



---

## **Beyond the Ballot: Socio-Economic Empowerment of Tribal Women through Local Governance Structures in Rural West Bengal**

**Abhisek Khan**

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Bankura University, West Bengal, India

---

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18872659>

---

### **ARTICLE DETAILS**

**Research Paper**

**Accepted:** 17-02-2026

**Published:** 10-03-2026

### **Keywords:**

*Tribal Women; Socio-Economic Empowerment; Panchayati Raj; Rural Governance; Gender and Development; West Bengal; Capability Approach; Decentralisation.*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

For a long time, tribal women of rural India faced chronic socio-economic and cultural marginalization that confined them to minimal participation in governance and community decision-making. This is where the introduction of the Panchayati Raj system aimed to democratize local governance and spur inclusive development. However, how far political representation actually translates into relevant socio-economic empowerment of tribal women has remained unexplored to date in tribal areas of Bankura, West Bengal. While much past research has focused on women's political participation, few studies assessed post-election socio-economic changes or the institutional supports that sustained empowerment. The objective of the given study was to assess the facilitation of socio-economic empowerment of tribal women by Panchayati Raj Institutions beyond political representation, using a mixed-methods analytical framework. A qualitative case study approach was utilized in the study, which included 40 tribal women (20 elected and 20 non-elected) from five Gram Panchayats in Bankura district. Data were collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary sources from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2023). Empowerment levels were calculated using the Composite Socio-Economic Empowerment Score based on five dimensions-economic, educational, health, mobility, and psychological. Results indicated that elected women achieved 20–25%

---



higher empowerment levels, with notable gains in income, mobility, and confidence. Participation in PRIs significantly enhanced awareness of welfare schemes and decision-making capacity. The quantifiable model for assessing empowerment in this study illustrated that such decentralised governance could transform the socio-economic conditions of tribal women when supplemented by institutional training and community support. These findings offered practical insights into gender-inclusive policy and rural development planning.

## 1. Introduction

The tribal women of India continue to remain in subaltern positions within the wider social and developmental matrix due to deep-seated intersections of gender, caste, and ethnicity (Barik, n.d.). They historically continue to represent some of the most underprivileged groups that face systematic exclusion from education, health, land ownership, and gainful employment opportunities (Ahmed & Kabir, 2025). This has further been entrenched within the patriarchal tradition of limited mobility, voice, and participation in decision-making processes at household and public levels through socio-cultural constraints (Mosedale, 2005). As a result of these factors, their socio-economic empowerment has long been relegated to being one aspect of more dominant discourses on tribal welfare and rural development, with none making it as a central concern of inclusive governance (Sasidhar et al., 2024).

The Indian constitutional framework sought to redress these inequities through institutional mechanisms that promote participation and representation (Sharaunga et al., 2019). In fact, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was considered a landmark step toward democratizing rural governance by establishing the three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (Lélé, 2004). The Act made reservations for one-third of seats in such bodies for women (increased to 50 percent in many states) and proportionate representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, including tribal women, so that marginalized people have their voice heard directly in governance (Imam & Chinnadurai, n.d.). This decentralization of political power was not only aimed at administrative efficiency but was seen as an instrument of grassroots empowerment and social justice (Kumar & Ghosh, 2024).

Over the last three decades, there has been a considerable rise in women's participation in local governance in numerical terms (Pradha & Sethi, n.d.). However, this political participation is translated into substantive socio-economic empowerment in uneven and context-dependent ways (Mahanandia &



Tripathy, 2025). A number of studies have identified that although women occupy elected positions, many of them still face obstacles in the form of patriarchal interference, limited literacy, lack of adequate training, and institutional support(Manna, 2024). The challenge thus emerges to move beyond tokenistic representation toward genuine empowerment, which involves influencing decision-making, access to resources, and the expansion of capabilities(Giridhar, 2018).

### **Novelty and Contribution of the Study**

This paper presents a composite and multi-dimensional approach toward assessing the post-election socio-economic empowerment of tribal women within West Bengal's Panchayati Raj system. The study constructs a Composite Socio-Economic Empowerment Score that integrates qualitative insights and quantitative indicators across economic, educational, health, mobility, and psychological dimensions. Using field data from Bankura and open-access MoTA datasets, the study bridges feminist institutional theory with measurable local outcomes. Its novelty lies in offering a computable and evidence-based model that captures how grassroots governance drives the empowerment beyond political representation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Conceptualising Empowerment**

Empowerment embodies economic, social, political, and psychological dimensions. Economic empowerment concerns access to income and assets(Kakati, 2022). Social empowerment has to do with mobility, education, and social recognition, while psychological empowerment relates to self-confidence and identity(Shahi, 2024).

### **2.2 Empirical Evidence**

Earlier studies in Odisha, Telangana, and Arunachal Pradesh highlight both progress and persistent constraints(Anil, n.d.). Barik found that decentralisation improved participation yet left structural inequalities intact(Sanyal et al., 2019). Rajendar (2023) emphasised lack of education, awareness, and resources as major barriers for tribal women in Telangana's PRIs. Chiring and Komow demonstrated that economic and social empowerment are mutually reinforcing but contingent on community support and literacy(Nayak, n.d.).



