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PARENTING STYLES AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG TRIBAL ADOLESCENTS IN INDIA: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT
Although the cognitive competence and high achievement motivation of tribal students have been demonstrated, there is a persistent achievement gap between tribal adolescents in India and their non-tribal counterparts. This study consolidates findings from eleven empirical studies (2015-2026) conducted in seven Indian states on the association between family environment, parenting styles, and academic achievement among tribal adolescents. Five themes were identified: (1) persistent tribal achievement gap in various locations; (2) positive role of authoritative parenting and academic stimulation on achievement; (3) negative effect of punitive parenting on achievement; (4) motivational, self-conceptual, and psychological factors as mediating variables; and (5) structural factors such as school quality, geographic location, and socioeconomic status as moderating variables which weaken the impact of family-level factors. The gender factor did not differentiate the academic achievements of tribal adolescents in most studies. This study suggests that bridging the gap in the academic achievement of tribal adolescents would require interventions at both the family and the structural level.

KEYWORDS: *Tribal Education, Parenting Styles, Academic Achievement, Family Environment, Adolescents, Achievement Motivation*

INTRODUCTION
India is home to more than 700 tribes, constituting 8.6% of the total population. However, the literacy rate of ST communities is just 59% (Census of India, 2011), and it is far lower than the national literacy rate, which is 73%. Despite affirmative action over the decades, Indian tribal adolescents have been showing poor academic performance when compared to other learners. Therefore, poor academic performance among Indian tribal adolescents hinders upward social mobility and is a structural problem.

Family constitutes one of the key factors in the explanation of academic performance. In his ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) claims that the family is the central microsystem influencing the development of a child. Baumrind's (1966, 1991) parenting styles framework (authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian) forms the basis of most empirical research on the impact of parental influences on children's educational outcomes, whereas Epstein's (1995) framework emphasizes the importance of school-family-community partnerships. However, all the aforementioned models were formulated in Western middle-class contexts, and their generalizability to Indian STs, known for their collectivist culture, multilingualism, isolation, and structural poverty, requires empirical validation.
Current research on tribal education in India is scattered and, lacks a clear unified review.

2. METHODS
A systematic search was performed in January 2026 within Google Scholar, ERIC, ResearchGate, and certain journal databases by means of Boolean operators among: tribal students or Scheduled Tribes; academic achievement or academic performance; parenting styles or family environment or parental involvement; India; adolescents or secondary school students.

Inclusion Criteria
Articles that met the inclusion criteria were those: (a) which contained empirical information on the academic achievement of tribal adolescents in India; (b) which explored at least one family variable or psychological mechanism that is directly related to the academic achievement of the adolescents; (c) published between 2010 and 2026; and (d) were full-text available.

Exclusion Criteria
Only theoretical articles, non-adolescent samples, and articles lacking quantitative results were excluded.

Thirty-four studies were initially screened, while full-text review resulted in eleven articles included in the present review. Information was extracted based on a standardised template. Due to methodological diversity, a narrative synthesis was used according to Popay et al. (2006).

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Table:1

Authors & Year	Setting	Sample	Design	Key Variable	Main Finding
Andrabi (2015)	Kashmir, J&K	N=564, Class-IX	Comparative survey	Tribal/non-tribal; gender → achievement	Non-tribal > tribal (p<.001); gender non-significant
Karmakar (2016)	Meghalaya and Kolkata	N=345, Class XI-XII	Cross-sectional, quantitative	Parenting style, culture → Psychological Capital	Non-khasi > khasi Adolescents
Perween & Dewan (2017)	Ranchi, Jharkhand	N=160, Adolescents	Comparative survey (2x2 factorial)	Parenting style → academic achievement motivation, Mental health	Warmth Builds motivation and well-Being
Sing and Gour (2022)	West Bengal	N=564 Class-IX	Comparative descriptive	Tribal status, gender → achievement	Non-significant gender difference (P > .05)
Messar et al. (2023)	Tirap, Arunachal Pradesh	N=576, Class VI-X	Descriptive survey	Parental involvement→Academic Achievement	(P < .01); Male > Female
Singh & Goswami (2023)	Gumla, Jharkhand	N=500, Class-X	Descriptive survey	Tribal vs. non-tribal → Maths & Science	Tribal deficit consistent across both genders (p<.05)
Janhabi et al. (2024)	Jharkhand	N=80, Class-X	Correlational	Family climate → achievement	Significant for boys (r=.468) & urban (r=.625); non-significant for girls
Majhi & Acharya (2024)	Keonjhar, Odisha	N=200, Class-IX	Descriptive survey	Achievement motivation → performance; gender	r=.403 (p<.01); females > males on motivation & performance
Sa and Sharma (2024)	Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh	N=2200 Class IX-XII	Cross-sectional, quantitative	Self-Esteem → Academic Achievement	Positive Self-esteem & Achivement Correlation; Majority Low Self-Esteem
Chhetri (2026)	Manipur	N=400, Class-XI	Descriptive correlational	Parental involvement → achievement	No Parental Involvement–Academic Achievement correlation; school type & location are key predictors
Rahang & Saikia (2026)	Kamrup Metro, Assam	N=140, Class-XI	Correlational survey	Home environment → board achievement	Academic stimulation (r=.230) & punishment (r=−.193) significant

