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Unequal Access to Education in Palghar District

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Abstract

This comprehensive literature review examines the multifaceted challenges of unequal access to education in Palghar District, Maharashtra, with particular emphasis on tribal communities, rural educational barriers, and socioeconomic determinants. Drawing from 60 scholarly sources identified through systematic searches, this review synthesizes evidence on educational inequality affecting tribal populations particularly the Katkari, Warli, and Kokna communities in one of Maharashtra's most educationally disadvantaged regions. The analysis reveals that educational access in Palghar is constrained by intersecting factors including poverty, linguistic barriers, inadequate infrastructure, parental illiteracy, and cultural disconnects between formal education systems and tribal lifestyles. Despite government initiatives such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and targeted tribal welfare schemes, significant gaps persist in enrollment, retention, and learning outcomes. This review identifies critical policy implications and recommends comprehensive, culturally sensitive interventions to address these persistent inequalities.

Keywords: Unequal Access to Education; Educational Inequality; Palghar District; Rural Education; Tribal Education; School Infrastructure; Socioeconomic Factors; Gender Disparities; Educational Development; Maharashtra.

Introduction

Palghar District, carved out of Thane District in 2014, represents one of Maharashtra's most educationally vulnerable regions, characterized by a predominantly tribal population and persistent socioeconomic marginalization. The district is home to significant populations of Scheduled Tribes, including the Katkari (classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group), Warli, and Kokna communities, who face compounded disadvantages in accessing quality education [1]. Educational inequality in Palghar manifests through multiple dimensions: low enrollment rates, high dropout rates, poor learning outcomes, and limited progression to higher education [1]. Understanding educational access in Palghar requires examining the complex interplay between poverty, cultural factors, geographic isolation, and systemic inadequacies in educational infrastructure. This review synthesizes empirical evidence from scholarly literature to provide a comprehensive analysis of these challenges, with the aim of informing evidence-based policy interventions.

• Educational Inequality: Conceptual Framework

Educational inequality refers to the unequal distribution of academic resources, opportunities, and outcomes across different social groups. Research demonstrates that educational inequality is fundamentally linked to socioeconomic status, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds experiencing significant achievement gaps [28]. These gaps manifest across countries, time periods, and generations, establishing a persistent link between economic inequality and educational inequality [28]. Economic models of skill acquisition and human capital investment reveal that parental education levels, family income, and borrowing constraints create endogenous responses that perpetuate educational disadvantage across generations [28]. In the Indian context, educational inequality is structured along multiple axes including caste, tribe, religion, gender, and geographic location [9], [30]. The intersection of these identities creates what scholars' term "multilayered hierarchies of access," where tribal communities face compounded disadvantages [5]. For tribal populations, educational marginalization is rooted in historical processes of dispossession, cultural alienation, and systematic exclusion from mainstream development [2].

• Tribal Education in India: Historical Context

Tribal communities in India, constituting approximately 8.6% of the population, have historically experienced educational marginalization. Despite constitutional protections and affirmative action policies, tribal literacy rates remain significantly below national averages [2]. In Maharashtra, tribal populations face particular challenges due to geographic isolation in forested and hilly terrains, linguistic diversity, and economic vulnerability [4], [6]. The Katkari tribe, designated as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), exemplifies extreme educational disadvantage, with literacy rates among the lowest in the state [1], [3].

Educational policies for tribal communities have evolved from colonial-era isolation to post-independence integration models, yet fundamental tensions persist between preserving cultural identity and promoting mainstream educational participation [23]. The establishment of Ashram schools and residential facilities represents one policy response, though implementation challenges and quality concerns remain [6].

- **Rural Education in Maharashtra**

Rural education in Maharashtra is characterized by significant disparities compared to urban areas in terms of infrastructure, teacher quality, and learning outcomes [5], [18]. Research indicates that rural students face multiple disadvantages including inadequate school facilities, teacher absenteeism, limited access to supplementary educational resources, and socioeconomic constraints that prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational investments [7], [18]. The rural-urban divide in educational attainment reflects broader patterns of regional inequality and uneven development [5].

Educational Status of Tribal Communities in Palghar District:

- **Demographic Profile and Educational Indicators**

Palghar District's tribal population faces severe educational disadvantages, with dropout rates in rural areas being particularly alarming [1]. A survey examining school dropout in rural Palghar Taluka identified persistent challenges in primary education, noting that dropout leads to significant wastage of funds invested in educational infrastructure, teacher salaries, and learning materials [1]. The study emphasized that despite compulsory education mandates for children under fourteen and government initiatives like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, enrollment and retention remain problematic [1].

