

**Jayanta Kumar Behera**

## **ECONOMIC STATUS AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

### **Introduction**

Role of tribal women in the study area is not only of importance in the economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Formation and continuity of family hearth and home is the domain of women. Women's role as wives, mothers, and organizers and as basic foundation of other dimensions of social life is of extreme importance. The role of women in childbirth, funerals and fairs and festivals is an important part of village life. Here women are carriers of traditional information in absence of written records. They are crucial actors in the preservation and dissemination of such knowledge. They are not only competent food producers and house makers but are also the transmitters of rich local oral traditions.

Ever since our country's independence both union and state governments have been evincing keen interest to ameliorate the socio-economic problems of women and more particularly of those belonging to socially and economically challenged section of our society. Women are the integral part of society but even at the end of present century they are physically, socially, politically as well as economically oppressed. However, they are the important part of the family, which is the basic unit of society. This paper attempt to suggest the methodology to carry out the study regarding attitude and status of women in tribal society. Working participation of tribal women can be defined as participation in the production of goods and services in the market, as well as in household production of goods for their own consumption. Coming to tribal societies, though they are in different stages of economic development, women have been playing a very significant role in every economy. The status of women in tribal economy is closely linked to the mode of production prevalent in that tribe. The women contribute their economic activities directly or indirectly. The present paper tries to examine the economic status of tribal women and how far they are conscious of their contributions in terms of economic empowerment.

We examine the social status of tribal women in the context of social structure, cultural norms, and value systems. The social framework

---

JAYANTA KUMAR BEHERA, Deptt. of Sociology, I. G. N. Tribal University, Amarkantak, Anuppur, 484886, M.P., *E-mail- jayantabehera90@gmail.com*

influences social expectations of the sex both as individuals and in relation to each other. The emerging values and norms must be seen in relation to the social traditions for the latter shape the attitude and behaviour of the members of society to a large extent. Under this research, the social condition of the tribal women is examined in terms of their life worlds. This involves explorations of their life histories and their present socio-economic conditions. The status of women in tribal economy is closely linked to the mode of production prevalent in that tribe. The women contribute their economic activities directly or indirectly. The present paper tries to examine the economic status of tribal women and how for they are conscious of their contributions in terms of economic empowerment. The emergence of tribal working women and their socio-economic role in the family leads them to attitudinal changes towards social aspects such as marriage, family education, social norms and customs.

The status of any social group is determined importantly by its levels of health, nutrition, literacy-education and employment-income. The tribal women constitute as in any other social group, about half of the total population. However, the importance of women in the tribal society is more important than in other social groups in India, because of the fact that the tribal women, more than woman in any other social group, work harder and the family economy and management depend on her.

To what extent, do women, compared with men, have access to knowledge, economic resources and political power, and to what degree of personal autonomy do these resources permit in the process of decision-making and choice at crucial points in the lifecycle? (UN, 1975). Women make up only 6% of India's workforce and the numbers get skewed as you go up the corporate ladder. Only 4% women are at the senior management level and almost none in a leadership role. Status of women is generally measured using three indicators: education, employment status and intra-household decision-making power. In general women with higher education tend to have a better position (WHO, 1989). In some cases, however, education alone may not be sufficient to enhance status unless it engages employment as well (Hogan *et al.*, 1999).

Gender principles are central to the organisation of traditional communities. Gender and the division of labour that depends on its recognition, are decisive elements giving these societies stability and cohesiveness (Illich, 1982). Emphasis on gender, a relational concept provides opportunities for looking at full range of social and cultural institutions, which reproduce gender hierarchies and gender-based inequalities. The cultural interpretation of gender is central to the identity and status of women that entails web of relationships. The conceptual framework to analyse women's status comprise the seven roles women play in life and work: parental, conjugal, domestic, kin, occupational, community and as an individual. In order to appraise the social status of women in these diverse ecological areas, the findings have

been divided in to subsequent categories: - (a) a girl /daughter/ an unmarried woman; (b) a married woman; (c) a widow; (d) divorcee; and (e) a barren woman. Apart from the social status, women role in the social sphere; economic activities; and decision making have been discussed.

Status is customarily defined by social scientists as a recognized social position or socially defined position of an individual or a community within a society. In recent times many attempts have been made to understand the status of women in tribal society. Anthropologist have suggested four different criteria to determine the status of women in a society i.e. (i) actual treatment, (ii) legal status, (iii) opportunity for social participation and (iv) character and extent of work. For this reason Robert Lowie has stated that any general statement regarding the relation of women to the society must be taken with caution. The women in tribal community constitute about half of the tribal population. Their role in the tribal society is even more important than in other social groups in India, because the tribal women, more than women in any other social group, work harder and the family economy and management depends on them.

It was reported by anthropologist working among the Tharus of U.P. and Nagas and Garos of the North-East there is no child marriage and no stigma on widowhood. The tribal woman enjoys the right to decide about her marriage. Instead of dowry there is bride price which indicates a high social status of tribal women. They earn and are therefore, to a great extent, economically independent. Among the tribal society, birth of a girl is not looked down upon because they are considered as economic assets. They participate in all agricultural operations (except ploughing), they work in all sectors of indigenous cottage industries, tribal arts and production of artifacts. Tribal women enjoy a lot of freedom before and after marriage. The wife may divorce her husband on the grounds of cruelty, impotency, incompatibility, poverty, infidelity or negligence. Traditionally the institute of divorce exists and divorce is granted by the Village Panchayat. The tribal woman may just walk out of her husband's house with/without intimation to her husband. Though she enjoys full liberty to choose her life partner and also to break the marital bond and marry with another person, for the tribal men it is not possible to cause harm to the modesty of a married woman. Severe penalties and punishments are inflicted on the man in all such cases. The women thus enjoy an almost equal status with men except in the sphere of rituals.

