

**SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE STATUS OF
TRIBAL WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO BASTAR DISTRICT, M. P.**

Dissertation submitted for the partial fulfilment for
the award of the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY



Ms. ABHA CHAUHAN
M. A. Sociology

**CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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DECLARATION

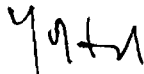
This dissertation entitled, Social Change and the Status of Tribal Women in India with Special Reference to Bastar District, M.P., submitted by Ms. Abha Chauhan for the Master of Philosophy degree has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiner's for evaluation.


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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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MS. ABHA CHAUHAN

CONTENTS	<u>PAGES</u>
DECLARATION	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	11
CONTENTS	111
I INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of Problem	1
Selection and Exposition of Problem	2
Theoretical Perspective on the Status of Women	6
Tribal Society - Status of Tribal Women	11
Status of Tribal Women	13
Tribal Society, Tribal Women and Social Change - A Historical Perspective	14
Change - A Historical Perspective	14
Introducing the District-Bastar	17
Bastar - A Historical Analysis	18
II SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMAN	27
A. Status of Women in the Traditional Social Structure of India	33
a. Role of Women in Tribal Economy	36
b. Social and Religious Status of Tribal Women	39
c. Status of Tribal Woman in Traditional Political Structure	45
B. Tribal Women and Social Change in India	48
a. Changes in her Economic Role	48
b. Changes in her social and Religious status	51
c. Changes in her legal and political status	53
d. Education and the Status of Tribal Women	54

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM :

The study of social status of women is important because it forms one of the most trustworthy and reliable indexes of the state of society and indicates the nature and direction of social change.

In tribal society of India also, women were found to have been occupying a prominent place as a critical variable to understand the changing phenomena. However, the study of tribal women cannot be complete, if examined in isolation of the whole society in general and the tribal system in particular. There is a need therefore, for a proper analysis of the political-economy of the tribal society and the place of tribal women in it, before examining the forces of social change affecting it.

The two significant questions therefore, to begin with, are -

- (i) what constitute the status of women
- (ii) What has been the impact of social change on the status of women.

An attempt is made in the present work to analyse these questions in relation to tribal women of India in general and of Bastar district, Madhya Pradesh in particular.

SELECTION AND EXPOSITION OF PROBLEM:

The present work is based on secondary sources of data mostly. The reasons for the selection of this problem, particularly of Bastar district were many. The important ones are: Firstly, there have been very few studies on tribal women in India and not a single work is there of Bastar tribes or of the tribes of Madhya Pradesh, as far as the tribal women are concerned. This seems strange when we acknowledge the fact that Madhya Pradesh is a state which has maximum number of tribal population. Secondly, in Sociology and Social Anthropology, the status of women in primitive societies has been a debatable proposition. Bastar district provide an adequate insight for this, as some tribes of Bastar are still very primitive. Thirdly, this proposition also directs us to the question as to whether tribal society in India was stagnant and isolated or was there some kind of contact with the outside world. In other words, was there any process of social change, even if at a slower speed. Fourthly, in Bastar, which was more or less a secluded area, the intervention by the state policies and the process of industrialization disturbed the autonomous structure. It therefore forms an important area to study the process of social change and how it affects the status of women subsequently. Lastly, to examine the progress of

Indian society on the whole. In other words, where do tribal people, particularly the tribal women stand in the mainstream of the whole society.

Our method of analysis will become clear as we examine some concepts indispensable to our study. These would include the following:

Social Status-Status of Women:

The concept social status has diverse meanings. One sociological tradition consistently uses to refer to a position in a social system, with distinct array of designated rights and obligations. In this tradition, the related concept of social role refers to the behaviour of status occupants that is oriented towards the patterned expectations of others.¹ In other words, social status has been reckoned in terms of the degree to which a person possesses the qualities or attributes which are considered valuable in a particular society and perform his role accordingly.²

In the light of the above definition it can be said that the status of women is determined in terms of the norms and taboos governing their roles and behaviour in that particular community. Anthropologists view the overall position of men and women primarily in terms of their respective rights and duties as reflected in the customs and norms of the society.³ Malinowski has pointed out, a correct definition of status can be given only

after taking into consideration all mutual duties between the sexes and the safeguards provided for the protection of each sex against the high handedness of the other.⁴

In contrast to this definition another view on the question of the status of women was propounded by Marx and Engels a century ago and followed later by many social feminists. They see the subordination of women as a part of the subordination of one class by another in the system of productions and is linked to the emergence of private property.⁵ Here the emphasis is on the freedom of choice of economic activity in the classless society in determining the status of women. But this view has its own repercussions. Participation in economic activities is not a sufficient criteria in itself to determine the status of women. In India, women of the lower castes who did not enjoy high status in the society have always been working either as cultivators or agricultural labourers or even as artisans.⁶ This view also leaves no scope for the study of matrilineal societies as it assumes that women in such societies enjoyed a better position.

It is agreed by and large that social status is determined in accordance with the common value system, to use Parsons Terminology. As far as the status of women is concerned the question is - who decides what forms the common value system? In primitive societies it is a crime for a women to touch her

man's hunting tools;⁷ she is ostracized if she becomes pregnant before marriage; is associated with witchcraft if remains barren.⁸ In India, till very recently a woman who was burnt alive was a 'Sati' and was held in high esteem by the people. It is true that such practices die out, even though very slowly and the attributes of social status change with time, but by and large what is called a common consensus has been the view of men. It is they who have decided whether women should be given freedom and if yes, to what extent.

This argument then becomes a subjective assessment of the status of women. The question still remains is - what constitute the social status of women?

Social status is a relative term. when we speak of the social status of women the obvious queries are - in comparison to whom and in relation to what? We make a comparison when we say that women in tribal society enjoy better status than women in caste society and we see it in relation to men when we say women all over the world occupy a low status.

But this relativity and comparison also needs base when we talk of the status of women. For this we have taken certain indicators like, her freedom of choice and movement in social matters, types of taboos, her role in tribal economy and her legal and political status.

Her position in any society is determined by what decision making power women have in different spheres of life, what choice of freedom, what degree of control, and what duties, rights and privileges she enjoys. It is seen that even among matrilineal societies women have no role in political sphere and even if they own property it is always managed and controlled by mother's brother⁹. The question for example, then is, it is not so essential whether women participates in economic activity but whether she can choose the type of work she wants to do. For we know that, even in primitive societies where ample freedom is given in the choice of her marriage, tribal women cannot choose not to marry. She has to marry and take up the duties at home.¹⁰

Theoretical Perspective on the Status of Women:

Keeping in view the above aspects it is believed that women in general form a disadvantageous group. A characteristic feature of labour market all over the world is that certain jobs are performed exclusively by men while other are performed exclusively by women. This general rule apply virtually to all agricultural tasks and of a great majority of the jobs in urban industries and service establishment.¹¹ Women produce children, women are mothers and wives, women do the cooking, mending, sewing and washing, they take care of men and largely excluded from high status occupations and from positions of powers¹². There are men jobs and women's jobs in the simplest hunting and gathering bands and in the most industrial societies.

In terms of the rewards of prestige, wealth and power attached to gender roles, women almost invariably come off worst. According to the U.N.'s Report - "Women constitute half the world's population, perform nearly two-thirds of its work hours, receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property!"¹³ The report of the committee on status of women in India pointed out that the image of the Indian woman created by a few women holding high positions or academic qualifications conceals, rather than reflects, the low status and educational level of the average women of India.¹⁴

In recent years, particularly with the rise of the women's liberation movement, the reasons for sexually based division of labour and for the inequality between male and female roles have been hotly debated. Two main points have emerged from the debate. The first maintain that the sexual division of labour and inequality between the sexes is determined to some degree by biologically and genetically based differences between men and women. Freud, for instance characterized women as constitutionally passive by saying that autoeroticism in women was phallic in nature, and to construct the libido as 'regularly and lawfully of a masculine nature whether in the man or in the women'¹⁵. This position is opposed by those who argue that gender roles are culturally determined and inequality between sexes results from socially constructed power-relationships. Most of the writings by feminists support this view point. Simone de Beauvoir maintains that the secondary place

of women in relation to men is not imposed of necessity by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men.¹⁶

These views have given rise to several theoretical orientation which form the vasis of the feminist movements. The important ones are - (i) Socialist Feminists

(ii) Radical Feminists

(iii) Liberal Feminists.

All of them believe that women status is low and needs to be changed. However they differ in their method and approach. Following Marx and Engels socialist feminist believe that with the development of productive force and the private property women as a result of their biological role in reproduction was reiegated to the family role and excluded from social production. This led to her loss of economic powers, as she lost control over the means of production, which further led to loss of status. This in Engels words was the 'world histroic defeat of the female sex.'¹⁷ Engels sees the emancipation of women as coming through their participation in social production. Several women's organization in India like-National Federation of Indian Women(NFIW), self employed women's Association (SEWA) and Association of Men Against Violence Against Women(MAVAW) work on these lines.¹⁸

The socialist feminist orientation has certain limitations. Firstly, their contention that socialism will automatically free women has not been proved to be true. The position of women in the Soviet Union, China and Cuba is not equal to that of men. Soviet women today are still responsible for the burden of house work and child rearing.¹⁹ Then by seeing the oppression of women as a part of the exploitative class system they ignore the issues which are related exclusively to women. Certain other dimensions like religious, cultural and psychological are overlooked. We would look into these in our discussion on the status of tribal women in India and in Bastar.

Radical feminists see women as a class and particularly as the primary feature of an unequal society the source of the oppression of women is often seen in the biological differences between male and female and the ability of the male to manipulate these differences through male institutions and values which constitute patriarchy, the most important unit of which is the family. They agree that to define women exclusively in terms of their sexual roles, that is, as wives and mothers is oppressive and believe in the radical changes and complete abolition of exploitation. In India there are not very many supporters of this view.²⁰

The radical feminists fail to pay adequate attention to the importance of the social relation of production in the women's lives,

for many black and working class women families serve as extended net work of support and even survival. Similarly this approach has weakness in the solution it offers to women's oppression, like to destroy the biological family and negate female biology.²¹

Moderate feminists focus on the struggle for equal rights within the framework of the existing society because they believe that men and women are created equal and therefore would have equal opportunity. Their demands mainly include, the right to vote, the right of inheritance of property, equal political participation, equal job opportunity and equal education.²² In India, it also includes legal protection against sex discrimination and against the prevalent attitudes and values and unjust social customs. Mahatma Gandhi strongly criticised 'excessive subordination of the wife to the husband' and raised his voice against customs and pleaded for women's education. He however assigned certain specific role to women which suited her more than man, those of 'Mother' and a 'housewife'.²³ Modern liberal feminists do not agree with this view point. According to Betty Friedan, one of the leading feminist 'women have accepted an ideology, the feminine mystique, which claims that their true vocation and only real fulfillment lies in their roles of 'wife and mother'.²⁴ In India, there are certain religious myth which play a significant part in institutionalizing such beliefs.

This theory has been criticized for not providing any cause for women's oppression and being ahistorical in its method. But as

a part of a feminist movement it has been most successful.

These theoretical perspectives put some questions and try to answer them. What has been the cause of women's low status in society? Why it is perpetuating? and how it can be improved? None of them is complete in itself but gives certain insights which would help us in analysing the status of tribal women in India and in Bastar.

