

A Review on Anthropological Perspectives of Women Empowerment among Banjara Tribe at Telangana and Andhra Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

This study examines women's empowerment among the Banjara tribal community in Telangana from an anthropological perspective. The Banjaras, known for their distinct cultural identity and social organization, live in settlements called "Tandas," where traditions strongly shape women's roles and status. Using a systematic review methodology, the study integrates findings from various research works to analyze the socio-economic, educational, health, and political conditions of Banjara women. Key anthropological variables include cultural custodianship, kinship roles, economic participation, marginalization, gender norms, decision-making power, and the impact of modernization. The analysis reveals that Banjara women play a central role in maintaining households and contributing to the family economy, yet face multiple challenges. Low literacy levels, early marriage, limited healthcare access, and economic dependency remain prevalent. Most women are engaged in agriculture and daily wage labor, indicating continued economic vulnerability. Although many have access to bank accounts and participate in self-help groups, financial and household decision-making is still largely controlled by male members, reflecting persistent gender inequality. At the same time, the study highlights gradual progress in empowerment. Factors such as globalization, government initiatives, and increased participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions have contributed to positive changes. Certain cultural practices, including widow remarriage and bride price, offer relatively greater social flexibility compared to mainstream systems. However, patriarchal attitudes, social taboos, and inadequate infrastructure continue to limit women's full empowerment. Overall, the study emphasizes the need for improved education, better healthcare access, enhanced economic opportunities, and increased awareness. A holistic and inclusive approach involving government, community, and institutional support is essential for achieving sustainable development and gender equality among Banjara women.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Gender mainstream, Society and culture

INTRODUCTION

The Banjara (also known as Gor) are an ethnic group distinguished within larger societies by their unique culture and characteristics. These include distinct physical features, a specific everyday language, particular habits, cultural unity, a cohesive social organization, and settlement within a shared territory (Lal, 2015). The Banjara people live in unique settlements called "Tanda" lively regions set apart from non-Banjara communities,

where their rich culture, traditions, and close-knit social life thrive in harmony. They have a community leader to deal with socio-political and religious life of the people called "Nayak". The women of this community have prominent costume and tattoo, the traditional Banjara attire includes a coarse gown or lunga, a skirt (phetiya), a tartan petticoat, an embroidered blouse (kanchali), and a mantle that covers the head and upper body. Their arms and legs are adorned with various ornaments such as bangles, anklets, necklaces made of coins, nose rings, and other

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Table 1 : Socio-economic, demographic profile of Banjara women

Sr. No.	Variable	Categories
1.	Age	Below 18, 18–24, 25–35, 36+
2.	Marital Status	Married, Widow, Divorced, Unmarried
3.	Age at Marriage	Below 18, 18–24, Above 24
4.	Family Type	Nuclear, Joint
5.	Family Size	1–3, 4–6, Above 6
6.	Education Level	Illiterate, Primary, Secondary, Higher
7.	Occupation	Agriculture, Labour, Self-employed, Homemaker, Service
8.	Income Level	Low, Medium, High
9.	Land Ownership	Husband, Wife, In-laws
10.	Housing Type	Hut, Semi-pucca, Pucca

Table 2 : Indicators of measurement of women empowerment

Sr. No.	Dimension	Indicators
1.	Economic	Income level, employment status, access to bank account, asset ownership
2.	Educational	Literacy level, school completion, awareness
3.	Health and nutrition	Access to healthcare, nutritional status, maternal health, health awareness
4.	Social	Participation in cultural activities, freedom of movement, social status
5.	Decision-making	Role in household decisions, financial decisions, voting behavior
6.	Political	Participation in Panchayati Raj, leadership roles
7.	Gender Equality	Attitude towards gender preference, age at marriage, rights on reproductive health
8.	Psychological	Self-confidence, autonomy, awareness of rights

trinkets made from bones and brass. Tattoos are very common among the banjara community irrespective of gender. There is superstitious belief is involved to avoid illness and misfortune. Like their decoration on costume with mirrors, tattoos are also both decorative for beauty and as protection from ill health or recognition. In the month of august (Shravanam) they will celebrate a festival of teej, one of the activities is young, unmarried girls pray for a good groom according to Mahanthy (2020).

