

Hope Amidst Hopelessness: Life Histories of Illiterate Oraon Tribal Women in  
Jharkhand, India

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Nijhar Jharia Minz

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Dr. Rosemarie J. Park, Advisor

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## Abstract

Hope Amidst Hopelessness: Life Histories of Illiterate Oraon Tribal Women in  
Jharkhand, India

This interpretive study asked the question: “*What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon women in Jharkhand, India?*” Life history methodology was used to gain insights into the lived experiences of illiterate women. I hoped to provide meaning and give voice to the voiceless. Observations, in-depth and open-ended interviews were used for data collection. The six Oraon tribal women shared their life experiences in Sadri language with the researcher who was from the same group. Six themes were identified: First, our lives are heavy and painful because of daily hard work; second, we do everything to send our children to school hoping that their lives will be better than ours; third, why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?; fourth, no one is there to listen to us; fifth, we look forward to cultural gatherings because they give us joy and satisfaction and sixth occasionally our hopes are raised by those in power but soon we are forgotten.

The study emphasizes the role of women as major providers and loss of women’s work. The women felt shame because of illiteracy. The focus of the women’s lives was their children. Also the lack of support from spouses and feelings of isolation permeated their lives. Their lives were in flux due to change in household and loss of tribal identity. The one brighter spot was their joy in celebration.

The study recommendations are for more in-depth study of Oraon women and in-depth study of the education system as related to the cultural identity of Oroans. The influence of patriarchy on women's lives in the Oraon community.

Adult education recommendations are for the implementation of culturally sensitive and comprehensive literacy campaign among Oraon women. The study of Oraon songs and dance can be used as a tool for literacy. Using a Frieran model of literacy is recommended for training adult educators from the Oraon community. Village involvement and supervision of community action programs is needed.

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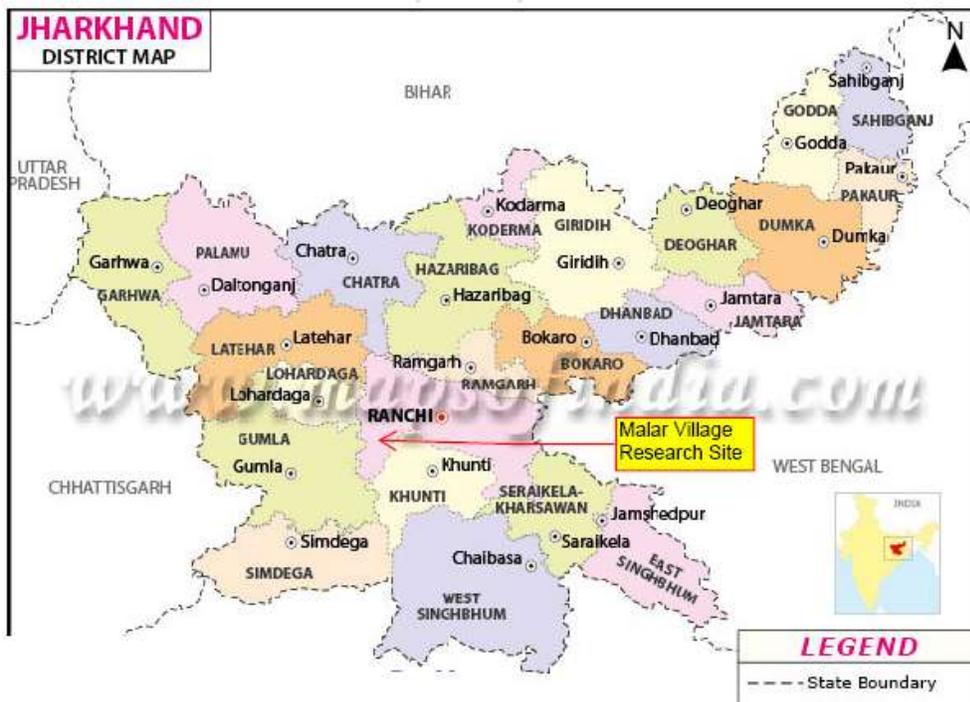
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## Map of India



### Map of Jharkhand, India



## Definition of Terms

**Akhra:** a round shaped raised platform in the Oraon village where villagers gather for dancing. This is also used for community meeting and gathering place.

**Arsa:** a traditional sweet cooked during festivals, preparation of which involves a lengthy process.

**Beachal Betti:** a term to refer to married daughter. Since the groom pays a bride price in wedding, the married daughter has almost no stake in her parents' family after her marriage.

**Bride price:** the amount mutually agreed upon by the bride and the bridegroom parties during engagement ceremony few months before wedding to be paid by the groom to the bride's parents.

**Co-sister:** Brothers' wives are co-sisters.

**Dalit:** a group of people who were earlier called untouchables. dalits.

**Dikkus:** In Jharkhand the term refers to those who have migrated to Jharkhand from outside the state who generally oppress and exploit the tribal people.

**Dowry:** Cash and material demanded by bridegroom's parents from bride's parents' as a condition for marriage.

**Dhumkuria:** a house used as cultural center of the village.

**Haria:** A traditional alcoholic drink made of fermented rice used during festival and special occasions such as engagement, wedding etc. It is also known as rice beer.

**Hooka:** In olden days this was a popular smoke among old people.

Janishikar: A popular cultural event celebrated every 12<sup>th</sup> year by the Oraon women to commemorate the victory of the Oraon women over Moghul Emperor Aurangzeb's army in Rohtasgarh.

Jagnath Mela ( Rath Mela): A famous large scale fair held near Ranchi city in the month of October every year where a chariot is drawn by devotees. This week long fair is the biggest fair of the region which is also popular for many attractions of entertainments such as rides and games and also for the sale of cultural and agricultural tools.

Jatra: Cultural gathering held in many places after the harvest season in Oraon habitat attended by different village dance groups.

Karam: It is a major festival of Oraon tribal people which is celebrated during the month of September-October when the rainy season is over. The religious ceremony revolves around the branch of *Karam* tree which is called *Karam* God-king, a God of prosperity and children.

Kartal: Small hand held musical instrument that has small flat bronze plates organized in wooded structure.

Lal sahib: Landlord in the village

Lotapani: Engagement ceremony held few months before wedding in which both the bridegroom to be and the bride to be exchange a pot of water three times as symbol of their commitment to each other.

Mandar: A very popular drum made up of mud and skin used by Oraon tribal people and also by other tribal groups of Jharkhand.

Mangni: A part of the engagement ceremony held at the home of bride's parents in which elders of bridegroom sides take part in a very interesting segment of creating story for seeking the bride and the elders of the bride side adopt a strategy of denial and negation against that story of bride seeking. As a result, it is a lively exchange of witty saying and creative appeal for seeking bride which is eventually accepted by the bride's side.

Marwa: A tent of *sakhua* tree (*Shorea robusta*) and foliage erected in the courtyard of wedding house. The *sakhua* tree is considered auspices in Oroan culture.

Mosi: Mother's sister.

Mukhia: The elected chief of the village.

Nahan: Ceremony of mother's first bath after child birth that takes place after seven days of the birth of a baby. A group of close relatives, friends, neighbors and especially those who help during pregnancy and delivery are invited for a feast. The mother wears new sari and she gives new saris to those who helped her in child birth.

Nagara: A very heavy drum made up of wood and thick animal skin which is played with two short round shaped stick.

Nana: Maternal Grandfather

Nani: Maternal Grandmother

Pahan: The village priest

Gram Panchayat: village council of the elected members.

Panchayat Raj: The system of local governance in which village and district level elected officials have power to propose and implement developmental projects in the area.

Parha: Cultural organization at the level of many villages.

Reservation Policy: It is a form of affirmative action designed to grant special privileges primarily to Scheduled Tribes, Scheduled Castes, other Backward Communities. According to this policy certain percentage of total available seats in educational institutions and government jobs are reserved for people from these communities.

Saag: Greens that are popular in Jharkhand; used both fresh and dried.

Sarhul: One of the two major festivals of the Oraons which is celebrated during Spring when Sakhua trees, the auspices trees of the Oraon people have new flowers. The festival is characterized by special worship of *Dharmesh* their supreme God, ancestors and village deity. The main attraction of the festival is community dance with Sakhua flowers pinned in women's hair and around men's ears.

Schedule Caste: Article 366 (24) of the Indian constitution defines "such castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within such castes, races or tribes as are deemed under Article 341 to be scheduled castes for the purpose of this constitution." Under Article 341 (1) the President of India has declared many communities such as dalits and sudras castes to be scheduled for special constitutional privilege for their development.

Schedule Tribe: The Article 366 (25) of the Constitution of India refers to Schedule Tribes as those communities who are scheduled in accordance with Article 342 of the Constitution. Many tribal communities that are marked with geographical isolation, distinct culture, economic backwardness are scheduled for special provision of privilege in employment, education and other areas. The Oraon tribe of the Jharkhand is also a schedule tribe.

5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Constitution: The 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule is the constitutional provision for the administration of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribe areas where the tribal population has special protection and privileges. Similarly, the 6<sup>th</sup> Schedule refers to the special administration status of tribal areas of the North East India.

Sutbandhan: The first step in wedding negotiation process in which the bridegroom's parents and a couple of other close relatives visit the bride's family in the leadership of a common person. A sari is offered to the bride who wears it to give her consent for marriage with that particular person. This is the first engagement.

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY**

Living in a diverse country like India one has to be conscious of his/her identity. This interpretive study will describe through the rich stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India: who are they, what they experience daily, what they feel and think about themselves, what they believe and what their hopes and dreams are. The objective of interpretive research or human science research is to understand the meaning of human experience in its uniqueness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Van Manen, 1990). In my research I have accepted that objective as a given. Consequently, I have tried to ask the women meaningful questions, listen carefully to their life stories and participate in their smiles, laughter and tears.

### **My Personal Interest in the Topic**

I was born in Chicago, USA in 1967 where my parents were living as my father was completing his Ph. D. degree from the University of Chicago in the area of Systematic Theology. My parents went back to Ranchi, India when I was six weeks old. I grew up in Ranchi, then a small city with limited facilities compared to today's Ranchi. I was raised in a privileged home where education was given high priority. My father taught in a theological seminary and in 1971 founded a liberal arts college in Ranchi with a specific intention of providing education and expanded life possibilities for the underprivileged (non-privileged) young men and women of society. My mother, on the other hand, focused on children's education and started a Kindergarten, the first of its kind in the whole city. While growing up I was aware of my identity as an Oraon and the identity of Oroan community. Though I grew up in a privileged environment, I was still very much aware of the fact that my own blood relatives were not privileged in

the same way as I or my sisters or my parents were. I could not fathom/comprehend the magnitude of the fact that my father held a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago while his own sisters were illiterate and did not have the opportunity to be enrolled even in a primary level school. I felt the injustice of it but I also knew that because of the time, place and situation there was no one to blame for it. Also, being a pastor's daughter, I visited many rural congregations where I encountered many wise illiterate men and women who, to my amazement, could recite and sing all the verses of many hymns without opening a hymn book. In rural congregations where most people are illiterate many knew Bible verses by heart. While singing hymns new to them they were able to remember and repeat the verses recited to them.

At the age of 12, I felt the call to be a pastor and developed a great concern for my community and church. At that time in the wider church in India, there was no thought of ordaining women. Nonetheless, I kept my hope alive and pursued my theological education. I completed my B.A. degree majoring in Psychology, and then went on to secure a Bachelor of Divinity degree in Pune, India, to be followed by a Masters of Theology in Christian Education at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. While I was at the seminary in St. Paul I was challenged by discussions with friends and professors about education in the church and community in India. During that time I was invited by many churches in the mid-west area of the USA to share with them my knowledge of the Church, and the life and status of women in India. During those presentations many challenging discussions led me to seriously reflect on education, adult education and literacy especially in the context of my own community in India. These interests led me to enroll in a Ph.D. degree program in Work, Community and

Family Education at the University of Minnesota. With that I began a journey full of expectations, curiosity and questions. My graduate education has become for me a place of discovery and the fulfillment of my own desire for learning and growth.

Adult Education, formal and non-formal education became the focal point of my studies. Later, I took classes in literacy and they sharpened my interest in the issue of literacy in India especially in the Oraon community of Jharkhand. During my protracted graduate studies I visited my home in India and spoke to many who worked either for the government of India or for non-government organizations in the area of literacy and development about my interest in literacy. They encouraged me to visit some of the literacy programs underway in India. After visiting a number of those organizations and meeting with women around the issue of literacy, I found myself asking more questions about the underprivileged and marginalized. What I saw was both disturbing and challenging as I witnessed not only acute poverty and underdevelopment but also that the literacy programs in vogue were in reality ineffective. Being an educator and a theologian, I was interested in the development and improvement of society. The key to development, I felt, lay in the empowering of women: socially, economically, spiritually and politically through both formal and non-formal education. Like other educators I also believe that the status of women can be changed for good through education. Thus, tribal women and literacy became my central interest and the focus of my research.

## **Tribal Women and Literacy**

The first prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru once said “You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women” (Quoted by Nelasco, 2010, p.1). A short discussion on women in the larger context of India may be of some help before our discussion of tribal women. According to India’s constitution (Article 14), women are legal citizens of the country and have equal rights with men (Nelasco, 2010). However, in a male dominated society, they lack acceptance in equal terms and as a result, Indian women suffer immensely (Wazir, 2000).

In spite of great leaps in development among women, especially in the cities of India, discrimination from womb to tomb is very much a reality even today (Kumar & Kumari, 2005) in the areas of education, employment, decision making, work place, etc. It is India’s irony that where female goddesses like Laxmi, Durga and Saraswati are venerated and worshiped by millions of Hindus, yet, women are treated as second class citizens. In dominant Hindu society, the girls, particularly in lower caste families, are not allowed to go to school or obtain higher education because their destination seems to be being a wife and mother, homemaker and caregiver (Karlekar, 2000). Thus, the traditional gender division in India is very large and is clearly evident in the areas of education, employment and health (Singh, Jabbi,& Rajyalakshmi, 1996). The low status of women in India is also evident in terms of the rigid patriarchy in Indian society, child marriage, lack of freedom in choosing life-partners, dowry system, economic dependence and lack of freedom. However, in contrast, the tribal women have a relatively better social status than do their counterparts in the dominant Indian society, as tribal society is generally egalitarian. They enjoy greater freedom in

choosing life partners, bride price, economic freedom etc. (Mahapatra, 2005; Rao, 2006). This positive aspect of the tribal women's life situation has not been generally understood. There has been no in-depth study of tribal women vis-a-vis discrimination within patriarchal tribal community and its impact on literacy, economic freedom, employment and fuller participation in community and national life (Nongbri, 2003). Traditionally, tribal communities have been studied as a whole; but tribal women's issues have seldom been the focus of their study. Therefore, I will discuss issues of pertinent concerns under three headings: "Tribal Women", "Oraon Women" and "Literacy".

### **Tribal Women**

According to the 2001 census about eight percent of the total population of India is tribal (Sahu, 2004). Given the population of India, that would make India's tribal population the largest tribal population in the world (Singh, Jabbi & Rajyalakshmi, 1996). Accordingly, there are over 84 million tribal people in India, half of them being women. The tribal communities in India have distinct socio-cultural practices, religious traditions, languages, myths, world views and ways of life which distinguishes them from the dominant Hindu and Muslim communities of India. Historically, the tribal communities have existed in remote and isolated places mostly in mountains, hilly terrain and forests. Isolation from the dominant society in India was a factor in these communities developing their own socio-political organizations, clan-system and community life based on cooperation, endogamy, human-nature-spirit continuum, etc.

(Ekka, 2000; Singh, 1996; Toppo, 2000; Xaxa, 2008). As the original settlers of the land the tribal people are also known as indigenous people (Dash and Pati, 2002).

On the other hand, these communities have remained educationally and economically underdeveloped in terms of both infrastructure and modernity. Their distinct identity as a people, isolation from mainstream Indian society, and their underdevelopment, qualified them for special status in the constitution of India. As many as 698 tribal groups have been “scheduled” in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6th schedule of the constitution of India (Roy, 2005). According to constitutional provision, the tribal people are provided special privileges such as reservation in jobs, educational institutions, political representation, and many other socio-economic developmental programs specifically aimed at their development. Despite this, the tribal people remain the “most backward ethnic group in India on the three most important indicators of development, education, health and income” (Singh & Rajyalakshmi, 1993, p. 3).

Apart from the obvious underdevelopment of the tribal communities, exploitation has been a major factor holding them back. It has to be noted that tribal communities inhabit lands that are rich in such natural resources as minerals, water, and forests (Roy, 2005). According to Singh (2002), 70 percent of India’s mineral resources are found in tribal territory. As mentioned before, the tribal communities constitute 8 percent of the national population, but they actually constitute about 40 percent of India’s displaced people, due to such government development projects as dams, factories and mines (Roy, 2005). Land is the primary source of income for tribals. Families depend on natural resources for food, firewood, medicine and livelihood. As

displaced people they not only lose their land but their identity as a people. The tribal people have been exploited by non-tribal Indians who have moved into tribal areas (Singh, Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi, 1996). As a result of the development projects tribal women have suffered more adversely than have tribal men (Singh, 1995).

Though there has been significant change in the lifestyle of tribal people generally, women are still the most underprivileged, suffering from illiteracy, poverty, ill health and lack of housing, among other problems (Manna, 2000). Even the developmental projects intended for their benefits, have harmed them. Due to their displacement by mega development projects, tribal women and children become cheap labor and the worst victims (Bodra, 2008). Tribal women end up working harder than do non-tribal women. Young tribal girls contribute to family income at an earlier age than do tribal boys. Some become domestic helpers in the big cities leading to large numbers of children missing school and also increasing their dropout rate. Many take care of their younger siblings while parents, especially mothers, work (Alam, 2000; Kujur & Jha, 2008; Nambissan, 2000). Gender discrimination against women is characterized by over-work, illiteracy, poor physical living conditions, high fertility, malnutrition, lower wages for comparable work, and the loss of land or property rights (Nongbri, 2000; Sinha, 2005). Beyond that, there are several societal taboos discriminating against tribal women, for example: they are barred from holding the office of a priest, in certain tribes only men can participate in ancestor worship, in some tribes women are forbidden to touch a plough or participate in the roofing of a house while they are menstruating (Xaxa, 2008).

## **Oraon Women**

While all tribal communities in India share many fundamental similarities, taking them as a uniform group would be less than accurate. In fact, the tribal communities are heterogeneous and have their own unique distinctions (Xaxa, 2008). Thus, the status of the tribal women also vary from tribe to tribe.

The Oraon tribe is the fourth largest tribe in India (Sikligar, 2004) also known as the Kurukh tribe. Oraons are mostly found in the central-northern states of India, including: Jharkhand, Chattisgarh, Orissa and West Bengal. Their language is called Kurukh. They are dependent on agriculture for their living (Koonathan, 1999). They are community oriented, have different clans with different surnames or last names. Oraons prefer to marry an Oraon but not of the same surname. The Oraons have a rich range of folk songs, dances and tales (Campion, 1980; Roy, 1915). They are nature worshipers, their songs, tunes, music and dances change according to the seasons and the festivals concerned (Kujur, 1989). Both men and women participate in the dance performed at social events and festivals. In some villages young men and women gather every evening to dance in a place they call *Akhra* (Dhan, 1967). This also serves as a community gathering place. During festivals or on special occasions they often dance throughout the night. Men play such musical instruments as the *Mandar*, *Nagara* (drums) and a variety of string instruments (Campion, 1980). They have their own costumes. Their clothing is different than that of other tribes in India (Kujur, 1989). Boys carry their flutes and play in the fields while grazing cattle. Girls enjoy singing and dancing and dressing themselves with flowers and jewelry (Dhan, 1967). Their lives are deeply connected to the nature around them. They are nature worshipers and

their festivals are inter-related with nature. Their unique customs, traditions and rituals are clearly seen in such social and religious events as their marriages, the naming of children and their festivals. Their traditional priest is called a *Pahan* who performs the ritual in their ceremonies (Koonathan, 1999). They have their own customary laws and their own social and political institutions. The head of the village is called the *Mahto* (Roy, 1915). Oraon culture and tradition include their unique education system called *Dhumkuria* which is a village dormitory. In their *Dhumkuria* young boys and girls receive instruction in community education and values. At present some Oraons have adopted Christianity, some Hinduism, but most of them are still nature worshipers (Kunathan, 1999). A majority of Oraons are educationally and economically backward. Those who have migrated to cities and are educated have better living standards, enjoy a higher social status and are economically better off. But such persons would hardly represent five percent of the Oraon people (Lakra, 1999).

Like other tribal communities, Oraon women represent about half of the total Oraon population. Oraon women have freedoms similar to those of other tribal women in India but they also face discrimination as do the women in other patriarchal tribal societies (Alam, 2000). The Oraon tribe is an egalitarian community and hence, Oraon women have a relatively higher status than do their counterparts in the dominant Hindu and Muslim communities which is evident in their freedom to choose life-partners, freedom to work, bride price, participation in social and religious events, decision-making power at family level, economic independence, freedom to venture out to market and other public places (Roy, 2005). The bride price among Oraons is different from a dowry which is evident in the dominant Hindu community. While generally a

dowry is a rigid demand of cash and material by the groom's parents from the bride's family as a condition for wedding, the bride price is paid to the bride's family by the groom's family. With a deep and accepted sense of honor the groom's family pays the 'bride price' in terms of money, grain and cattle to the bride's family with great honor for taking care of her from her birth until the time of her marriage.

Oraon women have the historical distinction of defeating the princely army of Aurangzeb during their rule in Rohtasgarh. While their kingdom was attacked by the moghul emperor and the Oroan men were drunk owing to a festival, the Oraon women dressed up in men's clothing and successfully fought the moghul army before losing to the same army the second time. Even today, Oraon women commemorate this event by going out on community and ceremonial hunting called *Janishikar* (hunting by women) once in every twelve years (Bodra, 2008). Still, the Oraon women are victims of discrimination, and injustice. In the Oraon tribe, women cannot inherit ancestral property, including land (Gupta, 2007). At times, women are victimized and ostracized as witches (Gupta, 2007). It is evident that, although the Oraon tribe is egalitarian in many regards, it has yet to transcend patriarchal structures that discriminate against Oraon women.

### **Literacy**

The United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) define literacy as the "ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute and use printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves the continuum of learning, in enabling individuals to

achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society” (UNESCO, 2005: 21, retrieved on 5/12/2011). The National Literacy Mission of India defines literacy as acquiring the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic and the ability to apply them to one’s day-to-day life (NLM retrieved on 5/12/2011)

According to the Indian Department of Education, literacy in India has made remarkable strides since Independence in 1947. This has been further confirmed by the results of the 2001 census. The literacy rate has increased from 18.33% in 1951 to 64.8% in 2001 (Pant, 2010). In spite of the increased literacy rate, India is still far behind its goal of total literacy. The literacy rate among males in 2001 was 75.85% where it was only 54.16% among women in the whole of India (Nelasco, 2010, p. 41). However, it must also be noted that literacy rate varies hugely from state to state. While Rajasthan has a very low literacy rate for women, Kerala has high literacy rate for women. Compared to India’s general literacy rate of 64.8%, the literacy rate among the tribal population is far behind the national average at 47.1% (Pant, 2010, p.36). The contrast is more pronounced when it comes to female literacy. The national average of tribal female literacy is only 34.8% compared to 54.16 % for the whole of India (Pant, 2010, p. 40). Even among tribal populations different tribal communities have different levels of literacy. Thus, there are tribal groups with a literacy rate of less than 25 % as in the case of the Kandh tribe in Orissa (Padhy and Mitra, 2009) and with a higher literacy rate than the national average among the Mizo and the Naga tribes in North-East India. The literacy level of Jharkhand State is the lowest among its tribal women. The State’s literacy level overall is 53.6% (male 67.3%) and (female 38.9%). However,

the tribal literacy level for male stands at 54.0% while that for females stands only at 27.2% (Pant, 2010, p. 39). Thus, literacy among tribal women remains a challenge in Jharkhand.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Education is a universally accepted index of development and indicator of quality of life for an individual, family, community, and society. It is also empowerment in terms of human resources and awareness of one's rights and responsibilities as a democratic citizen. Azariades and Drazen (1990) have discussed the significance and tangible benefits of education; Sen and Dreze (1999) observed that education provides human capabilities, the power to reflect, make choices, and seek a voice in society.

Since India's independence in 1947, education in general has been given great importance for national development (Acharya, 2004). The tribal communities of India, including the Oraons were given special protection and privileges in the Constitution of India in 1950 (Behura, 2002). According to this special provision, education for tribal people was given high priority. In an attempt to educate tribal people, residential schools were opened in tribal areas, special free hostels for girls and boys were established, free text books were provided, scholarships and grants were given to tribal students.

Even after six decades, however, the literacy rate among tribal people remains low. As indicated earlier, the literacy rate among tribal women is the lowest. In the state of Jharkhand the tribal female literacy rate stands at 27.2%. Discrimination

against tribal women has been a reason for their low achievement in literacy. Studies by Acharya (2004); Sahu (2004), Tripathy, (2002) show that even in the educational programs implemented for tribal people, tribal women remain disadvantaged as more tribal males benefit from the programs than do females. Moreover, for a long time the policy makers and planners considered the tribal society to be without gender difference. It was assumed that women and men shared the problems of the tribal community, which is largely true. However, Sahu (2004) rightly notes that tribal women have specific problems that require special attention and treatment.

Furthermore, it appears that hardly any attempts have been made to study how and why illiteracy persists in specific tribal groups. A possible reason for this may be a tendency among scholars to study the tribal society as a social organization without giving any attention to the distinction of intra-tribal issues, such as levels of development, the place and role of women, literacy and identity (Singh, 1993 b). However, many researchers (Ekka, 2002; Roy, 2005; Singh and Nayak, 1997) have concluded that the relatively low literacy rate among tribal people is a direct result of a failed education policy. Toppo (2000) lists the causes for such failure including poverty, domestic work, distance of school from home, the indifferent attitude of parents, suspicion towards non-tribal people, lack of instruction in the students' mother tongue, lack of tribal teachers.

It is only recently that the tribal women have become a focus of research, mainly due to the emphasis on women derived from the women's movement around the world in recent times (Xaxa, 2004). In fact, the government of India declared the year 2001 as the year of "Empowerment of Women" (Pashayat, 2004). However, notwithstanding the attention given to women in general with regard to right and opportunities, tribal

women remain largely neglected (Singh & Rajyalakshmi, 1993). Kishwar (1996) argues that about eighty percent of the people of India live in rural areas and most of the women come from small peasant and landless laborer households; yet, much of the research and policy has focused on the lives of urban, educated, middle class women. As a result, the condition of a vast number of women is neither documented nor their wisdom recorded. In the case of tribal women it is much more lamentable as there is a palpable paucity of research (Basu, 1993; Jabbi, 1993; Xaxa, 2004, 2008).

Out of the few research studies undertaken among tribal women, the majority have focused on the issue of women's empowerment, for example, "Tribal Women Empowerment and Gender Issue" (Banu, 2001) focuses on empowerment in relation to gender equality. "Women's participation in Panchayat in Scheduled Areas: With Special Reference to Madhya Pradesh" (Chauhan, 2003) defines empowerment primarily in terms of constitutional rights for tribal women. Studies such as "Empowerment of Tribal Women" (Pashayat, 2004); "Tribal Women: Their Plight and Empowerment" (Satyasundram, 2004); "Women's Empowerment Under the Walvi System: Study on Tribal Women in South Gujrat in India" (Sikligar, 2004); "Empowering Migrant Tribal Women in Orissa" (Tripathy, 2004) also defines empowerment of tribal women in terms of gender equality and human rights.

The feminist movement in India has impacted the discourse on the issue of gender equality for tribal women. Both the issues of gender equality and human rights for tribal women are mostly analyzed and argued in terms of economic freedom and executive power in comparison to others in the society at large. Furthermore, the debate

on empowerment in these studies takes modernity and technological advancement in non-tribal society as a standard for tribal women. Thus, Banu (2001) speaks of the presence of tribal women in educational settings, and professional schools and institutions whereas Chauhan (2003) argues for a constitutional reservation of seats for tribal women in *panchayats* as the best way to their empowerment. Though these studies are helpful, Xaxa (2008) underlines the fact that majority of the studies among tribal women are undertaken predominantly on the basis of the values of the dominant society of India.

