CHAPTER-5

STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN the JHARKHAND REGION

"To call women the weaker section is a libel, it is men's injustice to women. If by strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then women is immeasurably superior to men. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater power of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her men could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being the future is with women"

-- Mahatma Gandhi in “Young India” [30th April, 1930]

Status originally a Latin word which means condition or rank (Etymological Dictionary of the English language- Oxford University press 1958). Status is the position of a person a member of a group entitled to certain rights (New encyclopedia Britannica vol.-ix 15th edition P537). It is the legal standing of a person legally enjoying certain rights or subject to certain limitations, conditions in respects e.g. infancy or majority position or standing in society, a profession or the like (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary V-II P2007).

Social status means the position of an individual in a social system with attendant rights and duties. In law, status refers to the legally enforceable capacities or limitations of persons but social scientists also include these rights and duties fixed by custom as well as by law. A more colloquial usage, favored by some sociologist refers specially to position
with respect to the distribution of prestige and honour and sometimes by extension of wealth, power or authority. Statuses are arranged in hierarchical or ranked system and relative status is a major factor determining the behaviour of people — (E.M. Kirpatrick (Eds.) Chamber of universal learners Dictionary 1983, P 730)

A study in the abstract is a position in particular patterns. The status of any individual means the sum total of all the statuses, which he occupies. It represents his position with relation to the total society. (Ralph Linton -The study of men, Appleton century, New York-1936. P 346)

From the above definition it can be observed that social status means one’s position of respect, prestige and influence in social structure and relative rights and privileges, enjoyed by him in the society.

On the other hand economic status is generally determined by one’s income, property and wealth. Although social and economic statuses are different distinctively, yet one cannot exist without the other.

Socio-economic status appears to be the resultant of the position of an individual in a society by virtue of a complex fusion of both of them which often do not run parallel to each other in their own areas. This Intermingling takes place in an undefined and curious manner eventually to present an indicator to socio-economic status.

According to R.L. Bhardwaj (1980), “socio-economic status would therefore be ranking of an individual by the society he lives in, in terms of his material belongings and cultural possessions along with the degree of respect, power and influences he wields”.

It is therefore different to determine the socio-economic status of a tribal woman. Because besides the ascribed status, she has earned the achieved status too, apart from the objective factors like age, education,
employment, income of her own, her achieved status is influenced by some subjective factors which are imposed by the society in the form of social norms and customs. The present study has been concerned with both.

**Status of Tribal Women in India**

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society. She dominates in the tribes of eastern India like Garos and Khasis, but faces manifold hardships, among various tribes of western Himalayas, particularly the Kinners and Gaddis. The young women of Muria, Oraon and Adi Naga tribes enjoys the colourful life of their youth dormitory, but the Bhil women have to observe "Purdah" and adhere to her tribe’s moral values. The Khasa women of Jaunsar Bawar, the Kinner women of Himachal Pradesh and the Toda women of Nilgiri Hill have to please their three, four or more husband at a scheduled time, but the Gond women is supposed to serve her one husband.

Jyoti Sen (1974) says that status of women is not uniform among all the communities and varies from tribe to tribe and sometimes within the tribes. The level of economic quality and independent and also the indicators to measures the status of women in any society.

Likewise, we find different options with regards to the position of women in the tribal societies. Some writers assigned them a high status, while others opine that in primitive society, women were no better than a mere sex object or otherwise of an inferior sex.

Vernier Elwin remarks ".........tribal women is in herself exactly the same as any other women with the same position, love and fears, the same devotion to the home to husband and children, the same faults and the same virtues". While Haimendorf notes "......... many women in more civilized
part of India, may well the women of Naga Hills, their high status and their free and happy life and if you measure the cultural level of the people by the social position and personal freedom of its women. You will think twice before looking down on Nagas as savages”. R.H. Lowie reports “Neither superstitious sentiments nor men’s physical superiority have produce a greater department of primitive women, that she is generally well treated and able to influence masculine decisions regardless of all theory as to her inferiority or impurity that is precisely among same of the rudest people that she enjoys practical equality with her mate”.

Now whether this observation a myth or a reality. It is indeed not on easy question to answer. Early ethnographic materials suggest that studies have always been dominated by the male bias. This is perhaps because administrators turned scholars have basically been male and therefore could not find easy access to the domains of women’s view points.

