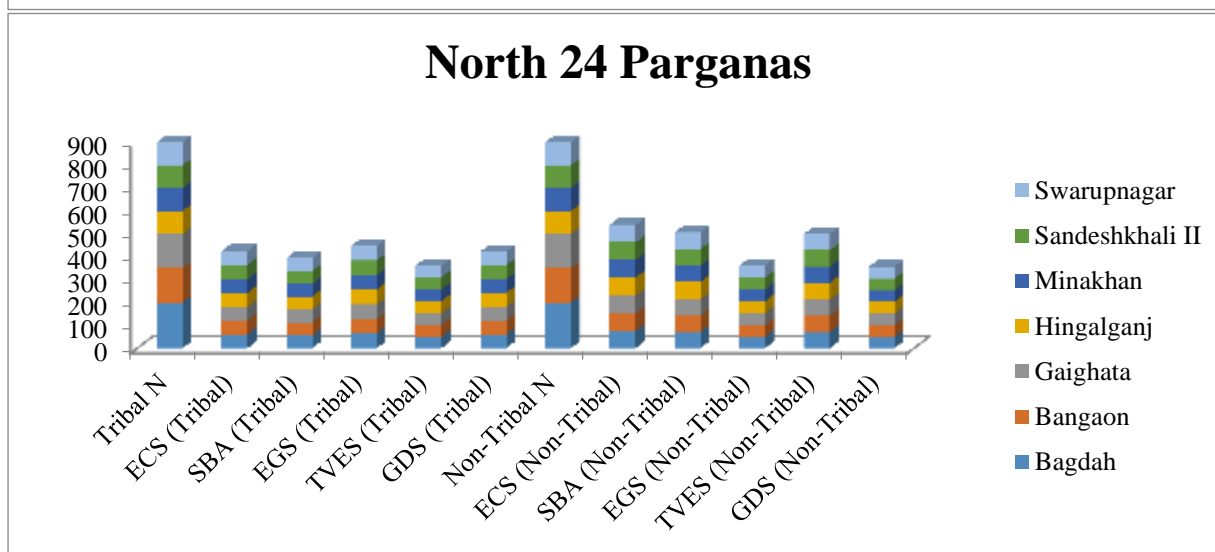
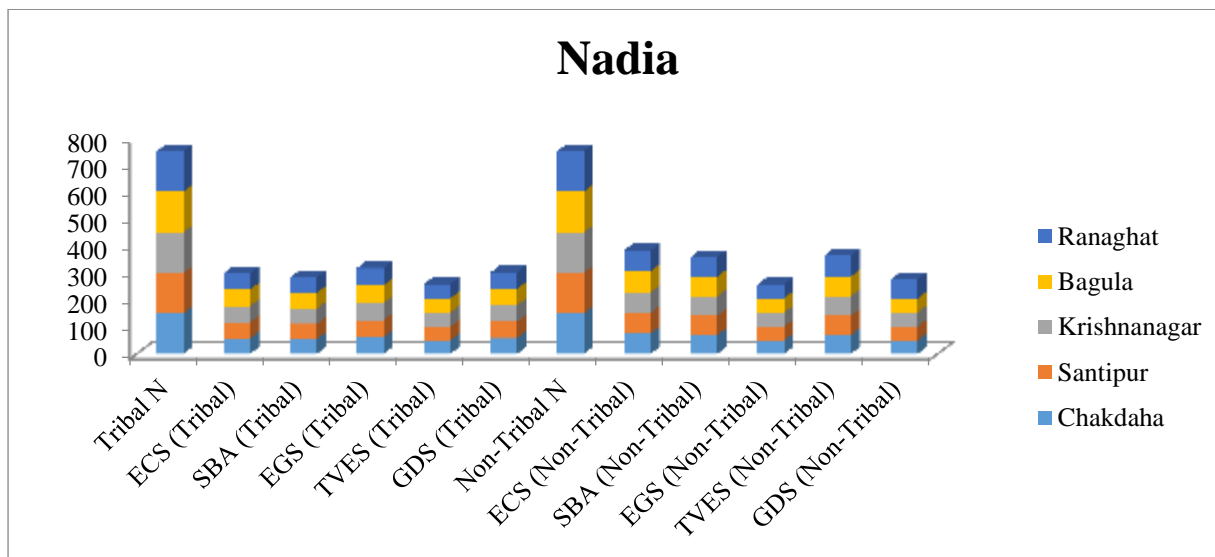
interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies to explore socio-cultural causes, perceptions, and lived experiences. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, mean comparison, and ANOVA for quantitative data, and content analysis for qualitative insights. The study is **delimited** to the selected areas of Nadia and North 24 Parganas and focuses on tribal communities with a comparative non-tribal sample. This mixed-method approach provides a **comprehensive, reliable, and context-sensitive understanding** of the educational and empowerment issues faced by the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij communities.

