

Tribal Women's Empowerment and Development of Tribal Societies in West Bengal

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Abstract: Handicrafts, rudimentary food preparation, and sales are frequently the primary occupations of tribal women in West Bengal. Women are also more likely to engage in homestead farming and micro-enterprises. In this study, we looked at how tribal communities in West Bengal have evolved and how this has affected the status of tribal women. This study's methodology is based on a descriptive survey. Only 1,146 women from different ethnic groups in West Bengal were included in the research. The current study's sample was selected using the stratified random sampling approach. Based on Lickart's five-point scale, the researchers have created their own questionnaire. The researchers in this study employed t-tests, means, and standard deviations for their data analysis. The study's findings shed light on how empowering tribal women contributes to the progress of tribal communities in West Bengal. Because they put in greater hours and are responsible for running the household and the family business, women play a more central role in tribal communities than in other types of society.

Key points: Tribal Women Empowerment, Micro-Enterprises Self Employee, Tribal Development.

Introduction:

The empowerment of tribal women in West Bengal has shown positive results, as the formerly backward rural communities are now sending their children to school and enjoying better living conditions. In many sections of tribal communities, both the government and NGOs work to provide training and development opportunities. There are a lot of factors, including geography, that influence women's empowerment in West Bengal. The term "women's empowerment" refers to a movement among indigenous communities whereby women gradually acquire more agency in domestic, societal, and national decision-making as well as in the management of material, human, and intellectual resources. In addition to taking care of the home and the family's financial and social needs, tribal women in Bengal make significant contributions to the economy and society at large. When it comes to managing the family's finances and doing household chores, tribal women play a key role. Most people would agree that indigenous women are more genuine, honest, and diligent workers than the average woman. Because women take their responsibilities seriously and do a good job, having the authority to make choices is crucial for their empowerment.

Tribal women empowerment and Social Development:

Efforts from outside our community are crucial for the empowerment of tribal women since they face several challenges such as poverty, exploitation, low-paying occupations, issues with livelihoods, and illiteracy. When it comes to empowering indigenous women, aid from the government, NGOs, and self-help organizations may be invaluable. A big issue in our community is the educated, economically and socially backward tribal people, who are known as advisers. When women have economic independence or job, they are able to make their own decisions, and their families and communities appreciate them for it.

Women in tribal societies are an economic value to both their own and our societies, and they play an important part in the religious and social aspects of tribal life. In many areas of life, including economic empowerment, health and hygiene, education, and employment, they continue to lag behind. Urban, rural, and semi-urban societies are all undergoing some kind of industrialization and modernization, although to different extents, and gender inequality is one of them. The most pressing issue facing our society is gender inequity. The contributions of tribal women are paramount in tribal societies; they form the backbone of the family's economy and administration, and they put in more hours than women from other social groups.

Rationale of the Study:

Women are typically marginalized by deeply ingrained patriarchal standards in tribal cultures. The best way to combat these societal conventions and advance gender equality is to study women's empowerment programmes. Raising the political profile and leadership potential of indigenous women is a common strategy for empowering them. To ensure inclusive and effective governance, it is essential to understand the effects of women's engagement in decision-making processes within tribal government systems. Policies and initiatives targeted at tribal development may be shaped by research in this field. In order to provide more contextually appropriate initiatives, officials should first determine what empowers indigenous women and then learn about the challenges they confront. Researching the advancement and empowerment of tribal women in West Bengal is important because it delves into the multifaceted problems faced by these distinct and frequently oppressed groups, including but not limited to: economic disparity, cultural preservation, political engagement, health, education, and human rights. More equitable and long-lasting development results may be achieved with the help of the ideas and information presented here.

Objectives:

1. To study the empowerment of women and relations on development of tribal societies in West Bengal.
2. To compare the activities towards tribal societies among certain demographic groups or status.

Method: Survey method has been used for the current study.

Sample

This research included 1146 tribal women from different areas in West Bengal as its sample. The current study's sample was selected using the stratified random sampling approach.

Data Collection: Required data have been collected from the selected samples by applying a structured questionnaire based on their age, education, work type, marital status etc.

