

Educational Attainment of Tribal Students in Government Ashram Schools: A Study from Junnar Tehsil, Maharashtra, India.

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ABSTRACT : Education plays an important role in building society. Due to a lack of education, certain groups, especially the Scheduled Tribes, are traditionally marginalized and economically backward in comparison with the total population of the country. Educational development is the most effective tool for their empowerment and ability to help marginalized and poor people out of the trap of poverty and enable them to come on par with the rest of the citizens. In recent years, there have been some reforms in the stakeholder system to provide better education to the tribal community. One of the major initiatives is the establishment of tribal residential schools and the expansion of facilities to increase the literacy rate of tribal children. The various facilities are provided in the tribal education scheme, many of which do not reach tribal students, and there is a need for study to know the status of various special provisions for these tribal students. But apparently, some loopholes require positive action to include the participation of tribals in their overall development. In Junnar tehsil, about seven government residential schools have been set up to provide tribal children with a better education. As a result, the tribal children received high-quality infrastructure and facilities. This paper will focus on the status of educational attainment and dropout rate of tribal students in Ashram schools of Junnar tehsil in Pune district of Maharashtra state.

KEYWORDS: Tribal education, Empowerment, Ashram schools, Educational upliftment

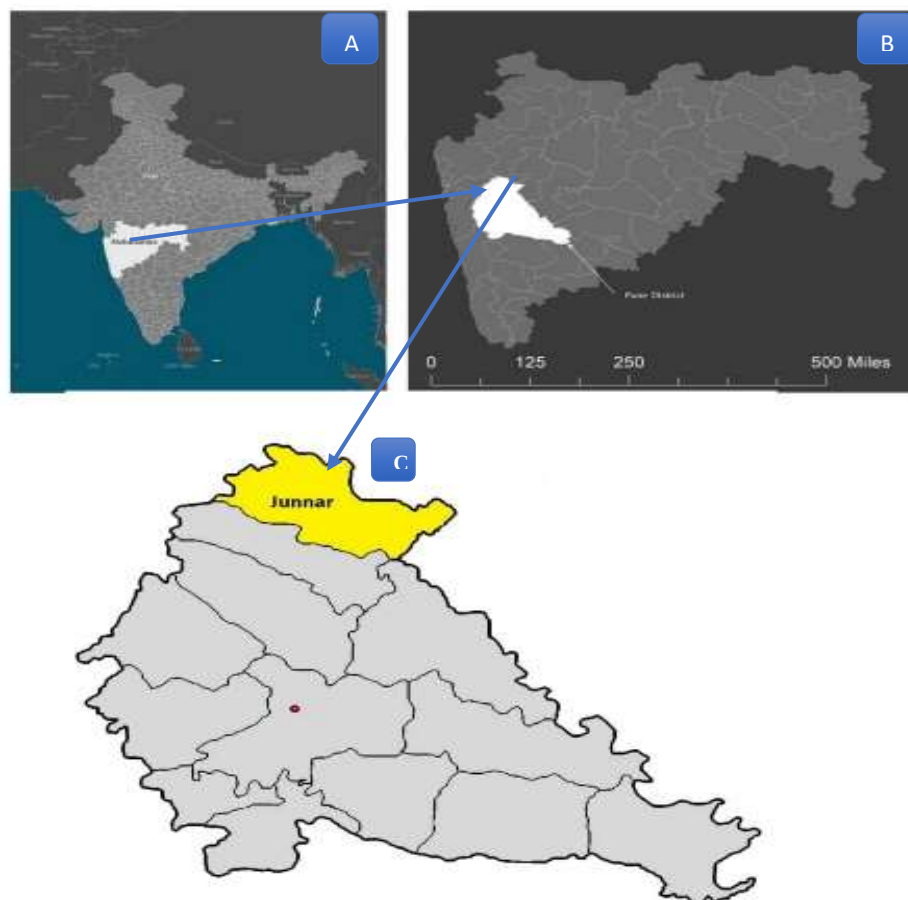
I. INTRODUCTION

Education in tribal areas is given the highest priority because it is a key to the socio-economic development of the tribal communities. Education has played an important role in making useful citizens in a democracy (Dar & Najar, 2018). Education is one of the ways for the development of tribal communities, which transfers society from backward to a developed one (Sharma, 1973). The Policy to incentivize educational interests of the backward sections of the people, especially the scheduled casts and scheduled tribes, has been contained in our constitution as a directive principle of state policy (Gawas, 2018). Article 45 of the directive principles of the constitution in India urges to provision of free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years (Rao, 2008; Verma, 2019). Therefore, our government made strong efforts to educate all children in the age group of 6 to 14 years as per provisions laid down in articles 45 and 46 of the Constitution (Kumar, 2015; Diamond, 1972). So, from time to time, commissions, committees, and working groups were established by the government of India to suggest ways to achieve the goal of education (Ahmed & Ali, 2020; Carnoy & Dossani, 2013). Those committees, commissions, and working groups recommended their thought, valuable suggestion for the development of education, including tribal and backward classes (Agrawal & Aggarwal, 1991; Mahrshi, 2023). The Indian government has created so many policies and plans regarding tribal education and its development, but there are also many problems also occurred in implementing these policies and plans (Minz, 2020; Sen, 1992). The large majority of the population in the tribal community is backward due to the correlation and awareness of education (Mallick et al., 2022; Sujatha, 2002). The government of India has launched various schemes and plans to promote education and welfare among the tribes, but even with so many efforts, the rate of literacy has not improved (Gautam, 2013; Chowdhury et al., 2021). Hence, the necessary measures, plans, and programs are needed to improve tribal education. In tribal education, there is a need for improvements in teaching-learning methods, infrastructure, facilities, amenities, and the overall environmental conditions of the educational institutions (Karmakar, 2024). The external, internal, and socio-economic and psychological constraints directly affected on system of education in the tribal community (Basantia, 2017).

