# Caste and Tribe, Poverty and Patriarchy: A Qualitative Assessment of Educational and Social Factors and Policies Contributing to the Current Status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Children in a State in India

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**Dedication**

For my son, Atharva,

*You fill every day with fun, adventure, love and meaning*

And

For children from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities

*Who continue to be brave in their quest for learning and true belonging*

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## Abstract of Dissertation

Caste and Tribe, Poverty and Patriarchy: A Qualitative Assessment of Educational and Social Factors and Policies Contributing to the Current Status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Children in a State in India

One of the pressing issues in the Indian education system is the educational progress of rural students from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities, as they continue to remain at a disadvantage. This study examined the perception of state education officials of the main factors that have contributed to the current educational status of rural students from these communities (with special emphasis on girls/women) and on the educational and social policies that facilitate, or constrain, their progress. A basic qualitative research approach was utilized. Data from interviews with state education officials in a state in India was used to analyze different social and educational factors and policies that facilitated and constrained educational progress of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups.

State education officials identified 'key problems' and 'government policies' attempting to solve the problems as influencing the educational progress of students from these communities. Students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, as well as girls were seen to face problems over and above those that confront low-income rural students more generally. Factors identified as facilitators were improved living conditions, educational resources and number of rural government schools; increasing numbers of residential schools for Scheduled Castes and Tribes girls; availability of state and national programs such as mid-day meal, school uniforms, and textbooks and special government programs such as scholarships for girls; and designing of bias-free textbooks to represent students' castes, tribes, languages, gender, and religions. Similarly, factors

identified as constraints were extreme poverty, malnutrition, and lack of permanent housing; health and hygiene issues (specifically for girls); continued presence of discrimination and segregation against these communities (particularly for girls); insufficient time and resource to represent the multiple castes, tribes, and languages of the Scheduled Tribes student groups in textbooks, and the grade retention policy.

The findings suggested that while state and national government programs and policies facilitate educational progress for students from low-income rural communities generally and Scheduled Castes and Tribes specifically, both educational and social factors are responsible for their continued high dropout rates, high absenteeism, and low participation and transition rates across all levels of education. These factors combined together contribute towards the slow educational progress of these student groups. Thus, their remains miles for the Government to go before India can attain 100% Gross Enrollment Ratio from preschool to secondary level by 2030.

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# CHAPTER 1:

# INTRODUCTION

One of the pressing issues in the Indian education system is the school participation and transition of rural students from historically social and economically disadvantaged groups. Among the various social groups, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continue to remain at a disadvantage. Their level of education and social status, among other factors, remains low when compared to other social groups (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019). National policymakers have renewed and increasingly adopted policies as a means to reduce the gaps. Studying the effects of such policies is especially important due to the explicit acknowledgment of the National Education Policy 2020 document of the "severe learning crisis" of children from Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Government of India, 2020, p. 46; Annual Status of Education Report, 2019).

This study focuses on the education of children from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities. Scheduled Castes are the groups whose ancestors adapted the name *Dalit*s, a self-identity of the former 'untouchables,' and Scheduled Tribes, also referred to as *Adivasis* or "aboriginals," are the groups who remained isolated and under-developed from the mainstream population in India (Khan, 2016; Patil, 2020). These groups are distinct from the Scheduled Castes group. In 1950, the Indian Constitution banned discrimination based on caste and tribe and initiated affirmative action, but the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, now about 25% of the Indian population and mostly residing in rural areas, continue to be among the poorest and least educated groups in India (Census of India, 2011a, 2011b; Gandhi, 2017). The study is based on interviews

with state education officials to determine their perceptions of the main factors that contribute to the current status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the educational and social policies that are facilitating, or constraining, progress.

Additionally, for children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, cultural and economic factors also influence school participation and continuation. Cultural factors include attitudes of parents towards schooling, schooling for girl siblings, caste discrimination, and female autonomy within a household; economic factors include household income, expenditures, and school and other education-related fees (Iyengar, 2011). Furthermore, the caste system (Goela, 2008), tribal status (Patil, 2020) and the high rate of poverty (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Santhakumar, Gupta & Sripada, 2016) have been found to influence schooling for these students. Hence, the educational issues faced by students from these communities, particularly girls, at all levels of education raise crucial concerns that have implications for school participation and transition in education and on future education policy.

In this chapter, I provide background information on the Indian education system while focusing specifically on the educational status of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, government schools[1]– specifically the Department of Education, Tribal Welfare Department[2], and the Social Welfare Department[3] managed schools, and rural regions.

[1] In India, government schools are categorized as those that comprise the Department of Education, Tribal Welfare Department, Local Body, other government-managed schools, Social Welfare Department, Ministry of Labour, Kendriya Vidyalaya/central school, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Sainik School, Railway School, and Central Tibetan School (Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, 2021).

[2] The Tribal Welfare Department is responsible for formulating and implementing policies and programs for the welfare and development of the Scheduled Tribes at the state level. These policies and programs are funded by the Central and State government for the overall development and well-being of the Scheduled Tribes communities (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, 2021a).

The context section reviews educational and social factors related to the study. The chapter then describes the problem to be addressed and the purpose of the study and its research questions. In the final sections, I provide a snapshot of the educational factors that constrain progress for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

## Background

It is important at the outset to elaborate on what is meant by *caste* and *tribe* and how people are categorized as "Scheduled Caste" and "Scheduled Tribe." These terms come in a variety of forms, such as historically disadvantaged groups, socially and economically disadvantaged groups, *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, tribal, and may emanate from national policy documents. This study addresses caste, tribe, poverty, gender, constitutional safeguards, and affirmative action put in place with respect to students, as opposed to teachers and principals. Additionally, educational, and social factors that either constrain or facilitate progress of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes are outlined.

### Caste and Tribe

The caste system in India is based on Hindu religious doctrine. The socially and economically disadvantaged groups are identified based on religion, sex, ethnicity, place of birth, caste, or tribe (Goela, 2008). In this study, I focus solely on the role of caste (i.e., Scheduled Castes) and tribe (i.e., Scheduled Tribes), although other factors are equally important in research on school participation and transition in education at all levels.

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[3]The Social Welfare Department is responsible for encouraging children, particularly girls/women, to attend either primary schools managed by the Department of Education or any of the residential schools managed by the Social Welfare Department for Scheduled Castes in towns or villages (Government of [State]: Social Welfare, 2021).

Historically, the caste system classified people based on specific occupation and linked them metaphorically to different parts of the cosmic man *Purush* (Gandhi, 2017; Jenkins & Barr, 2006). Nonetheless, the Scheduled Castes, formerly called the untouchables, were so inferior that they were not considered a part of the caste system (Gandhi, 2017). Scheduled Castes are those who are direct descendants of former untouchables; Scheduled Tribes are those who remain isolated and backward from the mainstream population in India on the basis of geographical isolation (Chauhan, 2008; Gopinath, 2018). Thus, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes groups are mutually exclusive constitutional categories.

Moving forward, Scheduled Castes and Tribes face social, educational, economic, and political isolation, yet the nature of these issues, particularly with respect to education, varies between the two groups (Chauhan, 2008; Gopinath, 2018). This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. While Article 17 abolishes the practice of untouchability, the concept continues to influence almost every aspect of social life (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Banerjee et al., 2013), what types of jobs individuals can access, and where children are seated in a classroom (Thakkilapati, 2016). As a result, caste and tribe continue to be significant educationally.

**Poverty**

Since India obtained independence in 1947, poverty has been a widespread and persistent concern in rural regions. For the purposes of this study, poverty is studied at the intersection of caste and tribe. Poverty has been cited as an important factor leading to poor educational status of students from the Scheduled Castes (Booroah et al., 2014) and Scheduled Tribes communities (Bhattacharyya & Basu, 2018; Patil, 2020). As shown in

Table 1.1, of the approximately 25% of the population in Scheduled Castes and Tribes, approximately 76.39% of the Scheduled Castes and 89.90% of the Scheduled Tribes populations live in rural regions of the nation (Census of India, 2011). Research studies highlight that Scheduled Tribes communities contribute disproportionately to rural poverty compared with Scheduled Castes communities (Shah & O.G., 2014; Booroah et al., 2014).

**Table 1.1**
*Percentage Distribution of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Population in Rural India*

| Social group | Rural (%) | Overall (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Scheduled Castes | 76.39 | 16.6 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 89.90 | 8.61 |

*Note*. Data from Census of India, 2011.

The 2011-12 Census of India data reports a decline in the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities living below the poverty level, from 62.3% in 2004-05 to 45.5% in 2011-12 (Joyita, 2013). Nonetheless, this has failed to translate into positive change, as the incidence of high poverty among these groups has resulted in constraints in schooling such as lack of transportation, lack of school supplies, and so on (Jenkins & Barr, 2006; Santhakumar et al., 2016). It has also resulted in poor health and increased mobility among these students (Ladd, 2012; Patil, 2020).

As evident from the discussion above, the effect of poverty is difficult to disentangle from the larger effects of the caste and tribe system, particularly for those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population. Although the importance of education as a tool for empowering these groups has been reinstated in the National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020) and reiterated in recent research studies (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Babu & Chandrasekarayy, 2015; Das & Halder, 2018),

with the existing levels of poverty within the castes and tribes, the challenges become more complex. Consequently, while it is difficult to disentangle caste from poverty and tribe from poverty, it is crucial to explore what state education officials perceive as the main factors that contribute to the current status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the educational and social policies that are facilitating, or constraining, progress.

### Patriarchy

Girls and women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities and living in the rural regions of India face greater social oppression when compared to their urban counterparts. For instance, a relatively high percentage of out-of-school girls and women in comparison to boys has been reported (National Statistical Office, 2020). In addition, low enrollment rates (Halim et al., 2016), low transition rates (Kingdon, 2007; Mehrotra, 2006), and high dropout rates (Santhakumar et al., 2016) at various school levels have also been reported for girls and women from these communities. A more detailed description follows in Chapter 2.

## Constitutional Background

### Constitutional Safeguards Against Discrimination

In response to the deep social divisions created by caste and tribe, leading to poverty and stigma, the Government of India has enshrined provisions for equality so that the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups receive special protection from the Constitution of India (Government of India, 1949 in Chaudhury, 2005; Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2019-20; Sabharwal, 2014). Since 1950, Articles 14 through 16 of the Indian Constitution have made provisions for the principle of equality in matters relating to prevention of

discrimination, with respect to any employment and appointment to any office under the State (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021a). Specifically, Article 15 broadly makes provision for equality for any person, which includes women and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population. Articles 341 and 342 list castes and tribes entitled to benefits (such as access to resources) for improving their well-being and to offset previous discrimination (Borooah et al., 2014).

With respect to educational provision, Article 29(2) states that no citizens are to be denied admission into educational institutions that are maintained by the state or are receiving aid from state funds on grounds of religion, race, caste, or language (Chaudhury, 2005). Furthermore, a 2005 amendment added subsection 5 to Article 15, which states (Goela, 2008):

> Nothing in this article . . . shall prevent the State from making any special provision, by law, for the advancement of citizens . . . [of] the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in so far as . . . [making] special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State.

To sum up, the Constitution of India provides for educational and economic justice for children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

**Affirmative Action**

The Government of India, in addition to the constitutional safeguards, has targeted the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities through the affirmative action policy. Article 15(5) and Article 16(4A) of the Indian Constitution make provision for the Indian government to set quotas for socially and educationally backward classes of citizens to realize the promise of equality for admission to educational institutions, including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State

(Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2021; Sabharwal, 2014). Affirmative action through the quota or reservation system redistributes opportunities for these communities so that they receive social justice such as reservation of seats for higher education or employment in government institutions (Goela, 2008). It is crucial to highlight here that the reservation system is an enabling provision that is discretionary and does not impose any obligation on the state.

## Context

### An Overview of Rural Government Schools in India

The Indian school education system consists broadly of three types of schools: government schools, those funded and managed by the central, state, or local governments; "private-aided" schools, those that receive funds from the government but are privately managed; and private schools, those that are both financed and managed privately (Kumari, 2015; Government of India, Ministry of Education, Department of School Education and Literacy, 2021). Of the schools in India, 69.77% are government, 22.38% are private, and 5.60% are government aided (Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021). Table 1.2 highlights the significant diversity within each of these categories of schools.

**Table 1.2**
*Percentage of Schools by School Management, Rural and Urban Sector, All-India*

| Category | School Management | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Government schools | Department of Education | 52.07 |
| | Tribal Welfare Department | 3.07 |
| | Local body | 13.00 |
| | Other Govt. managed schools | 0.06 |
| | Social welfare Department | 0.11 |
| | Ministry of Labor | 0.02 |
| | Kendriya Vidyalaya / Central School | 0.08 |
| | Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya | 0.04 |
| | Sainik School | 0.00 |
| | Railway School | 0.01 |
| | Other Central Govt. Schools | 0.01 |
| | Central Tibetan School | 1.30 |
| Other schools | Private Aided Schools | 5.60 |
| | Private Unaided (Recognized) | 22.38 |
| | Unrecognized | 1.96 |
| | Madarsa recognized (by Wakf Board/Madarsa Board) | 1.30 |
| | Madarsa unrecognized | 0.27 |
| Total | | **100** |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021

The 2019-20 Unified District Information System for Education Plus report highlights that among students who live in the rural regions of India, a higher percentage are enrolled in government schools. As shown in Table 1.3, within government schools, enrollment of students in schools specifically managed by the Department of Education (51.4%) is higher than that in private-aided (8.61%) and private-unaided schools. (26.65%). The case for students enrolled at the higher education level is similar (see Table 1.4).

In this study, I concentrated on schools managed by the Department of Education, Social Welfare Department, and the Tribal Welfare Department. While the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students going to schools managed by the Social Welfare Department (0.17%), and Tribal Welfare Department (2.03%) together comprise less than 2.5% of students compared to 51.40% of students in schools managed by the Department

of Education, it is important to include them in this study as the educational challenges become starkly explicit in these specialized schools, as they cater specifically to Scheduled Castes and Tribes student populations (see Table 1.3).

**Table 1.3**
*Percentage Enrollment of Students by School Management, Rural Sector, All India*

| School Management | Primary | Upper primary | Secondary | Higher Secondary | Total (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Enrollment at different levels | | | | |
| Department of Education | 53 | 28 | 13 | 6 | 51.4 |
| Private Aided | 17 | 30 | 32 | 20 | 8.61 |
| Private Unaided (Recognized) | 50 | 23 | 16 | 12 | 26.65 |
| Unrecognized | 76 | 19 | 4 | 1 | 1.52 |
| Social welfare Department | 16 | 46 | 25 | 13 | 0.17 |
| Kendriya Vidyalaya / Central School | 45 | 27 | 17 | 11 | 0.21 |
| Madarsa recognized (by Wakf Board/Madarsa Board) | 75 | 19 | 5 | 2 | 1.13 |
| Madarsa unrecognized | 72 | 22 | 6 | 1 | 0.23 |
| Sainik School | 16 | 45 | 26 | 13 | 0.01 |
| Tribal Welfare Department | 49 | 30 | 15 | 6 | 2.03 |
| Local body | 69 | 25 | 6 | 0 | 7.83 |
| Other Govt. managed schools | 21 | 26 | 10 | 43 | 0.07 |
| Ministry of Labor | 98 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 |
| Railway School | 31 | 29 | 21 | 19 | 0.01 |
| Central Tibetan School | 29 | 26 | 25 | 20 | 0.00 |
| Other Central Govt. Schools | 43 | 29 | 18 | 10 | 0.01 |
| Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya | 0 | 47 | 31 | 22 | 0.12 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021.

**Table 1.4**
*Percentage Distribution of Students by School Management, Rural Sector, All India*

| Level | Type of Institution | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Diploma/certificate below graduate level | Government | 28.9 | 31.3 |
| | Private aided | 2.2 | 2.1 |
| | Private unaided | 8.9 | 7.9 |
| Graduate and above level including diploma | Government | 4.5 | 3.6 |
| | Private aided | 2.1 | 1.8 |
| | Private unaided | 2.2 | 2.1 |

*Note*. Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

Most students going to rural government schools, particularly those managed by the Department of Education, Social Welfare Department, and Tribal Welfare

Department, come from poor and vulnerable communities (Saha, 2017). Furthermore, the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students enrolled in these schools has been found to be higher when compared to private-unaided schools—both at the primary and upper primary levels (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, n.d.; Table 1.5). In these schools, a higher enrollment rate for the Scheduled Tribes when compared to the Scheduled Castes has been reported (National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017). As a higher proportion of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups (that is, 79.66%) go to government schools, this study focuses on rural government schools.

**Table 1.5**
*Percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes Enrolled in Rural Government and Private Schools*

| Group | Classes | Group | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Scheduled Castes | Primary classes (Grades 1-5) | Government | 71.39 | 71.81 | 79.07 |
| | | Private | 28.61 | 28.19 | 17.53 |
| | Upper primary classes (Grades (6-8) | Government | 81.08 | 82.00 | 75.60 |
| | | Private | 18.92 | 18.00 | 14.55 |
| Scheduled Tribes | Primary classes (Grades 1-5) | Government | 68.37 | 68.81 | 83.81 |
| | | Private | 31.63 | 31.39 | 10.54 |
| | Upper primary classes (Grades 6-8) | Government | 76.00 | 76.20 | 80.05 |
| | | Private | 24.00 | 23.80 | 8.81 |
| **Total** | | **Government** | | | **79.66** |
| | | **Private** | | | **14.08** |

*Note*. Data from National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, n.d.; *National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017

## Educational Status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Rural government schools face multiple challenges. A few crucial ones particularly relevant for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities are (a) a low transition rate from primary to secondary schools and into either college or the workforce (National Statistical Office, 2020); (b) considerably low graduation rate for

women when compared to men (National Statistical Office, 2020); (c) large literacy gap between females and males for both the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups (Iyengar, 2011); and (d) gradual decrease in the percentage of rural male and female students graduating with increasing age. Therefore, as state education officials working with rural government schools seek to enhance the quality of education experienced by students at all grade levels, it is important to understand how they respond to education and social policies and, in particular, the main factors that have facilitated, or constrained, progress for Scheduled Castes and Tribes in their jurisdictions. Understanding these variations is important, as they serve to reduce the school participation and transition gap.

## Statement of the Problem

Much literature addressing rural students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities in India has focused on the importance of education, which is warranted given the acute poverty and social deprivation these students face (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Borooah & Iyer, 2005; Chauhan, 2008; Das, 2018; Das & Halder, 2018; Patil, 2020; Tripathy, 2020). There is substantial literature that contends that the issues of retention at the upper primary level and universal transition to the secondary level are the next big challenge for students living in rural regions (Kelly & Bhabha, 2014) and for those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Das, 2018; Patil, 2020). An improvement in school completion rate over time and low educational persistence for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities has been observed (Das, 2018). However, factors that contribute to these findings for these population groups across all levels of education have not been reported.

Additionally, many studies have concentrated on factors that contribute to the low literacy and high dropout rates among students from these communities. Most of these studies have been carried out either at the primary, elementary, or secondary level. At least seven factors have been identified. First is the high likelihood of being first-generation learners, thereby lacking proper guidance (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; National Statistical Office, 2020). Second is poor socioeconomic status, which research studies argue has a primary effect of poor educational attainment (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997) and secondary effect of resource constraint (Jonsson & Erikson, 2000). In particular, girls from these communities are unfairly impacted and thus have an abysmally low literacy level (Tripathy, 2020; Tripathy & Pradhan, 2003).

Third, the three-language formula consisting of Hindi, English, and the state language is not appropriate for tribal children (Doel & Patil, 2020); classroom instruction and textbooks are in the regional language, which is not understood by the tribal children who have a different minority language (Gautam, 2003). Furthermore, teachers are often unfamiliar with the language these students speak at home. Consequently, a one-way communication from teacher to student results in low levels of learning, high dropout, and high repetition among the Scheduled Tribes students (Deol & Patil, 2020). Fourth, irregular attendance of teachers and frequent closure of schools are the most important causes of dropout among tribal children (Sujatha, 1996). Fifth, parents of tribal children are migrant workers whose migration cycle coincides with the school calendar, making going to school impossible for these children. This issue is more widespread among students in Scheduled Tribes than in Scheduled Castes (Smita, 2007, as cited in Tripathy, 2020). Sixth, with respect to the Scheduled Castes communities, the issue of exclusion

(viewed as unfit for social association) and discrimination (unequal entitlement to economic and social rights) leads to discriminatory behavior and further thwarts students' learning (Ovichegan, 2015; Rao, 2009). Finally, students' families are unable to obtain necessary documentation for enrollment purposes (Tripathy, 2020).

Overall, low literacy levels and the high dropout rate among students from these populations are due to "economic backwardness, social customs, lack of awareness about education, cultural ethos and distance between home and schools" (Haseena, 2014, as cited in Doel & Patil, 2020). These are important factors that cause children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities to face additional educational challenges that their counterparts may not experience. The educational deficits that rural children from these communities, particularly girls/women, develop are serious economic and social impediments for their integration into society as they become adults.

## Purpose of Research

This study addresses a gap in the existing literature by attempting to better understand the factors that facilitate or hinder educational progress for children, particularly girls, from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. In particular, the study explores the perspectives of state education officials who, in their official roles, have influence on education policy, programming and budget which could be leveraged to improve school access, transition, and learning outcomes. The research is broad and invites reflection on all levels of education (i.e., Grades 1-12) and specifically investigates school participation and transition from primary to upper primary school, upper primary to secondary school, secondary school to higher secondary school for students from these communities.

Prior research on school participation and transition has been conducted at the end of primary school (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019). A more recent qualitative study has focused on adolescent girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes and explored barriers and enabling factors that cause girls to enter and complete secondary education in northern Karnataka (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016). To date, there have no studies that have explored the factors that have contributed to the poor participation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students, particularly girls, in education at all levels. This investigation explored state education officials' perceptions on contributors to educational and social inequities, as well as policies that facilitate or hinder progress for these communities. This knowledge of education officials' views of the quality of support and the resources available provided a more complete picture of the effects of policy.

Development discourse around rural students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities has continued in the country. Earlier research studies have explored the complex and dynamic interplay between caste, class, and gender (with emphasis on women) (Desai & Krishnaraj, 2004); caste and gender in three Indian states (Joshi et al., 2017); caste and its impact on education (Chauhan, 2008); and affirmative action and its influence on Scheduled Castes students from higher education (Malish & Ilavarasan, 2016; Tierney et al., 2019). These discourses have taken into consideration the two groups' comparable measures of economic, social, and educational deprivation. While prior research studies have explored the factors that contribute to the low literacy, poor participation, and high dropout rates among students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, many of these discussions have taken place at the primary, elementary, or higher education level.

To begin to address the issue of school participation and transition across all education levels, it is important to have a fuller understanding of what facilitates or thwarts students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities from attending school at all education level and completing secondary education in a particular state in India. Additional emphasis is placed on the participation of girls/women belonging to these communities, as the risk of them dropping out after primary school is high. Despite data on the percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students and girls from these communities who do not complete secondary education, and evidence of the detrimental impact that little or no education has on their well-being (particularly relevant to girls/women), there is little published research examining the factors that contribute to high dropout rates in this context. In this study, I aimed to better understand the social policies and educational factors that act as barriers or enablers for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, particularly girls, from discontinuing and dropping out of school.

Poverty level is important because it contributes to achievement differences between students and between schools (Coleman et al., 1966). Thus, schools in which most students come from low-poverty backgrounds have higher average achievement levels than schools with students from high-poverty backgrounds. For the purposes of this study, below poverty line will be used as a benchmark to identify populations living in high poverty and eligible for government aid. According to the 2011 Census of India report, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes populations make up a large percentage of India's poor. Consequently, these groups are beneficiaries of the below the poverty line status. Rural government schools that cater to a high percentage of students from the

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes population will be classified as high-poverty schools. Nonetheless, corruption has been reported where those ineligible for the below poverty line status have gained benefits (Panda, 2015; Roy, 2021).

The study focused on girls for several reasons. Various research studies have highlighted the benefits of educating girls, not only for the girls themselves but also for their families and society over generations (Gandhi, 2017). Educating girls is one of the most effective ways to empower women in families, communities, and society as a whole (Sen, 2000). Educated women translate their knowledge into better hygiene practices, thereby decreasing the child mortality rate, and also tend to send their own children to school (Watanabe, 2011). Thus, an emphasis on girls/women particularly those that belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities is vital.

## Research Questions

This research aimed to better understand what state education officials perceive to be the needs of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, with a special emphasis on girls/women. Furthermore, it aimed to understand officials' perception of the factors that facilitate and hinder their work. The study addresses four research questions:

1. How do government education officials describe the living conditions that constrain the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities in Green Estate?
2. In the view of government education officials, are government schools, teachers, and programs available to address the needs of these students?

3. What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence the educational progress of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
    a. Officials' perceptions of students, families, and communities
    b. Officials' perceptions of government schools
    c. Officials' perceptions of teachers
    d. Officials' perceptions of textbooks
    e. Officials' perceptions of the government's role
4. What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence girls' educational progress?
    a. Officials' perceptions of the safety, health, and hygiene needs of girls
    b. Officials' perceptions of discrimination and cultural factors that affect the education of girls
    c. Officials' perceptions of the role of residential schools

## Educational Factors That Constrain Progress of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Various educational factors have consistently been shown to constrain progress for children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. There are seven major areas of concern: teacher shortage and contract teachers, low student attendance rates, low teacher education and pay, concentrated poverty in schools, segregation and discrimination in schools, limited resources in rural government schools, and language as a medium of classroom instruction. Each factor is introduced here and discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

### Teacher Shortage and Contract Teachers

There is an acute and widespread shortage of teachers in rural schools in various states in India (Agarwal, 2019; Kulshrestha, 2021; Ragu Raman, 2021). The situation is particularly alarming in government schools. Low teacher salaries (Dundar et al., 2014), high teacher turnover, and involvement in nonteaching duties are some important causes of the teacher shortage in these schools. With a high percentage of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes going to rural government schools, the teacher shortage in these schools negatively influences their learning. This issue has been addressed by transferring teachers from schools that have a surplus of teachers (Agarwal, 2019), consolidating schools, and appointing contract teachers (Chandra, 2015; Goyal & Pandey, 2013). Nonetheless, the low qualification of contract teachers compared to regular teachers and the low salary that has resulted in protests by them has caused teacher shortage issues to remain.

### Low Student Attendance Rates

For students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, low attendance rates for both males and females going to rural government schools has been reported (Annual Status of Education Report, 2019). Poverty was identified as a key factor responsible for the low attendance rate among these students (Stelmach, 2011).

### Low Teacher Education and Pay

With respect to teacher education, nearly half of teachers (49.53%) do not have education beyond the higher secondary level (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017). Low teacher education in addition to poor quality of in-service teacher training has resulted in poor competency of the teaching staff in rural

India (National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017). With respect to teacher pay, low teacher pay has resulted in low motivation among teachers to teach efficiently or attend to students' needs. This further adds to the poor teaching quality that students experience in rural government schools.

### Concentrated Poverty in Schools

Concentrated poverty arising from the strong correlation between caste, tribe, and socioeconomic status of parents has disproportionately led to educational inequities for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Stelmach, 2011).

### Segregation and Discrimination in Schools

Various factors have led to segregation in Indian schools. These factors are particularly relevant to students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. A few important ones are proximity to school (Jenkins & Barr, 2006), parents' socioeconomic background (Juneja, 2016), and teaching practices (Ramachandran, 2004). All of these have implications on the quality of education that students from these communities experience (Jenkins & Barr, 2006; Kabeer, 2006).

### Limited Resources in Rural Government Schools

A gradual increase in expenditure on education has been observed since 2014-15 (Budget Documents of Union and State Government, Reserve Bank of India in Government of India 2020-21). Nevertheless, these funds are below the required amount (Government of India, 2020). As a result, rural schools lack infrastructure facilities such as classroom furniture, a sufficient number of teachers, playgrounds, toilets (particularly for girls), and teaching and learning materials (Chudgar et al., 2015; Muralidharan &

Kremer, 2008; Nayar, 2020). The lack of these resources negatively influences the learning experience for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

### Language as a Medium of Classroom Instruction

Using the dominant language as the medium of instruction in the classroom does not serve the Scheduled Tribes population, as they speak a minority language (Doel & Patil, 2020; Gautam, 2003). Students are not able to understand the classroom instruction, resulting in low levels of learning, low attendance rates, high dropout rates, and grade repetition among the Scheduled Tribes students.

## Overview of Methodology

The overall goal of this research study was to better understand the perspective of state education officials, particularly what they perceive to be the main needs of the children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities they serve and the factors that facilitate and hinder their ability to serve these students. Four social factors have been anticipated to impact the perception of the education officers: social class of the student population, poverty level of the state, gender (emphasis on girls), and segregation and discrimination. Similarly, seven crucial educational factors have been anticipated to impact the work of the education officers: teacher shortage and contract teachers; low student attendance rates; low teacher education and pay; concentrated poverty in schools; segregation and discrimination in schools; limited resources in rural government schools, and language as a medium of classroom instruction.

This study took a qualitative approach. The focus was on government schools, specifically Department of Education, Tribal Welfare Department, and Social Welfare Department managed schools, in rural regions with relatively high levels of poverty

among their student populations, as defined by qualification for Below Poverty Line. Data was collected through interviews with state education officials who discussed their perceptions of the main factors that contribute to the current status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the educational and social policies that are facilitating, or constraining, progress, with special emphasis on girls.

NVivo, a qualitative research analysis software, was used to help transcribe, code and organize the data.

