



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Socio-economic status of tribal women: A study of Jhargram district, west Bengal

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Abstract

A tribe is a social organization that lacks functional specialization, has territorial ties, and practices endogamy. Whether inherited or not, tribal leaders are bound together by a common language or dialect and are cognizant of social distance without experiencing the same social stigma that other castes and tribes do within the caste system. Women's socioeconomic standing is extremely important to both community and individual life. It is a multifaceted concept that can be quantified by combining different elements. The socioeconomic standing of tribal women is the subject of the current study. The location of the current study is Gopiballavpur II block in Jhargram District. This study is mainly based on primary data which have been collected from 4 villages by household survey. Usual statistical techniques are used to analyze the collected data. The study shows that the education level and economic condition which are the main indicators of the social status of tribal women are very low.

Keywords: Tribal Women; Education Level; Economic Condition; Social Status.

1. Introduction

The tribal population is an integral part of the social fabric of India and is the second concentration after the African continent. A tribe is a group of people living under primitive conditions and still not popularly known in more modern culture. A racial grouping known as a tribe is made up of a specific class of people who mostly inhabit forests and highlands. In, reality, they are native, simple, and primitive. Each tribe has a unique culture, and tradition in the arts, habits, and customs. (Pattnaik, 2007). Socioeconomic status is a complex term that encompasses two distinct elements: the social, which refers to a person's standing or place in the social hierarchy, and the economic, which is concerned with resources like wealth, income, and employment. Despite the lack of a universally recognized definition, authors and scholars have given their diverse interpretations of the term "socioeconomic status". A person's access to resources that are widely desired, such as material possessions, money, power, social networks, healthcare, free time, or educational opportunities, is reflected in their socioeconomic status. (Oakes and Rossi, 2003). Moreover, it is the status that a person or family holds about the average standards of cultural possessions, effective income, material possessions, and involvement in community group activities. (Chapin, 1928). It is frequently assessed using a mix of variables, including occupation, income, and level of education. Thus, it can be said that the concept of socioeconomic status is not monolithic. (Shrabanti., et.al.2014).

One important measure of a society's social justice is how it treats its women. Women's status is often discussed in terms of their level of education, employment, income, and health as well as their roles in the home, community, and society. In tribal societies, women play a crucial role because they work harder and are in charge of running the

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household's business and finances. In tribal societies, women are valued as economic assets and play a significant role in social, cultural, economic, and religious aspects of daily life. However, they continue to lag far behind in several areas of life, including economic empowerment, employment, good health, and education. Enabling marginalized groups in society, such as impoverished women, particularly those from tribal backgrounds, to gain and retain authority and assets so they can exercise self-determination, is commonly referred to as empowerment (Puttaraja, & Heggade, 2012).

A person's social life and behavior can be significantly characterized by their socioeconomic profile. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the socioeconomic status of tribal women and comprehend the nature of their interactions with the surrounding community. In Indian society, kinship and caste have a significant impact on social interactions, and there is a marked difference in the subcultures and living standards of different groups and areas. It would be possible to determine a leader's sociological significance by researching their socioeconomic circumstances. The distribution of political power is also determined by socioeconomic stratification (Nagaraja, & Kusugal, 2013).

1.1. Study area

The area of the present study is situated in Jhargram District. Four villages of Gopibllvpur II block in Jhargram district are purposively selected for the household survey to collect the primary data.

1.2. Objectives

1. To find out the socio-economic status of tribal women in the Jhargram district.
2. To examine the factors influencing the socio-economic status of tribal women in the same study area.

2. Database and methodology

The present is mainly based on primary data which is collected from four tribal villages of Gopiballavpur II block in Jhargram district. Primary data were gathered using the purposive sampling method from 125 sample respondents. Respondents of this study are Tribal women. A well-structured survey schedule was used to collect the social, economic, and demographic status of the tribal women. In addition to the use of survey schedule observation, group discussions are employed to collect the data. Percentage distribution is used to analyze the data with the help of MS EXCEL software.

3. Result and discussion

The present study aimed to understand the multiple dimensions of the social and economic status of tribal women. Age, education, occupation, family size, types, and annual family income of the respondents are the primary characteristics of the socio-economic profile. In this investigation, these elements, however, may help us comprehend the socioeconomic status of tribal women in the research area.

Table 1 Distribution of respondent based on their age

Age of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Young age (up to 30)	45	36
Middle age (31-50)	59	47
Old age (above 50)	21	17

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Table 2 Family size

Family size	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 2	9	7.0
3-5	69	55.2
6-8	34	27.2
Above 8	13	10.4

Source: Primary field survey 2023

The data in Table 1 shows that 36% of the respondents are in the young age group, 47% of the respondents belong to the middle age group, and 17% of the respondents are in the old age group (above 50).

