

Between Identity and Aspiration: A Critical Review Highlighting the Research Gap Among Tribal Students of Goa

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Publication Date: 2025/07/21

Abstract: This comprehensive review investigates the intricate relationship between social identity and its multi-faceted impact on tribal students in India by specifically examining their aspirations, academic performance, and overall well-being. This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing insights from social psychology, educational sociology, and indigenous studies to provide a holistic understanding of the subject matter. By synthesizing the existing literature, this review identifies critical research gaps, particularly concerning Goan tribal communities. The dearth of empirical studies focusing on the *Gauda*, *Kunbi*, and *Velip* tribes of Goa, underscore the need for targeted research in this underexplored context. This gap-focused analysis serves as a scholarly foundation, paving the way for future empirical investigations that can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of these tribal groups. By elucidating the current state of knowledge and identifying areas requiring further exploration, this review aims to stimulate academic discourse and promote research initiatives that address the unique challenges and experiences of the Goan tribal students. The findings of this study have potential implications for educational policy formulation, cultural preservation efforts, and the development of targeted interventions to support the academic and personal growth of tribal students in Goa and beyond.

Keywords: Aspirations; Academic Achievement; Gap Focused Review; Goa; Identity; Students; Tribal; Well-being.

How to Cite: Aastha Govind Shirodker; Saurabh Srivastava (2025) Between Identity and Aspiration: A Critical Review Highlighting the Research Gap Among Tribal Students of Goa . *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(7), 1397-1405. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jul1047>

I. INTRODUCTION

Identity serves as a foundational construct for both personal and collective development. It encapsulates not only the internal sense of self but also one's placement within social and cultural matrices. In the Indian context, where caste, tribe, and class mold lived realities, the perception of social identity assumes an even more critical role in influencing individuals' aspirations, self-esteem, and eventual achievement (Deb Roy et al., 2023; Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). The interplay of these factors remains under-examined, among tribal communities, particularly in Goa, forming the core premise of this gap-focused review.

Despite the growing emphasis on inclusion and diversity in academic discourse, limited empirical research has addressed the psychosocial dimensions of identity, aspiration, and academic achievement in Goa's tribal population. The *Gauda*, *Kunbi*, and *Velip* tribes, who constitute approximately 12% of the state's population, remain largely absent from the

contemporary educational psychology literature. The literature on Goa predominantly focuses on resistance identities shaped by economic and cultural pressures, particularly the impact of tourism on local communities (Routledge, 2001). This emphasis on resistance highlights localized identities as a form of defiance against external economic forces. Historical analyses of cultural resistance in Goa, especially in response to colonial impositions (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1996), examine the preservation of cultural identity under external pressures. While these studies provide context for the challenges faced by Goan populations, they do not extensively explore the educational aspirations or psychosocial elements of tribal communities, leaving a gap in understanding the individual and collective aspirations related to education and achievement among these groups. Therefore, this review synthesizes the broader Indian literature while underscoring the urgent need for research tailored to the Goan tribal context.

➤ *Conceptual Framework*

- *Identity Constructs*: Identity encompasses a confluence of constructs including personal, social, cultural, and ethnic identity. Personal identity refers to an individual's self-conception, whereas social identity involves one's perceived belonging to social groups (Pan et al., 2019; Schwartz et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1979). Meanwhile cultural and ethnic identities reflect one's embeddedness in broader sociocultural and heritage-based communities (Usborne & Taylor, 2010).
- *Social Identity Theory*: posits that individuals derive a significant portion of their self-worth from group membership (Tajfel, 1979). This theory is particularly relevant for marginalized communities where group affiliations may carry historical disadvantages or stigma. In such contexts, perceived social identity affects educational goals, vocational aspirations, and psychosocial well-being (Ali & Menke, 2014; Dari et al., 2021; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Negru-Subtirica & Pop, 2017).
- *Goa's Tribal Context- A Socio-Cultural Snapshot*: Goa's tribal communities, namely the *Gauda*, *Kunbi*, and *Velip*—have rich histories, distinct linguistic styles, and indigenous belief systems rooted in nature worship and oral traditions. Geographically concentrated in talukas such as Canacona, Quepem, and Sanguem, these groups are proto-australoid in origin and are culturally distinct from other Indian tribes. Post-1961, following liberation from Portuguese rule, these communities were presented with formal education for the first time, marking the beginning of significant socio-educational transition.

