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Research Article

Barriers to Empowerment: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Oraon Scheduled Tribal Women in Rural Jharkhand

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Abstract

For the development of a more inclusive framework in the country, the empowerment of women in tribal communities remains a critical challenge. The Oraon is among the largest tribal groups in Jharkhand. The contributions of Oraon women to the household economies, farming, and community are invaluable, and yet, they suffer from multiple forms of barriers without the social and economic support needed in the areas of education and health, employment, and decision-making. This paper attempts to understand the socio-economic barriers faced by tribal Oraon women in rural Jharkhand, and to identify and understand the structural and cultural dimensions explaining the absence of any meaningful socio-economic development. The focus of the study is to explore the barriers of inadequate education, the absence of economic engagement, poor health, prevailing social norms, and their impact on the overall reduction of women's autonomy and quality of life.

The study employs a descriptive research design and utilises both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data for the study were obtained using fully structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with the selected members of the Oraon women's community of rural villages, and secondary data were obtained from government documents, census data, and various publications. The findings were interpreted with the use of comparative and percentage analysis. The study identifies un/under education, lack of livelihood opportunities, restricted access to healthcare, and deep-rooted patriarchy as the main factors describing the disempowerment of Oraon women. The study indicates that, while there have been some improvements in the reach of government welfare schemes, there still remain deficiencies in information and implementation. The specific gaps highlight the need for more inclusive policies in education, training, and finance, and for a greater focus on the sustainability of disempowerment of women policies for tribes.

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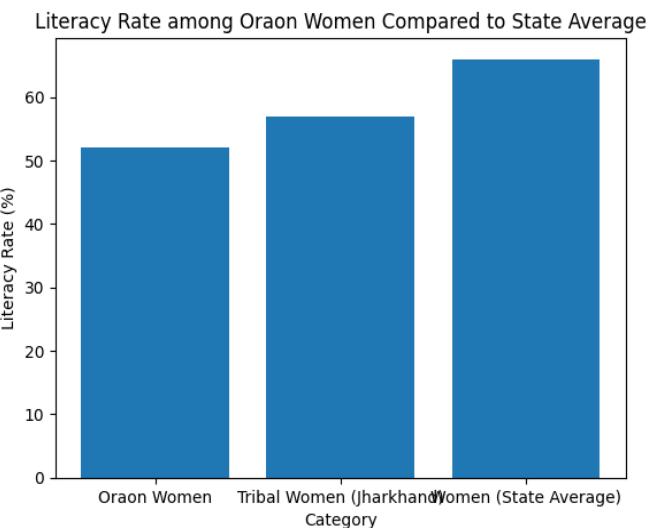
1. INTRODUCTION

There are many tribals or Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India, a country of diverse cultures, who are an integral part of it. Tribals have always lived close to and depended on the forests and natural resources. They practice agriculture in combination with other indigenous methods, along with the preservation of languages, traditions, and social structures. However, modernisation, industrialisation, and alienation of land have continuously disrupted these processes and pushed many tribes into socio economic vulnerability. From these women, tribal women fill an enigma. They are involved in all economic activities of economics. They are part of all streams of work, be it agriculture, collection of forest produce, wage labour or the management of the household; they work. They are economically active, yet, along with other forms of social marginalisation, they are victims of poverty, poor education, health, and above all, the patriarchal system. They are more illiterate, have more school dropouts, and have less access to jobs than non tribal women. Even though the Constitution has provisions to promote equality, inequities in almost all spheres, such as food, health of mothers, political power, and economic power, continue. Hence, it is important to know the tribal women to help formulate appropriate development interventions.

Jharkhand was created in 2000 and is known for the large number of tribals and natural resources it has. However, the state has a lot of underdevelopments; the major areas are rural and tribal. Mining and industrial projects have caused massive displacement, and then underdeveloped roads and infrastructure create a deeper stagnation of the problem. Unemployment, poverty, and a lack of education are damming the region, and deepening the issue are the large gaps in education caused by gender. Barriers like the distance of schools, social constructs focused on keeping women at home, and poverty lead to a lack of tribal women in the education system. Unpaid care work creates large barriers to accessing healthcare.