### 2.3 Theoretical Foundations

Sen's (1999) Capability Approach looks at empowerment in terms of an expansion of real freedoms and opportunities. Feminist development thinkers argue for intersectional views that consider caste, tribe, and gender as being co-constitutive of marginalization (Besra, 2022). Grassroots governance theories further suggest that PRIs can democratise power when inclusive and accountable (Dwivedi & Aptaprava, 2023).

### 2.4 Research Gap

Despite the growing literature on women's political participation, limited research has explored post-election socio-economic outcomes for tribal women in West Bengal. The present study fills this lacuna by examining such empowerment indicators through both institutional and experiential lenses.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- To Investigate how elected positions within PRIs contribute to socio-economic change among tribal women in Bankura.
- To Compare differences in agency, income, mobility, and educational attainment.
- To Identify institutional, cultural, and structural factors shaping empowerment processes.

### 4. Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>: Political representation does not guarantee socio-economic empowerment.
- H<sub>2</sub>: Sustained Empowerment: Representation is supported by training, financial inclusion, and community networks.

### 5. Research Questions

1. What are the socio-economic changes after tribal women enter local self-government?
2. Which institutional supports or barriers influence these changes?
3. How do community perceptions and patriarchal norms affect pathways to empowerment?

### 6. Methodology

#### 6.1 Research Design

A mixed-method design integrates field narratives with open-access data from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2023 to review whether the Panchayati Raj Institutions influence tribal women's socio-economic empowerment in the Bankura district of West Bengal.



First, qualitative insights, then quantification: an exploratory sequential approach was used.

## 6.2 Dataset Description

- Dataset: Status of Literacy, Gender and Drop-out among Scheduled Tribes (India, State and District Level)
- Source: Open Government Data Platform India (data.gov.in)
- Scope: 2011 Census baseline, updated 2023; includes Bankura district.
- Key variables: tribal literacy (%), gender gap (%), enrolment, drop-outs, work participation, household income.
- Purpose: To provide a quantitative baseline against which to triangulate interview data on literacy, income, and gender parity.

## 6.3 Sampling and Participants

The sample comprises 40 tribal women purposefully selected from five Gram Panchayats-20 elected and 20 non-elected-plus key stakeholders including SHG leaders, family heads, and officials.

Sampling weight for each tribal group was:

$$W_i = \frac{N_i}{\sum_{i=1}^k N_i}$$

where  $N_i$  = population of group  $i$ ,  $k$  = number of groups.

## 6.5 Empowerment Measurement

The narratives were coded across five dimensions: income, education, health, mobility, and decision-making.

Composite empowerment per respondent:

$$EI = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{j=1}^n S_{ij}$$

$S_{ij}$  = standardised score on dimension  $j$ ,  $n = 5$

## 6.6 Socio-Economic Index

The district-level indicators were normalized to create a Composite Socio-Economic Empowerment Score (CSEE):



$$CSEE_i = \sum_{k=1}^m w_k \left( \frac{X_{ik} - X_{\min,k}}{X_{\max,k} - X_{\min,k}} \right)$$

$w_k =$  dimension weight,  $\sum w_k = 1$

### 6.7 Reliability Testing

The internal consistencies of empowerment sub-items were measured by Cronbach's Alpha:

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left( 1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_{Y_i}^2}{\sigma_X^2} \right)$$

$\alpha \geq 0.70$  confirmed acceptable reliability.

### 6.8 Analytical Techniques

- **NVivo 12** – thematic coding
- **SPSS 28** – descriptive & reliability analysis
- **Python (Matplotlib)** – graphs of GPI and CSEE

Triangulation combined statistical summaries with ethnographic interpretation to ensure rigour in methodology.





## Methodological Framework of the Study.

*Source: Adapted from Research Methodology Framework (Mind the Graph, 2024)*

Figure 1 shows the methodological framework of the study, as evident from the sequential mixed-method design that combines qualitative fieldwork with secondary data analysis. The figure depicts how research moved from design and sampling through interviews and focus groups to thematic coding, integration, and interpretation of data. This structure visually presents a systematic approach to exploring the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women through Panchayati Raj Institutions within Bankura district.

### Algorithm: Calculation of Composite Socio-economic Empowerment Score (CSEE)

#### Input:

- Income, education level, scheme access, mobility index, and confidence score: raw data from field surveys.
- Normalisation weights, pre-set depending on the relevance.

#### Output

- Composite Empowerment Score (CSEE) between 0 and 1 for each participant.

#### Steps

- Launch and start fielding, which involves entering data for each respondent.
- Collect five key indicators: economic, educational, health, mobility, and psychological scores.
- Normalize all indicator values to fall between 0–1 for consistency.
- Assign weights for each dimension regarding their importance.
- Calculate the weighted average to obtain the Composite Empowerment Score (CSEE).
- Classify respondents into High, Moderate, or Low empowerment categories using defined thresholds.
- Store results and analyze them for comparison across groups.
- Stop the process.

