**“DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE AND TRIBAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF BANKURA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL(2003-2018)”**

*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

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*By*

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**ENROLLMENT NO. :- VU/RES./POLS/2021/10**

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I, Abhishek Khan (Enrollment No. - VU/Res./Pols/2021/10), declare that the thesis entitled **“DECENTRALISED GOVERNANCE AND TRIBAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY OF BANKURA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL(2003-2018)”** is my own work conducted under the supervision of (Guide Name) at Vidhyasagar University and approved by the Research Degree Committee. I have put in more than 240 days of attendance with the supervisor at the center.

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**Abstract**

This study takes a close look at the years 2003–2018 in the Bankura district of West Bengal to analyze how decentralization of power affected the advancement of tribal women. It examines the impact of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and other forms of local self-governance on the economic, cultural, and political standing of tribal women within the broader context of democratic decentralization in India. The main goal is to determine how much decentralization has empowered women from historically oppressed tribal communities by giving them more possibilities for participation, decision-making, and leadership.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates primary fieldwork, interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of secondary data to investigate multiple dimensions of empowerment—economic, social, political, and cultural. The findings indicate that, although decentralisation has expanded spaces for representation and grassroots participation, several entrenched structural barriers persist. Patriarchal norms, restricted educational opportunities, economic dependency, and caste-tribe hierarchies continue to limit the full realisation of empowerment. Nevertheless, certain positive developments are discernible, including increased visibility of tribal women in village councils, greater awareness of legal and social entitlements, and a gradual rise in their ability to exercise mobility and influence in both household and community-level decision-making.

By focusing on the lived realities of a tribal-dominated region, the research contributes significantly to the discourse on governance and gender. It demonstrates that empowerment through decentralisation is not an automatic outcome of institutional reforms but rather a slow, contested, and context-dependent process. The study argues that structural changes must be complemented with long-term policy support, continuous capacity-building programmes, and grassroots community mobilisation to transform decentralised governance into a genuine mechanism of empowerment. The insights generated not only deepen understanding of the Bankura context but also provide broader implications for strengthening inclusive and gender-sensitive governance in other parts of India.

**Keywords**: Decentralised Governance, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Tribal Women, Empowerment, Gender and Governance, Bankura District, West Bengal, Participatory Democracy, Rural Development, Women’s Representation

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# CHAPTER-1 INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of decentralised governance has, for centuries, attracted the attention of reformers, policymakers, and academics who sought to make governance more participatory and inclusive. Historically, across both Eastern and Western political traditions, decentralisation was often introduced as a safeguard against the excessive centralisation of authority in the hands of a few. By distributing power more evenly, it served to reduce the risk of coercion by the central state and encouraged accountability. In modern democracies, however, decentralisation is no longer perceived merely as a check on authority. Instead, it is seen as a mechanism to empower communities at the grassroots, to allow citizens to play a more active role in decision-making, and to strengthen the link between governance structures and everyday life.

By the mid-twentieth century, democratic decentralisation had become a central theme in global development debates. In newly independent countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, decentralisation was not only considered a political reform but also a pathway for inclusive growth, poverty alleviation, and community empowerment. International organisations and national governments alike increasingly promoted decentralisation as a tool to improve service delivery, deepen democratic practices, and bring marginalised populations into the fold of governance.

India aimed to incorporate democratic decentralization into its federal system after gaining independence in 1947. Article 40 of the 1950 Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy mandated that the state support the creation of village Panchayats as self-governing entities. In the decades that followed, a stronger structure of local government was progressively established through a number of administrative changes and rural development experiments. In 1992, a watershed event occurred in this process when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act was passed, officially recognising Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as constitutional entities. To guarantee political inclusion for historically marginalized groups in decision-making processes, the amendment established a three-tier structure of elected councils at the village, block, and district levels. It also mandated reservations for women, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes. The expansion of democratic discourse to even more compact community units, known as Gram Sansad’s, in West Bengal further increased the reach of local self-governance, while the establishment of Gram Sabhas broadened the opportunities for direct public engagement.

One of the most profound outcomes of these reforms was the entry of women into formal political spaces. With one-third of PRI seats reserved for them, women, particularly those from marginalised communities, gained an opportunity to move beyond traditional boundaries and participate in governance. For tribal women, who face multiple layers of exclusion—both as women and as members of indigenous groups—this reform carried particular significance. It created a legitimate platform through which they could assert their voices, engage in leadership, and influence decisions affecting their families and communities. Their inclusion not only altered the composition of decision-making bodies but also challenged long-standing social and patriarchal hierarchies.

West Bengal has been a pioneer in strengthening participatory governance. Even prior to the constitutional mandate of the 1990s, the state had initiated decentralisation reforms that gave Panchayats an active role in local administration. The subsequent introduction of Gram Sansad’s further broadened the scope of public involvement, ensuring deliberation reached the hamlet level. Within this framework, the tribal-dominated district of Bankura gained particular importance. Between 2003 and 2018, the institutionalisation of PRIs and Gram Sansad’s in Bankura created structured opportunities for tribal women to participate in political life. These forums allowed them to raise issues directly relevant to their lives—such as access to healthcare, education, land, and welfare schemes—while also giving them visibility as leaders and decision-makers within their communities.

The present study examines the extent to which decentralised governance in Bankura has contributed to the empowerment of tribal women. It explores how constitutional and institutional reforms opened new political spaces, and how tribal women navigated these opportunities within the constraints of cultural traditions, economic conditions, and systemic barriers. By situating the local experiences of women in Bankura within the broader discourse on decentralisation, the study seeks to highlight both the transformative potential and the limitations of grassroots democracy. It ultimately argues that democratic decentralisation in Bankura was not only a tool for delivering development but also an instrument of empowerment, enabling tribal women to negotiate power, assert agency, and influence social change.

## IDEA OF TRIBAL WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT

In modern discussions about development, especially as it relates to globalization, the idea of women's empowerment has taken center stage. In order to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth, prominent international organizations like the World Bank and UNDP have long stressed the importance of women's empowerment, specifically their involvement in governance, decision-making, and social transformation processes. The word "empowerment," originally meaning "the delegation of power," first appeared in a judicial context in the 17th century. As time went on, the definition expanded to encompass the ideas of allowing and enabling as well. But the civil rights movements gave rise to the contemporary understanding, which shifted the focus to the political emancipation of economically and socially disadvantaged groups (Tripathi, 2011). Feminist research expanded on this idea by seeing empowerment as a means to an end—gender equality—and by establishing it as a fundamental human right (Kabeer, 2001). In this perspective, empowerment is seen as more than just a measurable result; it is a prerequisite for equity, independence, and agency.

From the 1980s onwards, empowerment entered mainstream development policy, reframed as a tool for improving human development outcomes (Alsop et al., 2005). Unlike feminist advocacy, which prioritized equal rights, the development agenda focused on measurable aspects of empowerment, linking it to tangible outcomes such as access to resources, participation in governance, and improvements in living standards. Yet, debates continue on whether empowerment should be defined as a process of change, a state of autonomy achieved by individuals or groups, or as the impact of interventions designed to build agency.

In India, the discourse on women’s empowerment has unfolded both through grassroots social struggles and state-led development initiatives. It is evident that empowerment is not uniform but varies across cultural settings, historical periods, and socio-economic conditions. For tribal women, particularly in regions like Bankura district, empowerment cannot be studied in isolation from the dynamics of patriarchy, land rights, poverty, and the functioning of local governance institutions such as Panchayati Raj. The UNDP Human Development Report (1995) defines empowerment as the widening of people’s choices and opportunities, while Jejeebhoy (1995) links it more specifically to autonomy and the capacity for decision-making. Building on this, Alsop et al. (2005) describe empowerment as the ability to convert choices into tangible outcomes, even in the face of opposition or structural barriers. These conceptualisations carry particular significance for the context of Bankura, where tribal women’s agency continues to be shaped by entrenched socio-cultural constraints but has also found new avenues of expression through the mechanisms of decentralised governance.

Several scholars have elaborated on this multidimensional nature of empowerment. Keller and Mbwewe (1991) highlight collective organization, independent rights, and the challenge to subordination. Singha Roy (1995) emphasizes creating a social environment that allows women to make meaningful contributions for societal advancement. Mehra (1997) views empowerment as challenging discriminatory norms, while Panda et al. (2003) stress the importance of self-perception and self-reliance. Similarly, Khan et al. (2006) argue that empowerment involves control over resources, opportunities, and participation in decision-making. Applied researchers will find Kabeer's (2001) paradigm especially helpful because it defines empowerment as "the growth in people's ability to make strategic life choices in circumstances where this ability was previously denied." This viewpoint is in line with what indigenous women in Bankura experience on a daily basis; they have always had little say in governmental matters, but their involvement in Gram Sansads and Panchayat procedures represents a big step towards representation and agency.

Other scholars further expand on the layered process of empowerment. Reddy (2002) presents it as an interlinked set of changes involving awareness, confidence-building, resource access, and negotiation within power hierarchies. Lilly Kutty (2003) outlines empowerment as a gradual process beginning with welfare (basic needs), advancing through access to resources, then conscientisation (challenging discrimination), moving to participation (decision-making roles), and culminating in control (exercise of autonomy and rights). In a similar vein, Amartya Sen (1998) associates empowerment with the development of capabilities, arguing that poverty-driven exclusion suppresses rights and opportunities, thereby making capability expansion central to empowerment.

Within the framework of decentralised governance in Bankura district between 2003 and 2018, empowerment must therefore be understood as both a **process** and an **outcome**. As a process, it involves building women’s agency, awareness, and participation in local governance structures. As an outcome, it is reflected in their enhanced role in decision-making, better socio-economic status, and increased control over community and household resources. By situating tribal women’s empowerment at the intersection of feminist thought, developmental policy, and grassroots governance, this study acknowledges not only the broader theoretical dimensions of empowerment but also the unique historical, cultural, and institutional realities that shape the experiences of tribal women in Bankura district.

Here is a rundown of the main issues covered in the previous talks about decentralized governance and the empowerment of tribal women in Bankura District:

1. Increasing tribal women's agency in political, economic, and social and cultural decision-making, especially within the Panchayati Raj system.
2. Enhanced access to **education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, and basic public services** within their local geographical and social settings.
3. The systematic removal of all forms of **gender-based and caste/tribe-based discrimination** that restrict their active participation in governance.
4. Empowering tribal women to have a lasting impact on home and community decisions by fostering a sense of communal identity and self-dignity.

Hence, decentralised governance is not a static but a multi-faceted process that empowers women. The socio-cultural norms, historical events, and institutional frameworks of Bankura District have a profound impact on its character.

The evaluation of empowerment is an emerging area of research within women's studies and governance studies. Empowerment has been defined differently by various academics, who have placed different emphasis on various aspects of agency and involvement. Particularly noteworthy are the substantial contributions made by Sen (1999), Malhotra et al. (2002), Handy (2004), Sridevi (2005), and Adhikary & Dutta (2011), who have all developed frameworks to assess empowerment. Their research goes beyond a simplistic view of power to cover several areas of participation, decision-making, and control, providing a thorough outline of the ways empowerment shows itself in the political, economic, and social realms.

While some researchers have focused on the results of empowerment, others have looked at the processes that lead up to it (Kishor, 1997; Becker, 1997; Kabeer, 2001; Alsop et al., 2005). Empowerment, according to their views, is about more than just giving people access to resources; it also requires the ability to make the most of those opportunities and turn them into long-term change. This perspective highlights the complexity and breadth of empowerment as an evolving phenomenon, connecting opportunity with personal agency and success.

From an instrumentalist perspective, scholars such as Sen (1999), Kabeer (2001), Jejeebhoy (2002), Malhotra (2002), and Alsop et al. (2005) argue that women’s empowerment—particularly in the context of tribal women’s participation in local governance—rests upon two closely interlinked dimensions.

**Agency** – the capability of a woman to exercise meaningful choices, envision alternative possibilities, and act upon them within her personal and community life.

**Opportunity Structure** – the set of formal and informal institutions, such as Panchayati Raj bodies, customary practices, and community support systems, within which women’s agency is exercised.

There is a spectrum of empowerment that results from the interplay of these two variables. Participation in Gram Sabhas, resource distribution, and dispute resolution are all examples of community welfare, whereas health, education, and household decision-making are examples of individual welfare that are directly impacted by the level of empowerment. Empowerment is subsequently reinforced in a cyclical fashion by these achievements.

Alsop et al. (2005) further recommend that the measurement of empowerment should include assessment of:

* **Access to resources and opportunities**;
* **Capacity to make and implement decisions**;
* **Effectiveness of participation in institutions of governance**; and
* **Tangible improvements in social and economic well-being of women**.

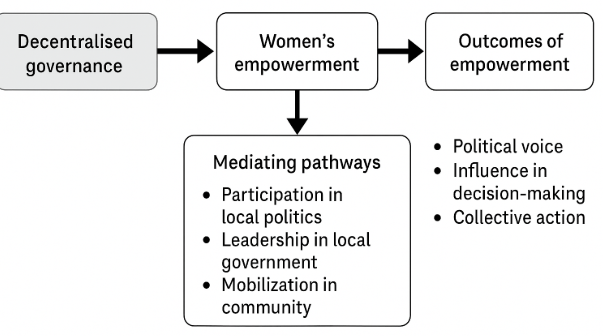
1. Whether a tribal woman has the **opportunity to exercise choice** within the framework of decentralised governance.
2. Whether she is able to **utilise that opportunity in practice,** by actively participating in household and Panchayat-level decisions.
3. Whether the choice exercised **translates into tangible and desirable outcomes**, both at the individual and community level.

The level of agency and the structure of opportunities are inversely proportional to the degree of empowerment. Not only does decentralization of power in Bankura empower women more, it also lays the groundwork for further advancements in women's autonomy.

Significant developmental impacts result from empowering women. Chain Diagram 1.2.1 (alsop et al., 2005) shows that empowerment has two sides. The opportunity structure's breadth and the agency's scope are these.

Thus, empowerment functions as an **instrument for enhancing household welfare and promoting collective social development.** By linking women’s empowerment with wider welfare outcomes, instrumentalist perspectives highlight the transformative role of women as **agents of change.** Within decentralised governance systems, this recognition becomes especially crucial, as tribal women in Bankura are increasingly viewed not merely as beneficiaries but as **active contributors to democratic decision-making and local development.**

#### Figure 1.2.1: Dynamics of Women’s Empowerment under Decentralised Governance



Although the conceptual perspectives outlined earlier provide useful insights, they remain largely confined to theoretical discussions. Empirical validation of the relationship between empowerment and developmental outcomes has so far been limited, leaving the evidence base relatively weak. As Alsop et al. (2005) observe, the absence of robust and universally accepted indicators of empowerment continues to hinder a clear and consistent measurement of its linkages with development. In light of this limitation, the present study seeks to advance the discourse by moving beyond theoretical formulations and undertaking an empirical assessment of this relationship within the context of decentralised governance and the empowerment of tribal women in Bankura district during the period 2003–2018.

## A FACT SHEET ON WOMEN IN INDIA AND THE RESEARCH DISTRICT

Globally, women continue to experience marginalisation in the sphere of development. Despite decades of policy reforms and international commitments, women’s status still trails behind men in critical aspects of human development such as education, health services, economic participation, and political representation. This persistent gap demonstrates that gender equality remains an unfinished agenda across societies.

The census figures of India provide a significant lens through which this disparity can be examined. Between 2001 and 2011, the national sex ratio (females per thousand males) showed an improvement, rising from 933 to 940. This demographic shift suggests that the growth of the female population marginally outpaced that of males during this period, a development often interpreted as a step toward narrowing gender inequalities.

Yet, when the data is disaggregated to examine the child sex ratio (0–6 years), the trend becomes more troubling. The child sex ratio fell from 927 in 2001 to 914 in 2011 (Census of India, 2011). Such a decline points to the persistence of entrenched gender discrimination and son-preference at the earliest stages of life. It highlights that, despite improvements in overall demographic indicators, structural biases continue to restrict women’s access to equality and dignity.

Within the framework of decentralised governance and tribal women’s empowerment in Bankura district (2003–2018), these demographic patterns acquire even greater significance. The declining child sex ratio is not merely a statistic but a reflection of the socio-cultural challenges local institutions must address. It underscores the urgency of grassroots interventions aimed at dismantling discriminatory practices and ensuring that governance reforms genuinely empower tribal women in both private and public spheres.

##### Table- 1.3.1 Number of females to every thousand males is the sex ratio.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Region / Area** | **2001 Census** |  |  | **2011 Census** |  |  |
|  | **Total** | **Rural** | **Urban** | **Total** | **Rural** | **Urban** |
| **India** | 931 | 944 | 898 | 939 | 946 | 924 |
| **West Bengal** | 933 | 949 | 891 | 946 | 949 | 937 |
| **Bankura** | 950 | 951 | 948 | 953 | 953 | 957 |

The demographic scenario of West Bengal reflects both progress and challenges concerning gender balance. The overall sex ratio of the state stood at 947 females per 1,000 males, the highest recorded in the last century. However, the child sex ratio revealed a declining trend, reducing from 960 in 2001 to 950 in 2011. This situation is mirrored in Bankura district, where the sex ratio improved marginally from 952 in 2001 to 954 in 2011. A closer look at community-wise data shows that while the sex ratio among the general caste was 937, it was relatively higher among Scheduled Castes (966) and Scheduled Tribes (984). Such figures highlight that tribal communities in Bankura demonstrate more egalitarian gender attitudes compared to other social groups. Thus, numerically, women are not far behind men in population share, yet deeper socio-economic indicators reveal persistent inequalities.

Illiteracy continues to be a major barrier to women’s empowerment. It accelerates the feminisation of poverty and deteriorates women’s social status. India, despite substantial educational expansion, has not been able to eradicate illiteracy. In 2001, female literacy was only 42.2 percent compared to 67 percent for men. Educational enrolment patterns further expose disparities, with female enrolment across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels being 49 percent against 62 percent for males. Although the literacy gender parity index has shown gradual improvement—from 0.8 in 1995–96 to a higher level in 2011—the gender gap remains visible. According to the 2011 Census, 82 percent of Indian males (aged 7+) were literate, while only 65 percent of females attained literacy. In West Bengal, female literacy reached 71 percent, yet Bankura lagged behind with 60 percent. The situation in Bankura illustrates the broader inequality: only 937 girls are enrolled per 1,000 boys at the primary level, and the dropout rate among girls is considerably higher.

Violence against women adds another layer of disempowerment. It occurs both within and outside the household and has been widely reported across India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (2013), over 106,000 women reported domestic violence from husbands or in-laws in 2012, a 7.5 percent increase from 2011. West Bengal alone witnessed an 18 percent rise during 2011–12, ranking first among Indian states in reported cases of domestic violence. These figures do not account for dowry-related fatalities, which would indicate a significantly higher actual prevalence. In addition, research from UNIFEM (2011) and NFHS (2005-06) shows that 25% of Indian women have been victims of domestic abuse, with the perpetrators being spouses or close relatives. The horrific reality is mirrored in Bankura, where the number of documented incidents of violence increased from 210 in 2001 to 326 in 2005.

Despite being passed, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) has been rendered ineffective due to enforcement issues and deeply entrenched patriarchal beliefs. By reducing women's agency and increasing their reliance on male relatives, violence perpetuates patriarchal societal norms.

Women’s economic contributions, though significant, often remain invisible. NSSO (2009–10) data shows that 347 women per 1,000 in rural areas and 465 per 1,000 in urban areas are fully engaged in household work, compared to negligible participation by men. Household work, though essential, is not counted as economic activity, and women’s supplementary earnings are usually subsumed under family income. Consequently, women work longer hours but receive a disproportionately low share of income. In 2001, estimated annual earned income stood at $1,531 for women compared to $4,070 for men.

The patterns of labour force participation, wage structures, and women's access to and control over resources are all marked by persistent inequities. According to statistics, women earn much less than men do. On a daily basis, women in rural areas earn an average of ₹119.76, while males earn an average of ₹297.35 (NSSO, 2009-10). Despite women's significant involvement in the unorganised sector, their presence in the organized service economy is noticeably lacking. In Bankura, just 32.04% of women are working, and even among those working, there is a severe lack of representation from the service and manufacturing industries. Many still do not have legal title to their land or other productive assets, and the majority of them work in agriculture (Bankura HDR, 2007).

In the political domain, progress has been facilitated through the implementation of reservation policies. By 2001, women accounted for 39.44 percent of the seats in Panchayats, reflecting a significant institutional step toward enhancing their representation in local governance structures. However, in many cases, male relatives continue to exert indirect control over female representatives’ decisions. Social practices such as child marriage exacerbate disempowerment; NFHS-3 reports that 53 percent of women in West Bengal marry before the legal age, with the average age of marriage in Bankura ranging from 15 to 18 years. Added to this, caste-based discrimination and socio-economic inequality remain prevalent in rural Bankura.

The demographic scenario of West Bengal reflects both progress and challenges concerning gender balance. The overall sex ratio of the state stood at 947 females per 1,000 males, the highest recorded in the last century. However, the child sex ratio revealed a declining trend, reducing from 960 in 2001 to 950 in 2011. This situation is mirrored in Bankura district, where the sex ratio improved marginally from 952 in 2001 to 954 in 2011. A closer look at community-wise data shows that while the sex ratio among the general caste was 937, it was relatively higher among Scheduled Castes (966) and Scheduled Tribes (984). Such figures highlight that tribal communities in Bankura demonstrate more egalitarian gender attitudes compared to other social groups. Thus, numerically, women are not far behind men in population share, yet deeper socio-economic indicators reveal persistent inequalities.