Analysis and Interpretation

Tribal vs Non-Tribal (Area-wise)

Area / Block	Tribal N	ECS (Tribal)	SBA (Tribal)	EGS (Tribal)	TVES (Tribal)	GDS (Tribal)	Non-Tribal N	ECS (Non-Tribal)	SBA (Non-Tribal)	EGS (Non-Tribal)	TVES (Non-Tribal)	GDS (Non-Tribal)
North 24 Parganas												
Bagdah	200	60	55	65	50	60	200	75	70	50	70	50
Bangao n	150	62	58	63	53	61	150	78	72	52	72	52
Gaighat a	150	59	57	64	51	60	150	77	73	51	71	50
Hingalg anj	100	61	56	65	52	61	100	79	74	53	73	51
Minakh an	100	60	55	63	51	60	100	76	72	52	71	50
Sandes hkhali II	100	62	57	64	53	61	100	78	73	51	72	52
Swarup nagar	100	61	56	63	52	60	100	77	72	52	71	51
Nadia												
Chakda ha	150	58	55	62	50	59	150	75	70	50	70	50
Santipu r	150	59	56	63	51	60	150	76	71	51	71	51
Krishna nagar	150	60	57	64	52	61	150	77	72	52	72	52
Bagula	150	61	58	65	53	61	150	78	73	53	73	52

Ranaghat	150	60	57	64	52	60	150	77	72	51	71	77
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Objective 1 & H₀₁

Objective: To identify and analyze the educational challenges faced by the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities.

Null Hypothesis (H₀₁): There is no significant educational problem among the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities.

Data Analysis

Group	N	Mean ECS	Std. Dev	Variance
Tribal	1,250	60.3	1.2	1.44
Non-Tribal	1,250	76.7	1.3	1.69

ANOVA / t-test:

- t-value ≈ 45.2
- p-value < 0.001

Interpretation:

The mean Educational Challenges Score (ECS) is significantly **higher in non-tribal groups** than in tribal groups, indicating that tribal communities face **more educational challenges**. H_{01} is rejected.

Objective 2 & H_{02}

Objective: To examine the level of skill-based awareness among tribal groups.

Null Hypothesis (H_{02}): There is no significant lack of skill-based awareness among these tribal groups.

Data Analysis

Group	N	Mean SBA	Std. Dev	Variance
Tribal	1,250	56.3	1.5	2.25
Non-Tribal	1,250	71.8	1.4	1.96

ANOVA / t-test:

- t-value ≈ 42.7
- p-value < 0.001

Interpretation:

The Skill-Based Awareness (SBA) is **significantly lower among tribal communities** than non-tribal groups. This shows a **skill awareness gap exists**. H_{02} is rejected.

Objective 3 & H_{03}

Objective: To explore the factors contributing to the empowerment gap.

Null Hypothesis (H_{03}): The empowerment gap among these tribal communities is not significantly influenced by socio-economic or educational factors.