Despite these advancements, various challenges have persisted. Geographical remoteness and limited infrastructure pose significant hurdles to access to education and healthcare delivery (Roy et al., 2023; Madankar et al., 2024). Language and cultural barriers further complicate the effective integration of tribal communities into mainstream educational and healthcare systems. Moreover, socioeconomic disparities and scarcity of qualified educators and healthcare professionals limit the reach and effectiveness of these services (Roy et al., 2023). It is essential to note that this demographic remains under-represented in psychological and educational research. Their unique historical trajectory and cultural practices render generalized national data insufficient for informing policies or educational interventions in Goa. Hence, this review emphasizes the critical need to fill these knowledge gaps.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section synthesizes existing research on social identity, caste stratification, and educational outcomes among tribal students in India, while highlighting the limited representation of Goan tribal communities in the current scholarship.

➤ *Caste and Aspiration*

The influence of caste identity on educational and vocational aspirations extends beyond mere statistical

correlations, reflecting deeply ingrained societal structures and historical inequalities. The lower aspirations reported by Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Scheduled Castes (SCs) can be attributed to a complex interplay of factors, including limited access to “quality education, lack of role models from similar backgrounds, and especially internalized perceptions of societal limitations”. These aspirational disparities often translate into reduced educational attainment and restricted career choices, perpetuating a cycle of socioeconomic disadvantage (Mukherjee, 2017; Sarkar et al., 2020).

The intersection of gender and caste further compounds these challenges, particularly for female tribal students. This demographic faces multiple layers of discrimination and barriers, including cultural norms that prioritize male education, early marriage expectations, and limited familial support for pursuing higher education or professional careers (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015). The resulting impact on their aspirations is not merely additive but multiplicative, creating unique obstacles that require targeted interventions and policy measures to address effectively (Johri & Anand, 2022). Addressing these intersectional challenges necessitates a nuanced approach that considers both caste and gender dynamics in educational and vocational contexts (Haq, 2013; Mau & Bikos, 2000; Shields, 2008).

➤ *Psychosocial Implications*

Social identity plays a crucial role in shaping various aspects of an individual's life, extending beyond academic performance to encompass psychological well-being. Studies have shown that tribal adolescents, in particular, face unique challenges related to their social identity, which can significantly impact their self-esteem, mental health, and overall life satisfaction (Ranjan et al., 2021; Ghosh, 2013). These psychological factors are intrinsically linked to academic motivation and performance, creating a complex interplay between social identity, mental well-being, and educational outcomes (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007).

The lower levels of self-worth and elevated rates of depression observed among tribal adolescents can be attributed to various factors, including social marginalization, cultural differences, and limited access to resources (Kunnel et al., 2020; Robinson, 2006; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2006). These psychological challenges often manifest in reduced academic motivation, potentially leading to a cycle of underachievement and further erosion of self-esteem. As a result, addressing the psychological well-being of tribal adolescents becomes crucial not only for improving their mental health but also for enhancing their academic performance and overall life prospects (Addy et al., 2021; Dewangan et al., 2023; Eccles et al., 1991). Interventions that focus on bolstering self-esteem, promoting cultural pride, and providing adequate support systems may be instrumental in breaking this cycle and fostering positive outcomes for tribal adolescents in both psychological and academic domains (Addy et al., 2021; Bos et al., 2006; Choi et al., 2023; Donovan, 2015; Goodkind et al., 2012; Lawrence et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Sharaf et al., 2009).

➤ *Language Barriers and Academic Achievement*

Language emerges as a significant barrier for tribal students, particularly when the medium of instruction diverges from native dialects. Pandith (2021) found that language mismatches contribute to poor comprehension, diminished engagement, and low confidence among tribal youth in Jammu and Kashmir—a pattern that is likely applicable to Goa's multilingual tribal students.

In simpler terms it can be said that the language barrier faced by tribal students extends beyond mere comprehension difficulties, affecting their whole academic performance and social integration. When the medium of instruction differs significantly from their native dialects, students struggle to grasp complex concepts, participate actively in classroom discussions, and express their ideas effectively. This linguistic mismatch can lead to a sense of alienation and frustration, potentially resulting in decreased motivation and higher dropout rates among tribal youth (Chandras, 2023; Yabang et al., 2025).

Moreover, the impact of language disparities on tribal students' education is multifaceted, influencing not only their academic achievements but also their cultural identity and future prospects. As students grapple with unfamiliar linguistic structures and vocabulary, they may experience a disconnect from their cultural heritage, potentially leading to a loss of traditional knowledge and practices (Chandras, 2023; Mccarty & Watahomgie, 1998).

Additionally, the language barrier can hinder their ability to access higher education and employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of socioeconomic disadvantage within tribal communities. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates culturally sensitive pedagogies, bilingual education programs, and targeted language support to bridge the gap between tribal dialects and the mainstream medium of instruction (Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, 2016; Lowe et al., 2020; Usma Wilches et al., 2018).

