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Unknotting dropout challenges: Katkari migrant children in Raigad, Maharashtra

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the educational challenges faced by the Katkari tribe in Raigad district, Maharashtra, and propose policy implications for enhancing educational outcomes. Through a mixed-methods approach combining primary data collection and secondary research, the study explores the socio-economic background of the Katkari tribe, analyzes the factors contributing to high dropout rates among Katkari children, and evaluates the effectiveness of existing educational interventions, particularly in Ashram schools. The findings emphasize the need for targeted policy interventions to address the complex educational needs of the Katkari community and promote inclusive development.

Keywords: Katkari tribes, residential schooling, out-of-school migrant children

Introduction

Backdrop

Education stands as a cornerstone for economic prosperity and social progress. Despite comprising 8.6% of India's total population, Scheduled Tribes (STs) face significant educational disparities, particularly highlighted in Maharashtra, where Katkari tribes endure marginalization. This paper explores literature concerning tribal education, unveiling persistent challenges Katkari children face in Raigad district, Maharashtra. While existing studies shed light on broader tribal education issues, a gap remains in understanding the specific educational plight of migrant Katkari children. This study aims to fill this gap, emphasizing the urgency for targeted interventions to address the academic needs of Katkari children.

For the Katkari tribe, distress migration has emerged as a coping mechanism amidst economic insecurity and limited livelihood opportunities. Seasonal migration to urban centres, often for brick kiln labour or other manual work, exposes Katkari families to exploitative labour practices and sub-human living conditions. This migration disrupts the education of Katkari children, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

The Scheduled Tribes (ST) population in India, accounting for 8.6% according to the 2011 census, faces escalating distress migration, significantly impacting their socio-economic and educational prosperity. This paper examines the macro context of the Katkari tribe in Raigad (Maharashtra). It investigates the challenges hindering education attainment among Katkari children in Ashram Shalas due to distress migration.

The Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India constitute a substantial demographic, with states like Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand, and Gujarat hosting over half of the total tribal population. Maharashtra's Katkari tribe, classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), faces compounded challenges due to social marginalization and economic deprivation. Despite concerted efforts to improve tribal education, gaps persist, especially concerning migrant Katkari children in Raigad district.

Literature Review

Education plays a pivotal role in fostering social inclusion and economic empowerment. However, marginalized communities like the Katkari tribe in Raigad district, Maharashtra, face numerous obstacles in accessing quality education. This study seeks to illuminate these challenges and offer actionable policy recommendations to improve educational outcomes for the Katkari community.

Research on tribal education offers valuable insights into the extent of existing knowledge and highlights areas warranting further investigation. This review synthesizes findings from various studies to elucidate the multifaceted challenges confronting tribal education, focusing on the educational experiences of migrant tribal children, particularly Katkari children in Raigad district, Maharashtra.

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Shyam Lal (1987) ^[12] and Sujatha K (1996) ^[11] underscored government initiatives to provide low-cost primary schooling in sparsely populated tribal areas. However, adequate resources and staffing could have improved the effectiveness of these initiatives. Overburdened teachers struggled to manage multiple classes, leading to poor educational outcomes and high dropout rates among tribal children.

Sardamony (1995) ^[9] highlighted the educational barriers faced by children of migrant labourers who accompany their parents on seasonal migrations. These children encounter limited access to schooling, exposing them to risks such as sexual harassment and exploitation. The cyclic nature of migration further disrupts their education, making it challenging to adhere to the school calendar.

Vinoba Gautam (2003) ^[19] examined the medium of instruction in tribal schools under the "Janshala" program. He identified language barriers as a significant impediment to learning, with many tribal children struggling to comprehend textbooks written in regional languages. Moreover, the appointment of non-tribal teachers further exacerbated linguistic challenges, hindering effective communication and comprehension.

Tripathy and Pradhan (2003) ^[18] attributed high dropout rates among tribal girls to poverty and economic constraints. Girls often assume caregiving responsibilities, limiting their access to education as they support their families' livelihoods. As a result, tribal literacy levels, particularly among girls, remain alarmingly low, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Smita (2007) ^[10] highlighted the disruptive impact of seasonal migration on the education of tribal children. Many children accompany their families to work in agricultural fields, leading to prolonged absences from school and eventual dropout. The prevalence of such migrations underscores the urgent need to address the educational needs of migrant tribal children.

Tripathy (2012) ^[14] emphasized the socio-economic vulnerability of migrant tribal communities, driven by poverty and landlessness. Seasonal fluctuations in agricultural activities further exacerbate their precarious livelihoods, compelling them to migrate for better opportunities. Tribal populations are disproportionately affected by these migration patterns, exacerbating educational disparities.

