

Perceptions and Aspirations of Bhuyan Tribe Parents Towards Girls' Education in Keonjhar District of Odisha, India

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KEYWORDS Educational Aspirations. Gender Equity. School Accessibility. Parental Perceptions. Tribal Education

ABSTRACT This paper aims to explore the perceptions and aspirations of the Bhuyan tribe parents towards girls' education, with reference to their desire, participation, and support for girls' education. The study was conducted by following a case study research method. The sample of the study comprised 40 Bhuyan tribe parents of Keonjhar district, Odisha, India. The data were collected through a semi-structured interview schedule. The data were analysed using the content analysis technique. The study revealed that the Bhuyan tribe parents are not much aware and responsive to girls' education in the community. The girls' education in the Bhuyan tribe is influenced by several factors, such as lack of parental and community awareness, social norms, prioritising boys' education, poverty, illiteracy of parents, cultural and language barriers, early marriage and household responsibilities, lack of female tribal teachers, resource constraints, geographical factors and safety concerns.

INTRODUCTION

India is home to about 700 tribes representing around 8 percent of India's total population. Tribes in India have long been noted for their rich cultural heritage, traditional knowledge systems, and unique languages. The Bhuyan is one of the important and major tribes of Odisha. They consider themselves to be children and the owners of the land and hence are known as Bhuyans. They are well-known for their worship of nature, animals, stones, and crops. Their diverse race, language, habitat, and economy represent their society's diversity (Sachan 2018). Education is the key to tribal development and plays a vital role in the development of society (Gangele 2019; Shinde 2023). However, in the 21st century, the educational endeavours for tribes that potentially intend to bring them to the mainstream of development are posed with a complex nature of challenges. The education of women of tribes becomes very crucial in this context, as it has held the highest place in the holistic development of society. Dr B.R. Ambedkar once stated, "*I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have achieved.*" Brigham Young also famously said, "*You educate a man; you educate a man. You ed-*

ucate a woman; you educate a generation." Therefore, the education of women in society carries pivotal importance. In tribal society, education empowers and transforms the lives of women. Several studies have been carried out to understand the nature of girls' education and the challenges they face. Studies indicated that the perception and importance of girls' education in tribal societies are influenced by their socio-economic conditions, lifestyles and accessibility to education (Nayak and Kumar 2022). Mor and Sethia (2015) found moderately favourable attitudes toward girls' education in Haryana, and underlined that the changing awareness of literacy and education through mass media campaigns affects all social segments of rural communities. Bhasin (2007) revealed that tribal women in Ladakh and Rajasthan's northeastern region, possess significant influence in their communities, with no dowry system, the right to choose their husbands, easy divorces, and a significant role in economic activities. The study by Jayaswal et al. (2003) revealed that high-achieving parents in Jharkhand were more supportive, committed, and liberal in their children's academic achievement. Another study conducted by Patel (1984) on tribal women in Gujarat highlighted socio-economic disparities and parental

attitudes, which led to irregular attendance and dropout rates among girls, underscoring the significance of improving education and addressing school-related issues. Gul and Sheikh (2014) reported a significant correlation between the employed and non-employed tribal women's attitudes toward education and employment, but no significant difference was observed between employed and non-employed tribal women's attitudes toward education. The study of Lagachu (2016) on education and women's rights in the Mising Tribe of Jorhat District, Assam, underscores the significance of universal education in changing norms, values, and status in embracing human rights, despite significant progress in education and training. The Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) have low literacy and school-going rates in India and show extensive gender disparities and high dropout rates, particularly after the primary school level (Maharana and Nayak 2017; Mohanty et al. 2019; Mutluri 2020; Bharadwaj and Singh 2025). Moreover, supportive school environments, culturally responsive curriculum, and parental encouragement have been identified as key factors to promote girls' participation in education in tribal communities, as identified by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) and Bhukya et al. (2024). Despite state and central government policy initiatives and interventions to promote girls' education, they are hindered by significant challenges faced by tribal communities in accessing quality education, as highlighted by the need for specific measures to address educational backwardness among these communities to promote their social development (Upmanyu 2016; Gangele 2019; Vinu 2021; Jyothi et al. 2021; Shinde 2023; Das and Bhoi 2025). In light of the above research studies, the present study was identified, and it aims to address limited research on the Bhuyan tribe's perception of girls' education, lack of understanding of different factors influencing girls' education among the Bhuyan tribe, and insufficient information on Bhuyan tribe parents' aspirations and future planning for their daughters' education in India and particularly in Odisha. Therefore, in this study, the investigator intended to explore the perceptions of Bhuyan tribal parents towards girls' education and their aspirations and plans.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:

