

Indigenous women's work roles and decision-making capacity: A case study on Bargarh block of Bargarh District, Odisha

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Abstract

Indian women have traditionally fulfilled multifaceted roles within their families and communities, contributing across economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Particularly, tribal women are often deeply involved in family and community economic activities, playing a vital role in sustaining and enriching tribal life. However, limited family support frequently impedes their potential to advance further. This study explores the lives of the tribal women in Birmal, Nileswar, Chakarkend, and Dhanger panchayats located in the Bargarh District, Odisha. By focusing on the Tribal women, the research aims to analyze their contributions to household responsibilities, active engagement in economic activities, and empowerment within the broader context of tribal society. Additionally, the study examines the socioeconomic challenges faced by these women, providing insight into the factors that influence their economic and social status. Data collection includes a combination of primary sources, such as surveys, interviews, and observations, and secondary sources, including books, journals, and magazines. The sample comprises 100 women between the ages of 25 and 45, offering a focused view of this demographic's specific experiences and aspirations. The research finds that the women are courageous and determined as they have encountered numerous challenges in their different epochs of family life; nevertheless, they efficiently handle the situation, and major financial support to their family comes from them.

Keywords: Indigenous women, Work roles, decision-making, Empowerment, Bargarh district.

1. Introduction

Women's empowerment in India is both a theoretical ideal and an urgent necessity, closely linked with the need to reshape socio-economic structures for holistic development. Although the country has made strides in areas like technology and the economy, gender disparities still prevail, evident in restricted access to education and healthcare, limited representation in governance, and unequal job opportunities. (Naik & Panda, 2023) Empowering women in India goes beyond achieving gender equality; it is crucial

for unlocking the potential of half the population and creating a society where women can actively contribute to national progress and economic growth. Despite there are signs of progress, female literacy rates are on the rise according to the Mass Education department of Odisha. Female literacy rate in rural areas is 60.7 per cent, though a gender gap remains, and more women are participating in higher education and entering the workforce, especially in urban areas, not in rural areas. Moving forward, sustained efforts in education, economic opportunities, and political representation are essential to achieve true empowerment and create a more inclusive society where women's contributions are fully recognized and valued. Nevertheless, the rural women are challenging patriarchal norms; significant challenges persist, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, where cultural norms and financial limitations impede girls' education. In Bargarh district, the rural women are encountered with different challenges such as cultural norms, restrictions on social participation, home decision-making, etc. But still, there is a lack of awareness of how important women in everywhere. The role of women in India, particularly in rural and tribal areas, has evolved significantly over the years. Historically, women in these communities have been integral to both economic activities and maintaining the social fabric of their societies. Tribal women, in particular, often shoulder dual responsibilities, contributing to the household income while also managing domestic duties.(Dilemma & Kumari, 2022) . This study focuses on the tribe to explore how women navigate their roles in the family while striving for empowerment. It also studies the impact of motherhood on their ability to balance personal aspirations with familial responsibilities. While India has made progress in sectors such as technology, governance, and education, deep-rooted gender inequalities persist, manifesting in unequal access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political representation.(Raj, 2023) These inequalities are especially pronounced in rural and tribal regions, where socio-cultural norms and economic constraints continue to limit women's autonomy. Empowering women is not only a matter of gender justice but also a strategic necessity to unlock the full potential of half the population, thereby contributing to national progress. The role of women in India's tribal and rural societies has undergone considerable transformation, yet challenges remain. Tribal women, such as those from the Sahara and Binjhal communities in Odisha's Bargarh district, often carry the dual burden of managing household responsibilities and contributing to the local economy through labour-intensive activities like agriculture and forest product collection. Despite their vital contributions, their work is frequently undervalued, and their family decision-making power remains limited.(Mallick & Nanda, 2024a) The complexities of motherhood, especially in rural tribal areas, often restrict women's access to education, employment, and leadership opportunities, placing them at the intersection of traditional expectations and personal aspirations(Acherjee et al., 2023). This study contributes to broader discussions on rural gender dynamics, offering insights into the pathways and barriers to women's empowerment in marginalized contexts. However, these contributions are frequently undervalued, and women's roles are confined to traditional expectations in this village. (Fathima Thabassum & Afsar Ahmed, 2020). Empowerment in this context is not just about economic independence but also about gaining autonomy and decision-making power within the family and community. Studies suggest that motherhood often imposes additional responsibilities on women, limiting their ability to pursue education, employment, or other opportunities that could lead to empowerment. The societal expectation for women to prioritize their roles as mothers and caregivers often conflicts with their aspirations for personal and professional growth. (Acherjee & Hariharan, 2023)