Women's empowerment involves a complex set of processes that includes gaining control over diverse resources, developing agency, and participating in the economic, social, and political spheres. Women's economic empowerment includes the ability to gain income, exercise property rights, and access financial services. Social empowerment includes education, health, mobility, and the absence of discrimination. Political empowerment addresses participation in governance and decision-making at the family and community levels. For tribal women, all forms of empowerment must include the dimensions of cultural identity and collective rights. Development initiatives that overlook indigenous knowledge systems are bound to be ineffective; therefore, empowerment must encapsulate the dual pillars of integration into mainstream economies and the fortification of community systems.

Chart 1: Literacy Rate Comparison



The chart compares literacy rates among Oraon women, tribal women, and women in Jharkhand as a whole, underscoring an educational deficit impacting social and economic prospects.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Work on the empowerment of tribal women intersects with the most important contours of inclusive development, equality of the sexes and social justice. Tribal women, while being pivotal in the sustenance of household economies and the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems, suffer marginalisation of various forms – be it economic, social, institutional or even geographic. Multiple aspects of empowerment, such as education, health, economic self-sufficiency and leadership and political participation are documented in substantive literature. In this review, literature is analysed thematically, in order to set the field academically and to identify gaps in the scholarship, especially with regard to the scant literature focusing on the community of Oraon women in rural Jharkhand.

Research on the Empowerment of Tribal Women

At the beginning of the research on tribal women's empowerment, the focus was primarily on the structural disadvantages of the women, including poverty, illiteracy, and being socially excluded. These have historically hindered women's access to constitutional provisions and development initiatives, which have resulted in a lack of progress in achieving substantive equality (Sindhi, 2012). Subsequently, the discourse shifted towards considering empowerment as a process that enhances women's agency and participation in the community. Cooperative-based businesses, in particular, allow tribal women in Jharkhand to obtain some degree of financial independence and develop entrepreneurial skills, although the leadership roles are often taken by the more educated women (Bhaskar & Kaushik, 2022). Access to microfinance and self-help groups (SHGs) promotes a shift from constraint to capability with regard to economic outcomes (Verma & Sharma, 2024). SHGs are associated with an elevation in

psychological, economic, and decision-making empowerment over oneself and the household. These research responses demonstrate that the effects of participatory powers vary by community. Where participatory power exists, the degree of research localisation appears to be linked to the level of empowerment.

Barriers to Education and Employment

Education is highly influential for the tribal women's empowerment, and the enduring gaps of Scheduled Tribe women's literacy in Jharkhand can be attributed to the triple challenges of poverty, child marriage, and socio-cultural norms that assign women to the home Rani and Kumar 2023. While the ability to access and utilize the internet is a critical component of the ability to use technology, digital platforms can improve access to employment and income opportunities, enhance socio-economic status, and, in the case of tribal women, a lack of digital skills, poor infrastructure, and limited access to digital tools may hinder the use of such platforms Mukherjee and Rakesh 2025.

Research shows that when livelihoods are supported through structured institutional backing, significant economic improvement can be made. For example, participation in the lac value chain has provided rural tribal women market access, increased income, and enhanced financial stability. This case illustrates the impact that focused development initiatives can have (Panda, 2017).

Land Ownership and Economic Dependency

The acquisition of productive means is an accepted component of economic empowerment. Women's attainment of secure land tenure, which strengthens household negotiation, reinforces livelihoods, and enhances community participation in decision-making (Raj, 2024). Despite these changes in policies, obstacles are still presented on the path to achieving women's full rights to land. The persistent, unaddressed, administrative refusal to streamline the processes, the land rights ignorance and direct discrimination on the division of inheritance rights sustain economic dependence.

The Health and Nutritional Challenges

A fundamental pillar of rural empowerment is, of course, taken for granted, and is the health of the population. A sociological study of women of the Oraon tribal group illustrates that rural areas continue to face the consequences of insufficient food and the neglect of maternal health care, which deteriorates women's own health (Ram, 2025). Zonal isolation compounds the danger of pejorative health affecting all. Ill health begets an array of challenges, such as low productivity, immobility, and unparticipation in education and income-generating activities. The repercussions of these challenges are the entrenchment of poverty across generations, thus the need for integrated development approaches that prioritise health.

Cultural Traditions and Gender Roles

Cultural values are a major aspect of how gender relations are structured in tribal societies. Some groups have, for a time,

maintained a more egalitarian division of labour. However, socio-economic changes have resulted in a more pronounced shift toward the entrenchment of patriarchy in some situations. The role of women in public and political life may therefore be constricted by social norms. Cultural identity also has a positive side. Indigenous women can often rely on the social solidarity that collective customs create to effect changes in a socially accepted manner. The main difficulty is how to balance the promotion of gender equality with maintaining the indigenous cultural values.