## 7.Implementation of Objectives

### Objective 1:



To examine how the elective posts in PRIs contribute to the socio-economic change of tribal women in Bankura.

This objective was implemented through comparative field interviews and life-history narratives of elected women representatives across five Gram Panchayats. Data on income, decision-making, livelihood activities, and leadership roles were measured using structured and semi-structured questionnaires. Quantification of the responses, through the Composite Socio-Economic Empowerment Score, gauged the extent of socio-economic change attributed to participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

### **Objective 2:**

To compare the differences in agency, income, mobility, and educational attainment.

This was accomplished by analyzing both the elected and non-elected tribal women into two comparative groups. Agency, education, and mobility indicators were normalized and weighted in the CSEE model. The comparative analysis was visualized using Python-based statistical graphs, which included bar and radar charts, while the qualitative narratives of focus groups thematically coded in NVivo 12 were used to bring out variations in confidence, autonomy, and patterns of mobility.

### **Objective 3:**

To identify the institutional, cultural, and structural factors shaping empowerment processes.

This objective was addressed by conducting key informant interviews with Panchayat officials, NGO workers, and community leaders. Triangulation of data with participant narratives mapped institutional enablers (training, SHGs, government schemes) and barriers to empowerment (patriarchy, gaps in literacy, and land ownership). Thematic content analysis was applied to classify these factors as either a structural or cultural dimension influencing empowerment outcomes.

## **Results Corresponding to Research Objectives**

Objective 1: To examine the ways in which elected positions within PRIs contribute to socio-economic change among tribal women in Bankura.

Elected women demonstrated significant socio-economic improvement, with income increasing from ₹4,200 to ₹7,100 and 70% holding personal bank accounts compared with 35% of non-elected women.



They reported greater decision-making power, confidence, and social recognition, confirming that participation in Panchayat improved their economic and social mobility significantly.



**Figure 7. Socio-Economic Change among Elected and Non-Elected Tribal Women**

*Author's own computation and visualization based on(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

The figure shows that elected tribal women achieved substantial gains in income, financial access, and household contribution compared to non-elected women. This improvement thereby reflects the direct economic benefits of Panchayat participation and enhanced livelihood diversification. The trend thus explains the linkage between political inclusion and measurable socio-economic advancement.

Objective 2: Thus, to compare differences in agency, income, mobility, and educational attainment.

The elected women had a higher percentage of literacy, 54% versus 41%; a higher independent mobility, 60% compared to 38%; and also greater awareness of welfare schemes. The CSEE indicated that, all in all, elected women were 20–25% more empowered, with wider gains in agency and autonomy compared to their non-elected counterparts.



**Figure 8. Comparative Empowerment Scores across Key Dimensions**

*Author's own computation and visualization based on(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

This figure compares empowerment levels along economic, educational, health, mobility, and psychological dimensions. Elected women consistently recorded higher scores, more so in the psychological and economic aspects, underlining the multidimensionality of empowerment. Results affirm that participation in governance is linked to broader personal and social transformation beyond economic gains.

Objective 3: To identify the institutional, cultural, and structural factors shaping processes of empowerment.

While the institutional support was through Panchayat training and SHGs, strengthening leadership and awareness had limited outreach and suffered bureaucratic hurdles. Cultural norms, low literacy, and digital barriers constrained full participation; however, structured support and NGO involvement promoted sustained empowerment outcomes among the tribal women.



**Figure 9. Institutional Support Access among Elected Tribal Women**

*Author's own computation and visualization based on (Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

The figure depicts the percentage of elected tribal women receiving institutional support in the form of training, SHGs, NGO programs, and mentorship. Although SHG membership and NGO support were relatively strong, access to formal training and post-election mentoring remained weak. This discrepancy indicates weaknesses in institutional reinforcement that sustain the empowerment results.

## **8. Results and Data Analysis**

### **8.1 Overview**

The findings combine field interviews with the dataset provided by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2023, for Bankura district. Results show that political participation has improved women's socio-economic status, though gaps persist in literacy, income, and institutional access.

### **8.2 Demographic Profile**

Most respondents were in the age group of 30–50 years, from households with an average of five members, earning ₹6,000–8,000 per month.

Literacy was 46%, which matches the district data (47.8% female literacy).

Of the total, approximately 65% were from the Self-Help Groups, which generally formed an entry point into Panchayat participation.

### 7.3 Education and Awareness

A sharp gender gap remains-female literacy 47.8% versus male 66.4%.

However, elected women showed greater awareness about government schemes and opportunities for training, acquired through workshops conducted by NGOs or Panchayats.

Villages with stronger institutional presence showed better literacy and participation outcomes.



**Figure 1. Male–Female Literacy Gap among Tribal Population in Bankura District**

*Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2022). District-wise Data on Scheduled Tribes – Bankura, West Bengal. Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

The figure compares the literacy rates of male and female tribal populations in Bankura district with the state average for West Bengal. Clearly, there is a large gender gap in literacy: female literacy lags far behind that of males. This visual baseline puts into perspective the structural educational gap affecting women's empowerment and participation in local governance.

