EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS AND NEEDS OF TRIBAL STUDENTS AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN ALIPURDUAR DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

Eshita Saha[1],
Ratan Sarkar[2i]
[1]PhD Research Scholar (Education),
UGC- NET- JRF,
Research Centre in Humanities and Social Sciences,
Prabhat Kumar College, Contai (Affiliated to Vidyasagar University),
Karkuli, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal- 721404,
India
[2]Assistant Professor of Education, Dr.,
Department of Teachers' Training (B.Ed.),
Prabhat Kumar College, Contai (Affiliated to Vidyasagar University),
Karkuli, Contai, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal-721404,
India

Abstract:

India is home to over 84.4 million tribal people, or Adivasis, who represent some of the country's poorest communities, still reliant on traditional practices such as hunting, agriculture, and fishing, with distinct cultures, languages, and lifestyles. In West Bengal's Alipurduar District, over 80% of the population belongs to ethnic tribes. This study investigates the educational problems and needs of secondary-level tribal students in Alipurduar, focusing on gender differences. A survey of 60 students was conducted using the standardized "Educational Problems Questionnaire" and a self-developed "Educational Needs Questionnaire." The findings revealed that 51% of students face challenges in teaching methods, 54% in the social and educational environment, 56% in organizational and administrative issues, and 59% due to cultural and historical factors. Additionally, 48% of respondents expressed educational needs related to school education, 55% expressed societal support, and 44% expressed family involvement. These results underscore the importance of addressing the specific educational challenges faced by tribal students to promote equitable learning outcomes.

Keywords: tribal students, educational problem, educational need, secondary education

[i] Correspondance: email sahaeshita06@gmail.com, ratanedu@pkcollegecontai.ac.in

1. Introduction

Education serves as a key mechanism for fostering social change and is a crucial factor in societal transformation, especially for marginalized communities, such as India's tribal populations. Tribes, defined by their unique social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics, remain among the most disadvantaged groups in the country and are often excluded from the benefits of modern development. Despite having the world's largest tribal population outside of Africa than 84.4 million Indian tribes, known collectively as Adivasis, continue to lead traditional lives, reliant on subsistence practices such as hunting, agriculture, and fishing. This isolation, combined with their distinct cultural identities, has contributed to their socio-economic marginalization, particularly in the sphere of education.

The Imperial Gazetteer of India (1911) defined the tribe as a collection of families sharing a common language, culture, and territory. This definition reflects the deeply ingrained social division between tribal and non-tribal communities, a division that persists today. Historically, tribal populations have been marginalized, and this exclusion is evident in their limited access to education. Education, however, holds the key to empowering these communities, enabling them to break free from cycles of deprivation and marginalization. By equipping tribal individuals with knowledge and self-awareness, education can foster self-reliance and help them leverage socioeconomic, political, and educational opportunities.

While the Indian Constitution does not explicitly define Scheduled Tribes (STs), Article 342 grants the president authority to designate tribal communities based on socio-economic criteria. These communities face significant educational disadvantages, and in states such as West Bengal, where tribes comprise approximately 2% of the population, the challenges are profound. In Alipurduar, West Bengal's 20th district, over 80% of the population belongs to various tribal groups, with Santals constituting the majority. The educational profile of these tribes reveals a stark gender disparity: while 57.4% of males are literate, only 29.2% of females have basic literacy. Among the major tribes, Bhutia is the most literate, with 72.6% literacy, while others, such as the Sevar, lag behind, with only 16% female literacy.

Alipurduar is home to a rich diversity of tribal groups, many of which have historically migrated from Tibet and Bangladesh. Despite this rich cultural heritage, the district's tribal populations, particularly groups like the Rava, Santal, and Toto, continue to face severe educational barriers (Tribal Education 2016). The district's topography, which is dominated by rivers, hills, and tea gardens, further compounded these challenges by limiting access to schools and educational infrastructure. Additionally, deep-rooted sociocultural and economic barriers further hinder the educational progress of tribal students. The alarming dropout rate among tribal students is a pressing issue (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2016; Joshi, 2010; Naik, 2017).

Recognizing these disparities, this study aimed to analyze the specific educational problems and needs of tribal students at the secondary level in Alipurduar. The

examination focuses on identifying gaps in the current educational system, understanding the unique needs of tribal students, and exploring the impact of sociocultural and economic factors on their educational outcomes. By addressing these issues, this study seeks to provide a roadmap for more inclusive and effective educational strategies that can empower tribal students and integrate them into a broader national development narrative.