1. To study the Bhuyan tribe parents' perceptions towards girls' education with respect to the desire for education, support for girls' education and parental involvement.
2. To explore the key challenges encountered by the Bhuyan tribe parents in promoting girls' education.
3. To study the aspirations and future planning of the Bhuyan tribe parents towards girls' education.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted following the case study research design of the qualitative research method to explore the perceptions of the Bhuyan tribe parents towards girls' education and to understand Bhuyan tribe parents' experiences with girls' education. In this study, 40 Bhuyan tribe parents from Keonjhar District of Odisha, India, were purposely selected as the study participants. The data were collected from the Bhuyan tribe parents using semi-structured interviews scheduled in the Odia regional language. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English. The content analysis technique was adopted to identify the patterns and themes for analysing the collected data.

RESULTS

The findings of the study were based on the analysis and interpretation of data. The study revealed insights about the perception of the Bhuyan tribe parents towards girls' education, the challenges encountered by Bhuyan tribe parents for promoting girls' education, and their aspirations and future planning towards girls' education. The results of the study have been presented in the following major themes.

Perception of Bhuyan Tribe Parents Towards their Girls' Education

The study revealed the perception of the Bhuyan tribe parents in the following key aspects.

Desire for Education

The study revealed that the Bhuyan tribe parents generally possess a positive attitude regard-

ing girls' education in the community, and expressed their desire and willingness to educate their daughters. The educated parents of the community continue to recognise the significance of education for girls in the community as a means to have a better life and better future. On the other hand, the illiterate parents of the community were found to be more religiously oriented and prioritised more on their socio-cultural practices, including customs and early marriage over education. During interactions, a literate parent indicated, *"...I am interested in educating my daughter to study and have a better life, but unable to provide education due to lack of resources and money..."*

The statements indicated that the parents in the Bhuyan community aspire and desire education for girls. However, their aspirations for education are constrained by their prevailing socio-cultural beliefs and financial barriers. Another illiterate parent lamented, *"...one day they will get married and go to their husband's house and manage the household activities...education is important for boys; they will earn money and support the family..."*

The study revealed that the illiterate and religiously oriented parents perceived that the girls will be married someday and take care of their husband's family and household, so they prioritise more on the education of boys than the education of girls in the community. The study revealed that parents' desires and decisions for girls' education in the community continue to be adversely influenced by socio-cultural beliefs, practices, customs, early marriage, traditional gender norms and economic constraints.

Support for Girls' Education

The study further revealed that the parents were generally supportive of girls' education and recognised its significance for improved life and future well-being. However, the parents expressed their willingness for educational support, but it is restricted due to lack of financial resources and economic insecurity. One parent of the community remarked, *"...I support my daughter's education, but lack of resources and financial issues hinder me a lot...I want my daughter to go to school and study for having a better life, but the education of my daughters is more challenging, so I want my daughter to do household activities..."*

This indicates that parents intend to support girls' education in the community, but financial constraints adversely influence their educational participation and continuity in education, and as a result, they prioritise domestic activities and household chores over education. The study revealed that there is a gap between the parental aspirations and their capacity to provide support for girls' education in the community. This suggests that poverty and resource constraints continue to restrict parents from being actively involved and providing educational support for girls' education among the Bhuyan tribe.