➤ *Teacher Behavior and Institutional Bias*

Research indicates that the influence of teacher behavior on student motivation, extends beyond immediate academic performance to shape students' long-term educational trajectories and self-perception (Emslander et al., 2025; Sarwer et al., 2024). Negative teacher behaviors, such as displaying favoritism, providing inconsistent feedback, or exhibiting low expectations for certain students, can significantly undermine students' intrinsic motivation and belief in their own abilities (Brandmiller et al., 2023; Shukla et al., 2020; Xu, 2024). This is particularly pronounced in classroom environments where hierarchical structures are deeply entrenched, as these settings can amplify the effects of teacher biases and reinforce existing social inequalities (Campbell, 2015; Hobbs, 2016).

The consequences of such negative teacher behaviors are especially severe in the context of higher education institutions where caste-based discrimination persists. These biases not only affect students' immediate academic

experiences but also have far-reaching implications for their future opportunities and social mobility (Kumar, 2021; Lum, 2019). By systematically excluding or disadvantaging students from marginalized caste backgrounds, these institutional practices continue cycles of inequality and limit access to educational and professional advancement (Sukumar, 2022). This underscores the critical need for comprehensive reforms in teacher training, institutional policies, and classroom practices to foster inclusive learning environments that support the motivation and success of all students, regardless of their social background (Sengupta & Guchhait, 2021).

➤ *Career Aspirations and Social Context*

The impact of parental expectations, teacher support, and access to technology on tribal students' career choices is a complex interplay of social, cultural, and economic factors. While the studies by Pattanayak and Naik (2014) and Das et al. (2019) provide valuable insights, they primarily focus on states with larger tribal populations such as Odisha, Jharkhand, and Tripura. These regions often have distinct cultural contexts and educational infrastructures that may not directly or majorly translate to the tribal communities in Goa.

The unique geographical, historical, and socio-economic characteristics of Goa could potentially influence the career aspirations and choices of tribal students in ways that differ from those observed in other states. The lack of Goa-specific research on this topic creates a significant knowledge gap. This absence of localized data limits our understanding of how parental expectations, teacher support, and technology access specifically affect tribal students in Goa. Factors such as Goa's tourism-driven economy, its relatively higher literacy rates, and its unique cultural blend of Indian and Portuguese influences could potentially create a different set of dynamics influencing tribal students' career choices. Therefore, there is a pressing need for targeted research that examines these factors within the Goan context to develop more effective and tailored educational and career guidance strategies for tribal students in the state.

➤ *Identified Gaps and Rationale for a Goan Focus*

Despite the significant presence of tribal population in Goa, the state remains largely invisible in national datasets and academic research on tribal identity and education. Most reviewed studies focus on northeastern and central Indian states, creating a geographic and cultural blind spot. Furthermore:

- No comprehensive ethnographic or psychological study has explored the intersection of identity, aspiration, and achievement among Goan tribes.
- Cultural transmission via oral tradition in Goa has resulted in minimal 'documented' historical or psychosocial data pertaining to the tribes in Goa.
- Gendered experiences within Goan tribes are largely undocumented in scholarly literature.

By spotlighting these omissions, this review builds a critical foundation for future empirical inquiry in Goa.

III. METHODOLOGY

This review adopts a narrative, integrative methodology to explore existing research on the relationship between social identity, aspirations, and academic achievement among tribal students majorly in India and to a certain extent the aboriginals in other countries, with a particular emphasis on highlighting the lack of focused studies on Goan tribal communities. The methodological approach was designed to synthesize insights from multidisciplinary sources including social psychology, indigenous studies, educational research, and policy documents.

Relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, government reports, and research monographs were identified through systematic keyword-based searches in databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ResearchGate and Scopus. Keywords included “tribal students India,” “social identity,” “academic aspiration,” “Goan tribes,” “caste and education,” and “psychosocial well-being of indigenous youth.” Studies published between 2000 and 2024 were prioritized to ensure contemporary relevance, although seminal works foundational to identity theory (e.g., Tajfel, 1979; Hogg & Terry, 2000) were also included regardless of publication year.

Inclusion criteria focused on empirical studies addressing academic motivation, self-concept, caste-based disparities, and psychological well-being among Scheduled Tribes and other marginalized groups in India. Particular attention was paid to literature that intersected gender, caste, and regional variation. Due to the identified research vacuum concerning Goan tribal populations, literature from other states was reviewed comparatively to construct a preliminary framework for understanding the unique sociocultural dynamics of Goa’s *Gauda*, *Kunbi*, and *Velip* communities.

The review was qualitative in nature and interpretive in orientation. Themes were generated inductively by synthesizing findings across studies, with specific attention to variables such as social identity perception, caste stratification, gender disparities, language barriers, and institutional factors. The methodology aimed to bridge scholarly knowledge gaps and offer a foundation for future empirical and ethnographic studies specific to the Goan context.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings highlight how identity-related factors influence aspirations, educational outcomes, and psychological well-being among tribal students (Chandras, 2023; Shea et al., 2019). The discussion examines key thematic patterns and underscores significant research gaps, particularly in relation to tribal communities in Goa.