The positive power of education and literacy for tribal women must not be undervalued. Apart from the benefits of education mentioned earlier, there are other positive and desirable impacts. Many researchers have concluded that women's education would promote improved basic living situations, health and nutritional awareness for the family, sanitation and hygiene, effective fertility control, later marriage, and understanding of exploitation and the ability to resist it (Banu, 2001; Reddy, 1991). This is apparent in the case of educated tribal women. My deep interest in these positive changes for tribal communities, and specially for Oraon tribal society, draws strength and inspiration from such ideals incorporated in the understanding of adult education in the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, which declared that,

...adult education is more than right; it is key to the twenty-first century. It is both a consequence of active citizenship and a condition for full participation in society. It is a powerful concept for fostering ecologically sustainable development, for promotion for democracy, justice, gender equality and scientific, social and economic development and for building a world in which

violent conflict is replaced by dialogue and a culture of peace based on justice (The Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, 1997, p.1).

Thus, it is clear that women's education is able to help promote the fulfillment of individual aspirations and also helps in national development. As a notably vulnerable section of Indian society, for the tribal women in general and Oraon women in particular, holistic education and literacy remains a tool and condition for the true emancipation of their personhood as individuals and as a community. Research studies have been inadequate because they have used a compartmentalized approach to literacy. Thus, Sahoo (2004) concludes, "the study of development oriented programs are fragmented in their approach and do not encompass the entire fabric of a human development system within which they live and survive" ( p.24).

In this regard, Satyasundaram (2004) points out that there is a need for new approaches to literacy among tribal women. Studies of tribal development should be "initiated on the basis of respect and understanding of tribal culture and traditions, besides appreciation of their social psychological and economic problems" (Satyasundaram, 2004, p. 37). Further, D'Souza (2003) argues that tribal education, as a process of empowerment, should be holistic in nature. Lack of research, or inadequate and insensitive research, ultimately leads to misunderstandings and inappropriate policies for them. Also an insensitive implementation of these policies affect women's lives adversely. Moreover, the minimalist definitions of literacy in terms of the mere ability to sign one's name for government record is unhelpful and unhealthy. Given the extent of illiteracy among Oraon tribal women, ineffective education policy and practice, inadequate understanding of literacy and practice,

poverty, exploitation and injustice, I believe a liberative model of education is both appropriate and needed.

Hence, my proposed research is an attempt to study the problem of illiteracy among the Oraon women in Jharkhand with the specific objective of understanding their life-experience in terms of dreams, aspirations, ideals, struggles and stories of survival as they relate to the issue of literacy and identity. My focus on literacy is for holistic development that will help understand the many-sided lives of Oraon women: Oraon Women as Tribal, Women and Tribal Women (identity).

### **Research Question**

Through my research question, I would like to seek a better understanding of the life experiences of Oraon tribal women in Jharkand State in India. Taking into consideration both, a specific research site and tribal group, my research question is: *‘What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India?’* I have chosen the life history methodology under the interpretive research paradigm with the belief that a life history methodology gives voice to life experience, particularly for those whose voices may be unheard or deliberately ignored or suppressed (Cole and Knowles, 2001). The Interpretive research paradigm helps researchers to immerse themselves in their study; it requires passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people (Janesick, 1998).

### **The Significance of Research on Tribal Women**

Interpretive research is “a systematic search for deep understanding of the ways in which persons subjectively experience (perceive, interpret, plan, act, feel, value, evaluate) the social world” (Haugren, 1989, p.41). The purpose of interpretive research is to provide insights, knowledge and understanding of the lived experience of the people or the group studied. This helps researchers or investigators to focus on areas that have not been researched or have not been researched in an exploratory manner (Marchant and Dupuy, 1996). This particular interpretive research study was conducted among six illiterate Oraon tribal women who willingly shared with me their life stories with love and passion. Their contribution to their society is priceless. Thus, it is my intention that this research will, first, contribute to the ongoing research knowledge of tribal people in India by seeking an in-depth understanding of the everyday lives of women. Second, it provides information about the Oraon tribe in Jharkhand State and offers a new direction for future research. Third, it will also help the Oraon tribal society to understand the potentially significant role of Oraon women in its struggle against illiteracy. Fourth, this project will provide a perspective only available to an insider of the culture of Oraon women. As an Oraon tribal woman researcher, the cultural world of Oraon women is more readily available to me than it is to an outsider, and that has enabled me to study the Oraon women on the basis of their own values. In this regard, my research has facilitated understanding of earlier conclusions and has enabled me to build upon them, thus enriching the information and understanding of the Oraon women. At the same time, however, as an educator and researcher, I have the necessary tools to remain objective in my efforts to lay bare the values and wisdom that

sustain their lives, and evaluate and analyze the findings thereby enhancing basic research knowledge. Fifth, this study helps record the voice of those who are on the margins of society and whose voices are not heard. Sixth, it is also intended to be a contribution towards making more appropriate government policies for tribal communities, with particular regard to the policy of literacy for Oraon women.

### **The Scope of the Study**

This research was conducted with the cooperation of six Oraon tribal women in the district of Ranchi in the state of Jharkhand, India. They shared their life stories which helped me understand the meaning of their lives. All six women are illiterate and have lived in village settings all of their lives. The objective of this study was to understand the lives of Oraon tribal women with as much depth and detail as possible. One way to approach this is through interpretive research, which aims to understand human experience in its uniqueness (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Van Manen, 1990) and the meaning individuals give to it. This study is intended to highlight the uniqueness of Oraon tribal women, who they are, their identity and all the forces that shape their lives. This information can be helpful in developing tribal education policy for both formal and non-formal education in Jharkhand, India and should also help tribal communities restore their language, culture and identity.

### **Research Location**

Malar is a typical tribal village of about 300 people situated about 20 kilometers North West of Ranchi City in the State of Jharkhand in North India. This village is connected with Ranchi City by Highway 23. The main village is located 2 kilometers away from the highway. The village is divided into many small clusters. This is an old

village. They have their own *Gram Panchayat* (village council) where *Mukhia* (village head) of the village runs the day-to-day affairs. The village secretary holds a special place in the village *Gram Panchayat*. The Oraon Priest called the *Pahan* still has an honorable place in the village. He is like an advisor to the *Gram Panchayat*.

In the 1930s my grandparents bought some farming land in this village and built a small house where they spent their retirement. At that time it was a very small village and everyone knew each other. Most of the people lived in the main village. Only 5 homes were next to the highway. I visited the village of Malar during the 70's and early 80s. Then it was very remote. The means of transportation were very limited. Only two buses went by this village and the time required to travel 20 kilometers seemed endless. As a little girl I recall sitting and waiting sometimes hours for the bus to arrive. The roads were very poor and during rainy seasons there was no guaranty of any bus going to the village. No electricity, no village market, no other facilities were available to the villagers.

Since then, there have been considerable changes in the village: a paved highway, the possibility of electricity, better means of transportation and communication. Some people have moved towards the highway and have built their homes nearby. Some have migrated from more remote villages into this area. There is a small tea shop run by a villager. The Lutheran Church in Ranchi has purchased land in this village next to the highway and built a Theological College and Multipurpose Training and Research Center there. There is a rice mill and a kiln nearby the village. The nearest police station is four kilometers away, and a post office two kilometers away. The nearest school is four kilometers away and a hospital six kilometers away.

There is a village health worker's office four kilometers away from the village and the nearest market is four kilometers away.

Ninety per cent of the people who live there are Oraon tribal people. The other 10 per cent are either lower caste Hindus or Muslims who have migrated for purposes of farming or business. This is a farming community and the main crop is rice. Over the past 10 years there have been important changes in local farming. Some of the farmers are no longer dependent upon one crop alone for their income but are working towards growing other cash crops. Electricity is not yet widely available in the village. There is a local road that goes to the main village, but at this point there is no public transportation available to and from the main village. People mostly walk or use bicycles or motorcycles to get to the village from the highway.

A few families from this village have migrated to cities for their livelihood. Almost 90 per cent of children are attending school. There is a free afterschool program run by Navin Doman Theological College and Multipurpose Training and Research Center. About 40 children who live in the neighborhood come regularly. Children from main village are unable to attend this program due to distance involved. There is an awareness among the people that education is beneficial and the government is encouraging parents to send their children to school. Most of the women and the elderly people of the village are illiterate. Those who are literate and are still in the village are engaged in farming while some are employed as teachers, bankers or government workers in neighboring towns of Ranchi city.

### **The Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the context, the interest of the researcher, the research problem, the research question, and the scope and significance of the research. Chapter 2 will discuss selected theoretical views on literacy, education, development, and liberation. Paulo Freire's educational theory and Indian government tribal policy will also be discussed. Chapter 3 will describe the qualitative research methodology, the life history method that was used to conduct the study, and the data that were collected and analyzed. Chapter 4 will be in two parts: the first part will provide the findings through a sharing of the life stories (profiles) of six illiterate Oraon women who were research participants; the second part will illustrate themes emerging from the life stories of these six women. Chapter 5 will discuss and analyze my findings in the themes based on literature concerning literacy for Oraon tribal women. Chapter 6 will present the findings of my research and also recommendation for future research and conclusion. At the end I will share my personal reflections on my research experience among Oraon tribal women.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE PRELIMINARY**

### **LITERATURE: LITERACY AND TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA**

The purpose of this literature review is to provide the research background and rationale for the study. This section will be guided by the research question, namely: *What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India?* The chapter will also discuss the adult education theory of Paulo Freire with particular reference to the empowerment of tribal women.

Tribal research has been an area of interest for researchers for a long time and has drawn many scholars of repute even in pre-independent India. Thus, John Campbell (1864), Edward Dalton (1872), Verrier Elwin (1939) and others studied tribal communities in India whose work provided the foundation for further research. They were followed by such Indian researchers as G. S. Ghureye (1958), S. C. Dube (1977), L. P. Vidyarthi (1964), and K.S. Singh (1982) who studied the tribal communities from an anthropological point of view. The first study of the Oraon tribe was undertaken by Lutheran missionaries who came to Ranchi, Jharkhand in 1845. Among the early missionaries, was Frederick Hahn who researched the Oraon language and prepared an Oraon grammar and dictionary in 1868 (Toppo, 1979). Though missionaries studied different aspects of the Oraon tribe, the most comprehensive research on the Oraon tribe was undertaken by S. C. Roy who, as a government official worked among the Oraons and Mundas (the other tribe in the Ranchi area) and published his seminal works titled *The Oraons* (1915) and *Oraon Religion and Customs* (1928). In recognition of his

pioneering work and substantial contribution to tribal studies, he is referred to as “the father of Indian Ethnology” (Bodra, 2008, p. 36).

Although there are large number of studies of the tribes of India, there are very few focused on tribal women (Singh, Jabbi, & Rajyalakshmi, 1996) and still fewer on tribal women and literacy. In this situation, a review of literature covering some of the important aspects of the tribal life in general and Oraon community living in particular would be helpful both for the understanding of the overall condition of the tribal people as well as for situating the research question regarding literacy and the identity of Oraon women.

### **Literacy/Education**

A new interest in tribal community was awakened in Independent India because, among other things, many tribal communities were given special constitutional status known as the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Indian Constitution which grants them privileges on the basis of positive discrimination. Their overall economic backwardness, long isolation from the dominant community and the need for national integration became the basis for the special status in the Constitution. Many of the studies of tribal society, since undertaken, have focused on the theme of education and illiteracy because literacy for researchers, in one way or the other, is seen as an effective tool for development (Mahapatra, 1994; Mukhopadhyay 2002; Panda, 2006), empowerment (Ambhast 1996; Bodra, 2008; Mullick, 2004), national integration (Joshee, 2003 ; Poddar, 2006) and employment (Bodra, 2008; Kailash, 1993). Moreover, in light of the 93<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act in 2001, education is now a

fundamental right of all children between 6 and 14 years of age (Roy, 2005). As a result there is a renewed focus on education and literacy.

Studies of the tribal document shows high drop-outs rates, low levels of learning achievement, low participation of girls in education, and low adult literacy rates among women (Bhargava 1989; Mohanti & Biswal 2009; Sahoo & Das, 2006). The low percentage of formal education among the tribal populations of India has been a continuing concern for scholars, planners and as well as for government and non-governmental agencies. For many researchers such as Ekka (2002); Singh and Nayak (1997) and Roy (2005), the low literacy rate among tribal people is a direct result of failed educational policy. Toppo (2000) identifies three interrelated factors contributing to the failure of education among the tribal communities, first, socio-economic factors, second, psychological factors, and third, institutional factors. Among the socio-economic factors are such issues as older children taking care of the younger ones and children helping in domestic work in order to supplement the family income. Psychological factors include the apathetic or indifferent attitude of many parents towards the education of their children because they think that education is not related to their immediate needs and interests and suspicion towards non-tribal people who organize and run educational institutions. Such institutional factors as the lack of instruction in the children's mother tongue, the distance of school from home, the inadequacy of schools and teachers, and the lack of tribal teachers all contribute to the failure of education among the tribal communities. Ekka (2002), while confirming these findings, underlines two significant causes of failure of education among the tribal community in Jharkhand. First, the medium of education is not in their own tribal

language. Instead it is either in Hindi or English. Second, poor government administration, corruption, insufficient funds and out-dated schemes and programs also contribute to the failure of education among tribals. Mohanty and Biswal (2009) and Pradhan (2006) also found mediums of instruction other than the mother tongue to be a factor in the rate of drop-outs from school. Related to this cultural aspect of the problem were the findings of Ambasht (1970) four decades ago whose study in the Ranchi district also revealed that the tribal students' lack of rapport with non-tribal teachers contributed to student drop outs. The tribal students did not have rapport with teachers who did not know the tribal language. Though this is very old research, it is worthy of mention for two reasons: first, it illustrates the fact that the use or non-use of the student's mother tongue has been an important factor in the educational activities of the tribes for a very long time and secondly, it is one of the very few published studies on the Ranchi district.

In any discussion of tribal education the efforts of Christian missionaries are also mentioned by the researchers and scholars. The Christian mission in the North Eastern states is given credit for the spread of education among the tribal population. As a result of their work, the states of Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland have higher literacy rate than the national average (Kujur, 2005; Mitra & Singh, 2008; Nambissan, 2000). The Christian missionaries also undertook educational development for the tribal people in Jharkhand (Kujur, 2005; Toppo, 1979). In the context of Jharkhand, however, the missionaries did not use tribal mother tongue as the medium of instruction in church schools, though missionaries in Jharkhand developed dictionaries and

grammar of the tribal language (Kujur, 2005; Ekka, 2007) that helped to preserve the tribal languages of Jharkhand.

Roy (2005) is very critical of the interventionist approach that the government of India has pursued with regard to tribal development. In his book *Tribes* he examined the extent of education among tribal people of North Bengal. His qualitative research included education among Oraon women. For him nearly six decades of planned development for tribal people by the government has only “succeeded in a process of reinforcing class differentiation within the tribal communities” and has contributed to developing an upper “cream layer” while “the average tribal populations cohabit with poverty, illiteracy and malnutrition and experience loss of cultural identity, cultural rights, and live without an effective voice to decide their course of development” (Roy, 2005, p. 136). The cream layer he refers to is a tiny minority among the tribal people who have benefited from the educational opportunities provided and found employment enabling them to live a life of comfort, material success and freedom. However, in the process of being educated they suffered the loss of their tribal culture (Toppo, 1979).

One of Roy’s major findings is that the existing education system, curricula and language policy have been framed to cater to the needs of the dominant communities which, instead of helping the tribals, create a sense of alienation among them ( Roy, 2005). Thus, in the context of the present primary education system in India “a tribal child remains in a physically, culturally, linguistically and psychologically disadvantaged position” (Behura, 2002, p. 324). Patel (2002) evaluated education among tribals from a human rights point of view and found that tribals are not only lagging behind in formal education but also in civil education, due to which, their

awareness level in the field of their constitutional duties and human rights lag far behind the people in mainstream culture. He concluded that being aware of their constitutional rights may help them against exploitation (Patel, 2002).

In her study of the Oraon tribe, Sita Toppo's book *Dynamics of Educational Development in Tribal India* (1979) shows that while education has helped the Oraon community in terms of employment, residence in the towns, a comfortable life and material possessions, it has also resulted in cultural deterioration. Educated tribals bereft of their culture form an elite group within the tribal community. Though very small in number they enjoy most of the privileges given to the tribal community (Behura, 2002). But for a vast majority of the tribal people, literacy is still a distant dream. Thus, Pradhan (2004) concludes that "despite constitutional provisions and many special plans, projects, schemes and programs launched by the government for educational development of scheduled tribes, no significant progress is observed in this sphere even today" (Pradhan 2004, p. 149).

The "welfare" mind-set of the educational planners and practitioners seems to be one of the reasons for ineffective tribal education. For Singh and Nayak (1997) education did not attain its desired result because it is based on these "welfare considerations" (p. 12). The welfare approach was the result of the government being under heavy moral pressure and constitutional obligation to undertake tribal development (Mallick, 2004). This was undertaken without the participation of the people concerned. A sense of superiority on the part of dominant community also contributed to this result.

### **The Education of Tribal women**

The literacy rate among the tribal population is low and that of tribal women is still lower. In 1991, tribal women had a literacy rate of 15% compared to 33% among the tribal men (Singh, Jabbi & Rajyalakshmi, 1996). According to the 2001 census, literacy improved to a tribal male literacy rate of 54.16% whereas tribal female literacy was 34.8% (Pant, 2010). Roy (2005) studied the gender disparity in tribal education. He found that literacy rate among tribal women is increasing relatively slowly. He cites the evidence of a continuing gender gap between tribal men and tribal women as the Census Report of India for 1961-2001. This gap was about 10.5 percent in 1961 but in 1991 the gap widened to 16 percent and overall it rises to 18 percent in rural India. For Roy (2005), the gap in rural India is significant because the majority of the tribal women reside in villages. Manna (2000) studied the nature of literacy levels among six tribal communities especially women in the three states of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. Her findings confirm the lowest literacy rate to be among tribal women. Four important causes, she concluded, for their illiteracy are: ignorant parents, poor economy, less emphasis on women's education and inadequacy of schools. Causes of drop outs in these communities were poor economic condition, lack of cooperation from the non-tribal students in helping tribal students and involvement in domestic work preventing tribal girls from attending school.

### **Socio Economic Development**

Studies of tribal education consider the socio-economic and cultural background of the family as important variables affecting education (Sujatha, 1996). Though extensive literature on the evaluation of tribal development schemes and projects in

India (Panda, 2006) is yet to be developed, many studies have focused on different aspects of tribal development. There are glimpse of the status of tribal community to be seen in various tribes and states, including the status of Oraon women and their community. Panda (2006) describes reasons for the need of tribal development: “their primitive way of life; economic and social backwardness; a low level of literacy; the absence of a value system and the lack of infrastructure” (p. 42).

The many development initiatives of the government over the years have been classified into three groups (Roy-Burman, 1989). First, protective measures which relate to constitutional safeguards and regulations restricting and regulating the alienation of tribal from resources, particularly land. Second, mobilization efforts including affirmative action in terms of reservation or quotas in academic institutions, services, and legislative quotas. Third, were developmental initiatives relating to a large number of programs covering social services, health, education, and the economy.

Mallick (2004) studied tribal development in West Bengal in terms of educational development initiatives, health care benefits, agricultural incentive programs, poverty eradication initiatives. Unfortunately, his findings indicated that the tribal population remained poor and undeveloped despite government efforts. Panda (2006) undertook a study of tribal development in Orissa state in which, he evaluated the many government five year plans from the perspective of tribal development. The study showed the impact of many welfare programs in the sector of education, agriculture and the economy and concluded that the tribal development program had failed to achieve their objectives. Verma (1996) studied tribal welfare programs in education, economic development, health, housing, and integrated projects included in

tribal sub-planning ventures and found ineffectiveness in all of these programs. Satnarayana (1990) studied government development projects for tribal people, although he found that there had been some improvement still, the result had been less than expected. Many agencies, including: government, Non-Governmental Organizations, religious and social groups, continue to make great efforts towards tribal improvement and development.

A considerable amount of resources in terms of time, energy, money have been spent on countless projects, research, publications, seminars, workshop, etc. Still, after six decades of India's independence, in many contexts in India including research and scholarship, the word "tribe" gives rise to images of undeveloped, poor and marginalized people. The tribal community in India is generally regarded as being backward, undeveloped and poor, based on the three most important indicators of development, namely: health, education and income (Singh and Rajyalakshmi, 1993). Even to scholars, the word "tribe" sometimes suggests backwardness and illiteracy for example Behura, (1996). More and more studies illustrate the lack of success of government developmental programs. A large number of developmental programs for education, health, irrigation, horticulture seldom met even 30% of their objectives (Panda, 2006).

Many studies have been conducted to describe and evaluate the nature, content and implementation of governmental developmental projects, policies and programs. The result of tribal development is disappointing as is evident in the conclusion of Rath (2006) who says that "the mainstream development model has limited impact on the

people living at the periphery, specifically for the tribes” (p.57). Kujur (2005) also questions the appropriateness of the development model. He attributes the failure of tribal development to the “import of the western model of development which was based on the exploitation of natural resources in colonies abroad and labor at home which finally led to the internal colonization of the tribal people” (Kujur, 2005, p. 51). Moreover, Government machinery was structurally not suited nor psychologically oriented towards weaker sections (Mallick, 2004). In addition, rampant corruption in different departments responsible for the implementation of developmental programs was highlighted as a reason for failure (Ekka, 2002; Panda 2006). Ekka (1996) cites corruption to be a major reason for the backwardness of Jharkhand. Due to corrupt bureaucracy and decaying polity, corruption entrenched in such departments as education, health, and agriculture (Ekka, 1996) has precluded any genuine implementation of the well-meaning programs and projects of the government. As a result, the people who have suffered the most are the tribals, including the Oraon tribal people.

In the context of Jharkhand, the disappointments due to a general failure of the development programs momentarily gave way to some hope among the Oraon people and other tribal people in Jharkhand when the long awaited aspirations of the tribal people of that region were seemingly being fulfilled as a new state was carved out of Bihar State in 2000. However, it soon became clear that the development of the tribal people of Jharkhand, including the Oraons, would be a matter of lip service for political leaders and a fertile avenue for corruption for government officials, contractors, middlemen and political leaders. Kujur (2005) draws the conclusion that the

“government developmental policies, instead of safeguarding the territorial identity of the tribals, have only facilitated an acceleration of its disintegration” in terms of a “rampant exploitation of land, water, forest and environment for commercial purposes of which tribals are no beneficiaries” (pp.47-48). In fact, contrary to the spirit of Constitutional safeguards for the tribals, the free modern state India raced to develop infrastructure and the massive industries and factories which the first prime minister of India, Nehru, called “Temples of Modern India” were in reality, in the words of Mahapatra “juggernauts of mass displacement of tribal people” (Mahapatra, 1994, p.38). Mahapatra’s (1994) scathing remarks remind that the great human tragedy in this is: “... that the state, which has been called upon by the Constitution to protect the tribal people from exploitation and discrimination, is itself the deliberate exploiter with a resoluteness, firmness and coerciveness, of which only a modern state is capable!” (p. 39). A quick glance at the data bears out this fact in Jharkhand. Ekka and Asif (2000) studied the issue of displacement in Jharkhand and found that 41.27 % of the tribals were displaced for different government projects such as water resources, industries, mining, defense establishments, and wild-life national parks. The national picture is no better in this regard. Though the tribal people are only 8.08 % of the population of the country, they account for more than 40 % of the displaced and project affected people (Fernandes, 2006). This painful irony can hardly be overlooked. On the one hand, the tribals are given special privileges for the sake of their development (such as protection of their land, culture and identity) but, on the other hand, in the name of national development, a large number of tribal people were displaced threatening their very survival. Once they lose their land they lose their ability to feed their family. Also they

lose their identity. It is understandable that women bear the brunt of such pain because they care for their family, they fetch the water and the firewood. Thus, Mukhopadhyay (2002) concludes that modern economic development has caused additional burdens for tribal women.

### **Health**

The health status of the tribals is both lower and inferior to that of the general population. Studies by Basu (1993) and Singh & Jaysawal (1996) indicated a higher infant mortality rate; higher fertility rates and greater malnourishment among tribals. Sahay (1996) and Singh (1991) studied the socio-economic and demographic correlation of the health situation of the tribal communities in India and found a lack of knowledge about preventive health care. These studies also reported that the very low health and nutritional levels among them were related to poverty, illiteracy and ruralness. Basu (1993) also found lower life expectancy among the tribals than the national average and a higher incidence of Sickle Cell disease and Glucose to Phosphate Enzyme Deficiency among some tribal groups. Singh, Jabbi and Rajyalakshmi (1996) found widespread ignorance and misconceptions about health issues in general. This may be due to their belief that sickness is caused by hostile spirits or by the breach of some taboo (Singh & Jaysawal, 1996; Verma, 1996).

Singh and Jaysawal, (1996) conducted their study in Jharkhand area and found that less than 8% tribal children were immunized; 2/3 of the children were malnourished; 44% of the children had severe malnutrition; the use of tobacco and alcohol was very high and that there was less awareness regarding matters of personal hygiene. They also found many misconceptions in the area of health knowledge in

general. For example, most tribal people believed that cancer was contagious; hospitals are only for emergency; insanity is caused by evil spirits; birth-control measures cause impotency; ignorance about supplementary food for the children. Further, their study revealed inadequate knowledge regarding the immunization of children, the benefit of breast feeding, the consequences of not boiling water, not drinking milk, and not eating fish or meat, not using birth control, not taking baths daily. These findings are further confirmed by Jain (1998). Mahapatra's study (2005) showed that the situation of tribal population is even worse than that of the Scheduled Caste (another backward community of India) population in terms of health care. Thus, Padhy and Mitra's (2010) study among the tribal people in Orissa and their findings that in tribal community "the most hopeless area is tribal health and nutrition" (p.199) is generally true nationally.

### **Integration to the Mainstream**

The whole thrust of development after independence was to integrate the tribes into the nation's mainstream population (Bhowmick, 2001; N. Ray an introduction in K S Singh, 1972). Isolation in remote areas was the characteristic of the tribal communities which provided the basis for the national integration program. While tracing the historical processes of the tribal development initiatives, Rath (2006) draws out the commonality and differences between Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India and, Elwin, the foremost name in the pioneering studies of Indian tribes. Nehru and Elwin are two seminal figures in the debate concerning the development of the tribes because both were instrumental in shaping the national policy towards tribal communities in India. Nehru's emphasis on national integration became the hallmark

of the government's tribal policy while Elwin's desire for isolation has been ratified, underlining one of the paradoxes of history as the "tribes themselves claim their isolation in terms of socio-cultural identity and political sovereignty" (Rath, 2006, p. 89). According to the desire of the first prime minister of the country, national integration acquired the status of hallmark for all the developmental programs for the tribal communities (Verma, 1996). This policy seeks to bring scheduled tribes into the main stream of society through a multi-pronged approach without disturbing their distinct cultures (Rao, 2006). Special privileges granted to the tribal people in the constitution were for their national integration which, in the words of Verma (1996), "visualised a policy of progressive acculturation of the tribal communities" (p. 35). Joshi (1998) also underlines integration as the basic assumption of all tribal policies and programs. However, such attempts at integration in terms of assimilation actually worked against the interests of the tribal communities. Thus, Pathy's (2005) study referred to that policy as: "the national cultural policy of assimilation that has devastated tribal cultures, languages, and their collectivities" (p. 42).

In order to achieve a national integration of the tribes the economic development was determined to be its most important aspect. Accordingly, tribal education was emphasized so that tribal people would have fuller access to employment; such affirmative policies as reservation or quotas in higher education and technical education and job reservation were adopted so that the educated tribal people would not have to compete, unaided with the educated people of the dominant communities. An overwhelming percentage of all the developmental programs implemented by such local administrative bodies as blocks and districts were geared towards making the situation

of tribal people economically sound. This is a non-tribal concept of well-being which is “constructed by technologically driven economic progress” (Sah and Sisodia 2004, p. 34). The extent of these government initiatives and efforts are to be seen for example, in the study of tribal development in Maharashtra (one of the Indian states) by Kokate and Solunke (2011). They found out from the report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India of 2008 that during the last thirty years the Maharashtra government has spent an average of 13 lakhs rupees (about \$28,000) on each tribal family through its tribal development program and yet they found virtually no tangible change in the condition of the tribal community in that state.

### **Gender and the Empowerment of Tribal Women**

In spite of the lowest literacy rate among the tribal women in India, their social status is comparatively better than that of the women of the dominant community. The tribal communities are generally egalitarian and hence women-folk enjoy a relatively higher social position than do women in the hierarchical dominant Indian society (Fernandes, 2006; Maharatna, 2005; Mukhopadyay, 2002 and Rao, 2006 ). The reality of participation in economical activity, freedom in marriage, decision-making power in the family, widow marriage, bride price, freedom to venture out of the bounds of home, and liberty to choose husbands indicate the relatively good status tribal women hold in their society. Although this observation is largely true, it is also the case that, such a desirable phenomenon, ironically, leads many social scientists to “rarely focus on the gender issue on the assumption that tribal societies are free from gender inequality” (Nongbri, 2003, p. 46). As a result, the gender inequality that does exist mostly remains unnoticed and unexplored. However, Kelker & Nathan (1991) and Nongbri (2003)

have shown by their research the actual subjugation of tribal women in their society. Many areas of discrimination include property inheritance, discrimination in religious leadership, lower wages, witch hunting, prohibition to plough, etc. (Sinha, 2005). In fact, this subjugation is to be understood in terms of discrimination against a tribal woman at three levels. First, she is discriminated against by the dominant society because she is a tribal person; second, by the patriarchy of Indian society because she is a woman and third, by the patriarchy of the tribal community to which she belongs. Thus, the gender issue is of significant importance in the discussion of Oraon women vis-a-vis their education and identity.