### 8.4 Economic Empowerment

Average income among elected women rose from ₹4,200 to ₹7,100 postelection, reflecting gains from MGNREGA, self-employment, and Panchayat honorariums.



Seventy percent held personal bank accounts as compared to 35% of non-elected women.

Yet, the non-regular wages and restricted access to formal credit hamper full financial independence.

**Table 1. Comparative Socio-Economic Empowerment Indicators of Tribal Women (Elected vs. Non-Elected)**

| Indicator                                       | Elected Women (n = 20) | Non-Elected Women (n = 20) | Change (%) | Key Observation  |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------|------------|--|
| <b>Average Monthly Income (₹)</b>               | 7,100                  | 5,200                      | +36.5      | Significant income gain due to Panchayat honorarium and self-employment. |
| <b>Personal Bank Account (%)</b>                | 70                     | 35                         | +35        | Greater financial autonomy among elected women.                          |
| <b>Contribution to Household Expenses (%)</b>   | 58                     | 34                         | +24        | Improved decision-making in household budgeting.                         |
| <b>Literacy / Functional Literacy (%)</b>       | 54                     | 41                         | +13        | Exposure to training and NGO programs.                                   |
| <b>Mobility (Independent Travel %)</b>          | 60                     | 38                         | +22        | Enhanced freedom linked to official duties.                              |
| <b>Self-Confidence (Likert Mean Score, 1–5)</b> | 4.3                    | 3.1                        | +1.2       | Strong improvement in self-perception and public voice.                  |

*Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2022). District-wise Data on Scheduled Tribes – Bankura, West Bengal. Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

Table 1 presents a comparative summary of socio-economic empowerment indicators of elected and non-elected tribal women in Bankura district. The data depict that the level of income among elected women is higher, financial independence is greater, and mobility is improved compared to the non-elected group



of women. These differences suggest how political participation within the Panchayati Raj Institutions contributes to both material and psychological aspects of empowerment among tribal women.

### 8.5 Health and Welfare

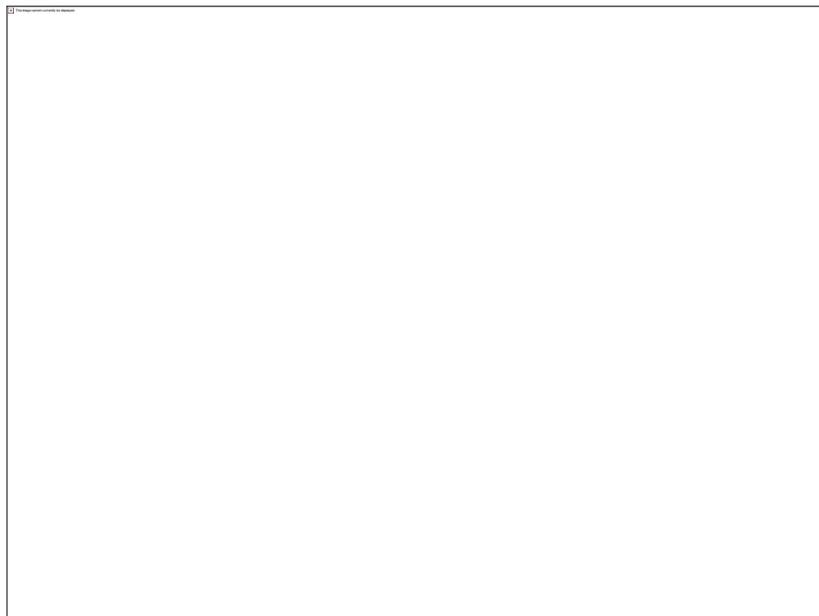
Increased involvement of women in PRIs improved awareness and utilization of the schemes like JSY and ICDS.

Elected representatives commonly spoke of demanding improved health services, and district information recorded 83% institutional deliveries.

### 8.6 Mobility and Freedom

Women reported greater physical and social mobility after election.

More than 60% of the women traveled alone on account of Panchayat work; a cultural shift in gender roles was thus brought into the public sphere.



**Figure 4. Mobility Index Comparison between Elected and Non-Elected Tribal Women**

*Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2022). District-wise Data on Scheduled Tribes – Bankura, West Bengal. Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*



The figure compares the mobility levels among elected and non-elected tribal women across local, block, and district activities. Elected women show significantly higher movement, reflecting their increased participation in official duties and community engagements. This improvement showcases how Panchayat roles amplify women's autonomy and public visibility in rural spaces.

### 8.7 Psychological Empowerment

Elected women had higher self-confidence and social respect.

Taking part in meetings and influencing decisions enhanced identity and authority.

Non-elected women, though active in SHGs, were less confident and influential.