## Limitations

This study focused on "Green Estate," a state in India and therefore cannot be generalized. This study does not seek to establish cause and effect or any direct relationship between educational factors and social policies and subsequent changes in administrative decisions. In addition, it does not make an attempt to measure the quality or level of implementation of services in the state or district, nor does it attempt to draw a connection between services provided and the academic outcomes of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student population. While this is a research question worth exploring, this study was limited to education officials' perceptions of their priorities and their capacity to implement them, as well as barriers and facilitators to their work. In addition, interviews were limited to education officials working with government schools i.e., Department of Education, Tribal Welfare Department, and Social Welfare Department managed schools. Interviews did not include the perspectives of principals, assistant principals, teachers, parents, or students regarding the services in place for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student population. Also, this study did not explore the provisions private-aided schools or other nontraditional schools have in place for the Scheduled

Castes and Tribes student population. Despite these limitations, the perception and observation of education officials is of considerable importance as it is these perceptions that can be expected to determine responses to the policies at different administrative levels**.**

## Researcher Subjectivity

Subjectivity cannot be avoided in qualitative research because it is built into the paradigm. "A qualitative researcher's intent is to uncover and interpret the subjectivity experience of the participants within their social context" (Kennedy, 2014, p. 20). Therefore, it is crucial that researchers identify potential threats and maintain awareness of their personal biases, values, experiences, and prior knowledge throughout the research process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Steps they can take include articulating their subjectivity, ensuring accurate representation of participants' viewpoints, and increasing the transparency of the analytic process.

To limit any researcher bias, it is imperative that I acknowledge my subjectivity in relation to the study topic and ways in which this may influence the study's questions and hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). Among the many roles I have held, being a woman, teacher, and volunteer stand out and speak directly to the study's focus on facilitators and constraints of school participation and transition for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

As a woman and an individual who does is not have a Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes background, I have had frequent opportunity to interact with women from these communities to discuss social, domestic, health, education, and economic issues that they encounter in their lives. I find that there are several ways to conceptualize

social or economic issues beyond transportation and food. Thus, I find myself considering possible reasons and solutions to health issues and access to schooling quite often. Therefore, my discussions with girls or women from these communities have predisposed in many ways. Thus, I will be mindful to take a step back and allow the participants to share their experiences and learn about what other factors may be influencing the issue.

I am a former urban elementary and high school teacher and have worked with students from high-poverty and low-poverty backgrounds. Thus, I hold my own hypotheses about some of the factors that constrain educational progress for high-poverty students in low-poverty schools.

In addition, I served as a volunteer researcher, interviewing district officials, principals, assistant principals, and teachers working in rural government schools and with economically and socially disadvantaged groups. These roles may serve me in positive and negative ways. For instance, during my interactions with state education officials, my background will allow for easy discussions around school participation and transition for students from these communities. However, I was mindful of my biases and allowed the participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Furthermore, by asking probing questions, I hoped to hear details beyond what I expected from my own volunteer and teaching experience. These roles were also accessed when establishing rapport with my participants. For example, during the interview process, I may empathize with the participants' difficulties or struggles associated with working with students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes background. However, to prevent influencing participants' views during the interview, informal side conversations were reduced.

With respect to school participation and transition, my experience of working in schools with students from high-poverty backgrounds aligns with the research that suggests that financial constraints and household obligations for students (particularly girls) from these communities is a major reason for students dropping out, particularly after upper primary school. I hypothesized that the state's most effective retention policies will be those that address the challenges of concentrated poverty in schools and make going to school more appealing.

Furthermore, with respect to contract teachers and teacher shortage, my experience suggests that the working environment and resources in rural government schools are highly related to teachers' willingness to stay in these schools. Among the teachers that I interviewed for a central government–funded program, those teaching in rural government schools, catering to a high percentage of high-poverty students, showed less willingness to remain in these schools. These teachers showed a preference for schools with better resources and a more supportive teaching environment. Thus, based on their experience, I hypothesized that the state's teacher retention policy for teachers working in rural government schools catering to high-poverty students should focus on the challenges these teachers face and make these schools more appealing places to work.

This detailed subjectivity statement was used as a living document throughout the research process. Any initial thoughts prior to data collection were revisited and added to this statement as the research progressed. Before each interview, the subjectivity statement was read to keep me aware of my own biases and notice keywords, phrases, or actions in the data. Thus, it helped me approach fieldwork with an open mind as opposed to finding what I expected to find. Finally, during the analysis and writing phase of my

dissertation, I drafted quick bullet points of what I expected to find based on memory and background knowledge. Doing so allowed me to take a more honest and open approach, which led to different interpretations of data.

In addition, I followed established procedures for developing an interview protocol (for example, getting the protocol reviewed by my dissertation committee members), conducting interviews (asking probing questions for clarification), coding (for example, have a priori first-level codes), transcription (audiotaping the interviews and asking participants to review transcripts to ensure their accuracy) (Merriam, 2009), and analyzing qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, my dissertation committee members reviewed the research design and assisted in efforts to identify and minimize biases and strengthen my study's findings. A discussion of the methods used to check for researcher bias and allow subjective interpretation of the study participants' data is included in Chapter 3.

## Definition of Terms

**Literacy rate**: Literacy rate has been defined as the percentage of literate persons among persons of age 7 years and above. A person who can read and write a simple message in any language with understanding has been considered to be literate in this study (National Statistical Office, 2020).

**Drop out**: Information on major reason for never enrolled/ever enrolled but currently not attending for all the persons of age 3 to 35 years who never enrolled/ever enrolled but currently not attending. An ever-enrolled person if he/ she did not complete the last level of education for which he/she enrolled and currently not attending any

educational institution for reasons other than ‘completion of the desired level of education’ (National Statistical Office, 2020).

**Participation**: Participation in this study has been defined as the ratio the number of students currently enrolled in the level of education to the number of persons in the corresponding official age-group.

$$\frac{\text{Number of persons currently enrolled in Classes I-V}}{\text{Estimated population in the age-group 6-10 years}} \times 100$$

**Below poverty line**: Below poverty line (BPL) is a point of reference used by the government of India to identify individuals and households in need of government assistance and aid (“Below Poverty Line,” 2021). Since 2002, the rural below poverty line census has adopted a “multi-dimensional view of poverty” that covers topics such as food, clothing, housing, land ownership, education, and labor status in contrast to norms based on calories or income (Alkire & Seth, 2013, p. 419). The poverty cutoff varies across states and union territories. In this study, the Below the poverty line index has been used to identify populations living in high poverty and eligible for government aid.

# CHAPTER 2:

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## Overview

In India, there is continued discourse about the needs of rural students, with a particular focus on students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. While most prior research has concentrated on increasing enrollment and access for these students and on identifying factors that contribute to their high dropout rates at the primary level (Annual Status of Education Report, 2019; Goela, 2008; Kaur, 2019), previous studies have explored the factors that have contributed to their poor participation and transition in education at all levels. Numerous factors lead to additional educational challenges for children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, which their counterparts may not experience. This research aimed to better understand what state education officials perceived to be the needs of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, with a special emphasis on girls/women. Furthermore, it aimed to understand education officials' perception of the factors that facilitate and hinder their work.

This chapter presents a review of empirical research relevant to this study and describes the analytical framework. The chapter begins with a description of four social factors: caste and tribe, poverty, and patriarchy. Since these topics are broad and the related literature vast, the review was limited to these topics as they relate to the goal of increasing upward educational mobility among students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups going to rural government schools. That section is followed by a review of legal safeguards for Scheduled Castes and Tribes through the constitution and affirmative

action policies. The third major section addresses the educational status of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The chapter closes by reviewing what is known about educational factors that constrain progress of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

## Methods of Literature Review

In searching for research relevant for this study, a variety of keywords and phrases were used: e.g., poverty level; gender gaps; teacher absenteeism; teacher shortage; contract teachers; teacher qualification; teacher pay; rural government schools; poverty and Scheduled Castes and Tribes; caste system in India; gender and disadvantaged groups; quota system in India; school participation and transition and Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These studies were located through education databases (e.g., ERIC), with emphasis on major academic journals in the field of education. A few of these include *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *International Journal of Educational Development, International Journal of Child Care and Development, Economic and Political Weekly,* and *Contemporary Education Dialogue*. In addition, national policy documents, constitutional documents, relevant books, news articles from sources such as *Times of India* and *News Bank,* and doctoral dissertations were included during the review process. Lastly, relevant research studies and documents from the past 10 years, plus key literature from earlier years, were referred to in this study.

## Analytical Framework

### Caste and Tribe

In India, accompanying its multicultural diversity is the existence of socially and economically disadvantaged groups who have faced oppression and subordination. These

social groups are identified based on religion, sex, place of birth, caste, or tribe (Goela, 2008). For the sake of simplicity, I focus solely on the role of caste (i.e., Scheduled Castes) and tribe (i.e., Scheduled Tribes), although other factors are equally important in research on school participation and transition in education at all levels.

The most widespread understanding of caste[4] is based on Hindu religious doctrine. One is born into a caste along with its accompanying rituals, social networks, occupation, and relationship with other castes (Borooah et al., 2014; Thakkilapati, 2016; Tierney et al., 2019). While a comprehensive review of the caste system is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that historically the caste system classified people based on specific occupation and was metaphorically linked to different parts of the cosmic man *Purush* (Gandhi, 2017; Jenkins & Barr, 2006; Tierney et al., 2019). The Scheduled Castes, formerly called the untouchables, were so inferior that they were not considered a part of the caste system (Gandhi, 2017; Chauhan, 2008). In practice, this meant living in the outskirts of villages, abiding by demeaning traditions, denial of equality of opportunities in all socioeconomic fields, including education (Chauhan, 2008). It is crucial to highlight that Muslims, Christians, Parsees, and other fall outside of the caste system but are not considered "untouchables" because they are not Hindu (Thakkilapati, 2016).

Since 1950, the concept of 'untouchable' has been made illegal by the Indian government[5] (Gandhi, 2017). The descendants of these groups have been given a new social signifier as the Scheduled Castes. The number of communities included as

[4] Very broadly, the four castes are Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras (Tierney et al., 2019). The castes are further subdivided into subcastes that are placed on a vertical plane, different and unequal.

[5] Article 17, renamed the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Protection of Atrocities) Act 1989, abolishes and forbids the practice of untouchability in any form (Das, 2000).

Scheduled Castes is not fixed. In response to the burden of social stigma and economic backwardness borne by members from these communities, the Constitution of India under Article 341 and 342 includes a list of castes who are entitled to benefits and affirmative action in both education and public sector employment (Borooah et al., 2014; Ovichegan, 2015).

On the other hand, the Scheduled Tribes are heterogenous communities comprising of people who were marginalized by caste–Hindu society, thereby creating a divide between caste and tribe (Bhukya, 2021). Scheduled Tribes, also called *Adivasis* (meaning original inhabitants), are communities that live in remote areas, forests, and hilly tracks cut off from society at large. The members of these communities are geographically isolated due to poor transportation and communication facilities. They have a specific tribal culture unique from the mainstream. Limited educational and economic opportunities have mainly been responsible for their poor socioeconomic status in Indian society (Chauhan, 2008; Tierney et al., 2019). Articles 341 and 342 also include a list of tribes entitled to similar benefits and affirmative action in both education and public sector employment as the Scheduled Castes (Borooah et al., 2014).

Since the 19th century, the link between caste and occupation has become less rigid since changing occupations has become easier. Yet, in modern India, caste continues to influence almost every aspect of social life, from who can socialize together (Banerjee et al., 2013), what types of jobs individuals can access, and where children are seated in a classroom, and has political implications, as in voting behavior (Thakkilapati, 2016). Scheduled Castes are still considered a ‘lower’ caste. Consequently, caste continues to be significant educationally and is an important form of social capital in the

power structure of a village government (Gandhi, 2017). Similarly, the historical issues and isolation of Scheduled Tribes groups from the mainstream population continue to deprive this population group from resources and educational opportunities. In addition, the challenges associated with being marginalized and economically impoverished the demand for education among members of these groups is not a priority (Shivangunde, 2020). Consequently, despite an increase in supply of education, low uptake, low retention, and high dropout at the school level continues be an issue (Shivangunde, 2020).

**Poverty**

Since 1947, poverty has been a widespread and persistent concern in rural regions of India. Poverty has been cited as an important factor leading to poor educational status of students from the Scheduled Castes (Booroah et al., 2014) and Scheduled Tribes communities (Bhattacharyya & Basu, 2018; Patil, 2020). After analyzing the "per capita monthly consumption expenditure," Booroah et al. (2014) argued that caste is an important determinant of inequality and poverty in India for Scheduled Castes and Tribes households. While the percentage of Scheduled Castes households living in poverty was similar in rural and urban areas (25.5% and 24.4%, respectively), Scheduled Tribes households had a higher percentage of poverty in rural households (24.3%) than urban households (at 4.2%). Of the approximately 25% of the population in Scheduled Castes and Tribes, 76.39% of the Scheduled Castes and 89.90% of the Scheduled Tribes populations live in rural regions of the nation (Census of India, 2011; Table 1.1, p. 5). Consequently, a higher percentage of this population lives in poverty.

On a positive note, in rural areas, the percentage of Scheduled Tribes below the poverty line fell 17 percentage points: from 62.3% in 2004-05 to 45.3% in 2011-12.

Similarly, the percentage of Scheduled Castes below the poverty line fell 22 percentage points: from 53.5% in 2004-05 to 31.5% in 2011-12 (Joyita, 2013; Table 2.1). Likewise, the proportion of the rural population living below the poverty line has decreased from 50.1% in 1993-94 to 25.7% in 2011-12 (see Table 2.1). Nevertheless, the 2015-16 National Family Health Survey report highlighted that 70.7% of Scheduled Tribes members are situated in the lowest two wealth brackets when compared to 50.8% of Scheduled Castes (Yadavar, 2018). Thus, the incidence of poverty among Scheduled Tribes households is higher than that in Scheduled Castes households. Additionally, economic mobility has failed to translate into positive change in the social sector for these excluded populations (Jenkins & Barr, 2006). Consequently, as Jenkins & Barr (2006) highlight much of the gains for these groups has been entirely symbolic.

**Table 2.1**
*Percentage of People Living Below the Poverty Line, All India*

| Social groups | 1993-94 | 2004-05 | % Change | 2011-12 | % Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rural | | | | | |
| Scheduled Castes | 62.4 | 53.5 | -8.9 | 31.5 | -22.0 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 65.9 | 62.3 | -3.6 | 45.3 | -17.0 |
| Total population | 50.1 | 41.8 | -8.3 | 25.7 | -16.1 |
| Urban | | | | | |
| Scheduled Castes | 51.7 | 40.6 | -11.1 | 21.7 | -18.9 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 41.1 | 35.5 | -5.6 | 24.1 | -11.4 |
| Total population | 31.8 | 25.7 | -6.1 | 13.7 | -12.0 |

*Note*. Data from Planning Commission, as cited in Jha, 2014; Joyita, 2013.

Various studies have demonstrated that students' socioeconomic status is one of the strongest predictors of their educational success (Huddleston, 2015; Reardon, 2011). For the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, poverty has been highlighted as a significant constraint in schooling (Jenkins & Barr, 2006; Santhakumar et al., 2016). As these children group in poor families, they experience poor health, low birth weight, limited access to high-quality schooling facilities, less participation in after-school programs, and

more movement in and out of schools when compared to peers not growing up in poverty (Ladd, 2012). High poverty rates result in barriers to enrolling in school in the form of lack of transportation, lack of school supplies, and in some cases the need to pay for subsidized mid-day meals (see Tables 2.2 and 2.3). Consequently, poverty is a positive predictor of poor educational outcomes and significantly impacts the school participation and transition of students in education at all levels.

**Table 2.2**
*Percentage of Funds and Resources Received by Students for Different Levels of Current Attendance—Scheduled Tribes, Rural Sector, All India*

| Level of current attendance | Stude ts received free educa ion (%) | % distribution of students not receiving free education by whether tuition fee is paid/ payable | | | | Average amount of tuition fee waive per student (Rs.) | Stude ts received scholarship/ stipen /reimbursement (%) | Average. amount of scholarship/ stipen / reimbursement per studeı t (Rs.) | Stude ts received free/ subsidized textbc oks (%) | Stude ts received free/ subsidized schoo supplies (%) | Stude ts receiving free midm al/tiffin/nutrition (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Fully | Partly | No | All* | | | | | | |
| Male students | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Preprimary | 63.6 | 91.3 | 0.8 | 7.9 | 100.0 | 624 | 4.8 | 516 | 54.3 | 17.1 | 64.9 |
| Primary | 87.3 | 84.4 | 4.2 | 11.5 | 100.0 | 1,205 | 24.9 | 674 | 86.1 | 16.1 | 87.6 |
| Upper primary/middle | 81.0 | 75.2 | 5.9 | 19.0 | 100.0 | 597 | 40.8 | 849 | 82.9 | 12.1 | 77.5 |
| Secondary | 55.9 | 69.9 | 8.0 | 22.1 | 100.0 | 821 | 44.7 | 1,342 | 57.4 | 11.7 | 17.8 |
| Higher secondary | 32.0 | 72.2 | 12.5 | 15.3 | 100.0 | 1,303 | 40.7 | 2,551 | 31.5 | 7.0 | 2.6 |
| Diploma/certificate (below graduate level) | 19.2 | 81.9 | 13.4 | 4.7 | 100.0 | 4,912 | 50.3 | 15,265 | 13.3 | 6.2 | 0.2 |
| Graduate and above including diploma | 12.7 | 81.4 | 8.6 | 10.0 | 100.0 | 6,221 | 58.6 | 7,830 | 5.5 | 0.9 | 0.2 |
| **All*** | **70.1** | **77.4** | **7.8** | **14.9** | **100.0** | **1,748** | **34.6** | **2,080** | **69.3** | **12.7** | **60.8** |
| Female students | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Preprimary | 75.5 | 88.5 | 0.7 | 10.8 | 100.0 | 674 | 3.2 | 464 | 65.3 | 25.0 | 78.2 |
| Primary | 87.5 | 84.4 | 3.4 | 12.3 | 100.0 | 834 | 24.2 | 651 | 87.6 | 16.0 | 89.0 |
| Upper primary/middle | 82.7 | 66.1 | 3.5 | 30.4 | 100.0 | 629 | 38.7 | 737 | 83.9 | 14.5 | 78.0 |
| Secondary | 57.7 | 69.3 | 5.0 | 25.7 | 100.0 | 858 | 42.6 | 1,464 | 55.4 | 10.9 | 19.9 |
| Higher secondary | 37.6 | 72.4 | 7.1 | 20.5 | 100.0 | 1,649 | 48.4 | 2,287 | 31.9 | 5.1 | 6.0 |
| Diploma/certificate (below graduate level) | 32.5 | 80.1 | 17.0 | 2.9 | 100.0 | 5,898 | 65.4 | 5,814 | 12.7 | 3.2 | 0.4 |
| Graduate and above including diploma | 13.9 | 84.3 | 7.2 | 8.5 | 100.0 | 3,896 | 44.5 | 6,148 | 7.8 | 1.1 | 0.2 |
| **All*** | **74.3** | **76.0** | **5.0** | **19.0** | **100.0** | **1,312** | **32.0** | **1,395** | **73.1** | **13.8** | **65.7** |

*Note.* From National Statistical Office, 2020.
*Including no response.

**Table 2.3**

*Percentage of Funds and Resources Received by Students for Different Levels of Current Attendance—Scheduled Castes, Rural Sector, All India*

| Level of current attendance | Students received free education (%) | % distribution of students not receiving free education by whether tuition fee is paid/ payable | | | | Average amount of tuition fee waiver per student (Rs.) | Students received scholarship/ stipend /reimbursement (%) | Average amount of scholarship/ stipend /reimbursement per student (Rs.) | Students received free/ subsidized textbooks (%) | Students received free/ subsidized school supplies (%) | Students receiving free midmeal/tiffin/nutrition (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Fully | Partly | No | All* | | | | | | |
| Male students | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Preprimary | 43.1 | 97.5 | 1.4 | 1.1 | 100.0 | 1,389 | 3.3 | 2,352 | 39.4 | 8.2 | 43.0 |
| Primary | 80.4 | 93.6 | 1.4 | 5.0 | 100.0 | 1,183 | 13.2 | 733 | 78.3 | 15.4 | 79.5 |
| Upper primary/middle | 74.1 | 87.8 | 1.0 | 11.1 | 100.0 | 1,230 | 18.0 | 945 | 74.1 | 14.3 | 71.4 |
| Secondary | 43.1 | 70.9 | 5.4 | 23.6 | 100.0 | 646 | 25.3 | 1,416 | 41.2 | 7.7 | 21.0 |
| Higher secondary | 25.5 | 80.9 | 5.5 | 13.5 | 100.0 | 1,536 | 28.6 | 2,232 | 19.0 | 6.3 | 6.8 |
| Diploma/certificate (below graduate level) | 15.0 | 84.2 | 11.4 | 4.4 | 100.0 | 9,988 | 41.1 | 6,819 | 10.7 | 3.5 | 0.7 |
| Graduate and above level including diploma | 11.2 | 80.4 | 12.0 | 7.6 | 100.0 | 7,176 | 33.3 | 6,819 | 8.5 | 3.0 | 1.2 |
| **All*** | **60.0** | **83.6** | **5.2** | **11.2** | **100.0** | **3,087** | **19.0** | **2,226** | **57.8** | **11.6** | **53.4** |
| Female students | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Preprimary | 50.3 | 96.7 | 1.0 | 2.3 | 100.0 | 1,460 | 3.1 | 1,691 | 41.5 | 14.9 | 51.7 |
| Primary | 81.6 | 85.1 | 0.2 | 14.7 | 100.0 | 668 | 12.5 | 735 | 82.3 | 19.2 | 82.5 |
| Upper primary/middle | 79.0 | 85.8 | 1.4 | 12.8 | 100.0 | 1,267 | 21.7 | 960 | 78.0 | 14.4 | 74.4 |
| Secondary | 46.1 | 70.7 | 3.5 | 25.8 | 100.0 | 986 | 30.6 | 1,502 | 47.7 | 11.0 | 24.6 |
| Higher secondary | 38.1 | 77.3 | 7.8 | 14.9 | 100.0 | 1,253 | 36.1 | 3,008 | 23.1 | 7.2 | 6.5 |
| Diploma/certificate (below graduate level) | 11.0 | 81.9 | 11.1 | 7.0 | 100.0 | 9,429 | 39.5 | 15, 708 | 8.6 | 1.1 | 0.4 |
| Graduate and above level including diploma | 11.6 | 81.0 | 8.1 | 10.8 | 100.0 | 9,615 | 38.0 | 6,175 | 6.9 | 2.0 | 0.0 |
| **All*** | **65.2** | **80.6** | **3.9** | **15.4** | **100.0** | **2,831** | **20.8** | **2,188** | **63.4** | **14.4** | **57.9** |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

Attributing the poverty gap between the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups and non-Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups to discrimination may be misleading, as poverty may arise due to the Scheduled groups' low education qualifications and credentials. Nonetheless, it is possible that the level of these qualifications and credentials may be the result of discrimination (Gang et al., 2006). Consequently, to highlight poverty as the main constraint in addressing issues faced within the domain of education for these

groups would result in an incomplete picture. Other factors such as caste and gender that also limit educational opportunities for these groups need to be considered (Tsujita, 2013). Consequently, these children remain disadvantaged across many social indicators. The government has developed various policies and programs, such as rural employment guarantee schemes, provision of food at subsidized rates, and free and reduced-price lunch, to encourage parents to send their children to school (Santhakumar et al., 2016). However, we are yet to witness these provisions' complete and proper implementation.

**Patriarchy**

Within the Indian context, women, particularly those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, face persistent patriarchy (Lastrapes & Rajaram, 2016). Although Indian law requires equal treatment of men and women, rural girls and women, especially those belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, face greater social oppression than their urban counterparts (Gandhi, 2017; Tripathy & Pradhan, 2003). At the national level, among girls and women, approximately 23.9% of Scheduled Tribes and 21.9% of the estimated Scheduled Castes population are out of school (National Statistical Office, 2020). The percentage of women never enrolling in schools within these communities is relatively higher for the Scheduled Tribes than for the Scheduled Castes (Tripathy, 2020). Consequently, the future prospects for these girls are not good, as they are less educated than men and have limited access to educational resources.

Girls from these communities face discrimination with respect to access to education (Anand & Yadav, 2006), earning, rights, and economic opportunities (Anand & Yadav, 2006; Lastrapes & Rajaram, 2016; Tripathy, 2020). To elaborate further, large gaps persist at the intersection of gender and caste—with girls from Scheduled Castes

and Tribes displaying large disparities in all educational indicators, particularly with regard to enrollment and dropout rates at the end of primary, upper primary, and secondary education (Halim et al., 2016; Kingdon, 2007; Mehrotra, 2006; see Table 2.4). Dropout is more widespread at the high school and secondary school level in many parts of India (Santhakumar et al., 2016).

With respect to enrollment, more than 55% of female students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities are currently not enrolled in school (National Statistical Office, 2020; see Table 2.4). This indicates that students from these communities are leaving school without receiving a high school credential. The percentage of girls enrolled at the primary and upper primary level is similar to that of boys. However, in higher grade levels, the transition rate is lower for women than for men. The Gender Parity Index is less than 1, indicating disparity in favor of men.

**Table 2.4**

*Percentage Distribution of Persons Aged 3 to 35 Years by Status of Enrollment and Level of Current Attendance for Each Social Group—Rural Sector, All India*

| | | Currently enrolled but not attending | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social group | Currently not enrolled | Nonformal | Below primary (3-5 years) | Primary (6-10 years) | Upper primary (11-13 years) | Secondary (14-15 years) | Higher secondary (16-17 years) | Diploma (24-29 years) | Graduate & above (5-29 years) |
| Male | | | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Tribes | 57.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Scheduled Caste | 55.8 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | | Currently attending | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Tribes | | 0.2 | 1.5 | 18.3 | 9.6 | 6.1 | 3.4 | 0.4 | 3.0 |
| Scheduled Caste | | 0.2 | 2.3 | 17.8 | 9.2 | 6.1 | 4.1 | 0.7 | 3.6 |
| Female | | | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Tribes | 63.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Scheduled Caste | 58.9 | 58.9 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| | | Currently attending | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Tribes | | 0.2 | 1.8 | 16.4 | 8.6 | 5.1 | 2.7 | 0.1 | 1.7 |
| Scheduled Caste | | 0.2 | 1.9 | 17.1 | 9.0 | 6.0 | 3.8 | 0.3 | 2.6 |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

Additionally, dropout rate is particularly important, as even 1% of school going children who are not enrolled translates into millions of children who are denied their fundamental right to education. An important cause of the high dropout rate is the low level of learning among these students (Annual Status of Education Report, 2019; Government of India, 2020). The 75th National Sample Survey Report No. 585 (National Statistical Office, 2020) noted a measurable difference in dropout rate of female over male 3- to 35-year-olds (see Table 2.4). This is a serious issue for girls (National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017; Santhakumar et al., 2016).

To elaborate further, among male students who never enrolled in schools, three major reasons were highlighted: (a) lack of interest in public education, (b) financial constraints, and (c) engagement in economic activities (see Table 2.5). Among female students, major reasons for not enrolling in school were (a) lack of interest in education, (b) financial constraints, and (c) engagement in domestic activities (see Table 2.5). Interestingly, while not going to school was considered a tradition in the Scheduled Castes community, the nonavailability of female teachers in school was what Scheduled Tribes considered a major obstacle for not going to school (see Table 2.5).

**Table 2.5**

*Percentage Distribution of Persons Aged 3 to 35 Years by Reason for Never Enrolling in Different Education Levels by Gender, Rural Sector, All India*

| | Female | | Male | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Scheduled Tribe** | **Scheduled Caste** | **Scheduled Tribe** | **Scheduled Caste** |
| % of persons who never enrolled | 23.9 | 21.9 | 15.7 | 14.6 |
| **Reasons for not enrolling** | | | | |
| Not interested in education | 22.3 | 21.9 | 19.3 | 23.4 |
| Financial constraints | 12.7 | 14.0 | 14.2 | 14.8 |
| Engaged in domestic activities | 12.7 | 12.7 | 3.7 | 1.4 |
| Engaged in economic activities | 1.5 | 1.4 | 5.7 | 6.2 |
| School is far off | 1.9 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 0.4 |
| Timing of educational institution not suitable | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.2 | 0.5 |
| Language/medium of instruction used unfamiliar | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Inadequate number of teachers | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.2 | 0.0 |
| Quality of teachers not satisfactory | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Route to educational institution not safe | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| No tradition in the community | 0.1 | 4.4 | 3.0 | 2.6 |
| Nonavailability of female teacher | 5.8 | 0.0 | | |
| Nonavailability of girls' toilet | 0.0 | 0.3 | | |
| Others | 41.8 | 43.1 | 52.2 | 50.7 |
| Marriage | 0.4 | 0.7 | | |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

Moving forward, the Government of India has launched several initiatives and schemes for girls' education[6] Affirmative action programs for women have been established to promote racial diversity in education (Gandhi, 2017). However, many of the policy conversations have been political (gender-based representation) rather than educational. Unsurprisingly, these debates are still ongoing. As a result, women's advancement in Indian society remains problematic, particularly for those who belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

In this study, caste and tribe, poverty, and patriarchy are the social factors that are included in the analytical framework because these were the most directly related to the issues I am addressing.

[6] For instance, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya policy, implemented in 2004, aims at providing upper primary education for girls predominantly, among others, from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities.

## Legal Safeguards

### Constitutional Safeguards Against Discrimination

The Indian Constitution makes it mandatory for state and local education authorities to protect the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups and ensure that they receive quality elementary education. Additionally, the state is responsible for protecting members of these communities from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (Directive Principle of State Policy, Article 46 in Chaudhury, 2005; Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021a; Sabharwal, 2014). The Constitution mandates positive discrimination in sponsored educational institutions (Jenkins & Barr, 2006). Several other important constitutional provisions aim at positive discrimination (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021a):

- **Article 17:** Abolition of "untouchability" and making its practice in any form a punishable offense.
- **Article 46:** Promoting educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes; protection from social injustice and all forms of social exploitation.
- **Articles 16 and 335:** Preferential treatment in matters of relaxing qualifying marks in any examination or lowering the standards of evaluation for employment in public services.
- **Article 350:** Conserving distinct Language or Culture. This is particularly relevant to the Scheduled Tribes. It promotes maintaining their unique socio-cultural heritage.

- **Articles 330 and 332:** Reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of Parliament) and State Assemblies (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Jenkins & Barr, 2006).

