Among the available value perspectives on the position of women in a tribal society, the one reveals that the women in a tribal society enjoy the status equal to male members. These women hold a high and honorable position. They work on equal terms with men in the fields and make their influence felt in the tribal council. Among some of the tribes in India, there is no clear division between men and women. (Elwin, 1961; Furer-Haimendorf, 1933; Hutton, 1921)[1]. On the contrary, the other unfolds into the fact that women's status in a tribal society is similar to that in the other societies. (Roy Burman, 1988; Sachchidananda, 1988)[2]. Both of these perspectives focus on the women's role in the social system which entailes rights and duties. They have analysed women's status in terms of mutual duties shared by men and women and the safe guards provided for the protection of each sex against the highhandedness of the other. They have also used the status in the sense of prestige and honour which may be studied in terms of women legal status and opportunities for their participation in the wider society. But in reality in these perspectives, the scholars have overlooked the fact that status of women in terms of prestige and honour can only be studied in relation to values in reference. Tribes have been studied primarily either with reference to the values of the Enlightenment, viz. freedom, equality, and fraternity, or in relation to the values prevalent in the dominant society. In short, in studying tribes in relation to the 'other', the values have invariably been either those of the universal values of the Enlightenment or the values of the larger

society in which freedom is often scorned and hierarchy much valued. Hardly any attempt has been made to study tribes in terms of the values prevailing in tribal society (Xaxa, 2014)[3].

The present study answers to the limitations of the aforesaid perspectives. It has taken the cognizance of Xaxa's concern explained above. Sociologists and social anthropologists have questioned the dichotomous conception of Indian society constructed during the colonial period. Though a distinction is maintained between 'tribe' and 'civilization', the two are not treated as isolated but as being in interaction with each other (Sinha 1958)[4]. Consequently, tribal society has not been seen as static but as undergoing a process of change. Change has been conceived as moving in a number of directions. Of these perspectives, the dominant view has focused on the change from tribe to caste. Indeed, much of the social anthropological discourse on tribes has been couched primarily in terms of the transformation of tribes into castes (Xaxa, 2014).

Changes occurring in tribal society invariably have been conceived of in terms of the tribe moving in the direction of becoming a part of , civilization' , by being assimilated into the society that the civilization represents (ibid). Historians and anthropologists have made such observations not only in the context of the past but also in the context of the present. Kosambi (1975)[5]refers to tribal elements being fused into the general society. Similarly, Bose (1984)[6] refers to tribes being absorbed into Hindu society. The fact that such claims have continued to

appear in a tribes are gradually turning into castes. In this journey towards absorption or assimilation, tribes are said to be at different levels or stages. Nowhere is this better reflected than in the classifications adopted by social anthropologist's attempting to understand the process of tribal transformation in India. Tribes have not only moved in the direction of Hinduism and the Hindu way of life. Equally important has been their movement towards Christianity. All these developments have been considered significant processes of cultural change in tribal societies. Yet we know little about the way these changes have affected the lives of women in these societies. How have women whose families have been acculturated into Hinduism adapted to the ethos of the new religious organization? What has been the extent of continuity and discontinuity in their lives? What have been the advantages and disadvantages faced by women in these changed situations? These questions not explored systematically in existing studies, have been well taken up in the present study.

Some studies on the Sanskritization process among tribes do point to some changes. Roy Burman, drawing on the studies made during the period from the 1930s to the 1960s, demonstrates how tribes undergoing the process of Sanskritization are opting for early marriage as a matter of prestige and are discouraging widow remarriage as well as divorce and separation (Roy Burman 1988: 14; Sachchidananda 1988: 80). In the study of Oraons, we had similar observations. The freedom enjoyed by Oraon women in the spheres of marriage, premarital sex, divorce, access to decision-making bodies, etc. is being gradually curtailed with

the adoption of Sanskritizarion. Their freedom in selecting a mate and marrying through elopement has been adversely affected. The purdah system among Oraon women is again an instance of borrowing from caste Hindus. The divorce and separation in Oraon society is evidence of desertion, indicative of the powerlessness of women. In this sense, Sanskritizarion may be viewed as a positive influence. Further, we find a linkage between age at marriage more with the customary practice of bride price than with Sanskrirization or distance from it. Citing the case of the Oraons under study, we found that it is not uncommon among them for a woman to wait until her mid-thirties before she could find someone who could pay the bride price and become her life partner.