### **Problems of the Study**

The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as their roles within the family, the community and society. In tribal communities, the role of women is substantial and crucial. Even after industrialization and the resultant commercialization swamped the tribal economy, women

continued to play a significant role. Collection of minor forest produce is done mostly by women and children. Many also work as laborers in industries, households and construction, contributing to their family income. Despite exploitation by contractors and managers, tribals are more sincere and honest than non tribals. (Awais *et al*, 2009)

However, tribal women face problems and challenges in getting a sustainable livelihood and a decent life due to environmental degradation and the interference of outsiders. The strategy was taken for the development of women, needs improvement, betterment, and upliftment to effect their empowerment. Tribal women have adjusted themselves to live a traditional life style in the local environment and follow occupations based on natural resources. Certainly, the programmes, oriented towards the empowerment of tribal women, have improved their status and socio-economic conditions. However, there are extensive variations across regions and tribes in terms of work participation, sex ratio, economic productivity and social life. The impact of development planning needs to be evaluated in terms of desired and unanticipated consequences. The development process should be perceived as an involvement and reorganization mechanism of not only the socio-economic system but the entire eco-system. Against this backdrop, the present paper reviews the emerging perspective in the context of the socio-economic empowerment of tribal women and changing paradigms of development.

### **Objectives of Study**

The objectives of survey reflect a clear focus on main goal of the research work. The following are illustrative examples of objectives for survey:

- To provide a profile of the area and socio-economic background of the respondents.
- To find out the constraints faced by tribal women in the study areas.
- To suggest measures for the better improvement of the respondents.

The rationale behind choice of the district is the following: 1) the tribals of Dindori district mostly inhabit the hilly regions, mainly in close proximity to forests comprising more than 64 percent of population in the district. 2) The district in which almost all of the Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) live for centuries, being far away from the mainstream in their relatively isolated, inaccessible, less fertile and less agriculturally productive regions of forests, hills and mountains; 3) the role of governmental scheme is very important in these areas for enhancement of the standard of tribal women.

Tribals living in such a remote area where facilities are not available, for which they depend on agriculture, forest. In agricultural system they have to follow the traditional method due to lack of modern techniques. Tribal women in such areas plays vital role to help in the traditional agricultural system.

Most of the tribals in these areas live below poverty line. A large percentage of tribal women are not educated and not aware of their rights and thus unable to access various opportunities meant for them. On an average 60 percent of tribal women are forced to migrate in search of jobs, after the completion of harvest season. They are prone to various forms of exploitation when they migrate. Migration also negatively affects their social status, health and overall development.

### **Methodology**

Scheduled Tribes inhabit all the States except Haryana, Punjab, Chandigarh, Delhi and Pondicherry. The district of Dindori (Madhya Pradesh) has a special distinction of accommodating about one-sixth of the total tribal population of the State. Tribals only constitute 64 percent of the district and thus, it stands fourth among all fifty districts of the State with highest proportion of tribal concentration. Dindori district is situated at the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh touching Chhattisgarh state. It touches Shahdol in east, Mandla in west, Umaria in north, and Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh State in south. It is 144 Km from Jabalpur on S.H 21, 104 Km from Mandla and 88 Km from holy place Amarkantak. It is located at 81.34 degree longitude and 21.16 degree latitude. The holy river Narmada passes through the district. It is situated at a height of 1100 m above sea level amongst herbal-rich, Maikal mountain ranges. Dindori has many historical as well as spiritual places. Some of the spiritual places are Laxman Madva, Kukarramath, Kalchuri Kali Mandir, etc. The Kanha Tiger National Park is 180 km and Bandhavgarh National Park is 140 Km away from the district headquarter. It was created on 25th May, 1998 with a total of 927 villages. The district is covered in seven blocks namely Dindori, Shahpura, Mehandwani, Amarpur, Bajag, Karanjiya and Samnapur. The Baiga are very Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups which can be found only in this district.

The survey sample is the set of respondents who are selected from a larger population for the purpose of participating in the survey. They are studied to gain information about the population as a whole. Sampling plans address generalize ability, certainty and precision of results by defining who is included in the survey, how many people are needed and how respondents are selected. The study is mainly based on primary data collected from selected respondents in the affected district of Dindori through multi-stage random sampling procedure. The researcher has conducted his study in Karanjia block of the district. Under the block numbers of GP was selected. Field survey have been undertaken in 15 remote tribal villages and forests areas among Baiga, Gond, Koal, Pradhan, Dhulia, Bhoomia and Agaria tribes in Karanjia block of Dindori district. Old and experienced men and women were interviewed for the first hand information on socio-economic condition. The numbers of villages were selected from district for studied. In the villages of district, 120

head of the households were selected on a random basis aggregating a total sample including female only available during interview. The selected sample respondents were contacted in their respective residences and the required primary information was collected with the help of a semi-structured interview schedule by trained local investigators. Some of the important variables covered in the study in respect of impoverishment risks include customary rights and privileges, traditional knowledge system. Further, with the help of focused group discussion, additional data were procured regarding awareness campaign among tribals. The interviews were individually carried out during the first contacts with the local population, 'native specialists' were identified, in other words, people who consider themselves, and are considered by the community as having exceptional knowledge about their socio-economic problems. Several field trips were undertaken for collection of data during different seasons. Information was gathered through oral interviews of the local tribal people, especially older persons. These data then can be analysed quantitatively or qualitatively depending on the objectives and design of the study. Survey can be designed specifically to gather information about knowledge related topics.