Tribal Society - Status of Tribal Women:

| A tribal woman occupies an important place in the social structure of the tribal society.²⁵ Tribal society though very different from the rest has been an integral part of the Indian society. |

In spite of the effort invested by anthropologists in the study of primitive societies, there really is no satisfactory way of defining it. Since Evans-Pritchard's time anthropologists have tried in a much more systematic way to provide a structural definition of the tribe particularly in the context of segmentary societies.²⁶ In India, so far, only Bailey has tried to characterize tribes in terms of segmentary principles, when he made a contrast between 'tribe' and 'caste'.²⁷

| Though traditional Hindu society was at one and the same time both hierarchical and segmental and many observers and scholars mistook castes for tribes, and tribes for castes, in general a large number of tribes have maintained their seclusion. But now the primitive of yesterday have come into contact with their

more 'civilized' neighbours and are coming to lose their 'primitive' character.²⁸ This has posed a problem of the definition of a tribe. Majumdar points out when one looks into the definitions given by various anthropologists, one is bound to be impressed by the dissimilarity of their views as regards what constitute a tribe²⁹. Kinship ties, common territory, one language, joint ownership, one political organization have all been referred to as the main characteristics of a tribe. |

The definition of tribe thus undergo a change especially when it includes the widest variety of social formations, from small food-gathering bands to vast populations of settled agriculturists comprising three million persons or more.³⁰ The problem in India was to identify rather than define tribes, and scientific or theoretical considerations were never allowed to displace administrative or political ones.³¹ Lists of Indian tribes were thus drawn up, with or without benefit of clear and consistent definitions. These lists are not only in current use, but provide constitutional guarantee of tribal identity to those included in them. The present list shows more than 400 tribes with an aggregate population of over 50 million persons accounting for 7.76 percent of the total population.³² They are mainly concentrated in three zones. The bulk of them are located in the central zones which runs through the middle of India from

Gujrat to Bengal. The second zone comprises north and eastern India, while the third zone is constituted by some minor tribes of South India.³³

Status of Tribal Women:

Sociologists and Social Anthropologists have differed on the question of what constitute 'Status' while for Marx, the participation in economic activity is the main criteria, for Malinowski status constitutes 'all the mutual duties between the sexes'.³⁴ On this basis these writers formulate their argument and present diametrically opposite views, some of which take the stand that primitive societies generally assign a high status to women, whereas other view-points support the opposite argument, namely that, in primitive societies women are generally a depressed group.³⁵

It is therefore important to analyse what we mean by status. A discussion on the theoretical perspective on women revealed that no criteria in itself is sufficient. For our purpose we have taken certain indicators which would include all aspects of women's life. Lowie has emphasized the criteria, actual treatment of tribal women besides others³⁶. For instance, he says that, a Toda woman while well treated rank as inferior and are excluded from ritualistic observances occupying foremost place in Toda culture. On the other hand, the Andaman Island women is virtually on a plane of equality with her husband, though somewhat larger

share of the work may fall upon her shoulders³⁷.! Thus, it is important to consider her legal status as well as what it is in actual practice. In Chapter II, we have dealt with these propositions in a greater detail.

Tribal society, Tribal women and Social Change- A Historical Perspective:

Our purpose in the analysis of social change is not to show the existence of fixed laws of historical development or in a different sense that every age can only be understood in its own terms and the meaningful comparison cannot be made across historical periods. The idea is to give a deeper historical background to our study of social status of tribal women of a India and of Bastar which would also enable us to comprehend the process of social change.

The process of social change can be understood better if we attempt to answer certain questions in our study of tribal women.

What is the level of analysis?

In answer to this question we will try to examine the changes taking place in the tribal society since the establishment of the colonial rule when they for obvious reasons had to open up the entire country to be able to rule effectively.³⁸ This disturbed the social structure of the tribal society and the status of tribal women. The important thing, therefore, is to analyse the political economy of social change since the British rule.

Whether change derives from factors internal or external to the tribal society?

In this we would consider orthogenetic or endogamous and heterogenetic or exogenous sources of change and how the processes like sanskritization and industrialization affected the social and cultural life of tribal women.

What is the nature of change?

It is important to consider with what speed the status of tribal women has changed and what are its effects. It is seen that in India social change in the Tribal societies have come with a slower speed³⁹. For instance in many areas the tribal communities were broken down slowly by the establishment of mines and quarries in their areas, and also by employing the tribal people as unskilled labour in industries, especially in middle India.⁴⁰

What is the direction of change?

Has the social status of tribal women changed for better or worse? At least the analysis would suggest a trend in the direction of change in the social status of tribal women.

The political economy of the traditional tribal society presented a picture of more or less stable and socially and culturally homogenous society in which tribal women had a specific status and role.⁴¹ This picture began to change as a consequence of

structural rearrangement as a new role, a new relationship, a new status, a new value or a new institution emerged, especially with the advent of the British Rule.⁴²

However, the crucial factors of social change during the pre-colonial period were formation of state in the later medieval period and migration of peasant castes.⁴³ These present castes with the superior technology of agricultural cultivation, use of implements, and concept of agriculture seasons, were responsible for the emergence of peasantized tribals in Assam, Rajasthan and Central India during the 17th and 18th centuries. They were also encouraged by the Mughal rulers and Zamindars to reclaim lands and offered various incentives for this purpose.⁴⁴

The colonial period witnessed an accentuation of these trends as movements of peasants into the tribal region continued. As colonial administration was established, a system of rent was imposed on the tribal chiefs, and demand for money created, moneylenders and traders went into the tribal regions. Besides this a new class of intermediaries, Zamindars, Jagirdars and Ghatwals who were entrusted with the collection of rent and administrative functions was introduced.⁴⁵ Transition to settled agriculture was facilitated by a number of other measures taken to conserve and commercially exploit the forest and mineral resources of the tribal country and to establish colonies. This resulted in the breakdown of the political economy of the tribal

society as it became the part of the mainstream and as a consequence of this, the migration of tribal labourers to plantations and industrial centres took place.⁴⁶

This analysis shows that the tribal society was moving closer to the peasant/caste system even prior to the British rule under the colonial impact this process of sanskritization became of movement encompassing tribes and sub-tribes.⁴⁷ For instance, the Santals put on sacred thread and claimed themselves to be Kshatriyas while a Gond chief was conferred a status of 'Nagbansi Kshatriya'.⁴⁸ This affected the status of tribal women of such tribes as the norms and customs of the Hindus put several restriction on their freedom. The process of Sanskritization however slowed down a little because of the demand for the implementation of welfare measures which followed the recognition of the tribes as a privileged category under the Indian constitution.⁴⁹

The process of sanskritization, the colonial rule, then the policy of Indian government and last but not the least, the process of industrialization brought in changes of varying degrees and types.

Introducing the District - Bastar:

Bastar is the biggest district of Madhya Pradesh and the third biggest district of India with an area of 39114 Sq Km.⁵⁰ According to 1981 Census the total tribal population of the

district is 1,249,197, that is 67.69 percent, where male constitute 619,669 and female 629,523 of the total population.⁵¹

Bastar has three towns—Jagdalpur, Kanker and Kirandul and eight tehsils, namely Jagdalpur, Kondagaon, Narayanpur, Kankar, Bhanupratapura, Dantewada, Bijapur and Kantal.⁵² Though other religions are also practiced most of the tribals are classified as Hindus.⁶³ The major tribes of Bastar are - the Hill Maria, the Bison-Horn Maria, Muria, Dorla, Bhattra and Dhurwa or Praja. The first four tribes together can be contrasted with the last two as they are part of that population which generally go by the name 'Gond'. These four tribes are known among themselves as 'Koiter'. They share a common language, 'Gondi', a distinct Central Dravidian language.⁵⁴

The general configuration of Bastar district is a succession of undulating ridges with intervening valley. The valleys contain some land suited for rice cultivation. The eastern, western and southern fringes of the district are between 500 to 1000 feet.⁵⁵ In Bastar, forest account for 70.52 percent of the area and the district is very rich in mineral resources.⁵⁶

Bastar-A Historical Analysis:

Bastar district is one of the new districts of Madhya Pradesh having been constituted in 1948 after the merger of

feudatory states of Bastar and Kanker⁵⁷. It was ruled by Kakatiya dynasty, a cadet branch of the Chalukyas.⁵⁸ Till the middle of the 19th century, the tribals had been the masters of the hills and forests. Then the form of exploitation under the feudal rules was carried out in the form of begar, a practice whose remnants can be seen surviving in the form of bonded labour even today.⁵⁹ As a result of this Bastar witnessed a series of uprising in 1876, 1892 and 1897.

It was only in 1886 that the state came under British influence, the first Englishmen to visit were Captain Fenwick in 1850 and Mr. Take in 1855⁶⁰. The British started the process of exploitation of natural resources and the search for new ones. Forests were taken under their possession with the implementation of the 1856 forest policy. When an armed upsurge was launched in 1910 as a consequence of this, the king crushed it with the help of the Britishers.⁶¹

Along these struggles, Sanskritization processes were also at work.⁶² It continued in the post colonial phase as well and affected the tribals with varying degrees. The anthropological investigations conducted in this area reveal that the tribal have adopted the concept of purity and pollution in respect to acceptance of various categories of food and follow it to place some communities at higher or lower in position in the local social hierarchy.⁶³ This contact has been accelerated in the course of time. The Bhagat movement started by

Baba Bihari Das in 1970 was an indigenous movement destined to bring tribals closer to the Hindus.⁶⁴ This process of sanskritization has brought significant changes in the status of tribal women of Bastar.

After the independence, a special measure was taken by the government for the welfare of the tribals. In the Fifth Five Year Plan, Tribal Sub-Plan approach was taken for the development of areas of tribal concentration.⁶⁵ In Madhya Pradesh this was extended to 21 districts and included four districts including Bastar, in full.⁶⁶

Bastar district, thus has received the attention of the state and the central government to the effect that their policies are a direct intervention in their traditional autonomous structure, particularly their economy. Besides this, the other processes of social change like Sanskritization which has not come to a stop in middle India, and the process of industrializations are also responsible for this. These processes not only affected the political economy and the status-quo of the tribal society, but the status of tribal women as well.

Before analysing these factors and processes of change it is essential to look into the status of tribal women in the traditional society of Bastar. Chapter III of the present study is an attempt in this direction while Chapter IV, goes into the dynamic aspect, analysing the changing phenomenon.



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CHAPTER - II

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA

Opinion of sociologists and social anthropologists is divided on the question of the status of women in tribal India. Divergent views have been expressed partly due to methodological error of generalization on the basis or strength of limited data and partly due to various interpretation of what constitute 'status'.

There are two dominant views regarding the status of tribal women. One, which suggests the equality of status of men and women and the other, which argues that women occupy a lower status in tribal societies. The socialist feminists following Marx and Engels lend support to the former's view point. According to Marx and Engels, 'women occupied not only a free but also a highly respected position among all savages and all barbarians of the lower and middle ages and partly even the upper stage'.¹ He advanced a historical explanation of the dialectical relationship between the developments in the means of procuring food, the rise of private property in them, the evolution of monogamy and the subjection of women. Similar views are expressed if we consider Lowie's work

in recent anthropological studies. Writing of the Crow Indians of North America he says, 'Women were emphatically not chattles', that 'altogether the position of women was far from unfavourable', that 'there were very few feminine disabilities in religious matters', that 'altogether Crow women had a secure place in the tribal life and a fair share in its compensation'.²

In general almost all early anthropological writings whethers of Margan, Bachofan as Henry Maine supported this view, viz, that 'Women in primitive society enjoyed status equal to that of men'. However some later scholars have demolished both the notion, that there is a universal evolutionary scheme, and that women in societies with matrilineal descent have a particularly lofty status.³

Some theoretical writer of the Victorian era supported the latter argument. According to Herbert Spences for instance, 'in primitive societies women are property to be bought and sold, and are treated as slaves or even animals, enjoying neither sympathy nor respect'.⁴

Thus, according to Lowi 'diametrically opposite views are current among the educated leity regarding women's place in primitive society. On the one hand she is conceived as little better than a slave or beast of burden condemned to perform the hardest drudgery, bought as a commodity, and without

redress against her master's brutalities. On the other hand she is regarded as undisputed mistress of family, if not of the communal life as well.⁵

Among most of the studies on Indian tribes today, Lowie's second view point is considered. Hutton writing on the position of Sema Naga women says that socially they enjoy a better position. In the husband's home the wife occupied a high position and her children are treated kindly⁶. Heimendorf says, 'husband and wife are for all practical purposes, partners with equal rights and their property is jointly owned.'⁷

Both these conceptions, so far as the overwhelming majority of people are concerned, fall ludicrously wide off the mark. Considering the first view point, that women's status is equal to men in primitive societies, obscures and limits the variation within the primitive society as they are at different levels of economic development and have their own traditions and customs which govern women's status and role. Secondly, the analysis is based on the works of mostly those anthropologists who studied matrilineal societies. Second argument is also a sweeping generalization and according to Evans-Pritchard 'these judgements rested only too often on quite inadequate accounts and were inclined also to be highly subjective and measured by somewhat arbitrary standards of our own sentiments!'⁸

It would thus be a scientific error to approach the women of a society with a rigid bias to the view that they have either a low or a high status. Rather than approaching the problem through this dichotomy it will be more useful to analyse the position of relative asymmetry in status of the tribal women vis-a-vis tribal men of that particular society and relative inequality between tribal and non-tribal women. This is because there can be so many intermediate status and there can be polarity, even if it is not very striking. For instance, among the Gonds of Bastar, Grigson says that, in various aspects of social life, women enjoys status and freedom, as for example, in the choice of husband, pre-marital sexual licence, seeking of divorce and so on. But in other aspects they are a depressed group working for their husbands as labourers might.⁹

It is therefore a difficult to assess the status of women as the condition involved in the relations of men and women are many sided and it is dangerous to over weight one particular phase of them. According to Lowie, 'there is so much variability in the relations of women to society that any general statement must be made with caution.'¹⁰ Evans-Pritchard retorts, 'it is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate objectively women's position in any particular primitive society or in primitive societies in general,'¹¹

For India, more recently Sachchidananda feels that 'The Indian social systems exhibit such grave disparities that it is almost impossible to depict women's role and status in a single statement which would be true for the entire country'.¹²

Therefore we need certain indicators to approach the problem. Several scholars have emphasized one or the other criteria for defining the concept 'status'. The tribes with different ways of life, culture and background give status to their women accordingly and any single concept may not correctly judge their position. Women's roles and status all over the world are generally determined by social institutions and norms, religious ideologies, economic systems and class positions¹⁵. For this it is important to consider the political economy of the tribal society and the place of tribal women in it.