3. RESULTS AND SYNTHESIS

3.1 The Tribal Achievement Gap as a Pan-Indian Phenomenon

The most persistent result from the corpus analysis is the presence of an achievement gap between tribal students and their non-tribal counterparts. Five studies from three states have confirmed the existence of such a gap: Andrabi (2015) in Kashmir (non-tribal M=48.28 vs. tribal M=44.48; p<.001); Sing & Gour (2022) in West Bengal (p<.001); and Singh & Goswami (2023) in Jharkhand (p<.05). Importantly, the achievement gap exists despite the fact that tribes display cognitive competence (Sujatha, 1987), and as found by Perween & Dewan (2017), greater academic achievement motivation among female tribal than non-tribal students (tribal M=60.31 vs. non-tribal M=50.13; p<.01). Thus, the existence of high aspirations alongside underperformance is the main contradiction that requires synthesis explanation. The mechanisms behind the phenomenon are structural in nature and include geographical isolation, poverty, medium-of-instruction difficulties, culturally non-responsive pedagogy, and inadequate policy implementation.

3.2 Parenting Quality, Parental Involvement, and Achievement

Five family-based predictors of achievement were identified in five studies. Karmakar (2016) provided the most theoretically robust evidence, showing that authoritative parenting was a strong positive predictor of all four Psychological Capital (PsyCap) dimensions – Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism – for Khasi tribal and non-Khasi urban adolescents (N=345) alike, whereas authoritarian parenting had a negative effect on PsyCap. Rahang and Saikia (2026) operationalized home environment through ten dimensions for 140 Karbi tribal adolescents in Assam; academic stimulation (r=.230, p<.01) and moderate parental control (r=.171, p<.05) emerged as positive predictors of scores in board examinations, whereas punitive discipline was a significant negative predictor (r=−.193, p<.05). Messar et al. (2023) showed a moderate positive correlation between parental involvement and

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achievement (r=.567, p<.05) in Arunachal Pradesh; interestingly, children of illiterate but highly involved parents scored 72.2 points higher on average than those from uninvolved families. Janhabi et al. (2024) reported a significant correlation between family climate and achievement for boys (r=.468) and urban adolescents (r=.625) in Jharkhand, but not for girls.

A vital contrary finding is the study conducted by Chhetri (2026), in which no significant correlation between parental involvement and academic achievement was noted in both districts of Manipur (Chandel: ρ=−.045, p=.525; Kakching: ρ=+.068, p=.342). Through multiple regression, school type (β=−.362) and geographic location (β=.333) were found to be the only significant predictors, thereby questioning the validity of the models proposed by Epstein (1995) and Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) models in structurally disadvantaged tribal contexts.