In order to understand the status of women among the various tribes there was a need to examine women from traditional to modern context. In patriarchal tribal society is reflected by notions such as birth of male child being auspicious, man as a bread winner and protector of the society and women being subordinate to their husbands. Madan and Majumdar (1956) have explained that status of women in all types of societies are lower than men, but particularly in the patriarchal societies it is determined by various types of taboos that are attached to women. These taboos may be protective or preventive or productive. In his observation regarding tribal people of India, Majumdar emphasised that mere absence of rights does not indicate subservience just as the existence of these does not warrant their exercise. In yet another version, Madan and Majumdar argued that it would be a scientific error to approach the women of a society with a rigid bias to the
view, that they have either a low status or a high status. And that such
dichotomy is generally misleading. There can be so many intermediate
 statuses and there can be polarity, though it may not be very striking.

The status and role of tribal women have been assessed and analysing
in various walks of life, keeping in view the theoretical arena connected to
status and role. At what scale the woman is rated and how far her
involvement in various aspects of living is are explored and delineated. An
attitude of males to females in general, as also in specific aspects is
analysed.

Theoretically low status of women has been accepted in a majority of
tribal society. But still it is better compare to non-tribal in some aspects as
she is not considered to be a burden. Tribal women in matriarchal and
matrilineal societies are undoubtedly better off in comparison to tribal
women in patriarchal and patrilineal societies. She might lead a very hard
life as far as physical labour is concerned, but they certainly enjoy a high
degree of freedom. The bride price itself is considered to be a mark of
respect and value for tribal women. Firm hand in most of the family matters
and their social participation is not much curtailed but still she cannot
become a religious or a political head. Thus, in every society, a women’s
status can be compared to a moving equilibrium at various times.

Toda women known to be the most pampered tribal women get special
treatment but still they are debarred from ritual ceremonies and sacred duties
which occupy the foremost place in Toda culture. They are prevented to
cook certain items which contain milk. Toda don’t touch their women in
certain period of time as they consider them polluted. The Andaman Island
men and women are equal participants in religious-economic life of their
tribes. They are eligible to speak out and form public opinion. But, still they
are considered to be a drudge as compared to Toda women. Among Gonds, the women in various aspects of social life enjoy status and freedom in choice of husband, premarital sex license, seeking of divorce. But in other aspects they are a depressed group working for their husbands like labourers. Maria Gond girls according to Grigson (1938) have the freedom to have premarital sex and choose a husband of her own and even they can freely divorce. But these are tabooed during menstruation and are debarred from attending ritual festivals. Hutton (1921) examines that Semenaga women also enjoys high status, she is never married against her own will and occupies high position as a wife and mother. But even these women are restricted in the matter of possession of property and sexual relations. The study of polyandrous Khasas in Himalaya shows that their women enjoy freedom in sexual matters, but a wife is shared by a group of brothers in which satisfying all the husbands may be exhausting and tortureous. She also has to labour hard outside home. Even in the matrilineal Khasis of north-east, though the women have high status and the husband, authority is negligible and she can even hold property. But still she is again a puppet in the hand of male members of her family specially her maternal uncle. Majumdar (1973) observes that the tribal women who do hard work age prematurely and submit to lots of restrictive mores and conventional limitations. But in practice they enjoy a lot of freedom to choose a partner to divorce and to give frequent visits to her paternal home.

These are two assumptions about the role of tribal women are that they enjoy a relatively high status and role compared to their non-tribal counterparts. They are treated more humanly and humanely. There is no female infanticide. Boys and girls are treated alike. There is no bride-burning. There is no child-marriage. They play a more active role in rituals
economy and family affairs. Their economic importance is signified by a high bride-price. Their freedom is within the four walls of the community. These facts reflect the tribal ethos which recognised the role of women in a healthy way. The tribes who have the matrilineal system have still been able to preserve the women's ownership of land while it has almost disappeared among the Nairs of Kerala. Secondly, this assumption about the favourable position of the women in a tribal community should not induce complacency and pre-empt all action. First, although the sex ratio is favourable it is declining. The number of tribal women taking up employment is rising sharply which shows the extent of their pauperization and marginalization. There is resistance to the recognition of their right to land and placing their right to maintenance on the statute book. Female literacy is still low except in a few pockets. The health and nutritional level of tribal women requires attention. In some areas where they were thriving on mining and other occupations has been replaced by men. The minimum wages for tribal men and women are not uniform. The women have been exposed most ruthlessly to the operation of market and other commercial forces and of unscrupulous elements that have flocked into the tribal areas in the wave of the exploitation of mines and establishment of industries. The tribal women are both economically and sexually exploited.