To sum up, the Constitution of India provides for social, political, educational, and economic justice for children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

### *Affirmative Action*

The quota or reservation system was developed in response to the fact that, prior to independence in 1947, only the "upper caste had access to public employment, a field which was a matter of high status and social recognition" (Goela, 2008). This public policy allows the central or state government to undertake measures to improve the educational, vocational, and economic opportunities for Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. The aim of this policy is to ensure fairness, promote integration, and reduce discrimination—both subtle and direct—related to caste and untouchability, particularly for the Scheduled Castes.

The reservation quota for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes is 15% and 7.5%, respectively (Kingdon, 2010; Kumari, 2015)—representing each group's share of the total population of India (Weisskopf, 2004). Reservations are confined to the public sector (Chaudhury, 2005; Sabharwal, 2014). Thus, in central government–funded higher education institutions, state-run and state-supported educational institutions, public housing, and government jobs, 22.5% of available seats are reserved for students from these groups (Thorat & Sabharwal, 2013). In various political democratic bodies including the parliament, state assemblies, and panchayat institutions at the district, taluk,

and village levels, the reservation policy aims at ensuring fair and equitable participation of Scheduled Castes and Tribes community members (Sabharwal, 2014).

With respect to educational opportunities, through the enactment of the national constitutional mandate, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009, steady progress towards universal enrollment has been made (Government of India, 2020). The RTE makes it a "fundamental right" for every child between 6 and 14 years of age to receive free and compulsory education (Kumari, 2015). The right stands until students complete elementary school education (Grade 1-8) or until the age of 14 years (Government of India, 2009), whichever comes first. Through the RTE, the members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes have been assigned reservations in the area of elementary admission, admission to higher education, and public-sector employment to help support these students and improve their access to educational opportunities.

Additionally, the 2009 RTE Act broadly outlines mandates for local authorities (that is, the municipal corporation, municipal council, Zila Parishad, Nagar Panchayat, Panchayat)—at the school level—to ensure that children from Scheduled Castes and Tribes have access to textbooks, mid-day meals, uniforms, the library, information and communications technology facilities, extracurriculars and sports, clean drinking water, and toilets for boys and girls (Government of India, 2009). In all, through the reservation system and the 2009 RTE Act, efforts have been made to uplift these groups and protect against discrimination in subtle and indirect forms.

Yet, while the 2009 RTE Act is a national constitutional mandate (except for Jammu and Kashmir), education is under the control of states, and there are differences between and within states in ways schooling is organized (Cheruvalath, 2014; Waldorf,

2013). Inevitably, the details of the implementation are interpreted slightly differently in different states, thereby limiting what can be legally enforced. Furthermore, much of the focus lies on access and less on completion of elementary education (Grades 1-8), with little attention to post–high school education and school participation and transition of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups. Nevertheless, while the framers of the Indian Constitution and government authorities, through the reservation system, aimed at establishing a new balance in Indian society, large disparities remain. For example, a study by Desai and Dubey (2012) highlighted persistent disparities in education, social networks, and income between the Scheduled Castes and non–Scheduled Castes groups. Scheduled Castes groups are often linked to communities that suffer from material inequality and have been denied education or control over resources.

## Educational Status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

While India has witnessed a positive trend in school enrollment, especially during the last two decades, rural government schools still face a host of challenges at all grade levels (Annual Status of Education Report, 2019), particularly for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities.

### Percent of Age Group Enrolled at Various Levels by Gender

As shown in Table 2.4 (p. 36), the percentage of 3- to 35-year-old students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who are enrolled at various levels of education is very low for both males and females. In addition, a gradual decline in the percentage of students enrolled across different school levels indicates a low transition rate from upper primary to secondary and into either college or the workforce.

## Percent Completing School at Various Levels (Including Percent Graduating from High School) by Gender

The percentage of both male and female students successfully completing higher secondary education is very low (see Table 2.6). In addition, the graduation rate for women (3.9%) is lower than for men (7.4%).

**Table 2.6**
*Percentage Distribution of Persons Aged 15 Years and Above by Highest Level of Education Successfully Completed by Gender, Rural Sector, All India*

| Gender | Not literate | Literate up to primary | Middle | Secondary | Higher secondary | Graduate and above | All |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 22.2 | 21.2 | 19.8 | 17.3 | 12.0 | 7.4 | 100.0 |
| Female | 41.2 | 20.4 | 14.4 | 12.5 | 7.6 | 3.9 | 100.0 |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

## Literacy Rate by Gender

Despite significant accomplishments in increasing access, the large gap in literacy rate between females and males (age 7 years and above) also remains a major concern (Iyengar, 2011; National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2014).

**Table 2.7**
*Percentage of Literates (Age 7 Years and Above) by Social Group and Gender*

| | Rural | | Urban | | Rural + Urban | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Social group | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Scheduled Tribes | 75.6 | 58.8 | 91.3 | 79.6 | 77.5 | 61.3 |
| Scheduled Castes | 78.0 | 60.9 | 88.4 | 75.3 | 80.3 | 63.9 |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

Additionally, there has been a gradual decline in the percentage of students who can read a Grade 2 level text when in Grade 5 and Grade 8 (see Table 2.8).

**Table 2.8**
*Percentage of Children in Government Schools Who Can Read a Grade 2 Level Text*

| Period | 2008 | 2010 | 2012 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 5 | 53.1 | 50.7 | 41.7 | 42.2 | 41.7 | 44.2 |
| Grade 8 | 83.6 | 82.0 | 73.4 | 71.5 | 70.0 | 69.0 |

*Note.* Data from Annual Status of Education Report Center, 2019.

## Percent at Various Levels of Education by Gender

The 75th National Survey Scheme Report highlights a minimal percentage difference between the rural male and female student population for those attending education at the graduate (7.5% and 6.3%) and postgraduate level (0.9% and 0.9%) (National Statistical Office, 2020; see Table 2.9).

**Table 2.9**
*Percentage Distribution of Students Aged 3 to 35 Years Currently Attending Education by Level of Education*

| | Percentage distribution | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Level of education | Male | Female | All |
| Rural | | | |
| Preprimary | 4.9 | 5.1 | 5.0 |
| Primary | 40.1 | 41.0 | 40.5 |
| Upper primary/middle | 21.2 | 22.3 | 21.7 |
| Secondary | 13.9 | 14.2 | 14.0 |
| Higher secondary | 9.4 | 9.3 | 9.4 |
| Graduation | 7.5 | 6.3 | 7.0 |
| Post-graduation and above | 0.9 | 0.9 | 0.9 |
| Diploma below graduate | 1.6 | 0.6 | 1.1 |
| Diploma graduate and above | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| **All** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |
| Urban | | | |
| Preprimary | 7.4 | 7.6 | 7.4 |
| Primary level | 33.2 | 32.3 | 32.8 |
| Upper primary/middle level | 17.9 | 18.7 | 18.2 |
| Secondary level | 12.7 | 12.9 | 12.8 |
| Higher secondary level | 11.0 | 10.6 | 10.8 |
| Graduation | 12.0 | 13.0 | 12.4 |
| Post-graduation and Above | 2.2 | 2.9 | 2.5 |
| Diploma below graduate | 2.2 | 1.0 | 1.7 |
| Diploma graduate and above | 1.5 | 1.0 | 1.3 |
| **All** | **100** | **100** | **100** |

*Note.* Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

To sum up, as education officials in rural government schools seek to enhance the quality of education experienced by students at all grade levels, it is important to understand how they respond to education and social policies and, in particular, the main factors that have facilitated, or constrained, progress for Scheduled Castes and Tribes in their jurisdictions. By focusing on high-poverty students living in rural regions the study aimed to determine how the status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes compares to other high-poverty rural groups. Understanding such variations is important to determine if they serve to reduce the school participation and transition gap and therefore increase the gap in opportunities and outcomes for students.

## Educational Factors That Constrain Progress of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Research conducted on social and educational factors has consistently shown that policies affect children from Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities in a variety of ways, both intended and unintended. It is therefore important to acknowledge the multiplicity of deprivations and the interrelationship between them. This section addresses seven areas: language as a medium of instruction; teacher shortage and contract teachers; segregation and discrimination in schools; resources; low student attendance rates; concentrated poverty in schools; and low teacher education and pay.

### Language as a Medium of Instruction

The three-language formula consisting of Hindi (in Hindi-speaking states) and non-Hindi (in non–Hindi-speaking states), English, and the state language as a medium of instruction is not relevant for children of the Scheduled Tribes (Doel & Patil, 2020; Gautam, 2003). These dominant languages as the medium of instruction in the classroom

and in textbooks and instructional materials are not understood by tribal students, who have their own language (Gautam, 2003). Furthermore, teachers' unfamiliarity with the tribal language results in one-way communication from teacher to student. This results in (a) a gradual disappearance of the tribal students' mother tongue; (b) students' gradual assimilation into the dominant culture, raising questions around the identity of the tribal population; (c) low levels of student learning due to an increased focus on understanding the language rather than learning core skills; and (d) low attendance, high dropout, and high repetition rates among the Scheduled Tribes students, further perpetuating preexisting inequalities (Deol & Patil, 2020). A few states, such as Andhra Pradesh and Odhisa, have developed learning materials in indigenous materials. Nonetheless, a paradox has resulted where the concept of imparting education in the mother tongue is juxtaposed with rising parental demands to enroll children in English medium schools (Patil, 2020).

### Teacher Shortage and Contract Teachers

An acute shortage of teachers in rural schools in India, at all levels, is widespread in various states in India (Agarwal, 2019; Kulshrestha, 2021; Ragu Raman, 2021). To make matters worse, the shortage of well-qualified teachers is widespread and particularly alarming in rural government schools (Lavania, 2018; Sharma, 2012). The shortages of teachers are prominent in blocks—a district subdivision for the purposes of rural development consisting of a cluster of villages—away from the district headquarters, and positions are often hard to fill. Various causes for these shortages have been reported, including high rates of teacher turnover (Sharma, 2012); low teacher salaries (Chaudhury & Khatua, 2013; Sreekanthachari & Nagaraja, 2013);

unattractiveness of the profession (Sharma, 2012); having appointed teachers who do not show up (Jadhav, 2018); having teachers pulled into political and nonteaching duties (Ullas, 2020); and having powerful politicians and bureaucrats connections allow teachers a transfer of their choice, which is often away from rural schools.

As a high percentage of the rural Scheduled Castes and Tribes student population goes to government schools, this negatively impacts the quality of education they receive. Consequently, parents are reluctant to send their children regularly to schools (Agarwal, 2019). A World Bank study reported that government-employed secondary school teachers have been found to illegally appoint proxy teachers who have basic qualifications to teach in their place in rural schools (Jadhav, 2018). The Ministry of Human Resource and Development reported an overall vacancy level for government teachers of 18% at the elementary level (Grades 1-8) and 15% at the secondary level (Grades 9 and 10) (Jadhav, 2018). A dearth of mathematics, English, and science teachers in rural government schools has been reported in states such as Gujrat (Kaushik, 2019).

The teacher shortage has been addressed in several ways: by transferring teachers from one block to another within a district (Agarwal, 2019), consolidating multiple schools, and hiring contract teachers or appointing part-time or para-teachers (Chandra, 2015; Goyal & Pandey, 2013). The latter teachers are typically more common at the primary and upper primary level (Kumar & Bunga, 2019). Although contractual or para-teachers have qualifications comparable to those of regular teachers, there has been limited evidence on their effectiveness in improving student learning (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2013). Furthermore, with increasing protests by contractual teachers on low wages, lack of regular in-service teacher training, and the lack of leave and other

service benefits, vacancies in rural schools continue (Ramachandran, n.d.). As a result, the teacher shortage continues to be a serious issue in rural government schools in India.

**Segregation and Discrimination in Schools**

Many factors lead to segregation in Indian schools. One important factor relevant to this study is segregation with a socioeconomic basis, where schools for the rich differ in form, content, and outcomes from schools available to children of parents who cannot afford the fees charged by private providers of education (Juneja, 2016).

Physical distance from schools has been cited as another barrier for children in India. This is particularly relevant to students from the Scheduled Castes communities who are at the higher levels of middle and secondary school. Students from these communities often live on the outer edge of the village. Consequently, in addition to the physical distance, the 'social distance' to the school needs to be considered. The Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) mentions the reluctance of students from Scheduled Castes to go to schools located in another hamlet due to caste tensions (PROBE Team, 1999, in Jenkins & Barr, 2006). In agreement with Jenkins and Barr (2006), additional analyses on the location of the school and the caste composition of the habitations within a village are necessary to draw conclusions related to this issue.

In addition, within schools, segregation may relate to discrimination practiced by teachers (Nambissan, 2009; Neelakandan & Patil, 2012). Small-scale qualitative research studies have suggested that teaching practices in the classroom influence students from these communities to either remain in or drop out of primary school (Ramachandran, 2004). Studies have reported high teacher absenteeism in schools with a higher percentage of Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. Students from these

communities are expected to run errands in school, sit in the corner of the classroom or in the back rows, and are assigned menial tasks such as sweeping and cleaning the classrooms (Kabeer, 2006; Nambissan, 2009; Neelakandan & Patil, 2012). As a result, not only is teachers' background and caste important, but their empathy with these children also affects their behavior and the education experience offered in classrooms. Overall, segregation and discrimination in school need to be viewed as a violation of the RTE Act of 2009.

## Resources

The public expenditure (from both central and state government) on education in India was 3.5% of gross domestic product in 2020-21 (Table 2.10). A gradual increase in government expenditure on education has been observed since 2014-15. These funds are for administrative purposes, school infrastructure, teacher salaries and training, scholarships and incentives for students and disadvantaged communities including Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Khaitan, 2021), monitoring and inspection, and improvement in school facilities (Table 2.11).

**Table 2.10**
*Indian Government Expenditure on Education, Total (As Percentage of GDP)*

| *2009-10 | *2010-11 | *2011-12 | *2012-13 | *2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 RE | 2020-21 BE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3.27 | 3.37 | 3.79 | 3.86 | 3.84 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 3.0 | 3.5 |

*Note*: Budget Documents of Union and State Government, Reserve Bank of India in Government of India 2020-21; *World Bank, 2020. RE = revenue expenditure; BE = budget expenditure; GDP, gross domestic product.

**Table 2.11**
*Functional Areas of School Education Expenditure*

| Functional areas | Budget items considered |
|---|---|
| Administration | Direction and administration, rents and taxes, water charges, electricity bills, other miscellaneous charges etc. |
| School Infrastructure | Construction and renovation of buildings, maintenance and repair of schools and hostels, school and teacher grant under SSA to purchase bookshelves, blackboards, benches etc., construction of kitchens under MDM scheme etc. |
| Teacher Salaries | Salaries, Grants-in-Aid, travel and medical allowances. |
| Equity and Inclusion | Expenditure related to implementation of RTE, scholarships, and incentives to backward and disadvantaged communities. |
| Monitoring and Inspection | Established costs related to inspection, salary and allowance of inspectors, training costs to inspectors, coordinators etc. |
| Teacher Training | Teacher training, expenses to run teacher-training institutions, salaries, and allowances to trainers etc. |
| Incentives to Students | Uniforms, textbooks, mid-day meal in elementary schools, bicycles, laptops, and other incentives like merit scholarships. |

Note: Bordoloi et al., 2020

Nonetheless, as posited by the National Education Policy 2020 and envisaged by the 1968 policy, the amount spent on education is considerably lower than the required 6% of gross domestic product (Government of India, 2020). As a consequence of underspending on public education, over 52% of government schools remain poorly funded. This has resulted in poor learning outcomes among the poor, as additional spending is needed to achieve an emphasis on early learning, revamping of the curriculum to focus more on foundational numeracy and literacy, and having a new assessment system that measures skills and learning rather than memorization. Much of the funds were spent on enabling access to education in these communities. Newspapers have reported that of the total money allocated for scholarships for students from Scheduled Castes, less than 50% was spent on students from these communities. Additionally, less than 23% of the money was utilized by the government for free coaching of students from Scheduled Castes (Nangia, 2020).

In addition, research studies have posited that in rural students from low socioeconomic backgrounds enroll in government schools that function with limited

resources. These schools lack infrastructure such as classroom furniture, a sufficient number of teachers, libraries, electric connections, playgrounds, toilets (particularly for girls), teaching and learning materials, and uniforms (Chudgar et al., 2015; Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008; Nayar, 2020). An unintended consequence of the lack of resources is a significant increase in dropout rates among these students. Overall, resources are limited in terms of overall funding and facilities.

### Low Student Attendance Rates

Students in remote disadvantaged areas generally have lower school attendance rates (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2008). This is true for students going to rural schools in India. The 2019 Annual Status of Education Report highlights that at the primary and upper primary levels, approximately 72% of students were found present in school on the day of a surprise visit (see Table 2.12).

**Table 2.12**
*Trends Over Time: Student and Teacher Attendance on the Day of Visit*

| Grade level | | 2010 | 2014 | 2016 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary schools | % Enrolled children present (average) | 72.9 | 71.3 | 71.4 | 72.4 |
| (Grades 1-4/5) | % Teachers present (average) | 87.1 | 85.0 | 85.4 | 85.1 |
| Upper primary schools | % Enrolled children present (average) | 73.4 | 71.1 | 73.2 | 72.3 |
| (Grades 4/5-7/8) | % Teachers present (average) | 86.4 | 85.8 | 84.7 | 85.8 |

*Note.* Data from Annual Status of Education Report, 2019.

With respect to Scheduled Castes, the attendance rate for female and male students was found to be relatively similar at the primary (85.3% vs. 86.2%) and upper primary (70.5% vs. 69.2%) level (see Table 2.13). In the case of Scheduled Tribes, boys had a slightly better attendance rate than girls at the primary level (88.4% vs. 84.2%) and upper primary level (70.8% vs. 67.9%) (see Table 2.13). Nonetheless, a gradual decrease

in the attendance rate from the upper primary level onwards has been reported for both the Scheduled Castes and Tribes group (National Statistical Office, 2020; see Table 2.13). This difference is partly influenced by the level of education and socioeconomic status of the parents, and by schools that remain closed due to absent teachers (Nedungadi et al., 2017).

**Table 2.13**
*Net Attendance Rate by Different Level of Current Attendance for Each Social Group by Gender, Rural Sector, All India*

| Social group | Primary | Upper primary | Primary and upper primary | Secondary | Higher secondary | Secondary and higher secondary | Primary to higher secondary | Post higher secondary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Caste | 86.2 | 69.2 | 88.9 | 54.1 | 36.1 | 58.3 | 84.3 | 15.3 |
| Scheduled Tribe | 88.4 | 70.8 | 89.0 | 52.1 | 30.6 | 54.3 | 82.4 | 12.7 |
| Female | | | | | | | | |
| Scheduled Caste | 85.3 | 70.5 | 87.5 | 55.5 | 35.4 | 59.5 | 84.3 | 11.3 |
| Scheduled Tribe | 84.2 | 67.9 | 85.5 | 48.4 | 27.2 | 49.6 | 79.0 | 6.9 |

Note. Data from National Statistical Office, 2020.

## Concentrated Poverty in Schools

The strong correlation between caste, tribe, and socioeconomic status of parents has created conditions of concentrated poverty in certain schools, so that there is a high concentration of poverty in rural Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Shah, 2007). The Scheduled Tribes communities depend on agriculture and traditional economic activities for their livelihood (Mohan, 2020). Thus, increased importance is given to earning money to support the family over education.

Research studies have contended that concentrated poverty can disproportionately impact educational opportunity for these students, particularly tribal girls, leading to a

situation of educational inequity (McQuillan & Englert, 2001; Mohan, 2020; Tripathy, 2020). For instance, as students from these communities belong to the poorest wealth quintile of households, their inability to meet additional costs of transportation, school supplies, and school uniforms adds economic pressure. Consequently, they are more likely to never attend school, drop out, and be overage than children in wealthier quintiles (Malik, 2013; Mohan, 2020). This is where schools managed by the Tribal Welfare Department, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, and Social Welfare Department can aid students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These schools are expected to provide an environment conducive to the education of such students.

The geographical isolation of Scheduled Tribes populations also affects education (Mohan, 2020). These communities reside in far-off places such as isolated hilly and forest areas where educational facilities are not available (Mohan, 2020). Despite parents' willingness to send their children to school, the long distances deter these students from attending, leading to absenteeism and higher dropout rates.

**Low Teacher Education and Pay**

Expansion of government schools in rural regions of India has resulted in massive recruitment of teachers over the past two decades. Consequently, there have been changes in the demographic profile of teachers, with more women, younger age groups, lower caste groups, and more local recruits in the workforce (Kidwai et al., 2013). Additionally, the educational qualifications of regular and permanent teachers have been found to be similar, with the latter having significantly more experience with teacher training. According to 2015-16 data from the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) (National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration,

2017), a higher percentage of teachers have education qualification not beyond graduate school completion, which while an improvement from the 2011-12 data is nonetheless very low (see Table 2.14).

**Table 2.14**
*Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Educational Background*

| | National data, District Information System for Education | |
|---|---|---|
| | Total* (%) | Total[#] (%) |
| Below secondary | 2.19 | 1.72 |
| Secondary (grade 10) | 20.57 | 30.13 |
| Higher secondary (10+2) | 26.63 | 17.68 |
| Graduate (10+2+3) | 33.69 | 42.04 |
| Postgraduate + above | 16.42 | 7.34 |
| M.Phil. | - | 1.12 |
| Ph.D. | - | 0.39 |
| Postdoctoral | - | 0.05 |
| No response | - | - |
| Other | 0.31 | - |
| **Total 99.51** | **100.47** | |

*Note*. Data from Kidwai et al., 2013; National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017; *2011-12; [#]2015-16

Due to the low educational qualifications of teachers, in-service teacher training is crucial to meet the evolving needs of education context and prescribed curricula and pedagogy. However, less than 20% of primary teachers receive any in-service training (National University of Educational Planning and Administration, 2017). Additionally, gender variation among teachers attending in-service teacher training sessions is prominent (see Table 2.15). Overall, the competency of the teaching staff in rural India is below par—with only 16% of teachers in India in 2016-17 having received professional qualification in teaching.

**Table 2.15**

*Percentage of Teachers Who Received In-Service Training by Gender*

| | Primary | | Upper primary | | Upper primary with secondary and higher secondary | | All schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Total |
| All states | 19.77 | 20.69 | 10.61 | 10.80 | 5.30 | 10.18 | 15.41 | 16.97 | 15.97 |

*Note*. Data from DISE 2016-17 in National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, n.d.

With respect to teacher pay, most prior research studies have concentrated on primary teachers. These studies posit that teachers are unwilling to travel to remote schools for a meager salary (Chaudhury & Khatua, 2013; Sreekanthachari & Nagaraja, 2013). Therefore, there are vacant teacher spots in these schools (Chaudhury & Khatua, 2013). In addition, low teacher pay has resulted in lack of motivation among teachers to teach efficiently or attend to students' concerns (Mangayarkarasi, 2012; Sreekanthachari & Nagaraja, 2013). Consequently, students who survive the poor teaching quality and make it through secondary school and higher education have a low level of skills and knowledge, which entangles them in the web of low-paying and poor-quality jobs (Krishna, 2018).

# CHAPTER 3:

# METHODOLOGY

## Overview

The purpose of this research study was to explore the perspective of state education officials on the main factors that have contributed to the low school participation and transition of rural students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities in education at all levels.

Based on prior research studies, four social factors have been anticipated to impact the perception of the education officers: the social class of the student population (Borooah et al., 2014; Thakkilapati, 2016; Tierney et al., 2019), the poverty level of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups (Borooah et al., 2014; Bhattacharyya & Basu, 2018; Patil, 2020), patriarchy (with an emphasis on girls) (Gandhi, 2017; Lastrapes & Rajaram, 2016; Tripathy & Pradhan, 2003; Tripathy, 2020), and segregation and discrimination (Chaudhury, 2005; Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2019-20; Kumari, 2015).

Similarly, seven crucial educational factors have been anticipated to impact the work of the education officers: language as a medium of instruction (Doel & Patil, 2020; Gautam, 2003; Patil, 2020); teacher shortage and contract teachers (Kulshrestha, 2021; Raman, 2021; Sreekanthachari & Nagaraja, 2013); segregation and discrimination in schools (Jenkins & Barr, 2006; Juneja, 2016; Neelakandan & Patil, 2012); resources (Chudgar et al., 2015; Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008; Nangia, 2020; Nayar, 2020); low student attendance (National Statistical Office, 2020); concentrated poverty in schools (Malik, 2013; Mohan, 2020); and low teacher education and pay (Chaudhury & Khatua, 2013; Sreekanthachari & Nagaraja, 2013). Therefore, the study aimed to determine the

efficacy of education and social policies in the view of education officials and to identify the facilitators and barriers to accomplishing the state's goal.

The following four research questions addressed different aspects of this effort from the perspective of education officials, i.e., the state education officers:

1. How do government education officials describe the living conditions that constrain the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities in Green Estate?
2. In the view of government education officials, are government schools, teachers, and programs available to address the needs of these students?
3. What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence the educational progress of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
    a. Officials' perceptions of students, families, and communities
    b. Officials' perceptions of government schools
    c. Officials' perceptions of teachers
    d. Officials' perceptions of textbooks
    e. Officials' perceptions of the government's role
4. What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence girls' educational progress?
    a. Officials' perceptions of the safety, health, and hygiene needs of girls
    b. Officials' perceptions of discrimination and cultural factors that affect the education of girls
    c. Officials' perceptions of the role of residential schools

These questions served as a guide for the research, which uses a qualitative methodological approach and is based on interviews with education officials in one state in India. A large proportion of this state's population lives in rural areas, and many students, including those from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, are served by government schools managed by state education officials (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2016; NIEPA, 2016-17). As highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2, this study specifically focused on schools managed by the Department of Education, Social Welfare Department, and the Tribal Welfare Department, within government schools. The state demographics, percentage of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes background, poverty level of these groups, and gender gaps made "Green Estate" an ideal setting for this study. Additionally, conducting the study at the state level had the added advantage of providing consistency in the education policy context.

In this chapter, I describe the study's design, sample and population, instrumentation, data collection process, data analysis process, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. The methods for this study have been designed to support the study's purpose as described in Chapter 1, guided by the analytical framework described in Chapter 2.

## Research Design

This study utilized a basic qualitative research approach. The central objective of a basic qualitative research study is to understand "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Moreover, a basic qualitative research study allows researchers to "discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and

worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 11). This approach aligned with the purpose of this study, which was to *understand* the perception of state education officials and how they interpret their priorities and challenges when working with students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. In addition, as the study's three research questions sought to explore what state education officials perceived to be the main factors that contributed to the current status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (with special emphasis on girls/women) and on the educational and social policies that facilitated or constrained progress for students from these communities, a basic qualitative research study design was deemed appropriate.

## Study Population

### Research Site

The site for this study was purposefully selected (Saldaña, 2013; Seidman, 2013). This type of strategy is commonly used in qualitative research to explicitly select sites and participants who will provide information that is particularly relevant to the research questions and goals (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Maxwell, 2013). "Green Estate," a state in India, was chosen because it has a heterogenous population with sociocultural and ethnic diversity. The state's relatively higher proportion of individuals from Scheduled Castes and Tribes made it an ideal setting for this study. Education officials from this single state were interviewed because they all follow the same state-level policy.

#### *Demographics (Caste and Tribe)*

Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities comprise of approximately 20% of the state's population (Census of India: Green Estate, 2011c). The population of Schedule

Tribes (12.45%) is higher than that of Schedule Castes (7.15%) within the state (Census of India: Green Estate, 2011c; Table 3.1). In addition, with the high percentage of Scheduled Tribes populations in four blocks[7] within the state, these blocks have been categorized as "Scheduled Areas[8]" (Sixth Schedule, Article 244(2) in Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b). Likewise, the state has a higher percentage of its population residing in rural regions, at 85.90%, compared to 14.10% for urban regions (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2016; Table 3.2).

**Table 3.1**
*Descriptive Indicators of Demographics for State– Green Estate*

| Description | State (%) | National (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Schedule Castes | 7.15 | 16.6 |
| Schedule Tribes | 12.45 | 8.6 |

*Note*. Data from Census of India, 2011c

**Table 3.2**
*Descriptive Indicators of the State – Green Estate*

| Description | | Green Estate | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Area ($km^2$) | | 78438.08 | - |
| Total population | | 31,205,576 | - |
| Population density/$km^2$ | | 398/$km^2$ (1,400/sq mi) | - |
| Population | Female | 15,266,133 | 48.92 |
| | Male | 15,939,443 | 51.07 |
| Population | Urban | 4,398,542 | 14.10 |
| | Rural | 26,807,034 | 85.90 |
| Sex ratio (female/1000 males) | Total | 996 | - |
| | Rural | 958 | - |
| | Urban | 1,000 | - |

*Note*. Data from Directorate of Economics and Statistics: *Green Estate*, 2016; population based on 2011 Census.

[7] Blocks are district subdivisions for the purpose of rural development (Block [district subdivision], 2021).

[8] Scheduled Areas are administered by the Centre and the State government for safeguarding the social, cultural and economic interests of the Scheduled Tribes in such areas (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021b)

### *Poverty*

As poverty is considered a factor that influences educational outcomes, school participation, and school transition at all levels for students from these communities, the high poverty level and gender gap in Green Estate made it an ideal setting for this study. In Green Estate, 31.98% of the population is below the poverty line (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2016). After 2005, poverty levels rapidly declined for the Scheduled Castes group, but not for the Scheduled Tribes group (World Bank, 2017b; Table 3.3). The rate of poverty is higher in rural regions than in urban regions (World Bank, 2017a & 2017c; Table 3.4). In addition, there is considerable variation in the distribution of poverty in different parts of the state. With respect to girls/women, while the rural female labor force participation in Green Estate has declined since 2004-05, the percentage is at 17%.

**Table 3.3**
*Percentage of Population Below the Poverty Line*

| Social Groups | 2005 | 2012 | Pace of poverty reduction |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scheduled Tribe | 29 | 32 | 2% per year |
| Scheduled Caste | 44 | 29 | -6% per year |
| Other Backward Caste | 31 | 33 | 1% per year |
| General | 36 | 33 | -1% per year |

*Note*. Data from World Bank, 2017b.

