



Empowering Tribal Women through Workforce Participation: A Study of Pakur District, Jharkhand

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***Abstract:** As more women participate in economic and decision-making activities, they are moving closer to empowerment. Women's active engagement in the workforce is the main driver of their empowerment. Women's participation in the workforce has decreased recently, which has created barriers to both economic growth and gender equality. Using secondary data from the 2011 census, the current study focuses on the tribal district of Pakur in Jharkhand in order to determine the kinds of jobs that tribal women pursue and investigate the major obstacles that prevent their empowerment with regard to workforce participation.*

***Keywords:** Women empowerment, Women participation in workforce, Tribal women, Gender equality, Economic growth, Economic and decision making, Jharkhand state, Pakur district, Census 2011.*

1. Introduction

Tribal communities constitute approximately 8.2% (Census of India, 2011) of India's population, with women being the predominant members of these communities. Yet, despite their demographic importance and the constitutional protection by the Indian Constitution, the realities faced by tribal women remain deeply concerning. Tribal women often get left behind when it comes to development in India. They live in deep poverty and don't have enough support for basic needs like schooling, good healthcare, owning land, or finding work. Many government programs exist, but these women still face major roadblocks in building better lives for themselves.

However, despite these challenges, tribal women are involved in multifaceted activities besides farming, like the collection of forest products, animal husbandry, wage labour, traditional handicrafts, etc. But many times, their immense contributions to economic efforts are unrecognised—both nationally and within their own families. This lack of recognition not only

conceals their vital role in the economy but also enhances their social and economic vulnerability. But the fact is that Tribal women are essential contributors to economic activity—both directly and indirectly, for the broader development of any nation. Ensuring they may engage fully in education, land ownership, financial services, and employment markets is not only an issue of equity—it is smart economics.

Jharkhand is one of India's most tribal-dominated states, with Scheduled Tribes comprising 26.2% of its population—among the highest in the country. In Pakur district, this number rises even further, 42.1% of the overall population in Jharkhand, and the tribal women constitute, like any other social group, about half of the total population.

2. Review of Literatures

Sukhija and Mishra (2024) examine the barriers to education and skills among Santhal and Munda women in Jharkhand, highlighting the facts like early marriage, cultural resistance to formal education, as well as economic hardships and inadequate educational infrastructure.

Rupla and Dasaratharamaiah (2019) show that education enhances tribal women's literacy, confidence, decision-making, employment prospects, and community participation, but progress is hindered by poverty, poor infrastructure, and restrictive social customs, requiring better facilities, financial support, and awareness.

Dr Rashmi Pramanik, in *Contribution of Tribal Women towards Household Economy*, highlights challenges faced by tribal women in the workforce, including insecure livelihoods, limited education, poor health, and low wages.

Giridhar, S. (2018) found that although Panchayat Raj Institutions facilitate tribal women's entry into politics, low educational attainment remains a major barrier to meaningful participation.

Paray, M. R. (2019) demonstrated that education significantly empowers tribal women in terms of literacy, confidence, decision-making, employment, and community engagement, but barriers like poverty, lack of facilities, and restrictive social norms persist.

Soumitro Chakravarty and A.N. JHA's (2011) study "Women Empowerment Through SHGs – A Case Study of Jharkhand State in India" shows that SHGs in Jharkhand empower women through financial inclusion and social participation but face structural and cultural barriers.

Kundu (2021) shows that tribal women play a key role in local economies through agriculture, forest produce, livestock, labour, and small businesses, but their contributions remain undervalued due to inequalities, gender barriers, and market exploitation.

Studies by Reddy and Rao (2017) notably focus on forest-based livelihoods, highlighting that the collection and sale of forest products are a key source of income for

2.1 Gaps in Existing Research

From the review of literature, it is clear that education plays a key role in empowering tribal women by improving literacy, confidence, decision-making, and economic participation.

However, most studies look at tribal women in Jharkhand as a whole and do not specifically focus on Pakur district, where the majority population belongs to tribal communities.

While earlier studies highlight barriers such as poverty, poor infrastructure, early marriage, restrictive customs, and lack of facilities, there is little research on how these factors actually affect tribal women in Pakur district. The link between education, skill development, and economic empowerment is also not well studied in this region.

