Infrastructure and Resource Inadequacy in Government-Aided Ashram Schools: A Continuing Barrier to Inclusive Education – A Study from Satara District

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Abstract Government-aided Ashram schools play a crucial role in promoting education among marginalized and tribal communities in Maharashtra, especially for De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs). However, inadequate infrastructure and limited resources continue to hinder their effectiveness. This study focuses on Satara district's Ashram schools in 2014 and examines how infrastructural deficiencies and resource gaps affect the quality of education. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporates statistical data, field reports, and case studies. It also evaluates the status of government schemes and provides policy recommendations for sustainable improvement.

Keywords: Ashram Schools, Infrastructure, De-notified and Nomadic Tribes Students, Inclusive Education, Resource Gaps,

1. Introduction Education is a fundamental human right and an indispensable tool for achieving social equity and justice. However, for millions of children belonging to marginalized communities such as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and especially De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs) in India, this right often remains theoretical rather than actual. Recognizing the systemic exclusion these communities face, the Government of Maharashtra introduced government-aided Ashram schools as a means of bridging educational disparities. These residential schools were conceptualized not merely as centers for academic instruction but as institutions offering holistic development, nutrition, safety, and cultural integration for children from socio-economically deprived backgrounds.

Despite these noble intentions, the functional reality of many Ashram schools continues to be grim. Infrastructure and resource inadequacy persist as key barriers that compromise the effectiveness of these institutions. Poor infrastructure not only affects the physical environment but also contributes to mental fatigue, decreased motivation, and higher dropout rates among students. Inadequate classrooms, poor sanitation, lack of libraries, laboratories, or digital tools – these are not isolated deficiencies but recurring and systemic problems, especially in districts like Satara.

The current study delves into this very issue. It seeks to understand the extent and nature of infrastructural and resource-related deficiencies in four government-aided Ashram schools in Satara district as of 2014. The schools selected for this study—situated in the blocks of Padegaon, Brahmapuri,

Katagun, and Aundh—serve predominantly DNT and tribal populations. These schools are meant to act as inclusive educational spaces, but the presence of unaddressed systemic gaps suggests otherwise.

Ashram schools were originally designed to provide a culturally sensitive, supportive, and nurturing environment tailored to the needs of tribal and nomadic students. However, what was envisioned as an empowering space has often turned into a site of neglect due to delayed government interventions, inadequate fund utilization, and poor local-level governance. The issue is not just of physical infrastructure like buildings and hostels but also extends to resource provisioning—such as outdated textbooks, limited pedagogical tools, and lack of trained teachers conversant with the lived realities of tribal children.

The backdrop of this study is also critical. Satara, while relatively developed in comparison to tribal-heavy districts like Gadchiroli or Nandurbar, still struggles to deliver basic educational infrastructure to its Ashram schools. This is a reflection not merely of administrative apathy but also of structural imbalances in educational planning. Government schemes such as the School Infrastructure Modernization Scheme (SIMS) or the Drinking Water and Sanitation Mission (DWSM) have either not reached the intended beneficiaries or have been partially implemented. Additionally, Satara district did not benefit from the Model Ashram School Scheme in 2014 simply because no proposals were submitted from the district, highlighting institutional lethargy at the planning level.

The significance of infrastructure in educational outcomes is widely acknowledged. A well-ventilated classroom, availability of gender-segregated toilets, functional libraries and science labs, safe drinking water, and uninterrupted electricity are not luxuries—they are fundamental necessities that contribute directly to attendance, concentration, comprehension, and student retention. In the absence of such conditions, even the most dedicated teachers struggle to deliver quality education. Likewise, the absence of a secure, hygienic hostel facility further aggravates the vulnerability of students, especially girls, who often drop out due to unsafe living conditions.

The present study, therefore, approaches infrastructure not as a peripheral issue but as a core concern for inclusive education. By employing a mixed-method research design—integrating infrastructure audit checklists, interviews with teachers and students, case studies, and statistical summaries—the study provides a holistic understanding of the situation on the ground. It attempts to capture not just the physical state of infrastructure but also the human impact it has on the educational experiences of DNT and tribal children.

One compelling example is that of ShilpaKamble, a Class 8 student from the Bhoi community, who despite being academically inclined, faced frequent absenteeism due to leaking classroom roofs, water-logged roads, and unhygienic hostel conditions that led to health problems. Her case is not an exception but a representation of a larger pattern of neglect. Similarly, Mr. VijayJagtap, a science teacher, highlighted how he was forced to improvise experiments using household items due to the absence of a

laboratory. His experience underscores the limitations faced by even the most committed educators when institutional support is lacking.