The political economy of the tribal situation requires a careful analysis of the social structure, Economy and Polity and other social and religious factors which will serve as indicators to examine the status of tribal women. While most of the writers emphasize the primacy of economic relations in these areas, our focus will also be on cultural aspects. The reason is that tribal society presents a picture

of an autonomous whole in which all these aspects are interrelated.

Every tribal community has its own way to meet its basic needs for the existence of its members and this brings it closer to the natural environment. This forms their economic life and includes such activities of man as are designed to secure him physical survival. The social life of a particular tribe is organized to make this effort a success and therefore other factors like social and cultural relations are the reality for the very organization of their economic process. Majumdar goes on to exemplify, adducing the Munda practice of stone rolling or making smoke by the Hos for a good rain for their crops.¹⁶ Jaunsar-Bawar dance naked before sowing, during the growth of the crop and just after the harvesting season.¹⁷

The social life which was organized to meet the basic needs thus makes a definite structure and organization in which tribal women occupy a significant place. These structural units also work or political association and at the same time combines political affairs with economic, social and religious affairs.

Thus we see that economic, socio-religious and political life of the tribals is intertwined and no single aspect can be overlooked or another overemphasized. But to examine the status

of tribal women and to reach to some conclusion, it is very important to anatically separate them and examine their interrelation whenever and wherever possible.

Status of Women in the Traditional Social structure of Bastar

Social Structure:

One of the way to analyse the status of tribal women in a society is to ascertain it in terms of their mode of descent, inheritance and succession, authority and residence, within the broad structural framework of patriliney and Matriliney. According to Sachchidananda, the case of tribal woman reveals that status of women is not a function of her economic role. It is determined by the principle of social structure - patrilineal or matrilineal, on which a particular society is based.¹⁸

Descent, Inheritance, Succession, Authority and Residence -

Most of the tribes in India are Patrinyomic, patrilineal, Pathriarchal and patrilocal. The major ones are the Bhil, Gond, Santal, Munda and Oraon.

When the society is patrilineal, the members trace their descent through male, normally to an original male ancestor. The property is inherited in male line and it is always a son who succeeds his father as the head of a clan or a

lineage. The authority entirely is vested in the hands of a male.¹⁹ In a patriarchal Kissan family, a tribe of Orissa, the daughter's never get a share of their parent's property.²⁰ This is true of almost all patrilineal societies though there is a difference of degree. In certain south Indian tribes like Irula, one of the major patriarchy tribes of Tamil Nadu, Parthsarthy observes that 'a daughter's right to the ancestral property of her father is recognized when there are no male lineal descendants or when she is a widow or a mother of a deceased.'²¹

It is to be noticed however that tribal women are not totally debarred from owning any kind of property. Among most of the tribes unmarried women have absolute right over their own earnings.²² However she inherits movable property and the boys get all immovable property.²³

The fact that they are allowed to inherit certain specific things and not others, in itself is an ample proof of their limited right of ownership and inheritance. Not only they are allowed to own meagre but own things unimportant. This is probably done to digress them from the control and management of major property areas.

The residence after marriage is usually patrilocal where the wife is expected to stay at the natal home of her

husband and adjust to their demands and fancies. Here it may well tend to depress her condition.

The Khasis, Garo and Jaintia tribes of Meghalaya and Nayers of Kerala represent a matrinyimic, matrilineal, matriarchal and matrilocal kind of social structure.²⁴ Here the descent is traced through a female line, succession and inheritance also descends in the same direction while the residence in most of the cases is matrilocal.²⁵ But does this speak of a better status of tribal women? A deeper analysis is required to know this. Among the matrilineal societies though the household property is inherited from mother to daughters and she is the owner of the property, the management of property is always vested in the hands of a male.²⁶ Among the Khasis, property is managed by the wife's brother²⁷, among the Garos by the husband and his father in law, who usually is his paternal uncle also.²⁸ Among both the Khasis and the Garos, though succession to important office is through females, it is always a male who succeeds - a sister's son.²⁹ Here the women power has been kept in check by the dissociation of management and decision making in production from ownership. Among the same matrilineal tribes, the immediate result of matrilocal residence is not feminine superiority but only the superiority of the wife's kin.³⁰ Therefore, when the husband after initially matrilocal residence establishes an independent domicile he is its undisputed lord.³¹ In

domestic management, males and females hold equal power, however in important matters male distinctly dominate.³² Sen reports from her study on Khasis that, 'here all married informants always consult their husbands in day-to-day work, either in economic activities or in matter of social life.'³³

Thus, matrilineal social structure which by law goes in favour of tribal women is not so favourable as it seems to be. It is not enough to say that the status of tribal women is determined by the kind of social structure a particular society has. Some other aspects needs to be taken into account, for instance, the participation of tribal women in the economic activity.

Role of Women in Tribal Economy:

There is a dichotomy of roles based on sex almost everywhere in the world in relation to the traditional economic structures.³⁴ The hazardous tasks as well as those requiring physical strength have been ascribed to men, and works which needs sustained effort and endurance have been assigned to women. This division is strengthened by taboos and beliefs.³⁵ In India the tribes are at different stages of economic development and in each women have a significant role.³⁶ The main ones are-food gathering and hunting, shifting

cultivation, cultivation of land by ploughing, and regions where the tribals work in mining and other industries. These mode of productions do not always exist in isolation but are also present simultaneously.

In societies characterized by hunting and food gathering, for example the Birhor in Bihar, hunting is the job of men while collection of fruits, edible roots and tubere is the work of women.³⁷ They also cook the meals, look after the children and manage the affairs of the household.³⁸ Besides hunting and gathering economy the Birhor have taken up the craft of rope making as a means of subsistence, in which women play a very important role.³⁹

In case of shifting cultivation, the tribes live in a comparatively inaccessible regions, where nature is less hospitable. A closer economic tie binds the group together and cultivation is a joint endeavour. Both men and women work together. The men fell trees and clear forest, the rest of the operations are done jointly by male and female.⁴⁰

In the agricultural tribes, for examples the Munda, Oraon, Santal and the Gond, women work shoulder to shoulder with men.⁴¹ The women exclusively look after the transplanting and harvesting besides weeding, reaping, husting and winnowing, while men do ploughing, levelling, irrigation and watching the

crops.⁴² Besides this women fetch water from the distant springs, collect firewood for fuel, clean the house, cook the meals and look after the children. In spite of this, tribal women suffer from certain disabilities for instance in agricultural economy, ploughing the field and thatching the roof are absolutely taboo for them.⁴³ Similarly among the Toda of the Nilgiris who practice pastoral economy it is taboo for women to enter the dairies since they are considered to be impure.⁴⁴ Among the sheep-rearing Gaddi of Himachal Pradesh a woman's job is to wash the sheered wool and spin while among the other tribes of central and western Himalayas like the Khasa of Jaunsar-Bawar, the Bhotia of Central Himalayas women work hard from morning till evening. In Kinnaur women help the men in horticulture.⁴⁵

In matrilineal societies, for instance among the Khasis, women are engaged in trade. They sell fish, stitch cloth in market and supply tea and snacks in the offices etc. They also work in agriculture, both shifting and wet paddy cultivation besides looking after the home and children.⁴⁶

Thus we see that the tribal women in traditional social structure had an important role to play in the tribal economy. But we cannot say that their status was equal to that of men as they participated equally with men in the tribal economy. Most of the times they did so for meeting the subsistence

requirements. For the similar reason now with the opening of mines and the growth of industries in tribal areas, they are going into these as wage labourers. What has been the impact of industrialization on the traditional economic role of tribal women and hence on their status will be analysed shortly. We can at best say at the moment that the tribal women had a significant role to play in the traditional tribal economy.

Social and Religious Status of Tribal Women:

In social matters, it is believed that the tribal women enjoys considerable freedom of movement and choice compared to her non-tribal counterpart.⁴⁷ Besides this by and large they also have freedom in matters relating to occupation mobility, marriage and divorce.⁴⁸ There is hardly any stigma with regard to divorce, remarriage of a divorcee or a widow and these are permissible. Generally birth of a daughter in a tribal society is not considered bad though in some patrilineal societies like the Khasa a male child is considered a boon and a female child as a curse.⁴⁹

Choice in Marriage -

Prevalence of various types of marriages in tribal societies like, marriage by exchange, capture, purchase, service, probation and by trial goes to show the importance of

men and women in choosing their mates. Tribal women have a say in the selection of mate provided it is in conformity with the marriage rules of the tribe.⁵⁰ Shakespeare states how among the Mizos unmarried girls enjoyed considerable freedom.⁵¹ There is, of course, a variation in the degree between tribe and tribe. Like though among the most of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh a girl has a very little say in the selection of a male,⁵² an Angami Naga women enjoys considerable freedom in selecting a mate.⁵³ Similarly the Mizo woman's opinion really counts at the time of the selection of her mate, whereas among the Bhil or Baiga it is just a formality.⁵⁴

However, when it comes to the question of decision making the men come to the forefront. The girl may select her partner but it is the male head of the family who finalises the match. It is he who decides the bride-price and similar matters concerning marriage. Even in case of the matrilineal Khasis it is maternal uncle who is the competent authority.⁵⁵

Thus, even though a tribal women has some choice in choosing her mate, the power of decision making lies with the men of the society.

Age at Marriage -

Adult marriage among tribals till very recently has been an important phenomenon.⁵⁶ For example, among Gonds, it

is found that the maximum number of males that is 66 percent were married at the age of 21-24 years and 70.09 percent females at the age of 17-20 years.⁵⁷

Tribal women in the traditional social structure, thus did not suffer from the evils of child marriage and the problem associated with it.

Bride-Price -

Many social anthropologists view that 'bride-price' as a derogatory institution, as it is thought that payment of bride-price amounts to 'buying a woman'. According to them the custom of payment of bride-price found in most of the tribal societies, is an affirmation of male dominance both at symbolic and empirical level.⁵⁸ Infact in the language of the Taron Mishmis of eastern Arunachal Pradesh, the word for marriage is 'miya braiya' which literally means 'buying a woman'.⁵⁹

Some social anthropologists however do not agree with this version. Evans-Pritchard for instance had said 'Payment for a bride constitutes a sale is now recognized to be a gross distortion of the facts'.⁶⁰ It is believed that bride-price is not just an economic transaction, but involves a whole gamut of kinship relations. It not only establishes relations between two families which continue throughout the life time

but also provides security for a women. Among the Rengma Nagas, divorce is very rare, as on divorce men loses the bride-price and it is difficult to pay more.⁶¹ whereas among the Angami Nagar, bride-price is nominal and this is probably a token payment for the change of residence on the part of the bride after her marriage.⁶²

It is believed by many that since the payment of bride price speaks of a better position of tribal women, correspondingly the shift from bride-price to dowry is considered as the mark of changing of the position of women from high to low.⁶³ How far this is true will be discuss in a short while.

Sex-Life -

Pre-marital relationship is not a subject of objections in the tribal life, provided the rules of avoidance in the choice of mates are not violated.⁶⁴ Therefore a greater degree of tolerance and social sanction prevails with regard to intimate relationship between a tribal maid and youth which may or may not lead to marriage.⁶⁵ The institution of youth dormitory provides a socially safe place for pre-marital sexual relations. Among the Murias of Bastar there exists a simple, innocent and natural attitude towards sex.⁶⁶

Despite this certain restrictions are not imposed on men which are imposed on tribal women like the pre-marital relation should not lead to pregnancy. If so she might be ostracized for this and if she dies in this state she will

become a spirit. Even where the institution of dormitory is existing, women leaves it immediately on their marriage whereas men are allowed to enjoy its membership for some more time.⁶⁸

Taboos and the Place of Women in Tribal Rituals-

There are certain laws and taboos which apply to most of the tribal women and are significant in determining their place in tribal rituals.