Women in tribal communities, particularly among the Banjara tribes of Telangana, play a vital role in sustaining their families, preserving cultural traditions, and contributing to the local economy. Despite these significant contributions, they continue to face multiple challenges, including low literacy levels, early marriage, poor health conditions, limited access to resources, and restricted participation in decision-making processes. Although globalization and various government initiatives have brought some improvements, deeply rooted patriarchal norms, socio-economic inequalities, and lack of awareness continue to hinder meaningful empowerment.

Anthropological perspectives are essential for understanding the lived realities of Banjara women, as they provide insights into cultural practices, social

structures, and gender roles that shape their status. Therefore, this study aims to examine women's empowerment through an anthropological lens, focusing on socio-economic, educational, cultural, health, and political dimensions. It aims to study the women's participation in decision making, impact of globalization an modernization on Banjara's women. It also seeks to identify existing gaps and challenges in order to inform policy interventions and promote sustainable and inclusive development.

METHODOLOGY

The present study with an anthropological perspective, reviews from the literature published in research articles and journals books and published reports, government documents and policy reports on Banjara women. adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the anthropological perspectives of women's empowerment among Banjara tribes in Telangana.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the present study provide a comprehensive understanding of the status and

Table 3 : List of Research studies and outcomes

Study	Study design	location	N	Outcome
Lal (2020)	Quantitative and qualitative	Khammam, Telangana	300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Build up women capacities for social transformation, decision-making process, political representation, entrepreneurial development and social leadership. ➤ Women have broken the barricades of confining themselves merely to reproduction and now actively participating in production activities.
Lal (2015)	Random sampling	Telangana	300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The community suffers from significant issues including poverty, high rates of child labor, malnutrition, and poor access to healthcare ➤ "Vicious cycle of poverty" ➤ The need for social development models for empowerment
Ravi (2018)	Random sampling	Adilabad, Telangana	150	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Socio economic status, education and resource facilities ➤ There is a need to put more attention on educational aspects of scheduled tribes, where this only can motivate them for future life.
Rathore <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Simple random sampling	Warangal, Telangana	120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Gender inequality in family planning ➤ Severe gender inequality in family planning among tribal communities in Telangana, where 83.3% of women were forced into family planning decisions by husbands or family heads.
Sharadha (2020)	Random sampling	Karimnagar, Telangana	200	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Socio-economic condition, health and effect of globalisation ➤ More than 90 per cent Lambada tribe's food habit, food items, dressing pattern, traditional festival and ceremonies were being replaced by non-lambada's cultural system ➤ Need to respect and practice tradition and cultural values of Lambada tribe.
Joshi <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Convenience sampling	Nagar Kurnool Telangana	100	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health profile: hypertension ➤ Majority participants (66.1%) were females and most of them (72.7%) were Illiterates with 50% population being alcoholics. ➤ Generalized weakness was the major health problem seen
Veeranna (2024)	Random sampling	Warangal Telangana	105	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Social, economic, educational, Political Rights, and Health conditions. Impact of globalisation and modernisation. ➤ Positive correlation between strategy implementation and performance of parishes. ➤ Strengthening of parish organizational structure to enhance effective execution of parish strategy
Chandana and Kumar (2020)	Cross sectional study	Bhadradi Kothagudem Telangana	120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Health problems, knowledge and gaps between services ➤ 75.8% tribal women have not diagnosed of any chronic illness ➤ 35% women have general health issues. ➤ More than 70% women have no knowledge on vector-borne diseases.
Pushpalatha (2023)	Multistage sampling	Vishakhapatnam Andhra Pradesh	287	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Empowerment of women and factors influencing ➤ Including low literacy, financial insecurity, and limited healthcare access ➤ Self-help groups (SHGs) and targeted development programs are essential for improving their status.
Lal (2009)	Anthropological technique	Andhra Pradesh		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tribal marriage system- majority of banjaras are now following non-tribal marriage systems. ➤ Thereby throwing their own identity into jeopardy.
Likitha (2025)	Qualitative	Telangana		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Issues faced by women entrepreneur, policies and implications ➤ Key challenges- limited financial access, inadequate marketing skills, and low digital literacy ➤ Entrepreneurship positively influences their social standing, increasing decision-making power and income within families.

