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Educational Development of Saura Women in Rayagada District: A Comprehensive Study

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the educational development of the Saura women in the district of Rayagada in Odisha, taking into account literacy rate, availability of educational facilities, government programs, and social-cultural issues. Based on primary and secondary sources, it is found that despite some achievements brought about by policies, the education of Saura women still lags behind due to factors such as poverty, beliefs, infrastructure, and child marriages.*

This paper discusses a multi-level strategy that seeks to improve the level of education of Saura tribal women of Rayagada district with an aim of facilitating inclusive and sustainable development. In the course of development, tribal women have had to meet certain social and cultural norms that finally resulted in taking away their freedom and power over the production system and household, family, children and indeed themselves. Despite the fact that there are sincere and concerted efforts by the government towards the overall development of Scheduled Tribes in general and of women in particular, tribal women have not been able to catch up in terms of almost all traditional development indicators. This includes the field of education, where tribal women have been denied of opportunities at different levels. It is important to offer them avenues that would help them to develop leadership qualities that would make them economically independent.

Keywords: *Development, Education, Saura, Tribal, Women, Rayagada, District.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education plays an essential role in the process of empowerment of individual and the community as a whole. For Saura women, education is a means by which they can gain social justice, economic independence, and political participation. The Saura tribes constitute some of the significant tribes in the state of Odisha, distinguished by their unique socio-cultural characteristics. The Rayagada district of Odisha houses a considerable number of Sauras, among whom education is an area of concern. Although there have been various attempts and schemes taken up by the Government in terms of education, the literacy level among Saura women is still below the state level. Reasons for the poor educational status include factors like poverty, isolation, early marriages, and traditional customs. Lack of proper schooling facilities, scarcity of female teachers and language problems have made things worse for Saura girls' education. Thus, to improve the educational status of Saura women, infrastructure development along with increased awareness among the community is necessary.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research conducted by Xaxa (2008) and Shah (2010) brings out how the tribal women are intersectionally marginalized within India's education sector. Mahapatra and Das (2021) stress the importance of local language, pedagogy, and culturally appropriate curriculum for tribals in their edited book. There has been a consistent theme in the Annual Reports of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs that the literacy rate among females belonging to Scheduled Tribes is much below the national average. Pattnaik (2013) is an example from Odisha that indicates high dropout rates amongst tribal girls.

A. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To assess the current educational status of Saura tribal women in Rayagada.
- 2) To identify the challenges faced by Saura girls and women in accessing education.
- 3) To examine the effectiveness of the government implemented different developmental
- 4) programmes for development of tribal women education.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present research study, descriptive and analytical research methodology is adopted to investigate the education development of Saura Tribal women in Rayagada district of Odisha. The study aims at analyzing various socio economic and cultural and institutional factors affecting educational status, literacy rate and educational opportunity of women. Qualitative as well as quantitative approach has been adopted to gain a holistic knowledge of the issue. Universe of the study comprises of all Saura Tribal women living in Rayagada district.

For conducting the survey, purposive sampling technique was used, which involved choosing people belonging to different age groups, different educational qualifications and socio-economic groups. In this particular survey 100 respondents were selected from different villages of the Rayagada for adequate representation of Sauras. The primary data was collected by conducting field surveys and interviews with the help of Saura women, local leaders, school teachers and education department officials. Secondary data was collected by collecting data from government reports, census data, academic journals, books, research papers and official publications from various organizations like Ministry of Tribal Affairs and Odisha Tribal Development Department. Data Collection Tools A structured interview schedule was used for collection of primary data. The questions in the schedule were both open and closed type, focused on aspects related to literacy rate, school attendance and dropout rates. Socioeconomic background of the respondents and attitude towards female education was also asked.

A. Statement of the Problem

Although there are provisions of the Constitution and social security programs for the tribal community, Saura girls of Rayagada district encounter several obstacles to accessing education. These obstacles include poverty, remoteness, early marriage, absence of role models, and cultural resistance.

