

# Status and Development of Tribal Women Empowerment in Birbhum District of West Bengal: An Empirical Study

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*Abstract - Women in a tribal society play a vital role in their social, cultural, economic and religious ways of life and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for economic empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all round development in the society. The present study examines the socio-economic status of tribal women and the impact of their life and development. This paper has tried to throw light on the status and development of Tribal Women Empowerment in Birbhum district, West Bengal.*

**Keywords:** Tribal Women Empowerment, tribal society, empowerment, status and development

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is an eternal truth that all men are not equal. Actually inequalities exist in all types' human society. However, human beings became unequal not only due to their individual intellect or physical strength but man-made or society-determined inequality is also a crucial issue which segregates each individual into different strata. Generally, society determines inequality and caste-based inequality is almost synonymous. In this context it can be presented that India's caste based inequality is such a subject of cognitive research which not only attracts Indian scholars but also foreign scholars and researchers and became the important area of discussion of Indian politics. Actually India is fabulously diverse, not only in geography and climate; it is also probably the most diverse country in the world in terms of religion, language and ethnicity.

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and are considered as an economic asset in their society. But they are still lagging far behind in the different walks of life like education, employment, good health and economic empowerment etc. Though they are industrious, they have limited control over resources and economic activities. Therefore, there is a need for economic empowerment of tribal women in order to overcome inequality, discrimination and exploitation and to achieve their all-round development in the society.

Economic empowerment of marginalized groups involves not only the process of creation of socio-political space for these groups by the state and civil society but also it is a process of liberation from man-made bondage through sustained struggle and resistance. It also represents realization of hopes and dreams of marginalized groups for a social environment, free of inequalities which affect them politically, socially and economically. The issue of economic empowerment is also linked with aspects like equality, liberty and fraternity. Thus the concept of "Economic Empowerment" of tribal women is quite new and it has been contextualized and acquired a new connotation in recent years among social scientists, policy makers, and development activists.

There are a good number of studies, explaining the causes and consequences of women disempowerment. Such studies are related to a general enquiry of women exploitation and dependency. These studies have identified lack of education, absence of skills and training, lack of property rights, social isolation and segregation and male control over resources and reproductive rights as responsible for women disempowerment. These factors in different degrees are applicable to the disempowerment of different socio-economic groups of women who are socially heterogeneous groups like White women versus Black women, educated and uneducated women, high caste women and low caste women, Christian, Muslim and Hindu

women. These socially discriminated women face different degrees and various types of obstacles for empowerment (Becker 1956; Boserup 1970; Sen 2001). Further economically, women are classified into high income, middle income, and low income groups (like men).

The tribal women being economically poor and socially backward live at a low level of the quality of life. Thus the tribal women often face the problems of food insecurity, malnutrition, lack of access to health care services and education and the victim of domestic violence and rape. Unlike the well organised modern communities, the tribal communities and tribal women lag far behind in social networking. This is the nature and dimension of the socio-economic disempowerment problem among the tribal women in India. Sen has advocated a human capabilities approach to the development process. The human capabilities include social, economic, cultural and political capabilities of the human beings. Sen (2001) has identified the following seven types of gender inequalities in his public lecture delivered at Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University in 2001. They are:

- Mortality inequality
- Natality inequality
- Basic facilities inequality
- Special opportunity inequality
- Professional inequality
- Ownership inequality
- Household inequality

These seven types of gender inequalities explained by Amartya Kumar Sen do not apply to women in tribal society. These gender inequalities apply in varying degrees in rural and urban society which are generally modernising and industrialising. However, the mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facilities inequality is more pronounced between women of rural and urban societies vis-à-vis tribal societies. Sen has referred to gender inequalities of different kinds between men and women. However, to understand and measure the disempowerment magnitude of the tribal women and their overall position, that has to be compared with the women of urban and rural society and not with their poor male counterparts.

## II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In behavioural science, generally normative survey methods are adopted more frequently as compared to the experimental method. It is an organized attempt to analyze, interpret and report the present status of a social institution, group or area. A research design is highly essential and inevitable as a blueprint. In the present investigation the normative research method has been employed. Every research needs data. So, we want to collect the data by using certain techniques. An Analytical case study method has been applied for the present study.

### III. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Qualitative and Quantitative both research approaches are employed in order to get empirical data from the field. The researcher developed the questionnaire and finalized it before being distributed to the targeted group of respondents.

### IV. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted to estimate the status and development of Tribal Women Empowerment in Birbhum district, West Bengal. Therefore, all the tribal women in the district of Birbhum, West Bengal constitute the population of the study. The sample of the study was selected to satisfy the objectives and hypothesis of the study. Then by adopting a random method, rural areas and urban areas were selected. Sample of the study consisted of 150 households of tribal people and 500 tribal women and 500 tribal men were selected from 150 households as sample.

### V. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The following tools were used for collection of data:

#### *Questionnaire:*

It used to gather views pertaining to education, aspiration and socio-economic status of tribal people, selected as sample.

#### *Interview Schedule:*

It is used to collect primary and secondary data pertaining to education, aspiration and socio-economic status of tribal people from various experts, social workers, NGO's, Government officials and tribal associations.

## VI. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives were laid down for the study:

- 1) To compare the levels of education and socio-economic status of the tribal women of Birbhumi district.
- 2) To compare the socio-economic status between the tribal male and female tribal people of Birbhumi district.
- 3) To compare the levels of education of tribal women who belong to different sub-divisions of Birbhumi district.
- 4) To compare the levels of education and socio-economic status of tribal women belonging to rural and urban areas of Birbhumi district.

