

---

## Status And Struggle For Survival Of Tribal Women In Uttar Pradesh

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Malika Parmar

<sup>1</sup>Assistant professor History Ram Janaki Mahavidhyalaya, Assai Berri, Kanpur Nagar

Received: 25 September 2023 Accepted and Reviewed: 30 September 2023, Published : 01 Nov 2023

---

### Abstract

**“ A Nation would not march forward if the women are left behind”**

**-Swami Vivekanada**

In any society, marked by tradition or modernity, the women occupy an important place. Their contribution to the maintenance of status quo, as also to the innovative perspective of society is of vital importance. And hence their proper place in any social cultural matrix needs to be explored. On non-tribal women, many works of sociological interests are available. But it is still rare to find more valid and exhaustive literature on tribal women. Such a background enthused me to scientifically explore the status of tribal women. These studies have raised crucial issues related to changing status of women in our society and problems faced by them. But unfortunately very little attention has been given to the understanding of millions of women dwelling in the villages and tribal areas, silently carrying out traditional, domestic and agricultural tasks and unquestioningly adhering to norms that have been espoused for them for many generations. We have to understand these village and tribal women, make them aware of themselves and improve their lot.

**Keywords-** Tribal Women, socio-economic status, education, bonded labour etc.

### Introduction

From time immemorial it is apparent from a number of instances which have come to light through various journals, periodicals, historical reports, etc. that the women have contributed a lot towards developing of a country. Similarly ours is not an exception to it. Around the country it has been found that women have assisted their male partners in raising resources for the progress of their families by maintaining their separate entity in the field of activities. Thus it goes without saying that no perfections can be arrived at without the participation of males and females alike, be it in agricultural or industrial operations. History is, undoubtedly, replete with such instances besides those of certain epics as well. From the primitive era to the modern age, the women have been contributing their mite for the betterment of their kiths and kins so as to occupy a better position in the society they lived.

The tribal women have, particularly played a dominant role not only in agricultural operations, but also in the field of crafts and forest-based economy. In this way, in the socio-economic sphere, the tribal women have an important position more or less equal to that of men. In spite of all the government plans and women welfare schemes, the benefits have not reached the tribal women. They cannot be regarded as being emancipated and free from the constraints of age old customs and traditions. It seems to be essential to save them from exploitation, to enrich their social status and to achieve their glory as respected citizens of India.

**Objectives-** The main aim for carrying out this work is to explore the condition of tribal women in social, economic and educational field and to analyze the challenges faced by tribal women.

**Methodology-** The present paper is based on only documentary sources, since it does not cover the people's perceptions. The published material, available in the form of books, journals, seminar papers,

plan documents, annual departmental reports, tribal Sub plan reports etc have been used as documentary sources.

**Status of Tribal Women-** In terms of status and problems of tribal women in Uttar Pradesh, is to be analyzed in this writing. Though the social organizational and religious attributes of the Uttar Pradesh tribes display a good deal of uniqueness, represented by features like polyandry, bride-price, peculiar customs and practices surrounding the institution of marriage ( for example, marriage by capture, service, exchange etc, levirate, Takwa or Ghar-baitha, that is, custom of keeping 'servant- husband', widow marriage and so on ), some elements of caste ideology and caste system of greater tradition have also been internalized to a differential degree. Excepting the Tharu and the Raji, the remaining three tribes, that is, the Bhotia, the Bhoksa and the Jaunsari follow some of the elements of caste system. The Bhoksa, The Tharu and the Jaunsari are predominantly agriculturists with specializations in various craft work ranging from weaving to basketry. The Bhotias were practising trade across the international border, till the border was sealed for them. The Rajis have been the hunting and gathering people and even now they resort to it considerably.