2. Need and Significance of the Study

Education plays a pivotal role in driving social change and empowerment, especially in marginalized communities, such as India's tribal population. Despite housing the largest tribal population outside of Africa—over 84.4 million Adivasis—these communities remain largely excluded from modern development and face significant educational disadvantages (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020). The isolation of tribal groups, combined with their unique cultural identities, has perpetuated socioeconomic marginalization, particularly in education (Tribal Education, 2016). In Alipurduar District, where more than 80% of the population belongs to various tribal groups, significant disparities exist, especially in gender literacy rates; for instance, while 57.4% of males are literate, only 29.2% of females achieve basic literacy (Census of India 2011). These stark realities underscore the urgent need to address the educational challenges faced by tribal students, particularly because high dropout rates have been reported (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2016; Joshi, 2010; Naik, 2017). This study aims to identify the specific educational problems and needs of tribal students at the secondary level in Alipurduar, thereby shedding light on gaps within the current educational system. By exploring the sociocultural and economic factors impacting educational outcomes, this research seeks to develop inclusive and effective educational strategies that empower tribal students, ultimately contributing to their integration into the broader national development narrative.

2.1 Objective of the Study
1) To identify the major educational problems faced by tribal students at the secondary level.
2) To examine the major educational needs of tribal students at the secondary level.

2.2 Research Questions
1) What are the major educational problems faced by tribal students at the secondary level?
2) What are the major educational needs of tribal students at the secondary level?

3. Methodology

3.1 Design

The research design serves as an essential framework for this study, guiding its methodology and approach. A critical aspect of this process is the selection of an appropriate research approach, as it dictates how relevant information is gathered. The research design encompasses various interrelated decisions that collectively shape the direction and focus of this study.

3.2 Population
This study considers all scheduled tribe students at the secondary level in the Alipurduar district as its population.
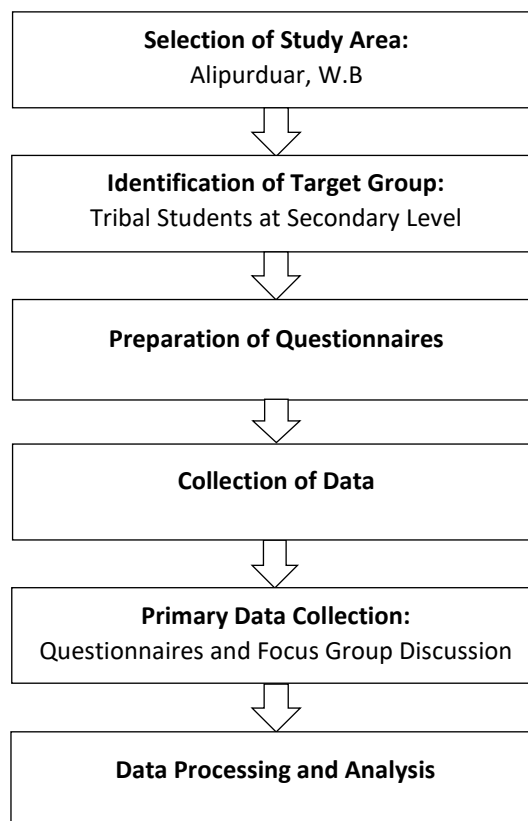
3.3 Sample
The sample for this study comprised 60 tribal students from various schools in the Alipurduar district.

3.4 Research Tools
The following tools were used to collect the data necessary for this study.
1) A standardized questionnaire entitled the "Educational Problems Questionnaire developed by Beena Shah and S.K. Lakhera.
2) The researcher created a customized questionnaire on educational needs to assess the educational needs of tribal students at the secondary level.

3.5 Steps Followed

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│      Selection of Study Area:        │
│          Alipurduar, W.B             │
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│    Identification of Target Group:   │
│    Tribal Students at Secondary Level│
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│      Preparation of Questionnaires   │
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│          Collection of Data          │
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│       Primary Data Collection:       │
│ Questionnaires and Focus Group Discussion │
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│     Data Processing and Analysis     │
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4. Results and Discussion

This chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of data, which involves breaking down the data into their constituent parts to uncover inherent truths using various statistical measures. Following data analysis, the interpretation of results requires careful, logical, and critical examination of the findings. The discussion that follows this analysis and interpretation justifies the obtained results, drawing on the research evidence found in the literature review as well as the researcher's insights.