Parental Involvement

The study revealed that the Bhuyan tribe parents faced challenges in involving, guiding, and assisting girls' students in academic activities due to limited educational background. During the interview, one parent of the community lamented, *"...I am busy with work by being involved in agricultural activities and don't have much time, and when I try to help my daughter in studies, I am unable to help as I don't know how to read and write..."*

This highlighted that Bhuyan tribe parents are unable to actively involve and guide their daughters in studies due to illiteracy, the burden of agricultural work, lack of sufficient time, so they prioritise household activities over their daughters' education. Another Bhuyan tribe parent explained, *"...I don't know how to guide my daughter in her studies...so I prioritise my daughter to do household activities rather than study..."*

This showed that although parents value schooling, due to poor literacy, more involvement in livelihood activities and farming hinders their educational support for girls' education. Moreover, the study found that parents in the community prioritise girls to do household activities over education. The parents indicated that the socio-economic conditions, low literacy, insufficient knowledge, work burden and competing demands of the family restrict the educational participation and achievement of the Bhuyan girls in the community.

Key Challenges Encountered by Bhuyan Tribe Parents for the Education of Their Girls

The study revealed the following key challenges encountered by Bhuyan tribe parents regarding their daughters' education.

Social Norms and Gender Roles

The study found that traditional gender norms and societal expectations adversely influenced the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The study indicated that the parents perceived education as more important for boys, while girls were expected to prepare for their future roles after marriage as housewives and homemakers. During interaction, one Bhuyan tribe parent stated, *"...girls can only run their house after their marriage, but one day girls will leave their parents and get married, so they have to learn and be involved in social and cultural practices of the community..."*

This indicated that the parents of the Bhuyan tribal community are deeply influenced by their continued socio-cultural beliefs and gender expectations, which adversely affect the parental aspirations and decisions regarding girls' education in the community. Similarly, another parent remarked, *"...one day girls will get married and go to their husband's family, so boys need education to support our family and girls should manage the household chores and learn our tribal social and cultural practices..."*

This indicated that Bhuyan tribe parents emphasise on social norms and gender roles that continue to be practised in their tribal community. The parents perceived that the girls should prioritise domestic activities and household responsibilities over schooling, resulting in lower educational priority compared to boys in the community. These parental perceptions contribute to gender discrimination in educational participation and advancement within the Bhuyan tribal community.

Societal Pressures

The findings of the study showed that societal and community pressure emerge as another significant challenge that hinders the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The parents reported that they face pressure from relatives and community members to follow the traditional socio-cultural beliefs, expectations, roles, marriage and family obligations of girls over education. One parent explained, *"...we face pressure from our relatives and community to marry our daughters; after marriage, they can study as per their husband's wish, so girls should prioritise*

household tasks and learn social and cultural practices of the community."

The study indicated that the parental decisions regarding girls' education in the community are adversely affected by societal and traditional expectations of the community. The families are discouraged from investing in and providing education and prioritise household activities over girls in the community and pressure parents to engage in socio-cultural activities and to marry their daughters. As a result, the educational aspirations of girls are often sacrificed to traditional social norms and cultural expectations.

Early Marriage and Household Responsibilities

The findings of the study revealed that early marriage and household duties were found as another major constraint to the educational participation of the girls in the Bhuyan community. The parents emphasised that girls should do household work as preparation for married life over formal schooling. During the interaction, one parent commented, *"...early marriage is common in our community for those girls who need to learn household chores and activities as their primary responsibility and after all they get married, so they must focus on household work..."*

This indicated that early marriage continues to be practiced in the Bhuyan community, and the parents perceived that the girls should emphasise learning and doing household work required after their marriage. As a result, early marriage and household responsibilities continue to restrict the girls' educational participation, aspiration and continuity within the Bhuyan tribe community.

Financial Constraints

The findings of the study identified financial constraints as another major challenge adversely influencing the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The study reported that parents were mainly below the poverty line and involved in daily wage labour and agricultural work. As a result, parents viewed the cost of education as an extra burden that hinders the educational participation of girls within the Bhuyan community. One parent during interaction stated, *"...we can't afford more for our girls' education, and we are saving for our children's marriage and socio-cultural customs..."*

This indicated that the parents' limited income, economic insecurity and burden for education hinder the educational participation of girls in the community. The parents reported that they are saving money for the marriage of their daughters and customs instead of investing in education. Thus, the financial constraints continue to become a significant barrier adversely influencing educational opportunities and participation of the girls within the Bhuyan community.