With improvement in economic conditions, or even Sanskritization, the data reveal that Oraon women workers tend to withdraw from outdoor agricultural work and allied activities. Observations available in the existing literature on the inverse relation between the rise in social status and the withdrawal of women from manual labour are taken in support of such an argument. It is significant to point out here that Sanskritization is not the only basis for the rise in social status in Oraon society. There is no doubt that with Sanskritization there has been a tendency among Oraons to withdraw women from manual labour, but this has more to do with well-to-do cultivators who either inhabit multi-caste villages or their vicinities. Withdrawal of female labour from contexts and situations other than the one referred to above, even when Sanskritization has been at work, is usually absent. In other cases, rise in status, such as that resulting from a change in occupation, especially

white-collar employment, has not necessarily led to the withdrawal of Oraon women from manual labour. Indeed, where such individuals are also tied to land and agriculture, women have continued performing their routine gender-specific agricultural activities. Where male members of the family are compelled to live away from the village because of the demands of employment, women have borne the added responsibility or organizing agricultural activities usually performed by men.

Whereas acculturation processes such as Sanskritization and Hinduization led to change of a certain kind among Oraons women, the change moved in a somewhat different direction in the context of the conversion to Christianity. Christianity opened up the space for Oraon women to participate in religious worship side by side with men, something that had been denied them under the earlier religious traditions of Oraon society. Many Protestant denominations allow women to be appointed as deaconesses, preachers, and trustees. They have also been organized into women's groups within churches for carrying out social, religious, and welfare activities. Christianity as practiced by these groups has also made modern education accessible to women in Oraon society. On the other hand, it also introduced a variety of restrictions in the name of church ethics and law that militated against the freedom women had enjoyed in traditional tribal societies. Christianity also introduced segregation among boys and girls and put a stop to divorce, which was easy to work out in accordance with tribal

customary law. Over and above this, gender inequality inherent in Christian churches and denominations continued.

Both Hinduization and Christianization thus led to a number of restrictions on the kinds of freedom women enjoyed in the traditional social setting of Oraon society. In the case of Hinduization, such restrictions were part of the concern with maintaining respectability and status; in the case of Christianization, it had more to do with religious morals and values.

Underlying the accounts of tribes in general and of women in particular is the basic assumption that tribes are primitive, savage, and backward. This point is made repeatedly in accounts of their means of livelihood and survival, technology, food habits, lifestyle, and, more importantly, through representations of their bodies in various studies. Tribes were invariably represented as half-clad, clothed in only leaves and grass, and at times as naked. They are shown vividly in pictorial form in anthropological and other works to emphasize their primitive existence. Such pictorial representation is now no longer the special privilege of anthropologists. It has now become an object of commerce, as seen from the pictures portraying the Oraons women. Women feature more prominently than men in these representations. Even ethnographers like Elwin and Furer-Haimendorf celebrated such practices among tribes. Elwin described in detail the place of sex in tribal life, discussing the sexual life of children, the notion of erotic and sexual attractiveness, courtship and romance, and frequency of intercourse, for example, in the

case of the Baigas (Elwin 1986: 230-270). That these practices were governed by certain codes and ethics has been overlooked or under-stressed.