In the context of tribal development, Xaxa's (2004) study underlines a shift in the image of tribal women due to the change in the value system of the larger society. In the post-independence era, the tribal society has experienced changes that have impacted women's lives. The economic burden and workload of tribal women as well as their access to education, food and nutrition, modern occupations and political participation, especially in the modern context, have not been given the kind of attention they deserve. In changing tribal society, Xaxa (2004) notes two directions of change, one, from tribe to caste, which implies tribal absorption into Hindu society, second, a tribal society's move towards Christianization. He observes that Christianity seems to have given tribal women their legitimate place as they are allowed to sit side-by-side with men in worship. Hinduism's influence, according to him, includes early marriage, tribal women tending to withdraw from outdoor work in agriculture and allied activities. However, Xaxa (2004) concludes that Christianity and Hinduism have both

led to a number of restrictions on the kinds of freedom that tribal women traditionally enjoyed.

The gender debate is fundamentally tied in with the question of the empowerment of women. Besides the important gender equation, the idea of empowerment is drawn from the context of human rights, which includes property rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill formation and dignified social existence (Barik, Kumar & Sarode, 2010). Keeping gender issues as an important part of the equation, Banu (2001) argues that empowerment should not only be political but multi-dimensional, it should be observed in all walks of life, including the domain of gender relations. She further notes the movement of tribal communities from hunting stage to settled farming way of life to be the reason for gender discrimination in tribal community. During their life as hunting and food gathering people women safeguarded the house and prepared food and at this time there was no gender discrimination. Later when some tribes moved from hills to plains and agriculture became one of their main occupations/livelihoods discrimination emerged on a smaller scale. Her findings underline Hinduism as the reason for gender discrimination in tribal society. For her, the bride price which is a positive aspect of tribal women suggesting as it does, their value (Maharath, 2005 and Mukhopadhyay, 2002) is, in fact, a sign of lower status because it refers to the commoditization of women (Banu, 2001).

A new sense of empowerment is being envisioned in terms of the constitutional provision of Panchayati Raj of the Seventy-Third Constitutional Amendment Act which

provides that one third of the seats in the local government of village, block and district be reserved for women. It would have a great impact on society in terms of the empowerment of women as it would be for the first time in the history of India that women will have been given a reserved place of power at the grass-root level of a democratic institution (Banu, 2001).

However, Chauhan (2003) in her study has shown that in the cases where tribal women are dependent on their husbands for support and assistance in panchayat work, it is mainly due to women's lack of awareness and experience, and less because of social norms. She used interpretative methodology in which observation was the main method. She had three focus points as she conducted this research. First, the tribal women must be looked at as *tribal*. Thus, she is a part and parcel of the tribal community that has suffered much. Second, the tribal women must be seen as *women* and not just 'tribal' (Chauhan, 2003). This is because they have always been deprived of power and decision-making positions, as well as control over natural resources. Third, tribal women are tribal as well as women; they are *tribal women*. Chauhan (2003) emphasizes the need to look at their situation from a holistic perspective without losing the gender dimension. It is not helpful according to Chauhan (2003), that in many studies women are clubbed with tribals or simply as 'women'. She found that, first, to a large extent, women are dependent on the support of their husband or other family members. Second, only a certain section of the tribal society or influential families dominate the election process and/or hold government power. Third, the reservation of seats for women in *panchayats* is the best way to ensure their political participation.

## Identity

Identity is at the core of any discussion of a tribal community. It is true that the issue of identity is a very complex phenomenon which warrants a comprehensive treatment. However, for my purpose of studying tribal identity in the context of literacy the discussion will be restricted to the cultural identity of the Oraon Tribal community. As indicated earlier, the Oraon community has been legitimately recognized as a community with special distinction, with its own rich heritage of socio-religious customs and traditions, rites and rituals, political and social structures, language and symbols, songs and dances, world view and value system. This is what affords the Oraon community a distinct identity which the government of India has recognized and for which it has provided a constitutional status known as the fifth schedule of the Constitution for special privileges (Dash and Pati, 2002). In its consideration the government also took account of the Oraon community's relative isolation from the main-stream population and general economic backwardness compared to other communities of India. In many studies, the identity of the Oraon people is not discussed but it is always assumed. The studies of Bodra (2008), Pandey (2005) and Sinha (2005) evidence this assumption. S. C. Roy was the first scholar to undertake a comprehensive ethnographical research of the Oraons. He published his book "The Oroan" in 1915 and "Oraon Religion and Customs" in 1928 which became an authority and standard for all researches to follow. The cultural traits of the Oraon people are also a source of their history and the unique ways they have for keeping the memory of important milestones of their community history alive. Campion (1980) studied their songs, ceremonies, feasts, etc. highlighting them as important sources of their identity

as a distinct people. Other studies of the Oraon cultural identity include Dhan (1967), Ghosh (2006), Kujur (1989) and Tirkey (1989).

However, for Xaxa (2008) tribal values have been studied in relation to the values of either the Enlightenment or the dominant society. His conclusion that hardly any attempt has been made to study them in terms of the values prevalent in tribal society shows a serious gap in tribal research. This further shows the need for research by cultural insiders. Accordingly, the question of the identity of the tribe must be taken into account in any legitimately holistic approach to tribal literacy.

Different from popular understanding, Fernandes and Barbora (2002) recognizes the question of identity as more than song and dance. He defends cultural values whose external expressions may change while their core remains sacred. Thus, he speaks of culture as “a system based on the values of equity, renewability of the natural resources and respect for the whole community past, present and future. This value system is the core of their identity” (Fernandes & Barbora, 2002, p. 11). His correlation of identity as basic to the survival of a community is important for understanding Oraon women and their emancipation.

In the discussion of cultural identity the model of education remains central. Education as a vehicle of change in culture (Shah, 2005) has been assessed as to its positive and negative impact on cultural identity. The question of tribal language as the medium of instruction for tribal people relates to the core of the question of identity. In this regard, the educational policy of the government has failed to implement its own objective of educating tribal people in their own mother tongue. In the case of the

Oraon people, the decision was taken in 1951 by the government of Bihar (Minz, 2007 ) but even after six decades it is yet to be implemented. This has been criticized by such tribal scholars as Ekka (2000), Kujur (2005) and Minz (2007) because it has led to an alienation of the people from their language, especially among the educated Oraon tribal people. That linguistic alienation has inevitably resulted in a significant erosion of their cultural identity. The correlation between education in the dominant language of the country rather than in the tribal language and cultural loss among Oraon people was established by the studies of Toppo (1979). Lakra (1999) also studied the processes of change in the Oraon society in the urban setting. He focused on the degree to which Oraons who migrated to the cities had been able to preserve their tradition and culture and were able to distinguish themselves as a separate group. This was an important study because, by Lakra's own acknowledgement, his study had "bearing on the more basic issue of tribal identity" (Lakra, 1999, p. xii). His study observed that in this process of change, Oraons were not able to organize the rituals and festivals around the agricultural life style in the same way they had been able to do so while living in an agricultural society. As a result their cultural vitality was being eroded. The study further revealed that many external characteristics disappeared or were modified. It is clear that the present model of education and modernization has impacted the Oraon identity negatively. As an Oraon himself, Lakra's desire for tribal identity is evidenced in his statement, "theoretically tribal identity and solidarity can outlive time and change, but preserving at least some external signs ... is necessary to make Oraons a living community" (Lakra, 1999, p. 222).

In the context of globalization, modernization and the increasing influence of the dominant community of India deliberately maintaining a concern awareness of Oraon identity is important. In fact, identity was a major theme in many of the tribal protest movements against British rule. The theme of identity remained a major concern in tribal movements and protests after the independence, for example the movement for a separate state that resulted in creation of Jharkhand state in year 2000. Nongbri (2003) also underlined the concern for identity that distinguished tribal movements. This clearly indicates the tribal community's deep desire to safeguard their identity. Still, after all these years the tribal people of India, including the Oraon people, find themselves in a difficult situation as far as their cultural identity is concerned. Nongbri (2003) articulated this difficulty: "the policy of protective discrimination enshrined in the Indian Constitution has sharpened ethnic distinction" but "on the other hand, the twin process of development and modernization combined posed serious threat to the identity of marginal group" (p. 37). Thus, in the discussion of literacy among Oraon women the question of identity is relevant and unavoidable.

### **Migration**

Another aspect of tribal people that affects tribal women is migration. It is a part of this study as two of the six women who participated in this research had migrated temporarily. The Oraon women's migration to Delhi, India's capital city, for mostly domestic work was studied by Kujur and Jha (2008). They found that 44.03 % were Oraon women; 94.20 % of total migrants were school drop-outs or without any formal education; 95.15 % migrated to earn a living and support their families; decline in agriculture work leading to severe unemployment was an important factor for

migration; low wages were paid in the place of their origin; their alienation affected social and cultural deterioration; low wages and long hours of work, mostly 10 hours per day; work environment not conducive; problems in getting married in the place of origin due to the stigma attached to menial work. Thus, migration, instead of solving the problems of Oraon women, in fact, compounded them.

Toppo (2007) also studied the migration of Oraon tribal people. His study revealed that poverty, and insufficient income from the land as the reason for their migration to brick kilns in neighboring states, and to many cities in the North. This migration also included their seeking employment as domestic help (maid servant). Toppo (2007) makes an important point when he argues that the destruction of tribal economy, polity and culture by land alienation led to a pauperization of the Oraon tribal community and against this backdrop they were forced to migrate as cheap and unskilled labor.

It is clear from the preceding literature review that the tribal communities in India experience marginalization and suffering. The developmental work undertaken both by the governmental and the non-governmental agencies has not produced the desired result and, as a consequence, the tribal populations in India continue to remain impoverished. Education, the key index of development, also remains out of reach to most of them. In the following section, I would discuss the educational theory of Paulo Freire with a view to underlining the importance of dialogical education in the context of the tribal people in India.

## **PAULO FREIRE: The Contribution of Adult Education Theory and the Empowerment of the Poor**

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born on 19 September 1921 into a comfortable, middle class family in the North-Eastern town of Recife in Brazil. His parents, Joaquim Temistocles Freire and Edeltrudes Neves Freire initiated him in the reading of the word. He used to write words and sentences from his life experiences on the ground under the shade of a mango tree with twigs from that mango tree (Taylor, 1993). When he was ten his family moved to Jabortao, which was about eleven miles from Recife, due to the economic hardships caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s. In one of the notes Nita Freire (Paulo's second wife) speaks of how it was in Jabortao that Freire encountered working class families as he played soccer with children of poorer background and while swimming in the Jabortao river watched "women hunched over rocks washing and scrubbing their families' laundry and that of better off families as well" (Freire, 1994, p. 4).

After school, Freire enrolled at the University of Recife as a law student but became increasingly interested in educational and philosophical questions (Roberts, 2010). In his twenties he married Elza Oliviera, a primary school teacher. Upon finishing his university education, Freire worked for Social Service of Industry where he began to formulate his pedagogical ideas while working with poor adults. His success in an adult literacy program in the early 1960s led to his appointment as the director of the Cultural Extension Service at the University of Recife and later he became the director of Brazil's national literacy program.

In 1964, the government was toppled by a military coup and Freire was arrested and later exiled. He spent the next several years mostly in Chile where he became involved with the Chilean Agrarian Reform Corporation. He returned to Brazil in 1980 and later served as the secretary of education for the Sao Paulo Municipal Bureau of Education. Freire was invited to various countries to help with the development of their literacy programs, namely: Nicaragua, Cuba, Portugal, Angola, Tanzania and Guinea-Bissau (Purcell-Gate and Waterman, 2000, p. 11). His effective literacy initiatives led him to work with UNESCO on its adult education program, to Harvard's Graduate School of Education as a Consultant and also to serve as the Special Consultant to the Office of Education of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. He published his most well-known book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 and many books, articles and essays followed. Many of them were an elaboration and development of the ideas and concepts introduced in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

As an educational theorist Paulo Freire provides a theoretical framework for my critical reflection on the concept of education and literacy in the developing world context. Though Freire is a Brazilian educator he is relevant for the context in India for the following reasons: First, Freire's context is quite similar to the context of tribal India, a context of poverty and the exploitation of the poor and the marginalized. Second, his focus on education for liberation is relevant for the tribal people of India in the context of their own struggle for emancipation, especially for that of the Oraon tribal women. Third, his pedagogy of the oppressed provides Oraon women with a critical perspective from which to understand and analyze the educational system in their world. Fourth, Freire's effective adult education method provides new hope and

possibilities for promoting literacy among Oraon women. Fifth, his emphasis on community affirms the Oraon community's emphasis on community living and participation. Sixth, as an educator and education administrator, his initiatives for education as liberation are helpful also to those responsible for developing adult education policy as they also are for practitioners of education among Oraon women. Moreover, it is not merely his radical theory that has influenced me, but rather what McLaren (1994) says about Freire's work, namely: that it "constitutes an important contribution to critical pedagogy, not simply because of its theoretical refinement, but because of Freire's success at putting theory into practice" (pp. 198-199).

Above all, what Freire says about the experience of people, whom, in his context he calls 'oppressed', provides a basis for the relevance and applicability of his pedagogy. In Freire's thinking, people's experience, especially that of the oppressed "served as a basis for interrogating the ideological dimensions of subjectivity and identity" (McLaren 2000, p. 154). And hence, Freire profoundly honored the experience of the oppressed and marginalized:

It's impossible to talk of respect for students for the dignity that is in the process of coming to be, for the identities that are in the process of construction, without taking into consideration the conditions in which they are living and the importance of the knowledge derived from the life experience, which they bring with them to school. I can in no way underestimate such knowledge. Or what is worse, ridicule it. (Freire, 1998, p. 62).

Nonetheless, one of the challenges in appropriating Freire's theoretical insights for a different context is "not to use him as an instrument of cultural invasion" (Mayo, 2004, p. 103), but heed to Freire himself who seeks continuing reinvention with a view to the contextualization of his educational philosophy. Instead of prescribing ready-

made solutions, Freire allowed the context to determine the meaning of his ideas and emphasis. For a different situation, he stated, “I have to be reinvented and recreated according to the demands – pedagogical and political demands – of specific situation” (Freire, 1997, p. 309). He privileges the context when he states that “reading the text must be preceded by the reading of the context” (Freire, 1995, p. 62). With the real possibility of continues contextualization Freire has been authentically appropriated in many different contexts (Kiwia, 1998; Mayo, 2004 & Murrel ,1997). Purcell-Gates and Waterman (2000) and others also speak of such examples in different contexts.

It was Freire who, in the early 1970s, redefined the concept of education that was aimed at liberation from oppressive structures and social change. As a philosopher of education, Freire’s critical pedagogy revolutionized the theory and practice of education worldwide. For his profound impact in the field of education in many diverse contexts he is considered ‘the Rousseau of the 20th century’ (Bhattacharya, 2010). I will discuss the following aspects of Freire’s educational theory which are of particular significance for the purpose in this project: dialogical education, literacy and humanization, praxis, conscientization, and Freire’s insistence on educational activity to be situated in lived experience and identity

### **Banking versus Dialogical Education**

While working as an educator in Brazil, Freire experienced the widespread illiteracy as well as the massive poverty and suffering among the masses. A large number of people were dominated and oppressed and as a result, they were unable to live a life of dignity and freedom. As an educator in such a situation, he realized that one of the fundamental reasons for such human misery is the prevalent education

system which, he called banking type education. He argued that “banking education” reinforces oppression and marginalization (Freire, 1970). For Freire, education is never neutral because “it is an action either for the domestication of people or for their liberation” (1985, p. 99). Thus, he proposed a pedagogy that aims at the liberation of oppressed, suffering people. Thus, it is clear that Freire’s starting point for a different paradigm of education is the reality of suffering and marginalized humanity.

In his most celebrated book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire denounced traditional education as “banking education” because it ultimately “serves the interests of oppression” (p. 51). As such, he proposed to do away with this approach in education completely. Instead of promoting creativity and freedom among learners, Freire found that banking education is an act of deposition, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communication with the students, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat (Freire, 1970, 1993). The implication of a banking system of education, for Freire, is not just that the student is only a recipient but, more importantly, in this situation, the teacher is the *subject* and the learner is merely an *object*. For him, only as *subject* is the student an integrated person while student and as *object* is merely an adaptive person (Freire, 1976). As an integrated person as *subject* is endowed with the ability to create and reform reality around him while as merely an adaptive person he is a victim of changes imposed upon him from outside.

In contrast to the transfer of information according to a banking education, dialogical education engages both learners and teachers in critical reflection upon their

world. In place of hierarchical teaching between students and teachers, Freire argues for dialogue between them; in place of active teachers and passive students he proposes a situation where in both teachers and students are active and engaged in the learning process; in place of memorization by the students, he argues for mutual critical investigation. In fact, it is a dialogue among participants of learning (McLaren and Leonard, 1993). Gadotti explains that for Freire dialogue is not just the encounter of two subjects looking for knowledge but it is “an encounter which takes place in praxis - in action and reflection – in political engagement, in the pledge for social transformation” (1996, p. xi). Freire’s fundamental supposition is that oppressed people suffer injustice which is reinforced by traditional education. Hence he proposes a dialogical education for their liberation, according to which oppressed people are given responsibility for seeking justice and liberation. One important way of seeking justice and liberation is asking questions about their situation. Thus, by using problem-posing educational activity dialogical education helps to develop people’s critical consciousness regarding their surroundings and the structures of injustice. In the course of such dialogical education “the oppressed develop the power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world” (Freire, 1970, p. 56). Freire believed that traditional education enables people only to adapt to their reality rather than to achieve integration with their context (Freire 1973). As we have seen earlier, as an adaptive person a student is devoid of the capacity to be an agent for social change.

In Freire’s proposed system of education the hierarchy between teacher and student is eradicated. Instead of teachers being subject and students being objects, through dialogue they become teacher-students and student-teachers jointly responsible

and committed to learning and growing. The students are no longer passive recipients of information, rather, they are critical co-investigators in dialogue with teachers. Thus, there is respect, participation and mutuality in such educational activity. In this framework a question about free rein to spontaneity and nondirectivity may be raised (Taylor, 1993). Freire's response is that education is always directive. However, "the educator being different from the pupil is never authoritarian in this relationship" (Gadotti, 1994, p. 56-57). Problem-posing education, for Freire, is not merely an activity inside the formal classrooms but it is related to life situations. Moreover, it relates to the authentic existence of people. Freire states that "Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of men as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (Freire, 1970, p. 56).

In his educational theory, Freire speaks of the oppressors and the oppressed; the oppressors being responsible for injustice and the woes of the oppressed. Due to Freire's emphasis on the serious and continuous dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, in applying Freire's theory of education, one might make the mistake of reacting against the oppressor. The danger is to understand the oppressor as bad, evil and not needed. However, Freire, though clearly assigning the liberating role to the oppressed over against the oppressor, he does not dismiss the oppressor. He says that dialogical education is not intended to oppress the oppressor but rather "to restore the humanity of both" (Freire, 1970, p. 28). Further, once the world of oppression is transformed through praxis, "this pedagogy ceases to belong to the oppressed and

becomes pedagogy of all men in the process of permanent liberation” (Freire 1970, p. 40).

### **Literacy and Humanization**

Three interrelated themes can clearly be recognized in Freire’s understanding of literacy: the idea of reading both the word and the world; reading as an act of knowing and theory-practice as an integral part of literacy.

In his essay, *The Importance of the Act of Reading* (Freire, 1983), Freire discusses the way he developed an understanding (a form of reading) of the world around him before reading words and books. He first learned to read in the world of his home, backyard and neighborhood. What he means comes through clearly when he says that “truly, that special world presented itself to me as an arena of my perceptual activity, and therefore as the world of my first reading. The texts, the words, the letters of that context were incarnated in a series of things, objects, signs” (Freire, 1983, p. 6). His assertion about reading the world around him underlines his insistence that “reading and writing only makes sense within the realm of a person’s lived experience” (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 42). Thus, “reading the world is always prior to reading the word” (Freire, 1983, p. 10). In other words, in any literacy effort “experience must be the main source of knowledge” (Gadotti, 1994 p. 105).

Freire is opposed to any mechanistic approach to reading and writing because he believes that such an approach is either a lifeless exercise in drill and memorization or a manipulative exercise in domestication. Such learning, for Freire, does not constitute knowing (Freire, 1983). For him to read is to uncover the deeper meaning of words in the learner’s world. It is moving beyond the words to a critique of social and political

reality. Reading is, thus, not walking on the words; it's grasping the soul of them (Dillion, 1985). Critical literacy, thus, refers to an emancipatory process in which one reads not only the word but also world which empowers a person "to unveil the ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices and cultural forms in order to reveal their selective interests" (McLaren, 1994, p. 307).

Further, critical literacy not only empowers people to unveil and decode the dominating factors underlying word and world, it also involves empowerment for action for transformation. An education based on praxis whereby people are able to act on their material surroundings and reflect on their actions with a view to transforming them. "It is praxis that lies at the heart of Paulo Freire's notion of critical literacy" (Mayo, 2004, p.48). It is in the sense of being able to bring about change, from Freire's point of view, that the reader must assume the role of a subject in approaching a text (Lankshear, 1993). In fact, Freire says "A person is literate to the extent (that they) use language for social and political reconstruction" (Freire, 1970, p. 159). This emphasis continues throughout his writing. Freire states that the purpose of literary education should be to liberate people so that they can achieve their full potential - their true humanity (Freire, 1993; McLaren & Leonard, 1993).

It is, then, clear that critical literacy is for the sake of humanization. For Freire, humanization is not just a project or one of the goals to be achieved rather it is the "ontological and historical vocation of people" (Freire, 1970, p. 58; Roberts 2010, p. 71). Thus, education as a movement of inquiry is to be directed towards humanization. The relevance of Freire's pedagogy is that it establishes the oppressed as historical beings and hence as subjects of history (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Freire was deeply

convinced of the human potential to create history, to change their situation of domination (Freire, 1970). This is based on his understanding of persons as subjects and not objects. However, people experience change both as subjects as well as objects. As objects people are adaptive but as subjects they are capable of changing reality (Freire, 1976). For him, adaptation for a person is “symptomatic of his dehumanization” (Freire, 1976, p. 4). However, in his liberative education, “authentic education” is “the process of humanization” (Freire, 1970, p. 66) in which, the marginalized and the oppressed act as subjects to create and change reality. Thus, his educational approach can make people critically aware of the structure of injustice and the potential within them for humanization.

### **Conscientization**

Humanization is the goal of Freire’s pedagogical project, and according to him, it is achieved when people become conscientized. Therefore, Gadotti calls “conscientization” the fundamental category of Freire’s paradigm of education (1996). However, Freire did not coin this word nor was he the first to use it; it is a term that was used by Brazilian radicals in 1960s. According to Freire, Bishop Camara, then Bishop of Recife popularized it (Zachariah, 1986). Freire’s conscientization is what dialogical education brings about in learners. “*Conscientization* represents the *development* of the awakening of critical awareness” (Freire, 1987, p. 19 emphasis author’s). In other words, through problem-posing education people undergo ‘conscientization’ which is “attaining a (more) critical awareness of social reality generally and the nature of oppression in particular” (Roberts, 2010, p. 72). Thus, conscientization is authentic education for Freire (Lankshear, 1987). “The fundamental role of those committed to

cultural action for conscientization,” Freire says, “is not properly speaking to fabricate the liberating idea but to invite people to grasp with their minds the truth of their reality” (1985, p. 85). Thus, conscientization is being acutely aware of the truth of the structure and garbs of injustice in a fully committed way. In an interview with Torres, Freire described it as, “the deepening of the coming of consciousness” and argued that “There can be no conscientization without coming first into consciousness...” (Freire, 1993, p. 110). Kutz and Roskelly argue that Freire goes beyond the narrower sense of ‘critical thinking’ and ‘active learning’ in his concept of conscientization which actually means *active consciousness in the minds of learners*: learners need to recognize both the personal and social dimensions of the subjects they learn” (1991, p. 112 emphasis author’s). The centrality of conscientization in Freirean pedagogy is to be understood as it is “grounded in powerful awareness of the roots and operation of inequality and hierarchy” (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 199).

### **Praxis**

Freire proposed learning by posing questions that stimulate reflection leading to action for liberation. For him, “Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970, p. 66). In his understanding of praxis Freire combines action, reflection and transformation as an integral part of his educational process for continuing the process of humanization. Thus, praxis remains “the goal and touchstone of Freirean education of critical conscious” (Marguerite & Rivage-Seul, 1994, p. 53). Moreover, praxis is a tool for the ontological and historical vocation of humanization. And when people pursue “their vocation they engage in critical, dialogical praxis” (Roberts, 2010, p. 71). Mayo (2004) recognizes praxis as the

central concept in Freire's pedagogy as it captures "the dialectical relationship between consciousness and the world, reflected in the pedagogical approach" ( p. 48).

### **Education in lived experience and identity**

In Freire's dialogical pedagogy, the life experience of the learners occupies central importance for many reasons. As we have seen earlier, the learners read their world before they begin reading formally. They read their world by experiencing it. Thus, they have a repository. In this "repository lies one's life's experience" (Mayo, 2004, p. 55). Drawing on this repository of life experiences learners arrive at new knowledge and new awareness. Educators help learners by helping them to apply their critical faculties and by problematizing the issues (Mayo, 2004).

Freire's emphasis on people's own knowledge and values further establishes the contention that learners are not empty vessels to be filled by teachers but their experience of their world is an important part of dialogical education. In fact, for Freire, the starting point of education must be "present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting aspirations of the people" (Freire, 1970, p. 68). The reality of poverty and suffering in the lives of the people is something neither to be ignored nor to be accepted but, in fact, it must be taken with all seriousness while critically questioning the cause of it. For Freire, the reason for social, economic and political inequalities is that "people in power view poor and marginalized people as objects" (Purcell-Gate & Waterman, 2000, p. 11). Based on their life experiences of marginalization and domination, people engage in praxis in terms of action and reflection for the sake of transformation and humanization.

Freire's approach to learning is not concerned solely with the cognitive aspect of learning but involves conceiving of educators and learners as "integral human beings" (Dardar, 2002, p. 91). As such, Freire takes the non-cognitive aspect of being seriously. In fact, virtues such as love, humility, courage, tolerance and hope have decisive value in his framework of liberative pedagogy. In his proposal of dialogical education in which dialogue is critical to interactive learning, love is a precondition to it (Freire, 1970). For him, love is both "the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself" (Freire, 1970, p. 62). As with many of his insights, the source of this emphasis on love is to be found in his Christian faith and he "never wavered in his support for Christ's call, 'to love one's neighbor as oneself'" (Roberts, 2010, p. 41).

The collective life experience of people relates to their identity. Language is a major marker of community identity. In this regard, Freire and Macedo (1985) stressed the need for adult educators to respect and build on their students' language, to respect and legitimate students' discourses, their own linguistic codes, "which are different but never inferior" (p. 127). Freire speaks of cultural invasion as "the penetration of the cultural contexts of another group, and ignoring the potential of the latter, they impose their own view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression" (Freire, 1970, p. 121). He recognizes all cultural invasion as "an act of violence", many times brought about by those who assumed the role of a friend. Such cultural invasion invariably leads to the cultural inauthenticity of people who begin to mimic the invaders in values, standards and goals (Freire, 1970, p. 122). Thus, people are alienated from the spirit of their own culture.

In his analyses of domination and oppression Freire is mindful of the particularity and identity of different people.

It is exactly because of my growing awareness over the years concerning the specificities of oppression along the lines of language, race, gender and ethnicity that I have been defending the fundamental thesis Unity in Diversity, so that the various oppressed groups can become more effective in their collective struggle against all forms of oppression (Freire, 1997, p. 310).

Thus, Freire's critical literacy is a paradigmatic engagement against all kinds of oppressions in society. For educators who work among the tribal people of India it is of fundamental importance to heed what Freire says about experiencing the daily life of the oppressed as important in beginning any dialogical education. He says that to really understand something one must "become soaked in the cultural and historical waters of those individuals involved in the experience" (Freire, 1993, p. 106). This is an important insight for any liberative education and it is especially helpful in the diverse situation of the third world. Therefore, Freire concludes, "pedagogy of the oppressed must be forged *with*, not *for* the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p. 33).

