Scheduled Tribe Women: An Introduction

The tribal population in India is larger than that of any other country in the world. In fact, it is almost equal to the tribal population of nineteen countries with substantial tribal populations. Myanmar, with a tribal population of 14 million, has the second largest tribal population. The tribal population of India is more than the total population of France and Britain and about four times that of Australia. If all the tribals had lived in one state, it would have been the fifth most populous state after Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Maharashtra.

Every Indian tribe has distinct features. An attempt has been made in this chapter first to introduce the selected Scheduled Tribe, i.e. Gaddi under investigation and then the Gaddi women.

3.1 THE GADDIS: A PROFILE OF THE TRIBE

Gaddis, a Scheduled Tribe of Himachal Pradesh, are found mostly concentrated in Bharmauri sub Tehsil of Chamba district, a place popularly known as Gaderon meaning the home of the Gaddis. They are also found along certain foot hills of Dhaul in Kangra and Mandi. Occupying an area between Dhauladhar and Pir Panjal, their territorial distribution is mostly confined to the western Himalayas.

The Gaddis are semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural and a semi-pastoral tribe. They used to spend six months in migration in search of grass and fodder for their cattle and seasonal employment for themselves and six months in their villages for sowing and harvesting their crops. But now the
position has changed considerably and most of them are living settled life in villages. Their villages are predominantly inhabited by Gaddi families.

The permanent villages of the Gaddis on an average lie between an altitude of 7,000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. They are small-sized villages ranging from 30 families to 200 families. Inhabitants of most of these villages are exclusively the Gaddis. They are generally situated on hill tops. The houses are mostly kacha with sloppy roofs. The winter habitation of the Gaddis are usually situated below an elevation of 6,000 feet on the broad and slightly sloping ground.

Gaddis speak Bharmouri or Gadiali and their script is *tankari* which today is a dying script known to a few old people. The younger generation has adopted Devanagri as their script.

**3.1.1 ORIGIN AND AFFINITY**

Proclaiming themselves as Rajputs, the Gaddis trace their origin to the plains from where they fled to the remote inaccessible hills to escape persecution at the hands of the Muslim invaders. Gaddi, in fact, is a generic term given to the indigenous population of Gaderon, i.e. Bhamaur in Chamba district which includes *swarnas* like Brahmin, Rajput, Khatri, Thakur, Rathis and the *non-swarnas* namely Hali, Sippis, Rehara, Bhadhi and Dom. Though all are regarded as Scheduled Tribes by virtue of their occupying a scheduled area, yet the latter group are also enumerated separately as Scheduled Castes. Thus they enjoy a double status both as a Scheduled Tribe and as a Scheduled Caste in this area. However, Gaddis themselves do not perceive the *swarnas* in their fold and treat them as menials and serving low caste.

Among the high castes, it may be mentioned that the Brahmins during the native Kings’ rule were bestowed with free gift of land, donations and other privileges. Presiding as ritual specialists and *purohits* of the rulers,
they enjoyed a status superior to that of Rajputs. Earlier they were not required to till their land, but as times changed and the privileges withdrawn, they started cultivating their own fields and officiating as family purohits for Rajputs and other clean castes during ritual exogamous gotras like Vashishta, Bhardwaj, Gautam which in turn is divided into number of als based on the peculiar characteristic of their ancestors.

Next to the Brahmins, are the Rajputs and its allies namely Khatris, Thakurs, Ranas and the Rathis who are not only numerically dominant but also socially, economically and politically the most powerful. It should be mentioned that the status of the Rathis is not at par with Rajputs and Thakurs because the term implies a loss of status as they might have been the class of progenies born out of the remarried widows. With the passage of time, Rathis have been accepted, though loosely, within the broader Rajput fold and inter-marriages among all these groups have come to be an accepted norm though each one of it is broadly an endogamous division. The Rajputs too are divided into number of exogamous gotras. They recognize two types of gotras—the Anderela gotra and the Baherala gotra which is similar in concept to the meaning of Brahminical gotra and the als. The chief function of these exogamous gotras and als is to denote descent and regulate marriage.

3.1.2 ETHNOLOGY

The overall topographical, character of the area is so mountaineous, rugged and dissected by numerous hills, streams and rivulets that one hardly finds any expanse of level ground. As already stated, they are mostly found in Bhamauri sub Tehsil of Chamba district. It is due to this reason that this place is popularly known as Gaderon meaning the home of the Gaddis.

The Gaddis reside exclusively upon the snowy range which divides Chamba from Kangra. A few have wandered down into the valley which
skirts the base of the chain but the great majority lives on the highest above. They are found from an elevation of 4,000 feet to 7,000 feet above which altitude there is little or no cultivation. A large number of tribals lives in Chamba and Kangra Districts of Himachal Pradesh.

As a race, they are very simple, fierce, stalwart and virtuous people and as a whole are very interesting tribe. They are frank, peaceful and merry in their manners. Sturdily built, very often bow legged, the tribals are accustomed to enduring great hardships during any sort of weather owing to their migratory life most of them lead. Due to exposure to sun and rain, they have a slightly dark wheatish complexion. The women folk are pleasing and homely and have the reputation of bearing—modest and chaste. They are bashful and courteous too. Raja Sansar Chand II of Kangra was infatuated by the beauty of a Gaddi girl and married her. She was called a Gaddi Rani.

3.1.3 POLITICAL HISTORY

The Gaddis have their glorious history. According to a well-known historian, J. Hutchinson, Bharmaur (Chamba) was the oldest principality in India. Maru was the first to settle in this place. He was a man of religious disposition and belonged to the ruling family of Ayodhya. Renouncing his age-old kingdom, he wandered from place to place in quest of peace and ultimately reached Chamba.

Narad Pal waged a war for 12 years with Chamba, whose forces advanced to Madankot near Mandi. This is still recalled in folklores. The Gaddi army, as the Chamba force is correctly called, besieged the Rana of Manali in the lower fort on the “Gaddi Padhar” for three months. Eventually, the Kulu people got rid of these invaders by treachery. Luring them across the Kothi gorge, after a peace had been patched up by inviting them to a social gathering, they took away the bridge in the darkness.
During all the military expeditions, the armies, of the Kings of Bharmour must have consisted in bulk of Gaddis and that was why even after the shifting of the capital to Chamba their forces were generally called the Gaddi Army. Even today, there is a good number of brave soldiers belonging to this tribe serving in the Indian Army.

