

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background of Study

Nepal is multiethnic, multicultural, democratic, independent, sovereign country. Its diverse topography includes the high snow-clad mountain (where mostly the Sherpas, Tamang and Bhotiyas of Tibetan origin live), the hill (where the Limbus, Magars, Gurungs, Sunuwar, Newar, Brahmin and Chhetries live) and the subtropical plain of the Terai (where Tharu, Danuwar and Maithili speaking community live (Shrestha, 1994).

The spectrum of communities ranges from the very orthodox Hindu Indo-Aryan groups to the relatively gender egalitarian Tibeto-Burman groups. Because of state's special favour, Hinduism constitutes a powerful ideological force in Nepal. But Women's socio-cultural and religious status in the Hindu system of belief and behavior are rather conflicting. Women are considered to be weak, irresponsible and incapable of protecting themselves against sexual assault. Sexual purity and devotion to men (father, son or husband) are the necessary conditions for gaining respect or esteem in the social structure. Women in the Hindu system gain respect and esteem only by controlling their own emotions and aspirations. Men's social position is not contingent on control of their emotions and aspirations. This is basic discrimination against women in socio-cultural and religious beliefs system. Men gain success by fulfilling their personalities while women may gain success only by suppressing their own personalities (Acharya, 1981).

The Nepalese society like a number of 'classical' societies is patriarchal. Patriarchal value regulating sexuality, reproduction and social production (meaning total conditions of production) prevail and are expressed through specific cultural metaphors. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain right do exist. But more subtle expression of

patriarchy is through giving message inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing self-effacing pure image of women and through the ritual practice which day in and day out emphasize the dominant role of women as a faithful wife and devout mother.

Males are preferred sex and the priority is always given to man in the family and society as well women's identity is connected with her male kinship e.g. father and son and husband. There is high value for virginity and purity in Nepalese society which looks down upon women who live without her male kin protection. Women lack resources and accesses to knowledge due to social structure and they are limited to traditional roles. They are exploited by the triple burden in the family, get fewer opportunities to make personal earning and are also limited to source of information and technology (Acharya, 1979). Subordination and discrimination of women as women begins in the womb and continues till the tomb. There is discrimination even in rituals performed after death (Shrestha, 1994).

Though women occupy more than half of the total population of Nepal, the status of women are nutritionally, economically, socially, educationally inferior than to men and maternal mortality rate is very high. Nepalese women are married early with an over burden of childcaring and rearing practices. Women in Nepal are engaged in domestic work and economic productive activities added to the burden of child bearing, frequent and closely spaced pregnancies and labor intensive task, such as carrying water, collection of firewood, planting, harvesting , tending to household livestock, washing clothes, breast feeding and carrying young children.

In Nepal, the literacy rate is 53.7 percent. Among them, males are 65.1 percent and females are 42.5 percent only (CBS, 2003). Literate males are nearly 23 percent greater than literate females on primary level education. The net enrollment is 80.4 percent. Among them 74.8 are girls and 86.0 percent are boys. This gap is wider in case of higher education.

Economic activities of women are always under estimated because household works are not classified under the economic activities. In our society, women are considered to be born to serve her husband's family and to run household smoothly without any comment. Virtually all household in Nepal, women play full and creative role in domestic economy (Seddon, 1987). They have to work at home and field with very little or without assistances. Beside household works, they are equally participating in the agricultural activities. This is generally true that at times, especially in the busy seasons of agriculture, women are required to bear the full load.

Women earning are substantially lower to that of men because of the household division of labour which assign domestic work mostly to women. The lack of awareness and cultural and social customs also limit female participation to work outside the home. There are substantial pressures with respect to health, education, mobility which keep women in lower wage works.

Through it is universal in context of whole Nepal that women status is lower and subordinate to male but within some culture, it is more pervasive than other. In the case of Maithili culture status of women are far more below than hill women. Like many other classical society based on Hindu orthodox practical value and strict caste system, Maithili culture maintain lower position of women in many sphere. Unique feature like dowry systems, strict Parda (veil) system, restriction of mobility, lower value attached to household work, further devalue the position of women.

This research is focus on the position of Maithili women from different aspects (economic, cultural, religions and political) by examining women at different stage of life and in different relationship to men in the household.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Mithila is land of ancient culture strongly based on Hindu philosophy and follows strict caste system. The tendency to patrilineal dominance, through

general throughout Nepal is particularly strong in Maithili society. Maithili society is an inegalitarian and sexually stratified societies where women in general have lower status than men. Women have no independent existence and a women's social position is entirely defined by her father's husband's or son's status. The social status of women in societies with hierarchical male-female relationships as described by Smock (1977) may be applied in toto to describe the Maithili women position "security and social approval come through satisfying these men (father, brother, husband and son) and particularly through providing male heirs for the husband's family. An independent woman has no legal or social place within society" (Acharya, 1981).

The women of Mithila are widely known for their painstaking habits, energetic nature, conscientiousness and sense of humor. They are accorded a respectable place in the society as they are well treated as mothers, wives and daughters, yet the paradox is that the very woman who holds so respectable place in the society are also discriminated against. Male superiority and female inferiority are order of day. The women are looked upon as physically weak, intellectually poor, psychologically oversensitive, mentally inconsistent, timid and irrational (Rosa, 1995). Therefore the women are kept under constant protection and supervision of the men who are supposed to be strong, assertive, rational and intelligent. Thus discrimination against starts from here as the woman is given a lower status in the society.

The birth of a boy brings prestige, identity, entity and dignity to a mother and family in Maithili society. A baby boy is welcomed by celebrating and rejoicing at the occasion. In Maithili there is a proverb "where a girl is born, the earth sinks by a foot but when a boy is born it rises a foot to greet him". Admits all these ideas, the parents start differential rearing of the offspring from the very first day of birth.

Maithili women have very low scale of autonomy in their behavior pattern i.e. speech, eating habits, choices of profession, choices of marriage

partner, forms of association etc. Young post-pubescent females have very little scope for mobility. Women have virtually no choice of profession except as housewives and agricultural works for their domestic unit. Restriction on mobility, association and choices of life partners are much stricter for women from higher castes as well as for those of better economic status (Acharya, 1981).

Dowry system, an inhuman custom is very prevalent in Maithili culture. Dowry or *dahej* is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving away of the bride in Maithili marriages. The inability of the bride's family to comply with these demands often leads to the daughter-in-law being treated a pariah and subject to abuse. In the worst cases, wives are simply killed to make way for a new financial transaction that is, another marriage. This kind of cultural practice tends to subordinate women in Maithili society.

The *purdah* system, the traditional system of Maithili culture of preserving purity, has further helped to exploit women under this system, the women are made to veil themselves from tip to toe and, thus, live in perpetual seclusion (Rosa, 1995). Women's mobility is greatly controlled by this system. Maithili women are deprived from many opportunities of outside world of their household due to this custom.

On status scale composed of economic, social-cultural, religious and political indicators, Maithili women in general would be far below men. On the basis of these general facts, following research problems are identified.

- A. What is socio-cultural and religious position of women in Maithili culture?
- B. What is economic and employment opportunity for Maithili women?
- C. What is political position of Maithili women?
- D. To what extent they participate in local politics, caste politics villand household decision making process?
- E. To what extent they possess power and authority?

To address these problems, I have different tool and technique of data collection, such as household survey, Interview with key informant and focus group discussion at Khorla village of Siraha district.

1.3 Objective of Study

The overall objective of this study is an attempt to depict the Maithili socio-cultural system in its totality and assess the position of women from different angles economic, social, cultural, religious and political by examining women from different economic strata. However the specific objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the socio-cultural position of Maithili women.
2. To examine the economic participation of Maithili Women.
3. To assess the power and authority in terms of ownership, household decision making and involvement in political process.

1.4 Significance of Study

There are a number of studies conducted on the status of women in general context but specifically the literature available on the status of Maithili women are very limited. In this context, this research fills this gap to some extent.

The position of Maithili women are regarded as vulnerable due to orthodox Hindu value system and strict caste system. Special focus is needed to address the problem associated with Maithili women. In this way this research is somewhat useful for government and nongovernmental organization which are working in the field of women.

CHAPTER-II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with the review of available literatures about position of women in Hindu Scripture, women's position and its relations with caste system, gender discrimination, gender inequality in the society as well as status of Nepalese women. In addition review of literatures on Maithili culture and Maithili women is specially focused.

2.1 Position of Women in Hindu Scriptures

Women are discriminated since invention of private property in human history that led gender inequality in social norms values and attitudes even now. This fact reflected from different religious books or other books, which were written in ancient period.

This was the general context in the ancient Hindu scripture where women's "essential nature" came to be identified with their sexuality although it was not directly or explicitly associated as such. At a general level the innate nature of women was represented as sinful. According to one text, women have been sinful right from the beginning when the creator first made the five gross elements, the three worlds and gave shape to men and women (Leslie, 1989:148). Women are edge of razor, poison, snakes, and fire all rolled into one (Leslie, 1989). At the time of creation the original Manu allocated to women the habit of lying, sitting around and an indiscriminate love of ornaments, anger, meanness, treachery and bad conduct (Manu Dharma Sastra: IX. 17). As easily as the Satapatha Brahman we are told that a woman, a shudra, a dog and a crow are the embodiment of untruth, sin and darkness (XIV.31).

A Jataka story states that women are a sex composed of wickedness and guile, womankind holds truth for falsehood and falsehood for truth. They are unstable as the sand and as cruel as the snake (The Jataka: I55). There says

another Jataka story "Wrathful are women, slanderous ingrates, the sewers dissensions and strife". Their passions are insatiable as they act according to their inborn nature (The Jataka: I 309).

Even the Ramayana associates most women with being essentially weak and sinful. According to Kausalya, women do not care for a good family, good deeds or wisdom, and their hearts are ever inconstant (Ramayana of Valmiki: II 39.236-40). The sage Agastaya states that it has been woman's nature ever since creation began to cling to man when he prospers and desert him in difficulty, their fickle natures are modeled on the flames of lighting (Ramayana of Valmiki:III.3.6).

The congenital fickleness of woman's nature is especially pertinent to the problem of dealing with the innately overflowing and uncontrollable sexuality of women. Thus, in the ancient texts it is repeatedly stated that they can never be trusted; further the Mahabharata states that they are difficult to control. The cunning tricks of the demons are known to be unique to women (XIII. 39.5). In another text they are linked to kings and creeping vines in that they will embrace whatever is beside them. They are adulterous by nature and are permanently on the lookout for an opportunity to seduce men according to a Jataka story "as greedy cows seek pasture anew, women usated for mate on mate" (The Jataka: I55).

The notion that the essential nature of women is vested on their sexuality is dealt with most explicitly by Manu, the most prominent ideologue of the Brahminical system. After ruling that woman must be closely guarded day and night regardless of their age, Manu tells us why it is that women must be guarded. Manu tells us that after conception by his wife, the husband becomes an embryo and is born again of her; according to Manu, that is the wifhood of wife (Manu Dharma Sastra : IX. 7) . In order to keep his offspring 'pure' Manu enjoins the husband to carefully guard his wife lest his future is denied to him . According to Manu their essential nature will drive women into seeking satisfaction any where anytime and with anyone. He states that:

'Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age; thinking it is enough that he is a man, they give themselves to the handsome to the ugly.'

Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal toward their husbands however carefully they may be guarded (Manu Dharma Sastra: IX. 15)

The most revealing statement that Manu makes in the context of women's essential nature points out.

"Knowing their deposition, which the lord of creature laid on them at creation (i.e., their reproductive power, their sexuality, their essential nature) every man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them (Manu Dharma Sastra: IX. 16).

The crucial place occupied by the wife in the whole system of perpetuating the social order and in enabling men to gain immortality through their sons is explicitly articulated by Manu:

'The reproduction of children, the nurture of those born, and the daily life of men, of these matters the wife is visibly the cause'.