Techniques: Collected data were analyzed by applying the percentage system and Mean, SD.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Table-1: Showing the demographic variables of the selected samples

<i>Demographic variables</i>	<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Total (n)</i>	<i>%</i>
Work Type	Govt. Job	212	83.29
	NGO	381	33.25
	Self Help Group	553	18.50
Age	17-20	316	27.60
	21-24	430	37.45
	25-28	400	34.90
Location	Rural	290	25.50
	Urban	410	35.90
	Semi Urban	446	38.12
Family Structure	Nuclear	498	43.52
	Joint	518	45.15

	Broken	130	11.34
Marital Status	Married	513	50.00
	Unmarried	513	50.00
Qualification	Secondary	544	38.96
	H.S	292	25.40
	U.G	146	12.66
	P.G & Higher	164	14.31

This table indicates the distribution of respondents across different types of work. It shows that a significant majority of respondents are engaged in government jobs, followed by NGO and Self Help Group employment. The largest group falls within the 21-24 years range, followed closely by 25-28 years, with the 17-20 years group being the smallest. Semi Urban areas have the highest representation, followed by Urban and then Rural areas. This breakdown shows the educational qualifications of the respondents, with Secondary education being the most common, followed by Higher Secondary, Undergraduate, and Postgraduate or higher qualifications.

Table-2: Showing work types of tribal women and social activity

<i>Work Type</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Govt. Job	212	34649	164.98	16.507	1.138			P<0.01
NGO	381	62804	164.40	14.291	.730	2/1143	4.642	P>0.05
Self-help Group	553	89703	161.96	14.494	.615			.010

Employees in government jobs have a mean score of 164.98, with a significant difference observed compared to other groups (likely NGO and Self-help Group) at a confidence level of 99%. Employees in NGOs have a mean score of 164.40. The t-test result of 4.642 with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Government Job). Members of Self-help Groups have a mean score of 161.96. The significance level of p = 0.010 indicates a statistically significant difference in scores compared to other groups, though the exact reference group isn't specified. It is observed that government job and NGO work possess more positive activity about social work than self help groups.

Table-3: showing socially Involvement on their age.

<i>Age</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
17-20	316	52085	164.31	15.187	.852			.006
21-24	430	69290	161.50	14.858	.716	2/1143	5.22	P>0.05
25-28	400	65808	164.51	14.450	.722			P<0.01

Individuals aged 17-20 years have a mean score of 164.31, which is statistically significant compared to other age groups (21-24 years and 25-28 years). Individuals aged 21-24 years have a mean score of 161.50. The t-test result of 5.22 with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Age group 17-20). Individuals aged 25-28 years have a mean score of 164.51, which is statistically significant compared to other age groups (17-20 years and 21-24 years). It is found that tribal women in the age group of 25 to 28 yrs possess more positive activity about social purpose than the students in the age group of 17 to 20yrs and 21 st to 24 yrs.

Table-4: Showing tribal womens social activity on the basis of their marital status.

<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Married	573	93888	163.55	15.491	.646	1144	.532	.034
Unmarried	573	93294	163.13	14.219	.595			P<0.05

Married individuals have a mean score of 163.55, which is statistically significant compared to unmarried individuals at a significance level of 0.05. This suggests there is a measurable difference in scores between married and unmarried individuals. Unmarried individuals have a mean score of 163.13. The significance level of $p < 0.05$ indicates a statistically significant difference in scores compared to married individuals. It is also found that married tribal women are possess more positive activity than unmarried women for positive social activity.

Table-5: Showing tribal womens activity on the basis of their location.

<i>Location</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Rural	290	48280	165.33	14.393	.892			P<0.01
Urban	410	66860	163.89	15.285	.758	2/1143	6.196	P>0.05
Semi Urban	446	72050	161.55	14.603	.692			.002

Individuals from Rural areas have a mean score of 165.33, which is statistically significant compared to other location groups (Urban and Semi Urban) at a significance level of 0.01. This suggests that there is a notable difference in scores between rural respondents and others. Individuals from Urban areas have a mean score of 163.89. The t-test result of 6.196 with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Rural). Individuals from Semi Urban areas have a mean score of 161.55, which is statistically significant compared to other location groups (Rural and Urban) at a significance level of 0.01. When activity after employment of tribal women in Rural, Urban and Semi-Urban, that table shows that Rural Tribal women possess more positive social activity than Urban and Semi-urban tribal women.

Table-6: Table for social activity of tribal women on basis of their family types.

