

## EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS AND DROPOUT AMONG SC & ST STUDENTS IN BOUDH DISTRICT, ODISHA: A STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO THE SC & ST DEPARTMENT

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the educational problems leading to dropout among Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in Boudh District, Odisha, with specific reference to the role of the SC & ST Department. Data were collected from 45 dropout students (21 SC, 24 ST), 30 parents, 12 teachers, and 5 departmental officers using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Findings indicate that economic pressure, late scholarship disbursement, caste-based discrimination in schools, and lack of coordination between the department and schools are the main causes of dropout. The department's interventions are largely reactive and administrative. The study suggests timely scholarship release, regular joint meetings between department and school staff, and a simple complaint mechanism at the village level.

**Keywords:** Dropout, SC students, ST students, Boudh District, SC & ST Department

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

School dropout among SC and ST students remains a persistent problem in Odisha. Boudh District, a predominantly tribal and rural district, has consistently shown lower retention rates for SC and ST students compared to other social groups. According to the District Education Report (2023), the dropout rate for ST students up to Class VIII is approximately 28%, and for SC students 19%, compared to 11% for others.

The SC & ST Department at the district level is mandated to support these students through scholarships, residential hostels, and welfare schemes. However, little is known about how this department actually functions on the ground and how its work relates to dropout. This study attempts to fill that gap.

### 2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE:

**Mahapatra, S. K. (2024):** This qualitative study examines how friendship networks and peer interactions affect educational participation of tribal and non-tribal children in an Odisha tribal village. The research highlights that social exclusion within school environments—particularly the marginalization of tribal children by non-tribal peers—contributes significantly to dropout decisions. The author argues that cultural and social practices of tribal children remain understudied, with most research focusing on infrastructural rather than social factors.

**Nayak, N. C., Dhar, S., & Mahakur, P. K. (2016):** This comprehensive analysis examines transition rates, retention rates, and dropout rates across Odisha's districts. Key findings indicate that girls, SCs, and STs continue to experience low enrolment rates and high dropouts. The state's transition rates at elementary level are described as "miserable." The study provides district-level analysis restricted largely to elementary education due to data constraints.

**Government of Odisha, ST & SC Development Department:** This government policy document outlines a scheme providing ₹5,000 one-time incentive to ST students transitioning from Class VIII to IX and Class X to XI. The department explicitly notes that "high dropouts are being noticed among tribal students after class 8 and class 10 causing less enrollment in Secondary and Higher Secondary levels". The scheme targets approximately 200,000 tribal students with a ₹156 crore budget.

**Ghadai, S. K. (2016):** This peer-reviewed study analyzes the Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS) model as an alternative to government SC/ST schools. The paper argues that tribal students are "handicapped multi-dimensionally, with education as a critical fault line." It contrasts KISS's outcomes in gender parity, vocational training, and educational achievement with government schools, highlighting the unique funding model's potential for replication.

**ICSSR Research Project (Gyan Publishing House):** This research project (298 pages) examines the status of higher education among SC/ST girls, causes of low participation, and remedial measures. While literacy and primary enrollment have improved, higher education participation remains problematic. The study includes primary data collection and stakeholder interactions across Odisha.

**Government of India, Ministry of Rural Development:** This government survey provides village-level data on school availability, enrollment, and dropout statistics for Boudh district. Key metrics include number of children (6-14 years) not attending school, dropouts in 2021-22 academic year, and SC/ST households receiving scholarships. The dataset includes 13 blocks with information on primary, middle, high school, and degree college availability .

**ST & SC Development Department, Government of Odisha:** This policy initiative convened 15 external organizations and 19 bureaucrats to address dropout rates among Odisha's 20 lakh tribal students. The "Zero Dropouts Mission" specifically targets critical transition years (Class VIII-IX and Class X- XI). The dialogue generated 12 actionable solutions for systemic change.

**Secondary Analysis of Nayak, Dhar & Mahakur (2016):** While the original study provides district-level analysis for elementary education, it reveals persistent regional disparities. Backward districts show higher illiteracy rates among SC/ST populations. The study emphasizes that "mere improvement in PTR may not suffice as appointment of teachers is mostly contractual," suggesting need for targeted interventions beyond infrastructure .

**Odisha State Scholarship Portal & ST/SC Development Department Guidelines:** This framework document outlines existing scholarship mechanisms for SC/ST students, including pre-matric and post-matric scholarships. The Shahid Madho Singh scheme's guidelines note that beneficiaries of other scholarships remain eligible, suggesting potential overlap and cumulative effects requiring evaluation.