The external constraints are related to problems and difficulties at the levels of policy, planning, implementation, and administration. And internal constraints about problems related to the school system, content, curriculum, medium of instruction, pedagogy, academic supervision, monitoring, and teacher-related problems, etc. The third constraint of problems related to the social, economic, and cultural background of tribal and psychological problems of first-generation learners in the tribal community (Sahu et al., 2025). A lot of educational problems are faced by tribal communities; hence government is trying its best to resolve all these problems of tribes by implementing specific educational plans and policies (Brahmanandam, 2015; Punnaiah, 2018). The Ministry of Tribal Affairs and the Ministry of Human Resources Development have established various provisions related to education, especially for educationally backward groups like tribal communities (Minz, 2020; Malyadri, 2012). The government has provided better provisions, relaxing norms for opening primary schools in tribal areas by establishing residential schools, such as Ashram Schools, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya, and Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, to alleviate the educational deprivation of tribal students (Baladaniya, 2022; Satyasavitri & Honakeri, 2018). The globalization of education has been the central concern, and the government has made educational plans and policies (Sen, 1992). Therefore, to formulate bodies such as the Education Commission (1964-1966), the National Policy on Education, Operation Blackboard, the District Primary Education Program, and the Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan for educational expansion under the various five-year plans, and to implement the recommendations of these bodies (Ali, 2025; Sen, 1992). However, even after seventy-three years of Indian independence, the goal of universal elementary education has not been achieved so far.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study area: The study was conducted in the North-west regions of Junnar tehsil, where a significant tribal population was recorded. In this study, various tribal populated villages and their ashram schools situated in Somatwadi, Sonawale, Ambe, Khatkale, Anjanawale, Khireswar, and Muthalane villages were visited for data collection.



Methodology : The study was conducted at the tehsil level in a one-phase manner by visiting government residential ashram schools over a period from 2022 -2025. A consultative approach was adopted for the study, where the Tribal Development Department (TDD) was consulted consistently at every critical stage of the study. Quantitative data were collected from TDD Ghodegaon and government residential Schools (principals, teachers, students, and wardens) through face-to-face interviews and structured questionnaires related to students' enrollment. while qualitative data was collected through consultations with Project Officers Ghodegaon and the Additional Tribal Commissioners' office in Nashik. The study covers a total of 7 schools and 120 respondents across all Government Ashram Schools in Junnar tehsil. The data was processed and tabulated using statistics, and findings were drawn scientifically. Standard protocols were followed for quality assurance throughout the data collection and processing.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the 2011 Census, Maharashtra has a 10.5 million Scheduled Tribes population (9.35% of the state's total population and 10% of all ST people nationwide. These communities mostly live in 15 districts of the state among a total of 35 districts (Roshan, 2024; Jaiswal, 2019). In comparison to their ST counterparts, the communities are less developed and impoverished. The ST people of Maharashtra share characteristics with the rest of India's ST communities, including low educational development, socioeconomic disadvantage, and social exclusion. Due to its low socioeconomic development and diversity, the delivery of education is further complicated by the fact that first-generation tribal students have different learning needs than the general population, and that it is difficult to modify educational systems to suit the needs of each tribal community. As a result, the Ashram School Program is unique since it was first intended to address the educational requirements and difficulties faced by the tribal community.

Ashram School Concept: The policy framework for the education of tribal students. : According to Article 21A of the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act of 2002, "education" is recognized as a fundamental right, and the Constitution of India mandates all children up to the age of 14 to receive free and compulsory education (Verma, 2019). To provide high-quality education for tribals, the various education commissions (Secondary Education Commission, 1952–53; Kothari Commission, 1964–66), National Policy on Education, 1968–1986; Draft National Policy on Education, 2016; National Education Policy 2020; and Right to Education Act 2009 have all emphasized, in varying degrees, the importance of implementing inclusive teaching methods, contextualizing curriculum content, introducing vocational education, and using tribal dialects in the classroom. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs launched the centrally supported Ashram School Program in 1974 with the intention of incorporating the many components for tribal students' education as stated in the various policies and guidelines (Nanjunda, 2018). Maharashtra's Education Department initiated the "Grant-in-Aid to Ashram schools for the welfare of Scheduled Tribes. Later on, the Education Department moved this program to the Directorate of Social Welfare, which then moved it to the Directorate of Tribal Development in Nashik between 1975-76 (Valvi, 2016). In Maharashtra state, currently, 529 Government Ashram Schools and 556 Aided Ashram Schools have been established under the Centrally Sponsored Ashram School Program and the Grant-in-Aid Scheme for VOs operating Tribal Sub Plan Ashram Schools, respectively (Dicholkar, 2018).

Status of School Education of Tribals in Maharashtra : Tribal populations now have improved access to free education regardless of where they live, mostly because of the expansion of school access through Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Tribal Sub-Plan in Schedule 5 areas (tribal areas). According to reports analyzing the UDISE data for 2024-25, Maharashtra recorded a total enrollment of 2.12 crore students, with approximately 42.45 lakh (16-17%) being ST students (Gangele, 2019). The Scheduled Tribes, however, lag behind the overall population in every other important metric. In Maharashtra state, 12.6% of boys and 10.3% of girls enrolled in standard XI and X dropped out of education, which was over 1% more than in 2023-24 (Motkuri & Revathi, 2024). In contrast to all other students, among ST, the dropout rate is greater, and the average retention from class I to XII is much lower. " Even while the gap has gradually narrowed over the past ten years, it is still large today. Similarly, Maharashtra's ST have been continuously performing below the state average, according to the National Achievement Survey (NAS) accomplishment level evaluations for various classes (Chattopadhyay & Durdhawale, 2009).

Table 1. Comparative literacy (%): All other persons vs Scheduled Tribes (ST) across Maharashtra, Pune District, and Junnar Tehsil for 1991, 2001, and 2011

Clades	Census year	Literacy All persons (%)	Literacy Scheduled Tribes (ST) (%)	Literacy Gap
Maharashtra	1991	64.9.	36.77	28.1
	2001	76.9.	55.2.	21.7
	2011	82.34.	65.73.	16.61
Pune District	1991	67.5	33.4	34.1
	2001	80.4	53.2	27.2
	2011	86.2	71.0	15.2
Junnar Tehsil	1991	65.0	32.0	33.0
	2001	78.5	50.0	28.5
	2011	84.1	66.5	17.6

(Source: <https://censusindia.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/42340>)

Ashram School in Junnar Tehsil of Maharashtra : A total of seven government-run residential ashram schools and several other aided ashram schools are operating to provide better education facilities for tribal students in Junnar tehsil. These schools serve both boys and girls and offer a variety of educational levels, from elementary school to upper secondary, with a focus on only arts streams.