The fundamental unit of society is the family, which bestows upon each member a certain social standing as well as roles and responsibilities. Families are the most effective setting for the long-term development of a value system, and a person's behavior and attitudes are shaped by the family to which they belong. That is, it establishes the status and function of tribal women as well as the size of the family—small or big. The number of family members living in each sample respondent's home is known as their family size. The size of the family and the respondent's socioeconomic status typically have an inverse relationship (Rao, 2010).

Table no 2 shows that the majority (55.2%) of the respondents belong to big size of family and 7% of respondents belong to nuclear families.

Table 3 Marital status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	12	10
Married	98	78
Widow	15	12

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Another social indicator of women's socioeconomic status is their marital status. The tribal community's early marriage system has been one of its key features. Women's status is altered by marriage. Additionally, it changes the role of women and adds to their responsibilities and workload. Table 3 displays the respondent's marital status.

Table no 3 shows that out of 125 respondents, 78% are married, 12% are widows and 10% are unmarried.

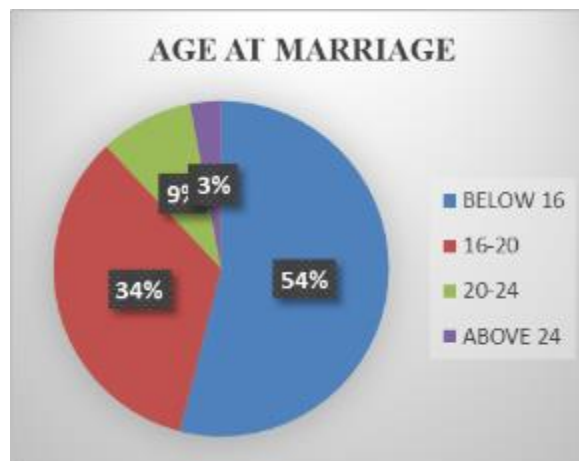


Figure 1 Age at marriage

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Age at marriage is also a key indicator of women's social status. Since marriage age is directly correlated with fertility, demographers are primarily interested in the age at which women marry. Without the use of contraceptives, early marriage increases the number of children born to a woman. Yet, marriage age becomes more significant than demographics because it also affects women's standing and opportunities in life, including access to education, financial security, and overall well-being (Bhagat, 2016). Fig no 1 shows that out of 125 respondents, 54% of women get married below 16 years old, and only 3% of women get married above 24 years old.

Table 4 Educational status

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	41	32.8
Primary	19	15.2
Secondary	57	45.6
HS	2	1.6
UG	4	3.2
PG	2	1.6

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Education and literacy are effective tools for the social and economic advancement of India's underprivileged populations. The Scheduled Caste population lags behind the general population in terms of literacy and education. Furthermore, Scheduled Tribe women have the lowest literacy rates in the nation, this difference is even more striking (Maharatna, 2009).

It is observed from Table 4 that, 32.8% of respondents are illiterate, 15.2% of respondents studied up to the primary level, and the majority (45.6%) of respondents are covered in the secondary level of education. According to the collected data, a very small percentage (1.6) of respondents studied up to graduation level. Tribal women tend to be more rooted in their customs and do not take the initiative to raise their educational standards, which is primarily the reason here. School dropouts, both male and female, are highly prevalent in this community.