The dominant view of tribes and tribal societies treated women socially and culturally as almost animal-like. A study, for example, shows that as many as 95 per cent of upper-caste women respondents consider Bhil women socially inferior (Mann 1987: 105)[7]. Some administrators and scholars who wrote on tribes and tribal life also perpetuated such a view. This view was even internalized to some degree by members of the tribes themselves. Tribes were so viewed and treated precisely because their values were contrary to the dominant values of the larger society. Mandelbaum (1970: 583)[8] puts it this way: *Tribal people generally take direct, unalloyed satisfaction in pleasure of the senses, whether in food, alcoholic drink, sex or dance. The twice-born tend to be ambivalent about such pleasures, they are inclined to defer them or refine them and surround them with elaborate ritual*.

The values governing the larger Indian society are, however, in the process of changing. Indeed, mere has been a paradigm shift with regard to the nature of values sought and at work in the post-independence period. The ethos in the period as embodied in the Constitution and the country's laws is one of freedom, equality, and social justice. The latter principle also features prominently in contemporary public rhetoric. Along with this there has been a shift in the image of women in tribal society, especially among the educated and the enlightened.

Ethnographers, British as well as Indian, were on the whole rooted in the spirit of Enlightenment rationality. To them, freedom equality, and fraternity were the basic values in the assessment of individuals and groups. They invariably judged the position of women in tribal society in the context of the dominant values of the West, which were contrary to the dominant values of the larger Indian society. Therefore, we have pitched entire discussion in the study on women in Oraon society against the position of women in a caste-based society.

The present study has analysed the status of women in Oraon society. Women in this society has been found as having a better status than that held by women in caste-based societies. Oraon women were found as having greater freedom with respect to movement outside the home, choice in marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and access to property and resources. This is revealed by our data on the rules of inheritance, right to property, enjoyment of freedom, share in the decision-making process etc. In short, the study has focused on the rights and privileges enjoyed by women, on the one hand, and the roles and responsibilities assigned to them because of their sex, on the other. Hence, Oraon women were invariably depicted as having a higher social status than their counterparts in caste-based society. These aspects of Oraon society are highlighted and are further corroborated by demographic evidence as *sex* ratio and female workforce participation (chs. 2&3). This is the general image of women described in this study on Oraon society. The data on economic burden and workload borne by the Oraon women as well as their access to education, food and nutrition, modern

occupations, and political participation, especially in the modern context reinforce the above observation.

Stages of Social Formation

The study has focused on the position of Oraon women in the context of all-round socio-economic changes in Oraon society. Their position, involvement, participation, and role in various aspects of tribal life are discussed and analyzed in the context of such wider socio-economic changes.

One of the dominant ways of looking at change from this angle is to study changes in the means of livelihood and survival. This is seen most clearly in the change from food gathering to food production, or from *Jhum* (slash-and-burn cultivation) to settled agriculture. Such a transformation is also seen as a shift from communal and collective ownership of land and use of labour to private ownership of land and labour.

Developments such as these have led to a critical examination of the idea of Oraon society as egalitarian. Forms of inequality in traditional Oraon society have been critically examined. Of these, gender inequality, has been highlighted as the most pervasive, irrespective of the stage of social formation. One of the aspects that has been highlighted in this context has been the relative position of women and men under different types of social formations such as food gathering and hunting, *Jhum* agriculture, settled agriculture, and state formation. The other way in which the position of men and women in Oraon

society has been studied with respect to division of labour, forms of property, religious institutions, family organization, and the state without using their social formations as the reference point (ch. 4). Through an examination of the former, an attempt has been made to show how the establishment of patriarchy took place in Oraon society. It is also shown in ch.4 how in social formations such as food gathering and *Jhum* agriculture, a rigid division of labour was either absent, or how gender inequality in one sphere was offset by equality in another sphere. The data show how the greater importance of Oraon men due to their participation in the public domain is neutralized by a similar kind of engagement by women through exchange and transaction activities in the market. It is not clear from the data whether this inequality has more to do with shifting cultivation or with the institution of settled habitation. Again, in the study we have also traced the monopolization of upper levels of the hierarchy by men in the formation of the state and to the establishment of individual property. Men's control over the ritualistic and public or political spheres is seen as a crucial factor in the struggle to exclude women from ownership of land.