Lack of Parental and Community Awareness

The study further revealed that lack of parental and community awareness continues to remain a major concern influencing the educational participation of girls within the community. The study reported gradual shifts in parents' perception of girls' education due to the influence of education, income and modernisation. The educated parents recognise the value of girls' education due to the influence of education and modernisation, while on the other hand, the illiterate parents give more importance to household chores, activities, marriage, and involvement in traditional socio-cultural practices due to economic constraints and lack of educational exposure. One parent of the community remarked, "...as we are farmers, it is very difficult to manage the education expenses of our daughters although the government gives some stipends, but it is not enough to cover all their expenses..."

This indicated that there is a gap in recognising the significance of girls' education among educated and illiterate parents. The educated parents expressed their support and willingness to educate girls within the community, while on the other hand, the illiterate parents prioritise livelihood, marriage, household activities, agricultural activities, traditional gender norms and socio-cultural practices over education. The study reported that there is low literacy and educational exposure among the parents and community members of the Bhuyan tribe, resulting in low awareness about educational opportunities, government support schemes and the transformative nature of education, leading to lower educational aspiration, participation and investment in girls' education in the community. Thus, lack of parental awareness, educational exposure and community awareness continue to adversely influence educational participation of girls within the Bhuyan community.

Resource Constraints and Family Support

The findings of the study revealed that resource constraints and inadequate family support were identified as a major challenge that hinders girls' education in the community. The parents reported that lack of financial resources and lack of family support restrict the educational participation of girls in the community. One parent of the community indicated, "...we are unable to afford the education of our daughter due to lack of finances, and it becomes very challenging for us to provide education..."

The study indicated that the parents of the Bhuyan tribe faced challenges in providing educational support to the girls in the community due to lack of financial resources and more preference was given to the education of boys. Consequently, inadequate family support and financial resources hinder the educational participation and progression of girls in the community.

Language Barrier

The study further identified language barriers as another key challenge restricting educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The parents indicated that their children encounter problems understanding the school instruction because the language of the school is different from their own home language and culture. One parent explained, "...our children struggle a lot to learn Odia, Hindi and English, particularly in which education is imparted in school and our traditions, histories, socio-cultural practices and indigenous knowledge are not taught in school..."

This indicated that the lack of mother tongue-based instruction, mismatch between home and school language, insufficient inclusion of Bhuyan tribe's histories, socio-cultural practices and indigenous knowledge in school curriculum leading to poor comprehension of lessons, poor confidence, limited involvement in class adversely influenced the educational participation of girls in the community.

Lack of Infrastructure and Educational Resources

The study further found that lack of female trained tribal teachers in school and lack of school

facilities like adequate classrooms, functional toilets, sanitation facilities, inadequate learning resources and study materials continue to hinder the educational participation of girls within the community. One parent of the community lamented, "...our school lacks proper classrooms, female tribal teachers, separate functional toilets and sanitation facilities, which makes it difficult for our girls to attend the school..."

This indicated that poor educational infrastructure, lack of female tribal teachers, and lack of safe and hygienic school environment continue to create unfavourable situations and discourage girls from attending school, which adversely influenced the educational participation of girls in the community.

Lack of Safety Concerns

The findings of the study further identified safety and security concerns as another key challenge that continues to influence the parental decision about the education of girls within the community. The parents reported that they were worried about the safety of their girls while travelling to and from school. One parent stated, "...we worry about our girls' safety while going to school, especially during early morning and evening hours..."

Another Bhuyan tribe parent remarked, "...toilets in the school have poor sanitation, which is a major concern for our girls' health and safety. We worry about our girls' safety during transportation..."

This suggests that the Bhuyan tribe parents are worried about the safety and security of their daughters while going to school and sometimes being teased by the local boys. The schools have separate toilets but are not functional, and sanitation facilities are very poor. The parents are also worried about the safe arrival of their daughters at home, which adversely hinders the educational participation of girls within the community.

Future Planning and Aspiration of Bhuyan Tribe Parents towards Girls' Education

The findings of the study indicated that the Bhuyan tribe parents generally aspire to provide education to the girls in the community and recognised its significance in securing better career opportunities, resulting in improving their future standard of living. The study found that financial con-

straints, cultural expectations, and uncertainty about future educational support continue to limit the educational participation of girls and parental aspiration in the Bhuyan community. During interaction, one parent member lamented, "...my daughter wants to pursue higher education, but I am not sure about whether I will be able to afford her education or not..."

