

# **INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the past Gandhi's contribution to the emancipation of women was unique and he included women in the freedom movement. He argued and propagated that woman is not backward but made so by the mean mentality of the male chauvinism. He also made efforts to create conditions favourable to development and progress of women (Mann, 1987). In spite of his efforts Indian women could not be helped to free themselves from the subordination of men. Rao (1992) quotes Swami Dayanand Saraswati who spoke about the emancipation of Indian women :

"As long as Indian women remain ignorant and do not obtain freedom from domestic thralldom, the hope of seeing India make any appreciable progress will never be realised. Female education and emancipation must have priority."

Hammond and Jablow (1976) observed that in societies throughout the world and recorded history, women's primary roles have been family oriented. The activities and relationships that are basic to their lives are within the context of the family roles (daughter, wife, mother and sister) which is thus fundamental for the understanding of women and their place in society.

Though the social and economic status of Indian rural women has changed to a considerable extent their condition is not yet satisfactory. Their participation in family decision

making is very much limited. Effective decision making is an important factor in development (Giriappa, 1988). In spite of the scanty and stray changes which have taken place in the sphere of status, the Indian women, especially the tribal women can not be regarded as being emancipated and free from the constraints of age-old customs and traditions which influence their day to day lives in their homes and movement in the society.

Theoretically, the low status of women is accepted even in tribal societies but in practice the traditional norms are somewhat liberal for them. But it is not the same in all the tribal communities, especially in the case of Andaman Pygmy woman, where she is considered a drudge.

Describing a Santal woman's status in her society Biswas (1956) has mentioned that though she was barred from certain religious and administrative functions her economic status was very high. It was she who generally went to the market, did the bargaining. All the produce was in her hand and looked for the sustenance of the family members. Shah (1950) in his study of the life of tribal women held that the social structure and organisation of tribal life centred around the family. As the pivot of the family life was the woman, her position and the social change that took place in her status and her daily life were most important. According to Jagirdar (1986) in Minyong tribal society women were highly respected and husbands were very considerate towards their wives. Among all the matriarchal tribal communities of

North East, the owner of household property is always a female as it is herited from mother to daughter (Nath and Majumdar 1980). In contrast to the above mentioned position according to Adhikary's' (1978) observation, among the Birhor tribals the authority within the family lies in the hands of the father, husband or an older male member according to the composition of the household. Singh (1988) speaks of tribal women having more active role in rituals, economy and family affairs. Their freedom is within the four walls of the communities.

While the status of tribal women, their role within their family, their economic right, their participation in household management and participation in community affairs have been debated for many years, these issues have not been focused much in relation to their participation in developmental programmes.

The tribal societies of which tribal women are important members have been exploited by the clever and economically powerful groups. For the last many decades the entire tribal population has been exposed to a number of external influences and stimuli. It has undergone and submitted to a good many cultural, economic and religious impositions. In recent years there has been industrialisation by which tribals are being affected to a great extent. They have adopted new ways of life. Shashi (1978) writes about the changes brought in tribal women's life that the tribal women

have changed their age old dress. They have started to wear sari and mill made clothes. They have modern ornaments and like to imitate their neighbours. These changes are seen not only in dress and ornaments but many other things in their daily lives.

Many of the tribals have adopted new ways of life which means giving up of the traditional ways of life. But among these tribal groups those who changed over willingly or through coercion to new ways were forced with various kinds of problems and were also able to find a solution, whereas there were some who could neither find any solution nor could they cope up with the strain arising from the transition. In some places government as well as voluntary agencies have introduced developmental programmes of various kinds to solve the problems of tribal groups and this directly might have helped to ameliorate to some extent the pathetic situation of rural tribal communities.

