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The socio-economic dynamics and educational access of tribal women in Bokaro, Jharkhand: An analytical exploration

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Abstract

This study explores the role of education in empowering tribal women in Bokaro District, Jharkhand. Tribal women are central to the socio-economic and cultural fabric of their communities, yet they face persistent barriers such as poverty, cultural constraints, and limited access to education. These challenges restrict their opportunities for economic independence and social mobility. Education is a transformative tool that can break these barriers, fostering empowerment by improving literacy, building confidence, and enabling access to employment. This research focuses on the foundational role of primary-level education in shaping the lives of tribal women, examining its impact on their ability to participate in decision-making, assert their rights, and contribute to household and community development. By addressing the interplay between education, culture, and empowerment, the study highlights key challenges and opportunities for tribal women in Bokaro District. It aims to provide actionable insights into policy measures and strategies to enhance their educational access and socio-economic inclusion, contributing to the broader goal of gender equality and sustainable tribal development.

The study uses primary data of Bokaro District of Jharkhand which has been collected in 2023. With the help of this study, an attempt has been made to explore various aspects of tribal women's empowerment in selected villages of the Chas block in Bokaro District, Jharkhand. The study has focussed on the socio-economic conditions, education, health, and employment opportunities of tribal women.

Keywords: Tribal, empowerment, gender equality, cultural barriers

Introduction

Tribal women in Jharkhand, especially in Bokaro, face a mix of long-standing issues and emerging opportunities. Women are integral to the social and economic life of tribal people, a sizable section of Jharkhand's population. Historically, tribal women have had limited access to formal education and work due to socio-economic constraints. Many tribal women face obstacles such as poverty, early marriage, cultural norms, and lack of infrastructure. Opportunities are restricted to unskilled labour and informal sectors due to lack of skill development and market access. Deep-rooted traditions and patriarchal structures limit women's participation in decision-making. Poor connectivity, lack of transportation, and inadequate access to services hinder development.

In light of this, the present paper attempts to assess how tribal women's employment affects their educational outcomes. For this, the study uses primary data of Bokaro District of Jharkhand which has been collected in 2023. The paper is divided into four sections. Section-I highlights the conceptual underpinnings related to tribal women education and employment. Section-II focusses on the methodology and data collection related to the study. Section-III describes the detailed analysis and findings of the present work. And lastly, section-IV suggests some policy measures to foster the educational achievement and potential.

In this write-up, an attempt has been made to explore various aspects of tribal women's empowerment in selected villages of the Chas block in Bokaro District, Jharkhand. The study has focussed on the socio-economic conditions, education, health, and employment opportunities of tribal women.

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Section-1: Access to Education and Challenges of Tribal Women: Conceptual Issues

Education is a vital instrument for empowerment, especially for tribal women who frequently experience many forms of marginalization because of their socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity. The transformative function of education in lowering inequality and facilitating socioeconomic mobility is emphasized by scholars like Dreze and Sen (2013) ^[2]. However, tribal women encounter particular institutional and cultural obstacles that prevent them from receiving high-quality education.

Economic hardships are a significant impediment for tribal women in accessing education. Studies by Shah et al. (2006) ^[6] highlight the prevalence of poverty in tribal communities, which forces families to prioritize survival over education. Additionally, infrastructural inadequacies, such as the absence of schools in remote tribal areas, further exacerbate the problem.

Rani, G.S., Rajani, N., & Neeraja, P. (2011) ^[5] studied how education can empower women, particularly in tribal areas. Their research shows that education helps women become more self-reliant, develop leadership skills, and gain confidence. Using data from government reports, the study highlights that educated women are more likely to take leadership roles and contribute to community development. However, the authors note a lack of research on how education affects women's long-term economic growth. They emphasize the need for more detailed studies to understand how education can bring lasting change not only to individuals but also to the wider tribal society.

Sindhi (2012) ^[7] looked at how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have helped empower tribal women in Gujarat through skill development programs. The study found that these programs have boosted women's confidence, financial independence, and involvement in their communities. Field reports show that NGOs have been successful in making policies work for these women. However, the study also points out challenges, such as the lack of long-term data to measure the lasting effects of these programs. Sindhi suggests that regular evaluation and monitoring are needed to make sure these efforts remain effective over time.

Bhattacharya & Murmu (2019) ^[1] researched the dual roles of tribal women in their communities. They found that tribal women significantly contribute to agriculture and manage households, playing an essential role in subsistence economies. However, their work is often unacknowledged, and they lack access to resources. The authors suggest that national-level studies are needed to highlight the economic value of their contributions.