Table 3 contd..

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Patil <i>et al.</i> (2025)	Purposive sampling	Yadadri-Bhuvanagiri	479	➤ Beta thalassemia and anaemia- 32 per cent female were found to be anaemic as compared to 15.5 percent males
Rajender and Nagendra (2025)	Mixed methods	Warangal, Khammam, Telangana	150	➤ Decentralization and self-governing ➤ Despite the structural shift, tribal empowerment is limited by continued financial reliance on the state, administrative constraints, and incomplete recognition of traditional Thanda institutions.
Talari (2024)	Mixed methods	Telangana	60	➤ Government and NGO revival programmes ➤ The role of cultural preservation as a tool for economic empowerment for Banjara women.

empowerment of Banjara women in Telangana from an anthropological perspective. The findings are organized under major dimensions such as socio-demographic profile, education, occupation, economic condition, health, decision-making, gender roles, and the impact of globalization and modernization. These results are based on the synthesis of existing empirical studies and literature, highlighting both the traditional cultural context and the changing socio-economic realities of Banjara women. The analysis reflects how factors such as family structure, literacy, livelihood patterns, health practices, and participation in social and political decision-making influence the overall level of women's empowerment within the community.

Women, as the primary caretakers of families and children, have faced significant challenges within the Banjara community. Their status varies considerably across different regions of Telangana, reflecting diverse realities and cultural influences observed in literature and social studies. In recent decades, Banjara women have contributed significantly to regional development, despite traditional views limiting them to household roles without personal voice or freedom. Patriarchal societal norms in Telangana have suppressed women's rights, keeping them subordinate to men. The caste council plays a key role in maintaining Telangana's culture, but men continue to dominate as the primary power holders (Praveen Kumar, 2024)

Family size:

Family structure plays a crucial role in shaping women's social, emotional and economic lives. The type of family system and the size of the family significantly influence women's responsibilities, decision-making power and overall well-being. In the Indian context, the transition from traditional joint families to nuclear families has been widely observed due to urbanization, migration

and socioeconomic changes. Several studies have examined family patterns among women to understand these changing dynamics.

Studies consistently show that nuclear families are predominant among respondents. Veeranna (2024) reported that a large majority of respondents 93.33 per cent belonged to nuclear families. While only 6.67 per cent were part of joint families, indicating a strong shift toward the nuclear family system. Similarly, Rathore *et al.* (2024) found that 91.7 per cent of respondents lived in nuclear families and only 8.3 per cent followed the joint family system. Sharada (2020) also reported a similar pattern, where more than 72 per cent of families followed the nuclear family system, while 29 per cent maintained the joint family structure.

Regarding family size, Lal (2016) revealed that 61.0 per cent of respondents had family sizes ranging from 4 to 6 members, whereas only 1.0 per cent had more than nine members, indicating that large families are rare. Additionally, 32.3 per cent of respondents had only three members in their families. Rathore *et al.* (2024) observed that 58.3 per cent of respondents had family sizes below three members, 25 families had 4 to 6 members, and 13 families had more than six members. However, Amgoth *et al.* (2021) noted that respondents were found in both nuclear and joint family systems, suggesting that although nuclear families dominate, joint family structures still exist in certain contexts.

Marital status:

Marital status and age at marriage are important socio-demographic factors that influence the social position, autonomy and economic participation of women. In many communities, marriage determines women's roles within the household and society. Studies focusing on tribal and rural women have highlighted variations in marital status, age at marriage, and cultural practices such

as widow remarriage, divorce, and bride price, which differ from the mainstream Hindu social system.