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the major educational problems faced by tribal students at the secondary level?

Tribal students at the secondary school level encounter numerous challenges in their education. It is essential for both the home and school environments to be supportive and conducive to learning. Parents should actively encourage their children to set and achieve educational goals, while teachers and the overall school atmosphere play a crucial role in delivering education, motivating students, providing guidance and counseling, monitoring progress, and alleviating fear and emotional stress.

Data regarding the educational problems faced by tribal students were collected using the "Educational Problems Questionnaire." The sample consisted of 60 students, with responses categorized into two groups: 'Yes,' indicating the presence of a problem and 'No,' indicating the absence of a problem, as illustrated in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Responses of Students in Different Areas of Educational Problems

| Area	Yes	No	Total (N=60)
1. Causes Related to Teacher and Teaching	31	29	60
2. Causes Related to Social and Educational Atmosphere	33	27	60
3. Organizational and Administrative Causes	38	22	60
4. Cultural and Historical Causes	36	24	60

The data from the table highlights several key educational problems faced by tribal students at the secondary level. Of the 60 students surveyed, 31 reported difficulties related to Teachers and Teaching, suggesting gaps in instructional methods, teacher-student relationships, and pedagogical approaches. Additionally, 33 students indicated facing challenges connected to the social and educational atmosphere, which could include peer interactions, classroom dynamics, and the overall learning environment. Organizational and administrative issues, such as school management and resource allocation, affected 38 students, reflecting the impact of institutional inefficiency. Moreover, 36 students identified cultural and historical factors as obstacles, which may indicate a lack of cultural sensitivity or representation within the curriculum and school practices. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of the educational barriers encountered by tribal students.

Table 1.2: Percentage of Students Faced Educational Problems

Area	Percentage of Total Students (%)
1. Cause Related to Teacher and Teaching	51%
2. Causes Related to Social and Educational Atmosphere	55%
3. Organizational and Administrative Causes	64%
4. Cultural and Historical Causes	60%

4.1.1 Interpretation

The data from the table indicate that tribal students at the secondary level in the Alipurduar District face significant educational challenges across various dimensions. Specifically, 51% of these students reported problems related to teachers and teaching, suggesting inadequacies in instructional quality and teacher-student relationships. Additionally, 55% of students experienced difficulties within the Social and Educational Atmosphere, which may stem from negative peer interactions and insufficient support from school staff. Alarmingly, 64% cited Organizational and Administrative Causes as barriers to effective learning, pointing to systemic issues, such as poor management and inadequate resource allocation. Furthermore, 60% of tribal students identified Cultural and Historical Causes impacting their education, highlighting the need for a culturally responsive curriculum that acknowledges their diverse backgrounds. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these multifaceted educational problems and to create a more supportive and equitable environment for tribal students.
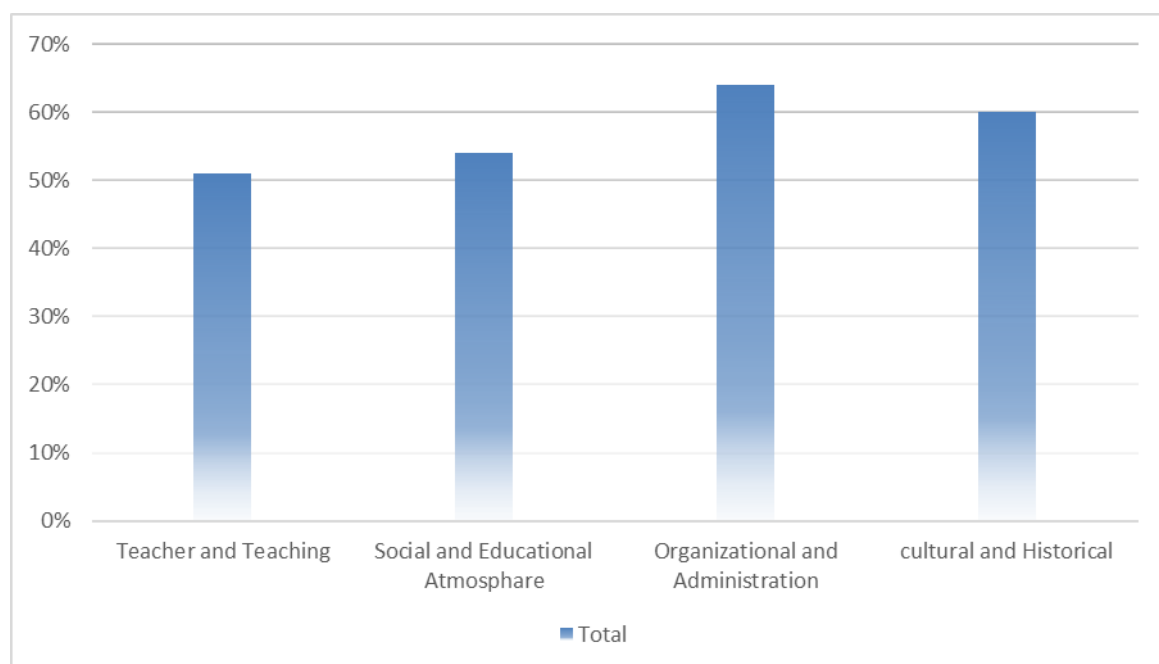
Figure 1.1: Percentage of Students Who Faced Educational Problems