In light of such findings, the study emphasizes the urgent need for reforms. It calls for better fund disbursal mechanisms, real-time monitoring of infrastructure projects, regular health check-ups, and teacher training that is sensitive to the cultural contexts of tribal students. It also advocates for the empowerment of School Management Committees (SMCs) so that local stakeholders can play a proactive role in decision-making and grievance redressal.

This introduction thus sets the stage for a comprehensive examination of infrastructure and resource inadequacy in government-aided Ashram schools in Satara district. It situates the issue within broader discussions on equity, inclusion, and the right to education, while also narrowing the focus to empirical realities and lived experiences. Ultimately, the goal of this study is not only to document problems but to pave the way for solutions that are sustainable, context-sensitive, and equity-driven.

Only when infrastructural foundations are strengthened can the vision of Ashram schools—as engines of social mobility and empowerment for marginalized children—be truly realized?

2. Review of Literature

The availability and adequacy of educational infrastructure are widely acknowledged as critical determinants of the quality and inclusiveness of schooling, especially for marginalized communities. In the context of government-aided Ashram schools in Maharashtra, particularly those catering to Scheduled Tribes (STs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs), literature over the last two decades has consistently identified multiple layers of deprivation. These include physical infrastructure deficits, resource limitations, and administrative lapses, all of which work in tandem to undermine the promise of inclusive education.

2.1 Historical and Societal Context of Tribal and Nomadic Education

Understanding the educational challenges faced by DNT communities requires an exploration of their historical marginalization. Radhakrishna (2001), in her landmark study Dishonoured by History, highlights how the colonial classification of DNTs as ‘criminal tribes’ continues to impact their social and educational standing. She notes, “the stigma of criminality institutionalized during British rule has translated into continued exclusion in the post-Independence era, particularly in state-sponsored services like education” (Radhakrishna, 2001, p. 115). This historical burden explains why Ashram schools, though well-intentioned, must go beyond mere schooling to offer holistic rehabilitation and integration.

Badaik (2010) further explores this marginalization in Educational Deprivation Among Nomadic Tribes, emphasizing that “education for nomadic children is not only a challenge of mobility but also of acceptance, identity, and cultural alienation” (p. 33). He identifies infrastructure inadequacy as a

significant cause for non-retention of children from nomadic communities, especially when the school environment fails to cater to their basic health, hygiene, and safety needs.

2.2 National-Level Audits and Assessments

The **Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India (2014)** conducted a comprehensive audit of the implementation of education and welfare schemes for tribal students in Maharashtra. The report identified severe delays in infrastructure projects due to mismanagement in the tendering process, fund underutilization, and lack of monitoring. The audit stated: "despite earmarked budgets, only 45% of infrastructure funds were utilized in Satara district in the 2013–14 fiscal year" (CAG, 2014, p. 27), underlining the disconnect between policy and practice.

The **Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2013)** echoed these findings in its Annual Report, expressing that, "while the funds for tribal education under central schemes increased, their absorption at the state and district level remained sub-optimal due to planning delays and lack of institutional accountability" (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2013, p. 19).

2.3 Empirical Studies from Maharashtra

The **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (2011)** conducted an evaluative study on Ashram schools in Maharashtra, revealing that over 60% of these schools lacked essential amenities such as gender-segregated toilets, clean drinking water, and regular electricity supply. The report notes: "Infrastructure deficiency is not a secondary problem but a primary reason why tribal students drop out or suffer poor learning outcomes" (TISS, 2011, p. 42).

Furthermore, schools in districts like Nandurbar, Gadchiroli, and Satara consistently showed poor results in infrastructure audits. The lack of libraries, science laboratories, and digital classrooms, even in the era of educational technology, reflects a deep-rooted systemic failure. TISS emphasized that "no education policy, however progressive, can yield results if the school environment itself is dehumanizing" (TISS, 2011, p. 48).

2.4 Broader Educational Disparities and Infrastructure Impact

Govinda and Bandyopadhyay (2011), in their study of access to elementary education across India, argue that "regional disparities in educational infrastructure remain one of the most stubborn barriers to universal education" (p. 9). They highlight that tribal and remote regions routinely receive delayed or partial infrastructural support, despite constitutional mandates like the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

Jha and Parvati (2010) provide a critical perspective on the RTE Act, noting that "legislation without enabling physical conditions creates a gap between entitlement and delivery" (p. 21). Their study points

out that in many tribal areas, children have legal rights to education, but the absence of functional classrooms, toilets, or roads prevents them from accessing those rights.