B. Significance of the Study

This research on “Educational Development of Soura Women of Rayagada District” is important as it brings into focus the problems faced by Soura women in the matter of their education. Education is a means of empowerment, and any knowledge about the constraints in the field of education for Soura women would help in solving the problems related to poverty, gender discrimination, and non-accessibility to schools among others. This study would also be useful in analyzing the effects of government policies on the education of girls such as Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Pre-Matric & Post-Matric Scholarships, and Tribal Hostel.

C. Education of Tribal Women at the National Level

The education of tribal women at the national level has become increasingly important in India for inclusive growth and social justice. This is because India's Constitution ensures the right to education and equality for all its citizens, especially the STs so as to uplift their socio-economic status. Various programs like the National Policy on Education (1986), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme, and the National Education Policy (2020) have come up since then to facilitate the educational access and retention of tribal people. Yet, the literacy level of tribal women lags behind compared to the rest of India's population. The socio-economic factors, language, gender discrimination, and remoteness of tribal areas have hindered their educational success till date. Gradual improvements are being observed due to the increase in the number of residential schools and scholarships and targeted projects like Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS). To empower these women through education, it is necessary to take into account the challenges which are multidimensional in nature, especially concerning culture, society, and gender.

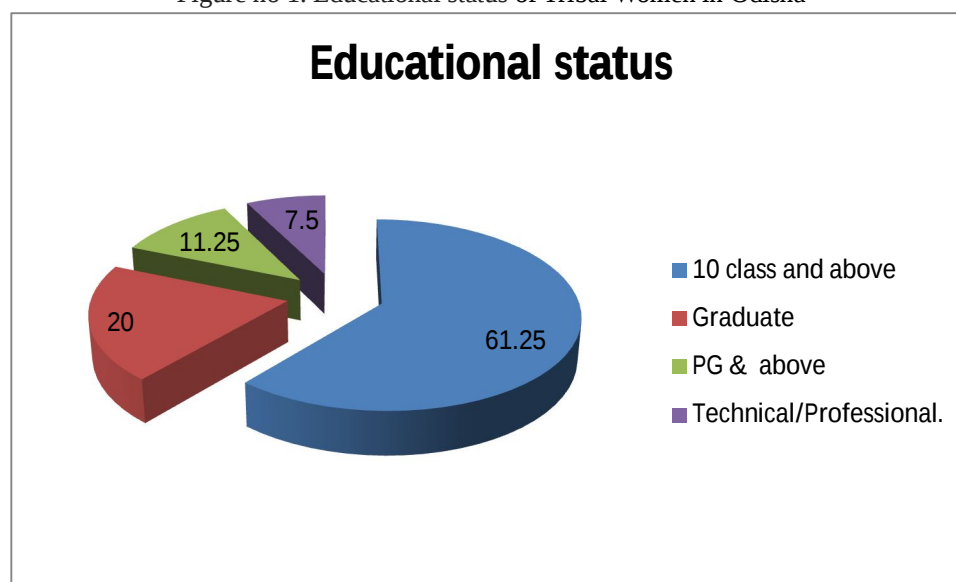
D. Educational Status of Tribal Women in Odisha

It is the country that comes second to Africa in having the largest tribal population in the world. According to 2001 Census figures, the tribal population in Odisha stands at 70.32 lakh and constitutes 22.16 percent of the state's total population. Odisha has 64 tribes declared by Article 342 of the Indian Constitution as 'Scheduled Tribes,' out of which thirteen tribes have been identified as 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs).' According to Article 244 (Fifth Schedule) of the Indian Constitution, there are several districts including Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, Koraput, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, as well as parts of Balasore, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Gajapati, Ganjam, Kalahandi, and Phulbani which fall under the purview of ‘Scheduled’.

Tribal communities in Odisha speak diverse languages, though many of these lack written scripts. In recent years, efforts have been made to develop scripts for certain tribal languages, such as the Saura language. The livelihood of these communities primarily depends on agriculture, forest-based occupations, animal rearing, and traditional handicrafts. Tribal women play a vital role in sustaining the tribal economy by participating in farming, tending livestock, collecting forest produce, and producing rural crafts,

while also managing household responsibilities. In many tribal areas, shifting or *Podu* cultivation remains a key agricultural practice, where women contribute significantly to every stage of production and resource management (Gita Devi Gupta, 2018). The constitutional provision and reservation system in India facilitates and promotes tribal population education in different technical and professional courses. Most of the tribal people are found in a high position in the government job, in politics, in industry, in corporate sectors, etc. gradually they are getting connected to the main stream of the society. Education can act as a powerful tool for reducing poverty and unemployment; improving health and nutritional standards and achieving sustained human development-led growth (World Bank, 2004). Odisha tribal is socially and educationally backward among the most disadvantaged group. Tribal children are motivated and facilitated further for modern education and the modern way of life.