For the maintenance of their traditional norms, the people have their traditional caste council called Bhaichara Panchayat, each caste having its own panchayat comprising of elderly respectable members of the community who are elected through voice vote. Matters pertaining to divorce, separation, maintenance, family feuds over the property, theft, breach of caste norms like inter-communal marriages, elopement etc. are all dealt with by the caste councils. A person once convicted is punished by way of social boycott, fine in terms of cash or kind depending upon the gravity of the crime. An inter-marriage between a high caste and a low caste is severely dealt with often resulting in ex-communication.

3.1.4 SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Gaddis are classified both as a Scheduled Tribe as well as Scheduled Caste in Himachal Pradesh. As nomads, higher castes Gaddis are Scheduled Tribe, whereas, the lower castes are Scheduled Castes. Gaddi, in fact, is a generic term given to the indigenous population of Gaderon, i.e. Bharmour in Chamba district which includes swarnas like Brahman, Rajput, Khatri, Thakur, Rathis and the non-swarnas, namely the Hali, Sippis, Rehara, Bhadhi, Dom. Though all are regarded as Scheduled Tribe by virtue of their occupying a Scheduled area, yet the latter groups are also enumerated separately as Scheduled Castes. Thus, they enjoy a double status both as a Scheduled Tribe and as a Scheduled Caste in this area. However, Gaddis themselves do not perceive the swarnas in their fold and treat them as
menials and serving low castes. However, there has not been much discrimination between different castes among Gaddis.

Inter-caste relations, specially among the clean castes, are fairly relaxed. They eat, drink and smoke together and may also intermarry. It may be mentioned that intermarriage among Brahmins and Rajput sections are not uncommon. However, relations with unclean socially low castes are severely limited. Earlier a low caste Hali or Sippi was not allowed to enter the house of a clean caste. Gradually such reservations are going, nevertheless, restrictions with regard to communal and connubial norms in relation to low castes are still very much present. A marriage of a clean caste with that of the low is severely frowned upon leading to outcasting.

3.1.5 FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

Gaddis believe in the joint extended family system where father, mother with their married and unmarried children commonly share the same roof. The eldest male member, as head of the family, commands great respect. The filial bond that binds the member of the family is strong and kinsmen are required to help and co-operate with each other in times of crisis. Women observe avoidance in the presence of the elder male member of the husband’s household but share joking relationship with the younger ones. Pardah, in the strict sense of the term, is not adhered to be the women-folk as they have to equally shoulder the economic responsibility along with their menfolk.

Gaddi family and kinship is basically patterned on patriarchal system. Succession from father to son and the inheritance follows the patrilineal line of descent. Gaddis have two types of inheritance, i.e. mundaband—whereby the property is equally divided among all the sons, and chundaband—where it is shared equally among the wives which is
subsequently divided among their male offspring. In Gaddi society, an illegal child called *chakhandu* born to a widow long after the death of the husband, is also given a share provided the woman chooses to remain with the family.

Marriage is a must amongst the tribals. The unmarried person will die of dog’s death—says a Gaddi of Garola village. The Gaddis are monogamous. The boy and the girl are never consulted and the marriage is arranged by their parents or guardians. The following types of marriages are prevalent among them irrespective of their castes and communities—

1) **Byah (Dharahom Pun)** — The regular betrothal takes place with mutual consent of the parents of the boy and the girl. To mature the betrothal, negotiations take place between the parties and the usual rituals like *kanyadan* are observed at the time of marriage. This type of marriage is quite rare in Gadiyar region.

2) **Bata Sata or Exchange** — In this form of marriage, a boy gets a wife in exchange for his sister for his wife’s brother. This is the most popular form of marriage among the Gaddis.

3) **Gudani** — This is a widow re-marriage. A widow is married by one of the brothers of the deceased husband. This is allowed among all castes except Brahmins. But now this custom is dying out and a widow is free to take on a new husband outside the deceased husband’s family.

4) **Kamash or ghar jwantri** — This is a typical type of marriage among Gaddis. The boy has to work in the house of his father-in-law, usually for a term of seven years. Though it is on the decline these days, one may see some cases in the interior.

5) **Khewat** — In Himachal Pradesh this marriage is also called reet or lag. This system permits a women to take on a new husband if he
pays the former husband the amount incurred by him on his marriage. The consent of the former husband is essential.

6) **Bariana**—In this marriage, cash payment is made for the girl. The amount is fixed mutually. Payment in kind is not favoured.

The marriage expenses incurred are usually proportionate to the economic position and means of the families involved. There are, however, one or two ways in which such households receive temporary help from their relatives or friends. The most important of these customs is tambol. This is prevalent among all the Gaddis. Some cash money is given to the bridegroom or his parents by friends and relatives who receive a present of almost same value in return on similar occasion of marriage in their families. Another custom called saj is also common where presents are given instead of cash. The presents generally are in the form of clothes, a bit of jewellery and cooking utensils, given to the bride or her parents under the same obligation as in the case of tambol.

**3.1.6 ECONOMY**

Gaddi economy chiefly resolves around agriculture and pastoralism. Majority of them own land which is jointly held within the family. Though each son may ask for its respective share after the death of their father, but the same is not commonly resorted to in order to avoid fragmentation of land. Though agriculture is the main-stay of the people, yet the yield is not sufficient sometimes to even suffice for the year long consumption of the family. This is mainly due to the rough terrain, rocky soil, semi-arid condition and severe winter covering the whole area under a thick blanket of snow from early October to March. Consequently, it is a single crop zone because the seeds once sown remain embedded under the snow and germinate after the snow melts. Maize is the main produce of the
area followed by wheat, pulses of *urad mah*. Tobacco is also grown in certain parts. Agriculture is thus not a profitable proposition as it is not only time consuming and labour intensive, but mismatched with productivity level.

Agricultural deficit is thus largely supplemented by rearing of sheep and goat; each family keeping a fairly large number of them. For this reason they have customary right, also known as *birtandari* right, over the forest land which is government owned yet each family has a patch of land pasturage. Sheep is reared for its wool and shearing is done thrice a year. The wool thus procured is sold off through the middle-men at a low margin of profit and a part of it is retained for self use. Each family has its own loom called *Khaddi*, where they weave their woollen cloth called *pattu* for coat, blankets (*garadu*) etc. However, rearing of sheep and goat poses peculiar problems for the people, for the area remains practically covered under the snow creating problems of fodder which in turn necessitates these pastoral Gaddis to migrate to lower region like Kangra during winter months and to higher reaches during summer. In this way, they are said to be truly a transhumane population.