**Table 3.4**
*Descriptive Indicators of Poverty, Inequality, and Labor Participation for Green Estate*

| Indicators | | 1994 | 2005 | 2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poverty rate (%) | All | 52 | 35 | 32 |
| | Rural | 55 | 36 | 34 |
| | Urban | 28 | 22 | 21 |
| Gini coefficient | All | 0.20 | 0.22 | 0.25 |
| Workers by sector (%) | Agriculture | 71 | 68 | 56 |
| | Industry | 6 | 7 | 13 |
| | Services | 23 | 24 | 31 |
| Labor force participation rate (%) | All | 56 | 60 | 51 |
| | Male | 84 | 87 | 82 |
| | Female | 24 | 31 | 17 |

*Note*. Data from World Bank, 2017a & 2017c.

### *Educational Status of Scheduled Castes and Tribes*

As analyzed in Chapter 2, the 2020 National Statistical Office report posits that students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities face numerous educational challenges at all grade levels. Of the 33 districts in Green Estate, five districts have been categorized as "Educationally Backward Districts"[9] (Pushkarna & Singh, 2017). The literacy rate is lower in rural regions than in urban regions and in females when compared to males (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2016). As shown in Table 3.5, the average rural literacy rate is 69.34%. Furthermore, the rural male literacy rate is 75.4%, which is higher than that of rural females at 63% (Census of India: *Green Estate*, 2011c).

**Table 3.5**
*Literacy Rate in Green Estate*

| Literacy rate | Group | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Both male and female | Overall | 72.19 |
| | Rural | 69.34 |
| | Urban | 88.47 |
| Female | Overall | 66.27 |
| | Rural | 63.0 |
| | Urban | 84.9 |
| Male | Overall | 77.85 |
| | Rural | 75.4 |
| | Urban | 91.8 |

*Note*. Data from Census of India: *Green Estate*, 2011c; Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2016.

Additionally, the 2017e World Bank state brief for Green Estate reported that for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, the percentage of students completing secondary school or higher was 24% and 20%, respectively. Therefore, as shown in Table 3.6, there is little variation in educational attainment between the two social groups across all levels of education.

[9] A district is designated an Educationally Backward District based on the gross enrollment ratio, which includes all enrolled in higher education proportionate to population in the 18 to 23 age group (Pushkarna & Singh, 2017).

**Table 3.6**
*Educational Attainment by Social Groups– Green Estate, 2012*

| Social Group | Illiterate | School level completed | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Primary School | Middle School | Secondary school | |
| Scheduled Caste | 18% | 37% | 25% | 20% | 100% |
| Scheduled Tribes | 16% | 33% | 27% | 24% | 100% |
| Other Backward Caste | 17% | 30% | 24% | 29% | 100% |
| General | 18% | 31% | 23% | 27% | 100% |

*Note*. Data from the World Bank, 2017e.

For the state's rural schools, the number of government schools is higher than the number of government-aided, private-unaided, and Madarsa unrecognized schools (Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021). Specifically, the schools managed by the Department of Education comprise a large percentage (70.12%) when compared to Tribal and Social Welfare Department–managed schools (Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021). Consequently, a higher percentage of students from these communities go to state-run schools (i.e., Department of Education, and Tribal and Social Welfare Department) when compared to private schools at the primary and upper primary school level (see Tables 3.7 and 3.8).

**Table 3.7**
*Enrollment by School Category and School Management—Rural*

| School Management | Year | Primary | Upper Primary | Secondary | Higher Secondary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Department of Education | 2018-19 | 57.70 | 25.29 | 13.44 | 3.57 |
| | 2019-20 | 57.12 | 25.85 | 13.50 | 3.54 |
| Local body | 2018-19 | 96.16 | 1.90 | 1.47 | 0.47 |
| | 2019-20 | 95.87 | 2.10 | 1.52 | 0.52 |
| Government-aided private schools | 2018-19 | 0.18 | 67.48 | 21.54 | 10.80 |
| | 2019-20 | 0.23 | 67.43 | 21.52 | 10.82 |
| Private unaided (recognized) | 2018-19 | 59.24 | 23.13 | 12.40 | 5.23 |
| | 2019-20 | 58.07 | 24.23 | 12.53 | 5.17 |
| Unrecognized | 2018-19 | 73.31 | 8.26 | 13.66 | 4.77 |
| | 2019-20 | 73.57 | 8.12 | 13.58 | 4.72 |
| Kendriya Vidyalaya / Central School | 2018-19 | 40.42 | 29.34 | 18.98 | 11.26 |
| | 2019-20 | 42.61 | 27.43 | 18.05 | 11.91 |
| Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya | 2018-19 | 0.00 | 45.39 | 32.97 | 21.64 |
| | 2019-20 | 0.00 | 45.44 | 32.27 | 22.29 |
| Railway School | 2018-19 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| | 2019-20 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Madarsa unrecognized | 2018-19 | 54.91 | 39.14 | 5.51 | 0.44 |
| | 2019-20 | 53.92 | 39.67 | 5.79 | 0.62 |
| Other government-managed schools | 2018-19 | 19.04 | 0.00 | 40.92 | 40.04 |
| | 2019-20 | 17.56 | 0.00 | 40.71 | 41.73 |
| Sainik School | 2018-19 | 0.00 | 48.56 | 37.07 | 14.37 |
| | 2019-20 | 36.42 | 34.39 | 22.06 | 7.14 |
| Tribal Welfare Department | 2018-19 | - | - | - | - |
| | 2019-20 | 0.00 | 57.14 | 23.19 | 19.66 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021.

**Table 3.8**
*Enrollment of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Students in Rural Schools by Management—Green Estate*

| Enrollment | Primary Classes | | Upper Primary Classes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Government | Private | Government | Private |
| Schedule Caste (%) | 83.67 | 9.19 | 77.83 | 6.10 |
| Schedule Tribe (%) | 76.15 | 14.04 | 70.23 | 11.07 |

*Note*. Data from NIEPA, 2016-17.

Lastly, in rural government schools, more girls than boys are enrolled at all levels of education. Nevertheless, there is a gradual decrease in enrollment of girls from the primary level to the higher secondary level (Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021; Table 3.9). Therefore, as

shown in Chapters 1 and 2, despite having constitutional safeguards and affirmative action that require state educational officials to ensure that students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes community receive quality education, enrollment and transition rates for women/girls remain low.

**Table 3.9**
*Enrollment by School Category, Gender, and School Management—Rural*

| | | School Category | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Primary(1-5) | | Upper primary (6-8) | | Secondary (9-10) | | Higher Secondary (11-12) | |
| **School Management** | **Year** | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys |
| Department of Education | 2018-19 | 50.99 | 49.01 | 52.97 | 47.03 | 54.60 | 45.40 | 49.12 | 50.88 |
| | 2019-20 | 50.84 | 49.16 | 53.19 | 46.81 | 55.20 | 44.80 | 50.64 | 49.36 |
| Local body | 2018-19 | 50.46 | 49.54 | 47.11 | 52.89 | 51.52 | 48.48 | 58.70 | 41.30 |
| | 2019-20 | 50.66 | 49.34 | 48.43 | 51.57 | 46.94 | 53.06 | 58.42 | 41.58 |
| Government-aided private schools | 2018-19 | 48.10 | 51.90 | 53.42 | 46.58 | 55.40 | 44.60 | 49.14 | 50.86 |
| | 2019-20 | 49.80 | 50.20 | 53.01 | 46.99 | 55.57 | 44.43 | 49.90 | 50.10 |
| Private unaided (recognized) | 2018-19 | 43.63 | 56.37 | 44.17 | 55.83 | 45.40 | 54.60 | 49.26 | 50.74 |
| | 2019-20 | 44.16 | 55.84 | 44.54 | 55.46 | 46.11 | 53.89 | 50.18 | 49.82 |
| Unrecognized | 2018-19 | 49.25 | 50.75 | 52.65 | 47.35 | 51.92 | 48.08 | 50.09 | 49.91 |
| | 2019-20 | 49.30 | 50.70 | 53.46 | 46.54 | 53.03 | 46.97 | 50.34 | 49.66 |
| Kendriya Vidyalaya / Central School | 2018-19 | 47.31 | 52.69 | 45.70 | 54.30 | 43.56 | 56.44 | 45.61 | 54.39 |
| | 2019-20 | 47.14 | 52.86 | 47.26 | 52.74 | 44.17 | 55.83 | 45.99 | 54.01 |
| Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya | 2018-19 | - | - | 42.94 | 57.06 | 41.08 | 58.92 | 42.60 | 57.40 |
| | 2019-20 | - | - | 43.85 | 56.15 | 42.52 | 57.48 | 41.73 | 58.27 |
| Railway School | 2018-19 | 50.00 | 50.00 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| | 2019-20 | 51.47 | 48.53 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Madarsa unrecognized | 2018-19 | 28.40 | 71.60 | 47.69 | 52.31 | 61.72 | 38.28 | 47.37 | 52.63 |
| | 2019-20 | 28.82 | 71.18 | 44.25 | 55.75 | 54.49 | 45.51 | 28.57 | 71.43 |
| Other govt.-managed schools | 2018-19 | 48.28 | 51.72 | - | - | 51.34 | 48.66 | 51.37 | 48.63 |
| | 2019-20 | 31.88 | 68.12 | - | - | 54.38 | 45.63 | 45.12 | 54.88 |
| Sainik School | 2018-19 | - | - | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 | 0.00 | 100.00 |
| | 2019-20 | 44.99 | 55.01 | 24.53 | 75.47 | 9.56 | 90.44 | 5.68 | 94.32 |
| Welfare Department | 2019-20 | 0 | 0 | 37.65 | 62.35 | 44.20 | 55.80 | 44.44 | 55.56 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021.

## Study Sample

A purposeful sampling technique was used to select participants for this study (Seidman, 2013). Creswell (2013) defined purposeful maximum sampling as "select[ing] cases that show different perspectives on the problem, process, or event" (p. 100). This approach allowed some quality assurance, as it achieved maximum variation and represented a range of participants and sites (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2006, 2013). In addition, snowball sampling was used in this study (Seidman, 2013), wherein participants suggest other individuals who met the study criteria. This was done with the purpose of accumulating new information-rich participants.

Individuals that were included in this study were key educational administrators at the state level. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act of 2009 requires every state to have education officials who have prior experience working in the state; these members are responsible for overseeing the utilization of educational grants and improving school quality. In addition, individuals that were included in this study had roles and responsibilities that included administration of rural government schools under the Department of Education, the Tribal Welfare Department, and the Social Welfare Department in the different districts within Green Estate and worked with students belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. As this study attempted to better understand the factors that facilitated or hindered progress for students, particularly girls, from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities across all levels of education (i.e., Grades 1-12), state education officials at different school levels were selected for interview. This helped ensure that the officers interviewed, and subsequently the perspectives included in the study, were broadly representative of the

students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities living in Green Estate and being served by the state.

In addition, information on participants' demographics (for example, age, gender, years of experience of working in the organization) and their characteristics (i.e., their professional role and responsibility in the organization) was collected. However, background information on their social group (i.e., belonging to either the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, minority language groups, or other marginalized groups) was not collected. This was purposefully done to ensure that participants were comfortable—or experienced the least amount of discomfort—when answering questions specifically related to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes or other marginalized groups that might be sensitive to probe. It was anticipated that by minimizing the discomfort and prioritizing rapport, a more accurate interview and findings would result (Bell et al., 2016).

Participants are the unit of analysis in this study. The participants who agreed or disagreed to participate in the study were from the organizations listed below[10]. Participants that were relevant to the study' s purpose were interviewed.

Participants were selected from five departments within the state.

1. **State Council of Educational Research and Training, Green Estate**: Education officials responsible for teacher preparation, professional development for teachers, student evaluation, inclusive education (through curriculum, textbooks, and material development), and research, survey, and assessment of rural government schools. As highlighted in Chapter 2, the 2009 RTE Act makes it

[10] The study was originally designed to purposefully select state education officials from nine departments. However, this number was reduced to five as four of the department did not work with schools, teachers, and students directly. This is the revised description which accurately presents what happened during the data collection phase.

mandatory for teacher training institutes to facilitate learning within the classroom based on the abilities and needs of the students. This effort is particularly relevant for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups. Thus, it was crucial that officials who were major decision makers on the above matters, at the elementary and secondary education levels, are interviewed.

2. **Samagra Shiksha Green Estate**: State education officials in charge of the appointment and deputation of teachers to different schools within the state, as well as in-service teacher training, the mid-day meal scheme, and scholarship and other incentive programs at the elementary (Grades 1-8) and higher secondary (Grades 9-12) school level. As described in Chapter 2, prior research studies posit that the teacher shortage and appointment of contract teachers in rural government schools constrain the educational progress of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. Since officials from this department were major decision makers for elementary and secondary schools and teacher training–related matters, it was crucial that I recruit them for this study.

    Furthermore, education officials in charge of access, improving the gross enrollment ratio, and ensuring an affordable quality higher education experience for students, with a special emphasis on students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population, particularly girls/women, and filling critical infrastructural gaps, based on the 2009 RTE Act. As discussed in Chapter 2, poverty and resources are important factors that influence the educational experience of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. Therefore, interviewing officials from Samagra Shiksha shed light on ways in which they

addressed the needs of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, as well as areas for future intervention.

3. **Board of Secondary Education Green Estate**: Major decision makers on matters such as improving literacy, including disadvantaged group students between 14 and 18 years old, ensuring universal enrollment and retention, ensuring access for Scheduled Castes and Tribes students, and providing infrastructure support for secondary schools. As this study explored facilitators and constraints for students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, interviewing officials from the Board of Secondary Education shed light on educational and social factors that facilitate or thwart school participation and transition for these students, particularly girls from these communities.
4. **Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes Green Estate**: Officials responsible for major education-related duties in the state government for Scheduled Tribes student populations only. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, within rural government schools this study was interested in schools managed by the Tribal Welfare Department. As officials from this department are responsible for formulating and implementing central and state government-funded policies and programs for the welfare and development of Scheduled Tribes students, for implementing provisions under the state Scheduled Tribes Reservation Act of 1978, and for implementing tribal subplan components of the State Annual Plan, it was essential that they be interviewed for this study.
5. **Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Castes Green Estate:** Officials responsible for major education-related duties in the state government for

Scheduled Castes student population only. As indicated in Chapter 1 and 2, within rural government schools this study was interested in schools managed by the Social Welfare Department. As officials from this department are responsible for formulating and implementing central and state government-funded policies and programs for the welfare and development of Scheduled Castes students, for implementing provisions under the state Scheduled Castes Reservation Act of 1978, and for implementing Scheduled Caste subplan components of the State Annual Plan, it was essential that they be interviewed for this study.

Table 3.10 outlines the different departments from which education officials were recruited. To ensure sufficiency in the range of participants and information collected, education officials were recruited from each of the departments (Seidman, 2013). This allowed me to have representation from all the departments. I was interested in ensuring that data was collected from a representative sample of state officials responsible for rural government school regions, poverty levels, disadvantaged groups (i.e., the Scheduled Castes and Tribes), and geographic locations. In total, 25 participants were asked to participate in the study[11]. Table 3.10 lists the different departments and the total number of state education officials from each department who participated in interview for this study.

[11] To protect the anonymity of Green Estate, the exact number of officials is not provided. In total, there were between 25-30 officials in total, and 25 were invited to participate in this study. Of the 25invited, their departments included the State Council of Educational Research and Training, Samagra Shiksha, the State Council of Educational Research and Training, the Board of Secondary Education, the Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes, and the Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Caste. It is important to again note that only 17 of the 25 invited were interviewed.

**Table 3.10**
*Interviewees by Administrative Department*

| Group number | Departments within "Green Estate" | Number of state education officials selected for interview |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | State Council of Educational Research and Training, Green Estate | 5 |
| 2 | Samagra Shiksha Green Estate | 8 |
| 3 | Board of Secondary Education Green Estate | 2 |
| 4 | Department of Welfare of Plain Tribes & Backward Classes Green Estate | 1 |
| 5 | Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Caste Green Estate | 1 |
| | **Total** | **17** |

Selection of specific individuals from each department to participate in the study was based on a combination of personal characteristics and randomization. In terms of personal characteristics, I prioritized those with prior experience working in the state to ensure that they are aware of the state's policies and any changes—improvements or deterioration—that may have taken place with respect to Scheduled Castes and Tribes students. Once this list of experienced officials, for each department was developed, the individuals to be invited to participate were randomly selected using an Excel-generated number. When the randomly selected participant declined to participate in an interview, then the next participant was contacted. Information was gathered on the group of participants by department and as a whole, including their years of experience, years worked within the state, and roles and responsibilities (Seidman, 2006).

First, a copy of the recruitment letter, interview protocol, and informed consent form was submitted in-person to the director of respective departments for consent (Creswell, 2013). After receiving permission from individual departments, selected education officials were initially invited to interview in this study by phone call. State education officials contact information was obtained either from the respective department's director's assistant or from education officials themselves. If an individual

could not be reached, a follow-up phone call was made. When this was not fruitful, an in-person request was made. During such meetings, the officials received a recruitment letter describing the study, as shown in Appendix A. Participant's background information was collected by phone and in-person.

## Data Collection

To begin to understand the perceptions of state education officials on the factors that contribute to the current status of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (with special emphasis on girls/women), data was collected through semi-structured interviews. While conducting observations would have provided valuable information relevant to implementation practices, processes, and interactions, the intent of this study was to understand the perceptions of education officials, making semi-structured interviews the most appropriate method of data collection to address the study's three research questions. Moreover, semi-structured interviews include a mix of structured and unstructured questions, thus allowing flexibility in the way the interview questions are worded (Merriam, 2009).

To increase the quality of data, I kept detailed notes during and after the interviews to capture nonverbal communication (Seidman, 2006). For instance, notes were made about any laughter (i.e., either funny, nervous, or ironic) or stress, hesitation or excitement when answering a particular question, and disruptions or interruptions, as well as for capturing the surroundings. These notes provided the full context of the interview and detailed information on the process.

**Data Collection Protocol**

Applying Creswell's (1998) approach for semi-structured interviews, an interview protocol had been developed based on the research questions and sub-questions and information unique to the position of the individual participants (see Appendix B). Most questions were open ended. Since the study aimed to explore the perception of state education officials on social factors and educational factors that facilitated or constrained education for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, the protocol had five main areas of focus:

a. Perception of the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students
b. Perception about priorities
c. Perception about challenges and problems
d. Perception about progress
e. Perception about support, policies, and programs

To avoid influencing participants' responses, two main measures were taken. First, during the interview process, I applied the "listen more, talk less" approach (Seidman, 2006, p. 78). I offered affirmative responses such as "uh huh" or "OK" or "yes" to acknowledge that I was listening to the participant and being attentive during the process (Seidman, 2006, p. 89). I limited sharing of my own experiences, to avoid distracting participants and keeping them from reconstructing their own experiences. Second, education officials were not asked to share their perceptions directly on the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student groups. On the contrary, in each set of interview questions, I used broad prompts. For example, the respondents were asked to share their experience of working with student groups in their schools generally. As they began to

elaborate on the issues, I allowed them to do so. They were then asked probing questions to elicit more detailed response about the student groups relevant to this study, i.e., the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, with emphasis on girls. I was flexible in the order the questions were asked.

In addition, probing questions or comments were used based on cue words from the participants or areas informed by the literature for the purpose of clarification, explanation or obtaining further information (Merriam, 1998). This exploration provided clarity on the information provided by the participant and removed generalities (Seidman, 2006). Types of probes used included the following:

- Could you please describe your _____?
- In your opinion …
- How would you determine _____?
- Could you please elaborate on what you meant when you said _____?
- Could you provide an example?
- Why do you feel _____are the state's main priorities?
- Why do you think this is so?

**Interview Logistics**

The recruitment and interviews were conducted from December 14, 2021, to February 1, 2022. Priority was given to conducting interviews by phone. For phone interviews, the date and time specified by the participants determined when the interviews were conducted. Potential interviewees were given a window of days to select from, and the interviewer was able to meet all meeting requests. Participants were given 20 working days (only weekdays) to choose from for participating in the interview. These

interviews were recorded using the Voice Memos application on my laptop. The audio file was then uploaded onto the NVivo Transcription application for analysis. For in-person interviews, the location was selected by the participants. Participants selected their office in all cases. For in-person interviews, familiarity with the setting was prioritized, as it would make the participants feel more comfortable.

The duration of the interviews generally ranged from 45 to 75 minutes. All interviews except one were recorded, as this allowed me to transcribe the interviews later (Seidman, 2006). For the interview that was not recorded—as the participant did not give consent for the interview to be recorded—detailed notes were taken. These notes were then further organized based on primary and probing questions and coded in a similar manner. Transcription was carried out using the qualitative software NVivo Transcription.

It is important to highlight that three out of 17 participants spoke in English and Hindi. Thus, such transcripts were translated into English. After the completion of this process, I reviewed the transcripts again. This allowed me to ask any follow-up questions for clarity and accuracy of information, identify significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the research questions (Anderson & Spencer, 2002), correct any statements or phrases missed when taking notes during the interview, and make notes of nonverbal signals such as long or slight pauses and interruptions, which were recorded on the Voice Memos application (Seidman, 2006). Analysis revealed that these nonverbal responses were neutral and did not, in fact, change or add to the meaning of the verbal transcript. While checking nonverbal cues was an important step, the cues only supported what was shared verbally. As a result, they were not further analyzed.

For interviews conducted via phone, I listened to the audio and ran the transcript side-by-side to check for the quality of the transcription. In addition, I added notes to the transcripts in the form of dots or notes to capture any nonverbal communicative factors in the audio (for example, long or slight pause) (Seidman, 2006). Lastly, to check the quality and increase the accuracy of the translation and transcription process, I shared the transcripts with the participants so that they could add, clarify, or verify that the translated sections and the transcription in general accurately represented their ideas.

## Data Analysis

The analysis of the data involved the following steps: transcribing the interviews (Seidman, 2006, 2013), deidentifying the data to ensure the anonymity of the state and participants (Seidman, 2006), "data reduction" (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and coding for various themes and subthemes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

The interviews were transcribed as quickly as possible on NVivo for Mac, version 12.0. To ensure the accuracy and timeliness of interview notes, questions or issues of particular interest or importance raised during the interview and memos attached to the corresponding transcript were uploaded to NVivo and were included as part of data analysis. Once the transcription process was complete, the interview recordings were deleted.

Next, the data was deidentified to ensure anonymity of the state and participants. For this process, an Excel sheet carrying the original names of the state, education officials, the department they worked in, and their pseudonyms was maintained. All references to other participants or officials was replaced with corresponding pseudonyms. As an additional measure, all references to "he" or "she" was replaced with "she" in the

transcripts. After the deidentification process, the original transcripts as well as the Excel sheet was deleted. The cleaned transcripts were coded using NVivo software.

The third step in the data analysis process was data reduction, during which data from the cleaned interview transcripts and interview notes were selected, simplified, abstracted, and transformed so that valid conclusions could be drawn and verified (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This process included further episodes of coding, developing themes, and writing summaries.

The coding process employed first- and second-cycle coding methods (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 58, 207), as discussed below.

### Attribute Coding

The first type of coding that was used was "attribute coding" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 69). Descriptive information such as characteristics of the setting (e.g., state), participant characteristics or demographics (e.g., pseudonym, age, gender, years of experience, professional role), time frame (e.g., date, time, time zone), data format (e.g., Interview 2 of 20), and other variables relevant to the study that provide essential participant information and setting-specific information for analysis and interpretation were categorized under "attribute coding" (Saldaña, 2013).

### Descriptive Coding

The second step of coding that was applied was descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding is a straightforward method that involves summarizing a "passage of qualitative data" in "a word or short phrase" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Doing so facilitates categorizing the data's contents in a tabular, summary, or index format.

Descriptive coding is “essential groundwork for … coding and further analysis and interpretation” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 55, as cited in Saldaña, 2013, p. 89).

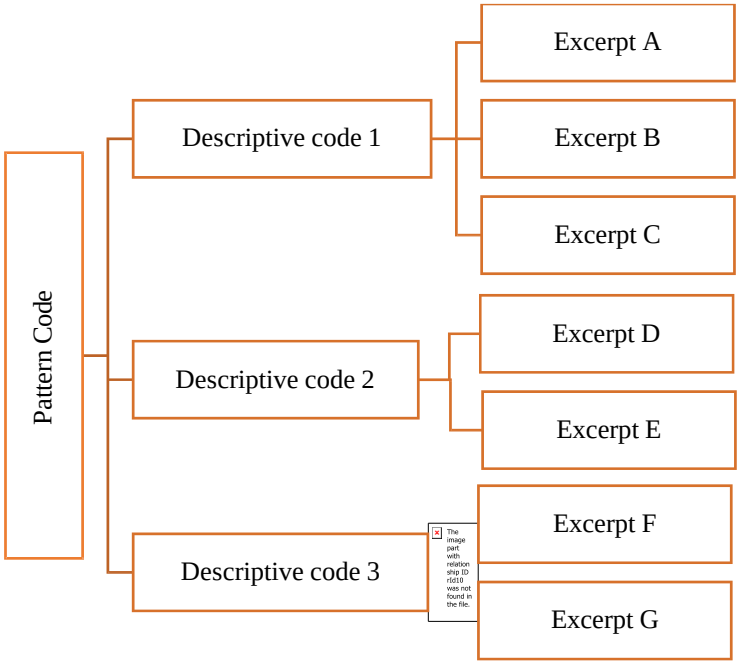
During this process, all transcripts were read several times while applying the whole-part-whole approach to obtain an overall feeling of the entire text. This involved back-and-forth movement within and between the transcripts to identify significant statements/phrases (sorting and shifting process). These identified ‘meaningful units’ or significant statements/phrases from the transcripts were extracted and descriptive codes were assigned to them (Seidman, 2006; Saldaña, 2013). From each transcript, significant phrases or sentences that pertain directly to the themes in the interview protocol were extracted.

**Pattern Coding**

The final stage of coding, which fell under the “second cycle” coding methods, consisted of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). Pattern coding involves grouping similar coded data together into a more “meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis … sets, themes or constructs” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 69; Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). This process allowed analysis of any commonalities and creating a pattern. Also, it resulted in an additional level of specificity beyond the descriptive codes.

Figure 3.1 provides an example of how descriptive codes were grouped together to form a pattern code. Pattern codes are “explanatory or inferential codes” that help identify emergent themes (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). Thus, pattern codes were major themes that were further analyzed and form the findings of this study.

**Figure 3.1**
*Assembly of Descriptive Codes to Determine Their Pattern Code*




A set of descriptive codes, based on constructs from the research questions and interview protocol, had been developed prior to data collection. Table 3.11 includes a set of first level a priori descriptive codes. These codes were refined based on the themes that emerged after examining the data (Wells, 2010). Pattern codes were developed once data collection and analysis had begun. The coding example in Table 3.12 includes an excerpt from state education officials interviews and demonstrates how descriptive and pattern codes were applied.

**Table 3.11**
*First Level a Priori Descriptive Codes*

| Research questions | Interview protocol questions | Descriptive codes |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What do educational officials in Green Estate see as the needs of each of these groups: students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities; girls specifically from these communities; other high-poverty groups; girls from high-poverty groups? | 1. Which student groups do your schools serve?<br>• [*If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned*] In what ways are the needs of these students different from the [*student group*s *X, Y…*] present in your school?<br>• Do girls from these *[Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes]* student groups have certain needs that are different from [*student group*s *X, Y…*]? | • Perception of the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students groups<br>• Perception of the needs of girls from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes groups |
| 1e. How does the status of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes compare to other high-poverty rural groups in their jurisdictions? *[caste and tribe; poverty]* | 6. Have these student groups gained as India's economy has made gains?<br>• *[If gains have occurred]* What do you consider the most important reasons for these gains?<br>• [*If not*] What do you consider the most important reasons for the lack of gains? | • Perception about progress of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students |
| 2. In the view of education officials in Green Estate, which educational and social policies have facilitated, or constrained, progress of school participation and transition broadly for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in their jurisdictions, and specifically for girls from these communities? *[caste and tribe; gender; educational factors (e.g., segregation and discrimination)]* | 5. What progress has been made in recent years?<br>• *[If progress has been made]* What do you consider to be the most important reasons for the progress?<br>• [*If not*] What do you consider to be the most important reasons for not making progress?<br>2. What do you see as the main priorities for the student groups in the schools you serve?<br>• *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* How do you understand the priorities varying for these student groups?<br>3. Could you please describe the main challenges that you face when serving [*student group*s *X, Y…*]?<br>• *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* What do you see as the main challenges in serving Scheduled Castes and Tribes students?<br>• How do you understand the challenges that other education leaders and teachers face in serving these students?<br>4. In your opinion, what are the main problems that these student groups [*X, Y…*] face?<br>• Do girls face different/additional problems?<br>• *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* Do students of Scheduled Castes and Tribes face | • Perception about progress made by students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, if any<br>• Perception about priorities of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students<br>• Perception about challenges and problems<br>• Perception about challenges<br>• Perception about challenges affecting educational progress for girls generally, and specifically for those from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups.<br>• Perception about problems of the Scheduled Castes |

| Research questions | Interview protocol questions | Descriptive codes |
|---|---|---|
| | different/additional problems?<br>• How is the experience of girls from these communities different from [*student group*s *X, Y…*]? | and Scheduled Tribes students groups |
| 3. In the view of education officials, what educational and social policies could influence the school participation and transition of students of each of these groups: students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, girls specifically from these communities, other high-poverty groups, and girls from high-poverty groups? | 7. *[For the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups]* Do you feel you have the resources needed to meet these students' needs (e.g., number of staff/ training of staff, stability of staff [retention/ absenteeism rates], physical facilities, supplies, technology)? *[resources; educational factors (e.g., teacher shortage; contract teachers; teacher absenteeism)]* | • Perception about progress |
| | 8. Could you please describe the programs and/or policies in Green Estate that have been most helpful in addressing the problems for students generally?<br>• How have these been helpful in addressing the problems for girls?<br>• *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* How have these been helpful in addressing the problems for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?<br>• How have these been helpful in addressing the problems of girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes? *[gender; social factors]* | • Perception about policies and/or programs specifically for students in the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities<br>• Perception about policies and/or programs for girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities |
| | 9. Would you recommend any programs and policies for the future? Which among these would you not support?<br>• *[For girls]* Are there any programs and policies you would recommend for girls in the future?<br>• *[For Scheduled Castes and Tribes]* Which programs and policies would you recommend for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the future?<br>• How about for girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes? *[caste and tribe; gender]* | • Opinion about policies and/or programs in general that have not been helpful<br>• Opinion about policies and/or programs specifically for students in the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities |
| | 10. Could you please describe the programs and/or policies in Green Estate that have not helped or have been counterproductive? Please include the following:<br>• For students generally<br>• For girls<br>• For Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students<br>• For girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and/or Tribes | • Opinion about policies and/or programs for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities that have not been helpful |

**Table 3.12**
*Coding Example*

| Excerpt from education official interview transcript | Codes | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Descriptive** | **Pattern** |
| Actually, as per the research findings, students [from a rural low-income background] are reluctant to come to school due to their family-related factors. Like, they have low income; therefore, some of them have to earn for their family. Secondly, there is seasonal absenteeism during agricultural harvesting time. | Migratory lifestyle | Officials perception of living conditions of low-income rural |
| So far as hunger is concerned, ... most of the [rural low-income] students either come to school either unfed or half-fed. I'm talking about government schools. So, the students come [either] half-fed or unfed or properly fed.... While nutrition is not so important for adult people, it's important for children [as] they are in the growing stage. And every day they are going to the schools.... But India, you can imagine, most of the people of India are from lower middle class onwards. Middle class—lower-middle class, but they cannot afford food every day. | Nutritional needs | |
| Apart from safety and security, [the] SEDGs they have a lot of issues. They are actually from when you say about SC [Scheduled Castes] or ST [Scheduled Tribes] children, their culture, and their way of living is completely different. And when they come to school, sometimes they're not, they cannot cope up or they cannot identify with what they have studied, what they are facing in their day-to-day life and what they are studying in the school. They sometimes find it a mismatch in these things. So, we need to, that is what NCF [National Curriculum Framework] is also focusing, to, you know, give them the kind of a similar platform where they can identify their cultural, this thing also and where the curriculum is taking them to. Something's very different. Sometimes th[ey] find, "Oh, we are doing this kind of facing problem in our day-to-day life. And when we're coming to school, totally different world we are seeing." How will they, they are children so they will not be able to. Even if the parents also, what are you studying, like this is irrelevant for us. | Unique culture | Officials' perception of Scheduled Castes and Tribes Families |

During the different stages of data analysis, the focus was on examining any similarities, differences, repetition, and relationships reported in the interviews by different interviewees (e.g., education officials in charge of elementary education and education officials in charge of secondary education) (Saldaña, 2013). Coding was conducted to not only explore specific content regarding student needs, factors that facilitate or constrain progress, and policies and programs for the Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes groups, but also consider the relative frequency with which certain issues were raised and the intensity with which views were expressed.