2. Literature Review

1. Bhattacharya & Murmu, (2019) studied the Tribal women, their role and status in the family, economic activities such as agriculture, wage labour, livestock/poultry, village market production, and their own business, and also the household of the tribal women. Double role in the family among the women in the tribal society and balancing multiple roles, this study highlights the tribes like Santal, Munda, and Ho women. This research used data collection tools and techniques like interviews, observation, and FGD. It is found quite complicated to assess their agricultural work since it is intimately associated with their social function inside the family, and also found that the tribal women are still distant from social and economic empowerment in different tribal areas.
2. Shelton. L.M, (2006) This research investigates the value of various strategies aimed at mitigating work-family conflict among women entrepreneurs. The researcher studied three primary strategies that are analyzed: role elimination, role decrease, and role-sharing. Women exhibit a preference for role-sharing strategies as they facilitate the enhancement of both professional and familial roles while concurrently diminishing inter-role conflict. The delegation of the venture role through participatory management methodologies and advanced human resource practices is found essential for motivated female entrepreneurs who are dedicated to fulfilling their familial responsibilities. The results often show that women-owned businesses using team-building and involving employees in decisions because women entrepreneurs are trying to balance work and family life, and it is due to the influence of their upbringing and natural tendencies.
3. Manna. A (2024), the manuscript studies the empowerment, gender equality, patriarchal structure of indigenous society and the policy for tribal women. It examines the concepts of empowerment and gender equality as they pertain to tribal women in India, elucidating the obstacles they encounter, such as the necessity of reconciling various responsibilities, including those associated with motherhood, within a patriarchal framework. This study found that successful entrepreneurship requires a holistic and integrated approach that involves the participation and collaboration of various stakeholders, such as the government, the civil society, the private sector, the media, and the tribal communities themselves. The researchers said that also need a recognition and respect for the diversity, vitality, and potential of tribal women, and their unique perspective and vision for a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development.
4. Nath & Dwivedi, (2021) examined the identity-based approach, role-based identity of tribal Indian women, and work-life balance (WLB) experiences of the Khasi & Jaintial tribal communities residing in Meghalaya, India. Study highlights the work-life balance (WLB), group-based identity, matrilineal identity, and role-based identity. The findings of this study indicate that maintaining a healthy WLB is essential for fostering women's psychological empowerment and enhancing career fulfillment, and it advocates for policymakers to initiate awareness initiatives.
5. This scholarly article investigates the dynamics of work-life balance among female labourers in rural locales, with an emphasis on sustainable livelihood methodologies. The research employs

primary data to analyzed the conditions of female workers within the rural tribal regions of northern Odisha. It suggests that the adoption of sustainable livelihood practices can augment their quality of life and overall well-being by facilitating consistent income streams and enhancing their life satisfaction. The analysis reveals that women, especially those belonging to tribal communities, frequently engage in a combination of diverse occupations to either subsist or elevate their standards of living. The findings advocate for a preference for rural non-farm employment opportunities instead of traditional agricultural labor.(Srivastava. Nilima & Dhal, 2022)