3.3 Psychological Mediators: Achievement Motivation, Self-Esteem, and Psychological Capital

Three empirical studies investigated psychological mediating factors between family and academic achievement. Majhi and Acharya (2024) reported a significant moderate positive association between achievement motivation and academic achievement among 200 Keonjhar tribal students (r=.403, p<.01; 99% CI [.250, .556]). Female tribal students significantly outperformed their male counterparts in both achievement motivation (p<.01) and academic achievement (p<.01). Interestingly, female students scored much higher in both variables despite the expected gender disadvantage. Perween and Dewan (2017) found that parenting styles influenced achievement motivation, with students from loving families scoring significantly higher on achievement motivation than those from rejecting families (p<.01). The significant correlation between achievement motivation and mental health (r=.789, p<.01) further suggests a three-stage mediating process: warm parenting → good mental health → high achievement motivation → achievement. In the largest sample size (N=2,200), Sa and Sharma (2024) found that achievement was positively correlated with self-esteem (p=.029). Females were 1.6 times more likely to score low on self-esteem, and Kol tribe students were 1.7 times more likely than Gond tribe students.

Karmakar (2016) applied this finding to PsyCap (Psychological Capital), indicating that authoritative parenting promotes the entire HERO (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, Optimism) construct, whereas PsyCap development was culturally moderated by the Khasi matrilineal system, especially for males.

3.4 Gender and Structural Moderators

Gender did not significantly differentiate academic performance in tribal communities in four of six studies examining this comparison (Andrabi, 2015; Sing & Gour, 2022; Rahang & Saikia, 2026; Janhabi et al., 2024). In those cases where gender differences were significant, girls were favoured (Majhi & Acharya, 2024), contrary to the story about the gender literacy gap in the country. This evidence indicates that there is greater gender equality in academic performance among tribal secondary students than statistics would suggest.

In all cases, structural factors remained the most prominent moderator. According to Chhetri (2026), school type and school location had more influence on students' achievements than any family factor. Singh and Goswami (2023) revealed that the tribal-non-tribal difference is consistent across genders in the government school setting, which suggests structural rather than familial causes. Sa and Sharma (2024) found no connection between parents' education and income and their children's self-esteem, which shows that family background affects the development of emotional resources but not financial ones. Taken together, these studies imply that the problem of tribal academic deficits is structurally caused and can be overcome only at the structural level.

4. DISCUSSION

Based on the synthesis, a multi-level theory of tribal academic achievements can be developed. Individual psychological resources (motivation, self-esteem, PsyCap) are proximal determinants of academic success. Family-level factors (parenting quality, parental involvement) have a dual effect, impacting psychological resources and academic behaviours. School-level factors (quality of education) moderate the impact of family-level resources on achievement. Finally, structural factors (poverty, geographical remoteness, language barrier, policy failure) limit the whole process. This explains the paradox high tribal motivation and poor academic achievements at the structural level.

The cultural moderation found by Karmakar (2016) and the contextualization found by Chhetri (2026) together make the wholesale adoption of Western models of parenting problematic for Indian tribes. The collectivist culture, matrilineal kinship structure, lack of parental literacy, and structural factors inherent to many tribal communities mean that Baumrind's typology, Epstein's spheres of influence, and Hoover-Dempsey's motivation theories all need to be revised. Future studies would benefit from developing culturally appropriate tools for assessing parenting and involvement (with input from the tribal communities) and then testing the mediation process using structural equation modeling with tribal samples. Longitudinal designs, multi-level modeling, and intratribal disaggregation based on particular ST communities are crucial methodological improvements.

5. IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

For policies concerning tribal communities, there is a need to shift focus from enrollment- and incentive-oriented policies to those aimed at improving educational quality. Some key points to consider when formulating policies for STs include: medium of instruction using tribal language for early schooling; investment in schools' quality and teachers' competence in tribal schools; culturally adapted parental involvement programs that can be accessed by illiterate parents; and mental health and self-respect promotion programs in school.

Within the classroom context, it is important for teachers to take advantage of the known achievement motivation of their tribal

students rather than make deficit-oriented assumptions. Parent-Teacher Associations must be utilized to stimulate academic motivation among students in their homes, while school counselors must be equipped with skills to deal with the intersectionality of tribal identity, gender, and self-esteem highlighted in this review.

The findings of this literature review demonstrate that the broader structural challenges. the family environment, as evidenced by the quality of parenting, parent involvement, academic motivation, and psychological capital, is a significant predictor of academic success among tribal communities; however, these factors only go so far due to certain constraints imposed by structural conditions. While having a positive and nurturing family environment is critical, it is not enough to compensate for other structural challenges faced by tribal children.

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