### **Themes for Contextualization**

From the preceding discussion it is clear that Freire's dialogical pedagogy is not only relevant to the issue of literacy and identity among Oraon women in India but also provides a theoretical framework for analyzing, interpreting and establishing a more effective adult literacy pedagogy. In the context of illiteracy, and the problem of drop-outs on the one hand and poverty, injustice and marginalization on the other hand, Freire's critical pedagogy can provide tools and resources to consider a different model of adult literacy in India. Freire's emphasis on dialogue based-literacy, equality of learners and educators, resourcefulness of learner's experience; conscientization and

critical reflection are themes and aspects that would provide a different orientation and direction for literacy engagement in the Indian context. In the light of what I have presented in earlier discussion the issue of illiteracy especially among women, inadequate awareness regarding the issue of literacy, lack of community involvement, lack of the use of tribal language as medium of instruction, irrelevant curricula, exploitation by the dominant community, deteriorating culture, job oriented education, inadequate political consciousness, and social and economic backwardness, what Gibson (1994) says about Freire's aim in terms of simultaneously striking four keys in the struggle for social justice: literacy, critical consciousness, liberation and economic development, is of decisive significance in the Oroan tribal context of India. Instead of the traditional educational system based mostly on a transfer of information and memorization, Freire's dialogical educational methodology promises genuine possibility for social change which would be more conducive for a fuller humanity. Even for the sake of democracy in India, the largest in the world, such a model of literacy is appropriate because critical pedagogy like this challenges both students and teachers for change in society and also for the advancement of democracy and equality. Freire's critical methods require of teachers and students to question the existing education as part of critical consciousness appropriate for citizens of a democracy (McLaren & Leonard 1993). Like Freire's Brazilian and Chilean context, the rest of the developing world situation is also characterized by poverty, exploitation and marginalization of the poor. The traditional education has not been able to eradicate poverty nor has it empowered people. By and large a curriculum-based education has not helped the people at a grass root level to understand either their surroundings or

their situation of marginalization. However, education should enable people to develop a critical attitude towards such situations. “Literacy has a potential role within attempts by subordinate groups to engage in political action aimed at resisting present inequalities of structural power (and their human consequences) by bringing about structural change” (Lankshear & Lawler, 1987, p. 28).

However, any uncritical appropriation of Freire’s theory, especially in India, would be inappropriate as the Indian context is also, in some important ways, quite different from that of Brazil and Chile. The profound plurality of religions, serious within and between communities, social classifications such as scheduled caste and tribe make it difficult to accept Freire’s concept of education as it is. His emphasis on liberation mostly in terms of economic development is not a particularly holistic way to understand educational goals. Here Gandhi’s (1977, 1997) emphasis on education as character building with an emphasis on the spiritual dimension of human life should act as a corrective to Freire’s theory. One of the problems of India is the issue of rampant corruption while although not entirely unique, can be dealt with in part by emphasizing character building as an integral part of any educational process.

Further, Freire’s blanket judgment about banking education as ‘not helpful at all’ seems to be extreme, especially when we realize that many among the masses have had years of education in that system. The present educational system in the Third World could very well play an interim role while Freire’s dialogical education is applied.

Thus, Freire’s critical pedagogy along with Gandhi’s educational insights could truly contribute towards holistic learning in India and elsewhere in the Third World.

Freire recognizes the people, especially the oppressed and the marginalized, to be agents of change as the active and critical participants in an effective educational methodology. Thus, adult education continues to hold promise in the process towards theory and practice with an emphasis on appropriate sustainable development.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a rationale for my study based on the central research question, “*What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India.*” It is grounded in two areas: the status of Oraon tribal women and adult education theory of Paulo Freire with particular reference to the empowerment of poor women.

From the foregoing review of literature it can be concluded that; Firstly, the tribal community in India is lagging far behind the dominant community of India in literacy and education. Secondly, the attainment of literacy is lowest among the tribal women. Thirdly, many decades of planning and efforts by both government and non-governmental agencies have not been able to increase the level of literacy among the tribes. Fourthly, the present educational system has helped only a few tribal people. Fifthly, even those educated in the present system are alienated from their tribal language and culture. Sixthly, even today the tribal community in India is suffering from extreme poverty and exploitation by middlemen and the dominant communities. Seventh, among the factors responsible for ineffective educational and developmental projects are the “welfare” mindset, the problem of the non-mother-tongue medium of education, lack of cultural sensitivity among teachers, lack of community participation ,

corruption, lack of awareness among parents of the value of education, economic deprivation, children's involvement in domestic work resulting in absence from school. All the facts about tribal community in India are also true for the Oraon community of Jharkhand.

The discussion of Paulo Freire's adult education theory highlights the relevance of dialogical education as appropriate and helpful for the literacy projects for tribal people and also for the empowerment of tribal women in particular. In the next chapter I will discuss the research methodology and methods used in this project.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Selecting an Appropriate Research Paradigm

According to Merchant and Dupuy (1996), “In any research, the decision regarding methodology is dictated by the research questions that are asked” (p. 539). The central research question in this research is, *What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of life stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India?* In this human science research study, I have selected life history methodology. In this chapter, I will describe my research design, discuss the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry, describe interpretative research and situate my research in life history methodology. Also, in this chapter, I will discuss data collection methods, instruments and procedures; describe text development, theme identification and data processes and discuss life history methodology.

### Research Design

The objective/purpose of my research is to understand and learn from the lives of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India. According to Patton (2002), in any research “purpose is the controlling force” (p. 213), that leads the researcher to design, analyze and write a report. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) call research design as “the process of operationalization” (p. 76) which means not only to “formulate the specific questions to be posed, but also to select appropriate instruments that will gather the data to answer them” (p. 76). Research design is planning the entire process from identifying the problem to organizing, gathering and analyzing the data and writing the report (Taylor & Bodgan, 1998). It provides the foundations on which research is built

and also adds dimension to the shared meaning that give form to interpretive study. As I was dealing with a particular research question in a specific context, I was open in my approach to research design. In qualitative research “flexibility and openness” (Patton, 2002 p. 255) are required. Van Manen (1990) encourages researchers to be both open and creative in finding procedures and approaches that are suited for their particular research.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is research that has its focus on the social world, rather than the world of nature (Liamputtong, 2009). This social world, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) can only be “understood from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated” (p. 19). The central motifs of qualitative research are to provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world (Bryman, 1988). It is a type of research that produces findings by learning about people’s social and material situations, life experiences, perspectives and histories not ordinarily arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Quantitative research is a formal, objective, systematic process in which numerical data are used to obtain information about the world. This research method is used to describe variables, to examine relationships among variables and to determine cause-and-effect interaction between variables (Burns & Grove, 2005). Despite their different origins and assumptions, both qualitative and quantitative research methods bring unique and valuable contributions to social research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is more flexible and fluid in its approach, says Liamputtong (2009), and because of its flexibility and fluidity, qualitative research is particularly suited to understand the meaning, interpretation and subjective understanding of the individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 & Liamputtong, 2009). Qualitative research, essentially, aims to “capture lived experiences of the social world and the meanings people give these experiences from their own perspective” (Corti & Thompson, 2004, p. 326). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in their *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, offer the following definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices...turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p.3).

Therefore, qualitative research, in particular, is an “interpretive approach” concerned with understanding the meanings which people attach to phenomena (actions, decisions, beliefs, values etc.) within their social world (Richie & Lewis, 2003. p. 3).

### **Interpretive Research**

The objective of interpretive paradigm or human science is to understand the meaning of human experiences in their uniqueness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Van Manen, 1990). It is “a systematic search for deep understanding of the ways in which persons subjectively experience (perceive, interpret, plan, act, feel, value, evaluate) the social world” (Hultgren, 1989, p. 41). Interpretive researchers study “persons or beings

that have ‘consciousness’ and that ‘act purposefully’ in and on the world by creating objects of ‘meaning’ that are ‘expressions’ of how human exist in the world” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 4). In doing this, an interpretive research practice engages both the hows and whats of social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Instead of seeking verifiable and absolute “truth”, the interpretive research understands the people who “make sense out of their experience and in doing so create their own reality” (Locke, Spriduso & Silverman, 1993, p.11). Thus, interpretive findings are equally valid and credible.

The underlying assumption behind interpretative research clarifies methodological issues involved in this research: (a) understanding is both epistemological and ontological; (b) understanding is historically conditioned; (c) understanding is a dialectical process between the subject and the world; (d) understanding is an event and not a psychological process of comprehension; (e) meaning is socially constructed; (f) knowledge and experience are context bound; (g) a knower and what is known are closely involved with one another; (i) inquiry is a moral endeavor (Hultgren, 1989). Interpretive research, thus, is naturalistic in that the researcher enters the world of the participant as it exists to obtain data without any deliberate intervention (Locke, Spriduso & Silverman, 1993). At the same time, however, reflexivity, according to Johnson and Waterfield (2004) makes obvious the researcher’s contribution to the interpretive process. Reflexivity acknowledges that researchers actually play a key role in how their data are both shaped and analyzed (Angen, 2000). Accordingly, the experiences, beliefs, personal history, and perspective of the researchers have a definite bearing on the research findings. In fact, the

reflexivity of the researchers make their research meaningful and credible (Liamputtong, 2009). In the present research my own reflexivity as a researcher is clearly involved and, I firmly believe, provides itself to be “a resource rather than a source of error or bias” (Sim and Wright, 2000, p. 134).

### **Liberation Theory**

The discussion of the liberation theory is to be followed and situated in the light of an interpretive approach to qualitative research which is characterized by contextuality, experiences, questions and meanings of individuals and a holistic understanding. The so-called “liberation theory” was born in the context of Latin America in 1960s and 1970s. The main proponents of this theory were Christian theologians who responded to poverty, injustice and oppression by articulating a theology which came to be known as “liberation theology”. Liberation theology as a method or theory is an umbrella term for many movements including African, black, feminist, and womanist theologies (Villa-Vicencio, 1999). There are many contextual theologies around the world that operate within the framework of liberation theory. For example, the Black theology in the US, the Feminist theology in many parts of the world, Liberation theology in Africa, all emphasize a liberating theory. In India, the Dalit (previously known as “untouchables”) movement and theology and the Tribal theology and in Korea, Minjung theology, are all examples of liberation theology. One can understand the religious theory involved in these theological expressions from the perspective of Robert Ackermann’s understanding of religion as criticism. As Purpel (1989) states, “Ackermann’s position is that religion has played an important role in providing critical criteria for judging the moral adequacy of a culture, in participating in

the active change of protest and organization, and in offering a set of alternatives.

Ackermann goes on to assert that only those religions that engage in social and cultural criticism can retain legitimacy and vitality” (p. 79).

The most recognizable exponent of liberation theology in Latin America is Gutiérrez (1973), who defines liberation method as critical reflection on praxis in the light of the Word of God (p. 13). As the background of his assertion of praxis, is the massive poverty of the mass brought about by the unjust socio-political structure of society and the daily experience of oppression by a majority of the people. Inspired by the gospel of Jesus Christ, this theory is “open – in the protest against trampled human dignity, in the struggle against the plunder of vast majority of people, in liberating love, and in building of a new, just and fraternal society” (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 15). Boff (1993) states that, “*At the root of the method of the theology of liberation is the nexus with concrete praxis. It is within this major dialectic of theory (of faith) and practice (of charity) that liberation theology operates*” (p. 73, emphasis original,). Another leading liberation theologian Segundo provides a systematic presentation of this methodology in his book *Liberation of Theology* (1977) which he describes as a, ‘hermeneutic circle’. He defines it as “the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the changes in our present day reality, both individual and societal” (Segundo 1977, p. 8). Segundo further describes the theory of a hermeneutic circle in four steps:

Firstly, there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological . Secondly, there is application of our suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and theology in particular. Thirdly, there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken

important parts of data into account. Fourthly, we have our new hermeneutic, that is, our new way of interpreting the fountain-head of our faith (that is, Scripture) with the new element at our disposal (1977, p. 9).

Experience of life and community is the starting point for this approach.

Differing from classical theology with its starting point in revelation and tradition, liberation theology, “must start with facts and questions derived from the world and from history” (Gutierrez, 1973, p. 12). Like Freire’s *conscientization*, liberation theology begins with reflection upon experience (Oldenski, 1997).

For many scholars such as Gutierrez (1973) and Segundo (1977), the exercise of praxis is the key to this approach. Gutierrez argued for the precedence of ortho-praxis over ortho-doxy (1973). For Segundo also, orthopraxis is of decisive significance. For him, orthopraxis is the ultimate criterion of orthodoxy in theology and interpretation. “The truth is truth only when it serves as the basis for truly human attitude” (Segundo, 1976, p. 32). Likewise, Bonino (1975) also underlines the importance of this approach when he says that “...theology has to stop explaining the world and start transforming it. *Orthopraxis*, rather than orthodoxy, becomes the criterion for theology” (p. 81, Emphasis original). Thus, Liberation theology is both “theory-for-praxis” and “theory-of-praxis” (Berryman, 1987, p. 86).

Another insight of the liberation approach is its emphasis upon the centrality of the poor and the oppressed. Gutierrez calls this *the preferential option for the poor* (1973, p. 239, emphasis in original). The poor are not only those suffering in socio-economic terms but includes all oppressed and marginalized people suffering racial

oppression, ethnic oppression and, for women, sexual oppression. More than this, “the epistemological option for the poor – which recognized the experience of the poor as a privileged *locus* of revelation and insight” (Tombs, 2002, p. 294) established their decisive place. Such a preferential option led the poor to be understood as active authors of liberation (Tombs, 2002).

Thus, Frostin recognizes that liberation theory is expressed in terms of a radical break in epistemology and the experience of oppression and struggle for liberation (Frostin 1988 & West, 2009). Like Freire, in his critical pedagogy, liberation theory focuses on the poor and the oppressed as the subjects of history. Solidarity with the poor, or maintaining a preferential option for the poor, has consequences for the perception of reality, and so an option for the poor implies ‘the epistemological privilege of the poor’. This penetrating expression suggests, argues Frostin, “that cognizance of the experience of those defined as poor is a necessary condition for theological reflection” (Frostin, 1988, p. 6).

Hence, it is clear that what Paulo Freire speaks of as education for liberation is intimately linked with the liberative theory seen in liberation theology. As I have explained in chapter two, Freire is deeply moved by the gospel of Jesus Christ and argues for a dialogical educational model based on the poor and the oppressed asking critical questions about injustice and poverty and being actively involved in an action-reflection process with a view to liberation. On the other hand, liberative theory in the form of liberation theology is concerned with praxis, the value of dialogue with those beyond the academy, and the struggle of the poor and oppressed as a privileged

epistemological locus for an engaged theology (Tombs, 2002). There is “a shift in liberation theology from philosophy as the primary cognate discipline alongside theology to the social sciences” (West, 2009, p. 17) and hence an emphasis on social relations is increasingly important.

### **Life History as Methodology**

While there are many methodologies that a researcher could use to investigate, for my research question I have chosen the life history methodology because it provides for sustained interactions with the different subjects involved over a long period of time, intimate and honest sharing of stories of life’s joys and pain, a chance to be a good listener and a meaningful participant in the lives of the subjects and their community. Besides, it also lends itself to effective documenting and to systematic and organized methods of collecting and interpreting data.

It is clear from the term that “life history is the study of the life experiences of individuals from the perspective of how these individuals interpret and understand the world around them” (Gall, Berg & Gall, 1996, p. 604). The life experiences of individuals, especially of those from other cultural contexts would remain inaccessible without the proper tools and appropriate approaches. Life history documentation in itself provides the research with just such a tool as it is “an entry into a life, a portal into a culture different from that of the reader. Life history texts become vehicles for self-understanding” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 374). Not only life history methodology is an effective way to understand an individual’s life, but it “goes beyond the individual and the personal and places the narrative accounts and interpretations within a broader context” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 20), such as cultural, political, familial,

educational, and religious spheres. While researching the lives of illiterate Oraon women, important educational insights are possible because life history seeks “to interrelate the private and the public, the personal and social. Private, personal, biographic, subjective perspectives are linked to meanings, definitions, concepts, and practices that are historical, structural, public, and social” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 22). In this regard, the life history methodology provides both an authentic and holistic approach to my study of Oraon women vis-a-vis illiteracy and identity.

For my research on Oraon tribal women, a community that has been on the margins of society and largely without a voice, this methodology is appropriate because as life history documents, “They connect memory and history to reflexive political action. They create spaces for voices of previously silenced persons to be heard. In this way, the postmodern historian-ethnographer helps create liberating texts” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp. 374-375). Hence, life history as a methodology for my research is helpful for several reasons: First, the Oraon tribal culture is primarily oral and, hence, their stories and experiences are passed on orally from generation to generation (Koonathan, 1999; and Pandey, 1997). Oral history gives voice to those who do not have written accounts (Roberts, 2002). Thus, a life history methodology is effective in documenting how the Oraon women tell their stories of life and the issues that are most important to them.

Second, life history, as Goodson (1983) argues, has the potential to make a far-reaching contribution to the problem of understanding the links between “personal troubles” and “public issues”. Thus, it can provide an important link between Oraon

women's regrets for not being given a chance for literacy and literacy as a public issue.

"Life history research draws on individuals' experiences to make broader contextual meaning" (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 20).

Third, since Oraon is a tribal community which attaches deep value to its cultural heritage, the life history further helps to show how an "individual interacts with the culture" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 88).

Fourth, as with other cultures, tribal culture is also dynamic (Xaxa, 2008) and hence effective study will require a methodology adequate for documenting the cultural change overtime. The value of life history is increased because it is able to capture the cultural changes in terms of "cultural deviance" and "the evolution of cultural patterns" (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 88).

Fifth, as a tribal group, Oraon tribal people are poor, backward and have remained isolated from the mainstream of Indian population (Ekka, 2002). There is an increasing awareness among scholars, activists and social scientists to not only study the marginalized communities such as tribal communities but at the same time, to seek to provide a "voice to the voiceless" (Lummis, 1987, p. 17). Life history acquires added significance in this regard as it provides freedom in life situations to express their struggles and dreams.

Sixth, life history enables people to "not only relate actual experiences, but also convey interpretative reflections on those experiences" (Hall, Stevens & Meleis, 1994, p. 38). This aspect of my research has facilitated the tribal Oraon women to not only open expression to their life experience, but also to actually reflect upon their life itself.

Thus, the life history of Oraon women reveals the multi-dimensional experience of their life, especially in its tribal nature, both as tribal women and as women.

Seventh, owing to the limitation of the subjects (in this case illiterates), the usage of life history is helpful in understanding their life and its meaning for them.

Eighth, during the prolonged length of time both for interviews and listening, a bond developed between me and the interviewees which became decisive for an open, candid and even confidential sharing of their stories. My time with these Oraon women provides clear evidence that life history is an interactive and cooperative technique directly involving the researcher (Plummer, 1993).

As an insider researcher I found the cultural world of Oraon women readily accessible to me and their stories echoed my own at a palpable level. Labaree (2006) speaks of the advantages of “insiderness” in research. “Insiderness in qualitative research refers, in general, to the study of one’s own culture and organization” (Labaree, 2006, p. 10). On the basis of a review of literature he lists four advantages to being an insider. First, the insider has value because the researcher will be familiar with the cultural setting. Second, insider status has value because the researcher and the respondent will have likely shared common social and occupational experiences (Cerroni-Long, 1994; Kanuha, 2000). The commonality can be the basis for building trust and relationship that contributes to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. Third, insiderness implies that the researcher has a greater understanding of how to interpret cultural work habits and practices and obtain key information normally available only to community members. And fourth, insiderness

has value because it facilitates reflexivity. Introspective analysis based on insider knowledge can lead to the discovery of greater clarity of purpose for the researcher and a deeper understanding of the evolving research process (Labaree, 2006).

### **Principles Guiding Life History Research**

Cole and Knowles (2001) describe the principles guiding life history research as relationality; mutuality; empathy and the practice of care, respect, and sensitivity.

#### Relationality

“At the heart of life history research is the relationship between the researcher and the person being researched” (Aston, 2001 in Cole and Knowles, p. 145). As in any other relationship, the relationship between the researcher and the participant, “demands attention and needs care, thought, sensitivity, respect, and trust in order to develop” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 26). In sharp contrast to empirical views that require distance and formality, the relationality is based on intimacy (Cole and McIntyre, 2001) and genuine friendship and respect for vulnerability (Cole and Knowles, 2001). Since I had visited the village of my research many times during my school and college years and I had interacted with two of the six participants I had good relationship with the interviewees from the very beginning. During the interview I shared with them the story of the illiteracy of my father’s sisters which also helped to further our openness and mutual trust. Additionally, as a female researcher interviewing other women I sensed the resonance of our shared gender (Aston, in Cole and Knowles, 2001) and even more so because of the fact that I also am an Oraon tribal woman.

### Mutuality

Mutuality is “a natural part of relationship - as part of the ‘conversation-in-relation’” (McIntyre and Cole, 2001). It also refers to the agreement between the researcher and the participants. As a researcher, instead of informing the participants about what I intended the research to be, I discussed my proposed research with them seeking their input and understanding and after clarifying everything concern to them we mutually agreed on what we would be doing together and why. We also discussed and agreed on the times and places for the interviews. In this mutuality was also included an understanding of possible changes that might be due to such unforeseen reasons as sickness or urgent work. The participants were informed about the nature of the documentation. I assured them of the security and confidentiality of the interviews for which they expressed their approval.

### Empathy

For Cole and Knowles (2001) empathy is obtained through reflexivity. Reflexivity is required for the development of an empathetic research practice because the telling of a life story can be a personal, intimate, and emotional experience. This expectation of being empathetic is in line with the earlier principle of relationality in which it is required that the researcher empathize with the research participants, especially while sharing the sensitive and painful experiences of their lives. As one among them in terms of my being an Oroan woman myself, I was able to genuinely empathize with the experience of the research participants.

### Care, Respect and Sensitivity

In life history research these qualities are “about the practical, the relational, and the very personal elements of a relationship” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 43). Thus, these qualities must be infused in to relationships. It is important because it is “the way respect creates symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1999, p.9) which creates an atmosphere of greater trust and openness. However, “these qualities cannot be prescribed, strictly controlled, or intellectually applied; they must be authentically felt and lived” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 44). Being an insider of the Oraon community I was able to develop a genuine relationship with the participants. As a person from the community, I was expected to address them with such appropriate relational terms as *didi* (older sister), *bahuriya* (sister in law), *mami* (maternal aunt) with accompanying expectations of care, respect and sensitivity.

However, it is also necessary that a researcher apply research methods appropriate to the task at hand along with the relational qualities referred to above. “As with other qualitative methodologies, researchers using a life history method must develop their studies based on good design, reflexive modes of implantation and analysis, and sound ethical principles” (Labaree, 2006, p. 3).

### **Research Methods**

In its original Greek, the word ‘method’ means ‘a route to the goal’ (Kvale, 1996, p. 4) which means or indicates that the researcher actually “wanders along with the local inhabitants, asking questions that lead the subjects to tell their stories of the lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as

wandering together with” (Warren 2002, p. 86). Methods are the range of approaches used in educational research to gather the data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and predication. Patton (2002) discusses three kinds of data collection in qualitative research, first in-depth, open-ended interviews, which provide voice to people who are being interviewed. This includes direct quotations from the conversation, experiences, feelings, opinions, perception and knowledge of the participants. Second, the kind of data gathered through observation by the researcher during the field work developed in terms of a description of people’s activities, behaviors, lifestyle, interaction and action in community. And third, documents which would include written documents, official publications, reports, personal diaries, letters, artistic work, photographs, written responses to open-ended surveys, etc. The methods I used to gather the individual life histories of six illiterate Oraon tribal women were: observation of participants and participation in the community, in-depth, open ended interviews, group interviews with Oraon tribal women, interactions with professional people working among Oraon community and library research. I conducted my interviews in the local language, *Sadri*. Besides their tribal language, Kunruk, all the research participants use *Sadri* in their everyday conversation. I know *Sadri* well, therefore I did not need an interpreter for my interviews.

### **Observation and participation in the life of the community**

I spent four years (2006-2010) in the research field. “Going into a social situation and looking is another important way to gathering materials about the social world” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 634). My residence during research was in

Ranchi where my parents live. The village of my research is 20 km away from Ranchi. As a researcher I was acutely observant and diligent in taking notes of people and their activities. I was also, careful to develop a rapport with the villagers, especially the women. My frequent visits to the village and time I spent with the women and men offered me ample opportunity to observe, record and analyze behavior, lifestyle, expressions and interactions (Liamputtong, 2009). Careful observation allows events, actions, experiences and so on, to be 'seen' through the eyes of the researcher, often without any particular effort on the part of those involved (Ritchie, 2003). I wanted to do a thorough study of my participants and for that I needed a trusting relationship with them. Therefore, I spent a considerable amount of time in research field. Not only did I spend time in observation, I was also intentional about participating in the lives of the women by visiting them in their homes and also by working with them in their fields during their planting and harvesting seasons. Many women invited me in to their homes and offered me water, tea and snacks. It was very special for me to share meals with them. I also took part in such community events as weddings and festivals.

#### The Village Context:

In fact, going to Malar village in 2006 was, for me, a reintroduction to the village. My grandparents had an agricultural farm in the Malar village. While growing up I had visited them and the village regularly. I remember vividly how, along with my parents and sisters and cousins, we would spend our summer holidays with my grandparents. While there, we would meet people in such different settings as homes, the well, weekly market, and at the rivulet where many villagers came for fishing and washing clothes. Our grandparents were invited to many events such as weddings,

festivals and village meetings. I remember accompanying my grandfather to many of these events. The villagers would know us as the grandchildren of Dr. Khess whom they called 'Baba' which means "father". Many of them worked on my grandfather's farm. As children we called older males in the village 'mamus' (a term for maternal uncles) and older females 'mamis' (a term for maternal aunts). All the villagers treated us with love and care. They were always ready to help us whenever we needed their help, especially in securing fruits such as mangoes, tamarind, berries and guavas. Thus, my childhood visits to Malar village provided my first experience of life and the people in the village.

When my grandfather moved from the village in 1977 I no longer stayed in the village for any prolonged period of time. But I continued to visit because we had our family land in the village. In fact, my parents had bought ten acres of land from my grandparents. My parents' farm was cultivated by villagers in *sajha* (a system of partnership by which the land owner allows other people to cultivate the land in return for one half of all that the land produces). Until the early 1990s we went to this village and spent whole days there on a regular basis. These visits were mostly to keep in touch with the people who cultivated our family land and also to collect the agricultural produce due to our family. My parents had a very good rapport with the villagers, many of whom came to them for guidance and suggestions regarding a variety of subjects such as education and village development. The villagers seemed to have a sense of my parents' high social status (they looked upon them as being educated and having important responsibilities) always holding them in very high esteem. During these visits I continued my relations with many of the villagers because they continued to

work on my grandparents' farm even though my grandparents no longer lived on the farm. I came to the USA in 1994. During 1994 to 2001, I usually went back to India for Christmas vacation. During my visits to India, we almost always went to visit Malar village as a family outing.

Beginning the research process:

However, my visits to the village from 2006 onwards were quite different in the sense that I was there as a researcher equipped with tools for field research. From the early months of 2006, I started visiting this village. I met old acquaintances. They were glad to see me back after a considerable period of time. I attended festivals in the village which provided opportunities for me to establish an initial rapport with many of the women. I came to realize that many of the women were new to me. I found out that they were married to men of the village. Since I knew many of these men I was able to develop a rapport with these women. Many of the older folks remembered and interacted with me. They were glad to see me back in their village which helped in my reintroduction to the village. In December of 2006, I knew that I was genuinely accepted by the community when I was invited with my family to a wedding. When I went to the wedding I was received with warm hospitality. To my amazement, the mother and the sister-in-law of the bride came and requested me to participate in the actual wedding ceremony. Among the many guests this privilege was given only to a few women. This special ceremony was traditionally done by close female relatives and friends who are older than the bride. I was deeply moved by such an honor being extended to me. I was delighted when I was asked to bless the couple. The whole village gathered for the wedding and it gave me a wonderful opportunity for two things:

First, it was an opportunity for me to interact with women in the presence of all the villagers and second, I was seen by the villagers as an accepted and special person in the community.

I kept a detailed journal of my observations and experience with my reflections. Although I knew the village from earlier visits, now I began to know people and their life in family and community as a researcher. As the days went by, I kept careful notes of my thoughts, observations and insights in my journal (Limputtong, 2009). Thereby, I was able to gain important knowledge of and helpful insights into the people and their life. “Participants observation is the most comprehensive of all types of research strategies” (Howard S. Becker quoted by Patton, 2002, p. 21).