6. The research explores the influence of patriarchal ideologies on the work-life balance of urban employed women in India. It consisted of semi-structured interviews, open-ended questions, and the use of a smartphone tool to record. It reveals that Indian women endorse patriarchal norms and exhibit a preference for joint family structures over nuclear family arrangements for the management of occupational responsibilities. Nevertheless, women experience psychological stress as a consequence of their attempts to achieve an optimal work-life balance. A significant proportion of participants possessed advanced educational qualifications and held managerial roles, cohabiting in joint family units alongside their spouses and parents-in-law. (Rawat & Natasha, 2022)
7. Work-life balance is a crucial concept for women, who often manage their work-life balance to ensure economic independence and empowerment. This study, part of doctoral research, aimed to identify factors facilitating work-life balance among 309 women employees in Coimbatore. The Descriptive research design was used, observing and describing phenomena in detail. Results showed that respondents aged 31-41 years had more work-life balance, while less educated individuals had less balance. The study also found that salary satisfaction influenced work-life balance, as employees who earn a substantial income tend to balance work and personal life. This highlights the importance of understanding and balancing work and life for women in today's workforce.(D. Kokila & Muralidhar. K, 2018)
8. Guberman et al. (1992) observed from their research on “Women as Family Caregivers: Why Do They Care?” and based on the in-depth interview, they focus on the caregiving decision, the dependent adult, gender role of women as family caregivers. The study involved 40 caregivers with the used of snowball sampling. They found that the fourteen factors emerged, like love, maternal feeling, feeling of family ties, caregiver personal characteristics, family tradition, etc. They also saw that more than one reason to explain women’s decision to assume caregiving. The account reveals the prevalence of the sexual division of labour. It is reinforcement through social policy and how women internalize ideas and norms regarding appropriate gender role behaviour.
9. “Women and Multiple Roles: Myths and Reality,” Barnett, (2004) stated that the role of wife and mother is natural and, therefore, performed without undue stress. This research might cover mental health, multiple roles, and women in society. It also focuses on the quality of the role that a woman occupies. These findings point out several changes in mental health practice. First reason is that well-intentioned mental health professionals may unwittingly or women may believe that it is their job, that is the source of her distress. The second is that men and women are similar concerning the degree of satisfaction that they report in their major roles and the

magnitude of the relationship between role quality and psychological distress. the researcher suggests that the gender difference in the centrality of social role needs to be rethought.

10. Their study focuses on the analysis of working women who are married and mothers, thus involved in multiple potentially conflicting roles. This research uses the personal interview and carried out a probability sample, representative of the general population of women aged 18 through 54 in a defined urban area (population size 50,000) within the New York Metropolitan area. The results reported here for a sample of women are consistent with these trends. Their results point to the lower levels of stress in family roles when compared to others, including the occupational role.(Kandel et al., 1985).
11. This research focuses on three key objectives about the tribal communities of Santal, Lodha, and Munda. It aims to examine their socioeconomic background, analyze the child sex ratio (CSR) and overall sex ratio within each group, and explore the differences in attitudes toward the birth of girl children and their social status. They share responsibilities equally with men in both domestic and social contexts. Notably, the study finds no evidence of gender discrimination, as both boys and girls are equally valued. The sex ratio in these communities reflects this equality, indicating a lack of preference for one gender over the other. This balanced perspective suggests that tribal societies uphold inclusive values, offering women meaningful roles and opportunities from an early age. The findings present a positive outlook for tribal women, who are likely to maintain and strengthen their roles in a gender-neutral environment. (S. Manna, 2016)

Objectives:

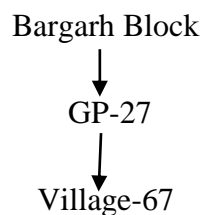
1. To know the socio-economic status of women participating in the empowerment programme in rural areas.
2. To understand the role of working women in the decision-making process at home, especially on financial and household matters.

Methods

The study incorporated both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (narrative) data. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed to analyse the quantitative data, while the qualitative data derived from women's narratives was examined. The researcher adopted an exploratory survey design and utilized Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) to have a comprehensive understanding of rural tribal women's position inside the home and the outside. Some of the techniques were used, like social mapping for village configurations and interpersonal dynamics, resource mapping for ascertaining the resources available and utilized by women, and seasonal calendars to analyse variations in labour and agricultural activities, like in summer they collect Mahula, kendu leaves, and in the rainy season they cultivate. Besides, daily activity schedules were also examined to monitor women's time utilization, such as from morning to night, and the activities they do. Nevertheless, for the precision of qualitative inputs, focus group discussions were conducted to gather insights regarding their perspectives, challenges, and decision-making processes within the household. These methodologies enabled the researcher to gather the data from the articulation of women about their experiences effectively through group dialogues. Primary data was gathered through structured and semi-structured interviews, focusing on demographic details, family support, economic activities, and motherhood

challenges. This research was conducted within the Bargarh block of Bargarh district in Odisha. It specifically examines the lives of women residing in selected rural villages. A total of 100 tribal households were systematically selected, and both strata and quota techniques were used to have a sample size of 100. This methodological approach has facilitated the inclusion of working women and daily wage labourers from diverse age groups, communities, and familial structures. The investigation targeted women aged 25 to 45, as this demographic typically engages actively in familial and economic responsibilities.