Off spring, the due performance of religious rites, faithful service and heavenly bliss for the ancestors and for oneself depend on the wife alone (Manu Dharma Sastra: X. 26-27).

It is noteworthy that according to Gautama, where as the lower caste adulterer should be killed, the woman is to be publicly humiliated and suffer a more ghastly death, Vasistha, on the other hand, reverses the onus of the guilt some what and while the women escapes the death penalty, which the low caste man must face (he is to be thrown into the fire) , the king is enjoyed to punish and humiliate her by shaving her head off, placing her naked on a donkey; and parading her along the highway. According to Vasistha, following this punishment she is rid of her impurity (Vasistha Dharma Sutra: XXI. 1-2).

Manu states this explicitly while discussing adultery. According to him 'by adultery is caused the mixture of castes among men hence follows sin, which cuts up even the roots and causes the destruction of everything (Manu Dharma Sastra: VIII. 353).

2.2 Position of Women and Caste system

There are some features of caste system which have direct relevance to women. Srinivas defines caste in the following words caste is a hereditary, endogamous, usually localized group having traditional associations with an occupation and a particular position in the local hierarchy of castes. Relations between castes are governed among other things by the concepts of pollution and purity and generally maximum commensality occurs within the caste' (Srinivas, 1978 B: 3). Features like caste endogamy as a mechanism of recruiting and retaining control over the labour and sexuality of women, concept of purity and pollution, segregation of groups and also regulating mobility of women are very crucial (Desai & Krishanaraj, 2004).

The very important feature of the caste system is its control over women's' labour. Caste not only determines social division of labour but also sexual division of labour. Certain tasks have to be performed by women while certain others tasks are meant for men. With upward mobility of the group, women are immediately withdrawn from the outside work. Physical mobility is also restricted through caste norms. The significant symbol of the low status of women in society is that the women of lower castes are accessible to men of higher status, while there is a very severe punishment for men of lower castes who dare to approach women of higher groups (Das, 1981:143-44; also refer to Desai, 1984:18-20)

The linking of women and shudra together is one more evidence of the low position of women. Prescriptions and prohibitions for shudra and women are same on many occasions. The prohibition of the sacred thread ceremony is for both women and Shudra. Similar punishment for killing a shudra or a woman, denial for religious privileges etc are some of the illustration which low caste and gender get entrenched (Altekar, 1962:204,317,326).

Caste system not only provided legitimization to feudal relation of production but ideologically also provided justification for subordination of women.

Women's general subordination was essential in this stage because it was only then that the mechanism of control upon women's sexuality could actually be effective. The mechanism of control operated through three devices and at three different levels; the first was through ideology, through the *Stridharma*, or *pativartadharma*, internalized by women who attempted to live up to the ideal notion of womanhood constructed by the ideologies of the society. In the case of Hindu society the design of the patriarchal and class structure was mapped out by the Brahmans, *pativarata*, the specific dharma of the Hindu wife, then because the ideology by which women accepted and even aspired to, chastity and wifely fidelity as the highest expression of their selfhood (Chakrawarti, 2004).

The basic rules for women's behaviors as expressed in the laws of Manu insist that a woman must constantly worship her husband as god; even though he is destitute of virtue or a womanizer. Women should be kept in dependency by her husband because by nature they are passionate and disloyal. The ideal women are those who do not strive to break these bonds of control. The salvation and happiness of women revolve around their virtue and chastity as daughter, wives and widows (Buhler, 1886: 195).

Giving emphasis on the symbolism in Hindu culture Leela Dube states that "one of the most significant aspects of the symbolism is how the two parents are situated in the process of reproduction. In his body man has the seed; the woman on the other hand is herself the field..... the two partners are not at par with one another insofar as the process of reproduction is concerned. The offspring belongs to one to whom the seed belongs. In fact he also owns the field (Dube, 1978:8).

A very sinister implication of this symbolism is that the man is the lord, master, owner or provider. A daughter or wife is a commodity or a possession.

2.3 The Nepalese's Context

Before 1951 the status of Nepalese women was weaker due to social political legal and economic factors. They were weaker, exploited and devoid of any sort of freedom. Social evils were affecting the freedom of Nepalese women like sati system, polygamy and unequal marriage and child marriage in vogue. After 1990, the government played some roles towards amnestying women's status in Nepal.

The interim constitution of 2007 states the right of equality under part 4 articles (2) that "no discrimination shall be made against any citizen in the application of general laws on the ground of religious, race sex, caste and tribes". But this constitution provision didn't come into practical life. Therefore, women are still dominated by male in our society through they contribute to the well being of their family status but their contribution is considered insignificant.

Women have lesser access to avenue of education and modern knowledge and less mobility too. Getting married and producing children are the ultimate goals for women (Acharya, 1997).

Nepal is an agricultural country and majority of the people engage in agricultural production where women have more burden than men due to the household work in the rural area. They spend a great proportion of their time on domestic activities (UNICEF, 1992). Women in Nepal contribute 50 percent of the household income and work 10.23 hours as against 7.51 hours for men So women do not get the time to enjoy equal status as men and are under represented in educational system too.

Women constitute more than 50 percent of the total population in Nepal (CBS, 2001). In the absence of proper education, sanitation, facilities, employment opportunities and access to control over the productive resources, therefore they are always lagging behind. Similarly, health, economic and political participation of women is very poor and weak (UNDP, 1998).. In the absence of normal counterpart who usually goes out for employment, her

burden of work and responsibilities also increase ever more. Women are more disadvantaged than their male counterparts due to inadequate access to exposure technology, credit and environment. As far as women's access to property and modern education, skill development and knowledge is concerned, Nepalese women in general lagging far behind the men.

Marital status makes a woman totally dependent upon her husband because her right upon the family property is only through husband. About the women's right upon family property, Bennett wrote that 'men are endowed with the right to property by virtue of the marriage (i.e. on their role a wife). Therefore women's economic security is entirely dependent on adherence to strict social norms of proper marital behavior (Bennett, 1980: P.89).

Writing about the occupational statuses of the women in Nepal, Seddon said that "women are confined into their domestic and subsistence activities" (Seddon, 1987: P. 193). In Nepal especially in rural environment, main occupations of the women are household chores and agriculture activities. "The boundaries of house work are not clearly defined. In most households a women economic contribution is crucial for its subsistence. Male earning alone is by no means sufficient".

Land rights i.e. central ownership inheritance is a complexity of problems which affect farming directly. Individualization of land right has especially favored men. Land allocation patterns under land reforms programs or resettlement schemes have already perpetuated this trend towards land ownership as vested in a male head of family. One source cite that land reform laws as having consistently ignored women reforming in general to the distributing of holding to families with a clear assumption that there is always a male at the head of the household. Even in rare cases of land ownership being vested in a woman, the convention may be strong enough to require a male relation as representative of the property and its owners. only 8% women have land ownership entitlement. Land rights created problems formidable not only in themselves but also in their bearing upon other aspects of the farming women's life and livelihood (Regmi, 1976).

Besides the heavy load of household works women are equally participating agricultural activities. According to Alfred De'sauza, in the countries of south Asia, about 70 percent to 80 percent of the total female work force is employed in agricultural activities either as cultivator or farm worker (De'sauza, 1980: P.22). And this work loads reach peak during planting and the post harvest period. About the over burden of household chores, Pradan advocated the "the share of the women labour force in Nepal is half of the totallabour force of the kingdom. These women perform unpaid household chores for 15 to 16 hour a day (Pradan, 1979).

2.4 Mithila and Maithil Women

Meena Acharya writes about Maithili women that "Maithili women play very important roles in the life cycle of a family and through it in that of the society. They are major actors in the subsistence sector. Women and female children contribute 28 percent of the total household income and about 54 percent of the time required for maintaining an average household. If time is considered a scarce economic resource in the welfare function, women play a much more important role in the welfare of the household that men do (Acharya, 1987).

Legally women may own property and women are entitled to share in the property of the affinal household. But in practice, women have no control over their own share in the affinal household and very little control even over their own personal property. A man, even distantly related is considered to be full guardian of a woman and the disposal of her property is conditional on his agreement. Despite the fact that women work ten hours a day for maintenance and reproduction of the household they are considered economically depend because they get no direct income. Women are the major partner in the reproduction of household member, but they have only very limited legal or socially recognized right over their children. If they decide to leave the affinal household, they have to leave their children and cut off all ties with them (Acharya, 1981).

Prof. Hari Bansh Jha writes about marriage in Maithili culture that 'most of the marriages are arranged at Sabhagaachhi or at other places. Love marriage is rare phenomenon. Under the arranged marriage it is the guardians of the girl and the boy who settle the marriage. The girl and the boy have very little say in such a marriage. Until a few years back a girl used to be married away to a boy without their getting to see each other. But now most of the marriage takes place after the boy approves of the girl. However, the discrimination continues, normally, a girl is not expected to make any choice of the boy she would marry. Instead, it is the boy and his parent who make the choice for the girl (Jha, 1997).

Jha further opines about Dowry, one of the inhumane customs in Maithili society, that perhaps nowhere else are the women as much victims of the dowry system as they are in Mithila. Formally, the main qualification for a girl for having a good bridegroom was her skill in homestead. But now a fat dowry or *Tilak*, apart from her beauty and education, is needed for a girl to get a good bridegroom. At times they are banished by their husbands when they fail to bring adequate dowry. There are also cases in which the brides are tortured, poisoned, straggled to death or are burned alive when they fail to meet the dowry demands made on them (Jha, 1997).

Women have to face problems in participating in political process partly due to the traditional culture which keeps them in seclusion under the *Parda* system and partly due to their backwardness in education and economic matter. More than this, the women themselves become quite critical of the women who join politics. There is a feeling that the women joining politics lose the very sense of purity (Jha, 1997).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with social science methodology adopted for this proposed study, these are the appropriate research design and scientific methods adopted for collection primary data from selected study area. The methods for the analysis and interpretation of the obtained data from the study area, is also included in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

This study was carried out on the basis of exploratory and descriptive research design. The deep rooted cultural practices, custom, social systems in the context of position of women are described in detail with the help of descriptive research design and the economic, political position of Maithili women are explored through exploratory research design.

The primary data and information obtained from the study area are analyzed to find out how these data and information indicates the proper position of Maithili Women in this society.

3.2 Rationale for the selection of study Area

To gather the information and data for the proposed study Khoria village at Chandra Ayodhyapur VDC of Siraha district of Eastern development region has been selected on the basis of following reasons.

Khoria village, situated at the Siraha district of Terai region is home land of Maithili culture. The life style and ideology of people of Khoria are still much influenced by this culture. Strict caste system and Hindu value system are regulating the life of people in this village which is one the typical feature of Maithili culture. Through the caste system is crumbling in urban area, it is still much more influencing factor in this village. In this way Khoria is in many

sense original representative of Maithili culture. There are many castes inhabitation in this village which varies from higher caste Brahmin to lower caste Musahar and Dalits. There are also large population of middle caste like Yadav and Mahato. There is also small population of service castes like Barahi (carpenter caste) and Hajam (hair cutting caste) who are still engaged in their traditional occupation. The total population of households of this village is 260. They engage in both agricultural and non agriculture (in most cases foreign employment) and dalits are agricultural wage labor. So it will be easy to study the position of Maithili women of different castes and different economic strata in this village.

3.3 Nature and Source of Data

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. It was collected through field works. Similarly, secondary data was collected through published and unpublished materials such as research articles, reports, books, CBS, VDC and DDC profiles.

3.4 Universe and Sampling Procedure

The universe of the study was the total household population of Khorria village. The total household of this village (the study area) is 260. Out of them 60 household were sampled for the purposed study, which was selected from each caste proportionally to their population. On the basis of these variables (caste, class, gender/sex age) Stratified random sampling method was applied to sample the household from universe. The sample population constitutes 22.98 percent of total household in Study Area.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques and Tools

In order to generate the primary data for the proposed study, household survey, key informant interview and focus group discussion were conducted.