Haseena (2014) ^[3] identified various factors contributing to tribal educational challenges, including economic backwardness, social customs, and cultural barriers. She stressed the importance of long-term strategies to enhance tribal educational attainment, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches tailored to tribal communities' unique needs.

Waghmore, Suryakant, and Bipin Jojo (2014) ^[20] documented the exclusion and deprivation experienced by Katkari communities in Raigad and Thane regions. Their study underscored the urgent need for culturally and economically sensitive government interventions to mitigate the extreme vulnerabilities faced by Katkaris.

Existing literature on tribal education reveals systemic challenges impeding educational attainment among STs. Studies highlight poor infrastructure, inadequate teacher-student ratios, and linguistic barriers. Moreover, economic factors, cultural norms, and seasonal migration patterns exacerbate educational disparities among tribal communities. While several studies underscore these challenges, limited research explicitly resolves the academic needs of migrant Katkari children in the Raigad district.

Despite the extensive literature on tribal education, there remains a notable gap in research focusing specifically on the educational experiences of migrant tribal children, particularly Katkari children in Raigad district, Maharashtra. This gap emphasizes the need for targeted research and interventions to address the unique challenges faced by this marginalized group, highlighting the justification for the present study.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are threefold:

- 1) To provide a comprehensive background of the Katkari tribe in Raigad district.
- 2) To examine the educational barriers faced by Katkari tribal children, leading to high dropout rates.
- 3) To propose policy implications to enhance the functioning of Ashram schools/residential schools for Katkari children.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through observations, interviews with household heads, and participatory rural appraisal techniques in two purposively selected villages with significant Katkari populations. Secondary data were obtained from published sources and government reports. The study focuses on 80 sample households across two villages and incorporates focus group discussions to triangulate findings and gain deeper insights into educational challenges. Data collection methods include literature review, interviews, and field observations to elucidate the educational experiences of Katkari children in the Raigad district. By triangulating findings from diverse sources, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the academic challenges faced by migrant Katkari children.

Table 1: Sample Villages in Raigad District and Selection of Katkari Households

Hamlet/Villages	Distance from Alibag (in km)	Number of Katkari households	Households Interviewed	Percentage
Chandewadi	74	110	50	56.82
Sonarwadi	117	80	38	43.18
Total		190 (100.00)	88 (46.32)	100.00

Source: Field study

Table- 1 provides significant insights into the distribution and representation of Katkari households within the Raigad district. Chandewadi, located closer to Alibag with 74 kilometers, exhibits a higher concentration of Katkari

households, totaling 110. Remarkably, most of these households, comprising 50, have been included in the sample, reflecting a relatively high participation rate of 56.82%. Conversely, Sonarwadi, situated farther away at

117 kilometers, possesses a smaller count of Katkari households, numbering 80. Despite this, a notable proportion, specifically 38 households, have been interviewed, accounting for 43.18% of the total households in the village. This suggests a moderate level of participation from Sonarwadi households, considering its geographical distance. Evaluating the total sample, consisting of 88 households from both villages, reveals that the majority of Katkari households have been included in the study, encompassing 46.32% of the total population.

Residential Ashram schools in Maharashtra

The genesis of Ashram schools’ traces back to traditional Indian Gurukulas, which emphasize close teacher-student interaction for holistic development. These schools aim to provide formal education while preserving tribal traditions and reducing dropout rates. In Maharashtra, the Tribal Development Department operates 1078 Ashram schools, catering to the needs of 4.25 lakh tribal children in remote areas. However, Katkari children face significant educational barriers, often forced into labour to support their families. Migration further disrupts their schooling, contributing to low educational attainment among Katkaris. Despite the potential of Ashram schools to alleviate these challenges, they still need to provide culturally sensitive environments and quality education for Katkari children, resulting in their overwhelming absence. Moreover, the lack of incentives and opportunities for higher education discourages Katkaris from pursuing further studies, perpetuating cycles of marginalization. Resolving these issues is crucial to ensure equitable access to education for Katkari children and promote their socio-economic empowerment.

Government initiatives such as Ashram schools and Eklavya Model Residential Schools aim to provide quality education to tribal children, including the Katkari community. However, persistent challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, teacher shortages, and low educational attainment, hinder the effectiveness of these interventions. Additionally, supply-side constraints such as single-teacher schools and lack of basic facilities further exacerbate dropout rates among tribal children.

