



Parental Support for Girls' Education in Scheduled Caste Families: The Role of Socio-Economic Status

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Abstract:

Education has long been recognized as a key driver of social transformation, individual empowerment, and economic development. In India, girls' education continues to face unique challenges, particularly among marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), who have historically experienced social exclusion, economic deprivation, and systemic discrimination. Parental support plays a critical role in shaping educational participation, especially at higher secondary levels, where the transition from schooling to tertiary education or vocational opportunities occurs. This study explores the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and parental attitudes toward girls' higher secondary education in SC families, with a focus on Purulia district, West Bengal. By investigating socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors, the research seeks to identify barriers and facilitators influencing SC parents' support for their daughters' education. The study concludes that while economic constraints, traditional gender norms, low parental literacy, and infrastructural limitations act as significant impediments, higher socio-economic status, government programs, maternal influence, community awareness, and recognition of long-term benefits can foster positive attitudes and active support.

Keywords: *Girls' education, Scheduled Castes, Parental attitude, Socio-economic status, Higher secondary education, Purulia, West Bengal.*

Introduction:

Education is widely acknowledged as one of the most potent instruments for personal and social transformation, serving as a foundation for empowerment, social justice, and economic mobility (Tilak, 2016; Kingdon, 2002). In developing countries like India, the role of education extends beyond individual advancement to community development, promoting gender equality and enabling intergenerational benefits. Among marginalized communities, particularly the Scheduled Castes (SCs), education serves as a critical tool for breaking historical cycles of oppression, poverty, and social exclusion (Shah & Mehta, 2014).

While India has made considerable progress in increasing female literacy and enrollment, persistent disparities remain, particularly in higher secondary education (Classes XI–XII), which represents a pivotal stage for academic, vocational, and social development. For girls, this level of education is not only a gateway to professional opportunities but also a mechanism for delaying early marriage, enhancing self-efficacy, and promoting family and community well-being (Azam et al., 2024).

Parental support is a significant determinant of educational participation. Attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of parents can either facilitate or hinder a girl's educational journey (Khattak, 2013; Mir & Lone, 2022). Among SC families, parental support is often influenced by socio-economic status, cultural norms, educational background, and access to resources. Understanding these dynamics is essential for formulating interventions that ensure inclusive education for girls from marginalized communities.

Significance of the study: The study highlights the crucial role of parental support in determining higher secondary education outcomes for girls in Scheduled Caste (SC) families, particularly in Purulia district, West Bengal. By examining the influence of socio-economic status (SES) on parental attitudes, it identifies key barriers—such as economic hardship, patriarchal norms, and infrastructural limitations—and facilitators, including government schemes and maternal support, that shape educational opportunities. The research provides insights for addressing educational disparities, informs policy and intervention planning, and promotes gender equity, social empowerment, and intergenerational development. Additionally, it contributes academically by integrating socio-economic, cultural, and structural dimensions to better understand parental support for girls' education in marginalized communities.

Objectives: This study explores the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and parental attitudes toward girls' higher secondary education in SC families, with a focus on Purulia district, West Bengal. By investigating socio-cultural, economic, and structural factors, the research seeks to identify barriers and facilitators influencing SC parents' support for their daughters' education.

Scheduled Castes in Purulia

Purulia district, located in the westernmost part of West Bengal, is predominantly rural and agrarian, with a significant tribal and SC population (Government of West Bengal, 2019). Historically, SC communities in Purulia, as elsewhere in India, have been socially marginalized, subjected to untouchability practices, and excluded from mainstream education and economic opportunities (Devi, 2018; Mete et al., 2023).

During the colonial era, educational access for SCs was severely restricted. Schools were largely accessible to upper-caste populations, and SC communities were often denied entry to public learning centers. These historical exclusions created cycles of illiteracy, poverty, and limited occupational mobility that persist to this day (Shah & Mehta, 2014).

After India's independence in 1947, the Constitution and subsequent policies attempted to redress historical inequities. Provisions such as Article 46 mandated the promotion of educational and economic interests of SCs. Various welfare schemes, scholarships, and reservations in education and employment were introduced to enhance access and participation (Government of India, 2020). However, despite these initiatives, socio-economic disparities, cultural norms, and infrastructure limitations continue to impede the educational progress of SC girls.

Socio-Economic Profile of SC Families

SC households in Purulia typically engage in low-paying, unorganized occupations such as agricultural labor, construction work, and small-scale manual trades. Household incomes are often unstable, limiting the ability to invest in daughters' education beyond the basic level (Mete et al., 2023). Educational attainment among SC parents is generally low, and first-generation learners constitute a large proportion of families, making parental awareness and support for higher education more challenging (Garai, 2021).

Economic constraints are compounded by socio-cultural factors. Traditional gender norms, patriarchal expectations, and domestic responsibilities often restrict girls' opportunities for continued education. In such contexts, parental attitudes—both positive and negative—play a decisive role in determining whether girls can access higher secondary education and beyond.

Relationship between Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Parental Attitudes toward Girls' Higher Secondary Education

Parental attitudes toward girls' education are profoundly influenced by the socio-economic status (SES) of the family, which encompasses income, occupation, educational attainment, and access to resources. SES directly affects a family's capacity to invest in education, the value parents assign to schooling, and their ability to support daughters in pursuing higher secondary education.

Families with higher SES typically enjoy greater financial stability, enabling them to afford tuition fees, learning materials, transportation, and other school-related expenses. Moreover, educated parents are more likely to recognize the long-term benefits of education, including increased employment opportunities, personal empowerment, and social mobility. As a result, higher SES families often exhibit positive parental attitudes, encouraging their daughters to pursue higher secondary education and supporting their academic aspirations (Khattak, 2013; Garai, 2021).