## Trustworthiness

Methodological rigor was obtained through the application of verification (Meadows & Morse, 2001), validation (Meadows & Morse, 2001), validity (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013), and reliability (Saldaña, 2013). These aspects were considered when interpreting the study's findings.

### Bias (Internal Validity)

During the recruitment and data collection phase of this study, the recruitment and data collection materials only referred to social and educational issues as factors that influenced the education experience of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student population, with emphasis on girls from these communities. Nevertheless, it is possible that those who chose to participate in the study "may have been motivated to do so in part because they have relatively strong opinions about the type of issues addressed in this study" (Wells, 2010, p. 66). Thus, bias due to participants motivation may in turn have affected how they responded to the interview questions.

### Transferability (External Validity)

For a research study's findings to satisfy external validity, it is crucial to ask if what will be learned from the findings can be generalized to the larger population (Seidman, 2006). In agreement with Seidman (2006), interview participants cannot be randomly selected and furthermore must consent to be interviewed; thus, self-selection is always an element in an interview study. As this study involved purposive sampling of

state education officials working with rural government schools and did not include the perspective of principals, teachers, parents, or students regarding the services in place for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student population, this study reflects a top-down perspective and cannot be generalized across other states or school districts. The findings of this study reflects what has occurred in rural government schools and the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes students within the state. Nonetheless, in agreement with Meadows and Morse (2001), an adequate sample size and identification of negative cases were ascertained.

### Unobserved Behavior

There is the potential for unobserved behavior, as the data collected as part of the study involved gathering perceptions of education officials on the factors that facilitate or thwart the upward education mobility of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. In using interviews as the primary method of data collection, this study relied on the participants' capacity to describe their own responses to the education factors and social policy in question, with its potential for subjectivity. Thus, there may be other important factors that education officials overlooked in their responses or other types of unobserved behavior that were not accounted for.

### Confounding Factors

Other confounding factors apart from poverty level may have influenced the study's findings. For example, the location of the districts, education officials social background, and gender, may have played a role in participants' responses.

### Ensuring Credibility in Method and Findings

Most importantly, member checking, also known as participant validation, was applied to explore the credibility of results. The transcripts were shared with the participants, so that they could add, clarify, and/or verify if the transcription had been accurately done. As this study was primarily aimed at understanding the perceptions of education officials, it was especially important that their verbal responses accurately reflected their points of view not only at that moment, but upon reflection.

## Ethical Considerations and Human Participants

The study's methodology involved minimal risk to participants. First, all participants were provided with sufficient information about the study to decide whether they wish to participate in it. They were asked to sign an informed consent form that explained the study's purpose (see Appendix C). This indicated the participants' willingness to participate in the study. The role of the consent form was vital. Should participants experience some degree of emotional distress or discomfort, it could leave them vulnerable to loss of reputation (Seidman, 2006). Thus, this form served as the first step in minimizing the risks participants faced when they agreed to be interviewed (Seidman, 2006). After being informed about the study, individual's who chose not to participate were not interviewed. Lastly, contact information of the researcher was shared in the consent form, should participants have questions or concerns about the research before, during, or after the interview is complete (Seidman, 2006).

In addition, the names of the state, state departments, and individual participants was not reported in an effort to ensure anonymity. Scheduled Castes and Tribes is a highly sensitive topic that affects a wide range of individuals and organizations.

Therefore, to ensure anonymity, the name of the education officials and the state was replaced with pseudonyms to avoid the possibility of being matched with the context of the study. The identity of the participants or any other related information was not revealed in any way. Any potential information that could help identify the state (e.g., the name of a different education department carrying the name of the state, the description of the state) in a quotation or transcript was omitted. Direct quotations, if any, used in the final report was not attributed to any particular person.

In addition, verbal consent from participants was obtained prior to recording the interview sessions. Steps was taken to protect the participants' identity and responses. First, a copy of the transcript was shared with the participants, if requested. This allowed me to check for any inaccurate information or misinterpretations and ensure the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Seidman, 2006). Second, the interview recording was deleted after the transcription process was complete. Third, the transcripts were stored on the researcher's laptop and in her university's Box drive account, both of which were password protected. Fourth, the education officials were not identified. Their original names in the transcripts were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity.

## Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of this study's research design, site, method used for data collection, sample (i.e., the state education officials), steps involved in the analysis of the data, and methodological rigor. The discussion of rigor included ensuring confidence that transcripts reflected the opinions of interviewees, ethical considerations, and anonymity of human participants. Chapter 4 reports key findings on

state education officials' perception of the factors that influence the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, as well as girls. Where information is absent or incomplete (mainly in the third research question), this is also an important potential finding. Absence of a specific response trend suggests that education officials may not be prepared or willing to share their thoughts, may not have developed opinions on questions, or may not be prepared to articulate responses to questions related to one or more marginalized groups.

In addition, it is important to restate that the primary research conducted, along with the literature review and review of other India-specific education equity studies, primarily explores perceptions of education officials. Learners, caregivers, and community members from one or more marginalized groups and those from majority groups are likely to have different experiences and points of view. State education officials were selected because of their influence in overseeing the management and implementation of equity policies and programs and their fiduciary authority. Comparing and learning from the perceptions of other stakeholders would be topics to consider in a future study, alongside this study or independently.

# CHAPTER 4:

# STUDY FINDINGS

## Overview

This chapter reports findings on the perspective of state education officials on the factors that influence the educational progress of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, as well as girls in Green Estate. The findings are based primarily on interviews with 17 education officials working in a state with a high proportion of low-income residents and with urban, suburban, rural, village, hilly, and plain land geographies. All education officials held full-time positions in the state. Only education officers with at least 5 years of experience were included in the study sample. The level of experience among the officials who participated in the study ranged from 8 to 28 years.

The number of responses varied considerably among topics, but unfortunately, the officials did not always clearly distinguish between the rural low-income population generally, girl students, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes specifically, and this was prominent in the third research question in particular. Earlier research going back decades, as well as more recent studies on Scheduled Castes and Tribes and non-Scheduled Castes and Tribes, demonstrates the entrenched inequality of education outcomes for Scheduled Castes and Tribes as compared to other high-poverty and marginalized groups (Mona & Sangeet, 2008; Rashmi & Paul, 2022). State education officials' perception of differences among and between marginalized groups was an area this research project had hoped to uncover. However, the officials were not forthcoming in differentiating or contrasting between core drivers or solutions for the groups, and

analysis did not always result in meaningful comparisons between marginalized groups. This finding itself, however, is important. As state-level education officials are often tasked with tackling inequity issues, their understanding of how, if at all, programs differ for albeit overlapping marginalized groups may be a necessary piece of the inequality programming and policy puzzle.

Therefore, while this study was not able to provide some of the hoped-for comparisons, it can flag state-level education officials as an important and perhaps pivotal group to further research in order to better understand and address entrenched poverty and low education of some groups, such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It is also possible that immediate causes and solutions for different groups are not, in fact, radically different. This could indicate that programming to promote education inclusion would be a question of dosage or coverage of programming, such as type and frequency of free meals or amounts and types of bursaries—but this would need to be verified in a future study.

In addition, the lack of comparison data of groups may reflect the fact that high proportions of government school students in Green Estate come from high-poverty rural communities, and their common needs are understood to outweigh any differences in cause, outcome, or possible solutions. In addition, while comparisons were encouraged, in some cases, officials were not asked directly to distinguish between the general population and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes; in those cases, the distinction was made by only a few respondents who made it on their own and still sometimes did not reveal differences among marginalized groups.

Those officials who distinguished between students belonging to low-income populations and Scheduled Castes and Tribes did so based on the Below Poverty Line index and location of the group within the state. Education officials referred to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes as living in more extreme poverty when compared to the general rural population. Furthermore, the respondents identified specific regions within the state where the Scheduled Castes and Tribes lived. For instance, they described Scheduled Tribes as indigenous communities that continued to live in remote forested areas, or hilly regions, and Scheduled Castes as groups that co-located with higher-caste Hindus and may not be geographically isolated. Consequently, as some of the findings suggest, Scheduled Tribes may experience issues differently when compared to Scheduled Castes.

The findings in this chapter have been organized according to the study's research questions presented below. The discussion that follows reflects both the responses to direct questions and responses that officials gave without being asked. Tables 4.1 to 4.4 show the frequency of the responses.

## Research Questions

The presentation of findings has been organized as follows:

A. Findings pertaining generally to students from low-income rural communities

- *Research Question 1:* How do government education officials describe the living conditions that constrain the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities in Green Estate?

- *Research Question 2*: In the view of government education officials, are government schools, teachers, and programs available to address the needs of these students?

B. Findings pertaining specifically to students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and to girls

- *Research Question 3:* What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence the educational progress of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
    1. Officials' perceptions of students, families, and communities
    2. Officials' perceptions of government schools
    3. Officials' perceptions of teachers
    4. Officials' perceptions of textbooks
    5. Officials' perceptions of the government's role
- *Research Question 4*: What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence girls' educational progress?
    1. Officials' perceptions of the safety, health, and hygiene needs of girls
    2. Officials' perceptions of discrimination and cultural factors that affect the education of girls
    3. Officials' perceptions of the role of residential schools

The four research questions address different aspects of the perception of state education officials on the main factors that influence the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities and for students specifically from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and of girls in Green Estate.

The section that follows reports the education officials' perception of the living conditions that constrain the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities in Green Estate. It also reports the view of officials on government schools, teachers, and programs available to meet the needs of these students.

## Findings Pertaining Generally to Students from Low-Income Rural Communities

Education officials perceived poverty as the main factor constraining the progress of students from rural communities in Green Estate. This section presents the research findings, organized by the research question:

- *Research Question 1:* How do education officials describe the living conditions that constrain the educational progress of students from low-income rural communities in Green Estate?
- *Research Question 2:* In the view of officials, are government schools, teachers, and programs available to address the needs of these students?

### Research Question 1

The research questions sought to explore what state education officials perceived to be the living conditions that constrained the education progress of students from low-income rural communities. The pattern code that emerged from the data coding and analysis process as influencing the educational progress of low-income rural student communities is presented in Table 4.1 and discussed in detail in the text that follows.

**Table 4.1**
*Factors Noted by Education Officials for Research Question 1*

| Pattern code | Descriptive code | Total number of officials identifying this component: Facilitator | Total number of officials identifying this component: Constraint |
|---|---|---|---|
| Officials' perception of living conditions that constrain students' educational progress | Poverty | - | 17 |
| | Malnutrition and lack of permanent housing | - | 7 |

*Note*: Frequency tables are included to give readers a perspective on how widely various points were shared by this group of education officials; the results cannot be generalized more broadly.

Officials described the extreme poverty of many of the rural students in Green Estate. They spoke of students suffering from malnutrition and coming to school unfed or minimally fed. They described students who lack permanent housing and families who lead migratory lifestyles because of seasonal jobs and flooding. One of the officials explained it this way:

> Actually, as per the research findings, students [from a rural low-income background] are reluctant to come to school due to their family-related factors. Like, they have low income; therefore, some of them have to earn for their family. Secondly, there is seasonal absenteeism during agricultural harvesting time.

Another official explained the nutritional needs this way:

> So far as hunger is concerned, ... most of the [rural low-income] students either come to school either unfed or half-fed. I'm talking about government schools. So, the students come [either] half-fed or unfed or properly fed..... While nutrition is not so important for adult people, it's important for children [as] they are in the growing stage. And every day they are going to the schools.....But India, you can imagine, most of the people of India are from lower middle class onwards. Middle class—lower-middle class, but they cannot afford food every day.

In addition to pervasive nutritional and housing needs, officials described other factors that constrain students' educational progress. Many students assist in their family's daily struggle for survival by working in the fields or at home or earning income for the family. Officials also reported that families often do not see the relevance of education in

the context of their lives and are unable to provide the academic support their children need to succeed in school. Below are examples of comments from two officials.

> Parents are unable to guide in the academic matter. They are poor. They won't engage for [academics]. They will be engaging another work for earning. They are unable to guide their students the right way. Most of the parents are illiterate also. They don't have the high ambition.

> As I said, academic factors are there. That you can say that till [Grade] 8 it is easy going. But high school when they reach that secondary level, then they start dropping out. So, this is a problem. They cannot continue their education because they cannot cope up.

Overall, state education officials identified extreme poverty, malnutrition, lack of permanent housing, involvement of children in work after school, and the lack of academic support as influencing the educational progress of low-income rural student communities. In particular, state education officials reported concerns such as dropout among these students due to learning levels arising from the families' migratory lifestyle and not appreciating the relevance of education in the context of their lives. Therefore, some officials expressed the need to first address poverty, food security, and housing for low-income families before engaging in, or as a prerequisite for, education change. This could be because officials understand parents' perception of the need to prioritize basic needs, but it was more often explained as the first step to improving learning outcomes in their professional view as well. The need to consider student basic needs such as food and income also came across in responses to multiple research questions, for various marginalized groups.

**Research Question 2**

The second research question addressed perceptions of the state education officials on the availability of government schools, teachers, and programs to address the

needs of these students. Table 4.2 summarizes the factors officials identified related to this question.

**Table 4.2**
*Factors Noted by Education Officials for Research Question 2*

| Pattern code | Descriptive code | Description | Total number of officials identifying this component | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Facilitator | Constraint |
| Officials' perceptions of the availability of government schools, teachers, and | Support staff-members within and between organizations and at the state, district, and block level | Lack of technical expertise, teacher training mentors | 3 | 9 |
| programs to address students' needs | Infrastructure | Availability of playgrounds, technology, and toilets | 8 | 4 |
| | School-related personnel resources | Recruitment, placement, and monitoring of teachers | - | 10 |
| Perception of the state and national programs | Mid-day meal | | 9 | - |
| | School uniform | | 13 | - |
| | Textbooks | | 17 | - |

Officials had different views about the availability of government facilities and personnel to serve the needs of low-income rural students. Some spoke of an adequate number of government schools in rural areas and the continued efforts by the state government to build new schools or consolidate schools when enrollment needs change. As one official stated:

> In rural areas there are sufficient number of government schools. Okay. We have norms. We have norms as per [the] RTE 2009 [Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act]. According to that norm, within 1 kilometer there should be one LP [lower primary] school. Within 3 kilometer there should be middle school. And within 8 kilometers secondary school.

Another official described the consolidation of government schools:

> See, I personally feel that it is irony that now our government school buildings are very beautiful. Earlier it was not beautiful. But now very beautiful school buildings and other classrooms. Yeah, of course, there are gaps. The other infrastructure gaps are there. See, even though the schools are there, some schools have less than a certain number of enrollments. For that some merging or fund donation kind of thing is also going on.

Another official described the status of the infrastructure of rural government schools:

> We have one kind of information we are collecting that is for U-DISE [Unified District Information System for Education]. So, in that format every year we are collecting information from school—whether land is available, infrastructure is available or not, drinking water, toilets, everything. So, based on that actually the state is providing where it is needed, where infrastructure is needed. So, like that actually they're providing also. So, if some issue is there, state also is providing.

However, officials' comments more often showed the persistence of deep-seated problems in low-income rural schools. They noted the lack of playgrounds and other infrastructure (ranging from technology (for example, projector, generator, computers, internet facility) to toilets) and the inequitable distribution of resources. They also described continued concerns about the recruitment, placement, and monitoring of teachers, but their views differed about the effectiveness of policies designed to alleviate the problem by transferring teachers from schools with high teacher-pupil ratios to those with lower ratios. One official explained:

> Actually, playground issue we do have. But the thing is that area per school also the area is very narrow. Area is very narrow. Playground issue is there due to the unavailability of land. But other infrastructure-related areas government is providing.

Another official elaborating on the technological needs explained:

> Some problem requires more expertise. Technical support is required nowadays. And, this computer, in this regard, we are somewhat lacking..... Again, nowadays we will require digital textbook. Now it be changed, design of textbooks will be

> changed. What does this mean? We have to include digital textbook also. We should be more resourceful. And we are talking about disadvantaged groups these are, children with special need we have to think more about that, so we have to be more resourceful. For this we have to be more resourceful

Below are statements from three different officials explaining the condition of technology, teacher recruitment, placement, and monitoring, and the impact of teacher transfer policies on their schools and students.

> Some problem requires more expertise. Technical support is required nowadays. And, this computer, in this regard, we are somewhat lacking..... Again, nowadays we will require digital textbook. Now it [will] be changed, design of textbooks will be changed. What does this mean? We have to include digital textbook also. We should be more resourceful. And we are talking about disadvantaged groups, these are children with special need we have to think more about that, so we have to be more resourceful. For this we have to be more resourceful.

> We have better position[ed] RTE norms in our state. But there is [a] problem actually; many teachers are reluctant to work in rural areas or some remote areas, hilly areas, river areas. Then they generally managed, actually managed by showing some family problems or personal problems and they [get] posted in urban areas. Okay. Because if one lady teacher, we have maximum lady teacher, lady teacher suffering from some critical problems, then government see to [it] that they are posted in urban areas. Therefore, there is, actually in some school, rural school there is insufficient teachers.

> These days what is happening is that in case of appointment [of teachers], there is corruption in place. So, quality teachers are not appointed. And if we do not have quality teachers, then what will they teach the students. They need to be willing or show interest in teaching the students. After bribing, they were able to secure the jobs. The thing is that people say that you rationalize. Where we are not having maximum teachers, you just bring the teachers from other places. Fine. You can do it with the government order; it will be done. Everybody wants to go. Nobody [wants] to lose their job. They will go. But the point is that he or she, basically the lady, she is having a family. She is staying 150 kilometers away. So, when she will come to school and when she will go back from school. So, whenever she will be in school, instead of doing that, my suggestion of that, OK, let it be what is there. Two, three things you can do now. Now, presently, what you are having is that you immediately need teachers. Fine. Where there is no enrollment, where rationalization is required, wait for somebody. When new recruitment, which you are doing, do it on those vacant areas. That is not being done. They will again say financial policy kind of thing.... From next recruitment it will be done. The point is that our financial system says that one post is created in Y school, so recruitment will be on that Y school only. Later on, you transfer it. My point is

> not that. When you are not having a job, you are seeking a job, so wherever you will be placed, you will go. But I am already in job, I will definitely put some [excuse]. So that should not be done. So, now I think from next recruitment it will be to be done. But already the damage is done. 5000, 6000, 10000 recruitments has been done already and all are being posted in those areas. If the first appointment is done in the town area, nobody can or nobody will go to the rural areas after being posted. If you post them directly in rural areas, they will go.

Officials described national and state government programs designed to alleviate specific cost burdens for low-income students; these programs provide free mid-day meals, school uniforms, and textbooks. The officials' comments focused primarily on the mid-day meals, which are intended to serve several purposes: address nutritional needs, reduce absenteeism and dropout rates (particularly at the secondary level), and strengthen bonding between different student populations. The officials' comments suggested that the meals have been effective in contributing to these goals. An official explained the impact of government programs like this:

> Fund is provided by the Samagrah Siksha [Green Estate]. And the school itself purchasing the uniform. Textbook is totally free. Textbook, they get it from Green Estate Textbook Publication. They publish it and distribute it [to] different districts. And then uniform, they are getting the funds as per as students' requirement. And the schools they create a committee and purchase online. Up to elementary level we [the organization] have been providing free textbook, free uniform, and mid-day meal. And in the secondary level, it was not this thing [funded; my addition] from the Government of India level also, but our state government has taken the initiative of providing free textbook and free uniform to those children also. So that might have actually helped the students to actually you know continue [with] their education.

Two officials described the role of mid-day meals:

> Mid-day meal is important for nutrition. Mid-day meal is important for retention of the students. Mid-day meal is important to address the high absenteeism in the schools. Retention, absenteeism, and for ensuring enrollment.

> Take the dropout rate from LP [lower primary] to UP [upper primary] and from UP to higher. Why this dropout? Because mid-day meal stops after Class 1 to 8. Dropout rate is there. So, we have already proposed [to] the government.

> Proposed [to] the government means government is thinking on that. Now pre-primary level has been included this year. Might be in future inter-level.

Officials also mentioned additional efforts by the Green Estate government to provide free school uniforms and textbooks to low-income students at the pre-primary level to strengthen early learning. However, most officials' comments showed the persistence of high dropout rates as the problems of poverty persisted. As one official noted:

> Actually, [so far] free textbooks are from Class 1 to 8, but [not] pre-primary. But there are some pre-primary schools in our primary school. That is why pre-primary workbook we have that, this also distributed free. So whatever material we are developing from our end it is free.

To sum up, education officials reported mixed findings on the availability and quality of government schools, teachers, and facilities in schools for low-income rural student groups. While some noted sufficient rural government schools and acknowledged continued effort by the state government to build new schools or consolidate them when enrollment needs changed, others reported deep-seated problems such as the continued lack of playgrounds, technology, and toilets. The officials raised concerns about the recruitment, placement, monitoring, and transferring of teachers in these schools. In addition, they noted the important role of government programs from the pre-primary to secondary level in improving student bonding, meeting nutritional needs, strengthening early learning, and reducing absenteeism and dropouts (particularly at the secondary level).

In addition, education officials emphasized the importance of having basic infrastructure in rural government schools, as per the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, to ensure quality education for low-income rural student

groups generally. Most of them noted that the availability of government schools, teachers, and programs was important in addressing the academic needs of low-income rural student groups. They also perceived state and national programs—free mid-day meals, school uniforms, and textbooks—as critical in ensuring students continued with their education, as not doing so could lead to problems such as inability to alleviate cost burdens for families, meet nutritional needs, and promote student bonding, and an increase in student absenteeism and dropout rates at the secondary level.

While the aforementioned views are important to consider when determining how to better serve marginalized groups, given the role and influence of education officials, an additional observation could be that officials in Green Estate would benefit from being supported to reflect on and discuss these issues with one another more systematically in order to not only more easily discuss government programs but also improve them and leverage their successes.

The section that follows reports findings on the perception of education officials on the living conditions, government schools, teachers, textbooks, and government role in influencing the educational progress of students specifically from Scheduled Castes and Tribes and of girls.

## Findings Pertaining Specifically to Students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes and to Girls

Students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, as well as girls, face problems over and above the problems that confront low-income rural students more generally. This section presents the research findings for these population groups, organized by the following research questions:

*Research Question 3:* What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence the educational progress of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes?

1. Officials' perceptions of students, families, and communities
2. Officials' perceptions of government schools
3. Officials' perceptions of teachers
4. Officials' perceptions of textbooks
5. Officials' perceptions of the government's role

*Research Question 4:* What do government education officials perceive as the factors that influence girls' educational progress?

1. Officials' perceptions of the safety, health, and hygiene needs of girls
2. Officials' perceptions of discrimination and cultural factors that affect the education of girls
3. Officials' perceptions of the role of residential schools

**Research Question 3**

The third research question explored the perception of state education officials on the main factors that influence the educational progress of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. The five pattern codes that emerged as factors influencing the educational progress of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes are presented in Table 4.3 and discussed in detail in the text that follows.

**Table 4.3**
*Factors Noted by Education Officials for Research Question 3*

| Pattern code | Descriptive code | Total number of officials identifying this component: Facilitator | Constraint |
|---|---|---|---|
| Perception of students, families, and communities | More extreme poverty | - | 9 |
| | Unique culture | - | 8 |
| | Geographic isolation | - | 8 |
| | Discrimination (physical and mental abuse; teacher bias) | - | 4 |
| | Malnutrition and lack of permanent housing | - | 7 |
| Perception of government schools | Government versus private or nongovernmental schools | - | 8 |
| Perception of teachers | Teacher commitment | - | 10 |
| Perception of textbooks | Bias-free textbooks | 5 | - |
| | Insufficient time and resources | - | 7 |
| | Translation of textbooks into multiple local languages | - | 4 |
| Perception of the government's role | Commitment among officials to meet the needs of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students | 5 | 8 |
| | Support staff members within and between organizations and at the state, district, and block level | 3 | 9 |
| | Mid-day meal | 9 | - |
| | School uniform | 13 | - |
| | Textbooks | 17 | - |
| | Tuition support | 11 | - |

### *1. Officials' Perceptions of Students, Families, and Communities*

**Extreme Poverty, Unique Cultures, Isolation, and Segregation**. The deprivations faced by many high-poverty students are compounded for students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Government education officials noted that these students are even more likely than the rural low-income populations generally to live in extreme poverty and to suffer from malnutrition and lack of permanent housing.

Officials perceived poverty as a major factor constraining progress for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. However, officials had different views about the extent to which these

students faced needs and problems over and above the rural poor generally. Some officials felt that poverty was the main constraint for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, as it was for many others in the rural population. As one official explained:

> Ya, broader needs are there actually. When we say that a girl child or a boy [is] from a SEDG [socioeconomically disadvantaged] group—SEDG like she may be a girl. He may be a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe student ... so, there they have their specific problems. So, when he or she is not coming to school and not attending, so maybe there is in the home front there may be extreme poverty issues. ... No job.

Two other officials described the unfavorable effect of poverty this way:

> Caste is not the issue. Whatever may be the caste, only the Below Poverty Line is the issue actually.

> One of the major issues the [Scheduled Castes and Tribes] children as they come from very poor background. I will not tell that very uneducated background, this is not right kind of word; I think from poor social background that we people cannot facilitate them in terms of social environment. They come from that background.

Other education officials, however, described the adverse effects of poverty in a broader social context. Officials spoke of students' difficulties in coping with school and their high absenteeism and dropout rates as linked to their unique cultures and languages, their migratory lifestyle, their behavioral problems, their belief that education is irrelevant, and their families' inability to help them academically. Below are examples of statements from three different officials describing these relationships.

> Apart from safety and security, [the] SEDGs they have a lot of issues. They are actually from when you say about SC [Scheduled Castes] or ST [Scheduled Tribes] children, their culture, and their way of living is completely different. And when they come to school, sometimes they're not, they cannot cope up or they cannot identify with what they have studied, what they are facing in their day-to-day life and what they are studying in the school. They sometimes find it a mismatch in these things. So, we need to, that is what NCF [National Curriculum Framework] is also focusing, to, you know, give them the kind of a similar platform where they can identify their cultural, this thing also and where the

> curriculum is taking them to. Something's very different. Sometimes th[ey] find, "Oh, we are doing this kind of facing problem in our day-to-day life. And when we're coming to school, totally different world we are seeing." How will they, they are children so they will not be able to. Even if the parents also, what are you studying, like this is irrelevant for us. Our culture very irrelevant in this context. NCERT [National Council of Educational Research and Training] is focusing on this also.
>
> Children find it difficult. Up to [Class] 8 it's okay but there is a section ... who keeps on migrating. That population, of course, their reasons are totally different. They keep on migrating, specifically [in] the river areas. During rainy seasons when the river areas is filled with water, then the schools are gone, people have to shift from there. That section for them, life is different. And about them, those children, their education, what [can] I say, the education is also not as it should be. So that is different. Otherwise, for the other sections, you find that because they keep on studying, they keep on going [and] they reach Class 8.
>
> Yes [there is a fixed geographical location where the Scheduled Tribe students live], yes. I mean government school teachers, they raised one issue like, I don't know, I'm not actually not quite supportive of that. They say that our students come from such and such background, so they feel that even though they try their best to, you know, develop some discipline for them, once they go back home, it's like back to square one. So that they sometimes feel that challenge. We are trying our best. But at home they have a totally different kind of setup. So, they go back again, you know, go back to those older habits. This is one major thing that I have understood from my interaction with the teachers.

Officials also described the fact that the "mother tongue" of students from Scheduled Tribes often differed from the language of instruction in schools, a circumstance that made it difficult to accommodate the students' multiple languages in classroom instruction and textbooks. Two officials explained.