2.2 Objectives of the Study

This research seeks to achieve the following key objectives

1. To identify the types of work undertaken by tribal women and assess the extent to which such participation contributes to their economic empowerment.
2. To investigate the key obstacles that limit their empowerment in the context of workforce participation

3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive research design and relies primarily on secondary sources of data. The data has been drawn from multiple authentic sources, including the Census of India 2011, the National Sample Survey (NSS) 60th Round, scholarly books on tribal women's education and development, peer-reviewed journals, academic articles, government reports and publications, reference papers, and credible websites related to the subject.

The use of secondary data has been considered appropriate for this study as it provides access to large-scale, reliable, and nationally representative datasets that are otherwise difficult to generate within the scope of individual research. Moreover, secondary data allows for comparative analysis, historical trend examination, and cost-effectiveness, making it a suitable approach for understanding the educational and developmental challenges faced by tribal women in Jharkhand, particularly in Pakur district.

3.1 Study Area

In the state of Jharkhand, Pakur district was separated from Sahibganj district on January 28, 1994. Sahibganj was formed on May 17, 1983, from the former Santhal Pargana district. It is bordered to the north by Sahibganj district (Jharkhand), to the south by Dumka district (Jharkhand), to the east by Birbhum district (West Bengal), and to the west by Dumka and Godda districts (Jharkhand). The district is predominantly tribal, with communities such as the Santhals, Paharias, and Lohras constituting a significant share of the population. Being a tribal-dominated region, Pakur reflects a unique cultural identity with distinct traditions.

In terms of administration, Pakur consists of one statutory town, six community development blocks, and one subdivision called Pakur. Here are names of the blocks: Amrapara, Hiranpur, Pakur, Maheshpur, Pakuria, Litipara

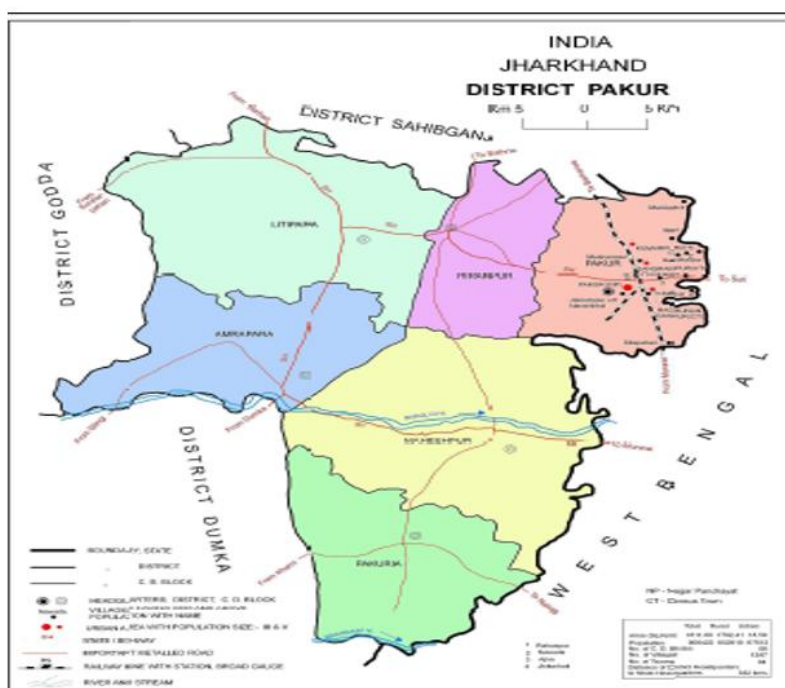


Fig. 1: Geographical map of Pakur district, Jharkhand

3.2 Data Analysis and Findings

3.2.1 Tribal Women's Status in Jharkhand and Pakur District

Table 1: Status of the Tribal Women in Jharkhand and Pakur District

	Total Scheduled Tribes Population in Jharkhand)		Total Scheduled Tribe Population in Pakur District	
	Count	%	Count	%
Persons	86,45,042	26.21	3,79,054	42.1
Males	43,15,407	49.91	1,86,967	49.32
Females	43,29,635	50.08	1,92,087	50.67

Source: Census, 2011

The above table shows that in Jharkhand, the Scheduled Tribe population is about 26.21 per cent. The concentration of the Tribal population is much higher in Pakur district (census 2011) compared to the overall state average of Jharkhand. This establishes Pakur as a tribal-dominated district. The data also reveals that in both Jharkhand and districts like Pakur, there is a balanced sex ratio in the tribal population. Infact tribal women constitute slightly more than half of the tribal population in Jharkhand and pakur district. This implies that tribal women’s participation in the workforce is much needed for the upliftment of society.