Table 2. Structured and categorized list of Government Residential Ashram Schools in Junnar tehsil.

Sr. No		Name of Aashram School	Government	Subsidize d/ Aided	Education level	Boy's	Girl's
1.	Government Residential Ashram Schools in Junnar	Aashram School Somatwadi	✓	-	1 to 12 th (Arts)	-	✓
		Aashram School Sonawale	✓	-	1 to 12 th (Arts)	✓	✓
		Aashram School Anjanawale	✓	-	1 to 10 th	✓	✓
		Aashram School Khatkale	✓	-	1 to 12 th (Arts)	✓	✓
		Aashram School Khireswar	✓	-	1 to 10 th	✓	✓
		Aashram School Muthalane	✓	-	1 to 10 th	✓	✓
		Aashram School Aambe	✓	-	1 to 7 th	✓	✓

Impact of Ashram School on tribal education : Tribal parents are unable to pay for the more expensive education that is currently available due to their financial circumstances; as a result, they send their children to work. Tribal literacy is declining day by day, because poverty is one of the main causes of their educational backwardness, and for this reason, they refuse to help them provide better education. Aashram schools offer free access to boarding and housing facilities as well as a supportive learning environment to tribal students. Educational expenses at Ashram schools include not only boarding and meals but also notebooks, books, stationery, student dresses, money for better care in a private hospital, and the cost of students' transportation from home to school and back during breaks and holidays (Nanjunda, 2023). Private tuition fees are also paid for a variety of causes. These expenses put financial strain on low-income tribal parents; these children could attend Ashram Schools and obtain a higher education, free housing, and free meals all under one roof (Satyasavitri & Honakeri, 2018).

Students' attainment status in Ashram Schools of Junnar tehsil

1. Aashram School, Somatwadi of Junnar Tehsil : Aashram School Somatwadi, enrolment statistics for the four academic years 2021–2022–2024–2025 demonstrate a steady pattern of admitting only female students from Class 1st to 12th. In all of the years, there have been no boys enrolled. The school included 452 girls

students in 2021–2022. Enrolment was spread throughout all classes, with class 8th having the largest strength (67 students) and class 2nd having the lowest enrolment of 9 students. The number of students enrolled slightly increased to 478 in 2022–2023, with Class 6th (54 students) and Class 8th (65 students) having the highest concentration. Class 1st had the very least number of students (11). During 2023–2024, there were 491 students enrolled overall. Between 53 and 68 students made up the majority of the students in classes 6th to 10th. There were just 11 students registered in Class 2nd, which was the smallest number.

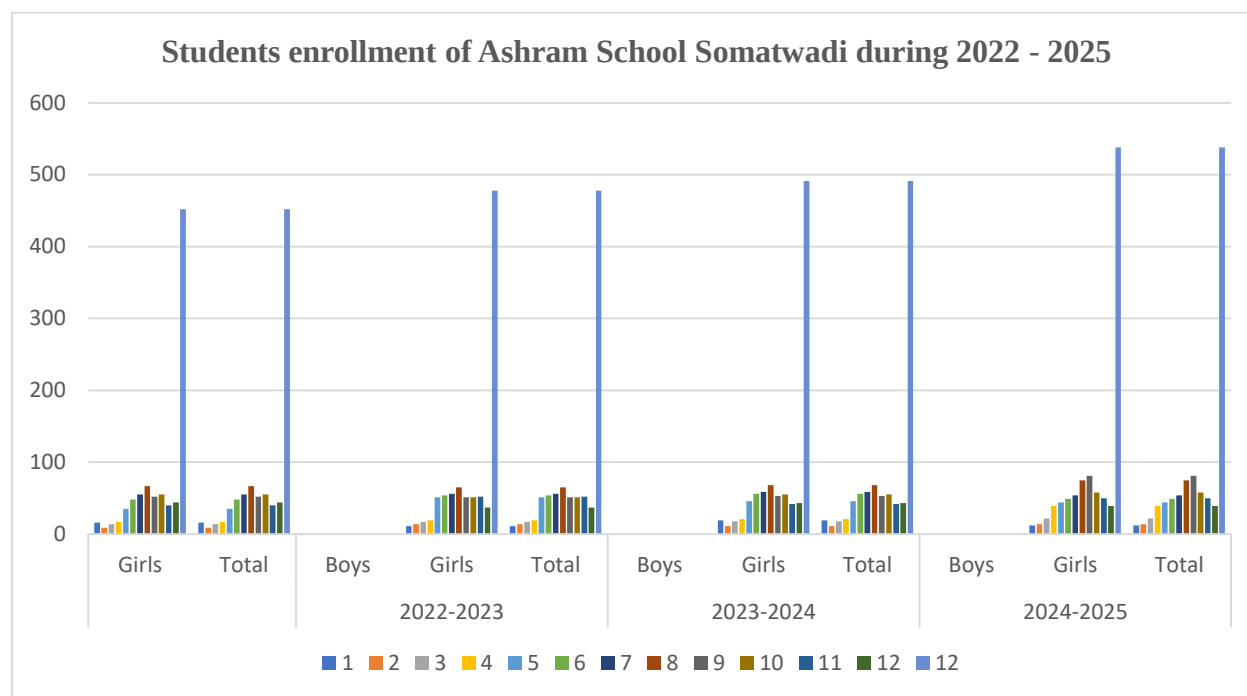


Fig 2. Students' enrolment at Ashram School Somatwadi from 2022 to 2025

The school's enrolment peaked in 2024–2025 with 538 girls' students, demonstrating consistent growth over time. Notably, the number of students in Class 9th increased significantly to 81, followed by those in Class 8th (75) and Class 4th (39). Class 1st had the smallest number (12 students). The overall data indicate that this school only serves girls, students, and enrollment has been steadily increasing annually. In comparison to the lower primary schools, the middle and upper grades (6th through 10th) continuously report larger numbers. This indicates a high rate of educational retention and continuity for female students at the Aashram School in Somatwadi.