Musavi and Gupta (2020) ^[4] studied the social exclusion of marginalized women, especially those in tribal communities. They explored the various barriers these women face, including legal, social, and institutional challenges that limit their access to justice and opportunities. The study stresses the need for stronger enforcement of legal protections and better policies to address these challenges. The authors recommend reviewing and updating laws to ensure tribal

women receive adequate support to overcome social barriers.

Kumari, S. (2018) ^[8] investigated the challenges tribal children face in accessing education. The study points out issues such as poor school infrastructure, a shortage of teachers, and a lack of resources, which lead to low enrolment rates and poor learning outcomes. Kumari stresses the need for better investments in schools and teacher training to improve education in tribal areas. She suggests that better education access could help uplift tribal communities socially and economically.

To improve access to education for tribal women, scholars advocate for localized and inclusive educational models. This includes developing culturally relevant curricula, training teachers to be sensitive to tribal contexts, and establishing residential schools in remote areas (Kundu, 2018) ^[3]. Additionally, enhancing community engagement and addressing economic barriers through targeted interventions can significantly improve outcomes.

Section II: Methodology

The present study is based on primary data which has been collected in the year 2023 from Bokaro District of Jharkhand. Bokaro district, located in the state of Jharkhand, India, is administratively divided into several subdivisions, blocks, and villages. The district comprises two subdivisions: Chas and Bermo. These subdivisions are further divided into a total of nine community development blocks, each serving as a local administrative unit. These blocks are Chas, Chandankiyari, Bermo, Chandrapura, Gomia, Jaridih, Kasmar, Peterwar and Nawadih.

Out of the nine blocks, Chas block has been randomly chosen for survey. In the second round, two villages have been chosen randomly from the Chas block namely, Maheshpur and Madhurdih. The respondents undertaken for the study were the tribal women living in these villages. A total of 340 samples have been taken from the two villages based in proportion of tribal population i.e., 208 samples from Maheshpur village and 132 samples from Madhurdih village. Relevant secondary data has been collected from academic books, research papers of different scholars, Census of India, 2011, Human development reports and the reports provided by Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India, Statistical profile of Scheduled Tribe, 2013 etc.

Based on the demographic statistics, the educational status of tribal women as been estimated for both Madhurdih and Maheshpur villages (Chas block, Bokaro District) in Jharkhand. These statistics has been used to analyse the problems associated with tribal women's educational achievement.

Section III: Tabulation and Analysis

The table-1 given below shows a broad representation across different age categories, from below 20 years to 45 years and above. The largest proportion of respondents falls in the age group of 29–36 years, contributing 28.53% of the total, followed by 21–28 years and 45 years and above, each accounting for 23.82%.

Table 1: Age-wise Distribution of Tribal Women (Respondent)

Age	Maheshpur Village		Madhurdi Village		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	6	2.88	2	1.52	8	2.35
21-28	40	19.23	41	31.06	81	23.82
29-36	52	25.00	45	34.09	97	28.53
37-44	48	23.08	25	18.94	73	21.47
45 and above	62	29.81	19	14.39	81	23.82
Total	208	100.00	132	100.00	340	100.00

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

In Maheshpur village, the majority of respondents belong to the age group of 45 years and above (29.81%), indicating a higher proportion of older women in this village compared to younger age groups. The second largest age group is 29–36 years (25.00%), followed by 37–44 years (23.08%) and 21–28 years (19.23%). Only a small percentage (2.88%) of respondents are below 20 years of age, suggesting lower participation of younger women in the survey or potentially fewer younger women in the village. On the other hand, in Madhurdi, the largest age group is 29–36 years (34.09%), followed by 21–28 years (31.06%), reflecting a relatively younger demographic compared to Maheshpur. The 37–44 years (18.94%) and 45 years and above (14.39%) groups are smaller in proportion, indicating fewer older women in the

survey sample from this village. Similar to Maheshpur, the participation of women below 20 years is minimal, with only 1.52% of respondents in this category.

Table-2 reveals that the married women constitute the majority (69.71%) of respondents, reflecting the prevalence of marriage as a key social institution among tribal communities. Single women form the second-largest group (25.00%), indicating a significant proportion of unmarried women, potentially younger individuals or those yet to enter the institution of marriage. The proportions of widowed (2.94%), divorced (2.06%), and separated (0.29%) women are relatively small, collectively accounting for just over 5% of the total sample.