### **Women's role in economic sphere**

The basic idea of Brown *et al's* (1980) approach is to assume that male occupational attainment is a non-discriminatory norm. By using the estimated parameters of a male occupational attainment model and female data for each of its variables, hypothetical female occupational attainment can be predicted. This hypothetical female occupational attainment suggests what female occupational distribution would have been like if females had faced the same occupational attainment pattern as their male counterparts. The difference between real male and predicted female occupational distribution patterns is caused by gender endowment differences, and the difference between predicted and real female occupational distributions is due to discrimination. Mawar *et al.*, in their study of Gonds in Madhya Pradesh found that most tribal women were illiterate and tied to a primitive economy. Their income level can be increased by raising their literacy level, and giving them training for income generating activities.

In traditional societies which lack market system, the business of everyday living is usually carried on gender division of labour (Illich, 1982). In the study area, the division of labour is mainly between herding and agriculture. In all other tasks concerned with life in the village, such as crafts, house building, watermills and work on boundary walls, there is division between men's work and women's work. Among Gaddis and Bhutias the men are shepherds and women grow crops for food. It is equally valid for Bhils and Bodhs, there too men are out on different duties and women grow crops for food. However the boundaries are not so clearly marked, as there is overlapping

and deviations from the rule. There are as well cases where the rule is inflexible and times when change is possible. Major portion of agriculture is done by women who do weeding, hoeing, planting, harvesting and thrashing except ploughing (which are done by men) in the fields adjacent to houses or far off fields. The other activities of women include looking after the house, children and cattle. Food processing and cooking is women's job. It is the women who with the assistance of children are largely responsible for the cattle, water fuel and fodder. This permits them considerable time away from home and the village. When they are away from home, they are free to talk to whom so ever they please, male or female, of any caste or creed. As a consequence, communication among women and between men and women is as high as it is among men. Tribal women are very strong and courageous in the handling of environmental imperatives as can be demonstrated in the trekking and work pattern under the severe limitations of the harsh environment. Several studies dealing with pastoral societies indicate that the position of women in such societies is not very high because the actual care of the livestock and handling of economic affairs is entirely a male domain. However among Gaddis and Bhutias, though women do not directly help in handling of livestock, they do look after their husbands during migrations. They cook for them and carry loads (Bhasin, 2004: 242).

The income of a person in general, is an indicator of his economic status. The economic status of a person will impact on his/her attitude. Therefore, the study assumes that, the attitude of women belonging to the families with higher income differs from that of the attitude of women who are in middle or lower level of the income group. The economic status of the family also plays an important role in the attitude, ideas and values of family members and their decision-making. In this paper, the monthly income of the respondents is divided into five categories, from less than Rs. 500/- to Rs. 3,000 and above. The respondent's monthly income is indicated below in the table 1, in a detailed manner.

Table 1 indicates that 32.5 % of the respondents have monthly income of up to Rs. 1000, 22.5% of the respondents monthly income is from Rs.1001-1500, 20% of the respondents' annual earning is Rs.1501-2000, 16.66% of the respondents are earning monthly income of above Rs.2001-2500, and remaining 8.34% of the respondents are not included to this above income group. The average monthly income of the respondents is Rs.1001-1500. On the whole majority of tribal's women family belong to the Economically Weaker Section (EWS) income group. Monthly incomes of the tribal's women are very low, because large numbers of tribal women family members are landless labour, and they have no agricultural land. The annual income of the respondents' is very low. Those who have some agricultural land with domesticated animals, their economic standard is high. Respondents are of the opinion that agriculture, small cottage industry and industrial ancillary jobs are the main

sources of income. Thus from the above data, it is evident that large number of tribals' main source of income is agriculture.

In an agricultural economy, most family members work to some extent if they are physically capable of doing so. Nevertheless, this kind of participation does not provide tribal women with independent income and, hence, a higher degree of economic independence. Therefore women participation in non-agricultural, especially in wage, salary and self-employed sectors, provides more meaningful measurements from the point of view of improving women's economic status. Tribal women have made tremendous progress toward gaining economic equality during the last few decades. Nonetheless, throughout the study area, women earn less, are less likely to own a business, and are more likely to live in poverty than men. Even in areas where there have been significant advances in women's status, there is still ample room for improvement. The present study assesses several aspects of tribal women's economic status: women's earnings, the female/male earnings ratio, the occupations and small scale industries in which tribal women work, women's business ownership, and women's poverty. Each of these factors contributes to the overall economic well-being of tribal women and their families. Tribal women's earnings have become increasingly important to families' financial status and often defend them from poverty. The occupations and industries in which tribal women's work have a strong influence on their earnings, benefits, and opportunities for growth. Tribal women have increased their participation in economic activities, there has been some progress in improvement of working conditions and some participants have reported a better understanding of women's economic rights in their communities.

The status of tribal women is intimately connected with their economic status, which in turn, depends upon rights, roles and opportunity for participation in economic activities. The economic status of tribal women is now accepted as an indicator of development. However, all development does not result in improving tribal women's economic activities. Pattern of tribal women's activities are affected by prevailing social ideology and are also linked with the stage of economic development. The reason for disadvantageous position of tribal women is extreme social restriction of freedom of movement and activities. Tribal women are socially and physically suppressed. They are confined to the domain of the household and suffer from various restrictions even within that domain. Low female participation in education is one aspect of this general pattern of women limited interaction with the outside world. Tribal women's limited opportunity to acquire education and information is bound to affect their ability to play an informed role in the family and in the society.

There is a persistent gender discrimination against tribal women in education mainly because of certain stereotypes and beliefs deeply embedded in society. The girl-child is somebody else's property, and hence should remain indoors to carry out the household chores. The boy child is preferred because



of the patriarchal values attached to the boy in performing the last rites and as an insurance against old age. Girls are not preferred because of the financial burden they would bring due to the prevailing dowry system. Thus women are treated as commodities. Though tribal women contribute substantially towards the running of the house and subsistence of the families, her mobility is controlled. There is a gender division of labour and tribal women are expected to perform the reproductive role. The burden of household chores and subsistence responsibility leaves hardly any opportunity for productive role. Lack of skill and knowledge limits their access. With their alienation, the women are unable to work outside. The development that deprives her of these resources does not give her a job. Thus she is reduced to being a housewife alone, unable to make an economic contribution to the family economy.

