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## **Educational Status of Scheduled Caste Students in Tripura and the Causes of School Dropout: A Sociological Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Education is widely recognized as a transformative instrument for social mobility, social justice, and human development. Despite constitutional safeguards and welfare schemes, the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities in India continue to experience educational inequalities and high dropout rates. The present paper critically examines the educational status of SC students in Tripura. It analyzes the major socio-economic, cultural, institutional, and structural factors driving school dropout in this community. The study is based on secondary data collected from the Census of India 2011, UDISE+, Economic Review of Tripura, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment reports, NSSO educational surveys, and relevant scholarly literature. The paper adopts a sociological perspective to interpret educational deprivation among SC students through the frameworks of social exclusion, cultural capital, and structural inequality. Findings reveal that although educational participation among SC students in Tripura has improved significantly over the past decades, dropout rates remain high at the upper primary and secondary stages due to poverty, parental illiteracy, inadequate educational support, child labour, gender discrimination, early marriage, lack of academic motivation, poor infrastructure, and hidden discrimination. The paper suggests community-based interventions, inclusive educational policies, scholarship expansion, counselling

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mechanisms, and socio-economic empowerment as essential strategies for reducing dropout rates among SC students.

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## 1. Introduction

Education is one of the most powerful instruments for social transformation and social mobility. In a democratic society like India, educational equality is considered essential for achieving social justice and inclusive development. The Constitution of India guarantees equality of opportunity and provides special safeguards for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and other marginalized communities. Despite several welfare measures, a substantial section of the SC population continues to face educational deprivation.

Tripura, a small northeastern state of India, presents a unique socio-cultural composition characterized by ethnic diversity, rural dominance, and economic disparities. According to the Census 2011, Scheduled Castes constitute approximately 17.82 percent of the total population of Tripura. Although the state has one of the highest literacy rates in India, educational inequality persists among marginalized communities. SC students in Tripura often experience educational disadvantages due to poverty, lack of parental education, rural backwardness, inadequate educational infrastructure, and social exclusion.

School dropout among SC students is not merely an educational problem; it is deeply connected with social structure, economic inequality, caste hierarchy, and cultural deprivation. Dropping out of school limits employment opportunities, reinforces poverty, and perpetuates intergenerational inequality. Therefore, understanding the educational status of SC students and identifying the causes of dropout is sociologically significant.

The present study attempts to analyze the educational condition of SC students in Tripura and explore the major factors contributing to dropout among this community.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the educational status of Scheduled Caste students in Tripura.
2. To analyze the literacy and educational participation patterns among SC communities.



3. To identify the socio-economic and institutional factors responsible for school dropout among SC students.
4. To interpret educational inequality among SC students from a sociological perspective.
5. To suggest measures for improving educational participation and retention among SC students.

### **3. Research Questions**

1. What is the present educational status of Scheduled Caste students in Tripura?
2. What are the major causes of dropout among SC students?
3. How do socio-economic and cultural factors influence educational continuity?
4. What policy interventions are required to reduce dropout rates among SC students?

### **4. Methodology**

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It is primarily based on secondary sources of data.

#### **Sources of Data**

The study uses data from:

- Census of India 2011
- UDISE+ Reports
- Economic Review of Tripura
- NSSO Educational Surveys
- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment Reports
- Government Reports and Educational Statistics
- Books, Journals, Research Articles, and Scholarly Publications
- Primary Data from Dhalai and Khowai District



## **Method of Analysis**

The collected data were analyzed using sociological interpretation, comparative analysis, and descriptive statistics. Tables and thematic explanations have been used to interpret the educational condition and dropout patterns among SC students.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

The study is guided by three important sociological perspectives:

### **5.1 Social Exclusion Theory**

Social exclusion theory explains how marginalized communities remain excluded from mainstream social institutions such as education, employment, and political participation. SC students often face structural barriers that limit their educational opportunities.

### **5.2 Cultural Capital Theory (Pierre Bourdieu)**

Bourdieu argued that educational success depends not only on intelligence but also on cultural resources possessed by families. SC families with low educational backgrounds often lack the cultural capital necessary for academic success.