Brief sampling framework:



$$\text{Samples per GP} = \left\{ \frac{100}{27} \right\} = 3 \text{ (with remainder of 19 samples)}$$

81+19 = 100, (19 samples were distributed among the largest GPs with a quota)

Results and Analysis

Profile of the respondent				
variable	Particular	frequency	percentage	standard deviation
Education	illiterate	15	15%	
	primary	47	47%	
	secondary	34	34%	
	Higher	4	4%	
Total		100	100%	
Marital Status	single	1	1%	
	married	95	95%	
	widow	2	2%	
	Divorce	0	0%	
	Separate	2	2%	
Total		100	100%	
SES	Bellow 5,000	4	4%	
	5,000-10,000	60	60%	
	10,000-15000	34	34%	
	Above 15,000	2	2%	

Total		100	100%	
Age				4.825

Table 1: Profile of the respondent

The respondent profile outlines key socio-demographic characteristics of the research participants (n=100 women), reflecting a socially stable but economically challenged community. Educationally, most individuals have only basic schooling, with 47% completing primary and 34% secondary education, while 15% are illiterate and just 4% reached higher education. A vast majority (95%) are married, indicating strong family orientation. Socio-economically, 94% earn below ₹15,000 per month, showing limited income levels and economic mobility. Only 2% earn above ₹15,000. The average age, with a standard deviation of 4.825, suggests a relatively balanced age spread, likely representing middle-aged adults who bear familial and economic responsibilities. Collectively, these factors depict a socially stable yet economically vulnerable population, situated in a rural or semi-urban setting, where educational and income opportunities remain limited. Most have only primary or secondary education, with very few attaining higher education, and nearly all earn below ₹15,000 monthly. The average age of the respondents was found to be middle-aged women with strong family ties and limited economic mobility

Table 2: Primary & Secondary sources of income

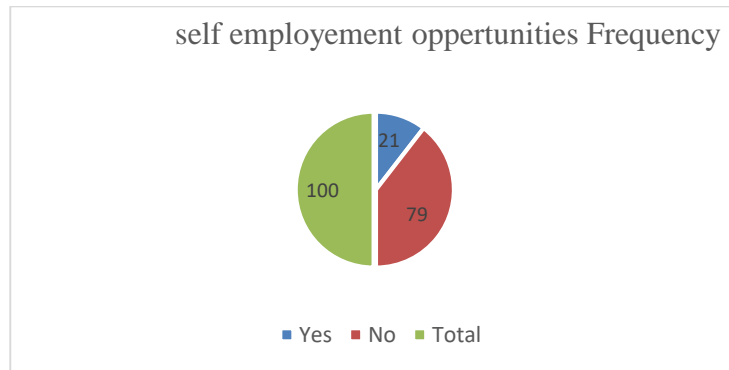
Primary sources of income			
		Responses	
		frequency	Percentage
Primary sources	Primary income	100	50.00%
	Agriculture	100	50.00%
Total		200	100.00%
Secondary sources of income:			
		Responses	
		frequency	Percentage
Secondary sources	Secondary sources of income	59	37.10%
	Running small shop	22	13.80%
	Handicraft	1	0.60%
	Wage labour	36	22.60%
	No secondary sources income	41	25.80%
Total		159	100.00%

The table represents a multiple-response analysis of the primary sources of income among respondents (n=100). Each respondent reported two sources: "primary income" and "agriculture," each of which was selected 100 times, choosing yes, they have primary sources of income, and this is the agriculture, resulting in a total of 200 responses. This results in 50% for each category under "Percent of Responses." This table found that agriculture is the primary income source and is equally essential and universally relied upon within this population for their livelihood. And the secondary sources of income response analysis reveal that out of 159 people, 59 (37.1%) reported having at least one secondary source of income, while 41 (25.8%) had no secondary sources of income. The most common additional income source was wage labour (22.6%), above the data by running a small shop (13.8%) and handicraft 1 (0.6%). Because people could choose more than one option, some had more than one secondary income source. Wage labour is found to be the most important, likely because it is easier to find or requires less investment. In contrast, very few were involved in handicrafts, which may be due to a lack of demand or skills. Overall, the data suggest that women often rely on simple, low-cost ways to earn extra money when their main income is not enough. Although the study encompassed 100 participants, the total number of recorded responses amounted to 159. This difference occurred because the respondents to select multiple types of secondary income sources, resulting in some individuals reporting various