Some anthropologists have taken this, that is, the kinds of restrictions placed on women during menstruation, pregnancy and child birth as an indicator to determine the status of tribal women. According to Frank and Bacdayans, 'surely the most obvious interpretation of menstrual taboos is that they are institutionalized ways in which males in primitive society discriminate against females.'⁶⁹ Others scholars have argued that menstrual taboos are symbols of the high power and status of women, and a recent study presents empirical evidence for matrilineal societies showing that menstrual restrictions have no relation to pattern of male domination of women or the reverse.⁷⁰

As mentioned, the religious and economic life of the tribals is intricately related. Touching a plough and roofing a house are taboo for the Kharia women.⁷¹ Besides this they are excluded from certain religious festivals and

and ritualistic observance like their periodical segregation during their menstrual period. The Oraon women also observe the taboo of touching a plough.⁷² If these taboos are transgressed, an expiation ceremony has got to be undergone. The Gonds of Madhya Pradesh do not touch a menstruating women for that is enough to destroy a good harvest.⁷³ The Todas of the Nilgiri hills do not permit their women even to enter the dairy area.⁷⁴ Among the Jaunsar-Bawar women have no place in matters of religion and ritual performances, except at Lakha Mandal where the spirit of the Pandavas is invoked by women.⁷⁵

Majumdar takes the religious side of taboo as safeguard ritual operations to protect religious persons and places of worship and prevent irreligion from spreading.⁷⁶ One reason could be that why women are not allowed to plough or thatch roof is because this involves hard work. However women in tribal societies have always worked hard. The Chenchu women participates equally along with male in strenuous activities such as fishing and collection of materials for house construction.⁷⁷ The pregnant women in Kissan family is expected to behave and carry on her work normally till she reaches the eighth month of pregnancy.⁷⁸ Further they have no place in the especial worship of tribal deities. Ancestor worship is an important feature in which sons alone

are eligible for offering oblation to the manes, daughters and wives refrain from it.⁷⁹

In the realm of religious practices and rituals, a tribal woman cannot hold the office of a priest. Among the Toda and Kota of Southern India, the women are debarred from crossing the threshold of a temple.⁸⁰ A Santhal woman cannot attend communal worships nor she can partake of the sacrificial meat.⁸¹ The women in matrilineal societies also do not have any role and their participation and performances of rituals is restricted. According to Nath and Majumdar, after marriage the women in the matrilineal societies do not enjoy any superior status.⁸²

Roy argues that segregation of tribal women during crucial periods especially from ritual observances is due not to any assumed inferiority in their status but due to the tribal's horror of such conditions which is supposed to attack evils and subsequently harm them and their crops.⁸³

Whatever the reason may be evidences show that women in general are considered in the state of pollution which is intensified during menstruation and child birth, and are discriminated as a consequence of this.

Status of Tribal Women in Traditional Political Structure:

The important questions here can be, what position women holds in the tribal political institutions, what decision making power she possess and what say she has in the political and other activities considered important by the society.

Political and social life of the tribals is not separate. The social life involves methods of grouping and grading people for the effective carrying out of the various activities for common existence by sharing in common activities under the bonds of relationship. There can be various tribal organization for this, but Dube opines that in India tribal design consists of family, clan, phratry and tribe.⁸⁴ Every head of a community who always is a male, at different levels like clan, village and territory is generally honoured, obeyed and accepted as the head of the group. His office is hereditary and the supreme and final authority is in his hands. Here we find that tribals living in small groups, are united by kinship marriage and frequent individual contact, and with them it is difficult to distinguish political affairs from domestic affairs.⁸⁵

The traditional political field of the tribals is confined to the institutions like the council of elders, village headman, village panchayat and the tribal chief - all of them are males who take important decisions in all matters.⁸⁶

In middle India, in Bihar, the Mundas exercise considerable influence over the tribal community in religious and social affairs and even now are entrusted with the work of collection of revenue.⁸⁷ In the Santal Pargana, for every

tribal village there is a council which is presided over by a Majhi and gives its decision on all important matters and disputes. In South India, the village headman is respected and his decisions are accepted. All these institutions are headed by a male or a group of males.⁸⁸

To take some more specific examples, among the AOs of Nagaland, the village affairs are entirely run by the council of elders which is exclusively male affair.⁸⁹ Among the Padam Minyong of Arunachal Pradesh no woman will formally join a 'Kebang'.⁹⁰ Among Kisans of Orissa,⁹¹ Irulas of Tamil Nadu⁹² and Bhils of Rajasthan,⁹³ all patrilineal societies, women cannot take a prominent part in public discussions and cannot also be a member of village panchayat.

Even among the strongly matrilineal Khasis⁹⁴ and Garos⁹⁵ of Meghalaya, the chiefs are males, though the system of succession is nepotic. The women have no position in the Darbar of the Mynthri nor can be appointed as 'Siem' (Chief) or 'Luoma Lyngdon' (priest). All the important decisions are taken by them.⁹⁶ Among Minyongs of Arunachal Pradesh no women will formally join a 'Kebang' and exercise no power in political life of the tribe.⁹⁷

Thus, tribal women in the traditional political structure did not have important position and their power was almost negligible.

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Thus, tribal women in the traditional political structure did not have important position and their power was almost negligible.

Viewing the overall situation we see that though women played a significant role in tribal economy and had considerable freedom in social matters, the political and religious status of women remained much lower ~~than~~ in the traditional social structure of the tribal society. However the tribal society formed a balance of all social relations in which tribal women had an important position. This equilibrium began to shake as the forces of social change began to play their role and slowly tribal social structure cracked losing its self sufficiency and autonomy becoming a part of the whole society.

Tribal Women and Social Change in India:

Changes in her Economic Role

Women in traditional economy whether hunting and food gathering or shifting cultivation played a significant role. But massive commercialisation of minor forest products resulted in the loss of her economic role.⁹⁸ In slash and burn cultivation there was a balance between her and man's role. This balance is however upset on the introduction of improved technology and conservation of forest into reserve areas.⁹⁹ Large scale tree felling and deforestation in the tribal areas have led to severe stresses and strain on the tribal women.¹⁰⁰ The percentage of total forest area fell from

16.89 percent to 14.10 percent during 1972-82. This has however increased the work load of tribal women.¹⁰¹ She has to spend double of her energies for domestic labour as she has to utilize nearly 6-9 hours in house drudgery for fetching water, fire wood, collection of fodder etc, from the forests¹⁰². With the miserable monotony of work at house, unbearable life conditions, and the difficulties faced by them in fulfilling these functions tribal women in certain regions resorted to commit suicide.¹⁰³

In agriculture, where plough cultivation is done women are not allowed to plough the land. This gives a decisive dominance to the man in the whole agricultural complex and the women recedes to the background.¹⁰⁴

With the problem of land alienation, land dispossession and pressure on land due to increased population tribals have been looking for alternative jobs. Opening of industries and mines in tribal areas or the migration to urban and metropolitan areas have given them some opportunity.¹⁰⁵ Dispossession of the tribal lands also rendered women's subordination to other as agricultural labourers which has resulted in the loss of her independence in the process of her participation in agriculture.¹⁰⁶ In last one decade the agricultural women labourer's ratio of the Tribal Women has gone up from 39.64 percent to 46.39 percent while workers in household

industries have increased to 40.46 percent.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it is seen that industrial activities reduces the participation of women either to household work or to primary sectors owing to the specific job demand involving higher level of skills with the change in technology. As a result of this she also has to spend more time and energy to keep going the meagre agriculture.¹⁰⁸

In construction employment too, both by government and non-government agencies it is women worker's called 'Rejas' who do more work and get paid less than the man workers.¹⁰⁹ In gang colliers work, the Kissan men get Rs.15/- and the women Rs.10/- per day, for a similar kind of work.¹¹⁰ This differential wage structure between male and female labourers is prevalent allover the countries and the wage exploitation of women labourers can be clearly seen in the Tendu leaf plucking, construction and other building operations.¹¹¹ Thus, tribal women are pushed inthe background with the coming of industrialization.¹¹²

Besides this, they have to cater the sexual needs of the contractors, agents and even co-male workers.¹¹³ The flesh trade of the tribal women is increasing in recent times as their conditions are worsening¹¹⁴. The recorded incidence of assaults committed on tribals increased from 843 in 1967 to 1138 in 1977.¹¹⁵

Thus, the expectation that the welfare measures introduced by the government and the industrialization of the tribal areas would help in improving the economic condition of the tribal in community has proved to be largely illusory.¹¹⁶ Tribal women suffered at the hands of aliens not only as a part of the tribal community but because they were 'women' as well.

Changes in the Social and Religious Status of Tribal Women:

Among the scheduled tribes, per 1000 males, the number of females was 983 while that of the whole country was 934.¹¹⁷ This spoke of the favourable condition of the women of tribal region in the Indian population.

Some changes in the social status of tribal women as a result of the opening up of tribal areas to the outside forces were - Unlike in Hindu society, the birth of a daughter in a tribal society was seldom regarded as curse, but in the recent years tribal people too started favouring male children.¹¹⁸ Originally all tribes favoured adult marriage but due to their contact with the hindus, they began to initiate the practice of child marriage.¹¹⁹ The Hill Marias of Bastar spoke with abhorance the practice of child marriage with they thought was the custom of their Hindu neighbours.¹²⁰ In 1971, among the total population 11.76 percent of the females got married by the time they reached 14 years, among the tribes the corresponding figure was only 2.6 percent.¹²¹ The age at which now they are beginning to get married is decreasing.

In the traditional tribal set up, boys and girls used to select their life-partners by choice and understanding. But due to acculturation, the girls have now lost their option and the parents and boys have become the deciding factors.¹²² Several types of marriages were in vogue and most of these were quite inexpensive. During the recent times the marriages have become mostly arranged ones and celebrations expensive. Different kinds of rituals of Hindu marriage gradually extend and settled down in tribal systems.¹²³ Like, it is becoming more prestigious to go in for early marriages, and discourage widow remarriage, divorce and separation, all of which were practiced amongst the tribal.¹²⁴

Bride-price which was considered of a customary payment during the time of marriage and a matter of social prestige is witnessing certain problems as a result of the impact of money economy.¹²⁵ Elwin states, 'special and difficult problem is the high price of wives.'¹²⁶ Among the Hos of Chota-Nagpur for a girl to wait till her mid 30's before she can find some one, who can pay and become her life partner is not uncommon.¹²⁷ Therefore though in some cases the practice has become pronounced and the amount charged as bride-price has been raised, in other it is changing into the dowry system.¹²⁸ In many of the Hindu castes this practice was in vogue but now some castes practice dowry and until

recently the amount paid or demanded as dowry was very high.¹²⁹

Since the nature of work has changed, the activities associated with the tribal economy has also undergone a change. The taboos which go by these have also been reduced.¹³⁰ Contact with the outsiders have brought change in the living and consumption pattern of the tribal women. They have started dressing up properly and using luxurious items.¹³¹

Still in many societies the importance of the religious head is felt, who always is a male.

Changes in the legal and political status of Tribal Women:

Though tribal women were not the member of any political institution nor they had the decision making power still the decline of traditional political structure has been a set-back to them.¹³² Tribal Panchayat which settled their problems was loosing its significance affecting the tribals, particularly their womenfolk more. She had to lose her opportunity to claim advice because, she was not in a position to move to a court since it involved heavy expenditure and there were a number of problem.¹³³

Political institutions and organizations are still dominated by males and very little impact of social change is seen in the political realm. Rajasthan law states that two women must be appointed 'Mahila Panches' in each Gram Panchayat. Therefore now some tribal women can be found

on village councils, gram panchayat.¹³⁴ Even in states like Meghalaya where matriliney dominates, since its inception, there have been only two females legislators, both Garos and none from the Khasis. Throughout the history of administration in Assam there was only one Khasi lady, who held the position of a minister. In the newly constituted Meghalaya Legislative Assembly there is no female legislator and in Methalaya no women has so far held the position of a minister.¹³⁵ Though in Meghalaya more women are involved in trade than men, Khasi males more than females are employed in various government offices of Shillong.¹³⁶

Thus the new laws and other factors like education also could not bring about much change in the political field as far as the women, particularly tribal women are concerned. We must now atleast see where do they stand in the educational sphere.

Education and the Status of Tribal Women:

The low level of formal literacy has not however been the most important indicator of the status of tribal women as Rani Gaidinliu and Rajmohini Devi, who played extremely significant roles in conscientising their respective communities did not have formal education.¹³⁷

But education in the modern world is not only a process of learning and wisdom but also a tool at one's command to survive in this age of competition.¹³⁸ In this competition

tribal community as a whole is lagging behind. Failure of tribal women to consolidate their position in the emerging factors of economy is to a considerable extent related to the slow rate of speed of education among them.¹³⁹ The general picture of female literacy in our country is depressing enough (24.9%) but the still lower literacy rates amongst scheduled tribes women is quite alarming (8.04%) not withstanding higher rates amongst a few tribes.¹⁴⁰

Thus education as one of the means to bring tribals, particularly tribal women in the mainstream has not been much successful.

The following conclusions can be made -

The status of tribal women in traditional social structure does not correspond to the two diametrically opposite views discussed in the beginning of the chapter. There was a relative asymmetry in the status of tribal men and women and the latter came off to be in much worse position after analysing their status in various social, religious, economic and political spheres.

The political economy of the traditional tribal society was shaken as the various forces of social change began creeping in, affecting the tribal society considerably.