A Socio-Historical Perception of Tribal Women in Jharkhand

The tribal societies of Jharkhand regions are patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal. Theirs was an agricultural-dependent economy. The Jharkhand's tribal economy is an embedded economy in which economic activities are based on the socio-cultural laws which are aimed at maintaining cohesion and harmony in the society. The tribal's social welfare
laws while egalitarian in most of its aspects are highly discriminatory against women in distribution of economic work and economic returns. The discrimination against women is more acute in agricultural sector.

On the account of these economic social and cultural factors, the living standard of the tribal population is low. They are at the lowest rung of development with some other non-tribal communities. Their income, social status and level of education is low despite this the tribal are hard working and efficient farmers. One important characteristic about their nature is that women are more involved in all types of work thus; the work participation rate is more among the women than the men. Apart from this they also carried the extra responsibility of the health care of the family at the cost of their own health. The role of women in tribal societies can be described in the words of Boulding as "breeder, feeder and producer." The indicators of the status of women were described as income, employment, educational level. Health and fertility, role in the family and her role in the social set-up i.e. her achieved status and power of decision-making.

**Women in Traditional Tribal Society**

The tribals in Jharkhand differ widely among themselves is the level of socio-economic development. Even the cultivating households of scheduled tribes in Jharkhand showed wide disparities in the size of their landholding. As in the means of subsistence, so also in their world view, tradition, orientation and commitment to the past, the tribals differ among themselves. In some the level of their socio-cultural integration is low, but among others it is high and patient. Among some the cultural institutions are simple but among some others they are highly complex and elaborate. The tribal communities in Jharkhand have a patrilineal nuclear family as the
basic unit of socio-economic life. In family the authority of father is supreme.

The status of tribal women also varies. But she has a wide freedom; she can go to market, visits friends. She can dance and sing with men. She can laugh and joke with men without reproach. Nevertheless she is considered inferior to men by existing tradition as well as in actual life pattern the inequality between sexes in apparent in all walks of life. But Jharkhandis, including women themselves point out that women in tribal society do not have as low a status as women in traditional wider society. Both in the family and in society, adivasi women certainly have a more prominent position than do women in developed class society in the plains. But this relatively superior position should not blind one either to its rapid erosion or the “traditional” inequalities.

There is no marked preference between boy and girl in tribal society. Both are equally wanted and she receives as much care and alteration as a boy gets. But she is more dependent on her mother from whom she receives the early training in household duties. She has considered voice in the selection of her partner even if she does not actually select him. She can divorce at her will expect in an every few instances. Her attitude towards sex is predominantly free and natural but sexual infidelity of married women is frowned upon. A woman is considered an economic asset and considerable value is placed on a hard-working industrious and dutiful wife. There is a clear division of work between men and women. Her life is spending in field, raising the children and attending to all domestic chores. But her important economic role does not give her very high position in the society at per with men, paradoxically, many tribal people shared certain social attitudes with the most progressive section of Indian urban society. Absence
of caste distinction, equality of sexes, preference for adult marriage, the liberty of divorce and widow remarriage and independence of nuclear family from any control on the part of a joint family where only some of the points on which there is an agreement between Indian progressive opinion and tribal customs. There is no glorification of womanhood as an ideal among the Hindus. The emphasis on feminine roles has considerable affect on girl’s personality and identities from early years of life. She is taught to be submissive to authority and invariably makes her hesitant to develop strong opinion and commitment outside her home world.

Status inequality of tribal women has existed for centuries and has been accepted as a part of tribal patriarchal social structure. The course of time, however the tribal communities have undergone a substantial change on account of various historical forces which are exterior to and independent of them. Many of the institutionalized mechanism of social control have gradually become ineffective. Consequently, structurally designed inequality against women has lessened substantially, but on the other hand the effectiveness of the institutionalized pattern of behaviour has exposed the tribal women to new form of inequality and exploitation.