3.2.2 Educational Status of Tribal Women in Pakur District

Table 2: Educational Status of Tribal Women

Residence	Total Literates	Male Literates	% of Males	Female Literates	% of Females
Total	1,27,393	77,064	60%	50,329	40%
Rural	1,25,787	76,249	61%	49,538	39%
Urban	1,606	815	51%	791	49%

Source: Census, 2011

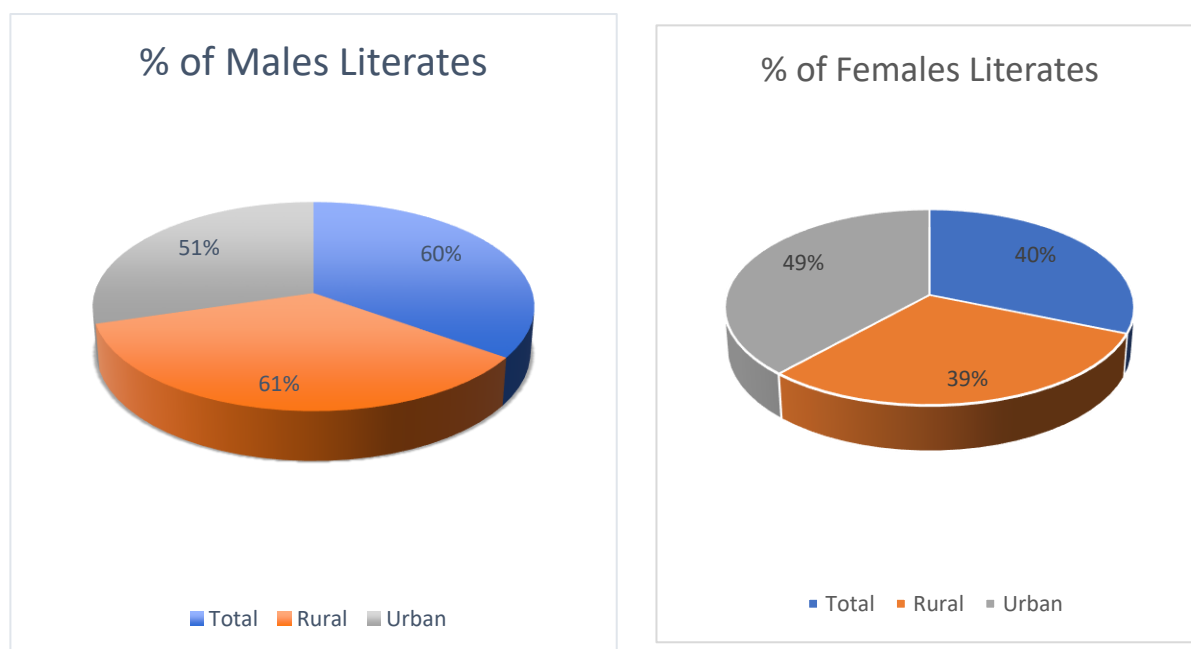


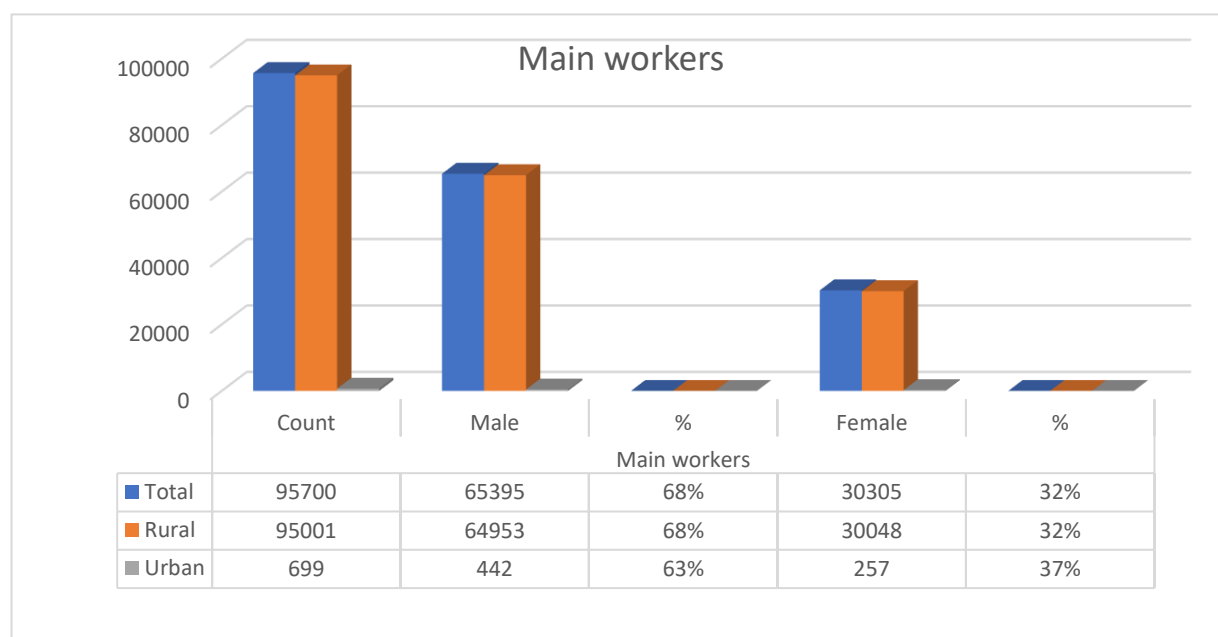