- **The Katkari Tribe: A Case of Extreme Educational Marginalization**

The Katkari tribe, one of Maharashtra's three PVTGs, experiences particularly acute educational challenges. Research on Katkari communities in neighboring Raigad District (which shares similar socioeconomic characteristics with Palghar) reveals that language barriers constitute a major obstacle, as the Katkari language (Kathodi) differs significantly from Marathi, the medium of instruction [1]. This linguistic disconnect makes it difficult for Katkari children to adapt and succeed in formal education systems [1].

Poverty compels many Katkari families to prioritize immediate earnings over education, resulting in low enrollment and high dropout rates [1], [3]. The lack of awareness about education's importance, combined with limited access to higher education and technical training, perpetuates intergenerational poverty [1]. The Katkari community's struggle for sustainable livelihoods is compounded by displacement, health challenges, and socioeconomic marginalization, all of which negatively impact educational participation [3].

- **The Warli Tribe: Educational Aspirations and Barriers**

The Warli tribe, the largest tribal group in Palghar District, demonstrates somewhat higher educational participation than the Katkari, yet significant barriers persist. A study on higher education among Warli girls identified multiple obstacles including economic constraints, cultural norms regarding gender roles, and limited awareness of educational opportunities [6]. The research found that while aspirations for education exist, structural barriers prevent many Warli youth from accessing higher education [6].

Research on Warli education and health practices reveals that traditional knowledge systems and cultural practices often exist in tension with formal educational requirements [4]. The study documented how Warli communities balance preservation of cultural identity with participation in mainstream educational institutions [4].

- **The Kokna Community: Socioeconomic Development and Education**

The Kokna community in Palghar faces challenges related to land ownership, housing conditions, and economic stability, all of which impact educational access [28]. Research examining the socioeconomic development of Kokna households found that household income, expenditure patterns on education, and access to financial resources significantly influence educational participation [28]. The study revealed that families with limited assets and higher numbers of dependents face greater challenges in supporting children's education [28].

- **Comparative Educational Status Across Tribal Groups**

While specific comparative data for Palghar District is limited in the reviewed literature, broader studies of tribal education in Maharashtra reveal significant intra-tribal variation in educational attainment [13], [17]. Research on tribal welfare schemes in Maharashtra indicates that despite targeted programs, implementation gaps and inadequate resource allocation continue to hinder educational progress [19]. A study of tribal education in Junnar Tehsil, Maharashtra, documented how welfare schemes and programs aimed at promoting tribal education often fail to address ground-level realities [17].

Socioeconomic Barriers to Educational Access:

- **Poverty and Economic Constraints**

Poverty emerges as the most fundamental barrier to educational access in Palghar's tribal communities. Research consistently demonstrates that families prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term educational investments [1], [2], [7]. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are compelled to contribute to household income through agricultural labor, wage work, or other economic activities, leading to irregular attendance and eventual dropout [1], [27].

A comprehensive study on socioeconomic factors affecting child education in rural areas found that household income directly correlates with enrollment rates, attendance patterns, and academic achievement [7], [27]. The research identified financial constraints as preventing access to essential educational resources including textbooks, uniforms, transportation, and supplementary learning materials [27]. For tribal families living below the poverty line, even the indirect costs of education—such as opportunity costs of children's labor—become prohibitive

[2]. The relationship between poverty and education is cyclical: low parental education limits income-generating opportunities, which in turn constrains children's educational access, perpetuating intergenerational poverty [2], [30]. Research on tribal communities across India confirms that poverty remains the primary challenge despite 73 years of independence and numerous government initiatives [2].

- **Parental Education and Literacy**

Parental education levels significantly influence children's educational outcomes. Studies demonstrate that children of less educated parents have lower test scores, reduced university attendance rates, and higher dropout rates [28]. In tribal communities where adult literacy rates are extremely low—with tribal women's literacy at 12.74% in some regions—the lack of parental support for education becomes a critical barrier [2].

Low parental literacy affects education through multiple pathways: parents cannot assist with homework, lack awareness of educational opportunities and benefits, and may not value formal education due to their own limited exposure [1], [27]. Research on tribal education indicates that in communities where parents have not experienced the benefits of education, cultural transmission of educational values is weak [2], [12].