**Economic Role of Tribal Women**

The tribal female participation rate is comparatively higher than the non-tribal female. As per 1991 census, tribal female constitute 30% of the work participation rate and the general female only 16%. There is no denying fact that tribal women contribute to economic development in a more substantial way than tribal man. It is clear that women as active workers constitute a large section of tribal labour force in particular and women’s labour force in general. Apart from domestic work, women from
all categories were engaged in many types of subsistence and other economic activities which were important for the existence of their family.

Either as agricultural labourer, tea-garden labourer, at times industrial and construction labourer, the tribal women works as a bread earner or as active producers at home. In the field of agriculture, right from the strenuous work of preparing the land for sowing (except ploughing) cleaning to irrigation, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, de-husking and storing of grains are merely done by tribal women. In the field of forestry also she is a potential contributor. She collects minor forest products such as fuel-wood, edible roots, fruits, honey, gum, flower, herbal plants, forest grass etc. which are useful for domestic as well as commercial purposes. Even in the field of animal husbandry and poultry farming a tribal women's contribution is no less than a man. She performs every job concerning the livestock. She also takes the cattle to field of forest for grazing. The tribal women has been actively participating in barter and exchange transaction in weekly markets. She exchanges farm, forest and animal products for items of daily household use.

Even in the town the major contribution of tribal women is found in the construction industry. Women are employed in large no. at various level of construction like: soil-lifting, sand-cement mixing, break-lifting etc. since tribal women do not indulge much in bargaining they became favorites of contractors for employment purposes.

Since childhood the tribal women is being trained into a mild creature but a hard worker. Women's contribution to economic development however helps only men. She has neither property rights nor a social status. So if they do not work not more than their male counterpart they do not
work less either. Thus, the tribal woman not only saves money but can also earn it.

Sachidananda (1978) explains that the status of tribal women in tribal society is not always a function of her economic role. The principles of social structure of a particular tribal society determine her status. A tribal woman’s hard work and contribution to the family’s income has not always helps her to raise her status in the society.

**Pattern of Residence and Distribution of Property**

Traditionally patrilineal and patrilocal is the norm of tribal social structure. Though patrilocal is not compulsory. The general tradition is that new house is built for each son gets married. But in case of only daughter or due to the absence of appropriate male heirs, the marriage is done in a Ghar-jamai form where generally the husband stays in his wife’s village. In some of these cases even the girl’s family adopts the son-in-law as their own son.

In Jharkhand, many form of property that can be said to lie between community property and the individual property of the male head of the household. In the foraging situation, access to productive resources (the forest) is that of the whole band. Membership of a band, which may be temporary, determined 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.

Among the settled agriculturist, land is main productive resources, on which is itself produce, there are definite rules of access based on kinship and lineage. Community access to land is combined with allotment of individual families, essentially to the male head of household. Whatever accumulation takes place, basically in the form of land is in the male line.
Patrilocal roles ensure 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 right in land and even more, by the continued importance of income from gathering with rules of accrual and control that do not make a distinction between worker and owner.

Even in tribal society of Jharkhand laws of inheritance and succession favour males. In all patriarchal societies property is equally divided among all the male children of the family. Females are generally left out or excluded. If the married woman has a son, he inherits the father’s property and she didn’t have any claim over it. In case of marriage breaks out, the women is absolutely without land. Unmarried daughters are excluded but are maintained till their marriage. So many a times they are harassed by their husband, father or other male relatives, who wish to deprives them. Males try to get rid of them in hope of asserting their inheritance claim. A number of women are forced to migrate in order to earn their livelihood since; their hold over family land is so insecure and dependent on the attitudes of their male relative, even though these women do bulk of agricultural work.