Illiteracy continues to be a major barrier to women’s empowerment. It accelerates the feminisation of poverty and deteriorates women’s social status. India, despite substantial educational expansion, has not been able to eradicate illiteracy. In 2001, female literacy was only 42.2 percent compared to 67 percent for men. Educational enrolment patterns further expose disparities, with female enrolment across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels being 49 percent against 62 percent for males. Although the literacy gender parity index has shown gradual improvement—from 0.8 in 1995–96 to a higher level in 2011—the gender gap remains visible. According to the 2011 Census, 82 percent of Indian males (aged 7+) were literate, while only 65 percent of females attained literacy. In West Bengal, female literacy reached 71 percent, yet Bankura lagged behind with 60 percent. The situation in Bankura illustrates the broader inequality: only 937 girls are enrolled per 1,000 boys at the primary level, and the dropout rate among girls is considerably higher.

Violence against women adds another layer of disempowerment. It occurs both within and outside the household and has been widely reported across India. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (2013), over 106,000 women reported domestic violence from husbands or in-laws in 2012, a 7.5 percent increase from 2011. West Bengal alone witnessed an 18 percent rise during 2011–12, ranking first among Indian states in reported cases of domestic violence. The true incidence is likely substantially greater than these figures, since they do not account for dowry deaths. Nearly 25% of Indian women have been victims of domestic violence, according to studies conducted by UNIFEM (2011) and NFHS (2005-06). This type of abuse typically occurs between spouses or inside families. The alarming increase from 210 reported incidents of violence in 2001 to 326 in 2005 in Bankura is indicative of this somber reality.

Improper enforcement and ingrained patriarchal attitudes have reduced the effectiveness of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), notwithstanding its passage. Violence undermines women’s self-confidence and deepens dependency on male family members, reinforcing feudal social structures. Women’s economic contributions, though significant, often remain invisible. NSSO (2009–10) data shows that 347 women per 1,000 in rural areas and 465 per 1,000 in urban areas are fully engaged in household work, compared to negligible participation by men. Household work, though essential, is not counted as economic activity, and women’s supplementary earnings are usually subsumed under family income. Consequently, women work longer hours but receive a disproportionately low share of income. In 2001, estimated annual earned income stood at $1,531 for women compared to $4,070 for men.

Persistent inequality exists in terms of participation in the labour force, wage structures, and access to and control over resources. In rural areas, men earn an average of 297.35 rupees per day, while women earn an average of 119.76 rupees (NSSO 2009–10). The presence of women in organised service sectors is negligible, in contrast to their prominence in unorganised sectors. Though they make up a small percentage of the overall workforce (32.04%), women in Bankura are underrepresented in both manufacturing and service industries. Even now, very few people own their own land, and the vast majority work in agriculture (Bankura HDR, 2007).

Some progress has been made in the political sector as a result of reservation policies. The percentage of women holding Panchayat seats increased to 39.44% by 2001. But male relatives still often influence female representatives' decisions in a roundabout way. As a social practice, child marriage worsens women's lack of agency; according to NFHS-3, 53% of West Bengali women wed before the age of majority, with Bankura having an average marriage age of 15–18. Added to this, caste-based discrimination and socio-economic inequality remain prevalent in rural Bankura.

Healthcare access is another domain where gender disparities remain pronounced. Globally, by 1996, nearly 70 percent of pregnant women received some form of prenatal care. In contrast, India lagged behind, with only 62 percent of expectant mothers accessing such essential healthcare services. Moreover, women’s health challenges are exacerbated by the high prevalence of anaemia, affecting 63.2 percent of women according to NFHS-3. Reproductive health further illustrates entrenched gender biases, as the responsibility for contraception disproportionately falls on women. National data shows that 37 percent of Indian women have undergone sterilisation, compared to a mere 1.2 percent of men, reflecting both cultural attitudes and systemic neglect of male participation in family planning.

Taken together, these indicators suggest that although demographic measures like the sex ratio reflect incremental progress, the broader socio-economic reality for women—particularly tribal women in Bankura—remains constrained by persistent inequalities. The challenges include low literacy rates, limited access to productive resources, wage disparities, early and often forced marriages, inadequate healthcare, and rising instances of domestic violence. These interlinked barriers restrict women’s agency and curtail their ability to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and political life.

For genuine inclusive development, addressing gender inequality must be recognised as a priority. In this context, decentralised governance structures hold transformative potential. By bringing decision-making closer to the grassroots and ensuring representation of marginalised voices, such institutions can play a proactive role in dismantling patriarchal barriers and enabling tribal women of Bankura to assert their rights. Only through strengthening these local governance mechanisms can the vision of empowerment be translated into tangible improvements in the lives of women.

## 1.4 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Globalization has failed to improve women's socioeconomic status to the expected level, according to an examination of their current situation in India, particularly in Bankura district. Women in India are frequently left out of the good things that happen as a result of globalization, rather than being the ones who benefit. The United Nations Millennium Declaration (2000) acknowledged that ending extreme poverty, hunger, and disease would be impossible without empowering women, which was a key component of the MDGs. Essentially, empowerment means giving those who have been historically marginalized the ability to make their own decisions and exercise agency. However, health and education programs that focus on reducing fertility rates or improving child welfare, rather than empowering women, often exclude or marginalize women in development efforts, whether on a global or national scale (Mehra, 1997). Reading, employment, healthcare, and educational attainment are just a few areas where women still fall short compared to men.

This reality makes the case for women-centred development strategies urgent. Empowerment is increasingly acknowledged as a vital mechanism for dismantling entrenched gender inequality and poverty. In recognition of this, the United Nations declared 2001 as the International Year of Women’s Empowerment. True empowerment, however, requires more than symbolic recognition; it demands an enabling environment that ensures equitable access to education, healthcare, employment, resources, and decision-making. Identifying and assessing the determinants of empowerment thus becomes crucial for formulating effective policies. Enhanced empowerment not only improves women’s standing within families and communities but also acts as a driver of inclusive social and economic development.

Despite its importance, empowerment remains a conceptually contested and often “fuzzy” construct in academic discourse. Kabeer (2001) argues that policy frameworks have at times reduced feminist aspirations into technocratic language, stripping away their transformative intent. No single universally accepted measure exists; different studies adopt context-specific approaches. Some scholars attempt to construct theoretical models linking empowerment, agency, opportunity structures, and development outcomes, while others rely on descriptive or anecdotal approaches. Empirical quantification of empowerment is comparatively rare. Alsop et al. (2005), in a World Bank working paper, acknowledge the instrumental value of empowerment but note that robust empirical evidence establishing its association with development outcomes remains limited. This void highlights the importance of the current research, which aims to experimentally investigate the effect of women's empowerment on development results in the Bankura environment.

Quantification of empowerment has gained prominence through instrumentalist approaches, yet its indicators remain context-specific. Empowerment is shaped by local socio-economic infrastructure, cultural practices, and institutional opportunities; thus, proposing a universal measure is unrealistic. Because of this, studies that focus on specific regions, like the one in Bankura district, are crucial. This dissertation examines women's empowerment from two vantage points: the home and the community. It seeks to construct a model of empowerment that is compatible with Bankura's socio-cultural realities.

Literature suggests that empowerment positively influences household and child welfare, though empirical evidence in this regard is limited. Theoretical frameworks, such as those articulated by the World Bank (2005), outline possible linkages between empowerment, agency, and development, but empirical validation is essential for policy relevance. For example, although family planning has been a core element of India’s policy framework since the 1950s, the linkage between rural women’s empowerment and their perceptions or choices regarding family planning remains insufficiently examined. Likewise, the growing recognition of domestic violence as a critical social issue over the last two decades underscores the importance of understanding how women’s empowerment—or its absence—shapes patterns of vulnerability. Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to explore the intersections between empowerment, family planning, and domestic violence, with particular attention to the lived realities of tribal women in Bankura.

Women’s empowerment plays a crucial role in shaping child welfare, as it directly affects children’s access to education, healthcare, and overall quality of life. Recognising this vital connection, the present study seeks to address three interrelated research questions:

For what reasons does decentralization of power affect women's empowerment? For Bankura's indigenous women, what factors are most important in achieving economic independence? What effects does empowerment have on developmental outcomes in domains like schooling, family planning, and domestic violence?

This study adds to our understanding of the complex relationship between decentralized government and women's agency by placing empowerment within the socio-economic and cultural framework of Bankura district. It sees empowering women in rural India as a means to a greater goal, rather than an end in itself, and a means to reduce gender inequality, alleviate poverty, and improve inclusive growth.

## 1.5 JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE SELECTION OF BANKURA DISTRICT

To better understand the interplay between women's empowerment and the economic security of families, researchers have chosen to focus on the Bankura area in West Bengal. There are a number of reasons why Bankura's choice is particularly significant.

First, Bankura is widely recognised as one of the backward districts of India. The district scores poorly across all the major dimensions of the Human Development Index (HDI), with values falling below the national average as well as the state average for West Bengal. This suggests that the people of Bankura are doubly disadvantaged—lagging behind both the broader Indian population and the regional context of the state. Within this scenario, women occupy an especially vulnerable position, with their socio-economic status consistently lower than that of men. Section 1.3 of this study presents empirical details that highlight the disadvantaged position of women in multiple aspects of human development. Given these facts, it is crucial to look at women's empowerment in the area from a communal and a household perspective.

Second, Bankura has a distinctive social composition, with more than half of its households belonging to socially and economically marginalised castes and communities. Women in these households have traditionally engaged in labour outside their homes to sustain family livelihoods, but their participation remains heavily concentrated in the unorganised sector, particularly in agriculture, animal husbandry, and related activities. Preliminary field evidence reveals a striking paradox: despite their visible economic contributions, women are subjected to widespread domestic violence and are frequently excluded from decision-making processes. Their role in family planning, as well as in critical decisions regarding children’s education, health, and welfare, is often minimal. This coexistence of economic contribution and domestic marginalisation underscores the need for a deeper exploration of women’s empowerment in Bankura.

Finally, women’s participation in both economic and non-economic decision-making—whether within the household or in community institutions—remains severely constrained. Identifying the structural, cultural, and institutional barriers responsible for this disempowerment is central to the present research. A better understanding of these dynamics can contribute to more effective policy formulation, enabling government agencies and non-governmental organisations to design interventions that genuinely enhance women’s autonomy and reduce gender-based inequalities.

Thus, the choice of Bankura district as the study area is not only appropriate but also imperative. It offers a critical context to explore how decentralised governance can address entrenched forms of inequality and foster the empowerment of tribal and marginalised women, thereby advancing inclusive development.

## 1.6 DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF BANKURA DISTRICT

It is crucial to place the study within the socio-economic and demographic framework of the district before analyzing the drivers of rural women's empowerment in Bankura. In addition to laying the groundwork for comprehending the study challenge, these contextual details highlight the importance and time-sensitivity of conducting empowerment-focused studies in this area.

Opportunities and limits are both shown by Bankura's demographic makeup. A large chunk of the district's population is from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the majority of the population lives in rural areas. Also, people's day-to-day experiences are still impacted by the pervasive poverty. Gender gaps are evident in nearly every indicator: women continuously fall short of males in terms of economic involvement, health outcomes, school enrolment ratios, and literacy rates. Given these disparities, it is especially crucial to conduct a study that focuses on gender.

Economically, Bankura remains heavily dependent on agriculture, while industrial growth has been slow and uneven. This structural imbalance restricts women’s access to stable employment in the organised sector, forcing them into low-paying, insecure, and often unrecognised occupations within agriculture and allied activities. As a result, their economic contributions, though substantial, rarely translate into enhanced social status or decision-making power.

By situating the discussion of empowerment within these socio-economic and demographic realities, this study grounds its analysis in the lived conditions of rural Bankura. The demographics, socioeconomic makeup, health, and level of education of the district are described in depth in the sections that follow.

These insights serve as the foundation for empirically assessing the ways in which decentralised governance can influence tribal women’s empowerment and improve household well-being at both individual and community levels.

### 1.6.1 BANKURA DISTRICT: A GEOGRAPHY PROFILE

According to the 2011 Census, Bankura is the thirteenth most populous district in West Bengal, and it has the fourth-largest geographical area. Located in the state's western half, this region is known as Rarhanchal for its unique culture and beauty. A considerable portion of this zone, including Bankura, is identified as Jangalmahal—an area with distinct socio-cultural and historical significance. Historically, parts of present-day Bankura once fell under the rule of the Malla Raj, whose legacy is reflected in the district’s rich cultural traditions and architectural heritage, particularly its terracotta temples and distinctive art forms.

The current administrative borders of the district were established in 1881 during its reorganization under the Burdwan Division of West Bengal. Now, 6,882 square kilometres make up Bankura, with 6,820.51 square kilometres falling into the rural category. This overwhelming rural predominance underscores the agrarian nature of the district, where livelihoods are largely dependent on agriculture and allied primary sector activities. The dominance of rural settlements not only shapes the socio-economic fabric of Bankura but also provides a crucial context for examining women’s empowerment, as their economic participation and social roles are closely tied to this agrarian environment.

##### Table-1.6.1 Area (in square kilometers) of land

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Rural** | **Urban** | **Total** |
| **West Bengal** | 85,427.26 | 3,324.74 | 88,752.00 |
| **Bankura District** | 6,820.51 | 61.49 | 6,882.00 |

### 1.6.2 THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND PHYSICAL LIMITS OF THE BANKURA DISTRICT

The district of Bankura is geographically positioned amidst several important administrative units of West Bengal. To the north, it is bounded by Burdwan district; the eastern frontier is shared with both Burdwan and Hooghly districts. Its western limit adjoins Purulia, while the southern boundary touches Paschim Medinipur district. This strategic location situates Bankura as a transitional zone linking the plateau regions of western Bengal with the fertile plains in the east.

The district’s physical landscape exhibits notable contrasts between its western and eastern parts. The western tract is marked by undulating terrain interspersed with low hill ranges, of which Susunia and Biharinath hills are prominent features. In contrast, the eastern part of Bankura consists largely of level plains, characterised by comparatively fertile soils, which make the area more suitable for cultivation.

Soil composition in the district is predominantly lateritic, with pockets of forest cover. Although ecologically significant, laterite soils are generally less conducive to high-yield agriculture. Bankura is classified as a drought-prone district, given its limited irrigation coverage. Only certain areas benefit from irrigation provided by large-scale projects such as the Damodar Valley Corporation and the Kangsabati Project. Rivers like the Mundeswari, Dwarakeswar, and Damodar contribute to forming fertile valleys in specific pockets. The Dwarakeswar flows centrally across the district, while the Damodar demarcates part of its boundary with Burdwan.

Agriculture continues to dominate the district’s economy despite these constraints. Nearly 82 percent of the population depends on cultivation for livelihood, largely because employment opportunities in secondary and tertiary sectors remain limited. Observations from the pilot survey undertaken for this research indicate that weak transportation networks and inadequate road infrastructure exacerbate this dependency, restricting mobility, access to services, and opportunities for trade.

These geographical, environmental, and infrastructural characteristics directly shape the socio-economic realities of the population. For women in particular—especially those from tribal and marginalised communities—such conditions amplify vulnerability, limit access to opportunities, and constrain their agency. Consequently, the district’s natural and infrastructural features provide a vital backdrop for analysing the processes of empowerment and the role of decentralised governance in addressing these structural challenges.

##### Table-1.6.2 Bankura District's Administrative Profile

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Administrative Unit** | **Number / Details** |
| **Sub-divisions** | 3 (Bankura Sadar, Bishnupur, Khatra) |
| **Community Development Blocks** | 21 |
| **Police Stations** | 20 |
| **Municipalities** | 4 (Bankura, Bishnupur, Sonamukhi, Khatra) |
| **Gram Panchayats** | 188 |
| **Villages** | 5,120 |
| **Inhabited Mouzas** | 3,510 |
| **Uninhabited Mouzas** | 390 |

1.6.3 BANKURA DISTRICT'S ADMINISTRATIVE PROFILE

Administratively, the district is centered around Bankura town. The district is subdivided into Bankura, Khatra, and Bishnupur to facilitate more effective governance. Because of its rich history, Bishnupur stands out among these. Renowned for its rich cultural heritage, especially the terracotta temples and peculiar creative traditions that continue to symbolize the region's character, this city was formerly the capital of the Malla dynasty.

At present, the district comprises 22 Community Development (CD) Blocks and an equal number of 22 Police Stations, reflecting a balanced administrative framework that integrates governance with law enforcement. The decentralised governance structure is further reinforced by the three-tier Panchayati Raj system, which operates through:

* **190 Gram Panchayats**
* **22 Panchayat Samities**
* **1 Zilla Parishad**
* **3 Municipalities** functioning as urban local bodies

Bankura’s administrative reach extends over 5,187 villages and 5 towns, highlighting its predominantly rural character. This rural predominance has direct implications for governance and development, as decentralised institutions such as Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samities play a crucial role in implementing policies, delivering services, and shaping local participation—particularly in initiatives aimed at enhancing women’s empowerment.

A comprehensive account of the district’s administrative structure is presented in Table 1.6.2, which outlines the institutional framework that underpins governance in Bankura.

### 1.6.4 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

 As per Census 2011, the total population of Bankura district stood at 3,596,292, constituting 3.93 percent of West Bengal’s overall population. Of this, an overwhelming 91.64 percent lived in rural areas, while only 8.36 percent resided in urban centres. This dominant rural presence underlines the limited spread of urban infrastructure, services, and amenities across the district.

Within this demographic composition, the female population was recorded at 1,608,635 in rural areas and 147,153 in urban areas, reaffirming the rural predominance of the district. In terms of demographic trends, the decadal growth rate during 2001–2011 was 12.64 percent, which was significantly lower than both the state and national averages. One of the major reasons for this slower growth is the large-scale out-migration of people, particularly from rural households, in search of livelihood opportunities in other parts of the state and country.

Although the rural share of the population remained very high, a slight structural shift was observed. The proportion of rural residents declined from 92.63 percent in 2001 to 91.64 percent in 2011, while the urban share increased from 7.37 percent to 8.36 percent over the same period. This reflects the early but visible signs of urbanisation in Bankura, though the pace of transition remains modest.

The rural–urban distribution of the population, along with its trends across the last two decades, has been systematically presented in Table 1.6.3 and Table 1.6.4. Together, these illustrate both the overwhelming rural character of Bankura and the emerging indications of gradual urban transition.

##### Table-1.6.3 Residence and the Rate of Decadal Growth in the Population

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Total** | **Rural** | **Urban** |
| **Population (Persons)** | 3,596,292 | 3,265,613 | 330,679 |
| **Male Population** | 1,840,504 | 1,686,978 | 153,526 |
| **Female Population** | 1,755,788 | 1,608,635 | 147,153 |
| **Decadal Growth Rate (2001–2011)** | 12.64 % | 11.43 % | 27.80 % |

##### Table-1.6.4 Percentage Breakdown of the Population in Rural and Urban Areas

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **2001 – Rural (%)** | **2001 – Urban (%)** | **2011 – Rural (%)** | **2011 – Urban (%)** |
| **West Bengal** | 71.50 | 28.50 | 67.40 | 32.60 |
| **Bankura** | 91.20 | 8.80 | 90.30 | 9.70 |

1.6.5 RURAL–URBAN DISTRIBUTION AND MIGRATION TRENDS

As reflected in Table 1.6.4, both West Bengal and Bankura district recorded a decline in the proportion of rural population during the period 2001–2011. While this is consistent with the gradual urbanisation process in the state, the pattern in Bankura carries specific characteristics. Unlike metropolitan areas where urbanisation is driven by industrial and service-sector growth, the urban settlements of Bankura continue to remain highly dependent on agriculture and allied activities. This indicates that structural transformation of the economy has been minimal, and the district still remains predominantly agrarian in its economic orientation.

An important demographic feature observed in the district is the prevalence of seasonalmigration among rural families. A significant proportion of households temporarily migrate to neighbouring districts during cultivation seasons to work as agricultural labourers. Findings from our field survey reinforce that such migration is largely distress-driven, reflecting the absence of adequate employment opportunities in the local economy. This seasonal migration not only shapes the livelihood patterns of households but also affects the decision-making power of women, who are often left behind to manage domestic responsibilities in the absence of male members.

##### Table-1.6.5 The Bankura District and the State of West Bengal's Sex Ratio

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **2001** | **2011** |
| **West Bengal** | 932 | 945 |
| **Bankura District** | 950 | 953 |

##### Table-1.6.6 Population by Caste (Percentage) as Per the 2001 Census

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **Scheduled Caste (%)** | **Scheduled Tribe (%)** | **General & Backward Classes (%)** |
| **West Bengal** | 22.80 | 5.70 | 71.50 |
| **Bankura District** | 30.90 | 10.10 | 59.00 |

### 1.6.6 CASTE-WISE SEX RATIO AND SOCIAL COMPOSITION

Gender equality and social hierarchy are better understood when the sex ratio in Bankura district is broken down by caste. Based on the 2001 census, the sex ratio for the general caste population was 937, for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) it was 966, and for the Scheduled Tribes (STs) it was 984. These numbers are displayed in Table 1.6.6. Gender discrimination appears to get more pronounced as one rises in the caste system, according to this trend. Scheduled Tribes societies are more likely to have balanced gender ratios than general caste communities, suggesting more equal gender relations.