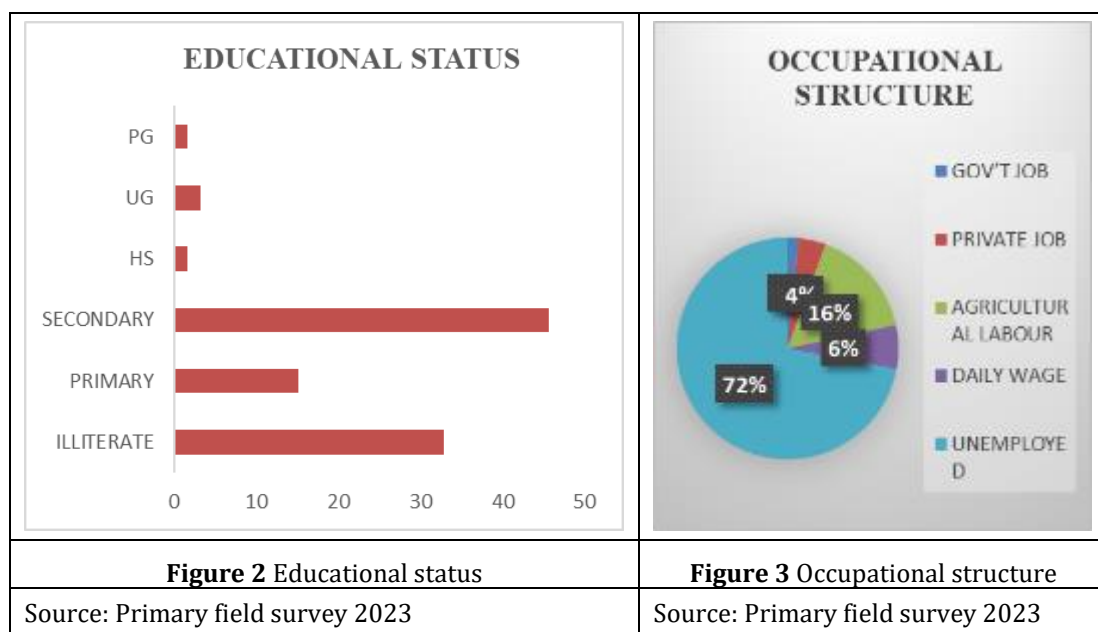


Table 5 Occupational status

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Gov't job	2	1.6
Private job	5	4
Agricultural labour	20	16
Daily wage	8	6.4
Unemployed	90	72

Source: Primary field survey 2023

The primary source of income and a good indicator of a person's socioeconomic standing is their occupation. In India, tribal women play a constructive role in the local economy and engage in subsistence activities alongside men. In actuality, women work longer than men. They perform all kinds of work in the study area, both inside and outside the home, under the demands of a mixed agro-pastoral economy. Women perform the majority of agricultural labor, including weeding, hoeing, harvesting, and threshing, in addition to taking care of the home, kids, and cattle. Labor is another job that women do. In both economic and non-economic endeavors, women play a significant role. (Manjunatha & Gangadhar, 2018).

According to the above table (5), of the 125 respondents, 72 % are unemployed, 16% as agricultural laborers, 6.4 % work as daily wages, 4 % are involved in private jobs and only 1.6 % are employed by the government.

Table 6 Monthly income

Monthly income	Frequency	Percentage
Below 1500	39	31.2
1500-3000	16	12.8
Above 3000	9	7.2
Not applicable	61	48.8

Source: Primary field survey 2023

A person's overall income serves as a gauge of their financial situation. A person's attitude will depend on their financial situation. Consequently, the study assumes that women from higher-income families have different attitudes than women from middle-class or lower-class backgrounds. A family's financial situation has a significant impact on the attitudes, beliefs, and values of its members as well as how they make decisions. Table No. 6 provides a detailed indication of the respondents' monthly income, where near about 49% of respondents are not engaged in any economic activity.

Table 7 Preferred place for treatment

Place of healthcare	Frequency	Percentage
Gov't	80	64
Private	27	21.6
Herbalist	4	3.2
All	14	11.2

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Tribal people typically reside in isolated, environmentally varied regions and climates. In most tribal areas, where magico-religious health care systems are prevalent, modern medicine is not accepted. It has been said that personal hygiene, hygienic conditions, and health education are lacking in tribal areas (Suresh & Priyamvada, 2009). One more significant socioeconomic indicator is one's state of health. Even in the present day, a sizable portion of the population, including tribes, still adheres to superstitious beliefs and favors shamans and healers. Table no 7 represents the preferred place of treatment by the tribal women.

The above table indicates that 64% of respondents like to go gov't the hospital during their illness for treatment whereas 21.6% of women prefer private hospitals and 3.2% of respondents prefer local herbalists.

