CHAPTER-4

GENDER STRATIFICATION AND TRIBAL CULTURE:
SOME ISSUES

"Discrimination against women shall mean any distinction exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of women of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

—— Women: challenges to the year 2000.

Gender is one of the several bases of stratification. There are no societies in which men do not, in some aspects of social life, have more wealth, status and influence than women (Giddens. A 1989) Women in different societies in different periods manifest a homogenous trait, that of a non-entity; (Singh, Indu Prakash 1988).

Sex (male/female) is a physical distinction; gender (masculine / feminine) is social and cultural. Social factors determine the existing differences regarding opportunities, rewards and limitations of men and women. It is through social processes and social institutions like family, marriage, kinship, education and training, gender roles (like women doing house work and men working outside home) are shaped and reshaped in all human societies. The term “gender role” de-emphasizes the biological aspects of being a female or a male and it focuses on the social aspects.
Gender roles, and then is the sum total of attitudes and behaviours, rights and responsibilities socially linked to one's sex.

Although masculine and feminine gender is usually associated with male and female, yet this is not an absolute correlation. The division of labour between men and women in different societies is based exclusively on gender roles rather than sex roles, determined by culture rather than biology. Virtually all human behaviour is learned behaviour. Gender is thus together with age, a widely used means by which societies have some form of division of labour and process of specialisation.

Even though women are divided in various caste, religions, class, race, nations they on the basis of the discrimination, oppression encountered by them can be grouped together, sharing the disadvantage of being women in a male dominated society. The relation between men and women is a power relationship. In fact, power is always relational compared to women; men have more power in most societies. However, the forms and execution of power may differ.

Indu Prakash Singh (1990) reports that women in Indian society, have been captured by the very institutions which attempt to safeguard and protect their lives and interests, namely; family, marriage, educational institutions, employment establishments, political mega structures, policing outfits, legal machinery etc. whether it is child marriage, infanticide, foeticide, wife battering, sati, widowhood, bigamy, polygeny, sexual harassment, physical torture, mental cruelty, rape prostitution, suicide etc, all these forms of oppression of Indian women map and draw the contours of our patriarchal society, which gives men overriding powers.

R. Crompton and M. Mann (1986) examines that although women today share certain status attributes in common simply by virtue of their sex,
their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their own occupation, but more commonly by that of their fathers or husbands. And if wives and daughters of unskilled labourers have something in common with the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners there can be no doubt that the difference in their overall situation are for more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female statuses were felt to be as great as to override difference of a class kind would be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification.

Likewise it is clear women that no matter which cultural group she belongs to face discrimination through norms set by the various social institutions.

**Tribal Culture and Women**

Culture can be most simply defined as a set of shared ideas or the customs, beliefs and knowledge that characterize a way of life. The role differentiation between man and woman is determined by caste, religion and cultural norms. Caste rules limit individual freedom for men and women through marriage regulation, through restriction on social and economic mobility. But in tribal society social structure along with cultural norms and values system are important determinants of woman’s roles and position in that society. Apart from this, traditions are also a major influence in shaping attitudes as well as behaviour patterns of any social group.

Religious values, myths and norms are often held to vest power in women, but whatever this informal power could give to women, it give them only limited access to wealth and authority and they could not mediate directly with the outside world. Women’s right to property, inheritance and their entitlement to resources of daily living depend on their placement and
recruitment to the family – the household. The location of their residence at marriage, nature of alliances, conditions attached them and so on. More reciprocal relations generally ensure a better status for woman in her conjugal home. Different kinds of families provide different degrees of space and authority for woman.

The culture of the tribals has symbiotic relationship with forests and land which was their major source of their livelihood. The concept of tribal culture is essentially relativistic; culture relativism means that the human thoughts and deeds should not be judged by any outside standards, but only by those of the society or group in which they take place. The nature of cultural pattern found in primitive society is not applicable to modern societies, as the nations are not patterned in terms of uniformities of individual behaviour, they are extremely heterogeneous entities, whose total pattern are interrelated parts of different kinds. Tribal culture on the other hand has a pattern or configuration. Pattern has a considerable variety of meaning but it expresses some underlying consistency and unity, a kind of overall integration. Pattern also connotes structuring; it is difficult to express "structure" concretely except in terms of some special component of culture such as social organisation. Ruth Benedict in "Pattern of culture" analyses pattern to be synonymous with basic attitude, life view or value system shared by all tribal members and thereby giving of behaviour. The concept of tribal culture emphasizes shared behaviour.