**Marriage**

The traditional tribal norms are somewhat liberal for the women and most of them continue to enjoy more freedom in matters of sex, divorce and remarriage than their counterpart among Hindus. Tribal women are free to select their own life partner. Even in arranged marriage the boy as well as the girl is asked for final approval. The pre-marital relations are not looked down upon in tribal society. But the conception of an illegitimate child is condemned socially. Among the tribals of Jharkhand marriage is considered
obligatory and they practice clan exogamy and tribal endogamy. A tribal woman is never subjected to early child-bearing and she is married when she is fully matured. The existences of such institutions like youth dormitory in different tribes where boys and girls are given a chance to meet each other and decide bears testimony to this fact, the custom of bride-price which exists among the tribals of Jharkhand is considered to be the mark of respect and high status to the tribal women. But the bride-price goes to her parents and not to her, which consists of cloths, cattle, livestock and cash etc. the girls also receive some gifts from her parents after marriage usually clothes and utensils. Monogamy is the rule in tribal communities. A man can acquire second wife on the death of his first wife or if she is barren. An important feature was that women played a very crucial role in the marital matters. For example, the match could not be made without the approval of both bride and groom’s mother. Most decisions concerning marriage proceeding were taken by women. Men looked after the physical arrangements.

**Divorce and Re-Marriage**

Tribal women enjoy a considerable right to dissolve a marriage. Divorce is granted by the tribal Panchayat at the desire of either partner. A woman can seek divorce if her husband is found to be lunatic, impotent or negligent to his familial responsibilities. It is granted to a husband on the ground infidelity of the wife, a witch, laziness and barrenness etc. the reasons for divorce forgo the bride-price paid by a man for marriage. But when the wife moves out she has to refund the amount of it. The principle behind this almost universal right of tribal women to dissolve a marriage is that marriage is considered more a social contract in which husband and
wife should behave properly, then a sacramental affair as conceived by the Hindus. The procedure for divorce varies from a formal ceremony to a mutual consent. Both divorce and remarriages are common in tribal society. A divorced woman can easily remarry. The general custom for smaller children is to go with the mother. In tribal society widowhood does not carry the stigma as it does in the caste Hindu society. A widow does not lend a restricted life. She can even remarry, if she so desires.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

The tribal women lead a very hard life. She does not stop working till the day of delivery. She continues to work inside and outside the house. The child was generally delivered by the village midwife, after which the mother and the child were secluded in a corner of the house for twenty one days. She could not work these days and only given watery rice and some pulses. Religious ceremonies were performed after the childbirth and feast was organised.

Motherhood confers a special status to tribal women. As the old tribal saying goes, ‘she is like a fruit bearing tree and must be treated with respect and care’ A mother is considered superior, in status to other women. But motherhood also put additional burden of work and responsibilities on the mother. She has to resume the normal duties shortly after the birth and take care of the child. In Jharkhand a woman carries her baby to field, forest and markets.

Decision-Making

Making decisions or imparting justice was perhaps never considered an important aspect of tribal woman’s life. Traditionally all community
decision making power belong to the village elders, who were all men. They have got the final authority on all matters. Decision regarding social matters such as the violation of social norms, excommunication, compromises etc. is the man who decides in the council. Individually the husband may seek his wife or mother's advice, but authority is vested on the male in which descent is patrilineal and residence patrilocal. Women are completely debarred from taking part in any traditional political organisation. Women have no right to be present or to elect a member in the tribal Panchayat. If she has to approach she can only do it through some male members but never herself. Women have no power whatsoever in these decisions. In the house however women took most of the major decisions, e.g. the work to be done, upbringing of children, their marriage etc. they also manage the household finances. Women were also responsible for the upbringing of their children till they attained puberty.

In addition to social organisation and economy, the religion of tribals has sufficient say in regard to the status of women. There are some elements of religious life where the women are not permitted to participate. This specially applies to religious positions which are said to be privilege of man alone.

In the realm of religious practices and rituals a tribal women can not hold the office of a priest. Many a time women are not supposed to be present in the secret grove or during main rituals. She can not attend the communal worship, and also can not partake of the sacrificial meat.

There are two crucial areas of inequality-property right and political participation. In all Jharkhand tribes property particularly land passes through the male line. The society is both patrilineal and patrilocal. Further, women perform a major share of the total social labour. The result of their
labour is accumulation in male hands. The other important inequality is that of political participation. The traditional village assembly (Panchayat) is virtually an all male institutions. Membership is of the male head of the household or someone else in his stead.

