

Panchayati Raj Institution: Ground Truth of Political Empowerment Status of the Marginalized Tribal Women in Jhargram Districts, West Bengal, India

Chakraborty C¹, Mondal M^{2*}, Karmakar P³

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¹ Chayon Chakraborty, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Midnapore College (Autonomous), West Bengal, India.

^{2*} Manishree Mondal, Associate Professor, Department of Geography, Midnapore College (Autonomous), West Bengal, India.

³ Puja Karmakar, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Midnapore College (Autonomous), West Bengal, India.

Bringing women in decision making process through the implementation of Panchayati Raj Institution enhances women's political empowerment. Appearance of women in grass root politics ensures two-way benefits. First, it boosts their economic, social and political status. Second, it makes the democracy stronger and more meaningful. This study mainly aims to assess the nature of the exact scenario of political empowerment through participation and representation of marginalized tribal women in active politics. This study truly relies on the primary data base which has been collected through a well-structured questionnaire survey by applying purposive stratified random sampling technique in the tribal dominated villages of Jhargram District. Political Empowerment Index has been calculated to define the exact scenario. The study reveals that more than half of the tribal women represent the Panchayati Raj Institution mainly because of the mandatory reservation system for women. More than 80 percent of the tribal women are less interested and aware about active political participation in grass root decision making process. Majority of tribal women agree about the lack of education, training, family pressure, caste discrimination, non-cooperation from male political leaders is the major hindrances in the path of their successful progress in the political arena. Finally, this research extracts the fact that the entry in grass root politics has no doubt opened a new door for the tribal women to be politically empowered but this seems a fallacy because of low level of political empowerment index value. Thus, it could not be wrong to say that there is a wider gap between the constitutional opportunity and the real exercise in the power game in Panchayati Raj Institution. These sections of marginalized tribal women have to go a long journey for achieving the desired goal of political empowerment.

Keywords: panchayati raj institution, political empowerment, tribal women, political empowerment index, power game

Corresponding Author	How to Cite this Article	To Browse
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1. Introduction

The 73rd constitutional amendment act brings women in local decision-making process through the mandatory reservation system in India (Palanithurai, 2001; Hust, 2002; Mathew, 2003; Aruna, 2018). It gave space to a number of tribal women in local self-governance. Subsequently, so many women entered in politics. Therepresentation of women particularly from the marginalised tribal group imply a powerful symbolic impact on grassroots politics which further ensures the stronger and meaningful democracy. Women from minority or marginalised group who remain underrepresented seeks policies favourable towards women once they elected in the decision-making bodies (Bratton and Ray, 2002; O'Regan, 2000; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). Presence of women in legislative bodies hiked the importance of gender equality, social welfare and women friendly policies as well (Lovenduski and Norris, 2003). Political participation and representation of women influence other women to be the part of the democracy by their direct engagement in politics and their political attitude and behaviour asPanchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India open up such opportunity to women where they are not only elect but also to be elected in local self-governance.

Tribal women as an ethnic minority group remain neglected in the society because of their social and economic backwardness. Political participation of tribal women and their empowerment was beyond thinking in an oppressive society. PRIs made history by eliminating such barriers and allow tribal women to come forward and lead themselves towards empowerment. It has been evident from the study of Bobo and Gilliam (1990) that there is a deep connection between higher representation and empowerment particularly from the minority group. Donovan et, al. (2004) suggest that minorities are more likely feels secure when they represented by their own representatives in legislative bodies. In this regard, tribal women feel trustful towards government as PRIs ensures their representation in local self-governance. Political participation between men and women or between ethnic or racial group has different rate and pattern. Such difference creates inequality in democracy. Marginalised tribal group are one of them who generally faced unequal behaviour in the society and in political arena as well.

According to Brown (2014) minority women faces structural inequality in democracy and do not participate equally in politics as elite or financially stronger women do. In a male dominated political sphere it is very challenging for women to participate in grassroots politics particularly for marginalised tribal women. Social and economic inequalities and prevailing caste system in rural areas is a challenging hurdle for women to cross and enter in the politics. Only representation in number doesn't ensure the empowerment of tribal women. It truly depends on their effective participation in panchayat functionaries (Behera, 2011).

The social, economic and political status of women in a society is a remarkable reflection of the degree of social justice in a society. In tribal communities, women play a significant role in family sustenance. Their socio-economic status is a significant factor as they work hard and contribute in family income. Even after industrialization and commercialisation their roles in family expenditure remain unchanged apart from child bearing practices and other household activities (Giridhar, 2018). Political participation of marginalised tribal women is one of the important pathways to ensure their empowerment. Their participation and representation in decision making process influence broadly that affect their lives and livelihood. It further impacted on their political consciousness, voting behaviour, perception about herself and her rights her potential and social attitude towards the marginalised tribal women representatives as well. PRIs ensure women participation in local self-governance and provide an open scope to ensure women empowerment across all hierarchy of the society. In this concern, tribal women have the opportunity to level up their socio-economic and political status by participating and representing in grassroots governance. Thus, this study mainly aims to extract the ground truths of the political empowerment status of the marginalised tribal women through their political activeness in PRIs.

2. Literature Review

The 73rd Amendment Act gives power to women across class, caste and ethnicity to participate and represent them freely in local decision-making process.