Conceptualisation of tribal culture in terms of it normative, pattern and relativistic aspects are useful tools of analysis and comparison, but its utility is limited while dealing with cultural change.
Tribal Culture and Patriarchy

Tribal society of the area studied is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The man is the head of the household, though substantial amount of freedom is given to woman within the family. But she has no power in the public sphere.

Patriarchy is not simply control over woman’s body in the sphere of reproduction; it is control over her total labour. Woman’s labour is exchanged for consumption, which is determined by the male head of the household. The popular assumption that the family is a homogenous group or that all member of household derived equal benefits has been considered false and it has highlighted over work deprivation and new form of oppression. A woman’s life is deeply embedded in the household in the family. Maithreyi Krishnaraj and Karuna Chanana (1989) in their study of “Gender and Household Domain” have clearly stated that the household is the primary arena for age and sex role, for forging kin solidarity, for socialization and economic cooperation. A decision to migrate or female member’s marriage are actions that call for readjustment in the household. This is the fundamental dilemma for woman. As their fate is linked to the household, they identify strongly with its welfare and yet the fear of losing its security generates special vulnerabilities.

Episodes like widowhood, separation, divorce, abandonment are traumatic for woman. Woman’s position within the household is subject to the additional influence of the placement of that household in the social hierarchy. No matter, whether a woman is in an urban sector or a rural area household. It makes a difference of which caste she is and class placement also has a bearing on her position in the household- whether she is landed or landless. It is therefore important to place the woman in a household within
this larger social order. The specific daily living such as the allocation of tasks, experiences of work and leisure, rendering and receiving nurturance, conflicts, and decisions regarding employment, migration, consumption, and children are all subject to the underlying age gender hierarchy.

Though it is widely known that the tribals have an equalitarian social structure (the concepts of caste and class are absent) based on community living and in-built system of reciprocity. This pattern did not undergo such change notwithstanding feudal and colonial exploitation over a long period of time. But the socio-cultural laws are highly discrimination against woman in respect of the distribution of economic work and economic returns. The women have to perform the monotonous work of transplanting, weeding and having but the right over the produce is that of the male member of the society. However, unlike the non-tribal woman, the tribal women have some control over some forest and minor agricultural products. In addition to the sex-based attitudinal variation that are reflected through her role and interaction in family. A woman is considered inferior and subordinate to men. Subordination of women in this respect is universally accepted among tribals. The roots of this lie in their being patriarchal where the important position through succession goes to male only. Succession to female is an alternative only in exceptional situation. But still the patriarchal customs are so strong that at puts limitations to such situations.

There were many changes in the position of woman in these tribes ranging from foraging hordes to agriculturist village communities. In the foraging situation access to productive resources (the forest) is that of the whole band. Membership of a band, which may be temporary, determines access to such resources. Income however is that of the individual family. Within the family, there is no notion of the income of the male head of the
household. In fact as seen in the Birhor, since women do the major marketing, they basically control the use of income. There is no accumulation of any substance. While patrilocality is the norm, matrilocality does not carry any disadvantages. There is little notion of male control of female sexuality, infertility itself is not such a problem and there is no notion of perpetuating the lineage. But still the patriarchal norms define the clear division of labour. Men were hunters and women gatherers. In any society power and prestige are held by those who control the distribution of valued goods beyond the family. Hunting was more prestigious than gathering since the hunted animal was distributed to the whole community, while women gathered enough food or water for her family only.

With land becoming the main productive resource, one which is it produced, there are definite rules of access based on kinship and lineage. In settled agriculture, community access to land is combined with allotment to individual families, essentially to the male head of the household. Whatever accumulation takes places, basically in the form of land is in male line. Patrilocality ensures that in this form of partly communal property, women are the first historic category of non-owning workers, a position that is somewhat mitigated by their continuing to have definite life interest rights in land. The tribes now also have notions of “purity of women” and perpetuation of the lineage, in order to be able to pass on the results of accumulation viz. land. It is with the establishment of individual property, that the tribal woman looses relative autonomy in her own sphere of actively leading to strict division of labour. Strong patriarchy notions with the tribal society lead to another important inequality which is of political participation. The traditional village assembly (Panchayat) is all male institution. Women are excluded from this traditional political organisation.
Men owned the land and strict rules of residence ensured patrilocality. This enabled men to utilize and appropriate women’s labour for accumulation within the male line. For women labour did not mean ownership, the two were separate. In fact, the very possibility of women expending their labour power on land, are now dependent upon their relation to men, whether fathers or husbands. Men control over the process of agricultural production is reflected in the strong taboos against women ploughing, in some cases against women even touching the plough. Male control over the produce of the land is seen strongly in the Munda custom whereby the male head of the household alone has the right to take grain out of the storage bin (mora).