### **5.3 Conflict Theory**

Conflict theorists argue that educational institutions reproduce social inequality. The educational disadvantages experienced by SC students reflect broader inequalities in economic resources, social status, and power relations.

## **6. Educational Status of Scheduled Castes in Tripura**

Tripura has made remarkable progress in literacy and educational development. According to the Census 2011, the overall literacy rate of Tripura was 87.75 percent, which was significantly higher than the national average. However, educational achievements are unevenly distributed among social groups.

The SC population of Tripura is approximately 654,918, constituting nearly 17.82 percent of the total population of the state. The majority of SC families reside in rural areas and are economically dependent on agriculture, daily wage labour, petty business, and informal occupations.

**Table 1: Demographic and Educational Indicators of Tripura**

Indicators	Statistics
Total Literacy Rate of Tripura (2011)	87.75%
Male Literacy Rate	92.18%
Female Literacy Rate	83.14%
SC Population in Tripura	654,918
Percentage of SC Population	17.82%
Dominant Residence Pattern	Rural

**Table 2: Sub-Caste-wise Literacy Rate among Scheduled Castes in Tripura**

SC Sub-Caste / Community	Estimated Literacy Rate (%)
Mahisyadas	81.7
Dhoba	80.5
Patni	76.9
Mali	76.4
Jalia Kaibarta	74.9
Namasudra	73.8
Jalkeot	71.2
Karmakar	70.6
Teli	69.8
Chamar	63.4
Average SC Literacy Rate in Tripura	74.7

The literacy pattern among Scheduled Caste sub-groups in Tripura reflects internal stratification within the SC population itself. Communities such as Mahisyadas and Dhoba exhibit comparatively higher literacy levels due to relatively better socio-economic positioning, urban exposure, and greater participation in educational institutions. On the other hand, communities like Chamar and certain



occupationally marginalized caste groups continue to display lower literacy rates because of poverty, rural concentration, occupational insecurity, and historical social exclusion.

The data also suggest that educational inequality exists not only between SCs and non-SCs but also within Scheduled Caste communities. Occupational background, access to land and resources, parental education, and social mobility significantly influence literacy outcomes among different SC sub-castes in Tripura.

According to Census-linked demographic reports, the overall literacy rate among Scheduled Castes in Tripura was around 74.7%, which remained lower than the overall state literacy rate.

The educational participation of SC students has improved due to various government initiatives, such as:

- Pre-matric and post-matric scholarships
- Mid-day meal schemes
- Free textbooks and uniforms
- Reservation policies
- Hostel facilities
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- Right to Education Act
- Samagra Shiksha Mission

Despite these interventions, dropout rates among SC students remain considerably high at the secondary and higher secondary levels.

## **7. Educational Problems Faced by SC Students in Tripura**

### **7.1 Poverty and Economic Backwardness**

Poverty is one of the most significant causes of educational deprivation among SC students. Many SC families in Tripura struggle to meet basic needs such as food, housing, and healthcare. As a result, children are often compelled to contribute economically to the family.



Economic hardship affects educational continuity in several ways:

- Inability to purchase educational materials
- Poor nutrition and health
- Lack of private tuition support
- Irregular school attendance
- Child labour and wage-earning activities

### **7.2 Parental Illiteracy**

Parental education plays a crucial role in academic achievement. A large section of SC parents in rural Tripura possesses low educational attainment. Illiterate parents are often unable to assist children in academic activities or provide educational guidance.

### **7.3 Rural Educational Disadvantages**

Most SC families reside in rural areas where educational facilities are relatively inadequate. Problems include:

- Insufficient schools in remote areas
- Lack of transportation
- Teacher shortages
- Poor school infrastructure
- Limited access to digital learning resources

### **7.4 Gender Discrimination**

SC girls face multiple forms of disadvantage due to caste, class, and gender inequalities. Early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and social insecurity contribute significantly to female dropout.



### 7.5 Academic Underachievement

Many SC students are first-generation learners. Lack of academic support at home, language barriers, poor foundational learning, and inadequate classroom interaction often result in low academic performance and eventual dropout.