2. Aashram School Sonawale of Junnar Tehsil : Aashram School Sonawale has shown positive enrolment growth with 71 students (33%) and gender inclusivity from 2021–22 to 2024–25. The total number of students enrolled at this aashram school has been steadily increasing. In 2011–22, the totally, 212 students were enrolled, including (99 boys and 113 girls); in 2022–23, total 233 students comprising with (104 boys and 129 girls); in 2023–24, the 271 students (115 boys and 156 girls); and in 2024–25, 283 students consisting with (121 boys and 162 girls), respectively. The noteworthy pattern trend is the steady increase in the proportion of female students. Female students already accounted for 53% of the student body in the 2021–2022). The next years saw a steady increase in this majority, which peaked in 2023–2024 at 57.6% before levelling off at 57% in 2024–2025. This data indicates that female engagement at the school is on the rise. In 2021–22, high enrollment was noted across classes 7th to 10th. and the maximum strength shifted to the 8th and 9th grades in 2022–23. The 8th class peaked in the 2023–24 school year, while the 7th and 11th classes also had notably high numbers. However, in 2024–2025, the largest student enrollment was observed in classes 7th, 9th, 10th, and 12th. In the class-wise enrollment, the primary section (1st to 5th) classes show slow but steady improvement in enrollment (from 23 in 2021–22 to 37 in 2024–25). This indicates improved entry-level enrollment and retention. However, in the middle section (6th to 8th), class presence of strong student enrollment with 76 students in 2021–22 and 91 students in 2024–25. The Classes 7th and 8th constantly show higher enrolments. The numbers in the secondary section (9th–10th) classes are as follows: 68 (2021–22), 70 (2022–23), 67 (2023–24), and 84 (2024–25). The 10th class shows a smooth transition into higher secondary by reaching a peak of 46 students in 2024–2025. However, there was a noticeable growth in the higher secondary (11th–12th) classes: 53 (2021–22) and 74 (2024–25).

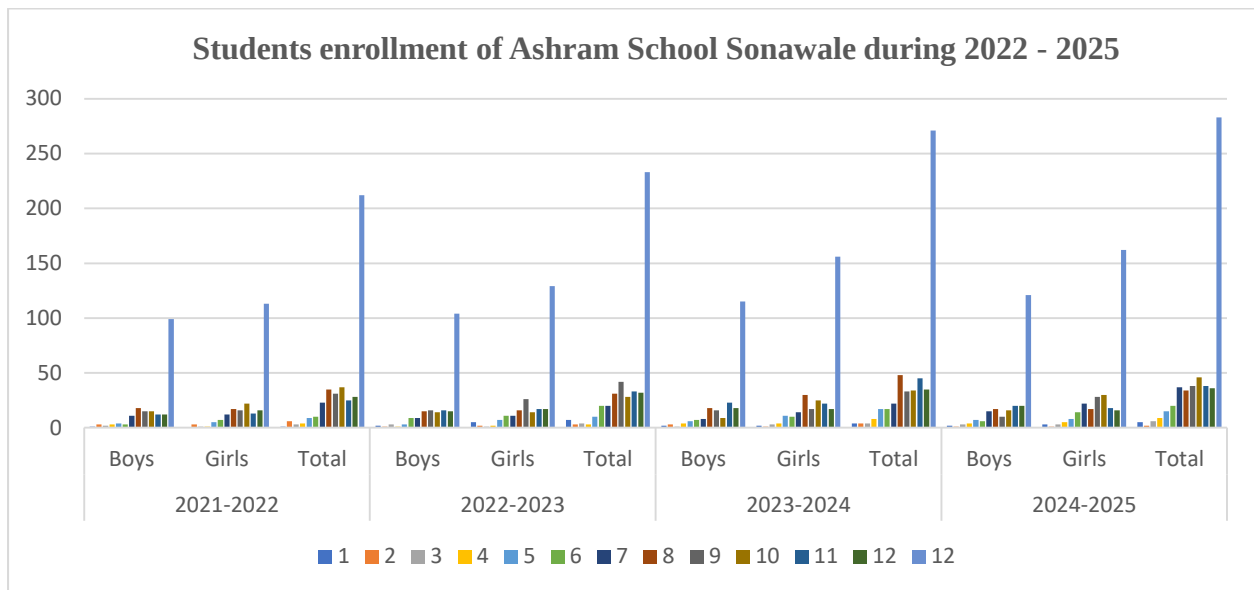


Fig 3. Students' enrollment at Ashram School Sonawale during 2022 - 2025

The number of students enrolled in 11th and 12th grade indicates that many of them continue their studies after 10th grade. The fact that there are more girls than boys in 2021–2022 (113 girls vs. 99 boys) and 2024–2025 (162 girls vs. 121 boys) shows that the school is crucial to the education of indigenous girls, probably as a result of the school and residential facilities. Girls' lower dropout rates are reflected in their enrolment being equal to or higher than boys', especially in secondary and higher school. This pattern shows how well residential facilities, government assistance programs, and community involvement have been implemented to support indigenous education.

3. Ashram School, Anjanawale of Junnar Tehsil : The total enrolment at the Anjanawale Aashram School increased from 161 students in 2021–2022 to 214 students in 2024–2025, representing a gain of 53 students (32.9%) over the four years. Over these years, the growth in enrolment has been evenly distributed between girls (an increase of 23) from 95 to 118 and boys (an increase of 30) from 66 to 96. According to the data, the majority of students in all four academic years are girls. The percentage of girls has stayed constant, constituting 59% of the student body in the 2021–22 school year and maintaining a distinct numerical majority in the subsequent years: 2021–22; 44% Boys (66) and 59% Girls (95), 2022–23; 44% Boys (83) and 54% Girls (106), 2023–24; 46% Boys (93) and 54% Girls (111), 2024–25; 45% Boys (96) and 55% Girls (118), respectively.