Incidentally, my husband was involved in developing a training center in Malar village. The construction site of the training center building became a good place to continue to build relationships with many of the women as many of them worked on the construction. I was able to speak their language and it facilitated trust and confidence. From the beginning I enjoyed warm reception and openness. Occasionally, I talked with them while they worked in the fields or took care of cattle. During the course of my interaction with them I came to realize that many of the women wanted to share more than just day-to-day things with me. Being an Oraon woman was a great help to me in developing relationship and in the deepening confidence among these women that helped me understand what they had to share with me (Labaree, 2006). By that time, however, it was still at my initiative that conversations were started. By then I had

hoped that they would be taking the initiative for conversation as a sign of their trust and confidence in me. Nevertheless, I continued building my relationship with them.

I was assured of that trust in September of 2008 when these women with whom I was interacting came to me at the construction site and invited me to celebrate *Karma* (a major Oraon tribe festival) with them. It was not just a courtesy invitation extended as a formality to someone, rather, it was an invitation from their hearts. I could sense the warmth of their hearts and their genuine desire for me to be part of their joy and celebration. I agreed wholeheartedly and I knew from this point on that I had the trusted relationship I needed with these women for them to be full participants in my research.

### **Unstructured Open-ended and In-depth Interview**

Instead of formally asking women for in-depth interviews, I shared with them my desire to listen to their life experiences. I explained to them individually the purpose of the interviews and of my work as a researcher. They agreed to my proposal. I made it very clear that they were free to share anything that they had experienced and also I told them that they were equally free not to share anything that they thought should not be shared. I did everything I could to reassure them that they were in charge of the interviews. By this time, we had a trusting relationship and a mutual confidence that had developed during my prolonged involvement with them and my fieldwork among them (Liamputtong, 2009).

### Confidentiality

I was intentional about assuring them of the confidentiality of all the information that they would share with me. Since I did not employ the help of an interpreter, the matter of confidentiality was strictly between me and the participants which I had intentionally developed for a period of over two years. Not having an interpreter was also important because sometimes the use of interpreter may lead the researchers to become “vulnerable to an added layer of meanings, biases, and interpretation that may lead to disastrous misunderstandings” (Frey & Fontana, 1994, p. 367). I approached those women whom I had observed for a considerable period of time in different situations and had found them to be open, able as well as articulate.

### The six life histories:

The six women who agreed to share their stories were Sunami aged 27, mother of a boy (6) and a girl (8) who works in the nearby rice factory, her husband is a farmer; Merkha 47, who works in the rice factory and has four children aged 19 (daughter), 16 (son), 13 (son) and 11 (son), her husband is a farmer; Chari 45, has a tea stall on the highway, her six children are aged 22 (married daughter), 15 (daughter), 13 (daughter), 11 (son), 9 (daughter) and 7 (son). Chari’s husband worked as day laborer who suffered stroke during the course of my research and was bedridden when I left the village. Binko 65, a widow has four adult children. The oldest daughter is married and lives with her husband in another village, her son with his family lives with her, a third daughter is widow who now lives with her and a fourth daughter who is 21 is also living with her. Shanti 21, lives with her maternal grandparents and is not married. Salen 35,

has three children aged 14 (daughter), 12 (son) and 10 (daughter). Salen is a vegetable vendor in Ranchi which is 20 km from the village. Her husband is a farmer.

### Interviews

Interviews are the most widely used method in qualitative research. Interviews take different forms but “a key feature is their ability to provide an undiluted focus on the individual” (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003.p. 36). They provide an opportunity for a detailed investigation of each participant’s personal perspective, in-depth understanding of the context in which the research phenomena are located and also, details of the participant’s life stories that provide meaning. Interviewing is an active process where interviewer and interviewee produce knowledge through their conversational inter relation (Kvale, 2007). This process is hard, draining, time consuming, labor intensive, expensive and complicated as Seidman (2006) says, but at the end it is rewarding. It is rewarding because interviews bring out the stories of people. Seidman (2006), says, “telling stories is essentially a meaning-making process” (p. 7). According to him, each story has a beginning, middle and end and in order to tell the whole story individuals must reflect on their experience. This experience as Heron (1981) says is symbolized through language. As language is the primary tool of communicating experience. I was grateful for my being able to speak the language of the participants for two reasons. Firstly, I was able to understand their communications both in terms of idioms and phrases and even irony and also communication with passion, emotion and feelings. At times, both interviewee and I experienced deep pain, anguish and sadness. Being able to speak the language of the participant was immensely helpful. Secondly, it removed the need for an interpreter. It provided for a direct, smooth dialogue between

interviewer and interviewee. During my time with these six illiterate Oraon women “I never lost the feeling that it is a privilege to gather the stories of people through interviewing and to come to understand their experience through their stories” (Seidman, 1998, p. xxi). Their stories enriched my life and helped me to respect Oraon people, their culture and community more than ever. In fact, story-telling was quite natural to my research participants because they are of a tribal community where their oral tradition of story-telling is their normal way of passing on community knowledge and wisdom (Roy, 2005).

I engaged the research participants in informal conversational, open-ended and in-depth interviews: The informal conversational unstructured interviews are an open-ended approach to interviewing (Patton, 2002). These informal or unstructured, open-ended and in-depth interviews are the best means to understand another’s experience. They offer a maximum flexibility to gather information. They allow interviewees to be free and expressive in sharing their life stories. The purpose of this approach is “not to get answer to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate” but to understand and experience other people and the meaning they make of their experience (Seidman, 2006 p. 9). In-depth interviewing is widely used by qualitative researchers (Kvale, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). More than questions and answers, interviews in social research are seen as ‘special conversations’ (Liamputtong, 2009) where empirical data are collected by inviting individuals to share in depth their perceived realities of their social world (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

An in-depth interview means one-to-one and a face-to-face interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee to “seek to build the kind of intimacy that is common for mutual self-discourse” (Johnson 2002, p. 103). I found that face-to-face interaction also provided the participant someone with whom to share their lives with. There were times when the sharing became very personal and emotional. Sharing at the painful stage for two of the participants became too painful to continue. Binko became very emotional while speaking about her daughter and son-in-law. She could not speak as she told of the tragic death of her son-in-law after only two years of marriage. She started sobbing. For her it was unbearable pain because her daughter became a widow at such an early age and that her son-in-law should have been there for her burial but instead, she had to bury him. She was sobbing while relating this painful experience. Speaking of grief while crying aloud is characteristic of Oraon women. I stopped the interview and stayed with her for support and understanding. We were able to continue the conversation later on.

Legard, Keegan, & Ward (2003) talk about leaving the choice of venue for interview to the participants. Most of the interview sessions were done either inside the house of the participants or in the courtyard of their house. However, in the case of Binko the interview was mostly done in the field where she took care of her goats and cows while Shanti, on several occasions, preferred a secluded place in her vegetable garden as a place for the interview. Most of the time, I was able to interview them without interruption but sometimes, at some point in our interview children or others needed the attention of the interviewee which was just fine with me. We were able to continue the conversation later on. The training center which my husband had

supervised while under construction was now completed. My husband taught in this center which was called Navin Doman Theological College and Multipurpose -Training and Research Center. I also volunteered in this center as a teacher. For my research, this became a very convenient place that I used to go back and write my notes, comments, and reflections (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

#### *Four Key Features of the in-depth Interview*

Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003) have identified four key features of the in-depth interview which are helpful in understanding and utilizing the method.

##### *In-depth interview as combination of structure and flexibility*

The first feature of an in-depth interview is that “it is intended to combine structure with flexibility” (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003, p. 141). Even in the most unstructured interviews the researcher will have some sense of key topics and issues to be covered during the interview. As I prepared myself for the task of in-depth interviews I knew it would be unstructured and flexible but I wanted to remain focused on my central research question: *What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon women in Jharkhand, India.* A steady focus on a central question helped me to be engaged with my participants during both formal and informal interviews.

##### *In depth interview as interaction between interviewer and interviewee: Questions*

Second feature of the in depth interview according to Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003) is that the interview process is created by the interaction of both the researcher and the participant. Interaction is built on open ended questions. It “is inherent in the

nature of interviewing” (Seidman, 2006, p. 22). Open-ended questions help the participant to explore whatever direction he or she chooses. Seidman (2006) talks about two types of open-ended questions. The first is called the “grand tour”, question in which the researcher asks the participant to “reconstruct a significant segment of an experience”(Seidman, 2006, p. 85). As I interviewed Sunami who worked in a rice mill, I asked her to reconstruct her day for me from the time she woke up to the time she went to bed. There is also a “mini tour” in this guided tour. I asked Sunami to talk about her particular responsibilities in this rice mill in the boiling area. The second type of open-ended question is focused more on the “subjective experience of the participant than on the external structure”(Seidman, 2006, p.85). For example, I asked Sunami to talk about what working in the boiler room was like for her. This gave her the opportunity to think and reconstruct her experience and share what seemed important for her without my guidance. Asking questions is an important part of the interview process since the nature of the questions plays an important role in shaping the response. According to Kvale (2007), there are two ways of asking questions in an interview: “thematically” to produce knowledge and “dynamically” to enhance an interpersonal relationship (p. 57). A good question should be composed of both types. I asked introductory questions like:

- (1) Tell me the story of your life. This is an open-ended question that provides the interviewee with an opportunity to share many things about her life.
- (2) What does it mean to be an Oraon woman in your own community?

(3) Please tell me about your life as a wife, mother, wage earner, as a person participating in your community.

(4) What does it mean for you to send your children to school?

Questions were open-ended to allow participants to talk at great length. There were also such second level questions as:

(a) What are the happiest moments of your life?

(b) What are some of the saddest moments in your life?

(c) What were your dreams and aspirations growing up?

(d) How did you feel not being able to go to school while growing up?

As I listened to their stories I was attentive to their verbal and non-verbal communications (Patton 2002).

*In depth interview requiring follow-up questions*

Third feature, Legard, Keegan & Ward (2003) speak of, the initial response of an interviewee as being always as surface level. Thus the researcher uses follow-up questions to obtain a deeper and fuller understanding of an interviewee's meaning.

Bryman (2008) talks about using follow-up questions to get the participants to say more about the answer they have just given. "Through a curious, persistent, and critical attitude in the researcher, the participants' answers can be further elaborated"

(Liamputtong, 2009, p. 47). This requires the researcher to be an active listener in order that he or she can "move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what

the participant has begun to share” (Seidman, 2006, p. 81). Listening is the most important skill in interviewing. Atkinson (1998) says, “listening well means caring for, respecting and honoring the other person’s life and story”(p. 35). When their statements were unclear I asked them questions like “what do you mean by this”. Or “could you please tell me more about what you said earlier”. These questions I used to prompt the participants to further discussion so that they had a clear understanding of the matter being examined (Liamputtong, 2009).

Some of the follow-up questions were specific and direct and helped me to gain a more specific response. Thus, Seidman (2006) argues that the “Interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry” (p.8). The research participants were willing to elaborate and explain in the course of inquiry. They were also willing to meet with me as I needed their help to clarify matters I had not understood in the interview session itself. After each session I went back to the Navin Doman Theological College and Multi-purpose Training – Research Center to transcribe the interviews verbatim with the help of my interview notes (Cole & Knowles, 2001).

#### *In depth Interview as knowledge generation*

A fourth key feature of open-ended interviews described by Lenard, Keegan & Ward (2003) is, that they are “generative in the sense that new knowledge or thoughts are likely, at some stage, to be created” (p. 142). The researcher does not only help the participant to tell the story but remains central in knowledge generation. “...it is an *inter-view*, where knowledge is constructed in the *inter-action* between the interviewer and the interviewee.” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2)

### **The role of the researcher**

The researcher, in any interpretive research, is seen also as an instrument (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) who brings his or her whole self into the research relationship. This research is not done in isolation as Lewis (2003) says, it is difficult to do interactive face-to-face interpretive research by phone and build a researcher-participant relationship. The researcher is “referred to as the instrument of research, in the sense that the researcher is seen as the instrument of decision-making throughout the research process, becoming an integral part of both the research process and the knowledge generated” (Merchant & Dupuy, 1996, p. 540).

In my preparation for field research I was conscious of not being too rigid about expectations from the participants and also about the use of tools and strategies. However, I found my preparation for adjustment a bit inadequate when two of the participants requested me not to use a tape recorder. They had heard some stories about the misuse of voice recording among their circle of friends. Upon my inquiry as to the specific context of such misuse they were unable to tell me anything. When I asked them if they did not trust me, their answer was firm and emphatic that they trusted me and were willing to share their life stories with me. Instead of convincing them I agreed to interview without recording. I realized at this point that trying to convince them to allow me to record our interview might be considered an intrusion and imposition. Since all of the participants were from the same village I wanted to be fair to all of them by not recording the interviews of any of them. In fact, I appreciated their objection and honored their desire which really helped in consolidating mutual trust and confidence. I realized that in the field one simply has to be flexible and ready to change and adapt.

As Cole and Knowles (2001) say, in such situations “the alternative is to make notes along the way” (p. 77). Participants did not have objections when I took notes during interview sessions. In course of the interviews I came to realize some of the advantages of interviews without the help of a tape recorder. For me, the interview did not end when the formal talk ended, as I was often invited to a cup of tea and snack during which the conversation continued. The participants often shared important insights during these informal settings which a tape recorder would have missed. While not being able to tape record the interviews might seem to have been a negative aspect of my research, in fact it helped me capture the important ‘door handle disclosures’ (Daly, 2007). Nonetheless, I became very careful in writing down the interview with my comments about emotions, pauses, tone etc. In some ways, interviewing without the help of a tape recorder helped me to be an even more attentive and involved listener. I was diligent in writing down interview content, comments and my reflection right after the interview (Daly, 2007).

### **Group Interviews with Tribal Women**

I interviewed six Oraon tribal women individually but was able to conduct some group interviews with additional Oraon women. Group interviews according to Frey & Fontana (1994) are “the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in formal and informal settings” (p. 364). I conducted group interviews in two different areas of the same state of Jharkhand. First, I wanted to expand my knowledge of what tribal women had to say about literacy and identity. Second, I sought to learn more of what tribal women thought about the status of tribal women in the society. Third, I wanted to cross-verify the themes based on research data by engaging other tribal

women to see if the themes emerging from my interviews had resonance with wider tribal women in the society. The group interviews I conducted were very informal and unstructured where ten to twelve women came to talk, share and discuss their life experiences in both family and society. Besides my interactions with women in group interviews, I also conferred with professionals who worked among Oraon tribal people such as teachers, social workers, health-care providers and pastors.

### **Library Research**

I used St. Alberts Library in Ranchi. This is a Roman Catholic Seminary library which has good resource on education, adult education and literacy besides theology, religion and philosophy. There were also good resources available on tribal education, tribal communities and tribal policies. Along with St. Albert's library I used the Gossner Theological College library and the Navin Doman Theological College and Multipurpose Training and Research Center library. These two libraries also provided me with rich resources on adult education theorist Paulo Frerie and tribal communities of India. I also deeply appreciated the resources available in the University of Minnesota Ames library.

### **The Analysis of Interview Data**

Research/interview data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations to extract the meaning and implications, reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). My initial analysis of the research data began before the interviews ended. It is helpful to begin data analysis from the beginning of the research

(Liamputtong, 2009). Given the long and intensive process of interviewing it was impossible for me to postpone the analysis to the very end:

It is difficult to separate the processes of gathering and analyzing data. Even before the actual interviews begin, the researcher may anticipate results on basis of his or her reading and preparation for the study. Once the interviews commence, the researcher cannot help but work with the material as it comes. During the interview the researcher is processing what the participant is saying in order to keep the interview moving forward (Seidman, 2006, p. 113).

In fact, the analysis of early interview data helped me to develop a scheme for the organization of the information that proved manageable even as the information accumulated. Initial analysis also gave a directionality to the research that kept the purpose of the study in focus. However, the bulk of the analysis was done only when the interviews were completed and all the data gathered.

### **Transcribing the Data**

Transcriptions are constructions from an oral conversation to a written text. “There is no true, objective transformation from the oral to the written mode” (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009, p. 186). It depends on the purpose of the research. Unlike other research in which transcribing means writing down the tape recorded interview, in my research transcribing is the process of writing down and summarizing the detailed notes and comments taken during interview. In fact, transcribing interviews is an initial data analysis (Gibbs, 2007). For my research, I transcribed all the data myself. I kept the verbatim in most cases, but at times, corrected the grammar without changing the meaning of the sentence. In some sense, the participants’ stories were not collected but they were co-authored by the researcher (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). It took many weeks for me to complete this task but it also provided the opportunity to relive the

moments of actual interview which helped me grasp their depth of meaning. I became familiar with the interview I had heard (Gibbs, 2007). I transcribed most of the data soon after the interview to ensure the text included both the emotions and the non-verbal expressions in my comments. Atkinson (1998) speaks of transcription at this level as interpretive because closeness to the text is closeness to the meaning. Because I was aware that qualitative research relies on interview transcripts, I paid serious attention to the process of transcription. Since I did not use a tape recorder I double checked the transcription with each of the participants and verified the meaning and impression that I had given them. I also verified the quotes with each of the participants and after their consent I used them in the text. I was also careful in securing all the texts and data as confidential.

### **Studying and Analyzing the text**

When the transcribing was completed the task of studying, analyzing and identifying themes was intense and most challenging because of the volume of the texts. However, I always reminded myself that “The analysis of the transcribed interviews is a continuation of the conversation that started in the interview situation, unfolding its horizon of possible meanings” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 193). Contrary to the scientists who are used to working with and manipulating objects “no other way than first to reduce them to silence” (Bertaux, 1981, p. 38 quoted by Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 113), a life history researcher finds “ways to make participants’ voices heard, to let their individuality to show and shine, to make their stories sound more loudly” (Cole and Knowles, 2001, p. 114).

Data analysis is “the process of making sense of the data and discovering what it has to say” (Holliday, 2007, p. 89). At the stage of analyzing and studying the texts comes the major onus for interpretation for the researcher (Butt and Raymond, 1989). “The identification of major themes, patterns, issues, events, sequences of events and their meaning is his or her prerogative” (Butt and Raymond, 1989, p. 407). “Data don’t speak for themselves, we have to goad them into saying things” (Barry Turner, 1993 quoted by Richards, 2009, p. 73). The researchers construct the themes and ideas (Balani, 2000). This is the contribution of the researcher. The first step for such construction is to exercise judgment about what is significant in the transcript (Seidman, 2006). Reducing data based on its import is “the first step in allowing the researchers to present their interview material and then analyze and interpret it (Wolcott, 1994). The important sections of the texts provided the bases for analysis, interpretation and making meaning of them. I found that the data analysis is a process whereby the researchers turn the data into “a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 1).

### **Sharing Interview Data: Profiles and Themes**

One goal of the researcher in choosing what is of interest in the interview transcriptions is to reduce and give shape to the material in a form which can be shared (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After analyzing the data, I chose two ways to share interview data. First, I created profiles of the participants and second, I developed themes.

The profile provides “an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one’s interview material to analysis” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). Although as a researcher

I decided what information to include and what not to include, yet by creating a profile in the participants' own words, I allowed their words to reflect their consciousness (Seidman, 2006). Profiles offer a way to understand the participants in their world:

It allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis. We interview in order to come to know the experience of the participants through their stories (Seidman, 2006, p. 119).

Creating profiles involves reading the transcription thoroughly and repeatedly, marking passages of interests and labeling them. Though all interview data are precious to the researcher yet choices have to be made on the basis of questions like “which passages are significant?” and “which statements are compelling for holistic understanding?” In profiles, different participants remained individuals with their own distinctions and particularities.

Thematic analysis is a ‘method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Thematic analysis is perceived as a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Bryman, 2008; Carpenter & Suto, 2008). For the thematic analysis two main steps were involved; going through the transcripts and trying to make sense of the interview data. Second, making sense of what is being said by the participants as a group (Minichiello et al, 2008). Thematic analysis “involves searching across a data set – be that a number of interviews of focus groups, or a range of texts – find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

I used Tesch's (1990) eight steps to sort unstructured data of the interview transcripts into an organized analysis process which also helped me in underlining different themes in the interview material:

1. Carefully read all transcripts to get a sense of the whole.
2. Pick one interview and while reading it ask, 'what is the underlying meaning of this interview?'
3. List all topics, cluster similar topics, and form topics into columns.
4. Take the topic list back to data, abbreviate topics as codes, then write codes next to the corresponding text to see if new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most describing wording for each topic, turn them into categories, then reduce categories by grouping related topics.
6. Decide how to abbreviate each category and alphabetize the codes.
7. Assemble the data from each category and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. Recode existing data as needed (pp. 142-145).

Two important steps of cross-verification helped me to understand and affirm the themes identified in the research data. First, as stated earlier, I checked these themes in the group interviews. Secondly, I consulted the literature review to see if the themes have any resonance with earlier research. In both instances the themes were found to be consistent and thus, their plausibility affirmed.

### **Identification of Research Site**

I chose village Malar of Ranchi district in Jharkhand state of India as my research site. The village is an Oraon tribal village situated about 20 kilometer

NorthWest of Ranchi on national highway 23. From the beginning I knew that I would be doing research among Oraon tribal women. I have explained in chapter one that I had developed special interests in women and literacy because of my experience at home, church and society, all part of the Oraon community.

### **Credibility of the Research**

“Reliability pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings” (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 245) and validity has to do with the measurement instruments (questions, scales) used – in the production of data and the development of explanation (Plummer, 1983). Credibility is also understood as comparable to internal validity (Liamputtong, 2009). There has been criticism of the qualitative research paradigm for its lack of validity. The life history researchers seemed to be in quandary in responding to the criticism that they lack methodological rigor and criteria (Roberts, 2002). Generally, the criticism has been leveled against qualitative research based on the quantitative criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability (Janesick, 2000). Wolcott (1994) argues that validity in qualitative research has to do with description and explanation. In other words, is the explanation credible? The purposeful and careful selection of the participants for their unique characteristics lends the research credibility (Carpenter & Suto, 2008). Moreover, credibility, according to Carpenter and Suto (2008) is “based on the constructivist assumption that there is no single reality but rather multiple realities that are constructed by people in their own contexts and require authentic representations of experience that can be seen as plausible by the participants” (p. 149). In addition, credibility is achieved by representing multiple realities of the participants as accurately and adequately as possible (Liamputtong, 2009). This issue

should be understood in light of the fact that there are more than one way of interpreting an event (Janesick, 2000).

The question of validity also depends on the researcher. Kvale and Brinkman, (2009) consider validity in terms of quality of craftsmanship. The experience of past research, the quality of research already produced, and the credibility of the researcher lend validity to the findings reported. Moreover, Kvale and Brinkman (2009) understand validation in terms of permeating the entire research process. They identify seven stages in which validation should be a part of, the process namely: “thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, validating and reporting” (pp. 248-249). Thus, the issue of validation is “not inspection at the end of production but quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production” (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p. 249). The value of qualitative research is in the statement that “Somehow we have lost the human and passionate element of research. Being immersed in a study requires passion; passion for people; passion for communication and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research” (Janesick, 2000, p. 394). Haranett (2007) says that life history once written down gains permanence and identity and the “narratives describe events and they also act as validations for events.” ( Bathmaker & Harnett, 2010, p. 167).

### **Summary**

This chapter contains my discussion of research methodology including interpretative research and liberative theory and lays out the framework of a research paradigm in the context of illiteracy and identity among Oroan tribal women in Malar village. A discussion of life history methodology establishes its appropriateness for my

research question. The chapter also includes my discussion of research methods and the analysis of research data with a view to establishing an adequate and scientific design to undertake the research interview. Included in this chapter is a description of the research site and the research participants. In the next chapter, I will discuss the profiles created on the basis of the participants' life histories and the themes that were developed from the analysis of the research data.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS PART I: PROFILES OF THE WOMEN**

This chapter provides profiles of the women who participated in this study. In the previous chapter, I introduced these six illiterate Oraon women of Jharkhand, India. Jharkhand is one of the new states of India, created in the year 2000. As a new state it has struggled in the area of leadership, education, health and economic development. As a region Jharkhand is not developed and as a state it remains one of the most backward states of India. Thus, there is much to be desired in the area of education and development (Kumar, 2008). The life stories of these women provide a glimpse into the struggling and impoverished life of one segment of society in Jharkhand. This chapter is divided into two parts; part one presents the profiles of six women and part two provides themes generated from the life stories of these six women and their daily experiences, hopes and dreams.

### **Profile: Sunami**

My name is Sunami, I am 27 years old. My husband is a farmer. I have a daughter who is 8 years old and a son who is 6 years old. I was born and brought up in Duko Chachkopi, 20 kilometers Northwest of Malar village. I have two sisters and two brothers. Both of my brothers are married and are living with their families in the village. My younger sister is in Punjab, a Northwestern state of India. She is a domestic helper for a distant relative and is trying to save money so that she can finish her high school education. My father passed away five years ago; my mother is living with my brothers.

My childhood was fun, growing up with my siblings and many children of the same age in the village. We used to enjoy the open fields where we played many kinds of sports. As a group of children we went to the forest; we climbed trees and plucked fruits and shared them with everybody. It was also a lot of fun grazing cattle together as a group. It became a tradition for all the children from the village to gather near our village forest every day with their cattle. While we took care of the cattle, fed them and gave them water, we also played and had fun. During summer season it was especially fun for all of us to take the animals to the pond for drinking water. When the animals had finished drinking water we gave them baths. Giving baths to the animals was fun because we got to swim and enjoy the water. During the rainy season girls went picking mushroom and boys went fishing.

I think I was 8 or 9 years old when I started taking care of cattle all by myself, my younger brother came along to help and play with the other children. Every morning we did our daily chores, ate our food and took our cattle to the field. We had goats, cows and water buffalos. Water buffalos were used for farming. They were our best friends because we could ride on them. At home the first chore I had to do was to pick up the cow dung and clean the barn early in the morning. Then my job was to help my sister wash dishes, clean and sweep the court yard with cow dung paste. My older sister and mother cooked food for the whole family in the morning. In the evening, we used to sit around the stove and shared with each other our activities of the day while my mother cooked our food and I helped her.

The planting season was important for us. We worked together as a family to prepare the field and plant the crops. Our main plantation was paddy. It took many days to prepare the field. My father and brothers had to work hard at this. We depended on the rain which was like gambling. Some years we had adequate rain and it came at the right time, but there were other years when it did not rain enough and we had a bad crop. Planting days were fun also as neighbors came to help. While we planted all the women would sing. Harvest time was also special as I would help my parents and brothers to bring the crop to a certain place in the village where all the villagers would bring their harvest too. The young men of the village kept watch over the village harvest during night time. At 4 a.m. my family would go to work in the harvest. I would bring food for them around 9am and then stay to help them for the rest of the day.

As children we looked forward to the festival and the fair. The festival was a time for celebration. Our whole village gathered to dance at *akhra* (our community dance ground). My mother made special food on this great occasion. Getting new clothes for the fair became a wonderful tradition for us. We waited throughout the whole year for this great day to come. The fair was so much fun because we went on rides, ate good food and our parents bought toys, ribbons and bangles for us.

My father was the head of our household. He had a strong personality. During the day he worked hard but every evening he came home drunk. My mother was a sober and very respectful woman. She struggled to raise her five children as best as she could. My parents came from two different backgrounds. My father was born and

brought up in the same village and in the same house. He did not go to school; he wasn't exposed to the world outside his village. On the other hand, my mother went to school till third or fourth class (grade). She was born and brought up in the big city of Calcutta (Kolkatta) where her family was settled. My mother's greatest disappointment was that she could not send her own daughters to school because of her drunkard husband. I heard my father's comment when he was drunk and mad at my mother, "Sending girls to school is waste of money and time. Girls are to grow up and get married and become someone's wife. It is better for them to learn to be hard working women". I heard him say these words so many times that I had no interest in education and school.

My childhood was fun but it did not last long, my older sister got married and left home. My father needed help in farming so my older brother dropped out of school to help my father in farming. All of a sudden I realized I was mature and responsible for the household work. I knew very soon my turn would come when I would have to leave my family as my sister had done. About five years later, a relative brought a marriage proposal for me. He spoke to my father about it. My father accepted the proposal without consulting my mother. Later he told my mother and they shared the decision with me. Soon they invited the elders of the village and our relatives to join them on the appointed day for *sutbandhan* (first formal marriage proposal ceremony). Everyone in my family liked the groom; on that same day they fixed the date for both engagement and wedding. I did not have a chance to see him well as I was shy but all my relatives talked about how happy I would be with him.