It has been possible for women from marginalized groups to enter in the panchayat functionaries only because of the constitutional provision of PRIs where they have the scope to pull themselves up in the social, economic and political order (Ghosh and Kumar, 2014; Raheena and Sara, 2017; Sharma, 2021).

For women, cast is a significant factor in socio-political atmosphere. Women from lower caste group face difficulties even from upper caste female colleagues. Non-cooperation towards lower caste women representatives and restriction to speak in front of higher caste representatives of panchayats is very common in rural India (Mathew & Nayak, 1996; Mathew, 2003; Govinda, 2006). Illiteracy is a significant factor behind the low level of participation by women in local self-governance. Illiteracy further leads to high dependency of women on male members, sometimes upon their husband. Subsequently the problem of proxy-participation arises in lower tier of politics just because of illiteracy and zero idea on panchayat functionaries (Mohanty, 1995; Bhaskar, 1997; Pai, 1998). It has been evident from the several studies that many women file nomination not because of their own will but due to the pressure from husband or any male family member or by the male political leaders. This is very common in case of Schedule Caste (SC) and Schedule Tribe (ST) women in order to fulfil the reserved quota in PRIs (Mohanty, 1995; Bhaskar, 1997; Panda, 1999; Pai, 1998; Buch, 2009). Hence, small proportion of women from backward class effectively participates in grass root governance (Palanithurai, 2001; Hust, 2002; Mathew, 2003). Dominant caste took the advantage of it and women from backward classes remain oppressed even after being elected in PRIs.

It has been suggested by the several scholars in their study that political participation differs worldwide based on the gender, class, caste and ethnicity (Verba et al. 1995; Junn 1997; Leighley 1990; Ramirez, and Segura 2001; Tate 2004; Kam et al. 2008). Women's social positioning significantly differs because of marginalization based on race and ethnicity. Social and economic resources play a crucial role behind the effective participation of women in politics. Low level of education and income resources among women of backward classes at individual level lags behind higher educated and elite women (Brown, 2014).

Participation and representation of women from tribal group is important for healthy democracy. Women representatives from a marginalized group can table their issues in decision making process. Women representatives from tribal community can draw tribal women friendly policies by effectively participating in PRIs. There are numbers of obstacles found through different literature which elected women representatives particularly from backward classes face on a regular basis in local grassroot governance. Illiteracy, lack of family support, low remuneration, less control on financial resources, caste-based seating arrangement in panchayat meetings, caste based social discrimination, non-cooperation from male colleagues, male domination, supremacy of elites are the reasons behind the high rate of drop out of marginalised elected women representatives in PRIs even during their tenure (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009; Rai et al. 2013). Satyam (2013) in his study in Jharkhand reported that women from tribal group enthusiastically participate in three tier panchayat election. Though there is a direct tress of proxy participation of tribal women in PRIs but it enabled women to raise their voice in grassroot governance to some extent. Elected women tribal representatives are in chaos and confusion about their duties, rights. They are also in a state of complete domination by their male counterparts particularly in decision making under PRIs. This is a common scenario across all tribal areas in the state.

Several studies uphold the different aspect of caste-based women representation in PRIs in the country. Empowerment of women particularly from disadvantaged group and benefit for the society through PRIs has been extracted through different literature as well. Women from the reserved category provided more public goods like drinking water supply, roads etc. and quality infrastructure as compared to unreserved women panchayat members (Duflo and Topalova, 2004). Reservation system found helpful in the study of Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) where women from reserved category delivered quality service to the disadvantaged group at the panchayat level.

Women from backward section of the society have to face several challenges. Sometimes they can overcome it sometimes not. Young women of Shimoga district in Karnataka are willing to re-contest in PRIs as social and family status of women has increased and they contributed in the social welfare in their last tenure (Kadam, 2012).

In Tamil Nadu thirty types of discrimination against backward class women has been assessed. Untouchability is one of major concern in PRIs. Dalit women are not allowed to visit Gram Pachayat (GP) offices as well (Palanithurai, 2001). Participation of women from SC, ST and Other backward classes has been found nominal in Maharastra. Arora and Prabhakar (1997) extracted the fact that women from upper caste or dominant caste are more interested in politics. Subsequently, capacity building programmes and training for women panchayat representatives proved fruitful to achieve women empowerment at higher degree (Behar and Kumar, 2002).

3. Methodology

The research is mainly dependent on primary data base. The primary data are collected through questionnaire survey (fig 1). A total of Two hundred nine (209) elected women representatives shared their experiences in PRIs through pre-structured questionnaire survey and focused group discussion. Purposive sampling technique has been used to run the primary survey. The report has been prepared on the basis of primary data which have been collected in between November 2023 to January, 2024.

Based on the selected variables, different empowerment indices have been calculated. Scores given at three-point scale to the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) based on their performance in PRIs and responses at the time of questionnaire survey. Each variable has a maximum score of 3 for highest and 1 for minimum achievement of women representatives through PRIs. There are five variables for each index with a maximum possible score of 15. Women Personal Liberty Index (W.P.L.I), Women Social Participation Index (W.S.P.I), Women Political Awareness Index (W.P.A.I), Women Political Participation Index (W.P.P.I) has been calculated based on the following formula (Kumari & Singh, 2012)-

$$\frac{\text{Scores Obtained}}{\text{Maximum Possible Scores}} \times 100$$

Hence forth, Women Political Empowerment Index (W.P.E.I) has been calculated where it is the average of W.P.L.I, W.S.P.I, W.P.A.I and W.P.P.I. It should be clearly mentioned that high index value indicates higher performance by the women panchayat representatives.