Government Policies and Welfare Programs

The State has made a significant contribution to the empowerment of tribal women, especially in the area of access to livelihoods and finances. The projects run by Jharkhand State Livelihood Promotion Society (JSLPS) and Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) have improved the level of agricultural output, income and financial literacy of rural women (Lakra & Kullu, 2025). The remaining gaps highlight the fact that there is a lack of literature that simultaneously integrates the various aspects of tribal women's empowerment through the study of various disciplines such as education, leadership, access to land, health, and participation in institutions, as the literature reviewed has done.

Table 1: Selected Studies on Tribal Women's Empowerment

| Author & Year | Focus Area | Key Findings | Research Gap |
|-------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ram (2025) | Oraon women | Persistent socio-economic barriers | Limited multidimensional analysis |
| Sukhija & Mishra (2024) | Education | Skill gaps restrict employment | Community-level studies needed |
| Raj (2024) | Land rights | Ownership improves autonomy | Implementation challenges |

This table summarises key scholarly works related to tribal women, outlining their focus areas and major findings. It helps contextualise the present study and identify existing research gaps.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study examines the socio-economic challenges faced by the Oraon Scheduled Tribe women in rural Jharkhand. It seeks to explore the socio-structural aspects of individual and collective women's empowerment. The rural tribal areas continue to suffer from gross inequitable and inadequate distribution of education, health, and employment opportunities, as well as participation in decision-making. Although there are several policies aimed at uplifting rural tribal areas, the inequitable situation remains. The above conditions merit a focused and systematic study, which would form the basis of analysis and policy recommendations.

The research seeks to analyse the socio-economic status of Oraon women in terms of education, employment, income, shelter, and the availability and accessibility of basic services. It seeks to identify primary obstacles to empowerment, such as economic and psychological dependence, social subordination, and insufficient institutional support. It also seeks to correlate

education and employment with economic self-sufficiency and the role of women in making decisions within the family. It also seeks to examine the level of awareness and accessibility of the various government welfare and social protection schemes, as well as the social security programs, available to the Oraon women. The study aims to provide, on the basis of empirical data, more focused policy alternatives for improving the socio-economic status and the women's empowerment of the Oraon women in rural Jharkhand.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

As stated, objectives frame the study, a multi-faceted approach is taken to comprehend the rural tribal women empowerment scenario. The research looks at the role of structural, economic, and cultural dimensions in shaping opportunities, agency, and socio-economic growth of the Oraon women. This study aims to address the following questions: What is the rural Jharkhand socio-economic scenario of Oraon women? What cultural and structural dimensions act as barriers to their empowerment? What is the impact of education and employment on women's roles in household decision-making? To what extent does financial empowerment contribute to one's autonomy and self-reliance? What is the awareness and reach of government welfare schemes among the Oraon women, and how accessible are these schemes to them?

For the empirical analysis of the study, the following are posited as hypotheses, which are: education positively influences women's empowerment and their participation in decision-making; women's financial autonomy increases their autonomy in the household; and the more one is aware of the welfare policies, the more one's socio-economic status improves, and institutional participation increases. These hypotheses set the stage to explore the interconnections among education, income, institutional participation, and empowerment.

4. METHODOLOGY

Research involving the socio-economic status and empowerment of women of the Oraon Scheduled Tribe in rural Jharkhand utilised descriptive and analytical methods. In regard to the descriptive part, the research aims to collect and systematically describe demographic data, education, employment, and resource accessibility. As for the analytical part, the research aims to describe the correlation among three variables: education, income, and the ability to make decisions. Research was carried out in the rural parts of Northern and Central Jharkhand in the districts of Ranchi, Gumla, Lohardaga, and Latehar, where the Oraon tribe is predominantly located and where the main economic activity involves agriculture. In reference to the community-specific research aim, the study used a purposive sampling technique. With respect to age, marriage, and economic engagements, the research team made certain that the sampled individuals reflected a good range of diversity. As per the authors, a sample of 120 women of the rural Oraon tribe was adequate for the research's descriptive and comparative objectives.