The data presented in Figure 1.1 illustrates that tribal students encounter the greatest challenges in the area of Organizational and Administrative Causes, indicating

systemic issues that significantly hinder their educational experience. Cultural and Historical Causes emerged as the second most prevalent problem, suggesting that students face difficulties related to their cultural context and historical background. The Social and Educational Atmosphere ranked next, reflecting challenges stemming from peer interactions and the overall school environment. Finally, the areas of Teacher and Teaching present relatively fewer problems for students, indicating that while teaching quality and teacher-student dynamics still matter, they are not as prominent as the other issues identified. This analysis highlights the need for comprehensive strategies to address the organizational, cultural, and social factors that impact the education of tribal students.

4.2 Research Question 2: What are the major educational needs of secondary level tribal students?

Tribal students at the secondary level in the Alipurduar District have distinct educational needs that differ from those of their peers. A common issue in modern education is the tendency to treat all students equally, overlooking that each child's educational needs can vary significantly. Unfortunately, tribal students are often placed in the same classroom as others, and this becomes the teacher's responsibility to adapt the teaching methods to accommodate these diverse needs.

To assess these educational needs, data were gathered using a tool called the "Educational Needs Questionnaire." The students' responses were categorized as either "Yes," indicating they have educational needs, or "No," indicating that they do not have specific educational needs. These findings are presented in Table 1.3, where "Yes" signifies the presence of an educational need, and "No" denotes the absence of one.

Table 1.3: Responses of Students in Different Areas of Educational Needs

Area	Yes	No	Total (N=60)
1. Needs Related to School Education	29	31	60
2. Needs Related to Society	33	27	60
3. Needs Related to Family	26	34	60

The data presented in the table reveal significant insights into the educational needs of secondary level tribal students. Of the total sample of 60 students, 29 indicated having educational needs specifically related to School Education. This highlights the importance of tailored academic support and resources to enhance students' learning experiences in the school environment. Additionally, 33 students expressed educational needs connected to society, suggesting a broader context in which these students navigated their educational journeys. This may encompass social integration, community involvement, and support systems that facilitate educational attainment and personal development. Furthermore, 26 students identified educational needs pertaining to the family, indicating the crucial role that familial support plays in a child's educational success. This reflects the need for engagement and resources aimed at assisting families

in fostering an environment conducive to learning, thereby bridging the gaps between home and school. Together, these findings underscore the necessity of a holistic approach to education for tribal students, addressing not only academic requirements, but also the social and familial contexts that significantly impact their educational outcomes.

Table 1.4: Percentage of Students Who Have Educational Needs

Area	Total (%)
1. Needs Related to School Education	48%
2. Needs Related to Society	55%
3. Needs Related to Family	44%

4.2.1 Interpretation

The data presented in the table indicate that tribal students at the secondary level in the Alipurduar District experience educational needs across various areas, specifically concerning School Education, Society, and Family. Notably, 48% of the students identified the educational needs associated with School Education, highlighting a significant demand for academic support and resources tailored to their unique learning contexts. Additionally, 55% of the tribal students expressed educational needs related to society, suggesting that social integration, community support, and cultural awareness are vital to their educational experiences. Furthermore, 44% of the students indicated educational needs connected to the family, emphasizing the critical role that familial involvement and support play in fostering an effective learning environment. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of addressing the multifaceted educational needs of tribal students to promote their overall development and success in the educational system.