Several studies indicate that a majority of women respondents are married. Veeranna (2024) reported that most respondents were married, accounting for 64.76 per cent of the total sample. The second largest group consisted of widows, with 25.71 per cent, while 9.53 per cent were separated or divorced. The study also examined the approximate age at marriage of the respondents, it is revealed that the highest proportion of respondents, 52.38 per cent were married at the age of 18, followed by 36.20 per cent who were married between 18 and 24 years, 11.42 per cent who were married after the age of 24. These findings suggest that most women were married between the ages of 18 and 24. Similarly, Sharada (2020) found that most of the women (90%) were married, while the remaining 10 per cent were widows. Amgoth *et al.* (2021) also observed that a significant proportion 55.8 per cent were married at a young age between 15 and 18 years. These findings indicate that early marriage continues to be a common practice among women in many rural and tribal communities.

Social status:

The social status of Banjara women is relatively better compared to women in the traditional Hindu caste system. Banjara women actively participate in the domestic economy and often enjoy greater freedom, including involvement in decisions related to marriage. Divorce is relatively accessible in their society, and widows are allowed to remarry without facing social stigma. Lal (2009) highlighted that such flexibility in marital relations is reflected in cases like that of Nunsavath Ambali from Warangal district, who reportedly married and divorced multiple times during her lifetime. Furthermore, many tribal societies follow the practice of bride price instead of dowry. This practice contrasts with the dowry system prevalent in the Hindu caste structure, which often places financial burdens on families with daughters and contributes to gender inequality and adverse sex ratios.

Overall, the reviewed studies indicate that most respondents are married, and marriage commonly occurs at a relatively young age. While early marriage remains prevalent, tribal communities such as the Banjara exhibit more flexible marital norms, including acceptance of divorce, widow remarriage, and the bride price system. These cultural practices provide women with

comparatively greater social freedom and economic participation than those observed in the traditional dowry-based Hindu caste system.

Education:

Education is a crucial determinant of women's empowerment, as it enhances awareness, decision-making ability, and access to opportunities. However, among tribal communities, educational attainment remains low due to socio-economic constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural factors. Veeranna (2024) found that most Banjara women had only basic education, with 31.43% educated up to primary level, while only 10.48% had higher education. Similarly, Rathore *et al.* (2024) and Lal (2016) reported high levels of illiteracy, indicating that lack of education continues to be a major concern. Amgoth *et al.* (2021) further revealed that 58.3% of respondents dropped out at the secondary level, largely due to parental illiteracy (88.3%), poor financial conditions, and limited encouragement for education.

Multiple factors contribute to low educational attainment and high dropout rates among tribal women. Family-related issues, early marriage, lack of parental interest, household responsibilities, and sibling care were identified as major reasons for discontinuing education (Amgoth *et al.*, 2021). Structural barriers such as lack of proper schools, shortage of qualified teachers, and cultural and linguistic differences also discourage continued education (Kamalakar and Kandi, 2023). Overall, these studies highlight that tribal women's education remains limited, restricting their empowerment and opportunities. Addressing economic barriers, improving access to quality education, and promoting awareness among families are essential for enhancing educational outcomes and empowering tribal women.

Occupation:

Occupation plays a crucial role in determining the socio-economic status of individuals, particularly in rural communities. In India, agriculture and allied activities continue to be the backbone of livelihood, especially among marginalized groups and women. Understanding occupational patterns helps to identify economic dependencies, gender roles, and inequalities in employment opportunities. Overall, the findings consistently indicate that agriculture and allied activities remain the primary source of livelihood among respondents. As highlighted by Veeranna (2024), nearly

half of the respondents depend on agriculture and agricultural labour, with smaller proportions engaged in self-employment, household roles, and formal jobs. Similar trends are observed in studies by Lal (2016), Rathore (2024), and Amgoth *et al.* (2021), where a majority—especially women—are concentrated in agricultural and informal sectors. Additionally, women often perform dual roles as homemakers and wage labourers, leading to their increased participation in low-paid and unstable work. This pattern reflects persistent gender-based occupational inequalities and a continued reliance on agriculture in rural communities.