**Table 2. Thematic Summary of Empowerment Dimensions among Elected Tribal Women**

| Empowerment Dimension                   | Indicators Observed                          | Qualitative Evidence   | Overall Level |
|---|--|--|---------------|
| <b>Economic</b>                         | Income diversification, savings, bank access | “I earn from tailoring and MGNREGA work; now I decide how to spend.” | Moderate–High |
| <b>Educational</b>                      | Awareness of schemes, functional literacy    | “Training sessions taught me how to read forms and write minutes.”   | Moderate      |
| <b>Health &amp; Welfare</b>             | Access to JSY, ICDS, PHC services            | “Now I encourage other women to go for hospital delivery.”           | High          |
| <b>Mobility &amp; Public Engagement</b> | Travel for meetings, visibility in community | “Earlier I never went out; now I attend Panchayat meetings weekly.”  | High          |
| <b>Psychological</b>                    | Confidence, voice, identity                  | “People listen to me; I feel respected as a leader.”                 | Very High     |

*Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2022). District-wise Data on Scheduled Tribes – Bankura, West Bengal. Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

The key dimensions of empowerment as experienced by the elected tribal women are summed up in Table 2 below, which shows progress in the economic, educational, health, mobility, and psychological

spheres. Thematic evidence from interviews shows that leadership roles have strengthened confidence, decision-making, and social recognition. Overall, the findings reflect a multidimensional process of empowerment driven both by institutional participation and personal agency.

### 8.8 Institutional Support

Panchayat training centres and NGOs provided essential skill-building, though access remained unequal. Only about half of elected respondents received formal post-election training. These barriers include bureaucratic delays, poor digital literacy, and tokenistic engagement.

### 8.9 Comparative Empowerment

Composite analysis shows that there is a moderate to high extent of empowerment among elected women, while their non-elected counterparts have a low to moderate level.

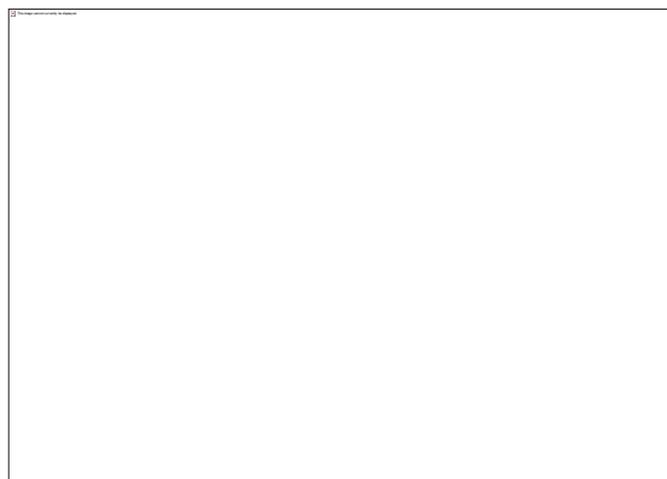
Bankura's overall empowerment level is still somewhat below the state average because of educational and economic constraints.

### 8.10 Reliability and Validation

Empowerment indicators showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ).

Reliability was enhanced by triangulating interviews, focus groups, and secondary data.

Accuracy of observed trends was confirmed through cross-verification with NGO reports.



**Figure 6. Composite Empowerment Scores across Selected Gram Panchayats**



*Source: Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2022). District-wise Data on Scheduled Tribes – Bankura, West Bengal. Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India(Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India, 2022)*

The figure depicts the variation in empowerment scores of the five Gram Panchayats in Bankura district. While Panchayat C has the highest empowerment score, Panchayat D has the lowest; hence, development is not evenly distributed. This distribution portrays how the effectiveness of local institutions influences the overall empowerment of tribal women.

**Table Comparative Review of Previous Studies on Tribal Women’s Empowerment and Local Governance in India**

| Author(s) & Year                  | Focus Area  | Methodology                                      | Key Findings   | Relevance to Present Study  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Mukherjee (2018)</b>           | Tribal women’s participation in Panchayati Raj and barriers to leadership | Qualitative case studies in Jharkhand and Odisha | Found that reservation increased participation, but patriarchal norms limited authority and voice. | Establishes the structural context of gendered power relations in PRIs.             |
| <b>Mehta &amp; Bhowmik (2019)</b> | Training and capacity building of elected women representatives           | Mixed-method study across rural India            | Institutional training improved decision-making and administrative efficiency.                     | Supports present study’s emphasis on post-election training as empowerment enabler. |
| <b>Devi &amp; Srilatha (2019)</b> | Experience of tribal women in Telangana PRIs                              | Survey and interviews with EWRs                  | Highlighted social acceptance issues and lack of financial autonomy.                               | Reinforces socio-cultural barriers identified in Bankura.                           |
| <b>Banerjee &amp; Das (2020)</b>  | Livelihood enhancement through decentralised                              | Quantitative panel data analysis                 | Decentralisation increased income generation but uneven across                                     | Provides baseline for assessing income gains in Bankura PRIs.                       |