Efforts have also been made to implement developmental programmes for tribal women as well as other women in the society to raise their status in the family and in the community. Indira Gandhi laid emphasis on the status of women by introducing a chapter on women's development in the Sixth Five Year Plan. It stressed women's role in development. The ministry concerned had special units to deal with programmes for the upliftment of women (Maurya, 1988). But it is debatable. In spite of introduction of so many programmes for the welfare of women, what is the extent of participation of

tribal women in these developmental programmes. Has this effort really brought any change in their condition, status and their key role in entire family affairs ? What is her position in the family affairs ? What is her position in the family and society as a woman ? What is her literacy level which is one of the most important determining factors in the development of any population. It is the need of the hour to think that unless there is development of tribal women, there will be no change and development in tribal family and society at large.

### 1.1 Rationale for the study

The tribals in Bihar, like the tribals elsewhere in the country, are predominantly rural, overwhelmingly illiterate, abjectly poor and depressingly malnourished and unhealthy (Singh, 1987, 1988).

The problem of tribal population has acquired a new significance after independence. The planners, research scholars of social sciences and other disciplines have come up with various questions as mentioned by Desai (1978). What are these tribes ? How do they differ from non-tribal groups? Why have they remained so segregated from other groups ? How do they fare in history ? What is their present status and condition ? What is their future in context of objectives and strategies laid down by government for their development ? It is very much doubtful whether they have been able to find satisfactory answers. But there

is no doubt that it has created a great awakening among these groups. Struggle to improve their condition has been and is being launched by various groups comprising this stratum of tribal population.

According to Mahalingam (1988) the problem of tribal development has reached a critical stage and has assumed an added significance in context of the high priority accorded to social justice. Some of the tribal groups have remained completely untouched by the process of economic development and some have been adversely affected by it.

The Indian National Congress - as the Governing Party - has from the day of forming the constitution of the Indian Union adopted various measures to handle tribal problems of diverse nature. Special provision was made in the constitution to develop tribal area. Christian Missionaries and Hindu Social Reformers have also made tremendous efforts to study and reform the condition of tribal people. Academicians, Anthropologists, Sociologists and many others have conducted vigorous drive to analyse scientifically the situation and the problems of tribal population. Tribal Research Institutes have been sponsored to explore and examine the life pattern of tribal communities. There has been concern over tribal women's lives and various categories of people have made a significant contribution by analysing the problems and situations of tribal women in different parts of our country as well as of those abroad.

Indian society has gone through many rapid changes in a relatively short time that has elapsed since country gained independence. These changes have created their own pulls and demands on one segment of Indian society, that is women. While the rest of the world is changing, in some communities, women are supposed to conform to age old and traditional images and stereotypes, especially true of tribal women. The problem of women's emancipation has been the subject of growing sociological interest in our country. Being aware of the importance of studying Indian women from a socio-cultural perspective, a large number of social researchers have already conducted many useful empirical studies on the status of women in various communities in India. Critical observations, however, reveal that most of these studies have been conducted in urban areas. This is precisely because of women social scientists' inconvenience and unwillingness to work among the tribal and rural women of our country.

Though more than four hundred tribal communities live in India, the tribal women have not drawn the attention of our social scientists in a big way. Literature in social sciences reveals that there exists a very limited number of empirical studies dealing with status, role in the family, participation in family decision making and other issues of tribal women. There have been differences of opinion among anthropologists on the issues of status of women in tribal societies. Most of the anthropological studies reveal the tribal women's life from the researcher's angle and not from tribal women's view.



By studying the lives of one group of tribal women one cannot draw general conclusion for the rest of the tribal groups. Every group has its own demographic, socio-economic, political and cultural background. According to Sarkar (1994) status and role of women in tribal societies do not work in a uniform pattern in all the communities. These differ from tribe to tribe and from region to region. Sometimes the same tribe living in different regions may show diversified behaviour patterns so far as the status of their womenfolk is concerned. It is also a matter of fact and revealed by studies, as change encompasses various spheres, women's position also goes through certain changes which may be positive or negative (Dhillon, 1981). In some matriarchal tribal communities women enjoy a position almost similar to that of men whereas in some patriarchal tribal communities they are the target of exploitation and oppression, sometime by men of the same culture and sometime due to their own ignorance.