Economic Empowerment:

Economic empowerment refers to the ability of individuals, particularly women, to participate in and benefit from economic activities with dignity and equitable access to resources (Eyben *et al.*, 2008). In rural and tribal contexts, this empowerment is shaped by access to financial assets, income levels, housing conditions, and involvement in livelihood activities, all of which influence women's independence and decision-making power.

The findings suggest that while many women possess basic financial assets such as bank accounts and jewellery, their control over these resources remains limited, indicating continued dependence on male family members (Veeranna, 2024). Income levels largely fall within low to medium ranges, reflecting ongoing economic vulnerability (Rathore, 2024; Amgoth *et al.*, 2021; Saradha, 2020). Although there have been improvements in housing and basic amenities, poverty and inadequate living conditions persist. At the same time, tribal women actively contribute to the economy through agriculture, self-help groups, and entrepreneurial activities, supported by government and community initiatives (Likhita, 2025). However, structural inequalities and restricted financial autonomy continue to constrain true economic empowerment, highlighting the need to reduce poverty, expand access to resources, and strengthen women's independent financial decision-making.

Ownership of land:

Ownership of land is a key indicator of economic empowerment and social status, especially in rural areas. It determines access to resources, decision-making power, and financial security. However, in many traditional societies, land ownership is predominantly controlled by

men, limiting women's independence and authority.

Veeranna (2024) revealed that a majority of the respondents, 35 (33%), reported that property is owned in their husbands' names. The second highest proportion, 29 (27.62%), indicated ownership in their own (wives') names, while 27 (25.71%) respondents stated that property belongs to their in-laws. These findings reflect limited property ownership and control among women, highlighting their continued economic dependence within households.

Social life:

Social life in tribal communities reflects cultural beliefs, traditions, and practices that shape identity and relationships. Women play a key role as custodians of this heritage while adapting to changing socio-economic conditions. Findings show that most respondents strongly follow customs and traditions, with festivals and rituals widely observed (Veeranna, 2024; Saradha, 2020).

However, modernization and economic pressures are gradually altering traditional lifestyles, including a decline in Banjara attire and crafts. Institutional support and women's groups are helping preserve culture and promote economic independence (Talari, 2024). Although women's participation in local governance has increased due to reservations, decision-making often remains male-dominated (Rajender and Nagendra, 2025). Overall, social life reflects a blend of cultural continuity and gradual change.

Health:

Health is a fundamental component of human development and a key indicator of well-being in tribal communities, influenced by access to healthcare, awareness, nutrition, and socio-economic conditions. The findings indicate low healthcare utilization among Banjara women, as most seek medical care only during illness and rarely undergo regular check-ups (Veeranna, 2024). Early pregnancies, including those below 18 years, are common, and while many deliveries are institutional, some women still depend on home deliveries, reflecting disparities in healthcare access. Studies further highlight a high prevalence of health issues such as anaemia, hypertension, tuberculosis, diabetes, and malnutrition (Saradha, 2020; Lal, 2015). Anaemia remains particularly widespread, along with genetic concerns like beta-thalassemia among Banjara populations (Patil *et al.*, 2024). Limited awareness, transportation barriers, and

socio-economic constraints continue to restrict access to healthcare (Chandana and Kumar, 2020), although awareness of diseases like COVID-19 shows some improvement (Joshi). Overall, these findings underscore the need to strengthen healthcare accessibility, improve nutrition, and promote preventive health practices among tribal women.

Decision making:

Decision-making is a key indicator of empowerment and reflects the level of autonomy and participation individuals have within the household and society. In rural and tribal communities, decision-making power is often influenced by traditional gender roles, socio-economic status, and cultural norms. Women's involvement in family and political decisions is crucial for achieving equality and inclusive development.

The findings indicate that decision-making is largely dominated by male members, with a majority of respondents stating that men alone take family decisions (Veeranna, 2024). Although some women participate jointly, independent decision-making by women remains limited. While a significant proportion of respondents actively participate in voting, many still rely on their husbands' choices, reflecting restricted political autonomy. Despite moderate interest in politics, only a small number of women hold political positions. However, studies suggest a gradual shift, with women increasingly participating in productive activities and decision-making processes (Lal, 2016). Overall, these patterns highlight the persistence of gender inequality in decision-making, while also indicating slow progress towards women's empowerment and leadership.