Conversely, families with low SES often experience economic constraints that limit educational investment. Financial instability can lead to prioritizing immediate household needs over long-term educational goals. In such contexts, parents may perceive girls' higher secondary education as a luxury rather than a necessity, particularly when traditional gender roles suggest domestic responsibilities or early marriage. Even when parents acknowledge the importance of education, economic hardships can prevent consistent support, resulting in higher dropout rates or limited academic progression (Mir & Lone, 2022; Mete et al., 2023).

SES also interacts with socio-cultural factors to shape parental attitudes. Higher SES parents are often better positioned to challenge traditional norms that restrict female education, viewing schooling as a path to empowerment. Lower SES families, particularly in marginalized communities like Scheduled Castes, may adhere more strictly to patriarchal expectations, viewing investment in girls' education as secondary to domestic duties or survival priorities (Shah & Mehta, 2014).

Structural factors such as school accessibility, quality of education, and infrastructure further mediate this relationship. High SES parents can mitigate challenges such as distance to school, lack of facilities, or safety concerns, reinforcing positive attitudes toward daughters' education. Low SES families, in contrast, may perceive structural obstacles as insurmountable, limiting parental encouragement and support (Mete et al., 2023).

In summary, SES plays a decisive role in shaping parental attitudes toward girls' higher secondary education. Higher socio-economic status enhances financial capacity, awareness, and empowerment, fostering supportive attitudes, while lower SES constrains parental support due to economic, social, and structural limitations. Understanding this relationship is crucial for designing interventions that target economic and socio-cultural barriers, thereby promoting gender equity and educational advancement for girls.

Barriers and Facilitators Influencing SC Parents' Support for Girls' Education

The educational participation of girls from Scheduled Caste (SC) families is shaped by a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors. Parental support is pivotal in determining whether SC girls can access, continue, and complete higher secondary education. Understanding the barriers that hinder and the facilitators that enhance parental support is essential for developing effective interventions.

Barriers to Parental Support

1. **Economic Constraints:** Financial limitations are one of the most significant barriers for SC families. Low household income, irregular employment, and dependence on informal or manual labor restrict

parents' ability to invest in education beyond the basic level. Many families perceive higher secondary schooling as an unnecessary expenditure, particularly for daughters who are traditionally expected to assume domestic responsibilities (Khattak, 2013; Garai, 2021).

2. **Socio-Cultural Norms and Patriarchy:** Patriarchal values and caste-based traditions often discourage girls from continuing education. In many SC households, early marriage, domestic chores, and caregiving responsibilities are prioritized over schooling. These cultural expectations can undermine parental support, even when parents recognize the theoretical benefits of education (Mir & Lone, 2022; Shah & Mehta, 2014).
3. **Parental Education and Awareness:** Low levels of parental literacy and lack of awareness about the benefits of higher education for girls are significant impediments. First-generation learners may not fully understand how higher secondary education can lead to employment opportunities, social mobility, or enhanced self-efficacy, reducing their motivation to support daughters' schooling (Mete et al., 2023).
4. **Structural and Infrastructural Challenges:** Geographic distance from schools, unsafe or inadequate transportation, poor school infrastructure, and lack of gender-sensitive facilities such as separate toilets act as practical barriers. For rural SC families in districts like Purulia, these obstacles often outweigh perceived benefits, discouraging parents from sending daughters to higher secondary school (Devi, 2018; Mir & Lone, 2022).
5. **Intersectional Disadvantages:** Girls from SC families face multiple layers of disadvantage, including caste marginalization, gender discrimination, and economic vulnerability. This intersectional disadvantage compounds barriers, making parental support conditional and inconsistent.

Facilitators of Parental Support

1. **Higher Socio-Economic Status (SES):** Families with better income, stable employment, and higher parental education are more likely to support girls' education. Higher SES enhances financial capacity and awareness, allowing parents to invest in school fees, transportation, and learning materials, thereby fostering positive attitudes toward higher secondary education (Khattak, 2013; Garai, 2021).
2. **Government Schemes and Policy Initiatives:** Programs such as scholarships, mid-day meal schemes, and Kanyashree Prakalpa in West Bengal incentivize education and delay early marriage. These interventions reduce economic burdens and provide recognition and support to parents, encouraging them to continue their daughters' schooling (Government of India, 2020).
3. **Maternal Influence:** Research indicates that mothers often play a more supportive role than fathers in promoting daughters' education. Mothers' awareness of educational benefits, empathy for daughters' aspirations, and active involvement in academic decisions enhance parental support (Verma & Bhatnagar, 2024; Garai, 2021).
4. **Community Awareness and Social Networks:** Exposure to awareness campaigns, peer influence from other parents, and positive role models within the community can shift attitudes toward girls' education. When parents observe other families valuing education, they are more likely to prioritize schooling over traditional gender roles (Mete et al., 2023).
5. **Perceived Long-Term Benefits:** Parents who understand the broader advantages of higher secondary education—such as employment opportunities, delayed marriage, and improved family health—are more likely to support continued schooling for daughters. This recognition acts as a motivational facilitator for educational investment.

Conclusion: The support of SC parents for their daughters' higher secondary education is shaped by a dynamic balance of barriers and facilitators. While economic constraints, traditional gender norms, low

parental literacy, and infrastructural limitations act as significant impediments, higher socio-economic status, government programs, maternal influence, community awareness, and recognition of long-term benefits can foster positive attitudes and active support. Identifying these factors is essential for designing targeted interventions that address both practical and cultural challenges, ensuring that SC girls can access and benefit from higher secondary education, ultimately promoting gender equity and social mobility.

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