Figure 1.2: Percentage of Students Who Have Educational Needs
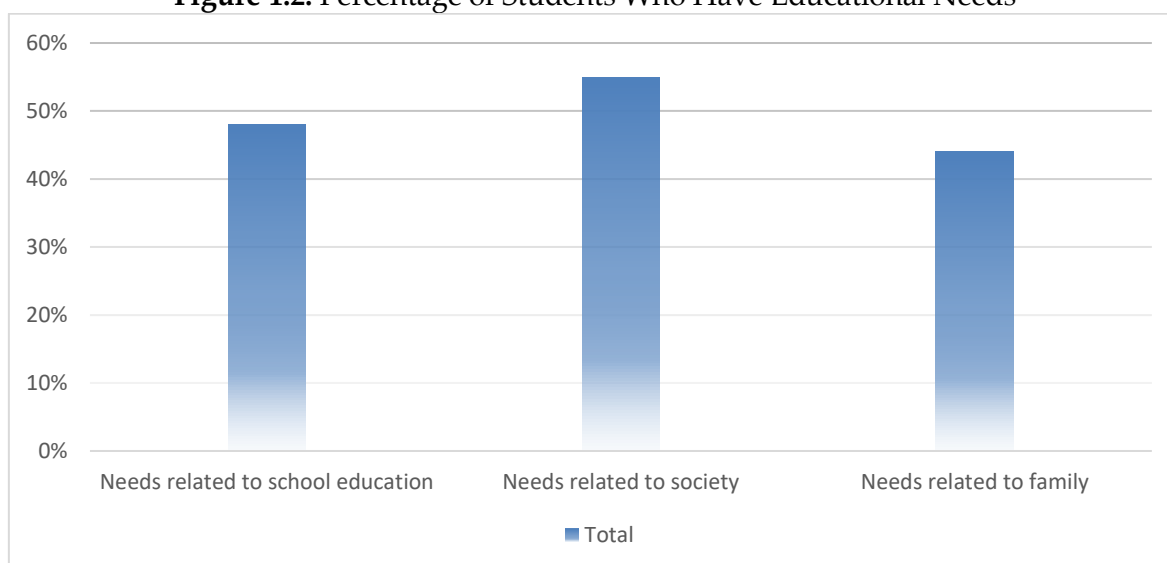
The data illustrated in Figure 1.2 reveals that the majority of tribal secondary students express a significant need related to **society**, indicating that social integration,

community engagement, and cultural support are crucial for their educational experiences. A considerable number of students also identified needs related to School Education, suggesting that academic resources and tailored educational strategies are essential for their learning. In contrast, the need related to family is relatively low, indicating that while familial support is important, it may not be perceived as a primary concern compared to societal and educational factors. This distribution of needs highlights the need for targeted interventions that address the social and educational contexts of tribal students to enhance their overall academic success and well-being.

Table 1.5: Mean Score of Different Areas of Educational Need

Mean Value of Needs Related to School Education	Mean value of Needs Related to Society	Mean Value of Needs Related to Family
9.78	7.92	7.74

The data presented in Table 1.5 shows that the mean value for Needs Related to School Education is 9.78, indicating that this area is of significant concern for tribal students. The mean value for Needs Related to Society was 7.92, and for Needs Related to Family, it was 7.74. Although the mean for school education was higher, the differences among the mean values across the three areas were not substantial. This suggests that tribal students perceive their educational needs in a balanced manner across school, social, and familial contexts, reflecting the interconnected nature of these aspects in their educational experience.

5. Major Findings

Using a mixed-methods approach, the present study surveyed 60 tribal secondary-level students and revealed the following key challenges:

- **Teacher and Teaching Issues** Approximately 51% of tribal students reported encountering difficulties in the areas of teachers and teaching. These challenges stem from ineffective instructional methods, language barriers, and lack of culturally relevant teaching materials. Teachers often lack training to address the unique needs of tribal students, which exacerbates these problems.
- **Social and Educational Environment:** About 54% of the tribal students expressed difficulties related to their social and educational environment. This refers to the overall school climate, peer interactions, and the attitudes of teachers and administrators. Tribal students frequently feel marginalized or excluded due to cultural and social differences, which negatively impact their learning experiences.
- **Organizational and Administrative Factors:** A total of 56% of the students cited organizational and administrative issues as contributing to their educational challenges. These include poor school management, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of basic resources, such as textbooks, libraries, and extracurricular

activities. Administrative inefficiency also makes it difficult for students to access support services.