Table 3: Employment Status of Respondents

Employment Type	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Employment	100	100	100
Daily wage labor	37	37	37
Ston crushing	0	0	0
Farming	62	62	62
Migrated Labor	0	0	0
Construction	0	0	0
Handicraft	1	1	1
Tailoring	0	0	0
Teaching	0	0	0
Collecting forest product	0	0	0

The employment data in Table 3 reveals all respondents are engaged in some form of work, reflecting a 100% employment rate. The majority are involved in farming 62.0%, and daily wage labourers 37.0%, which show a strong dependence on informal sources of income. These occupations form the backbone of the local economy. On the other hand, very few respondents are involved in other types of work. Only one person (1.0%) reported working in handicrafts, and none reported employment in areas like stone crushing, construction, tailoring, teaching, or collecting forest products. The findings indicate that the local economy is mainly based on agriculture and unskilled labour, with little access to training, education, or infrastructure. Local women are not found in more diverse, skilled employment.



Graph 1: Perception of Training in Ensuring Self-Employment Opportunities

Figure 1 shows that a majority of respondents believe training supports self-employment. The green section indicates that 79% participants said no, while a smaller blue portion 21% are said yes, which provides self-employment opportunities. This suggests a generally negative perception of the impact of training. However, the presence of some uncertainty highlights the need to enhance training quality and its relevance. Strengthening program outcomes further increases confidence in training benefits in rural areas.

Table 4: Perceived Outcomes of Joining the Program

Statement	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
Confidence improves after joining program	yes	64	64	64
Control over financial matter	yes	49	49	49
Business growth	yes	16	16	16
Feel empowered socially and economically	yes	56	56	56
Recommend this program to others	yes	90	90	90

Table 4 outlines the perceived benefits experienced by respondents after joining the program. A majority (64%) reported improved confidence, while 49% felt a greater sense of control over their finances in their household, indicating enhanced self-reliance. Moreover, 56% of participants recognized social and economic empowerment, reflecting the program's wider impact beyond just financial aspects. However, only 16% noted business growth, finding that the benefits of entrepreneurship may take longer to materialize or may require additional support. Importantly, 90% of respondents expressed a willingness to recommend the program to others, demonstrating strong overall satisfaction.

Table 5: Decision-Making Authority in Household Financial Matters

Statement	Self	Husband	Joint decision	Others
Income spending decider	4	24	72	0
Major purchase decider	5	20	75	0
Education expenditure decider	3	23	74	0
Loan credit decider	3	26	71	0

Table 5 highlights household financial decision-making patterns among respondents. In all categories, income spending, major purchases, education expenses, and loan or credit decisions, joint decision-making dominates, ranging from 71% to 75%. This indicates a strong culture of shared financial responsibility within families. Decisions made solely by the husband range from 20% to 26%, while independent decisions made by respondents themselves remain low, between 3% and 5%. No cases were reported where “others” outside the couple were the primary decision-makers.

Table 6: Respondents’ Participation in Household Financial Activities

Statement	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Budget involvement	20	2	51	15	9
Financial Contribution to Saving	1	5	66	19	9
Opinion Value	24	14	36	21	5
Financial decision without consultant	0	15	24	9	52

Table 6 highlights women’s participation in household financial activities. Budget involvement is relatively strong, with 88% reporting some level of engagement, though only 20% are always involved. financial contributions to savings are less consistent, with 66% contributing sometimes and just 1% always contributing. Regarding the value of opinions, 74% felt their views are considered at least occasionally, reflecting moderate influence in decision-making. Notably, over half (52%) never make financial decisions without consultation, indicating a preference for joint decision-making. These results found active, though varied, participation in household finances, with budgeting showing higher engagement than savings or independent decision-making. Encouraging greater consistency in savings contributions and empowering individuals for autonomous financial choices could further strengthen household financial stability.