Figure no 1. Educational status of Tribal Women in Odisha



Sources: primary Data

The above figure No.01 indicates the educational status of respondents. According to the analysis, 61.25 per cent of the respondents are 10th class above, whereas 7.5 per cent of them have reached the Technical/Professional level. While 20 percent of them have a graduate degree and 11.25 percent of the respondents are PG & above. Thus, from the above analysis, it is seen that the majority of respondents (61.25 per cent) are coming under the educational qualification 10th class and above, as the finding of this analysis.

IV. EDUCATIONAL PROFILE OF SAURA TRIBAL WOMEN

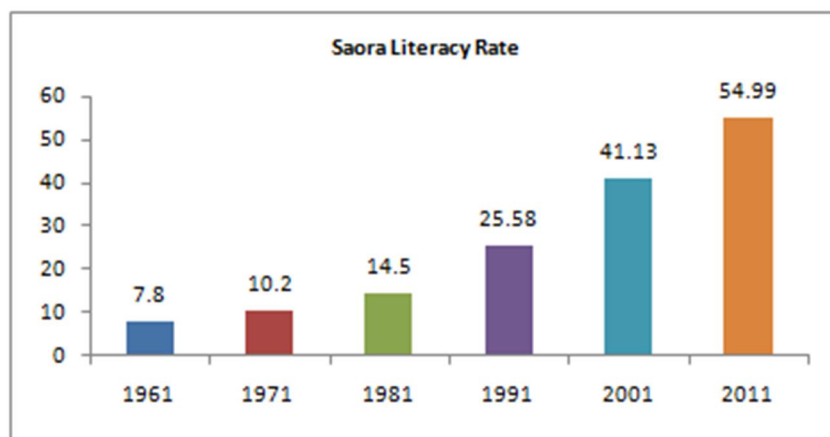
The educational profile of Saura tribal women in Rayagada district reflects both progress and persistent challenges in achieving educational equity. Although literacy among the Saura community has gradually increased over the decades, women's literacy remains considerably lower than that of men and below the district and state averages. Most Saura women, particularly in rural and hilly areas, have limited access to formal education due to poverty, geographical isolation, and socio-cultural constraints. It is seen that a considerable number of women are either illiterate or educated up to the primary level only. Very few have gone to secondary or even higher education. Early marriages, family duties, and also certain traditional beliefs make it difficult for them to pursue education. In addition to these factors, poor educational facilities, scarcity of female teachers, and the gap between the language used by the Sauras and Odia medium of education are other factors responsible for the poor literacy status of these women. Even then, with schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, and also Ashram schools, the results have not reached all Saura women.

A. Literacy Status of the Saura women in Rayagada

The literacy level in the Saura tribal community has been gradually increasing during these decades, as depicted from the above chart. In 1961, the literacy level was noted at just 7.8 percent, implying that most members of this tribe had limited access to formal education. It rose to 10.2 percent in 1971, implying that there was some effect from the post-independence efforts in improving the educational status of these tribes. During the 1980s decade, it increased by a small percentage to 14.5 percent, which could have

been brought about by the introduction of primary education. In 1991, the literacy level shot up to 25.58 percent, implying that there was awareness of education among the members of this tribal group. Over the next two decades, the literacy level continued to increase, reaching 41.13 percent in 2001 and further increasing to 54.99 percent in 2011. These statistics show the positive impact of the government policies, literacy drives, and welfare schemes meant to promote tribal education. However, even with these improvements, the literacy level of the Saora tribe is relatively lower than those of both the state and nation as a whole.