The relevant secondary data have been collected from government offices, websites, and publications. Arc GIS 10.3.1, SPSS 2019, Microsoft Office Word 2016, Microsoft Office Excel 2016 are used for analysis the result. The collected data have been tabulated, organized and analysed using various cartographic techniques. The entire study follows an intensive literature review.

Figure 1: Questionnaire survey

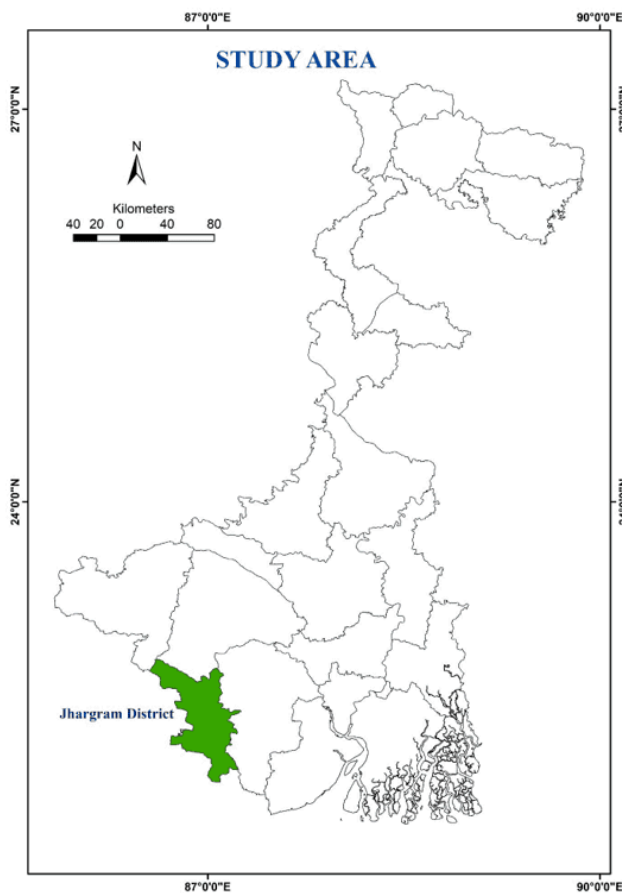


Source: Field survey

4. Study Area

Before 2017 Paschim Medinipur and Jhargram was a single district and known as Paschim Medinipur district. Later Jhargram separated from Paschim Medinipur and becomes the 22nd district of West Bengal (Paschim Medinipur Zila Parishad, 2011) (fig 2). The district is known as the part of 'Jangle Mahal' as the districts are well covered by forest (Paschim Medinipur Zila Parishad, 2025; Jhargram District, Govt. of West Bengal, 2025). As per the 2011 Census of India, tribal population share in the district was 14.88% with a literacy rate of 79.04 percent. Both the district is recognized as the backward district of West Bengal. Least agricultural and industrial opportunity makes the people vulnerable. Tribal people of this forest covered areas largely depended on the forest resources to sustain their livelihood. Lateritic soil cover, non-perennial river systems of the districts are the barrier of economic progress. Kangsabati, Shilabati, Dulung are highly flood prone rivers of this region during monsoon season.

Figure 2: Location of the study area



Source: Computed by the authors using ArcGIS 10.3.1

5. Result and Discussion

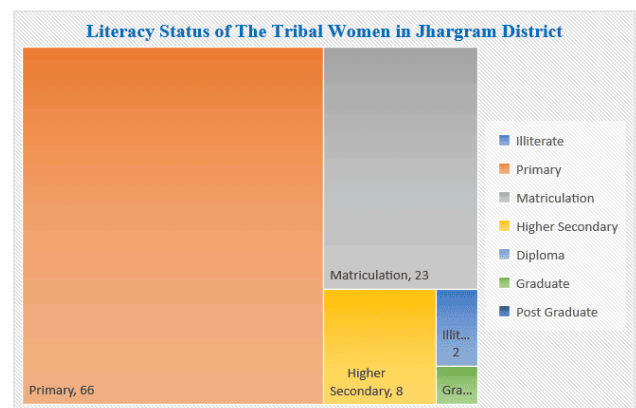
5.1 Cultural Background of Tribal Women

5.1.1 Literacy

Literacy is one of the most significant factors behind the effective participation of women panchayat members particularly in case of marginalized tribal women who have less social exposure. Women with less educational attainment are highly vulnerable in case of panchayat functionaries. Education makes people aware, judgmental and ethical in case of performing duties and responsibilities. In this regard, majority of women representatives from tribal community in the district have primary level education i.e. 66%. Just eight percent in Jhargram district crossed higher secondary level (fig 3). This has a greater implication in rural decision-making process. Women from marginalized tribal group often neglected and misguided by their male seniors because of their low level of read and writing capacity. They also suffer to understand the policy rules and regulation as they are unable to extract the originality of policy outcomes.