Tribal women as a result of this began to lose their freedom and choice in social matters and independent in the economy without gaining much in the political and educational fields.

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CHAPTER- III

STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN BASTAR DISTRICT, M.P.

In Bastar, the total population of female is 629,523 as against the total population of male which is 619,669.¹ This suggests a sex-ratio far better than that of the state and of the country. In India, this could be because of the fact that tribal women like their counterpart in the caste society do not suffer from maltreatment and enjoy considerable freedom particularly in social matters,² or also because of the fact that men often engage in more dangerous activities than women such as warfare and hunting.

The tribals of Bastar have been in constant contact with the outsiders as the process of sanskritization continued. But this got accelerated with the establishment of administrative system and opening of mines and industries in this area, affecting the status of tribal women of Bastar considerably. Before we analyse these changes, it is important to consider, what has been the status of tribal women in traditional social structure of the society.

Status of Tribal Women of Bastar in the Traditional Social Structure-

The important tribes of Bastar as already mentioned are the Gonds, which includes - the Hill Maria, the Bison-

Horn Maria, the Muria and the Dorla. Each constituent tribe of the Gonds is complete in itself and all tribes have their own structure and organization. Besides this the other tribes are the Bhattra, Dhurwa or Praja.³

The tribes of Bastar have a patrilineal social structure. The most important characteristics prevailing in their social design is the dual organisation or moiety. Each society is composed of a number of patrilineal clans known among themselves as brother clan, viz. among the Hill Maria of Bastar, there are 90 and 69 clans in each moiety. The Bison Horn Maria have phratries.⁴ The Dhurwa of Bastar are divided into a number of patrilineal clans which are locally called. 'Bansh' or 'Vansh'. Every clan has a name and the members of a clan believe themselves to be related to one another agnatically, that is, they all feel that they are descended from a common male ancestor.⁵

Daughters and sisters have no right of inheritance of their father's or brother's, lands as property. A widow is entitled only to maintenance⁶. The usual residence pattern is also patrilocal, so that in most instances it is the female marriage partner who comes outside the village.⁷ In the case of each family the oldest male agnate is the head

of the household. In him is vested the authority and responsibility for looking after the welfare of the entire family.⁸

Thus, tribal social structure of Bastar tribes is characterized by Tribe-Moiety-Phratry-Clan-Village-Lineage and family are headed by male, where not only the office is succeeded in the male line but inheritance of property is also from father to son. It becomes clear from this that tribal women in Bastar occupy insignificant position in the patrilineal social structure of Bastar tribes.

Socio Religious Status:

A tribal women in Bastar enjoyed a considerable freedom in her social life. As a girl she has enough freedom both in premarital sexual life and in the choice of a husband.⁹ Among the wild Maria Gonds of Bastar the consent of the girl is considered an essential preliminary to the women.¹⁰ It is generally considered that a girl goes of her own-accord and pours turmeric powder over a man, it is a valid marriage and he can take her to live in his house.¹¹

A tribal women of Bastar is fairly free to leave her husband if he ill-treats her or if he cannot be get a child. Tribal sentiment strongly condemns wife-beating. Among Hill

Marias there are no such cases at all.¹² Her natural taste for ornament is given full scope, her parents gradually collecting heads and metal neck and arm rings, her boy companion presenting her with heads and curved hair-combs and her husband when she is married recognizing her right to spend a few of the scanty piece she earns from the sale of basketery at the Bazar on simple trinkets.¹³

She participates in the tribal dances and songs. Infact her position vis-a-vis her husband is far free than that of the ordinary Hindu housewife. The marriage of widow is freely permitted. As a rule it is considered suitable that she should marry her deceased husband's younger brother.¹⁴ Above all she is not exposed to the evil of child marriage and premature motherhood, the habits of their Hindu neighbour of which Maria headman will speak with abhorrence.¹⁵ Certain tribes of Bastar have become more or less Hindus and have adopted their customs. Way back Grigson noticed its begining. He observed that, 'pre-puberty marriage never occurs among the Hill Maria, who look upon it as an utterly abhorrent custom of the 'Kosar' or 'Hindus'.¹⁶ Among Bhatras, a girl should be married before puberty and if no husgand is available, they tie a few flowers into her cloth and consider this as marriage. Matches are usually arranged by the parents.¹⁷

Among Halbas another Hinduised tribe, if an unmarried girl goes along with an outsider of low caste she is expelled from the community but if with a member of a caste from whom a Halba can take water she may be readmitted to caste, provided she has not eaten food cooked in an earthen pot from the hands of her seducer, but not if she has done so. Among the same people, matches are usually arranged on the initiative of the boy's father through a mutual friend who resides in the girl's village and is known as the 'Matalia' or 'matchmaker'.¹⁸

'Ghotul' among the Marias, Hill, Maria and the Bison-Horn Maria tribals of Bastar play a significant role in the life of both men and women and treat them almost equally.¹⁹

A relationship is shared by unmarried boy's 'cheliks' and girls, 'Motiaris', and there by close relationship develops between them which at times is strengthened by the ties of Ghotul marriage known as 'Shabu Marriage', seldom terminated by divorce. Divorce in fact is very rare. Murial regard adultery as evil and dangerous and on the whole Muria marriage is secure and not often marred by fear and jealousy.²⁰

Nevertheless though both 'cheliks' and 'Motiaris' enjoyed considerable degree of freedom, there was some difference. A girl automatically leaves the ghotul when she

marries and must never enter it again, but a boy relative his membership until he can afford to give a farewell feast.²¹

Payment of bride-price does not always mean that the status of tribal women is high. Among Marias of Bastar, Grigson noticed, 'woman on the whole is a kind of property or a valuable adjunct to the house and family. For her, the husband's family has to pay a bride-price that is a severe tax on its resources or else, where cross-cousin marriage prevails, she represents the payment of debt incurred where her father took his bride from the family and clan to which she goes as a bride.'²²

Still the bride-price was the sign of women's importance in the tribal society which seems to be declining today.

Thus we see that the tribal women of Bastar had some freedom in the field of marriage, divorce, remarriage and sexual life though not as equal to those of men. The inheritance of property is always through males and women own what is considered immaterial. The important decisions are taken by the head of the family who always is a male. Then there are several taboos on women-So many particularly in the religious field, that they make tribal women suffer because they are 'women'-abiological being.

Now we will examine these taboos and restrictions imposed on tribal women of Bastar and see what effects it has on their status.

In almost all the tribal societies the economic activities of women are clearly marked and are given religious sanction. Women are not allowed to plow or hunt²³ probably because they are considered difficult tasks. But this reason becomes questionable when we notice that (a) women in these societies work very hard, (b) women are not allowed to perform simple tasks, Toda women does nothing as far as milk is concerned.²⁴

Edward J. Jay in his study of village Orche in Bastar notices that unmarried young girls are not allowed to cook for the family, since they are considered to be in the state of pollution before marriage women are excluded from most ceremonial activity, though they are expected to clean and sweep the house before every major ceremony.²⁵ This state of pollution is intensified during the menstruation and child-birth. A Gond woman cannot draw water during her periods as she is considered impure, nor go into a or touch cowdung.²⁶ Halbas speak of such women as 'Mund Maili' or being the head dirty Hill Maria women give birth to a child, act his ambilical cord, cleans him - all alone.

If the child is born dead the mother has to bury it somewhere in the forest, going there alone and digging the grave without assistance. Russel and Hiralal observed that, if a woman dies in the condition of pregnancy, the spirit of such a woman is supposed to become a 'churel' and horn men.²⁸ The spirit of a woman whose engagement for marriage has been broken off, or who has deserted her husband's house for another man's is also supposed to become a 'churel'.²⁹ In three cases among Jagdalpur Marias and Bhatras women suspects were roughly handled.³⁰ Similarly, a woman who menstruates very late and who does not bear a child is ostracized. 'Pandu' is the word used for such an unfortunate woman.³¹

Marriage is considered essential in everyone's life among the tribals of Bastar. There is laxity in pre-marital relations, but if this results in pregnancy, there can be no formal marriage, which the Hill Maria call 'Marni' and Bison - Horn Maria 'Pendul'. That kind of union is known as 'ahene-hattu' (thus-went) among the Hill Marias.³² In 1913, two Hill marias murdered a Maria Lohar girl, with whom both had often cohabited, through fear of disgrace one of them would incur if the child which has conceived was born and she named him as the father.³³ Victims of small-pox and women dying in pregnancy or child-birth are buried by Bison-Horn Marias, but not in the regular manner.³⁴

Besides this discrimination against women during crucial periods, they have very little say in the religious matter nor do they hold any important religious post. Edward J. Jay notes that in Bastar, all priests and shamans are men and never women.³⁵ Among the Hill Marias of Bastra, the only ceremonies in which women are permitted are those of the village small-pox Goddess and not in any other.³⁶

The reason for this attitude could be the year of supernatural objects. In most of the tribes of Bastar nature still rules over men. In this way religion in primitive societies serves as a mechanism of social control and the various norms and taboos are observed to maintain a cohesive and coordinated social life. For instance it is tabooed for a couple to cohabit during harvest season, therefore it is essential for a man to be at the fields at that time and for a woman to perform her household work.³⁷ Besides this reason, the other could be to give her rest and maintain cleanliness for which she is secluded.³⁸ In most of the tribes, also in Bastar, there is an institution of 'Courade', in which husband leads a life of invalid when his wife is expecting.³⁹ Still the torture both physical and mental which women has to go through does not find its equivalent.

Tribal women of Bastar thus, have some freedom and choice in social matters even if they are institutionalized,

compared to the non-tribal women. However in matters of religious life they occupy a very low position.

Tribal Women of Bastar and their Economic Role-

There are various grounds upon which different kinds of tasks may be allotted to different kinds of people. Four important differentiating criteria are - sex, age, ascribed social status and aptitude or special skill.⁴⁰

The division of labour in societies of simple technology is not a matter of the full time practice of different special skills, but for most purpose it rests on differences of age and sex.⁴¹ This difference varies according to the stage of economic development of a particular tribe, the more technologically backward more sharp distinction on the basis of sex there would be. Certain tribes of Bastar like Hill Maria living on Abhujahmur hills practice shifting cultivation, the division of labour is strictly on the basis of sex where women play a significant role.⁴²

Whatever the prominent type of production it demands, whether among hunters, herders or cultivators, most men and women do a prescribed kind of work and the social cohesion is sustained through what Durkheim called mechanical solidarity

and social control maintained through repressive laws. Conformity to a common set of rules is the paramount values, and Durkheim thought that this conformity was achieved through the fear of punishment, either secular or supernatural.⁴³ This kind of conformity was seen in the traditional set up of Bastar tribes.

Most of the tribes of Bastar practice either one or the other type of economy- they are food gatherers and hunters, shifting cultivators, agriculturists, pastoralist, artisan or industrial labour.⁴⁴ But the most important thing is that almost all of them practice cultivation of some kind or the other.⁴⁵ Grigson notes, the whole life of the Maria is primarily directed towards the raising of food from the earth, either by cultivation, as by gathering the fruits of the forest, or by fishing, hunting or trapping.⁴⁶ Another important thing is that their economic activity is not exclusively economic. It determines the sites of his village and regulates his relations with his wife. His festivals are designed either to ensure the benevolence of the earth and the ancestors and the clan God towards the crops about to be sown, or to celebrate the first eating of each of the main crops, and the final harvest home in a spirit of communal thanks giving⁴⁷. In other words, their economic activity remains central around which other social and religious activities revolve.

Some tribes of Bastar like the Hill Marias practice the most primitive form of economy-hunting and food gathering. Here the division of labour is perfect where hunting is mainly done by men and food gathering by women.⁴⁸ Traditionally hunting was almost a religious exercise, and the success or failure of a ceremonial hunt was believed to augur a good or a bad harvest. The social aspect of a major hunt is indicated by the fact that a Maria must observe chastity and fast before he goes out to hunt and he must meticulously observe the prescribed taboos.⁴⁹ Hunters must not walk across the foot prints of a woman in her periods nor should they cross her shadow. Adultery on the part of one of the hunter's wives can also ruin a hunt and needless to say, if such a thing happens, the woman has to bear the consequences.

The gathering of roots, tubers, yams is an important occupation of Bastar women.⁵⁰ The fruits of mahuwa, achar, tendu, seona, jamun, aomla and mangoes are all collected by women and children. They eat these fruits and also use in several preparations like 'paize', a semi-liquid preparation of grain. The women also gather various leaves, flowers and seeds and vegetables. The digging of forest roots and yams in the rains is one of the women's chief occupations. They also collect other things like large supplies of 'Siari' or elephant creeper leaves for use as plates and drinking vessels.⁵¹

Both men and women do fishing women make a series of small mud dams across the swampy ends of tanks or pods, and dry out the space enclosed by each dam in turn by throwing the water out with winnowers or baskets, they then collect what fish are left in the mud.⁵² Besides this, women in Bastar look after the house, the children, cook food and bring water from a long distance.

