

Research Paper

## Socio-economic and Educational status of Kharia people in Purba Medinipur District

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### ABSTRACT

The Kharia community, a tribal group in India, is divided into three types: Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia, and Delki Kharia. The Dudh Kharia primarily reside in the Purba Medinipur District and belong to a socio-economically deprived class, as indicated by previous studies. This qualitative survey study investigates the status of Kharia community students in Purba Medinipur. Data were collected from 50 Kharia individuals using two self-made questionnaires, employing purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using percentage analysis. The findings revealed a lack of prior research on the Kharia community, despite extensive literature review. The study shows that 32% of students who drop out of school do not own a home, and all participants reported taking loans from various sources. The primary reasons for school dropouts were poverty, unhealthy family environments, malnutrition, and illnesses. This study serves as a preliminary exploration, emphasizing the need for comprehensive long-term research on various indigenous tribes, particularly the Kharia community. The findings suggest that the Kharia society holds many conservative views about their community, necessitating further in-depth investigation. Ultimately, this study underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions that address both socio-economic and educational challenges. Empowering the Kharia community through comprehensive educational reforms and economic support initiatives is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving long-term progress.

**Keywords:** *Kharia community, School dropouts, Socio-economic challenges*

The term "tribe" was coined by colonialists (Thapar, 1977). According to Singh (1993) and Beteille (2008), "tribe" is primarily a colonial construction, referring to groups that were predominantly forest dwellers. British writers claimed that tribes descended from a common ancestor and lived in primitive or barbarous conditions. According to the 2011 census report, tribes constitute eight percent of the total population of India. Article 366(25) of the Constitution of India refers to Scheduled Tribes as those tribes or tribal communities that are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution and have been declared as tribes by the President of India through public notification. Scheduled Tribes in India are similar to "indigenous" or "native people" in other parts of the world. India has the largest tribal population globally, comprising 8% of the total population, which

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amounts to 104,281,034 individuals (Census of India, 2011). Of this total, 11.3% reside in rural areas, while only 2.8% live in urban settings.

The socio-economic and educational status of marginalized communities, particularly the Kharia people in Purba Medinipur district, reflects a persistent pattern of disadvantage that is symptomatic of broader systemic inequities in India. Tribal communities, despite their rich cultural heritage, are often trapped in cycles of poverty exacerbated by historical marginalization, social discrimination, and limited access to essential resources (Xaxa, 2005; Bose, 2012). The Kharia people face numerous challenges, including high rates of landlessness and reliance on informal labor markets, which further entrench their socio-economic vulnerabilities (Nayak, 2020; Baskey, 2019). The lack of economic opportunities has significant repercussions on their educational prospects, as many children are forced to drop out of school to contribute to family incomes (Singh, 2014). Research has shown that educational attainment among tribal populations is often hindered by inadequate infrastructure, systemic neglect, and socio-cultural barriers that prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational benefits (Soniya & Vezhaventhan, 2017; Soren, 2016).

Moreover, the interplay of gender, health, and addiction issues complicates the educational landscape for the Kharia community. Girls often face heightened barriers to education due to entrenched gender norms and economic pressures, leading to disproportionately high dropout rates (Nayak, 2020; Patel, 2011). The socio-economic status of families, influenced by male addiction to alcohol and associated domestic issues, creates an environment where children's education is deprioritized (Baskey, 2019). This situation is further aggravated by a lack of culturally responsive educational practices that fail to engage tribal students meaningfully, resulting in alienation and disengagement from the schooling system (Shah, 2010; Kumar & Das, 2014). Therefore, addressing the socio-economic and educational challenges faced by the Kharia community necessitates a comprehensive approach that integrates economic empowerment, targeted educational interventions, and a commitment to social justice, ultimately aiming to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization that defines their current status.