> Now we're taking care of only the tamar tribes. But many are demanding a middle section. Many are demanding. Some tribals are demanding—Keto tribes are demanding, Green tribes they are demanding. But we cannot give all of them to study in their mother tongue, no. There has to be some resource person to develop materials. Some training institutions has to be there to train the teachers. So how this, we at SCERT and Government of Green Estate has tied up with language learning foundation. We are going to do survey work on (1) how many children from which school, (2) how many children's mother tongue and school language are different. This type of survey is going to come up on the basis of what we will do.

> And we involve the different ethnic societies—Sahitya Sabhas—when developing material for other communities. But this is good. We get appreciated. People like this strategy of ours.

Officials also spoke of the isolation of many Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who live in segregated communities, often in geographical areas that create additional hardships. They are more likely than other low-income rural populations to live in remote areas, without roads and without transportation to school. They are also more likely, therefore, to be further separated from other communities and from schools by frequent flooding.

The segregated communities in which many Scheduled Tribes reside are considered a major obstacle in working with the families. One official described families segregated into separate areas; entire communities lagging behind; and each unwilling to change its lifestyle. In some cases, flooding forces entire communities to migrate and children are left without access to schools. Five different officials described the impact of living in geographically isolated and segregated communities with special reference to the Scheduled Tribes groups.

> So, is there a fixed geographical location where the Scheduled Tribes students are located? Yes. Yes, it is there. Six districts are there..... There are all ST [Scheduled Tribes] dominated districts. So, ....they're all autonomous districts. These districts where the focus on SC [Scheduled Castes] or ST is more, there also we see that their dropout ratio is high.
>
> Every district has different challenges because of geographic location. Then hilly areas also. We have two districts which are under hill areas. The situation of the plain areas is different than the hill areas. And we have river end areas also. The river areas, the situation is totally different. There is no communication.
>
> Floods are there. Six months of floods are there. In Green Estate, there are minimum 2 or 3 months goes on floods. They have to live in the street, side way rivers in the rural area.

> And regarding the society during British period, you go to one interior Green Estate village in the tribal village, you see the same status is going on. In some rural tribal areas, the same status is going on. There is no environment for reading and learning, studying. Same their family pattern is going on. Agriculture. This type of living is going on. Students have not been given proper learning environment.....And not so much advanced schooling system also. You see the school; there are no blackboards right now also.
>
> Issues as I have said, sometimes poverty is a common issue, maybe a common issue. But whatever we did,.....maybe their entire community is lagging behind. So, in that area, usually the communities are concentrated in the specific areas. We have a Teesta community; we have Tundra community that are basically in Green Estate. Rosevalley communities, you know, minority communities. So, there they have the children, when they're coming from this background, they're coming from that community and the general children coming from a different community. So, they have a different set of problems. They come with a different set of problems. It may be their cultural thing or may be in their home front. The geographical barrier also you can say here.

The "geographical barrier" and resulting isolation of Scheduled Tribes did not occur by chance but resulted from purposeful segregation over a long period of time. The result is the greater difficulty for many of these students to meet the expectations of a society from which they have largely been excluded.

**Discrimination**. Caste-based discrimination has been illegal in India since 1950, and the Indian government has attempted to compensate the communities through affirmative action—with both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes enjoying different kinds of affirmative action—in public higher education, public employment, and through psychological and support programs in some schools and communities. In addition, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes represent about a quarter of India's population. But as many countries have learned—and as the research findings demonstrate—societal customs are not easily reversed.

Officials noted that students from Scheduled Castes face physical and mental abuse by dominant groups (typically upper caste Hindus and sometimes Muslims). Officials also mentioned discrimination in schools, typically in the context of teacher bias, and discrimination in the society at large. One official noted that despite Green Estate's diversity, the existence of discrimination is not openly discussed. Perhaps most important, however, is the overall theme of the responses pertaining to Scheduled Castes and Tribes. What comes across most clearly are perceptions of the uniqueness of the students' cultures and lifestyles and their poverty, isolation, and separation from mainstream society. Officials expressed their hope for "national integration" in the context of the discussion of the mid-day meal, which all children are eligible for and eat together. The meal was described as a bonding program as much as a nutrition program. As one official put it while referring to Scheduled Castes communities, "Other than that, you know, "[un]touchability was there, untouchability." Below are examples of comments from two different officials.

> Uhhh... see when we say SEDG [socioeconomically disadvantaged group] focusing on sensitization and specific this thing diversity, cultural diversity. So, in Green Estate we have so many different communities. There is diversity. We cannot say openly that, "OK, discrimination is there."

> Yeah, this [physical and mental abuse faced by socioeconomically disadvantaged group students] is a very, very, you know, sensitive thing, very sensitive thing. See, we uh, this is, we have recently launched, but it is not yet functional, due to COVID. It is in a different state. So, we had the psychosocial this support help line, but we also have this kind of convergence with the child helpline with our toll-free number, which also needs some modifications in the state level. And there is, I am preparing one cell in every school. Psychological psychosocial support to give the children. So, there will be one cell, one drop box, okay. So that [the] child, a boy or a girl, he or she will be writing down any issues inside the school or outside the school she is facing, she is having trouble focusing on the studies. So that she can write down confidentially. And a team is being made, headed by girl ambassadors. We have girl ambassadors in every school for gender-friendly environment and leadership qualities in girls to develop for girl's

> empowerment. Girl ambassadors will be heading that with the teachers. So confidential they will open, they will discuss, and they will solve it within themselves if it's possible. And, if not, that cell will have a tie up with the nearest health department, adolescent-friendly health clinic where a psychiatrist will come once in a month or once in 2 months. Psychologists will come from the health department and help the child overcome the issue the child is facing. That is what I'm planning. Maybe next month we will put the letters. That is not like so much of budgetary requirement. It doesn't take too much budget.

Officials had mixed responses about whether conditions had improved in recent years. Some officials noted positive changes—improvements in living conditions in the past 20 years, students who excel, and some increased family interest in education. Two officials described the improvements this way:

> If no mid-day meal, students would not be there. The poor people will go to the household work. Parents cannot feed them. Nowadays in the state of Green Estate, you will not find child [involved] in household work. But in previous days, if you go down the line, 10 years back or 20 years back, in every household you will find that one or two kids were there who were involved in household work. They used to work in the paddy fields, cultivation fields. Dropouts were there after completing primary education. After Class 4 or 5 they used to go to the paddy fields for cultivation or helping the elders in the cultivation. Because parents could not afford to feed them.
>
> See now awareness has increased. And SC [Scheduled Caste] and ST [Scheduled Tribes] people are becoming more aware. They know that you know how education, actually, how empowers them. Isn't it? They can actually enhance the quality of their living. All these things definitely because until and unless you are educated you will always be under someone's this thing. So, when you are educated you can decide for yourself. And a lot of opportunities are there.

Another official told this story:

> We have put so much effort like, you know, for child marriage, for health hygiene, for gender sensitization of teachers. ... In the field level we have seen improvement. We have seen a lot of improvement. But still, it is there. When we say that addressing the psychosocial issues, the girls still suffer from that kind of, you know, psychological issues that you know, then abuse, then all kind of stuffs are still there. Then there is this lifting of child marriage, drug abuse, all these things we cannot say openly about drug abuse. But even inside you can see children are still facing this kind of, you know, issues in the school or in the community level.....So those things we need to bring out and we need to solve

> this. It's not an easy task. Actually, we are doing that and it's not that we will do it for the next 2 years and we will stop. It is not that, but it will take time. Gradually, it will take time. At least we have to start somewhere, and we have to go in a direction that 2026 okay fine occupied is far, far better than today. But you see in a school if you go today and when you go in 2026, you will see a lot of difference.

However, officials' comments also showed the persistence of deep-seated problems. Families continue to suffer from severe poverty. Communities remain isolated. Dropout rates remain high, and the problems of girl-child marriage, which contribute to high dropout rates, continue.

> Economically [issue] is obviously there. But even like everything is free in the school. See they [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students] get the uniform free, they get the textbooks free. Then get a meal also. But even then, like economic issue is definitely there. ... That means advancement has not yet gone to the village areas. That's a political issue. So, the development in education is also not coming up to that extent which we are talking about. The people are living in the same status.

Overall, education officials reported that students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes faced physical and mental abuse within their communities and faced discrimination in the form of teacher bias in schools. While some reported mixed findings for improvement in living conditions, others stressed the important role of mid-day meals in addressing discrimination against the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups.

### *2. Officials' Perceptions of Government Schools*

Education officials described government schools as inferior to private or other nongovernment options. Government schools are now attended primarily by high-poverty families who cannot afford private school tuition. High-poverty students, therefore, whether or not they come from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, are segregated by poverty. Families who have alternatives do not send their children to government schools. This is

reported as a change from earlier times when government schools served a broader population of students. An official told this story:

> If you ask me, "Will you enroll your daughter and son in government school?" No, never. I cannot play the fool with my children's future. I cannot take the risk.....But, I am a product of a government school. And on the same bench, on the right side there is a doctor's son and on the left side, there is a son of tailor. I can remember those days. ... My father was a central government worker and I, a government employee's son.....Earlier government school was like this. But today government [school] is for BPL [Below Poverty Line]. For those who are incapable of paying the tuition fees, they are the ones who are going. Those that are not much interested in education are the ones who are going to these schools. And for these students the teachers are not interested in improving the quality of these students. The aim of the teachers is to get them promoted to the next grade level so that they do not have to take up further responsibility of these students.

Many government schools are further segregated by their location in Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, often in isolated areas. In some rural tribal areas, the status of these communities has not changed according to one official, who added that schools in these areas had "no environment for reading and learning … no blackboards." Below is an example of a comment from another official.

> Do you face any challenges when you have to design a textbook for students who come from the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe community?.... For these categories of people, we have not found any challenges. Only, especially ST people know, ST people have mostly their language. They have got their culture. Tamar tribe children, they study in Rihub medium school only. So, no problem. But ST people, they have got their language, many of them have got their script, they have got distinct culture. That's why, by challenges means dearth of resource person. So, that's why that is challenge. SC, as such, they don't have separate language, no. Even though Tamar tribe they have got separate language but still we are continuing with them in Rihub only. But language problem is there in tamar tribe area.
>
> And regarding the society during British period, you go to one interior Green Estate village in the tribal village, you see the same status in going on. In some rural tribal areas, the same status is going on. There is no environment for reading and learning, studying. Same their family pattern is going on. Agriculture. This type of living is going on. Students have not been given proper learning

> environment.....And not so much advanced schooling system also. You see the school, there are no blackboards right now also.

Since government schools are generally perceived as inferior to other educational options, even families from high-poverty communities, including Scheduled Castes and Tribes, try to find a way to send their children to private schools or other nongovernmental options.

> Government is spending three major expenses—mid-day meal, uniform, and textbook. By these three free systems, some people are thinking that, "Oh, being a Ricksha Walla I have money, why should I give my children to free school? I should also read, I mean, I should also send my children to private school." Some ego problem is also there. Some people are not accepting this—free, free! Everybody wants to expense something for their children. They don't like free. They say this is working against the system.

> ... I don't know what the mindset is like of [socioeconomically disadvantaged groups]. Even though some economically backward parents also, they send their children to private schools. Some parents in early cases where we see because then they may be having some mindset that private schools offer some better opportunities, some facilities may be there, some disciplines may be there, I don't know.

In summary, education officials reported on the low quality of government schools when compared to private schools, and the preference among high-poverty communities for private schools.

### *3. Officials' Perceptions of Teachers*

While teachers' commitment to their students was noted by one official, teachers were more often described as uninterested in strengthening learning for students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and, instead, as focused primarily on getting their students promoted to the next grade so they would no longer be responsible for them. This is quite feasible under India's current grade retention policy, which limits the length of time students can stay in grade—a policy intended to remedy the earlier practice of

retaining students in grade over extended time periods, which often has the adverse consequence of promoting students without the help they need to learn the material. Some officials felt the promotion policy was especially detrimental to students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes because teachers no longer had an incentive to ensure that the students learned the coursework before being promoted. Many students, therefore, are promoted year after year with little learning taking place and without the opportunity for the small group instruction that would provide additional help. Examples of such statements from two different education officials follow.

> I personally feel that somehow the teachers of the government schools ... should not be perceiving that because children from disadvantaged background is coming we need not take much attention. I personally feel that that mindset should not be there. Why a teacher is there—it is the personality of the child, so you should not be thinking from what background he or she is coming, isn't it? ... "Okay, he came from this background, and I have transformed him. I have taken him to that level": That will be the satisfaction.

> Teachers are getting good interaction with the children. Actually, in rare case, exceptional case, some students come out with their own [ability]. It doesn't matter the family. ... Generally, the people [teachers] dealing with these [Scheduled Castes and Tribes] children, evening, morning, they are already more active.

Four different officials described the various impact of the grade retention policy on their students:

> This [no retention] policy is applicable from elementary level up till Grade 8. Actually, what happens nowadays is that the students who entered Grade 9 may not have the quality to write his name also due to the no retention policy. That particular student is coming every year and appearing for the exams and getting promoted to the next grade level. How much marks that student is securing, whether that student was able to even write his name on the paper or not, this we do not know.

> So, yeah, so you'll find that till 8 Grade they study. But once you reach 9, this problem crops up. They find science difficult. They find maths difficult. They cannot read English. And [in Grade] 9 pass or fail comes in again. So maybe 9

> also if they just managed to pass, then again [in Grade] 10, in the board [examination], they do not qualify.
>
> That is one of the prime. Because earlier for no retention policy it wasn't that the student should [be] kept behind in one class [if not performing well academically]; it was not this. Rather the policy was that if a study failed, then those students were to be gathered and taught so that we can promote it to the next class. But the teachers do not know this. What they do, they promote the student to the next class. They nothing to worry. So, if these students are kept behind in the same class for a particular grade they also need to [be] taught accordingly, right? Separately, single, or in a group of two or three specifically. What the students are lacking in, what their limitations are, these need to [be] rectified, right? These kind of burdens teachers do take.
>
> Now that is because of the no-retention policy. You cannot fail anyone. So, the teachers also, they do not, you know, take the pain of ensuring that [disadvantaged] children achieve the learning outcomes or the competency. So, it's easy going and these children, they're not learning.

One official also mentioned that it might be helpful to match the students with teachers from similar backgrounds—particularly when the students were from Scheduled Tribes communities—so the teachers would be more sensitive to the students' needs and also know the tribal languages. One official explained:

> If teachers are from same community, ya, it helps. Why it helps because he or she will be able to understand, first of all, the language barriers or some kind of cultural things are there. So, if I am from a particular community, I'm from a Tundra community and I am teaching in a Tundra-dominated area where the child is also Tundra, so I will know what their particular community's issues are there. So, it will have a greater understanding to solve the problems. ...It sometimes happens with teachers because, as again, in a Tundra or a Teesta-dominated area, if a teacher is posted who doesn't know their language, who doesn't know anything about their culture, then it will have a lot [of problems].

Overall, education officials reported mixed findings. A few reported on the lack of teacher commitment towards teaching disadvantaged students while others suggested aligning the background of teachers with students (particularly Scheduled Tribes) to meet their needs. Much of teachers' focus was on getting these students promoted to the next grade with little interest in strengthening their learning.

### *4. Officials' Perceptions of Textbooks*

Education officials noted that textbook authors attempt to design bias-free textbooks by representing the students' castes, tribes, languages, and religions. The officials cautioned, however, that textbooks alone could not prevent teachers from introducing bias into their instruction, nor could they "fix" the severe problems of deprivation and of physical and social isolation faced by students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Officials also reported that authors often have insufficient resources and time to carry out the large amount of work needed to represent the multiple castes, tribes, religions, and languages. Just in terms of languages alone, for example, core subject textbooks, like mathematics and science, are translated into three languages—English, Hindi (the national language), and the state language. Some textbooks (that is, the language textbooks) are translated into the eight major tribal languages of the state, yet still exclude many students because few tribes speak the same language. There are also Scheduled Tribes that either attend or are advocating for separate schools that teach in tribal languages and reflect tribal cultures. The demand for the different versions of textbooks clearly exceeds the printing capacity to produce them. Examples of such statements from three different officials follow.

> I have told that already that we try to reflect in the textbook all the caste, religion, so that there are no biases. And textbooks are developed in nine languages [including the state language]. All languages have the freedom to choose pictures accordingly. They adapt. The first textbooks are developed in [state language], then these are adapted. And language textbooks are some[what] different.
>
> Same year we do for all medium groups. And earlier what happened, translation was emphasized more but now we don't. [We] emphasize more on transcription. Some lessons of math—maths is almost same but in math though there is more focus on translation, but in illustration part like citing example we give the clear

> scope for their adaptation. Okay. And language, socials and EVS [environmental science], they get lots of freedom to express their custom, culture, everything.
>
> This [translation of textbooks] is not imposed by the, that is, from the Supreme party. That is coming from the grassroot level. That means teachers have reported that these examples of the textbook should be regional experience based. That means, say, earlier we translated textbook from NCERT [National Council of Educational Research and Training] textbooks, that means national level. We translated the textbook of mathematics and science, and it was served in the schools. But teachers and students finding difficult. Difficult means not relating their own cultures and literatures, etc. Because the students have their local experience. Taking examples from the local. They get difficult.

An example of statement describing the time limitation follow:

> And the most important limitation is time limitation. We have to prepare textbooks within a stipulated period. Always. But if one has to give justice to these things, at least, a good tenure is needed for preparing textbooks. But always these things are done in a hurried way.

### *5. Officials' Perceptions of the Government's Role*

All officials said they gave high priority to meeting the needs of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and received assistance from a wide variety of government and private organizations to which they referred students for services. The officials also noted special government resources and programs specifically for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In addition to programs like mid-day meals, free school uniforms, and textbooks that are provided to high-poverty students generally, some government programs are designed to address the segregation and discrimination faced by students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities by providing funds specifically for programs serving these communities—for example, sensitivity training for teachers in community and language differences and incentives and scholarships to help students progress in school. There also has been an attempt to consolidate remote, isolated schools to ensure sufficient

enrollment and prevent closure of these schools to make them more resource efficient and accessible. An official stated:

> And do the students have to come from a certain socioeconomic background in order to qualify for mid-day meal? No, no, no. Irrespective of caste, creed, social status, whoever is enrolled in the school, for any class, every child has to share food together so that a sense of bonding is developed in their mind. You know, the schools, students from different religion, different linguistic background, and if we just impose the national integration, equity, national diversity, no one will understand. But if the students from their very tender age, from their childhood, if they share food, sitting together if they share food, the sense of bonding and belongingness develops in their mind, which develops a kind of bonding and contributes toward fostering national integration. This is why mid-day meal is very important. Other than that, you know [un]touchability was there—untouchability. In the state of Green Estate, untouchability is not there.

A different official provided a similar response:

> So, this is the scheme [mid-day meal] working towards meeting the hunger of the child, also working towards developing national integration. See, if the child of higher caste is said that "No, he is from lower caste, you cannot share food," you cannot make him understand. You have to develop his character, form his character. You will have to shape his character in this way from his childhood so he should feel that we are one. That's why it's a flagship program of Government of India. People generally misconstrue it's only for literacy, but it's not only for literacy. That's why Government of India is very much serious about this.

Two different officials also commented on this issue:

> Different components have different issues. Regarding some components may find [that] their fund is less. But in my case, whatever fund I have got till now it's good fund that we have received. At least for giving preliminary interventions. This is very good. Like for career [guidance] we have got ample. Like they have increased the fund for career guidance. They have increased the fund for special programs for ST and SC we conduct. For Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes ...we conduct special program. Awareness, [gender] sensitization about their schemes, what are the schemes available for them. Government departmental meeting, convergence meeting at the district level. These are the funds that we get enough fund for planning all these activities.
>
> And there are some administrative reforms also there. That means the amalgamation of the schools. Previously the schools were isolated. The ME [English-medium] school, the LP school, and the high school. But nowadays the school[s] are amalgamated. Say for Class 1 to Class 10, at least. And, in coming

> years, it'll Class 1 to 12. The schools will be in the same campus. It is going on. But earlier it was separate. But due to amalgamation some development has been seen in the performance.

Education officials reported that the provision of free mid-day meals, school uniforms, and textbooks facilitated educational progress for Scheduled Castes and Tribes student groups, alleviated cost burdens, and made school more accessible. Additionally, they noted the impact of the mid-day meal and the provision of special government resources such as sensitivity training for teachers related to community and language differences, incentives, and scholarships to help students from these communities progress in school. In addition, state education officials reported various factors that negatively influenced the educational progress of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. These included (i) family characteristics (i.e., living in extreme poverty, children suffering from malnutrition, lack of permanent housing, unwillingness to change their ways of living, inability to provide academic support, their belief that education is irrelevant, and the unique culture and language of Scheduled Tribes); (ii) geographical factors (e.g., the Scheduled Tribes population living in geographically isolated and segregated communities, and floods during rainy season resulting in a migratory lifestyle); (iii) discrimination faced by Scheduled Castes in the form of physical, social, and mental abuse in classrooms; (iv) the quality of rural government schools (i.e., lack of infrastructure, lack of environment for reading and writing); (v) the quality of teaching and learning in rural government schools (e.g., low motivation among teachers to improve the learning levels of these student groups); and (v) textbooks (i.e., the nonalignment of textbook content to the context of the Scheduled Tribes students and insufficient time and resources for transcribing textbooks into multiple local languages

with content that aligns with students' context). They also noted that special government schemes for Scheduled Castes and Tribes students such as free mid-day meal, school uniform, textbooks, and tuition support had a positive impact on the educational progression of Scheduled Castes and Tribes learners.

All of the above factors combined play a critical role in influencing the educational progress of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students. It is important to note, however, that many of these factors also cut across other marginalized groups, such as high-poverty groups, outside Scheduled Castes and Tribes. For example, discrimination was an important factor that was very different for Scheduled Castes and Tribes students as compared to other high-poverty learners, and therefore this perception or factor may be worthy of additional exploration.

As state education officials reported, the persistence of deep-seated challenges, despite improvement in living conditions in the past 20 years, has resulted in these communities remaining isolated and lagging behind economically and educationally. Officials stated that aligning the background of teachers with students from Scheduled Tribes communities may serve as an advantage in improving learning levels and meeting these students' needs (such as reducing dropout rates). However, in addition to expressed optimism for targeted government programs, education officials also noted that despite state and national government efforts to support these communities, students continue to face high dropout rates, student absenteeism, and the problems of girl-child marriage.

**Research Question 4**

The fourth research question explored the perception of state education officials on the main factors that influence girls' educational progress. Three pattern codes

emerged as factors influencing the educational progress of girls generally, and specifically from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups. These codes are summarized in Table 4.4 and discussed in detail in the text that follows.

**Table 4.4**
*Factors Noted by Education Officials for Research Question 4*

| Pattern code | Descriptive code | Total number of officials identifying this component | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Facilitator | Constraint |
| Perception of safety, health, and hygiene needs of girls | Safety (transportation and living in isolated regions) | - | 5 |
| | Health and hygiene | - | 4 |
| Perceptions of discrimination and cultural factors that affect the education of girls | Child marriage | - | 4 |
| | Gender bias | - | 7 |
| Perceptions of the role of residential schools | Mentions of residential schools for girls | 6 | - |

Like Scheduled Castes and Tribes, girls have faced centuries of discrimination. Some of the examples given by government officials relate to rural low-income girls generally, but most pertain specifically to girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. These girls must contend, simultaneously, with the inequities of gender, poverty, and membership in Scheduled Castes and Tribes. In the past several decades, India has made major advances in girls' education and in public opinion on gender equity, but as shown in the research findings, much remains to be done.

### *1. Officials' Perceptions of the Safety, Health, and Hygiene Needs of Girls*

Girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes face special problems of safety, health, and hygiene. They are often not permitted to attend school if they have to walk any distance because of concerns about safety. The problem is widespread: It affects the large number of families who lack transportation and live in scattered, isolated communities, often

further isolated by flooding. The result is that many girls do not have access to schools. Below are examples of comments from three different officials who explain the safety needs of Scheduled Castes and Tribes girls.

> Then you find in hilly areas due to the distance, and due to lack of sort of communication, you find that the [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes] students, they do not go to school. If it is very far from their home, they have to walk.... So, distance becomes a problem.
>
> Mainly in the river areas, there are no permanent household. They [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes families] shift from one year to another year from one place to one place. During the flood season it is very difficult for them.
>
> So, accordingly in Tundra, Redwood there are hilltops and all. There we cannot afford. Another provision is there. You can go for transportation facility also, but that is also nonviable in Green Estate. Because in Redwood or Woodside or anywhere—you have seen the hilltops. What sort of transport will be available? Children has to come on foot. Then they have to go again [on foot]. And for two, three children because very scattered population.

Below are examples of comments from two different officials who explain the health and hygiene needs of Scheduled Castes and Tribes girls.

> If the school is little bit distanced or even their habitation is situated in little bit interior, they do not permit girl children to go to school. The minor children go to school, but [in] ... Char and hill areas ..., as the girl children get puberty, they stop to go to school. So, this is a kind of thinking of both the parents in the society. So, these are the basic hurdles we have to face with first potentiality.
>
> For [Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes] girls, actually sometimes you know like once up to Class 5, these things okay. But some things because of the access issue, like maybe they want to go to a school, but then the school is a bit far from their [home]. So, once they attain puberty, so that becomes an issue.
>
> In addition, many girls do not attend school during their menstrual cycles.

Officials interviewed mentioned both cultural factors and the lack of toilets and "necessary provisions" in some schools, although there was a difference of opinion about the adequacy of facilities and supplies. In some cases, girls do not attend school after

puberty at all. To try to alleviate the problem, some schools offer programs focused on safety, health, and hygiene, although, again, officials' perceptions differed about the extent of these programs. One commented:

> Government has taken through many schemes for improving the situation [of building toilets for girls]. Government constructed [in] all schools, girls toilet. And the government provided sanitary napkin free to the girl students above 13 plus or 12 plus something years. Government made free for each and every, to all girl students. And in every school [state] government nominated, not appointed, nominated nodal teacher for menstrual health and hygiene management.

Another official had a different opinion:

> There are other problems. For girls, this problem is there that you cannot say that they don't continue their education, but sometimes, I don't know, girls toilet is a problem since the Google toilet facilities are yet, not yet up to the mark. Most of the girls they find it difficult to come to school during special[ly] those menstrual days. And we even have some customs and traditions in some rural areas where, even we belong to that generation, of course. We are not allowed to go out for 3 days. We have to stay at home. And in this way what happens, they fall back in their studies. Because in these government schools it's not that, for this sort of category of people, or this sort of learners today 3 days of classes at least [they miss out on]. At home there isn't someone who will help them to catch up or, in school itself, the teacher will take some extra classes for them. In that way, they fall behind.

Thus, education officials reported that girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes face special problems of safety due to the lack of transportation and living in scattered isolated communities. They also face health and hygiene needs due to both cultural factors and the lack of toilets in schools.

### *2. Officials' Perceptions of Discrimination and Cultural Issues That Affect the Education of Girls*

Although discrimination against girls is still present in the state, its rate is reported as lower than rates in other states in India. However, customs like girl-child marriage continue in some "pocket areas." After Grade 8, many girls in these areas get married and

drop out of school. According to one official, the status of girls' education is good, and many improvements have been made, but a lot more needs to be done.

> Our girls' education status is good. Even girls' share is more in the system than the boys. So that is not an issue. But still there are some pocket areas. As, for example, I can tell you Tundra it is there. Tulsi it is there. In Regant, it is there—here minor belt is there. There still it is a problem. Child marriage issue. We are still tackling it. And then their education. Up to Class 8, no issue. They used to come to school. After Class 8, they get married. After Class 8, they don't come to school. These are the areas we are still working on. Improving a lot but still lot more things to go. So basically, this is the scenario in the state.

One official noted that gender bias is "deeply rooted" in the society: If families have to choose, boys are likely to be sent to private schools or English-medium schools, while girls are sent to government schools, which are perceived as lower quality.

> One of the major problems is unawareness.....If you go in details in depth, you will find that in case of river areas.... you will find that girl children are not preferred for education; boy children are preferred for education..... Once you realize the reality of the thinking from the parent that there are two—one son and one daughter in the family—the son they will admit in the private school or English-medium school, the daughter they will send to the government school. So okay, this is fine. But what is their objective? The objective is that the boy child should be better in position. They should go to the private school, English-medium school. Girl children will have to give marriage to her, so she has to complete BA or MA in the government school. And that is the ultimate of thinking for the parent in terms of education. So, this is happening in our rural areas, river areas, basically in hilly areas among the tribal societies [since] long back, long back.

Attempts have been made to reduce gender bias in textbooks through the choice of examples and illustrations.

> We consider gender sensitization very consciously. We consider this, that means, this specialty of textbook we have already considered. Say, for example, in mathematics textbook, we prefer giving example of girls first rather than boys. And mother first, rather than father. And the authors tend to give equal importance [to] both genders. Yeah, that is considered. ... For gender equity, other texts are also developed to cater [to] the gender equity. Some specific lessons are also there in social science and in language. Wherever there's a scope for giving such treatment, we have developing sectors. And, in common subjects, when

> giving examples ... gender equity is considered. We think we have given justice to this area.

To sum up, education officials reported customs like early girl-marriage in certain areas from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities contributing to their high dropout rates. Others reported the continued prevalence of gender bias, with boys more likely to be sent to private schools or English-medium schools over girls.

### *3. Officials' Perceptions of the Role of Residential Schools*

Some officials advocated for residential schools, particularly for girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, for girls from other high-poverty communities who come from "labor" backgrounds, for girls considered unable to attend regular school, and for girls who live in "educationally backward blocks" (defined as blocks with a female literacy rate below the national average and a gender gap above the national average). The purpose is to facilitate a focus on academics, reduce dropout rates, and separate girls from (what are perceived as) the negative impacts of their communities. Some residential schools are currently in operation and officials' comments suggested an interest in increasing them. Officials described girls as vulnerable in the society and their education the first to be sacrificed if the family is in crisis. The girls are then out of school and in the child labor force or working in the home. Officials felt that the residential schools offered at least a few years of education, which would strengthen the girls' ability to care for their families and, in some cases, to continue in school. An official explained:

> We have 81 educationally backward blocks throughout Green Estate..... These blocks are called backward blocks as per census 2001 survey depending upon the female literacy rate below to the national average, and gender gap above the national average. In first year and by applying these two criteria, the Government of India identified 81 blocks in Green Estate as educationally backward blocks.