In shifting cultivations, still practiced by the Hill Marias,⁵³ on a large scale, the work is divided on the basis of sex, the men burning and clearing a plot of land usually near a navigable river, and the women cultivating it and gathering the crop. Though men do heavy work like cutting the trees, Grigson writes that in Bastar women and children do assist in cutting small trees and undergrowth and arranging timber for firing.⁵⁴ Besides this they cut and gather firewood, help clear the swidden fields, carry heavy loads of leaves from the forest, carry large pots of water from estream to house, dig roots out of the grounds and so on.⁵⁵

The division of labours among Gonds of Bastar is elaborate and is conditioned by major animistic beliefs about fertilization and contagious magic.⁵⁶ All the men and women of the clan and hamlet combine to carry the threshold and winnowed grain of each cultivator to his compartment in the

long granary. From the time when the new kosre comes into ear till the harvest is over all their men sleep apart from their wives in their fields, while their womenfolk have to sleep in the village, it being taboo for women to sleep in the fields and have sexual intercourse during the period.⁵⁷ Besides this it is also taboo for women to have anything to do with a threshing floor (Kara) or the winnowing operation.⁵⁸

Shifting cultivation has gradually led to the use of plough by Gonds who came into contact with plain agriculturists.⁵⁹ It is probable that millet cultivation began on the highlands when rice came to be cultivated in valleys and lowlands in very early times.⁶⁰ In 1939, Grigson writes on the basis of the field experiences between 1927-1934, 'in most Hill Maria area 'penda' (Swidden) is the only kind of cultivation'.⁶¹ Later in the foot-hills village of Orcha, Jay found in 1959 a combination of swidden and plough cultivation of rice.⁶²

Leadership, migration contact with strangers, imitation of stronger societies and imposition of inflexible values by dominant cultures gradually led to the weakening of hunting economy from the tribal of Bastar. Social change affected the old clan-based socio-economic organization, disrupting local unity introducing fear and insecurity among them.⁶³ Still the role of tribal women did not lose importance

because atleast for 3 months the Maria had to depend on the forest produce or hunting and trapping as in 70 percent of cases agricultural produce as a food does not suffice for the whole year.⁶⁴ Even as late as in 1980s Mehta notes that though Gonds of Bastar have cultivated varieties of hill rice, shifting cultivations continued to produce more varieties of grain and crops, soil and climate. The tribals of this region have stuck to this kind of cultivation because of their low density of population and thick vegetation.⁶⁵

The hunters, grasslanders and shifting cultivators of the highlands and tribal areas became agriculturists by occupation by the time India became independent.⁶⁶ All this though brought some change in the nature of women's work it did not however reduce her work load. In plow cultivation, though women did not plough, they helped hoe the fields. Her work in the house, and looking after the children continued with other work like gathering, fishing and marketing.⁶⁷ The visitors to the Dhauria market observes, long rows of village men and women sitting or squatting in front of some product which they are trying to sell. Women make trips to market quite often.⁶⁸

Till recently amongst the Gonds of Bastar subsistence economy continues with plough cultivation, followed by Barter and the first emergence of elementary commercial activities.

The emergence of political rule, law and land ownership is as important a landmark as the beginning of the use of currency.⁶⁹ Still another landmark is the sowing of commercial crops and coming of money economy. This has been all the more due to the commencement of the process of industrialization.⁷⁰ The exogenous factors have disturbed the stable economy of the tribals and the economic role of the tribal women of Bastar. Our purpose in the next chapter would be to analyse this.

Thus we see that the tribal women of Bastar had a considerable role to play in the primitive economy whether in hunting and gathering or shifting and plow cultivation. But this significant economic role did not always speak for the high status of women as Marxists believed because she worked not out of choice but out of helplessness, not because she liked working but to meet the subsistence requirement of the family. Of Maria Gonds women of Bastar Grigson says that she is not a full human being like aman!⁷¹ Though we may say that men too like women worked very hard, we must not forget several restrictions and taboos imposed on women in economic activities. On the whole it is observed that men spend a lot of time in drinking or lazing around.⁷²

Legal and Political Status of Tribal Women of Bastar

We have already dealt with this aspect in connection with the status of Tribal Women of India in the previous

chapter. The conclusion after the analysis was that, tribal women occupied a very low position in the political set-up, whatever kind of social structure, patrilineal or matrilineal a particular society had, or whatever stage of economic development it has been whether of primitive communism or of advanced technology. Ample evidences have been given to support this argument. Now we have to see whether this holds true of the tribal women of Bastar or not, if yes to what extent.

The tribals of Bastar have clearly demarcated territorial boundaries where they live together united by kinship, marriage and frequent individual contact, and with them it is difficult to distinguish political affairs from domestic affairs.⁷³ The important social organization are of various kinds which also work as political association.⁷⁴ In Bastar these are broadly -Tribe, Moiety, Phratry, Clan village Group, Lineage and Family.⁷⁵ The important political institutions associated with these were, the council of village elders, village headmen and village panchayat constituted and headed by males alone.⁷⁶

The country of the Marias is traditionally divided into several paraganas which are multi village groups and the headman of each paraganais known as 'Paragana-Manjhi'.⁷⁷ The

paragana manjhis were the link between the state and the people and they were the representative of the people before the government.⁷⁸ Each paragana consists of a number of villages and a head known as 'Patel' who acts as spokesman for all the villages dealing with outside authority. The position is hereditary and usually belongs to the largest and most numerous clan of a village.⁷⁹ Each village is comprised of two or more hamlets which are known as 'Paras' and the chief 'Paras-mukhia'. All these institutions are hereditary and according to the law of progeneriture, the paragana-manjhis is a powerful person.⁸⁰

In the case of each family the oldest male agnate is the head of the household. In him is vested the authority and responsibility for looking after the welfare of the entire family and he generally represents his family at village ceremonies.⁸¹ Every individual participate in decision process which affect the regulation of affairs. Women and children are excluded from the realm of village politics as they have no say in village affairs.⁸²

There is no formally constituted village council among the Murias but the elders of the village customarily gather every morning at day break in the adolescent dormatory of the village. Village business most commonly consists of decision regarding ceremonial agricultural schedules and activities relating to the outside administration. Women again are excluded.⁸³

The Dhurwa of Bastar possess what may be called areas tribal councils referred by them by the term 'Panchayat'. All the Dhurwas recognize the 'Cetia' of Tong pal as their 'Naik' (or headman) while the office of the 'Cetia' is hereditary in as much as the succession person from father to son, he is assisted in carrying out his functions by a council of Dhurwa elders.⁸⁴ Generally speaking the members who guide the collective action of the panchayat are the prominent elderly males. The main function of such a tribal panchayat at present is to take cognizance of those branches of the social rules which regard the purification rites to be performed with a view to readmitting the guilty person into their community.⁸⁵

It becomes clear from this analysis that the tribal women of Bastar occupied a very low legal and political status in the traditional social structure. Not only they do not hold any position in the political institution, they do not also have any decision making power.

Anthropologists have formulated a rosy and glamorous picture of the women in tribal society, postulating it to be an egalitarian society. It was left to the field workers, like Grigson in the case of Bastar who did an extensive field-work there and opines that 'woman on the whole is a kind of property or available adjunct to the house and family.'⁸⁶

that she is not a full human being like a man.⁸⁷ On the whole, therefore we can say that in comparison to man, woman in Bastar had much lower status.

However, the important thing is that tribal groups in Bastar shared a communitarian living where men and women had significant role in the tribal economy. Tribal social structure here is organized in certain definite way to meet the basis requirement of food which is usually accompanied by some ritual ceremony. Political organizations and institutions are formed to regulate the economic, social and religious life of the tribals. Thus their entire life was interwoven with many forces of cooperation and organised effort.

It is against this communitarian frame, the 'syndrome' of change and its implications on the status of tribal women of Bastar will be examined.

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CHAPTER - IV

SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE STATUS OF TRIBAL WOMEN OF BASTAR

The tribals of Bastar have been in constant contact with the outsiders as has already been noted. Their traditional social-structure maintained its continuity till the area was opened up by the Britishers for the exploitation of natural resources through the implementation of its policies. Thus, a money economy was introduced among the tribal communities and the land hunger of the non-British vested interests increased.¹

In 1947, as the princely estates and Zamindari system was dissolved, a new district of Bastar was formed.² Special measure were taken up by the government of India for the tribal people and the policy of integration was adopted.³ It made certain recommendations through intensive agricultural District Programme and Community Development Programme. In the tribal project areas, one agricultural extension officer and ten Gram-Seraks have been provided in each block. Besides this, the concept of T.D.Blocks was adopted, Tribal Development Agencies were registered and Tribal sub-plan approach was adopted.⁴ In Madhya Pradesh two Agencies were registered during the Fifth Five Year Plan,

under Tribal Sub-plant approach four areas were identified as the areas of tribal concentration for tribal development, Bastar being one.⁵ In Bastar, 28 out of 32 blocks in the district were converted into T.D.Blocks, multipurpose society were opened and Tribal Cooperation Development Federation was started.⁶

This direct intervention on the part of the government brought tribals in contact with the outsiders further which increased later with the opening up of industries in this region. There were some traditional industries in Bastar like the rice-mill, oil-mill, flour-mill, etc.⁷ But industrialization in the present content has greatly affected the tribals, particularly the tribal women of Bastar. Three major projects taken up in Bastar were-

(1) D.B.K.Railway line, (ii) Bailadita Iron-Ore Mines, and (iii) Dandakaranya Development Project. Besides this, the construction of Bodhghat Hydrel Dam on the Indravati river, worth about one hundred crores, is coming up shortly in Geedam in Bastar.⁸

The construction of Bhilai-Dallirajhara railway line which passed through the tribal area of Balod Tehsil hastened the process of industrialization with this Dallirajhara iron-ore mine has also started functioning. Bailadila, the zone

of huge iron ore deposits lies in the heart of the Muria Gond track in Bastar. To exploit the rich deposits the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) which went into operating has its road built through dense forest and linking the area with the headquarters of the district. A township of about 125 quarters inhabited by about 1200 immigrants officers, staff and workers of the mines has grown in this place with necessary infrastructure of water supply, community centres, schools, hospital and welfare activities.⁹

Thus, the political-economy of Bastar region began to change slowly as the district received a special attention. Due to the government policies there was a considerable change due to the penetration of capital economy and industrial culture. How it disturbed the tribal equilibrium and affected the economic role of tribal women of Bastar will be taken up now.

Changes in the Economic Role of Tribal Women of Bastar:

Economic role is associated with the status of tribal women and it does not only mean the participation of women in tribal economy but also what kind of work they are doing, whether it holds prestige in the society or not, are they paid indiscriminately and most important is whether they are doing forced by other people or the prevailing circumstances.

These querries will be looked into as we explore the position tribal women occupied in Bastar district and the subsequent changes that had taken place.

Women in tribal economy play a significant role. Among the non-tribal women, 11.9 percent are workers where as their tribal counterparts account for 20.75 percent as workers. In Bastar 32 percent tribal women are workers according to the 1981 Census.¹⁰

Hunting and gathering was once a very important economy for the tribals of Bastar in which tribal women had an important role to play. Forest therefore, has been very important for the tribals of Bastar. The total geographical area of Bastar district is 39.18 Lakh hectares out of which 29.9 lakh hectares (66%) were classified as forest. The district is very rich in forest wealth. As per pre-investment survey of forest resources, it has a growing stock of 187 in cubic metres of industrial woods and 4.37 m tons of bamboo,¹¹ Besides major forest produce of industrial importance a variety of minor forest produces are also available like gum, honey, kora-cocoon, tikkur and phool-bahari. Certain minor forest products like tendu leaves, saal-seeds, Mahua etc. are the chief sources of livelihood for the tribals which were mainly collected by the tribal women.¹² But with the increasing

control of commercial interests on these natural resources. The tribals are being deprived of their natural rights to their livelihood they are forced to sell these products at much lower rate.¹³ Tribal women also collected the firewood and sell in adjacent market after walking for a long distance.¹⁴ What tribals used to get freely from nature, is to be bought from the market now. The task of tribal women has thus increased with this. Besides collection and gathering of food, they have a responsible of selling and buying also.

Shifting cultivation was carried on in large scale in Bastar. Still Abhujmar Maria practice it. In this economy women have worked side by side with men, from clearing the jungles, to planting and finally harvesting, besides doing other domestic activities. Once the shifting cultivation was banned, most of the tribals took to settled kind of agriculture. In Bastar, rice is the chief crop which is cultivated like this. In this women help in planting and harvesting and the rest of the major activities like ploughing, carrying paddy from the field to the village, threshing are done by the males.¹⁵ Thus, as the tribes of Bastar took to settled agriculture, tribal women have been relegated to the domestic sphere doing mainly cooking, bringing water and firewood and looking after the children. Her economic role as compared to the one in food gathering and hunting economy of a settled kind. In Bastar, the number of tribal women as compared to men over the years as

cultivators has decreased substantially,¹⁶ as it is clear from the given table.