3.5.1 Household Survey

The household survey was an important technique of data collection in this research. In order to collect the data on the socio- economic (personal identification, occupation, income expenditure, land holding, livestock practices and education) condition of household especially of Maithili and their authority and power was also assessed through it.

Structured and semi structured questionnaire was prepared to gather the data from sampled household to find out the socio-economic and political status women of study area. Questionnaire was prepared for both male and female to study comparative status of women to male of the study area. The Questionnaire was filled up through interviewing both one male and one female of age of +15 of each sampled household of study area.

3.5.2 The key informant Interview

To generate the in depth data about the cultural system like marriage, other many ritual and local custom and socio- culture position of women, key informant interview were vigorously applied.

To gather the data and information, Key informant Interview Schedule was applied as research tool. Through this tool social and cultural life of Maithili women was assessed. These informants were the educated Maithili women, old women, women activists, knowledgeable person about local culture. They were both male and female.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussion

The focus group discussion was conducted among Maithili women. The member for focus group discussion was selected from the sampled household of study area. To find out the over all position of women in Maithili society through different angle and sensitive information related to the problem of women, this method was specially used.

In order to collect the data and information through this technique topic guideline was applied as research tool. The focus group discussion was conducted among 6-8 women from different caste.

3.5.4 Time Allocation Study

The time Allocation Study was in many ways the central component of the study to assess the actual economic contribution of women at household.

3.6 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Completed Questionnaires was checked immediately after the interview and correction made wherever required. The data was converted into uniform and standardized units before data coding in preparation for data processing

The collected quantitative data was first processed through validation, editing and coding. Secondly, the processed data was presented in tabular form. Some of the specific comparative indicators between man and women are presented through the table to make the study comprehensive at a glance.

The collected qualitative data was analyzed and interpreted to find out the socio-culture and religious condition of Women. Qualitative data was analyzed and described elaborately to make a logical statement

In short, the nature of the study was basically descriptive. Simple statistical tools like percentage, average and ratios was used to present data, which enabled to present overall position of women status.

3.7 Limitation of Study

Every research has some limitations. This study has also some limitations.

The present study has been under taken in the Khoria village of Siraha. Because the study is limited to a particular group of Mithila of particular

geographical area, the conclusions drawn from the study are mere indicative rather than conclusive. The study does not disclose the whole problem but give a glance on the problem .However it is significant in some extent to understand the existing problem. Limited time and budget is also one of the limitations of this study.

3.8 Organization of Study

This research has been organized into seven main chapters in order to make the study more specific, precise and impressive. The first chapter is an introductory one, which provides general introduction about an overall situation of women and social discrimination and domination by men. Similarly, this chapter also provides statement of problems and the objectives of the study. The second chapter is about literature review, which includes conceptual review, theoretical implication and review of previous study.

Chapter third deals the research methodology applied to generate necessary data from study area, method of data collection and method of data analysis to illustrate for study. Chapter four present the general introduction and physical setting of the study area and deals with the people and their life style of Maithili community.

Similarly, the fifth chapter reflects the Social life of Maithili woman which includes the Marriage pattern, Dowry system, Educational opportunity available for them. The six chapters reveal an analysis of position of women in economy, power and authority in terms of household decision making power, time investment in work and participation in party politics and caste politics. Finally, chapter seven is the summary, findings and conclusions of the study.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHY AND ECONOMY OF STUDY AREA

Mithila is an ancient central region of south Nepal and North India lying between the lower ranges of the Himalayas and the Ganga River. The Nepal boarder cuts across the top fringe of this region. The Gandak and Kosi rivers are rough western and eastern boundaries of Mithila. Mithila was the capital of Videha kingdom as per epic Ramayana. The Ramayana records a dynastic marriage between prince Rama of Ayodhya and Sita, the daughter of Raja Janak of Mithila. The town of Janakpur, in the western Nepali section of Mithila, is believed to be Janak's old capital. At present, Mithili speaking people are found inhabiting the Terai plains between the districts of Rauthat and Morang in Nepal, and are about the adjoining district in Bihar and west Bengal.

Khoriya, the focus of this study, is a village situated about eighteen kilometers from Siraha district headquarters. This village is situated at Chandra Ayodhyapur VDC of Siraha district. This district is located at the eastern Terai region of Nepal. It joins with Saptari district to the eastern boarder and Dhanusha to the west. In northern boarder, Siraha meets with Udaypur in south, it joins with Madhubani district of Bihar province of India.

This village seems to be relatively new settlement dating back only to the middle of last century when reclamations of forest and wasteland was encouraged by Rana regime. Most of the resident of this village are migrants form the southern part of Terai region.

Khoria village is a very important part of Chandra Ayodhyapur village development council. According to CBS 2003, the total population of this VDC is 7132 of whom 1223 persons lived in Khoria village, the settlement selected for this study. This settlement is situated at a distance of one kilometer south of Mahendra highway. There is a primary school nearby the settlement and high school is situated at about three kilometer away. There are also two primary

levels private English school situated at about one kilometer away from this settlement.

This village is a typical Terai settlement organized around a few wealthy households and inhabited mostly by middle ranking caste, the Yadav and Mahato. There are also few houses of so called high caste like Brahmin and Rajput. Besides these caste groups, there are also some middle ranking service castes like Barahi and Hajam. Although, there is big population of middle caste, some of dalit's houses are built at the fringe of village. There is no residential segregation between middle caste and high caste but dalit's resident are segregated by a wide gap of open space.

Although the walls of the caste system are crumbling fast in the urban area, the caste system still constitutes one of the basic organizing principles in the rural Terai. As elsewhere, Brahmans are at the top of the Hindu hierarchy, while the Musahar or untouchables are at the bottom.

Because of the importance of caste structure in the village life, it was considered necessary to include all castes in our analysis. Accordingly, for sampling purposes, the households in the village were classified according to caste and a proportional sample was drawn from each caste.

Table 4:1 Caste Group Distribution of the Households in the Village and the Sample Size.

S.N.	Caste	Number of household in village		Sample households	
		Number	% of total H.H	General survey	
				Number	% to total sample H.H
1	Brahmin	3	1.14	2	3.33
2	Yadav	119	45.59	27	45
3	Mahato	70	26.92	17	28.33
4	Barahi	12	4.59	3	5
5	Hajam	8	3.06	2	3.33
6	Musahar	48	18.39	9	15
7	Total household	260	100	60	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

As shown in above table, there is largest number of Yadav caste in Khorla village which constitute 45.59 percent of total household. Mahato is second largest population after Yadav. The third largest population is the population of Musahar which constitute 18.39 of total house hold.. There is only small number of Barahi and Hajam household in this village with 4.59 and 3.06 respectively

4.1 AGE

For the purpose of analysis, the age of the respondents are classified into four categories, very young (below 16 years), young (16 to 29 years), mature (30-59 years) and old (60 years and above). Age of the respondents was taken in the years they had completed during the period survey.

Age is an important demographic characteristics, age makes difference in working hour, types of work and involvement in decision making process.

Table 4:2 Age Wise Distributions of Respondents

S.N.	Age	Number		Percentage		Total	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Number	percentage
1.	Very young (below 16 years)	7	10	11.66	16.66	17	14.16
2.	Young (16 to 29 years)	21	22	35	36.66	43	35.83
3.	Mature (30 to 60 years)	23	23	38.33	38.33	46	38.33
4.	Old (60 and above)	9	5	15	8.33	14	11.66
	Total	60	60	100	100	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2008

In this study, ages of the sampled respondents were range from 15 to 81 years. Highest percentage of the respondents was 30-60 age groups (38.33). Almost 35.83 percent of respondents belonged to 16-29 years age group.

Respondents of the very young (below 16 years) years were 14.16 percent. Lowest percentage of the respondents (8.33) was old. Though, theoretically they were dependent population, but they were performing lots of tasks to assist their family income.

4.2 Economic Status of Household

Through, land is still major source of prestige and power in rural Nepal, foreign employment is emerging as second source of livelihood. Mainly the economic status of household is determined by these two factors. How much they possess the land and how many family members are engaged in foreign employment. The major source of household depend on these factors.

The economic factors exert strong influence on the role of women vis-à-vis men in any society. On the basis of land holding size and foreign employment the households have been divided into three economic strata- top, middle and bottom. The household occupied 5 bigha or more than it is classified into top and household possessed less than 5 bigha and more than 2 bigha are grouped into middle economic strata. The household who have less than 2 bigha is put into bottom economic strata. The income gained from foreign employment is included indirectly in this classification because they generally invest all their income from foreign employment to purchase land property. Although some families had no big land property and no foreign employment, they are classified under top Strata because they are engaged in business and Government employment.

Table 4:3 Household by Economic Strata and Caste

Economic strata Caste	Top	Middle	Bottom	All strata
High Brahman	-	1 (50.00) (3.03)	1 (50.00) (5.26)	2 (100.00) (3.33)
Middle Yadav and Mahato	8 (18.18)	30 (68.18) (90.90)	6 (13.63) (31.57)	44(100.00) (73.33)
Barahi and Hajam	-	2 (3.33) (6.06)	3 (5.00) (15.78)	5 (100.00) (8.33)
Low (Dalit) Musahar	-	-	9 (100.00) (47.36)	9(100.00) (15.00)
All caste	8 (13.33) (100.00)	33(55.00) (100.00)	19 (100.00) (100.00)	60(100.00) (100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, in the Khoria village, among total household, the top economic stratum constitutes 13.93 percent of the households, the bottom economic stratum constitute 31.66 and the middle economic stratum constitutes 55 percent. It demonstrates that there is a growing number of middle class due to foreign employment opportunity. Economically, the village is clearly polarization. All the Musahar Household is on bottom economic strata. Almost 90 percent of middle economic strata are occupied by Yadav and Mahato.

Caste differentiation and economic stratification cut across each other. In case of Musahar, caste also function as a class but in other case it doesn't. No Brahmin household is on top strata. Some of Yadav household are on the top economic strata and some are at bottom strata. But most of them belong to middle economic strata.

4.3 Size of Agricultural Farm Land

As like in other part in Terai, there is tremendous pressure on the land. The farmland ratio in the sampled households was being 4.2 people per Bigha. The average land holding size for the sample households was 1.4 Bigha per

households. But it varies along individual households. Among the sample household 20 percent household have no land. Almost 70 percent households have less than 5 Bigha of land. Only remaining small numbers of households have more than five Bigha land.

Table 4:4 Land Holding Size per Household

Size of farming size	Number	Percent
Landless	12	20
Small (up to one bigha)	22	31.66
Medium (1 bigha to 5 bigha)	23	38.33
Big (more than 5 bigha)	6	10
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Though this village is rich in water resources, there are not any systematic irrigation system but they use water pump to irrigate their own land. There is one channel which is not sufficient for irrigation purpose.

4.4 Tenure Status

In our agrarian country, tenure status plays a significant role in socio-economic status of person. There were three categories of land cultivators in this village. They were land owners (cultivating own land), tenants (cultivating other's land in rent) and land owner-cum tenant (cultivating both types of land).

Table 4:5 Tenure Status per Household

Tenure status	Number	Percent
Land other	32	53.33
Tenant	3	5
Tenant cum land owner	17	28.33
Landless labor	8	13.33
Total	60	100

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, highest percentage of (53.33%) of the respondents is land owner. Most of the farmers are tenants cum land owner. There are 28.33 percent of the respondents who are tenant cum owner. Though 5 percent of the respondents are tenants, they have to share a fixed account of food grains and money to the land owner, fixed by their mutual understanding.

4.4 Number of livestock

Livestock raising is an integral of the Nepalese economy irrespective of caste, creed, wealth and ecological region of the country. Each and every farmer household maintains a few numbers of livestock. The main objective of raising livestock is for milk, curd, ghee and meat for household consumption as well as for sale. Livestock raising varies according to their ethnicity, ecological belts and economic conditions.