The myth of gender equality or the higher status of women in Oraon society has also been brought under scrutiny through the examination of customary law in relation to women in the areas of property, inheritance, marriage, and so on. It has been shown that Oraon women are put at a disadvantage vis-a-vis men. It is interesting to note that the very practices illustrated as pointers to higher social status in one kind of setting turn out to be in-built depressors in another. We have made this

point in the discussion of bride price. We have pointed out how women among Oraons are treated as mere commodities, procured easily by men through financial settlement in the form of bride price, a custom originally intended to compensate the girl's family for the loss of an economically active member. The custom of bride price as the socially legitimate purchase of a wife has thus become a convenient justification for men to abuse their wives and to treat them as disposable commodities. The system of bride price has proved to be a bane for women and lies at the root of the proliferation of polygamous unions as wealthy men can take on a number of wives simply by paying an agreed upon sum to the girl's family. Points out that bride price is viewed not so much as a recognition of a woman's contribution to the household or as a payment for the loss of a productive member, but as compensation to the father of me bride and his agnatic group for past expenditure on her maintenance, particularly consumption of food. Based on this, we may argue that the bride price (valued in practical terms) is regarded as an important contribution that an Oraon woman makesto the production of reproduction. The lack of ownership of property rights by women is justified by the Oraons on the ground mat women after marriage move from their natal to their affinal village.

In this context, there are two aspects explicated by Xaxa (2014) which deserve special mention:

(1) *It is an established fact that the division of labour in tribal society is based more on sex than any other factor. Division of labour has been*

both fluid and rigid. It is, however, not clear as to what stage and on what principle the division of labour in tribal society could be said to have assumed the form of inequality of rank or status between the sexes. There is little discussion of how and on what basis the differences, especially those between the sexes, came to be graded (whether divisions were merely the those of work and labour, and therefore devoid of the evaluation and gradation, intrinsic to the evaluation of being of high or low social status). Hence the study of me status of tribal women poses certain problems. It is difficult to study women from the perspective of the values inherent in these societies, especially since these values are based on notions of collectivity, equality, and sharing. Hence, rather man talking of high or low social status, it is more pertinent to talk of gender inequality. In the case of the latter, one can examine me relative position of women and men in relation to their access to equal opportunity, both formal and substantive.

(2*) The taboo on women couching or using the plough in tribal society has been seen as a way of denying women control over the means of production, viz. land (Nathan 1997; Kishwar 1987: 96)*[9]*. This lack of access to and control over land is, however, already denied to women in tribal societies by existing customary laws. Oraon and Ho women, forbidden by taboo from holding me plough, for example, are already denied access to land by the customary laws of their societies. The explanation for me denial of women's access to land in terms of taboo thus seems far from adequate. After all, even me Brahmans are forbidden by taboo from ploughing, but that does not mean denial of*

access to land for them. Even in swidden agriculture, which Bose describes as a women's farming system, the allocation of plots is made to men in their capacity as me heads of households, though women exercise greater control over me plots after they have been allocated. There has also been tribal land under swidden agriculture controlled and distributed by the chiefs, such as among me Mizos, the Semas, and the Konyaks. There is no custom of plough cultivation among these tribes; yet women are denied access to land even in these communities.