## VII. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The investigator of the present study framed the following hypotheses:

*H<sub>01</sub>*: There is no significant relationship between education and socio-economic status of the tribal women of Birbhumi district.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: There is no significant difference of socio-economic status between the tribal male and female tribal people of Birbhumi district.

*H<sub>03</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the levels of education of tribal women belonging to different locations.

*H<sub>04</sub>*: There is no significant difference in socio-economic status between rural and urban tribal women of Birbhumi district.

## VIII. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

*H<sub>01</sub>*: There is no significant relationship between education and socio-economic status of the tribal women of Birbhumi district.

Comparison in education and socio-economic status is an integral objective of the study, especially of the tribal people in the district of Birbhumi. These are the prime indicators of the development of our society, also in tribal society. The study was conducted to measure and estimate the effect of education and socio-economic status of the tribal male and female in the district of Birbhumi. To compare the significant association between education and socio-economic status among the tribal male-female respondents, the method of (Chi Square) test was adopted.

TABLE I  
SHOWING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
EDUCATION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS  
OF THE TRIBAL WOMEN OF BIRBHUMI DIST

Status-Economic Status		High	Average	Low	Total	Significance Level
	High	15	90	75	180	
Average	10	80	65	155		
Low	30	50	85	165		
Total	55	220	225	500		

Above table indicates an association between education level and socio-economic status. Result indicates that the value of  $\chi^2$  11.2 is significant at .05 level, meaning thereby, education level of tribal people differ significantly on the basis of their socio-economic status.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: There is no significant difference of socio-economic status between the tribal male and female tribal people of Birbhumi district.

The study was also conducted to estimate the effect of Socio-economic Status on Education and aspiration of the tribal male and female in the district of Birbhumi. To estimate the significant difference between average socio-economic status among the tribal male-female respondents, method of 't' test has been adopted

**TABLE II**  
SHOWING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF BIRBHUM DISTRICT

Group	N	Mean	SD	SED	t	Level of Significance
Male	500	86.41	56.42	4.24	3.28	0.01
Female	500	72.49	61.09			

The value of ‘t’ 3.28 is significant at 0.01 level, meaning thereby, male and female tribal people in the district of Birbhumi differ significantly about their socio-economic status. Results also indicate that the socio-economic status of male ST people was higher than the female tribal people. Therefore, the gain was in favour of male tribal people. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

*Ho3:* There is no significant difference in the levels of education of tribal women belongs to different locations.

The study was conducted to measure and estimate the effect of education at rural and urban tribal women in the district of Birbhumi. To compare the difference in opinion about education among rural and urban tribal women, method of test was adopted.

**Table III**  
SHOWING DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN TRIBAL WOMEN TOWARDS THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Level of Education						
Location	High	Average	Low	Total	t	Level of Significance
Rural	25	10	260	295	12.2	0.01

Urban	20	15	170	205		
Total	45	25	430	500		

Above table indicates a comparison between tribal people of rural and urban locations on the basis of their attitude score towards education. Result indicates that the value of  $\chi^2$  12.2 is significant at .01 level, meaning thereby, rural and urban tribal women differ significantly in their levels of education.

*Ho4:* There is no significant difference in socio-economic status between rural and urban tribal women of Birbhumi district.

The study was conducted to measure and estimate the effect of socio-economic status at rural and urban tribal people in the district of Birbhumi. To compare the difference in opinion about socio-economic status among rural and urban tribal people, method of test was adopted.

**TABLE IV**  
SHOWING DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN TRIBAL WOMEN TOWARDS SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-Economic Status						
Location	High	Average	Low	Total	t	Level of Significance
Rural	16	13	365	394	28.9	0.01
Urban	59	17	296	372		
Total	75	30	661	766		

Above table indicates a comparison between tribal people of rural and urban locations on the basis of their socio-economic status. Result indicates that the value of 28.9 is significant at .01 level, meaning thereby, socio economic status of rural and urban tribal women differ significantly. The gain is in favour of urban tribal women.

various departments and the awareness of the tribal women about government help.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Tribal population occupies a significant place in Indian society. Since independence a number of schemes have been introduced to improve the living conditions and emancipation of the tribals. Planned efforts have also been taken for tribal development. But the conditions and status of this population are yet to improve.

It is important to understand that tribal communities and specifically tribal women are vulnerable because they are poor, asset less and illiterate compared to the general population; often the distinct vulnerability arises from their inability to negotiate the cope with consequences of their forced integration with the mainstream economy, society, cultural and political system, from all of which they were historically protected by their relative isolation. After independence, due to the requirements of planned development like dams, mines, industries and roads they are forced into displacement, literal and metaphorical. Tribal women found themselves at an extreme disadvantage in the face of an influx of better-equipped outsiders into tribal areas. Their already fragile socio-economic livelihood base of the tribals women was devastating – ranging from loss of livelihoods, land alienation on a vast scale, to hereditary bondage.

It has pointed out several important problems faced by the tribal women. A few of them are the level of education, aspiration and socio-economic status (SES). As very few studies have been conducted on these issues, the present study has greater relevance on the following grounds.

One of major problems faced by the tribal women is education. The apathy and indifference shown by the formal institutional agencies have driven the tribal women to the backbenchers. The present study throws more light on the level of tribal education, its causes, level and magnitude.

The present study examines the socio-economic status of tribal women and the impact of their life and development. The indifference and unhelpful nature of officials of various departments connected to tribal development have not alleviated the sufferings of the tribal population. The present study also aims to explore the nature of disinterest, disinterest of the officials, types of coordination that exist among

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