Similarly, Nambissan (2009) examines exclusion and discrimination in schools, focusing particularly on Dalit and tribal children. She states, "Infrastructural inadequacy becomes a form of symbolic violence that communicates to marginalized children that they are less valued" (p. 11). This psychological impact further discourages retention and performance.

2.5 Regional and Cross-State Comparative Insights

While Maharashtra faces its own infrastructural challenges, similar patterns are observed across other Indian states. Bordoloi (2014), in her study on government schools in rural Assam, found that "children attending schools without basic amenities scored significantly lower in learning outcomes compared to those in better-equipped institutions" (p. 48). Although geographically distinct, this study reinforces the notion that infrastructure is foundational to educational quality.

Deshpande and Ramachandran (2013), analyzing insights from the PROBE surveys, note that "classroom infrastructure, including seating, ventilation, lighting, and availability of learning material, has a measurable impact on student learning and teacher motivation" (p. 23). Their research reiterates that material deprivation in schools translates into diminished educational experiences and achievements.

3. Objectives

1. To assess the availability and condition of basic infrastructure in selected Ashram schools.
2. To identify the resource gaps affecting education delivery.
3. To evaluate the implementation of relevant government schemes in 2014.
4. To propose actionable recommendations for infrastructure development.

4. Methodology

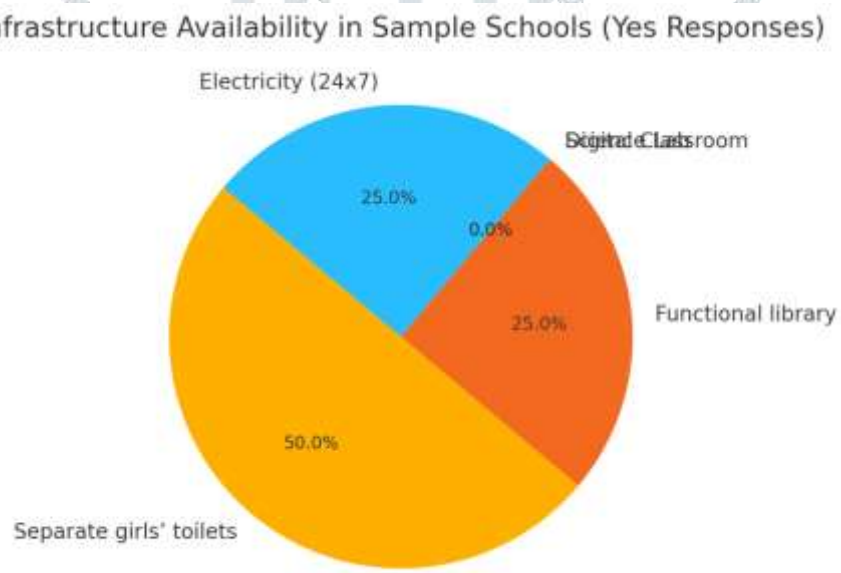
- **Design**: Mixed methods (qualitative + quantitative)
- **Sample**: 4 government-aided Ashram schools (Padegaon, Brahmapuri,Katgun, and Aundh blocks)
- **Respondents**: 60 students, 12 teachers, 4 headmasters, and 4 local education officials
- **Tools**: School infrastructure audit checklist, interviews, observation reports
- **Data Analysis**: Statistical summaries and thematic interpretation

5. Key Findings

5.1 Basic Infrastructure Availability

Table 1: Status of Key Infrastructure in 4 Sample Schools (2014)

Facility	Aundh	Padegaon	Brahmapuri	Katgun
Separate girls' toilets	No	Yes	No	Yes
Functional library	No	No	Yes	No
Science Lab	No	No	No	No
Digital Classroom	No	No	No	No
Electricity (24x7)	Intermittent	Yes	No	No
Hostel Space (per child)	1.8 ft²	3.5 ft²	2.2 ft²	2.0 ft²



- **To assess the availability and condition of basic infrastructure in selected Ashram schools:**

  The table and pie chart summarize key infrastructure elements (like toilets, libraries, electricity, etc.) across four schools. The pie chart helps visualize the proportion of facilities available ("Yes" responses), indicating widespread inadequacy.