There were various types of livestock in surveyed area such as buffaloes, cows, goats, hens. Therefore all the households were categorized on the basis of number of animals they possess .

Table 4:6 Livestock per Household

Number of Livestock	Buffalo	Cattle	Goat	Hens
Number	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)	No (%)
0	30 (50)	11 (18.33)	18 (30.00)	54 (90)
Up to 2	27 (45)	34 (56.66)	24 (40.00)	54 (6.66)
3 to 5	3 (5)	12 (20)	16 (24.67)	2 (3.33)
6 and above	0 (0)	3 (5)	2 (3.33)	-
Total	60 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	60 (100.00)	60(100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

In the areas that have been surveyed, different types of livestock's are found to be kept for different purpose. Among the livestock, the buffaloes are the expensive ones. Therefore 50 percent households have no buffaloes. Only 45 percent of the sampled households have raised up to 2 buffaloes and five

percent have 3 to 5 buffaloes. Almost 19 percent of households have no cattle. Goats are cheaper and easy to keep. Therefore goats are found in 70 percent of the total sampled household. There are only 10 percent households raising the hens. Hens are kept only by Musahar so it is not common in the village. Although people from upper caste eat meat of hens/ cocks, they don't raise these birds in their own house due to Hindu culture restriction .

4.6 Education

The large population of Nepal is illiterate in which women comprise the largest group among the illiterate. In the study area, literacy rate of women are very low as like other part in Nepal. The education of responds are categorized on the basis of their schooling therefore education of the respondents are divided into two categories literate and illiterate.

Table 4:7 Literacy Pattern by Economic Strata and Sex (for population of 15 years and above)

SEX Eco. Strata	Male		Total	Female		Total	Both		Total
	Literate	Illiterate		Literate	Illiterate		Literate	Illiterate	
Top	10 (71.42)	4 (28.57)	14 (100.00)	8 (33.33)	10 (66.66)	15 (100)	15 (51.72)	14 (48.27)	29 (100)
Middle	24 (54.54)	20 (45.45)	44 (100.00)	10 (24.39)	30 (73.39)	45 (100)	34 (40.00)	51 (60.00)	85 (100)
Bottom	6 (25.00)	18 (75.00)	24 (100.00)	3 (12.5)	21 (87.5)	24 (100)	9 (18.75)	39 (81.25)	48 (100)
All strata	40 (48.19)	43 (51.80)	83 (100.00)	18 (27.78)	61 (77.21)	79 (100)	58 (35.80)	104 (64.19)	162 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table 35.80 percent of the sample population could read and write, but 5.7 percent have no proper schooling. Only two people have higher education and 13.2 percent have had secondary schooling. More over only 22.78 percent of women in the sample were literate as against 48.19 percent of man. Among them only 3.7 percent had had secondary schooling.

The economic strata to which they belonged is an important factor in female education. Relatively more women from higher economic strata are literate. only 33 percent of women from higher economic strata are literate, only 12.5 percent women from bottom economic strata are literate.

4.7 Family Structure

Structure of the family plays an important role in the status of women. There are mainly two types of the families in the study area. Therefore respondent families were dichotomized into two categories joint and nuclear. Nuclear family includes husband, wife, and their unmarried children and it is comparatively small in size. Joint family means husband, wife one or more, their married and unmarried children and other relative living in one household who share their meal in the same kitchen.

In rural Nepal, most of the families are of extended type. In joint families, women's economic condition is found much poorer than nuclear families. However, work load of women in joint family is less than in nuclear family.

Table 4:8 Family Structures by Economic Strata

Family structure Eco. Strata	Joint	Nuclear	Total
Top	7 (87.5)	1(12.5)	8 (100)
Middle	14(42.42)	19 (57.57)	33 (100)
Bottom	4 (21.05)	15 (78.94)	19 (100)
All strata	25(41.66)	35 (58.33)	60 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, there is considerable number of joint family in study area. Almost 58 percent of sample household are nuclear in family structure. The incidence of extended families is higher in top and middle economic strata than in the bottom economic strata. It is generally the land which keeps a family together. Brother of poorer household tend to split earlier but their parents usually live with one of the brothers.

4.8 Life Style

The life style of Maithili society is similar to most of other Hindu society in so many senses. But it has some unique feature in Maithili society. In this society close relationships are maintained. Most peoples go through a cycle of living in extended- nuclear-extended household (Kapadiya, 1974). The incidence of extended family is much higher in the top and middle economic strata than in the bottom economic strata. It is generally the land which keeps a family together.

The majority of the populations live in thatched one store houses. These houses are usually conglomerates of one room buildings built around a courtyard. The buildings are built on all four sides with small openings at the four corners. Wealthy households have the whole courtyard to themselves, while in poorer households several brothers share a courtyard.

In wealthy households, there is an outer building at some distance from the main household. Men spend most of time in this building. Male visitors are received and lodged here and men of the house may also sleep in this building. These outer buildings also serve as store- houses for farm implements and machine, chemical fertilizers, grains and all kinds of good used on the farm. Women seldom go these building.

4.9 Food and Clothing

Though globalization has brought some changes in the Maithili culture, food habit, clothing etc, there is still some of unique habit of food and clothing. The main food of the people of Khorias is rice, wheat bread. A variety of pulses and some vegetables form a permanent part of the diet. The very poor, however, can rarely afford pulses and vegetables all year round. Usually a meal for poor villages consists of a piece of flat bread (roti) with salt and pepper or rice with either vegetable or pulses.

Dhoti for male and sari for female are the main clothes for the Maithili people. The women mostly wear sari which they wrap around their body, pulling one corner over their back and towards the front so that it covers them head to foot. Men usually wear dhoti, Lungi and Kurata etc.

4.10 Hindu Ideology and Maithili Culture

Maithili people have a rich cultural heritage and strong folk traditions. The legend of Rama and Sita, the model king and the ideal queen of Hindu culture, symbolizing benevolence and self sacrifice, pervades the folklore and lives of the people. For the Maithili people, as for almost all Hindus, Sita exemplifies the strongly need cultural ideal of female behavior.

In Maithili culture physical labour are associated with low status. This is perhaps, a feature of most societies just emerging from a feudal economic system. In the Maithili view, people of high status should not engage in physical toil. It means that for both men and women there is social prestige in avoiding physical work or at least in not working in the fields, a very low status job in feudal agricultural societies.

Purdha system is very much prevalent among Maithili culture. The high value attached to sexual purity has also resulted in strict purda (keeping the face covered) for a woman in her affinal household. *Purdha* is also a sign of respect shown to male affine. A young bride in her affinal household is expected to observe strict Parda and not to show her face to the elder men of her household or male villagers in general. She should not appear before a male stranger, nor should she raise her voice. No males, except her husband and men of his lineage geologically junior to her, are supposed to hear her voice. When she has to communicate with men she must do so through children.

Despite her seclusion, women in both wealthy and poor families have to do very hard work, through the kind of work done by the poorer women is more visible to outsider. But even the women of rich household have to work

very hard household work like cooking, rearing the children, washing the dishes, clothes etc. Their labour are never regarded as valuable as male's.

Marriage is most important social ceremony in Maithili culture. It is also considered essential for every Maithili man and women. It is the way that women can lay claim to inheritance and find security in their old age. Divorce and remarriage is against the cultural ideal, which stresses that women, like Sita must maintain strict-sexual purity and remain faithful to one husband all their lives. Remarriage is stigma for higher caste like Brahmin. However, it is not considered stigma for middle and Dalit communicates.

4.11 Kanyadan

One of the most unusual forms of marriage in world cultures is the Indian idea of marriage- as – gift. The indigenous term is very close to Marcel Mauss's conception of the gift: dan means, literally, "gift" Kanya is young girl, a virgin. The most sacred form of marriage for 2500 years in Hindu culture has been Kanyadan, "*the gift of a virgin girl*". The concept has a prominent place in ancient Hindu law books, and is known everywhere today, as well. The "love match" well known in India as the western way of making marriages-is considered scandalous and immoral, especially in Mithila.

When a man's daughter comes close to puberty, he begins to search for a husband for her. It is his responsibility to take the initiative; groom's families bide their time, waiting for offers. The idea Kanyadan is that a virgin is the best gift a man will ever have to give, he seeks to give this precious gift, therefore, to a worthy recipient. He likens this gift to gift to the gods, "my daughter's husband is Vishnu to me" said one respondent. Of course, this recipient must be a member of his own caste, but preferably someone of a slightly higher status than his own.

Ideologically the women are seen as weak and dependent on men, while men are supposed to be strong and able to cope with the world and support

their families. Women are therefore always encouraged to be attached to men-father, husband, brother or son (see Acharya, 1981). Both men and women have a very negative view of women's personality and behavior.

In this culture a women must show unfailing devotion to her husband and extreme subservience. In ideal situations mothers are respected and loved. But reality diverged and while there are respected and powerful women, there are also ignored, powerless, destitute women in this society.

4.12 Women in Mithila Painting

In general Maithili women take charge of the ritual life of the families and provide the wall and floor paintings that accompany the household's daily annual and life cycle rituals. In painting the marriage chamber in their home and the khobarghar, the oldest women of the family whose husband is still alive and who has living children will begin the painting with area dot at the centre-point of to east wall.

4.13 Major Festivals

Nepal is a country of festivals; in fact the Nepalese are said to observe more festivals than there are days in the year. Hardly a day passes without some festivities, ceremonial observance, or pilgrimage occurring in country so as its region in Mithila. The following is a brief description of the major festivals observed in the Mithila.

4.13.1 Chhath Parba

This is one of Hindu festival known for its unique association to Mithila. It is devoted to the worship of the sun god. It is, therefore also known as Surya Sheshti. The festival begins in the sixth day of the month of Kartik in the Hindu lunar calendar. The major concern of this festival is the special worship of 'Sun' God for the welfare of husband and family members of a Hindu women. I asked one of the female respondents about this festival and she answered,

'generally it is taken by women and it is the special duty of worshipping along with the help of family members. It is because of the devotedness of a Hindu woman towards her husband in particular and towards the family members in general. She pray to 'Sun' God for the long life of her husband and prosperous life as well'. This festival is celebrated mainly for three days. On the first day one should (the woman or man who takes the charge of worshipping) take the holy bath and eat just vegetarian(chokho) foods. On the second day she/he should fast for the whole day even without a drop of water and in the evening she/he should just take rice pudding(khir) and sweets. On the final day which is considered as major day of the festival i.e. "Saujhka Arga"(in Maithili). People gather on the bank of ponds, rivers as per their convenience and worship for the whole night till the rise of the sun in the next morning. On this day the setting sun is worshipped while on the next morning the rising sun is worshipped as well.

The position of women in Maithili culture is revealed in a song of Chhat in which women herself describing her pathetic condition.

Prayed to you again and again, a sun god

Please don't give me the life of women

Even, if you gave me a women's life, a sun god

Don't make me beautiful

If you gave me beauty

Don't give me a stupid husband

If you gave me a stupid husband

Don't make me barren women

If you make me barren

Don't give me the company of a co-wife

If you make a co-wife what crime had I committed?

4.13.2 Deepawali and Lakshmi Puja

Deepawali is known as the festival of lights and is celebrated for five days. On the occasion of Laxmi Puja houses are illuminated at night. An assortment of special sweets are prepared and offered to guests. At this time certain animals (crow, cow, dog) are also favored with food and garlands. The first day is known as Laxmi Puja and second day is known as Gobardhan Puja. As the name "Laxmi puja" connotes itself the prime concern of women, as the name 'Laxmi' is the female deity. It becomes clear that the involvement of women in this festival is obvious. So, I asked one of the respondents about the prime involvement of women in this festival and I got the response like this, "We women are considered as the Goddess of property i.e. Laxmi so, we are given more importance in this festival in order to gain lots of riches."