Patriarchy is not simply control over women’s labour in the sphere of reproduction; rather it is control over their total labour. Women do not control accumulation, but they loose any autonomy in both the labour process and in consumption. What is instituted by patriarchy is a relation of production within the family, whereby women’s labour is exchanged for consumption, which in turn is determined by the male head of the household. The object of the male control is not just that part of women’s labour as reproducers rather than it is the entire labour of women, whether for production or reproduction. One can observe changes in the control over labour from the relative autonomy of those who labour, to a step by step institution of the full male control over agricultural income within the tribal society. The accumulation that results from agricultural labour under male control and involves the alienation of the labour of women, which they performs as labourer, but the product of which they do not control as owners. The process of alienation of women’s labour within the family is accompanied by a corresponding control over aspects of women’s social
existence, over marriage, sexually free movement and so on, along with the regular use of violence to “keep women in their place”. But alienation of tribal women’s labour within the family is still partial in Jharkhand that full alienation, which is characteristic of patriarchy, has not been established here. The reasons for this absence lie in the importance of gathering and the continuation of forms of communal property in land.

**Division of Labour among Tribal Communities**

The division of labour is quite different in both foraging tribes and among the settled agriculturist. This division of labour is not something natural but inevitably connected with particular relations of production can be seen in the role of certain taboo or prohibition. In the gender relation of foraging communities there is a division of labour into somewhat separate but equal spheres, with an overall male domination. Among these forging communities like Birhor, the division of labour between men and women are less emphasised than among the settle agricultural communities. The Birhor depends on forest for their livelihood, which was seen as a common resource, where residence gave a right to use these and no notion of any corporate property being attached to the land. Gathering provided the main means for procuring a diet. Both man and woman joined in hunting, though the deep forests are regarded as taboo for woman. Both man and woman collected chop fibre form the forest, while the whole family including children, joined in rope making. The gathering of roots, tubers, leaves and so on was the special task of woman and girl, while Birhor settlement had council composed of both men and women, as well as political participation. But Birhor tribes already exhibit a clear division of labour. This is most specific in case of child rearing and preparation of food in the home. At the
same time, in this and other activities as well, they do not exist the strict taboos and strong notion of what is and what is not say man’s work. There is a large element of sharing in the jobs, including “House Work”. They does exist a general dominance of men over women, which is reflected in the male monopoly of leadership position, but this dominance does not extends to all spheres of women’s activity. Women have a considerable autonomy and decisions about their production, consumption and mobility. Control over sexuality, reflected in marriage rules and rights over women, is not so prominent in this tribe.

Among the settled agrarian communities such as the Munda has land santhal the village community is basically in a form of corporate community. The lands were held in common by the village community and were allotted to individual families or lineage. Rather than the clan or bond possessing a piece of land it is the lineage (Khunt) that is the actual possessor. With this a two field distinction is introduced. The second is that between the superior lineage of the original settlers (Khunktidars) and other subsidiary lineages. These subsidiary lineages had occupancy rights, but were not full-fledged members of the village community. These interestingly were mainly relatives from the female side. The first is between owing and non-owing produces between men and women. The gender dimension of institutional arrangements reveals that women related to this communal property only as workers and not as owners. Women access to resources was thus mediated by the patriarchal village community. Among the settled agriculturist women provided much of the hard labour. They undertook almost every form of heavy work. Transplanting paddy, reaping, carrying earth and so on along side men and these tasks were not regarded as
sharply distinct. Gathering of forest products and fishing were common occupation for women is evident from this Santhal song:

\[\text{Let us together, girl! Go to tiko stream,}\]
\[\text{Let us together, girl! Go to our own woods.}\]
\[\text{In our jungle, girl! Let us gather leaves.}\]
\[\text{In Tiko stream, girl! Let us catch fish.}\]

(Triosi 1978: 48, Vinita Damodran 2002: 140)

In all the agriculturist tribes of Jharkhand, there are universal taboos against women ploughing or even touching the plough and against women roofing the hut. The very strong taboos against such activities are themselves understandable only if such activity had, in fact been carried out by women in an early period. Prohibition enforces with dire sanction, were necessary to enforce a new division of labour. For example, husking of paddy is considered unimportant agricultural work, so it is done only by women. It is considered below men’s dignity to that or any housework. The creating work of ploughing is done by men only and it is believed that calamity will arrive if a woman is touching the plough.