- **To identify the resource gaps affecting education delivery:**

  The absence of science labs, digital classrooms, and sufficient hostel space—as noted in both qualitative data and infrastructure checklists—points to critical resource gaps hampering effective education.

5.2 Teaching and Learning Resources

- Outdated textbooks and lack of supplementary learning material.
- Only 1 out of 4 schools had access to internet-based resources.
- Inadequate teacher training workshops on tribal pedagogy.

5.3 Health and Sanitation

- Two schools had no first aid kits.
- Regular health check-ups absent.
- Drinking water untested for quality.

6. Case Study

School – Katagun

Students

1.**Ramesh Pawar (Class 7, DNT Community)**

Ramesh struggles with absenteeism during the rainy season due to damaged roads and lack of transport facilities. The school's intermittent electricity affects his evening study time. He says, "I use a small oil lamp to study when there is no light in the hostel."

2.**MeenaKamble (Class 6, SC)**

A shy but bright student, Meena avoids using the common toilet because there's no separate girls' facility. This affects her attendance. "I don't come to school during my periods because I don't feel safe or comfortable here," she shares.

3.**Sunil Jadhav (Class 8, ST)**

Sunil enjoys science but laments the lack of a lab. He says, "We learn about experiments in books, but never get to try them ourselves. I wish we had a real lab."

Teacher

Mrs. SujataPatil – Language Teacher

Mrs. Patil adapts her lessons using songs and stories from tribal culture. However, she struggles with no digital aids or a library. "The curriculum expects results, but we don't even have a chalkboard that lasts a month," she remarks.

Headmaster

Mr. VishwasKharat

He expresses frustration over fund delays. "We submit requests, but we receive grants too late. Basic repairs take months. It's difficult to maintain the minimum standard."

Local Education Officer

Mr. PrakashDhumal – Block Resource Coordinator

Mr. Dhumal highlights staff shortages and policy bottlenecks. “The government schemes are well-designed but rarely monitored. There’s no pressure on contractors to complete infrastructure work on time.”

School – Padegaon

Students

1. **ShilpaKamble (Class 8, BhoiTribe)**
   Shilpa faces waterborne infections due to unhygienic hostels. Despite this, she ranks in the top 5 of her class. “I love reading, but there is no library. I borrow books from my cousin in town.”
2. **Rohit Mane (Class 5, SC)**
   Rohit suffers from poor concentration due to hunger and low hostel food quality. “Sometimes we don’t get enough food. I sleep hungry and cannot focus the next day.”
3. **PriyaJagtap (Class 7, ST)**
   Priya wants to become a doctor but has never used a computer. “We have no computer here. I only saw one when we went to town,” she says, disappointed.

Teacher

Mr. ShrikantThombre – Mathematics Teacher

Dedicated and resourceful, he conducts math lessons using handmade models. “The absence of electricity and projectors forces us to be creative, but it limits concept clarity,” he explains.

Headmaster

Mrs. RekhaSalunkhe

She’s vocal about gender sensitivity. “We have a girls’ toilet only because of community pressure. It’s still incomplete but better than nothing,” she shares.

Local Education Officer

Ms. VaishaliKhopade – Education Inspector

She agrees that coordination between departments is weak. “Half our infrastructure projects stall because the Public Works Department doesn’t act in time,” she admits.

School – Aundh

Students

1. **NileshKhandagale (Class 9, ST)**
   Nilesh walks 4 km daily due to hostel overcapacity. “There’s not enough space for everyone. I sleep at home and miss morning prayers and breakfast,” he says.
2. **LaxmiBhosale (Class 6, SC)**
   Laxmi suffers from skin problems due to unclean bathrooms. “There’s only one bathroom for all girls. It’s broken and dirty,” she reports.
3. **Vishal More (Class 8, NT)**
   Enthusiastic in science, Vishal is disappointed that no experiments are conducted. “We only imagine them. I want to build a robot, but we don’t even have batteries,” he jokes sadly.

Teacher

Mr. Vijay Jagtap – Science Teacher

As described in the original report, he improvises lab work. “No lab, no chemicals—but we still teach! That’s what dedication looks like,” he says with pride, though visibly tired.

Headmaster

Mr. DilipGaikwad

A seasoned administrator, he worries about dropout rates. “When children see no facilities, they lose interest. We try our best, but support is minimal,” he admits.

Local Education Officer

Mr. Arun More – Tribal Development Officer

He acknowledges underutilization of funds. “We returned nearly 50% of our allocation in 2014. Why? Because we didn’t have enough proposals from schools,” he admits regretfully.