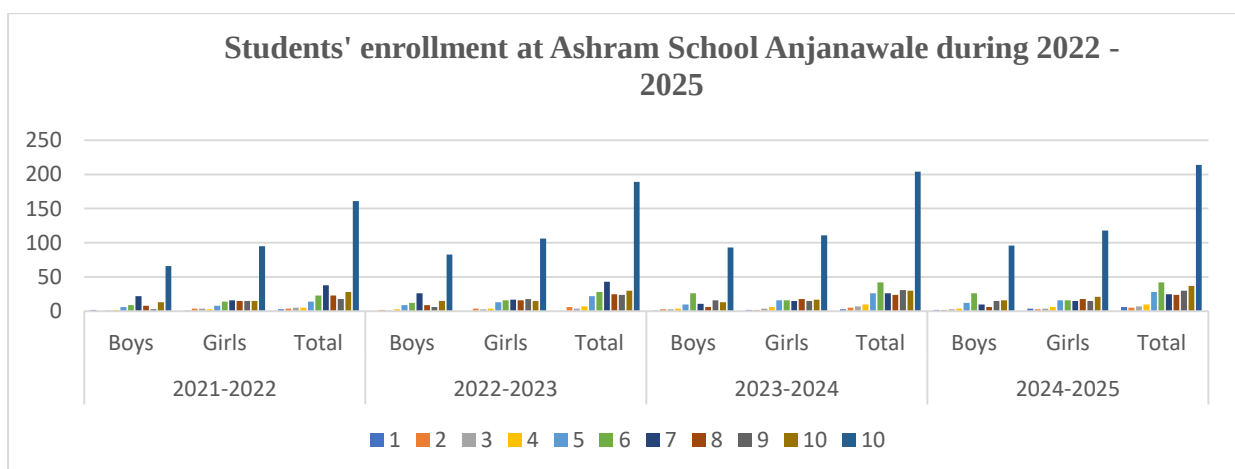


Fig 4. Students' enrolment at Ashram School Anjanawale during 2022 - 2025

In 2021–2022, there were 161 enrolled students, with girls making up 59% of the class and boys 41%. A notable rise of 28 students, with a growth rate of 17.4% in 2022–2023 compared to 2022–2023. This suggests a time of high enrolment in new admissions, especially in the fifth and sixth grades. In 2023–2024, growth reduced to a 7.9% growth rate, or an increase of 15 students. The rise this year was fuelled by continuity and retention in the intermediate and secondary grades (6th and 9th), which is a sign of effective academic advancement and student satisfaction. In 2024–2025, the growth rate further slowed to an increase of 10 students, or 4.9%. The statistics characterize the enrolment as "stable and strong," despite the minor growth, suggesting that the institution is sustaining its student enrolment by offering improved facilities to enhance tribal education. Maintaining the students' strength in higher classes indicates a positive sign of student retention. In lower primary (1st to 4th) grade, student enrollment is modest, ranging between 5 to 10 students per class. In the 1st standard, intake is low, which may affect the future strength of students, but on the other hand, the upper primary (5th to 7th) standard shows the highest enrollment growth. The 6th standard has consistently grown and shown strong retention of students from 23 (2021–22) to 42 (2023–24 & 2024–25). While the 7th standard has fluctuated peak of 43 (2022–23), then declined to 25 (2024–25), and these numbers indicate possible dropout or transfer issues of students. In secondary (8th to 10th) grade, student enrollment is strong and stable, especially in 9th and 10th grades. In the 9th standard, student enrollment showed excellent retention from 18 (2021–22) to 30 (2024–25), while in the 10th standard rose steadily from 28 (2021–22) to 37 (2024–25), which is a better indicator of students completing their education. The primary challenges at Anjanawale Aashram School, Junnar, are increasing new admissions at the entry level (1st standard) and addressing the decline in 7th standard enrolment. The school is seeing steady overall growth with strong retention at the middle and secondary levels, with girls still making up the majority but boys gradually catching up.

4. Ashram School Aambe of Junnar tehsil : Total enrolment at the Aashram school, Aambe, increased steadily over the course of four years, from 57 students in 2021–2022 to 89 students in 2024–2025, representing a 56% increase. A total of 57 students were admitted in the 2021–22 academic year, consisting of 32 boys and 25 girls. The proportion of students is generally equal across all classes, with slightly higher enrolment in the lower grades of first to third. In the 2022–23 school year, a total of 60 students with 31 boys and 29 girls, were enrolled. It is a slight but encouraging gain of three students over the prior year. A total of 66 students with 29 boys and 37 girls, were admitted in 2023–2024. a notable change towards gender equity, as seen by the sharp rise in girls' enrolment. The highest numbers of students recorded by the upper grades (5th and 6th) were 19 and 11, respectively. In the current year, 2024–25, shows the highest jump in four years by 23 students and a total of 89 students enrolled, with 43 boys and 46 girls. The growth was increased in almost all classes, especially in the 1st standard (14 students), 5th (18 students), and 6th (19 students). The boys and girls enrolled number nearly equal, which is a positive indication of gender equality. According to the gender study, although boys predominated in the first two years, girls eventually overtook them in enrolment in 2023–2024. In 2024–2025, the ratio is almost equal (43 boys to 46 girls), reflecting an increase in the number of females enrolled in school. This is in line with community and governmental initiatives to promote girls' education.