Table7: Household Decision-Making & Distribution

Statement	Self	Husband	In-laws	joint decision
Daily expenses decider	3	27	31	39
Food menu decider	58	3	1	38
Medical treatment decider	2	31	2	65

Chores divide decider	3	9	2	86
Guest hosting preparation decider	9	2	1	88
Clothes buying decider	4	23	0	73

Table 7 presents the distribution of household decision-making responsibilities among respondents, their husbands, in-laws, and joint decisions. Joint decision-making predominates in most areas, particularly in chore division (86%), guest hosting preparation (88%), medical treatment (65%), and clothing purchases (73%). Personal autonomy is most pronounced in food menu planning, where 58 respondents reported making independent choices. Husbands demonstrate a more significant role in decisions regarding daily expenses (27) and medical treatment (31), while in-laws are more actively involved in daily expenses (31). The data indicate that household decision-making is predominantly collaborative, with certain domains influenced by traditional gender and family roles. Promoting balanced participation across all decision-making areas could foster mutual respect, enhance household harmony, and strengthen family cohesion.

Table 8: Women's decision-making abilities

Statement	Significantly Improve	Slightly improved	No Change	Slightly Worsened	Significantly Worsened	Total
Decision-making improved since started earning	32	57	11	0	0	100

Table 8 shows that women's decision-making abilities have improved since they started earning income, with 32% respondents reporting significant improvement and 57% noting slight improvement. Only 11% observed no change, and none reported a decline. These findings suggest that financial independence positively influences women's roles in household decision-making. Additionally, regarding their involvement in decision-making, indicates that most respondents (21%) wish to have an even greater role in decision-making. Specifically, 58% participants expressed a strong desire for increased involvement, while 40% indicated a moderate desire. Only 2% were satisfied with their current level of involvement, and none expressed disinterest. Overall, the results underscore the empowering effect of economic contribution and the desire for more active participation in household matters.

Table 9: Strategies for Managing Work, Household Responsibilities, and Community Roles

Statement	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
I manage everything alone	16	16	16
I get help from family	77	77	77
I compromise on work responsibilities	5	5	5
I get help from co-worker	0	0	0

I compromised on household responsibilities	2	2	2
Community role	100	100	100
Role of a citizen	100	100	100
Role of a business owner	20	20	20
Role of a SHG president	24	24	24
Role of a mobilizer	0	0	0
Role of a community facilitator	5	5	5
Role of an employee	5	5	5
Volunteer	2	2	2
Role of a community member	5	5	5

The merged findings present a comprehensive view of women's strategies for balancing household responsibilities alongside their involvement in community roles. A substantial majority (77%) reported relying on family support, demonstrating the centrality of kinship networks in managing dual demands. In contrast, 16% of respondents carried the manage alone, while only small proportions compromised on work (5%) or household duties (2%). The absence of co-worker support highlights a lack of workplace mechanisms to ease domestic pressures. Concurrently, community engagement was found to be universal, with all participants (100%) identifying as active citizens. However, participation in formal leadership or entrepreneurial positions was limited, with only 24% serving as SHG presidents and 20% as business owners, while smaller fractions engaged as facilitators, employees, or volunteers (2-5%). This pattern indicates that while women are deeply engaged in both private and public spheres, structural barriers may constrain their advancement into positions of authority. Overall, the results underscore the necessity of strengthening supportive family structures, promoting equitable domestic responsibility-sharing, and implementing institutional capacity-building initiatives that foster women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Discussion

The results of this study provide a comprehensive and insightful understanding of the socio-economic, occupational, and decision-making patterns of women in the Bargarh District of Odisha. Overall, the findings illustrate a community that is socially cohesive yet economically constrained, wherein women assume pivotal roles within both their families and communities. Despite their significant contributions, these efforts frequently remain unrecognized and undervalued within the prevailing traditional socio-economic framework. The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that educational attainment among women is still considerably low. While a majority have completed only primary or secondary schooling, a smaller portion remains illiterate. This situation underscores the ongoing disparity in access to education, which directly impacts women's employment prospects and overall empowerment. Furthermore, most of the women are married, which aligns with the traditional familial structures prevalent in rural Odisha. Income levels are modest, with the majority of respondents earning below ₹15,000 per month, reflecting the economic vulnerability of women in rural settings who predominantly rely on low-paying, informal employment. The lack of stable income sources further highlights the limited availability of employment opportunities for women in the region. Agriculture and daily wage labor constitute the primary foundation of women's livelihoods. Farming represents the principal