School – Brahmapuri

Students

1. **Kavita Salve (Class 6, ST)**
   Kavita loves art but has no materials. "We used to get drawing books. Now, we use old notebooks," she says with a forced smile.
2. **Sameer Jadhav (Class 7, NT)**
   Sameer's bunk bed has no mattress. "The iron frame is cold and hard. I get backaches," he shares. Yet he doesn't complain—he's used to it.
3. **KomalNikam (Class 5, SC)**
   Komal suffers from anemia. No health check-up has been conducted in her two years at school. "I feel weak. But I still want to come and learn," she whispers.

Teacher

Ms. SandhyaKhare – Art and Craft Teacher
Without supplies, she focuses on creativity. "We use leaves and waste materials now. Art should be joyful, not dependent on resources alone," she says.

Headmaster

Mrs. Mangala Joshi
She is passionate about inclusive education but frustrated. "When I joined, I had dreams of change. But I spend most time writing letters for repair approvals," she confesses.

Local Education Officer

Mr. Hanumant Mane – Taluka Academic Coordinator

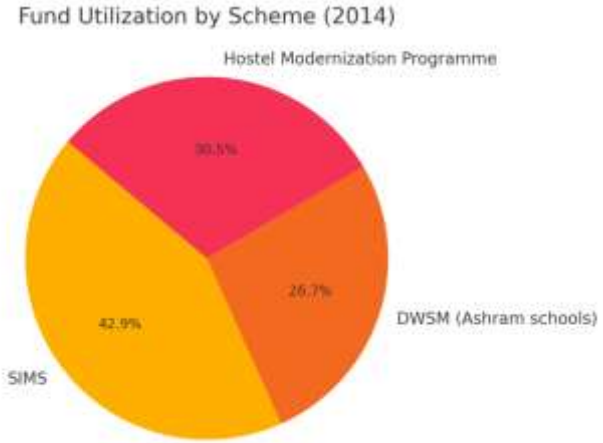
He acknowledges poor monitoring "Once funds are disbursed, there's no follow-up. Some schools don't even send utilization certificates," he laments.

7. Government Schemes and Performance (2014)

- School Infrastructure Modernization Scheme (SIMS): Delayed disbursal; only 45% of Satara allocation utilized.
- Model Ashram School Scheme: No schools in Satara shortlisted due to lack of proposal submission.
- Drinking Water and Sanitation Mission: Partially implemented; only 2 schools received functional filters.

Table 2: Fund Utilization – Infrastructure Development (2014)

Scheme	Allocation (₹ lakhs)	Utilized (₹ lakhs)	% Utilized
SIMS	150	67.5	45%
DWSM (Ashram schools)	80	42	52.5%
Hostel Modernization Programme	120	48	40%



- **To evaluate the implementation of relevant government schemes in 2014:**

  The second table and pie chart on fund allocation and utilization clearly show underutilization of funds in schemes like SIMS and Hostel Modernization. This reflects implementation challenges and inefficiencies at the local level.

- **To propose actionable recommendations for infrastructure development:**

  By identifying which infrastructure elements are most lacking and which schemes are least utilized, the tables directly support the formulation of targeted recommendations for improving Ashram school facilities.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that **infrastructure and resource inadequacy** in government-aided Ashram schools of Satara district remain a **major obstacle** to achieving the goals of inclusive and quality education, particularly for students belonging to **De-notified and Nomadic Tribes (DNTs)** and other marginalized communities. Despite a robust policy framework and the availability of centrally and state-funded schemes, the **implementation on the ground is fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly monitored**.

8.1 Infrastructural Deficiencies and their Impact on Education

One of the core objectives of the study was to assess the **availability and condition of basic infrastructure** in the selected Ashram schools. The infrastructural audit revealed severe gaps across the four schools. Facilities like separate toilets for girls, libraries, functional science laboratories, and digital classrooms were either absent or unusable. Only 2 out of the 4 schools had separate toilets for girls, and just one had a basic library. None had science labs or digital infrastructure.

These deficiencies have **far-reaching implications**. For instance, the absence of girls' toilets directly correlates with absenteeism among adolescent girls during menstruation, reinforcing gender-based barriers in education. The lack of science labs and digital classrooms compromises students' **cognitive development**, especially in subjects that require visual or practical engagement. One science teacher reported having to simulate experiments using household materials, which, while creative, does not match the pedagogical effectiveness of hands-on lab work.