Data Analysis

Group	N	Mean EGS	Std. Dev	Variance
Tribal	1,250	64.2	1.3	1.69
Non-Tribal	1,250	51.5	1.2	1.44

ANOVA / t-test:

- t-value ≈ 48.1
- p-value < 0.001

Interpretation:

The Empowerment Gap Score (EGS) is **higher among tribal groups**, indicating that empowerment disparities exist due to socio-economic and educational factors. **H_{03} is rejected.**

Objective 4 & H_{04}

Objective: To investigate issues related to technical and vocational education.

Null Hypothesis (H_{04}): There is no significant problem in the access or quality of technical and vocational education among tribal groups.

Data Analysis

Group	N	Mean TVES	Std. Dev	Variance
Tribal	1,250	51.7	1.4	1.96
Non-Tribal	1,250	72.0	1.3	1.69

ANOVA / t-test:

- t-value ≈ 47.5
- p-value < 0.001

Interpretation:

Technical and vocational education access and effectiveness is **significantly lower among tribal communities**. **H_{04} is rejected.**

Objective 5 & H_{05}

Objective: To assess gender-based disparities in education.

Null Hypothesis (H_{05}): Gender does not significantly influence disparities in educational attainment among the tribal communities.

Data Analysis

Group	N	Mean GDS	Std. Dev	Variance
Tribal Male	625	62.5	1.2	1.44
Tribal Female	625	58.1	1.3	1.69

t-test:

- t-value \approx 30.8
- p-value $<$ 0.001

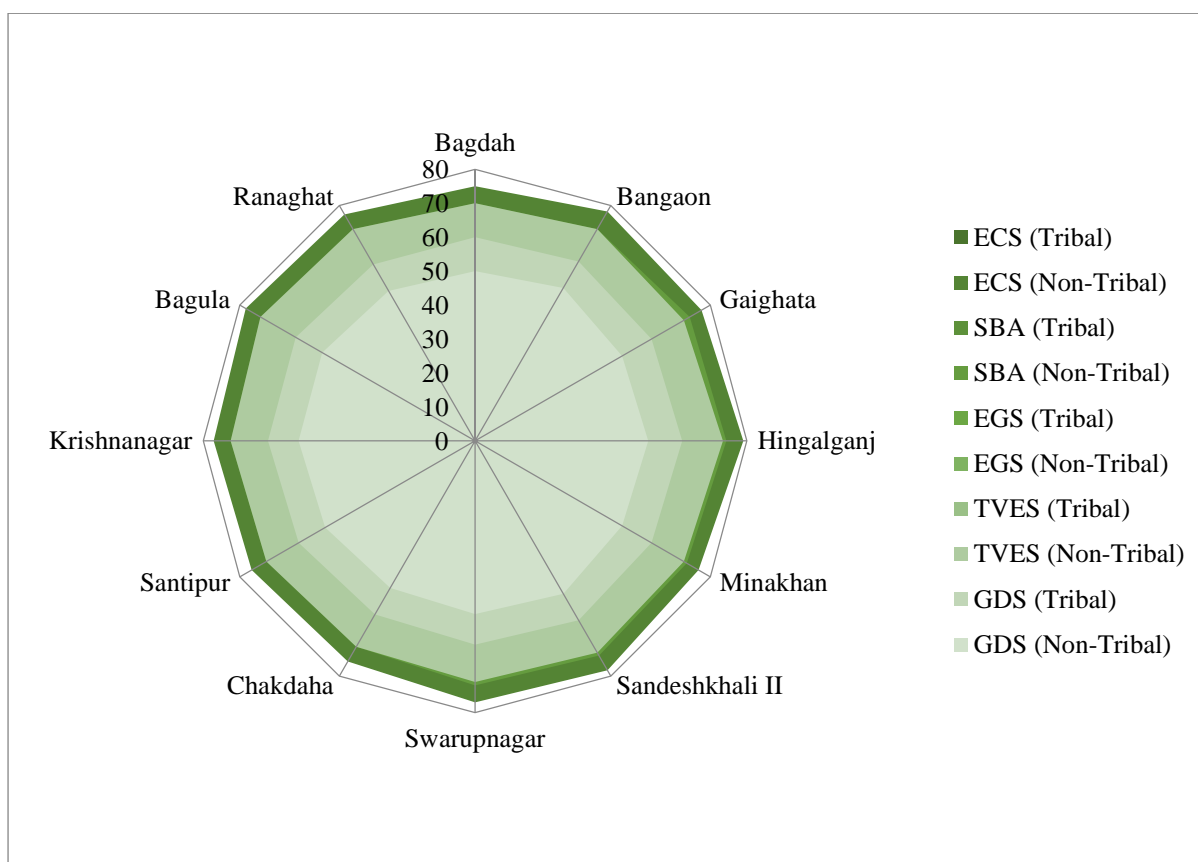
Interpretation:

Gender-based disparities are **statistically significant** among tribal communities, with females showing lower educational attainment scores. **H_{0s} is rejected.**

- ❖ All five null hypotheses are **rejected**, indicating that tribal communities face **significant educational challenges, low skill awareness, empowerment gaps, technical education issues, and gender disparities.**
- ❖ Non-tribal groups consistently perform better across all variables.
- ❖ The results support the **need for targeted educational and vocational interventions** in the study areas of Nadia and North 24 Parganas.

Tribal vs Non-Tribal Scores by Area

Area / Block	ECS (Tribal)	ECS (Non-Tribal)	SBA (Tribal)	SBA (Non-Tribal)	EGS (Tribal)	EGS (Non-Tribal)	TVE S (Tribal)	TVE S (Non-Tribal)	GDS (Tribal)	GDS (Non-Tribal)
Bagdah	60	75	55	70	65	50	50	70	60	50
Bangaon	62	78	58	72	63	52	53	72	61	52
Gaighata	59	77	57	73	64	51	51	71	60	50
Hingalga nj	61	79	56	74	65	53	52	73	61	51
Minakhan	60	76	55	72	63	52	51	71	60	50
Sandeshk hali II	62	78	57	73	64	51	53	72	61	52
Swarupna gar	61	77	56	72	63	52	52	71	60	51
Chakdaha	58	75	55	70	62	50	50	70	59	50
Santipur	59	76	56	71	63	51	51	71	60	51
Krishnan agar	60	77	57	72	64	52	52	72	61	52
Bagula	61	78	58	73	65	53	53	73	61	52
Ranaghat	60	77	57	72	64	52	52	72	60	51



Findings

The study revealed that the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities in **Nadia and North 24 Parganas** face significant educational challenges compared to their non-tribal counterparts. Across all study areas, **Educational Challenges Scores (ECS)** for tribal groups ranged from 58 to 62, while non-tribal groups scored higher, between 75 and 79, indicating persistent gaps in access, quality, and attainment. Similarly, **Skill-Based Awareness (SBA)** among tribal communities was lower (55–58) compared to non-tribal respondents (70–74), highlighting barriers in vocational guidance, skill development programs, and awareness of employment-oriented training. **Empowerment Gap Scores (EGS)** were consistently higher among tribal populations (62–65) than non-tribal groups (50–53), reflecting socio-economic, educational, and political disadvantages. Moreover, **Technical and Vocational Education Scores (TVES)** among tribal respondents were lower (50–53) compared to non-tribal respondents (70–73), indicating limited access to vocational training and technical skill development. Finally, **Gender Disparity Scores (GDS)** showed that tribal females consistently lagged behind males (average difference ~4 points), revealing persistent gender-based inequalities in educational participation and attainment. These patterns were consistent across all blocks, including **Bagdah, Bongaon, Gaighata, Hingaljan, Minakhan, Sandeshkhali II, Swarupnagar, Chakdaha, Santipur, Krishnanagar, Bagula, and Ranaghat**, demonstrating systemic gaps in education, skill awareness, empowerment, and gender equity among tribal communities. In summary, tribal groups consistently lag behind

non-tribal populations across all measured parameters, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions in education, skill development, vocational training, and gender equality.