On January 12, 2003 I got married in my home and was brought to a new home and a new family. For a few days I felt strange in this new environment. I had to learn new ways of doing things in my new home. This place was different as people spoke more Sadri (a dialect) than Kurkukh (Oraon mother tongue). Being a new daughter-in-law I was expected to do all the work in our home. My co-sister (brother-in-law's wife) was there to help me and introduce me to a new style of life but it wasn't easy. She had three young children of her own. My husband and brother-in-law worked together on the farm. My mother-in-law was old and weak so I took care of her at home. My work began before sunrise, starting with getting water from our neighbor's well, and continuing with cleaning the barn, preparing rice (from the paddy), cooking and serving food for the whole family. During the cultivation season I worked both in the house and on the farm. My nephew and nieces were also there to help.

The farm we had wasn't big enough for our size family to survive, therefore, my husband and I decided to find other ways to earn living. After harvesting the crop that year we left home to go to West Bengal to find employment in a brick kiln. Life there was hard. We returned home towards the end of the summer so that we could help in preparing the fields for planting. In the morning I was busy cooking food for the family and during the day worked on the farm. Daily work was hard on me as I got pregnant with my first daughter. I did not have time to rest during the day. Fortunately, my niece was old enough to help me to get water from the well, clean the barn and wash dishes before she went to school. After the harvest season my brother-in-law decided to build another house for his family. They moved when their house was built.

Around that same time I went to my mother for the delivery. There was a group of women who surrounded me during delivery for help and support. I was very scared but my mother was right beside me holding my hand to give me comfort. My husband came to see our daughter after few days. I lived with my mother and brothers for two months. She took care of me and my daughter. Our son was born in 2006; this time I decided to stay home for the delivery; my mother came to help me during child-birth. With the help of other women of this village my delivery was successful.

From the beginning, we struggled as a family to survive. After my mother-in-law died, my husband tried to find a job in various places. In 2007 he went to Ranchi City to find some kind of manual work. He found a daily-wage job in a construction company. I decided to move there with our children to find a job for myself too. We found a place to live and we both started working in construction. It was hard to work with two young children. Our daughter played at the construction site with other laborer's children and I carried our infant son on my back while I worked. For a few months this job seemed to work out all right but we soon realized that it wasn't safe for our children. We returned home by the end of 2007. In 2008 both of us started working at the Training Center construction site in the neighborhood. It worked out best for us living at home, to work close to home and earn money. After four months my husband stopped going to work, he lost interest in this job and started drinking.

I was the only one left to earn money and manage the house. When the construction of the building was completed I lost my job. That year we did not get enough rain so we decided to leave our 5 year old daughter with our relatives and to go

find work. This time we went to Bihar and worked day and night there to earn some money to bring back home. In May of 2010 we returned to our village. We brought seeds for planting and worked hard to prepare the field but again we did not have sufficient rain. I needed to look for work because my husband had no interest in looking for a job outside the home. He said, 'he prefers farming' and he found excuses to stay home. During that time the manager of the rice mill in our neighborhood was looking for more day laborers. I went to him and he hired me right away. I am glad that I now have a place to work and earn some money to raise my family. My daughter is 8 years old and goes to school 6 kilometers away from home. Our neighbor's son takes her on his bicycle. She likes going to school. My son who is almost 6 years old is still home but I would like to send him to school next year. I want both my children to be well-educated.

### **Profile: Merkha**

My name is Merkha. I am 47 years old. My husband is a farmer. He has three sons from his previous marriage and I have one daughter from my first marriage. I was born and brought up in a small village of 35 families. The nearest town is 10 kilometers from my village. My father was a farmer but later in his life, he got a job in the railway department in a small town. After getting his job, he moved to this town with my mother but the rest of the family stayed in the village. He died 10 years ago. I have three brothers and two sisters. All are married. My mother is very old and lives with my brothers in the village.

All six siblings grew up in the village. We worked hard to survive. My parents did not have enough money or land to take care of our big family. I recall my parents

working all the time. My parents and my brothers worked on the village landlord's farm. It was normal for the villagers to work on different farms as all the families were poor and needed money.

When I was 13 or 14, I also started working on the landlord's farm. At the end of the day I earned five rupees (1 cent). Soon my brother found other work both for himself and for me. It was on a vegetable farm five kilometers away from the village. We were happy to work in this new place because we were paid a little more and we learned new ways of growing vegetables. During the vegetable growing season we brought home free vegetables from this farm which saved money at home. We worked six days a week. The working days were long beginning before dawn and ending after dark. We were paid weekly unless we needed money in the meantime. On payday, we went to the town to buy food and other things needed by the family.

While I was quite young my older sister took care of me and my younger brother and sister as our parents were gone for the whole the day. She must have been 10 years old. She cooked food for us and took care of us. I started helping the family by taking care of the goats at the age of five or six. Often my parents would take me and other younger siblings with them to the farm of the landlord where I would baby sit my younger brother and sister.

After my older sister was married and had left our home, my mother stayed home to take care of the cattle and house. Later, my older brother decided to find a better job in the city, so he moved away and after finding a job he took my other brother with him. My younger brother was left in the village to help my father on the farm. My

younger sister decided to stay home and work around the house and farm. We raised some seasonal vegetables that my sister took to weekly market in the town to sell. By this time my father had gotten a temporary job in the railway department in a place fifteen kilometers away from the village. My mother went to live with him. Three of us were left at home to take care of the family farm. My older brothers were married and stayed in the city for some years.

I don't know how many children from our village went to school. We did not have a school in our village, so for most of us it wasn't an option. There was one government school in the town ten kilometers from our village which was very far for children to go.

When I was about eighteen years old my parents arranged my marriage. After marriage I came to this new village but our marriage did not last. My husband lived in the city alone and whenever he visited us in the village he was abusive to me. After suffering abuse for many years I left him and went back to my parents' home with my four years old daughter.

I started my new life back in my parents' home with my sisters-in-law. They were most supportive of me and helped me rebuild my life. I worked as a day laborer so that I could take care of myself and my daughter. By this time there was a school in the neighboring village. My nieces and nephews went to this school which wasn't too far away so my daughter started going to school with them. I was concerned for her life and education, but my sisters-in-law and both older brothers promised me that they would raise her and help her in her education. They paid for her tuition, books, her

uniform, stationery and other expenses. It was a good place to raise her in a secure environment.

I have lived in this village of Malar for the last 9 years. Through some relatives, my brothers who were concerned about me found out about my present husband who was then a widower. My family inquired about him and thought that he would be a good match for me. His first wife died when their youngest son was a little over a year old. When my brothers told me about him having three sons aged six, four and two years old without a mother, my heart went out to them and I agreed to this proposal. But my worry was for my own daughter Sunita. My sisters-in-law promised to keep her as their own daughter and raise her up. I trusted their words and got married to my husband.

Life in the new house was different; I needed to make lots of adjustments. I had just one daughter but now I had three sons. My husband had three sons from his previous marriage. The youngest son was only 2 years old whom I raised like my own. All three sons liked me and made me very welcome in their home. I soon became aware of the \ financial needs in our home. My husband was not much concerned about the three boys. I wanted them to go to school. We had lots of family land but my father-in-law, before he died, sold some of the land and mortgaged some of it. There was but a little land left for the family's survival. I knew I had to do something to raise my family. So I found a job in a nearby brick kiln. That helped us as a family. The children were able to go to school. I paid for their tuition, books, stationery and uniforms. All three boys became very close to me and related to me as if I were their

birthmother. I started a kitchen garden and involved all my three sons in the gardening. This contributed towards our family economy. I encouraged my husband to start some kind of vegetable business but he was not interested. He likes to be just a seasonal farmer. During seasonal field work he likes to be busy in the field but otherwise he just likes to stay around the house. I also help him in the farming work.

It was hard work in the brick kiln, by the end of the day I was very tired. Instead of working in the brick kiln I decided to sell rice beer at the roadside. It did not require hard work; I just had to sit all day under the tree waiting for the customers to stop by. I was happy because I was earning easy money. My husband was very happy because he got free rice beer every day and I brought home money daily. But it did not last long. My daughter came to live with us three summers ago and one day I asked her to help me by selling rice beer. Being obedient my daughter sold rice beer at the roadside for a day but that night she cried and said she would never do this kind of cheap job just to earn money. The men who had come to drink rice beer had made dirty comments on her beauty and even said that they would kidnap her. Her tears and words changed my attitude toward earning easy money by selling rice beer. I do make rice beer at home for family, friends and relatives but I do not sell it anymore.

Just three years ago Sunita my daughter came to live with me. It was her decision to leave my brother's family and come here. She wants to continue her education; she is doing intermediate (12<sup>th</sup> grade) in Bero college. When she came to live with us I did not know how my family here would react. To my surprise, all three boys liked her. They are happy to have an older sister who would do their chores, cook

for them and do dishes for them but my husband wasn't happy. He made me promise him that I would not give even one rupee towards her education or her living. She can live and work from here but she is not allowed to expect or accept money from our household. It is very painful. I want her to finish her study in college and secure admission to a nursing school. She wants to be a nurse and help others. While she is here she earns money to pay for her tuition, clothes, bus fare to go to college, etc.

Last year I started working in a rice mill. I earn 80 rupees (about \$ 1.5) a day. I am paid every Friday. With what I earn, I buy rice for the whole family. I provide the food and other needs of the family. My husband is expected to provide for our family and also for his other siblings in need. He does not earn enough so that responsibility also falls on me. With different experiences in my life, I have learnt to survive as a woman and a mother. I am happy I can provide for my children so that their lives are better and brighter.

#### **Profile: Chari**

My name is Chari. I am 45 years old, the mother of six children and also grandmother of a 2 year old boy. I am the firstborn among four girls in my family. All four sisters are married and living in different places. My parents are still alive; they are living in the same village where I was born and brought up. My father's family has lived in this village for generations. This is a small village of 40 families and almost all are related to one another. My father had three brothers and so my grandfather's share of land was divided among four sons. They all lived under one roof. My mother told us how hard it was after she got married and came to be with my father in this village. As many as twenty people lived in their home. My mother was the youngest daughter-in-

law so she had to work hard to take care of the household. Just before I was born my father built a small house near their original house. I was born in this new house, now all the brothers had their own land so all worked hard to earn their living. My father's share of land was not big enough to support usso both my parents also worked as day laborers. During cultivation season they would work on their farm and also on neighbor's farms to earn extra money and during off season they also would find some day laborer jobs nearby.

I do not recall much about my childhood fun because life at home was very hard. I remember taking care of the household when my parents worked. While my parents were gone I took care of my sisters, cows, goats, chickens and pigs. Most of the time, I did not realize how the day went by. When my sisters were 6 or 7 years old my parents enrolled them in school. There was a school in our neighboring village. All my three sisters were privileged to go to school. My second sister went till class 6 and my third sister went till class 9 but the youngest sister went till class 10. I wanted to go to school but my parents did not send me to school.

When I was 11 or 12 years old, I went to work in a brick kiln away from home with some of my friends from the village. During summer season we worked there. It was about 30 years ago, we were paid only three rupees (less than a cent) per day. All five friends lived away from home for three months, worked and earned and brought some money back home. Later I started working as a day laborer like other friends from the village. I contributed to our family's income and saved some money for the festival and annual fair. We looked forward to the fair every year. One year I saved

close to 100 rupees (two dollars) bought new clothes for all of us in the family. I went to the fair with my friends and sisters. We enjoyed the fair's good food and fun rides.

Though our land was small, we all worked hard on the farm. I do not recall my sisters going to school during planting or harvest time. We worked on our farm as well as our neighbor's during planting and harvest season. The tradition in our village was to help one another during planting and harvesting. We ate small fish and crabs found in the paddy field during planting season. I enjoyed working on the farm with my family and friends-especially towards the end of planting when we played with mud which was particularly joyful for me. I also enjoyed the fellowship we had with our neighbors during the evening meal which the family provided on the day we helped them with their farming.

When I was 17 or 18 years old I married Bisram and came to live in Malar village. We have six children: four daughters and two sons. The oldest daughter went to school till she was in 7<sup>th</sup> class. Our second daughter is interested in education and is in 9<sup>th</sup> class. Our third daughter dropped out of school when she was in 6<sup>th</sup> class. She is working in Ranchi city as a domestic helper. Our son is in 5<sup>th</sup> class. He also takes care of the cattle and helps me in my daily work. Our next daughter is in class 3 and the youngest son is in class 1. I would like all our children to go to school and be educated and find a job in order to live a better life. Even though I wanted to go to school, I was not given a chance to do so. I want to give all my children that opportunity.

Apart from working at home I have always worked as a day laborer to raise my family. For many years I worked in the brick kiln near our house. Later I worked in

construction near our village. From 2007 both my husband and I worked in the construction at the training center next to our house. When building was completed in March of 2009, my husband asked me to go to Calcutta with other friends to work in bigger construction sites. He made this decision so that I could earn lots of money and send home. I wasn't convinced but I decided to go for the sake of my children. There was a man whom my husband knew, and with his help I reached Calcutta and started working. That was a big construction company; they paid 50 rupees more than what I got when I worked at the Training Center. But life in a big city was expensive and it was painful to leave my children at home. We were given a small room to live in near construction site; more than 15 women lived in a small room. We cooked, ate, slept and worked. Once a week we were paid enough money to buy food. I could not survive there for long. Somehow I managed to work for two months and decided to return home to be with my children and husband.

My husband also was a day laborer. He worked and enjoyed his life, spending all the money he made on himself. I was left responsible to feed my family. On pay day he would return home drunk. He was abusive. He was very dominant in decision making but wasn't willing to work hard to raise his family. When I was in Calcutta he decided to open a tea shop near our house. When I returned from Calcutta I was amazed to see him making tea and snacks in the tea shop. I was happy thinking that he had changed. When he saw me back he wasn't happy and made me work harder than before both in our home and in this tea shop. He stopped working in the tea shop. Most of the time he would expect either me or my daughters to bring what we needed from the town. He enrolled our younger son in an English medium school in the town. I was

left with the concern for raising money for both food and education. I did all that I could.

In September 2010 my husband had a stroke. His right side is completely paralyzed. He was unconscious when he was found by the road side. With the help of the good people at the Training Center we were able to secure treatment for him. For many days he was unconscious in the hospital. I do not know if he will ever get better but I have hope. Since his stroke my time is spent on him: taking care of him daily, feeding him, massaging him and being at home with him. Under the circumstances, I can't find a job that would provide for our family's needs. Because of the drought of the past two years, we have not been able to cultivate any rice on our one acre of land. My sisters are helping me financially but I can only wonder how long they will be able to do so. They, too, have their own families. I am helpless. Our Tea shop is closed because I can't leave my paralyzed husband alone and work there. I can't let my daughter stay at the shop alone. She wants to write her exam next year and I want her to follow her dream. My sister suggested that I send my third daughter to Ranchi to work. She knew someone there who needed domestic help. I sent her trusting all would be well for her. I don't know how much money they would give to us. I want to keep her at home but money is necessary for us right now to buy food, medicine for my husband and school tuition for our children. I feel I am failing in my duties. I can't work and raise my family.

**Profile: Binko**

My name is Binko and I am 65 years old. I am a mother and grandmother. I have three daughters and one son. My husband died five years ago. He was his father's

only son, therefore, he inherited all the land which now my son Anil has inherited. All my children are adults, two are married. The third daughter Sushma got married in 2006 but her husband died in June of 2008. She has a one year old daughter. They are living with us. My younger daughter Anita is in college. I have two grandsons and three granddaughters. My husband was a caring and hardworking man. As a farmer he worked on our farm; before dawn he was out working in our field and came home when children went to school, then he ate his meal and went to work in doctor *baba's* (father's) farm so that he could earn extra money to pay for our children's education.

My husband believed in sending children to school so he enrolled our daughter in a school in our neighboring village. He accompanied her to school for a few days until she found some friends to walk to school with. There were not many children from our village who went to school. When our son was 6 years old his sister took care of him and took him to school every day. This became a tradition in our home and our younger daughters all went to school. They all did well. The oldest daughter is a teacher in a government elementary school. My son, after finishing his Intermediate degree (12<sup>th</sup> grade) decided to stay home and take care of the family farm. Our whole family works hard on our farm throughout the year. We raise goats to supplement our income. My daughter who is a widow is a great help; the youngest daughter works on our farm before and after her college. I am busy taking care of goats. At present we have 18 goats. We sold some just recently. My son takes care of our cows. We raise some money selling milk.

I grew up in a small village near Bero. We were 6 brothers and sisters. My father was the oldest among four brothers; we lived in the house my grandfather built. It is a typical village house where cattle and people lived under one roof. The same house is divided into three sections for my three uncles' families. My grandfather had lots of land which was divided among four sons. My three brothers own my father's property but only one brother lives with his family in the village.

My childhood was fun. We were many children in our extended family and we grew up together. All the children of the village got together under one big Mango tree every day to play. As children we did our chores, helped in the household and spent time outside home to play. The older siblings took care of the younger siblings. The whole village was like a family, we all knew each other, played together and worked together. I took care of my younger sister. When my mother was busy she tied my younger sister on my back so that I could carry her and care for her while I played. We ate rice and vegetable in the morning and left the house to play outside. We came back home if we were hungry or needed something from the house. When I grew a little older, along with my younger brother I took our cattle for grazing. During the summer season it was much fun tending cattle outside with friends. We spent most of the day outside eating fruits and berries in the forest, playing in the ponds and getting back home at dusk. There was a big *akhara* (village dancing ground) in our village. The whole village gathered in the evening to dance and relax, I learnt our cultural songs and dance as a child in this place. My father was a hard worker; he raised potatoes in winter season. So we were busy throughout the year on the farm. During cultivation time our

house hold was busy as were the others in the village. We left early in the morning as a family to work in our fields. We helped each other in the village during planting.

While growing up I did not desire much because my world was very small. We did not know about anything beyond our village. Being a third child I did not have the heavy responsibility my older brother and sister had. But I worked around the house, my sister did all the cooking but I did all the cleaning. The first time I saw a paved road, a bus, motor cycles, trucks and shops was when my father took me and my brother to Bero market. He wanted to sell wheat so he took me and my brother just to see the town. I still remember my mouth was open when I saw the market, and a bus that was making a great deal of noise. The street was busy - we had not seen anything like this before. My father bought some sweets for us to take home. We couldn't wait to get back home to taste something new and tell everyone about our adventure.

I did not know the man whom I was to marry. My relatives brought the proposal and my family accepted it. Our engagement took place and after a few months we got married. After our marriage I was brought to my in-laws place. My new life was very different from what my old life had been. I grew up in a village away from town, away from busy life and in a close-knit community. When I came to my in-laws house they lived near the roadside and the houses were far apart. We were six children in the family so the responsibilities were distributed among all of us. Here the story was different: the responsibility of the house was mine. My husband, his father and step brother all left home early in the morning every day to work on the farm. My step mother-in-law helped me with the household work. Soon after our marriage, my sister-

in-law got married. I helped my husband with the field work when I could. We had four children. Raising four children, sending them to school and working on the farm was difficult but we survived.

When my husband was alive he reminded me that we lived a good life because we raised four responsible children. They all are educated and know how to live successful lives. Though there is sadness in our family because of the sudden death of my third daughter's husband, we are still a happy family. We work hard and know how to live together. My children provide all that I need. I have food to eat, a house to live in, clothes to wear and grandchildren to hold. I am free to do what I like to do—being outside with goats.

#### **Profile: Shanti (Budhni)**

Budhni is my name, given to me by my relatives. Actually, any one might have given me the name they did, because I was born on *Budh* (Wednesday). While growing up I did not like my name because my name also means foolish or ignorant. In fact, because of this, some of my friends teased me calling out my name “Budhni”. To prove myself as an intelligent person I had a dream of being an educated person and becoming a nurse.

I am 21 years old. I was born in my paternal grandparent's home. I am the second child of my parents. Right after I was born my mother was asked to leave the house with me as a baby. My *dadi* (paternal grandmother) did not want to keep us at home so my mother left her husband, older daughter and everything that belonged to her and came to live with her parents in another village. I do not know the reason why

my mother and I were asked to leave, I did not ask and now I do not want to know. I grew up in my maternal grandparents' house. I think I was 5 years old when my mother remarried. It was painful to let her go but I was glad to be with my grandparents whom I called mother and father. My aunts took care of me as though I were their own sister.

I grew up as the youngest sibling in the family. My grandparents took care of me as they would their own child. As a normal village child I did my daily chores. I loved being outside playing with other children of my age and taking care of the cattle. My two aunts who were at home went to school in our neighboring village. Seeing them going to school I requested my *nana* (maternal grandfather) and aunts to take me to school. I started going to school when I was 6 years old. I went to school for two years. I liked school. In the evening when my aunts would study I would go to them and they helped me learn the alphabet. My grandfather bought me a slate to write on. When I played outside I used big sticks to write on the ground learning my letters and numbers. I walked to school with my aunts and friends from our neighborhood. But the time soon came when I had to discontinue my education. My grandfather couldn't afford to send me to school. He had two daughters who wanted to finish their schooling and he was the only person in the house earning any money. He could not afford to send all of us to school. I went to school for only two years.

Later my aunts got married and I was left alone with my grandparents. My grandmother was never healthy therefore my aunts did all the household work. When they left the house all the responsibilities of the house were left to me. My grandfather

worked as a day laborer and also on his little farm. Very soon I learnt to cook and do all the household work. I took care of the cattle and helped my grandfather on the farm.

I wanted to go back to school. When I was eleven years old I spoke to my grandparents and went back to school for readmission. This time when I went to school I changed my name to Shanti. My headmaster took me in and asked me to sit in class three. I was the oldest in the class but I could not keep up with both my education and chores at home. I struggled to be a regular student in school. But soon monsoon season came and all my dreams of being an educated person were shattered. My grandfather needed my help on the farm and with the cattle and my grandmother needed me to take care of the house as she was ill. With the hope that after planting season I would get back to school I decided to work very hard both on the farm and in the home.

Due to unavoidable circumstances I was unable to return to school. I found myself being busy at home, on the farm and helping relatives and neighbors. Slowly my dream of being educated started fading. I satisfied myself by saying that I could write my name and told myself that when I would have time I would go to my friends who would teach me how to read. Soon I started enjoying my free time, visiting with friends. When my grandmother was healthy she worked on our neighbor's farm. Her life encouraged me to be financially independent. We were only three in the family. During the off season I had some extra time, therefore, I decided to work as a day laborer on our neighbors' farm. I was happy to earn my own money; being only 15 years old I spent all my money just on myself. If my grandfather would ask for money I would tell him it was my hard earned money. By age 17, I started working at a

construction site near home. I was paid Rupees 75 (\$ 1.5) per day. By this time I realized how important it was for me to save some money for myself and for my little family. My grandparents were everything to me; I realized their sacrifice for me and now it was my turn to be responsible towards them. The construction site was close to our home and the work day was from 9am to 5pm with a half hour lunch break. I was able to do household work before leaving for work. In the evening when I came back I had time to cook for my grandparents. I worked at this construction site until the summer of 2008. Later that year my friends took me to the city to work at a big construction site. Their payment was better. I was excited about the work possibilities as well as the increased earnings but I soon came to realize that working in the construction for many hours and also traveling to get there was an issue. I was spending lots of money on auto fare. I needed to leave by 7 am to get to the work site by 8:30am. To leave at 7am I needed to get my household work done very early. By the time I got home it was late at night and I was too tired to make the evening meal, and get ready for the next day. For three months I managed but realized it was not worth working in the city. I quit my work and am now staying home taking care of my grandparents.

Each year during cultivation I took time off from construction work and took care of my grandparents little farm. My grandfather is very old and he is unable to do anything now. My relatives are kind and they help us in our farming. My mother and aunts come to visit us but all of them have their own families and responsibilities especially during the cultivation season. Just a few months ago I requested my mother to send my half-brother to help us. He is 11 years old and was going to village school

in their place but did not like school and dropped out. I want him to stay here with us and go to school. I want to fulfill my dream in my half-brother's life since I have not been able to pursue my own dream.

I often sit and regret not going back to school. I wish someone had encouraged me. Somewhere that dream of being a nurse is still in me. I wonder if there is any way I can get back to school and become a nurse and help people in need. I do wonder about myself 'where I would have been at this time if I were educated? Maybe in a nursing school or still in college?' For one thing it is for sure that I might have been a better caregiver to my grandparents. I did have an opportunity to go to school but circumstances were such that I became a drop-out at age 11.

At present, since I am not working, I do not have any source of income but I am glad to be home to care for my grandparents. They need me at home as they need ever more care at this age. I am also happy to be part of the youth organization in my village. Just a year ago some of us got together and decided to start a 'Malar Village Youth Organization' to help and care for one another. I like to help my community and this organization has been a wonderful way for some of us young people to help in farming and caring for community. My family is concerned about my life, my marriage, my future. I am ready for marriage but worry about my grandparents. I would like to get married to someone who is educated and will respect me as a person, one who will give me the freedom to work so that I can send our children to school.

**Profile: Salen**

My name is Salen and I am 35 years old. My husband is a farmer and I have two daughters and one son. We are four sisters and two brothers. I grew up in a village called Kurgi, 25 kilometers North-west of Ranchi City. My father had two brothers. All three brothers' families lived under one roof but had separate kitchens. Their family property was divided when my grandfather died. Each family had just enough to survive therefore my parents had to work hard throughout the year. They grew vegetables to sell. Because there wasn't enough in the village one of my uncles decided to go to the city to work.

My childhood was normal. There was a small village school till class 5. The children from the village and the neighboring villages attended this school. Though my older brother went to school, due to work load at home he could not continue his education. In those days neither my parents nor my siblings realized the importance of education. Farming was important for us. My younger brother was not interested in education even though he was given the opportunity to go to school. He liked playing outside and taking care of cattle.

My mother was a hard working woman. She worked on the farm to grow vegetables and sold them in the village market. Many vegetable dealers came from the city to buy vegetables in the market. My mother and aunt had the idea of going to the big market in the city to sell their vegetables for a better price. My father disagreed with them but one Saturday morning both co-sisters decided to go on their own and left the house very early in the morning to go to the market in Ranchi City. When they got back they had the money to prove that what they had done made sense. Their fresh

vegetables were sold very quickly. My father agreed that they were right and he helped grow more vegetables for them to take. We worked hard. Every Friday we packed big baskets for them to take to the city market. There were only a few buses those days from our village to Ranchi City. Every Saturday morning we helped my mother carry vegetable baskets to the roadside so that she could catch the bus. Most Saturdays she left before sunrise and returned after the sunset. Summer season was fine but winter was hard on her. Most often, she carried her lunch with her. During the summer season she worked hard, she dried *saag* (different kinds of greens leaves) to sell. It was in high demand in the city.

We knew how to work hard and also knew how to enjoy life. My father took us to *Jagnath mela* (big Fair near Ranchi City) every year. We looked forward to this fair. It was a joyous occasion for us because we would have new clothes, delicious food and rides. He bought farming equipment at this fair. Just before my sister's wedding he bought a *mandar* (traditional Oraon drum) for our family. We were a happy family. We worked hard and enjoyed going to places, singing and dancing.

During my cousin sister's wedding I met my husband. We liked each other and he sent his uncle to our home with the marriage proposal. Soon the dates were set for both our engagement and wedding. After our marriage I was brought to a new family, it was a small family compared to my big family. My husband is the oldest brother. He has two younger sisters and one younger brother. I was happy to be married but had many challenges before me: coming to a new house, learning new ways of doing things and living was different. I came from a family who worked hard throughout the year on

the farm. In my husband's family, they cultivated only paddy. They had lots of land yet they did not work hard. Later I found out that their extended family was large and their land had not been divided. His younger brother was in school; he was encouraged to go to school but was lazy. He did not help on the farm either. Being oldest sister-in-law I was expected to do everything around the house and on the farm. My mother-in-law stayed home most of the times as she had some back problem. My sisters-in-law helped me with the cleaning but I had to do the cooking. The most difficult thing for me was to get water from the well far away. During cultivation season I worked in the house and took food to all those who worked in the field. My work began before sunrise and did not end till the whole family went to sleep.

Both my sisters-in-law got married in two years. My two children (daughter and son) were born in this village. After my father-in-law died my husband decided to move to Malar village. We built our house there and moved because there were better possibilities for raising children and finding manual jobs in the off season. After moving to this new village, I tried to talk to my husband about growing vegetables. I shared what I knew with him about my family and how my mother went to Ranchi to sell vegetables weekly. But my husband was not interested. We have land but it does not produce enough food for the whole family. Our third daughter was born here. We needed money to raise our family. We needed money for my mother-in-law's treatment. My husband was not interested in finding any kind of job. So I decided to look around for jobs, I worked in the construction sites in the city but I soon realized that it wasn't worth it. I left home before my daughter and son went to school. I cooked meals for the day; took my lunch and left for the day. On my way back from

work I would buy rice, lentils and vegetables to cook. When I returned home my younger daughter would be crying for food. I would then go find fire wood, make fire and start the cooking which took hours. I became frustrated because the money that I was earning was spent in my auto fare and groceries and whatever was left my husband took from me. I wasn't able to save any money. I was tired and frustrated when I got back home to find my children crying for food. I realized that my husband was not taking care of them. He soon started drinking because there were women in the neighborhood selling rice beer. In my frustration I decided to look for other ways of living and raising my family.