Though something has been done for the tribal women, much still needs to be done. If at all one wishes to establish India amidst the upheaval in which she finds herself today, one has to take tribal women along with other rural women into confidence, understand their needs, sensibilities and problems and chalk out an elaborate, well conceived strategy to give them a better and happier future.

In the light of the above mentioned overview of the general position of tribal women the investigator felt the

need of taking the issue of 'Ho' tribal women of Bihar who have been a very neglected group by social scientists and scholars in the field of empirical research. Therefore this study was planned to analyse empirically the 'Ho' tribal women's role in managerial decisions, their status and participation in developmental programmes. These women occupy an important place in the social structure of the tribal society and any change in the structure would consequently affect their position. Investigation of 'Ho' tribal women's role in managerial decisions could help to reveal some of their status dimensions. Recently, in the context of world wide commitment to 'development' there has been an increasing awareness that in most tribal settings the burden of women's work and the constraints that customs and traditions place on her should deserve a special scrutiny. We need to strive forward to change the outlook and way of life of tribal women and this is possible only when her present condition and way of life are thoroughly understood. This study would help the various empirical studies which have been undertaken on tribal women, in arriving at a general theoretical perspective on the role of tribal women in decision-making, their social position and developmental problems in the context of the nature of the specific society. Such a perspective would also help researchers and social scientists to have a sound conceptual approach to tribal women's issues in various walks of their lives.

In view of the increasing recognition of the linkage between research, national policy and development programmes oriented to women, greater stress is now placed on full and accurate statistics about women. Further, more and better data are sought not so much to provide a framework for managerial welfare services for women to raise their status but rather to situate them firmly in economic planning and national development. Therefore to have deeper understanding of the problems in relation to the status of 'Ho' tribal women, their role in family decision making and participation in developmental programmes the present research was planned.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The present investigation is an attempt to explore 'Ho' tribal women's role in managerial decisions, their status in the family and participation in developmental programmes.

### 1.3 The Main Objectives of the study

1. To identify the demographic characteristics of tribal women and their household.
2. To study the extent of participation in managerial decision in relation to :
  - a) Household affairs.
    - i) Money centred decisions.
    - ii) Children centred decisions.
  - b) Farm activities.

3. To assess the nature of dependence of status on the following determinants :
  - i) Power exercised in decision making in the family.
  - ii) Freedom in spending family income.
  - iii) Help received in discharging household chores.
  - iv) Observance of traditional customs and behaviour which are indicative of the subordinate status of women.
  - v) Participation in social activities.
  - vi) Age at marriage.
  - vii) Literacy level of tribal women.
  - viii) Labour force participation.
  - ix) Decision regarding their own career.
4. To examine a) the extent of tribal women's participation in various developmental programmes and b) the impediments preventing them from participation.
5. To assess the impact of following variables on the level of participation in managerial decisions, in developmental programmes and level of status of tribal women :
  - i) Age of respondents.
  - ii) Literacy level of respondents.
  - iii) Employment status of respondents.
  - iv) Educational level of the head of the family.
  - v) Family type.
  - vi) Family income.
  - vii) Exposure to the larger environment.

6. To know the opinion of tribal men and the respondents about the status of tribal women in the family and society.
7. To discover the nature of interdependence of different variables under study.

#### **1.4 Assumption of the study**

Due to industrialisation and modernisation tribal community is in the process of continuous change.

#### **1.5 Hypotheses of the study**

1. The personal, family and situational variables influence the respondents' level of participation in decision making, developmental programmes and the level of their status.
2. The literacy level of respondents is the cause of differences in (i) their pattern of decision making and (ii) various determinants of their status.
3. The variation in the opinions related to different components of status of tribal women is determined by sex and literacy level.
4. Extent of participation in developmental programmes contributes to tribal women's (i) input into decisions about the household and farm related activities and (ii) the level of status.

### 1.6 Delimitations of the study

1. The study was carried out in two Community Development Blocks of Singhbhum district of Bihar state.
2. The sample consisted of 200 'Ho' tribal women and 100 'Ho' tribal men.
3. Equal number of illiterate and literate respondents were considered for the study.