The study explored a range of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through a set of questionnaires, which captured the respondents' education, occupation, income, and some household attributes, and were accompanied by some semi-structured interviews, which captured the lived experience and perceptions of empowerment and of the problems and challenges of everyday life. Informal discussions also contributed to contextual affirmation and response triangulation. Secondary data were used from census data, National Family Health Survey data, government reports, academic articles and reports on tribal welfare to frame the findings from the perspective of various levels of development.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents

| Variable | Category | Percentage |
|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| Age | 18–30 | 42% |
| Age | 31–45 | 38% |
| Education | Illiterate | 30% |
| Education | Secondary | 27% |
| Marital Status | Married | 72% |
| Occupation | Agricultural Labor | 55% |

This table presents the demographic profile of respondents, including age, education, marital status, and occupation. It provides a foundational understanding of the study population. For the socio-economic stratification, measures of central tendency were used for the income and age variables, disparity for education and employment was done through comparative analysis and for the correlation of education, income and empowerment, correlation analysis was used. Other analyses were done to achieve the study objectives. A variety of tables and charts were used for analysis and presentation.

All ethical considerations were adhered to. The study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Furthermore, confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and a culturally sensitive approach was used. There are some constraints in the study. The places for data collection are only a few rural areas, and because of time and resource limitations, the sample size of the data is limited. Therefore, the outcomes of the study cannot be applied to the whole Oraon community. However, the findings are still applicable and relevant since data are carefully collected and cross-checked to enhance the findings.

Socio-Economic Profile of Oraon Women

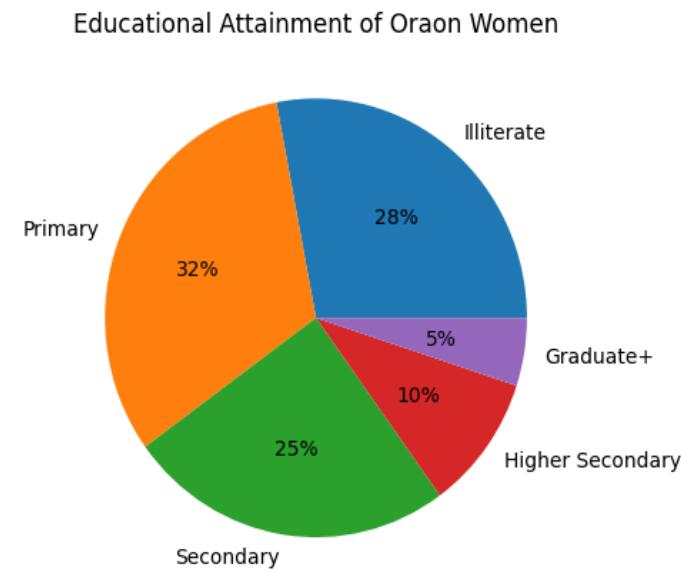
Examining the socio-economic profile of any group is an important place to start when looking at the dimensions of empowerment. The socio-economic conditions of the community provide the most basic understanding of resource-related issues around access, control, and the potential for advancement. As we know, rural Jharkhand is home to many active participants in the household economy, and the Oraon women in particular, who work as agricultural labourers, housewives and as workers in the unorganised sectors. However, the rural structural constraints continue to determine her life chances. Therefore, it matters to study the interrelated parameters of education, occupation, income, family size and composition, land holding and relative poverty.

Education

As a field of concern itself, education is a sign of the advancement of society as a whole, and in the case of the Oraon Women, it shows the backwardness of the community. The older generations have very low levels of educational attainment. Educations and literacy levels, in particular, are low among older generations owing to a lack of schooling facilities, extreme poverty, and a dominant social order that placed women in the sphere of home and the domestic. Younger women have shifted considerably in the positive direction of educational attainment. This shows an improved outlook for the younger population and a more focused government intervention in schooling. However, the community was beset by the problem of educational attrition, especially at the level of secondary schooling. Reasons attributed to this phenomenon include economic problems, early marriages, and the need to care for siblings and perform household chores.

Staying financially and economically independent is a struggle for women in the community. There are still great barriers to education for women, such as access and safety. There is a great need for improvements in the education system to be able to create more educated women in the community. The community is starting to shift and see the value in education, and the positive impact it has on jobs and mobility.

Chart 2: Educational Attainment Distribution



This chart illustrates the distribution of respondents across different educational levels. It helps identify patterns of low higher education participation and early school dropout.

Occupational Structure

The economy of the community and local businesses is primarily agrarian. Many women work on the land as cultivators and are also wage labourers. They perform several important tasks, and their work is grossly viewed as

supplementary, rather than assisting the primary owner of the land. Women also work within their households. Some participate in construction, brick kilns, or domestic work, which typically offers low wages.