Thus, they have to depend on the male colleagues or male political leader. In most cases, their dependency reaches at the fullest. On other hand, villagers seek information and guidance about any panchayat functionaries or government policies from their respective panchayat member but they can't satisfy their demand. Thus, a negative statement about women representatives carries forwarded among rural folks. But women with higher educational background create some hope. They performed their duties in an effective manner.

Figure 3: Literacy status of the tribal women representatives

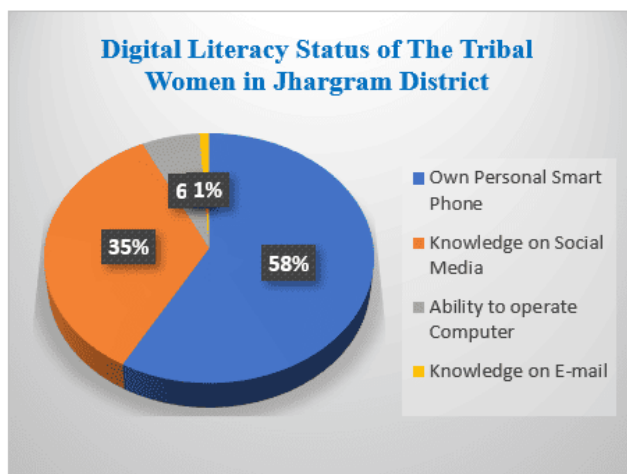


Source: Field survey

5.1.2 Digital literacy

Digital literacy is exceptionally important in this digital era. Most of the panchayat functionaries now a day operate through digital services. Not only this but also information related to the policies and schemes of government circulates through technologies i.e. websites or applications. Apart from this information on political ongoing in the country are easily accessible through digital media. Social media also plays a significant role to circulate message quickly in case of emergency. That's why operating smart phone or computer is highly essential particularly for people's representatives. In this case, women panchayat representatives from tribal communities of the study area are well advanced. In Jhargram district 58% tribal women representatives (TWR) own smartphone and 35% tribal women representatives operate different social media (fig 4). But they accept the fact that they are less known about different e-governance facilities. These are mainly handled by their male colleagues or panchayat officials. They further added that they want to capable themselves if there is proper training facilities provided to them for the same.

Figure 4: Digital literacy of the tribal women representatives

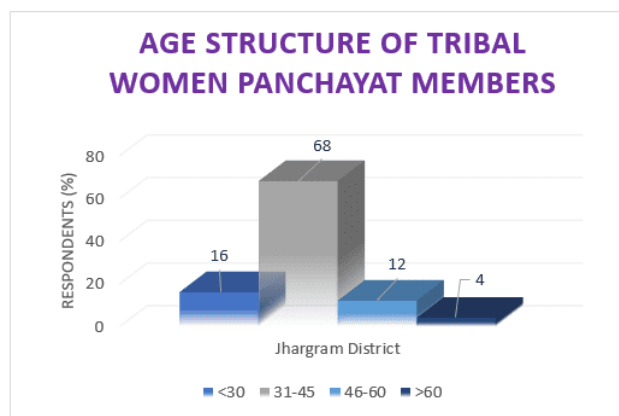


Source: Field survey

5.1.3 Age Structure

It has been believed that young workforce always remains highly efficient and hardworking at every tier of work space. Majority of the tribal women representatives (68%) in Jhargram district belongs to mid age group where their age is in between 31 to 45. 16% TWR are very young or even less than 30 years old (fig 5). Though their engagement in PRIs from young age group is high but they are inexperienced in this field as well. Taking this as an opportunity male senior leaders or colleagues in rural self-governance manipulates TWRs very easily and their supremacy continues. It has been evident from the study that majority of young TWRs preferred to shelter either by their husband or any male political leader simply because of their first time participation in PRIs. But it also inherited through the survey in the study area that the degree of participation among young TWRs in political activities like meetings, marching, protesting and deputation is higher than the old aged TWRs.

Figure 5: Age structure of the tribal women representatives

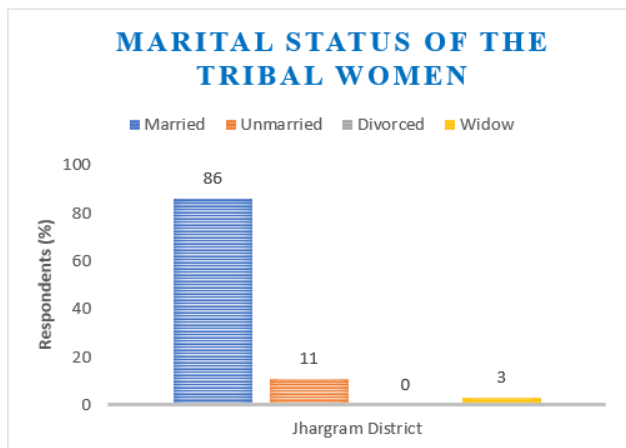


Source: Field survey

5.1.4 Marital Status

It has been evident from the literature that there is an inference caused by the husband in political and panchayat functions of women representatives in local self-governance. In this concern, marital status of TWRs in the study area is highly essential. It has been also experienced through literature that because of the mandatory reservation system in PRIs when males are unable to represent themselves, they often influence their wife to nominate themselves in panchayat election. This is how their control over local politics continues. It is no surprising to observe that 86% TWR in Jhargram district are married. Only 11% TWRs are unmarried (fig 6). It has been also extracted from the field survey that marginal tribal women representatives act under the guidance of their husband. In most of the political activities either they accompanied or fully handled by their husband. Thus, there is a tress of dummy representation by the majority of TWRs in PRIs in the study area. Though, women representatives share their thought that they can manage the panchayat and political activities by their own but it's a tough challenge for them as society follows patriarchal rules.