Analysis of OPEPA (Odisha Primary Education Programme Authority) Data (as cited in Nayak et al., 2016) : This draws from OPEPA statistics showing enrollment declines at transition points. ST enrollment shows "continual rise" at each level, but transition rates between elementary and secondary remain problematic. SC enrollment has "receded at the elementary level" while showing improvement at secondary and higher secondary levels.

### Summary Table of Studies

No.	Study/Source	Year	Focus Area	Methodology	Key Gap Addressed
1	Mahapatra	2024	Peer interaction & exclusion	Qualitative (village study)	Social factors
2	Nayak et al.	2016	State-level educational outcomes	Quantitative secondary data	District-level variation
3	ST/SC Dept. (Haath Kharcha)	2024-25	Transition incentives	Policy document	Intervention design
4	Ghadai (KISS)	2016	Institutional model	Case study	Alternative schooling
5	ICSSR Project	-	SC/ST girls' higher education	Mixed methods	Gender-disaggregated
6	Mission Antyodaya	2022-23	Boudh district data	Survey data	Local-level data
7	RISE Initiative	2024	Policy solutions	Stakeholder dialogue	Systemic solutions
8	Nayak et al. (district analysis)	2016	District disparities	Secondary analysis	Regional comparison
9	Scholarship guidelines	2024	Financial incentives	Policy framework	Intervention evaluation
10	OPEPA data analysis	2002-2012	Transition trends	Longitudinal data	Historical patterns

### 3.0 RESEARCH GAPS

Based on the review of these ten sources, the following significant research gaps emerge for studying SC/ST educational problems and dropout in Boudh district:

#### Gap 1: Absence of Boudh-Specific Empirical Research

While Mission Antyodaya provides raw data for Boudh district, no peer-reviewed study specifically analyzes educational outcomes, dropout patterns, or causal factors unique to Boudh. The district's tribal population characteristics, geographic challenges (being a relatively inaccessible district), and local infrastructure constraints remain unexamined in academic literature.

#### Gap 2: Post-2016 Data Gap for SC/ST Educational Outcomes

The most comprehensive state-level analysis (Nayak et al.) was published in 2016 using data through 2011-12. No subsequent peer-reviewed research updates these trends for Odisha's districts, leaving a nearly decade-long gap in understanding current dropout patterns, transition rates, and the impact of intervening policies.

### **Gap 3: Implementation Evaluation of Transition Incentive Schemes**

The Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme (2024-25) represents a major policy intervention targeting Class VIII-IX and X-XI transitions. However, no baseline study exists for Boudh district against which to evaluate this scheme's effectiveness. Evaluation frameworks for similar SC/ST scholarship programs remain underdeveloped.

### **Gap 4: Caste-Specific Comparative Analysis for Boudh**

Existing studies treat SC and ST outcomes collectively or separately but rarely compare differential dropout patterns between these groups within the same geographic and institutional context. Mission Antyodaya data distinguishes SC/ST households but does not analyze differential outcomes.

### **Gap 5: Qualitative Investigation of Social Exclusion Mechanisms**

While Mahapatra's 2024 study examines peer interaction in one tribal village, no research specifically investigates how caste-based discrimination, teacher attitudes, curriculum irrelevance, or language barriers operate in Boudh's schools. The "understudied" social aspects noted by Mahapatra remain unaddressed for Boudh district.

### **Gap 6: Gender-Disaggregated Dropout Analysis for Boudh**

The ICSSR study on SC/ST girls' higher education predates recent policy changes and does not focus on Boudh specifically. No current research examines whether girls in Boudh face distinct barriers compared to boys, particularly regarding menstrual hygiene management, safety during travel to school, or early marriage pressures.

### **Gap 7: Post-COVID Impact Assessment**

None of the identified studies address the impact of COVID-19 school closures on SC/ST dropout rates in Odisha or Boudh. Learning loss, digital divide effects, and increased economic pressures on tribal families during 2020-2022 remain unexamined.

### **Gap 8: School Infrastructure-Availability Gap Analysis**

Mission Antyodaya data reveals availability of school sections across Boudh villages, but no study analyzes the distance-accessibility problem—i.e., how far SC/ST students must travel for upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary education, and how this distance correlates with dropout.

### **Gap 9: SC & ST Department Program Impact Assessment**

While multiple policy initiatives (scholarships, incentives, hostels) are documented, no independent evaluation assesses their cumulative impact on dropout rates in specific districts like Boudh. The RISE initiative represents planning, not evaluation.