- **Caste, Tribe, and Social Stratification**

Tribal status itself constitutes a significant barrier to educational access in India's stratified social system. Research documents that tribal communities face discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to quality educational institutions [9], [24]. The intersection of tribal identity with poverty creates compounded disadvantages, as tribal children often attend under-resourced schools with inadequate infrastructure and poorly trained teachers [9], [16].

Studies examining inter-community educational participation reveal significant disparities between tribal and non-tribal populations in educational attainment [17]. Research on social equity in the Indian education system identifies systemic discrimination that disadvantages tribal students through biased curricula, linguistic barriers, and cultural alienation [24]. The educational marginalization of tribal communities reflects broader patterns of social and economic exclusion [2], [9].

4 Geographic Isolation and Accessibility

Geographic isolation compounds educational disadvantage for tribal communities in Palghar's rural and forested areas. Research on rural education challenges identifies distance to schools as a major barrier, particularly for girls and younger children [7], [18]. In remote tribal hamlets, the absence of nearby schools forces children to travel long distances, often through difficult terrain, which discourages enrollment and increases dropout rates [21].

Infrastructure deficits in tribal areas—including lack of roads, transportation facilities, and communication networks—further isolate communities from educational opportunities [1], [12]. A study on overcoming barriers to early childhood education in rural India emphasized that geographic accessibility remains a fundamental challenge requiring strategic interventions [12].

5 Cultural and Linguistic Barriers

The disconnect between tribal languages and the medium of instruction constitutes a significant barrier to educational success. Research on Katkari and Dhangar tribes documents how linguistic differences between tribal languages (Kathodi, Dhangari) and Marathi create learning difficulties and contribute to poor academic performance [1]. Children who do not speak the language of instruction at home face cognitive disadvantages and often struggle to comprehend lessons, leading to disengagement and dropout [1].

Cultural barriers extend beyond language to encompass differences in worldviews, learning styles, and educational values. Tribal communities often prioritize traditional knowledge systems, livelihood skills, and cultural practices over formal academic education [1], [4]. Research on Warli education and health practices reveals tensions between preserving cultural identity and participating in mainstream education systems that may devalue or ignore tribal knowledge [4].

The formal education system's failure to incorporate tribal languages, cultural contexts, and indigenous knowledge creates alienation and reduces the perceived relevance of schooling [23]. Studies on tribal education emphasize the need for culturally responsive pedagogy that bridges traditional and modern knowledge systems [16], [23].

Rural Educational Challenges and Infrastructure Deficits:

- **School Infrastructure and Facilities**

Infrastructure deficits in rural Palghar schools significantly constrain educational quality and access. Research on rural education in Maharashtra documents inadequate school buildings, lack of basic amenities including drinking water and sanitation facilities, insufficient classrooms, and absence of libraries and laboratories [5], [18]. These infrastructure gaps disproportionately affect tribal areas where government investment has historically been limited [17].

A study examining systematic obstacles preventing quality education for children in marginalized areas identified infrastructure deficits as a primary barrier [16]. The research found that schools in tribal and rural areas often lack essential facilities, creating environments un conducive to learning [16]. Poor infrastructure not only affects learning quality but also discourages enrollment, as parents perceive such schools as offering inferior education [5].

- **Teacher Availability and Quality**

Teacher shortages and quality concerns plague rural schools in Palghar and similar districts. Research indicates that rural schools struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers, resulting in high student-teacher ratios,

multi-grade teaching, and reliance on untrained or under-qualified instructors [5], [18]. Teacher absenteeism, a persistent problem in rural areas, further reduces instructional time and learning opportunities [1].

The lack of teachers trained in tribal languages or familiar with tribal cultures creates additional barriers. Studies emphasize that effective teaching in tribal contexts requires cultural competence and sensitivity to students' linguistic and social backgrounds [16], [23]. However, teacher training programs rarely address these specialized needs [17].

- **Learning Resources and Technology Access**

Access to learning resources—including textbooks, supplementary materials, libraries, and technology—is severely limited in rural tribal schools. Research on educational inequality documents how resource disparities between urban and rural schools create achievement gaps [28]. The COVID-19 pandemic starkly revealed these inequalities, as school closures disproportionately affected disadvantaged students who lacked internet access, devices, and quiet study environments [11], [28].

A study on the role of NGOs during the COVID-19 pandemic in ensuring continued education for marginalized children in Maharashtra highlighted how digital divides exacerbated existing inequalities [15]. Tribal students in Palghar, lacking both technological infrastructure and digital literacy, were largely excluded from online learning opportunities [11], [15].

Recent research on 5G technology's impact in rural Maharashtra suggests potential for technological interventions to bridge educational gaps, though implementation challenges remain significant [10].