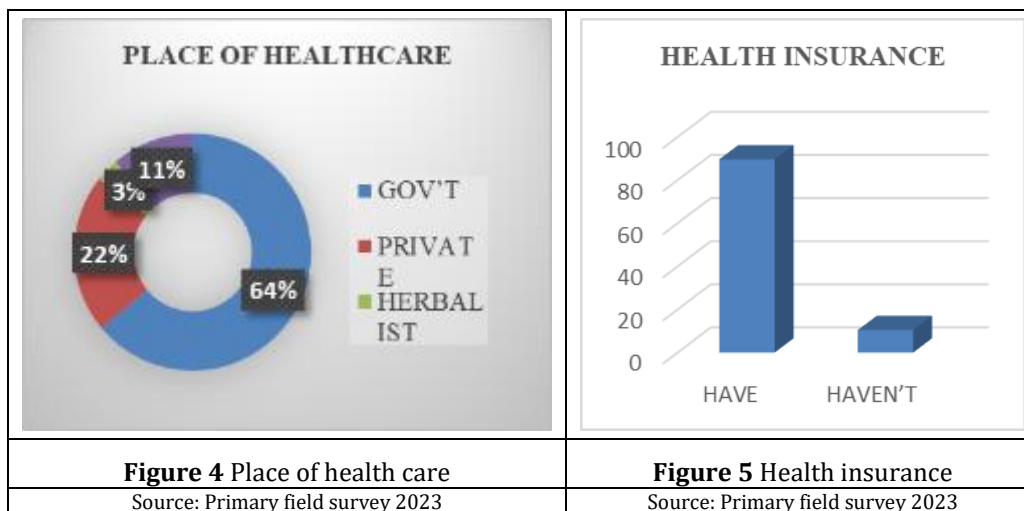


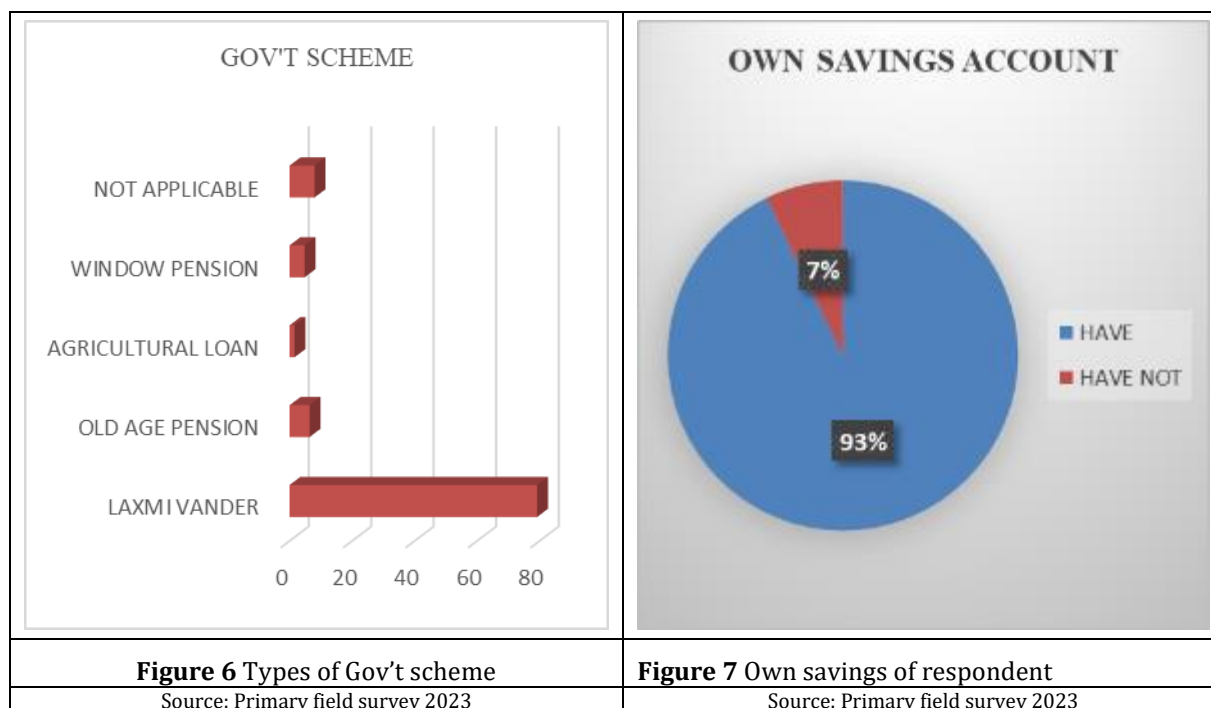
Figure no 5 displays near nearly 90% of respondents enjoy health insurance which is provided by the West Bengal Gov't as a health insurance scheme namely "Swastha Sathi".

Table 8 Own Savings

Own savings account	Frequency	Percentage
Have	116	92.8
Have not	9	7.2

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Savings is one of the powerful key indicators of the socio-economic status of women. Figure no 4 displays that 93% of respondent have their own savings account.



Nowadays, different Gov't schemes have helped tribal women to enrich their livelihood. A very small amount nearly 1000rupees per month they have gotten from the State Gov't.

Table 9 Gov't scheme

Types of schemes	Frequency	Percentage
Laxmi Vander	99	79.2
Old age pension	8	6.4
Agricultural loan	2	1.6
Window pension	6	4.8
Not applicable	10	8

Source: Primary field survey 2023

Table no 9 reveals that 79.2% of respondents are beneficiaries of the Gov't scheme namely "Laxmi Vander", and 6.4% of respondents are beneficiaries of the old age pension. 4.8 % of respondents have gotten a widow pension.

4. Conclusion

According to the study, the majority of respondents were illiterate and unemployed. The majority of those surveyed are part of nuclear families and their family size was small. Early marriage is one of the important causes of the low educational and also economic status of tribal women. Tribal women lead a low socio-economic condition in this area due to their poverty. As tribal women are an integral part of our society, policymakers and local development specialists should develop policies that are suitable and efficient. Expanding the number of informal education classes and providing more incentives for uneducated women is necessary. Programs for women such as free health care, education, and incentives for work and education-focused initiatives, are necessary for this government to maintain the community standard.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any personal, organizational, or financial relationship related to the material in the study.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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