The major fairs of the region are *Bharman yatra, Minjhar, Sui-ka-mela,* and *Mani-Mahesh* fair, each celebrated on a fixed day. The major festivals are *Dholru, Lohri, Holi, Janamastmi, Baisakhi, Diwali, Shivratri* and the like.

Besides agriculture and sheep rearing, daily wage earning through government agencies like Forest and Public Works Department is also on the rise, but there are hardly few who can be truly said to be landless. There are few enterprising people who through their own efforts have secured for themselves respectable jobs in the Forest Department, Defence, teaching. Few have become businessmen and contractors in public and private organizations.
3.1.7 NOMADISM

The Gaddis are semi-nomadic. During the winter, they come down to low altitude and in summer, they again return to their native villages. In fact, a real nomadic life of the Gaddis can be observed while they are in migration with their folk. A shepherd carries some light utensils of aluminium and an iron Pan. He invariably keeps a hukka in one hand. With a Khalru of cereals and other essential and limited articles, loaded on his back, he follows his flock. He carries his tobacco in a leather pouch. He does not have any spare clothing with him and wears the traditional chola in which some newborn kids or lambs sleep.

A Gaddi woman can be seen in migration carrying loads equal to that of a man. She carries the luggage on her shoulders and ties her little child to load, holds some utensils in one hand, helps another child of hers with the other hand and covers the inaccessible and impassable paths in the Himalayan valleys. Thus, she accompanies her husband through thick and thin, sharing his trials and tribulations as a real better-half.

During the journey, a shepherd cooks simple food consisting of maize-flour bread, masuri dal or vegetable if available. Sometimes, salt, green chillies and raw onions fill the plate.

The tribal does not keep any tent with him and sleeps under the open sky. During inclement weather, he lies under the shade of a tree, a projecting rock or in a cave. In the absence of these he doubles himself with a bundle and lies among sheep and goats. A blanket is as good as his bedding and the dora (200 feet long woollen rope worn by every Gaddi around the back) serves as pillow.

The dogs of the Gaddis are so fierce that they can repel the attack of a bear or even a panther. They watch their master’s flocks and protect them.
The Gaddis are very fond of their dogs. They would not easily part with them for love or money.

The malundi (Shepherd) sells his sheep and goats if the bargain is favourable or if he is in need of money. Being God-fearing and superstitious, he sacrifices a he-goat on certain difficult passes. He never takes bath, seldom cleans his teeth and thus leads absolutely nomadic life. But it is surprising to note that despite his carelessness, he is very healthy and quite happy.

He covers between 5 to 7 miles a day. He has to exert himself much in keeping his flocks on the right path. This work is done with the assistance of the dogs or by whistling to which the sheep and goats amazingly respond.

The nomad invariably carries a flute with him. When he plays a folk tune, the hills echo and the hill girls suspend their work under its influence which cannot be expressed in words.

Man is, of course, an organism adapted to nature. As such, he is ultimately dependent on his geographical environment. Wide fluctuations in geographical conditions set limits. However, in given relative stability of natural conditions, such as man now enjoys, he can become master of his natural environment rather than remaining its slave. But the Gaddi fabric of life seems to be different.

A newly married couple is in migration, crossing the inaccessible paths of Himalayas. The wife is tired and feels pain in her legs. She complains that she did not enjoy even a single night peacefully after her marriage. She blames her husband that this is all due to their migratory life.

But now the position has changed. Only a few Gaddi families living at an altitude of more than 10,000 feet, still continue the practice of migration. Majority of the others have started living a settled life in hilly villages, some of which are solely the Gaddi villages.
3.2 TRADITIONAL STATUS OF SCHEDULED TRIBE WOMEN

The women in the tribal community, as in other communities, constitute about half of the tribal population. The well-being of the tribal community, as that of any other community, depends importantly on the status of their women. For a thorough understanding of the status of women, we have to dig in time and space, as the status of women has been like a moving equilibrium at various times in different societies, including the tribal ones. Theoretically, the low status of women is accepted even in a majority of tribal societies, exception being the matriarchal, matrilineal and polyandrous societies. Like Hindu women, the tribal women are also rated lower to men, in immediate response. But in actual practice, the tribal women enjoy comparatively more freedom and are devoid of many constraints that are still imposed on caste women. The traditional tribal norms are somewhat liberal to womanhood and most of them continue to live in their customary style including position and behaviour.

There are three types of views about the status of tribal women expressed by different scholars. The first view holds that the status of tribal women is higher than their counterparts in caste-ridden society. It emphasizes that they lead a very hard life and enjoy more freedom than their counterparts among Hindus. They can roam about freely, visit markets or friends, cut jokes with men without any reservations and are usually free to select their life partners. They are at liberty to divorce their husbands and remarry again. Divorce or widowhood is not taken as stigma in tribal society. The bride price itself is considered to be a mark of respect the value for a tribal woman. They have firm hand in most of the family matters and their social participation is not much curtailed as in the case of caste women. Thus, the popular and overall image and perception of the tribal women is
that of being better off than their non-tribal counterparts. There is no child marriage and no stigma on widowhood. She enjoys the absolute right to decide about her marriage. Instead of dowry there is bride price indicating a high social status of the tribal women earn and are, therefore, to a great extent economically independent. Their contribution to the family and the community is more valuable and important in comparison to their counterparts in Hindu society. A higher social status of women has been reported by Furer-Haimendorf (1943), Hutton (1921), Hunter (1973), and Firth (1946) among Tharus of Uttaranchal., and Nagas and Garos of the North East.

According to second view, there are many facts, which indicate a low status for the tribal woman. For example, she does not have property rights except in a matrilineal society, which is a small proportion of the tribal population. She is paid fewer wages than her male counterpart for the same work. Several taboos discriminating against a tribal woman exist in certain tribal groups implying impurity and low status. She cannot hold the office of a priest. There are taboos related to menstruation as in non-tribal communities. The Kharia woman cannot touch a plough nor can she participate in the roofing of a house. The Oraon woman is also prevented from touching a plough. The Todas of Nilgiri Hills do not permit a woman to enter the dairy area. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh do not touch a menstruating woman for fear of destruction of harvest. In certain tribes only the males can participate in ancestor worship. The Toda and Kota women in southern India cannot cross the threshold of a temple. The Santal women cannot attend communal worship. Rivers (1973), Dalton (1872) and Grigson (1938) have reported low status of women among Todas, Kharias and Mariya Gonds with reference to certain taboos during certain periods and ceremonies.
The third view has been expressed by Majumdar (1973), who has reported a higher status of tribal women on some indicators while lower on others, while Shashi (1978) has concluded that the status of tribal women varies from tribe to tribe. The developmental projects have adversely affected the tribal women. With deforestation they have to travel longer distances to gather forest products. Incidentally, this has been one of the reasons for the participation of tribal women in the Chipko movement to save the trees. There are evidences of sexual exploitation of tribal women by forest and mining contractors. The incidence of sexual assaults on tribal women has increased.