In West Bengal, there are 40 different tribal groups. The Kharia community is one such primitive tribe living in West Bengal, as well as in parts of Odisha and the Chotanagpur region of Bihar and Jharkhand, and in states like Assam, Chhattisgarh, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, and Meghalaya. The Kharia people are part of the Lodha community, although they are generally considered to be more developed than the Lodha people. It's important to note that the Kharia and Kharia Shabar are two distinct tribal groups. Based on geographical location, culture, and other significant aspects of life, the Kharia people are divided into Hill Kharia, Delki Kharia, and Dudh Kharia. According to the 2011 Census, the total number of Kharia people in India was approximately 753,000. The Kharia community has its own language, known as Kharia; however, this language is relatively unknown in West Bengal.

### ***Objectives***

The main objectives of the present study were given below:

1. To know the socio-economic status of Kharia people.
2. To know the educational status of Kharia people.

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### ***Study Area***

The researcher studied in the Kharia para, 1no. Gokulpur Gram Panchayet, Patashpur P.S., Medinipur (East) district of West Bengal. Kharia Para is very close to rivers Keleghai and Baghui. On the bank of the river Khari plant is cultivated by these group of people and used to prepare baskets, kulo, pali, etc. These people have almost no land for their cultivation. They lived in low land of the river belt and were totally dependent upon 'Khari'. There is no forest. The only source of income to them is daily labour. A large section of these people is habituated in drinking country liquor. Generally, they have no other bad habits.

### ***Sample and sample technique***

50 peoples from the Dudh Kharia community of Kharia para was taken as the sample of the study by using purposive sampling technique.

### ***Questionnaire***

Two questionnaires were developed by the researcher,

1. Questionnaire to study the socio-economic status of Kharia people;
2. Questionnaire to study the educational status of Kharia people.

### ***Collection of Data***

The present investigator used two sets of questionnaires including the demographic data sheet for collection of relevant data from the sample. The investigator personally contacted each sample and discuss in detail about cause of data collection. Collected data were analyzed by using percentage only. He collected data from 32 males and 18 female's sample.

### ***Major Findings***

- Socio-economically Kharia people are poor and weak.
- Equality of status and opportunities are not available in society amongst the higher cast people.
- Still, they are accepted as the untouchable by the higher cast people.
- By faith Kharia people are Baishnab and they believe in the Hindu religion.
- They prefer Kirtan, Ramayana-songs, Chandi-mangal, Manasha-mangal, Sasthi-mangal and Shitala-mangal.
- Occupation of the Kharia people is preparing Baskets from 'Khari', cultivation, catching fish, and daily wager. cultivate the
- Most of the Kharia people have no cultivable land and, therefore, they cultivate the land as 'Bhag-chasi'.
- They prefer to consume country liquor, particularly the daily wager males. Females protest against addiction to country liquor become when the males because addicted, they destroy their property and torture their wives and children.
- Females are also daily wager to protect their family.
- 32% of samples have no own house. Others have houses made up of clay and bamboo. Only 6% have some gold and silver and 32% have cattle.
- Economically Kharia people are weak.
- 60% of samples answered that their monthly income in the family is less than Rs. 5000/.
- 100% of samples answered that they take loans either from banks or from other individuals. In most cases, they are unable to repay the loan principle plus interest to the bankers or to the personnel. he engaged

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- In the Kharia para, 1, 6 peoples are engaged in the Government/private sector service.
- Most of the Kharia children are educationally backward and they take primary and secondary education from Government aided schools.
- Due to severe poverty more than 50% children drop-out every year (academic session) before completion of their first public examination.
- Another cause of drop-out are health problem of the children.
- 52% samples reported that Kharia children in most cases are not interested in education, rather they are interested about income. Parental alcohol addiction is also a causative factor of children's drop out.
- 52% samples answered that the boys in the age group 14-16 years engaged themselves in the foot-path hotels in cities and metropolitan towns.
- 18% samples answered that teachers' behaviors towards the Kharia children in the class is not adequate.
- 74% samples reported that parents are less interested and less conscious about education of their children.
- Parental divorce is another cause of school drop-out, as reported by 40% samples.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Kharia community in Purba Medinipur, as revealed by this study, faces substantial socio-economic hardships. The data indicate that the majority of Kharia families are entrenched in poverty, with 60% reporting monthly incomes of less than Rs. 5000, and many lacking basic necessities such as home ownership (32%). These findings are consistent with prior research on the socio-economic conditions of tribal communities in India, where poverty, landlessness, and economic vulnerability are pervasive (Singh, 2014). The occupational roles of Kharia individuals, such as basket-making, sharecropping, fishing, and daily wage labor, further confirm the community's economic marginalization. This reliance on low-paying, unstable jobs underscore the cyclical nature of poverty in indigenous tribes.