For a few years we struggled as a family. About five years ago during the rainy season when I was picking mushrooms I thought of my mother who went to sell vegetables, mushrooms, and dry greens. I told my husband that I was going to Ranchi the next morning to sell mushrooms. The next day I went to pick mushrooms very early in the morning, got ready and left for the city market. The mushrooms were sold in two hours and I had money in my hand. On the way home I decided that I was going to do the same thing the following Saturday. When I had the money I would buy vegetables from the nearby village markets on Tuesdays and Fridays and go to Ranchi city market on Wednesdays and Saturdays to sell. This was my decision and I did not care about what my husband was going to tell me. I was concerned about my children. By this time all my children were in school; they helped me in household work. The days I left for city market I cooked food for all and left in the morning. My oldest daughter helped her brother and sister to get ready for school.

My husband likes to sit around the house and do nothing. But I like what I do. I am busy on Tuesdays and Fridays buying vegetables from village market and on Wednesdays and Saturdays I go to Ranchi to sell the same vegetables for a better price. On Mondays and Thursdays I tried to work around the house. I like making broom and knitting mats so I work on those things on Mondays and Thursdays. Our children have chores that they do every day before and after their school. I encourage them to study in the morning before school. I think I am a successful vegetable vender and would like my children to learn the best way to live their lives. I want them to be educated, to find jobs, work hard and be responsible for their family and village.

## **FINDINGS PART II: THEMES EMERGING FROM THE LIFE STORIES OF THE WOMEN**

In the previous section I introduced six women who have profound stories of life. In this section, I have underlined the themes that emerged from each of their stories by listening carefully to them, watching their expressions, and sharing their emotions. These themes illustrate the struggles, sorrows and joys of their lives. There are six major themes with subthemes.

### **Theme 1: Our Lives are Heavy and Painful Because of Daily Hard Work**

These tribal women work hard; their work begins before sunrise and ends after everyone else in the family has gone to bed. They start their day in the kitchen and end the day in the kitchen: starting fire for cooking, making rice from paddy, cleaning, getting water from the well and cooking. Before they leave the house, they clean the

courtyard, pick up the cow dung, feed and dress the children for school and take care of the needs of the elders. The women who help with the farming go to work in the field but those who work as day laborers finish chores at home early in order to rush to work with a small lunch bag in hand. All six women who participated in the research shared their role in the family as bread winners, their frustration over earning less than what they work for and the great agony over not getting help from their husbands in raising their family. Under the first theme, I have discussed the three sub-themes, namely: *bread winner; we earn less than what we work for and we work both at home and outside the home.*

### **Bread Winners**

Traditionally, in Indian society, men are the bread winners while in tribal society men and women both contribute towards family income. All these six women grew up in homes where both parents were responsible for raising their families. The father was seen as the head of the household who cared for the family and was responsible for the family. Sunami talked about her father who believed in farming:

He was a hardworking man. He worked and made us all work on the farm. My mother who grew up in the city and did not know much about farming life learned to live in the village and worked hard. Though she was educated compared to my illiterate father, she respected and supported him. They worked together. He wanted our home to be self-sufficient and self-supported.

Chari shared about her family, “My father went to the field before sunrise, my mother cooked food and fed us at home before leaving for the field. She took food and water for my father so he could work long hours in the field.” Binko who is the older woman recalled her family life and said that her father made sure all the children had food to eat and clothes to wear. Her husband, who was a responsible father provided

for all. “When my father-in-law died my husband took responsibility for the entire household. My mother-in-law, who lived with us was old and we took care of her. Our children were in school and my husband worked hard to keep them in school and took care of the farm all alone. Merkha’s parents also worked hard to provide for their family. She said:

Some days I did not see my father because he went to work before I woke up and got back home after I had gone to sleep. During farming season he worked on our family farm before he went to work on *Lal sahab*’s (local land lord’s) farm and on the way back he would stop by our farm.

Salen’s father spent hours on the vegetable farm in order to earn extra money to raise his family. Shanti remembers her grandfather working hard on the farms of others in order to raise his family. She told:

My *nana* (maternal grand father) did not have enough farming land so he helped others who had big farms. He worked as a day laborer and raised his five daughters. When my mother and I were betrayed by my father’s family he provided for us and raised me as his own daughter.

However, a very different reality emerged as the research participants shared their stories. In this generation, the role of being a provider has shifted from the father to the mother. Salen took a long breath, looked outside, and said:

My husband does not take the responsibility for providing for our family. Early in our marriage he cared for our family; we worked together in the farm. Since I started selling vegetables he is more relaxed. He stays home and does nothing. He does not help in the household work nor does he contribute towards providing for the family. He is lazy. If he wanted to he could find a job close to home. He finds food to eat and rice beer to drink and with that he is happy. I am the one who works day and night and to bring in the money needed to buy food, clothing and also provide for the education of our children. He is not even ashamed of asking me for money to buy tobacco and rice beer.

Bread winner does not mean simply providing food for the family. For these women it means providing education for children, giving them a safe place to live and sharing their motherly love with those who are orphaned. As is the case with Merkha who shares her life not only with her own daughter but also with three young boys who lost their mother. Their father couldn't care for them and their extended family couldn't nurture them either. Merkha agreed to her second marriage to a widower hoping for a better life. But very soon she found his family to be economically unstable. Her father-in-law, before he died, had mortgaged most of the family land so that they have to depend upon something more than just farming for their livelihood.

There were three small children aged 6, 4 and 2 in the family. I could not see them go hungry. I wanted to be a good mother to them. I was concerned for their education so I went to the brick kiln and started working there. I worked 7 days a week. I got the oldest son enrolled in a small school in the neighboring village. I needed to work to pay for his tuition, uniform, books and stationery. The other two children were too young to go to school so, most of the time, I took them with me to work; the four year old played with other children but the two year old was always with me. I tied him on my back when I worked. Life was stressful when I started working in the brick kiln but we had food to eat and clothes to wear for children. {Merkha}

Even today she said:

I earn 80 rupee (\$ 1.5) per day in the rice mill. Friday is our pay day. I get 420 to 460 rupees (less than \$ 10) depending on the number of working days. I receive that money and immediately it is gone because I buy 15-20 Kilogram rice right there for the week ahead. We are a big family; children are growing and they eat a lot. I bring very little money home. With that little money I have to manage the house buying such things as oil, sugar, salt, tea leaf, spices, lentils, and other things to eat. Also kerosene oil for lamps, soap, detergents and other needed things have to be provided out of that income. My husband is a farmer and he wants to be a traditional farmer. I have suggested him that he raise vegetables for some extra income but he does not listen to me. He likes to hang around with his friends and enjoy the rice beer that I make. On the other hand, it is I who have to earn the money to provide for our family's daily needs.

Chari, who is mother of six, became the bread winner for her family after her third daughter was born. She said:

There was no other choice for me than to go to work in the brick kiln when my third daughter was about one year old. I was forced to take this job because the brick kiln being next to our house made it possible for me to come home during my lunch hour to watch my children. Most of the days my husband would be out of the house. I never knew what he did because I was not allowed to question him. He earned money but just for himself. He did not give me money to raise our family. If he was in a good mood he would bring some food items or clothes for children but he did not offer help to buy any of the necessary things when they were needed.

Sunami shared her painful experience: “One day I had a headache and, as I was sweeping the floor, I wanted to sit down. I decided to sit and take a little break but right at that moment the boss came and shouted at me. I tried to tell him about my headache but his response was to go home and lose money for half a day.” She said, “what was I to do in this situation? I had to keep on working because of the 80 rupees (\$ 1.3) involved were more important to me than my need for relief for my headache.”

### **We earn less than what we work for**

Traditionally, there is a distinct division of labor in the society. There are some kinds of work that women are not allowed to do, such as ploughing and roofing. Each tribe in India has its own traditional division of labor. Even in construction work, men and women have different tasks; women carry bricks, sand, concrete mixture all day long on their heads. In a multi-stories site, they carry loads many floors up and down. Many a times, they have to use a temporary bamboo-slope to go up and down, which is slippery and dangerous for women with a heavy load on their heads. Moreover, they are paid significantly less than men. If for some reason, women have to do the work that

men generally do, women are still paid what is due for them as women workers.

Though they realize that this is discriminatory and unjust, yet they accept it because it is the way it has always been. This sub-theme expresses the tribal women's deep desire for change in wages and compensation in the work place.

Shanti was very excited to start working when she was only 14 or 15 years old on a vegetable farm. She was paid Rs. 30 (\$ .50) per day during the first season. She assumed that it was just because she was new that she was given less. Later she went to work at a construction site. There she learnt that women are paid less than men. She stated:

Always my friends and I were the first ones to get to work, opened the doors, got all the materials and equipment (tools) outside, cleaned the surroundings, and started our work. We really worked hard. Others, mostly men, would come half an hour late. They would take time to store their bicycles, food and clothes outside and then come to the site to work. Even at work they would talk, laugh and take quick breaks for sharing and chewing tobacco with other men. Besides, that they would order the women around for petty things and on top of that, they would find fault with our work. We had only a half hour break for lunch. I went home to eat because it was so close to my work and if I was 5 minutes late all the men would grumble. The women workers were the last to leave the work place after cleaning all the tools, cleaning the surroundings, storing the tools inside, and locking the door but when the pay day came we were paid less than the men were.

The women are deemed physically weak and hence, their labor is regarded as less valuable. They are victims of exploitation. They work hard but are underpaid and overworked. Merkha works in a rice mill and is paid 80 rupees (\$ 1.3) per day. She works from 8am till 5pm. There are 10 local women who work in that rice mill. Their job is to clean the boiler room, pick rice, pack and move packed rice for delivery.

Merkha told:

There are men who work with us in the packing area; they make us do everything even lifting 25 kilogram rice bags from one place to another. They sit around, look after the machines and order us around. Many men who are non-tribals from neighboring state take advantage of us because we are illiterate and tribal women. They mostly sit and do their work and yet, they are paid more than we are. Carrying the rice bags to the delivery truck is hard work. Generally, men are assigned to load delivery truck but when they have large orders, the women are assigned to do this work too but we are paid less than the men are.

Tribal women are sincere and hardworking; they do what they are assigned and do it diligently. There are many ways that people take advantage of the women when they are working. Sunami who also works in this rice mill says, “The boiler room is a dangerous place to work and that being the case we have been told time and time again to be careful”. Every morning when they sign in they are assigned jobs; their supervisors are men who don’t let them take a break.

My husband sent me to work in Kolkata in a construction company. There were many tribal women there who worked like machines; people who were overseers would shout at us if we were slow. We were not allowed to sit down or visit with each other. I did not like the place, the people or the work. When I first came there I was told that I would be able to save money but soon I realized it wasn’t more than what I was making at home. Here also men were paid more than we were. {Chari}

### **We work both at home and outside the home**

“Working outside the home is not my choice, I am forced to do it.” Said Sunami. One afternoon Sunami asked me to come to her house during lunch break so that she could share her life story with me. Knowing it was her lunch time I got there little late. When I knocked on the door and did not get any reply, I decided to sit outside the house and wait for her. A little later I heard her voice inside the house from the side of the attached barn so I went in calling out and asking if anyone was home. She said that she would be right there and asked me to take a seat. But knowing her

well I decided to go towards the sound to look for her and see if I could be of help to her. I saw her cleaning the barn. Cleaning the barn in the afternoon was a shock to me but I did not say anything knowing that she might be embarrassed.

This morning I couldn't get all my work done so I did what was necessary and left for work. Cooking, cleaning, and getting my daughter ready for school is a priority for me in the morning. I hope to get help from my husband but he is always late in getting up. I do his work too taking the cattle out. I expect some help from him at home because he is always home but it is very rare that he helps me in the daily chores. I would like my husband to watch our son who is at home, give him food when I am away, etc. But he would never do that. My son waits for me to come back to give him food, even my husband expects me to serve him daily. During lunch hour when I come home I see all the work waiting for me; everything from giving food and water to the cattle, to cleaning dishes, and washing clothes. My husband could do some of that work to help me, at least he could feed the cattle but he just sits around the house. Some days I get so busy doing things that I go back to work without eating my lunch. Working both at home and outside the home is hard for me to manage, especially when my husband does not help me. {Sunami}

Merkha expressed her agony about working both at home and also long hours at her work place. She said, "I am being crushed as wheat in a grinding stone." Naturally their bodies are tired working day and night. Men, if they are working in the field all day, return home and rest but women don't have the choice of resting. Merkha states, "After getting home I go straight to the well to get water to cook our evening meal." Sunami said, "My first responsibility after returning home from work is to wash dishes, bring water from the well, cook, bring the cattle home and then feed the family."

Women also have social responsibilities along with their regular work. It is as Binko described it:

When visitors or relatives come home, I leave all that I am doing to serve them. This is our culture. My mother taught me to be hospitable. Being hospitable means washing their feet to welcome them to our home, giving them water, tea or rice beer and food to eat. When visitors come, it is polite to sit and visit with

them. Sometimes I can't finish my work because of this but it is important for me to be hospitable.

The women in the village have no time to recuperate and rest following childbirth. All five women who are married explained that although, at times, it was difficult to work during pregnancy they continued to work hard. Binko is the mother of four children who worked in the field with her husband till her day of delivery. After a week when both mother and child had their ceremonial bath she went back to the field to work carrying her child on the back. Sunami who had her second child in her house said, "I was glad my mother came to be with me and help with my older daughter. After "*Nahan* (ceremonial bath), I was able to do all my work, my mother lived with us for few more days to help me; she bathed and massaged my son. I was able to get back to my regular work." Chari was alone for each delivery, she had little help from her husband, but she said:

I learnt to take care of myself and my children in those difficult moments. The hard work was washing clothes. I went to the well to wash clothes. I took my little child with me to the well so he/she would be safe. Older children always watched their siblings and that was helpful.

Salen couldn't understand why her husband had become so lazy over the past few years. She said:

Since I started earning money by selling vegetables my husband has become lazy. I am away from the house five days out of seven. On Wednesdays and Saturdays I am in Ranchi selling vegetables and on Tuesdays and Fridays I go to nearby village markets to buy vegetables to sell the next day. On the days I go to buy I leave very early so that I can find good produce. The evenings are spent in preparation for the next day in addition to my daily chores at home. For the past few months I have started selling vegetables on Sundays in Itki railway station. On Saturdays I try to sell vegetables early so I can shop for my family in the city. On Mondays and Thursdays I make mats and brooms to sell in the city. Never once had my husband asked me how I take care of the family. For

him food is available in the kitchen, he serves himself when he is hungry. I leave very early and come back late in the evening. My daughter who is just 13 years old helps me in the kitchen.

Days are longer for women in the village because they do everything from scratch. During spring they collect leaves to boil paddy to make rice. Throughout the year they collect firewood from the forest, dry them and store them in a safe place. Sunami went to collect firewood 30 kilometers away from her home leaving her family behind. This was necessary for her, she said, "As this was the only chance I had to collect firewood for the next year." She went for a week to her friends' village where the whole village got together to clean the forest and collect firewood for their families. This is a community affair, where the whole community gathers to help one another. This is done before the rains begin so that they have firewood for the rainy and winter season. The weather did not cooperate with Sunami when she got to this village.

During my first two days there they had rain. No one wanted to go and work in the rain, but I was concerned because I had left the family and I had just this one chance to go so I went alone. Few people were there cutting small shrubs. I joined them. For the next five days I worked hard cutting and stacking the woods in one place. {Sunami }

Friends helped her to assemble two small truckloads of firewood. She returned home hoping to make transportation arrangements to transport the firewood she had gathered to her home. Though these women find themselves without the wholehearted support of their husbands they continue to struggle for their families' survival. When the vegetable prices went up last winter Merkha wanted to grow vegetables in their backyard. She wanted her husband's help but he was not interested in this.

I asked my husband to plant some vegetables for us to eat but he ignored me and went away. I was very hurt but decided to go and prepare the garden by myself.

He came behind me, I thought he would help but he sat there and watched me work. May be it is a man-thing; he prefers visiting with his friends and drinking rice beer. {Merkha}

Chari's husband opened a tea shop but instead of working in it himself he expected her to work there. She explained:

My husband opened the tea shop. I was very happy. But he expected me to work there. He sat in the shop as a manager and did not do any work. I cooked, served the customers and washed the dishes. This wasn't easy work as I managed two places at the same time. Before dawn I finished all the chores at home and then opened the tea shop. I worked there as I did at home. I went to the well and got water for the day. My daughters helped me. We made three to four trips in the morning to get water for the day. I would start the fire in a coal stove and then get ready to prepare the breakfast. My husband would come in his own time and sit and demand his cup of tea.

Cultivation season is a busy time for everyone. Merkha said, "I cooked food very early in the morning for our children to eat before they went to school. Then I went to work in our field with my husband before I went to work in the rice mill. Some days I skipped lunch because I wanted to make sure that the field would be ready for plantation before the rains came."

Shanti has no option open to her. She is the caregiver and provider for her elderly grandparents:

Since my *nana* (maternal grand father) and *nani* (maternal grand mother) took care of me now I feel it is my turn to take care of them in their old age. I cook and feed them before I go to work and when I return home I clean the house and prepare dinner for them. During cultivation season, I am responsible for their farm. I get help from our relatives to prepare the ground as I am not permitted to plough. I also help my relatives when they need my help. {Shanti}

**Theme 2: We do everything to send our children to school hoping that their lives will be better than ours**

Education is always considered to be the key component of human development and a great liberating force. These women work hard to send their children to school with great hope for the future of their children. They sacrifice much to make life better for their children. Sunami feels deeply responsible for her two children. She said, “I don’t want my children to grow up like me.” She works 6 days a week in the rice mill with the hope that she might be able to send her children to a good school. She sacrificed her motherly love for her daughter when she and her husband left her 6 year old daughter with relatives and went to Bihar state to earn their living. Her daughter was in class 1 and continued to go to school from their relatives’ home. Regarding this Sunami shared:

It wasn’t easy leaving a little girl alone, she did not understand what was happening but I wanted the best for her. Her father did not care whether she came with us or stayed behind. But I wanted her to go to school. I made the decision and the arrangements with our relatives with a promise that we would send money for her expenses in school and at home. Being away from my daughter, I cried many nights thinking about her. I wanted to see her but I knew that it was all done for her good and that of the family.

Chari who wanted to go to school but was not allowed to do so said, “I do not want my children to be in the situation that I am in. I want them to live with dignity.” She is very hopeful about her second daughter. With excitement she said, “My second daughter is my hope. I will do everything to let her continue in her studies. She is good in her studies and wants to be a nurse. She is an inspiration to her siblings.”

There are three sub themes that speak of these women's struggle and dreams:

*groaning pain of not being able to go to school; concerns for their children and their future; seeing education as a way to better life.*

### **Groaning pain of not being able to go to school**

Those women who were unable to attend school feel sadness and pain. I was also sad to hear their stories. Shanti wanted to go to school to prove to everyone that she was not the fool that many people thought she was because of her name. She said:

I requested my *mosi* (maternal aunt) who went to school in our neighboring village to take me along. I cried so much that my *nana* (maternal grandfather) who was struggling financially took me to the school and enrolled me in class 1. I was happy to attend school. I went with my aunt and other children in the neighborhood. It lasted only two years and I could not continue my education because my aunts were also in school. Financially it was hard on my grandfather to send three children to school. One aunt was in class 10 and needed more time for studies. My grandparents needed my help at home and needed money for my aunt to complete her schooling. I was sad but I thought I would be able to go back to school again later on.

Chari grieves about missing school. Being the oldest daughter she became responsible for her three younger sisters. She had to sacrifice in order to create possibilities for her sisters and in the process lost all her own possibilities for an education. I sensed that she felt this as an injustice. With tears in her eyes she repeatedly lamented not being able to attend school:

I do not understand why my parents did not send me to school. They sent my three sisters to school. When I realized I was not to be given that privilege I requested my parents, even begged them to send me to school but their answer was always no. I understood their situation; they themselves were helpless. They worked hard to raise their family by working on the farm and as day laborers. Being the oldest daughter, it was understandable for me to stay home

and help my parents raise my younger sisters, tend the cattle and take care of household chores. {Chari}

For some, going to school was not even an option. Sunami did not talk much about her own education. When I asked her if she ever wanted to go to school she turned her face from me and said, “There was no option of my going to school in our house.” Her father was illiterate and did not believe in education and certainly not for girls. As Sunami continued her interview she said:

My father always said, ‘girls are meant to stay home when they are in their parents’ home and learn to work on the farm and in the house. One day they will grow up and leave their parents’ house and go to be with another family, they will be members of another’s household. They will be “*baechal betti*” (sold daughters). Why should I spend money on girls who are going to be someone else’s one day? They should learn to be good housewives to take care of their house, husband, and children.’ When my father was drunk he repeated those words. I remember leaving our house and going to my neighbor’s house during such outbursts because I hated the word “*Baechal betti*” (sold daughter). Seeing his attitude towards girls made me very sad and I knew that there wasn’t much hope for me even though I would express my desire to go to school.

Salen said:

Though there was a school in my village, my sisters and I were not allowed to go to school. My parents understood that girls should learn household work to find good husbands. I just gave up any hope I had of going to school, knowing that it was intended only for boys. My parents talked about boys’ benefit from education to help the family in the future. They thought if boys in the family would study they would be able to help them later in life. I did dream about going to school but it never became possible for me or my sisters.”

Chari who wanted to go to school wondered:

I wonder what I would have become or where I would have been if I had gone to school. My sisters have jobs. My younger sister works in a school. She earns good money. Her family life is so much better than mine; her children are in a good school. They live in the city, her husband has a good job in a factory. Because of her job she is able to help me financially. I think if I had gone to school, I would have been in a better situation than I am in right now. I might

have had a better house, a better place to raise my children and be able to send them to a better school.

Merkha is a victim of poverty. She never thought that there might be an option for a person like her or her siblings to attend school.

My parents were so poor that they could not afford to send us to school. Going to school meant staying away from home in a rented place, having kitchen expense in two places meant extra expense, including tuition fees, paying for uniforms, books, exercise copies, stationery and other expenses. There wasn't any school near our village. My parents never even talked about sending us to school. None of us went to school. Instead we grew up earning our living from age 11 or 12. (Merkha)

Groaning pain of not being able to attend school is still fresh in Shanti's life. She went back to school after dropping out for two years. At age 11 she was bold and courageous enough to go back to school all by herself and asking the headmaster for readmission. This time she changed her name to Shanti and enrolled herself in school. But, of necessity, she again found herself staying and helping her grandparents at home who were in need. With a heavy heart she shared the dream of her life:

When I was about 5 years old, my *nani* (maternal grandmother) got very sick, *nana* (maternal grandfather) took her to the nearest hospital. We went by bus to this place; they admitted my *nani* and I, along with my *mosi* (aunt) stayed with her in the hospital. I admired all the nurses and doctors who came to see my grandmother. I liked how nurses were well dressed especially their white dresses; they were well mannered and worked hard. As a child I wanted to be just like them, I wanted to be a nurse when I grew up. But I could not continue my education because of our family's situation. My dream is still a dream and I wonder if it could ever become a reality.

### **Concern for the children and the future of their families**

Women who did not have the opportunity of going to school have a great concern for their children and their future. They understand the primary role of

education as an agent of change. Shanti who dreamed of becoming a nurse wants her half brothers and sisters to be educated. She expressed her concern for her family:

My mother and her husband seemingly do not think about the future for these children, but I do. I want my half brother who is 11 years old to go to school. He was enrolled in school but his dad wanted him to help in farming so he pulled him out of school. When I learned of this I found an excuse to call him to stay with me to help with my *nana* and *nani* (maternal grandparents). I told them that I needed help in tending the cattle and he would be a great help. So they sent him. I am sending him to an after-school program in the Training Center to learn to read and write and next year I will enroll him in school.

“Selling vegetables in the city, traveling on hot summer days and rainy and cold days alike, going to different village markets looking for fresh vegetables, being harassed by other vegetable venders is no fun” said Salen. She continued:

I don't want my daughters to follow in my footsteps. The day I realized that it all depends on me how I raise my children I decided to work hard for the sake of my children so that their future might be brighter than mine. I don't want my daughters to live my life selling vegetables; I don't want my son to live like my husband not supporting his family. I want them to complete their schooling and not be drop out. I want them to learn and be educated and find a good job and not just depend upon farming.

Sunami understands the importance of the encouragement and support needed to help her daughter to go to school. She said:

Every evening my daughter would sit with her books. From time-to-time she would ask questions. I knew my daughter needed help to finish her homework. Being an illiterate person I could not help her. I requested my husband but he always had excuses. I have seen neighbors' children studying at night. I would often send her to them to get help in her homework. Last year some students from the Training Center came to invite my daughter to an after-school program. I was happy and gladly sent her to that program. She is happy to attend this program because she gets help with her homework. I am glad she has a place where she can learn and grow.

There is a great concern among these women lest their own children of being dropout of school because their husbands have been dropouts.

My husband was “*lanal beta*” (after second marriage his mother brought him to the new family) so he did not have much choice. He lived dependent upon the grace of his stepfather. He was able to attend school till class 7 but later he was needed in the family’s farm work. Being the oldest male in the family he had more responsibilities than the others did. Therefore he discontinued his education. {Chari}

She is really concerned now because her husband is bedridden and she is bound at home to stay and care for him. Her concern is for her third daughter who is discontinuing her education to work as a domestic helper in the city in order to earn money to help her mother raise the family. Her son who is 11 or 12 years old is responsible for the farming. He cares for the cattle and works on the farm before and after school.

Education expands livelihood opportunities and increases earning potential and thus helps in tackling poverty at large. Merkha who grew up in poverty wants her daughter to have a better life.

My daughter, who is almost 20, would like to become a nurse. That was her dream as a child and I will do whatever I can to help her pursue her dream. I know my husband does not let me help her but I want to be there for her as a mother to see her complete her intermediate degree (class 12<sup>th</sup>) and find a good nursing school where hostel is provided. Our hope is in a government nursing school where she can be granted both scholarship as well as hostel. We are so poor that we can’t afford any private school. I want her life to be better than my own. I want to find a good husband for her, an educated man who has a good job so that their lives are better than ours.

### **Education as a way to a better life:**

Education is widely accepted as an index of development and a key to a better life for both family and community. For these poor and the marginalized women education is hope for the future. Binko recalls some of her conversations with her husband when their first daughter was born. Her eyes were filled with tears of joy when she shared her memories, “My husband believed in education, he was not himself fortunate enough to go to school, but he heard a lot about education from doctor *baba* (father). Doctor *baba* (father) encouraged him to work hard, have a big dream and save money to send our children to school to become teachers, doctors, nurses or important big office holders. When our oldest daughter was born my husband said, “She will be a teacher and I will provide everything she needs to go to school so that her life might be better than ours. She will not struggle like us.” Binko continued her story and said:

I have seen the change in my family through education. My daughter helped us to understand living. We were illiterate and many people took advantage of us because we could not read or write. When she started to read, write and understand we depended on her to tell us what to do or not to do. She helped us in making major decisions for our family. When she became a teacher she came home and honored us. She helped her brother and younger sisters financially to complete their degrees. She became the spokesperson for the extended family. When people needed counsel they went to her. She became key a person to help us in filling out any paper works. She is thoughtful and even now helps us in farming by providing seed for our farm every year. She not only helps our family but our extended family as well.

Chari has great hopes for the future. She said, “My second daughter is very interested in studies. She wants to study.” Sunami who has two young children dreams that someday her children will be living and working in a city. Her hope is high and she wants to achieve this by working hard for her children. She said:

I work in a rice mill as a laborer; I am paid less than many who work in the same mill just because I am illiterate. I can't read numbers on different machines. On pay day I feel ashamed when I put my thumbprint in the register because the men who work in the office comment on our ignorance as illiterate women. I know my children will not experience the shame I do.

There is hope through education for these illiterate tribal women. Sunami

continued:

I will send my children to school so that their lives are not spent in misery. At least they will have some choices in life, choices of job, and choices for their families. What is there for us here in this small village? There is no school, no hospital, no electricity, no water. We have to struggle for life everyday. I want their world to be bigger than mine. They will have better opportunities.