A review of the studies related to the status of women in tribal India authenticates some of the observation made in the preceding paragraphs. According to Dhebar Commission Report (1961), the tribal woman is not a drudge or a beast of burden but exercises a firm hand in family matters. Majumdar and Madan (1970) have stated that the equal opportunity for work does not necessarily come as blessing. Toda women, for example, are debarred from ritual ceremonies and sacred dairies but they are otherwise treated kindly and don’t become the target of social contempt. The Toda women are among the most pampered of Indian tribal women. On the other hand, in the Andaman Islanders’ society, men and women are equal participants in the religious-economic life of their tribe. But compared to a Toda woman, an Andaman ‘pygmy woman’ is a drudge. But then Toda women, while well trained, rank as inferior and are excluded from the ritualistic observances that occupy the foremost place in Toda culture. They are even prevented from cooking, at least whenever the food contains milk as an ingredient. Among the Gonds, the women, in various aspects of social life, enjoy status and freedom, as for instance, in the choice of a husband,
pre-marital sex license, seeking of divorce and so on. But in other aspects, they are a depressed group working for their husbands as labourers might.

Analyzing the Chenchu situation, Furer-Haimendorf (1943) concludes that husband and wife are for all practical purposes partners with equal rights and their property is jointly owned, nominally everything belongs to man except those personal belongings a wife acquires from her parents. Majumdar (1950) has stated that among the patriarchal Tharus, the status of women is high. In the same way, Srivastava (1958) has remarked that it may seem a paradox to us that in a patriarchal society, which the Tharus have today, women still enjoy, dominate position in their community. The property is owned both by men and women and the latter spend their income without any advice from their menfolk. Speaking of higher status of Garasia women, Dave (1960) has mentioned that if they are forced to marry a particular man the don’t like, they have their way by running away from the husband’s house and securing the divorce later. If the husband changes them of infidelity or any social irregularity, they have full freedom to explain their case personally before the Panchas.

Writing on Maria Gonds, Grigson (1938) has mentioned that as a girl, a Maria Gond has considerable freedom both in pre-marital sexual life and in choice of a husband and she is fairly free to leave her husband if he ill-treats her or if can’t beget a child. The women who has a taste for ornaments and beads, quite natural in itself, is given full scope by the husband who recognizes her rights to spend her earnings on their purchases. While writing on the position of Sema Naga women, Hutton (1921) has admitted that they enjoy a high social position. Though the marriages are arranged on the basis of convenience, a girl is never married against her will, and in the husband’s home the wife occupies a high position and her children are treated kindly. The Lambada and Banjara women are treated as
equal partners in family life, in bread winning and in contributing to the household budget. Among the matrilineal Khasis, according to Mann (1987), the husband’s authority is greatly curtailed. Foremost in the family affairs is the women’s initiative. The husband is a co-earner and a partner. Likewise, among the polyandrous tribes of Lahul, Kinnaur, Ladakh and Northeast, the women commands a high position and respect.

Divergent views, thus, characterize the status of tribal women. Lowie (1950) has rightly remarked that diametrically opposite views have been current among the educated laity regarding the women’s place in primitive society and a general sweeping statement must not be accepted wholesale. He has further clarified that treatment of woman is one thing, her legal status another, while the character and extent of her behaviour belong again to a distinct category.

3.3 TRADITIONAL STATUS OF GADDI WOMEN

The position of the women in the Himalayas like everything else is materially affected by the position of the women in the Gaddi community of Himachal Pradesh. Among the Gaddis of Chamba District, the woman used to occupy an important place. During the migration period, the women used to manage all the domestic affairs of the community, and sometimes tackle difficult problems and take important decisions on their own initiative. This training in responsibility made them self-reliant and capable housewives.

The Gaddi women have been physically fit and sturdy and enjoyed greater freedom than many of their sisters in and around Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh as the custom of keeping women in seclusion (‘purdah’) had been entirely unknown. Its observance was, in fact, impossible on account of nomadic habits of the people. Men and women used to mix freely dance and sing together. The young men and women were seen walking and standing arm in arm, or with their arms round each other’s waists laughing.
and kissing each other. They have been always genial and cheerful and have an abundant sense of humour. Neither shy nor timid, they have been smiling at ordinary dangers.

An attempt has been made here to construct and assess the traditional status of a Gaddi woman.

3.3.1 AFTER BIRTH CEREMONIES

The life of tribal people has been full of superstitions and other religious beliefs and these are reflected in number of their activities. Gaddis have not been exception to it. These superstitions and other peculiar beliefs make the delivery of a child a very difficult ordeal for the mother. She was kept in an outhouse, usually a shed intended for beasts, for ten or twelve days, and the extreme cold, with the sufferings natural to her state, often used to result in serious illness or even her death.

According to Sherring (1906), on the fifth day after childbirth among Bhotias, ‘Pancholi ceremony’ was performed, the woman and child being allowed to occupy a separate room or house, but no one was permitted to touch them. Should any one even by accident touch them, the only purification was by sprinkling cow’s urine on his own body and tasting the urine, a common practice, which has been strictly in accordance with orthodox Hinduism. On the eleventh day, ‘Namkaran’, or name giving, took place. On this day woman and child were purified and then allowed to enter the house and touch water. A horoscope was also prepared according to the Hindu horoscope scriptures. On 22nd day or onwards, she can take charge of kitchen after undergoing the process of purification. The tradition of keeping woman in outhouse after the child birth has not been so profound among the Gaddis.
It has been the practice to give a feast to all the villagers and relatives, irrespective of the fact that newborn child is male or female one. Village deity, Kul-devta and Ranth devta as well as other souls and deities were worshipped to bless the new born for long and prosperous life. Even ceremonies like ‘Karnbhed’ and ‘Anna-prasan’ did not make any discrimination for a boy or a girl. The only ceremony, which only boys had during the third, fifth or seventh year was that of ‘mundan’ which girls, did not undergo. But this ceremony had nothing to do with the status of newborn male child or a female child.