Fig. 2: Literacy Distribution of the Tribal population in Pakur District

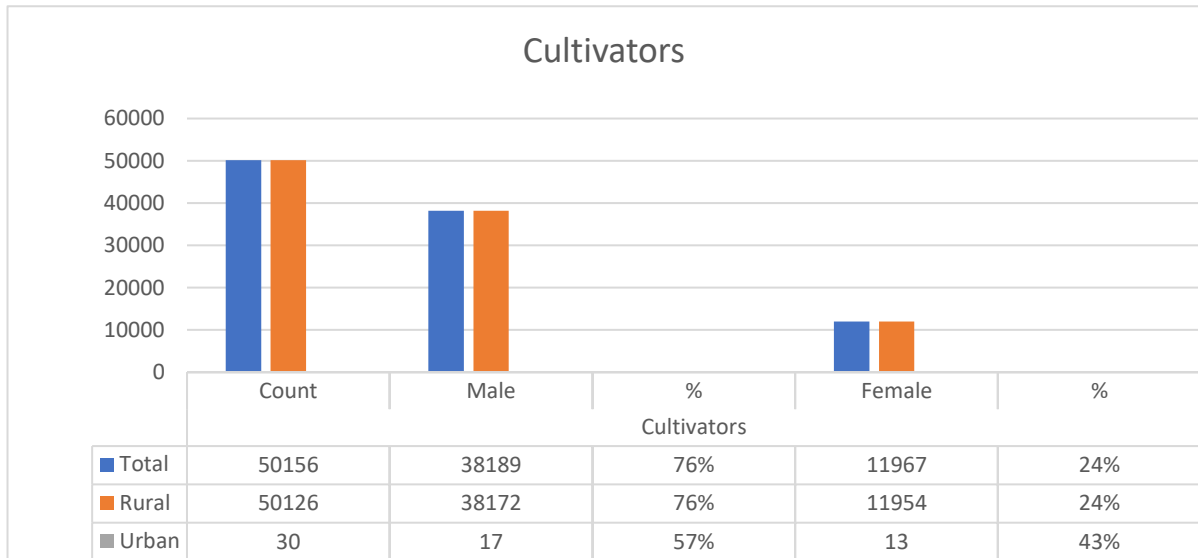
The data from the above tables and diagrams highlight the existence of a gender gap in literacy. Males are in a comparatively better position than females. If we consider both rural and urban perspectives, the urban segment shows a relatively more balanced distribution compared to the rural segment.