**Socio- economic situation of tribal women-** Looking to the general socio-economic situation of Bhotia, Raji, Tharu, Jaunsari and Bhoksa communities the status of women can be rated at comparatively a higher plane. Traditionally and customarily they are treated as important members of the society. Right at the time of birth a female child is welcome and she keeps on receiving cordial treatment through her childhood. She is extended complete freedom in mixing with the boys. During the course she develops a mind of her own and exercises it at the time of choosing her mate. A Bhotia girl can turn down a proposal of marriage if she does not like the boy. A Bhoksa or a Raji girl is free to choose her marriage partner. A Jaunsari girl has to marry the boy of her parent's choice and a Tharu girl has no choice of her mate as she is married at an early age.

In household matters the tribal women has extensive command and she can exert her viewpoint at various fronts. The usual relationship between husband and wife, and between a wife and her in-laws is friendly. Though the social set-up is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal but the freedom of woman, as wife and mother, is hardly curbed as she is given due recognition in household matters.

**Role of women in economic sphere-** The women participate in almost all the economic venture like agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, collection of fuel and food from forests and art and craft. Except ploughing the fields, a role meant for men alone, the women actively participate in clearing the fields, sowing, watering, weeding, harvesting and in storing the grain. Right from morning till evening they are busy in work and in free time they do the weaving and basketry work. Keeping in view the depth of women's participation in economic pursuits, they are taken as asset. On marriage the parents of girl lose a pair of helping hands and hence they justify their demand of bride price which is widely practised.

Because of the custom of patriliney among these tribal societies the inheritance of clan name and family property is in male line only. But a daughter may inherit property in case she has no brother. For instance, among Bhotias the parents can keep such girl and her husband, with them and she inherits mother's jewellery. The son-in-law, kept in his in-law's house, is called as 'Ghar Jawain'. Among Bhoksa a married sister can get some movable property if the brothers agree upon it. A Jaunsari daughter does not inherit property but a wife is the manager of property though it is in the name of her husband. The residential pattern, in general, is patrilocal where wife has to shift to husband's residence after marriage. A society is patriarchal the headship of social control institutions, at all levels, is earmarked for senior male members only. Female heads are unheard of among Uttar- Pradesh hill tribes. The male members control society through tribal council. The women cannot ordinarily

participate in its proceedings unless she is asked to present her case before the council. Woman is free to divorce her husband if he is unable to keep her contented. If the husband is not found guilty then the wife has to refund the bride-price. In case of adultery, among the Tharus, the adulterer male has to compensate with double the amount of bride-price to the parents as well as to the husband. In case of Raji's the husband tolerates most of the acts and demands of wife. The background for such a tolerance is the difficulty in procuring a new wife because of high bride-price among them. The Raji wife commands both respect and dominance over her husband. In case the husband takes a second wife, when the first one is alive, the later may leave him and the husband, in that case, forfeits the amount of bride-price paid for her. A Jaunsari wife can be divorced if she refuses to entertain, sexually, the Dharam bhai of her husband.

The Bhotia widows, in most of the cases, are free to marry again, if they desire so. A widowed sister, in case of bhoksa, is allowed to stay in her natal home and her brothers ensure her subsistence. An issueless widow can have right over her deceased husband's property among the Raji. She is free even to sell a part of it. A Tharu widow inherits her deceased husband's lands and other property. She can keep a man as Gharbaitha (servant-husband) at the same time. Among Jaunsaris the question of widowhood does not arise so prominently as the woman simultaneously gets married to several brothers. Jaunsari practise fraternal polyandry. Due to set division of labour one husband is almost always present to look after the wife. A wife is, usually, socially and economically, secured among polyandrous Jaunsaris. A widow, among these tribes, is economically secured and no stigma is attached to her on being widow or on widow marriage.

**Struggle for survival-** The life of tribal women folk has been deteriorating over the decades. Poverty, lack of basic necessities and exploitation by non-tribals have been the problems faced by all tribes, along with environmental degradation. Destruction of forests, the life line of tribal economy, has hit the tribals hardest. Large scale tree felling and deforestation in the tribal areas have led to severe stresses and strains on the tribal women. This has only increase the work load of tribal women. She continues to be squeezed of her energies for domestic labour as she devotes nearly 6-9 hours to mundane activities of everyday life, e.g. fetching water, fire wood, collection of fodder, etc. from the forest. With the miserable monotony of work at home, uncharitable life conditions, and the difficulties in fulfilling these functions, tribal women in certain cases are known to have even resorted to suicide. 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. Dispossession of the tribal lands also rendered women's subordination to others as agricultural labourers which was accompanied by the loss of her independence in the process of participation in agriculture.