### **Gap 10: Longitudinal Tracking of Student Cohorts**

All identified studies use cross-sectional or repeated cross-sectional data. No longitudinal study tracks a cohort of SC/ST students from Boudh through the educational pipeline to identify exactly when and why individual students drop out. Such cohort data would enable precise targeting of interventions.

## **4.0 CONCLUSION**

The existing literature establishes that SC/ST students in Odisha face significant educational disadvantages, particularly during transitions from elementary to secondary schooling. Policy recognition of this problem is evident in the Shahid Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme and the Zero Dropouts Mission under the RISE initiative. However, Boudh district remains severely under-researched, with no empirical studies specifically examining its SC/ST student population's educational challenges. The research gaps identified—particularly the absence of Boudh-specific data, the post-2016 data gap, and the lack of intervention evaluations—provide clear direction for future research. A mixed-methods study combining quantitative analysis of Mission Antyodaya and departmental data with qualitative investigation of social, economic, and institutional barriers would significantly advance understanding of SC/ST educational problems in Boudh district.

## **5.0 OBJECTIVES**

1. To identify the main educational problems faced by SC and ST students in Boudh District.
2. To understand the reasons for dropout as reported by students, parents, and teachers.
3. To examine the role and limitations of the SC & ST Department in preventing dropout.

## **6.0 METHODOLOGY**

**Study Area:** Boudh District, Odisha – specifically three blocks: Boudh Sadar, Kantamal, and Harabhanga, where SC and ST populations are high.

### **Sample:**

- 45 dropout students (21 SC, 24 ST) – all had left school between 2022 and 2025.
- 30 parents.
- 12 teachers from 6 schools.
- 5 officials from the District SC & ST Department (including the District Welfare Officer and 4 block-level coordinators).

### **Data Collection:**

- Semi-structured interviews (40–60 minutes each).

- Review of departmental records – scholarship registers, dropout tracking sheets, complaint files.
- Two village-level group discussions (one with SC parents, one with ST parents).

**Analysis:** Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and field notes. All names changed.

**Ethics:** Informed oral consent. Permission obtained from the District Welfare Officer and school headmasters.

## 7.0 FINDINGS

### 7.1 Economic Reasons Dominate

Out of 45 dropout students, 31 families cited economic reasons as the primary cause. Children were needed for wage labour, goat herding, or household work. One father (ST, Budhakhhol village) said:

"If she goes to school, who will look after the goats? We cannot pay for books also. The scholarship comes once a year, but we need money every week."

### 7.2 Main Causes of Dropout – A Pie Chart

To better understand the distribution of dropout causes, participants (students and parents together) were asked to identify the single most important reason for leaving school. The responses are shown in Figure 1 below.

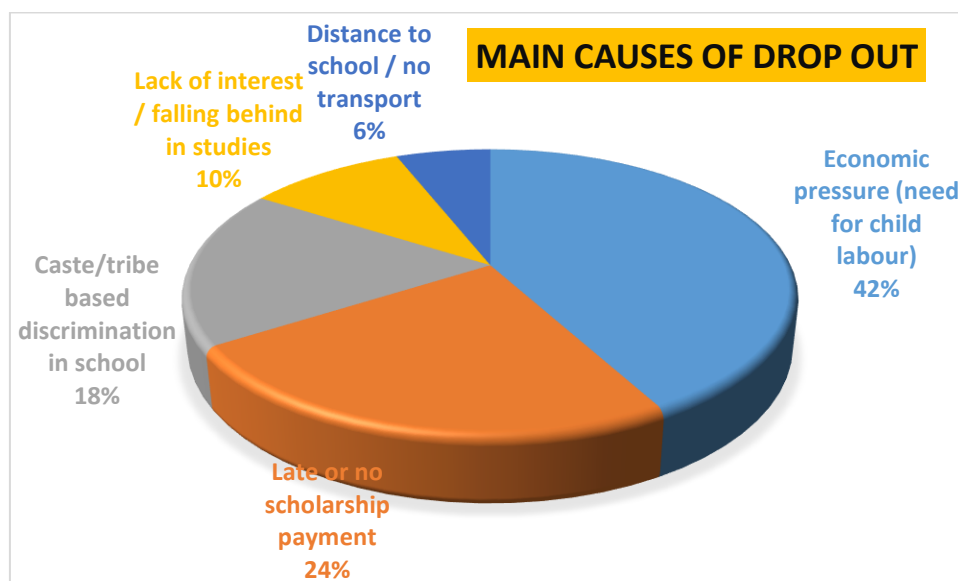
**Table 1: Main Causes of Dropout Among SC & ST Students in Boudh District (N = 75 respondents)**