Besides farming, women also raise livestock, gather items from the forest, and do handicrafts. While these activities contribute to the household income, they do not enhance the family's financial security because of the absence of access to finance, markets and skilling. The mixing of productive and reproductive activities increases their burden and results in several hours of unpaid work. The patterns of occupation show both resilience and structural disadvantage.

Chart 3: Occupational Structure

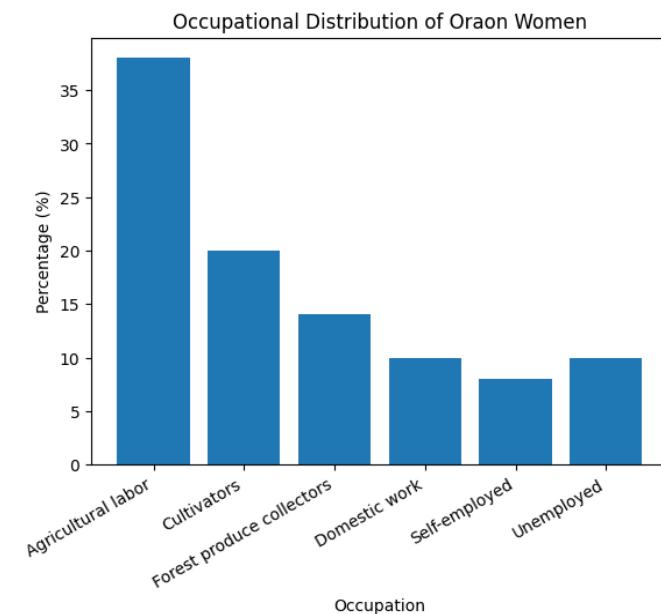


Chart 3 shows the main livelihood activities of Oraon women, highlighting their predominance in farming and informal activities. The chart shows little room for diversification and economic frailty.

Household Income

Oraon families suffer from low and unstable income due to seasonal variations in farming and daily wage work. The unpredictable weather means income is often not secure despite the many income earners. The perception of women's income as supplementary also means they lack input in decision-making. Women's workers' savings are already constrained, and their access to formal banking is limited. They are financially most at risk due to unforeseen expenses such as medical bills or harvest failures. Although some families have benefited financially from self-help groups and microfinance programs, financial exclusion persists. These stresses highlight the need for more adaptable strategies in livelihood diversification, skills development, and greater access to systemic credit.

Family Type

The kind of family structure directly influences the degree of autonomy offered to women and the role that comes with it. In the case of the Oraon, both nuclear and extended family structures are practised, though there seems to be a shift towards nuclear structures due to high out-migration, economic constraints, and changing expectations of family. Women in nuclear families are in a better position to take part in family-wide decisions, especially those related to children's schooling and controlling family expenditures, although they tend to do a disproportionate amount of the family work, as there is less labour available. Extended families are a source of social and economic support and resource pooling, but they can also reinforce systems of domination and unequal power relations, especially with senior men as decision-makers. Marriage is almost always practised, and women usually move to their husband's family, taking on new roles and duties. The prevalence of child marriage is decreasing, but it remains an issue that limits certain women's educational and professional prospects. In general, family structures and customs influence the degree of freedom felt by women in and around the home.

Land Ownership

Economic stability in most rural contexts closely relates to land ownership. But for the Oraon communities, land is almost always registered to the male members of the family. Even women who farm do not have land titles in their names. This absence of title ownership diminishes their decision-making influence in the family, and their access to institutional credit is also limited, as land is often used for collateral. Land that is marginal and divided also constrains the potential for productivity and income, while families that don't own land become fully reliant on wage work, which enhances the risk of economic instability. Initiatives aimed at encouraging joint land ownership and improving legal education have started to break the norms of traditional land inheritance, but the development is still slow. The improvement of women's legal entitlements to land would provide more economic independence and contribute to sustainable empowerment.

Poverty Indicators

Numerous pointers show that a significant number of Oraon families are in chronic poverty: income, housing, and sanitation deficits, and public welfare program dependency. Food insecurities may occur during agricultural off-seasons, which makes them dependent on subsidised grains. Healthcare expenditures affect fragile household budgets, driving them into debt. Nutrition and health poverty are results of reliance on public aid and subsidised grains. The distress of a household is often self-evident. Women suffer most in the inescapable poverty of the community. Scarcity of resources increases the burden on women by making them work harder and stunting their progress. Still, informal mutual aid is often a response that the community uses. Marginal structural changes, such as rural jobs and targeted food aid, have provided limited relief to collectives of women. The longitudinal structural poverty remains dominant.