The survey data clears that 43.33% of the respondents have engaged themselves in the grazing of cows/goat and buffalos. 12.5% of the respondents have engaged in sewing work in leisure time. 17.5% of the respondents are working in poultry farms. 11.67% of the respondents engage themselves in handicraft work. 15% of the respondents engage themselves in dairy farm. When the agricultural work was completed, then they engaged themselves in different types of household works such as grazing their cows, goat and buffalos. Except it they also engage themselves in sewing, poultry, handicraft and in dairy work. It is clear from the above statement that majority of tribal women's secondary source of income is animal husbandry. It meant large number of tribals domesticate cow, goat, buffalo, pig as their secondary source of income. Women in tribal communities are more likely to participate in the informal sector, where they become family workers or self-employed. This occurs not only because it is easier for them to work while looking after children, but also because the fixed cost of employment in the informal sector is much lower than in the formal sector. Tribal women have increased their participation in the different sector as a labor. However, they still face salary discrimination; tend to be in low-paying jobs. Few tribal women participate in the formal economy, but most are in the informal sector with low wages and no job security. Gender disparities in earnings have persisted despite equal qualifications and experience. Tribal women have improved access to income-earning opportunities, but lack control over the resources they earn.

The gaps and challenges were closely linked to the achievements, reflecting the fact that, although much progress has been made, much remains to be done, and that, even in the tribal areas where the progress has been achieved, significant gaps remain. Some of these gaps include the gender gap in education and training, the lack of enforcement and implementation of gender-sensitive legislation, job and earnings discrimination for tribal women who are economically active, lack of recognition of women's unpaid work burden, unequal access to services, including financial services, low representation of women in decision-making positions.

### **Tribal Women and Livelihood**

There are many facts which indicate a low status for the tribal woman. For example, she does not have property rights except in a matrilineal society which is a small proportion of the tribal population. She is paid less as wages than her male counterparts for the same work. Several taboos discriminating against tribal women exist in certain tribal groups implying impurity and low status. The tribal women cannot hold the office of a priest. There are taboos related to menstruation as in non-tribal communities. The Kharia women cannot touch a plough nor can she participate in roofing of a house. The Oraon women are also prevented from touching a plough. The Todas of Nilgiri Hills do not touch menstruating women for fear of destruction of harvest. In certain tribes only the males can participate in ancestor worship (Satyanarayana and Behera, 1986). The Toda and Kota women in southern India cannot cross the threshold of a temple. The Santal women cannot attend communal worship. Anthropologists have reported low status of women among Todas, Kharias and Mariya Gonds with reference to certain taboos during certain periods and ceremonies. The major role that women play in agricultural operations has been discussed by Roy Burman (1998). In the slash and burn cultivation, women join in felling and burning trees, making holes with digging stick, sowing seeds, weeding and harvesting. In plough based cultivation, transportation, weeding, winnowing and dehusking is done entirely by women while harvesting and threshing are done by both men and women. Generally ploughing is done by men but in some tribal societies, women do the ploughing too.

Women among the tribal population have very important role in the agriculture-cum forest-based economies. Women's work is regarded as crucial for the survival of tribal households in terms of provisioning for food, income, earning and management of financial resources. Food gathering is also a vital economic activity even for women of agricultural tribes. Women are major earners from the sale of NWFPs especially in forest dependent livelihood systems. Due to tribal women's role in trade and marketing and to having primary responsibility for household provisioning, they are the *de facto* managers of most household income, as well as of the agricultural produce. In order to ensure women's productive and effective participation in the development, intensive and sustained training on an on-going basis would have to be given. Women would also be encouraged to go on exposures and training outside the village, as the exposure to areas of new developments on different sectors which would be relevant in opening the windows of livelihood opportunities. A very large majority of the tribals (almost 90%) are engaged in agriculture; their other economic activities being food gathering (including hunting and fishing), pastoral, handicrafts, trade and commerce, and industrial labour. Rarely are they engaged in only one occupation. The employment status of tribal women may be considered in terms of their work participation, agriculture, forests, non-agricultural activities and impact of development programmes. Though the work participation among tribals is greater than

among the general population, within the tribals it is again the males who have a higher work participation rate than the females, as in the general population. Though an overwhelming majority of tribal men (85%) and women (91%) were involved in agriculture, there were more cultivators among tribal males while more tribal women were agricultural labourers. The major role played by women in agricultural operations. In the slash and burn cultivation, women join in felling and burning trees, making holes with digging stick, sowing seeds, weeding and harvesting. In plough based cultivation, transportation, weeding, winnowing and dehusking is done entirely by women while harvesting and threshing are done by both men and women. Generally ploughing is done by men but in some tribal societies, women do ploughing too (Roy Burman, 1988).

Occupation is an important indicator of the economic status of the individual. The nature of occupational structure determines the individual, personality and standard of living. In the present paper information was collected about the occupational status of respondents. The study shows that a significant proportion of respondents is engaged in collection of forest products and remaining respondents are working in all kinds of occupation. The survey data indicates that 23.33% of the respondents are working in agriculture sector. 27.5 respondents working in collection of forest products, 20% of the respondents are in plantation work, 12.5% of the respondents engaged in irrigation work, 16.67% of the respondents are as agriculture labour, The study shows that majority of respondents are from agriculture background other respondents have different kind of jobs.