4.13.3 Chaurhan

Chaurhan is the festival in which, the full moon is worshiped on the fourth day of the month of August especially performed by women in southern Terai, offering special dishes of dalpuri and curd along with sweets to the full moon. In fact she tries to see the face of her husband in the full moon (which is also called 'Karvachaut' in Hindi). Women are more concerned and interested in this festival because it is also done for the welfare of her husband and family.

4.13.4 Dasain

Dasain glorifies the triumph of good over evil, of goddess Durga's slaying of the terrible demon Mahisasura, who roamed the earth, terrorizing the populace in the guise of a ferocious water buffalo. Ten days of intense sacrificial and joyous worship celebrate fertility and the victory of good over evil, as represented by the goddess Durga Bhawani and the various gods who battle the demon.

The first day of Dasain is called Ghatsasthapna, seventh day or Phulpati is the offering of flowers and leaves. On Maha Asthami, the eighth day, the

fervor of worship and sacrifice to kali and Durga increases. Dasain takes its name from Vijaya Dashami, the great tenth day of victory.

4.13.5 Maghe Sankranti or Tila Sankranti

Maghe sankranti is the first day of the month of Magh. Magh is a sacred month so the first day is celebrated with a feast at home particularly constitute of til and raw sugar (sakkar). Lord Vishnu, the preserver, is worshipped and thanked for the return of the warm season once more. The use of til, sakkar and rice especially refers to the debt of the younger ones towards the elder ones, so as to return them (elders ones) as the help when they become very old or disabled physically. This is a traditional hindu belief.

4.13.6 Holi or Faguwa

This is a colorful occasion when people smear each other with powder and splash colour water onto one another and youth love to play. This continues for one full week. The fever of this game goes very high on the full moon day which is the last day of celebration. In this day people exchange greeting as offer various sweets. This festival is not celebrated by widow. As we know the colour of vermilion (sindur) is red and it is filled on the head of a married women which is the evidence of the life of her husband so it becomes clear that the widow women obviously do not entertain this festival of colours and especially the red one.

CHAPTER V

SOCIAL LIFE OF WOMAN

An individual's place in society is determined by many complex factors. In societies where an individual's worth is judged not in terms of his or her individual qualities but on the basis of the social network and the social groups to which he belongs, an assessment of women's position becomes very complicated (see Acharya, 1981). By virtue of their birth and marriage they are placed in a social class and depending upon that class, they are either privileged in relation to men and women of other classes or are not. Women have family identities which place them closer to men of the same family and class than to women of other families and other classes.

In Maithili culture this is more complicated due to rigid caste structure. Caste is one of the major factors which determine an individual status in the society. Both men and women inherit caste by birth but after that sexual behavior and marriage play vital roles in determining women's caste status, while for men these factors are of little or no importance in the Hindu social Milieu, a woman derives her full caste identity only after marriage (Bennett, 1977).

According to Maithili culture women life can be divided into three life stage.

5.1 Kanya

Kanya young girls, prior to their marriage, generally live care free lives in their father's household with their heads uncovered. They are carefully sheltered from contact with opposite sex; protection of their virginity is one of their father's most sacred duties. She is taught from the age of five or six to pray to the goddess Gauri to bring her a husband 'like Shiva'. These days she may be allowed to go to school, but in rural Terai many Brahmans still worry about letting their daughters get too educated; e.g. 9th grade may be "too

educated". Around puberty, their father search for a husband. The legal age of marriage in Nepal is sixteen for girls, but many are married younger than this, for traditionally it was a sin of the father to let his daughter come of age while still unmarried and living in his house.

5.2 SUHAG

When a woman is married, she enters the auspicious state of *suhag*. This term refers a married woman with a living husband; it suggests she is sexually active and bearing children. She wears the mark of her *suhag* in her vivid saris, in arms jingling with bangles, gold around her neck and ears, and above all in the red powder (sindur) she puts in the part of her hair every morning. However, the transition may be difficult, for she is taken to live in a strange household in a strange village, married to a husband she has never met. She must keep her head veiled at all times in her husband's village and must observe avoidance taboos with all the men senior to her husband. E.g. if she's sitting on the verandah and her father-in-law arrives, she flees to an inner room. This is the most critical phase of her life.

5.3 VIDHUWA

When a woman's husband dies, she becomes widow (the term *vidhuwa* is cognat to English "widow". As her husband's body is taken is taken by men to be burned, women take widow to the pond where they break her bangles, wash the red powder out of her hair, and robe her in a white sari. After that she never never again wear the ornaments and beautiful saris of a *suhagin*, but instead will live a life of asceticism in her dead husband's household. She is thought to be quite inauspicious, and she stays in the background during all auspicious ritual occasions such as wedding.

In Maithili culture, girls are regarded as other property. Girls are prepared from early childhood to accept their transfer to another household by marriage. The whole socialization process inculcates in them the idea that they

are only temporary guests in their natal households and that their ultimate destiny lies with the unknown household to which they will go after marriage.

From the moment a baby girl is born she is an object of scorn. This is reflected immediately in the after-birth ceremony. When a boy is born there is rejoicing and congratulations all round but if it is a girl nobody brother to congratulate the mother or to celebrate. If the girl baby has been preceded by other female children, the father is jeered at and becomes the butt of jokes in the community while the mother must suffer the open disappointment and even the anger of her husband and her other affines. After too many daughters, a man may even decide to take another wife. In many cases wife herself advice her husband bring other wife.

In one case, the mother of a one year-old baby girl (who had three older sister) often cursed the youngest daughter with the wish that she would die. The little girl was told this partially in play, but she had already realized that her mother's words expressed anger and she used to cry whenever she was cursed in this way by her mother. Her mother was very much afraid that her husband might decide to bring in another wife because she had not produced a son.

A young Maithili girl begins her life in this atmosphere. By the time she is twelve or thirteen, her family begin to search for a husband for her and by the time she is fifteen or sixteen, she will normally have been married off. She learns hide her face, if somebody from her affinal group is present. Her movements are confined to the areas where no chance of meeting her affines has.

While a boy is growing into manhood he has no particular responsibilities except to help his father in farm work if he is from a poor family and to study if he is from rich one. A girl, on the other hand, is expected to help her mother in household tasks from early childhood. Up to the age of six or seven, boys and girls play together, but it is usually boys and girls of the same lineage. It is generally regarded that girls should not be left without work for too long. It is particularly mother responsibility to teach the girls about household responsibilities.

Thus, a girl is first awareness of the world around her begins with the realization that she is unwanted and is of little value to her parents or other natal household members. She learns to accept that preference is always shown to the male children in the family in food, clothing, education and other aspects of lives. She also learns to treat her brothers as privileged family members. She takes out her frustration on her younger sisters or female cousins.

5.4 Opportunities for Literacy and Education

In Maithili culture, parents provide less education to girls than boys because they think that girls household works are more important than schooling, more concerned due to safety/security problems where most of teachers are male and school do not have separate toilets for girls. The parents have also traditional biases toward girl child and think their investments are sheer wastages as the boys families after marriage of their daughter will be benefited but not themselves.

In the study area, education for girl is given low priority. Here education for girls is looked upon a useless luxury, since girls are not expected to need education in their daily life. The study area shares a primary school with other two settlements. Here are also two private primary level English schools. The following table illustrate the educational opportunities available for the girls.

Table 5:1 Number of Boys/Girls in Government School/Private School

Sex	Government school		Private school		Total	
	Total Enrolment	presence	Total Enrolment	presence	Total Enrolment	presence
Boys	82 (61.65)	61 (74.39)	87 (87)	78 (89.65)	169 (75.53)	139 (82.24)
Girls	51 (38.34)	13 (25.49)	13 (13)	11 (84.61)	64 (27.4)	24 (37.5)
Total	133 (100)	74 (55.63)	100 (100)	89 (89)	233 (100)	163 (69.55)

Source: School enrollment sheet of boys/girls in primary schools of study area

As shown in above table, it indicates lower representation of girls in both government and private school.

However in case of private school, the representations of girls are very low i.e. only 13 percent of total enrolled student. Though the enrollment of girls in government school shows better comparatively, the presence of girls in survey day was very poor. Only 25.49 percent of girls were present on that day. In response to any question about this poor attendance of girl students, the teacher said that although the girls were better students, their guardians usually want them to stay home and work. They are very interested to send them regularly to the school.

But in case of private school, only 13 percent of girls are enrolled in comparison to 87 percent of boys. This indicates that in Maithili culture, guardians don't want to invest more on girl's education. There were so many cases in study area, where the boys from some household study in private school and girls in government school.

Table 5:2 Attitude of respondent towards education

Q. Is it important to go to school?				
Respondent		Male	female	Total
For boys	Yes	59(98.33)	60 (100)	119 (99.16)
	No	1 (1.66)	-	1(0.833)
Total		60 (100)	60 (100)	120(100)

For girls	Yes	51 (85)	44 (73.33)	95 (79.16)
	No	9(15)	16(26.66)	25(20.83)
Total		60(100)	60 (100)	120(100)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, only 0.833 percent of the people interviewed show no need for the education for boys, while for girls the figure was 20.83 percent of male respondents and 26.66 percent of the female respondents thought that there was no need to educate girls.

Table 5:3 Attitudes towards education by economic strata

Q. Is it important to go to school?						
Economic strata		Top	Middle	Bottom	All strata	
Answer						
Boys	Yes	16 (100)	65 (98.48)	38 (100)	119 (99.16)	
	No	-	21 (1.51)	-	1 (0.833)	
Total		16 (100)	66 (100)	38 (100)	120 (100)	

For girls	Yes	11 (94.44)	52 (78.78)	28 (73.68)	95 (79.16)	
	No	1 (5.5)	14 (21.21)	10 (26.37)	25 (20.83)	
Total		18 (100)	66 (100)	38 (100)	120 (100)	

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Among the three economic strata, more respondents from the middle and bottom economic strata seemed more indifferent to female education. Almost all the respondents from all strata advocated education for boys. More than 21 percent from middle strata and 26.31 from bottom strata responded that there was no need of education for the girls. The overwhelming majority of interviews in the middle and bottom strata were for boy's education, while on the question of educating girls they were divided.

Table 5:4 Desired Level of Education for Boys and Girls

Particulars Levels of schooling	Male		Female		Total	
	For boys	For girls	For boys	For girls	For boys	For girls
Primary level	1 (1.66)	8 (13.33)	-	11 (18.33)	1 (0.833)	19 (15.83)
Middle level	-	2 (3.33)	-	-	-	2 (1.66)
SLC	25 (41.66)	35 (58.33)	21 (35.00)	43 (71.66)	56 (46.66)	78 (65)
As high as can Possible	34 (06.66)	15 (25)	39 (65.00)	6 (10.00)	73 (60.83)	21 (17.5)

Total	60 (100)	60 (100)	60 (100)	60 (100)	120 (100)	120 (100)
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Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, even those who expressed an awareness of the need for education for girls invariably wanted less education for girls than for boys. Among the 60 male respondents in this category, only 15 (25 percent) wanted to educate girls as much as they could afford to do. On the other hand 34 (56.66 percent) out of total 60 respondents answering the question expressed their desires to educated boys for as long as they could afford to do. The percentage of female respondents wanting to educate boys to the highest possible level was 65 percent, while for girls the figure was only 10 percent.

In analyzing these kinds of attitudes toward education in general and female education in particular, the cost of education, the irrelevance of the girl's educational qualifications for her natal household and the need for a girl labour in the home appeared to be the most important factors hampering female education in this community.

It is considered that literacy will be of no use of female in their adult life. A woman is not expected to deal with the outside world, so whatever she learns she will forget. Education of girls is also hampered by the fact that educated girls have to be married off to more educated boys which needs more dowries.