Table 2: Education profile of the sample migrant Katakari households (N=88)

Socio-Economic Profile	No. of Members	Percentage
Age-group		
Below 5 years	64	16.84
5 years to14	82	21.58
15-45	106	27.89
46 and above	128	33.69
Total	380	100.00
Level of literacy		
Illiteracy	176	46.32
Knowing only signature	124	32.63
Read and write	80	21.05
Total	380	100.00

Source: Field study

The provided data in table-2 delineates the socio-economic profile of a population based on two key parameters: age distribution and literacy levels. Regarding the age-group distribution, it becomes apparent that there is a diversified representation across different age categories. Notably,

individuals below 5 years constitute a substantial segment, numbering 64 individuals, accounting for approximately 16.84% of the total population under consideration. Similarly, the age bracket spanning from 5 years to 14 encompasses 82 individuals, constituting roughly 21.58% of the population, suggesting a significant portion of children and adolescents within the demographic. Moving into the working-age population, individuals aged 15 to 45 represent 106 members, comprising approximately 27.89% of the total population, indicating a sizable workforce within the community. Moreover, the elder segment, aged 46 and above, demonstrates a considerable presence, with 128 individuals, constituting approximately 33.69% of the population, underscoring the demographic's aging composition.

Transitioning to the assessment of literacy levels within the population, it is evident that there exists a spectrum of educational attainment. A notable proportion of individuals, totaling 176, are classified as illiterate, representing approximately 46.32% of the total population, indicating a significant segment facing challenges in accessing formal education or acquiring literacy skills. Moreover, a substantial portion of the population, comprising 124 individuals, possesses basic literacy skills, characterized by the ability to comprehend a signature, constituting approximately 32.63% of the total population, reflecting a prevalent but limited level of literacy within the demographic. Furthermore, a minority segment within the population, encompassing 80 individuals, demonstrates proficiency in reading and writing, accounting for approximately 21.05% of the total population, suggesting a relatively smaller yet existent cohort with higher educational achievements. In totality, the presented data offers a nuanced understanding of the socio-economic dynamics within the population, encompassing diverse age compositions and varying levels of educational attainment, thereby serving as a foundational framework for further analysis and targeted interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by different segments within the community.

Socio-Economic & other indicators causing drop-outs

Over dependence on subsistence and uncertain agriculture, absence of rural non-farm employment, increasing deforestation, and recurring droughts have resulted in abject poverty of in the tribal dominated districts of Raigad. It has been observed that the development of economic infrastructure like irrigation, electrification, banking, communication, which could have generated direct economic benefit to the people for sustainable form of livelihood in the district has not been followed up in a right perspective.

The backwardness of tribal regions, widespread poverty of the tribes and problems of integrating them with the mainstream of civilization etc. are the stumbling -blocks in the path of educational development of tribes (Tripathy, 1989) [16]. In the tribal regions high frequency of dropouts because of lack of awareness about the significance of formal education is conspicuous.

Thus, it was further ascertained that poverty of the migrant households constitute the crucial factor for drop out of the children and non-enrolment of their children in Ashram Shala and as such, they are deprived of their right to education.

Table 3: Reasons for non-enrollment of tribal children in the Ashram Shalas (N= 88)

Sl no.	Reasons for non-enrollment	Response/ Percentage
1	Distance from home	14 (15.91)
2	To earn money to support the family income	22 (25.00)
3	Sibling care	06 (06.82)
4	Failure in class	18 (20.45)
5	Lack of awareness and dislike of parents for study	12 (13.64)
6	Gender discrimination	06 (6.82)
7	School is not attractive	10 (11.36)
7	Total	88 (100.00)

Source: Field study

Table 3 depicts that the dominant reasons for tribal children's non-enrollment in the Ashram Shalas are earning money to support the family income (25 per cent), failure in class (20.45 per cent), and lack of awareness and dislike of parents for study (13.64%).

Though primary education through Ashram Shala is within easy reach in many areas, secondary schools are less widespread to be within easy reach of most villages. A communication gap exists between the teachers and the taught, on the one hand, and between the textbooks and the students' mental preparation to receive anything from them, especially at the primary education stage.

The magnitude of educational development of tribes largely depends on a wide range of factors, mainly on the nature of tribal life (settled, semi-settled, practising shifting cultivation, migratory), the Ashram Shala administration and environment, cultural barriers (assimilated tribes, tribes in transitions and primitive tribes), domestics and household economic use of the children, staff pattern, difficult communication etc. The reasons for the high dropouts of tribal children in the study district have been portrayed in Table -3.