In the agriculture prevailing in Jharkhand, women play the major role in all agricultural operations other than ploughing. Overall their contribution to even field labour itself is more than that of men. The social prohibition on women ploughing is the key to establishing a division of labour, which implies both a political hierarchy and a form property. The prohibition on roofing is a way of emphasizing man’s superiority in the home and woman’s dependence on them for a home. The priority of division of labour and control of labour does not however necessarily hold for the development of
all subsequent stratification. But once established the new division of labour would have additional consequence in strengthening hierarchy.

**Tribal Egalitarian Tradition and Gender Relations**

Due to the egalitarian tradition of tribal communities the boundaries between the private and the public, between the women’s sphere and man’s sphere were not culturally elaborated. Even the taboos on hunting were not greatly either. Among many of settled agricultural communities, the ritual “Jani Sikhar” or women’s hunt of the Oraon, Munda, Santhal and Ho suggests an earlier period when women of there communities may have regularly participated in hunting, a participation that subsequently become ritual as weapons came under male monopoly.

Verrier Elwin (1975) observes that “Jani Sikhar” is a unique technique which has been derived to compensate women psychologically and symbolically for the discrepancy in social status. The custom of “Jani Sikhar” or women’s hunt seems to be compensatory function for the wrong women suffers from men. It seems to have originated in the myth describing how a number of Oraon women dressed as men routed a Raja and his army which invaded their country. The custom shows that although men may rule the country is much the women’s as the men’s.

Sachidananda (1979) examines that Jani Sikhar is held once every twelve years among the Munda, Ho, Santhal & Oraon tribes. Women dressed in masculine dress with bows, arrows, axes etc. take part in the hunt. They leave the village in a group in search of game and go to another village and take whatever they find. The wife of Parha Raja (tribal council chief) functions as the leader of the hunt in that locality. The women in the second village repeat the performance in the third village and thus the mock hunt proceeds in reality till many villages have participated and the village from
which the hunt started is reached. The girls collected the hunt such as fowl; goats, sheep, pigs etc. are considered to be the property of women. Now a day, the hunt is made a mere of recreation than anything else. Therefore compensatory function of women’s hunt has lost its significance in the course of time.

In patrilineal societies, hypergamous ideology stress gender hierarchy. But the tribal tradition of Jharkhand stress upon egalitarianism. There is a no hierarchal relationship between wife givers and wife takers, not even between bride’s brother and the groom. But some types of gender hierarchy between husband and wife in ideological form do prevail. Moreover the custom of bride-price among the tribals, itself is a mark of respect for the women. The service of a daughter is equally important to a tribal family. Hence the bride price is payable by the groom’s family to the girl’s family of orientation at the time of her wedding which is like a compensation for the father loss of her service. Tiplut Nongbri (1998) in her discussion of bride-price, points out that in tribal society women are treated as mere commodities to be easily procured by men through bride-price. A custom that was originally intended to compensate the girl’s family for the loss of an economically active member, bride-price has thus become a convenient justification for men to abuse their wives and then treat them as disposable commodities.

There was no discrimination between boys and girls in the matter of food. As recorded in the Oraon marriage sermon by William Archer (1940) a colonial administrator, which advised: “Imagine you are out for hunting boy and you kill a deer? You will bring it home and the girl will cook it, when she has cooked it she will cut it up. But mark for all the others. She must serve the flesh on a tiny tamarind leaf, but for herself she must take it from a
large korkot leaf. Attend again when the bull is killed for meat, girl must insist on having the flesh, on having only flesh-nothing else. The boy will have the bones, nothing more than the bones.”(Vinita Demodaran (2002): 141). The command to the girl to take a lager share of a meal is perhaps based on a sense of the greater survival value of women for the community.

A tribal woman certainly enjoys more freedom of movement than their counterpart in wider society. Purdah is unknown among the adivasis. There is free is free mixing and conversation with visitors. Women in the house may drink Haria (rice beer) with their husbands or others. And commonly dancing is an important part of adivasi social life. Pre-marital sex is not frowned upon, though it is expected that the rules of clan exogamy and tribal endogamy will be observed. Menstrual taboos are not generally prevalent among the Jharkhand tribes.

There is a considerable presence of women in the market. They come to sell their forest products and also to make weekly purchases for their families. Young girls, dressed in their best, almost invariably with flowers in hair, not only go about their business of buying and selling, but more importantly, meet with young boys from other villages. Most marriages are decided in these market meetings. Thus, the market is a very important social space for women.