Similarly, another parent member stated, "...after school education our daughters will marry and we are saving for her marriage because for higher education we require more money and resources and we can't afford it..."

This indicated that financial constraints, cultural expectations, prioritising marriage, social norms and uncertainty about future educational support by parents emerged as the significant barriers, which adversely affects the parental aspiration and future planning about girls' education in the Bhuyan community. The study also revealed that the educational participation of girls in the community is viewed according to their marital status and their husbands' choices instead of their own desires and aspirations. The findings of the study also revealed a gap between parental aspiration and constraint among Bhuyan tribe parents. The study indicates that parents in the Bhuyan community were not much concerned, aspired to, and planned for the education of girls. Although some are willing to provide educational support, which is also hindered by lack of resources, limited facilities and lack of finance. The study underscores financial support, educational opportunities, and community awareness programmes to enhance and foster parental aspirations for educational participation among the Bhuyan community.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the perception and aspirations of the Bhuyan tribe parents towards girls' education in Keonjhar district of Odisha, India. The findings of the study revealed that the perception of the parents towards girls' education is closely linked with the socio-cultural and economic factors that hinder their educational participation. The findings of the study revealed the parents' desire for girls' education for an improved life, which is consistent with the studies conducted on the education of the marginalised tribal com-

munities (Sinha 2005; Hembram and Acharya 2024). The study indicated that the educated Bhuyan tribe parents expressed their willingness to educate girls in the community and recognised education as a means of achieving a better life, empowerment and social mobility. This reflects a growing awareness of education as a transformative tool for improving individual and community well-being. Similarly, Nayak and Kumar (2022) also found that the tribal parents increasingly recognised the significance of girls' education in spite of facing several socio-economic issues. The present study also corroborates the findings of Mor and Sethia (2015), which indicated that the attitude of rural communities towards education is increasing due to growing awareness of literacy and education among them. However, despite the positive perceptions of parents, the study revealed that parental support and involvement in girls' education remain constrained by low literacy, involvement in labour work and lack of educational awareness in the Bhuyan tribal community. The parents expressed that they were unable to guide girl students academically due to their lack of education and more involvement in agricultural works similar findings were reported by Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2010) and Bhukya et al. (2024), which indicated that tribal parents value the importance of education but often face challenges in actively supporting girls' students in academic education due to livelihood pressure, and limited educational experiences despite their aspirations for girls' education. The results of the study further indicated that the traditional social norms, gender roles, and cultural expectations continue to influence parental decisions regarding girls' education. The illiterate parents and the older community members perceived the primary role of girls in the community as future housewives and viewed household activities as more important than formal education. The study revealed that early marriage was commonly practised among Bhuyan families. These findings corroborate previous studies, which found that gender norms, patriarchal values, and early marriage were major barriers that hindered the educational participation of girls in tribal communities (Patel 1984; Sinha 2005; Nayak and Kumar 2022). The findings of the study revealed that the families of the Bhuyan tribe mostly depend on daily wage labour and agricultural activities and struggle to meet educational expenses beyond basic

schooling. The parents reported that they are saving money for the marriage of their girls and customary obligations, prioritising household survival over the education of their girls in the community, which is consistent with the studies of Kerai and Suna (2021) and Nayak and Kumar (2022), which reported that poverty, economic insecurity, and limited financial resources hinder educational access and retention of tribal girls. However, the findings indicated that the socio-economic deprivation in the Bhuyan tribe community continues to hinder the educational participation of girls despite positive parental aspirations. The study further revealed that the language barrier in school, lack of infrastructure, lack of culturally responsive study materials, educational resources and safety concerns were the major challenges restricting the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan tribe community. The parents viewed that the girl students of the Bhuyan tribe continue to struggle to understand the language instruction of the school because their socio-cultural traditions, language, histories, customs and practices are not included in the school curriculum. The study further found that lack of classrooms, poor sanitation facilities, inadequate educational resources, and safety concerns during girl students travel to schools were the major obstacles to girls education in the community, which corroborates with the studies of Swain (2016), Kerai and Suna (2021), Sarathi et al. (2024), which emphasised the significance of culturally responsive curricula, mother tongue based instruction, adequate educational resources and safe learning environment for promoting girls education of tribal communities. The findings of the study indicated that the growing parental awareness, educational exposure and community attitudes continue to influence their educational aspirations for girls' education in the community, which is consistent with the studies of Upmanyu (2016), Gangele (2019) and Vinu (2021). This suggests that financial support, adequate infrastructure for education, teachers' training, and sustained community-based awareness programmes are required for improving the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The findings of the study with reference to aspirations and future planning for girls' education in the community indicated that the educated Bhuyan tribe parents desire higher education and better career opportunities for their daughters. However,