3.3.2 STATUS AS A DAUGHTER

Girls, as daughters, enjoyed full freedom like those of boys and one could notice nothing that discriminated them from boys. They have been as active as boys and had equal status. The division of work in the households required girls to bring water, clean utensils, serve meals, cut grass and help in agricultural work or weaving carpets or making woollen pullovers as the case may be. In contrast to girls, boys were required to collect wood, plough the fields, if they can, and help the father or elder brothers in business.

Girls had never been considered any burden in parent’s house and they were never sold. There is a popular proverb among the Gaddis depicting the true status of girls whose English version is: if the sisters or daughters are happy, they are equal to devi-devta worth worshipping and if they are angry, they are like bad and harmful souls. Thus, parents not only looked into their requirements for making them happy, but also tried their best to inculcate in them all the good qualities and capabilities required for hard life of a wife in their society.

3.3.3 POSITION OF GIRLS IN DORMITORIES

Dormitories have been reported to be existent in tribal societies among all parts of the world. In India, according to Majumdar and Madan
dormitories, bi-sexual as well as mono-sexual, are found in practically all parts of the country where tribal people have their habitation. It is named differently in different tribes. Village dormitory has been a characteristic feature of the social structure of most of Indian tribes. Dormitory connotes a social centre for young boys and girls generally at night in a house or a field for dance, drink and music. It is based upon courtship or pre-marital acquaintance and love.

According to Sherring (1906), married and unmarried single women and married women, till the time their first child is born, go there. If the village has more than one Ranth, the process of inter communication becomes easier.

Participants in these dormitories have to sleep compulsorily at the same place. Becoming exhausted from the dance they pair off and go to sleep. As several pairs sleep in the same small room, chances of sexual intercourse were considerably minimized, and there were hardly any cases of pregnancy.

As he main object of dormitory was to arrange marriages, only those persons resorted there who can marry one another, such as the boys who were not relatives. This institution of dormitory played so important a role in their social life that even during the period of migration, while on route to their summer and winter dwellings, they arrange dormitory in open air.

Although Gaddis had given it up many years ago, still they are quite willing to attend the dormitory whenever they visit the village where it is prevalent.

**3.3.4 MATE SELECTION AND DOWRY**

The Gaddis, as a rule, have always been more particular in their marriage observance than in their other ceremonial usages. All through the tract, an inclinations and will of the females appear to have greater weight
than is common in other communities, both in regard to the formation of such engagements, and in the subsequent domestic management.

Child marriage among these tribes has been a rarity and it was uncommon to see a Gaddi bride below 18 or 19 years. At the time of marriage, the age of the girl was above 18 years, while in the case of a boy it used to be between 20 to 22 years. The marriage by engagement has also been prevalent among the Gaddis. References are also available in respect of marriage by capture (Upreti, 1968; Srivastava 1966); marriage by Hindu customs (Crooke, 1988); and marriage by the exchange of sisters (Furer-Haimendorf, 1966).

Dowry, in the strict sense of the term, does not exist among the tribals. In case the parents or the guardians want to give some articles to the girl when she departs as a bride, it used to depend on the boy whether to accept it or not. During marriage, generally girl’s clothes, ornaments, utensils, bed, ‘ansia’ (grass cutter), ‘takli’ for spinning wool and a basket to keep wool is given to her by parents. Because parents according to her requirements and choice specially make these articles for her, they are considered her personal property even if she decides not to marry. Thus, dowry did not exist among the Gaddis in the way it has been prevalent among Hindus.

3·3·5 STATUS OF WOMEN AS A WIFE

Woman occupied an important place among the Gaddis and they have been respected and given due regards as wives. However large quantum of work there may be in the household, one did not think of acquiring second wife except in rare cases where first wife has no issue.

As she used to get training in agricultural work, spinning and knitting, making meals and entertaining guests from her parents, she did not
have any problem to tackle after marriage in her in-laws household. In fact, every Gaddi woman has been expert in all these.

During her busy daily schedule, male family members appreciated her for her work. As a wife she had considerable freedom to take even the important decisions about any family matters in the absence of male family members, who used to be away in down markets for most of the time.

Majumdar and Madan (1970) have designated Gaddi economy as midway between the pastoral and agricultural economies. In fact, the semi-nomadic life of Gaddi is reflected in the pattern of their socio-economic life. To have a idea of traditional compartmentalization of work and activities, one has to look into the economy of the Gaddi, particularly the occupational structure. Gaddi women occupied a vulnerable position not only in their family set-up but also in economy. They made many woollen articles for commercial purpose besides making articles for their own use such as rough woollen cloth of a fine texture. It was used to make ‘banbu’ (gowns) for the females and long-coats for the males, saddle bags (Khabojas) etc. These bags were used for transporting goods on the back of sheep and goats.

Thus, the women have traditionally been employed chiefly in weaving woollen blankets, and were assisted in this task by men. They could dispose of their fabrics in any way they choose. They had no agricultural labours to attend to. The division of labour among the sexes was not inequitable. The men had reserved for themselves the more tedious and onerous tasks, for example, the march to difficult terrains to uphills or other places.

The Gaddis are patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal, but the structure of family has been quite different from that of traditional Hindu
joint families. Though there has been a head of the family (generally the eldest male member), still he did not exercise absolute authority on the members of the family. He did not assign the work to different members as the tribals had evolved such a system of socialization that the division of labour took place automatically. Ladies were to look after the household and men had to do business and out-door activities. In the absence of menfolk, women carried on all the household works so smoothly, that menfolk need not have to say or complain any thing to them. However, head of the family was given due regards and his decisions were generally carried out by all the members. In all other important family decisions, women had decisive role to play and their suggestions were not generally turned down by menfolk.

Gaddi wives enjoyed full freedom, as they did not live in purda or seclusion even when father-in-law, husband’s elder or younger brother or any other male member including a stranger was present. In fact, she could talk to menfolk freely without any hesitation and her talking and joking with any one was not taken otherwise. Their husbands had full faith in them.

3.3.6 STATUS OF WOMAN AS A MOTHER

The Gaddi women were traditionally called ‘Minshiri’ or ‘Minashiri’, ‘Min’ or ‘Mina’ means mother, whereas, ‘Shiri’ means son or a male. In other words, tribal woman had two peculiar characteristics. On the one hand, she was simple, broad-hearted, tolerating all the discomforts and all other qualities of a mother, whereas, on the other hand, due to her hard tasks, duties and courage she had the qualities of a man. She enjoyed considerable respect and regards as a mother in her family. She had been entrusted with the duty of upbringing of the children and had decisive role to play during the mate selection, as father alone could never arrange the marriage of the daughter.
3.3.7 STATUS OF WOMAN AS A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

All daughters-in-law had a respectable place in a Gaddi family though the eldest one enjoyed special and higher position. She was called ‘Mulin Rani’ who was in charge of kitchen. Though others also assisted in cooking the meals, she invariably used to serve the meals to all the family members. With the advance in age, she could relegate these duties to younger ones.