The institution of youth dormitory allows free mixing of boys and girls of the same age group. It is called “Dummeria” among the Oraons and “Giti-ora” among the Mundas. This youth dormitory functions as an institution of reciprocity and very much deep-rooted in their socio-economic and religious system. A senior member is selected as a leader and she is responsible for the discipline and other affairs of association. She acts as an intermediary between the village and the member of the association.
Its activities are interwoven with the socio-economic and religious life of the village. Hunter (1868) reports that the officials like jog majhi and jog paramanik among the santhals supervise the activities of the unmarried boys and the girls in youth dormitory. The girl’s dormitory of Oraon is known as “Pelerpa”. It is interesting to observe that an elderly male member is elected as a leader of the girl’s dormitory. He of course, is assisted by a senior and experienced female member known as Barka dangrin. The members are involved in many socio-religious functions of the community as a whole. It is their duty to cook at times of house building ceremony and reaping the paddy in batches when called for. The relationship between boys and girl’s dormitory is of dancing and singing together as a part of pleasure oriented tribal life. According to Roy (1928) there were specific taboo to prevent the boys and girls to spend their rights together in the dormitory. He mentions of the superstition that if a girl enters into Dhumkeria (dormitory) of the boys the boys may loose their eye sight and even the girl also. The dormitory may be located at the centre of the village, in front of the boy’s dormitory or at any corner or at the out skirts of the village. Sometimes a special building is constructed for this purpose. The members are trained in the dormitory not only in the hazards and practical aspects of life but also in the finer and aesthetic parts like dance, music, folklore and tradition of their cultural heritage and romantic part of their life. Free mixing of boys and girls is never thought to be unchaste. Among tribal community in general chastity begins with marriage, juvenile chastity is not the rule. In reality the sexual infidelity by the female after marriage seems to be rare in tribal society then among the civilized communities. The dormitory is the centre of village life and education centre as well. In the words of Haimendorf (1948) it regulates the relations of every men and women, the other members of the society and
forms the framework for the numerous mutual obligations between individuals and groups. At the same time it strengthens the sense of unity. But in modern times the dormitory as a visible social institution has lost its importance.

In Chotanagpur, women of both the settled agricultural communities and the foraging ones experienced a greater sense of participation in communal life. Even in settled agricultural communities when women desired property rights, they had some measure of control over their labour and work was something that men and women did for each other. The tribal women have a wide range of freedom within the four walls of their community. The Santhal had devised a formidable institution called "Bitlaha" against those who violated their women and their norms. The facts reflect the tribal ethos which recognizes the role of women in a healthy way. But with the onslaught of colonial rule all this under went a great change.

**Tribal Women, Land Rights and Witchcraft**

In land system, the community remained the paramount power. This has limited the scope for the development of individual forms of property, which alone could, perhaps, have developed into full pledge private property. Land as the private property of men (whether held by them individually or communally) is an important factor in the development of that overall control by men, which is called patriarchy. The foundation of the village community is that of the male descendants of the re-claimer of the soil. *Khutkathi* system of land ownership is defined in these terms. Within the system of descent, the land is inherited in the male lines, but women nevertheless, have had certain definite though limited, rights in the land.
Both W.G. Archer (1984) and Govind Kelkar and Dev Nathan (1991) in their studies have described that tribal customs in Jharkhand has a fine gradation of various rights in land that women in different situations can have. The rights of unmarried daughters, wives, widows and so on have all been elaborately spelled out. These rights were of two kinds, one is a life-interest in land, a right to manage land and its produce and the other is a right to a share of the produce of the land. The second right, a right not to manage or use the land as one wishes but to have a share of produce, is again of two kinds. The first is maintenance (Khorposh) right. The second is to a share of produce which may be over and above such maintenance needs—that of an unmarried daughter to a small portion of any crop she has helped harvest, which may be accumulated by her or be used to buy her own clothes, ornaments etc. This in poorer families would only be a way of assuring maintenance for the daughters. In case of better-off families, this share of the income can be used by the daughter to say, lend out money or purchase a goat etc. many a times such accumulation from share of the harvest can also be exchanged against a part of the family land. Whatever is accumulated from such income belongs to the women and can be taken by her husband’s home, where it will remain her property. A woman can accumulate some assets. Income from her wage labour or her own sale of forest produce gathered by her etc. can be used for such accumulation. In case when marriage breaks down, a father or brother may keep some land for the women. But this is not something a woman can claim as a right, since remarriage usually takes place so any such allotment is only temporary. In the event of a couple being divorced after child-bearing age, when remarriage is not possible then the man has to give her sufficient land for maintenance and to allow her to live apart. A wife has thus no rights in land.
whatever her relation to the land it is through the mediation of her husband. But still such a right to decide one's own consumption and accumulation would give the women (especially, daughters) a superior position as compared to that where there every act of consumption has to be approved before hand by the head of the house.