the aspirations of the parents are influenced by financial constraints, socio-cultural norms, gender roles and cultural expectations favouring early marriage. The study revealed the gap between Bhuyan tribe parents' aspirations and reality, which indicated that although the parents recognised the significance of girls' education but face structural constraints that hinder the educational participation of girls in the community, which is consistent with the studies of Jayaswal et al. (2003) and Nayak and Kumar (2022). However, the emergence of such parental aspirations is encouraging because it indicates their desire and willingness to envision improving the futures of their daughters through promoting education. The present study revealed that there is growing parental aspiration for the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. However, the socio-economic barriers, traditional gender norms, early marriage, language barrier, poor infrastructure, low parental involvement and safety issues continue to hinder the educational participation of girls in the Bhuyan community. The present study corroborates earlier research on tribal education in India, which emphasised the persistent interaction between poverty, culture and educational exclusion (Maharana and Nayak 2017; Mohanty et al. 2019; Mutluri 2020; Hembram and Acharya 2024; Bharadwaj and Singh 2025). Moreover, the resilience and aspiration of Bhuyan tribe parents underscore a considerable scope for educational advancement of girls in the community. Therefore, culturally responsive education, financial support, adequate school infrastructure, mother tongue-based education, teacher training to teach tribal language, community sensitisation programmes and parental involvement are required for achieving educational participation and educational equity among the Bhuyan tribe.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that Bhuyan tribe parents prioritise their daughters' education and career, while some parents believe marriage is more important than education and do not emphasise higher education. This highlights cultural and societal barriers that prioritise marriage over their daughters' education. Although some Bhuyan tribe parents are willing to allow their daughters to pursue higher education but due to financial constraints

and concerns as to the time and money required, they are not aspiring for the future education of their daughters and prioritise their boys' education over girls. The parents prioritise domestic work, physical labour and particularly the marriage of their daughter. The study highlights the challenges faced by parents in providing education to their daughters, including economic constraints, social norms, and lack of parental awareness, gender bias, and cultural barriers. However, there is a growing interest in education among parents, and with proper support and resources, girls' education can be promoted. The study emphasises the need for a comprehensive approach to address the complex economic, social, and cultural barriers that hinder girls' access to education in these tribal regions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends several key strategies to promote girls' education and to increase awareness among the Bhuyan tribe. There should be government support and funding for infrastructure development, including the construction of separate sanitation facilities, hostels, and improved transportation. To reduce socio-economic barriers, the tribal community should become socio-economically empowered through vocational training, microfinance initiatives, skill development programmes, social and cultural change through awareness programmes, community engagement, parental education and awareness initiatives. Further, initiatives should be undertaken to make them digitally literate through awareness programmes and providing digital gadgets so that they can get access to enhanced learning opportunities in different online education platforms. The study also emphasises the need for sanitation, safe access to schools, and improved infrastructure, including school transportation for girls. The teachers need to be trained in students' cultural language to address gender related and other specific challenges, and female tribal teachers should be appointed to mitigate cultural barriers by incorporating their teaching with the local language and culture of the Bhuyan tribe. Establishing community-led initiatives, culturally relevant curricula, and parental involvement can further ensure the success of girls' education in the region. Addressing health and safety concerns, such as sanitation, toilets, safe

drinking water facilities, resolving local harassment, and advocating for policy reforms in tribal education, are crucial for fostering an environment where Bhuyan tribe girls can thrive academically. These strategies can promote empowerment, development, and social change among the Bhuyan tribe, contributing to a more equitable and just society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank this study's participants for their invaluable cooperation and input.

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Paper received for publication in December, 2025
Paper accepted for publication in August, 2026