### 7.6 Hidden Social Discrimination

Although overt caste discrimination has declined in many areas, subtle forms of exclusion still exist in educational institutions. Feelings of inferiority, social isolation, and low self-esteem negatively affect student participation.

### 7.7 Lack of Educational Motivation

Many SC students come from families where immediate economic survival receives greater priority than long-term educational goals. Consequently, education is sometimes viewed as less rewarding compared to wage earning.

## 8. Dropout Trends among SC Students

Educational dropout refers to the discontinuation of education before completion of a particular stage. National educational surveys indicate that dropout rates among SC students remain higher than those of many other social groups.

In Tripura, dropout rates are comparatively lower at the primary level due to the successful implementation of universal elementary education programmes. However, dropout increases sharply during the upper primary and secondary stages.

**Table 2: General Pattern of Dropout among SC Students in Khowai and Dhalai Districts of Tripura**

<b>Educational Stage</b>	<b>Khowai District (%)</b>	<b>Dhalai District (%)</b>	<b>Dropout Trend</b>
Primary Level (I–V)	6.8	8.5	Relatively Low
Upper Primary Level (VI–VIII)	14.7	17.9	Moderate
Secondary Level (IX–X)	28.4	33.6	High
Higher Secondary Level (XI–XII)	41.2	47.5	Very High



## 8.1 Interpretation of the Data

The above data indicate that dropout rates among Scheduled Caste students increase progressively with advancement in educational stages in both Khowai and Dhalai districts of Tripura. At the primary level, dropout rates remain relatively low due to government interventions such as free textbooks, mid-day meals, and universal elementary education programmes. However, dropout rates begin to rise significantly at the upper primary level because of growing economic pressure, irregular attendance, and weak academic foundations.

At the secondary stage, dropout rates become considerably high, especially in Dhalai district, where socio-economic backwardness, rural isolation, and limited educational infrastructure create barriers to educational continuity. The highest dropout rates are observed at the higher secondary stage, where financial constraints, early involvement in labour activities, lack of access to coaching support, transportation problems, and low parental educational awareness contribute heavily to school discontinuation.

Comparatively, Dhalai district exhibits higher dropout percentages than Khowai district across all educational stages, reflecting relatively greater educational deprivation and socio-economic vulnerability among Scheduled Caste communities in the district.

## 8.2 Sociological Explanation

The pattern reflects the structural inequalities experienced by marginalized caste communities. Educational discontinuation among SC students is influenced not only by poverty but also by social exclusion, cultural deprivation, weak institutional support, and limited access to educational resources. As students progress to higher educational levels, the cost of education and academic competition increase, leading to higher dropout tendencies among economically weaker SC households.

The transition from elementary to secondary education becomes difficult because of:

- Increased educational expenses
- Academic competition
- Need for private tuition
- Distance of secondary schools



- Adolescent labour participation
- Early marriage among girls

## **9. Major Causes of School Dropout among SC Students**

### **9.1 Economic Causes**

Economic vulnerability is the primary factor behind dropout. Students often discontinue education to engage in:

- Agricultural labour
- Daily wage work
- Household economic activities
- Informal sector employment

### **9.2 Educational Causes**

Educational institutions themselves contribute to dropouts through:

- Poor teacher-student interaction
- Lack of remedial teaching
- Examination fear
- Inadequate counselling
- Language difficulties
- Rote learning practices

### **9.3 Family-Related Causes**

Family environment significantly influences school retention. Important family-related causes include:

- Large family size
- Domestic responsibilities



- Parental migration
- Family conflicts
- Lack of educational awareness

#### **9.4 Social and Cultural Causes**

Social customs and community perceptions affect educational participation. In some rural areas, children are expected to assist families rather than continue their education.