3.3.8 STATUS OF WOMAN AS A MOTHER-IN-LAW

Mother-in-law enjoyed a high position in the family and she supervised all the domestic affairs. She was busy in spinning and weaving at home and also looked after the domestic animals. She was never in conflict with her daughters-in-law and invariably had good relations with them. She had been acting successfully as the head of the family (‘Karta’) enjoying all powers to take any decision on family matters.

3.3.9 DIVORCE

Divorce, though permitted among these tribes, had not been frequent. The form of divorce was simplicity itself. According to Sherring (1906), a man used to tell his wife to go, and accordingly she left him. If she wished to live with another man, the union was not known as a true marriage, although the man in question had to pay for her to her former husband, who on his part gives a relinquishment. In divorcing a woman, the husband used to give her a piece of white cloth. The cloth was invariably white, the idea being to give her and her children by any subsequent marriage, purity and legitimacy, and until the cloth was given no divorce could take place.

In fact, should a man elope with another man’s wife he was shoe beaten and his goats and sheep stolen from him with their packs, while the
children were considered illegitimate. The husband, or any of his close relations, could so treat the erring man or any of his close relations. The children were known as ‘Teliyas’ until the second husband held a formal meeting of village elders in the presence of the first husband and official account had been taken of the original husband’s marriage expenses and these had to be made good, and as it was given, this set the woman free.

There was no means by which a wife could claim a divorce, and if a man took a second wife, and refused to release the first, there was no way in which he could be compelled to release her. However unhappy she may be, she could not marry again unless she had been properly released. However, in common practice a second wife was only taken with the concurrence of the first, generally in cases of sterility, or on the definite understanding that the first wife would be released.

3.3.10 STATUS AS A WIDOW

Widow occupied low status in comparison to married women as well as the girls. Widow marriage, in the sense of a marriage with all the honour and dignity of a first marriage, was unknown. However, according to Sherring (1906), it was a common practice for widows to go and live with other men, but the unions thus created never occupied the same rank in popular estimation as an ordinary marriage, although no disfavour was shown such as out-casting from food or drink. The man in question paid a sum of money to the deceased husband’s relatives who in return gave what is usually known as a ‘ladawa’ or relinquishment. Generally, the younger brother accepted widow of an elder brother as wife.

3.3.11 TABOOS FOR WOMEN

The Gaddis have been a hard working and practical people as they could be seen always at work, both men and women, and in their idlest
moments still spinning thread for weaving. Still they were in the clutches of many superstitions and taboos. A taboo is a negatively sanctioned social rule connected with religion and natural powers. The Gaddi women had to undergo many taboos. For example, women could not go to the roof as it made them impure. It was supposed that deities live on rooftops. Similarly, there were taboos related with menstrual period, doing something inauspicious in a temple, taking bath at a holy place or washing clothes their etc. In this case, she had to purify herself.

3·3·12 ROLE IN RITUALS, CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS

Among the Gaddis, the omnipresence of the supernatural and the sense of dependence on the Divine mercy had found expression in many rituals, ceremonies and festivals, which could be interpreted only in terms of the influence of the environment. Women had a peculiar role to play in these occasions. For worshipping some Gods or Goddesses, women participation was significant. For example, only a housewife has been most capable to offer worship to ‘Nayunt’ a power Goddess. They participated in Holi, Dusshera, Diwali, Raksha Bandhan, Janamashtmi and many of the local festivals. A married woman could go to her parents once in a year to offer prayers and worship the souls connected with father’s side.

3·3·13 INHERITANCE OF PROPERTY

The Gaddi women had no special property of their own as in Hindu law, although at the will of their husbands or father, they might be allowed to keep what they earned by spinning wool or making blankets, but this was entirely dependent on the pleasure of the men concerned.

A peculiar custom among the Gaddis was that generally a daughter inherited her mother’s property like ornaments and clothes and not her daughter-in-law. Similarly, sons were entitled for their father’s property and
if the son wanted to give a share to their unmarried sisters, it was not objected to by the community. However, a daughter became eligible for her mother’s property only after latter’s death. In case a daughter decided, to remain unmarried, the same rule applied for inheriting mother’s ornaments and clothes.

3.3.14 ROLE IN TRIBAL PANCHAYATS

Panchayats play an important role in tribal villages. Disputes related to fields, pastoral land, and division of property among brothers or neglect of father by sons etc. were settled by the panchayat. Traditionally, a council of elders did this and attempt was made to give unanimous judgments or compel the parties to have mutual agreement. Now this task has been taken by statutory village panchayats. Women have been traditionally discussing the disputes in the village and framed the rules in dormitories and thus used to assist the council of elders, which mainly consisted of male members.

One may conclude that as the whole, tribal women have had fairly high status. She had been treated as a person having her own prestige and name, and her domestic accomplishments were recognized and appreciated. Barring a few exceptions, she has had a fair amount of power in the process of decision-making, practically in all spheres of life.

From this traditional status, we can now safely proceed to examine the contemporary status of tribal woman in the light of various forces of change and their impact.

3.4 CONTEMPORARY STATUS OF GADDI WOMEN

Various sociologists, social anthropologists and others, acquainted with the Indian cultural dynamics, have noted a unique phenomenon
characterized by many of the tribal groups’ gradual march towards the Hindu pole for Hindu social recognition as well as acquiring a higher status thereof; hitherto denied to them in the regional Hindu social framework. The phenomenon is quite old, and it has been shown that many of the present day Hindu castes and sub-castes have tribal background. The tribal absorption into the Hindu fold was accomplished through a prolonged and gradual process of cultural transformation, generally defined as ‘Hinduisation’. Instances from tribal India are not lacking on this score. In fact, it has been stated that over seventy per cent of tribal people has undergone this transformation (Srivastava, 1966). These tribal people have been variously described by anthropologists as : “Hinduised without being Hindus” (Elwin, 1942), “imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society” (Ghurye, 1943), “indistinguishable from the inferior ranks of the caste order” (Majumdar, 1947) and the like. In this section of the present chapter, we propose to analyze contemporary status of the Gaddi women in the light of the cultural dynamics going on in this tribes. An attempt has also been made to identify the factors responsible for change in the status of the Gaddi woman.