The 2001 census revealed that out of Bankura's total population, 31.25 percent is Scheduled Caste and 10.36% is Scheduled Tribe. When taken as a whole, these numbers demonstrate that the area is home to many people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The concentration of SC and ST is particularly high in Bankura, making it one of the major districts in West Bengal. These proportions are far higher than the state averages.

From the perspective of this study, the demographic weight of SCs and STs has particular relevance. Tribal women, in particular, form a significant segment of the district’s population, and their empowerment through **decentralised governance structures**—such as Panchayati Raj Institutions—holds transformative potential. The relatively favourable sex ratio among tribal communities indicates a cultural predisposition towards gender equality, which, if supported with appropriate policies, can serve as a strong foundation for advancing women’s empowerment in the district.

### 1.6.7 SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Before the later division of Dinajpur and Midnapore, Bankura was one of seventeen districts of West Bengal. Its ranking was ninth in the state's Human Development Report (2004). This average ranking shows that the district is behind the rest of the state in terms of development, especially when compared to the state norms in areas like healthcare, education, and income generating.

The detailed values of the Human Development Indices (HDI) for Bankura, highlighting its comparative position within West Bengal, are presented in Table 1.6.7. These indicators provide an essential background for analysing the socio-economic context within which women’s empowerment—especially that of tribal women—must be studied.

##### Table –1.6.7 District of Bankura's Human Development Index

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **Health Index** | **Income Index** | **Education Index** | **Human Development Index (HDI)** |
| **West Bengal** | 0.71 | 0.44 | 0.68 | 0.61 |
| **Bankura District** | 0.66 | 0.28 | 0.61 | 0.53 |

In comparative terms, the socio-economic indicators of Bankura district reveal a mixed picture. While the health and education indices of the district are only marginally lower than the state averages of West Bengal, the income index shows a far more concerning gap. This indicates that income poverty is a more acute challenge in Bankura than deprivations in health and education.

According to estimates from the *Planning Commission* and the *West Bengal Human Development Report (2004)*, which drew upon data from the *National Sample Survey Organisation (1999–2000)*, Bankura exhibited alarmingly high levels of poverty at the beginning of the century. Around **59.5% of rural households** and **52.4% of urban households** were found to be living below the poverty line during this period. The per capita monthly consumption expenditure—a widely recognised measure of economic well-being—stood at only **₹350.28 in rural areas** and **₹500.40 in urban areas**. Although modest improvements have been recorded in certain social indicators, such as literacy and health, these figures underline the district’s persistent economic challenges and continuing struggle to achieve balanced human development.

When positioned within the broader landscape of West Bengal, Bankura emerges as one of the economically weaker districts of the state. This entrenched income-related poverty continues to act as a major impediment to inclusive development. For marginalised communities, particularly tribal women, such economic constraints severely restrict access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power, thereby undermining both individual and collective empowerment.

##### Table-1.6.8 Distribution of the Population in 2001 by Occupation

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **Farmers (%)** | **Agricultural Labourers (%)** | **Non-farm Occupations (%)** |
| **1991** | 44.0 | 35.5 | 20.5 |
| **2001** | 33.0 | 36.8 | 30.2 |

The occupational profile of the population in Bankura district reflects the characteristics of a predominantly agrarian economy. Evidence from official data (Table 1.6.8) indicates that the majority of residents continue to be dependent on agricultural activities, underscoring the relatively underdeveloped nature of the district’s economic structure. Nevertheless, gradual changes are discernible. Between 1991 and 2001, a noticeable section of the workforce shifted from farm-based employment to non-farm occupations, suggesting the early emergence of economic diversification and developmental transition within the district.

Despite such positive tendencies, the share of agricultural labourers remained almost stagnant during this period. This persistence indicates that while a section of cultivators succeeded in diversifying into non-agricultural employment, the agricultural labouring community had limited avenues to alter their occupational standing. Consequently, agriculture continues to dominate the local economy, thereby restricting structural transformation.

The occupational distribution further highlights this dependence: 32.6 percent of the working population are cultivators, 37.1 percent are engaged as agricultural labourers, and only 30.3 percent participate in non-agricultural sectors. This shows that nearly 70 percent of the district’s workforce remains directly tied to agricultural livelihoods.

This heavy reliance on agriculture carries significant implications for decentralised governance and the empowerment of tribal women. Restricted diversification of income opportunities tends to reinforce the economic vulnerability of women, particularly those from tribal communities. However, the gradual movement of some cultivators towards non-farm sectors also points to the latent potential of decentralised policies and local self-governance institutions in promoting livelihood diversification. Such institutional interventions can strengthen women’s participation in emerging economic activities, thereby advancing both economic security and empowerment.

### 1.6.8 EDUCATIONAL STATUS

Table 1.6.9 presents a comparative picture of the educational status of males and females in Bankura district and West Bengal. The data highlights that, despite national and international emphasis on education as a fundamental human right—enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—literacy levels in Bankura remain a concern. A significant proportion of the population, particularly in rural and marginalized communities, continues to lack basic reading and writing skills. This gender-based disparity underlines both structural inequalities and the need for more inclusive educational interventions in the district.

Final estimates from the 2011 Census put the national literacy rate at 74.4 percent, with West Bengal doing slightly better at 77.08%. The general literacy rate in Bankura was just 70.95 percent, which was lower than both of these indicators. There was an even more noticeable gender gap when looking at female literacy rates; these were significantly lower than the state and national averages, demonstrating the prevalence of gendered educational disparities in the area.

Further analysis of the data reveals a nine percentage point improvement in district literacy from 2001 to 2011. But by 2011, approximately 29% of Bankura's population aged six and up still could not read or write, even though concerted literacy initiatives had been going on for twenty years. Adding another perspective, the Bankura Human Development Report (2007) noted that female literacy was below 50% in more than 16 out of 22 blocks. This points to the fact that rural women are more likely to be illiterate than males, which reflects systemic inequality.

Educational participation among girls remains fragile. While enrolment at the primary and upper primary levels stands at 937 girls per 1,000 boys, the ratio declines significantly at higher levels of education. This declining trend is coupled with an increase in dropout rates among adolescent girls, driven by socio-economic constraints, early marriage, and lack of institutional support.

The empowerment of women is greatly affected by trends of low literacy rates and high dropout rates. Not only does low educational attainment limit women's access to resources and jobs, but it also limits their ability to have a say in household and community decision-making.

##### Table 1.6.9 Gender Differences in Literacy Rates

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **2001 – Total** | **2001 – Male** | **2001 – Female** | **2011 – Total** | **2011 – Male** | **2011 – Female** |
| **India** | 65.2 | 75.6 | 53.5 | 74.3 | 82.0 | 65.3 |
| **West Bengal** | 68.0 | 76.8 | 60.1 | 76.9 | 82.5 | 71.0 |
| **Bankura District** | 63.2 | 76.5 | 49.2 | 70.7 | 80.8 | 60.2 |

Significant disparities in literacy continue to persist among socially marginalised groups in Bankura. As reflected in the *2011 Census (Provisional Population Totals, Directorate of Census Operations, West Bengal, 2005)*, both Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) exhibit literacy levels considerably below the state average. The data presented in Table 1.6.10 illustrates these persistent gaps, highlighting how systemic socio-educational inequalities remain deeply entrenched in the district.

Such educational deprivation among SC and ST communities has far-reaching implications. It not only restricts individual opportunities for socio-economic mobility but also undermines broader efforts at inclusive development. For women—particularly tribal women—low literacy compounds existing disadvantages, limiting their access to information, institutional support, and participation in decision-making processes. Addressing these inequalities is therefore critical to advancing women’s empowerment within the decentralised governance framework.

In the case of the Scheduled Caste population, the 2001 Census recorded literacy rates of **58.22 percent for males, 27.11 percent for females, and 42.92 percent overall.** These figures are distinctly below the corresponding averages for West Bengal, indicating the relative educational backwardness of this community in the district.

A comparable trend is observed within the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Bankura. According to the 2011 Census, literacy among ST males stood at **67.84 percent,** while the rate for ST females was only **31.13 percent,** resulting in an overall literacy rate of **49.60 percent.** Although male literacy among the STs is slightly higher than that of their Scheduled Caste counterparts, the female literacy rate remains alarmingly low, underscoring a deep and persistent gender disparity in access to education.

These inequalities are not merely statistical reflections but indicators of structural and socio-cultural disadvantages that shape the lives of tribal women. The continuation of such gender-based educational deprivation has direct implications for both empowerment and governance. Limited literacy restricts women’s ability to access information, assert agency in household and community matters, and engage meaningfully in democratic processes. In the context of decentralised governance, low levels of female literacy diminish women’s effective participation in Panchayati Raj institutions, curtail their influence in local decision-making, and reduce their capacity to benefit from emerging opportunities for socio-economic mobility.

##### Table-1.6.10 Among Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Members, the Rate of Sex-Based Literacy

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **State / District** | **SC – Male** | **SC – Female** | **SC – Person** | **ST – Male** | **ST – Female** | **ST – Person** |
| **West Bengal** | 70.3 | 47.5 | 59.0 | 57.1 | 29.8 | 43.6 |
| **Bankura District** | 58.0 | 27.5 | 43.0 | 67.5 | 31.5 | 49.5 |

According to the data that is currently available, the Scheduled Tribe communities in the Bankura district have a higher level of education than the rest of the state. On a regular basis, a larger percentage of tribal people are literate than Scheduled Caste people. Scheduled Tribesmen and women are more likely to have completed secondary school than Scheduled Castes men and women.

Despite some overall progress in literacy, sharp gender disparities remain evident. Women from both Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) groups continue to record substantially lower literacy levels compared to men in the same communities. This persistent gender gap underscores the barriers women face in accessing equitable education, which in turn constrains their prospects for upward social mobility and weakens their capacity to engage meaningfully in household decision-making and community governance.

These discrepancies have serious consequences for the advancement of women in Bankura. When women are unable to further their education, it limits their career options, keeps them in a lower social position, and reduces their productivity. For SC and ST women in particular, this creates a cycle of disadvantage that perpetuates socio-economic marginalisation. Such structural barriers directly undermine the goals of decentralised governance, where meaningful participation and inclusivity are essential. Without addressing these inequalities, the empowerment of tribal women will remain partial and constrained, posing a major obstacle to the achievement of inclusive development in the district.

## 1.7 STUDY AREA OVERVIEW

On the boundary between the Chota Nagpur Plateau and the Bengal alluvial lowlands lies the western West Bengal district of Bankura. Its geography is marked by undulating terrain, red lateritic soil, and semi-arid conditions, all of which shape the livelihood strategies and settlement patterns of its inhabitants. The district is bordered to the east by Bardhhaman and Hooghly, to the west by Purulia, to the south by Paschim Medinipur, and to the north by Birbhum. It covers over 6,882 square kilometers. The economy is predominantly agrarian, supplemented by forest-based occupations and small-scale cottage industries. Notably, Bankura enjoys a distinct cultural identity through its terracotta art and craft traditions, which are both economically and symbolically significant.

From a demographic perspective, Census 2011 records the district’s population at nearly 3.6 million, of which Scheduled Tribes constitute around 11–12 percent. The major tribal groups include the Santals, Mundas, Oraons, and Bhumij, who are primarily concentrated in the western and southern blocks of the district. Tribal women occupy central roles in agricultural production, household management, and community cultural life. However, their socio-economic vulnerabilities persist in the form of limited access to education, healthcare, and political representation, thereby justifying their selection as a focal point for examining empowerment through decentralised governance.

Administratively, Bankura comprises 22 Community Development Blocks, 3 Municipalities, and more than 190 Gram Panchayats, functioning within the Panchayati Raj framework institutionalised by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992. The selected study period, 2003–2018, spans three Panchayat election cycles. During this time, the constitutional provisions for seat reservations facilitated greater participation of women—including tribal women—in grassroots governance. The period was also marked by the implementation of significant development programmes such as MGNREGA, SGSY, and various tribal welfare schemes, most of which were channelled through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). These programmes became crucial instruments of livelihood security and platforms for women’s participation in public decision-making.

Culturally, Bankura is known for its vibrant tribal festivals, folk traditions, and artistic heritage, which underscore the active role of tribal women in community and cultural life. Yet, despite their cultural centrality, their political and economic agency has historically been circumscribed. The strengthening of decentralised governance, however, created new avenues for women to move beyond traditional roles and claim spaces of leadership within formal institutions.

The choice of Bankura as the study area is thus particularly significant. The district combines a substantial tribal population, a history of active Panchayati Raj, and a socio-economic context defined by both deprivation and cultural richness. Together, these factors provide fertile ground to assess how decentralisation during the period 2003–2018 influenced tribal women’s empowerment and reshaped their roles in household, community, and governance structures.

## 1.8 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Decentralised governance in India, institutionalised through the Panchayati Raj system, was envisioned as a mechanism to deepen democracy at the grassroots, enhance participation, and empower marginalised groups, particularly women and Scheduled Tribes. In a district like Bankura, with its significant tribal population and entrenched socio-economic inequalities, decentralisation carries the dual promise of improving governance and addressing structural barriers such as patriarchy, caste hierarchies, and poverty. However, despite constitutional safeguards and numerous state-led interventions, the extent to which tribal women have been genuinely empowered through these structures remains both uncertain and contested.

Between 2003 and 2018, a series of reforms and policy measures were implemented at national and state levels. These included the expansion of women’s reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, the roll-out of welfare programmes targeting rural households, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening elected women representatives. Yet, a critical question arises: have these interventions moved beyond symbolic representation to ensure substantive empowerment? The persistence of restrictive cultural norms, institutional bottlenecks, and socio-economic marginalisation often constrains tribal women’s ability to exercise agency, influence governance, and secure equitable access to resources.

This divergence between policy intent and ground-level realities constitutes the central problem of the present study. While decentralisation is designed to advance inclusivity and empowerment, the intersection of gender, tribal identity, and economic vulnerability complicates its outcomes. Bankura’s distinctive socio-cultural composition, marked by a significant tribal presence, offers an important case to examine whether decentralised governance has served as a genuine instrument of empowerment or whether it has been limited by entrenched patriarchal practices and administrative barriers.

## 1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present research carries importance on multiple fronts. **Academically**, it enriches the growing body of scholarship on decentralised governance and women’s empowerment by focusing specifically on the tribal context of India—an area often overlooked in conventional studies. Although decentralisation has been extensively discussed in terms of enhancing administrative efficiency and fostering democratic participation, its **gendered implications**, particularly for tribal women, have not been adequately explored. By addressing this gap, the study contributes new perspectives to both governance and gender discourse. By undertaking a case study of Bankura district, this research integrates perspectives from governance studies, gender studies, and tribal development, thereby offering an interdisciplinary contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

The study is also highly relevant for policy-making. Its findings provide evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of decentralised institutions in empowering tribal women and highlight both the achievements and limitations of governance structures. Such insights are critical for refining policies related to the Panchayati Raj system, women’s reservations in local governance, and tribal welfare programs. The outcomes of this research may help ensure that women’s political participation moves beyond token representation and translates into meaningful influence in decision-making processes.

Socially, the study holds considerable value as it addresses the empowerment of one of the most marginalized groups in India—tribal women—who face double disadvantages on the basis of both gender and community identity. By analyzing their role and participation in governance over a fifteen-year period, the research sheds light on how decentralisation has affected their access to power, resources, and recognition. This not only deepens the understanding of social inclusion in rural governance but also provides practical guidance for NGOs, civil society organizations, and development practitioners working at the grassroots level to design culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions.

Furthermore, by covering the period from 2003 to 2018, the study captures a critical historical phase when the Panchayati Raj system was consolidating in West Bengal. This temporal scope allows for a nuanced examination of long-term trends, continuities, and shifts in women’s empowerment through local governance. Such longitudinal analysis enhances the historical understanding of how structural reforms intersect with social transformation in rural India.

## 1.10 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

* What is the role of decentralized governance in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in Bankura District?
* How do self-help groups (SHGs) contribute to the socio-economic status of tribal women compared to tribal men and non-tribal populations?
* What are the cultural and social barriers that affect tribal women's participation in economic activities, particularly in NTFP collection?

## 1.11 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The current research aims to analyze the dynamics of decentralized government in West Bengal's Bankura district from 2003 to 2018, paying special attention to how it empowered tribal women. Here are the specific goals:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of self-help groups (SHGs) in enhancing the economic empowerment of tribal women in Bankura District.
2. To quantify the socio-economic contributions of tribal women, comparing their roles and impacts with those of tribal men and non-tribal populations.
3. To assess the intersectionality of empowerment among tribal women, examining how caste, age, and education levels affect their economic participation.
4. To conduct qualitative research on personal narratives of tribal women regarding their experiences in SHGs, NTFP collection, and the challenges they face.
5. To investigate the influence of cultural and social norms on women's engagement in economic activities, particularly in relation to NTFP collection.
6. To analyze the role of technology in improving the effectiveness of SHGs and its impact on the empowerment of tribal women.

## 1.12 HYPOTHESIS

* **H1:** Participation in self-help groups (SHGs) significantly increases the economic empowerment of tribal women in Bankura District.
* **H2:** Cultural and social norms have a measurable impact on the economic participation of tribal women in NTFP collection and other economic activities.
* **H3:** There is a significant relationship between the use of technology in SHGs and the level of empowerment experienced by tribal women.
* **Null Hypothesis:** There are no statistically significant differences in the economic empowerment, cultural influence, or technological impacts on tribal women engaged in SHGs compared to those who are not.

## 1.13 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the Bankura district in West Bengal because of its distinct sociocultural context and large tribal population. The study's results are geographically limited to this district and its circumstances, but they might provide light on comparable tribal areas. Temporally, the study covers the period from 2003 to 2018, a crucial phase marked by the implementation of decentralised governance reforms, gender quotas in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), and various state and central schemes aimed at tribal development and women’s empowerment. Thematically, the research focuses on the interface between decentralised governance and tribal women’s empowerment, examining their participation in PRIs, access to decision-making processes, leadership opportunities, and the impact of decentralisation on their socio-economic status in areas such as education, livelihood, health, and political agency. From an analytical perspective, the study employs a case study design that integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods. It relies on secondary data from government reports alongside field-based surveys, interviews, and discussions with tribal women representatives, community stakeholders, and administrative officials. On the policy front, the research evaluates national and state-level initiatives—most notably the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and tribal welfare schemes—to examine the extent to which these frameworks have translated into concrete empowerment outcomes at the grassroots level. However, the scope is delimited in that the findings are restricted to one district and may not fully reflect the diversity of tribal women’s experiences across India. Further, the focus is primarily on formal governance structures, with limited attention to informal leadership systems, and the concept of empowerment is examined mainly through political, social, and economic dimensions, leaving cultural and psychological aspects for future research.

## 1.14 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

1. **Geographical Limitation**

Because of its large tribal population and distinctive sociocultural context, the Bankura district in West Bengal has been selected as the focus of the current study. While this study's results may shed light on other tribal areas facing comparable challenges, they are geographically limited to this district.

1. **Time Frame Constraint**

The research covers the period from 2003 to 2018. Changes in policies, governance structures, or socio-economic dynamics beyond this period are not captured, which may limit the study’s relevance in the current or future policy landscape.

1. **Dependence on Secondary Data**

A significant portion of data relies on government records, reports, and Panchayati Raj documents. Such sources may contain biases, gaps, or inconsistencies, particularly in documenting women’s actual participation and empowerment outcomes.

1. **Sample Size and Representativeness**

Due to logistical and resource constraints, the number of tribal women respondents and local governance representatives included in the survey and interviews was limited. Hence, the conclusions reflect the perspectives of a selected sample rather than the entire population.

1. **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers**

Communication challenges sometimes arose during fieldwork due to dialectal and cultural differences. Although translators and local facilitators were engaged, subtle meanings of responses might have been lost or misinterpreted.

1. **Attribution of Empowerment Outcomes**

Many variables, including decentralised governance, education, government welfare programs, non-governmental organization interventions, and market forces, all work together to empower indigenous women.

1. **Subjectivity in Measuring Empowerment**

Women’s empowerment is inherently multidimensional and often shaped by subjective experiences. While indicators such as decision-making authority, participation in political processes, and levels of economic independence can be measured, the lived realities of empowerment vary considerably across individuals and communities, reflecting diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts.

1. **Political Sensitivity**

Panchayati Raj functioning often intersects with local politics. Respondents may have hesitated to express candid views on governance or political interference, leading to possible response bias.

1. **Resource and Time Limitations**

Constraints of time, funding, and manpower restricted deeper longitudinal engagement with communities, thereby limiting the scope for long-term observation of empowerment processes.

## 1.15 CHAPTER OUTLINE

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

Introduces the study by linking decentralised governance in India with tribal women’s empowerment, focusing on Bankura district. It outlines the idea of empowerment, presents demographic and socio-economic data, and states the research questions, objectives, scope, and limitations.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Reviews theories and studies on decentralisation and women’s empowerment. Highlights empowerment as multidimensional—social, economic, political, cultural—and identifies the gap: limited empirical research on tribal women in Bankura between 2003–2018.

**Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

Explains the mixed-method design with surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Defines universe, variables, and units of analysis. Describes tools, validation, data coding, statistical techniques, ethics, and flowchart of the research process.

**Chapter 4: Data Analysis**

Presents household and community-level data on empowerment. Uses tables, charts, and statistical methods (factor analysis, correlation, regression) to show both progress and barriers in tribal women’s empowerment in Bankura.

**Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications**

Interprets findings in light of theory. Suggests policy measures (education, capacity building, anti-violence efforts), administrative steps for stronger Panchayats, and academic implications for further research.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion and Ethical Declarations**

Summarises that decentralisation created opportunities but empowerment remains gradual and constrained. Reflects on fieldwork challenges, provides ethical declarations, funding/interest statements, and closes with the importance of inclusive governance.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1 INDRODUCTION

Decentralised governance has emerged as a pivotal framework in India’s democratic development since the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which institutionalised Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as vehicles for participatory democracy and grassroots development. Scholars such as Bandyopadhyay (2004) and Mathew (2000) have highlighted how decentralisation not only redistributes power but also creates new spaces for marginalized groups, particularly women, to influence decision-making. Within this discourse, tribal women occupy a unique position, as their empowerment is shaped by the intersection of gender, caste, and ethnicity. Studies on West Bengal’s Panchayati Raj system (Bhattacharya, 2010; Basu, 2012) indicate that while state policies and quotas have enabled greater representation, structural barriers—such as patriarchal norms, economic dependence, and limited education—continue to mediate their actual agency.

The case of Bankura district is especially significant, given its predominantly tribal demography and history of socio-economic deprivation. Research by Mukherjee (2015) and Chattopadhyay (2017) demonstrates that decentralised institutions in Bankura have become crucial platforms for integrating tribal women into local governance, yet their impact has been uneven, contingent on political culture, resource distribution, and community mobilization. Between 2003 and 2018, policy interventions in women’s reservation, self-help groups, and rural development programs created new opportunities for empowerment, but the lived experiences of tribal women reveal both advancement and persistent constraints.

Thus, existing literature underscores the duality of decentralisation—as a progressive institutional mechanism for women’s participation and as a field of contestation where entrenched hierarchies limit transformation. This study situates itself within this scholarly debate by examining how decentralised governance in Bankura district has influenced tribal women’s empowerment over the period 2003–2018, seeking to contribute both to gendered governance studies and to tribal empowerment discourse in India.

## 2.2 REVIEW RELATED LITERATURE

1. **Participatory Governance Reform in West Bengal: Policy Agendas and Local Responses, Dasgupta, D., et al. (2020).** The study by Dasgupta et al. (2020) examines the complexities of participatory governance reforms in West Bengal, focusing on the factors influencing citizen engagement and the implications of political regimes on governance practices. Utilizing qualitative methodologies, including interviews and document analyses, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of local governance from the perspectives of officials and residents. Key findings reveal that non-institutionalized participatory practices often create a gap between elite intentions and local realities, with the ISGP project demonstrating more effective integration than the SRD project, despite potentially reducing citizen participation to formalities. This research distinguishes itself by conducting a comparative analysis of the SRD and ISGP projects, emphasizing the critical role of local bureaucracies and political ownership in participation. The study contributes to theoretical discourse on governance while addressing significant research gaps, such as the long-term sustainability of participatory practices and the underexplored influence of political elites, although it remains limited by the absence of quantitative data and statistical tools.
2. **Women’s Political Participation and Empowerment in Urban Local Governance in West Bengal, India, Bauri, A., et al. (2022).** The study by Bauri et al. (2022) investigates women's political participation and empowerment within urban local governance in West Bengal, focusing on the dichotomy between effective and pseudo-participation among women representatives. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the researchers employed purposive sampling and conducted semi-structured interviews, complemented by quantitative indices to gauge political empowerment and awareness levels. Key findings reveal that while the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has enhanced women's representation, significant barriers to genuine political agency persist, influenced by socio-economic status and political lineage. This study's novelty lies in its dual qualitative and quantitative methodology, emphasizing lived experiences over mere representation metrics. The research contributes to theoretical frameworks on women's empowerment and provides practical insights into the legislative impacts on political engagement. However, methodological limitations include a lack of data from less developed districts and an inadequate examination of reservation policy effectiveness, addressing critical gaps in existing literature on women's political roles.
3. **Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expression amongst the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of West Bengal, Ghosh, J., Sinha., et al. (2023).** The study by Ghosh, J., et al. (2023) investigates undocumented traditional knowledge and cultural expressions among the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of West Bengal, emphasizing the socio-economic implications of traditional knowledge exploitation. Utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including extensive field studies across five districts, the research gathered empirical observations through direct interviews and documentation of practices. Key findings indicate a rich diversity of traditional knowledge facing exploitation risks, with many PVTGs receiving inadequate compensation for their contributions. Despite legal frameworks aimed at protecting traditional knowledge, the study reveals their ineffective implementation and the necessity for improved Access and Benefit Sharing mechanisms. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach, merging empirical studies with theoretical frameworks, contributing both practically and educationally to understanding traditional knowledge's socio-economic context. However, it acknowledges limitations in thoroughly capturing the active expressions of traditional knowledge in daily life and the effectiveness of legal protections, addressing significant gaps in the literature.
4. **The creation and withdrawal of spaces for participatory governance: the case of village development committees in West Bengal, India, Dasgupta, D., et al. (2023).** The study by Dasgupta, D., et al. (2023) investigates the dynamics of participatory governance through Village Development Committees (VDCs) in West Bengal, India, aiming to understand how political frameworks, external funding, and local elites shape participatory initiatives. Employing qualitative methodologies such as stakeholder interviews and political discourse analysis, the research uncovers that while VDCs initially enhanced local governance, entrenched political interests led to their eventual decline. The findings indicate that shifts in government support directly affected participatory governance, highlighting the necessity for broader political coalitions for sustained success. This study's novelty lies in its integration of political analysis with empirical observations, addressing the sequential relationship between the creation and dismantling of participatory spaces. It contributes to theoretical understanding by revealing the complex interplay of political actors and funding impact while identifying gaps in the literature regarding the facilitation and hindrance of participatory governance. However, methodological limitations include the qualitative focus, which may not capture broader statistical trends or the full scope of external funding's role.
5. **Governance and Institution in the Indian Forest Sector: An Analytical Study, Basu, J. P., et al. (2023).** The study by Basu et al. (2023) aims to investigate the local-level dynamics of forest governance in India, with a particular focus on decentralized governance structures and their impact on forest-dependent communities. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research utilizes quantitative methods to develop a forest governance index from data collected across 36 villages, enabling comparative analysis. Key findings indicate that the majority of villages exhibit poor forest governance, with only two classified as having good governance. The study's novelty lies in its large-n approach, contrasting existing literature dominated by small-n analyses, thus contributing significantly to both theoretical and practical understanding of forest governance. However, methodological limitations exist, particularly in the reliance on self-reported data, which may affect the reliability of findings. The research addresses gaps in large-n studies and quantitative analyses of decentralized governance's socio-economic impacts, ultimately guiding future governance improvements in the Indian forest sector.
6. **Institutional dynamics and water resource management: the case of traditional water bodies in West Bengal, India, Chowdhury, K., et al. (2021).** The study by Chowdhury et al. (2021) examines the influence of local political power relations on the management of traditional water bodies in West Bengal, India, emphasizing the need for comprehensive research on local governance dynamics. Utilizing qualitative analysis and empirical data collected through surveys and interviews with local farmers, the study reveals that effective management practices are deeply rooted in historical customs and social norms, which persist despite socio-economic changes. The findings highlight the stability of socio-economic conditions among small-scale farmers and illustrate the ongoing relevance of traditional management practices. This research introduces a unique approach by integrating institutional analysis with empirical insights, thereby contributing to our understanding of the sustainability of water resources. However, it identifies methodological limitations in exploring the nuances of local power dynamics and calls for updated studies that examine the evolving socio-economic conditions of small and marginal farmers to address existing gaps in empirical evidence linking traditional practices with contemporary resource management.
7. **Role of gram panchayat in rural development: a micro-study on the purulia district of west bengal, das, n. C., et al. (2024).** The study by Das et al. (2024) investigates the pivotal role of Gram Panchayats in rural development within the Purulia District of West Bengal, aiming to elucidate the structure of the Panchayat Raj system and evaluate various rural development programs. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative insights from interviews and case studies with quantitative data collected through surveys. Key findings reveal that effective local governance is critical for successful rural development, with Gram Panchayats identified as essential facilitators for community progress, despite current challenges in addressing rural poverty and enhancing literacy and nutrition. This micro-study approach provides localized insights that differentiate it from broader analyses, contributing significantly to understanding grassroots dynamics. However, the methodology is limited by the specific contexts of Purulia, highlighting gaps in research concerning the localized impacts and challenges of Gram Panchayats, which remain underexplored in existing literature.
8. **Panchayat and rural development: A case study of Kudhani block under Muzaffarpur district, Bihar, Kumari, A., et al. (2018).** The study by Kumari et al. (2018) evaluates the effectiveness of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the execution of rural development programs, specifically within the Kudhani block of Muzaffarpur district, Bihar. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology that includes field studies and interviews, the research provides localized insights into the challenges faced by Jamaruha Gram Panchayat in implementing development initiatives. Key findings indicate that, while PRIs play a crucial role in rural development, significant obstacles persist, necessitating an understanding of local contexts to enhance governance outcomes. The novelty of this study lies in its focused case study approach, contrasting with broader analyses of PRIs. This research contributes practically by elucidating the specific impediments faced at the grassroots level and highlights the need for further empirical investigations into the unique challenges of individual Gram Panchayats. However, methodological limitations include a reliance on qualitative assessments, which may overlook quantitative performance metrics, thereby addressing a significant research gap in the empirical evaluation of PRIs' roles in various local contexts.
9. **Denial of Rights Continues: How Legislation for ‘Democratic Decentralisation’ of Forest Governance was Subverted in the Implementation Process of the Forest Rights Act in India, Das, B. K., et al. (2019).** The study by Das et al. (2019) investigates the complexities surrounding the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in India, with a specific focus on the widespread confusion among potential rights claimants and implementing staff. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research incorporates case studies and interviews with stakeholders to analyze the institutional and political dynamics that hinder effective rights recognition. Key findings indicate that misconceptions about rights, coupled with institutional ambiguities, significantly undermine the FRA's objectives, limiting autonomy in forest governance. This research contributes novel insights by emphasizing micro-level nuances and contextual factors that subvert legislative intentions, distinguishing it from broader studies. However, methodological limitations include the potential lack of generalizability due to localized case studies. The study addresses research gaps regarding the specific political factors contributing to misunderstandings of rights and the infrastructural challenges facing forest governance reforms, highlighting the need for comprehensive studies on these micro-level processes.
10. **Economic Empowerment of Women and Sericulture : A Socio-Economic Study of Ranibandh Block of Bankura District, WB, India, Patra, P., et al. (2025).** The study by Patra, P., et al. (2025) explores the socio-economic empowerment of women in the sericulture industry of the Ranibandh block in Bankura District, West Bengal, India, focusing on the extent of women's participation and its impacts on economic empowerment. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative data analysis with qualitative assessments of community engagement, employing statistical tests to analyze correlations and performance metrics. Key findings reveal a significant increase in women's involvement in silkworm rearing, with marked rises in cocoon production, particularly from DTV-I and DTV-III races, and notable differences in income generation across villages. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive socio-economic analysis, distinguishing itself by combining economic performance data with qualitative insights. The study contributes both theoretically and practically, highlighting the transformative effects of women's collective efforts, while also identifying gaps in understanding socio-cultural barriers and the long-term benefits of women's participation in tasar production.
11. **Trend of metamorphosis of traditional agro-based tribal society to non-agricultural society: a case study of Jangalmahal of Bankura district, West Bengal, Chattaraj, M., et al. (2019).** The study by Chattaraj, M., et al. (2019) addresses the transformation of traditional agro-based tribal societies in Jangalmahal, West Bengal, focusing on socio-economic factors influencing the shift to non-agricultural livelihoods. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporates primary data through pilot surveys using the Population Proportional to Size methodology and secondary data from census handbooks. Key findings reveal significant shifts in tribal livelihoods away from agriculture, driven by economic pressures and emerging opportunities in non-agricultural sectors, with qualitative insights underscoring cultural changes accompanying these transformations. The novelty lies in the methodological combination of pilot surveys and comprehensive questionnaires, enhancing data representation. The study contributes to theoretical frameworks by elucidating the dynamics of tribal community transitions, while practical implications highlight the need for targeted government interventions. However, methodological limitations include a lack of focus on the impacts of non-agricultural employment on tribal identity and insufficient empirical data on adaptive strategies, addressing critical research gaps in the literature.
12. **Leveraging Boundary Objects for participatory governance in India's environmental policy process, George, B., et al. (2025).** The study by George et al. (2025) explores the evolution of environmental governance in India, emphasizing the need for participatory approaches to effectively manage 'wicked problems' faced by local communities. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative case studies and stakeholder interviews, the research investigates the practical applications of boundary objects in facilitating collaboration among diverse stakeholders. Key findings reveal that traditional top-down governance methods are inadequate, while participatory frameworks that incorporate local knowledge enhance policy effectiveness and community engagement. The novelty of this research lies in its application of boundary object theory specifically within the Indian context, offering new insights into fostering meaningful participation among varied social groups. However, methodological limitations include a lack of quantitative analysis and limited empirical studies on boundary objects in governance frameworks. This study addresses gaps related to socio-cultural dynamics in community engagement and the outcomes of participatory initiatives in biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation.
13. **Decentralized governance reforms in Primary Education: Some Reflections on West Bengal, Roy, D., et al. (2012).** The study by Roy et al. (2012) investigates the impact of decentralized governance reforms on primary education in West Bengal, focusing on the experiences of marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Utilizing a qualitative methodology, including ethnographic studies and field data collection, the research provides a nuanced understanding of the educational challenges faced by these communities. Key findings reveal that, despite increased enrolment rates, particularly among SC and ST students, learning outcomes remain poor, with many children unable to read or write at basic levels. The study's novelty lies in its ethnographic approach that contrasts with previous quantitative studies, emphasizing the significance of social dynamics in educational reform. The research contributes to theoretical frameworks by highlighting the disconnect between enrolment and educational quality, while also identifying gaps in qualitative research regarding the effectiveness of Village Education Committees (VECs) and socioeconomic factors affecting educational access. Limitations include a lack of statistical analysis, which could have provided additional insights into the trends observed.
14. **The Status of Women among the Tribal Communities of West Bengal, Tigga, R., et al. (2024).** The study by Tigga et al. (2024) examines the socio-cultural and economic roles of women in tribal communities of West Bengal, particularly focusing on how cultural practices and family dynamics influence their empowerment and limitations. Utilizing a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative ethnographic research and quantitative data from governmental sources, the research reveals that while tribal women significantly contribute to agriculture and community decision-making, they face barriers regarding education and economic independence. Key findings indicate that governmental and NGO interventions have made some strides in improving their socio-economic status, yet gaps in policy implementation persist, especially in remote areas. This study's novelty lies in its multidimensional approach, integrating various aspects rather than isolating them, contributing both theoretically and practically by highlighting culturally sensitive development needs. However, methodological limitations include insufficient exploration of specific cultural practices and a lack of comprehensive assessments of the effectiveness of interventions, indicating a need for further research in these areas.
15. **Making Decentralisation Work: A Comparative Ethnographic Analysis of Forest Conservation and Village Governance in West Bengal, India, Datta, S., et al. (2021).** The study by Datta et al. (2021) investigates the effects of decentralisation on local communities' governance in forest conservation within West Bengal, India. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, including participant observation and field interviews, the research aims to contrast the governance outcomes of Joint Forest Management (JFM) and gram panchayat structures. Key findings reveal that gram panchayats offer more inclusive and transparent systems than JFM, which often perpetuates bureaucratic control that limits local agency. This novel comparative ethnographic method enhances understanding of local governance dynamics, contributing significantly to both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in community engagement and accountability. However, methodological limitations include a lack of quantitative analysis and the need for further exploration of power asymmetries within JFM structures. The research addresses gaps concerning the influence of physical spaces on governance and calls for more ethnographic studies on state-local actor dynamics in forest governance.
16. **Impact of Globalisation on the Empowerment of Tribal Women at Mining Sector in India: (Special Reference to West Bengal), Hazra, S., et al. (2021).** The study by Hazra et al. (2021) investigates the implications of globalisation on the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women in the mining sector, with a concentrated focus on West Bengal, India. Utilizing a descriptive research design and case study analysis, the research predominantly engages secondary data sources, including government records and journal articles, to elucidate the challenges faced by these communities. Key findings reveal significant social and economic dislocation caused by mining activities, which detrimentally impact women's empowerment, and indicate that while some mining companies have implemented resettlement policies, these measures often fail to provide substantial benefits to displaced women. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach that examines the interplay between globalisation, mining, and gender empowerment, thus contributing both theoretically and practically by highlighting critical gaps in understanding long-term socio-cultural impacts and the effectiveness of rehabilitation policies. However, methodological limitations include a reliance on secondary data, which may overlook nuanced primary insights, addressing a research gap in the empowerment of tribal women amid globalisation in mining contexts.
17. **Women, Participation and Development: A Case Study from West Bengal, Banerjee, N. K., et al. (1984).** The study by Banerjee et al. (1984) investigates the effectiveness of various developmental programs aimed at enhancing the socio-economic conditions of women in rural West Bengal, particularly focusing on the Bankura district. The research employs qualitative methodologies, including field surveys, participatory observation, and interviews, to gather insightful socio-economic data from women involved in these initiatives. Key findings reveal that existing programs often neglect the specific needs of impoverished rural women, resulting in increased vulnerability instead of empowerment. The study’s novelty lies in its emphasis on grassroots organizations as crucial players not just for training facilitation but also for socio-political empowerment and economic independence. The research contributes practically by highlighting viable economic activities that align with women's capabilities, while also addressing methodological limitations such as the lack of quantitative data and statistical tools. Moreover, the study identifies significant research gaps, particularly in understanding socio-economic dynamics and the role of local organizations in supporting women's economic endeavors.
18. **Decentralisation and Women’s Participation: A Study of Darjeeling Municipality, 1994-2015, Thami, L., et al. (2017).** The study by Thami et al. (2017) examines the impact of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) on women's political participation in Darjeeling Municipality from 1994 to 2015, integrating historical analysis with contemporary survey data to illuminate the nuances of women's empowerment within decentralized governance. Utilizing a mixed-method approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses, the research employs interviews and surveys, enriching data interpretation through graphical representations. Key findings reveal a striking escalation in women's representation in local councils, from under 4% to nearly 44% post-reforms; however, it also identifies persistent patriarchal attitudes as significant barriers to effective participation. The novelty lies in its comprehensive methodology, which bridges qualitative and quantitative insights, contributing to theoretical frameworks on women's empowerment in governance. Despite its insightful findings, the study acknowledges methodological limitations, particularly the lack of in-depth qualitative exploration of challenges faced by women, thus addressing critical research gaps regarding socio-political dynamics that hinder women's full engagement in local politics.
19. **Political Empowerment of Tribal Women in India through PRIs of Local-Self Governance, Nayak, K. B., et al. (2024).** The study by Nayak, K. B. et al. (2024) examines the political empowerment of tribal women in India through the framework of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) following the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which aims to enhance women's representation in governance. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative analyses of case studies with quantitative data on electoral participation rates and socio-economic indicators, the research highlights the gradual improvement in women's visibility in political roles, although significant barriers remain. Key findings indicate that while the amendment has positively impacted women's political engagement, patriarchal structures continue to marginalize tribal women within their communities. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive integration of historical and contemporary perspectives on women's political participation, contributing to a deeper understanding of socio-economic implications. However, it also acknowledges limitations, such as insufficient empirical data on the experiences of tribal women in accessing political office and a lack of focus on the long-term effects of women's participation on community development.
20. **Decentralised Governance in Tribal Areas of Odisha- A Critical Analysis, Mohapatra, B. P., et al. (n.d.).** The study by Mohapatra et al. (n.d.) critically examines decentralized governance in the tribal areas of Odisha, aiming to assess its impact on socio-economic development, investigate the participatory role of Scheduled Tribes, and evaluate the effectiveness of the PESA Act in resource distribution. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research draws on field studies and secondary data to analyze local governance frameworks and community participation. Key findings indicate that while decentralization presents opportunities for enhanced representation, significant barriers persist, such as entrenched poverty and bureaucratic oversight, leading to mixed outcomes for marginalized communities. The novelty of this research lies in its localized focus on under-explored tribal areas, providing fresh insights into the implications of the PESA Act. However, methodological limitations include limited empirical data and insufficient analysis of participatory mechanisms, highlighting gaps in understanding the dynamics between decentralized governance and traditional power structures in these regions.
21. **Tribal women in local governance: a study of problems and prospects, ghosh, b., et al. (2020).** The study by Ghosh et al. (2020) examines the challenges and prospects of tribal women's participation in local governance in India, particularly after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. Utilizing qualitative methodologies, including surveys and interviews in the village Kuchut of Burdwan District, West Bengal, the research reveals that 95% of tribal women expressed a personal interest in entering politics, highlighting their engagement despite facing numerous cultural, social, and religious barriers. The novelty of this work lies in its focused analysis on the unique socio-cultural context of tribal women, providing fresh insights often overlooked in broader women's political studies. The study contributes to the theoretical discourse on women's political participation by detailing systemic barriers and the nuanced experiences of tribal women compared to their non-tribal counterparts. However, it also identifies methodological limitations, such as the lack of quantitative data and the need for comparative studies on tribal versus non-tribal women's political motivations, underscoring significant research gaps in understanding the effectiveness of women's reservation policies.
22. **Women in politics: a study of tribal women's participation in local governance, palmu, k., et al. (2018).** The study by Palmu et al. (2018) analyzes the political representation of Bhutia and Lepcha women in local governance within the context of Sikkim's legislative framework, specifically the Sikkim Panchayat Act. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that combines electoral data analysis and case studies, the research identifies how socioeconomic factors influence women's participation in Panchayat elections and the barriers they face. Key findings demonstrate a nominal increase in women's representation following the introduction of reservation policies, yet significant disparities persist in higher decision-making roles. The paper's novelty lies in its comparative analysis of electoral data across multiple districts, providing insights into the varying levels of participation among tribal women. This research contributes to the theoretical understanding of political empowerment for tribal women, while highlighting practical barriers that hinder their full engagement. However, methodological limitations include a lack of longitudinal data on the long-term effects of reservation policies, underscoring the need for comprehensive studies addressing cultural obstacles to political participation among diverse tribal groups.
23. **Tribal Women’s Participation In Grassroots Level Governance: An Anthropological Study Of Sundargarh (Scheduled) District of Odisha, Sarap, S. S., et al. (2023).** The study by Sarap et al. (2023) examines the participation levels of tribal women in grassroots governance in the Sundargarh district of Odisha, focusing on the implications of governmental policies such as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. Utilizing qualitative anthropological methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation, this research reveals a disparity between the formal presence of tribal women in Panchayat roles and their practical engagement in political processes, primarily due to barriers like lack of awareness and education. This study's novelty lies in its anthropological approach, emphasizing qualitative insights often overlooked by quantitative studies, thereby contributing to a richer understanding of socio-cultural factors influencing participation. However, it highlights methodological limitations regarding the generalizability of findings. Furthermore, it addresses significant research gaps, particularly the need for comprehensive examinations of educational impacts and the real-world effects of policy frameworks on tribal women's political engagement.
24. **Study of Elected Tribal Women Representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: A Case of Jharkhand, Kumar, S., et al. (2013).** The study by Kumar et al. (2013) investigates the political dynamics and social dimensions of elected tribal women representatives within Panchayati Raj Institutions in Jharkhand, India. The objectives include exploring the power and authority dynamics of these representatives, analyzing the impact of constitutional provisions on their effectiveness, and synthesizing comparative insights from prior scholars. Utilizing a qualitative methodology that incorporates comparative analysis of existing literature, interviews, and case studies, the research identifies significant discrepancies between the constitutional rights of tribal women and their actual authority. Key findings indicate that these elected representatives face considerable challenges in exercising political power, necessitating enhanced support systems. This study's novelty lies in its focus on the under-researched area of tribal women's political participation, contributing valuable insights both theoretically and practically. However, limitations include a lack of quantitative data and insufficient exploration of socio-cultural factors, addressing critical research gaps in understanding the barriers faced by these women in governance.
25. **Decentralised Governance and Tribal Development in Scheduled Areas of Northeast India: A Case Study of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council, Mohapatra, G., et al. (2017).** The study by Mohapatra et al. (2017) investigates the impact of decentralised governance on tribal development outcomes within the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), exploring the effectiveness of existing laws and organizational challenges. Utilizing a qualitative case study methodology, the research analyzes governance frameworks, legal documents, and interviews with stakeholders, providing a unique, localized perspective on tribal governance. Key findings reveal significant gaps in the implementation of the TTAADC framework despite its provisions for tribal development, indicating inconsistent governance effectiveness. The novelty of this study lies in its focused approach to a specific tribal context, contributing to the understanding of decentralised governance's impact in scheduled areas. However, methodological limitations include the reliance on qualitative data, which may not capture broader quantitative trends. This research addresses gaps in the practical functioning of the TTAADC and the relationship between decentralised governance and developmental outcomes in these regions.
26. **Decentralised governance and planning in India: case study of a tribal district, Mohapatra, B. P., et al. (2015).** The study by Mohapatra et al. (2015) investigates the effectiveness of decentralized governance models in tribal districts of India, focusing on unique socio-cultural dynamics and the role of community participation in development outcomes. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative stakeholder interviews with quantitative data analysis to examine governance patterns, employing checklists for comprehensive data collection. Key findings reveal significant challenges in governance specific to tribal areas, the importance of stakeholder engagement, and the need for governance frameworks that leverage local knowledge. The novelty lies in bridging qualitative and quantitative insights, enhancing the understanding of decentralized governance. This study contributes theoretically by filling gaps in governance literature and practically by informing policy development. However, a limitation exists in the empirical exploration of stakeholder engagement impacts. Addressing research gaps, it highlights the need for more quantitative analyses to complement qualitative insights in tribal governance studies.
27. **Gender and Governance in Rural Services: Insights from India, Ghana and Ethiopia, World Bank, et al. (2010).** The study by World Bank et al. (2010) investigates the intersection of gender and governance in rural services across India, Ghana, and Ethiopia, aiming to understand how gender biases affect agricultural extension services and the effectiveness of community-based organizations in promoting women's access. Employing a mixed-method approach that includes case studies, surveys, and qualitative interviews, the authors gather insights from various stakeholders. Key findings reveal significant discrepancies in service satisfaction rates among different socio-economic and gender groups, highlighting that the presence of female extension agents enhances women's participation in agricultural initiatives. This research is novel as it synthesizes insights from three distinct countries, providing a holistic understanding of gender governance that is often overlooked in prior studies. Contributions include theoretical insights into governance structures and practical recommendations for inclusive policy-making; however, methodological limitations arise from the limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of female extension agents and the need for further studies on the dynamics between community organizations and government structures in advancing gender equity.
28. **Impact of Development Programmes upon Tribal People through Grass-Root Democracy in the District of Birbhum – A Study of Ballabhpur Village, Mukherjee, S., et al. (2023).** The study by Mukherjee et al. (2023) examines the impacts of grassroots democratic practices on the implementation and success of development programs in Ballabhpur Village, focusing on the socio-economic changes experienced by tribal communities. Employing an exploratory and analytical methodology that integrates both structured and unstructured questionnaires, the research captures qualitative insights alongside quantitative data, providing a nuanced view of tribal perspectives. Key findings reveal that participatory decision-making enhances resource allocation and empowers tribal communities, with successful programs aligning closely with their cultural values. The novel dual-method approach enriches the understanding of grassroots democracy within tribal contexts. Despite these contributions, the study acknowledges methodological limitations, including a limited sample size and the potential for bias in self-reported data. It addresses research gaps by highlighting the need for more comprehensive qualitative data on tribal experiences and insufficient exploration of the intersection between grassroots democracy and development tailored specifically for tribal populations.
29. **Tribal Development Programmes and its Administration in the State of Maharashtra, Kokate, A., et al. (2020).** The study by Kokate et al. (2020) examines the intricacies of Tribal Development Programmes in Maharashtra, focusing on the financial allocations and administrative structures impacting tribal welfare. The objectives include analyzing the budgetary outlays, understanding the role of the Tribal Development Department, and investigating various implemented welfare schemes. Utilizing secondary data collection methods, the research synthesizes information from diverse sources to assess the effectiveness of these programmes. Key findings indicate a mismatch between the increasing overall budget for tribal development and the limited rise in funding for the Tribal Sub-Plan, revealing inefficiencies in resource allocation. The novelty of this study lies in its critical analysis of resource distribution effectiveness rather than mere financial reporting. The research contributes to theoretical understanding and practical insights into tribal welfare administration while identifying gaps such as the lack of empirical impact assessment and socio-economic outcomes. Methodological limitations include the reliance on secondary data, which may not capture real-time challenges faced by the department.
30. **Self-Help Groups: A Keystone of Microfinance in India, Reddy, C. S., et al. (2005).** The study by Reddy, C. S. et al. (2005) explores the evolution and impact of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in India, focusing on their role as financial intermediaries for the poor. The objectives include addressing operational challenges of governance and management, examining the effectiveness of SHG Federations, and investigating the broader social and political roles of SHGs. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative assessments and quantitative analyses to offer insights into SHG performance. Key findings reveal that SHGs have significantly improved access to credit for poor households, demonstrating high repayment rates and fostering women’s empowerment. The novelty lies in the integration of extensive field studies with robust data analysis, contributing both theoretically and practically to the understanding of SHG dynamics. However, methodological limitations include scarce empirical evidence regarding the organizational structure's influence on SHGs’ sustainability and limited exploration of the social and political impacts beyond financial intermediation.
31. **Women Empowerment in India: A Brief Discussion, Hazarika, D., et al. (2011).** The study by Hazarika et al. (2011) explores the historical and contemporary context of women's empowerment in India, focusing on the socio-economic and political barriers women face despite constitutional guarantees. Utilizing qualitative methodologies, including historical document analysis and legislative reviews, the research integrates empirical studies and government reports to assess women's conditions. Key findings indicate that while legislative advancements have been made, gaps in practical implementation persist, particularly in education and economic participation. The novelty of this study lies in its multi-faceted approach, providing a holistic view that combines historical, legislative, and current socio-economic perspectives on women's empowerment. The research contributes to the theoretical understanding of gender equality and offers practical insights for policy development. However, methodological limitations include a lack of quantitative data and insufficient exploration of the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender, along with the need for comprehensive studies on grassroots movements and long-term legislative impacts.
32. **Women’s empowerment and education: Panchayats and women’s Self-help Groups in India, Ghosh, R., et al. (2015).** The study by Ghosh et al. (2015) investigates the interplay between women's empowerment, education, and the roles of Panchayats and Self-help Groups (SHGs) in India. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both qualitative assessments and quantitative analyses, including surveys and descriptive statistics, to evaluate the impact of educational initiatives on women's participation in SHGs and local governance. Key findings reveal that while SHGs significantly contribute to women's economic empowerment, their effectiveness is amplified when combined with educational programs, particularly in light of the 73rd Amendment, which increased women's representation in governance. The study's novelty lies in its comprehensive analysis that integrates educational impacts with economic outcomes, thus providing a holistic view of empowerment. However, methodological limitations include a lack of empirical evidence on the direct correlation between educational attainment and political participation, highlighting gaps in understanding how microfinance interacts with educational opportunities for women.
33. **An Overview of the Self-Help Groups in Tribal Inhabited Jangal – Mahal and Their Role in Women Empowerment: A Case Study of Ranibandh Block of Bankura District, West Bengal, Sarkhel, J., et al. (2013).**  
     The study by Sarkhel et al. (2013) evaluates the socio-economic status of women in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) within the Ranibandh Block of Bankura District, West Bengal, addressing gaps in understanding the challenges faced by tribal women. Employing a mixed-method approach with structured interviews and stratified random sampling, the research provides both qualitative and quantitative insights into SHG membership. Key findings indicate that SHG membership correlates positively with enhanced self-confidence and economic independence, revealing a significant relationship between the duration of membership and levels of empowerment achieved. The novelty of this research lies in its dual methodological approach, allowing for empirical testing of hypotheses based on primary data. While the study contributes practically to policy measures for improving SHGs, it also highlights methodological limitations, such as the need for broader empirical evidence on SHG impacts in tribal contexts and a deeper exploration of effective policy interventions for women's empowerment.
34. **Educational Status of Tribal Women in West Bengal, Maji, S., et al. (2016).** The study by Maji et al. (2016) investigates the educational status of tribal women in West Bengal, focusing on the specific challenges they face, the socio-economic factors influencing their educational achievements, and the effectiveness of existing governmental and non-governmental initiatives. Utilizing a methodology grounded in secondary data analysis, the research synthesizes findings from academic literature, census data, and reports from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, presenting a systematic examination of demographic, socio-economic, and educational data. Key findings indicate significant educational disparities, with tribal women exhibiting lower literacy rates and educational attainment compared to other demographics, influenced by poverty, cultural attitudes, and resource accessibility. This study contributes theoretically by highlighting the unique barriers faced by tribal women and practically by informing educational policy and interventions. Limitations include a reliance on secondary data, which may not capture the full spectrum of personal experiences, while underscoring the need for more empirical research addressing the impact of socio-economic factors and the effectiveness of targeted educational programs.
35. **Recent Status of Education, Employment and Empowerment of Women in West Bengal, Sarkar, R., et al. (2017).** The study by Sarkar et al. (2017) investigates the correlation between literacy and the gender ratio in West Bengal, alongside the role of employment in women's economic empowerment and the socio-demographic factors influencing their labor participation. Utilizing secondary data from the 2011 Census and National Family Health Survey, the research employs statistical methods such as Spearman's correlation coefficient to analyze the relationship between literacy rates and gender ratio. Key findings reveal that while West Bengal boasts a higher literacy rate than the national average, progress in women's literacy is gradual, and employment positively impacts women's decision-making in households, with significant variations across rural and urban areas as well as among different religious groups. The study's novelty lies in its rigorous analysis of previously underexplored correlations in this specific context. However, it acknowledges limitations in addressing the nuances of socio-demographic influences on employment across diverse settings and highlights gaps in understanding how global economic shifts affect women's job opportunities in different districts.
36. **Sociological Perspectives on Media, Gender and Cultural Studies, Roy, P., et al. (2024).** The study by Roy et al. (2024) investigates the impact of Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms on traditional media consumption in West Bengal, with a focus on how viewer behavior evolved during and after the COVID-19 lockdown. The research employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews from over 100 participants across various demographics. Key findings reveal a substantial 67% increase in OTT subscriptions, with users exhibiting a preference for diverse content, particularly in regional languages, indicating a shift towards hybrid consumption patterns. This research is novel in its regional focus and methodological approach, providing valuable insights for media producers and advertisers within the localized context of West Bengal. However, limitations include a lack of extensive demographic analysis and the need for further localized studies on digital media transformations. Additionally, significant gaps remain in understanding the advertising industry's adaptation to these evolving viewer preferences.
37. **Media convergence: its prospect and role of empowering marginalized rural women in west bengal, hazra, b. K., et al. (2017).** The study by Hazra et al. (2017) addresses the critical lack of comprehensive research on the role of media convergence in empowering marginalized rural women in West Bengal. The objectives center on exploring the relationship between communication strategies and the socio-economic improvements of these women, utilizing a descriptive and analytical approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods through surveys and interviews. Key findings indicate that effective communication strategies can significantly enhance empowerment, thus demonstrating the potential of media convergence to bridge socio-economic disparities and foster community development. This research offers a novel perspective by combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, contributing to theoretical frameworks within communication and gender studies. However, methodological limitations include a scarcity of data regarding the specific effects of media convergence on marginalized groups, as well as insufficient exploration of the interplay between different media platforms, indicating a clear research gap that warrants further investigation.
38. **Socio-Economic Perspective of Women Education, Employment and Empowerment in West Bengal, Duari, B., et al. (2017).** The study by Duari et al. (2017) investigates the socio-economic perspectives of women's education, employment, and empowerment in West Bengal, focusing on the correlation between literacy rates and gender ratios, the impact of employment on economic empowerment, and socio-demographic factors affecting women's employment. Utilizing secondary data analysis, the research employs Spearman's correlation coefficient to evaluate literacy and gender ratios and cross-tabulation for profiling women's work participation. Key findings indicate that education significantly correlates with improved gender ratios and that employment enhances women's decision-making roles, particularly in urban settings where empowerment levels are higher than in rural areas. The study's novelty lies in its empirical approach, merging quantitative data with underexplored socio-demographic variables in the context of women's empowerment. However, it has methodological limitations, such as insufficient exploration of how different employment types influence empowerment and a lack of recent studies on the intersection of education and cultural practices affecting women's roles, highlighting important research gaps in the field.
39. **Scenario of Women Empowerment: A Regional Analysis of Selected Indicators in West Bengal, Khatun, P., et al. (2024).** The study by Khatun et al. (2024) addresses the significant lack of localized research on women empowerment indicators in West Bengal by exploring socio-economic factors in both rural and urban settings. Utilizing descriptive statistical techniques for data analysis, the research presents clear visualizations of trends, highlighting key disparities in empowerment indicators influenced by education and resource access. The findings reveal pronounced regional differences, alongside a demonstrated link between effective policy implementation and empowerment outcomes, suggesting a need for targeted interventions. This novel approach, which integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, enhances the understanding of the interdependencies affecting women's status in the region, contributing theoretically to empowerment studies and practically to local policy-making. However, the study acknowledges methodological limitations, such as the absence of comprehensive data on cultural practices impacting empowerment. Additionally, it identifies gaps in evaluating government policy effectiveness at the regional level, emphasizing the necessity for further exploration in these areas.
40. **Empowering rural women through backyard poultry farming: Adoption of Haringhata Black in tribal district of West Bengal, Gupta, M. D., et al. (2021).** The study by Gupta, M. D., et al. (2021) investigates the economic empowerment of rural women through the adoption of the Haringhata Black poultry breed in West Bengal, focusing on factors such as income enhancement and decision-making authority. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research utilized quantitative surveys of 150 self-help group members and multiple regression analysis to identify significant empowerment factors, complemented by qualitative insights from skill development training. Key findings revealed that women experienced medium to high levels of empowerment, with notable increases in income and social participation after adopting the poultry breed. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on the Haringhata Black breed, addressing a gap in existing literature that often overlooks the distinct effects of different poultry breeds on women's empowerment. While contributing valuable insights into practical empowerment strategies, the study also highlights limitations such as insufficient long-term empirical data and the need for more comprehensive research on various poultry breeds' unique impacts on women's socio-economic status.