Figure 6: Marital status of the tribal women representatives



Source: Field survey

5.1.5 Occupational Structure of the Tribal Women

It has been experienced from the study area that majority (53%) of the tribal women representatives are unemployed and 39% are seasonal wage labour in Jhargram district (table 1). This shows the true facet of their marginality. Being a backward area, both the district has minimum income opportunity. Hence, for the sake of family sustenance they have to engage themselves in seasonal labour force. With minimum or no land holdings they generally work as wage labour in agricultural field. Unemployment makes the situation worst for the TWRs because their economic dependency level on their husband or any other male family member is high. Thus, they have to compromise with their willingness in case of political participation. In most cases they have to follow the family decision and remain suppressed in the political sphere as well.

Table 1: Occupational structure of the tribal women representatives

Occupation	Respondents from Jhargram District (%)
Unemployed	53
Self employed	7
Seasonal wage labour	39
Business	0
Service	1

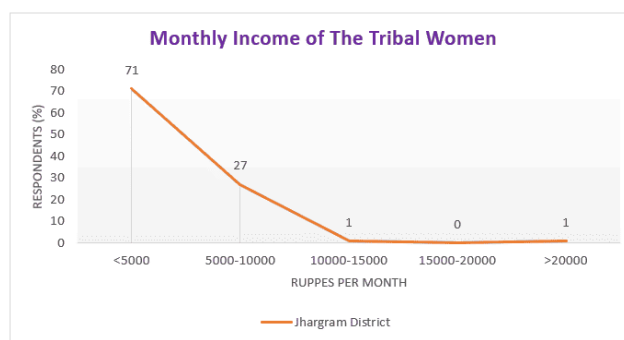
Source: Field survey

5.1.6 Monthly Income

Majority of the tribal women representatives are poor in the study area. In Jhargram district TWRs have a monthly income of less than 5000 rupees (fig 7).

Remuneration that they received is one and only source which provides some sort of stability in their economic life. But this is not sufficient in today's high inflated market. They lack in alternative income sources because of the backwardness of their locality. With such a low month income they have to struggle a lot. In this regard, they remain busy in search of alternative income throughout the year and as a result their political duties get neglected. Everyone knows the dependency of tribal women on forest. Most of the day women spent in forest to collect different forest products and sell them in the nearby market. TWRs are one of them. Thus, their economic burden makes their life miserable where low amount of remuneration doesn't seek their interest to work fulltime in panchayat functionaries. On otherhand, women representatives from tribal community also accept the fact that, though the remuneration as panchayat member is insufficient for family sustenance but it helps to some degree to improve their lifestyle. They further seek attention to hike their remuneration so that they can spent some more time in local self-governance for the betterment of their locality on a regular basis. They also opined that hike in remuneration will attract more women to be engaged in grassroot politics as well.

Figure 7: Monthly income of the tribal women representatives



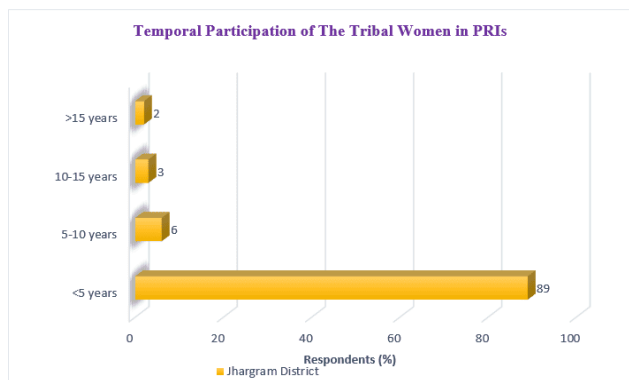
Source: Field survey

5.2 Tribal Women in Politics

It has been observed that majority of the tribal women participates in the local self-governance for the first time. This means they have an experience of less than 5 years. 89 percent TWR from Jhargram district falls in this category. It has been experienced that proportion of TWRs gradually decreases when tenure of experience increases in both of the districts (fig 8).

Therefore, inexperience of the tribal women in political field hits them different. It has been also observed from the study that experienced TWRs are more active and capable to handle the panchayat functionaries as compared to the inexperienced TWRs. Thus, it can be summarized that there is a possibility of good performance by the tribal women if they repetitively participate in grassroot politics.