Gaddis of Chamba District present peculiar cases. They, in order to secure Rajput social status in their regional Hindu framework, had involved themselves in the process of cultural proximation and sanskritization. As already stated, a large part of Gaddi region is completely rugged, mountainous and the human settlements here are confined mainly to few hill tops and some valleys. Gaddi villages are generally situated on the hill tops or in the interior hills. Except Bharmaur Tehsil of Chamba District, other hills don’t have much snow fall. A few Gaddi families have wandered down into the valley which skirts the base of the chain but the great majority
lives on the hill tops. Their attempt to raise the status through sanskritization has yielded fruits and they have been successful in getting much respectable place in hill society.

The forces of change have crumbled their traditional status. Sex discrimination has entered among the Gaddis. Now like neighbouring communities, Gaddis also prefer a male child. However, a female child is not an unwelcome one. They, in fact, consider female child as symbol of ‘Lakshmi’ and prefer to have both the male and female ones. There is equal joy at the time of the birth of the first child irrespective of sex. However, if the first child is female, they prefer male ones subsequently. The mechanism adopted to inform the villagers about the new born baby is oral information on the same day or the next day, both in the case of a male and female child. Here also, the women are no longer kept in ‘Sheds’ and the restrictions for touching the mother or the child are not adhered to.

Thus, by and large, a male birth involves a higher degree of happiness and more elaborate ritual performance among the tribals. They argue that a male member in the family is more useful not only that he earns more and carries forward the family name and descent, but also because he stays with the parents to serve them in old age. Though, the tribe represents a patrilineal and patriarchal society, this attitude has developed only through the process of cultural approximation with caste Hindus. In overall perspective, it sounds that a female child is not an unwanted one among the tribe selected for this study.

The above change in the attitude connected with the birth of a male and female child has affected the Status as a Daughter as well. Traditionally there was no discrimination between sons and daughters and the latter were not considered burden on the parents. Now sons have higher status and superior position vis-à-vis daughters among Gaddi tribe. As is usually the
position among higher castes in hilly region, Gaddis claim that the male member stays with parents and serves them in old age, whereas, the daughter leaves the parental place after she gets married. Though economically boys and girls are earning members even among this tribe, they contend that the son is welcome as he carries forward the family name and descent and he alone has the privilege of performing last rites in the event of parents’ death. This type of growing attitude is reflected in the parents’ more proneness for giving formal education, including higher education, to male members than the female ones. Parents, more or less, have started considering daughters as burden on them.

As regards the **Position of Girls in Dormitories**, there has been a profound change among the Gaddis. The institution of dormitory has been prevalent as a bi-sexual village dormitory. Its main object was to provide a social centre for dance, drink and music. Based upon courtship or pre-marital acquaintance and love, it used to be the main institution for arranging marriages, besides entertainment and socialization.

With the change in the status of boys and girls and the abolition of the institution of dormitory, the practices of mate selection have also undergone transformation. Traditionally, the child marriage among the tribals has been a rarity. As regards the forms of marriage, one could find marriage through dormitory and marriage through capture as the most prevalent ways traditionally. Marriage through engagement of ‘Thochimo’, by Hindu custom and by the exchange of sisters could penetrate the tribal customs afterwards. In all these marriages, the woman’s own inclinations have been decisive and the mutual consent of bride and bridegroom was always preferred.

**Dowry**, in the strict sense of the term, did not exist among the Gaddis. As the traditional status of the woman has been relatively high and
her own inclinations for marriage were decisive, the question of dowry did not arise. This type of situation could have given rise to bride-price, which, too, is not reported to be widely prevalent. However, during the process of cultural proximation and sanskritization, the evil of dowry, as it existed in many other Hindu social groups in hill region, entered among the tribals. It has reached to such an extent that one can’t think of marriage without dowry. As many Gaddis have been successful in achieving Rajput status, they adhered to dowry as was done by high caste Hindus who provided them the model for sanskritization.

As a wife, Gaddi woman enjoyed equal status to her husband as she was respected and given due regards in all the matters. She was first to get up in the morning and last to go to bed. At mental, physical and emotional levels, she never suffered from inferiority. Unlike many other Indian tribes, where woman imported more freedom of views under the trends of Hinduisation, modernization and urbanization, Gaddi woman’s Status as a Wife has gone down considerably. Among the Gaddis, though ‘purda’ has not entered, still wife’s status has come down vis-a-vis her husband. The husband has assumed dominant role in almost all the spheres of life after the change in traditional occupation since late 1960’s. She is still the first to get up in the morning and last to go to bed, but this has started becoming burden both physical and mental as the husband never shares her burden at home and sometimes sits even idle.

Compartmentalization of Work and Activities have been very well devised traditionally and there was no confusion, whatsoever, about it. The Gaddi woman occupied a vulnerable position not only in family activities but also in economy at large. Besides making woollen articles for commercial, purpose at home, a woman also helped in agriculture, where so ever it was pursued and in what so ever form it was pursued. Now-a-days
women work in kitchen, they help in agricultural work, grass cutting and bring it home for the cattle. In contrast, men do the outside work, help in spinning the wool and take care of agriculture. The tedious and onerous task of marching from hill-tops to down markets and back for trade is no more pursued by men. In fact, women still contribute a lot in economy of this tribe, sometimes more than what their counterparts—the menfolk do.

The status of a woman is also reflected through the Freedom to the Wife in the concerned society, tribal or non-tribal. Traditionally the wives of Gaddi tribe enjoyed full freedom as they never lived in ‘purda’ or seclusion even when father-in-law, husband’s elder brother or a male stranger was present. In fact, she could talk to menfolk freely without any hesitation and her joking with anyone was never considered bad. With the change among the tribals as a result of the processes of Hinduisation, sanskritization and then re-tribalization, as also the subsequent changes, the freedom granted to a wife has been fully curtailed.

At present, Gaddis maintain a very rigid attitude to spinsterhood and rule out any question of granting pre-marital sexual freedom. No one approves of it, the question of respect and tolerance is secondary. All the male heads of the families were negative in their attitude to spinster. They believe that remaining a spinster invites stigma and scar on the family, more so on the parents who get a bad name and are socially criticized. As the marriage among these tribals is considered a natural phenomenon and no one remains unmarried, exception being some abnormal boys, keeping an unmarried girl is socially disapproved. Parents and society condemn spinsterhood for fear that such situation may cause a big social problem in the community as the spinster is more prone to become a witch. The fear of this kind also saves even of a spinster in the family. Such a climate ultimately helps to retain a clean social order which is the goal of the tribal society. Like
restriction on pre-marital relations, extra-marital sex relations are also
denounced and taken serious note of. Even the widows, though may be
young, are not permitted to enter such relations.