Figure no 2. Literacy status of the Saura women's



Sources: <https://www.scstrti.in/index.php/communities/tribes/91-tribes/204-saora>

B. Enrolment/ Attendance Facts

The area is predominantly tribal (55.99% of the population) and also has the lowest percentage of females who have attended schools (either currently or in the past). According to NFHS-4 (2015-16) survey, roughly 39% of rural women in the age group six years and above have attended school in Rayagada district, while the percentage in the State is much higher. This shows a large gap that exists due to deeply entrenched socio-economic and cultural reasons. Such issues as poverty, geographic isolation, language barrier, and early marriage are responsible for this low level of literacy and enrolment among tribal women. Based on the study conducted at schools (Class VI-X) from tribal districts, it was noted that in the academic year 2021-22, there were about 3,016 students enrolled in the sample schools from Rayagada district. It shows the extent of participation in education of tribal children in the area and indicates some improvement in their enrollment levels amid all the difficulties such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, language barrier, and lack of secondary education institutions in the region. However, this information also confirms the necessity of educational efforts to increase retention levels, as tribal girls suffer most from the drop out issue because of socio-economic and cultural reasons. Impact of Pandemic on School Dropouts among Tribal Children in Odisha and Way Forward Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (Scstrti) St & Sc Development Department, Govt. of Odisha.

C. Dropout & Non-enrolment Challenges

Primary school dropout rate in Rayagada was estimated at 11.67% and at the upper primary level it was around 17.10%. This was the data collected in 2018 which is one of the highest drop-out rates in the entire state. It clearly reflects a worrisome trend of discontinuation of education, especially after the elementary stage. Apart from that, a survey in 2021-22 reflected that in adolescents girls aged between 11-14 years in Odisha, Rayagada had the highest number of girls not going to school which was 2,256. The above numbers depict the continuous issues related to education faced by the district, especially tribal girls due to various reasons like poverty, household obligations, lack of female teachers, distance and early marriages. This problem needs to be addressed to reduce dropout rates and make education inclusive for tribal children in Rayagada. As far as the tribal children in general are concerned, the dropout rate was reported to be 17.7% in Rayagada district, according to an NGO operating in South Odisha. This high percentage of dropouts is due to various challenges associated with sustaining education among tribes. Economic hardships, migration of families seasonally, unavailability of schools in distant locations, poor infrastructure, and cultural and language barriers prevent these children from attending school regularly. Many children end up discontinuing their studies because of the aforementioned reasons.

Dropout trends impact both literacy rates and future empowerment of these children in Rayagada district. In addition to this, structural issues such as closure of 121 schools in Rayagada district make it difficult for children to continue their education. Villages in the mountainous and far-flung districts of Rayagada face the problem of lack of proper road connectivity, which makes it hard for students, particularly girls, to go to school on a regular basis. Due to the closure of poorly attended schools, students have to cover long distances to reach schools, which leads to absenteeism and higher dropouts. Moreover, due to lack of well-trained teachers, poor infrastructure facilities, and insufficient teaching materials, students tend to get discouraged from attending classes.

D. Learning Higher Education of the Tribal women

Rayagada district has experienced a scenario where there have been some successes and some challenges in the area of higher education. While there have been improvements in the infrastructure of educational institutions in Rayagada district, the enrollment of students, especially from the tribal community, continues to be very low. Some of the key institutions in the district include Rayagada Autonomous College, Gopabandhu College, and specific institutions like Government Women's College, Government College of Engineering and Gunupur Degree College, Thyiram Women college that cater for the needs of students from the tribal and non-tribal communities. Nevertheless, the number of institutions of higher learning is still inadequate for the large number of rural and tribal people in the district. Lack of accessibility, inability to afford hostels for female students, poverty, and lack of awareness of higher education opportunities hinder enrollment, particularly by the tribal women. Despite measures by the government such as scholarships, special hostels for ST/SC students, and formation of new institutions, much more needs to be done regarding quality, inclusive and employability-based education. Higher education in Rayagada is imperative not only for educational improvement but also to enable the tribal youths to be effective members in governance and socio-economic development.