Table 2: Marital Status of Tribal Women

Marital Status	Maheshpur Village		Madhurdi Village		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Divorced	5	2.40	2	1.52	7	2.06
Married	162	77.88	75	56.82	237	69.71
Single	37	17.79	48	36.36	85	25.00
Widow	4	1.92	6	4.55	10	2.94
Separated	0	0.00	1	0.76	1	0.29
Total	208	100	132	100	340	100

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

In Maheshpur village, married women dominate the sample, comprising 77.88% of respondents. This indicates a higher prevalence of marriage in Maheshpur compared to Madhurdi. This may reflect cultural differences, economic conditions, or levels of education. Single women account for 17.79%, much lower than in Madhurdi, suggesting that younger or unmarried women are less represented in this village. The proportions of divorced (2.40%) and widowed (1.92%) women are small, with no cases of separation reported in Maheshpur. Whereas, in Madhurdi, the proportion of married women (56.82%) is significantly lower than in Maheshpur, indicating potential differences in marital practices, demographic structures, or life circumstances. Single women make up a much larger share (36.36%) compared to Maheshpur, suggesting a relatively younger population in this village. The percentage of widowed women (4.55%) is higher than in Maheshpur, as is the proportion of divorced women (1.52%).

Table-3 depicts a significant proportion of tribal women across both villages are either illiterate (25.21%) or have attained only primary-level education (39.97%), indicating limited educational progress among the majority of respondents. Education level beyond primary school show a marked decline, with secondary education (20.95%), matriculation (8.23%), and intermediate (5.65%) collectively accounting for only 34.83% of the total respondents.

Table-3: Education Level of Tribal Women (in %)

Education Level	Maheshpur Village	Madhurdi Village	Total
Illiterate	29.20	21.22	25.21
Primary	38.63	41.30	39.97
Secondary	22.41	19.49	20.95
Matriculation	6.45	10.01	8.23
Intermediate	3.31	7.98	5.65

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

Maheshpur has a higher percentage of illiterate women (29.20%) compared to Madhurdi, suggesting greater challenges in accessing or completing formal education. The largest group in Maheshpur (38.63%) has attained primary education, reflecting some progress in foundational literacy and schooling. The proportion of women with secondary education (22.41%) is higher than those with matriculation (6.45%) or intermediate (3.31%) qualifications, showing a significant drop-off after secondary school. The percentage of women with intermediate qualifications is the lowest (3.31%), indicating minimal advancement to higher secondary education. The percentage of illiterate women in Madhurdi (21.22%) is notably lower than in Maheshpur, suggesting relatively better educational access or outcomes in this village. The picture of Madhurdi shows a highest proportion of women with primary education (41.30%), slightly surpassing Maheshpur. The percentage of women with secondary education (19.49%) is slightly lower than

Maheshpur, but the proportion with matriculation (10.01%) and intermediate (7.98%) qualifications is significantly higher, indicating better retention in higher education levels. The percentage of women with intermediate qualifications in Madhurdih (7.98%) is more than double that of Maheshpur.

Table-4 given below shows the majority of tribal women are daily wage earners (50.88%), reflecting the prevalence of low-income and insecure employment among the

respondents. Farming (22.35%) is the second most common occupation, followed by skilled labor (12.06%). A small proportion of respondents are engaged in service (3.53%), business (2.94%), shopkeeping (3.24%), and professional work (1.47%), indicating limited access to formal or entrepreneurial job opportunities. Unemployment (3.53%) is also reported, showing a need for expanded job opportunities for tribal women.

Table 4: Occupational Status of Tribal Women (in %)

Occupation	Maheshpur Village		Madhurdih Village		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Daily Wage Earner	95	45.67	78	59.09	173	50.88
Farmer	44	21.15	32	24.24	76	22.35
Skilled Labour	32	15.38	9	6.82	41	12.06
Service	9	4.33	3	2.27	12	3.53
Business	8	3.85	2	1.52	10	2.94
Shopkeeper	7	3.37	4	3.03	11	3.24
Professional	4	1.92	1	0.76	5	1.47
Unemployed	9	4.33	3	2.27	12	3.53
Total	208	100.00	132	100.00	340	100.00

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

Daily wage labor is more prevalent in Madhurdih (59.09%) than in Maheshpur (45.67%), indicating higher economic vulnerability in Madhurdih. Maheshpur has more women engaged in skilled labor (15.38%) than Madhurdih (6.82%), suggesting better access to skill development or local opportunities in Maheshpur. Both villages have minimal representation in professional roles or entrepreneurial activities (service, business, shopkeeping), indicating significant barriers to entry into formal or high-skill occupations. Unemployment is slightly higher in Maheshpur

(4.33%) than in Madhurdih (2.27%), pointing to disparities in access to job opportunities.

The overall family structure (table-5) depicts a majority of tribal women respondents live in joint families (57.94%), reflecting the traditional prevalence of extended family systems among tribal communities. However, nuclear families (42.06%) also represent a significant proportion, suggesting an increasing trend toward smaller, independent family units.