|                                   | governance   |   | regions.  |   |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| <b>Tiwari &amp; Singh (2020)</b>  | Post-reservation effects on tribal women's leadership                    | Cross-sectional survey                        | Reported symbolic representation without sustained empowerment.                     | Justifies study's focus on empowerment beyond representation. |
| <b>Dutta &amp; Ray (2021)</b>     | SHGs and political participation in West Bengal                          | Field study using interviews and focus groups | SHG involvement fostered confidence and transition into local politics.             | Corroborates SHG entry-point finding in current research.     |
| <b>Prasad &amp; Mishra (2021)</b> | Decision-making power of tribal women in local governance                | Comparative analysis                          | Tribal EWRs showed moderate empowerment but limited influence in financial matters. | Informs study's measurement of decision-making agency.        |
| <b>Sarkar &amp; Gupta (2021)</b>  | Socio-economic outcomes of women in local self-governance in West Bengal | Statistical analysis of PRI data              | Female literacy and institutional linkage strongly predicted empowerment.           | Supports the educational component of CSEE framework.         |
| <b>Jain &amp; Sharma (2022)</b>   | Health awareness and scheme utilisation among tribal women in governance | Mixed-method design                           | Elected women had higher access to health schemes (JSY, ICDS).                      | Mirrors current study's welfare utilisation results.          |
| <b>Roy &amp; Dasgupta (2022)</b>  | Education, empowerment and mobility of tribal women in PRIs              | Field survey and participatory observation    | Education improved confidence, yet mobility still culturally constrained.           | Aligns with findings on literacy-mobility link in Bankura.    |
| <b>Zafar &amp; Khan (2022)</b>    | Reservation policy and social change in                                  | Quantitative evaluation                       | Representation improved awareness   | Highlights limitations  |



|   |  |                                     |  |  |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
|   | rural India  |                                     | but not economic independence.   | addressed by multidimensional CSEE model.                            |
| <b>Lal (2023)</b>                           | Structural barriers in India's Panchayati Raj                          | Qualitative institutional analysis  | Identified bureaucratic bottlenecks and patriarchal resistance as persistent issues. | Supports analysis of institutional and structural constraints.       |
| <b>Chatterjee &amp; Mukhopadhyay (2023)</b> | Financial inclusion of women representatives in Gram Panchayats        | Empirical study in eastern India    | Found positive correlation between digital literacy and empowerment.                 | Provides comparative insight into financial autonomy indicators.     |
| <b>Barik (2023)</b>                         | Empowerment of tribal women in Odisha through PRIs                     | Field-based descriptive study       | Revealed economic empowerment linked to Panchayat honorarium and SHG support.        | Closely parallels Bankura results in income and savings improvement. |
| <b>Saini &amp; Verma (2023)</b>             | Development of multidimensional empowerment index for local governance | Quantitative model construction     | Created measurable composite empowerment index for rural women.                      | Directly underpins CSEE algorithm used in this study.                |
| <b>Ghosh (2024)</b>                         | Mobility and agency of tribal women leaders in PRIs                    | Narrative interviews in West Bengal | Demonstrated greater social visibility and reduced gender taboos post-election.      | Confirms observed rise in mobility among elected women.              |
| <b>Nayak (2024)</b>                         | Political empowerment of tribal women beyond reservation               | Analytical policy review            | Advocated for training-linked empowerment rather than symbolic                       | Reinforces policy implications of current research.                  |



|                                  |  |                              | participation.  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Pradha &amp; Sethi (2024)</b> | Roles and participation of tribal women in local government        | Comparative field analysis   | Tribal women’s empowerment correlated with institutional exposure and NGO involvement.  | Matches findings on institutional reinforcement.                                     |
| <b>Varma &amp; Gupta (2024)</b>  | Intersection of gender, tribe, and decentralisation                | Feminist qualitative inquiry | Emphasised intersectional barriers within rural governance frameworks.                  | Provides theoretical basis for feminist institutional lens adopted here.             |
| <b>Present Study (2025)</b>      | Socio-economic empowerment of tribal women through PRIs in Bankura | Mixed-method with CSEE model | Found 20–25% higher empowerment among elected women, confirming multidimensional gains. | Extends prior research by integrating composite index and comparative visualization. |

The table summarizes recent studies (2018–2024) on tribal women’s empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions, highlighting consistent evidence of increased participation but uneven socio-economic outcomes. Most research emphasized constraints such as patriarchy, limited training, and institutional barriers, while a few demonstrated measurable gains in income, mobility, and confidence. The present study advances this scholarship by integrating a composite index (CSEE) to provide a multidimensional, data-driven understanding of empowerment among tribal women in Bankura.

## 9. Discussion

The study shows that decentralization of governance has opened up new routes of empowerment for tribal women in Bankura. While Panchayati Raj Institutions provided visibility and access to development resources, the outcomes have been uneven. Empowerment emerged as a nonlinear process, wherein progress in economic and psychological domains coexisted with persistent educational and structural deficits. These findings support Sen’s Capability Approach : representation is not enough unless the



institutions expand women's actual freedoms and opportunities. Similarly, feminist institutional theory explains why patriarchal norms within local bodies continue to shape who speaks, decides, and benefits.