**Tribal Woman: The Present Scenario**

The position of woman has undergone many changes since the past, owing to the changed pattern of living cost by outside influences and the need to introduce new economic practices. The most shocking impact of infiltration of superior economic and political super aliens in tribal belt is displacement in which women and children are the worst victims. Different industrial and capitalist groups have entered tribal area in search of raw material and cheap labour. They have monopolized the forest and mineral resources on the one hand and the home and hearth of tribal on the other. The peaceful tribals are forced to adapt the totally alien culture leading to deep seated disturbance and derangement in their habit and life pattern. The influence of alien patriarchal system has deteriorated the status of tribal women. Community life was shattered. Due to increased workload and poverty, Widows and single women are being left alone to fend themselves. Women lost most of their customary rights and privileges. Her right of possession is totally curtailed. In several cases, the powerful element in the community (both tribal and non-tribal) had forcefully occupied land belonging to widows. This resulted in the further deterioration in the poverty situation of the tribals in general and of their women in particular.

Important changes have occurred in marriage customs and rituals and also in the system of divorce and remarriage. Though bride-price still an important part of marriage negotiation the practice of dowry has been
adopted by few especially, the upper class families who try to attain a higher social status by following Hindu caste practices. The rules regarding divorce and remarriage have remained unchanged but rarely do women decide to leave their husband unless they are forced by circumstances, as they have become much more dependent on their husbands. As most of the men have adopted the Hindu caste values, so no one comes forward to marry widow and divorce women. In tribal society a girl is not a liability as in the dowry giving communities, but also an economic asset both because they contribute to the family in the form of wage labour and latter receive bride-price. In the traditional tribal society which is patriarchal, the girl still had many rights but these rights seem to be disappeared slowly because of external influences. Today girls have very little say in the choice of a partner. Dowry is slowly replacing bride-price and woman is in the danger of becoming only a commodity. Due to the process of Sanskritisation it resulted in decline of freedom of movement, in pre marital sex life, choice of partner, right to divorce and remarry. Now the boy is given preference to a girl child.

Modern education and unregulated contact with outsider has largely affected their tribal way of life and pattern of education. The scenario of education amongst tribal women is quite disappointing. The literacy rate of rural tribal female is the lowest of all groups. There is gender bias in the literacy of tribal population as in other groups. The female literacy is being lower than the male literacy.

Conversion to Christianity has been a major vehicle of change and modernisation to tribes. It has opened the opportunities for education; economic upliftment and the way to achieve status. It has been observed that there is a high percentage of literacy among the Christian section along with political awareness and a motivation of change.
With opening up of mines and growth of industries in Jharkhand, a large number of women have been drawn into occupations unknown to them. Their status in the labour market has changed. The primary objective of taking to a particular type of job by the worker is merely earning of livelihood. This has led to abuses and they have also been subjected to sexual exploitation. Tribal women are looked upon as easy game. Since, they come from communities that are being increasingly pauperized. The tribal women working in construction industry, brick kilns and mines are the worst sufferer where neither they have proper wage rate nor fixed working hour.

After independence special development programmes and special privileges are granted to the tribes under our constitution. They were either going toward Hinduism or towards Christianity as a result of contact and conversion. But still, it has opened the opportunities for educations, economic upliftment and way to achieve status. It has been observed that there is almost a direct correlation between percentage of literacy which bring political awareness and a motivation of change.

There are several implications of modernisation and urbanisation on tribal women’s life like deprivation of tradition livelihood by displacement, negative experiences of industrial discipline and conflict discriminatory treatment by men, exploitation and harassment by government officials, contractors, money lenders and replacement of elders control and cohesive family system, taboos and customs in violation of traditional setting, loss of human touch and purity of mind, emergence of different attitudes, artificiality, suspicion, helplessness and alienation etc are the main factors which have made women’s life miserable and meaningless.
The tribal women provide an anomalous position in modern India. On the one hand, they enjoy a greater degree of freedom of movement and choice compared to the average Hindu peasant women and yet the customs of inheritance of property places them at a comparatively disadvantageous position in the context of latest legal right to property given on the Hindu code Bill. With regard to the modern political system tribal women have been participating at the formal level by using their right to franchise, but when it comes to the question of decision making they are still at the periphery. They have not succeeded in adopting new skills and breaking through tradition and significant number as yet.

