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## EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN ODISHA: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper seeks to analyse the various dimensions of social, economic and political empowerment of tribal women of Odisha. The paper has been concluded with an optimistic note that tribal women of Odisha have made tremendous progress in the socio-economic and political fabric of Odisha.

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### INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of tribal women is one of the central issues in the process of development all over the world. It is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi layered concept. Women empowerment is a process in which women gain greater share of control over material, human and intellectual resources as well as control over decision-making in the home, community, society and nation. However the tribal women faced many problems in our society. There is basic cultural and psychological tendency on the part of men to dominate the women, which is also seen among the tribal men. On the part of the tribal women too, due to sociological or cultural reasons, they are unable or unwilling to come out of their clichés. Of course, ignorance and illiteracy play a major role in hampering the empowerment of tribal women. It is indeed a herculean task on the part both of government and voluntary agencies to find different ways and means to assist the tribal societies in general and the tribal women in particular to climb the ladder of knowledge, awareness, development and progress.

The tribal societies in India are considered as the weakest sections of the population in terms of common socio-economic and demographic factors such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of developmental facilities and adequate primary health facilities. For many decades, 'growth with equity and social justice' has remained on the development agenda of developing countries, but from the historical point of view Indian society suffers from substantial disparity in education, employment, and income based on caste and ethnicity. According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, over 84 million people belonging to 698 communities are identified as members of Scheduled Tribes (ST) in India. Among the 29 states in India, Odisha, being socio-economically backward and culturally sound, occupies a unique place in the tribal map of the country having largest number of tribal communities (62 tribes including 13 primitive tribes) with a population of 9.59 million constituting 22.86% of state's population and 9.17% of the total tribal population of the country (Census of India, 2011). They mainly live in isolated areas and far away from the modern civilization with their traditional values, customs,

beliefs and myth. Out of 30 districts in Odisha, nine are considered as tribal districts (according to Location Quotient value). Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Sundargada, Mayurbhanj, are fully tribal district and 9 blocks of Kandhamala, 10 blocks of Keunjhar, 1 block of Balasore 1 block of Deogard come under tribal area of the state.

## CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Broadly, empowerment means individual acquiring the power to think and act, freely exercise choice, and to fulfill their potential as full and equal member of society. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNDFW) includes two factors in its definition

- Acquiring Knowledge and understanding of gender relation and the way in which these relations may be changed;
- Developing a sense of self-worth a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes and the right to control one's life.

Philosophers and social activists have defined women empowerment in diverse perspectives. Swami Vivekananda has put forth his view in the following words *"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing."* Therefore, the inclusion of "Women Empowerment" as one of the prime goals in the eight Millennium Development Goals underscores the relevance of this fact. Thus, in order to achieve the status of a developed country, India needs to transform its colossal women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women. Empowering women to participate fully in economic life across all sectors is essential to building stronger economies, achieve internationally agreed goals for development and sustainability, and improve the quality of life for women, men, families, and communities. Malala Yousafzai has commented *"We cannot all succeed if half of this are held back."* There is no denying the fact that women in India have made a considerable progress in almost seven decades of Independence, but they still have to struggle against many handicaps and social evils in the male-dominated society. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (India's first Prime Minister) said *"when women move forward the family moves, the villages moves, and the nation moves."* In the opinion of Kofi Annan *"There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."*

## Indicators of Empowerment

The empowerment process is difficult to measure quantitatively. Various authors have used education, work participation, and exposure to mass media, the means or sources by which women are expected to develop decision-making authority, greater freedom of movement, autonomy, and attitudinal changes in favour of gender equality, as indicators to measure empowerment. Education is an essential foundation for all social, economic and cultural development (Sen, 1994) that enhances the human capital and economic prospects of a country (UNFPA, 2005). Investment in women's education results in an improved status through improved economic prospects, greater decision-making authority, control over resources, exposure to the modern world, husband wife

communication, and self-reliance in old age, and reduced restrictions on physical mobility (Moser, 1998). A mother's education is linked to better reproductive health and reduction in young children's mortality rates (Jejeebhoy, 1996; UNFPA, 2005). Education is also likely to enhance women's economic independence by equipping them with skills necessary to take advantage of paid employment opportunities. Labor force participation not only gives women an opportunity to earn income, but also exposes them to the outside world and to authority structures and networks that are not kin-based (Dixon-Mueller, 1993).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the various programmes promoting socio-economic empowerment of tribal women.
- To find out the role of tribal women in the decision-making process of the state.
- To analyse the constraints to empowerment of tribal women and to make recommendations for effective participation of tribal women in every sphere of society.

## METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The researchers have collected informations by making a pilot study among the tribal women of seven tribal dominated districts (Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Kandhamal, Sundargard, Mayurbhanj) of Odisha. The Gond and Bhattada of Nabarangpur District, Khond and Souras in Rayagada District, Santals, Kolha, Munda, in Mayurbhanj District, Koya, Paroja and Kondh in Koraput District, Banda and Koya in Malkangiri District, Khond tribes in Kandhamal district, Oraon and Kissan in Sundargard District are primitive tribes in these districts. The Secondary sources of data have been collected from the available literature: Government documents, books, journals, website and newspaper articles etc.

## PROFILE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN ODISHA

Tribals are the indigenous people who live in the lap of the nature, and depend on natural resources for their livelihood constitute the major segment of Indian society. About 44.70% of the area of the State has been notified as the Scheduled Area and comprises the entire seven districts of Mayurbhanj, Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada, Nabarangapur, Sundargarh, and Kandhamal. The total population of Scheduled Tribe in Odisha is 22.8% as per Census 2011 and has increased marginally from 22.1% in 2001. As per the 2011 census data 22.3% are male and 23.4% are female.

Table No.1

Sl.No	Tribes	Polulation		Sex Ratio	Literacy Rate	
		Male	Female		Male	Female
1	Santal	445,700	449,064	1008	68.07	43.26
2	Oraon	177,457	180,655	1018	76.18	59.17
3	Gond	438,624	449,957	1026	71.64	48.03
4	Soras	264,364	270,387	1023	66.81	43.56
5	Koya,	71,014	76,123	1072	36.46	23.77
6	Bonda	5,669	6,562	1158	45.65	28.84
7	Paroja	180,122	194,506	1080	46.44	24.44
8	Kondha	790,559	836,927	1059	59.17	35.57
9	Bhattoda	222,266	228505	1028	50.94	29.47
10	Munda	279,211	279,480	1001	73.53	51.27

Source (Tribes in Odisha At A Glance, 2015)

The above table presents the demographic profile of major tribes in Odisha. The Bonda is an ancient tribe of people numbering approximately 12,000 (2011 census) who live in the isolated hill regions of the Malkangiri district of southwestern Odisha. In Bonda society, the women enjoy a privileged position. They are the primary workers and providers of food for the community. This matriarchal dominance is also seen in the marital norms of the community. Bonda girls largely marry boys who are at least five to ten years younger than them. Thus the girl looks after her husband as he grows up and in turn he cares for his older wife. In contrast with many other populations in India, the number of women among the Bonda greatly exceeds the number of men. The Kondha are indigenous tribal groups of India. The highest concentration of Kondha 16,27,486 found in Kandhamal, Koraput and Rayagada district of Odisha. Kondha women are very laborious, therefore female family members are considered assets, because of their contribution inside and outside the household and women are on equal footing with the male members in constructing a house to cultivation.

The Santal or Saontal are 2nd highest scheduled tribe of Odisha. Promoting Tribal Rights and Culture of the workforce, income and wellbeing of the family are accorded due respect and credit. The husband consults his wife in all important questions, including property matters. Though significantly contributing to agricultural activities, women are debarred from trade, services, etc., which require greater mobility and contact with strangers. For all other purposes, they enjoy a more or less equal status. Traditional customs are comparatively more liberal to women. Oraon is one of the tribal communities found in India, which mainly depends on agriculture for earning their living. They are also known as Kurukh tribes. The Oraon people have a rich range of folk songs, dances and tales, as well as traditional musical instruments. Both men and women participate in dances, which are performed at social events and festivals.

The Soras are a prominent tribal community in the Rayagada district of Odisha and specific pockets of Koraput and Gajapati districts. The Sora family is polygamous. The total household economy revolves around the woman member who is hardworking and who helps her husband in ploughing and harvesting crops in addition to attending household chores exclusively. The Gondi or Gond people are Adivasi people of central India. The Gond women drape a saree in a different fashion and adorn their necks with a number of long black bead necklaces. Traditionally they do not wear blouse. They are non-vegetarians who eat fish, chicken and mutton. Rice and Jowar are the staple cereals. The men drink alcohol occasionally. The Gond have a rich tradition of art and craft which includes body-tattooing, floor-painting (rangoli), pottery, basket-making etc.