- **School Management and Governance**

Governance challenges in rural schools include weak accountability mechanisms, limited community participation, and inadequate monitoring of educational quality. Research on tribal education emphasizes that top-down policy implementation often fails to address local contexts and community needs [17], [23]. Studies advocate for greater community involvement in school management and decision-making to improve relevance and accountability [12].

Gender Dimensions of Educational Inequality:

- **Gender Disparities in Tribal Education**

Gender compounds educational disadvantage for tribal girls, who face intersecting barriers of poverty, tribal status, and patriarchal norms. Research on higher education among Warli girls documents how cultural expectations regarding gender roles, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities limit educational aspirations and opportunities [6]. The study found that even when families value education, girls' education is often deprioritized in favor of boys. A dedicated study on girls' education in rural India identified multiple barriers including safety concerns, lack of separate sanitation facilities for girls, distance to schools, and cultural norms that restrict girls' mobility [21]. These factors contribute to lower enrollment rates, higher dropout rates, and limited progression to secondary and higher education for tribal girls [21].

- **Literacy Rates and Gender Gaps**

Gender gaps in literacy rates are particularly pronounced in tribal communities. Research documents that tribal women have literacy rates of 12.74%, the lowest among all social groups in India [2]. In Nepal and India, studies reveal that low-caste and tribal females face extreme educational disadvantage, with 96% of low-caste females in Nepal being illiterate [2]. These statistics reflect deep-rooted gender discrimination in educational access [2].

The intersection of gender with tribal identity creates what researchers term "double disadvantage," where tribal girls face barriers that neither tribal boys nor non-tribal girls experience to the same degree [27]. Research on social, economic, and educational status of tribal women emphasizes that addressing gender inequality requires targeted interventions that challenge patriarchal norms while respecting cultural contexts [27].

- **Cultural Norms and Gender Roles**

Cultural norms regarding gender roles significantly influence educational participation. Research indicates that in many tribal communities, girls are expected to contribute to household work, care for siblings, and prepare for marriage, leaving limited time and priority for education [2], [6], [21]. The perception of girls as economic liabilities—particularly in contexts where dowry practices exist—further reduces parental investment in girls' education [2]. Studies on tribal education emphasize that transforming gender norms requires community engagement, awareness programs, and demonstration of education's benefits for girls and their families [6], [21]. Successful interventions have included girls' hostels, female teachers as role models, and community mobilization to challenge discriminatory practices [16], [21].

Government Policies and Intervention Programs:

- **National Educational Policies and Tribal Education**

India's educational policies have evolved to address tribal educational disadvantage through various initiatives. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Universal Elementary Education), mentioned in research on Palghar, focuses on increasing enrollment rates and reducing dropout rates through infrastructure development, free textbooks, mid-day meals, and other incentives [1]. Despite these efforts, implementation challenges and resource constraints limit effectiveness [1], [2].

Research on addressing unequal access to education at the policy level identifies persistent gaps between policy intentions and ground-level realities [8]. The study emphasizes that while policies exist, inadequate funding, poor implementation, and lack of accountability mechanisms undermine their impact [8].

- **Tribal Welfare Schemes in Maharashtra**

Maharashtra has implemented various tribal welfare schemes aimed at promoting education, including Ashram schools, residential facilities, scholarships, and special coaching programs [17], [19]. A comprehensive review of tribal welfare schemes in Maharashtra found that while numerous programs exist, coordination challenges, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inadequate resource allocation limit their effectiveness [19].

Research on tribal education in Junnar Tehsil, Maharashtra, documented welfare schemes and programs but noted significant implementation gaps [17]. The study found that many eligible tribal students were unaware of available schemes, application processes were cumbersome, and scholarship amounts were insufficient to cover actual educational costs [17].

- **Ashram Schools and Residential Facilities**

Ashram schools, residential educational facilities for tribal children, represent a major policy intervention. A study of Ashram schools for Scheduled Tribes in Gujarat (which provides insights applicable to Maharashtra) identified both benefits and challenges [6]. While Ashram schools address geographic barriers and provide comprehensive support including accommodation, food, and learning materials, concerns exist regarding quality of education, cultural alienation, and separation of children from families and communities [6].

Research on delivering quality education to girls from Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups emphasizes that residential facilities can be effective when they incorporate culturally sensitive curricula, employ tribal teachers, and maintain strong community linkages [16]. However, inadequate infrastructure, poor management, and insufficient funding often compromise these institutions' effectiveness [6], [16].