Among tribals there are no restrictions on women's participation in the farming process. A tribal woman can actively participate in all agricultural operations including, ploughing, digging, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting, preparing the granary, threshing, winnowing and storing food grains. In agriculturally backward areas, tribal women are forbidden to touch a plough and can not dig the ground but in all other agricultural operations, women participate actively and traditionally these are a female's job. Processing of food grain is exclusively a woman's job. Every morning tribal women dehusk millet and paddy in husking levers and then clean the grains and cooks them. They not only save money, but also earn it, unlike females of other communities. Tribal women work as men's partners in agriculture, yet their status remains the same. Not only in agricultural sector but also in collection of forest product and as a labour, they always keep their hand with men. Tribal women work very hard for the livelihood of the family but live a poor life, in spite of their many contributions in the house and on the farm. Tribal women are important for the improvement and progress of tribals. They are the pivot of tribal agriculture, performing many household and agricultural jobs. Without them, tribal welfare in agriculture is meaningless. The above data show that most of the tribal women are engaged in informal sector includes jobs such as domestic

servant, small trader, artisan, or field laborer on a family farm. Most of these jobs are unskilled and low paying and do not provide benefits to the worker.

Serious gaps persist related to discrimination against tribal women in the workplace. There is a salary gap, with women earning lower salaries than men, evidenced even when the job description, skills and experience are equal. There are unequal employment opportunities and marginalization of women. Large numbers of women are relegated to the informal sector. Violence against women and sexual harassment persist in the workplace. There is a need to develop standards and ensure these standards get achieved.

### **Women and forests**

Majumdar (1973) has reported a higher status of tribal women on some indicators while lower on other, while Shashi (1978) has concluded that the status of tribal women varies from tribe to tribe. The development projects have adversely affected the tribal women. With deforestation they have to travel a longer distance to gather forest products. Incidentally this has been one of the reasons for the participation of tribal women in Chipko movement to save the tribal the trees. There are evidences of sexual exploitation of tribal women by forest and mining contractors. The incidence of sexual assaults on tribal women have increased. Minor forest produce forms a major source of income in many tribal communities, especially those having less than five acres of land. Women and children are almost exclusively involved in collection of minor forest produce, its storage, processing and marketing (Singh, 1993; Roy Burman, 1988). Increased government control of forests has affected tribal economy adversely. Appointing of agents from outside for collecting forest produce has not only affected their livelihood, but has also made the work of women more difficult. Collection of fuel wood has become more difficult since it is less accessible and more time-consuming. The result has been less income combined with less fuel wood available for themselves and lesser nutrition. It also leaves them little time for earning wages. Government control over forests has also reduced hunting to a ritual.

Tribals have been residing in forest areas for generations, cultivating land and collecting non-timber forest produce. Minor forest produce forms a major source of income in many tribal communities, especially those having less than five acres of land. Women and children are almost exclusively involved in collection of minor forest produce, its storage, processing and marketing (Singh, 1993). Minor forest produce plays an important part in the tribal economy. Its collection and marketing is a major source of livelihood for most tribal families contributing around 75% of their total income.

### **Women and Forest Related Occupations**

The tribal women have a heritage of close association with forests. The associations in the form of economic livelihood are more often informal

and unorganized and sometimes a struggle comes up against rangers and forest officials. It is implicitly known that a large section of the beneficiaries from forest based activities are not women, not even the tribal or the local people and sometimes people with power and money. The forest based enterprises at the local level revolve mostly around collection and processing of forest products and manufacture of articles of wood, rattan, cane, reeds etc. catering mostly to rural need (Arnold, 1994). Women are more associated with collection and extraction. The forest related economic activities can be defined as those economic activities falling under any industry that uses forests or its products as an essential element. Some of these activities identified in literature relate to wood, bamboo, cane, oil gums that are harvested from forests, woodlands and trees. The paper categories a set of activities as forest related based on the raw material/inputs they use and the foregoing analysis of data is hinged on this specification. However, it may be admitted that there is a degree of porosity in the specification as these are based on what is apparent from description provided by NIC (National Industrial Classification). It is possible that some activities not included do use directly or indirectly services or products from forests which cannot be confirmed while as already noted many other forest based activities may not have been reported. On the other hand inclusion of certain activities is based on presumption such as a tribal working for a hotel or tour operation is considered forest based although there is some chance that such an operation is not in any way linked to forest. In other words the perception and nature of available data underlie the specification made here.

**Agriculture:** (1) Raising bees, production of honey or silk (tassar) (2) farming rabbits and other animals (3) hunting, growing, timber, (4) conserving forests, operating tree nurseries, logging and producing wood in the rough (prop, railway tiles), gathering leaves and other forest materials, forestry services, logging services.

**Manufacturing:** (1) Hydrogenated oils, vanaspati and animal fats and oils cakes and meals and residuals (Oleosearics), (2) Bidi (Tobacco), (3) Textiles, tapes, coir, ropes of fibre, (4) tanning leather work stuffing and products of fur and skin, (5) Sawing wood and processing plywood, wood (flooring, doors, boxes building materials and boards wooden industrial goods and agricultural material, carts, boats, sports goods, toys, decorations, pencils, umbrella, sticks musical instruments), (6) Products of bamboo, cane, reeds, leaves and grass inducting baskets and bins, bags, ornamental boxes, fancy articles, pith and salacity, broomsticks, that thing, (7) Pulp, paper, newsprint, boards and special purpose paper and its products, sacks bags and boxes of paper, hoop cones cups and saucers, Pappier-mache articles, wall paper, file cover, carbon paper, (8) Turpentine and resins, organic acids, cellulose natural polymers, gums all from vegetable origin, (8) Pharmaceutical and botanical products and preparations.