Among the tribals, there was a residual female right to land in the form of a life interest of widows in land. This while, gave some dignity through management of production and control over consumption to widows did not affect the process of accumulation, which continued undisturbed in the male line. A widow becomes, a substitute father for her children. So as long as she lives, she inherits all the land and movables. She can even a temporarily mortgage the land. Of course, in all the cases of widow’s right, the right is conditional on her remaining in the village and her not remarrying. Khorposh is a right, not just to be maintained, but a right to the land. It is a Khorposh’s tenure, that is a land right, a right to manage the land and to supervise cultivation. The life interest of a widow in her husband’s land is the right that has been most under attack and in which there have been numerous changes. In the context of widow’s right to land in Jharkhand Govind Kelker and Dev Nathan (1991) provides a three phases in the degradation of widow’s land right can be seen- in the first, the widow has rights equal to those of her late husband, in the second, she has rights over a plot of land sufficient for her own maintenance, in the third, any independent access to land is negated and the widow merely lives on maintenance provided by the male heirs of her husband. Further maintenance is elastic, when consumption is controlled by others, it is always possible but even become inevitable that for widows who are seen merely living out their time, and consumption will be reduced to the barest minimum possible. But this
third phase in the degradation of widow’s right has not yet been fully reached, but the pressures in that direction are visible. Most people, men in particular have come to mean by the term Khorposh mere maintenance and not a right to posses land for maintenance. But position of widows in tribal society is different from Hindu society. Different in two situations come from: (i) the continued participation of such adivasi widows in labour, both in field and forest as well as the home as a result of which widows can have there own income from the collection and sale of various kinds of forest produce and, (ii) the right which widows still have, in the event of maltreatment by their relatives, to demand the allotment of a separate plot of land for their maintenance.

Another situation in which a women has the most comprehensive land rights on par with men, is when she is married in “Gharjamai” form i.e. where the husband comes to reside in women’s home (matrilocality and not according to the normal patrilocal rule.). The Gharjamai form is normally used when a man has no sons to inherit the land. Earlier this form was not restricted to such a situation. A daughter married in this form becomes like a son and has the same rights to land as any other son. With village approval, any women could be married in the Gharjamai form. But Gharjamai married is not so easy among the Mundas, as there are always male agnates waiting for opportunity to get some more land.

During the British rule as the landlord and the colonial state whittled away at the rights of the patriarchal village community, customary law, which had attempted to maintain some measure of land interest for women, was abandoned. Khorposh tenures suffered all through the late nineteenth century. Dispute over land rights between men and women reflected a situation of growing crisis. Women’s land interests were clearly not
perceived a strategically admissible. Something similar happened in Chotanagpur, resulting in a series of land dispute in this period. And where later women challenged men in colonial courts and attempted to recover maintained rights. The discourses of resistance were drawn here from particular claims, where women’s experience of insecure rights to land challenged the dominant discourse with customary law. W. Archer (1984) had recorded a number of cases by widows and daughters who were bent on acquiring rights beyond customary law.

A clear deterioration in the rights of women also shows the growing ascendancy of the male relatives whose interest is to take over the land as soon as possible and not even to wait till the death of the widow. The ramification of this struggle to restrict women’s rights to land and its manifestation is particularly shown in the form of witch hunting. But V.Xaxa (2004) points out that witchcraft is much more complex than a practice associated only with property rights. In fact, a number of witch-hunting cases have been reported from time to time from tea gardens of jalpaiguri district in West Bengal, where access to property was hardly of consequences.

Vinita Damodran (2002) studied “Gender, Forest and Famine in 19th century Chotanagpur”. In which she argued that attacks on women were primarily motivated by greed for often it was single women whose properties were then acquired by male relatives – the economic argument alone does not allow us to understand why women were the primary target. According to her the violence against women needs to be seen in the context of the breakdown of the ecological moral economy. A new and disturbing trend was also beginning to be noticed in settlement reports and this was a dramatic increase in ritualized violence against women. As land disputes
increased, the pressures of rapid ecological changes combined with the erosion of common property rights and deformation meant that women were increasingly made targets of male violence in the context of an economic and ecological crisis. She argues that the rise in witch-hunting in the latter half of the 19th century was linked to the breakdown of the social norms and the increasing pressure on the community as a result of colonial interventions. As the disease, disorder and famine become endemic so did witch hunting. The knowledge of the medicine men or the Ojhas that ultimately cured the diseases, with the receding forests and inability of the Ojhas to procure medicinal plants and animal products for their remedies, they were increasingly found to be turning to the exorcism and ascribing the causation of diseases to individuals, usually women. So it was possible to argue that as traditional means of coping with illness broke down and deforestation, debt and diseases become the lot tribals, ritualized violence against women increased.