Status of a tribal woman as a Mother, Daughter-in-law and
Mother-in-law has also undergone change. Traditionally a tribal mother
enjoyed considerable regard and respect in her family. The same has been
the case for a daughter-in-law. But now the men, who were previously away
from home for most of the time, have started exerting and dominating the
women and criticizing on one pretext or the other. Those who are unable to
become the mothers, i.e., are barren find themselves in uncomfortable
position.

Another arena where a woman and her status are well reflected
concerns the situation of divorce. Divorce, though permitted among the
Gaddis, had not been frequent. Man and woman had freedom of divorce and
the procedure has been very simple. But the process of Hinduisation has
brought change in their attitudes towards divorce. Divorces have entered
the tribal society. The main factors responsible for seeking a divorce by a
woman are: ill-treatment by the husband, economic insecurity, including
lack of food supply to the woman if he is staying away from the family,
husband’s extravagancy, impotency and excessive drunkenness. Physical
beating of the wife by the husbands is yet another event that compels the
woman to take steps for divorce. In other words, the background of divorce
has its root in social, economic and biological parameters. Hunger, sex and
socio-economic insecurity determine woman’s attitude to the continuity or
discontinuity of marital union.

Gaddi woman’s contemporary Status as a Widow has also
worsened. What is the general reaction to widow, and the restraints imposed
on her hinted at the contemporary status. Considering a widow as unfortunate and helpless, the tribals, in general grant her liberty to marry. Among the Gaddis, a widow can marry her deceased husband’s younger brother or the elder brother or select anyone outside the village for this purpose. Sometimes, she had to seek the permission of her father also for this. Oftenly, she is not permitted to marry now. A widow’s presence is treated inauspicious on certain auspicious occasions. Knowing it well, the widows themselves avoid their presence and participation. As such a widow feels segregated, and the discrimination keeps on pricking her. On many occasions the widows are rated as second rate citizens. There has been only very few cases of widow marriage, where she married to her deceased husband’s elder or younger brother. They are leading a normal life along with their new husbands’ first wife.

In addition to social organization, the religion of the tribals has sufficient say in regard to the status of a woman. There are still some elements of religious life where the women are not permitted to participate. This especially applies to religious positions which are said to be the privilege of men alone. The females are also kept apart or segregated during worship of religious places. However, the Taboos for Women related with going to house tops, doing something inauspicious in a temple, taking bath at a holy place or washing clothes there, menses etc. have changed completely among the Gaddis. With the increasing impact of education, the superstitions connected with child birth have also changed.

The role of tribals women in Rituals, Ceremonies and Festivals still occupies an important place. They participate in religious fairs and take part in all the local, and regional festivals.

Pattern of Inheritance of Property is one of the stronger indicators of position of an individual. Various forms of inheritance mark societies.
Among matrilineal communities, where the status of women is high women inherit property which includes land, house, livestock and ornaments. Among patrilineal communities, inheritance is in male line and sons inherit the property of their father. If sons wanted to give a share to unmarried sisters, the community did not object it to. During the processes of Hinduisation and sanskritization, the traditional pattern of inheritance of property has changed. In both the villages, the large majority of heads of the family subscribed to the view that the women are deprived of their right over the property. It is chiefly the prerogative of the world of men.

The traditional mechanism of social control among the tribals has not been that elaborate in the sense that larger bodies, beyond village, to enforce law and order were missing. Most important, therefore, has been the village council or the tribal panchayat. Woman used to assist the village council in settling the disputes. With the cultural transformation going on among the tribals, the importance of women in their capacity to assist the village panchayat was decreased. The woman’s association, in terms of position, with traditional council had become almost nil. Thus their Role in Tribal Panchayat has decreased considerably. However, statutory village panchayats and reservation of seats for scheduled tribes and scheduled castes have given boost to women’s status. They have significant role to play in panchayats these days and many Gaddi women have been able to become pradhans of the panchayats.

3.5 EMERGING CONTEMPORARY PORTRAIT

On the basis of the discussion of the above determinants of the status of women, the present status of tribal woman, her contemporary portrait emerges. Gaddi tribe is essentially patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal tribe. The processes of Hinduisation and Sanskritization, that started in 1581
with the opening of Mt. Kailash and holy Mansarovar for the pilgrims, have affected Gaddis in almost all the aspects of their life. The traditional higher status of tribal woman has come down considerably and the evils associated with caste society have entered among the women of Gaddi tribe making their position still worst. Here a female birth involves lesser degree of happiness. Girl is considered burden for the parents and is differentiated in number of life ceremonies and rituals. Her say in marriage, divorce, widow remarriage, inheritance of property and all such cases has been totally curtailed. Girls no longer think of the type of freedom which they traditionally had in dormitories, daughter-in-law have to observe little distance from the elders to get little respect in the family; old mothers have to live at the mercy of their son(s); widows are not to think of re-marriage in order to live in the family and the village; wives are not to raise their voice in case husbands beat them under the influence of excessive drunkenness or otherwise; women are not to think of claiming any share in the ancestral property; and they are not to dream even for getting leadership in village councils very easily. In other words, a woman has been placed in a subordinate position as is the case among non-tribals in hills and not raise her voice against male domination and accesses.

Tribal woman is still physically fit and sturdy. She is the first to get up in the morning, and last to go to bed as usual. But at mental, physical and emotional levels, she has started suffering from inferiority and admits it. Domination of man over woman has increased in almost all the spheres of life. Thus, a tribal woman’s status has definitely come down during the cultural dynamics in this tribe and her contemporary status, though a little high as compared to other groups in hill regions, is considerably low in comparison to her own traditional status.
However, the policy of protective discrimination has increased education and employment among Gaddi women. They have even become more conscious about their rights and the governmental facilities available for them in various fields. The introduction of statutory panchayats has opened new vista for the empowerment of the tribals. The importance of traditional tribal panchayat has altogether decreased. A number of Gaddi women are now Gram Pradhans.

It is true that there has been a decline in the status of Gaddi women, but it is still better than their counterparts in surrounding hilly region. They enjoy more freedom of thought and action in comparison to their neighbourly Hindu sisters.