E. Mid-day Meals

The Mid-Day Meal (MDM) Scheme has played a very important role in improving the attendance rate and lowering the dropout rate of the children in the district of Rayagada. The program ensures that one healthy and nutritious meal is provided to the students from Class I to VIII in government and aided schools. In this way, it provides both food as well as education to the children in the form of incentives. Although there are certain problems in the program such as food shortages, lack of proper infrastructure, and monitoring in some distant places. Nonetheless, it is a very important initiative for the education and nutrition of tribal children in Rayagada.

F. Pre- and Post-Matric Scholarships for Tribal Women

The Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship Schemes contribute immensely to increasing education amongst the tribal women in Rayagada district. The Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Schemes are meant to decrease the monetary constraints which restrict ST students from pursuing their education. Pre-Matric Scheme helps to educate tribal girls studying in Class IX and X with financial support in terms of tuition, books, uniform, and hostel expenses. On the other hand, the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme provides financial aid to the tribal girls in colleges and universities who pursue higher education. Through these schemes, there is more enrolment and retention of tribal girls in schools and colleges, thus bridging the educational disparity between the tribal community and others. However, some challenges include late release of funds, inadequate awareness, and bureaucratic hassles. Improvement of these programs and raising awareness will empower the tribal women through increased education opportunities and their involvement in the social and administrative arena.

G. National Fellowship for Scheduled Tribes

The National Fellowship Scheme for Scheduled Tribes (NFST) is a central-sponsored scheme aimed at encouraging advanced studies and research amongst the students of the Scheduled Tribes (STs). This scheme is implemented through the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, and offers financial support to ST scholars enrolled in M.Phil and Ph.D. programs in various universities and research institutes of the nation. The scheme includes provisions for fellowships, contingencies, and house rent allowance.

H. Educational Infrastructure

The structure of education in Rayagada district, especially those areas that are dominated by the Soura tribe, is very significant in determining the educational progress of Soura women. In the past years, the government has taken efforts to make sure that more people have access to education by developing primary and upper primary schools, secondary schools and even tribal residential

schools like Ashram Schools and Seva Ashram High Schools. The purpose of these schools is to provide free education, boarding and other facilities to tribal children including the Soura girls to facilitate their education. However, the infrastructure of the educational institutions in most areas dominated by the Soura community is poor. There are many schools in remote and hilly areas where the infrastructure of the schools is bad. They lack essential services like drinking water, separate toilets for girls, library and laboratory among others. Poor accessibility of roads along with distant locations of the village and schools is yet another deterrent to regular attendance. Also, lack of competent teachers, high teacher-pupil ratio, and inconsistent supervision adversely impact the educational standard of Soura women. The involvement of the government in introducing schemes such as SSA, RMSA, and EMRS has certainly contributed to providing improved access to education and necessary infrastructure to an extent. Moreover, the provision of hostels for tribal girls, scholarships, and Mid-Day Meals has certainly added to higher enrolment rates among the Soura women. But still, consistent monitoring, infrastructural improvements, and culturally based education model are critical for making the entire education system more inclusive and beneficial for the Soura women. Hence, the improvement of the educational infrastructure in these tribal areas is quite necessary so that Soura women are able to receive education without any hindrance.

V. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

However, the educational status of Saura women from the tribal community in the Rayagada district continues to be very unsatisfactory. Conventional thinking, inadequate educational infrastructure, and non-implementation of government policies have continued to present problems. Despite some successes in awareness programs, there is an immense requirement for culturally-sensitive measures to encourage the education of the Saura women. It is encouraging to note that the Saura girls who get educated up to secondary level play the role of change-makers within their communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