Witch hunting is not only related to economic level, but also to the ideological and political contradictions internal to tribal society and to the forms of transition that is undergoing. W. Archer (1974) describes the origin of witchcraft by a Santhal myth, which also explains the struggle between the sexes, within the family and in tribal society as a whole. As the myth goes:- 

*One day the village men assembled "we are men, they said. Why are we disobeyed? If we say a word or two to women, they reply with twenty words of anger. We can bear this state no longer." Then they said, "let us go to Marang Buru and learn an art so that these women will respect us more. At mid night they met in the forest and called to Marang Buru. 'Grandfather' they said, many men are so harassed they have come to see you". Marang buru came to them. What is troubling you grand children? He said. They told him their trouble and implored him to teach them how to keep their*
womenfolk in order. The women then came to know that the men had approached Marang buru to teach them something. The women got the men drunk, dressed up in men's clothes and tricked Marang buru into teaching them. "Marang buru then taught them the incantations and gave them the power of eating men." The next day, when the men came, Marang buru realized that he had been tricked by the women. He then made the men "expert in the art of witch finding."

In this Santhal myths women through trickery acquired knowledge which they had no right to like wise there is a categorization of women and men into witches and witch-finder respectfully, was an essential part of the process of establishing the authority of men. The most important of these rituals (for example in the sarna, or to the abe bongas, the household sprits) are taboo for women. They were also prevented from participating in any of the sacrifices to various deities, and to partaken the most valued part of the sacrificial meat. They can't even participate in the ordinary public worship. Which participation in these rituals gave men their authority, exclusion from the same ritual deprived women of authority. So, men alone can become Ojhas-spirit healer-cum-witch finder. Kelker and Nathan (1991) argued that historically women had a more important role in healing. For instance, among Mundas there is no original Mundari word for a male healer. There is a Mundari word for witch-finder (Deora), but for the word for male healer, ojha is of Indo-Aryan origin. The specialist male healer ojha may have well been relatively male late institutions among the Mundas. Like wise witch hunting may well be a part of the process of reducing women's role in healing.

Buddadeb Chaudhari (1992) examines that the witchcraft seems to be a technique of social control. The belief that ill-tempered old people are accused of being witches enforces friendship and social co-operation and the
fear of going out at night reduces opportunities for extra marital sexual relations of widow women. He also ruled out another possibility that in a patrilineal societies like of Mundas, Hos, Santhals, Kharias, and Oraons, the married women are all outsider(belonging to different kin group) and so witchcraft accusation are leveled against such women to maintain harmony and unity in patrilineal kin group.

What witch hunting reflects is on attack on the existing status of women. Both in the sphere of social authority in general and in that of land rights in particular, such an attack would not be necessary where a low status for women has been already well established. Witchcraft was formerly regarded as a mysterious power is now turned into the sources of all evil. Such an ideology is certainly conducive to the social process of controlling women. In Santhali, society where historically women had been more powerful witch hunting was also used to change the order of society and to force women into new gender roles. Like wise witch hunting is not the suppression of a rebellion, but the process of establishing the authority of men, the process of establishing patriarchy.

Gender Ideology and Tribal Welfare

V.K. Durga and D. L Prasada Rao (1994) in their comparative analysis of tribal and non-tribal women, observes that women’s status is governed by a similar ideas, which are purely cultural and men made. This distinct ideology is based on certain stereotypes which are a part of the culture of a society. There can be observed in the form of specific ways in which the roles of two sexes are distinguished are based on certain beliefs like women are weak, delicate and need to be protected, lack skills etc. beliefs of this kind are similar to both tribal and non-tribal societies. Man is
always given a status of pride as brave, strong caring, skillful and protector. Thus under the pretext of giving security women is labeled as inferior.

Gender is an important factor in the allocation of roles, state and power in all societies. In the traditional societies, socialization of boys and girls as well as child rearing beliefs and practices in general are organized on the basis of position, status and role of men and women, in the family and in society. In the patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilineal tribal society of Jharkhand, boys assume adult status within the same family where they are born and bought up. They are the permanent members of the family. A girl on the other hand is looked upon as a transient member of the family in which she is born and brought up because on marriage a girl has to be transferred to her husband’s family. It is in the latter family that she takes up her adult domestic roles. It is there that she gives birth to and takes care of her children and of her husband’s family. The development of appropriate personality characteristics and qualities for boys and girls during socialization process in the family emphasis this differential in their future adult roles. Thus this practice heavily discriminates against girls.