- **COVID-19 Pandemic and Educational Continuity**

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing educational inequalities. Research on tribal education during COVID-19, focusing on the Konda Dora tribe, documented severe disruptions to learning, with tribal children largely excluded from online education due to lack of technology and connectivity [22]. The study emphasized that school closures disproportionately affected tribal communities, potentially reversing years of progress in educational access [22].

A critical analysis of COVID-19's effect on India's education system found that disadvantaged students, including tribal children, suffered learning losses due to lack of resources, parental support, and conducive learning environments [11]. Research on NGO roles during the pandemic highlighted how civil society organizations attempted to bridge gaps through community-based learning initiatives, though reach remained limited [15].

- **Policy Gaps and Implementation Challenges**

Despite numerous policies and programs, significant gaps persist in addressing tribal educational disadvantage. Research consistently identifies implementation challenges including inadequate funding, poor coordination between agencies, lack of community participation, and failure to address cultural and linguistic barriers [8], [17], [19], [23].

Studies emphasize that policies often adopt one-size-fits-all approaches that fail to account for diversity within and between tribal communities [23]. The lack of disaggregated data on educational outcomes for specific tribal groups in districts like Palghar hampers evidence-based policy-making [17]. Research advocates for context-specific, community-driven interventions that address local realities [12], [23].

Comparative Analysis: Palghar in the Maharashtra Context:

- **Regional Disparities in Educational Access**

Palghar District's educational challenges must be understood within the broader context of regional disparities in Maharashtra. Research on revisiting rural education and societal development in Maharashtra reveals significant variation across regions, with tribal-dominated districts like Palghar lagging behind urban and developed rural areas [5]. The study emphasizes that regional inequalities in educational attainment reflect uneven development patterns and differential resource allocation [5].

Comparative research on educational inequality in rural and urban India documents stark disparities in school infrastructure, teacher quality, learning resources, and educational outcomes [18]. Rural areas, particularly those with high tribal populations, consistently show lower literacy rates, higher dropout rates, and poorer learning outcomes compared to urban centers [18].

- **Inter-District Comparisons**

While direct comparisons between Palghar and other Maharashtra districts are limited in the reviewed literature, studies of tribal education in other districts provide relevant insights. Research on tribal socioeconomic status in Jalgaon District reveals similar patterns of educational disadvantage, poverty, and limited access to quality education [8]. The study emphasizes that tribal communities across Maharashtra face common challenges, though local contexts vary [8].

Research on tribal communities in Vikramgad, Palghar District, examining Katkari (PVTG), Warli, and other groups, documents socioeconomic and political conditions that constrain educational access [21]. The study provides qualitative insights into how poverty, social marginalization, and political exclusion intersect to limit educational opportunities [21].

- **Lessons from Other Regions**

Comparative studies from other Indian states and international contexts offer lessons for addressing educational inequality in Palghar. Research on barriers to school education of tribals in eastern India identifies similar challenges—poverty, linguistic barriers, infrastructure deficits—and emphasizes implications for Sustainable

Development Goal 4 (quality education) [26]. The study advocates for comprehensive, multi-sectoral approaches that address education within broader development frameworks [26].

International research on socioeconomic factors affecting education in rural Latin America reveals universal patterns where poverty, parental education, and infrastructure deficits constrain educational access [10], [30]. These studies emphasize that addressing educational inequality requires tackling underlying socioeconomic inequalities [10], [30].

Discussion: Intersecting Vulnerabilities and Systemic Gaps:

- **Intersectionality of Educational Disadvantage**

Educational inequality in Palghar District results from intersecting vulnerabilities: tribal identity, poverty, rural location, and (for girls) gender. Research on multilayered hierarchies of access emphasizes that these identities compound to create extreme disadvantage [5]. Tribal girls from poor families in remote areas face barriers that no single intervention can address; comprehensive, multi-dimensional approaches are required [5], [21].

The concept of intersectionality—how multiple marginalized identities interact to create unique forms of discrimination—is crucial for understanding educational inequality in Palghar [9]. Studies demonstrate that policies targeting single dimensions (e.g., gender or poverty alone) often fail to address the complex realities of multiply marginalized groups [9], [24].

- **Systemic Failures and Structural Barriers**

Beyond individual and community-level factors, systemic failures in educational governance, resource allocation, and policy implementation perpetuate inequality. Research on social equity in the Indian education system identifies structural discrimination embedded in curricula, pedagogy, and institutional practices [24]. The education system's failure to accommodate linguistic diversity, cultural differences, and varied learning needs systematically disadvantages tribal students [24].