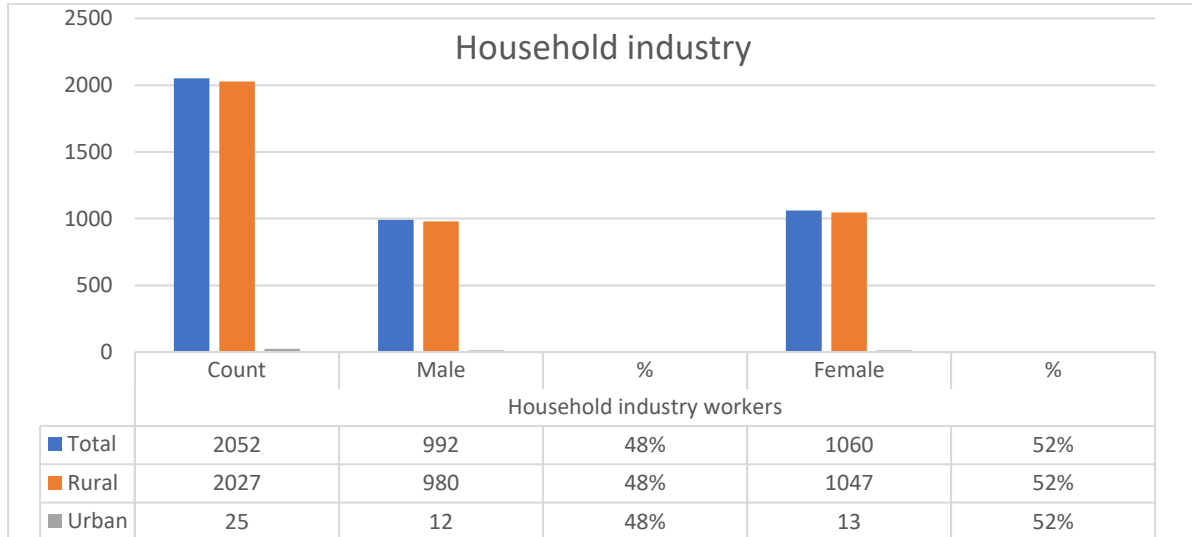
3.2.3 Women's Occupational Structure in Tribal Societies

Table 3: Participation of workers in different categories (Source: Census 2011)

	Main workers					Cultivators				
	Count	Male	%	Female	%	Count	Male	%	Female	%
Total	95700	65395	68%	30305	32%	50156	38189	76%	11967	24%
Rural	95001	64953	68%	30048	32%	50126	38172	76%	11954	24%
Urban	699	442	63%	257	37%	30	17	57%	13	43%
	Agricultural labourers					Household industry workers				
	Count	Male	%	Female	%	Count	Male	%	Female	%
Total	28827	15913	55%	12914	45%	2052	992	48%	1060	52%
Rural	28816	15904	55%	12912	45%	2027	980	48%	1047	52%
Urban	11	9	82%	2	22%	25	12	48%	13	52%
	Other workers					Marginal workers				
	Count	Male	%	Female	%	Count	Male	%	Female	%
Total	14665	10301	70%	4364	30%	97519	37723	39%	59796	61%
Rural	14032	9897	71%	4135	29%	97330	37607	39%	59723	61%
Urban	633	404	64%	229	36%	189	116	61%	73	39%