In poor family, poverty makes education unattenable. It is considered that girls should make money from farm work or wage labour rather than waste their time in useless education. Literacy for the sake of literacy seems useless to the people of study area. Literacy and education are seen as steps to non-manual and non-farm work.

On the other hand well off families, educated boys have started to seek literate wives. This has propelled a few wealthy families to send their girls to

school. At the same time there is a greater tendency to marry off girls at a young age to young uneducated boys because educated boys need large amount of Dowry (Tilak).

5.5 The Marriage

The marriage is major ceremony in Maithili culture. Marriage takes place within the same caste. Endogamy is prescribed by society. It is regarded necessary for both men and women. Among higher caste, chronological order of descent is maintained. Accordingly marriage is avoided up to seven clans. Most of the marriages are arranged. Love marriages are a rare phenomenon. Under the arranged marriage, it is guardians of the girl/boy who settle the marriage. Until a few years back, a girl used to be married away to a boy without their getting to see each other. But now most of the marriages take place after the boy approves of the girl. However, the discrimination continues. Normally a girl is not expected to make any choice of the boy she would marry. Instead it is the boy and his parents who make choice for the girl.

Over the past few years, education and the media have made some impact on the marriageable age. Therefore, the age at which marriage take place has gone up, some two or three decades ago, most of the marriages used to take place before the age of 15 years but nowadays the age of marriage has risen to 20 years and above. Child marriage has not yet been totally given up as it is still practiced in certain communities of Mithila.

Severe *purdha* (seclusion) of the bride during the first few years are maintained after her transfer to her husbands' household which relaxes slowly with the birth of successive children.

Dowry (dahej) is prevalent in Maithili culture. Dowry is the payment in cash or kind by the brides family to the bridegroom's family along with the giving away of the bride (called Kanyadan) in Maithili marriage. Kanyadan is an important part of Hindu marital rites. Kanya means daughter, and dana

means gift. The practice of giving cash money (*Tilak*) to the bridegroom is specific to the wealthy families of Maithili community. It may be considered a "price" for hypergamy, and the bride's parents are willing to pay a somewhat higher price to send their daughter to a family of better economic strata. Before a marriage is contracted there is a lot of lagging over the amount of *Tilak*. The bridegroom's side wants to get as much as possible, while the bride's parents want to settle the *tilak* at the minimum necessary for getting their daughter married into the family of their choice. Many families sell their land to get their daughter married off. One of my respondent named Ramprasad sah, the father of bride sold 10 katha of his land to arrange the dowry for his intermediate educated daughter to get government job holder bride groom two years ago. *Tilak* (dahej) payments are becoming more and more onerous for the parents and are undermining the value of daughter's in Maithili society. Educated boys cost more. Informants said that *tilak* for a young boy still in school is about 50,000 rupees; *tilak* for boys finishing school with a school leaving certificate is about 100,000 and for an engineer or a doctor the price is up to 500000 rupees. When a girl is born the first consideration is to get her married off well.

In past, this practice was only prevalent among upper caste, and nowadays it spreads also among lower caste. It is most necessary in case of Brahmin and other middle caste.

After the arrangement of the marriage between the two families, the formal ceremony of *tilak*-giving takes place. People from the bride's house usually the father, brothers and father's brothers go to the bridegroom's house where *Tilak* is given. After the valuable and money are handed to the bridegroom amid ceremonial chants and joking songs by women, the bridegroom has to touch the feet of the elders of the bride's side who are present. This is called *chhekha*. The ceremony is accompanied by the singing musicians. The *Tilak* ceremony is a kind of engagement between the prospective bride and groom.

It is interesting to note that the groom's side bargains, not only over the gifts to the bridegroom and his parents, but also over the gifts given to the bride by her own parents. This is because women do not have total control over their own jewelry or even their clothing.

After the marriage, the bridegroom's household shows off the dowry and the bride while the villagers may either criticize or praise the bride and the quality and quantity of the gifts sent by the bride's people. The bride rarely hears these criticize.

The practice of dowry abuse is rising in Mithila, the most severe in bride burning. The burning of women whose dowries was not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. It is evident that there exist deep rooted prejudices against women in Mithila. Cultural practices such as the payment of dowry tend to subordinate women in Maithili society. I witnessed an incident when I was in the field work. It so happened in a village of Siraha district. A beautiful but not educated girl from Yadav caste was married to a middle-class family boy. Before the marriage and at the time of marriage the people from boy's family did not demand for dowry (Tilak). Everything happened smoothly. Actually the boy was fascinated by the beauty of the girl he married and agreed to marry without any kind of dowry. But the girl's decree of destiny was something else. After few days of marriage she was being tortured by the family member of her husband including her husband as well. The reason was that she didn't bring any dowry or money with her. The torture reached at the culmination and turned into a heinous crime that led to the death of the poor, beautiful, newly married bride. She was actually burnt in fire, giving it a name of kitchen accident. The truth was later revealed to the society and law and the family members of that bride groom are still in the jail of Siraha in the charge of her murder. So, the dowry system had led many of innocent girls to the mouth of death.

At the beginning, as the most junior woman in the household she is gradually drawn into the household chores. Her first job is cooking, since it is the duty of the youngest affinal women to do the household cooking. She is not assigned tasks for which she would have to venture outside the house.

As the daughter-in-law and youngest sister-in-law in the family, the young bride is subjected to critical eyes and her work is constantly watched to detect mistakes. In rich household, if she did not bring a good dowry or *Tilak*, she may be treated very harshly right from the beginning. Her position in the affinal households is stronger if her natal household is in a position to support her.

In poor households the new bride is entrusted with any and all household activities about a month after her arrival in the house, but she is usually not taken to the fields to participate in agriculture work for two or three years. Once she has produced a child, she is expected to work in the fields like other women. In poorer household a wife is judged according to ability to work rather than by what she has brought in the form of dowry or *Tilak*. These assets are minimal in poor families.

At this stage in her life, a woman is expected to show extreme respect towards those of her husband's relatives who are senior to her either by age or by generation. Her freedom of behavior and speech is severely restricted. She goes out to the fields to go to the toilet only in the early morning or in the late evening with some other females of household. She is not supposed to be seen by any males of the house or of the village who are senior to her husband. She may, however, be seen by her husband's younger brothers or cousins or other related males who are a generation below to her and she is allowed to have a joking relationship with her husband's younger brother and his young cousin.

Women's visits to their natal homes are infrequent but they usually spend a few months there at a stretch. One informant said that it was difficult to visit her natal home frequently because when she came back to the husband's household after such visits; she had to bring substantial gifts of food and

delicacies to her in-laws. Her *naihar* (natal home) had to give her and all her visiting children new clothing too.

Maithili women are usually expected to have their babies in their natal households. While lactating, therefore, they may spend many months in their natal household, if they have living parents or brothers who care for them. Except for these visits to their natal household, women at this stage of life have very little mobility.

Table 5:5 Mobility Pattern by Age group and Sex

Age-group	10-14		15-24		25-39		40+		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Trips										
No trips	6 (85.71)	7 (100)	9 (56.25)	13 (86.66)	6 (22.22)	21 (72.41)	7 (41.17)	19 (90.47)	28 (38.35)	60 (83.33)
1-3	1 (14.28)	-	6 (37.5)	2 (18.81)	14 (52.85)	7 (24.13)	7 (4.17)	2 (9.52)	28 (38.35)	11 (15.27)
4-10	-	-	1 (6.25)	-	3 (11.11)	1 (3.4)	2 (20.58)	-	6 (8.11)	1 (1.38)
10+	-	-	-	-	4 (14.81)	-	1 (5.88)	-	5 (6.84)	-
Total	7 (9.58)	7 (9.72)	16 (21.91)	15 (20.83)	27 (36.98)	29 (40.27)	17 (23.28)	21 (29.16)	73 (100)	72 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

Actually, the overall mobility appears very low for Maithili women than of men. About 83.33 percent of female and only 38.35 percent of male had no trips outside the village within the year of their survey. About 38.35 percent of the males and 11 percent of the female had made 1 to 3 trips.

5.6 Conception, Birth and Fertility

A couple without children after longtime from their marriage is regarded as social stigma in Maithili community, within two to three years, a woman is expected to begin having children. If she does not produce any children within five years after living with her husband, people begin to worry and suggest various prayers, rituals and visits to village curers. If she is able to produce at

least daughter, her husband and her in-laws are willing to wait for quite a long time for a male child from her. But if she is unable to produce a son towards the end of her child bearing ages then the man has the legitimate option to marry second wife. In fact relatives will advise him to do so. If he is himself an only son, there may be great pressure on him to marry again. In my research area a married women didn't get any child after several years of her marriage. After the medical check-up it was known to every one of her family and husband that her life will not be secured when she will try to get the child by hook and by crook because of the survey gynecological problem as the doctor had warned her. In spite of this, she tried to have a child on the pressure of her husband and family members and society as well. She was even told that her husband may marry another women if she won't get at least a child. Guided by this fear and the fear of being socially unfit without children she overlooked the doctor's advice tried to get the children. As a result at the seventh month of her pregnancy she was operated and got the twin children. But she died after two month of the baby's birth. And her husband too married a woman. So this is also a major problem of women in the maithili society.

Through polygamy is decreasing day by day, it is still prevalent in Maithili society. Generally it brings conflicts in family. When asked why they had polygamous marriage; men gave many different reasons, such as dislike of the first wife, or the first wife's inability to bear a son. In my research area I found an incident related to polygamy. It so happened that an educated girl from a middle-class family married to a boy of same status. But unfortunately just after 3-4 days of her marriage, the boy blamed her of being gynecologically unfit, being ugly, black in complexion etc. Actually she was just a little bit unfair in complexion and nothing else. But the boy blamed her of several things like being mentally disturbed and others etc. Finally, he kicked her out of his home and married an Indian girl along with lots of dowry. The previous girl and her family are still attempting to get justice but failed to get yet. That girl is still studying in T. U. Kirtipur.

The wife must resign herself to a co-wife if she is unable to provide male progeny. One women in the sample who has been unable to give a birth of

a son said that she will go on having children until she gives birth to a son. If she fails to do so, she will ask her husband to marry again. There were only two cases of polygamous in this study area.

Thus it is crucial to a woman's well-being that she produces sons. Without sons she loses her hold over her husband and her security in the household. Her rights are limited to mere subsistence which she must earn by constant toil. It is not surprising that the focus of a young woman's attention during her productive years is on producing sons, since also not surprising that women are devoted to their sons. Love will, of course, be shown to both sons and daughters, but a women's self-interest lies in bearing as many sons as possible.

As a consequence, fertility is high in this society. The number of conceptions and children born alive is uniformly high for women in this society. Fertility in general and the begetting of sons in particular is highly desired and prized in Maithili society. A women's worth is judged in terms of how many sons she can produce.

A woman gains full membership and security in her husband's household after she gives birth to a son. But a long time elapses between the birth of a son and a woman gaining a hold over household affairs. Mean while her husband must gain control over the farm affairs or an effective voice in the management of the farm. In this interim period a woman's source of power is her husband. She reaches the height of her power when her husband is the head of the family and her children are growing up.

CHAPTER VI

WOMEN IN AUTHORITY, POWER AND ECONOMY

Authority is derived externally on the basis of a society's legal and political framework while individual power may be gained on the strength of individual character and circumstance which based on social, economic and political structure of particular society. While women are granted equal rights in matter of voting and getting elected to positions of power in the public domain, in matter of basic rights of citizenship they are grossly discriminated against. Women have only limited rights of inheritance and ownership of property (Bennett; 1979) and they are still included in the category of minor in many matters. Their rights in family affairs are extremely limited and father and parental blood relatives have ultimate rights of custody over children of the lineage concerned.

Patrilineal dominance, as like other part of Nepal, is particularly strong in Maithili society. Legally, Maithili have political rights equal to those of men in certain matters, but in practice they can make very little use of these rights. The actual exercise of political and legal rights is limited because of the lack of a firm economic base, the lack of education, and because of differences between local social custom (customary law) and national law.

