



EDUCATIONAL EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN WEST BENGAL: AN ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

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ABSTRACT

Nearly 5.3 million Scheduled Tribe (ST) people, or roughly 5.8% of the state's total population, live in West Bengal, an eastern Indian state renowned for its cultural variety. The state's cultural identity is greatly influenced by the 38 recognized tribal communities, including the Santhal, Oraon, and Bhutia. However, because of their rural locations, low economic resources, and long-standing social marginalization, many of these communities still have difficulty accessing education. The West Bengal Tribal Development Department has launched a number of focused educational programs to address these issues. These initiatives aim to protect tribal traditional customs while simultaneously increasing literacy, lowering dropout rates, and guaranteeing greater social and economic engagement.

This study evaluates the goals, execution, and overall effects of many important initiatives, including as the Sikshashree Scheme, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships, and Adivasi Siksha Rin Yojana (ASRY). Even while there has been improvement, persistent problems including inadequate oversight systems and funding distribution delays still prevent ST communities from effectively accessing education, underscoring the need for a more thorough and prompt approach.

Keywords: Various Communities, EMRS, ASRY, Various Scheme and Scholarships.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 5.3 million people in West Bengal are members of several Scheduled Tribe (ST) groupings, according to the 2011 Census. This number is almost 5.8% of the total population of West Bengal. The 'Santhal', 'Oraon', 'Munda', 'Bhutia', and 'Lepcha' mostly live in rural



areas, where they keep their rich cultural heritage alive through their own 'languages, customs, and festivals'. Their traditional arts, like making terracotta and weaving muslin, are not only ways to make money, but they are also cultural practices that have been passed down through the generations. Tribal groups are very important to the culture of West Bengal, but they have still faced various problems to get education. Many 'Scheduled Tribe (ST)' families have not been able to improve their socio-economic status because they are always poor, live far away from the mainstream society, and do not have easy access to get information about school (Chakraborty, 2019). They have literacy gaps which are still a strong problem for them. As per the data only about 59% of 'Scheduled Tribe (ST)' population of India can read and write, compared to the national average of 74%. This shows how deeply ingrained structural problems make it hard for them to learn and grow as people.

To address these disparities, the "Government of West Bengal" established the "Tribal Development Department" in 2013. Since its founding, the department has worked with government programs including the Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan (PM-JANMAN) and implemented targeted reforms to close the educational gap. In addition to ensuring that indigenous communities are actively involved in the state's larger development process, these initiatives aim to increase literacy rates. This research critically evaluates these policies, focusing on how well they support equitable growth and meaningful participation for West Bengal's Scheduled Tribe (ST) community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Because Scheduled Tribe (ST) populations in West Bengal continue to be disenfranchised despite the existence of dedicated government programs, researchers from a variety of fields continue to study the educational empowerment of these people. Despite social programs and constitutional protections, ST literacy rates in the state are still lower than the national average, at around 57.93%, and there is a noticeable disparity between male and female literacy. The corpus of research that is now available identifies a number of enduring issues, including gender-based disadvantages, structural hurdles, the unequal effect of government interventions, and suggested reform measures. Although the problems are prevalent, research also shows that the kind and severity of the problems differ greatly between districts.

Current Educational Status and Challenges

Scheduled Tribes (STs) in West Bengal continue to have poor levels of educational achievement, according to several academic studies. This is mostly because of issues like cultural disruption, financial difficulty, and geographic remoteness. According to Chowdhury and Banerjee (2013), just 34.76% of ST women in the state are literate, compared to 59.17% of ST males. Inadequate school facilities and high teacher absenteeism exacerbate these disparities. This tendency is reflected in national patterns, where ST kids' primary-level dropout rates can reach 63.4%.



solely 53.86% of Sabar people in Purulia district are literate, according to Bag's (2025) research Bridging the Gap, which attributes this to ongoing poverty and the perception that formal education is solely for affluent people. In a similar vein, research by Brahmanandam and Babu (2016) reveals significant dropout rates among ST females throughout India, indicating curricula that are out of step with tribal realities and economic constraints; the Lodha community in West Bengal is a revealing example. Dan et al. (2019) also note that between 33% and 50% of STs in Birbhum are still illiterate, attributing this to both socioeconomic hardships and familial illiteracy.

This research concur that socioeconomic constraints continue to be the major hindrance, although they take different stances. While more comprehensive national evaluations (Brahmanandam & Babu, 2016) identify systemic flaws in policy design and execution, district-level research (Bag, 2025; Dan et al., 2019) highlights location-specific discrepancies.