- **Cultural and Historical Barriers:** Nearly 59% of the tribal students faced educational challenges related to cultural and historical factors. Many tribal communities have distinct cultural practices and languages that are not reflected in the mainstream education system, leading to feelings of alienation and disconnection from the curriculum. Historical marginalization further compounded these issues, limiting the opportunities for these students to succeed. The study also identified several key educational needs among tribal students.

- **School Education Needs:** A total of 48% of the tribal students indicated a need for improvements in school education. This includes better teaching practices, enhanced school facilities, and more inclusive curricula that reflect tribal culture and language.

- **Societal Support Needs:** About 55% of the students expressed a need for greater support from society. Tribal students often face discrimination and social isolation, which affect their confidence and willingness to engage in academic activities. Addressing societal biases and promoting a more inclusive environment are crucial for their success.

- **Family related Needs:** A total of 44% of the tribal students identified a need for stronger family support in their educational journey. Due to economic hardships or lack of awareness, many tribal families are unable to provide the necessary encouragement or resources for their children's education. Family involvement is essential to motivate students and improve their academic outcomes.

6. Conclusion

Education serves as a crucial catalyst for transformation and plays a vital role in the economic advancement and empowerment of tribal communities. It equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate new challenges, while simultaneously preserving their cultural identities. However, the present study highlights that tribal students face numerous barriers in accessing quality education. These challenges include insufficient resources, inadequate infrastructure, and scarcity of educators who are culturally aware and trained to meet the unique needs of tribal students.

Geographic isolation and poor school facilities further exacerbate these issues, particularly for girls who often have limited access to education. Additionally, the curriculum frequently does not resonate with the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of tribal students, leading to feelings of disengagement and a higher likelihood of dropout. Compounding these challenges, many tribal children are compelled to prioritize work over education because of the prevailing poverty within their communities.

A multifaceted approach is required to effectively address these barriers and ensure that education serves as a true driver of development. This approach should

include improvements in school infrastructure, development of culturally relevant curricula that reflect the values and languages of tribal communities, and initiatives aimed at engaging and supporting tribal families in the educational journey of their children. Other factors that can also play a pivotal role in establishing a suitable teaching-learning environment are teacher-student relationships, peer interactions, classroom dynamics, school management, and resources. By implementing these strategies, education can fulfill its transformative potential, leading to the upliftment and empowerment of tribal communities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive society with community involvement and social interaction.

Acknowledgments

Funding & Conflict of Interest

About the Author(s)

Ms. Eshita Saha is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Education at Prabhat Kumar College, Contai, affiliated with Vidyasagar University, West Bengal. She holds an M.A. in Education from Visva-Bharati and has completed her B.Ed. from the University of Calcutta (Alipore Campus) and M.Ed. from Eastern Dooars B.Ed. Training College, affiliated with BSAEU. Additionally, she earned an M.Phil. in Teacher Education from WBUTTEPA. Ms. Saha successfully cleared UGC-NET (Education) in 2016 and was awarded the UGC-NET JRF in December 2023. Currently, she is the recipient of a Junior Research Fellowship from UGC, actively contributing to the field of educational research. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0000-5208-8524

Dr. Ratan Sarkar is an Assistant Professor of Education (Stage II) in the Department of Teachers' Training (B.Ed.) and a former Head of the Department of Education at Prabhat Kumar College, affiliated with Vidyasagar University in West Bengal, India. He holds postgraduate degrees in English Language & Linguistics, Applied Psychology, and Education, along with a Ph.D. in Education. He has also completed a B.Ed., M.Ed., and M.Phil. in Special Education (Intellectual Disabilities), and has additional qualifications such as Post B.Ed. Diploma in School Administration and Advanced Diploma in Computer Application, and a Certificate Course in Research Methodology (Gold Medalist). Dr. Sarkar has received several awards, including the National Merit Scholarship and UGC Research Fellowships. He has published many articles and led a research project funded by the MHRD. Currently, he guides doctoral scholars and is pursuing an M.A. in Education and Technology at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences,

Mumbai. His research interests include disability, inclusive education, and the use of EdTech and AI in education.

ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5480-0165
ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ratan-Sarkar
Academia: https://independent.academia.edu/SarkarRatan

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