## 2.3 RESEARCH GAP

Decentralised governance and women’s empowerment have been widely studied in India, most of the existing literature is concentrated at the macro level, focusing on national or state-wide analyses. These studies often overlook the micro-level realities of specific districts, particularly those with significant tribal populations such as Bankura in West Bengal. Tribal women, due to their unique socio-economic vulnerabilities, cultural practices, and limited access to resources, experience decentralisation differently from their non-tribal counterparts. Yet, their specific voices and lived experiences remain underrepresented in governance research. Furthermore, the majority of studies tend to be cross-sectional, capturing only short-term effects of policies or reforms, without considering the long-term trajectory of empowerment outcomes. This creates a temporal gap, as little is known about how decentralised governance has shaped tribal women’s empowerment over an extended period such as 2003 to 2018.

Another important limitation in existing scholarship is the lack of focus on the policy–practice interface. While programmes like MGNREGA, NRLM, and SHG-based initiatives are central to women’s empowerment, there is insufficient evidence on how local governance structures in tribal regions have mediated their implementation, accessibility, and sustainability. Most prior works discuss decentralisation and empowerment as separate domains, but the intersectional role of governance in shaping the economic, social, and political dimensions of empowerment remains underexplored. Moreover, the regional imbalance in research is striking: states such as Kerala, Karnataka, and Rajasthan dominate the discourse, while West Bengal, despite its long history of decentralisation reforms and significant tribal presence, remains underrepresented in academic studies.

Finally, methodological gaps persist. A large proportion of existing research relies on descriptive approaches and anecdotal evidence, which limits the capacity to establish concrete linkages between governance reforms and empowerment outcomes. There is a need for robust empirical evidence supported by both quantitative tools—such as surveys and statistical analyses—and qualitative narratives to provide a holistic view of tribal women’s empowerment. Addressing these gaps through a district-specific, tribal-focused, and longitudinal case study will not only enrich academic discourse but also provide practical insights for policymakers to design more inclusive and effective governance mechanisms.

# CHAPTER-3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

The current investigation makes use of a mixed-methods strategy, combining descriptive and diagnostic methods with an eclectic approach. This multi-dimensional framework was considered essential for capturing both the complex realities of decentralised governance and the nuanced experiences of tribal women in the context of empowerment and local democracy. By combining these approaches, the study ensures a holistic balance of conceptual exploration, empirical documentation, and causal analysis.

The exploratory dimension focuses on identifying and clarifying the conceptual and theoretical constructs underpinning decentralised governance, tribal participation, empowerment, and grassroots democracy. Since the subject involves multiple overlapping concepts—ranging from institutional functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to the socio-cultural position of tribal women—an exploratory lens helps uncover the hidden linkages, refine definitions, and establish a comprehensive framework for further inquiry.

The descriptive dimension seeks to present an objective portrayal of the functioning of PRIs, particularly Gram Sansads, as the central platforms of participatory democracy in the Bankura district. It aims to map the nature, extent, and quality of tribal women’s participation during the period 2003–2018. By doing so, the study provides an empirical account of attendance levels, deliberative roles, and the overall inclusivity of governance processes, thereby highlighting patterns of engagement and representation across different tribal communities.

The diagnostic dimension examines the causal factors influencing both participation and non-participation of tribal women in Gram Sansads. This involves identifying structural, cultural, economic, and political barriers that either enable or constrain their involvement. Furthermore, it investigates the consequent impact of these participation patterns on women’s socio-political empowerment, including decision-making capacity, leadership opportunities, and perceptions of autonomy within the Panchayat system.

By integrating these three dimensions, the research design combines depth—through qualitative insights drawn from lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives—with breadth—through quantitative patterns, statistical evidence, and comparative assessments. This eclectic approach is therefore not merely methodological but also philosophical, as it acknowledges the complexity of the research problem and seeks to address it from multiple complementary vantage points.

## 3.2 UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY

This study's universe is West Bengal as a whole, and more specifically, the Bankura District, chosen for its unique cultural, political, and social characteristics. Bankura is widely recognized for its sizeable tribal population and their long-standing engagement with the Panchayati Raj system. The district represents a microcosm of the larger dynamics of decentralised governance in West Bengal, where issues of inclusion, empowerment, and participatory democracy are particularly pronounced.