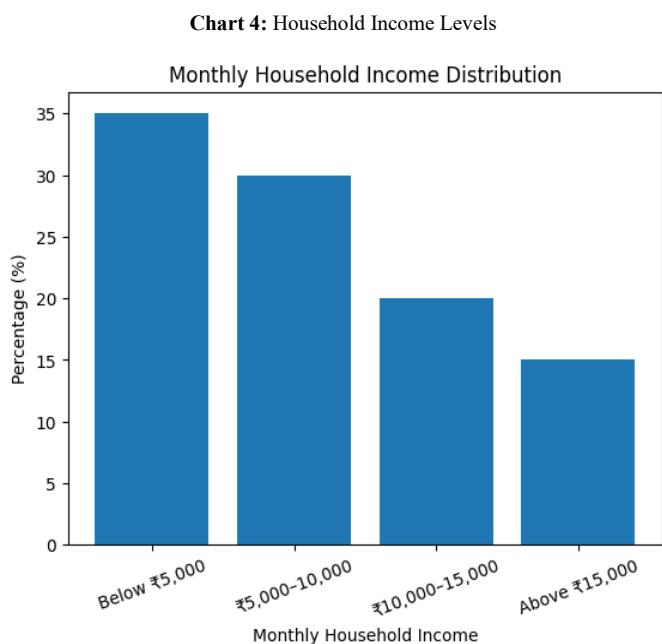
Barriers to Empowerment: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Oraon Women

Empowerment means being able to make choices and have an active role in society, and in the economy, and politics. For many Oraon women in rural Jharkhand, due to the structural inequalities and the socio-cultural primitive marginalisation, it remains elusive. Development initiatives have led to some improvements for communities; however, the barriers in economy, education, society, and politics are interrelated and continue to restrict women's freedom and ability to rise in status.

Economic Barriers

Empowerment cannot be achieved without economic autonomy, yet stiff barriers for Oraon women exist in the form of gaining and sustaining a good and stable source of income. They are active participants in many economic activities, be it agriculture, work in the forests, domestic and seasonal migrations, but the return of their work is inadequate. Women do the same work as men but are still less remunerated, thus reducing their capability to decide on savings, investments and overall controllable spending of the household. A significant portion of women are concentrated in the informal sector, which is characterised by unsteady income, no contract, and no benefits, and as a result, are more vulnerable to exploitation.

The challenges presented by the ownership and control of productive assets are also relevant here. Since land and other such assets are customarily recorded in the names of the male members of the family, women then lack the means to obtain formal credit and to engage in economic activities independently. Such economic dependence may give rise to financial precariousness in the event of a marital breakdown or widowhood. Financial exclusion, in conjunction with a combination of low literacy, lack of documentation, and distance from formal financial services, means that, more often than not, women have to rely on informal money lenders who charge very high interest. Although some women have benefited from credit and savings made possible by self-help groups, there are still very low levels of participation in such groups and in financial literacy programs, indicating the persistent and deeply entrenched structural obstacles to the realisation of poor women's limited access to resources and opportunities.



This chart shows the income categories of the surveyed households. It demonstrates the economic stability of the households in the survey and also illustrates the extent of poverty and financial difficulties.

Educational challenges

Even today, young marriages continue to disrupt educational pathways when young women take on the full range of domestic responsibilities and look after children. Rural areas are particularly impacted as they are geographically isolated and are far away from educational institutions like secondary schools and colleges. Long travel times to schools, in combination with safety issues, prevent families from enabling their daughters to continue their studies. Furthermore, the shift from the indigenous languages spoken at home to the dominant regional or national languages of instruction can impact understanding and engagement, and can contribute to a loss of confidence and disengagement from studies. All of these challenges contribute to the formation of limited human capital and the perpetuation of intergenerational poverty.