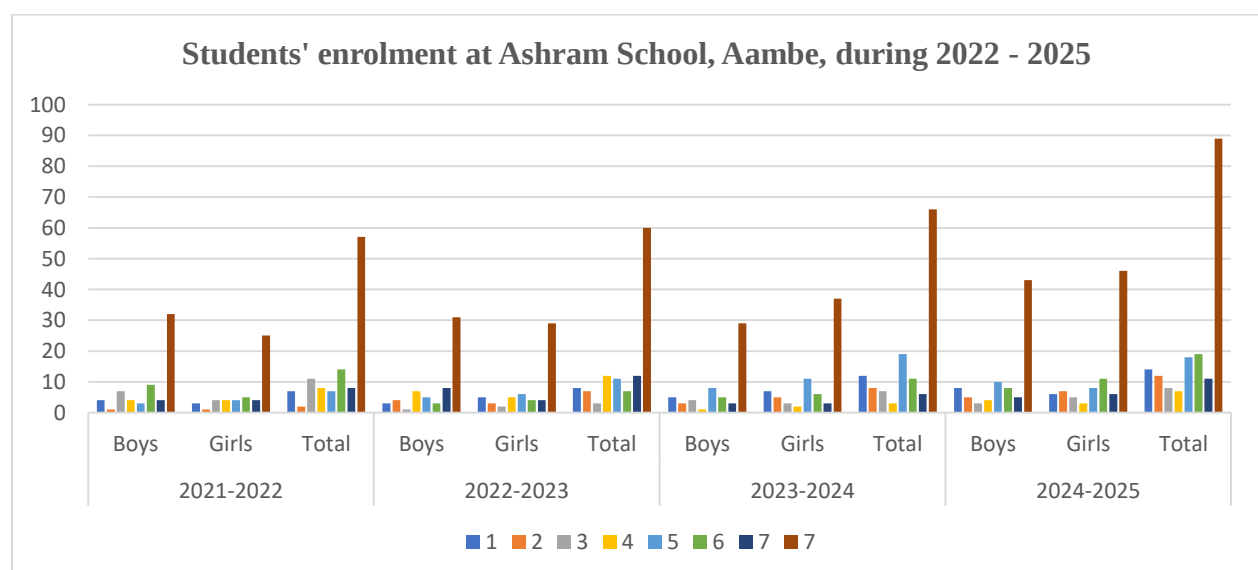


Fig 5. Students' enrolment at Ashram School, Ambe, during 2022 - 2025

Overall, enrolment at the Aambe Ashram School has been steadily increasing, and attaining gender parity is a major advancement in both boy and girl enrolment. While the high middle-class enrolment (5th to 6th) indicates solid retention, the lower (3rd and 4th) enrolments indicate that transfers or drop-out need to be addressed. The four-year growth record of Aashram School Aambe is inclusive and healthy, with particular success in the enrolment of girls and overall growth.

5. Ashram School, Khatkale of Junnar tehsil : Aashram School Khatkale, overall enrolment has increased steadily over the past four years, including 2021–2022 (207 students), 2022–2023 (216 students), 2023–2024 (219 students), and 2024–2025 (278 students). The school's enrolment trended upward, with 71 additional students admitted between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025. As per the gender distribution, the number of boys (101) and girls (106) enrolled in 2021–2022 was nearly equal. From 2022–2023 to 2023–2024, the number of girls continuously exceeded that of boys (133 vs. 83 and 135 vs. 84). The fact that there were first-time reversing boys (152) than girls (126) by 2024–2025, which suggests that girls initially preferred to attend middle school. In 2021–2024, there were only 1-2 students enrolled in the primary (1st–4th) classrooms, which is extremely low for the early years. In 2024–25, there was a notable increase, particularly in the first standard (3 students) and fourth (10 students). This implies a renewed inflow at the entry level, which could bolster the school's foundation going forward. The enrolment in the upper primary grades (5th to 7th) is steady, guaranteeing a seamless transfer to higher education.

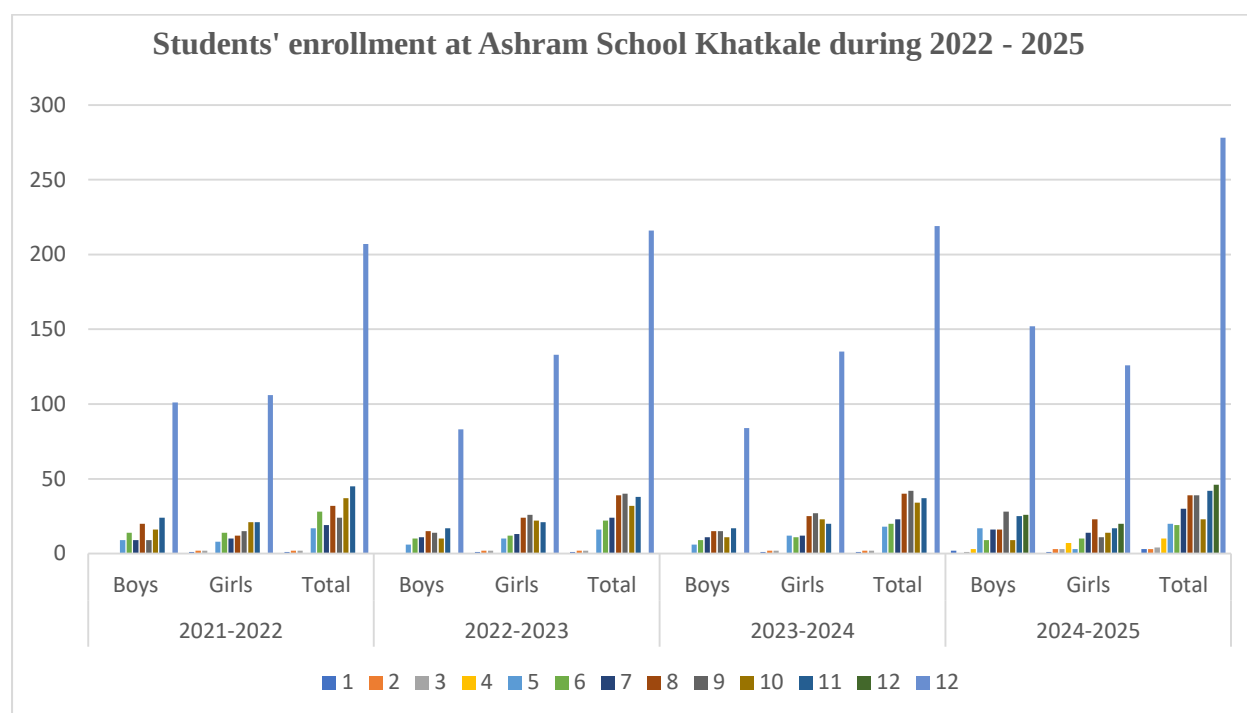


Fig 6. Students' enrollment at Ashram School Khatkale during 2022 - 2025

The number of students enrolled in the 5th standard increased from 17 to 20 between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025, while the 6th and 7th standards consistently enrolled students between 19 and 30 annually. Enrolment in the 8th standard in the secondary grade remained high, while that of the 9th standard peaked at 42 in 2023–2024 but declined slightly to 39 in 2024–2025. The 10th standard enrolment reduced from 37 to 23 between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025 as a result of dropouts or students moving to other institutions for higher education. In the higher secondary grades, class 11th enrolment was strong, reaching 45 students in 2021–2022 and then stabilizing at 37–42 students. In 2024–2025, a robust enrolment of 46 students (26 boys and 20 girls) was implemented for the 12th standard. This enlargement shows how school facilities have been upgraded to senior secondary standards. In the aashram school Khatkale, the highest student enrollment was recorded in 2024-25 is in 8th (39), 9th (39), and 12th (46), which shows the strength in secondary and upper secondary levels. However, the 10th standard decline is concerning and may require interventions like counseling and improved retention strategies. The girls' enrollment, although strong in earlier years, but it slightly reduced compared to boys in

2024-25. The opening of the 12th class has significantly boosted overall numbers and indicates the school's growing importance in the Junnar region.