The focus on Bankura becomes especially relevant because the region has witnessed unique experiments in Panchayati Raj governance, particularly through the institutional innovation of the Gram Sansad. Unlike in most other Indian states, West Bengal introduced the Gram Sansad as a functional unit below the Gram Sabha, making it a smaller and more accessible platform for direct citizen engagement. For tribal women, who often face cultural, economic, and social constraints, the Gram Sansad provides an operational space where their voices can potentially be heard more effectively than in larger and less personal assemblies.

The study period from 2003 to 2018 has been deliberately chosen to provide a comprehensive view across one and a half decades of governance reforms and political shifts in West Bengal. This time frame captures changes in policy emphasis, grassroots political mobilisations, and variations in the participation of tribal women across different Panchayat election cycles. It also reflects how broader socio-economic transformations—such as rural development programmes, literacy initiatives, and women’s self-help group movements—interacted with the Panchayati Raj framework to shape the empowerment of tribal women.

## 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

A sound and dependable database is the cornerstone of any empirical research. In the absence of reliable data, the findings of analysis may become distorted, leading to erroneous interpretations that misguide both scholars and policymakers, ultimately defeating the purpose of the study itself. Therefore, the collection of scientifically valid, accurate, and contextually relevant data constitutes an essential prerequisite for undertaking any meaningful empirical investigation.

In line with these considerations, the present study conducted primary data collection in Bankura district, West Bengal, during 2012–2013. Data were gathered through structured and systematic procedures designed to ensure both adequacy and reliability. This section presents the methodology adopted for data collection, outlines the scope and characteristics of the dataset, and details the diagnostic checks applied. These checks were undertaken to evaluate the appropriateness of the sample size, thereby confirming its suitability for factor analysis as well as for the estimation of the econometric models discussed in earlier sections of the study.

## 3.4 SAMPLING

The present study has been designed to investigate women’s empowerment among tribal communities in Bankura District, with a particular focus on the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in shaping empowerment outcomes. A stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure fair representation across different socio-economic backgrounds, caste categories, and educational levels. The sample was restricted to women aged eighteen years and above, as this group is most likely to engage in both household decision-making and community-level activities.

The survey covered a total of 300 women participants. Of these, 185 were drawn from women who were active members of SHGs, while the remaining 125 were selected from non-SHG participants, thus ensuring a comparative framework for assessing empowerment. Alongside the quantitative survey, 30 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted. These interviews sought to capture personal narratives and lived experiences of empowerment, focusing on themes such as financial inclusion, social mobility, participation in wage employment, and exposure to government welfare schemes. The mixed-method approach helped the study achieve both statistical validity through the survey data and contextual richness through the qualitative narratives.

The stratification ensured representation across different communities. Villages dominated by Scheduled Tribes (such as Sidabari, Meghkata, and Gopalpur) were specifically included to highlight tribal women’s unique experiences, while Scheduled Caste (SC) dominated areas like Ghatdighi and Dhaban, and minority-dominated villages such as Hati and Sarisadighi, were incorporated to capture the heterogeneity of the district. This careful balancing between quantitative breadth and qualitative depth strengthened the robustness of the study’s findings.

### 3.4.1 PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE AREAS

The villages selected under this study reflect the socio-cultural diversity and economic challenges of Bankura’s Jangalmahal region. Many of these villages are geographically remote and poorly connected to transportation and market hubs, which directly affects access to employment opportunities, financial institutions, and educational facilities. Despite these structural challenges, the selected villages demonstrate unique social dynamics that are valuable for understanding the variations in empowerment across communities.

For instance, villages such as Sidabari, Gopalpur, and Meghkata are predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Tribe communities. Women here often depend on agricultural labor and NREGA participation for livelihood, with SHG activities providing a significant platform for collective empowerment. In contrast, Sarisadighi and Hati villages have a sizeable share of Muslim households, where cultural norms and economic limitations shape women’s access to resources and decision-making differently. Ghatdighi, Tegharia, and Dhaban reflect Scheduled Caste concentrations, where social and economic marginality intersects with empowerment processes.

Across all surveyed areas, the absence of formal banking infrastructure was striking. In the absence of such institutions, Primary Agricultural Credit Societies and SHG-led microfinance groups emerged as the main sources of credit and financial inclusion. The study observed that SHGs played a transformative role by enabling women to access loans, engage in small-scale income-generating activities, and collectively negotiate for better opportunities. In villages with stronger and longer-standing SHGs, women reported higher confidence in decision-making, greater mobility, and enhanced participation in both household and community matters. By contrast, villages with weaker or newer SHG presence reported slower progress in empowerment indicators.

##### Table 3.1 Geographical Dispersion of the Sample Participants

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Block** | **Village** | **Dominant Community** | **SHG Members (n)** | **Non-SHG Women (n)** | **Total Survey Participants** | **In-depth Interviews** |
| Kotulpur | Hati | Muslim / SC | 20 | 10 | 30 | 3 |
| Kotulpur | Ghatdighi | SC | 25 | 15 | 40 | 4 |
| Kotulpur | Sarisadighi | Muslim | 15 | 10 | 25 | 3 |
| Kotulpur | Sihar | Mixed (SC/ST) | 25 | 15 | 40 | 4 |
| Chhatna | Sidabari | ST | 20 | 10 | 30 | 3 |
| Chhatna | Gopalpur | ST | 25 | 15 | 40 | 4 |
| Chhatna | Tegharia | SC / ST | 15 | 15 | 30 | 3 |
| Chhatna | Meghkata | ST | 20 | 10 | 30 | 3 |
| Chhatna | Dhaban | SC | 20 | 15 | 35 | 3 |
| **Total** | – | – | **185** | **125** | **300** | **30** |

Participation in NREGA wage work was also reported in many villages, especially among Scheduled Tribe women. This engagement not only supplemented household income but also introduced women to new forms of community participation and collective bargaining for work opportunities. The in-depth interviews further revealed that empowerment outcomes were mediated by factors such as age, literacy, and marital status. Younger women and semi-literate participants often expressed enthusiasm about SHG membership and wage work, describing these as avenues for asserting greater autonomy. Older participants, however, tended to stress the importance of SHGs for household financial stability rather than personal mobility.

Thus, the profile of the sample areas highlights a complex interplay between social diversity, institutional access, and cultural constraints. While SHGs and NREGA have opened new avenues for empowerment, the absence of formal infrastructure and the persistence of traditional norms continue to act as significant barriers.

### NATURE AND SCOPE OF DATA

The goals and needs of the empirical investigation informed the meticulous construction of a structured questionnaire. A pilot study was carried out in each village before the main survey to collect initial data at the village level and to fine-tune the survey tool. Female representatives from each household in the sample provided the bulk of the data. An individual interview was conducted with one female representative from each chosen family in order to gather information. Conversations were held in the local tongue to make sure everything was clear and comfortable. Therefore, the dataset utilized for this study is wholly primary.

We conducted a comprehensive household survey to learn more about women's empowerment and its sources, effects, and characteristics. Various empowerment indicators were measured at the household and community levels, as described in Section 3.2. In order to evaluate empowerment's larger impact, data on household welfare was also added. Questions pertaining to domestic violence and family planning decision-making were especially crafted to capture these topics. Income and spending habits in the areas of food and nutrition, energy and fuel, healthcare, and schooling for children were also recorded.

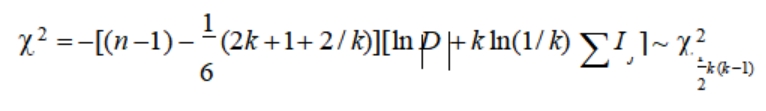
The villager, responder, and household demographics and socioeconomic status were also included. Among these characteristics were the women's age, level of education, occupation, and social position.

Other important ones were the size of their landholdings, yearly household income, dependency ratio, membership in self-help groups (SHGs), caste, religion, and distance to necessary services like schools, hospitals, and banks. The data was organized into three groups: person, household, and community factors, to make analysis easier.

Given the limitations of household surveys, respondents were not always able to provide precise numerical data. In such cases, reasonable generalisations were made, while efforts were undertaken to reduce errors through cross-checking and verification techniques, thereby minimising discrepancies or personal biases.

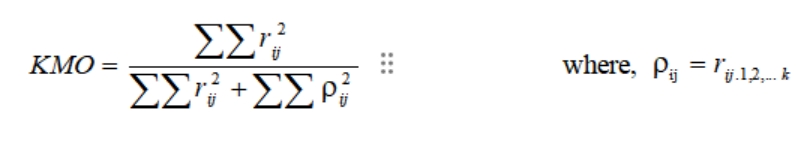
3.4.3 DIAGNOSTIC CHECK FOR THE SAMPLE SIZE

To analyze women’s empowerment both within households and at the community level, we propose using factor analysis. Before proceeding, it is essential to verify whether our dataset is suitable for such analysis. The key prerequisite for applying factor analysis is that the selected variables—in this case, the indicators of women’s empowerment—must exhibit significant inter-correlations. To assess this condition, researchers generally rely on two widely accepted diagnostic tools: Bartlett’s test of sphericity and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy.

Specifically, Bartlett’s test of sphericity is employed to examine the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix of the chosen variables is an identity matrix. In other words, it checks whether the observed correlations among the variables are sufficiently strong to justify the use of factor analysis. The test is based on a chi-square statistic, which provides the basis for determining whether the correlation structure is appropriate for extraction of factors.

where, *k* stands for number of variables, *I j* denotes jth eigenvalue of D.

The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was employed to evaluate the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis. This statistic works by comparing the relative sizes of the observed correlation coefficients with those of the partial correlation coefficients among the variables. In practice, the KMO value is computed using the following formula:



According to the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) criterion, a value between 0.8 and 1.0 reflects a strong and satisfactory degree of common variance among the variables. When the statistic falls within the range of 0.6 to 0.8, the level of common variance is considered acceptable though only moderate. However, a value below 0.6 indicates that the dataset does not exhibit sufficient shared variance, making it unsuitable for factor analysis. In line with this methodological guideline, the dataset of women’s empowerment indicators must first be tested using the KMO measure. Only when the statistic is found to be 0.6 or above can Principal Component Analysis (PCA) be applied; otherwise, the data should not undergo factor analysis.

Once the dataset successfully meets this diagnostic requirement, PCA can be employed to extract the underlying factors representing women’s empowerment along with their respective factor loadings or weights. The application of this method enables the construction of a composite empowerment index, which can then be used to assess women’s empowerment both at the household level and within the broader community.

**Application to Women’s Empowerment Indicators**

The dataset on women’s empowerment indicators will first be subjected to diagnostic checks, including Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic, to confirm its suitability for factor analysis. Once these conditions are satisfied, **Principal Component Analysis (PCA)** will be applied to identify latent dimensions and assign statistical weights to the underlying indicators. This approach enables the construction of a **Composite Index of Women’s Empowerment**, which will be developed at both the **household** and the **community** levels, thereby providing a comprehensive measure of empowerment across multiple social contexts.

## 3.5 RESEARCH SETTING

* The study will be conducted in Bankura District, West Bengal, focusing on various tribal villages.
* Data collection will occur in both rural and semi-urban areas to capture diverse socio-economic contexts.
* The research will involve direct engagement with tribal communities, particularly targeting women aged 18 and above.
* Fieldwork will include visits to self-help groups (SHGs), local markets, and community gatherings to observe interactions and collect qualitative data.
* The setting will also encompass local governance institutions to understand their role in women's empowerment.

## 3.6 TIME DIMENSION OF THE STUDY

This research will adopt a longitudinal approach, examining the period from 2003 to 2018. Data will be analyzed on an annual basis to identify trends and changes in the empowerment of tribal women in Bankura District, with specific attention to the impact of decentralized governance initiatives implemented during this timeframe.

## 3.7 SOURCES OF DATA

### 3.7.1 PRIMARY:

* Surveys administered to tribal women in Bankura District to assess economic empowerment and participation in SHGs.
* In-depth interviews with tribal women to gather personal narratives regarding their experiences with SHGs and NTFP collection.
* Focus group discussions with community leaders and SHG members to understand cultural and social norms affecting women's economic participation.

### 3.7.2 SECONDARY:

* Government reports and policy documents related to decentralized governance and tribal welfare programs.
* Academic literature and case studies on tribal women's empowerment and SHGs in India.
* Statistical data from local government and NGOs on socio-economic indicators of tribal populations in Bankura District.

## 3.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

* Structured surveys targeting tribal women to quantify economic empowerment and participation in self-help groups (SHGs).
* In-depth interviews with tribal women to gather personal narratives and experiences related to SHGs and NTFP collection.
* Focus group discussions with community members to explore cultural and social norms affecting women's economic participation.
* Participant observation in SHGs and community meetings to understand dynamics and interactions.
* Secondary data analysis from government reports, NGO records, and academic literature on tribal women's empowerment and governance.

## 3.9 VARIABLES

### 3.9.1 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:

* Participation in self-help groups (SHGs)
* Cultural and social norms
* Use of technology in SHGs
* Caste, age, and education levels of tribal women

### 3.9.2 DEPENDENT VARIABLES:

* Economic empowerment of tribal women
* Socio-economic contributions of tribal women
* Engagement in non-timber forest product (NTFP) collection
* Personal narratives and experiences related to empowerment

## 3.10 OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

* **Decentralized governance:** The process by which decision-making authority is distributed from central authorities to local tribal councils and community leaders, enabling local participation in governance.
* **Economic empowerment of tribal women:** The enhancement of tribal women's ability to make independent economic decisions, improve their financial status, and increase their participation in income-generating activities, particularly through self-help groups (SHGs).
* **Self-help groups (SHGs):** Community-based groups formed by tribal women to promote savings, provide microcredit, and facilitate collective economic activities.
* **Non-timber forest products (NTFP):** Natural resources obtained from forests that do not require harvesting trees, including fruits, nuts, and medicinal plants, which contribute to the economic activities of tribal women.
* **Cultural and social norms:** The established beliefs, practices, and expectations within tribal communities that influence women's roles and participation in economic activities.
* **Technology in SHGs:** The use of digital tools and platforms to enhance the operational efficiency of self-help groups, including mobile applications for financial management and communication.

## 3.11 UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The primary unit of analysis for this study will be individual tribal women aged 18 and above residing in Bankura District, West Bengal, focusing on their economic empowerment and participation in self-help groups (SHGs). Additionally, community governance structures will be analyzed to understand their influence on women's empowerment outcomes.

## 3.12 UNIT OF OBSERVATION

The primary units of observation for this study will be individual tribal women aged 18 and above involved in self-help groups (SHGs) and non-timber forest product (NTFP) collection, as well as the local governance institutions that influence their empowerment. Data will be collected at the household level to capture socio-economic dynamics and cultural contexts affecting women's roles.

## 3.13 INSTRUMENTATION FOR DATA COLLECTION

The study will utilize structured questionnaires for quantitative surveys to assess economic empowerment and participation in self-help groups (SHGs). Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interview guides designed to elicit personal narratives from tribal women regarding their experiences with SHGs and non-timber forest product (NTFP) collection. Focus group discussion guides will be developed to explore community perspectives on cultural and social norms affecting women's economic participation. All instruments will be pilot-tested for clarity and relevance before full deployment.

## 3.14 TOOL VALIDATION

Conduct pilot testing of survey instruments and interview guides with a small group of tribal women and community members to ensure clarity, cultural relevance, and appropriateness of questions. Gather feedback to refine tools before full-scale data collection. Utilize expert reviews from local researchers and practitioners in tribal studies to validate the content and construct of the instruments.

## 3.15 DATA CODING AND ENTRY

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups will be coded thematically using NVivo software, identifying key themes related to empowerment and socio-cultural dynamics. Quantitative survey data will be entered into SPSS for statistical analysis, utilizing descriptive statistics and inferential tests to evaluate hypotheses. A standardized coding manual will be developed to ensure consistency in qualitative coding, and data entry will be double-checked for accuracy.

## 3.16 SOFTWARE USED FOR DATA ANALYSIS

NVivo will be utilized for qualitative data analysis, enabling thematic coding and analysis of interview transcripts and focus group discussions. SPSS will be employed for quantitative data analysis, facilitating statistical tests such as descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to evaluate the effectiveness of self-help groups (SHGs) and other hypotheses related to tribal women's empowerment.

## 3.17 STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

The analysis will employ descriptive statistics to summarize survey data, including means, medians, and standard deviations for economic empowerment indicators. Chi-square tests will be used to assess relationships between categorical variables, such as participation in SHGs and socio-economic status. Regression analysis will evaluate the impact of independent variables (e.g., technology use, cultural norms) on the dependent variable (economic empowerment). For qualitative data, thematic analysis will be utilized to identify patterns and insights from interviews and focus groups.

## 3.18 DATA VISUALIZATION PLAN

The data visualization plan will incorporate various techniques to effectively communicate research findings. Quantitative data will be represented using bar charts and pie charts to illustrate the economic empowerment levels among tribal women, their participation in self-help groups (SHGs), and comparisons with tribal men and non-tribal populations. Line graphs will depict trends over the 15-year period from 2003 to 2018. For qualitative data, thematic maps will visualize the geographical distribution of tribal women's empowerment and their socio-economic contributions. Additionally, infographics will summarize key findings and narratives from interviews, enhancing accessibility and engagement with the data.

## 3.19 PILOT STUDY

A preliminary pilot study will be conducted involving a small sample of approximately 30 tribal women from Bankura District to test the clarity and relevance of the survey instruments and interview guides. Feedback will be gathered to refine the tools before full-scale data collection. The pilot study will also assess the feasibility of data collection methods and identify any potential challenges in engaging with the community.

## 3.20 CONTROL OF EXTRANEOUS VARIABLES

1. Stratified sampling to ensure representation across different socio-economic backgrounds, castes, and educational levels.
2. Use of control groups (non-SHG participants) to compare empowerment outcomes.
3. Statistical controls for age, education, and socio-economic status in data analysis.
4. Standardized data collection instruments to minimize variability in responses.
5. Regular training for data collectors to ensure consistency in qualitative and quantitative data gathering.

## 3.21 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring they understand the purpose and nature of the research.
2. Confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing data and securely storing information.
3. Cultural sensitivity will be prioritized, respecting local customs and practices during data collection.
4. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.
5. Ethical approval will be sought from relevant institutional review boards before commencing the research.

## 3.22 LIMITATIONS OF METHODOLOGY

1. Potential biases in self-reported data may affect the accuracy of economic empowerment assessments.
2. The study's focus on Bankura District limits the generalizability of findings to other tribal regions.
3. Cultural sensitivities may restrict open communication, impacting the depth of qualitative insights.
4. The reliance on structured surveys may overlook nuanced experiences of tribal women.
5. Temporal constraints may limit the ability to capture long-term impacts of decentralized governance initiatives.

## 3.23 DELIMITATIONS AND SCOPE BOUNDARIES

This study is confined to the Bankura District of West Bengal, focusing on tribal women aged 18 and above from 2003 to 2018. It will specifically examine the impact of decentralized governance on their economic empowerment through self-help groups (SHGs) and non-timber forest product (NTFP) collection. The research will not extend to other districts, tribal populations outside Bankura, or time periods beyond 2018, ensuring a concentrated analysis of the specified community and timeframe.

## 3.24 ASSUMPTIONS

1. Tribal women are willing to share their experiences and perspectives during interviews and surveys.
2. Governance structures are accessible and functioning effectively for tribal women in Bankura District.
3. The socio-economic conditions of tribal women are representative of the broader tribal population in the district.
4. Participants will provide honest and accurate responses regarding their economic empowerment and participation in self-help groups (SHGs).
5. The cultural and social norms influencing tribal women's economic activities are consistent throughout the study period from 2003 to 2018.

## 3.25 RESEARCH REPRODUCIBILITY CONSIDERATIONS

1. Document all research methodologies, including sampling methods, data collection instruments, and analysis techniques.
2. Ensure transparency in data coding and entry processes, detailing software used and statistical techniques applied.
3. Maintain a comprehensive data management plan, including storage and access protocols for both qualitative and quantitative data.
4. Conduct pilot testing of instruments and refine based on feedback to enhance reliability.
5. Provide clear guidelines for replication, including participant demographics and contextual factors influencing findings.

## 3.26 FLOWCHART FOR RESEARCH PROCESS

1. Identify Research Problem
2. Define Research Objectives
3. Formulate Research Questions
4. Develop Hypotheses
5. Design Research Methodology (Mixed Methods)
6. Define Population and Sample Design
7. Conduct Pilot Study
8. Data Collection (Surveys, Interviews, Focus Groups)
9. Data Analysis (Quantitative and Qualitative)
10. Interpret Results
11. Draw Conclusions
12. Report Findings.

# CHAPTER-4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study, based on both quantitative and qualitative evidence gathered from the field. The data was primarily drawn from household surveys conducted during 2012–2013, supplemented by community-level indicators, in-depth interviews, and participatory observations across selected blocks of Bankura district. By adopting a mixed-method approach, the study captures not only measurable trends but also the lived experiences of tribal women under decentralised governance.

The findings are organised in alignment with the research objectives outlined in earlier chapters. They explore multiple dimensions of empowerment, including women’s participation in local political processes, changes in socio-economic conditions, barriers that continue to hinder effective leadership, enabling mechanisms that strengthen women’s roles, and variations observed across different blocks of the district.