Social and Cultural Constraints

The expectations of women are compounded by the enforcement of traditional gender roles within the family. On top of the household chores like cooking, cleaning, and caregiving, she also has to provide childcare and meet the financial obligations of the household. This results in women being allocated the greatest share of household and domestic work, with little left to pursue education or entrepreneurial ventures, or to participate in community activities. There are also informal restrictions (often imposed within the community) that limit women's access to markets, community services and education. These restrictions, often justified by the fear of endangering women or damaging their social standing, are designed to 'protect' women, but merely reinforce the culture of

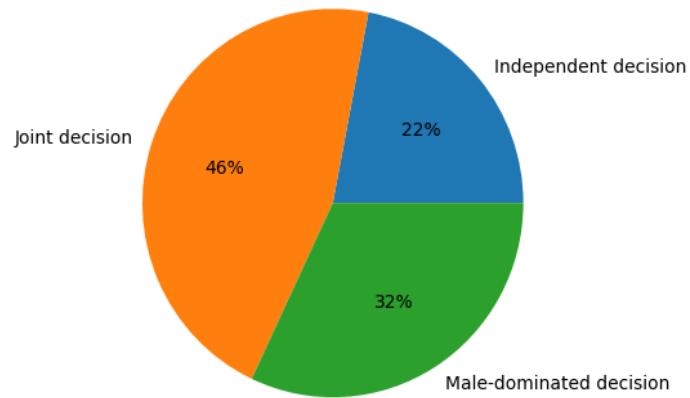
ignoring women's social and economic rights. A woman's unpaid work in family caregiving, to a large extent, illustrates the sense of economic and social entrapment women work within.

Political Barriers

Women's empowerment comes in part from women being able to engage in politics and influence the decision-making process in their communities. While women's presence in the Panchayati Raj system has increased as a result of the reservation system, that does not guarantee their active and full participation. Women do not have the confidence, are not educated enough, and do not have awareness of the necessary political structures to engage in community decision-making. Ultimately, this means that just being represented as a woman does not guarantee that there will be adequate and effective leadership.

In some cultures, regardless of the deeply ingrained social norms, some women are elected into leadership positions, believing that the women will get some power while the male relatives continue to wield the actual power, in a sort of proxy leadership, weakening the purpose of the political system and the development of women as leaders. In addition, the knowledge of rights, participatory governance, and welfare in the most peripheral villages remains weak. Women, as a result of ignorance of their rights and the ways to deal with their grievances, will advocate for their rights, and therefore, the emphasis on education and civic frameworks is justified. This is the type of framework that will heighten women's political activities and enable them to be active participants in the political arena, define, and advocate for their positions.

Chart 5: Decision-Making Power
Women's Participation in Household Decision-Making



This chart represents the extent to which women are involved in household decisions, whether independently or jointly. It serves as an indicator of autonomy and empowerment within family structures.

Understanding and Engagement Initiatives from the Government

The government's welfare initiatives also help tribal people and other marginalised groups in improving their socio-economic conditions. Initiatives help target specific areas like livelihoods, housing, maternal health, and financial inclusion, which help in the empowerment of individuals. For Oraon women, the government initiatives can help more if people have more awareness about them, as well as accessibility and efficient implementation at the grassroots level. The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) is primarily focused on strengthening the livelihoods of rural people by organising women into self-help groups (SHGs) and building sustainable savings and credit. Amongst Oraon women, involvement in SHGs has brought about greater awareness of finances, more active participation in collective actions and greater participation in the management of finances at the household level. Nonetheless, there are still women who are eligible and are not yet members, in large part, owing to the level of outreach being minimal and there being a lack of information and social inertia in the remote areas. There is a great need in improving training and awareness campaigns.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is a safety net during economic hardships,

ensuring wage employment. For some Oraon women, it is an additional source of income during agricultural off-seasons, reducing the need for wage labour migration and balancing domestic and paid work. As we have seen in some cases, there are often delays in payment, insufficient work, and a lack of support from the staff, which ultimately serve as an obstacle for women participating in the program. If the payment and availability of work are improved, women are likely to stay motivated and involved. Programs to accomplish a specific goal, such as the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) maternal health program, have motivated women—especially those at risk during the birth process—to seek the help of appropriate health specialists. The purpose of such programs is to increase the number of successful births and, therefore, save the lives of mothers and children. Increased awareness, substantial financial means, available health care services, and maternity insurance have all contributed to the improvement of institutional birth. Still, some women have limited access to services due to a lack of medical care, poor roads, and distance to medical care. Improved emergency transport and a well-functioning rural health care system would assist in solving the problem of distance.