**Historicity of Gender**

Social status involves not a single social role but a whole array of such role. Robert K. Merton inducted another dimension that is role-set, in this arena of sociological significance. He could do so through his conception of social structure. Merton took of with explanation that the contemporary sociological theorists, irrespective of some of their ideological differences, agree to the promise that social status and social role comprise major building blocks of social structure. The concept of status and role connects culturally defined expectations with a pattern conduct and relationship which make a social structure.

It is very important to note the women’s stand in the context of social organisation including family, adoption, inheritance, succession, marriage and divorce. Since a large number of determinant of social status are housed in these elements of social organisation, so it is necessary to get into their implication concerning women. As social organisation is not an isolated sphere from total socio-cultural matrix, the other elements like economy,
religion and mechanism of social control follow in sequence. The reasons for and against a particular practices, custom, tradition, involvement, bar etc. are elaborately provided. All these together have formed the indicators of status.

The tribals are the poorest social groups. The tribal women, unlike their non-tribal particularly lower caste counterparts do not have to suffer from the double burden of poverty and gender. This feature is more pronounced if the women are educated (even if only literate) and under the influence of Christian missionaries. The situation here is so different because females are not considered economic liabilities, and the birth of a girl is not looked down upon. They are considered economic assets instead. Forest based tribal economy; in most part of Jharkhand is women centered and economic worth of work is reflected in the social position of the women. Yet women have a subordinate status and community decision, inheritance rights and religious customs.

Tribals especially their women are custodian of culture routed in integrated economic values. The wisdom of the tribals is that the earth meets the basic needs of not only humans, but of the entire creation. So they do not take or extract from nature anything more than what is essential, there art, leisure and entertainment are in partnership with mother earth. So they do not sell or buy land. They also perceive the divine and the sacred in the trees, hills streams, animals and all creation. It is irony that our modern society which is fast destroying this balance in nature, considered the indigenous people “Uncivilized and uncultured.” Women realize it fully as the burden of providing food, water and fuel to the family is on them; besides they are less lured by the glamour of modernisation and easy money. Therefore
development, economy and modernisation should be eco-feministic, i.e. aimed at promoting women’s participation and not destroying nature.

The theories on gender stratification based on biological differences, only could not possibly explain all the other factors used in gender differentiation. Gender differences in power and privileges are assumed to have immersed from the degree of inborn abilities that determined division of labour within the family. Max and Engels (1845) pointed out in German ideology – “the division of labour implies the possibility that enjoyment, labour production, and consumption develop in different individuals ------”. Thus, division of labour is a social order that is established within the family and extends to extra-familial, social sphere to. Even in a society where each is a master over the other and control labour power. The nomination by men folk in public sphere extends to the domestic sphere of women. The command at home is the first step towards enslavement of women in society.

Both male and female have clearly defined relationships to the system of economy, family and gender. But definitely the relationship is not of equality. A women’s position is always related to her husband or father. Even in the dual income families it has been conventional to subordinate the class identities of women’s job to those of husbands. Randall Collins (1990) on the basis of this approach suggests a solution in the form of a two dimensional theory of stratification by introducing two dimension of social hierarchy: class and status. He uses conflict theory of class dimension as against organizational power position (viz. order givers verses order takers) and the stress that status is itself not merely given by the cultural order but is produced by material means of cultural production. So, the relation of husbands with wives can be analysed by using the class criteria of order givers and order takers in the family. The domestic class position of women
is heavily over laid by work in the area of status production rather than economic re-production in relation to the economic and occupational structure of the entire society. Thus we find women to be involved in production and consumption of culture, where as men are more concentrated in the realm of material production and its power relation. The class position of the women assimilates with the position of their father and husbands. This implies that women share their respective male class structure.

Tribal society of the area studied is patriarchal and patrilineal. The man is the head of the house, though substantial amount of freedom is given to the women within the family. However she has no power in the public sphere. As Joan Huber (1987) puts it, this is because women are consumers and not producers and work allocated to them are based on sex, bearing and caring of children, household duties and agricultural work which are tedious and monotonous but not strenuous like ploughing.

So, according to Malinowski, the status of women in tribal society can be assessed and analysed after taking into consideration the mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the high headedness of the other.