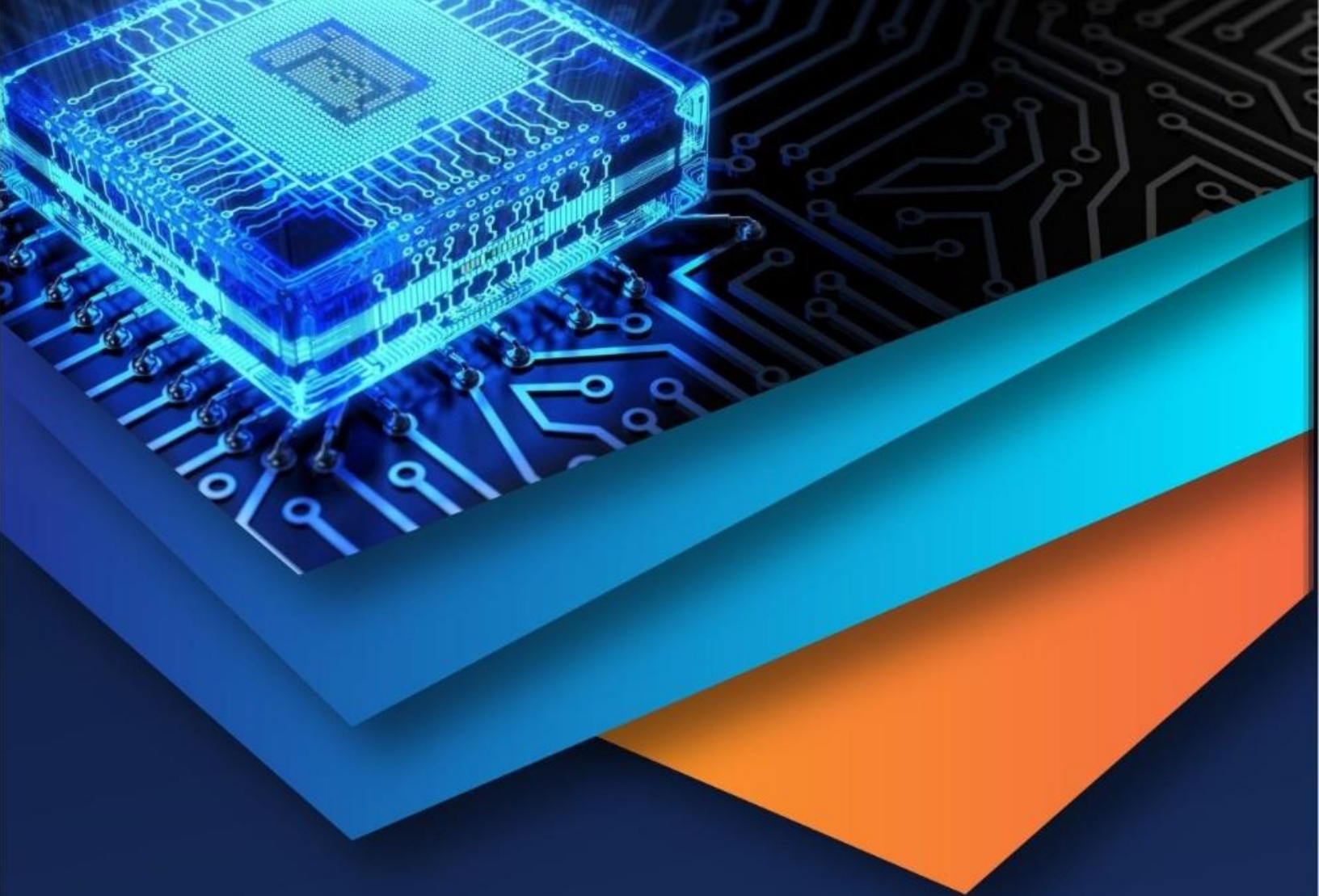
The research on Educational Development of Saura Women in Rayagada District has found out that although there have been some steady improvements in terms of literacy and educational development, there are certain problems which continue to affect the participation of Saura women in the education sector. It has been found that socio-economic backwardness, language barriers, early marriages, and lack of access to schools are the major problems facing the Saura women. In spite of government programs like Mid-Day Meal Program, pre-matric scholarships, and tribal hostels for girl students, the dropout rate among Saura girls is very high, especially after primary schooling. The increased enrolment in primary schools, the existence of self-help groups among women, and programmes conducted by NGOs and government departments on awareness have been responsible for the improvement in the educational level of Saura women. The schemes such as National Fellowship for Scheduled Tribes and the skill development programmes are creating new avenues for educated women from tribes to pursue higher education and employment. For ensuring sustainable educational development, there is an urgent need for proper infrastructure, timely payment of scholarships, gender-friendly teaching methodology, and community involvement. Educating Saura women empowers not only these women socially and economically but also enables them to make decisions for the community. Therefore, education needs to be given due importance to empower and develop the Soura tribal women of Rayagada district.

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