Table 3: Awareness vs Actual Utilisation of Welfare Schemes

| Government Scheme | Level of Awareness | Level of Utilisation | Key Challenges |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--|
| NRLM | Moderate to High | Moderate | Limited outreach, irregular training |
| MGNREGA | High | Moderate to High | Delayed wage payments, work availability |
| PMAY | Moderate | Moderate | Documentation barriers, slow approval |
| Janani Suraksha Yojana | Moderate | Increasing | Transportation and healthcare access |
| Tribal Welfare Programs | Low to Moderate | Low | Information gaps, bureaucratic delays |

This table illustrates the respondents' knowledge of various government initiatives and compares it to the knowledge. This illustrates a gap between what the government has initiated and what has been implemented at the grassroots level.

5. DISCUSSION

From an economic, educational, socio-cultural, and political perspective, the findings of the study exemplify the dimensions of empowerment of the Oraon women (Ram, 2025). Various improvements, such as educational participation, livelihood activities, and social protection programs, have opened up avenues, while there are a myriad of constraints that are still preventing substantive empowerment. The continuity of the findings when compared to existing literature is notable. Little education and limited access to paid work remain as a big sieve of women's empowerment, showing the overwhelming structural social and economic inequities that define the life chances of the tribal women (Sukhija & Mishra, 2024). The positive impact of group activities, and, in particular, self-help groups, has also been attributed to the increased confidence and empowerment of women in leadership roles and decision-making in the organised community structures. Barriers to empowerment are often deeply embedded in cultural and structural frameworks. Persistent poverty and low levels of

development, poor infrastructure, and insufficient quality education and employment diversification leave little room for aspiration on Jagati (2024). Cultural frameworks make this more complex. When there are embedded expectations of women ranging from gender/traditional roles to domestic responsibilities and even informal mobility restrictions, there is little opportunity for women in economic or public spheres. Cultural frameworks change, and while there are signs of change after education, migration, and economic development, meaningful change is often a sustained multi-level awareness and outreach process. The experience of Oraon women is an example of deep intersectional complexity. The experience of poverty, and the 'dual' discrimination of being poor and a woman, adds to the geo-spatial remoteness of the 'peripheral' underdeveloped areas, suffering from uneven development. This layered and compounded marginalisation is the result of geo-spatial location, identity, and poverty.

Policy Recommendations

An obvious starting point is the increasing of women's socio-economic mobility through improved access to secondary and higher education. Setting up more educational institutes in the tribal belts, coupled with the establishment of girls' hostels, will reduce the distance and security related drop out risks. The

provision of financial support in the form of scholarships is also likely to support young women, along with school curricula that include vocational training, to make smoother school-to-work transitions. Through the lens of women's empowerment, especially in the far-flung areas, Self Help Groups (SHGs) must increasingly become important vehicles for promoting savings and financial independence. The establishment of SHGs in far-flung areas must be complemented with training and workshops on financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and digital banking. The economic empowerment of women through the building of sustainable income streams will be furthered by strengthening the intersections of SHGs with banks and relevant markets. The jump-off point for the financial inclusion of women must be financial literacy. The SHGs in the villages can conduct training on saving, accessing credit, and the economic transfer of government benefits. Banking processes can be made more user-friendly. Additionally, community facilitators can offer more mobile banking options and streamlined documentation services. Economic empowerment of women must include their land rights. If women are legally educated on the rights of inheritance and encouraged to hold joint land titles, their bargaining power in the households will increase, thereby making way for access to institutional credit. This will also be the case when land registration is transparent and efficient.

6. CONCLUSION

In the case of the Oraon women of rural Jharkhand, the socio-economic barriers to their empowerment were the key focus of the study. Findings show that while there are some improvements recorded for education, participation in livelihoods and access to welfare schemes, there are barriers that need to be addressed. Among these barriers are the formal economic structures that constrain women's autonomy. Wage gaps, informal employment, the lack of property ownership and restricted access to financial resources are some of the barriers. Furthermore, there are educational barriers that relate to systemic student dropouts, and inadequate educational infrastructure that limit the economic mobility of women. In addition, socio-cultural barriers that are the result of dominant patriarchal ideologies, which increase a woman's responsibility for housework and caregiving and limit her presence and participation in the public sphere, are pertinent. There has been an increase in political participation due to the enactment of reservation policies. However, limited awareness and confidence continue to affect women's political participation and advocacy. It is clear that these barriers are interrelated and that the response to such barriers is not simply an act of legislating policy; the response requires a realignment of structures and the mindsets that are associated with the policy.

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