6. Ashram School Khireswar of Junnar tehsil : The overall number of students enrolled in Aashram School in Khireswar has increased steadily over the past four years, including 2021–2022 (244 students), 2022–2023 (253 students), 2023–2024 (271 students), and 2024–2025 (281 students). This shows that during the four years, there has been a net growth of 37 students (15.16 percent growth). As per gender enrolment, between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025, the number of boys enrolled increased from 113 to 126, while the number of girls enrolled increased from 131 to 155. Enrolment of girls has risen from 53.7% in 2021–2022 to 55.2% in 2024–2025. This data indicates improvements in the participation of girls in their education. The lower primary (1st to 4th) standard numbers for enrolment are largely unchanged per class, with the 1st and 2nd classes seeing a minor increase. The 5th class, on the other hand, exhibits a robust transition from lower to upper primary grade, growing steadily from 22 to 31 students in just 4 years.

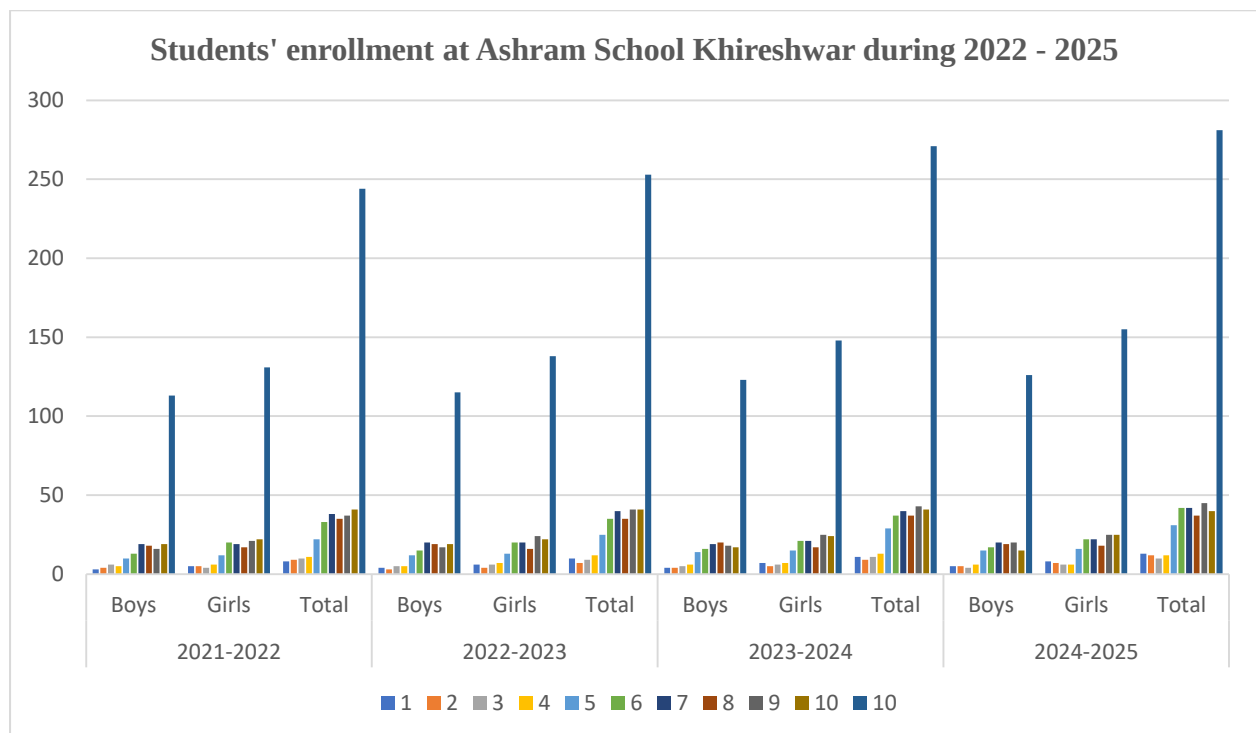


Fig 7. Students' enrolment at Ashram School, Khireswar, during 2022 - 2025

The 6th class in upper primary increased significantly from 33 to 42 children, but the 7th and 8th standards remained steady at 37 to 42 students annually. This suggests that middle school enrolment is being retained well. In contrast, class 9th enrolment in the secondary grade indicates a steady increase trend from 37 to 45 students, while class 10th enrolment remained static (41 to 40 students), indicating either stagnation or dropouts before the SSC exam. Aashram School, Khireswar, exhibits consistent retention up to the 9th grade, robust girl engagement, and sustained overall growth. The school is making good progress as enrolment approaches 300. It is necessary to focus on preventing dropouts before the 10th grade in order to ensure that more students finish their SSC.

7. Ashram School, Muthalane of Junnar tehsil : The total enrolment of Aashram School Muthalane increased steadily from 2021–2022 to 2024–2025, representing a 19.5% rise in enrolment over the period. The fact that females have continuously dominated boys in terms of enrolment throughout the year (2021–22: 126 girls vs. 104 boys, and 2024–25: 154 girls vs. 121 boys) demonstrated the effectiveness of female students' enrolment and retention. Enrolment increased in both years; however, the increase was marginally more for girls (28 additional students) than for boys (17 additional students). Enrolment growth is steady but moderate for the lower primary standards. The number of students enrolled in the 1st class doubled from 6 to 11 between 2021–2022 and 2024–2025. Additionally, the other classes (2nd to 4th) have a steady increase, indicating improved progression rates and high entry-level intake. In the upper primary classes, the 5th class's enrolment, which

ranges from 22 to 31 students, shows strong retention, while the 6th and 7th classes' large enrolments (33 to 42) continue to suggest stability in middle school attainment. In terms of secondary standards enrolment, class 9 has continuously grown from 37 to 45 students, while class 8th has stayed steady at 35–37. However, class 10th stayed relatively stable (41 in 2021–2022 and 40 in 2024–2025), indicating that although retention is high up to class 9, there may be a small dropout or migration at the end. The continually increased enrolment of girls in this ashram school is indicative of both successful attempts to educate girls and a favorable gender balance. The greatest numbers are found in classes 5th to 7th, suggesting strong continuity beyond primary levels. Enrolment in class 10th has stagnated when compared to class 9th, which raises the possibility that some children are not finishing secondary school. Ashram School Muthalane has shown constant growth in enrolment, high female participation, and smooth transitions from elementary to secondary education.