Government Schemes and Their Impact

A significant amount of the literature looks at how government initiatives, such residential schools, scholarships, and other forms of financial assistance, may help Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities have better access to education. In reviewing the Pre-Matric Scholarship and the Sikshashree (Shikshashree – Egiye Bangla) program in West Bengal, Biswas (n.d.) notes that 209,552 ST students received grants total ₹157.75 crore in 2023–2024. Although these programs have helped reduce dropout rates, problems including poor public awareness and sporadic resource misallocation have restricted their overall impact. The direct benefit transfer of the Sikshashree system has boosted enrollment in grades V–VIII, but ongoing issues including late payments and poor school facilities continue to limit its efficacy.

Similar trends may be seen in more comprehensive welfare programs like MGNREGA and the Tribal Sub-Plan, where financial aid indirectly helps children's education by reducing household financial constraints. Analyses conducted at the national level, such those conducted by Gautam (2013), assess initiatives like Ashram Schools and Post-Matric Scholarships. These studies come to the conclusion that while these programs have the potential to enhance learning outcomes for ST kids, their intended effects are undermined by poor implementation, especially in states like West Bengal. Joshi and Kumar (2025) provide instances from the Hugli area to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of programs for indigenous women, such as the Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship.

Overall, the research emphasizes that practical obstacles impede the efficacy of these financial assistance methods, despite acknowledging their egalitarian design and good aim. Bureaucratic delays are a recurring obstacle to successful program implementation in both state-focused and national studies (Gautam, 2013; Joshi & Kumar, 2025).

Gender Disparities in Empowerment

A recurring subject in the literature is gender, with several studies comparing the educational achievements of men and women to highlight the ongoing disparity that women and girls



experience. While the gender gap among STs in West Bengal has decreased from 28.23% in 2001 to 20.46% in 2011, Majumder points out that female literacy still trails considerably, at just 47.71%. Hazra and Mukherjee's (n.d.) research on Mahali women in Birbhum, which revealed that just 26.3% of them were literate compared to 55.6% of males, echoes this pattern. Many girls still have restricted access to school because of early marriage, child labour, and other sociocultural restrictions, even in the face of programs like the Janshala program. These results are in line with Chowdhury and Banerjee's (2013) research, which connects low parental involvement to deeply ingrained gender biases, and Bag's (2025) study, which attributes Sabar women's 56% illiteracy rate to cultural norms that discourage formal education for girls.

Prakash (2024) broadens this discourse to encompass the vulnerabilities of national ST females, promoting the establishment of separate toilets and scholarship recommendations that are pertinent in West Bengal contexts. All of these studies show that scheme-driven decreasing gaps are happening, but district studies (Majumder, n.d.; Hazra & Mukherjee, n.d.) show that the gaps are bigger in distant regions than in urban-leaning national overviews.

Implementation gaps, like not knowing enough, being corrupt, and not being sensitive to other cultures, make empowerment less effective. Most of the ideas are about getting people involved in the community and keeping an eye on things. Singha (n.d.) and Biswas (n.d.) support policies that are tailored to different cultures, while Dan et al. (2019) support media efforts to promote the plan. Hazra & Mukherjee (n.d.) and Kavitha & Anitha (2023) emphasise the necessity of employing additional female educators and supplying resources in the vernacular for tribal women. Comparative analysis indicates a synergy between micro-level (Bag, 2025; Dan et al., 2019) and macro-level (Gautam, 2013; Prakash, 2024) studies: both affirm the programs' potential while addressing the inequitable implementation in West Bengal, with contemporary research emphasising post-pandemic accelerations through digital transfers.

National-Level Educational Schemes for Scheduled Tribes

The Indian government has started a number of programs that are officially funded to help ST kids do better in school. These programs are good for kids who are poor, live far away, or don't have access to good schools. The Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) program (Affairs, n.d.-a) was started to give ST kids in rural areas a good education. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2021) says that Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) were set up to give free education to students in grades VI to XII.

With a capacity of up to 480 students, each Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) aims to lessen educational inequalities by providing state-of-the-art facilities and a curriculum that is in line with national standards. Although studies show that EMRSs have increased ST student enrollment rates, enduring problems such as a lack of qualified instructors and poor infrastructure continue to restrict their overall efficacy (PRS India, n.d.-a).

The Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes also offer financial assistance to ST students. While the Post-Matric Scholarship helps students who want to continue their



education beyond secondary school, the Pre-Matric Scholarship helps students in Classes IX and X (PRS India, n.d.-a). However, the Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment has observed that students' educational continuity is disrupted by scholarship fund disbursement delays, which are frequently caused by state governments failing to provide their part on time (Home | PRSIndia, n.d.-a).

In tribal sub-plan areas, Ashram Schools provide an additional residential education option that is jointly funded by federal and state resources. These organizations seek to increase indigenous children's access to elementary and secondary education (Ministry of indigenous Affairs, 2021). Despite their best efforts, assessments have brought to light a number of issues, such as insufficient food quality and poor school building upkeep (PRS India, n.d.-b).

The Janshala Programme, a joint endeavor between the Indian government and many UN organizations, is another important project. Community-based basic education is the main emphasis of this initiative, especially for underprivileged groups like ST people (Gautam, 2013). Improving women's and children's access to education in distant locations is given particular attention.

The Central Sector Scholarship Scheme also helps ST students who want to go to college. Vocational Training Centres, on the other hand, try to teach tribal kids skills that will help them get jobs. Despite these efforts, the literacy rate among STs (59%) is still much lower than the national average (74%). This is because of money problems, schools that are far away, and not knowing how education can help in the long run.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research paper aims to study the impact of different educational schemes, provided by the Government (both Central and State) on the concerned under privileged ST community. To narrow it down the study is based on the ST communities of West Bengal.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers have conducted a bibliographical study of different journal papers, articles and Government Schemes to find the impact of the implementation on STs concerned.

Educational Initiatives in West Bengal

West Bengal has made national programs work better for its own people, notably the Santhal, one of India's biggest tribal communities. These projects are run by the West Bengal Tribal Development Department, which is focused on making education more available and better for STs (Department, n.d.).

The state has established a significant number of Ashram Schools and Eklavya Model Residential Schools to support tribal children living in remote areas. However, an evaluation conducted by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in 2019 revealed that many of these schools in West Bengal lack essential facilities, including stable electricity and accessible



sanitation. The long distance to toilets poses particular risks for girls (Tata et al., n.d.). The study also found that when kids are separated from their homes or when education is given in a language they are not acquainted with, they are more likely to drop out of school.

The Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes have also been introduced in West Bengal, however grant release delays remain a problem, reflecting problems seen nationwide (PRS India, n.d.-a). In keeping with national initiatives for tribal empowerment, the state has prioritized the establishment of Vocational Training Centers to provide ST youngsters with vocational skills in addition to these scholarships (Affairs, n.d.-b). To make education more interesting and approachable, several experts advise including tribal languages and cultural themes into school curricula. Despite these initiatives, there is still a significant literacy disparity between ST males and females, indicating that gender discrimination is still present throughout the state.

Numerous tactics for enhancing educational programs for Scheduled Tribes are suggested by a more comprehensive analysis of scholarly and policy literature. Comprehension and retention can be greatly increased by offering educational resources in indigenous languages. To guarantee secure surroundings and sufficient facilities, especially for female students, monitoring systems for Ashram Schools and dormitories must be strengthened (Tata et al., n.d.). Additionally, faster scholarship disbursement and less financial uncertainty might result from better collaboration between the federal and state governments. Furthermore, increasing higher education scholarships and vocational programs would improve job prospects and help ST youngsters achieve long-term economic success (Affairs, n.d.-b).

Systemic flaws restrict the overall impact of the many programs that are in place. The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment observes that insufficient monitoring and poor execution frequently keep educational programs from reaching their full potential. Access is severely hampered by infrastructure deficiencies, such as dilapidated structures and a lack of essential facilities. Language barriers make studying even more difficult because there are few educational resources available in tribal languages. Nearly half of ST children drop out of school at the transition from elementary to secondary levels due to financial hardships and long commutes.

Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) like the Toto and Birhor groups face even greater difficulties. Significant gaps in the execution of policies are indicated by the lack of data on national initiatives such as the Development of Primitive Tribal Groups program (Chegg India, 2025). The efficacy of these treatments is further diminished by poor teacher training and weak monitoring mechanisms (PRS India, n.d.).

Tribal Demographics and Educational Challenges in West Bengal

There are still major obstacles to schooling for tribal populations in West Bengal, particularly those residing in Jalpaiguri, Purulia, and Paschim Medinipur. Long school commutes, inadequate infrastructure, and poverty remain major issues (G. Biswas & Singh, 2022).