Table 5: Type of Family of Tribal Women (in %)

Type of Family	Maheshpur Village		Madhurdih Village		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Joint	138	66.35	59	44.70	197	57.94
Nuclear	70	33.65	73	55.30	143	42.06
Total	208	100.00	132	100.00	340	100.00

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

Joint families are more common in Maheshpur (66.35%) than in Madhurdih (44.70%), reflecting stronger adherence to traditional family structures in Maheshpur. Nuclear families are more prevalent in Madhurdih (55.30%) compared to Maheshpur (33.65%), suggesting that socio-economic changes, such as migration, education, or employment opportunities, may be influencing family structures in Madhurdih. The predominance of joint families in Maheshpur suggests a more traditional societal framework, possibly due to lower urbanization or migration rates. Conversely, the higher prevalence of nuclear families

in Madhurdih may be linked to economic factors such as mobility, job-related migration, or aspirations for independence.

Table-6 highlights that male heads of households dominate overwhelmingly, accounting for 93.82% of the total respondents, indicating a strong patriarchal system where men are predominantly considered the household heads. Female household heads represent only 6.18% of the total, reflecting limited participation of women in leadership roles within families.

Table 6: Gender-Wise Head of the Household (in %)

Household Head	Maheshpur Village		Madhurdih Village		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	195	93.75	124	93.94	319	93.82
Female	13	6.25	8	6.06	21	6.18
Total	208	100	132	100.00	340	100.00

Source: Computed by author from Primary Survey

Both villages exhibit similar patterns, with male-headed households dominating and female-headed households being a small minority. The minor variation between Maheshpur (6.25% female) and Madhurdih (6.06% female) suggests that traditional norms around gender roles are consistent across the two villages. The low percentage of female household heads could be attributed to women's economic dependence, lack of education, or limited opportunities for income generation.

Findings

- The dominance of older women in Maheshpur may reflect demographic variations, such as out-migration of younger populations for education or work opportunities. The higher percentage of younger women (21–36 years) in Madhurdih suggests that this village might have better retention of younger populations or a higher fertility rate.
- The higher proportion of married women in Maheshpur and single women in Madhurdih suggests potential cultural differences or socio-economic factors influencing marital decisions. The presence of widowed, divorced, and separated women, though small in proportion, highlights the need for targeted interventions to support these vulnerable groups, addressing economic, social, and emotional challenges.
- Maheshpur lags behind Madhurdih in educational attainment, particularly at higher levels, indicating possible disparities in infrastructure, awareness, or socio-economic conditions. The high illiteracy rates, particularly in Maheshpur, emphasize the need for targeted literacy programs and community awareness campaigns to encourage educational participation among tribal women.
- The high proportion of daily wage earners in both villages underscores the economic precarity faced by tribal women, who predominantly rely on unstable and low-income jobs. The low representation in service, business, shopkeeping, and professional roles highlights the need for policies that promote skill training, education, and access to formal job markets.
- Joint families often provide stronger social and economic support systems, which may benefit women in Maheshpur. However, nuclear families, which are more common in Madhurdih, may face challenges related to childcare, financial stability, and social isolation.
- The high proportion of male-headed households reflects entrenched patriarchal norms, where decision-making and leadership roles within families are primarily assigned to men. The low percentage of female household heads could be attributed to women's economic dependence, lack of education, or limited opportunities for income generation.

Section IV: Policy Implications

The significant demographic differences between the two villages indicate differing socio-economic dynamics, cultural norms, or migration patterns. Understanding these differences is critical for designing interventions aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal women in these villages. Tailored policy measures and community programs are essential to address the diverse needs of tribal women based on their marital status and village-specific

contexts. Meaningful access to secondary and higher education, infrastructure improvements, and community engagement, are crucial for improving educational outcomes for tribal women in both villages. Addressing the disparities through targeted interventions, including education, skill development, and support for entrepreneurship, is crucial for improving the socio-economic conditions of tribal women in both villages. The analysis underscores a strong patriarchal structure in both villages, with an overwhelming majority of households headed by males. The minimal presence of female-headed households highlights the socio-cultural and economic barriers faced by tribal women. Efforts to promote gender equity and support for women's leadership within families are crucial for achieving broader socio-economic development in these communities.

Conclusion

To sum up, a variety of approaches are needed to improve the socioeconomic status of tribal women in Bokaro District, such as increased educational opportunities, skill-building courses, economic empowerment projects, and a determined attempt to overthrow patriarchal structures. Tribal women's empowerment is crucial for both their own welfare and the general advancement of their communities. Tribal women may only attain economic independence, social equality, and a higher standard of living by tackling these systemic obstacles and advancing gender parity. Significant strides can be made in the direction of tribal women's empowerment in the area by emphasizing their educational and professional advancement as well as their support in leadership positions within the family and community.

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