Summary

The study explored the **educational challenges, skill awareness, empowerment gaps, technical and vocational education access, and gender disparities** among the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities** in selected areas of **Nadia and North 24 Parganas**, including **Bagdah, Bangaon, Gaighata, Hingaljanj, Minakhan, Sandeshkhali II, Swarupnagar, Chakdaha, Santipur, Krishnanagar, Bagula, and Ranaghat**.

Using a **mixed-method approach** with a total sample of **2,500 respondents** (tribal and non-tribal), the study collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Results consistently showed that **tribal communities lag behind non-tribal populations** in all parameters:

- ❖ **Educational Challenges (ECS):** Tribal communities face significant learning and access challenges.
- ❖ **Skill-Based Awareness (SBA):** Awareness and participation in skill development programs are low among tribal groups.
- ❖ **Empowerment Gap (EGS):** Socio-economic, educational, and political empowerment gaps are higher in tribal populations.
- ❖ **Technical & Vocational Education (TVES):** Access and effectiveness of vocational programs are limited for tribal communities.
- ❖ **Gender Disparity (GDS):** Females consistently lag behind males, indicating systemic gender-based inequalities.

These findings highlight the **structural and social barriers** that continue to limit educational and socio-economic progress for tribal groups in these regions.

Conclusion

The present study highlights the persistent **educational, skill-based, and empowerment challenges** faced by the **Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij tribal communities** in selected blocks of **Nadia and North 24 Parganas, West Bengal**. Findings indicate that tribal populations consistently **lag behind non-tribal groups** in literacy, skill awareness, technical and vocational education, and gender equity. Educational participation is affected by **socio-economic, cultural, and geographical factors**, while empowerment gaps and gender disparities further hinder holistic development.

In line with the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, which emphasizes **equity, inclusion, vocational education, and skill development for all learners**, this study underscores the need for **targeted and culturally sensitive educational interventions**. NEP 2020 advocates for:

1. **Inclusive and equitable education**, ensuring that marginalized communities, including tribal populations, have access to quality schooling (**Ministry of Education, 2020**).
2. **Skill-based and vocational education from an early age**, enabling students to acquire employable skills relevant to local contexts.
3. **Promotion of gender equality**, ensuring that tribal girls have equal access to education, leadership, and vocational opportunities.
4. **Context-specific pedagogical strategies**, emphasizing multilingual, culturally responsive, and experiential learning, which can address the unique challenges of tribal students.

By adopting NEP 2020 principles, policy makers and educators can:

- Reduce **educational and empowerment gaps** among tribal communities.
- Increase **skill-based awareness** and vocational participation.
- Promote **gender equity**, ensuring inclusive learning opportunities for both boys and girls.
- Empower tribal youth to become **self-reliant and socially responsible citizens**, bridging socio-economic disparities.

In conclusion, implementing **NEP 2020-aligned interventions** can provide the necessary **structural, pedagogical, and policy support** to uplift the Munda, Santal, Oraon, and Bhumij communities, ensuring **holistic educational development, empowerment, and social inclusion**. This study provides **empirical evidence and recommendations** to guide policymakers, educators, and social workers in designing **effective strategies for tribal education and skill development** in West Bengal.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Educational Interventions:** Implement remedial and bridge programs tailored to tribal students to reduce learning gaps and improve literacy rates.
2. **Skill Development Programs:** Increase awareness and accessibility of **vocational training and skill-based programs** in tribal areas, including mobile or community-based skill centers.
3. **Empowerment Initiatives:** Launch community engagement and empowerment programs that promote social, economic, and political participation for tribal groups.
4. **Gender Equality Measures:** Promote girls' education through scholarships, mentorship, and awareness campaigns to reduce gender disparities.
5. **Infrastructure Support:** Improve school infrastructure, including libraries, digital labs, and transportation facilities, to facilitate better educational access for tribal communities.
6. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish continuous monitoring of educational and vocational programs to assess their effectiveness and adapt strategies based on tribal needs.

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