> So basically, as you will be realizing that the educational backward block is with out-of-school children.

Two different officials described the role of residential schools:

> Pockets are there, certain hilltops are there. It is still there. The point is that their school is not viable. So, for that we are planning some residential schools. Right now, we are having around three residential schools in the state. But last year ... we got another chain approved from the Government of India. So, we have to put a lot [of effort] for that. But finally, we will be having 13. So, 13 is a good number.....Even state government is also planning for 109 high schools in rosevalley [area]. These are focus areas actually. So, that is another project. ... But finally, it has been adopted by the state government directly, not by the Government of India. So those 109 schools will be established. The construction of these schools is going on. Those will be functional from the coming academic year. So, this is another one on access.

> So [the residential school program] is an intervention which started in year 2004 that targets girls [that are] out-of-school children actually in the block [level]. These are girls and these are out-of-school children, bring them to the fold of the umbrella of the education. But as these girls are basically from child labor background, from economically poor, weak social awareness level, .... so they cannot be brought to the formal school. Clearly, so it will not be possible to retain them in the formal school with the normal kind of arrangement. So [the residential school program] is the residential arrangement with numbers of teachers, all other facilities—hostels, dormitories for children, recreation for children, all other facilities, co-curricular activities for children, and all dress materials—everything which our girl children required, these arrangements are there in the [residential school]. This is big residential school for 100 to 150 children. At present it is 100 children. Through this we are going to minimize the girls out-of-school children in the block. So, this is a big help towards the universalization of elementary education in terms of girls because girls are little bit vulnerable in the society. So, as they grown up in the river areas, minority areas, hill area tribal area, they do not allow children to go to school sometimes. Because they think that as they are growing older, education is not required for them. So, from this type of unawareness kind of thing among the community, many girl children keep out of school. Again, for some economical condition, when a family becomes a victim of some crisis, basically the girls children become the target. Boys become target in the second. Girls become first target. Actually, girls will be stopped to go to school and boys will continue for some time, like that. Or the first sibling care or elder, cooking or sometimes during agriculture, in case of tribal families, girl children go to agricultural fields. Like the majority is girl children take care of family. So, uhhh, this residential school for girls target[s] that vulnerable section of girls who is benefited through universalization of education.

Two other officials concurred, explaining:

> So once children goes out from [the residential school], 4 years of education in their life, so it's contributing in their life a lot. On the other hand, many children find that who have passed out of [the residential school] now are in college, some of them are married also. They become good family holder, good mother[s]. So, because [the residential school program] is running from last 12 years now, so they become good mother also, good family decision makers. That is also kind of success, [you] know, in that sense; you cannot say that as girl children passed out high secondary from [the residential school program] and she got married and she became a mother she is not successful. So, this is the kind of assistance to the family, to the next generation. If you compare with her mother, you'll find that mother was different and that the daughter is different. So that is because of [the residential school program].

> Some of the students was very excellent performances after coming out from [the residential school program]. So, in Chalan area in Pinewood [district] there is a girl child—I have forgotten her name, sorry—she has completed her B.Sc.honors with 87 percentage. She is a girl from [the residential school program]. So, most [residential school] results are, results are, [only] for girl children, not for all children, once you get them channelized, they will never miss out the subjects.

Overall, education officials reported on the important role that residential schools play for girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes or for those from high-poverty communities in facilitating a focus on academics, reducing dropout rates, and separating them from perceived negative impacts of their communities. Interestingly, research and anecdotal evidence alike have shown that residential (boarding school) programs aimed at increasing access and learning for girls and other marginalized learners offer, at best, mixed results (Haig-Brown, 1988; McKegney, 2011; UNICEF, 2023; Smith, 2009). This is not to say that education officials were "wrong" in their views, but it does confirm that crafting and implementing best programs for marginalized groups, including girls and girls sitting at the intersection of marginalization, are complex. It also suggests that more research could be done to understand the perceptions and perhaps professional needs of officials when it comes to education programming.

In general, education officials indicated that girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities have made advances in education and that specific government improvements have been made, such as a reduction in gender bias in textbooks through examples and illustrations. Nonetheless, officials also reported inequities of gender and poverty in the form of discrimination (preference for boys over girls to be sent to private or English medium schools; girl child marriage in some areas), safety (due to lack of transportation and living in isolated communities), health and hygiene needs, and cultural factors (not attending schools after puberty). As mentioned, education officials also advocated for residential schools as a way to ensure multiple pathways of access for girls.

In all likelihood, families and communities would have responded very differently to the research questions around girls' education and residential schooling in particular. Prior research studies with families and communities have, however, identified similar concerns and barriers (if not solutions) as those expressed by education officials, especially poverty and isolation as it relates to improving education for girls. Families and communities reported economic barriers, lack of quality education in rural regions, less value attached to educating girls when compared to boys, safety concerns for girls, and child marriage to reduce economic burden as constraints influencing educational progress for students from these communities (Acharya & Sahoo, 2019; Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Iyengar, 2011; KHPT, 2012). However, this was not the focus of this research study.

## Summary of Findings

The state education officials interviewed for this study indicated different facilitating and constraining factors influencing the educational progress of students from

low-income rural communities, the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, and girls. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 detail the study's main findings discussed in this chapter. The different factors identified have been categorized as 'key problems' and 'government policies' to address key problems. Key problems have been defined as issues in the low-income rural communities and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes society, including girls, whereas government policies to address key problems have been defined as current government policies attempting to solve the problems.

Based on this overview of main findings, education officials noted extreme poverty as a major factor that constrained both high-poverty rural students and Scheduled Castes and Tribes educational progress. As the literature shows, this is not surprising, as poverty has broad implications on areas such as living conditions, health and wellness, the availability of resources for rural education, and the academic outcomes of students from these communities (Bhattacharyya & Basu, 2018; Booroah et al., 2014; Patil, 2020). Education officials expressed that some system-level factors limited the educational progress of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students. These factors included the lack of availability of rural government schools and low numbers and qualifications of teachers.

**Table 4.5**
*Summary: Key Problems*

| Factors | Findings |
|---|---|
| Findings pertaining generally to students from low-income rural communities | |
| Extreme poverty | • Education officials noted the extreme poverty of many rural students. Furthermore, they noted the lack of academic support, nutritional needs, and lack of permanent housing as constraining students' educational progress. |
| Government school facilities and personnel | • Education officials reported mixed findings on the availability of facilities in rural government schools. While some noted enough government schools, others reported the continued lack of playgrounds, technology, toilets, and lack of effectiveness of policies related to the recruitment, placement, and monitoring of teachers in these schools. |
| Findings pertaining specifically to students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes and to girls | |
| Living conditions | • Education officials noted factors such as more extreme poverty, unique culture, unwillingness to change their way of living, nutritional needs, and lack of permanent housing influencing the educational progress of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes.<br>• For the Scheduled Tribes population specifically, officials noted that geographical isolation of these families results in their separation from other communities, leading to an entire community lagging behind and children being left without access to schools.<br>• Officials reported that girls face special problems of safety due to lack of transportation and living in scattered isolated communities. They also face health and hygiene needs due to cultural factors and lack of toilets in schools. |
| Discrimination | • Education officials reported that students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes faced physical and mental abuse within their communities, as well as discrimination in the form of teacher bias in schools. This is particularly relevant for those from the Scheduled Castes communities.<br>• Education officials reported early girl-marriage in certain areas contributing to their high dropout rates. Others reported the continued prevalence of gender bias, with boys more likely to be sent to private schools or English-medium schools over girls. |
| Government schools | • Education officials reported that government schools are inferior in quality and are attended by high-poverty families, thus segregating students by poverty when compared to private or other nongovernment schools. These schools are further segregated by their location in rural tribal areas where the quality of these schools has not changed. |
| Teachers | • Education officials reported mixed findings, where low commitment towards teaching disadvantaged students and a focus primarily on getting these students promoted to the next grade leads to a low level of learning among these student groups. |
| Textbooks | • Officials noted that that attempts to design bias-free textbooks that represents the students' castes, tribes, languages, and religion are made. However, designing such textbooks alone could not prevent the social and physical deprivation faced by these students, nor could it prevent teachers from introducing bias into their instruction. |
| Language | • Education officials noted the unique language of students from the Scheduled Tribes families. They reported insufficient resources and time to represent the multiple castes, tribes, and languages of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes student groups. |

**Table 4.6**
*Summary: Government Policies to Address Key Problems*

| Factors | Main findings |
|---|---|
| State and national government programs | Education officials noted that the provision of free mid-day meals, school uniforms, and textbooks facilitates educational progress for students from low-income rural communities generally by alleviating cost burdens and making school more accessible. They also noted the provision of special government resources such as sensitivity training for teachers in community and language differences, incentives, scholarships, and tuition support for students specifically from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities to help them progress in school. |
| Government policies | Education officials noted the important role that residential schools play, particularly for girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes, in facilitating a focus on academics, reducing dropout rates, and separating them from the perceived negative impacts of their communities. Officials also reported that the grade retention policy was particularly detrimental for students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes backgrounds due to the adverse consequence of teachers promoting students to the next grade with no incentive to ensure they learned the coursework before being promoted. |

In addition, education officials noted more controversial programs such as residential schools for high-poverty and Scheduled Castes and Tribes girls, as well as more broadly accepted approaches such as offering multiple languages in classroom instruction and textbooks to address learning needs of Scheduled Castes and Tribes students. These findings suggest that perceptions of education officials are complex and could warrant additional in-depth research to better understand their points of view, what they are based on, and their influence in pursuing more equitable education in India.

Chapter 5 considers and builds on these key study findings against other India-specific education studies in order to explore learning and add to the dialogue on equity and education policy. The chapter is framed around the following topics:

- The impact of India's economic growth on the education of high-poverty rural students: overview of changes in (a) gross domestic product and poverty levels;

(b) resources for rural education; and (c) academic outcomes. Family income of marginalized groups was frequently mentioned by officials in this study.

- Rural education in the context of evolving rights for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and girls: (a) societal and policy changes; (b) changes in rural education; and (c) the continuing impact of isolation and discrimination on the education of high-poverty rural students from Scheduled Tribes and Castes. The rural and often isolated geographic location was mentioned by officials in this study.
- The factors that contribute to the current perception in India—and in many other countries throughout the world—that public schools are schools of last resort for students who have no other options. While private/public school sorting was not mentioned by officials interviewed, poverty and isolation were flagged as major barriers. As attendance in private or non-state schools is increasingly across India and around the globe, the shift in enrollment is exacerbating the isolation of high poverty students as they are left behind in state schools.
- The question of India's experiment with residential schools for girls from Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the context of the negative outcomes of residential schools for minority students in other countries, including the United States, Australia, and Canada. The complexity of this approach is especially relevant to this study as it was shared as a good example of how to increase access to education for girls.
- The issue of multiple languages in classroom instruction and textbooks for Scheduled Castes and Tribes students. These topics were also mentioned by education officials during the study.

# CHAPTER 5:

# POLICY IMPLICATIONS

## Overview

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to learn more about what state education officials see as the leading factors or contributors to low school participation and limited educational progress of students from marginalized groups. The interviews provided a wealth of information from state education officials from one state in India. Reviewing this information in the context of the literature and in particular in the context of other India-focused studies, permits readers to interpret the study findings in a broader context and build on the findings in formulating future research and policy. This chapter considers the following issues:

- The impact of India's economic growth on the education of high-poverty rural students
- Rural education in the context of evolving rights for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and for girls
- The role of government schools in rural communities
- India's experiment with residential schools for girls in rural communities
- Rural education for language-minority students

## Alignment of Study Findings with the Literature and Country-Specific Data and Evidence

### A. The Impact of India's Economic Growth on the Education of High-Poverty Rural Students

India has made substantial gains in its gross domestic product (GDP) since 2011. This indicates the nation's growing economy (see Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1**
*Trends in Annual GDP Growth*

| Year | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| GDP growth (annual %) | 5.2 | 5.5 | 6.4 | 7.4 | 8.0 | 8.3 | 6.8 | 6.5 | 3.7 | -6.6 | 8.7 |

*Note.* From World Bank (2023a).

In addition, in rural India there has been a significant 14.7% decline in extreme poverty rates between 2011 and 2019 (Kharas et al., 2020; Roy, 2021; The Print Team, 2022; see Table 5.2). For families from Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups, there has also been a decline in extreme poverty rates. The poverty headcount index for rural Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes groups fell by 22% and 17% between 2004–05 and 2011–12, compared with an average overall slower decline of 16.1% (see Table 2.1, chapter 2).

**Table 5.2**
*Poverty Trends: National*

| Year | Poverty rates (%) | | Total poverty rate (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | Urban | |
| 2011 | 26.3 | 14.2 | 40.5 |
| 2019 | 11.6 | 6.3 | 17.9 |
| Percentage points decline between 2011 and 2019 | 14.7 | 7.9 | 22.6 |

*Note:* From Roy (2021).

However, after 2019, some articles reported an increase in extreme poverty in rural regions due to pandemic-induced reduction in economic growth (Mahapatra, 2021; Ram and Yadav, 2021). The report suggest that a disproportionately higher proportion of the rural population fell to Below Poverty Line, which is partly due to high unemployment rates, reduced spending by people, and reduced public spending on development by the Indian government (Mahapatra, 2021).

However, this is quite a controversial claim as there are others who believe that India's official poverty numbers are grossly underestimated (Bhalla et al., 2022a, 2022b). More recent international debates on increasing the poverty line from $1.90 to $3.20 per person per day (approximately 68% higher than the earlier line) contend that most poverty estimates did not account for subsidized food grain (that is, wheat and rice) (Bhalla et al., 2022a). This is an important factor as it is "enough to contain any rise in poverty even in the pandemic year 2020" (Bhalla et al., 2022a). Therefore, the pandemic-induced disproportionate increase in extreme poverty needs to be considered fully for accurate estimates (Mahapatra, 2021).

In contrast to the case of reduction in extreme poverty in rural regions, the gains in GDP have not translated into increased spending on public education. The government's total expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP for 2021-22 was 3.1% (UNESCO, 2022; see Table 5.3). This rate is half of the target of increasing educational spending to 6% of GDP (Government of India, 2020). The percentage might not have changed, but the absolute amount has.

**Table 5.3**
*Trends in Indian Government's Expenditure on Education and Annual Change*

| Category | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Expenditure on education total (% of GDP) | 3.8 | 3.87 | 3.84 | No data | 4.11 | 4.25 | 4.31 | 4.36 | 4.41 | 4.47 | 3.1 |
| Expenditure on education total (% of government spending) | 13.56 | 13.99 | 14.05 | No data | 15.69 | 15.72 | 15.81 | 16.64 | 16.73 | 16.54 | – |
| Annual change in expenditure (%) | 1.73 | 0.43 | 0.06 | No data | 1.64 | 0.03 | 0.09 | 0.83 | 0.09 | -0.19 | – |

*Note*. From World Bank (2023a, 2023b) and UNESCO (2022).

The 2021-22 Unified District Information System for Education Plus report highlighted that a decline in transition rate for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities continues to remain an issue (see Tables 5.4 to 5.6). Lastly, the enrollment of girls from both groups continues to decline as they move from one school level to another.

**Table 5.4**
*Performance Indicators: Percentage of Gross Enrollment Ratio, Dropout and Transition Rates*

| Parameters | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---|---|---|
| Gross enrollment ratio: Scheduled Castes | | |
| Primary | 113.7 | 113.1 |
| Upper primary | 100 | 103.79 |
| Elementary | 108.6 | 109.66 |
| Secondary | 84.8 | 84.91 |
| Higher secondary | 56.1 | 61.49 |
| Gross enrollment ratio: Scheduled Tribes | | |
| Primary | 106.7 | 106.5 |
| Upper primary | 95.8 | 97.95 |
| Elementary | 102.7 | 103.35 |
| Secondary | 78.6 | 78.1 |
| Higher secondary | 45.2 | 52.01 |
| Dropout rates: All categories | | |
| Primary | 0.8 | 1.45 |
| Upper primary | 1.9 | 3.02 |
| Secondary | 14.6 | 12.61 |
| Transition rates: All categories | | |
| Primary to upper primary | 92.1 | 93.18 |
| Upper primary to secondary | 91.3 | 88.81 |
| Secondary to higher secondary | 73.3 | 78.41 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-22.

**Table 5.5**
*Gross Enrollment Ratio by Social Groups and Gender*

| | Primary (5 to 6) | | Upper Primary (8 to 9) | | Elementary (1 to 8) | | Secondary (10 to 11) | | Higher Secondary (11 to 12) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Group** | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| **Scheduled Castes** | 111.5 | 114.9 | 103.1 | 104.5 | 108.4 | 111.0 | 84.2 | 85.6 | 59.5 | 63.7 |
| **Scheduled Tribes** | 106.3 | 106.7 | 98.3 | 97.6 | 103.4 | 103.3 | 77.0 | 79.2 | 50.5 | 53.6 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-2022.

**Table 5.6**
*Dropout Rate and Transition Rate by Level of Education and Gender: All Categories, 2021-22*

| **Dropout rate** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary (1-5) | | Upper primary (6-8) | | Secondary (9-10) | |
| Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| 1.6 | 1.4 | 2.7 | 3.3 | 13 | 12.3 |

| **Transition rate** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Primary to upper primary (5 to 6) | | Upper primary to secondary (8 to 9) | | Secondary to higher secondary (10 to 11) | |
| Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| 93 | 93.4 | 89.7 | 88.8 | 77.6 | 79.3 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-2022.

With respect to infrastructure facilities in government schools, the 2021-22 Unified District Information System for Education Plus report highlights improvements compared to the previous years (see Table 5.7). However, computer-related facilities fell behind.

**Table 5.7**
*Percentage of Availability of School Resources by Management, 2021-22*

| Parameters | Government | Government aided | Private unaided | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure facilities (%) | | | | |
| Functional drinking water facility | 96.1 | 95.6 | 96 | 91.4 |
| Functional boys' toilet facilities | 91.2 | 92.8 | 98 | 88.2 |
| Functional girls' toilet facilities | 94.0 | 93.6 | 97.9 | 87.9 |
| Functional computer facility | 35.8 | 67.5 | 71.9 | 39.0 |
| Internet facility | 24.2 | 53.1 | 59.6 | 28.8 |
| Functional electricity connection | 85.4 | 86.9 | 91.7 | 77.9 |
| Pupil-teacher ratio – rural and urban | | | | |
| Primary | 26.17 | | | |
| Upper primary | 19.45 | | | |
| Secondary | 17.60 | | | |
| Higher secondary | 27.08 | | | |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-2022.

Approximately 76% and 90% of people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes respectively live in rural regions. (Census of India, 2011).

As the research on the low-income rural communities discussed in this report suggests India's national economic growth has led to improved living conditions and increased educational resources in the state, both for the rural population generally and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes specifically. But as state education officials shared and other studies show, these gains are quite limited; extreme poverty, malnutrition, and lack of permanent housing facilities continue for many and the lifestyles in some communities—especially Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities—are described as unchanged for decades. These findings are also consistent with broader research findings which show recent declines in economic growth in rural areas that are linked in part to the impact of COVID (Rural Education India, n.d.). The major economic disparities between urban and rural areas continue, with the largest share of India's low-income population living in rural communities.

Despite the gains in GDP and decline in extreme poverty rates, the effects have not resulted in much gain in educational outcomes (in terms of school participation and transition) for students from these communities. And as education officials noted, girls in the communities are among those most negatively impacted. Thus, caste or tribe along with poverty continues to limit educational opportunities for girls and needs to be considered in future policy efforts (Tsujita, 2013), as well as in programming and allocation of resources. Many officials indicated that students from these most marginalized population groups are more likely to report high absenteeism, low levels of learning, and higher dropout rates at the upper primary or secondary school level. Therefore, there is a need to learn more about the extent to which India's economic gains have also led to educational gains for students living in high-poverty rural communities. Furthermore, when education officials have been involved or pivotal in these gains, their perspectives and learning could be explored and shared with others who might benefit.

Another important finding as indicated by the education officials was that the provision of health services and food security is extremely important for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population to prevent their slide back into poverty. Thus, the government's subsidized food distribution program—the Antyodaya Anna Yojana—is an extremely important effort towards ensuring that their basic needs are met (Kharas et al., 2020; Mehta & O'Donnell, 2022).

Given this research, it is possible that addressing extreme poverty conditions of families from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities is the greatest challenge that state education officials face when planning, interpreting, and/or implementing education policies, programs or schemes for the students from these communities. While funding

was not an issue reported as a cause of concern by the education officials, with a decrease in the Indian government's spending on education in 2021, any positive influence on education resources and on academic outcomes (as measured by transitions to higher levels of education and dropout rates) will most probably be slower than predicted.

Moving forward, with future conversations focused on eliminating extreme poverty in India by 2030 (one of the Sustainable Development Goals), the focus of future efforts should be to consider rural and urban differences when tailoring poverty reduction strategies as well as the unintended consequence of these efforts. For instance, improving connectivity between rural and urban areas could improve food security, and support health interventions (Kharas et al., 2020). However, an unintended consequence of better connectivity may fuel outmigration from Scheduled Tribes areas to the cities. Furthermore, it is important to assess family- or community-specific needs, as the needs of Scheduled Castes families will vary from those of Scheduled Tribes families. It is also important to identify the factors contributing to extreme poverty in these households when designing poverty interventions, and this includes contributing factors as understood by families and education officials alike. For instance, most education officials reported that a higher proportion of marginalized families are involved in agriculture, and their living conditions have not changed much. These may be important factors contributing to lower education success of learners, where increased importance is given to earning money to support the family. In this case, school schedules might need to be adjusted during harvest, for example, in addition to provision of bursaries and other teaching and learning supports.

## B. Rural Education in the Context of Evolving Rights for Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and for Girls

### *Societal and Policy Changes*

The Ministry of Law and Justice in India through the enactment of the national constitutional mandate—The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009—makes it a "fundamental right" for every child between 6 and 14 years of age to receive free and compulsory education (Kumari, 2015). Additionally, the country has enshrined constitutional provisions making it mandatory for state and local education authorities to protect the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups. For instance, Articles 14–16, 17, 46, and 335 of the constitution related to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups aim at positive discrimination to address the deep social divisions created by caste and tribe, leading to poverty and stigma (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2021; Sabharwal, 2014). The constitution also identifies action such as reservation in educational institutions, including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the state (Sabharwal, 2014), and reservation of seats for higher education or employment in government institutions to uplift these groups and protect against discrimination in subtle and indirect forms.

In addition, the state and national government provides a number of educational schemes for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities to support continuous school attendance and schooling. A few important provisions in place are free textbooks, school uniforms, and scholarships (at the pre- and post-matric level). Furthermore, there are special provisions in place for girls from these communities such as bicycles and scholarships.

However, prominent newspaper reports and research findings continue to highlight deprivation of basic education rights and facilities for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups (Hindrise, n.d.). For instance, the national and state schemes have benefited high-poverty rural students, particularly girls, with improving school attendance generally and enabling them to continue school. However, "corruption and gaps in the accessibility and coverage" associated with these schemes have been reported (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016, p. 267). Also, reservation policy in private educational institutions is not available for school education.

For instance, family members from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes have indicated that the schemes do not make provision of equal opportunity for students from these groups. They reported that the schemes often do not pay for learning tools such as bags, pens, and worksheets after Grade 8, and funds were needed to cover these expenses. Also, because of unclear application guidelines and timelines, students from these backgrounds have been unable to access the scholarship program on time (The Network, 2021). The scholarship funds received by girls particularly are often utilized by the family for household costs (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016). Lastly, the pandemic-induced economic slowdown has negatively impacted rural families, making it difficult for them to afford school fees or even basic necessities, causing children to drop out of school altogether (Rural Education India, n.d.).

With respect to reservation quotas, the All India Survey on Higher Education reported there has been considerable improvement in the percentage of Scheduled Tribes students enrolled in higher education since 2014-15 (Press Trust of India, 2023; see Table 5.8). The statistics are on the rise for the Scheduled Castes group too. Most of these

enrollments have taken place in government institutes. While there has been an improvement, these students are still not well represented. Apart from institutions not abiding by the policy or "making loopholes a norm," families from these communities are also hesitant to come forward to avail themselves of these government schemes (Das, 2021).

**Table 5.8**
*Enrollment in Higher Education by Group*

| Social Group | 2020-21 | Percentage growth |
|---|---|---|
| Scheduled Castes | 5.8 | 27.98 |
| Scheduled Tribes | 14.2 | 47 |
| Other backward class | 35.8 | 31.67 |
| Other communities | 44.2 | - |

*Note*. From Press Trust of India (2023).

As suggested by the research findings on the low-income rural state discussed in this report, state and national programs such as mid-day meal, school uniforms, and textbooks play an important role for students generally, and the Scheduled Castes and Tribes specifically, in continuing their education. The state education officials indicated that program supports alleviated cost burdens for low-income families and students. The study findings also showed that education officials hope for "national integration" through the shared mid-day meals. This was a desired benefit alongside reducing absenteeism and dropout rates. Furthermore, the provision of special government programs such as scholarships and tuition support at the pre- and post-metric level has helped students from these communities gain progress in school.

But as the literature suggests, these gains are limited and the concern of hidden costs, for many, remains. Due to the extreme poverty backgrounds of these families, having to meet these costs is a challenge. As education officials indicate, there are other

constraints linked to extreme poverty. These include the need for school-aged youth to be employed or to work in the fields or in the home. Therefore, it is important for state education officials and policymakers to consider the many types and complexity of deprivation that students from these communities face as they craft better policies and programs to address students' needs based on the understanding of intersecting forms of identity. This would include tailoring responses to community needs as well as engaging education officials who would be overseeing and sometimes implementing these efforts.

### *Changes in Rural Education*

The National Education Policy 2020 of India reiterates the important role of education as the main avenue to integrate students from these communities into mainstream society (Government of India, 2020; Sahni, 2020). Similarly, research studies have argued the important role of education for students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes as a path to social mobility (Hindrise, n.d.).

To realize the important role of education, the Indian government has implemented various initiatives to ensure universalization of school education. All school education programmes or initiatives are offered under the banner of Samagra Siksha Abhiyan, and the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (School Meal Programme), to enhance schools in rural India. These programs focus on universalizing elementary education, with special focus on Scheduled Castes and Tribes and on girls. The School Meal Programme also focuses on retaining students through elementary education.

However, the issue of poor-quality rural education in India remains (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016). A few important problems are the lack of proper school infrastructure (i.e., toilets [particularly an issue for girls], number of schools,

benches, blackboards, playgrounds, drinking water), insufficient and underqualified teachers, high teacher turnover rates, overcrowded classrooms, lack of basic resources (such as textbooks, computers, internet access), and transportation (Rural Education India, n.d.; Hindrise, n.d.). Thus, the poor quality of rural education contributes to the cycle of poverty, as after completing secondary school rural students are more likely to be involved in low-skill or low-paying jobs (Rural Education India, n.d.).

Findings on the low-income rural communities identified in this report suggest gains like having a sufficient number of rural government schools and using school-level data to determine facilities required in these schools would be highly beneficial to most marginalized learners including those in rural, more isolated areas. India's national economic growth has led to improved resources in rural government schools; however, these gains are limited. Lack of playgrounds, inequitable distribution of resources for rural schools, lack of infrastructure ranging from technology to toilets, unqualified teachers, poor classroom instructional practices, and lack of motivation among teachers to improve learning levels of poor performing students were described as areas of concern that continue to remain. As a higher percentage of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities live in rural regions, a higher proportion of this population finds themselves enrolling in these low-quality rural government schools. Thus, as reported in the literature and noted by education officials in this study, these rural student groups experience low levels of learning and higher dropout rates (Annual Status of Education Report, 2019; Khaitan, 2020). While education officials indicate that state and national government work towards ensuring students enrolled in government schools receive a quality education, it is important to also acknowledge the lack of

resources, poor infrastructure facilities, and poor teaching and learning practices within classrooms that have been identified in government research. These deficits further perpetuate discrimination and segregation for students enrolled in underresourced schools (Rural Education India, n.d.).

Moving forward, future investment by the state and national government in training teachers so that they are qualified to teach not only relevant subjects but also high-poverty rural students who have additional needs may be beneficial (Akshatha, 2018). Doing so is particularly important as the National Education Policy 2020 strives to establish an education system that provides equitable access and high-quality education for all learners, regardless of social and economic background (Government of India, 2020).

Furthermore, focusing on bridging the technology gap is an important focus area for the education officials interviewed (especially given the pandemic). Technology and support for tech would allow access to a variety of high-quality online learning resources for rural teachers and students, facilitate collaboration and sharing of resources between teachers, and offer connectivity with the outside world.

### *The Continuing Impact of Isolation and Discrimination on the Education of High-Poverty Rural Students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes*

Safety and security concerns for girls who travel a distance to school have been raised in international reports (Bista & Cosstick, 2005). Such travel also raises family concern. With girls being more vulnerable than boys, they are easier targets and are sometimes forced to succumb to early marriage or discontinue schooling (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016).

In the context of this study, given the complex relationship between social context and demographic isolation, it is important to look beyond access to a wider understanding of participation (Gandhi, 2017). As the research finding on girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes report suggests, due to the remote and difficult geographical terrain inhabited by them (particularly relevant for the Scheduled Tribes population), safety and security concerns for girls due to lack of transportation to and from school continue to remain an issue.

As posited in the National Education Policy 2020, while government policies focus on education as an avenue to integrate girls into society, these efforts can bear some fruit by raising awareness about the importance of education in rural areas. These efforts can be multiplied through collaboration with local schools' staff members and nongovernmental organizations.

Beyond the issue of isolation, various research studies have described the different ways in which discrimination is experienced by Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. Discrimination may be in the form of gendered labor within the family, in teaching and learning processes in schools, whether subtle or overt, or in more damaging ways like sexual violence (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016).