In tribal societies too, people prefer a baby to a girl because descent, inheritance and succession is through male line. Though male children are desired but there is no regret at the birth of a female child. A girl is an economic asset to her natal and affinal kin group. A parent gets economic return from a girl during marriage, but even then he prefers the birth of a boy especially among the settled agriculturist tribes because the perpetuation of lineage is moral important. Among the Mundari Khuntkkatidars, having a son is given more somewhat more importance than among the Santhals. Even Ghar jamai marriage is not so easy in Mundas.
Decision making power is an important aspect of the status. In a patrilineal society, this power is usually in the hands of the senior male members. So it is man who controls the children and family. Thus in tribal society, woman finds no place in local political organization. In a patrilineal society, a woman is valued more for reproductive capacity than her productive skills. The decision to mortgage property or acquire new property rests on men, although the woman contributes much to the family income. Major decisions of the family affairs rest with men.

Woman as a mother has some responsible status and role in any society. In spite of the importance as mother, her children do not belong to her, but to her husband and to his group. This instance of legitimization of children makes a men and his group to possess women as their exclusive property, the factors related to marriage, rules of residence, rules of descent and on the foundation of legitimization. These factors also govern the gender ideology, in the traditional tribal societies of Jharkhand. According to K. Gough (1972) and Leach (1961) legitimization of marriage is universal and resultant of marriage i.e. the children should be legitimate heirs of the group. A women’s duty is to give legitimate child or in other words socially recognised off springs to men and his kin group. The factor plays an important role either in associating or dissociating a woman from her group. This principle of legitimization goes hand in hand with marriage and identified through certain marriage payments like bride-price. Legitimate marriage and legitimate children are ideal situation in any tribal community. So there is a total role control over women’s sexuality as an important aspect of patriarchy.

Tribal societies of Jharkhand give freedom to a wife to divorce if there is any incompatibility between the spouses. But at the same time she is
deprived of material benefits which she was otherwise enjoying. It is quite likely that such an imbalance is to provide deterrent to a women’s wish to divorce moreover if a man divorce his wife, he can forgo the bride price paid by him for his marriage. But when a wife moves out, she has to refund the amount of it, which is a difficult proposition for her. As the practice the bride price goes to the girls parents and she didn’t have any share out of it. So she cannot get divorce that easily. Thus in reality, the norm for divorce discourages such a move by the wife. That way it provides a built-in-mechanism to discourage divorce. And extension of patrilineal ideology is that women is important only to perpetuate the line of descent, thus a women’s self respect in traditional families was protected not only through her father or husband but also through her son. So the ideal situation for a woman is to become a mother of a son, thus the role of mother is more valued in any tribal society like the wider society.

Bina Agarwal (1994) undertook study on “Gender and Land rights in South Asia.” She observes that the lack of effective property rights, especially the land is the main reason for their economic, social and political subordination in south Asia. In effective terms this ritual taboo for women against ploughing in Jharkhand makes dependency on men in settled cultivation unavoidable and greatly circumscribes women’s ability to farm independently. Moreover, patrilocality, village exogamy and long distance marriage as a norm serves a barrier to women’s ability to exercise direct control over land. Single women (unmarried and widowed) are particularly vulnerable to various forms of harassment by male kin, like beating or accusation of witchcraft.

Many practices make clear the lower, dependent position of women. When a women violets any of the sexual norm, it is her father or husband
who gas to pay. Extra marital sexual relations on the part of women are considered a violation of husband’s rights. Extra marital relations on the part of a man on the other hand, are not taken seriously. Again if a man commits the sin of having sexual relations with a non tribal, he can be readmitted into the tribe on breaking of relations with the non tribal woman and paying a fine. A woman who has sexual relation with a non tribal can not however the readmitted into the tribe. This attitude of strict tribal endogamy too related to the notion that purity of woman is attached with purity of tribe just like the caste system.

In Jharkhand, though the tribal woman is strong and energetic, yet considered a member of the weaker sex. She is attached to men folk and is regarded as their property. A Munda joke reflect prevalent attitudes “why do women, use both hands to wash their face and men only one?” The answer is “because women have two lords, viz. Singhbonga (Munda god) and her husband.”

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