Gender:

Gender is a key social determinant that shapes roles, responsibilities, and access to opportunities within communities. In rural and tribal settings, gender norms strongly influence child preferences, educational access, and decision-making power. Examining these dynamics is essential for identifying inequalities and fostering balanced and inclusive development.

The findings indicate the persistence of gender-based disparities. Veeranna (2024) reported that 44.76% of respondents preferred sons, compared to 24.76% who preferred daughters, while 21.91% expressed equal preference, reflecting a continued bias toward male children. Additionally, 50.48% of respondents favored

early marriage for daughters, whereas only 28.57% supported higher education, suggesting limited emphasis on girls' long-term development. Supporting this, Rathore (2024) found a pronounced son preference among tribal families, with 87.5% desiring male children. Reproductive decisions are often influenced by male family members or elders, with a high prevalence of female sterilization (83.3%) and reported pressure from husbands or in-laws. Low contraceptive use is further shaped by fear of side effects, lack of awareness, and spousal disapproval. Sharada (2020) also highlights the role of low educational attainment, noting that widespread illiteracy restricts awareness and empowerment.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that gender inequality remains deeply entrenched, characterized by strong son preference, early marriage of daughters, and limited prioritization of female education. Women's autonomy in reproductive and social decision-making is often constrained by familial and societal pressures. Although some awareness of family planning exists, low literacy and entrenched norms continue to impede equitable practices. Addressing these issues requires focused efforts to promote female education, challenge son preference, and strengthen women's independent decision-making, thereby advancing gender equality and empowerment.

The impact of Globalisation and modernisation:

Globalization and modernization are key forces driving social, economic, and cultural change, particularly in rural and tribal communities where they reshape traditional lifestyles, occupations, and gender roles. Findings show that a majority of respondents perceive globalization positively, noting increased opportunities for deprived women and shifts in traditional attitudes (Veeranna, 2024). At the same time, persistent barriers such as social taboos, superstitions, and patriarchal norms continue to limit women's empowerment. Modernization has also influenced cultural practices, including dress, lifestyle, and occupations, with many women gradually moving beyond traditional livelihoods due to technological advancements. Changes in marriage patterns, food habits, and social behavior further reflect this transition (Saradha), although limited exposure to mass media restricts awareness and adaptation for many (Amgoth *et al.*, 2021).

Despite these positive changes, tribal women continue to face socio-economic challenges. While

modernization has improved awareness, confidence, and access to opportunities, many women remain economically and socially disadvantaged (Veeranna, 2024). Factors such as education, occupation, health, and resource access play a crucial role in shaping empowerment levels (Pushpalatha, 2023). Overall, globalization and modernization have created pathways for development but have not fully dismantled deep-rooted inequalities. Strengthening education, improving access to development programs, and addressing social barriers are essential to ensure inclusive and sustainable empowerment of tribal women.

Conclusion:

Banjara women in Telangana occupy a central role in sustaining the social, cultural, economic, and religious fabric of their communities. Despite being active contributors and valuable economic assets, they continue to face significant challenges such as low levels of education, limited employment opportunities, poor health conditions, and restricted control over resources. These constraints result in economic dependency and social marginalization, ultimately affecting their quality of life. The need for economic and social empowerment of Banjara women is therefore critical to address persistent inequalities, discrimination, and exploitation.

Policy implications:

Promote awareness, education, and social change: Conduct awareness campaigns on rights under the 73rd Amendment, encourage gender sensitization, promote girl child education, reduce early marriage, and strengthen adult literacy and residential schooling initiatives.

Strengthen economic and leadership empowerment: Provide skill development and vocational training (entrepreneurship, financial management, tailoring, handicrafts, digital skills) along with capacity-building programs to enhance leadership and participation of tribal women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Improve access to essential services: Ensure better allocation of resources for education and healthcare, focusing on maternal health, scholarships, and community-based solutions such as mobile healthcare units to address local barriers.

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