Chapter 6
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"To awaken the people it is the women who must be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves, the nation moves" – Jawahalal Nehru.

Women constitute the silent half of the world’s population. Empirical studies on women started only during the nineteenth century and the women’s issues have attracted the attention of social scientists.

In tribal society, women are found to have occupying a prominent place as a critical variable to understand the changing phenomenon. The tribal women are constantly trying to improve their condition in society and some situations attempting to enter in the fold of caste system.

Coimbatore is an inland district in the southern part of the Indian peninsula. It is known as ‘Manchester of South India’. According to a popular legend the name “Coimbatore” is derived from “Kovanputhur” after a Irula tribal chief who ruled over this region. At present it has a population of 42,71,856. Out of this the Scheduled Tribes population is only 0.68%

If we look around the tribal society in Coimbatore District, it is obvious that tribal women are enclosed and brought up in the culture of silence, their life starting continuing and ending up in the darkness of silence. As tribal women hold up half the tribal population, it becomes imperative that they should be brought out of their shell of darkness, silence and powerlessness into the mainstream of development and to the process of gaining control over the self, ideology and the resource determining power.

The tribal women occupies an important place in the social structure of the tribal society. The tribal society though very different from the rest, has been an integral part of the Indian society. In Coimbatore District, tribal women enjoys the status and freedom. The birth of a daughter in the tribal society is not considered bad. So female infanticide is
not known the them. Tribal women have freedom in the selection of mate provided it is in conformity with the marital norms of the tribes and they are not suffering from the evils of child marriage and the there is no dowry death. In tribal society even widowhood does not disqualify a woman from marrying again. Even though it is the man who decides the major issues of the family in the tribal society, before taking decision the matter is placed before the family. The legal position of the tribal women is low and dependent.

The mode of living of the tribal communities passed through a series of changes by their relationship with non tribal neighbours. Changes can be noticed in their life style, in naming their children, dress pattern, hairstyle, food habits and in recreation activities. By the efforts of the government and non-governmental organizations changes can be seen in their housing pattern, transport, source of lighting and communication

Education in the key catalyst to the development of human resources. The Government has taken a number of steps for the educational development of tribal women, which includes opening of schools, provision of incentives like scholarships, reservation of seats, free tuition, transport, midday meals scheme, clothing, supply of free reading materials etc.. Though Government tried to attract tribal girls to school by providing all these schemes, a slow but steady growth only can be seen in Coimbatore. And tribals are not much concerned and aware of higher studies for their girls.

Tribal women economy was connected only with forest and forest economy, And their economy can not be differentiated from that of the economy of the region. But this traditional economy of the tribals got a new exposure with the introduction of development plans in their habitations by Five Year Plans, Tribal Sub-Plan, Welfare Schemes like TAHDCO, TRYSEM, DWCRA, TRIFED, NSFDS, SSTDC, JGSY, EAS, SGRY, IJRY and SGSY. And introduction of WSHG in Coimbatore District has brought a new era in the economic development of tribal women. There is a slow change brought about when a small portion of this tribal women, came in to contact with economically more advanced people.

Human beings do not live alone, and in order to meet their needs of food and shelter, companionships and love they form into associations and build institutions
through which such needs are satisfied. As a result, arrangement for the political power has been changing from time to time as mere awareness an election, casting their votes, becoming member of a political party and entering into election campaigns.

It is important for the tribal women to be conscious of her rights and duties for equal opportunities as well as taking the opportunities given to them. Awareness creation regarding socio-economic health and culture related issues are required for tribal women. Unless the developmental programmes concentrate on tribal women the tribal society as a whole can not be developed. Thus improvement in the status of tribal women, through all possible ways must be considered to improve their overall quality of life.

The educational system for tribal women must be differentiated from the other sections of the society. In addition to bookish knowledge to the tribal girls, by restricting them to classroom, they have to be given more practical training along with the basic education.

In addition to education, computer training should be given to the tribal girls who are studying with lot of expectations in this competitive computer world. Without all round development of individuals not much can be achieved and fulfilled by introducing computer in all fields.

Apart from education, socio-economic activities should also be incorporated particularly on child care, hygiene, public health, social work and so forth for an integrated development. The younger generation of tribal women should be given qualitative attention as far as development is concerned.

By dedicated efforts of both government and non-governmental organizations, social economic and educational changes among tribes, particularly tribal women will pick-up right direction and speed.

Tribal women must recognize the fact that the constitution of India ordains them to actively take part in the overall planning of the villages where they live. The NGOs being associated with tribal women could also concentrate a lot in this awareness generation campaign. They have the positive bent of mind to work sincerely. The shape
of the leadership is to be grown proportionately, so that the representation and say of women are duly honoured and recognized.

The bulk of the tribals in Coimbatore district have remained in close interaction with other sections of the population for a long time. Such contacts have generated changes in tribal society. It is true that changes have been fast.

There is no doubt, that the women in tribal society in Coimbatore district have benefited in the process of development since independence. Tribal households with social, economic, educational and political entitlements have been able to enhance the condition of tribal women in the near future.