Reasons for a gap in literacy among tribal girls and their dropouts:

It was revealed from the focus group discussion that the crucial reasons for the non-enrolment and dropping out from schools among the tribal children as a whole and tribal girls, in particular, were social, economic, and cultural. The array of reasons found was:

- i) Boys are given preference over girls in education due to gender discrimination. This disparity is particularly marked in rural areas and in urban when opportunity costs are high.
- ii) Girls are made to help in domestic activities earlier than boys. They are expected to look after the younger siblings, collect firewood or fuel and fodder, fetch water, etc., to free the mother from productive activities. They also need to shoulder domestic responsibilities.
- iii) When girls attain puberty, fear for their safety bolts on the family name and conservative cultural norms make parents withdraw them from school.
- iv) Early marriage ends schooling.
- v) Parents are unwilling to send their daughters to co-educational schools and schools without female teachers.
- vi) If schools are far away from home, parents are worried about the girl's safety, so sending an escort with her is not always practical.
- vii) a girl's life goal is a marriage where she will be required to take care of the family. Thus, the parents feel that education has no value and is irrelevant to girls' lives. Moreover, the school curriculum is irrelevant to the girl's

needs.

Findings from the FGDs

Preliminary findings suggest that migrant Katkari children encounter multifaceted barriers to education, including irregular school attendance, linguistic barriers, and a lack of culturally sensitive educational materials. Seasonal migration patterns disrupt academic continuity, leading to high dropout rates among Katkari children. Moreover, socio-economic factors and cultural norms perpetuate educational marginalization, hindering the holistic development of Katkari children in the Raigad district.

There were revelations from the FGDs about numerous stumbling blocks which obstruct the socio-economic development of tribes, which in turn impact their educational attainments.

These impediments were among other things

Lack of organization at the village or community level amongst the Katkari and exploitation by outsiders.

The prevailing situation of landlessness, indebtedness, and bonded labour.

Illiteracy among the katkari households.

Lack of basic amenities in Katkari hamlets, deplorable housing conditions, food, and nutritional insecurity.

Inaccessibility to proper health care facilities

Inaccessibility to legal documents like caste certificates, ration cards, BPL certificates, etc.

1. It is revealed from the FGDs that land alienation, failure of crops, ineffective implementation of Government plans and programs like land reform measures and forest right acts are contributing factors for large-scale landlessness and poverty of Katkari households.
2. Explanations for influencing the educational achievement of tribal children were lack of ownership rights (private as well as community) over land, water bodies and forests, loss of access and control over natural resources traditionally harnessed - coupled with a lack of alternate options (assured wage labour and employment), threat of evictions and displacement, lack of information and awareness, and inadequate education, social and psychological insecurity.
3. The study revealed impoverished living conditions, uncertain livelihood, and lack of provision for primary education at the destination point of the work site due to the seasonal migration of parents in search of work, which are crucial features for the low literacy of tribal children.
4. It is further inferred from the FGDs that when the basic needs of katkaris are denied, the government is supposed to intervene with remedial measures, mostly in the welfare schemes. However, there can be three ways that mislead eligible beneficiaries out of the purview of their rights to food. (a) Lack of awareness about the schemes themselves, (b) an eligibility criterion with selection in the hands of local elites and (c) tardy program implementation, (d) corruption and pilferage of development funds, of course, invariably manifested in all tribal regions of our country with variation in degree - all these factors deprive the needy and poor marginalized katkari tribes the benefits of food security. (e) The lack of literacy among the katkari children is due to their migration and the non-

availability of schools in the migrant areas. The katkaris believe that children are added assets to the families. They believe that employment for their children, even at 11 to 15 years old, could bring the families food baskets.

Educational achievement among Katkari children is abysmally low compared to other neighbouring tribal communities of the state. Katkari children are forced to undergo a series of vulnerabilities and social atrocities within the school circles.

Concluding Observations

The study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions to address the educational challenges faced by the Katkari tribe in Raigad district, Maharashtra. By prioritizing inclusive and culturally relevant education, policymakers can empower marginalized communities like the Katkari tribe, fostering their socio-economic upliftment and contributing to equitable development.

The Katkari of today are a fragmented and very scattered community, extremely dependent on others for their livelihoods and for a place to live. Most Katkari are landless workers with only periodic and tenuous connections to their original nomadic, forest-based livelihoods. Many have become bonded labourers working in brick kilns and charcoal units serving the urban and industrial interests of Greater Mumbai.

Residential Schools, as an access strategy for girls from marginalized communities, have been part of programmes under the Department of Education. Besides, residential schools are also included in policies under the (1) Department of Social Welfare, (2) Department of Tribal Affairs and (3) Department of Women and Child Development. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBV) and Ashramshalas are girls' two most crucial residential school programmes. KGBV is essential for its focus on empowerment.