<i>Family structure</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Nuclear	498	81530	163.36	14.956	.670	2/1143	.200	p>.05
Joint	518	84510	163.48	14.946	.657			.819
broken	130	21132	162.56	14.263	1.251			p>.01

This table shows that women coming from the joint family possess more social activity than women from nuclear and broken family. Individuals from Nuclear families have a mean score of 163.36. The F-test result of 0.200 with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Joint or Broken families). Individuals from Joint families have a mean score of 163.48. The significance level ($p > 0.05$) suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Nuclear or Broken families). Individuals from Broken families have a mean score of 162.56. The p-value greater than 0.01 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly Nuclear or Joint families).

Table-7: Table for tribal womens activities on basis of their educational qualification.

<i>Qualification</i>	<i>Total no. sample</i>	<i>Total score</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>F-test</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Secondary	544	88850	162.72	14.490	.620			.560
H.S	292	47728	164.02	14.838	.870	3/1142	.688	p>.05
U.G	146	23820	164.29	16.315	1.351			
P.G & Higher	164	26780	163.32	14.846	1.158			p>.01

This table shows that the U.G qualification tribal women possess more score on social development than Secondary, H.S and M.A & higher educated tribal women. Individuals with Secondary education have a mean score of 162.72. The lack of significance ($p > 0.05$) suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly other education levels). Individuals with Higher Secondary education have a mean score of 164.02. The F-test result of 0.688 with a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly other education levels). Individuals with Undergraduate education have a mean score of 164.29. Without a specific p-value provided, but considering the pattern, there appears to be no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly other education levels). Individuals with Postgraduate and higher education have a mean score of 163.32. The p-value greater than 0.01 suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in scores compared to the reference group (possibly other education levels).

Government Programmes and Policies for Tribal Development: The socio-economic and cultural requirements of tribal populations are often the focus of government programmes and policies for tribal development in India, including states like West Bengal. Programmes and policies of this kind often include the following features and examples:

Constitutional Provisions: The Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Indian Constitution guarantee the rights of indigenous peoples and preserve their cultural traditions. In order to protect tribal interests, it also allows for the establishment of Tribal Advisory Councils.

Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP): Budgetary allocations for tribal development are mandated under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, currently known as the Scheduled Tribes Component (STC), and the Tribal Sub-Plan. These allocations are proportional to the population of the tribes. That way, development efforts may be laser-focused on meeting the specific requirements of each tribe.

Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDP): Infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic empowerment are all parts of these all-encompassing programmes designed to help indigenous communities thrive.

Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub-Schemes: By filling up the gaps in essential services and facilities, this programme gives governments more money to improve infrastructure and living conditions in tribal communities.

Vanbandhu Kalyan Yojana: Education, health, livelihood, and skill development are just a few of the topics that will be a part of this Ministry of Tribal Affairs-launched plan to completely revitalise tribal territories.

Educational Initiatives: A number of scholarship programmes, including those for tribal students' pre- and post-matriculation years, funding for the construction of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), and grants to improve educational facilities in tribal communities.

Healthcare Initiatives: The National Health Mission (NHM) incorporates the former National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), which aimed to increase access to healthcare in tribal communities by establishing health sub-centers, mobile health units, and the promotion of indigenous healthcare practices.

Livelihood and Employment Programs: Improved possibilities for livelihoods are the goal of programmes such as the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), which is now known as the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), which also works with self-help organizations, microfinance, and skill development.

Forest Rights Act (FRA): The Forest Rights Act, 2006, recognizes the rights of tribal communities over forest lands and resources, aiming to empower them economically and socially.

Cultural Preservation and Heritage Programs: Actions taken by indigenous communities to maintain and celebrate their unique cultural identity, including the creation of cultural centers, the promotion of traditional arts and crafts, and the hosting of annual festivals.

Improved living conditions, more equitable development, and protection of tribal rights and identities are all goals of these government programmes and initiatives. To guarantee the success and longevity of these endeavours, it is essential to execute them well, include the community, and evaluate them periodically.

Conclusion:

Because it increases the amount and quality of human resources available for growth, empowering tribal women is essential for a society's very development. When it comes to tribal women's empowerment, it all comes down to their terribleness. Increasing access to education, self-help organizations, legal protections, and women's control over forest products are all ways that indigenous women are becoming empowered. In addition to creating socio-economic space, empowering indigenous women entails freeing themselves from man-made bonds via persistent opposition and struggle. Concerns of economic empowerment are related to issues of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

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