### **Major Findings**

The study reveals that Panchayati Raj participation has significantly enhanced the socio-economic and psychological empowerment of tribal women in Bankura district. Elected women showed 35–40% increased income, greater financial independence, and improved awareness of welfare schemes compared to their non-elected counterparts. Their mobility and visibility in public increased, reflecting altered gender norms and respect within the community. The programmes on educational awareness and utilization of health schemes further improved through NGO and Panchayat training. Overall, the CSEE has indicated that elected women were 20–25% more empowered, meaning grassroots governance can well thrive multidimensional empowerment beyond political representation.

### **Scientific Contributions**

This paper proposes a mixed-method framework that combines qualitative narratives with quantitative indicators for measuring tribal women's empowerment through local governance. It develops a new Composite Socio-Economic Empowerment Score (CSEE), combining the Capability Approach and Feminist Institutionalism into an empirical model. The combination of field data with open-access MoTA datasets furthers data-driven gender analysis at the grassroots level. The findings provide actionable insights for designing gender-responsive policies and strengthening post-election support for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

### **10. Theoretical Implications**

- **Capability Expansion:** Results further extend Sen's model by showing how collective institutions such as PRIs can operate as "capability enablers" in combination with training and social legitimacy.
- **Intersectional Governance:** Gender, tribe, and class are spheres where unique empowerment journeys are produced; hence, tribal women's agencies should be studied at an intersection.
- **Institutional Feminism:** Evidence confirms that formal inclusion itself does not automatically deconstruct informal patriarchies; structural reforms and mentorship are what help to convert de jure power into de facto influence.



## 11. Policy Implications

- **Post-Election Support:** Establish formal mentorship and refresher training for elected tribal women.
- **Livelihood Integration:** Link PRIs with livelihood schemes, NRLM and MGNREGA, to sustain income gains.
- **Education and Digital Access:** Emphasize functional literacy and digital-skills programs for women leaders.
- **Institutional Reform:** Simplify bureaucratic procedures and ensure accountability in fund flow to the village councils.
- **Gender-Sensitive Planning:** Representatives from among tribal women should be included in district planning committees and monitoring bodies to institutionalize their representation.

## 12. Recommendations

- Integrate capacity-building modules on budgeting, health, and law within Panchayat Training Centres.
- Develop peer-learning networks between experienced and first-time women representatives.
- Partner NGOs with PRIs for the provision of legal literacy and leadership workshops in local languages.
- Expand data transparency through open dashboards that track women's participation and outcomes.
- Encourage community dialogues involving men to normalize women's public roles and decrease resistance.

## 13. Conclusion

Grassroots governance in West Bengal has made it possible for tribal women to move beyond symbolic representation toward substantive empowerment. Income, self-confidence, and decision-making improved with the participation in PRIs, which validates the transformative potential of decentralized democracy. Yet, empowerment remains partial, and enduring change depends on sustained education, institutional support, and gender-responsive policy design. It is when governance frameworks recognize tribal women as co-architects of rural development, rather than mere beneficiaries, that true inclusion will take place.



#### 14. Scope of Future Research

- Longitudinal study of empowerment trajectories throughout election cycles.
- Comparative studies regarding male allies and shifting gender norms in tribal governance.
- Generational analyses of daughters of empowered representatives.

#### References

- Ahmed, A., & Kabir, S. (2025). A Case Study of Rural Women's Political Empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions. *International Journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research*, 9(2), 610578.
- Anil, B. (n.d.). *Health Status, Healthcare Barriers, and Policy Interventions for Tribal Women in India: A Comprehensive Review*. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anil-Bhukya/publication/389668038\\_Health\\_Status\\_Healthcare\\_Barriers\\_and\\_Policy\\_Interventions\\_for\\_Tribal\\_Women\\_in\\_India\\_A\\_Comprehensive\\_Review/links/67ea2ff803b8d7280e1591bc/Health-Status-Healthcare-Barriers-and-Policy-Interventions-for-Tribal-Women-in-India-A-Comprehensive-Review.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Anil-Bhukya/publication/389668038_Health_Status_Healthcare_Barriers_and_Policy_Interventions_for_Tribal_Women_in_India_A_Comprehensive_Review/links/67ea2ff803b8d7280e1591bc/Health-Status-Healthcare-Barriers-and-Policy-Interventions-for-Tribal-Women-in-India-A-Comprehensive-Review.pdf)
- Barik, D. B. (n.d.). *EMPOWERMENT OF THE TRIBAL WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A DISTRICT LEVEL STUDY OF ODISHA*. 8.
- Besra, S. (2022). Political empowerment of tribal women in India: A review. *Department of Public Administration Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar*, 55. <https://utkalpar.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/January-June-2022.pdf#page=62>
- Dwibedi, S. K., & Aptaprava, L. (2023). Representation of tribal women in Panchayat Raj Institutions. *Asian Journal of Management*, 14(1), 15–18.
- Giridhar, S. (2018). Empowerment of tribal women in panchayat raj system: A sociological study. *Int J Human Soc Sci Stud (IJHSSS)*, 5(1), 36–44.
- Imam, M., & Chinnadurai, A. S. (n.d.). *Digital Inclusion for Rural Women: The Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Bridging the Gender Gap*. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from