Cultivators		
<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1961	221,871	208,357
1971	251,983	51,681
1981	324,341	139,656

Thus we see that in agricultural economy, the tribal women in Bastar have been pushed back to household work their economic role significantly declining though compared to female more men are engaged as cultivators, they own very less. According to a survey about 88 percent of the population in Bastar is involved in agriculture, out of this 85 percent own less than 5 acres of land, 12 percent own 5 to 10 acres and the rest 3 percent more than 10 acres. Most of these plots are unirrigated, uneven and rocky.¹⁷

According to M.P. Land Revenue Act, 1959 the transfer of land from the tribals to the non-tribals is banned.¹⁸ In a study by R. S. Srivastava, it is revealed that in five years, between 1968 to 1972, 20.49 percent of the tribal land possessed by the tribals has been officially permitted to be sold. Besides this, the extent of benami-illegal

transfers of land is very difficult to be assessed.¹⁹ This Act of 1959 has been reformed on 10th January, 1984 to the effect that the government will fight the cases of those tribal whose land has gone to the non-tribals and will restore their land. But at present also the tribals are deprived of their land mostly by the administration. Big dams, factories, mining, electricity scheme, defence installments, forestry etc. are driving the tribals out of their land on a massive scale.²⁰

The problem of tribal women to a greater extent is linked to this large scale land alienation. Several studies explain about the massive land disposition, even during the British rule. This process had been recently accentuated even after the independence and continue to increase even in the 1980s despite the promulgation of the land Transfer Regulations and its implementation.²¹ The problem of land alienation, together with increase in population and pressure on land, the tribals have lost their land and started working as agricultural labourers.²²

Dispossession of the tribal lands renders women's subordination to others' in agriculture where she has to participate as a wage labourer in transplantation, harvesting and threshing the crops.²³ The status of tribal women in this context turned inversely to the former situation in which she

had been all the while relatively independent in the process of her participation in agriculture. The dependency form of now is mainly a bondage form and very rarely a free labourers form. According to the Report of the working group on development of scheduled tribes during Seventh Five Year Plan the percentage of tribal women as agricultural labourers increased from 26.45 percent in 1971 to 46.39 percent in 1981, whereas the percent of men engaged as agricultural labourers decreased from 60.36 to 53.61.²⁴ In Bastar both men and women contributed substantially by earning as agricultural labourers. There is however an increasing trend in favour of women as shown in the table.²⁵

<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1961	33,020	32,964
1971	40,248	32,902
1981	44,068	45,392

The reason for the concentration of tribal women in the agricultural sector is the result of the establishment of industries in the tribal region of Bastar. Expansion of the industrial capital in the tribal regions further resulted in two way process of change, that is, immigration of the outsiders into the tribal regions and emigration of the tribals to the urban towns, where they were invariably compared by women and children.²⁶ This results in the shift of women's economic role.

Tribals of Bastar have taken up jobs in the industrial complex as their subsistence requirement is no longer satisfied by either forest or land. In Bailadila Iron-ore complex. Bastar, 80 percent of the tribal workers think that the industry has opened new areas of employment for the tribals of Bastar.²⁷ The poverty has been the principle factor behind the tribals joining the ranks of industrial wage-earners.²⁸

It is noted that while being engaged in industry, a majority of them continue to maintain agriculture as a main as a subsidiary occupation. Their agricultural land is taken care of by their wives mainly.²⁹ This has happened with those families who have come from neighbouring areas to work in either Bailadila Iron-ore complex or at the site of the construction of Hydel dam.³⁰ Infact to maintain the agro-industrial economic pursuit even the nuclear family has broken up into two households, one where the husband lives with the school going children while in the other wife with minor children as unmarried grown up daughters stay back and look after the agriculture.³¹ Thus, as men have become engaged in different types of work related to the industry, agricultural work has been vested mainly on the womenfolk. Tribal men in Bastar cling both to agriculture and industrial occupation and their women play the vital role in the

dual economic involvement. This has increased the burden of tribal women in Bastar.³²

However, quite a number of tribal women work as wage labourers. Since a large number of them did not possess enough skill to work they were employed in unskillful work like soil lifting, sand-cement mixing, brick lifting etc.³³ During the 1960s when Bhansi was the base camp of N.M.D.C. the Murias from Bhansi, Kamath, Nerli and other roadside villages joined the ranks of industrial labour. They were employed as unskilled labourers. A good number of tribal women have settled down in the complex.³⁴

Similar is the case with the tribal women working in Bailadila Iron ore complex. Here a large number of women are either cultivators or agricultural labourers or in the primary sector of economy. This will become clear from the given table of the occupational distribution of population of this area.³⁵

	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Agricultural Labourers	39721	2866
Other labourers (in mining, forestry etc.)	5038	3029
Cultivators	40101	14009
Household Industry	745	259
In other activities	1554	405

Apart from this the number of female non-workers in Bastar is also more than male non-workers. According to the Census, 1981, out of total non-working population of 567,427 in Bastar, tribal men are 228,253 and women number is 339,174.³⁶ Although no case study has been done till now on the changing status of tribal women of Bastar, it is difficult to say about the wages paid to men and women. As the differential wage structure between male and female labourers is prevalent all over the country and the wage exploitation of women labour is clearly seen in the tendu leaf plucking, construction and other building operation.³⁷ We can see that the tribal women of Bastar are not different from these.

Thus we see that with the industrialization of Bastar district, there have been significant changes in the economic role of tribal women affecting her social status. These are First, with the shift from food gathering and hunting economy, and shifting cultivation to a settled kind, tribal women became confined to activities of domestic sphere. Second, as tribal men became engaged in different type of work related to the industry, agricultural work has been vested mainly on the womenfolk. Third, with this status of tribal women in this context turned inversely propotionate to the farmers situation in which she had been relatively independent

in the process of her participation in agriculture. Fourth, another significant consequence of industrialization is the removal of a large section of male labour force from the primary sector and concentration of tribal women in this. Fifth, the change has increased the burden of tribal women. In village she looks after the agriculture or work as a labourer, besides her other household work. In industrial complex apart from working as a wage labourer, she cooks, manages the house and do marketing.

A shift from traditional to industrial economy therefore, reduced the economic role of tribal women of Bastar and therefore her overall status.

Changes in the Socio-Religious Status of Tribal Women of Bastar:

It is has already been debated that even with considerable advantages, tribal women do not have status equal to that of tribal men. Arduous work, no right of inheritance and succession, no political and legal status and a rough treatment on violation of taboos goes on to speak of her limitations. Tribal women of Bastar is no exception to this rule. On the contrary her position is even worse as tribes of Bastar are still very poor.³⁸

But the social structure of the tribal people was more or less stable and autonomous. It was a community where men

and women were partners in all aspects of social life which was interwoven with many forces of perpetual unity, cooperation and organised factor.³⁹ Evans-Pritchard commented while talking about the position of women in primitive societies, 'she does not regard herself as being at a disadvantage and she does not envy her manfolk what are describe as their privileges.'⁴⁰

Edward J. Jay talking about Maria Gonds of Bastar says that they have a division of labour which is a matter of convenience rather than rigid rules about male and female behaviour and so on.⁴¹ Even the ownership of property which is through male line is not of much significance as tribals of Bastar own very meagre.

This picture of common living together began to change as the outforce penetrated in and disturbed its political-economy. As far as the social status of tribal women of Bastar is concerned it began to change initially as a result of Sanskritization. Some tribes like the Halbas and the Bhattras became much closer to the Hindus while others like the Marias especially the Hill Marias remained away from them.⁴² It is in the former tribes she evils of Hinduism began to have its influence. One such recent movement which attempts to Hinduise tribals of Bastar in a large scale was started by Baba Bihari Das in 1970s, known as the Bhagat Movement.⁴³ The tribal society got divided into two distinct groups of Bhagat and non-Bhagat. Later the Bhagat were asked to observe

non-commensality norms in dealing with the ordinary tribals, which posed family and social problems for the tribals. This affected the social status of tribal women of those tribes which got converted into Bhagats. Women were asked to worship their husband and to honour their marital status by putting vermillion in the parting in their hair and to touch the feet of their husbands every morning and evening. They were to avoid both pre-marital and extramarital relations.⁴⁴ This imposed several restrictions on tribal women of Bastar. Tribals started favouring male children and the birth of a daughter was looked down upon. Originally all tribes favoured adult marriage of tribal women but due to the constant contact with the Hindus, they began to initiate the practice of child marriage.⁴⁵ Now dowry has become prominent and bride's father has to invariably pay it to the bride groom's father. The Murria institution of 'ghotul' also suffered. In Lanjore village in Bastar, the Bhagats built their own ghotul.⁴⁶ The Bhagats ghotul is called 'Ram Mandli' and the code of conduct is different from that of the traditional ghotul'.⁴⁷

Remarriage and divorce both have become difficult. Religious taboos imposed on tribal women have not reduced much as still a vast number of women are engaged in primitive economy and to certain extent are governed by their norms and traditions. While working as wage labourers in industries and

mines such restrictions are not imposed because the economic activities here is not connected like in the traditional tribal economy with the religious ceremony. Tribals therefore, did not find it very difficult to adapt to the nature of work in industry.⁴⁹ But they are not free from stresses and strains as they keep their link with village also for the industrial complex has offered only a limited opportunity for employment and economic mobility.⁵⁰ Since the industrial employment is exogenous to the traditional social system, the industrial workers are thrown in a situation of social-vocational conflict.⁵¹ This conflict is all the more strenuous for the tribal women, because it is they who are responsible for keeping the agriculture and industrial work ~~and~~ at balance. Then they are paid very less and also manage the house-work. This leads to the high rate of abseneeism, more in the case of tribal women as they have to go in for maternity leave.⁵² This is one of the reason why in many private industries the recruitment of women is discouraged.⁵³

Besides this tribal women of Bastar like other women have suffered sexual harresment from the hands of males-whether contractors, traders or industrialists.⁵⁴ She, therefore, faces problems from two sides, one because they are tribals and therefore exploited like their men. Infact even more asthey are paid less and are restricted to unskilled

laborious jobs. Second, they are oppressed because they are women, 'the other sex in the words of Simone de Beauvoir.⁵⁵

In an industrial work situation the women come in contact with various communities and many cases of moral degradation and marriage of tribal girls with the people of other communities have been reported.⁵⁶ In 1981, several tribal youths started an agitation and gheraoed the Jagdalpur collectorate because of the abduction of a tribal girl named Kamala out of Bastar to work as a maid servant and the retrenchment of tribal women as labourers.⁵⁷ This flesh trade of the tribal women is increasing in recent times as their conditions are worsening. The objectification of the tribal women is increasing in the light of the expansion of the monetisation of the tribal economy, as well as the expanding industrial bases. There are many instances when the tribal women in Bastar were harassed openly. In 1983, there was an agitation against the unemployment which was on the increase in the Bailadila Iron-ore complex. In one instance, 'the women labourers are alleged to have been made naked in police custody after their arrests,'⁵⁸ and according to one report, 'those who fled to the jungle included at least three women in an advanced stage of pregnancy and who delivered prematurely in the forest.'⁵⁹ In Bailadila Iron-ore complex, there has been an increase in the immoral traffic.⁶⁰

Exploitation of tribal girls is directly link with the impoverishd conditions of the tribals besides the attraction of the glamorous life. Joshi, interviewed 50 girls working as labourers, house-mid-cum concubines and those doing different types of menial jobs in the town and concluded that the fascination for the city life has played an important role in their migration.⁶¹ They are easily allured and trapped by the hordes of scouts lurking on them. As a result of the establishment of Bailadila Iron-ore complex, tribal women of Dantewada and Jagdalpur Tahsil of Bastar have met with the same fate.⁶²

Besides this, the tribal women who have settled down in Kirandul, Bachel and other roadside areas, economic factors play a secondary role. Most of the girls who come from the well-do-do agriculturist families have accepted the undignified jobs as a means of their survival in the complex.⁶³ This can be seen in their living and consumption pattern.

Thus we see that the changes which have come in the social status of tribal women of Bastar are manifold reducing their status to quite an extent. Firstly, tribal women have lost their independence and choice in social matters concerning mainly marriage, divorce and remarriage. Certain features of Hindu society like child marriage and dowry dystem is doing

more harm than good. Secondly, they are not fully governed by their laws nor the new laws have been incorporated. They don't have any advantage of succession and property, whatever little they owned in the primitive economy is also lost. Thirdly, tribal women work mainly as agricultural labourers or as wage labourers in the industry where they are finding difficult to cope in the new setting. Their stresses and strains are on the increase. Fourth, not only do they have problems in adjusting, but being women are harassed sexually and metted with a very bad treatment.