### **Social Empowerment**

The schemes inaugurated by Odisha Government are multidimensional leading to social empowerment of tribal women. Biju Kanya Ratna Yojana creates an environment for girl that promotes, equal opportunities, eliminates discrimination, and ensure empowerment through change in social attitude. Mukhyamantri Mahila Sasaktikarana Yojana aims at empowerment of women and gender equality. Odisha government provides the schemes like Public Distribution System (PDS), Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS),

Annapurna Scheme, Antyodaya Anna Yojana and Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) have been launched especially to provide food security to all age groups women. For the old women government has launched National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS), National Maternity Benefit Scheme (NMBS) and Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) which are undertaken to provide social security for workers in unorganised sector. Similarly, at State level the schemes like National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS), National Old Age Pension Scheme (NOAPS) and Madhu Babu Pension Yojana (MBPY) are being implemented to ensure social security in unorganised sector in Odisha.

### **Anti-liquor Movements**

Odisha has been witnessing an unprecedented surge in people's movement against liquor in many parts of the State, especially among tribal women of the marginalised sections in rural areas. The movement demands complete ban on sale and consumption of liquor by the Government. The ordinary women from their own every day experiences are narrating their problems and how liquor consumption has impacted their socio-economic life and pauperized many households. Consumption of alcohol has been identified as one of the major causes of poverty and violence in social life, especially against women and children. It has been contributing to loss of quality of life, working hour, ill health and influencing the decision making process in many ways in the matter of public importance.

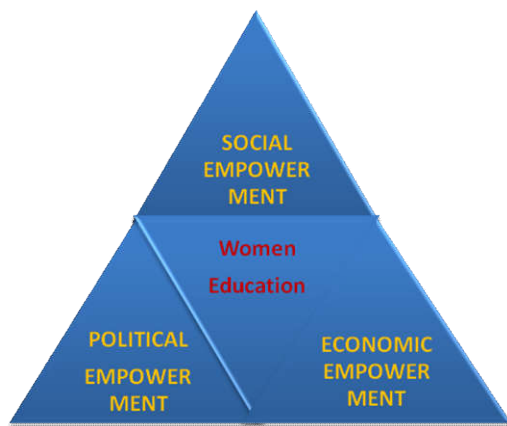
### **Education**

Equal access to education for women and girl is the guiding principle of education policy in Odisha. Special measure have been undertaken to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender sensitive educational system, increased enrolment and retention rates of girl and improve the quality of education to facilitate lifelong learning as well as development of vocational technical skill by women. Reducing gender gap in secondary and higher education would be the focus area. Sectoral time existing policies have been achieved with a special focus on girl and women, particularly belonging to tribal women. Sarva Sikha Abhiyan (education for all 6-14 year age), Ashram schools, mid-day meal schemes the number of Adivasi (tribal) children going to school and finishing at least primary school is low. The number of ST girls in school is even lower. Maltidevi Prak Vidyalaya Paridhan Pre-school creation, Biju Juba Sasaktikaran Yojana providing laptops to meritorious students between age group of 18 to 25 and Mid-day Meal Scheme (MDMS) have been launched especially to provide food security to 6-14 year girl child. Though there was an increase in total as well as female literacy among tribals, it is still at a slower pace as compared to the overall population. In case of tribal female the literacy rate has increased from 23.37 % (2001 census) to 41.20 % (2011 census).

### **Empowerment of Women through Education**

#### **Maternal Health and Nutrition**

Health of tribal women is mainly associated with their existing environment, social isolation, poverty, inadequate housing, mental illness, widowhood etc. Generally, at household level cultural norms and practices and socio-economic factors determine the extent of health problems among tribal women. Tribal communities in general are highly disease prone.



Their misery is compounded by poverty, illiteracy, ignorance about causes of disease, poor sanitation, lack of safe drinking water and blind beliefs. As a result of which birth rate, death rate, infant mortality rate, life expectancy rate, maternal mortality ratio, total fertility ratio etc. of Odisha lags behind the national average. The health status of tribal people is poor because of the isolation, remoteness and being largely unaffected by the developmental process. In India several focused interventions for improvement in health and nutritional status of tribal women have been initiated in the last three decades, to improve the prevailing situation, the Government of Odisha launched the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) programme, Mamata Yojana to alleviate the issue of maternal and infant under nutrition. Anganawadi Workers ASHA karmi and ANM play a great role in making conscious the tribal women about their health and nutrition.

### ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Development is meaningless if women are not involved and it is possible through economic empowerment of women. The main objective of women empowerment are to create more and more awareness in every field like agriculture, cottage industry etc.

#### Agriculture

80% of tribal women in Odisha are engaged in agriculture. Though they are living in hilly areas they are always working in field and cultivate different hilly crops like rice, groundnut, ginger, oilseeds, pulses, corn, barley, ragi, mustard, and vegetables. The beneficiaries have been engaged in Farm Forestry, (fisheries, poultry, duckery and goatery). Biju Krushak Vikash Yojana aimed to maximise the irrigation potential through panipanchayats. Biju Krushak Vikash Yojana, Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY) creating an environment for tribal women that promotes equal opportunities, eliminates discrimination and ensures empowerment through changes in societal attitude. These programmes benefits tribal women workers in agriculture and train them in organic farming.

#### Self Help Groups

70% of Tribal Women Self Help Groups are working holistically to encompass different aspects of empowerment through SHG movements. These include expansion of credit linkage to as many SHGs as possible so that SHGs have paid-up capital to start economic activities, through these loan they manage natural resources like (bamboo basket making,

khalipatra (leaf plate) stitching, ayurvedic medicine, candle, wood toy, tamarind packing, turmeric grinding and packing) and Snacks making like (papad, badi, and pickle) Domestic Tailoring, Hand Embroidery, Machine Embroidery, Beauty Parlor, Interior Decoration, Fashion Designing, Cloth Painting and the like. 50% of the family incomes have been supplemented by the women of the families.

### Entrepreneurship and Skill Development

Kaushal Vardhan Kendras (KVKs) at Panchayat level for mobilising and imparting skills pertaining to local employment/livelihood opportunities to school drop-outs, adolescent girls, housewives and rural youth. Each KVK will be linked to the nearest ITI/MSI/ATI for capacity building, curriculum development, assessment and certification. The KVKs will also function as counselling and guidance centres for youth to help them make informed choices. NGOs will also be empanelled for running of these centres in their areas of operation.

### Globalization and women

Globalisation has represented a new challenge for realization of the goal of women equality. There is re-farming, policies for access to employment equality and empowerment of tribal women. Benefit of the growing global economy have been unevenly distributed leading to wider economic disparities, the feminization of poverty, increased gender inequality deteriorating working conditions and unsafe working environment especially in informal economy and tribal areas.

### Witch Hunting

Witch hunting is a common practice of tribal area. The real motivation for witch-hunting is the desire to eliminate the woman and take away her land. Witch-hunting reflects the immediate economic objective of taking away of widow's rights to the land in favour of the husband's male relatives. Among the Santhals, where widows have a relatively stronger transition of rights on land, witches are exclusively women, whereas among Munda, Oraon and Ho it can be both men and women. Odisha is one of the few states in the country to have a law against witch-hunting. Like the Odisha Prevention of Witch-hunting Bill, 2013, but still it is unsuccessful. The hilly tribal people deny the rules and regulations of the government.

### POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

Promoting tribal women's political participation and involvement in public affairs does not benefit women alone, but also men and communal life generally. This makes women's effective involvement in politics a crucial issue with far reaching consequences on the development of society as a whole. Women's participation in politics may take various forms such as active involvement in community life, civil society organizations, local bodies and government institutions. In all such instances, women should be equally and effectively represented in various processes of decision making.

### Decision Making

Political empowerment of women is a part of the overall empowerment process. Political empowerment is a major path to women's empowerment and participation in the decision-making process will lead to women empowerment in the true

Sl.No	Tribal District of Odisha	General Panchayat Elections(ST) Members 2007				General Panchayat Elections(ST) Members 2012			
		Women Ward Member	Women Sarpanch	Women PanchayatSamiti Member	Women ZillaParishad Members	Women Ward Member	Women Sarpanch	Women PanchayatSamiti Member	Women ZillaParishad Members
1	Koraput	596	80	48	6	863	115	69	8
2	Malkangiri	317	38	21	3	359	56	30	5
3	Rayagada	531	60	40	5	739	88	57	7
4	Nabarangpur	453	59	38	5	662	86	54	8
5	Kandhamal	482	55	31	4	631	80	45	5
6	Sundargar	853	95	65	8	1763	.....	89	12
7	Mayurbhanj	1215	134	85	11	1248	196	122	17