In order to locate change, in the study we also focused on the increasing social differentiation taking place among Oraons. Such social differentiation was found to be rooted in forces outside of Oraon societiy, such as introduction of private property in land, growth of trade and the emergence of the market, emigration of non-tribes in search of land and employment, spread of modern education, opening up of new occupations, state-sponsored programmes, and similar activities. Accordingly, social differentiation has moved along different lines. The Oraons lost their land and were compelled to take up employment as labourers in nearby quarries and coal fields and in emerging towns as unskilled or semi-skilled workers also observed by Vidyarthi (1982)[10] and Banerjee (1981), or move permanently or temporarily elsewhere in search of work. A minority has been able to take advantage of the forces unleashed benefits extended by the state to tribes. This has led to differentiation among Oraons based on criteria such as education, occupation, income, wealth, and assets. They have become differentiated into categories such as the rich, the middle, the poor, and

the landless (ch.4). This has led to the emergence of class relations, traditionally absent in tribal societies as studied by Shah (1982)[11], Bose (1984), Pathy (1984)[12]. There is, however, a lack of a gender perspective on the differentiation witnessed by Oraons society*over* the years. There has been no sustained discussion on whether relations between men and women have remained the same across different social categories among Oraons or whether they have changed. A few studies do provide some insights into this dimension among other tribes For example, Punalekar (1988)[13] in his study of tribes like the Dhodia, the Chodhra, the Gamit, and others in Gujarat points to a division between the well-to-do and the lower strata. The difference in social and political behaviour is also reflected in the social situation of the Oraon women of the two groups. Women of the well-off section have come to enjoy certain advantages. Their daughters are enrolled in local schools for pre-primary education. There is a distinct tendency among these sections to provide girls higher education in schools away from the native village. Many of them join professional courses, such as teaching and nursing, and some even pursue technical courses. They alsotake advantage of the facilities provided under the reservation policy. Migration to cities for education provides them with opportunities to acquaint themselves with urban ways of living and thinking. Their food habits and dress preferences reflect the influence of the urban way oflife. There is also a tendency among them, on the one hand, to emulate the norms and practices of the women of the dominant caste groups and, on the other hand, to deliberately abandon or de-emphasize their own traditional customs,

rituals, and social practices. There is also increasing disregard for, and even indifference towards Oraon women of the lower stratum of their village.

In contrast, Oraons from the lower stratum havelow school enrollment rates and high dropout rates. Their children hardly *move* beyond the primary level. Hence, they are constrained to work as construction labourers, domestic servants, cart pullers, scrap collectors, vendors, etc. In this struggle for survival, women make a valuable contribution and face considerable hardships. Yet their role and participation under these difficult conditions is hardly recognized. Further, due to such struggles, daughters are forced to discontinue their studies and go out to earn a living to supplement the family income. In towns, women develop a heightened sense of insecurity and dependence. Indeed, often their fathers, husbands, or brothers decide matters concerning their work and wages. Often, such decisions taken by the men are challenged if they are taken without consulting the women or at lower wage rates. The data reveal that educated Oraons in white-collar jobs in recent years aspire for homebound wives as a marker of higher social status. This ultimately has lowered the status of women.

The discussion of bride price also reveals glimpses into the kinds of changes taking place, especially among the richer sections of Oraons society. These data are in consonance with the study of tribes of Arunachal Pradesh where rich among them have been using the traditional practice of bride price for their own sexual aggrandizement

(Nongbri 1998; Mann 1988)[14]. There has also been a shift from bride price to dowry among the educated and salaried sections of Oraons under study, the data speak.

In the post-independence period, various provisions have been made by the state for the protection and upliftment of tribes. The benefits under these provisions have been distributed very unevenly across the tribes. Within the tribes too, distribution is very uneven along the line of sex. This is reflected in the negligible presence of Oraon women in educational institutions, government and semi-government jobs, and institutions of governance. The female literacy rate among Oraons as per the 2011 Census was... per cent as against... for men. The data for other sectors along the line of sex are not easily forthcoming. The data that we have gathered from our study are quite revealing.