Tribal women of Bastar are paying heavy cost to get into the mainstream and they seem to find no other alternative.

Changes in the Legal and Political Status of Tribal Women of Bastrar:

Tribal women in India had virtually no legal and political status in the primitive community. All those thinkers who support the view that tribal women were on the same plain as their men-folk, avoid looking in this most crucial aspect, because this aspect not only tells who controls major activities but also who decides major issues.

Assaid, Bastar tribes are patrilineal in nature and the important posts in the council are filled by males.⁶⁴ The heads of the tribe, Paragana, village, clan, family are all males who take important decisions in all political economic,

social and religious matters.⁶⁵

Bastar since centuries was ruled under Maharaja who more often than not used to be a male. The British administration took over the taxation and brought Bastar under their direct rule. However, the Raja continued to yield considerable influence over the people.⁶⁶ With India's independence tribal areas were scheduled to be treated as special demanding more attention. The Panchayati Raj Scheme was initiated in 1959, its object being to give major role to the people themselves.⁶⁷ For this it decided to establish Gram Panchayat in Bastar district also under the M.P. Panchayats Act, 1962.⁶⁸ As for powers with the implementation of Panchayati Raj in the country, more powers have been vested in the head of the village. He is also called 'Gram-Pradhan'. The village administration is run by the Panchayat with 'Mukhia' as the head and other members are called 'Panches'. Mukhia is assisted by a government nominee called 'Gram Sevak'.⁶⁹ Though any person can stand for the election in Bastar, the important posts like of Paragana Manjhi and Patel are held exclusively by males.⁷⁰ According to a recent study, there is not a single example among Murias where the post of Patel, a village headman, has been held by any tribal women.⁷¹ The old system still has its influence. Though Gram Kutchery, a Panchayat court, take up disputes of general nature, social

offences like excommunication, elopement, sex offences, etc., are still in the jurisdiction of the traditional panchayat.⁷²

Thus, there exists an atmosphere of conflict regarding jurisdiction between the traditional and the statutory panchayats. Introduction of election based on adult franchise has led to the growth of factions and parties.⁷³ Since in Bastar district all the political and legal posts were held by males, it were they who took the advantage of first in the new administrative and political system. This group became the elite group which benefitted most on the pretext of improving a lot of tribal people and worked in coordination with the government. The cause of tribal women served their purpose adequately and was considered only as long as it did so.

Tribal women of Bastar thus remained excluded from decision making bodies at all levels and their participation in political system at the most, was limited to casting their votes.

Though the traditional political system was male's sphere of activities they helped in solving tribal women's problem to certain extent, without any cost and at much greater speed, even if the problems were mainly social.⁷⁴ For instance, conjugal separation, through divorce was prevalent among the tribes of Bastar. In most cases they also had the right to ask for a

divorce. There were numerous grounds on which the decree of divorce should be issued by the council of relatives or the tribal panchayat for the reasons of adultery, cruel treatment, laziness, impotency, barrenness, inability to agree and defying social taboos. But gradually the traditional authority system have been found to be eroding and judicial courts made in roads in to the tribal systems.⁷⁵ Due to this again women had to lose her opportunity to claim advice because, she cannot be in a position to move to a court since it involves heavy expenditure, a number of formalities and much longer time. As tribal women are not aware of these and are mostly uneducated they avoid taking risks. Divorce is one instance, similar type of difficulties are faced by the tribal women in different problem.

Thus we see that though tribal women of Bastar did not have any political rights in the traditional political system, atleast there problems were heard and attempt used to be made towards its solution. New political system adopted by the government of free India has posed many problems for them. First, tribal women of Bastar could not occupy important political position. Second, the right to vote was given to them without making them understand what it means. They begin to be bought for 'votes'. Third, they lost their problem

solving agency without getting a new one, leave alone a better one. Fourth, court hearing requires money and formalities. Tribal women of Bastar are neither well off nor much educated.

Education and Social Change Among Tribal Women of Bastar:

The level and degree of education of women in a society is a reliable index to study the status of women in that society and its changing aspect.

Education in tribal societies worked as a mechanism for stabilising social norms and values.⁷⁶ With the changing world, the concept of education is experiencing a complete transvaluation. Today education is a powerful agent of social change. This came as a result of British rule and it facilitated only those people who were strategically necessary to maintain their domination.⁷⁷ Tribals, particularly of the middle India, therefore remained backward despite the fact that special privileges were granted to them according to the article 47 of the constitution in order to promote with special inter-alia, the educational interests of the weaker section.⁷⁸ According to the 1981 Census, while the literacy rate of tribal men is 24.52 percent, it is only 8.04 percent for the tribal women. It is also quite low in comparison to the literacy rate of women in general. The situation of Madhya Pradesh is even worse which has literacy rate of 10.68 percent, Male-17.74 percent

and female only 3.60 percent.⁷⁹ Bastar being predominantly a tribal area and the most backward district of Madhya Pradesh one can well imagine the level of education here especially of their women.

The following table will make the picture clear-

Literacy Rate of the Tribal of Bastar

<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
1961	6.77%	0.91%
1971	7.52%	0.97%
1981	12.53%	2.4%

This situation is indeed alarming as the literacy rate of tribal women of Bastar is much lower than that of tribal men.⁸⁰

According to a recent study, there are 3,175 primary schools, 453 secondary, 62 Higher secondary, 4 colleges and only 3 vocational institutions.⁸¹ In Bastar, Kanker has an arts and commerce college, while Jagdalpur is served by a combined college. Higher secondary and High Schools have been established in all the 3 towns- Kanker, Kirandul and Jagdalpur.⁸² But very few children go for education, girls even less and the drop out rate is quite high. The main reason is that the tribal families consider their children an economic asset, They are also suspicious of the governmental schemes due to the bad treatment

metted out to the tribals.⁸³ There are provisions for free text books, hostel facilities and scholarships for the tribal people by the Government. According to a report, the books take a long time to reach, that is, if they do and the hostels are in miserable condition. Tribal girls have fewer advantages in comparison, besides this they have a problem of security. In 1978, two girls of one of the hostel were raped in which one died.⁸⁴

It is clear from the above analysis that the percentage of literate tribal women of Bastar is extremely low and their drop out rate is quite high. The impact briefly is - First, Tribal women of Bastar could not avail the opportunity of formal education. The Government policies to a large extent is responsible for this. Second, those few of them who are literate, it has not helped them in seeking a good employment, a large number of them still work as unskilled labourers. Third, they have lost their traditional form of education which was in the form of customs, norms and values of the society without acquiring a new one. Ghotul, an institution of education and entertainment lost its significance which resulted in the confinement of tribal women at home. Fourth, education as a tool of social change has not helped much to ameliorate the status of tribal women of Bastar.

We have looked into the status of tribal women of Bastar in economic, socio-religious and political spheres and the impact of social change on it and found that tribals have lost their autonomy and self sufficiency, but could not catch up with the mainstream of the society. They are in the transitional phase and the tribal women are the worse victim in this. Chapter V by way of conclusion looks into this problem in more detail.

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CONCLUSION

The two important questions we tried to answer in the course of the present study are:

- (i) What is the status of women in Tribal Societies.
- (ii) What has been the impact of Social change on the status of tribal women.

These questions have been attempted in relation to the tribal women of India in general, and of Bastar District, M.P., in particular.

The conclusions drawn are the following :-

At the General Level:

- (i) We cannot approach the problem of 'Status of Tribal Women' with a rigid bias to the view that they have either a low or a high status such dichotomies are misleading. We can only talk of the 'relative asymmetry' and 'relative inequality' in status of Tribal women vis-a-vis men of that particular society and/or non-tribal women.
- (ii) Such diametrically opposite ~~ms~~ views are given by some Sociologists and social Anthropologists who base their argument on one or the other criteria. It is seen in the

present work that no single criteria in itself is sufficient to determine the status of Tribal women.

- (iii) The status of tribal women cannot be looked in isolation to the rest of the society as women occupies an important place in the social-structure of the Tribal society and any change in its structure would consequently affect her position.

Keeping these points in view, we have considered the political economy of the tribal society and the place of tribal women in it. In the analysis of the political economy of the tribal society we examined the social-structure, economy and polity and other social and religious factors which also served as indicators to examine the status of tribal women. While most of the writers emphasize the primacy of economic relations, our focus has also been on social and cultural factors. The reason is that tribal society presents a picture of an autonomous whole in which all these aspects are interrelated and intertwined in such a way that no single aspect can be overlooked or another overemphasized. But in order to reach to some conclusion we have separated them analytically while examining their inter-relations whenever and wherever necessary. These conclusions are:

A. At the Substantive Level

- (i) The status of tribal women was much better than the status of non-tribal women in India. For instance, the participation of the non-tribal women compared to the tribal women is much lower, nor do the latter suffer from any social stigma of the caste society.
- (ii) The status of women in matrilineal society is somewhat better than the women in patrilineal society like, their legal status is much higher than their counterpart in patrilineal societies and they have significant role in tribal economy.
- (iii) The conclusion we have reached to, after a comparative analysis of the various types of India by taking into account every indicator, is that, the status of Tribal women in India has been lower than those of men. For instance, Majumdar states that, equal opportunity for work does not necessarily come as a blessing¹ where women work hard to meet a bare subsistence requirement, men try to escape the degradation of forced idleness by indulging in alcoholic drink or they would neutralize the women power by emphasising the beliefs and practices connected with witchcraft and magic.² Women are excluded from the traditional political organizations, and in the realm of religion and ritual practices women are seldom

seem to hold the office of a priest.³ Even in matrilineal societies, though succession to important offices is through females but it is always amale who succeeds - a sister's son.⁴ The owner of household property is always a female, but management of property is always in the hands of a male.⁵

In social matters women's consent is taken into account in very few tribes, ultimately all the decisions including the fixation of bride-price is a man's job.⁶ It is seen that in tribal societies, man's access to extra - domestic spheres give them a chance to work independently and take important and vital decisions. Several instances of this kind have been given and this holds true of the Bastar tribes as well. Thus, though there are variations which we have analysed in our work, by whatever criteria or standard we may judge it, the position of women in tribal societies is hardly equal to that of men.

B. The other conclusion we can draw at the substantive level would be related to the impact of social change on the status of tribal women of India and Bastar. These are :-

- (i) The status of Tribal women has gone from bad to worse as a result of the impact of social change which affected the social structure of the tribal society. In social matters they lost their freedom of choice; in economic matters,

their independence; and gained nothing much in political and educational fields. The same is true of Tribal women of Bastar.

- (ii) It is seen from various instances that tribal women of India are lagging much behind the non-tribal women and the tribal men as well, in all the spheres of activities. The condition of tribal women of Bastar is even worse.
- (iii) Tribals are in flux today, where they and in particular, tribal women have lost their original world but cannot derive any benefit from the 'new world' which only adds and element of agony and melancholy to the whole episode.
- (iv) Besides this, they have problems in psychological and social-cultural adjustment in the industrial complex. With the traditional authority declining and community feeling eroding, tribal women feels alienated in her work as wage labourer where she works for economic gains only. She is forced to work to meet her basic requirements which is a routined, and monotonous and hard work.
- (v) On the whole it is seen that, if tribals have taken any advantage of the government policy, it is men who have come out to be in a better position.

Though the purpose of this dissertation has been only to analyse the impact of social change on the status of tribal women and not its causes, still we can say that the reason

is the uneven development of capital in these areas. It is not the traditions and norms of their society that have been responsible for this, but the capitalist road which is being followed by the country today and the developmental projects of the government which have uprooted the tribals from their economy without providing them any alternative. Therefore our emphasis has been on the analysis of political-economy of social change, looking into this problem from historical perspective.

Yogendra Singh has pointed out that the British rule produced radical and lasting changes in Indian society and culture.⁷ Britishers not only created an elite class for their vested interests but also kept the majority of tribals in isolation which resulted in their tremendous backwardness. And when it opened the areas for the exploitation of natural resources, the change was witnessed at two levels, (i) At the structural level, shattering the traditional political economy of the tribals, and (ii) At socio-cultural level, where the contacts with the hindus and the spread of christianity were responsible for the decay of their own culture and traditions without their incorporating the new ones.

The Government of India have followed the Integration policy as far as the tribals are concerned and introduced many welfare schemes for them⁸, but the result as we have seen is not in the positive direction because the basis is the same,

it is the legacy of the British rule. Tribal women of India and of Bastar have lost their role in the political economy and the social and cultural life as a consequence of this, without gaining any significant role and therefore status. There is a dialectics between old community values and the new ones, and the tribal women are standing at the cross roads without knowing where to go and what to do. Such are the repercussions of social change on the status of Tribal women in India, Bastar being no exception.

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