Figure 8: Temporal participation of the tribal women representatives in PRIs



Source: Field survey

5.3 Factors Behind Participation

It has been very essential to investigate what factors plays the significant role behind the participation of tribal women in PRIs. It is not surprising to know that, desire of husband or any other male family members as well as the reservation for women are the two biggest driving factors in this process. 46 percent from Jhargram district responded that they participate in the PRIs as per their male family member’s wish more specifically by their husband. On the other hand, 37 percent TWRs participates in the PRIs as the seat was reserved for women (table 2). It should be clear out why these two factors greatly influence tribal women. This is the effect of power game of male dominated political practice. Generally, men dominate in the political arena. They contest election as well. But if the seat turned out as women reserved seats then they push their wife to participate in the panchayat election and enjoy the political power in the name of her wife or daughter. Thus, they stand tall in the power game as usual and inexperienced, illiterate tribal women have no understanding to exercise the power by their own.

Table 2: Factors influencing the participation of the tribal women representatives.

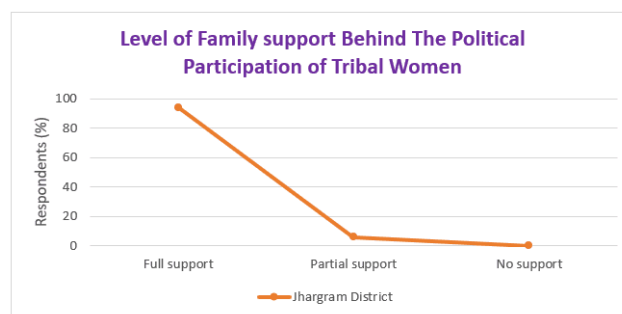
Factors influencing the participation	Respondents from Jhargram District (%)
Self interest	3
Seat was reserved for women	37
Desire of Husband/any other family member	46
Desire of neighbours	8
Desire of any political party	6

Source: Field survey

5.4 Family Support

Family support plays a crucial role to participate in the grassroot politics especially for the tribal women. Generally, tribal women are home bounded and remain busy in household activities or child bearing practices. Jhargram district belongs to a backward region where this is very common among the marginal tribal group. More than 80 percent respondents admitted that without family support it was not possible to take part in the local self-governance (fig 9). They discussed within their family whether to participate or not in PRIs. All the possibilities, advantage and disadvantage have been cultured among the adult family members then they filed nomination. Thus, they strongly agreed that family support is exceptionally essential to take such decisions particularly for the marginal tribal women.

Figure 9: Level of family support



Source: Field survey

5.5 Major Challenges

It has been extracted from the study that what are the key challenges that tribal women representatives have to face during their tenure in PRIs. It has been agreed by the 41 percent from the study area that family pressure is the key challenge in front of them. Gender discrimination and caste discrimination are the other two problems that hit those most.

19 percent tribal women representatives from Jhargram district raised their concern over caste discrimination (table 3). It has been admitted by the TWRs that after being elected they supposed to do the panchayat functionalities which hampered their family responsibilities. There is a least scope to balance their dual responsibilities. In this case, family pressure became the significant barrier in front them. On the other hand, elite class political leaders or colleagues underestimate them as they belonged to the lower caste of the society. Dominancy of the elite class in the political decision-making push them back in both of the district even in the tribal dominated areas as well.

Table 3: Major challenges faced the tribal women representatives.

Major Challenges	Respondents from Jhargram District (%)
Gender discrimination	22
Caste discrimination	19
Inhibitions in speaking in front of male seniors	11
Family Pressure	41
Non-cooperation to opposition representatives	7
Non-cooperation from colleagues	0

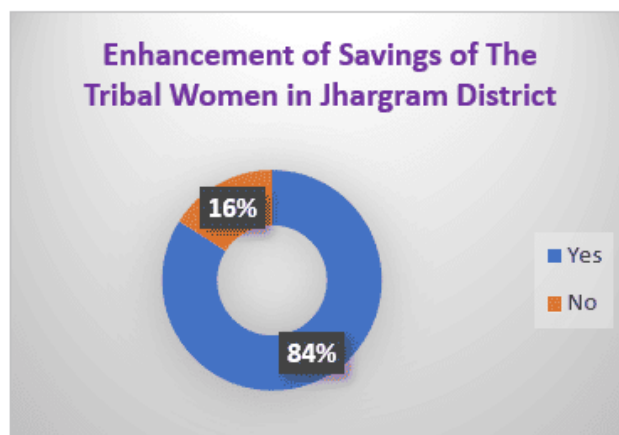
Source: Field survey

5.6 Economic Status

5.6.1 Savings

Savings is considered as an asset of the hard time. Being elected as the EWR, women from the tribal community strengthen their financial condition. Though the remuneration is low but still it helps them a lot to make some savings to secure their future. More than 80 percent of the women tribal representatives from the district enabled themselves to make savings through their political engagement (fig 10). This truly impacted them on a positive note particularly for the marginalized tribal areas of Jhargram district.