A survey conducted by Pew Research Center found that most Indians did "not feel there is a lot of caste discrimination" (Sahgal et al., 2021). Those who identified themselves as Scheduled Castes or Tribes posited that while discrimination against their group is present, it is not widespread (Sahgal et al., 2021, p. 2; see Tables 5.9 and 5.10). Among the general findings, (a) Indians were comfortable living in the same neighborhoods as people of different castes but preferred to socialize within their own

caste; (b) highly educated individuals were more likely to belong to upper castes when compared to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups; and (c) the Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups were more likely to be unable to afford food, housing, or medical care when compared to non–Scheduled Castes and Tribes groups. It is important to mention that these findings vary by region.

**Table 5.9**
*Percentage of Indian Adults Who Say, in India Today, There is a Lot of Discrimination Against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes*

| Respondents | Discrimination against | |
|---|---|---|
| | Scheduled Castes | Scheduled Tribes |
| General population | 20 | 19 |
| Men | 21 | 20 |
| Women | 20 | 19 |
| Brahmin (Upper Hindu caste) | 17 | 17 |
| Other general category | 19 | 19 |
| Scheduled Caste/Tribe | 26 | 23 |
| Other/most backward class | 17 | 15 |
| Recent financial hardship | 25 | 24 |
| No financial hardship | 17 | 16 |

*Note.* From Sahgal et al. (2021). "Recent financial hardship" includes those who say they did not have enough money to pay for food, medical care, and/or housing in the last year.

**Table 5.10**
*Percentage of Indian Adults Who Felt Personally Discriminated Against Because of Their Caste in the Past 12 Months*

| Category | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| General population | 14 | 82 |
| Men | 15 | 82 |
| Women | 14 | 83 |
| Brahmin (upper Hindu caste) | 13 | 84 |
| Other general category | 12 | 83 |
| Scheduled Caste/Tribe | 17 | 79 |
| Other/most backward class | 13 | 85 |
| Recent financial hardship | 20 | 77 |
| No financial hardship | 10 | 87 |

*Note.* From Sahgal et al. (2021). Total does not add up to 100 as those adults who did not recognize or were not a member of a caste or did not answer their responses are not shown.

The survey also gathered data on perception of gender attitudes in families and society among Indian adults across all age groups. It found that men were more likely than women to have conservative views on gender (Evans et al., 2022). An important finding was that women felt that they were discriminated against "a lot" because they were women as compared to caste-based discrimination (Evans et al., 2022, p. 7). A higher percentage of men viewed the role of women as taking care of children, having less right to a job, and obeying their husbands at home. In agreement with the study findings, such attitudes may be the reason for the low female labor force participation rate compared with the rest of the world (21% vs. 53% global median). Broadly, the findings (although varying by region) highlighted that Indian adults (particularly men) support more conservative gender norms than those from North America, Latin America, and Western Europe.

To address the discrimination faced by girls or women, the Indian government has implemented the *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao* ("Save the girl child, Educate the girl child") program to improve the status of girls by ensuring educational opportunities for them. However, because of highly patriarchal values and beliefs, as well as gender discrimination and violence in society, there is continuing lack of support from family members to continue education for girls, as well as support for early child marriage (Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2022). Thus, a higher proportion of girls than boys continue to remain out of school.

This research study's findings are consistent with the body of literature on learners from Scheduled Castes and Tribes. As suggested by state education officials and supported by the research, Scheduled Castes and Tribes students face discrimination in

subtle ways. For some, their living conditions have improved, students are performing well academically, and there has been increased family interest in education. Nonetheless students continue to face physical and mental abuse by dominant groups (typically upper-caste Hindus and sometimes Muslims). They continue to face teacher bias in rural government schools. Furthermore, in alignment with prior research, 'discrimination' faced by students from these communities is often not talked about in an open manner. Moreover, families from these communities continue to face challenges such as lack of food, health facilities, and housing. However, the study also suggests the important role of the mid-day meal as a bonding program to facilitate national integration; all children are eligible for it, and all eat together.

With respect to girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities, the study's findings are inconsistent with the broader literature on patriarchy (Gandhi, 2017; Lastrapes & Rajaram, 2016; Tripathy, 2020; Tripathy & Pradhan, 2003). The study's findings suggest that the rate of discrimination has decreased and that there has been an improvement in the number of girls completing education compared to some other states in India. Furthermore, there has been improvement in the academic performance of girls when compared to boys from these communities.

Yet, in Green Estate and more broadly, the gains are quite limited; continued discrimination persists in the form of gendered labor within the family, continuing customs of girl-child marriage in some 'pocket areas' contributing to dropouts, and the preference for sending boys over girls to private or English-medium schools. Consequently, caste and gender disparities continue to exist in rural India. These factors

continue to play a significant role in determining education expectations and outcomes for students from marginalized, including rural communities.

### C. The Role of Government Schools in Rural Communities

The 2020-21 and 2021-22 Unified District Information System for Education Plus report highlights the sharp decline in the percentage of students enrolling in government schools and the sharp increase in enrollment in private schools at the elementary level. It also highlights a similar trend at the secondary and higher secondary level (see Table 5.11). This would very likely result in further isolation for learners from most marginalized communities across India. While state versus non-state schooling was not discussed by education officials in this study, isolation was expressed as a major concern.

**Table 5.11**
*Percentage of Enrollment of Students by School Management and Level of School Education – Rural and Urban, 2020-21 and 2021-22*

| | Primary (1-5) | Upper Primary (6-8) | Elementary (1-8) | Secondary (9-10) | Higher Secondary (11-12) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2020-21 | | | | | |
| Government schools | 77.94 | 40.68 | 118.62 | 20.04 | 11.67 |
| Government-aided schools | 20.27 | 28.20 | 48.509 | 29.19 | 22.37 |
| Private unaided recognized schools | 32.48 | 15.92 | 48.40 | 10.09 | 8.03 |
| 2021-22 | | | | | |
| Government schools | 52.02 | 27.01 | 79.04 | 12.65 | 8.31 |
| Government-aided schools | 20.31 | 27.93 | 48.24 | 28.64 | 23.11 |
| Private unaided recognized schools | 47.22 | 24.27 | 71.49 | 15.58 | 12.92 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020-2021 and 2021-22.

The Indian government has attempted to improve the quality of education of government schools by providing free mid-day meals, school uniforms, textbooks, and scholarships—specifically for Scheduled Castes and Tribes students—and providing bicycles (specifically for girls) (Akshatha, 2018). It has also invested in improving the

infrastructure of government schools and decreasing the pupil-teacher ratio across 4 years (see Table 5.12). However, these efforts have not succeeded in making public schools an attractive option among high-poverty rural communities.

**Table 5.12**
*Performance Indicators: Availability of School Resources by Management*

| Parameters | Government | | Government aided | | Private unaided | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Infrastructure facilities (%) | 2021-22 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | 2020-21 |
| Functional drinking water facility | 96.1 | 95.39 | 95.6 | 94.93 | 96 | 95.45 |
| Functional boys' toilet facilities | 91.2 | 90.82 | 92.8 | 91.02 | 98 | 97.84 |
| Functional girls' toilet facilities | 94.0 | 93.31 | 93.6 | 92.42 | 97.9 | 97.40 |
| Functional computer facility | 35.8 | 31.11 | 67.5 | 60.44 | 71.9 | 62.70 |
| Internet facility | 24.2 | 13.64 | 53.1 | 43.81 | 59.6 | 52.96 |
| Functional electricity connection | 85.4 | 82.15 | 86.9 | 84.98 | 91.7 | 90.74 |
| Pupil-teacher ratio – rural and urban (%) | 2018-19 | 2019-20 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 | | |
| Primary | 27.7 | 26.4 | 26.3 | 26.17 | | |
| Upper primary | 19.1 | 18.1 | 18.9 | 19.45 | | |
| Secondary | 20.6 | 18.4 | 18.4 | 17.60 | | |
| Higher secondary | 29.6 | 26.2 | 26.3 | 27.08 | | |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

For instance, international and national newspaper reports have called attention to continuing issues related to rural government schools in India (Akshatha, 2018). Some of these issues are the lack of school infrastructure, the low quality of classroom instruction, teacher absenteeism, teacher shortage, underqualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, a high pupil-teacher ratio, and lack of learning resources (Rural Education India, n.d.; Hindrise, n.d.). This has resulted in either the closure of public schools or merging of schools due to insufficient students or a "homogeneous section of children from working class and migrant families" enrolled in these schools (Akshatha, 2018, p. 1).

All of these factors have resulted in rapid growth of the private school sector and high-poverty families holding a general opinion that students enrolled in government schools receive low-quality education. Consequently, families from high-poverty backgrounds, despite financial obligations, strive to ensure their children are enrolled in English medium private schools as they perceive that private schools provide better quality education and will help their children get better paying jobs or better employment opportunities (Akshatha, 2018). Furthermore, students enrolled in these institutions are outperforming those in public schools, even after controlling for socioeconomic background variables (Akshatha, 2018; Tooley, 2020).

It is important to note that such a trend (see Table 5.13) has not been observed in India alone, but also in other developing nations such as the Lagos state, Nigeria (approximately 70% in preschool and primary school level), Nairobi (Kenya), Kampala (Uganda), and Accra (Ghana) (Tooley, 2020). The general population holds the perception that public schools are schools of last resort for students who have no other options. Consequently, a rapid spread of low-cost private schools in rural regions has been observed (Tooley, 2020).

**Table 5.13**
*Enrollment in Low-Cost Private Schools in India*

| Region | Urban | Rural |
|---|---|---|
| Private school (%) | 70 | 30 |

*Note*. From Tooley (2020).

Private schools are generally perceived to be more accountable and offer better quality education than government schools by lower middle-class and middle-class families (Akshatha, 2018). As teachers are more accountable in private schools, these

schools are generally perceived by these families as providing better quality education. In terms of improving student outcomes, after controlling for observable child, family, school, and teacher characteristics, it was found that despite students in private schools performing better than students in government schools, the average score as well as the gain in learning from one grade level to the next was low for both school types (Goyal & Pandey, 2009).

This study's findings align with the broader literature on government and low-income private/non-state schools, as the report suggests that government schools serve primarily high-poverty families, and even these families—despite their extremely limited resources—try to find a way to send at least some of their children to private schools, with priority given to boys. However, an interesting addition to the literature is the finding that government schools are further segregated by their location (particularly in tribal areas) where there is a lack of environment for reading and learning. Thus, while The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 makes education compulsory for school going children, the quality of rural government school and the demographic of students enrolled in these schools further perpetuates segregation (Juneja, 2016; Kumari, 2015).

Interestingly, similar to government schools, private schools show gradual reduction in enrollment as students progress from one school level to another. This is an area state and nonstate education leaders could explore and improve upon. Findings from international successes such as What Works in Girls Education (Brookings Institute) could be disseminated, and conversely, scholars could better disseminate their

comparative findings to officials, as practitioners and scholars work towards improving the quality of education in government and nonstate schools alike.

### D. India's Experiment with Residential Schools for Girls in Rural Communities

India's government-run residential schools program, from the upper primary level onwards, is a national effort that focuses on enrolling rural girls from socioeconomic disadvantaged backgrounds who have either dropped out or are vulnerable to dropping out in educationally backward blocks (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2007). The program seeks to challenge norms informed by one's caste, tribe, and gender such as (a) promoting access to schooling; (b) providing security and protection to girls; (c) improving academic outcomes for students, particularly girls; (d) providing a better learning environment; and (e) promoting socialization and mainstreaming of children from "rural and remote regions and those belonging to ethnic and linguistic minorities" (Bista & Cosstick, 2005, p. 2). The program also aims to address the high gender disparities that exist among rural disadvantaged communities (Rajendra & Sarin, 2021).

Residential schools in India have been gradually increasing in number since the policy came into effect in 2004 (see Table 5.14). These schools provide facilities such as cycling and self-defense classes, curriculum tailored towards the special needs of students to enable catching up (Jain & Rajagopal, 2012), and gender- and culture-sensitive training for teachers so that they are better oriented to work with students attending the program (Rajendra & Sarin, 2021). On a positive note, girls enrolled in these schools have reported improved academic performance (Santoshini, 2019).

**Table 5.14**
*Total Number of Residential Schools in India*

| Parameters | 2007 | 2018 | 2020-21 | 2021-22 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Residential schools | 916 | 3,697 | 34,946 | 45,369 |

*Note*. Data from Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2021-2022; Rajendra and Sarin (2021).

Yet, a more recent evaluation report by an apex public policy think tank, NITI Aayog, criticized government residential schools with reproducing further social inequities (NITI Aayog, 2015; Rajendra & Sarin, 2021). The report highlights the culturally isolating effects of these schools. While girls admitted into these schools may have an advantage relative to their peers as they are able to continue with education (Santoshini, 2019), physically separating students from their social origin and providing education has been found to be "deeply problematic" (Bhog, 2016; Rajendra & Sarin, 2021).

Santoshini (2019) reported other problems: (a) the limited number of girls finding access to residential schools (Bhatty & Dongre, 2016); (b) death and sexual abuse of girls; (c) lack of food and hygiene; (d) "constant reminder to students to be grateful for the free education and lodging, and not complain when facilities and services fall short" (Santoshini, 2019, p. 3); (e) purposeful closure of village schools due to low enrollment of students and allocating those funds to residential schools, thus compelling parents to enroll their children in these schools away from home; (f) scarcity of teachers in subjects such as physics, math, botany, and the state language; (g) low-quality teaching due to contract teachers receiving low pay showing low motivation towards improving student learning; and (h) irregular monitoring of residential schools. All of these factors highlight the substandard quality of life and education in residential schools.

Similar outcomes of cultural isolation for Aboriginal and American Indian students enrolled in residential schools have been reported for several other countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States (Buti, 2002; Panetta, 2021). The curriculum followed in these schools focused on Christian education with no emphasis on these students' culture or history. Only a few hours each day was set aside for school or lessons. In addition, mental and physical abuse and substandard care were reported for these children. Consequently, children suffered from abuse (physical, emotional, sexual, and spiritual), loss of their native language, poor health, suicide, loneliness, and alienation (Buti, 2002). A more serious effect resulted in terms of loss of culture, family connection, and trust due to the separation of these children from their families.

In the context of this study, some state education officials' reflections are supported by national and international studies. For example, they consistently state that residential schools must make provisions to meet the safety and security and health and hygiene needs of learners. Also, while officials' perspectives on the effectiveness and appropriateness of residential programs differed from the literature, the core challenges leading to recommendations for residential programs were extremely similar. Officials' perceptions of the negative impact of early girl-child marriage and inequitable household-related burdens experienced by girls, for example, were also broadly found in country and region-specific studies (Rajendra & Sarin, 2021; Santoshini, 2019). However, as noted, the officials' suggestion that residential schools are a possible solution for addressing social inequity and high dropout among girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities runs counter to what is known from the literature in this area, and enrolling girls in these schools results in loss of language and identity and separation of

girls from their families that has been found to have far-reaching negative outcomes (Buti, 2002; NITI Aayog, 2015; Panetta, 2021; Santoshini, 2019). To sum up, there is a substantial amount of research—not just in India but also globally—on how problematic these residential programs often are.

India needs to exercise caution as it continues to expand residential schools for girls, especially for those from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities (Mohanty, 2020; NITI Aayog, 2015; Rajendra & Sarin, 2021). Continuing to implement this policy without considering its long-term impact (for example, its culturally isolating effects on students, loss of native language) and ignoring its complexity may continue to reproduce social inequities and may adversely impact students' experiences. And while there has been improvement in the academic performance of girls enrolled in these schools, the issues of low-quality education in these schools, lack of motivation among teachers to improve learning for students, irrelevant curriculum, poor physical condition of the schools, reports of sexual abuse and deaths, and lack of food and hygiene continue to raise questions around the quality of education, safety, health and hygiene, and conditions in residential schools. Moreover, due to the limited number of girls enrolled in these schools, the program is not designed to solve the problem of "education for all" (Santoshini, 2019). In all, physically separating students from their families and providing education to first-generation students in poorly run residential schools has been found to be unfavorable for the personal growth of students, resulting in further perpetuation of caste, tribe, and gender discrimination.

This study suggests a related area for exploration which is the possible need for education officials to have access and understanding of national and international policy

and program evaluations and, similarly, the need for academic and scholarly researchers to present their work to national and state education officials in a way that is digestible and relevant to their responsibilities and lines of authority.

### E. Rural Education for Language-Minority Students

Given the multilingual diversity present in India, the notion of using mother tongue as the medium of instruction is not new to the Indian education system (Lightfoot et al., 2022). The 2011 Census data reported 22 official languages and 270 mother tongues (Census of India, 2011; Pruthi, 2018). Legally, state government education is required to offer, under Article 350A of the Indian Constitution, "adequate facilities for instruction in the mother-tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups" (Khaitan, 2020, p. 4). The same has been stressed by the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act. Likewise, for students from Scheduled Tribes communities, the Kothari Commission on Education suggested that in tribal areas for the first 2 years of school, the medium of instruction and books should be in the local tribal language. Regional language should be taught separately as a subject and should become the medium of instruction by the third year (Khaitan, 2020).

The most frequently cited is the three-language policy originally proposed in 1956. The three-language policy consists of Hindi (in Hindi-speaking states) and non-Hindi (in non–Hindi-speaking states), English, and the state language as a medium of instruction (Doel & Patil, 2020; Gautam, 2003). The new National Education Policy 2020 emphasizes the benefits of mother-tongue–based instruction. It states that "wherever possible, the medium of instruction in schools until Grade 5, but preferably until Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language"

(Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 3). This approach is to be followed both in government and private schools (Ministry of Education, 2020). This recommendation has been made based on research findings that argue that using the language the child is comfortable with in early school years improves learning outcomes, ensures retention, increases student participation, and reduces repetition and dropout rates (Lightfoot et al., 2022).

Notwithstanding the various efforts invested, the implementation of the language policy has been inconsistent. A few important issues have been reported (Khan, 2017; Lightfoot et al., 2022):

- The ongoing debate on which native language becomes the mother tongue and which to exclude in regions with more than one tribe residing together.
- The lack of trained teachers to implement the change in both government and private schools
- Textbooks in English using difficult language that may be suitable for urban schools but is not suitable for students or teachers in rural areas
- Failure to recognize that teaching in most higher education institutions takes place in English, causing a disadvantage for students who grow up studying in a native or mother tongue. This also adversely affects their job prospects, where English has become the 'lingua franca' of the world

A more common criticism of this policy (and an unintended consequence) lies in it creating a divide between those who can speak English and those who cannot. Approximately 44% of students in rural areas are enrolled in private schools because the medium of classroom instruction is English (Karthik, 2018). While government schools focus primarily on native languages, with English being spoken from Grade 5 onwards as

a second language, private schools discourage the use of the native language—even among peers and friends. Thus, socioeconomic disadvantaged communities, regardless of the quality of 'English medium' schools, prefer sending their children to these schools because of the perception that mastery of the English language will ensure their children's success in later life. This presents a clear competitive disadvantage to students enrolled in public schools. It also results in students going to English medium schools harboring a negative attitude towards their native language. This has serious consequences later due to the lack of English medium schools beyond elementary level in rural regions (Khan, 2017). Thus, a large proportion of students are forced to opt for vernacular medium schools.

In the context of this research study, the findings are consistent with the broader literature, as state education officials report on students from Scheduled Tribes suggests that insufficient resources and time are allocated to represent the multiple tribes and languages for classroom instruction and textbooks. Also, they noted the rise in demand for separate schools that teach in tribal languages and reflect tribal cultures by families from Scheduled Tribes in the state. As more recent studies highlight, it is important to consider the implications, for example, the tradeoff that needs to be considered between teaching children in their home language and thereby increasing their comfort level and ease of learning the subject matter but at the same time incurring the risk of potential loss of higher education and job opportunities if they don't become fluent in the major national languages (Lightfoot et al., 2022).

Overall, finding balance with multilingualism requires careful planning and resources. Trying to promote the native language or mother tongue when English is now

a preferred language of instruction for the fast-growing lower middle class has implications. Also, while teaching in the native language has its strengths, it is not a silver bullet for solving the problem of low learning outcomes for students. Future efforts should focus on changes in pedagogical practices, having supplementary material and language handbooks in the local language, and training teachers who are proficient in native and local languages to teach in such classroom settings (Khaitan, 2020). Lastly, it will also be important to reach out to families from these communities, informing them how transitioning from their mother tongue or native language will make understanding English easier.

## Summary

This chapter analyzes the state's findings in the context of research at the national level. Overall, much of the state's findings align with that of other studies on education in India and education equity in scholarly literature. However, there are instances where differences were found. The state findings from education officials align with external findings on factors such as, the continued presence of extreme poverty, lack of permanent housing, malnutrition, health and hygiene facilities, lack of transportation, and higher percentage of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes population continuing to reside in rural and/or isolated regions. There were similarities on factors such as, the important role of government schemes in continuing education for these students; the importance of increased educational funding (as measured by transitions to higher levels of education and dropout rates), lack of school infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, shortage and underqualified teachers, presence of subtle forms of discrimination and physical and mental abuse faced by Scheduled Castes and Tribes students either by dominant groups

or teacher bias in rural government schools, and insufficient time and resources allocated for representing the multiple tribes and languages for classroom instruction and textbooks.

Nonetheless, differences in findings from this study and other research findings were observed where the state's findings reported noticeable improvement in all aspects of education. For instance, an increase in the number of rural government schools and residential schools for girls from disadvantaged communities (as a means to address high dropout rates and social inequity among girls from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities); an improvement in number of girls completing education and better academic performance of girls when compared to boys from these communities; and although limited an improvement in the living conditions of Scheduled Castes and Tribes families. The perception of education officials contrasted with external findings and research trends point to both the complexity of the topic and perhaps the need to engage education officials on India-specific evidence as well as scholarly findings on best practices more generally. These differences also suggest a need for researchers and scholars to offer their findings to practitioners, such as state officials, in a way that is more accessible and actionable.

To sum up, while low-quality of rural government schools may be one factor, it is not the only factor responsible for continued dropout rates, student absenteeism, and low transition and transition among students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities. Social factors such as extreme poverty, early child marriage, high rate of illiteracy and unwillingness among parents to send their children to school, lack of transportation, health, and hygiene issues are additional factors that contribute towards

the slow educational progress of students from these communities. In addition, perceptions and misconceptions of education officials may sometimes assist and at other times hinder the policies and programs designed to increase equity. Thus, there remains miles to go before India can attain 100% Gross Enrolment Ratio from preschool to secondary level by 2030.

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## APPENDIX A:

### Recruitment Letter to State Education Officials

I am conducting a research study for my doctoral dissertation at The George Washington University in Washington, DC. The study aims to determine the main factors that have contributed to the low participation of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities in education at all levels. Furthermore, it aims to determine the efficacy of education and social policies in the view of education officials; and to identify the facilitators and barriers to accomplishing the state's goal.

Research on the factors influencing these areas will provide important information that could be used to strengthen educational policies. My doctoral dissertation is intended to assist in providing that information.

I would like to request a brief, 45-60 minutes interview with you to discuss your insights on this topic.

Your responses to my interview questions would be dealt with anonymously. I would use pseudonyms in place of your name and the names of departments. All interview data will be kept in secure locations and will ultimately be destroyed to preserve your confidentiality. The audio recordings will be destroyed after the transcription process.

Please contact me at this e-mail address or telephone number if you are able to participate:

anshusaha@gwu.edu
+1-206-972-5180

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Anshu Saha
Doctoral Candidate, Education Policy
The George Washington University

## APPENDIX B:

## Interview Protocol for State Education Officials

### Introduction

*Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today. As you may know, I am a doctoral student in education policy at George Washington University, and I am writing my dissertation on what state officials perceive to be the needs of various student groups in the schools from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes communities in their jurisdiction. In our interview today, I would like to discuss different topics. These will pertain mostly to the role of state officials in serving the needs of students from Scheduled Castes and Tribes.*

*You were randomly selected to participate in this study because of the responsibility of your office for Green Estate. The interview should last 45-60 minutes. Everything you say will be kept confidential; your name will not be associated with any specific comments or conclusions expressed in the study. Please refrain from using specific names of individuals in your response during the interview. This interview is being recorded purely for transcription purposes.*

*Please be advised that I would like you to focus your response before the time the schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., through March 2020. Do you have any questions before we begin?*

### A. Perception of the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes students

*First, I would like to ask you a few questions about your perception of the needs of various student groups in the schools you serve. In doing so, I would like you to focus your response on:*

- *Rural government schools only*
- *The student groups your school serves and those that belong to socially and economically weaker sections of the society; and*
- *Girls from different student groups.*

1. Tell me about the students your schools serve?
    i. Can you tell me more about the ways in which you serve [*student group*s *X, Y…*]?
    ii. [*If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned*] Can you tell me more about the ways in which the needs of these students different from the [*student group*s *X, Y…*] present in your school?
    iii. Do girls from these *[Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes]* student groups have certain needs that are different from [*student group*s *X, Y…*]?

**B. Perception about priorities**

2. What do you see as the main priorities for the student groups in the schools you serve?
    - *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* How do you understand the priorities varying for these student groups?

**C. Perception about challenges**

3. Do you see student groups [*X, Y…*] facing any challenges?
    - Could you please describe the main challenges that you face when serving [*student group*s *X, Y…*]?
    - *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* What do you see as the main challenges in serving Scheduled Castes and Tribes students?
    - How do you understand the challenges that other education leaders and teachers face in serving these students?

4. Do you see student groups [*X, Y…*] facing any problems?
    - In your opinion, what are the main problems that these student groups [*X, Y…*] face?
    - Do girls face different/additional problems?
    - *[If Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups mentioned]* Do students of Scheduled Castes and Tribes face different/additional problems?
    - How is the experience of girls from these communities different from [*student group*s *X, Y…*]?

*The next set of questions pertains to progress made in your school.*

**D. Perception about progress**

5. Have you seen any progress made in recent years for student groups [*X,Y…*]?
    - *[If progress has been made]* What do you consider to be the most important reasons for *[ insert specific information provided]* progress?
    - [*If not*] What do you consider to be the most important reasons for not making progress in *[insert specific information provided]*?

6. Have you seen any changes in these student groups in recent years?
    - *[If changes have occurred]* What do you consider the most important reasons for these *[insert specific information provided]* changes?
    - [*If not*] What do you consider the most important reasons for the lack of gains in *[insert specific information provided]*?

*The next set of questions relate to support, policies, and programs in place for the different student groups.*

**E. Perception about support, policies, and programs**

7. Do you feel you have the resources needed to meet these student groups [*X, Y…*] needs (e.g., number of staff/ training of staff, stability of staff [retention/ absenteeism rates], physical facilities, supplies, technology)?
    - *[For the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups]* How does the needs of these student groups [*X, Y…*] vary from that of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups?

8. Could you please describe the programs and/or policies in Green Estate for addressing the problems of students generally?
    - Have these been helpful in addressing the problems of these [*X, Y…*] student groups?
        i. *[If yes]* How have these been helpful in addressing the problems of these [*X, Y…*] student groups?
        ii. *[If no]* How have these not been helpful in addressing the problems of these [*X, Y…*] student groups?
    - Have these been helpful in addressing the problems of girls?
        i. *[If yes]* How have these been helpful in addressing the problems of girls?
        ii. *[If no]* How have these not been helpful in addressing the problems of girls?
    - Have these been helpful in addressing the problems of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes student groups?
        i. *[If yes]* How have these been helpful in addressing the problems for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
        ii. *[If no]* How have these been counterproductive in addressing the problems for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
    - Have these been helpful in addressing the problems of girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
        i. *[If yes]* How have these been helpful in addressing the problems of girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
        ii. *[If no]* How have these been counterproductive in addressing the problems of girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?
    - Have these been helpful in addressing the problems of low-income students?
        i. *[If yes]* How have these been helpful in addressing the of low-income students?
        ii. *[If no]* How have these been counterproductive in addressing the problems of low-income students?

9. Would you recommend any programs and policies for the future?
    - Which among these would you not support?
        - *[For girls]* Are there any programs and policies you would recommend for girls in the future?
        - *[For Scheduled Castes and Tribes]* Which programs and policies would you recommend for members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the future?

- How about for girls who are members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes?

*Thank you for your time and thoughtful comments. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't discussed yet?*

## APPENDIX C:

## Informed Consent Form

*Educational and Social factors that can make a difference in meeting the educational needs of students from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities: Perception of state education officials*
*IRB # NCR213870*

You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Dr. Iris Rotberg (faculty), Anshu Saha (doctoral student) of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University. You are being asked if you want to take part in this study because of your role as a state education officer. Please read this form and ask us any questions that will help you decide if you want to participate in the study..

Your decision to take part or not will not affect the services or benefits provided to you by your state department of employment.

The purpose of this study is to better understand state education officials' perspectives of the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes students, and the educational and social factors that state education officials perceive to facilitate and/or hinder their ability to serve this population of student. A qualitative approach, consisting primarily of interviews with state education officials, will be used to examine the effects of social class of the student population, poverty level of the state, gender (emphasis on girls), and segregation and discrimination on the school participation and transition of students from these communities across all levels of education. This will help determine the main needs of children from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes communities they serve and the factors that facilitate and hinder their ability to serve these students. The focus will be rural government schools, specifically those managed by the Department of Education, Tribal and Social Welfare Department, and Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, with relatively high levels of poverty among their student populations. In addition, a review of relevant national and state-level documents directly related to the research and to supplement interview data will be conducted.

You are one of 28 people randomly selected to take part in this study. The total amount of time you will spend participating in an interview is approximately 45-60 minutes. This study has the following risks:

You may feel discomfort answering the interview questions. You are free to not answer any question or to stop participating at any point. The following steps are being taken to reduce these risks: all data will be deidentified (meaning that all interview responses will be immediately separated from the respondents' names and email addresses and replaced with a pseudonym); all data including the excel sheet that links pseudonyms with original

names will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and GW Box drive, both of which are password protected and only the researcher knows the password

The records of this study will be kept private. In my doctoral dissertation or presentations, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you as a subject or any other individual.

Taking part in this research will not provide you a direct benefit, however the benefit to society will be a better understanding of state education officials' perspectives of the needs of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes students and factors that facilitate or inhibit state education officials' ability to meet these needs.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns. You can contact me at anshusaha@gwu.edu.

Agreeing to electronically sign this form indicates your informed consent. Thank you for your time and participation.

_____

(Signature)