The cash flow that tribal women have access to, by sale of forest produce and by breeding livestock, has disappeared. They have been forced to walk miles away from their villages leaving behind their children, either to collect forest produce or find wage labour and have had to sell away all their cattle. In many situations there is seasonal migration leading to work insecurity, breaking up of family relations and exposing them to various social hazards. The research data reveals that 65% of the respondents have given their opinion in favor of self consuming. 32.5% of the respondents view in favour of sales only and 13.33% of the respondents have given their opinion in favour of both, it means on the one hand they consuming the forest product and on the other hand remaining forest product sales by them in the market directly or indirectly they sent it to the market. So the data shows that a large number of tribal women engaged themselves in the collection of forest product. Firewood is also provided by forests. Since firewood gathering is done mainly by women, the interaction between forests and women gets further enhanced. Since all the duties of tribal women are connected with the forests and they look towards the forest for nature's gifts, their dependence on forests is strong and intrinsic. During the collection of forest product, lots of problems are faced by her. They have cut down vast stretches of forest for survival and face the harassment of the forest department every year and are accused of practicing 'unsustainable' agriculture like shifting cultivation. Women, old and young, have to keep moving with their little children due to multiple displacements. Some of them who have settled closer to the tourist towns had to shift to construction work, petty trades or prostitution as a means of survival.

### **Women as Mine Labour**

In India, as in most Asia-Pacific countries, exploitation of land for mineral resources has a long history of abuse and plunder. Mining has been a focal industry in all the Five Year Plans of the country and it could not be perceived as anything but 'development' in demanding people's forfeiture of their lands for 'national prosperity'. Most minerals and mining operations are found in forest regions, which are also the habitat for tribal (indigenous) communities. India being a vast country, the history and status of mining varies from region to region. Starting from rat hole mining, small legal and illegal mining, to large-scale mining mostly by the public sector and since the 1990's by the private sector's participation, there are a wide range of problems and conflicts in relation to mining. Especially, the problems of local communities, displaced or affected by mining have had far reaching consequences. Earlier when a woman was working on her farm or collecting minor forest produce from the forest for her family, she felt belonged to it. However with the change in scenario, when she has to do the labour work, she has to collect forest produce for the other agencies, her economic role becomes different. They feel as they are working as unskilled labourers, it does not help in improving their position. Providing skilled training to women may

help in elevating their status. Tribal women insist on a need based plan for providing work on year round basis, in line with the multiple occupational pattern of their work.

Where displaced women were absorbed into mining related activities, it is mostly in the small private or unorganized sector where women are the first to be retrenched, have no work safety measures, are susceptible to serious health hazards which also affect their reproductive health, and are exposed to sexual exploitation. The large scale mines, which are shifting to technology dependence, have no scope for women's participation as they are illiterate, lack technical skills and face cultural prejudices. Where women formed 30-40% of the workforce in mining, they have been reduced to less than 12% and in the coal sector alone, to 5%. Schemes like VRS have been thrust upon women so as to retrench them first. While the large scale mining has no space for women, the small-scale sector absorbs them only as contract or bonded labour under highly exploitative conditions. Wages are always less than those for men, they do not get a paid holiday even one day in a week or during pregnancy or childbirth, no work equipment is provided, there are no toilets or work facilities. The women are exposed to the exploitation, physical and sexual, of the mine-owners, contractors and other men. They have to walk back miles to return to their villages and are vulnerable to assault on the way. The women suffer from several occupational illnesses right from respiratory problems, silicosis, tuberculosis, leukemia, arthritis, to reproductive problems. They work with toxic and hazardous substances without any safety. Women living in mining communities eke out their livelihood by scavenging on the tailings and wastes dumps, often illegally, and are constantly harassed by company guards, local mafia or police. They are at the mercy of local traders for selling their ores. Whereas women could take their infants to the fields or to the forest earlier, women working in mines have to leave their children behind at homes, unattended. If they do manage to take the children, they have to expose them to high levels of dust and noise pollution, are susceptible to accidents due to blasting or falling into mine pits while playing, etc.

Women from land-owning communities have been forced into wage labour, which is a socially and economically humiliating shift. Most of them depend solely on the wages of the male members as mining by nature of its activity does not permit women to participate. Women are also forced into petty trades or other businesses but the social taboos of participation in these sectors, their lack of literacy or skills, exposes them to further exploitation in these trades. While the large scale mining has no space for women, the small-scale sector absorbs them only as contract or bonded labour under highly exploitative conditions.

The survey data shows that 45.83% of the tribal women are working as labour in bauxite mines. 40.84% of the tribal women are working as labour in crasser mines. 13.33% of the tribal women are working as labor in coal

mines. In the above discussion it is clear that large numbers of women engage them in bauxite mines as a labour. Some engage them in the crasser work. Some tribal women with their husbands migrated from one place to other to engage them in coal mines. For many years tribals have migrated from one place to another in search of employment. Tribal agriculture and allied activities are seasonal and dependent on rainfall. The tribes have been migrated to far off places in search of employment and their descendants hardly returned back to their homeland. The tribals are hard working. Except the kids, the husband and wife engage themselves in hard labour. But they are very much exploited by the contractors who pick them from their village and take them with proper transportation arrangements to the work site either at factory or at the road sides where the construction work commences. But the most unfortunate part of these migrants and the newly recruited tribal labourers is that they become unemployed as soon as the earth work is over or the construction is completed. In this way the innocent tribals are exploited by the contractors.

### **Impact of Development programmes**

The impact of development programmes has been different on different sections of tribal women. A small number of tribal women have taken advantage of education, new opportunities for employment and self-fulfilment. In sericulture project for tribal women in Udaipur (Brandon & Dixit, 1988) a remarkable change in the quality of life of the tribal women was reported. Besides economic benefits they had more leisure, self-reliance, innovativeness, adaptability and a more aware social outlook. The impact of development planning needs to be evaluated in terms of desired and unanticipated consequences. The development process should be perceived as an involvement and reorganization mechanism of not only the socio-economic system but the entire eco-system. Several programmes have been formulated like TRYSEM, PMRY, BUPP, UBSP, SJSRY, etc. SJSRY is a central sponsored programme to strengthen T.C.G. in this programme with many packages such micro-macro enterprises, capacity building, training for self employment, and other social activities. The government has also introduced different development schemes and forming SHGs in the name of TCG, DRDA programme of the government. Other SHGs formed either by NGOs or NABARD or even voluntarily do not find mention here and there is no single agencies where one could get such figure (Padiyar, 2009: 107). It is an effective strategy for women. Bringing women together from all spheres of life to fight for their rights or problems and engage them into income generating activities and participating health, social awareness and to eliminate social evils like illiteracy and alcoholic, drug addition, dowry, women atrocity, gender discrimination and female infanticide etc.