The analytical framework integrates tables, figures, and interpretive commentary to ensure that numerical patterns are explained alongside their contextual significance. For example, voting and meeting attendance rates are not merely presented as statistics but interpreted in relation to issues of agency, patriarchal constraints, and institutional structures. Similarly, socio-economic data such as income generation, SHG linkages, and landholding patterns are analysed in conjunction with narratives of women’s autonomy, rights, and decision-making capacity.

The chapter is structured into five key sections:

1. **Political Participation** – examining women’s presence, voice, and patterns of proxy participation.
2. **Socio-Economic Impact** – assessing income generation, livelihood opportunities, and persistent gaps in rights and authority.
3. **Barriers to Leadership** – identifying structural, cultural, and institutional constraints.
4. **Enablers** – highlighting the role of NGOs, legal frameworks, and community support.
5. **District-Level Trends** – analysing variations across different blocks, caste groups, and education levels, with particular attention to post-2013 shifts.

Together, these sections provide a comprehensive understanding of tribal women’s empowerment in Bankura, situating local experiences within the broader context of India’s decentralised governance framework. The analysis not only documents progress but also points to the gaps that remain, offering insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars.

## 4.2 POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### 4.2.1 PRESENCE VS. VOICE

The introduction of reservations under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment was a transformative step in ensuring women’s entry into grassroots governance. In Bankura district, this reform substantially increased women’s numerical presence in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). By 2013, nearly 40 percent of Panchayat seats were held by women, indicating significant strides toward gender inclusion in political representation.

However, empirical evidence highlights a clear distinction between mere presence and effective voice. While women were physically present in meetings and official positions, their ability to shape discussions, negotiate resources, or resolve disputes remained limited. This phenomenon underscores the gap between *de jure* participation (guaranteed by law) and *de facto* empowerment (actual influence in practice).

**Survey Findings**

Household survey results reveal that while participation in political spaces is relatively high, effective involvement remains restricted:

* **72% of women respondents** reported attending Gram Sabha meetings, compared to 83% of men.
* Only **28% of women raised issues** or spoke during meetings, in contrast to 61% of men.
* Just **21% of women felt their opinions influenced decisions**, compared with 54% of male respondents.
* Access to formal voter identity documents was fairly high, with **91% of women** possessing Voter IDs, though still slightly behind men (95%).

These statistics highlight that women’s *formal inclusion* does not automatically result in *substantive participation*.

**Qualitative Insights**

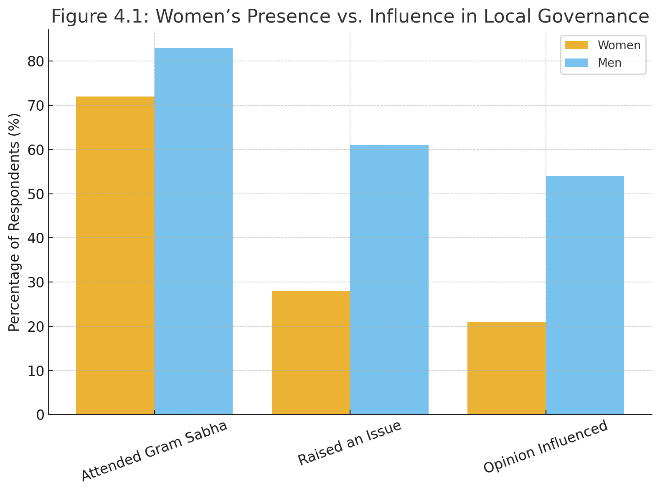
Field observations and interviews further enrich the quantitative findings.

* Older women—especially widows or those from conservative households—often chose to remain silent, citing norms of respect, hesitation, or lack of confidence.
* Younger women, particularly those with at least secondary education or linked with NGOs and Self-Help Groups (SHGs), displayed greater assertiveness. They were more likely to raise issues concerning health, drinking water, education, and livelihood.
* Some women admitted that they attended meetings at the insistence of male relatives, but refrained from speaking due to fear of ridicule or disapproval.

Together, these insights suggest that political socialisation and capacity-building efforts play a critical role in transforming women’s presence into genuine voice.

##### Table 4.1: Voter Participation and Awareness Indicators

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator** | **% Women Respondents** | **% Men Respondents** |
| Voter ID possession | 91% | 95% |
| Attended Gram Sabha | 72% | 83% |
| Raised an issue in meetings | 28% | 61% |
| Felt their opinion influenced decisions | 21% | 54% |

Figure 4.1: Women’s Presence vs. Influence in Local Governance  
**

### 4.2.2 PROXY PARTICIPATION

One of the most critical challenges undermining the effectiveness of women’s representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is the phenomenon of proxy participation. Although decentralised governance created unprecedented opportunities for women to occupy formal positions of authority, in practice, many elected women representatives were not the primary decision-makers. Instead, male relatives—most commonly husbands, fathers-in-law, or elder brothers—exercised authority on their behalf. This dynamic was evident across several dimensions of governance, including the signing of official documents, negotiation of projects with block-level officers, and crucial financial decision-making at the Panchayat level.

Field interviews confirmed the prevalence of this practice. In nearly half of the documented cases, women representatives were routinely accompanied to official meetings by their husbands or fathers-in-law, who not only provided logistical support but also assumed a decisive role in discussions and approvals. In some instances, male relatives directly signed or influenced project files, effectively reducing women’s political participation to a symbolic presence rather than substantive engagement. This reflects a deeper structural issue where cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes continue to override legal provisions designed to empower women.

At the same time, the study identified signs of gradual change. Exposure to training programmes, NGO-led workshops, and awareness campaigns began to reduce such dependence, particularly among younger and better-educated women representatives. Over time, many of these women reported increased confidence in handling official responsibilities, engaging in debates, and making independent decisions. For example, women with prior involvement in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) or community mobilisation activities were better able to resist familial control and assert their leadership.

Thus, while proxy participation highlights the persistence of patriarchal gatekeeping within the Panchayat system, the emerging evidence also points toward a slow but steady transformation. With continuous institutional support, legal safeguards, and grassroots-level training, elected women representatives can gradually shift from being proxies for male relatives to becoming autonomous leaders in their own right.

## 4.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

### 4.3.1 INCOME GENERATION AND SHG LINKAGES

One of the most significant socio-economic transformations following women’s participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions has been the growth of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and their impact on income generation. The post-election years witnessed a sharp rise in the number of tribal women joining SHGs, which became important platforms for microcredit access, livelihood promotion, and collective bargaining. These groups not only facilitated savings and loans but also encouraged women to explore new avenues of economic activity, ranging from poultry farming and handicrafts to small-scale trading and agricultural ventures.

Survey data provides clear evidence of this upward trend. In 2003, only 19% of women reported being part of SHGs and a mere 11% earned independently. By 2008, the figures had nearly doubled, with 34% of women engaged in SHGs and 28% generating their own income. By 2013, nearly half of the women (46%) were members of SHGs, and 39% reported independent earnings. This steady growth highlights the role of decentralised governance in facilitating women’s access to institutional support and income opportunities.

The influence of government schemes was particularly noteworthy. MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) provided women with guaranteed wage labour opportunities, often paid directly into their bank accounts, reducing their dependence on male family members. Similarly, SGSY (Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana) and related microcredit schemes enabled women to secure small loans collectively and start enterprises that contributed to household income. These earnings enhanced their bargaining power within families, allowing them greater say in expenditure on food, children’s education, and healthcare.

Qualitative interviews further reveal that women valued SHGs not merely for income but also for the social solidarity and mutual support they created. Regular meetings, collective decision-making, and peer accountability helped build women’s confidence in financial management. Younger women, in particular, reported that SHG membership provided them with an entry point into leadership roles within the village community.

Thus, SHG linkages acted as both economic and social catalysts for empowerment. While the rise in participation demonstrates progress, challenges such as limited market access, small loan sizes, and lack of training in enterprise management continued to restrict the scale of economic independence achieved by women.

##### TABLE 4.2: WOMEN’S INCOME AND SHG PARTICIPATION (2003–2013)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Year** | **% Women in SHGs** | **% Women earning independently** |
| 2003 | 19% | 11% |
| 2008 | 34% | 28% |
| 2013 | 46% | 39% |

### 4.3.2 LAND RIGHTS AND DECISION-MAKING AUTHORITY

While women’s participation in Self-Help Groups and livelihood programmes has contributed to increased income opportunities, land ownership and control over major household assets remain predominantly male-dominated. Land continues to serve as the most significant form of productive asset in rural Bankura, not only as a source of income but also as a marker of social status, security, and bargaining power. Yet, despite constitutional provisions and progressive legislation, women’s access to land ownership has been minimal.

Survey findings show that only 12 percent of women respondents reported having land registered in their name. Even in cases where women were listed as joint owners, decisions regarding cultivation patterns, leasing arrangements, or sale of land were usually taken by male family members. This lack of ownership restricted women’s ability to leverage land for credit, negotiate tenancy arrangements, or assert themselves in household and community decision-making processes.

In terms of everyday authority, women enjoyed relatively more autonomy in small-scale household decisions, particularly those related to food expenditure, children’s schooling, and healthcare choices. These areas were considered within the traditional domain of women’s responsibilities and thus granted them some influence. However, when it came to strategic decisions with long-term implications—such as the sale or purchase of land, construction of houses, or arranging marriages—women’s role was significantly limited. In most families, male elders or husbands retained the final say, reflecting deep-rooted patriarchal norms.

Qualitative interviews revealed that women often felt constrained by cultural expectations and legal complexities. Some women admitted reluctance to demand inheritance rights, fearing social stigma or conflict within the family. Others pointed out bureaucratic hurdles and lack of awareness about land registration procedures, which further discouraged them from pursuing ownership claims. Even among elected women representatives, several noted that their personal influence was curtailed by the absence of asset ownership, which undermined their credibility in Panchayat-level negotiations.

The persistence of such patterns indicates that economic empowerment through income generation has not yet translated into structural empowerment through asset ownership. Land rights remain a critical gap, and without stronger reforms in inheritance practices, property registration, and awareness-building, women’s decision-making authority is unlikely to expand beyond household consumption-related matters.

## 4.4 BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

### 4.4.1 PATRIARCHY, ILLITERACY, AND FAMILY PRESSURE

Despite the constitutional mandate for women’s representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, deep-rooted patriarchal norms remain one of the most formidable barriers to effective leadership. In Bankura’s tribal and rural communities, women are often socialised into roles of domestic responsibility, while leadership and decision-making are considered the prerogative of men. This cultural framework not only limits women’s public visibility but also discourages them from asserting their voices in governance spaces.

Illiteracy compounds these challenges. Among Scheduled Tribe women in the district, the literacy rate was recorded at only 31 percent, significantly lower than that of men and below the district average. This educational gap has far-reaching consequences: many women representatives struggle to read official documents, understand budgets, or navigate bureaucratic procedures, which in turn reinforces their dependence on male relatives or government functionaries. In Gram Sabha meetings, illiteracy often translates into silence, as women hesitate to engage in discussions where technical or policy-related terms are used.

Family dynamics further reinforce these constraints. Field surveys and interviews reveal that many women representatives were discouraged by their own family members from speaking in public forums. Husbands and in-laws frequently instructed women to remain passive listeners rather than active contributors, fearing that vocal participation might invite criticism or damage family reputation. Several women admitted that even when they had ideas to share, they refrained from speaking due to the fear of public humiliation, ridicule, or being dismissed by male counterparts.

The combined weight of patriarchy, illiteracy, and family pressure thus creates a triple burden that undermines women’s confidence and restricts their political agency. While some younger, educated women have begun to challenge these barriers, the broader picture remains one where legal empowerment through reservation has not yet dismantled entrenched social norms.

### 4.4.2 TOKENISM IN RESERVED SEATS

While the policy of reservation under the Panchayati Raj system has undoubtedly increased the numerical presence of women in local governance, it has also given rise to the problem of tokenism. In many cases, women representatives occupy positions of authority in name only, with little actual involvement in decision-making processes. This form of symbolic participation undermines the very spirit of political empowerment that reservations were meant to achieve.

Field evidence suggests that women were often pressured to sign official documents or endorse Panchayat resolutions without meaningful deliberation. Rather than engaging in debates or shaping policies, their roles were reduced to formal approval of decisions that had already been taken elsewhere. This not only diluted their agency but also entrenched the dominance of established male leaders, who continued to control governance through indirect means.

Case study evidence highlights this dynamic vividly. In some Panchayats, it was found that decisions regarding budget allocations, development projects, or beneficiary selection were pre-drafted by male members or party leaders. Women representatives were then asked to simply endorse these documents, sometimes without being given the opportunity to review or question them. Such practices reveal how structural patriarchy adapts to institutional reforms, maintaining male dominance while outwardly complying with the mandate of gender inclusion.

Interviews with women representatives further revealed that many felt compelled to comply with such practices due to political inexperience, fear of conflict, or family pressure. A few admitted that resistance could lead to social isolation or loss of informal support networks. Younger and more educated women, however, showed greater willingness to question pre-drafted decisions, suggesting that exposure to training and awareness programmes can help mitigate tokenism.

Thus, while reservations have succeeded in securing women’s seats at the table, tokenism ensures that their voices are often muted. Unless institutional safeguards, capacity-building measures, and accountability mechanisms are strengthened, women’s representation risks being reduced to a symbolic gesture rather than a transformative force in local governance.

## 4.5 ENABLERS

While structural barriers restricted women’s leadership, several enabling factors played a critical role in strengthening their agency within decentralised governance. These enablers created pathways for women to move beyond symbolic presence and exercise real influence in community affairs. Among them, NGO-led training, community solidarity through SHGs, and increasing legal awareness emerged as particularly significant.

### 4.5.1 NGO TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Local and regional NGOs such as PRADAN, Bandhan, and Lok Kalyan Parishad actively engaged with women representatives to build their capacities. These organisations conducted structured training programmes focusing on budgeting, literacy enhancement, record-keeping, and public speaking. Such interventions were crucial in bridging the knowledge gap faced by many women due to limited education or exposure to governance processes.

Survey and interview data suggest that women who had attended at least one round of NGO training were considerably more confident in Gram Sabha meetings. They were more likely to raise issues relating to water supply, sanitation, and livelihood opportunities, compared to those who had no such exposure. One elected Panchayat member recalled that her first training on Gram Panchayat budgeting gave her the confidence to question discrepancies in expenditure on rural roads. This illustrates how targeted capacity-building can directly influence women’s political assertiveness.

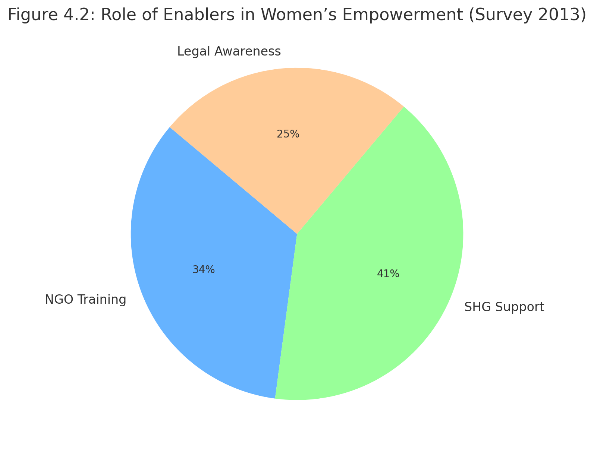
Over time, repeated participation in workshops also fostered a sense of leadership identity among women. Many reported that training reduced their dependence on male relatives during official proceedings, thereby gradually eroding the culture of proxy participation.

### 4.5.2 COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND LEGAL AWARENESS

Community-based structures such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) played a parallel role in strengthening women’s empowerment. By bringing women together on a regular basis for savings, loans, and discussion, SHGs created networks of solidarity. These networks encouraged collective bargaining, where women acted as a group to demand better services or negotiate with Panchayat officials. For example, in one case, an SHG collective successfully lobbied for improved drinking water supply in a tribal hamlet by consistently raising the issue in Gram Sabha meetings.

Equally important was the growing awareness of legal rights. Women increasingly cited laws such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) and anti-dowry provisions as sources of confidence. Awareness campaigns by NGOs and government departments enabled women to recognise violence and harassment not as private matters, but as issues warranting legal recourse. This legal knowledge empowered many to challenge domestic violence, dowry-related demands, and property disputes, thereby extending the scope of empowerment beyond political participation into the household sphere.

#### Figure 4.2: Role of Enablers in Women’s Empowerment (Survey 2013)

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## 4.6 DISTRICT-LEVEL TRENDS

### 4.6.1 BLOCK-WISE VARIATIONS

The analysis of field data revealed that the empowerment outcomes of tribal women in Bankura were not uniform across all blocks. Instead, they reflected the interplay of multiple factors, including the presence of supportive institutions, local socio-cultural norms, and the effectiveness of decentralised governance structures.

Blocks such as Khatra and Ranibandh, where NGOs like PRADAN and Bandhan had a strong grassroots presence, consistently reported higher levels of women’s participation. In these areas, NGO interventions in the form of training workshops, SHG mobilisation, and legal literacy campaigns provided women with skills, confidence, and solidarity networks. As a result, women in these blocks were more likely to attend Gram Sabha meetings, raise issues collectively, and influence resource allocation. Several elected women representatives from these blocks highlighted that NGO support not only improved their confidence but also helped them translate political representation into meaningful voice.

By contrast, blocks such as Saltora displayed much lower levels of empowerment outcomes. Here, entrenched patriarchal customs, rigid caste hierarchies, and low literacy rates curtailed women’s participation in decision-making processes. Even elected representatives were found to act under the influence of their male relatives, and cases of proxy participation were particularly prevalent. Field interviews revealed that women in Saltora often faced ridicule for speaking in public, and many withdrew from active engagement in Panchayat affairs as a result.

The district-level variations therefore illustrate that structural reforms alone are insufficient to guarantee uniform empowerment outcomes. Instead, progress is contingent upon the synergy between institutional frameworks, community-level interventions, and shifts in social attitudes. Where NGOs and SHG networks created enabling environments, women demonstrated greater agency; where patriarchal norms remained unchallenged, empowerment was largely symbolic.

### 4.6.2 CASTE, EDUCATION, AND GEOGRAPHY

Empowerment outcomes in Bankura were also shaped by caste identities, educational attainment, and geographical location. These factors influenced both the level of participation in collective platforms such as SHGs and the extent of confidence displayed in political forums.

Field data shows that Scheduled Tribe (ST) women exhibited relatively higher levels of participation in SHGs compared to Scheduled Caste (SC) women. The stronger SHG engagement among ST women can be partly attributed to the active presence of NGO programmes in tribal-dominated blocks such as Ranibandh and Indpur, where SHGs became vital platforms for savings, microcredit, and community solidarity. In contrast, SC women in certain blocks, especially where caste hierarchies remained rigid, faced greater social stigma and weaker institutional support, resulting in lower levels of collective mobilisation.

Education emerged as a key enabler of confidence in governance forums. Educated women were more likely to speak up in Gram Sabha meetings, raise questions, and challenge pre-drafted decisions. Blocks such as Bishnupur and Sonamukhi, where female literacy rates were comparatively higher, showed stronger participation of women in Panchayat deliberations. In contrast, blocks like Hirbandh and Mejia, marked by low literacy and limited access to formal schooling, recorded weaker performance on this dimension.

Geography also played a significant role. Remote villages with poor road connectivity and limited infrastructure reported weaker mobilisation of women. Poor transport not only restricted women’s ability to attend meetings regularly but also limited NGO outreach and government programme implementation. Women in remote habitations often remained isolated from the networks of solidarity and training opportunities available in more accessible villages, reinforcing the gap between policy provisions and ground realities.

Overall, the analysis highlights that empowerment cannot be viewed as a uniform process across caste groups, literacy levels, or geographies. Instead, it is mediated by intersecting factors of social identity, education, and physical accessibility, which together shape the opportunities available to women.

##### Table 4.3: District-Level Variations in Women’s Empowerment (2013)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **High-Performing Blocks** | **Low-Performing Blocks** |
| SHG Participation | Ranibandh, Indpur | Saltora, Gangajalghati |
| Women in Gram Sabha | Khatra, Taldangra | Onda, Saltora |
| Literacy-linked Confidence | Bishnupur, Sonamukhi | Hirbandh, Mejia |

## 4.7 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the complex and uneven trajectory of tribal women’s empowerment under decentralised governance in Bankura district. The evidence, drawn from household surveys, community-level indicators, and qualitative fieldwork, illustrates both progress and persistent challenges.

First, the introduction of reservations in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has significantly increased the numerical presence of women in governance structures. By 2013, women occupied close to 40 percent of Panchayat seats. However, this quantitative rise has not been matched by qualitative gains in influence. Attendance at Gram Sabha meetings is relatively high, yet only a minority of women actively contribute to discussions or shape decision-making, pointing to a gap between presence and voice.

Second, the persistence of proxy participation continues to undermine women’s agency. In many cases, male family members—husbands or fathers-in-law—exercise authority on behalf of elected women representatives. This not only restricts women’s autonomy but also sustains patriarchal dominance in local governance despite formal reforms.

Third, the study finds that economic opportunities have expanded through Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and employment schemes such as MGNREGA. Participation in SHGs increased from 19 percent in 2003 to 46 percent by 2013, providing women with access to microcredit and enabling income generation. Yet, these gains remain circumscribed by the absence of structural empowerment in the form of land rights and control over major assets, with only 12 percent of women holding land in their own name.

Fourth, several barriers continue to hinder women’s political leadership. Patriarchal norms, low literacy rates (especially among Scheduled Tribe women), and family pressures discourage active engagement in governance forums. In addition, practices of tokenism—such as pressuring women to sign pre-drafted documents—dilute the spirit of genuine representation.