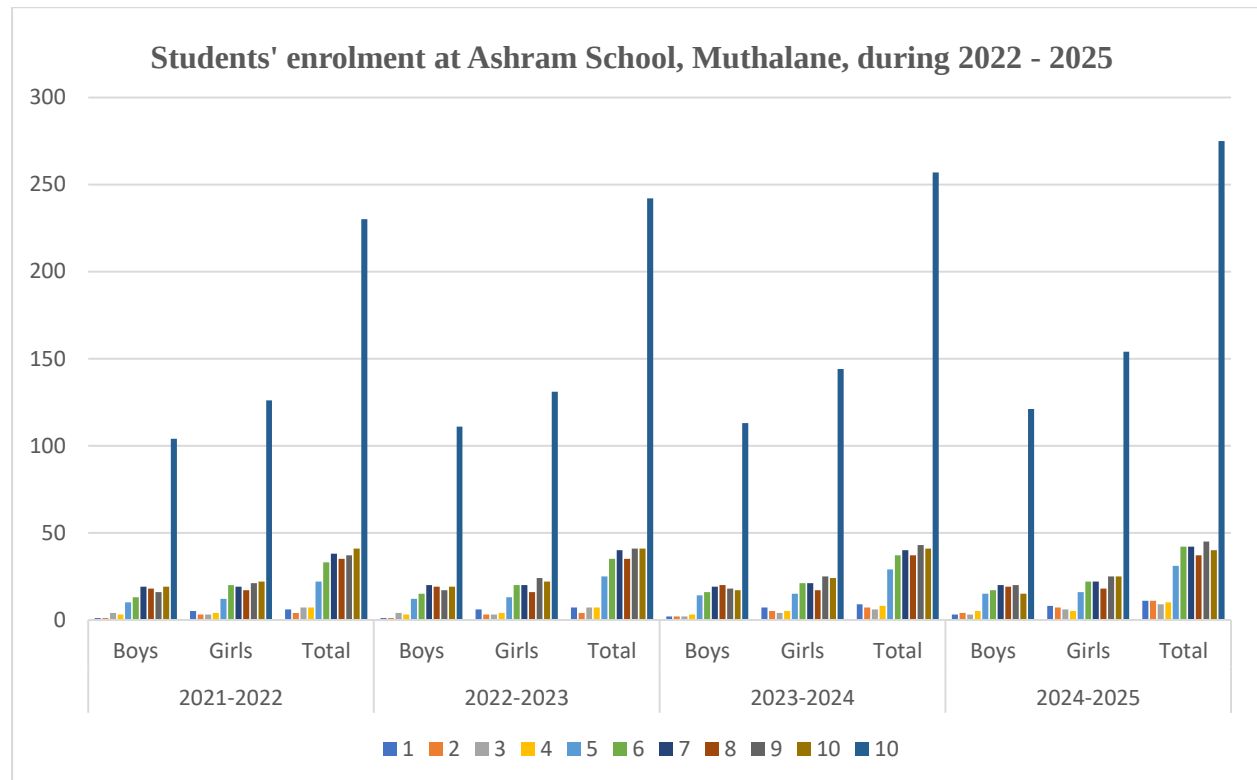


Fig 8. Students' enrolment at Ashram School, Muthalane, during 2022 - 2025

The school's contribution to enhancing tribal and rural education is seen in the generally positive trend. However, to guarantee that children successfully finish their education, extra care might be required to improve retention at the secondary level, particularly in classes 9th to 10th.

IV. CONCLUSION

The information clearly shows that the Ashram School Program was successfully implemented to enhance the educational attainments of the Scheduled Tribes in Junnar tehsil. The Ashram school concept is effectively expanding among tribal students by providing free educational access and retention in Junnar tehsil. However, it is especially important to focus interventions on educational advancement, particularly in early grade enrollment and secondary level retention. There is a steady and noticeable growth in total student enrollment across all seven government-run ashram schools in Junnar tehsil during 2021-22 to 2024-25. This indicates that the tribal schools have improved trust and utilization by tribal communities. Additionally, significant enrollment was observed in middle and higher classes (6th to 10th) at Somatwadi, Sonawale, and Muthalane ashram schools, which suggests strong student retention and continuity beyond the primary level. In view of the empowerment of girls' education, a significant trend is the rising and sustained enrollment of girls in Junnar tehsil. The girls either make up the majority of students in the majority of schools (Somatwadi, Sonawale, Anjanawale, Khireshwar, and Muthalane), and their enrolment has rapidly grown near parity with the boys' students. This indicates that the ashram school model, which provides free residential and financial support, has been successful in removing socioeconomic obstacles that have historically resulted in higher dropout rates for tribal

girls' students. By addressing the literacy gap, Ashram school Sonawale and Khatkale appear to be actively closing the literacy gap based on a steady increase in enrolment and retention from primary through secondary or higher secondary level. The low enrollment was observed in the first standard in some ashram schools like Anjanawale and Khatkale in Junnar tehsil. This indicates a need for improved outreach and focus on increased entry-level admission. In contrast, the secondary transition enrollment in the 10th standard at Khireswar, Muthalane, and Khatkale has slightly decreased in comparison to the 9th standard. Indicated a recurring problem with dropout before the crucial 10th class examination. The Ashram school program in Junnar Tehsil has been effectively improving enrollment and retention, especially for girls, in tribal communities by offering a complete, inclusive, and supportive educational environment. Its beneficial effects will be further reinforced by ongoing efforts to increase entry-level admission and reduce secondary or final stage dropout.

ETHICAL APPROVAL : The ethical norms are followed by the Project Officer, Tribal Development Project Office, Ghodegaon, Pune, as per Letter No: 2024:1 (2)/3190 for the data collection in the study, which includes both primary and secondary data.

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