Attitudes toward assistance are also fraught with conflict. Some believe that assistance and social support are rights and that people are entitled to a



basic standard of living. Often an entitlement is viewed as something that a person has earned and therefore has a right to claim. The opposite belief is that assistance extended out by those ruling with the power and means to provide for people without power and in need; and hence a "handout." There is no stigma attached to service as entitlement because the recipient deserves the service, but there is stigma attached to service as a handout because the recipient has not earned the service. The views and ideas expressed about question like attitude towards welfare scheme shows the level of consciousness of the tribal women. The government is trying always for their betterment, and to bridge the gap between them and others so far as the government has implemented a number of welfare schemes for their development. But some respondents have negative ideas regarding the scheme because the welfare schemes have some obstacles that's why, the respondents have no strong confidence upon the positive impact of the welfare schemes.

The principle of universality calls for social services that provide benefits to all members of society regardless of their income or means. Selectivity means that services are restricted to those who can demonstrate need through established eligibility criteria. A major difference between universal and selective programs is the extent of the stigma attached to receiving services. Universal services are available to all whereas selective services are available only to recipients who are identified as incapable of providing for themselves. The advantage of universal coverage is that everyone receives the benefit which prevents many social problems. A major disadvantage of such an approach is its cost. Selective coverage ensures that only those most in need will be covered. Such targeted coverage is less expensive but it stigmatizes the recipient and can be too narrow. Those who do not fit the prescribed criteria exactly will not receive anything. To what extent should individuals be responsible, and to what extent should society be responsible? For the most part, social welfare policy in this country has followed the residual approach. Most social programs were created to respond to an identified need after it occurred. The result of this approach is a categorization system used to identify who should receive services and who should not (Wilensky & Lebeaux 1965).

The primary data reveals that 15% respondents have positive attitude in respect of the welfare schemes, 22.5% respondents have negative attitude towards the welfare schemes and residual 62.5% respondents have indifferent attitude (means neither good nor bad). Those respondents who have not derived benefit out of it have negative views regarding the scheme. Some people have given their views as indifferent, like: at the time of interview the researcher asked him about their idea regarding the scheme at that time; one of the interviewer views that neither we have positive attitude nor the negative attitude, we are silent regarding the matter because if we expressed negative attitude towards the scheme then we may be screened out of the purview of benefit from the social service providers. 20.66% respondents are of the opinion

that they have derived benefit of the welfare schemes often. While 38.67% respondents opine that they have availed the benefit of the welfare scheme seldom. The residual 40.67 respondents did not obtain any benefit of the schemes. Large numbers of respondents have apathetic aloofness towards the benefits of the welfare schemes as few respondents derive benefit out of it. It means few number of tribal women are conscious regarding the welfare schemes and they enjoy the benefit of these schemes and large numbers of tribals are detached from it.

Women are playing an important role in various fields such as agriculture, dairy farming, handicraft etc., but their contribution in these fields has not been viewed as economic activity. A large number of them work in the primary sector as unskilled workforce and get wages lower than men. Women mostly are illiterate hence, most of them suffer from economic subjugation, powerlessness, isolation, vulnerability, and poverty. The issues of economic upliftment of women and their empowerment have been the prime concern of the Government in various schemes. The Government felt that NGO's might be involved in this area for implementation of some of the programmes such as DWCRA by organizing Self-Help Groups (SHGs). As there are functionaries of this NGO at the grass root level to organize local communities in the village, there is a possibility of effective implementation of the schemes. Moreover it deals with the primary concerns of the people- food and clothing. To make people self-reliant the NGO plans to slowly withdraw so that dependency of the people on external agencies may be minimized which is a sound objective for the real development of the local communities.

There are numbers of SHGs functioning in the tribal areas of Dindori district. The women are attracted to the benefits such as savings, availability of loans for purchase of sheep, buffalo and other cattle. After the formation of one group people realized the importance of such groups and slowly but steadily new groups emerged. The group members meet regularly and decide the future course of action. In these meetings the SEDS (Students for the Explorations and the Development of the Space) functionaries educate them about savings and health care. Due to regular meetings and Gram Sabhas conducted by SEDS their awareness level has increased enormously about their health care, children's education and most importantly savings. As savings accumulates women members become able to withdraw money during emergency. According to the statement of one of the respondents at the time of interview that before the formation of the groups, if anybody was ill in the family, they had to rush to moneylender for help whereas now, there are SHGs to help them. They borrow money from the group. The lending of money for one's own or children's is decided on the severity or necessity of the person which they feel urgent, such as health care, or children's school fees or any other urgent need. Women are found to be active in leadership in SHG. Women are sharing their views or dissatisfaction very freely and there is no undue interference.

There are few NGOs/SHGs working in this area for the benefit of the tribal. The data clearly revealed that 26.66% respondents have taken loan from such institutional facilities for starting business. Another 40.84% respondents have taken loan for the agricultural production purpose. 22.5% respondents have availed the help of such loan to get rid of debts from money lenders. Residual 10% respondents obtained deposit facility. From the above data it is clear that the bank facility is not available in that area, it means it is far away from the tribal villages that's why they face many problems such as debarred from different kinds of loan facility. Consequently they are always exploited by the money lenders exorbitant rate of interest on the loan amount. The problems of poverty and drought that plague the region continually, but the work of other like-minded NGO's, both the local environment and population have seen improvements that change the situation for today's community for better future. Their saving levels according to them have improved enormously due to the efforts of the SEDS. Majority of the women are sending their children to schools as they have realized about the significance of education. They also have plans to contest and win the elections in the village and thus participate in the village administration and policymaking process.