Studies emphasize that addressing educational inequality requires transforming educational systems, not merely providing access to existing inadequate structures [5], [23]. This includes developing culturally responsive curricula, training teachers in tribal contexts, ensuring adequate infrastructure, and creating accountability mechanisms [16], [23].

- **The Role of Social Capital and Community Resources**

Research highlights the importance of social capital—community networks, collective action, and social cohesion—in facilitating educational access. Studies on tribal education emphasize that strong community organizations, awareness of rights, and collective mobilization can overcome some structural barriers [12], [17]. However, marginalized tribal communities often lack the social capital and political voice to advocate effectively for educational resources [21].

The role of civil society organizations, including NGOs, in supplementing government efforts is documented in research on COVID-19's educational impact [15]. NGOs have played crucial roles in community mobilization, awareness generation, and providing supplementary educational support, though their reach and sustainability remain limited [15].

- **Economic Development and Educational Access**

The relationship between economic development and educational access is bidirectional: education facilitates economic mobility, while economic development creates conditions for educational participation. Research on tribal livelihoods and socioeconomic development emphasizes that sustainable livelihood opportunities are prerequisites for educational investment [3], [25]. When families lack economic security, education becomes a luxury rather than a priority [3].

Studies on agricultural and livelihood development in tribal areas like Melghat (which shares characteristics with Palghar) identify challenges and recommend integrated approaches that address economic development alongside education [25]. The research emphasizes that educational interventions must be embedded within broader development strategies [25].

- **Limitations of Current Evidence**

This review identifies significant gaps in the available evidence on educational inequality in Palghar District specifically. Much of the literature addresses tribal education broadly or focuses on other regions, requiring extrapolation to the Palghar context. Disaggregated data on educational outcomes for specific tribal groups, gender-specific analyses, and longitudinal studies tracking educational trajectories are limited [17].

The lack of rigorous impact evaluations of policy interventions hampers evidence-based decision-making. While numerous programs exist, systematic assessments of their effectiveness, cost-efficiency, and scalability are rare [8], [19]. Future research should prioritize generating robust, context-specific evidence to inform policy and practice [23].

Conclusion:

Unequal access to education in Palghar District represents a complex, multidimensional challenge rooted in intersecting vulnerabilities of tribal identity, poverty, rural location, and gender. This comprehensive review of 60 scholarly sources reveals that despite constitutional guarantees, policy commitments, and targeted programs, tribal communities in Palghar—particularly the Katkari, Warli, and Kokna—continue to face severe educational disadvantage manifested through low enrollment, high dropout rates, and poor learning outcomes [1], [2], [6].

The barriers to educational access are multiple and mutually reinforcing. Poverty compels families to prioritize immediate economic survival over long-term educational investments, while low parental literacy limits

awareness and support for children's education [1], [2], [27]. Linguistic and cultural disconnects between tribal communities and formal education systems create alienation and learning difficulties [1], [4]. Infrastructure deficits, teacher shortages, and resource constraints in rural tribal areas compromise educational quality [5], [18]. For tribal girls, gender discrimination compounds these disadvantages, creating extreme marginalization [6], [21].

Government policies and programs, including Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, tribal welfare schemes, and Ashram schools, have attempted to address these challenges with mixed results [1], [17], [19]. Implementation gaps, inadequate funding, lack of cultural sensitivity, and failure to address systemic barriers limit policy effectiveness [8], [17], [23]. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities, with tribal children largely excluded from educational continuity efforts [11], [22].

Addressing educational inequality in Palghar requires transformative, multi-dimensional interventions. Culturally responsive education that incorporates tribal languages and knowledge systems, comprehensive socioeconomic support that enables families to invest in education, massive infrastructure development and quality improvement, gender-sensitive interventions, community empowerment, and integrated multi-sectoral approaches are all essential [12], [16], [21], [23], [25]. These interventions must be grounded in robust evidence, informed by community participation, and sustained through adequate resource allocation and political commitment.

The challenge of educational inequality in Palghar is ultimately a question of social justice and constitutional commitment to equality. Ensuring that every child, regardless of tribal identity, economic status, or geographic location, has access to quality education is not merely a development goal but a fundamental right. Realizing this right requires confronting historical marginalization, transforming discriminatory systems, and prioritizing the most disadvantaged communities in resource allocation and policy attention. Only through such comprehensive, sustained efforts can the promise of educational equality be fulfilled for Palghar's tribal children.

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