6.1 Access to Resource

Still land inheritance is major source of prestige and power in Mithila. Like in many agrarian society of Nepal, land is playing a major role in whole economic system and main determinant of overall power structure in Maithili society .

Table 6: 1 Land Entitlement by Sex

Sex economic Strata	Male			Female		
	yes	No	Total	yes	No	Total
Top	8(100.00)	(0.00)	8(100.00)	6(75.00)	2(25.00)	8(100.00)
Middle	33(100.00)	(0.00)	33(100.00)	8(24.24)	25(75.75)	33(100.00)
Bottom	8(42.10)	11(57.89)	19(100.00)	1(5.26)	18(94.73)	19(100.00)
All strata	49(81.66)	11(18.33)	60(100.00)	15(25.00)	45(75.00)	60(100.00)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

The given table shows the information about the land entitlement by sex and the different economic strata. At overall, the total entitlement of male is far greater than women's entitlement on land out of total.

As shown, where 81.66 percent of male respondents out of total male respondents have land on their entitlement, only 25 percent of female respondent out of total female interviewee have any land on their possession.

Similarly, the women belongs to top economic strata have higher land property in their name than women from middle and bottom economic strata. This is probably because the families with larger piece of land register some land in women's name to save their land from brother's claim for share. Where 75 percent of women from top economic strata have some land property, only 5.26 percent women entertain this entitlement from bottom economic strata.

In the Maithili community the inheritance system is patrilineal and the male of patriline inherit all property, both landed and moveable. Legally some of rights on property are provided for women in Nepal, but in practice the

traditional inheritance rights of the Maithili women are far more limited than the legal code could have them. On the break up of a joint household, all of the ancestral property passes over to the direct decedents in the patriline. A Maithili woman is not entitled to any share in the property, widow and unmarried daughter can claim only for maintenance. Even when there are no male descendant rather than a daughter (married or unmarried), unless a will is specifically made in her favor or the property is transferred to her during the father's life time. Generally a couple without son will take the latter course and distribute some of their property among their daughter giving the rest to the male patrilineal relative who also inherits the duty to perform the death ceremonies and memorial services after the death.

Women's power over the distribution of property is limited. It can be exercised only through the husband. A woman who has inherited paternal property has to face many encroachments and difficulties from other member of her paternal lineage. There are many cases in the village which illustrate the apathy shown towards women's rights to property. In Maithili custom, daughter, married or unmarried regardless of their age, have no rights to their parents property. If married, they are entitled to have maintenance rights in their husband's household, if not married, they have to stay with their fathers or brothers and work for their living. In other words, a women's right to land ownership is derived through her husband and through her male decedents. In the society, where all the relations of production are based on land, the limitation on a women rights to and ownership puts her on very unequal footing with men.

In Maithili culture, ornament is regarded as sole property of women. Generally women are very proud of their ornaments. Even through they are not in fact control of their own ornaments, jewelry and other ornaments are informally considered their own property. Usually men will sell this jewelry only in a family emergency. Women try to acquire as much jewelry as possible. Women then formally have some property in the form of rights, even over their

ornaments. On divorce, ornaments given to a women by her husband or affine have to be returned and in the ordinary course of events a women has later to give some of her ornaments to her daughters and daughter-in-law on their marriage.

The isolation of a woman without sons in her husband's household makes her very vulnerable to physical brute force from her husband and her husband's family. In the study area a respondent named Kamala whose husband has married another wife because kamala didn't get any son from hee husband.so kamala was generally assigned the work of out household and treated as a servant by her family as well as by husband. Although people do not exactly advocate or approve of wife-beating it carries no strong social stigma and women are supposed to bear it stoically. In the villager's view, a man has absolute rights over his wife and he is entitled to do whatever he likes with her. A woman's command over her own personal property is thus conditional on her physical strength or her ability to transfer her property to safe custody in a case of dispute.

6.2 Time allocation

Working hours per day during peak season of agriculture

The household as a unit of production requires certain time inputs from all its members. Working hour per day of the sampled respondents was categorized into three categories, Low (up to 8 hour a day), Middle (8-12 hours a day) and High (above 12 hours a day).

Besides household works, women are equally involved in the farm activities too in peak season of agriculture. Maithili women have to bear double load of homework and agricultural works like transplanting, harvesting etc.

Table 6:2 Working Hour of Female Respondent

Working hour	Number	Percentage
Up to 8 hours	4	6.67
8 to 12 hours	20	33.33
12 hours to above	36	60.00
Total	60	100.00

Working Hour of Male Respondent

up to 8 hours	12	20.00
8 to 12 hours	35	58.33
12 hours to above	13	21.66
Total	60	100.00

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table, working hour of the respondents ranged from 4 hours per day to 16 hours per day working hour of female respondent was higher than the male respondent. Almost 60 percent female respondent worked more than 12 hour in comparison of 21.66 percent of male respondent. Women have to perform agriculture work along with domestic work of household. Working hour of the women differ according to different-socio-economic variable. Only 4 respondents have to work less than 8 hours per days which constitute 6.66 percent of total respondents. Among the total 60 respondents, there are 60 percent respondents who have to work more than 12 hours, rest of respondents have to work more than 8 hours and less than 12 hours.

Among children, girls work more than boys of the same age. Their input in domestic sphere is far greater than boys. It is also clear that women have to work longer than men for the overall welfare of the family.

6.3 Types of Work Performed by Women

As a housewife, a woman has to perform various types of heavy as well as light work. These tasks may be more time consuming and troublesome. In our rural society there is no fixed types of work routine for women. They have to perform all domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning houses and utensils, fetching water, grinding and processing of the cereals, diary products, food preservation, looking after the children, bringing firewood and fodder etc. Beside all these domestic work, women from middle and bottom economic strata, also work in agriculture field.

Table 6:3 Types of Work Performed by Respondent

Types of Work	Performing		Not performing		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Cooking	55	91.66	5	8.33	60	100
Cleaning	51	85.00	9	15.00	60	100
Fetching water	52	86.66	8	13.33	60	100
Collecting firewood	38	63.33	22	36.66	60	100
Grinding and processing	42	70.00	18	30.00	60	100
Washing clothes	51	85.00	9	15.00	60	100
Working in field	41	68.33	19	31.66	60	100
Caring livestock	52	86.66	8	13.33	60	100
Caring children	44	73.33	16	26.66	60	100

Source: Field Survey 2008

Women contribute less time to 'productive' work and more to domestic work. Generally in Maithili culture, domestic work is considered not as productive works.

6.3.1 Animal husbandry

Animal husbandry is an integral part of Maithili economy. In Maithili society, ideally women are not supposed to work outside the four walls of the house. Hence they have to work in the fields or participate in herding, lowers their prestige and the prestige of their household. But in reality, in the majority of the households' women, especially girls of household devote the largest part of their work day to animals husbandry. Animal husbandry is the major productive work for both boys and girls.

In almost all households, women usually supply fodder and clear the sheds of the larger animals, while smaller animals, such as goats and sheep, are

entirely the responsibility of women and children. Women of poor household generally keep goat and she goat.

6.3.2 Agriculture

Agriculture work includes work in the fields, such as ploughing and leveling, planting, weeding and irrigation. Harvesting and post harvest transportation of crops, threshing and the first storing also come under agriculture. Since all these activities involve moving out of the courtyard, the female time input to household's own farm is uniformly lower than that of males; women of Maithili society do not plough, but they participate fully in planting, harvesting weeding of all crops. Local fertilizer application and seed selection constitute other major female activities in agriculture. The women from bottom economic strata equally participate in agriculture activities as agriculture wage labour. Women from top economic strata least participate in agriculture activities outside their household.

Food processing is another area in which women make a large contribution. Almost all food processing is done by women. This part of the production process can hardly be ignored in a largely self-sufficient agricultural household. Women of all economic strata involved in food processing. But women from top economic strata and middle economic strata heavily involved in this activities. Women do not participate directly in the cultivation process in wealthier households, but once the harvest is in, the women of the household form the core of the labour for further processing of the crop. Paddy for household consumption and for feeding the labour force is husked, cleaned and parboiled at home by women. Food processing for the household cannot be separated from food processing for the payment of wages and for feeding the farm laboring.

Flour is usually ground in the mill but pulses and beans have to be ground at home to make them fit for cooking. The dal (lentils) given to the wage laborers are cooked whole.

Apart from this regular work women also perform some occasional and seasonal food processing, for example preparing beaten rice, making pickles and drying vegetables.

6.3.3 Fuel Gathering

Females spend a lot more time on fuel collection than men. Only rarely is firewood available for fuel, so all women had to work on shaping crowdung to make dung paddies suitable for burning. Poor women, with no animals in the house, have to collect dung from village paths and pasture land. They also collect small sticks. The usual practice in the village is to put straw or whatever small pieces of wood are available for example pulse bushes, jute sticks, straw, into the cow dung. This is then made into a 2-3 foot long bundle about 12 inches in diameter and dried in the sun. These bundles are called goraha. Another similar product of smaller size is called gorahani, and the cow dung strata chips are called chipri. These are main kinds of fuel used in the village.

6.4 Involvement of Respondents in their Family Decision Making

Involvement in family decision making process indicates one's higher or equal status in the family. Status of women is also religiously higher in Nepal, especially in higher caste Hindu families. But it is only in theory or it can be said that it is true to some extent, when they are in status of daughter. When they enter in the status-roles of a daughter-in-law, their status is very low. In their role of daughter or daughter-in-law, women are not accepted as a decision maker outside the kitchen, cow-shed and in some farm activities. When, particularly at their old age, performing the role of mother or mother-in-law, she can take part in decision making process. Except for a few percentages, most of the women have no authority or say on economic decision making. The situation is much worse in case of Maithili women.

At the household level, a woman in Maithili society has no socially sanctioned authority to make decisions on her own. But in spite of this she may

in fact wield considerable power and play an important role in household decision making.

For a more detailed study of decision making, household affairs were divided into nine spheres. Women's decision making roles in the different sphere differ significantly.

Table 6:4 Involvements of respondents in their family decision Making

Decision stage Objects decision	Decision			
	Male	Female	Jointly	Total
Cooking	3 (5)	51 (85.00)	6 (10.00)	60 (100)
Expenditure on small food item and HH necessity	22 (36.00)	31 (51.66)	7 (11.66)	60 (100)
Education and health	37 (61.66)	11 (18.33)	12 (20.00)	60 (100)
Capital investment	18 (72.00)	2 (8.00)	5 (20.00)	25 (100)
Borrowing	18 (58.06)	3 (9.67)	10 (32.25)	31 (100)
Disposal of house hold resources	15 (31.25)	26 (54.16)	7 (14.58)	48 (100)
Labour allocation	49 (90.74)	2 (3.70)	3 (5.55)	54 (100)
Agriculture	39 (66.10)	12 (20.33)	8 (13.55)	59 (100)
Clothing and durable	38 (63.33)	12 (20.00)	10 (16.66)	60 (100)
Gifts social function and travel	29 (52.72)	22 (40.00)	4 (7.27)	55 (100)
Total	268 (52.34)	121 (23.3)	72 (14.06)	512 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2008

As shown in above table 85 percent of the daily looking decisions were made by women. Their role in spending decisions was significantly less prominent. Even in case of food items and small household necessities, women made only 51.66 percent of the decisions. They played small role in decision how much money to spend on education or health.

The women role in household investment, borrowing and other resources allocation decisions was low. They made only 8 percent and 9.67 percent respectively on capital investment and borrowing. Women played a much less significant role in decisions on investment in land and animals.