Figure 10: Savings of tribal women representatives

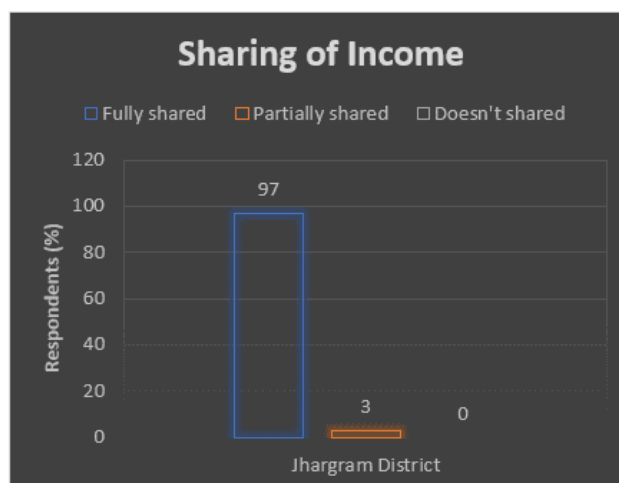


Source: Field survey

5.6.2 Sharing of Income

It has been observed that economic independency of tribal women has increased through their political participation. Tribal women representatives gladly accept that they are happy to share their income in the family expenditure, savings or in case of emergency. This is quite satisfying for them as they become capable in financial contributions which increase their economic status as well. In this regard, more than 90 percent TWRs in Jhargram district fully shared their income in family expenditure (fig 11). This is so satisfying to experience that political participation of women has provided an opportunity to the marginal women to make them financially independent and gain economic stability. This is truly making sense that PRIs helps to increase income opportunity in a backward region and make marginalized tribal women economically empowered.

Figure 11: Sharing of income of the tribal women representatives

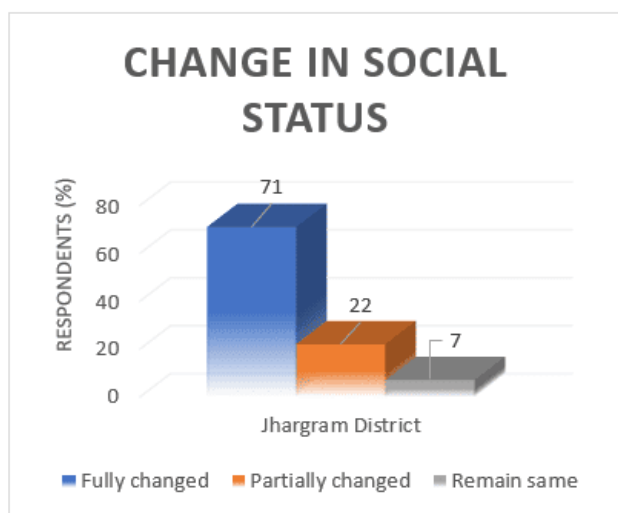


Source: Field survey

5.7 Change in Social Status

Participation of the tribal women in local self-governance not only enhances their economic status but also their social status. Elected tribal women representatives revealed that their social recognition, popularity or social identity has significantly increased after being elected in the PRIs. 71 percent TWRs in Jhargram district responded that their social status has significantly changed after becoming the panchayat member (fig 12). During the survey they highlighted that only few particularly their neighbours know them. But after election their familiarity crossed such narrow boundary. They started to receive invitation in many social functions, ceremonies or even invited as the chief guest in local festivals as well. These means a lot to those marginalized tribal women once that were just home bounded. PRIs make them socially empowered to a certain degree. But the other side of the coin has a dark reality that tribal women representatives get recognition in their own community while the elites of the society still don't consider them to take the chair in many social programs. Thus, their struggles are in continuation and have to go a long way.

Figure 12: Change in social status of the tribal women representatives



Source: Field survey

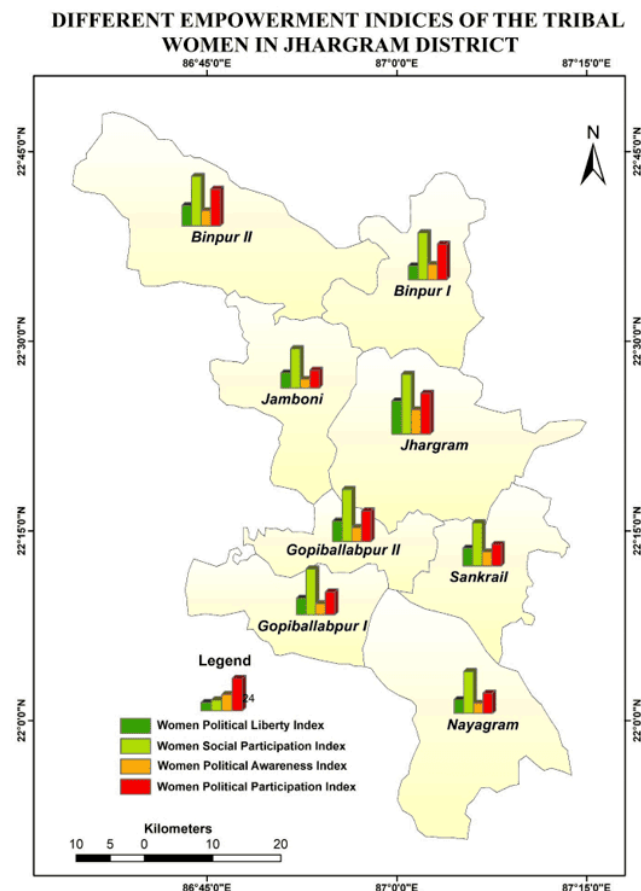
5.8 Political Empowerment of the Tribal Women

It has been evident from the above discussion that PRIs enabled women empowerment through the active participation in grassroots politics. Overall political empowerment has been measured through different indices in the study area.