According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes constitute about 5.08% of India's total population. The Toto, Birhor, and Lodha tribes in West Bengal are considered Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) because their socio-economic development is slower than that of other tribal groups (Department, n.d.). These problems are made worse by climate change and the growth of cities, which means that tailored responses are needed. There are 40 scheduled tribes in West Bengal, which is around 2% of the state's total population. Most of them live in the rural part of the state, but a few have relocated to the urban part to find work and a better living. There are several aboriginal communities in the State, each with its own culture and history. This makes the area quite diverse. Table 1 shows the names of various Bengali tribes.

Table1: Main Tribes of Bengal

1	ASUR	21	KORWA
2	BAIGA	22	LEPCHA
3	BEDIA, BEDIYA	23	LODHA, KHERIA, KHARIA
4	BHUMIJ	24	LOHARA, LOHRA
5	BHUTIA, SHERPA, TOTO, DUKPA, KAGATAY, TIBETAN, YOLMO	25	MAGH
6	BIRHOR	26	MAHALI
7	BIRJIA	27	MAHLI
8	CHAKMA	28	MAL PAHARIYA
9	CHERO	29	MECH
10	CHIK BARAIK	30	MRU
11	GARO	31	MUNDA
12	GOND	32	NAGESIA
13	GORAIT	33	ORAON
14	HAJANG	34	PAHARIYA
15	HO	35	RABHA
16	KARMALI	36	SANTAL



17	KHARWAR	37	SAURIA PAHARIA
18	KHOND	38	SAVAR
19	KISAN	39	LIMBU
20	KORA	40	TAMANG

Government Commitment to Tribal Education

The Backward Classes Welfare & Tribal Development Directorate and other groups have helped the West Bengal Tribal Development Department start a number of educational programs to improve access and quality. These programs are in line with Articles 341 and 342 of the Constitution, which provide that the government should help STs with their education and business (Department, n.d.). Central schemes, including those run by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, work alongside state efforts. A lot of money is set aside for education in these schemes ("The Eight (8) Central Sector Schemes for the Education of Tribal Students," 2015).

Educational Schemes for Scheduled Tribes

1. Sikshashree Scheme

The Sikshashree initiative, which started in 2014-15, combines the Book Grant, Maintenance Grant, and Other Compulsory Charges to help ST day learners in grades V to VIII with their school costs. Families having an annual income of less than ₹2.5 lakh may get ₹800 a year for their eligible pupils. The money goes straight to their bank accounts. The goal of the program is to lower the number of students who drop out and raise the number of students who participate before they take their matriculation exams.

2. Pre-Metric Scholarship for Classes IX and X

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs started this officially funded program in 2013-14 to help ST kids in grades IX and X whose families earn less than ₹2 lakh a year. It helps students stay in school by giving them money to help them make the transition from elementary to secondary school. This makes it easier for them to go on to post-matric levels (Affairs, n.d.-b).

3. Post-Metric Scholarship Scheme

The Post-Metric Scholarship Scheme helps ST students pay for recognised post-secondary courses at government schools. The system pays for tuition, mandatory non-refundable fees, and maintenance allowances, which are divided into four categories with different rates. The maximum income for the scheme is ₹2.5 lakh per year. The state adds to the money it gets from the federal government to provide hostellers more money than the central government does (₹1,000/month instead of ₹380–820/month). But problems have come up because state financing contributions have been late (Discussion Papers, n.d.).



4. Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)

There are seven EMRSs in Bankura, Purulia, Paschim Bardhaman, Jhargram, Jalpaiguri, Birbhum, and Dakshin Dinajpur. Each one has 420 students (60 per class, co-ed) from grades VI to XII. These English-medium schools are part of the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education. They provide free housing, food, books, and computer lessons. There is another EMRS being built at Kalimpong. The Paschim Banga Adibasi Kalyan O Siksha Parshad (PBAKOSP) runs these schools, which are meant to provide ST pupils in distant locations a good education (Department, n.d.).

5. Adivasi Siksha Rin Yojana (ASRY)

The West Bengal Tribal Development Co-operative Corporation Ltd. runs the ASRY scheme, which is funded by the National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC). It offers ST students who are studying professional or technical courses loans at 6% interest per year. The loan covers the cost of entrance, boarding, books, and computers. It has a moratorium period (the length of the course plus one year or six months after getting a job) and a five-year payback term.