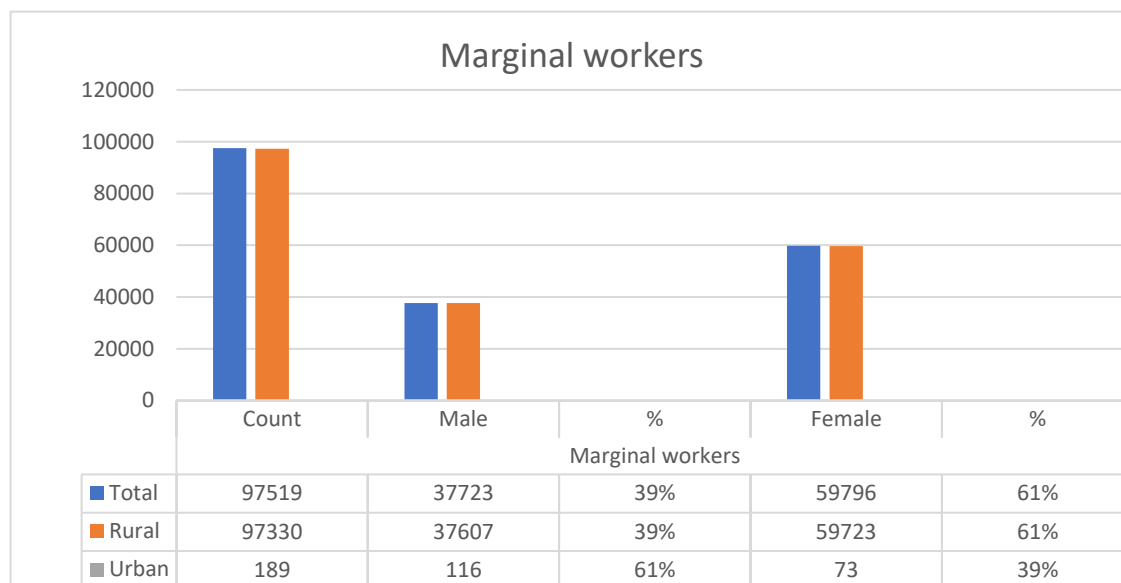


Fig. 3: Category-wise participation of Tribal Women Workers

From the census of India main worker is defined as a person who engages in economically productive activity for at least 183 days in a year. The above tables highlight that the participation of females as the main worker is lower compared to that of males. Women dominate marginal jobs and household industries. Boserup (1970) and Agarwal (1994) show in their studies that women’s agricultural work is often unrecognised because they work as unpaid family workers. In Pakur, women’s role in sowing, harvesting, fuelwood, and water collection is crucial, but is recorded as marginal or secondary.

The participation of rural tribal women as agricultural labourers is significantly higher than that of urban women due to the lack of proper education, skills, training, and alternative income opportunities. A study by Jharkhand Tribal Development Society (2019) shows that male migration and extreme poverty force women to participate in work force as marginal workers. In Pakur district, tribal women are engaged in various types of informal household industries like bidi making, leaf plate making, forest product collecting, etc which are low-paid, home-based.

Due to a lack of proper education and alternative sources of income, tribal women are confined to their local activities, which are not sufficient to support their families. Singh & Kundu (2017) note that women in Jharkhand are concentrated in low-wage, insecure, and seasonal jobs, while men dominate better-paying, stable jobs. Subhajit Kundu (2019) finds that tribal women play a central role in non-farm household industries as a survival strategy. In Pakur, their dominance (52%) in household industries reflects this finding.

3.2.4 Obstacles to Tribal Women’s Empowerment

From the 2011 census data, it has been revealed that the workforce participation in almost all major high-paid categories is dominated by men; women’s participation is significantly unsatisfactory. This presents a picture of the traditional patriarchal Indian society, where

women's role in decision-making is negligible. Women are concentrated in seasonal, insecure, home-based activities that undervalue women's labour.

However, the data also reveals that tribal women have an adequate capacity to participate in the workforce and are efficient in contributing to the upliftment of the economy. With appropriate interventions—such as enhancing access to education and skills, ensuring land rights, strengthening women's cooperatives, and improving market access—these roles can be transformed from survival strategies into avenues of empowerment. In sum, women in Pakur already form the backbone of agricultural and household economies. Recognising, valuing, and strengthening their contributions is not only essential for gender justice but also for sustainable rural and tribal development.

4. Recommendation

- Provide proper, free education.
- Design Skill-based training programs on local demand
- Provide basic facilities
- Provide alternative sources of income
- Policy integration.

5. Conclusion

The entire study reflects that the role of tribal women in workforce participation is not up to the mark. They are undervalued, unrecognised. But tribal women constitute almost half of the total tribal population. So almost half human resources are underutilised. These patterns are reinforced by poverty, tribal socio-cultural practices, language barriers in education, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to skills and markets. For the better economic growth and the improvement of society tribal women's active participation in the workforce and their economic empowerment are necessary. This underscores the need for gender-sensitive educational policies, livelihood diversification, and infrastructural support to empower tribal women and bridge the socio-economic gaps in the district.

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