#### **9.5 Gender-Specific Causes**

SC girls face additional barriers, such as:

- Early marriage
- Household labour burden
- Safety concerns
- Lack of sanitation facilities in schools
- Gender bias in resource allocation

#### **9.6 Institutional Causes**

Institutional inadequacies include:

- Inadequate classrooms
- Teacher absenteeism
- Lack of laboratories and libraries
- Weak monitoring mechanisms
- Poor implementation of welfare schemes



## **10. Sociological Interpretation of Dropout**

Dropout among SC students should not be interpreted merely as individual failure. It is deeply connected with structural inequality and social disadvantage.

### **10.1 Reproduction of Social Inequality**

Educational institutions often reproduce existing social inequalities. Students from economically and culturally privileged backgrounds enjoy greater academic advantages.

### **10.2 Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty**

Educational discontinuity reinforces poverty across generations. Children from poor SC families often remain trapped in low-income occupations due to a lack of educational qualifications.

### **10.3 Marginalization and Social Mobility**

Education is an important means of upward social mobility. High dropout rates among SC students restrict access to employment, higher education, and social empowerment.

## **11. Government Initiatives for SC Education**

Both the Central and State Governments have implemented several schemes for improving educational participation among SC students.

### **Major Schemes**

1. Pre-Matric Scholarship for SC Students
2. Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme
3. Mid-Day Meal Programme
4. Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan
5. Right to Education Act
6. Free Textbook Distribution
7. Hostel Facilities for SC Students
8. Coaching and Remedial Programmes



9. Reservation in Educational Institutions

10. Digital Learning Initiatives

These schemes have improved enrolment and literacy rates, but implementation gaps continue to limit effectiveness.

## 12. Findings of the Study

The major findings of the study are:

1. Educational participation among SC students in Tripura has improved considerably over the last few decades.
2. Despite high literacy rates in the state, educational inequality persists among SC communities.
3. Poverty remains the most significant factor responsible for dropout.
4. Parental illiteracy and lack of educational awareness adversely affect educational continuity.
5. Rural educational disadvantages and weak infrastructure contribute to school discontinuation.
6. SC girls experience higher vulnerability due to gender discrimination and early marriage.
7. Secondary and higher secondary levels witness greater dropout rates.
8. Institutional factors such as poor academic support and inadequate counselling also contribute to dropout.
9. Educational exclusion among SC students reflects broader patterns of social inequality.

## 13. Suggestions and Policy Recommendations

The following measures may help reduce dropout rates among SC students in Tripura:

### 13.1 Economic Support

- Increase scholarship amounts
- Provide direct financial assistance to poor families
- Expand hostel and residential school facilities



- Introduce conditional cash transfer schemes

### **13.2 Strengthening School Infrastructure**

- Improve rural school infrastructure
- Ensure adequate classrooms, libraries, and laboratories
- Improve transportation facilities in remote areas

### **13.3 Academic Support Mechanisms**

- Introduce remedial teaching programmes
- Establish counselling and mentoring systems
- Provide free coaching support for weak learners

### **13.4 Gender-Sensitive Measures**

- Promote girls' education campaigns
- Ensure separate sanitation facilities for girls
- Prevent early marriage through community awareness

### **13.5 Community Participation**

- Increase parental awareness regarding education
- Encourage community-based educational monitoring
- Strengthen School Management Committees

### **13.6 Digital Inclusion**

- Expand digital learning infrastructure
- Provide free internet and digital devices for economically weaker students



## 14. Conclusion

Education is central to social justice, empowerment, and democratic participation. Although Tripura has achieved significant progress in literacy and educational development, Scheduled Caste students continue to face multiple barriers that hinder educational continuity. Dropout among SC students is not merely an educational issue but a reflection of wider socio-economic inequalities, caste-based marginalization, and structural disadvantages.

The study reveals that poverty, parental illiteracy, rural backwardness, gender discrimination, institutional inadequacies, and social exclusion are major causes of dropout among SC students in Tripura. Therefore, educational policies should not only focus on enrolment but also emphasize retention, quality education, socio-economic support, and inclusive institutional practices.

Reducing dropout rates among SC students requires a holistic approach involving government agencies, educational institutions, civil society organizations, local communities, and families. Only through inclusive and equitable educational development can the constitutional goals of equality and social justice be achieved.

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