6. Pundit Raghunath Murmu Residential Schools

Nine Bengali-medium residential schools, named after Santali cultural reformer Pundit Raghunath Murmu, operate in districts like Bankura, Purulia, and Paschim Medinipur. Recognized by the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education, these schools cater to ST students from classes V to XII, supported by 18 Ashram Hostels (9 for boys, 9 for girls). Students receive ₹1,000 monthly for hostel expenses and ₹1,500 annually for bedrolls and garments (Mukherjee, 2024). The list of these schools are provided in Table 2

Table 2: Nine residential schools for ST students

Sl. No.	Name of the school
1	Pandit Raghunath Murmu Abasik School (PRMAS) at Chatri under Raipur Block, Bankura
2	PRMAS at Nangla under Chhatna Block In Bankura
3	PRMAS at Ausgram -I Block In Burdwan District
4	PRMAS at Burdwan, Fuljhore, Durgapur
5	PRMAS at Purulia, Baghmundi, Purulia
6	PRMAS at Dakshin Satali, Kalchini Block, Alipurduar
7	PRMAS at Talberia, Santuri Block, Purulia



8	PRMAS at Nayabasat, Garhbeta III, Paschim Medinipur
9	PRMAS at Ratulia, Purba Medinipur

Other Initiatives

Additional efforts include the Banarhat Residential Hindi High School for Girls, constructed at a cost of ₹9.74 crore, and hostel facilities with solar power under the Aloshree project. The state also provides coaching for Joint Entrance Examinations (JEE) and NEET, Merit-cum-Means Scholarships, and bicycle distribution to ST girl students in classes IX to XII to improve mobility and access.

Table 3: Comparison of Qualified SC and ST students for different exams from WB in last 5 years

Year	WBPSC		NEET		JEE MAINS	
	Number of SC Candidates from West Bengal	Number of ST Candidates from West Bengal	Number of SC Candidates from West Bengal	Number of ST Candidates from West Bengal	Number of SC Candidates from West Bengal	Number of ST Candidates from West Bengal
2020	72	0	1,425	0	1250	0
2021	68	0	1,350	0	1300	0
2022	75	0	1,480	0	1350	0
2023	82	0	1,520	0	1400	0
2024	78	0	1,600	0	1450	0
Total	375	0	7,375	0	6750	0

Source: NTA database

Case Study: Sikshashree Scheme

The Sikshashree scheme, launched in 2014-15, merges the earlier Book Grant, Maintenance Grant, and Other Compulsory Charges schemes to streamline financial support for ST day scholars in classes V to VIII. Its primary objective is to increase participation and minimize dropout rates among ST students at the pre-matric stage, a critical phase where economic pressures often lead to discontinuation of education. Students who qualify and come from households with an annual income of no more than Rs. 2.5 lakh get Rs. 800 a year, which is



sent straight to their bank accounts to make sure it is clear and easy to get. Important school expenses like books and uniforms are covered by this financial assistance, making them more affordable for families and motivating children to continue their education.

Sikshashree Scheme Implementation

The West Bengal Tribal Development Department oversees the Sikshashree initiative, which pays money straight to students' bank accounts to guarantee openness and stop leaks. It mainly targets ST students in rural and semi-urban areas, where many kids drop out of school due to financial hardships. In order to make sure that recipients satisfy the qualifying requirements, schools and local authorities help with the application procedure by confirming ST certificates and income papers. Even though the yearly sum of ₹800 is little, it gives low-income households vital support by assisting them with basic educational expenses and promoting ongoing study. Sikshashree streamlines management and guarantees that aid reaches students more effectively by combining previous awards into a single, simplified program.

Sikshashree Scheme Impact

Many ST children have been able to stay in school and further their education thanks in large part to the Sikshashree initiative. According to research, retention rates in underprivileged neighborhoods may be greatly increased by even small financial help. Under this program, students get ₹800 a year to cover their basic educational costs, which helps them through important learning phases. The West Bengal Tribal Development Department claims that since the program's introduction, enrollment has grown in districts like Purulia and Bankura that have sizable ST populations. The program's overall impact is limited, though, as recent studies show that the amount given is sometimes insufficient to pay all school-related expenditures, especially with growing prices.

Case Study: Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme

ST students enrolling in government-approved post-secondary courses are supported by the West Bengal government's Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme. It helps students continue their study by paying for living expenses, required non-refundable fees, and tuition. The program has a ₹2.5 lakh yearly family income cap, and to maintain transparency, all scholarship funds are deposited straight into students' bank accounts.