These data clearly point to the fact that there is a bias against women in the values and social structures in Oraon society, especially in the domain of politics. To ensure the participation of Oraons in the decision-making process, seats were reserved for them in Parliament and the state assemblies (lower houses only) for a period of ten years initially, but this has been extended until a date under a constitutional amendment. The participation of Oraons in the political process has been studied at various levels, ranging from local self-government bodies, such as panchayats and district councils, to state legislatures and Parliament. Yet the participation of women in these bodies has been

negligible, if not altogether absent. Women's membership of state legislatures is a case in point.

As data reveal, Oraon women have remained handicapped in almost all sectors of social and economic life. In addition, they have been constrained to work under depressing conditions. They have not only been exposed to greater hardships and difficulties due to depletion of resources (land, forest, water), both at the levels of the household and the community, but also to greater danger due to the changing nature of work and livelihood. Women often walk long distances to collect fuel and to draw water for households or fields. The strategy of coping with such situations and the lack of alternative modes of livelihood have led to large-scale migration of Oraon men and women to distant places, even to urban centers, in search of employment. When only men migrate, women have had to bear the burden of taking care of the farm in addition to their usual responsibilities.

The constitutional provisions have affected men and women differently in Oraon society. In the study, we have located these effects within a concrete situation of state action, viz. the Supreme Court ban on timber logging and its implications for the Oraon women of the Jharkhand region. This ban has resulted in increasing women's already enormous economic and domestic responsibilities, imposing an additional burden on them. The ban threatens women's traditional rights to land and forest, and also reinforces their marginalization from the management of their natural productive resources.

Emerging Discourse

Tribal communities in India are enormously diverse and heterogeneous, differing widely with regard to language, physical characteristics, demographic traits, means of livelihood, and cultural exposure to the wider world. They are, in fact, more heterogeneous than the larger Indian population if caste were excluded from consideration. The People of India project conducted under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India enumerated 461 tribal communities, of which 174 have been identified as sub-groups. Hence, the traditional treatment and position of women among different tribes differs, with considerable variations in their roles and activities, rights and privileges. At the same time, women continue to be governed by customary laws and norms. The data that we have on gender in tribal societies are sketchy, especially in the context of recent changes in these societies. Given such heterogeneity, it is difficult to generalise about the position of women as a whole across tribal groups in India. What has been observed can at best be described as being illustrative and heuristic.

Despite such heterogeneity, tribes share one trait in common, that is, they are different from the dominant community or the region, whose members have always been seen as aliens and outsiders. This is seen most clearly in situations where groups identified as tribes are engaged in intense competition and conflict with the dominant regional community, or even with those from outside the dominant community. In undivided Bihar, such conflict resulted not only in the creation of

tribal state, Jharkhand but also led to an exodus of the non-tribal population from the sub-region. Such conflict still prevails, especially in Jharkhand where non-tribes still form a significant population. Outsiders here are invariably described as exploiters and oppressors, and are addressed by term *diku* used for outsiders, but carries to a lesser degree the connotations of exploiters and oppressors. In a social arrangement such as this, tribes in Jharkhand have been experiencing a serious threat to their identity on account of the kinds of changes taking place. There has been a steady erosion of their life-support system based on land and forest. There has been increasing pauperization of the majority of tribes in this region. There is a loss of language. There is a danger of the tribes becoming a minority in their own land. Given all these conditions, the construction of identity and community has been moving in different directions. In all these processes, tradition and customary law, and hence even gender, play pivotal role in the context of tribal society in Jharkhand.

This has led to an interesting discussion on gender issues in tribal societies with far-reaching consequences for women's freedom, on the one hand, and the issue of equality, on the other hand, especially concerning property rights in land. The problem concerning the above two issues revolves around three points. One concerns tribal tradition. The second relates to transfer of tribal land from tribes to non-tribes. The third concerns the use of the provision of reservation by children born of inter-tribe marriage. It hardly needs to be mentioned that the last has emerged from the encounter of tribes with non-tribes Xaxa (2014).