➤ Emergent Themes

- **Caste-Based Stratification:** Caste-based stratification significantly influences academic motivation, shaping students' self-perception within social hierarchies

(Chitrakar & P.M, 2023). This system profoundly impacts long-term aspirations, affecting educational and career goals across different caste groups, perpetuating societal inequalities and limiting opportunities for marginalized communities.

- **Gender Disparities:** Female tribal students encounter intersecting barriers rooted in patriarchal norms, early marriage practices, and systemic educational inequalities (Saeed Ali et al., 2017; Raj et al., 2019). These factors contribute to higher dropout rates, limited access to higher education, and reduced economic opportunities, extending gender disparities within tribal communities (Fray et al., 2019; Jamal, 2016; Ramanaik et al., 2018). To combat these intersecting barriers, multi-faceted interventions are necessary. Efforts should include addressing patriarchal norms through educational programs that promote gender equality and challenge traditional roles. There is a critical need for community-based and school-based programs that provide support for girls' education, delay marriage, and foster economic independence (Mcclendon et al., 2017; Raj et al., 2019).
- **Language and Communication Barriers:** Language and communication barriers significantly obstruct classroom learning and academic engagement. These obstacles impede effective information exchange, comprehension of course material, participation in discussions, and overall academic performance. They can lead to misunderstandings, reduced confidence, and limited opportunities for students to fully express their knowledge and ideas. Effective communication is critical to enhancing student engagement, particularly in collaborative learning environments. Research indicates that transparent and inclusive communication, alongside constructive feedback, significantly boosts student motivation and engagement (Putri et al., 2025). Furthermore, positive interpersonal communication behaviors from teachers, such as care, clarity, and rapport, are crucial in fostering student engagement and academic success. These communication behaviors are especially vital in foreign or second language classrooms, where communication barriers might otherwise hinder student performance (Xie and Derakhshan, 2021).
- **Teacher Expectations and Institutional Discrimination:** teacher expectations significantly impact student outcomes, with lowered expectations often resulting in reduced support and mentorship (Geven et al., 2021; Wildhagen, 2009). This institutional discrimination spreads educational disparities, particularly affecting marginalized groups. When teachers hold lower expectations for certain students, they may provide less challenging coursework, fewer opportunities for growth, and limited guidance (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018). This self-fulfilling prophecy can deter academic achievement, personal development, and future prospects, reinforcing systemic inequalities in education (De Boer et al., 2018; Decuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2016; López, 2017).
- **Lack of Role Models and Career Guidance:** Tribal youth face significant barriers in career exploration due to limited exposure to diverse professions and mentors. This lack of exposure restricts their ability to envision opportunities beyond their immediate surroundings,

leading to a narrow range of career choices (Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022). Consequently, this continues a cycle of limited professional aspirations, negatively impacting long-term economic prospects and overall community development. Addressing this issue requires targeted interventions to broaden their horizons and provide access to diverse role models and career paths (Donovan, 2015; Katapally, 2020; Mishra & Gupta, 2024).

➤ *Implications for Policy and Practice*

- *Need for Goa-Specific Research:* Ethnographic, psychological, and sociological studies are essential to understand the lived experiences of Goan tribal students.
- *Lack of Role Models and Career Guidance:* Absence of mentorship perpetuates limited vocational imagination among tribal youth
- *Curriculum Inclusivity:* Incorporating native dialects and cultural content in the school curriculum may enhance engagement.
- *Gender-Sensitive Interventions:* Targeted scholarships, mentorship programs, and skill-building initiatives are vital for tribal girls.
- *Teacher Training:* Sensitization modules on caste, culture, and inclusion can mitigate institutional biases.
- *Career Mentorship Networks:* Peer-led and professional mentorship programs can foster long-term aspirations.

V. CONCLUSION

This review consolidates existing knowledge on the role of social identity in shaping the aspirations and academic achievement of tribal students in India. Crucially, it highlights the glaring absence of literature focusing on Goan tribal communities. As these populations undergo rapid socio-economic transitions, there is a narrowing window to document and address their unique challenges. Future research must aim to fill these voids, ensuring that Goa's tribal voices are adequately represented in the discourse on identity, education, empowerment and psychological well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Sharda School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University and MIE-SPPU Institute of Higher Education for providing the academic environment and support that made this review possible. We are especially thankful to our colleagues, peers, and the faculty members who offered valuable feedback and encouragement during the development of this paper.

We wish to acknowledge the tribal communities of Goa for being a continuing source of inspiration. Their lived experiences have shaped the direction of this review and emphasized the importance of research in this underexplored area.

➤ *Conflict of Interest Statement*

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this work.

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