It has been experienced that Women Personal Liberty Index (WPLI) and Women Political Awareness Index (WPAI) is comparatively low than the Women Social Participation Index (WSPI) and Women Political Participation Index (WPPI) in both the districts. Women personal liberty includes intra household decision making or ability to take independent decisions.

In case of Jhargram district similar scenario has been experienced. WSPI and WPPI is comparatively high than the WPLI and WPAI. Jhargram being the districts headquarter has higher degree of political empowerment among the tribal women. Gopiballavpur-I, Binpur I and II also have the high rate of political participation and social participation from the tribal women (fig 13). Urbanization impact plays the crucial role where political empowerment of tribal women elevates to some degree through their active political participation in the local self-governance. Marginal areas of the district have a minimum scope simply because of the low level of education and traditional mindset of the society towards women and least political knowledge and awareness among tribal women. Besides all the odds PRIs is quite successful to bring marginal tribal women in the political arena where they are participating and exploring their scope of empowerment through their active participation and representation in grassroots governance.

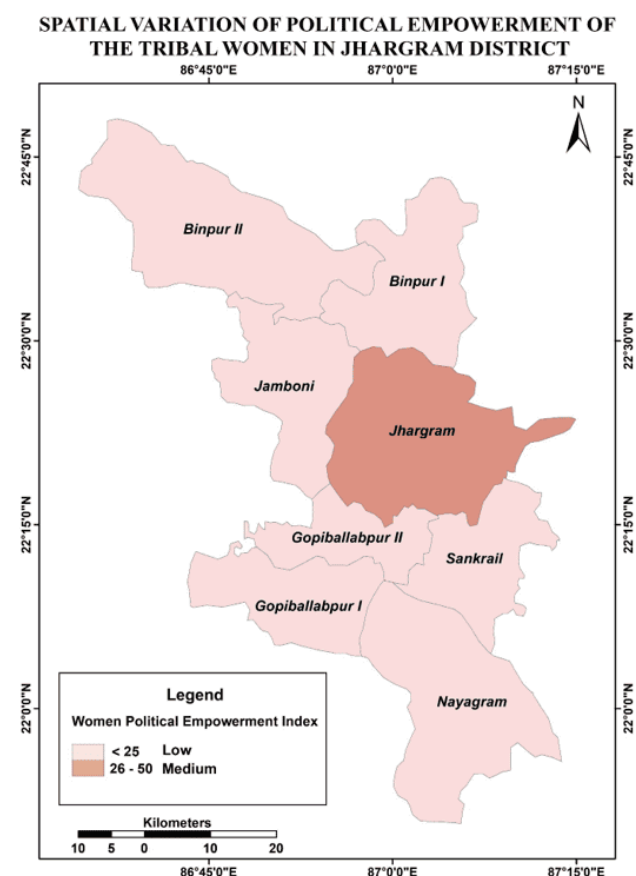
Figure 13: Spatial variation of political empowerment indices of the tribal women representatives



Source: Field survey

Participation and representation of tribal women in grassroot governance lead them towards political empowerment. They have crossed a long way but yet to achieve high degree of empowerment. Scenario in Jhargram district is even worst. Except Jhargram all other blocks show the low political empowerment of the tribal women representatives (fig 14). None of the district shows higher political empowerment among tribal panchayat members. Being a backward region, it is quite natural that it's a hard task to achieve higher women political empowerment particularly for the illiterate, politically unaware, marginal tribal women. But the achievement that the TWRs achieved is appreciable. Something is better than nothing. Their minimum access to the social arena or economic arena somehow became possible only because of their political engagement under PRIs. This is a positive sign for the near future where their achievement will be sky high.

Figure 14: Spatial variation of political empowerment status of the tribal women representatives



Source: Field survey

6. Suggestions and Recommendation

Some immediate initiatives should be taken by the government at grassroot level to change the scenario of the marginalized tribal women. First of all, remuneration of the panchayat members should be hiked especially for the benefit of those marginal people. Training programs or capacity building programs should be arranged on the regular basis to boost their self-confidence. Women should be more politically aware through the digital literacy so that they have the knowledge on the political ongoing in the country. This may help them to take appropriate decisions by their own. Self Hep Group (SHG), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi workers should play the lead role in this process. These women centric organisations may communicate with the marginalised tribal women and train them how to communicate or works in the society.

Members of these organisations who belongs to the tribal community should come forward and directly participate in the grassroot politics. They have experience, knowledge and act smartly in different social programmes. Their leadership quality, communication skills with the women may bring the change in this field as well. Thus, it has been strongly recommended to push those experienced, smart and active tribal women to set the example in the political sphere.

7. Conclusion

This research explored the true facts and facets of PRIs in West Bengal. It is evident from the study that the entry in grass root politics has no doubt opened a new door for the tribal women to be politically empowered but this seems a fallacy because of low level of political empowerment index value. Thus, it could not be wrong to say that there is a wide gap between the constitutional opportunity and the real exercise in the power game in Panchayati Raj Institution. On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that PRIs enabled marginalized tribal women to move forward and brings the meaningful achievement of women empowerment. Economic and social status of tribal women representatives has significantly changed after being elected. Their personal liberty is presently valued within family and political sphere which brings a remarkable change in their lives. But still, marginalized tribal women have to go a long journey to achieve the desired goal of political empowerment.

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