Use of alcohol among the tribal's women in the study areas stands as a barrier in the way of development. Alcohol has been synonymous with the tribal culture since ancient times to the present age, as a part and parcel of celebrating. The sentimental attachment of tribals with one kind of liquor or the other is evident from the fact that *mahua* trees is treated sacred by many of the tribals and worshipped. Drinking may be said to be a part of their social culture from times immemorial. Due to this the children become the first victims of drop-outs at primary level. This affects their education and health condition. 91% of respondents in the surveyed village admitted that they regularly consume alcohol. Residual 9% respondents informed that they do not drink alcohol. It consequently affects tribal economy. If they have to give up the traditional liquor, the initiative has to come from within the community. Many of the tribal communities are aware of the evil effect of liquor addiction and consequently in a number of tribal areas strong movements have arisen from time to time which have dissuaded the tribals' from consuming distilled liquor. Understanding the importance of liquor in the life and livelihood of tribals, the State Government at various point of time has imposed restriction on the production, distribution and trading of liquor in Scheduled Areas as well as non-Scheduled Areas of the State. In this case women also played a vital role to start a revolt against the consumption of liquor.

Savings is also an indicator of economic status of the respondent's. The saving in this study represents income of the family and their saving habit. It is a very important determinant of the condition of the respondent's family. The field work reveals the savings of the respondents also the

awareness of the savings. Data indicates 54.67% of the respondent's savings are in SHG, 7.5 % of them saved their money in L.I.C, 13.33% of the respondents have savings in banks, and 25% of the respondents don't have any kind of savings for their future. It clearly shows that tribal women are being empowered economically. The above data cleared that the respondents are more conscious about the Self Help Group rather than other saving scheme.

### **Conclusion**

The present position and condition of the tribal women is not an accidental affair. It has evolved because of the operation of several forces in the past. The economic cycle and division of labour in the tribal areas has given an important role to the women. This economic role has undoubtedly affected the social position of women, who have social freedom that is quite remarkable in its scope. There is cultural similarity among the different tribal groups in the different areas under study, as the women from different areas have the similar economic roles to play, necessitated by the demands of environment to grow food for their own consumption. The economic value and worth of women therefore as (a) an independent and necessary unit of economic activity without which the given economic system will not survive, (b) as complementary to the men as work force, in the organized functioning of the whole economic system. Role of women is not only of importance in economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Women's role as wives, mothers, organizers and as the basic foundation of other dimensions of social life is of utmost importance. The tribal women in different areas occupy an economically significant place that is reflected in the generally high position and the importance that they have. The socio-economic equality of sexes can be observed in the attitudes and practices concerning marriage, divorce and household harmony. The tribal women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men. However these women are not backward. They have power in their own sphere, no men tell them what to do. They are responsible for their own share of work and share the benefits of their own work as long as the unit of production and consumption remains the home. Their own perception and that of their men, is that women share major share of socio economic activities and consequently they are respected, well thought of and think well of themselves. Her economic ability and consequent social position has resulted in special institutional privileges that are bestowed on the women. Their contribution to subsistence economy gives them important and irreversible position. It may be concluded as it is observed that ecology and environmental factors existing in tribal areas under study have given these women a special economic power, and an elevated status.

**Table 1**  
**Earning of Monthly Income**

Income	No of Respondents	Percentage
Upto 1000	39	32.5
1001 – 1500	27	22.5
1501 – 2000	24	20
2001 – 2500	20	16.66
2501 – 3000	10	8.34
Total	120	100

#### REFERENCES

- Awais, M., Alam, T., Asif, M.  
 2009 'Socio-economic empowerment of tribal women: An Indian perspective', *International Journal of Rural studies*, 16(1), pp.1-11.
- Bhasin, V.  
 2004 *Ecology and Status of Women among Tribals of India, Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh*, Delhi, Kamla-Raj Enterprises, Page-242.
- Brandon, R.R. & Dixit, B.N.  
 1988 'Sericulture for tribal women, in J.P. Singh, N.N. Vyas & R.S. Mann (Eds.) (1988), *Tribal women and development*, Udaipur: MLV Tribal Research and Training Institute, Tribal Area Development Dept., Rajasthan.
- Brown, R. S., Moon, M. and Zoloth, B. S.  
 1980 'Incorporating Occupational Attainment in Studies of Male/Female Earnings Differentials', *The Journal of Human Resources*, 15, pp. 3-28.
- Illich, I.  
 1982 *Gender*, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Majumdar, D.N.  
 1973 *A Glimpse of Garo Politics in North Eastern Affairs*, London: Longman.
- Padiyar Geetali  
 2009 'Women Empowerment', *A Journal of Asia for Democratic Development*, The Council for Peace, Development and Cultural Unity, Modi Niwas, Jain Mandir Road, Morena, India, page-107
- Roy Burman, B.K.  
 1988 'Challenges of development and tribal women of India., in J.P. Singh, N.N. Vyas & R.S. Mann (Eds.), *Tribal women and Development*, Udaipur: MLV Tribal Research and Training Institute, Tribal Area Development Department, Rajasthan.

Shashi, S.S.

1978 *The Tribal Women of India*, Delhi: Sandeep Prakashan.

The United Nations

1975 *Conference on Women in Mexico City*, New York: United Nations.

WHO.

1989 *Preventing Maternal Deaths*, Geneva: World Health Organisation.

Wilensky, H. I., & Lebeaux, C. N.

1965 *Industrial society and social welfare*, New York: Free Press.