(Source: Information on General Elections to PRIs, State Election Commission, Odisha, Bhubaneswar)

sense of the term. The PRIs are playing a central role in the process of enhancing tribal women's participation in politics and decision-making process. The state legislature of Orissa Panchayat Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2011 by amending the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act, 1964, Orissa Panchayat Samitee Act, and the Orissa Zilla Parishad Act enhanced the quota for women from the existing 33% to 50%. The 50% reservation for tribal women in Panchayati Raj institutions is an important part of this empowerment of tribal women. In the above table in all Districts tribal women's participation in 2012 Panchayat election has increased in comparison to 2007 Panchayat election.

### Role of NGOs

Union and State government funded local NGOs, (Pragati, South Orissa Voluntary Action (SOVA), Prastutee, Srujanika) are working for the social, economic and political empowerment of tribal women leading to poverty reduction and to manage natural resources for livelihood promotion efficiently and effectively. The organizations are working on field demonstration interventions related to skill development, community based natural resource management, livelihood enhancement and women health including advocacy on quality public service.

### Hindrances to Empowerment of Tribal Women

From the above study the researchers have found various obstacles in the way of empowerment of tribal women.

- 50% of tribal women are illiterate even they do not know the official language of state which creates a big hindrance to express their view in the meeting of local affairs.
- Lack of recognition of the collective rights of indigenous people to their lands and recourses.
- Scarcity or the loss of access to forests and natural resources needed to maintain the family's livelihood.
- Forced displacement brought about by development aggression.
- Improper facility for attendance to educational institutions.
- Limited access to social services such as education and health.
- Loss of traditional roles and knowledge.
- Domestic violence
- Poverty

### Concluding Observations

Education is an important determinant of status of women in society.

The government should promote free higher education and technical education with scholarship for all tribal women. Tribal women's practices like witch-hunting which includes extreme violence and deep rooted beliefs have led to the torture and murder of alleged witches, for which government should take strong action in this regard how to tackle the social evil. The network of distance education should be developed in tribal area. Women self-help groups should be organized to promote economic emancipation of tribal women. New skill development training and entrepreneurship training with scholarship should be imparted to tribal women. Proper health facility especially the facility of medical deliveries should be provided to all tribal pregnant women through government policy. Civil society groups should arrange awareness programmes for tribal people to fight against blind beliefs and evil practices like witch hunting. Tribal women and girls should be guaranteed equal rights at the social, political and economic sphere. Tribal women should be provided safe and secured working place with proper privacy.

All forms of violence against women physical and mental, whether at domestic or societal levels, including those arising from customs, traditions or accepted practices shall be dealt with effectively with a view to eliminate these evils. Institution and mechanisms schemes for assistance should be created and strengthened for prevention of such violence, including sexual harassment at work place and customs like dowry, for the rehabilitation of the victims of violence and for taking effective actions against the perpetrators of such violence. A special emphasis will also be laid on programmes and measures to deal with trafficking against women girl. The empowerment of tribal women depends on many things. The first and the most important source of power for the tribal women are in their tribalness, the very nature of being tribal. They belong to the original community which settled in India long before the influx of outsiders. That is why they are known as Adiviasis, people who have been inhabitants of the soil from the beginning. This renders the tribal women a real sense of pride, a sense of authority over things they have been using for centuries. Besides historical and ethnic identity, other sources of empowerment for tribal women are the increasing ratio of education, development work through Self-Help Groups, women's authority over forest products and legal safeguards. In the final analysis, Empowerment approaches for women is not only about providing services, but also about recognizing their lived realities of multiple layers of discrimination that hinder their access to services. A key instrument to promote tribal women's participations in the development process not just as beneficiaries but as acting agents of change is what is normally referred to as grassroots level organizations of women. 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments advocating one third reservation of seats for women in local bodies have dramatically raised their number

in Panchyats and Urban local bodies. This has enabled the tribal women in Odisha to increase their political power so that they can have more equitable share in the decision making process of society. Empowerment is not a distant dream for the tribal women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and they can play a very effective role in bringing about a revolutionary change in the social, political economic, psychological, moral and cultural angles of Odishan society.

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