The validation came not only from the need for covering the living costs and making it possible to have access to physical, residential space and food to be able to access the schooling facilities but also from the need for providing a conducive environment for education where these children are not expected to participate in work and other chores. Although there is no definite policy on residential schooling in general or for girls in particular, several residential schooling strategies exist for girls in the public school system in India. Specific small-scale residential schooling strategies outside the state sector are also funded through public funds or other avenues. While a few of these have some interlinkages, many have evolved independently of each other, drawing their rationales from a variety of experiences within and outside the country. The information on the performance of these schemes/programmes/initiatives needs to be more balanced, isolated and sporadic.

The benefits of this development paradigm have been disproportionately cornered by the dominant sections at the expense of low-income people, who have borne most of the costs. Development, which is insensitive to the needs of these communities, has invariably caused displacement and reduced them to a sub-human existence. In the case of tribes, it has ended up destroying their social organization, cultural identity, and resource base and generated multiple conflicts, undermining their communal solidarity, which

cumulatively makes them increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.

Displacement deprives of the vital sustenance of the tribal people who depend on the land, forests, and common property resources (CPR) for their livelihood, and finally, their long-term sustainability is also endangered.

The key factors explaining the highest incidence of poverty in tribal regions are:

Tribe's' low bargaining capacity.

Their low degree of political representation and poor quality of local governance.

Constrained access to forest, land, and water.

The issue of control, power and access to natural resources is contentious both at the economic and political levels for tribal groups, apart from deep-rooted corruption and massive pilferage of development funds by Government officials (Tripathy, 2014)^[15].

From the above discussion, it also transpires that despite development efforts, the benefits of development have not percolated to the Katkari tribe, somewhat adversely affecting their lifestyle, leading to the violation of human rights, the miserable living standard of tribes, restricted community rights over natural resources, and their forest resources, and finally, culminated to an identity crisis of the tribes. The reckless and indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources by the non-tribes who dominate the government machinery in the tribal area results in not only a threat to tribal survival. Still, it is also leading to depletion of resources in the tribal regions.

Suggestions

Relevant suggestions with implications for policies that focus on the solution to socio-economic and education problems of the kithara's are:

This study highlights the critical need for targeted interventions to address the educational needs of migrant Katkari children in Raigad district, Maharashtra. By recognizing the unique challenges faced by this marginalized community, policymakers can formulate culturally sensitive strategies to promote inclusive education and empower Katkari children. By bridging the gap between policy rhetoric and on-ground realities, stakeholders can pave the way for equitable educational opportunities and sustainable social transformation among tribal communities in Maharashtra.

1. Improving the infrastructural facilities of tribal Ashram schools and the quality of education, adequate provision for classrooms, bathrooms, and drinking water should be made.
2. An Adequate number of teachers should be recruited, especially from the local area so that they can teach in the local dialect. Vocational training courses should be introduced to attract more tribal students.
3. There is a need for partnership between the government, NGOs, and the private sector in education, as the government is also not capable of providing all services. Partnership, however, doesn't mean subcontracting but working as equal partners. Hence, it is suggested that the teachers should have sincerity of purpose and a dedicated attitude to serving the tribal students.
4. The income of Katkari (PVTG) farmers needs to be enhanced through the development of agriculture, horticulture, and vegetable cultivation in collaboration

with the dedicated NGOs in Raigad district. Cashew plantations in the hill slopes, grafted mango tree plantations, pineapples, bananas, lemons, and papaya, etc., are essential for horticulture development to generate additional sources of income for the Katkari tribes.

5. The Katkari tribal youths need to be trained to upgrade their technical competence for their development, improve the quality of human resources essential for effective administration, ensure freedom from exploitation, and enrich their quality of life. The training component should include leadership management, natural environmental protection, maintenance of health and hygiene, household management, child care, etc., to improve their way of life. Tribes evolved local-specific livelihood strategies based on their indigenous knowledge. There is a need to change the school curriculum regarding the richness of tribal culture to arrest the dropout rate of PVTG children.

So far as tribal female education is concerned, efforts are being made to generate community demand for tribal girls' education and enable conditions for people's and women's participation to create the push factors necessary to guarantee girls' education.

Providing the educational requirements of the Katkari tribe necessitates focused policy interventions and systemic enhancements, such as improving infrastructure and resources in Ashram schools, hiring trained teachers fluent in local languages, and integrating culturally sensitive curricula. Moreover, holistic approaches integrating livelihood support, health services, and community engagement are vital for fostering sustainable educational development within the Katkari community.

Motivation and mobilization of parents and the community at large, enhancing the role of women and mothers in school-related activities and participation in school committees, and strengthening the linkages between the school, teachers and communities are some techniques through which the enabling conditions are being created.

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