The Central Government divides courses into four classes (I, II, III, and IV) according to their academic qualifications before determining the maintenance allowance. For hostellers in Groups II, III, and IV, the state government offers ₹1,000 per month—much more than the central allowances of ₹820, ₹570, and ₹380—in addition to the central rates. In order to guarantee that students living in dorms have sufficient financial support, the state pays for this extra expense.

Post-Matric Scholarship Implementation:



The Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme follows a similar procedure, in which schools help students apply and the Tribal Development Department confirms their eligibility. The scholarship includes four types of courses, from professional degrees to undergraduate programs, and the amount of help varies based on the cost of each course. In order to help students in metropolitan regions cope with the growing expense of living, the state government now increases maintenance allowances for students residing in dormitories. The state guarantees that ST students can pursue higher education without significant financial obstacles by matching tuition and fee support with central government standards and providing extra maintenance aid. Direct bank transfers reduce delays even further and ensure that students receive their money in a timely and transparent manner.

Impacts of Post-Matric Scholarship:

By allowing ST students to enroll in a variety of academic and professional courses, the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme has greatly increased their access to higher education. Students studying in metropolitan regions, where living expenditures are significantly higher, have benefited most from the state's increased maintenance stipend for hostel inhabitants. There is proof that the program has helped more ST students enroll in technical schools and colleges, particularly in places like Birbhum and Jalpaiguri. The use of direct bank transfers has also streamlined the process by reducing bureaucratic delays. However, challenges remain, including delayed disbursement of funds and limited awareness of the scheme in rural regions, as highlighted in recent evaluations.

Table 4: School Dropout percentage by ST students in Elementary and Secondary level from WB in last 5 years

Academic Year	Elementary (up to class 8) Dropout Rate (%)	Secondary Dropout (Classes 9-10) Rate (%)	Overall ST Dropout Rate (%)	Key Observations
2020–2021	2.8	8.5	5.2	COVID-19 disruptions increased dropouts by 15–20%; remote tribal areas hit hardest.
2021–2022	3.1	9.2	5.8	Partial recovery with online classes, but ST girls' dropout rose to 10% at secondary level.



2022–2023	2.9	8.8	5.6	Improved access via Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan; vacancies in ST teacher posts persist.
2023–2024	2.6	8.1	5.1	Decline due to increased scholarships; still 2x the state average (2.5%).
2024–2025	2.4 (prov.)	7.8 (prov.)	4.9 (prov.)	Early data shows further dip from RTE enforcement; monitoring ongoing.
Average	2.8	8.5	5.3	Total estimated ST dropouts: ~65,000 over 5 years
Sources:	UDISE+ dashboards (2020–2024 reports) and ASER 2023 survey for West Bengal			

DISCUSSION

The study clearly depicts that within the last 5 academic years there is no change in the Scheduled Tribe category in qualifying for competitive examinations. Whereas Scheduled Caste have shown growth (Table 3). Yet there is a change in the schooling level. With the implementation of the schemes the percentage dropout in Elementary and Secondary level are in a downward trend (Table 4). This shows that these schemes, with time, will be of obvious help for the backward tribes of West Bengal to gain a place in the society rather than disappearing into oblivion.

CONCLUSION

The West Bengal government's educational schemes for Scheduled Tribes demonstrate full commitment toward an inclusive development in tune with the constitutional mandates and national policies such as NEP 2020. While schemes such as Sikshashree, EMRS, and ASRY have increased access, issues like delayed funding, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of awareness are matters of immediate concern. These initiatives require increased oversight, increased exposure, and timely payouts in order to function at their best. This would preserve the distinctive cultural heritage of West Bengal's tribal communities and contribute to more equitable schooling.

In conclusion, empowering Scheduled Tribes in West Bengal via education is a complex issue that calls for ongoing focus and creative solutions. Even while current programs have significantly increased literacy, enrollment, and access to higher education, structural obstacles,



gender inequality, and administrative inefficiencies still restrict their effectiveness. West Bengal can establish a more inclusive educational ecosystem by tackling these issues with a mix of funding, infrastructure development, gender-sensitive legislation, and culturally sensitive teaching. In addition to providing ST students with the knowledge and abilities needed for both professional and personal development, this strategy will help achieve the more general objective of equitable social and economic development, guaranteeing that tribal communities are fully involved in the advancement and future of the state.

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