One of the most important changes in tribal society is the large-scale alienation of tribal land from tribes to non-tribes. Several studies have pointed to the massive land dispossession that took place during the British period. This process has been accelerated during the post-independence phase of development despite the adoption of the Land Transfer Regulation in states with large tribal populations. Tribal land has passed from tribes to non-tribes in a variety of ways, mostly through fraud and deceit. Our study of Oraon society is a case in point.

One of the ways by which non-tribals acquire tribal land is by marrying tribal women. In view of the fact that there is a restriction on the alienation of land from tribes to non-tribes, such methods have become fairly popular in areas like Jharkhand. Our study reveals the high incidence of alienation of tribal land through marriage with tribal women among the Oraons of Lohardaga. Tribal women entering such marriages are not only seen as aligning with the *dikus* but also as acting as conduits of land transfer from tribes to non-tribes. This is an emotive issue among the tribes in view of the long Struggle that they have waged against the alienation of tribal land. Coupled with this is the wider issue of tribal demography. Tribes in their own territory or locality are increasingly shrinking in numbers, with far-reaching economic and political implications. In the process, their survival as a group or community is at stake. Hence, anything that tends to jeopardize their land and population is regarded with a great deal of concern and anxiety. This explains the opposition against women marrying outsiders, especially those considered *diku.*

Related to this concern is the issue of reservation. There has been a general tendency among the families of mixed marriages to take advantage of reservation extended for the benefit of tribes. This trend is indeed problematic. Should children born of a tribal mother and a non-tribal father be considered tribal or non-tribal? The question has two aspects. One is legal and the other is socio-cultural. After all, even tribe as a legal category in the form of the scheduled tribe has a socio-cultural basis. Both these aspects are problematic in the case of mixed families. As per the customary law of the Oraon community described as a scheduled tribe, lineage is invariably patrilineal, which makes the status of children of mixed marriages problematic. Even if they were to take their mother's totemic title and seek to take advantage of the legal provisions provided for tribes, they would still be contravening customary law. The opposition against women marrying non-Oraons is compounded by the weight of Oraon tradition, according to which marriage outside the community is regarded a crime as serious as incest.

An equally interesting discourse in tribal society is over the issue of women's property rights, particularly inheritance. A section of Oraon society is in favour of property rights in land for women despite resistance to the same in the name of custom and tradition. Among Oraons of Jharkhand, as per tribal tradition, there is no individual ownership of land. Rather, the tradition there is that of the *khuntkatti* system, in which land is invariably held on the basis of lineage and hence property belongs to no one individual. Hence, the question of extending ownership rights in land to women does not arise. A higher

sex ratio among the Oraon tribe accounts for a large number of unmarried women. A number of them claimed their customary right to maintenance, which was often questioned by their male agnates. Resistance to the demand for women's property rights is also related to the economics of land size. Women's entitlement to land rights has led to further subdivision and fragmentation of already subdivided and fragmented land in Jharkhand, and hence does have implications for farm efficiency and viability.

Issues such as these pose a problem for a woman as an individual and a citizen, on the one hand, and as a member of a community, on the other hand. As an individual and as a citizen, a woman is entitled to the provision of human rights as well as citizenship, which guarantee the individual the right to freedom. Yet human rights as well as rights under the Indian Constitution also make provision for the protection and safeguarding of tribal interests on the ground of tribes being either a minority or an oppressed social group or community. Adopting either one or the other position can only be taken at the risk of being accused of ignoring or overlooking the other dimension of the problem. This stance is sure to be more problematic for non-tribal scholars or activists than it is for tribals. The problem has to be resolved from within, and none other than by the tribal people themselves. Oraon society under study today faces similar kind of problem and it has an implication for understanding the status of Oraon women in Jharkhand. The data gathered from the area of study reinforce this aspect.

The present work is a novel attempt to analyse the true status of tribal women in Oraon society. However, it has its own limitation mainly due to limitation of the social science methodology which inhibits a researcher to know about all dimension of reality.

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