occupation, supplemented by occasional wage-based labor. However, these activities are highly seasonal and uncertain, resulting in fluctuating incomes throughout the year. Only a small number of women are engaged in skilled professions, such as handicrafts, largely due to the absence of training programs, skill development initiatives, and adequate market linkages. Some women have attempted to augment their income by operating small shops or engaging in part-time wage work. These endeavors exemplify their resilience and determination to support their families despite constrained resources. The near absence of handicraft work further emphasizes the need for enhanced skill development programs and market opportunities for women artisans. Empowerment and decision-making patterns among the respondents indicate gradual progress. Many households practice joint decision-making in financial matters, including budgeting, education, and significant purchases. This shift suggests that women's voices are increasingly being heard and valued, although complete independence in decision-making remains uncommon. Most women are involved in budgeting and managing household savings; however, only a few make financial decisions independently. This pattern implies a transition from dependency to shared familial responsibility. Earning an income has played a transformative role in enhancing women's self-confidence and their engagement in household decision-making processes. Financial independence has enabled women to assert their perspectives and gain respect within their families. Nevertheless, traditional gender norms continue to present challenges for some women, constraining their authority in both household and community affairs. The task of balancing domestic responsibilities with professional obligations remains a significant challenge. Many women navigate this balance with the assistance of family members, while others bear the burden independently. Some women even compromise either household or work-related tasks to fulfil their responsibilities. This situation underscores the necessity for improved community and institutional support systems that can assist women in effectively managing multiple roles. Despite these challenges, all respondents actively participate in community life. Many have emerged as entrepreneurs, Self-Help Group leaders, or engaged citizens, reflecting their increasing confidence and leadership potential. Their involvement in community and social development activities signifies a gradual but steady advancement in women's empowerment at the grassroots level. However, their representation in formal employment and leadership positions remains limited, highlighting the need for stronger institutional support, enhanced access to education, and targeted empowerment initiatives to help women fully realize their potential. The study ultimately demonstrates that women in Bargarh are agents of change, resilient, resourceful, and determined to improve their families' economic and social well-being. With the right support systems, training, and access to opportunities, they can play an even more transformative role in building stronger, more equitable rural communities.

Conclusion

The study conducted in Birmal, Chakarkend, Nileswar and Dhanger Gram panchayat of Bargarh District, Odisha, yields valuable insights into the lives of tribal women, their economic conditions, and their increasingly significant roles within family and community contexts. The findings indicate that while these women have made considerable strides in becoming active earners and decision-makers, they continue to encounter challenges rooted in poverty, limited educational opportunities, and entrenched social expectations. Most women in the community have attained only basic education, with a limited number able to pursue higher studies. Despite these educational constraints, nearly all are

engaged in various forms of work. Farming and daily wage labor serve as the primary sources of livelihood, indicating a strong reliance on agriculture and informal employment. A small subset of women participates in skilled labour, such as handicrafts, highlighting the need for improved access to training, resources, and market opportunities. Although household incomes remain modest, many women contribute to family earnings through small shops or other part-time activities. Within households, financial and everyday decision-making is predominantly undertaken jointly by husbands and wives, reflecting a growing trend of cooperation and mutual respect. However, the independent decision-making power of women is still in the developmental stage and is contingent upon their confidence and economic stability. Earning their own income has facilitated a pronounced sense of empowerment for many women. They now feel more capable of making decisions and voicing their opinions within their families. This newfound independence has not only bolstered their self-confidence but has also elevated their social status within the community. Nevertheless, balancing household responsibilities with income-generating activities remains a challenge, and most women continue to depend on familial support to effectively manage both roles. In the realm of community life, women are becoming increasingly visible and active. Many have assumed leadership positions in Self-Help Groups or initiated small businesses, reflecting their growing influence and commitment to improving their environments. These accomplishments signify a gradual yet meaningful transformation in gender relations within the village. In conclusion, the women of Sahajabal are progressing toward greater economic independence and social empowerment, despite the ongoing presence of structural and cultural barriers. Enhancing access to education, financial resources, skill training, and leadership opportunities can further reinforce this progress. A holistic approach to empowering these women will not only uplift their individual lives but also contribute to the long-term development and stability of their families and the community as a whole.

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