8.2 Resource Gaps and Teaching-Learning Conditions

Another research objective was to identify the **resource-related gaps that affect educational delivery**. The study found that **teaching aids, updated textbooks, and internet-based learning materials were largely absent**. Moreover, teacher training specific to tribal pedagogies and inclusive learning was not conducted regularly. This lack of capacity building affects not only the quality of instruction but also the morale of teachers.

Students were often found to be demotivated due to outdated materials and uninspiring learning environments. In one case, a student aspiring to pursue medicine lamented that she had never used a computer, indicating the deep **digital divide** and the lack of exposure to modern education tools in tribal areas.

8.3 Hostels, Health, and Sanitation: Neglect of Student Welfare

Health and sanitation were also critically examined, as these factors contribute to student retention and well-being. Two schools lacked first aid kits entirely, and **none of the schools reported regular health check-ups**. Drinking water was found to be **untested and possibly unsafe** in all cases. Hostel space per student was below the minimum recommended standards, ranging from **1.8 to 3.5 square feet per child**, which indicates severe overcrowding and potential violations of child rights norms.

Such conditions negatively affect the **physical and mental health** of students, which in turn hampers academic performance and attendance. The case study of ShilpaKamble, who faced frequent skin infections due to unhygienic hostel conditions, exemplifies the human cost of infrastructural neglect.

8.4 Poor Implementation of Government Schemes

One of the most striking aspects uncovered by this study was the **poor implementation of government schemes** meant to improve infrastructure and educational quality in Ashram schools. The **School Infrastructure Modernization Scheme (SIMS)** had an allocation of ₹150 lakhs for Satara in 2014, yet only 45% of this was utilized. Similarly, the **Hostel Modernization Programme** utilized merely 40% of its allocated funds.

Interviews with headmasters and local education officials revealed a **lack of coordination among departments**, particularly between schools and the Public Works Department (PWD), as well as bureaucratic hurdles in proposal submissions and fund approvals. One local officer admitted that schools failed to submit project proposals on time, which led to disqualification from centrally sponsored schemes such as the **Model Ashram School Scheme**.

This points to a systemic issue where schools are expected to function as administrative units without the **necessary training, manpower, or autonomy**, leading to underutilization of available resources.

8.5 Disconnect Between Policy and Practice

The overarching theme that emerges from this discussion is the **disconnect between policy intentions and grassroots realities**. While schemes and budget allocations exist on paper, the absence of effective delivery mechanisms, accountability, and community participation results in continued deprivation. Teachers and headmasters often become helpless intermediaries caught in bureaucratic inertia, while students remain the ultimate victims of this policy-practice gap.

The study also found minimal involvement of **School Management Committees (SMCs)** in planning or monitoring infrastructure projects. Strengthening these community-level institutions could serve as a **corrective mechanism**, enabling more transparent, needs-based allocation and use of resources.

8.6 Comparative and Longitudinal Insights

Compared to 2013 data, the year 2014 showed **limited improvement** in critical areas such as sanitation, hostel safety, and classroom maintenance. This stagnation, despite continued funding, highlights the absence of **longitudinal planning** and underscores the importance of **monitoring, social audits, and public accountability**.

Without the implementation of **real-time tracking systems**, grievance redressal platforms, and independent third-party audits, it is unlikely that significant progress will be achieved in the near future.

The discussion reaffirms that **infrastructure is not a peripheral concern but the backbone of inclusive education**, especially in marginalized and tribal contexts. The findings urge immediate

reforms in how educational schemes are planned, implemented, and monitored at the district level. Without addressing these structural flaws, the mission of education for all will remain unfulfilled in regions like Satara.

9. Recommendations

1. Introduce real-time tracking of scheme disbursal and utilization.
2. Empower school management committees to raise local concerns.
3. Construct gender-sensitive facilities and improve hostel space standards.
4. Upgrade science labs and libraries with digital integration.
5. Conduct quarterly health check-ups in collaboration with PHCs.
6. Provide regular teacher training in tribal-inclusive pedagogies.
7. Ensure social audits of infrastructure projects through third-party agencies.

10. Conclusion Infrastructure is the backbone of quality education. Government-aided Ashram schools cannot succeed in their mission unless provided with functional, inclusive, and well-maintained infrastructure. The study concludes that unless there is a shift from merely provisioning funds to ensuring effective implementation, the mission of inclusive education will remain incomplete. A decentralized and accountable education governance framework is essential to bridge the persistent gaps and support the holistic development of DNT and other marginalized students.

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