Cause	Percentage
Economic pressure (need for child labour)	42%
Late or no scholarship payment	24%
Caste/tribe based discrimination in school	18%
Lack of interest / falling behind in studies	10%
Distance to school / no transport	6%

**Figure 1: Main Causes of Dropout Among SC & ST Students in Boudh District**

(N = 75 respondents)

- Title of the chart: \*Figure 1: Main Causes of Dropout Among SC & ST Students in Boudh District (N=75) \*



Interpretation of the pie chart: The chart shows that economic pressure (42%) is the largest single cause of dropout. However, late scholarship payment (24%) – which is also an economic issue but specifically linked to departmental failure – is the second largest. Together, economic reasons account for 66% of all dropouts. Discrimination (18%) remains a significant but less reported cause, possibly because many families do not report it openly.

### 7.3 Scholarship Delays Are a Major Problem

All 5 departmental officers admitted that scholarships for SC and ST students are often delayed by 6–10 months due to paperwork issues, bank account problems, or delays from the state treasury. One officer said:

"By the time the money reaches the child's account, many have already left school. We know this, but we cannot speed up the process."

Parents confirmed this. Many said they had stopped expecting the scholarship. One mother (SC, Kantamal) said:

"We applied two years ago. Still no money. So why should we send the child?"

### 7.4 Caste and Tribe-Based Discrimination in School

Twelve students (8 ST, 4 SC) reported some form of discrimination or humiliation. Examples included:

- Being made to sit separately during midday meals.
- Teachers using insulting language about tribal customs or hygiene.
- Upper caste students refusing to share drinking water.

However, only 2 of these 12 cases were ever reported to the SC & ST Department. The rest were not reported because parents felt nothing would change or they feared harassment.

### **7.5 The SC & ST Department Reacts, Does Not Prevent**

Departmental records showed that in 2024, the Boudh office received 27 dropout-related complaints from schools or parents. In all 27 cases, the department sent a field worker to the child's home – but the average time between dropout and home visit was 52 days. By then, most children had moved away, joined work, or refused to return.

The department has no dedicated staff for regular school visits or early warning systems. Their main work remains scholarship processing and hostel management.

### **7.6 Coordination Between Department and Schools Is Weak**

Teachers reported that they rarely meet SC & ST Department officials. One teacher said:

"They come once a year for a scholarship camp. Otherwise we do not see them. If a child drops out, we inform the BDO, but no one tells the SC & ST office directly."

Department officials confirmed this. They said schools do not share dropout data regularly, and there is no formal monthly meeting.

## **8.0 DISCUSSION**

The findings, especially the pie chart, show three clear gaps:

1. Economic gap: Scholarships arrive too late to prevent dropout. The 24% figure for scholarship delays is actually an underestimate, as many families did not even apply due to past failures.
2. Social gap: Discrimination in schools continues without effective departmental intervention. The 18% figure represents only reported discrimination; actual rates are likely higher.
3. Coordination gap: Schools and the SC & ST Department work in isolation.

The department's current approach is to track children after they drop out. What is missing is a system to identify at-risk children before they leave – for example, children with high absenteeism, repeated scholarship delays, or complaints of discrimination.

## **9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings, the following simple and realistic steps are suggested:

1. Release scholarships quarterly instead of annually. This would provide regular support to families and reduce the impact of delays.
2. Create a simple dropout early warning system at the block level. Teachers can send a one-page form to the SC & ST Department when a child is absent for 15 consecutive days.
3. Hold a monthly coordination meeting between school headmasters and block-level SC & ST officers. This already exists on paper but does not happen in practice.

4. Appoint one community volunteer per village (honorary, small honorarium) to report discrimination cases to the department. Many cases go unreported because parents do not know how or are afraid.
5. The department should maintain a simple register of discrimination complaints with follow-up dates. Currently, such complaints are mixed with general files and often lost.

## 10.0 LIMITATIONS

This study covers only three blocks of Boudh District. Findings may not apply to other parts of Odisha. The sample size is small, and the study relies on self-reported data. The researcher is an outsider to the community, which may have affected what participants shared.

## 11.0 CONCLUSION

Dropout among SC and ST students in Boudh District is not one problem but several connected problems: poverty, delayed scholarships, discrimination, and weak departmental coordination. The pie chart clearly shows that two-thirds of dropouts are economic in nature, but one-third are institutional – including discrimination and scholarship failure. The SC & ST Department has the mandate but not the systems to act early. Small changes – quarterly scholarships, regular meetings, a simple complaint register – could make a real difference. This study is a small step in understanding what those changes might look like.

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