A crucial factor exacerbating this poverty is the Kharia community's dependence on loans, with 100% of respondents admitting to borrowing from banks or individuals. The inability to repay loans and accumulating interest reflects a cycle of indebtedness often seen in marginalized communities (Baskey, 2019). This financial instability, coupled with a cultural issue of alcohol addiction among males, intensifies their vulnerability. The study's finding that alcohol abuse leads to the destruction of family property and domestic violence has been similarly noted in other tribal studies, where male alcoholism contributes to both economic and social degradation (Nayak, 2020). Women in the Kharia community, often daily wage earners themselves, must bear the dual burden of economic support and managing the consequences of male addiction, a trend found in other impoverished communities (Baskey, 2019).

Education emerges as another significant concern in this study, with over 50% of Kharia children dropping out before completing their first public examination. Poverty, health problems, and lack of interest in education are cited as the main reasons for this dropout rate. These findings align with research on educational marginalization in tribal communities, where economic hardship forces children to prioritize income over schooling (Soren, 2016). Furthermore, the study found that many boys (aged 14-16) leave school to work in footpath hotels in cities, driven by the immediate need for financial contribution. This premature entry into the workforce not only reflects the economic distress of their families but also

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perpetuates the cycle of poverty and educational backwardness (Soniya & Vezhaventhan, 2017).

Parental disengagement from their children's education, reported by 74% of respondents, is another critical issue. The lack of parental interest is linked to broader socio-cultural conditions, including poverty, illiteracy, and alcohol addiction. This aligns with other studies indicating that parental neglect or disinterest is a major barrier to children's educational success in tribal communities (Soren, 2016). Additionally, the study highlights teacher discrimination, with 18% of respondents reporting inadequate behavior towards Kharia children in schools. Such discriminatory practices further alienate tribal students from the educational system, contributing to high dropout rates and poor academic performance, as noted in other marginalized communities (Baskey, 2019).

Caste-based discrimination continues to be a significant challenge for the Kharia community. Despite their adherence to Hinduism and practices such as Kirtan and Ramayana-songs, the Kharia people are still considered "untouchable" by higher caste groups. This reflects the deeply entrenched caste-based hierarchies in Indian society, which persist despite religious conformity (Singh, 2014). The social exclusion experienced by the Kharia people perpetuates their marginalized status, limiting their access to resources, opportunities, and upward social mobility.

### CONCLUSION

The study reveals that the Kharia community faces intertwined challenges of poverty, addiction, and educational deprivation, further intensified by systemic discrimination and limited access to resources. These issues require sustained, long-term interventions that address both socio-economic and educational needs. Developing strategies for community empowerment, through targeted policies and support programs, is essential for fostering meaningful change.

Education is vital for the holistic development of individuals, playing a crucial role in breaking the cycle of poverty and social marginalization. It serves as a powerful tool for personal empowerment and is key to improving the socio-economic standing of marginalized groups. Without a strong emphasis on education, the Kharia people will continue to face barriers in achieving social mobility and economic independence.

The Kharia community's vulnerability in terms of education, income, and social status demands urgent attention. Mass awareness about the importance of education, coupled with efforts to ensure social and economic justice, is crucial for their development. Only through comprehensive educational reforms and opportunities for economic advancement can the Kharia community overcome these persistent challenges and achieve long-term progress.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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