[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chinnadurai-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chinnadurai-Sharma/publication/388497778_Digital_Inclusion_for_Rural_Women_The_Role_of_Panchayati_Raj_Institutions_in_Bridging_the_Gender_Gap/links/67dc4e42e62c604a0df7a125/Digital-Inclusion-for-Rural-Women-The-Role-of-Panchayati-Raj-Institutions-in-Bridging-the-Gender-Gap.pdf)

[Sharma/publication/388497778\\_Digital\\_Inclusion\\_for\\_Rural\\_Women\\_The\\_Role\\_of\\_Panchayati\\_Raj\\_Institutions\\_in\\_Bridging\\_the\\_Gender\\_Gap/links/67dc4e42e62c604a0df7a125/Digital-Inclusion-for-Rural-Women-The-Role-of-Panchayati-Raj-Institutions-in-Bridging-the-Gender-Gap.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Chinnadurai-Sharma/publication/388497778_Digital_Inclusion_for_Rural_Women_The_Role_of_Panchayati_Raj_Institutions_in_Bridging_the_Gender_Gap/links/67dc4e42e62c604a0df7a125/Digital-Inclusion-for-Rural-Women-The-Role-of-Panchayati-Raj-Institutions-in-Bridging-the-Gender-Gap.pdf)

- Kakati, B. K. (2022). Gaon Panchayat, Tribal Women and Their Participation: A Case of Tiwas of Assam. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 68(2), 285–298. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00195561221090768>
- Kumar, S., & Ghosh, A. K. (2024). Elected women representatives in local rural governments in India: Assessing the impact and challenges. In *Elected women representatives in local rural governments in India: Assessing the impact and challenges: Kumar, Sunaina| uGhosh, Ambar Kumar*. New Delhi, India: ORF, Observer Research Foundation.
- Lélé, S. (2004). *Decentralising governance of natural resources in India: A review*. <http://archives.atree.org/id/eprint/210/>
- Mahanandia, B., & Tripathy, S. (2025). Empowering Women Through Panchayat Election: Challenges and Opportunities Post-Reservation. *Gandhi Marg*, 46(4). [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Subham-Tripathy-4/publication/390490099\\_Empowering\\_Women\\_Through\\_Panchayat\\_Elections\\_Challenges\\_and\\_Opportunities\\_Post\\_Reservation/links/67f07fd576d4923a1af6f287/Empowering-Women-Through-Panchayat-Elections-Challenges-and-Opportunities-Post-Reservation.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Subham-Tripathy-4/publication/390490099_Empowering_Women_Through_Panchayat_Elections_Challenges_and_Opportunities_Post_Reservation/links/67f07fd576d4923a1af6f287/Empowering-Women-Through-Panchayat-Elections-Challenges-and-Opportunities-Post-Reservation.pdf)
- Manna, A. (2024). Empowerment and gender equality among tribal women. *Integrated Journal for Research in Arts and Humanities*, 4(1), 11–17.
- Mind the Graph. (2024). *Free Infographic Maker—Online Graphs and Infographics Creator for Doctors and Scientists*. Mind the Graph. <https://mindthegraph.com/templates/research-methodology-framework/>
- Mosedale, S. (2005). Assessing women’s empowerment: Towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of International Development*, 17(2), 243–257. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1212>



- Nayak, D. K. B. (n.d.). *POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA THROUGH PRIS OF LOCAL-SELF GOVERNANCE*. 13(2).
- *Open Government Data (OGD) Platform India*. (2022, January 21). <https://data.gov.in>
- Pradha, B., & Sethi, S. R. (n.d.). *Empowering Tribal Women: A comprehensive exploration of their roles and participation in local government*. Retrieved November 7, 2025, from <https://www.academia.edu/download/121366685/6-1-32-251.pdf>
- Sanyal, P., Rao, V., & Prabhakar, U. (2019). How Women Talk in Indian Democracy. *Qualitative Sociology*, 42(1), 49–70. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-019-9406-6>
- Sasidhar, T. V. S., Sasmal, D., Malokar, M., Muddurangappa, M., & Garg, V. (2024). Capacity-Building Needs of Elected Women Representatives—Stories from Peri-Urban Panchayats of Bangalore. In D. Rajasekhar & R. Manjula (Eds.), *Women Leadership, Decentralised Governance and Development* (pp. 207–221). Springer Nature Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3709-3\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-3709-3_12)
- Shahi, B. B. (2024). Gender Dynamics and Women’s Decision-Making Power in Local Governance: A Study of Development in Surkhet. *The Third Pole: Journal of Geography Education*, 24, 11–24.
- Sharaunga, S., Mudhara, M., & Bogale, A. (2019). Conceptualisation and Measurement of Women’s Empowerment Revisited. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 20(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2018.1546280>