Similarly, women play a very important role in decision over the disposal of household resources. Almost 54 percent decisions over it were taken by women. Women play a minor role in labor allocation that was only 3.70 percent. In agriculture involving questions about the choice of crops, fertilizer and seeds, women decided 20.23 percent of the cases by themselves, 13.55 percent decided jointly. Although men take the major role in agricultural decision making women also play a significant role. At overall level, where 52.32 percent of decisions were made by male, only 23.63 percent were made by women.

6.5 Community Affairs and Politics

In the public domain of politics women's investment is much less evident. For the present analysis, the public domain may be divided into party politics and caste politics.

6.5.1 Party Politics

A number of simple question covering aspects village, district and national politics were put to village women in the sample. Most of women show lack of knowledge about political process and lack of political knowledge. However, women seemed to be more aware about village politics. Most of women express awareness about their panchyat politics but only few women know about district and national politics.

6.5.1.1 Participation in voting

Participation in voting is regarded as participation in political process. In Maithili culture, participation in voting in election is very high as shown in below table.

Table 6:5 Participation of Women in Casting Vote

Response Economic strata	Regular	Once or twice	Never	Total
Top	3 (37.5)	5 (6.25)	-	8 (100)
Middle	9 (27.27)	22 (66.66)	2	33 (100)
Bottom	5 (26.31)	11 (57.89)	3 (15.78)	19 (100)
All strata	17(28.33)	38 (63.33)	5 (6.33)	60 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2008

As shown in above table the women from top and middle economic stratum participate more than bottom regularly. But in case one or twice, they are seen somehow equal.

Almost all women from each economic stratum had cast their vote in recently held constitutional assembly election. But only voting did not indicate their higher level of political participation.

Table 6:6 Decision on Voting

Response Economic strata	Regular	Once or twice	Never	Total
Top	8 (100)	-	-	9 (100)
Middle	25 (75.75)	3 (9.09)	5 (15.15)	33 (100)
Bottom	8 (42.10)	3 (15.78)	8 (42.10)	19 (100)
All strata	42 (68.33)	6 (10.00)	13 (21.66)	60 (100)

Source: Field survey, 2008

Above table indicates the lower active participation of Maithili women in political process. Only 10 percent women decide where they have to cast their vote. Almost 8.33 percent decisions are taken by male member of family. No women from the top economic strata have ever taken decision where they

have to cast their vote. Comparatively women from bottom economic strata have more freedom to take decision on casting their vote.

Women who participate in political life are ridiculed by the village elite who establish the social norm. Many women were questioned as to why they did not participate in regular panchayat proceeding and they replied that in their society women simply do not participate in this kinds of event. Sometime women are compelled to participate in politics activity due to their personal and family benefits. But the social norm does not allow Maithili women to participate directly in panchayat politics.

6.5.2 Caste Politics

Traditional caste politics, sometime, allows for female leadership of the caste grouping in some special cases. Each caste group has its own assemblies which give judgment on affairs relating to caste and rituals. The leader of the caste is called the *Maizon*. Each village has a *Dewan*, who represents the villagers of the particular caste in the caste sava. Members of caste assemblies, *Maizon* and *Dewan*, must all be invited for important life ceremonies such as marriage and death.

In past, these Dewar, *Maizon* and assemblies are powerful institutions in the village, presiding over matters of food habits, sex relations, marriage, the caste status of individuals and all other matters pertaining to caste. But recently these institutions are losing its power. But it is still in practice in remote village. They may outcast individuals, a procedure called *bhatkatne*. A member so ex-communicated faced social isolation. For example, Harilal and his family were not allowed to participate in caste feasts or ceremony of village. According to one informant, this punishment was meted out to Harilal because Harilal, married man, had remarried an already married woman.

On the death of a *Maizon*, his son is expected to take over leadership and to inherit the title of *Maizon*. The post of Dewar is also hereditary. But in cases

where the successor is under age, his mother or the late *maizon's* widow assumes the title and becomes the leader of the caste community until the inferior comes to age. Thus a woman may play an important formal role in caste affairs, but she can do it only as a custodian of a junior male.

In this way, the women roles in public affairs are just as subordinate to male. It is generally informal in nature and mostly in support of man in their struggle for power.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with summary of major finding of the study and conclusions drawn from the analysis of the study. Some of the recommendations are made on the basis conclusion of the research.

7.1 Summary

From the previous analysis, it is clear that Maithili society is greater inegalitarian and sexually stratified society based on Hindu philosophy and strict caste system. On the status scale composed of economic, socio-cultural cum religious and political indicators, Maithili women in general would be far below men. Father would always be higher than sister, husbands higher than wives and father-in-law higher than Mother-in-law etc.

Male children are more preferred, generally regarded that their birth brings prestige and future economic and social security to the family. But from the moment a baby girl is born she is an object of scorn and regarded as misery for the family.

The educational status of Maithili women are very low compared to male member of this society. Parents do not like to invest on girl's education generally because they regard that their education are not utilized for natal household. Girl children have to assist on the household work so they have no time to spend on acquire education. Some of families send their daughter to government school just because most educated grooms of this society prefer to marry educated girls. Education of girls is also hampered by the fact that educated girls have to be married off to more educated boys and this becomes an expensive arrangement.

Marriage is compulsory for women in Maithili society. For women, besides the social need to produce progeny, marriage is also seen as primary means of livelihood for women. Now, dowry system is integral part of Maithili marriage which not only devalue women socially but brings a lot of physical and mental torture for women. This inhumane system affects badly on the whole status of women in this community. The low birth rate of female children is also one of the consequences of this system.

Maithili women have very low scale of autonomy. They have very little autonomy in behavior pattern i.e. speech, eating habit, choice of marriage partner, choice of association. They have very little scope of mobility. The *purdah* system, the traditional system of preserving purity, has further helped to exploit the women. *Purdah* further restricts on mobility which deprives women to participate from various opportunities available in the outside world.

Women play a very important role in the subsistence economy of the Maithili community. Besides household works women of the village are equally participating in agricultural works. Working hours of the women range from 4 hours per day to 16 hours per day. Cooking, cleaning, fetching water, fuel and firewood, caring of children, tending the livestock, transplanting, weeding-loosening the earth, harvesting, processing food grains and storing are done by women. Bringing manure to the farm and food grains to the mill is also done by women besides this they are also bearing the occasional work load such as white washing the household in many festivals.

In Maithili society the inheritance system is patrilineal and males of a patriline inherit all property, both landed and movable. Although some amounts of land are registered on the name of women, they have no disposable right. Men register the land on the name of women to get the security from brother and other kinship's claim on land.

Women's power over the distribution of property is limited and can be exercised only through the husband. A woman is not entitled to any share in the

property, widow and unmarried daughter can claim only maintenance. Although ornaments are regarded as sole property of women in Maithili culture, they have no full control over their own ornaments; usually men sell this jewelry in a family emergency.

Women's involvement in decision making process is very low. They participate in only minor affairs of household. The major decisions on the family affairs are taken solely by male member of family. Most of the women have say in household matter but ultimate decision making power rests on men. Earning women are to be found involved in decision making more than housewives. The women from bottom economic strata involve more on decision making process than women from top and middle economic strata.

The participation of women in political process in Maithili society is very low. They have to face problems in participating in this process partly due to the traditional culture which keeps them in seclusion under the *purdah* system and partly due to their backwardness in education and economic matters. There is a feeling that the women joining politics lose the very sense of purity. The Maithili women and society are very particular about purity, only for women and not so much for men. Suspicious about women's purity, whether false or real, inhibit the women from joining politics.

It is very true in Meena Acharya words that there is a vicious circle of low social status, low economic and income status, low opportunities and low social status. In other words, women are economically far below men because they are socially confined, and economic options. They have no control over income because they have no control over the means of production, and they have no control over the means of production because they have no income.

7.2 Conclusions

After analyzing the Position of women of Khorla village of Chandra Ayodhyapur VDC, the following conclusion have been drawn on the basis of established fact that women have no independent existence and entity; they are only come into existence through the relation with men as mother, daughter, wife, etc but not solely as women, in pure biological entity.

- In Maithili culture, it is established fact that there is a systematic sexual discrimination against women. Culturally they are regarded as inferior than male and accorded a lower position in society. They are not allowed to take part in many religious activities like death ritual of relatives. There are negative opinions about the nature of women both among men and women.
- Social lives of women are confined inside household. They have very low scale of autonomy. They have very little autonomy in behavior pattern i.e. speech, eating habit, choice of marriage partner, choice of association. They have very little scope of mobility.
- The Educational status of female is very poor in comparison of male of this community. In analyzing these kinds of attitudes toward education in general and female education in particular, the cost of education, the irrelevance of the girl's educational qualifications for her natal household and the need for a girl labour in the home appeared to be the most important factors hampering female education in this community. Low status of education closes the door for many opportunities for the improvement in the condition of Maithili women.
- The *purdah* system, the traditional system of preserving purity, has further helped to exploit the women. *Purdah* further restrict on mobility which deprive women to participate from various opportunities available in outside world.

- The practice of dowry abuse is rising in Mithila, the most severe in bride burning. The burning of women whose dowries was not considered sufficient by their husband or in-laws. Most of these incidents are reported as accidental burns in the kitchen or are disguised as suicide. It is evident that there exist deep rooted prejudices against women in Mithila. Cultural practices such as the payment of dowry tend to subordinate women in Maithili society.
- Fertility is high in this society. The number of conceptions and children born alive is uniformly high for women in this society. Fertility in general and the begetting of sons in particular is highly desired and prized in Maithili society. A woman's worth is judged in terms of how many sons she can produce.
- It is concluded that women have no independent existence and entity; they are only come into existence through the relation with men as mother, daughter, wife, etc but not solely as women, in pure biological entity.

7.3 Recommendations

The preceding analysis shows that women's status in Maithili society is very low. After the acceptance of the two facts that women have low status in Maithili society and that improvement in this status should be a part of the development plans and programs in this area, the third and the most difficult question to be answered is, how to go about interpreting Maithili women into the development process and thereby raise their socio-economic status.

- To improve the income status of Maithili women, income generating opportunities for women should be provide on which they have control. Several studies have shown that women's increased control over income, and with it increased control over the allocation of household resource, leads to improve health and nutrition of not only for women, but also for their children as well.

- Although women contribute lots in the subsistence economy of Maithili region, they are not regarded as key player. Improving the farming method and increase in agriculture productivity alone will not be effective in improving status of women in Maithili community because land is totally controlled by men. No matter how hard women work, the control over the yield from agriculture will go to men. However, increase in agriculture productivity does not upgrade status of women directly, it fulfill many basic need of women and improve household condition which directly influence the health and nutrition of women.
- Plans and programs directed towards the problems of the household sector and subsistence farming regarding farm techniques, food storage and nutrition, fuel use and storage, sanitation, health and education must be targeted to women. It is necessary to improve the technology of food processing, animal care and other household chores to release women for more productive work and participating in several programs like adult education, agricultural extension, health programs etc.
- Ruth Dickson is very true in case of Maithili women that to improve the status of women, women have to be drawn out of the household and into market activity. The crucial factors here is not whether it is a market activity or not but who owns the primary means of production and has control over income seems to be the primary factor in determining women's status. So women have to be drawn into new types of activities where they have control of the primary means of production and resulting in come.
- Awareness campaign against the dowry should be launched effectively by the student community, HMGIN, NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies, and electronic and print media. Effective organizations should be formed by men and women together to launch a social movement against the dowry system. Government should take legal action against this inhumane system.

- In order to improve the social and cultural life of the women what is essential is that the educational materials should be developed by the HMG/N and the concerned bodies in Maithili. Also, education should be made compulsory for the girls up to the secondary level and fees in the schools, colleges and in the university should be waived for them.
- Legal provision should be made to entitle the women's share in parent's property as like son weather they get marry or not.
- Law should be translated in to practice
- Those who violate law should be punished.
- Social movement should be launched against the many prevalent custom like dowry system, purdah system, domestic violence, witch accusation system, etc. to improve the social status of women.

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