Among the economic problem, the tribal women faced several other difficulties for their livelihood and illiteracy is one of the root cause of many other problems. The reasons for female illiteracy are many fold. In their own interest the little girl is not spared for school education as she has to help her mother in household work, as also for baby-sitting when her mother goes to work outside. Their argument is that they do not get any instant reward for formal education and their meagre economy does not permit an investment for a later reward and that when the daughter has to move her husband's house, there is no use for spending time, money and energy on her school or college education. Due to illiteracy, indebtedness, meagre economy, the tribals are living in the worst condition i.e. **Bondage Labour**. *"It is a system whereby a debtor pledges his labour or the labour of somebody else close to him in lieu of the interest to be paid on the loan advanced to him by the creditor."* At one stage the bondage or serfdom of tribals was widely rampant. The non tribal shopkeeper, trader or landlord pays some money to the tribals when the later is in need. If the amount is not repaid, as per, agreement, the

man, his wife or any other member of the family is pledged to the creditor's family to work for them against the interest accrued. Hence, bondedness may continue for generations to generations. They have to suffer great privations and work for their master from dawn under conditions of semi-starvation.

As a result of this system the tribals (i) Loss of personal freedom and utilization of their labour almost free of cost. (ii) Change in occupation and loss of money. (iii) Land alienation and its acquisition by the credit. (iv) Conversion of their wives, sisters and daughters into prostitutes, sold and resold in near and distant cities for ending the debt bondage and (v) Chronic venerable diseases.

**Conclusion and Suggestions-** Tribal women, who enjoyed much more freedom than their non tribal sisters, are facing difficulties. There has been significant erosion in their status due to the influence of Hinduism on tribal culture. The status of tribal women has gone down as a result of the impact of social changes, which affected the social structure of the tribal society. In social matters they have lost their freedom of choice, in economic matters their independence and gained nothing significant in political and educational fields. Tribal women have lost their original world but cannot derive any benefit from the 'new world'.

In the light of above discussion, there are some suggestions for the betterment of tribal women- (i) Widespread illiteracy in tribal areas has to be wiped out first of all. Special literacy drives should be undertaken for tribal women. (ii) It is very necessary to stop land alienation, harassment and exploitation of the tribals in the hands of money-lenders, contract middlemen, police and rural elite. (iii) The need to rehabilitate the bonded labourers at places which are at a safe distance, away from easy reach of their exploiters. (iv) All the tribal welfare schemes may be implemented by the labour contract co-operative societies organized among and by the tribals and not by the contractors.

### References

1. Hussain, S., 1983 "Development of Hill Areas. Focus on women". In T.S Papola, B.K. Joshi, H.S verma, R.C Sinha, (eds). Development of Hill Areas: Issues ana Approaches. Himalayan Publishing House, Lucknow.
2. Dhebar, U.N., 1961 Report of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission.
3. Lips.H, 1991, Women, Men and Power, Mountain View, C.A Mayfeld.
4. Chandra, 1974 "I.A.S. Probationers Report". Quoted from Gross, P.H. Birth, Death and Migration in the Himalayas, 1982. Bahri Publications Private Ltd, New Delhi.
5. Mann. K, 1987, Tribal Women in Changing Society. Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
6. Berreman, G.D, 1972, Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change. University of California, London, England.
7. Mann, R.S, and K. Mann, 1989. Tribal cultures and change. Mittal Publications, New Delhi.
8. Raha, M.k. and S.K. Mahato, 1985 The Kinnaures of the Himalayas, Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta.
9. Russel, R.V, and Heeralal, 1981, Tribes and Castes of Central Provinces.
10. Gill, M.S., 1972, Himalayan Wonderland, Delhi.
11. Majumdar, D.N, 1962, Himalayan Polyandery. Asia Publishing House, Bombay.