Fifth, the analysis also identifies important enablers of empowerment. Training and capacity-building programmes conducted by NGOs like PRADAN and Bandhan have enhanced women’s confidence and public speaking abilities. SHG networks have provided solidarity and collective bargaining power, while legal awareness—particularly of laws such as the Domestic Violence Act (2005)—has strengthened women’s ability to resist domestic violence and dowry harassment.

Finally, the study underscores that empowerment outcomes are not uniform across the district. District-level variations are visible, shaped by geography, caste, and education. Blocks with strong NGO presence (e.g., Khatra, Ranibandh) or higher literacy levels (e.g., Bishnupur, Sonamukhi) show relatively better outcomes, while remote or patriarchal-dominated blocks (e.g., Saltora, Hirbandh) continue to lag behind.

Taken together, these findings reveal that while institutional reforms have opened important avenues for women’s political and economic participation, structural and cultural barriers remain deeply entrenched. The next chapter will build on these insights to discuss their broader implications for policy, governance, and gender equality in rural India.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter brings together the findings of the research to explore their broader significance, drawing out how the study contributes to academic knowledge, informs policy, offers practical suggestions for administrators, and lays the groundwork for future scholarly inquiry. Grounded in the case study of Bankura district in West Bengal (2003–2018), the chapter reflects on the transformative, yet uneven, impact of decentralised governance on the empowerment of tribal women. The findings reveal that while progress has certainly been made—especially in terms of increased visibility and participation—deep-rooted structural and cultural barriers continue to limit the full realisation of empowerment. Against this backdrop, the implications of the study are discussed below in four key domains.

## 5.1 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The research makes a substantial contribution to the interdisciplinary field of political science, gender studies, and rural development by empirically examining the link between decentralised governance and tribal women's empowerment. Unlike previous studies that often rely heavily on theoretical constructs or focus on urban or general rural populations, this study is rooted in the unique socio-cultural and political landscape of a tribal-majority region. The use of a mixed-methods approach—combining quantitative data, qualitative interviews, and focus group discussions—adds depth and authenticity to the findings. The study foregrounds the lived experiences of tribal women who have historically been marginalised by both gender and ethnicity, thereby highlighting the intersectionality of power, identity, and governance.

A key research contribution is the development of a nuanced, context-specific model of empowerment that incorporates dimensions such as agency, opportunity structures, access to resources, and social norms. The research challenges the simplistic notion that political representation alone leads to empowerment. It shows that while decentralisation offers formal spaces for participation, real empowerment requires the dismantling of socio-cultural and institutional barriers. By documenting both successes and limitations, the study not only contributes new empirical data to the discourse on decentralised governance in India but also raises critical questions about the assumptions underlying policy frameworks.

Moreover, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of how reservation policies, local governance structures, and development schemes interact in the context of a tribal district. It identifies empowerment not as a linear or uniform outcome but as a contested and evolving process influenced by various internal and external factors. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of feminist political theory that emphasises empowerment as both a means and an end in social transformation.

## 5.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the empirical evidence collected during the study, several policy recommendations emerge that can significantly improve the outcomes of decentralised governance, particularly in tribal and underdeveloped regions like Bankura. First and foremost, there is an urgent need to institutionalise capacity-building programmes for elected tribal women representatives. These programmes should not be limited to one-time training sessions but must be continuous, locally contextualised, and inclusive of practical skills such as public speaking, budget planning, negotiation, legal literacy, and conflict resolution.

Secondly, gender budgeting must become a core element of Panchayat-level planning. Currently, many development schemes are implemented in a top-down manner with little sensitivity to gendered realities. Local bodies must be required to disaggregate data by gender and caste, set gender-sensitive targets, and monitor outcomes accordingly. This would ensure that development funds are used more equitably and effectively.

Third, the inclusion of women, particularly tribal women, must go beyond the mere allocation of reserved seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Their participation in sectoral development committees (such as those dealing with health, education, child welfare, and livelihoods) should be mandated and monitored. This would enable them to influence planning and implementation in areas that directly impact their lives.

Fourth, policy frameworks should incorporate mechanisms for impact evaluation, assessing not only the number of women in leadership positions but also the quality and effectiveness of their participation. These evaluations should feed into policy revisions and be made public to ensure accountability.

Lastly, tribal welfare schemes should be mainstreamed within Panchayat-level planning. At present, such schemes often operate through separate bureaucratic channels, leading to redundancy, inefficiency, and exclusion. Integrating these schemes into the broader framework of decentralised governance would promote synergy and inclusivity.

## 5.3 ADMINISTRATIVE SUGGESTIONS

Effective policy implementation hinges on robust administrative mechanisms. To that end, several administrative reforms are necessary to operationalise the recommendations outlined above. The establishment of gender resource centres at the block and district levels is a crucial step. These centres can act as knowledge hubs, training facilities, and support systems for women in governance. Staffed by trained facilitators, they can provide legal advice, capacity-building support, and networking opportunities for tribal women leaders.

Second, the development of a centralised digital monitoring platform that tracks Panchayat-level performance using gender- and caste-disaggregated data is essential. Such a platform would not only promote transparency and accountability but also help in identifying gaps and directing resources where they are most needed.

Third, the creation of independent grievance redressal mechanisms within the Panchayat system would empower women to report issues such as corruption, exclusion, or discrimination without fear of retaliation. These ombudspersons should be empowered to investigate and resolve complaints in a time-bound and impartial manner.

Fourth, Gram Sansads (village-level assemblies) should be made more inclusive and participatory. Their functioning should be standardised, with mandatory representation and feedback mechanisms for women, particularly from marginalised groups. Periodic social audits should be conducted to assess the effectiveness of these meetings in influencing local governance.

Lastly, a system of recognition and incentives should be introduced for Panchayats that demonstrate high levels of inclusivity, transparency, and positive gender outcomes. These could include additional funding, public awards, or access to special development projects, thereby creating motivation for better governance.

## 5.4 ACADEMIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research also open up several avenues for future academic inquiry. One of the most pressing needs is for longitudinal studies that track changes in empowerment levels beyond the study period of 2018. Such studies would help in assessing the durability and long-term impact of decentralised governance on tribal women’s empowerment.

Additionally, comparative case studies across other tribal and non-tribal districts in West Bengal or other states could help identify patterns, best practices, and region-specific challenges. This would enhance the generalisability of findings and inform more nuanced policy interventions.

There is also a need to develop a standardised empowerment index that is sensitive to the unique socio-cultural contexts of tribal communities. This index should go beyond economic indicators to include factors such as social mobility, decision-making power, cultural participation, and psychological autonomy.

Academics from political science, sociology, anthropology, and development economics should be encouraged to collaborate on interdisciplinary research projects that examine empowerment through different lenses. Such collaboration can provide more holistic insights and address the complexity of empowerment as a socio-political phenomenon.

Finally, future research should adopt participatory methodologies that allow tribal women to co-create knowledge, influence research design, and articulate their own narratives. This would democratise the research process and ensure that findings are more grounded, authentic, and relevant to the communities being studied.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

## 6.1 OVERALL CONCLUSION

The present study has endeavoured to critically examine the intersections between decentralised governance and the empowerment of tribal women in the Bankura district of West Bengal during the period 2003–2018. Through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates political theory, gender studies, and empirical fieldwork, the research has revealed that while decentralised governance has opened up new political spaces and institutional opportunities for tribal women, the path to genuine empowerment remains fraught with challenges. The constitutional and institutional reforms—particularly the 73rd Constitutional Amendment—have succeeded in bringing tribal women into the fold of formal governance structures through mandated reservations. However, the mere presence of women in political bodies does not automatically translate into substantive participation or agency. Deep-rooted structural barriers such as entrenched patriarchy, low levels of education, socio-economic deprivation, and caste-based exclusion continue to undermine the transformative potential of decentralisation. Despite these obstacles, the study has documented encouraging trends, including increased awareness among women regarding their rights, growing participation in Gram Sabhas and Panchayat meetings, and improved access to government welfare schemes. Thus, the findings conclude that decentralised governance, when combined with sustained policy support and community mobilisation, has the potential to serve as a meaningful vehicle for the empowerment of tribal women. However, this process is incremental and context-specific rather than automatic or uniform.

## 6.2 RELEVANCE TO POLICY

The insights generated from this research carry substantial implications for policy formulation and implementation. One of the most significant contributions of the study is its emphasis on moving beyond the framework of numerical representation to focus on the quality and depth of women’s participation in governance. It highlights the urgent need for designing and implementing targeted capacity-building programs that equip tribal women with the knowledge, confidence, and skills required to engage effectively in public decision-making. Policy makers must consider instituting regular training sessions, legal literacy workshops, and mentorship initiatives tailored to women from marginalised communities. Furthermore, the study underscores the necessity of integrating gender-sensitive governance with broader socio-economic policies, especially those related to education, healthcare, livelihood support, and land rights. The Panchayati Raj Institutions should be leveraged as platforms for convergence, where multiple development programs are coordinated and made accessible to tribal women. The research also recommends the institutionalisation of gender audits and impact assessments at the Panchayat level to ensure that governance processes are inclusive, responsive, and accountable. Ultimately, for policy to be effective in empowering tribal women, it must adopt a holistic and intersectional approach that addresses both institutional access and social transformation.

## 6.3 RESEARCHER REFLECTION

Conducting this research has been an intellectually rewarding and personally transformative journey. Entering the field, particularly the remote tribal villages of Bankura, brought me face-to-face with the everyday realities, struggles, and resilience of tribal women—realities that often remain invisible in mainstream academic or policy narratives. Through interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, I was able to witness how these women negotiate power, challenge social norms, and make decisions within the constraints imposed by tradition, poverty, and patriarchy. It became clear to me that empowerment cannot be adequately understood through survey data or institutional indicators alone; it must be approached through the lens of lived experience. The process of fieldwork taught me humility, patience, and the importance of listening with empathy and openness. I also realised the limitations of my own academic preconceptions and learned to value indigenous knowledge systems and grassroots voices. This research has reinforced my belief in the importance of context-sensitive, participatory, and ethically grounded research. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute not only to academic knowledge but also to creating a more equitable and inclusive discourse on governance and empowerment in India.

## 6.4 ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethical integrity was central to every stage of this research. Prior to conducting fieldwork, ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate academic authority at Vidyasagar University. All participants were approached with full transparency regarding the purpose, scope, and implications of the study. Informed consent was obtained both verbally and in writing, and participation was entirely voluntary. The researcher ensured that participants could withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences. In cases where participants were illiterate or unfamiliar with formal consent procedures, special care was taken to explain their rights in local languages and dialects. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained; all personal identifiers were removed from transcripts and reports, and data was securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. The study also adhered to cultural and social norms while interacting with tribal women, avoiding any intrusion into private or sensitive areas unless explicitly permitted. Importantly, no participant was offered financial or material inducements for participation, ensuring that consent remained free from coercion. Thus, the research was conducted with full respect for the autonomy, dignity, and rights of all individuals involved.

## 6.5 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The researcher affirms that there were no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, or outcomes of this study. No external individual, organisation, or agency had any influence over the data collection, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of findings. The researcher does not hold any personal, professional, or financial affiliations with any political party, NGO, or government body that might benefit from the results of this research. All conclusions drawn are based solely on empirical evidence and scholarly reasoning, without any form of bias or undue influence. The work has been carried out independently, under the academic supervision of the designated research guide, and all ethical and institutional norms have been strictly followed. By making this declaration, the researcher commits to upholding the highest standards of academic honesty, transparency, and accountability.

6.6 FUNDING DISCLOSURE

This doctoral research was conducted entirely without the aid of external funding from any governmental, non-governmental, or corporate organisation. The fieldwork, data collection, travel, and other research-related expenses were personally borne by the researcher. No scholarships, research grants, or fellowships were received specifically for the purpose of this study. Any infrastructural or administrative support received was limited to routine academic assistance provided by Vidyasagar University as part of the doctoral program. This financial independence ensures that the research remained free from potential biases or obligations toward funding agencies. The absence of external funding further reinforces the impartiality and authenticity of the research findings presented in this thesis.

## 6.7 CLOSING STATEMENT

This thesis stands as a testament to the complexity, challenges, and possibilities that define the relationship between decentralised governance and the empowerment of tribal women in India. The findings have illustrated that institutional reforms, while necessary, are not sufficient on their own. True empowerment must be rooted in a broader ecosystem of social justice, economic opportunity, cultural recognition, and democratic participation. The tribal women of Bankura, whose voices form the heart of this study, are not passive beneficiaries but active agents of change. Their resilience, agency, and aspirations offer valuable lessons for governance systems not just in West Bengal, but across India. As we continue to deepen democratic decentralisation and strive for inclusive development, it is imperative that the voices of the most marginalised are not only heard but placed at the centre of policymaking. This research aspires to contribute to that goal by providing evidence-based insights and advocating for more responsive, equitable, and gender-just governance. It is offered with humility, hope, and a deep respect for the communities whose experiences it seeks to represent.

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# Appendices

**Appendix A: Household Survey Questionnaire**

**Section 1: Socio-Demographic Profile**

1. Name of respondent (optional)
2. Age (in years)
3. Marital status: Married / Unmarried / Widow / Divorced / Separated
4. Caste/Tribe: SC / ST / OBC / General
5. Educational qualification: No schooling / Primary / Middle / Secondary / Higher Secondary / Graduate / Postgraduate
6. Occupation of respondent
7. Occupation of spouse (if applicable)
8. Total household members
9. Household monthly income (approximate)
10. Land ownership: Yes / No (If yes, specify size)

**Section 2: Economic Empowerment**  
11. Do you earn a personal income? Yes / No  
12. If yes, do you have control over your earnings? Fully / Partially / Not at all  
13. Do you have access to household resources (land, savings, assets)? Yes / No  
14. Who decides on household expenditure? Self / Husband / Joint / Other family members  
15. Are you a member of a Self-Help Group (SHG)? Yes / No  
16. If yes, how long have you been associated with SHGs? (Years/Months)  
17. Have you taken loans through SHGs or cooperatives? Yes / No  
18. Purpose of loan: Consumption / Business / Agriculture / Children’s education / Others

**Section 3: Decision-Making & Autonomy**  
19. Do you participate in household decision-making (education of children, healthcare, asset purchase)? Always / Sometimes / Rarely / Never  
20. Who decides on family planning matters? Self / Husband / Joint / Elder family members  
21. Are you consulted in community matters (Gram Sabha, village meetings)? Yes / No  
22. Have you contested or held any position in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)? Yes / No

**Section 4: Social & Cultural Participation**  
23. Do you participate in local cultural, religious, or community events? Regularly / Occasionally / Rarely / Never  
24. Do you feel respected in your family and community decisions? Yes / No  
25. Have you faced any restrictions on mobility (visiting markets, health centres, banks)? Yes / No  
26. Have you experienced domestic violence or coercion? Yes / No (Optional/Confidential)

**Section 5: Perceptions of Empowerment**  
27. Do you feel your economic condition has improved in the last 10 years? Yes / No / Can’t say  
28. Do you feel more confident in expressing your views publicly than before? Yes / No  
29. Do you believe Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have created opportunities for tribal women’s empowerment? Yes / No  
30. What do you think are the biggest barriers to empowerment in your community? (Open-ended)

# Appendix B: Interview/Focus Group Guide

1. How has decentralised governance (Panchayats, Gram Sabhas) impacted your life as a tribal woman?
2. Can you share any experiences where you felt empowered to make decisions in your household or community?
3. What role do SHGs and microfinance play in improving your economic condition?
4. Do you believe women leaders in Panchayats are effective in representing tribal women’s issues? Why or why not?
5. What challenges still prevent women from exercising full autonomy?

This structure ensures:

* **Quantitative data** (yes/no, Likert scale, categorical responses) for statistical analysis.
* **Qualitative insights** (interviews, focus groups) to capture lived experiences.
* Alignment with the empowerment indicators you analysed (economic, social, political, cultural).

**Ethics Statement**

This research was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical standards for social science research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The purpose, scope, and objectives of the research were clearly explained to respondents in their local language to ensure complete understanding. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without any negative consequences.

All data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions were treated with the highest degree of confidentiality. Personal identifiers were either removed or anonymized during data analysis to protect participants’ privacy. Sensitive questions related to household decision-making, financial matters, and experiences of social or domestic challenges were asked with discretion, ensuring that respondents felt safe and respected.

No form of coercion or undue influence was exercised during data collection. Special care was taken while engaging with women from vulnerable communities to avoid reinforcing power imbalances. The researcher also ensured that cultural norms and local traditions of the Bankura tribal communities were respected throughout the research process.

The study was conducted exclusively for academic purposes, with no commercial interests involved. The findings will be shared with relevant academic bodies, institutions, and local governance stakeholders only in aggregate form, ensuring that individual respondents cannot be identified.

**Conflict of Interest and Funding Disclosure**

The researcher declares that there are no conflicts of interest, whether personal, financial, or institutional, that could have influenced the design, execution, analysis, or reporting of this study. The research was undertaken independently and solely for academic purposes.

This study did not receive external financial support from government agencies, private organizations, or funding bodies. All expenses related to fieldwork, data collection, and analysis were borne by the researcher. The absence of external funding ensured complete academic independence and objectivity in the research process.

**Conflict of Interest & Funding**

The researcher affirms that there are no conflicts of interest, whether personal, academic, or financial, that could have affected the objectivity of this study. The research was conducted solely for academic purposes, without any commercial or institutional bias.

No external funding was received from government agencies, private institutions, or non-governmental organizations. All costs associated with fieldwork, data collection, and analysis were personally managed by the researcher, ensuring independence in both methodology and interpretation of results.

**Supplementary Materials**

The supplementary materials related to this study include:

1. Copies of the structured household survey questionnaire and focus group discussion guide.
2. Tables of raw survey data and frequency distributions of household and community indicators.
3. Summaries of in-depth interview transcripts (with identifiers removed to maintain confidentiality).
4. Additional statistical outputs (e.g., regression tables, correlation matrices) not included in the main text due to space constraints.
5. Sample consent forms provided to participants prior to data collection.

These materials are available upon request from the researcher and will be shared in compliance with ethical and confidentiality guidelines.

# Annexure – I

**Questionnaire**

**Purpose of the Questionnaire**

This questionnaire is designed to collect data from respondents (tribal women and stakeholders) regarding their experiences, perceptions, and participation in decentralised governance and its role in women’s empowerment in Bankura district. The information collected will be strictly used for academic purposes and treated with confidentiality.

**Section A: Demographic Profile**

1. Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:
   * 18–25
   * 26–35
   * 36–45
   * 46–60
   * Above 60
3. Education level:
   * Illiterate
   * Primary (up to Class V)
   * Secondary (Class VI–X)
   * Higher Secondary
   * Graduate and above
4. Marital status:
   * Married
   * Unmarried
   * Widowed / Divorced
5. Occupation:
   * Housewife
   * Agricultural labourer
   * Farmer (landholder)
   * Daily wage labourer
   * Service / Job
   * Self-employed
6. Monthly household income:
   * Less than ₹5,000
   * ₹5,001–₹10,000
   * ₹10,001–₹20,000
   * Above ₹20,000

**Section B: Awareness & Participation in Decentralised Governance**

1. Are you aware of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and their functions?
   * Yes
   * No
2. Have you attended Gram Sabha meetings in the last year?
   * Regularly
   * Occasionally
   * Never
3. Do you feel your opinions are heard in Gram Sabha meetings?
   * Always
   * Sometimes
   * Rarely
   * Never
4. Are you aware of your voting rights in Panchayat elections?
   * Yes
   * No
5. Have you ever contested or considered contesting in Panchayat elections?
   * Yes, contested
   * Yes, considered
   * No

**Section C: Empowerment Indicators**

1. Do you feel decision-making power in household matters has improved since 2003?
   * Yes, significantly
   * Yes, somewhat
   * No change
   * Declined
2. Do you control the use of family income/expenditure?
   * Yes, fully
   * Partially
   * No
3. Are you involved in community decision-making through Panchayats?
   * Yes, actively
   * Yes, passively
   * Not involved
4. Has participation in local governance improved your self-confidence?
   * Yes
   * No

**Section D: Access to Government Schemes & Benefits**

1. Are you aware of government schemes for women/tribals (e.g., SHGs, MGNREGA, health schemes)?
   * Yes
   * No
2. Have you benefited from any government scheme between 2003–2018?
   * Yes
   * No
3. If yes, specify the type:
   * Employment (MGNREGA)
   * Education support
   * Health/medical support
   * Self-help group (SHG) initiatives
   * Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Section E: Challenges & Barriers**

1. What are the main barriers you face in participating in governance?
   * Illiteracy
   * Lack of time (domestic burden)
   * Male dominance in community
   * Financial dependence
   * Lack of awareness
   * Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you face resistance from family/community for active participation in Panchayat matters?
   * Yes
   * No

**Section F: Outcomes & Perceptions**

1. Compared to 2003, do you feel women in your village are more empowered today?
   * Yes, highly empowered
   * Moderately empowered
   * Slightly empowered
   * Not empowered
2. In your opinion, has decentralised governance (Panchayati Raj) improved:  
   a) Women’s education? [ ] Yes [ ] No  
   b) Employment opportunities? [ ] Yes [ ] No  
   c) Political representation? [ ] Yes [ ] No  
   d) Decision-making power? [ ] Yes [ ] No  
   e) Social status in community? [ ] Yes [ ] No