These women believe that education helps children to be bold in speaking out, to, learn how to behave, and live a civilized life. Merkha could not afford to give her daughter the best clothes or food, but she could help her in education. She was proud to share her daughter's achievements. With a sense of satisfaction and pride she shared the following:

I am not only proud that my daughter has completed class 10 and is going to intermediate college in Bero (a small town ) but also I am proud to know that she is conscious of who she is. When I did not have any job I decided to make easy money by selling rice beer at the road side. My husband was happy with me because I was making money and he could have free glasses of rice beer when he wanted. One afternoon I was not feeling well so I came home and asked my daughter Sunita to go and sell the rest of the rice beer. She did not want to do that work but seeing that I was sick she decided to go. After an hour she came back home in tears and said, 'how can you make money doing such a cheap job? There is no respect; all kinds of people stop by to drink beer and they make bad comments to me. Many young men stop just to talk to me. It is better to eat rice with salt than to sell rice beer by the road side. You sell yourself by selling rice beer.' She opened my eyes. Since then I have stopped selling rice beer. I am proud of her and am glad to know that she is my daughter and has a sense of right and wrong.

Merkha continued to share:

When we were young no one was there to counsel us and tell us how important education was for our lives. My parents were illiterate and simple village people. No one encouraged them to send children to school. Their world was small and they could manage just by living in that small world. But I realized when my daughter was born how important education is. Education will open up everything for my daughter. It will make a way for a better life. I was very thankful to my brothers who encouraged me and financially helped me to send my daughter Sunita to school. They promised me that they will pay for my daughter's schooling. My daughter went to school with her cousins; she was interested in school and made progress in studies. When a proposal came for my second marriage my brothers promised me to keep my daughter with them so she could complete her schooling. As I struggle each day with living and raising my family I realize the importance of education.

**Theme 3: Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?**

Though illiterate, these women know that education is very important for a good life, yet they have many questions about education. These questions arise due to what they experience each day at home and at work. Four out of six women who shared their life stories have husbands who went to school. They are intrigued to see that education did not bring about any change in the lives of these "educated" men. Their lives are characteristic of those who had never been to school.

I thought going to school would bring changes in a person's life. I do not see any changes in these men in our village who have been to school. Some times I wonder what my husband did in school or what did he learn? He is proud to say that he is 9<sup>th</sup> class pass but he shows no sign of responsibility, thoughtfulness, respect or maturity. He does not take responsibility for himself or his family. {Merkha}

Salen shared her dream of getting married to an educated person so that they could raise their children in a better environment. But she was deeply hurt when she realized her husband's attitude towards education.

I was very happy when I found out that my husband had been to school. I knew we could not depend on just farming to raise our family. With his educational background I thought he might find a job in the city and that we could live there. When I shared with him my dream about raising our children in the town or city he said that he was not interested in working outside the home and that he preferred to be a farmer and stay in the village. He thought that the village school was good enough for his children to learn to read and write. I am disappointed to see him not helping our children in their school work. {Salen}

Women have a great respect for education and for educated people but they are conflicted when they see their husbands sitting around gossiping and drinking and doing nothing worthwhile. Sunami's husband is young, physically fit and able to get a job, but for one year he has stayed home without doing anything. In frustration Sunami said, "I am tired of seeing him sit around and doing nothing. He is at home but does nothing to help me. He shows no concern for sending our children to school."

The way my husband treats me looks like he has never been to school. I admire those who are educated and treat their family members well. My husband looks at me as if I do not know anything; he controls my life even though I provide everything for the family." {Chari}

These women expressed deep anguish over their "educated" husbands' lives. On the one hand, they have much hope for a better life for their children on account of education but, at the same time, they fail to understand as to why educated people would live such irresponsible and insensitive lives. Instead of making progress because of their education they live as if there is no tomorrow. Their indifferent attitude towards the future of their children is what these women find most painful. Instead of being helpful, most of the time the husbands create more worries and burdens for their wives. In their frustration, these women have almost given up on them. *Living in bondage to drinking and sitting idle; not caring for their family; husbands don't share emotionally;*

*and abusive husbands* are four sub themes under theme three “Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?”

### **Living in bondage to drinking and sitting idle**

Traditionally, drinking rice beer was a common practice among Oraon tribal community. It was served during such family or community celebrations as festivals, marital negotiations and weddings. Generally, women prepared rice beer at home to serve family and friends. When guests came they were served rice beer along with other food items. At present, a customary drink has become a huge problem for the community as it has become commercialized and is available in the markets and roadside. Many men folk in the community are addicted to rice beer and other alcoholic drinks. This has caused great suffering and pain for their families. This was quite obvious in the stories of four of the married women who participated in the research.

It is not that he does not work, he works but he spends all his money on drinking. When he worked as a day laborer he would come home on pay day completely drunk. To make the children happy he would bring them some sweets. I did not cook an evening meal for him on pay days knowing that he would come home late and completely drunk. I tried talking to him but he would say, “I work hard and I enjoy my life. I am not asking you to give me money to drink. This is my life and I want to enjoy it.” He would keep on drinking for the next three to four days until his money was gone. He would look for excuses to drink. {Chari}

I visited Chari’s family often and went to drink tea in their tea shop. One day when I came to visit I found their house was locked and the tea shop was closed. I went to a neighbor’s house and their door also was closed. I could sense something was not right. Soon I saw both husband and wife were singing and coming home holding each other’s hands. I was surprised and I asked them what was special, he started crying loud saying, “My good friend is dead.” In order to forget the pain, he said, he drank

some alcohol. I observed that for the next three to four days his tea shop was closed.

“Alcohol and rice beer is tearing our families apart.” said Sunami in deep distress. She continued:

Last summer when we were gone to another state to earn our living we gave our land papers and power of attorney to our relatives. My husband was called by our relatives to come and settle our land matter with the rice mill manager. When I returned home this year, I saw a nice big road on our land. My husband had agreed to lease our land to the rice factory for constructing an access road for the mill. In return, he was given some money, the promise of a job for both him and me and for free drinking water for our family and neighbors. The money that he received went in drinking. Often he would approach the manager to ask for money and get drunk with his friends. The manager is happy to give out a few rupees to manipulate us.

I knew that drinking was a major reason for the tribal people’s loss of their land. In fact, this aspect of tribal life has been used to perfection by people from the outside in order to usurp their land. But, to experience the pain and helplessness of the innocent victims was deeply moving. Merkha’s husband leased over an acre of land to build a waste water tank for the rice mill. Merkha said, “I was not allowed to ask how much money my husband received from the manager.” In such a land deal women’s opinions are generally not heard. These women have tried to help their husbands so that their drinking does not destroy their families. Salen’s husband was a social drinker. He worked hard during the day and had rice beer in the evening if he was very tired. But, as time went by, he started drinking every day.

I saw him visiting neighbors and friends every evening and coming back drunk so I decided to prepare rice beer at home to keep him at home. It worked for some time but later I found out that when I was away from home he would drink during the day. As a result, he would not go to the field to work. In anger I decided to stop making but it did not help. He has become a regular drinker. When he is offered drinks he drinks day and night, sometimes he even drinks

rice beer on credit. I have been asked by the women who sell rice beer to pay my husband's debt. {Salen}

In addition to their struggle for survival, these women also have to struggle to deal with their drunkard husbands so often in the evening when they are exhausted in body and mind. A drunkard husband is more than a pest for them at home. In some sense, their difficult situations make them tough.

One Friday evening I returned home thinking about the groceries that needed to be bought for the week. Friday being payday I had 200 rupees (about \$ 4) in my hands. I took our grocery bags and left for market. On my way to the market I met my husband who was coming from the market. He was drunk I asked him to go home but he followed me to the market. There he would not let me do what I needed to do. He kept pestering me, asking for money. People were looking at us. I managed to get what we needed and brought him home. He was very angry with me and started arguing with me because I did not give him the money he wanted. {Sunami}

Life goes on for these women, men drink and sit around the house, visit with other men and expect their wives to work, bring money home, feed them and care for the family.

### **Not caring for the family**

In the traditional family of the Oraon community, a husband and father is expected to provide, protect and lead the family. It was a model for many of the women in their families before their marriage. The women did not hide their feelings regarding the sad reality of their husbands.

My husband was always busy; it did not matter if he was working or just talking to someone. When our children questioned him about what kind of work he did he would say 'I am working for you so that you will have good life'. But in reality he worked for himself. He worked so that he would money to drink and when he was drunk he would sleep, go back and drink more till his pocket was empty. He did not help me to raise our family or pay for our children's

education. Caring is not only helping financially but being home for the children when they need a father. {Chari}

Sunami saw a change in her husband when he lost his job in the city. For him, losing his job drove him to become indifferent towards his family. Her husband's irresponsibility is very painful for her. She narrated:

Our early married life was good. My husband and I worked together. We took care of the farm; went outside the village to work when we realized we did not have enough to survive. He was very sincere and humble person who worked hard. He was very nice and caring to me till our son was born. Since he lost his job in the city and we moved back to the village, he has become a different person. He does not really care for our family. He is not concerned about providing food, clothing or education for our children. He may be thinking that 'I am earning enough for all.' He does not care to look for work; he is young and strong and can find work but he has learnt from other men in the village to sit around under the trees, talk and drink rice beer.

When her youngest boy was almost 4 years old, Merkha went through a crisis at home with sickness. All three children were sick. She requested her husband to look for a job in town as a day laborer so that she could stay home with their sick children. He neither listened to her nor took care of their sick children.

I missed many days of work which meant less earning. Those days I worked in the brick kiln near our house. Then our youngest son got sick, emotionally it was very hard for me to leave him and go to work. But money was needed so I went to work every day. His older brother looked after him when I was gone. Every day I cooked and fed them before I left. One day this little one who was very sick cried when I was going to work. He did not want me to leave but I had to go. I went to work but my heart and mind were at home worrying about him. During lunch break I came home running just to check on him. Seeing him asleep I was at peace and did not care about waking him up. I ate my food and went back to work. I think it was not even an hour later when my oldest son came running to call me. His brother was very sick and needed mother around him. I got permission from the manager to leave work early and requested a little money, he gave me 50 rupees (about \$ 1) and I ran home. My son was very sick. I picked him up and ran to the road side hoping for a bus or an auto

rickshaw to stop to take me to the hospital. I felt helpless, my older son was with me; I was crying as I was very worried; my husband was not around. I managed to take him to the doctor where they did all kinds of tests. His fever was so high that they kept him in the hospital. I told them I did not have any money but they said your son's life was more important than money at this time. Later they told me he had jaundice. He was treated for that and got better. I had to take a loan from the manager to pay the hospital bill and for his medicine. My husband came and saw us in the hospital but did not offer to stay with the sick child. Our older boy who was 9 years old was there to help me. {Merkha}

Salen also feels left alone to live and care for their children:

My husband prefers to stay home and do nothing unless it is cultivation season. This past summer I begged him to go and prepare the land before the rains were to come but he won't listen to me. I had to push him out of the house every morning. He would wait for me to go to the market and then he would lie around the house. He has a few friends like him who sit, talk and drink rice beer. He has no concern for his family. He has no concern for me. I spend all day away from home either buying vegetables or selling. He does not care how I feel. When I get back home most of the time he is not home. Our children come to me to ask for any money they need for school. I am the one who is responsible for providing for our household.

Sunami's daughter is in class 1 and goes to a private school 6 kilometers from their home. She said,

I am the only one in the family who is concerned for her schooling. My husband who went to school does not care if our daughter goes to school or stays home. I do not understand his attitude. I do everything to get her ready; feed her, give her lunch and get her ready for school. The older children from our neighborhood take her to school on a bicycle. Some days I have to put her in an auto-rickshaw if she is alone to go to school. It hurts to know that my husband who is home does not offer his help to take her to school. He has a bicycle and he is physically fit but has no interest in the life of this little girl who is eager to go to school. I always thought people who went to school learn more than reading and writing. I know some people who went to school and are educated. They are well mannered and have concern for their families. I am tired of seeing him sitting around the house doing nothing.

### **Husbands don't share emotionally**

It was very strange and special in a way to listen to the women spoke of their intimate relationship with their husbands.

My husband talks to me when he needs money from me. A few days ago I came home late in the evening from Ranchi, it was raining; I was wet and cold; I wanted to sit near the fire and drink hot tea. He saw me and came and sat by me. I was happy to see him sit with me in the kitchen. I thought of serving him tea but he said he already had some in our neighbor's house. Instead, he asked for money. When I asked him why he needed the money he said, 'It is none of your business to ask, just give me some money.' I was ready to serve him tea but he wanted money. {Salen }

Chari shared her deep hurt about her husband's greed for money even at the price of their daughter. She told:

My husband sent my oldest daughter to Delhi to work as a domestic helper when she was 13 or 14 years old. I requested him not to send her but he would not listen to me. He said she will work and send lots of money for the family. She is going to help you so that you don't have to work. I tried talking to my daughter also but she was excited about going to a big city. She was away for two years. I begged my husband almost every day to bring her back. I was worried about her wellbeing, her safety but he would not listen to me. He wanted money. He did not care about her life. I was very worried and became very ill. Later, after much pleading, my husband went to Delhi and brought her back.

Often women feel alone and helpless. Husbands don't show any concern for their wives. When Merkha's son was sick she needed her husband to share her pain, she said:

When I saw my son lying helpless I picked him up and took him to the hospital. I wanted my husband to be with me to help me, hold my son and share my burden and pain. I could not find him. I was alone in the hospital and when doctors were doing different tests they did not let me go to be with my son. I was holding my older son's hand who was only 9 years old. I thought I was going to lose my son. I needed my husband to be with me. Later when he came to the hospital he did not ask me how I was doing.

Sunami also shared her struggle:

I carry the burden of my family all alone; my husband does not care about my life. When I am tired, and would like to talk to him he would be either drunk or sleeping. I forget about pain when I am busy during the day but when I come home, my life feels overburdened with worries and anxieties.

Their inability to share their concerns with their husbands takes a heavy toll on them. Chari told:

Due to the pressure of raising our family, making both ends meet, sending children to school, facing sickness and uncertainty I was depressed. There were times when I felt like was going mad. Many times, my daughters consoled me, wiped my tears and strengthened me. My husband was not to be seen on many of these occasions.

### **Abusive Husbands**

Four women who are married are also abused physically, mentally and emotionally. Sometimes they react to this, but most of the time they take such abuse as part of being a wife and a woman. Merkha's first marriage was painful. After their marriage her husband left Merkha in the village with her in-laws and went to the city to work. Being the oldest daughter-in-law, Merkha cared for her in-laws faithfully. She helped on the farm and helped the family with everything they needed. Since she was told that her husband had a stable job in the city she had expected him to go there but she had also expected to accompany him. She related her experience of the early days of their married life:

My marriage was arranged knowing that he had a stable job in the city. He appeared to be a responsible person but when he left for the city and did not come home for few weeks, I was concerned. When he came home I expected him to give me some money so that I could manage the house. Instead of giving me any money he shouted at me. Later, whenever he came home he would argue with me over petty things. If I insisted on asking for money, he would push me and often beat me. It was hard to suffer such abuse at the hands of my husband who was not there with me and, when he was, abused me. But, my in-

laws were very nice to me and my daughter. I was married to him for five years. I grew vegetables and sold them in the market. Even when our daughter was born my husband did not bring customary gift for her. I lived in misery during the early years of my married life. I was able to stay in this marriage only because my in-laws loved me and my daughter and I loved them. {Merkha}

As a result, Merkha left her husband and went back to her parent's home. Even her in-laws were so tired of their abusive son that they agreed to her decision to abandon her husband and return to her parents' home.

Emotional and physical abuse is common in the lives of these married women. They carry the scars of their painful abuse both in bodies and hearts. It was so bad that for Chari, her husband's paralysis became a blessing in disguise.

In some ways I am in peace since my husband became bedridden. Though there are other worries I am free from physical abuse. He controlled every aspect of my life. I have spent my married life in tears. He made decisions for me. He took my salary from me. He always said, 'I talked to the manager and got the job for you, so this money belongs to me.' If I talked back he would start an argument and then he would hit me with whatever he could lay his hands on. It happened so often that I took his abuse as a part of my life. In such situations, the children would leave home and hide themselves outside. Once he was so angry at me that he threw firewood that was burning in the stove at me. Luckily, it was outside in the courtyard and I was able to run away. I did not get hurt physically but I was deeply hurt inside. I almost ran away from home but I thought of my children and cried for a long time away from the house. {Chari}

It took a very long time for Merkha to share her emotional pain with me. As far as her husband is concerned Merkha's daughter from her first marriage is the cause for his abuse. Her daughter moved to her mother Merkha's house for her college education. Because of her, Merkha has had to suffer emotional abuse.

I do not understand why my husband gets so upset when it comes to anything that has to do with my daughter. He has asked me not to spend money on her. After my daughter arrived everything went well for a few months. My husband did not have any problem with her earning some money. But when he found out

that she was saving the money she earned for her education, his attitude towards her changed. He stopped talking to her. He would not go into the kitchen if she was working there. He strictly warned me not to give any money to her not even one rupee. How can I not? I am working hard to raise our family; pay for three sons for their schools, clothes, food and everything and not be able to give even one rupee to my own daughter is hard for me. She is earning and paying for her own schooling, clothes, transportation and other needs. As a mother it is so painful for me not to be able to support her especially towards her education. I am asked to be mother to the three boys to whom I have not given birth but I am not allowed to care for the one to whom I gave birth. I can't share my pain with anyone. Sometimes I feel like my chest is going to burst with the pain and heaviness of my heart. {Merkha}

Sunami who is a mother of two was sad to share her emotional pain:

I expect help from my husband in daily chores but he is not at home to help me. He does not show any responsibility towards our children. I have requested him to watch our son when I am at work but most days I hear complaints from my son that his father is not at home when he is hungry. Instead of helping me he expects me to serve him and provide for him.

Chari couldn't stay away from her family for more than two months. She returned home from Kolkotta. She said:

When I got down from the auto rickshaw I could not believe my eyes, my husband was making tea and snacks and serving customers. I thought he was changed. But when he saw me he was angry and did not talk to me for many days. Later he made me work harder than before at home and in the tea shop. He stopped working and expected my daughters and me to bring all that was needed from the town. He came to collect the money from the box every hour. He would sit and talk to the customers and expect us to wait on him.

#### **Theme 4: No one is there to listen to us**

While listening to the stories of the research participants it was obvious that there was no one to listen to them. Though they live in families and within community, most of them are very lonely and feel helpless. The overwhelming challenges and poverty in their lives compel them to struggle constantly for survival. It was clear that

my interviews with them were a time for them to share their lives in a way that they had never done with any body else. In fact, due to the trust and rapport I was able to build with them, these women poured out their dark and painful past to me making them equally painful to me. Since almost all these families are struggling with so many issues of survival, rarely do they have the time, opportunity and persons with whom to share their emotions of pain and hurt. Unlike the women in the traditional tribal structure of the family, these women have become the principal bread winners for their families. As a result, these women are burdened with the worries and stress that come down over them as they realize that their struggle for survival is doomed to fail. I have come to realize that the strong solidarity and support traditionally provided in the tribal community is disappearing fast. Binko recalls her life as a child when she experienced community and belongingness. She said:

At times it is good to live in past memories, I sit and day dream while I tend goats. We had such wonderful life, being free in the village, running around in the open field, drinking water from the spring, eating fresh berries and fruits in the forest. I just smile thinking about those days. In the evenings we gathered near *Akhra* ( a round shaped raised platform in the middle of the village for community gathering and dancing) sang and danced as a community. The children sang and danced, grandparents sat and smoked *hookka* (a kind of smoke) with their friends and visited. My grandfather had a good time with his friends. They shared their joy and pain with each other. My mother went to our relatives' house every day to visit them. When my mother prepared special curry at home we shared it with our relatives and neighbors. Our neighbors shared their lives with us. We were like one big family. Now everybody is busy, people don't sit around in the evening to talk and share let alone singing and dancing. Children have their own life, they go to school, and parents are busy working. All my friends are gone; I don't have anyone to talk to; there is no one to talk to. I prefer to be with the goats all day long. In the evening when I get back home my children give me food I eat and I go to bed. After losing my husband my life is very lonely.

The loneliness and a sense of alienation are all the more pronounced because of their husband's inability to share with their wives emotionally. I have discussed this in two subthemes. They are: *neighbors are too busy, we are too far away from relatives; and the local community leaders are indifferent.*

### **Neighbors are too busy and Relatives are too far away**

For such a close knit community as the Oraons, it is a struggle to adjust to a situation different from that of the families they grew up in. They grew up in families with many relatives living close by or under one roof. They were able to share their joys and sorrows with those around them. In this generation, our life situation is different. All are caught up in the race for survival which does not leave time for them to share their lives with any one, especially their pain and suffering. Chari broke down as she talked about her feelings of loneliness and helplessness during a crisis.

The most painful experience was when I had a miscarriage. Then I was new to this village, there wasn't any home in the neighborhood, ours was the only house. Seeing so much blood I thought I was going to die. I didn't know what was happening to me. I was overcome with fear and I wept bitterly; I wanted my mother to be around. There was no one to share the awfulness of the experience with me at that time.

When Chari's husband was found unconscious near the roadside her children went looking for help in the neighborhood. They went from door to door but most of the people were away that evening. She had a hard time finding help and as she shared the experience with me she cried and said, "What has happened to our community? Why wasn't any one there to help?" She is still suffering with the pain and loneliness. She said:

I stay home all day taking care of my husband. I cry and wonder what will happen to us. My daughters try to console me but they do not understand what I am going through. How can I share with them the pain I have. Every night I go to bed crying, hoping for a better tomorrow. I keep looking at the door hoping for someone to come and talk to me. I miss my sisters and wish that they were living close by to help me in this difficult moment. They help me financially but I need them physically to be with me.

Shanti is struggling with the pain and burden in her heart.

As a child I had many questions about my life; why was my mother asked to leave the house with me? Am I the cause of my parents' separation? Why did my mother leave me and get married and go to live her own life? I even questioned my mother's love for me. I received love from my grandparents and aunts but that is not like my mother caring for me. Even now sometimes I wonder about these questions but there isn't any one to help me with an answer to my questions. {Shanti}

Not only does she have concerns and questions about her past, she is also anxious about her future and finds herself lonely and without anyone to share her anxiety.

I do worry about my future. My grandparents are old. Some day they will die and then what will happen to me? Though there are relatives who tell me, 'We are here for you', still deep inside me I fear the future. I fear finding the right husband, and I worry about who will take responsibility for my marriage expenses. If my grandparents are still alive when my marriage proposal comes, what am I going to do? How can I leave them alone? If they are dead who will send me off from our house into my marriage on the day of my wedding. There are so many questions and concerns but I have no one to share them with me. {Shanti}

The struggle for survival also makes it difficult for them to see their relatives often. Mostly, they are able to see them once a year during festivals which is certainly a time of joyful celebration and not a time for sharing the painful sufferings of their lives. They miss their relatives during the ordinary days of their lives when they have to go through difficulties. However, death in the family brings all the families together for

mourning and mutual support. Binko was able to see her relatives after four to five years when her husband died. Binko said:

It was a sad moment. All my sisters came for the burial and when I saw them I broke down and I cried my heart out. I felt how deeply I needed my brothers and sisters at that moment. My younger sister sat with me during the burial. It was something different that I felt that I can't describe. My younger sister stayed with me for three-four days. We sat and shared everything about our lives. It was so nice of her to come and spend time with me.

Binko feels comfortable sharing her pain and struggle with people of her own age. She longs for a friend or a relative with whom to share everything. She said:

I have everything, I have a house to live in, I have my children who take care of me. I have grandchildren who run around the house but I don't have friends who could sit and talk with me. I don't have any one my age to share my personal struggle. It is painful to see my daughter being a widow. She is only 25 years old. Seeing her I cry within thinking about her and her future. I do not want to cry at home because she will get more upset. My daughter who was a happy person is now very sad. I can't express my sadness to my children. I wish someone was around to cry with me and let me mourn with them.

In their struggle they need people who are able to listen to them sympathetically but, they also sense a need for sharing with those who might in turn need them and their help. Merkha laments the fact that she was not able to go and be with her aging mother. As a daughter she is torn between her responsibility as a mother and her obligation as a daughter.

Salen grew up in a house where four families lived together. Each family had their own kitchen. She misses that part of sharing which happened while they lived under one roof. She said:

Every evening all the cousins sat in our court yard to share with each other and talk about our lives. During the winter season we made a big fire in the middle of our court yard and sat around it sharing and talking. Our grandparents sat there with us near the fire. They amused us by telling their childhood stories. My grandmother sang when she shared stories of her life with us. All mothers had their own gathering place. They enjoyed their lives too. Sometimes they would laugh so hard that we children would go and ask them why they were laughing. I wish I had friends and relatives who had time to sit to share and laugh and have good times together with me.

There are times when the women in the neighborhood would come together.

But due to their busy life now they are unable to share any quality time with each other to help and encourage one another. Sunami said:

I am good friends with my neighbor but she is as busy as I am. We both work in the rice mill but most of the time we work in different places. When we see each other we are so busy that we have time just to greet each other and say *Johar* (greetings). We do not have any quality time when we can sit down and share our joys and sorrows with each other. When I am home I care for my young children because they need me. Sometimes I share some things that excite me with my 8 year old daughter but I don't think she understands. I wish we were not so busy.

### **Community Leaders are indifferent**

Another level of isolation is to be found in the indifference in the attitude of the village leaders regarding women's concerns. These leaders like to occupy places of importance during social events. However, they remain mere spectators when they are called upon to actually do something for the welfare of the village. Shanti expressed her frustration in this regard:

When we heard that outsiders had purchased land in our village to build a rice mill, our village youth organization went to the village council to ask them to stop this work. We heard that the whole village would be polluted with waste from the mill; our cattle would die as a result and that even the land would lose its fertility. We were concerned about all of this, so we talked to the *Mukhia* (village head) and council secretary about it. Though they understood the validity of our grievances they kept quiet and did nothing about it.

This attitude of the leaders became evident during drought season. For the last two years, the rain was sporadic and it impacted the villagers. Being responsible for the family, women were very worried. They were scrambling for any help they could get for their survival. After hearing about some drought relief programs of the government some went to the village leaders to seek their intervention. But it was to no avail. Chari says, “No one came to our village to see our situation”. The drought affected the women most. They had to fetch water from far away and manage somehow to feed their children. Salen says, “We requested our leaders to provide a small well in our neighborhood but they paid no attention to our needs.”

**Theme 5: Moments of Joy: We Look Forward to Cultural Gatherings Because They Give Us Joy and Satisfaction**

In their lives of great misery, these women also have bright spots which adorn their lives with hope and joyful celebration. When these women were sharing with me their experiences of the festivals, annual *Jatras* and fairs they were filled with joy and satisfaction. All the signs of the heavy burdens they were carrying disappeared and bright smiles and even laughter took center stage. I also had the rare opportunity of rejoicing with them as they related their life affirming celebration of festivals and life renewing participation in fairs. Their richness of culture is most assuredly preserved in their songs and dances on display during festivals *Jatra* and fairs. In some sense, these were events that empower the women to celebrate life. They forget their pain, struggle, loneliness, abuse and suffering while celebrating festivals. During such special seasons, when they hear the sound of the *mandar* (Oraon traditional drum) they experience an

inner peace and invitation to join with the community in dancing and singing. For them, these events, it seemed, were times to shout victory over life's struggle. It is fascinating to see that during the festive season should anyone go to the *akhra* (the village dancing ground) and starts playing the *mander* (tribal drum), and very soon the whole village would gather for community dancing. They would dance for hours and would be lost in total celebration. There are three sub themes namely: *festivals; fair and Jatra (cultural gathering); and weddings and other celebrations.*

### **Festivals and Celebrations**

There is a great deal of excitement before the two festivals they celebrate annually. They celebrate "Karam" in August/September and "Sarhul" in March/April.

The thought of a festival brings joy and excitement in my life. I go to my *mosi*'s(aunt) house to celebrate *Sarhul*. Her village is bigger than ours; there the whole village celebrates *Sarhul* as a community. Good food is prepared in each house. Relatives and friends visit each other, the *Akhra* (dancing ground) is decorated. After the *pahan* (priest) performs the ceremony in *Sarna* (worship place) we all gather at *Akhra* (dancing ground) to dance. Usually the young people dance all night long. I prefer to celebrate *Karam* with my friends here in the village. All the young women fast on preparation day. Very early in the morning on the day of *Karam* we go for the ceremony. I look forward to this festival because young women play a major part in this festival. Dancing and food are the main attractions of the festival. {Shanti }

I try to prepare our house for the festival. My daughter is a wonderful help in cleaning our house and the surrounding area by applying cow dung paste. I like preparing *arsa* (special traditional sweet), and *haria* (rice beer). I look forward to both festivals to prepare good food and serve all our family and friends. My sisters-in-law visit us with their families. My house is full of relatives. We eat, drink and dance. My husband loves playing *mandar* (drum) and even though we don't have *Akhra* (dancing ground) close by yet the whole neighborhood gets together in front of our house to dance. The festival time is a great occasion to take some time off from work to celebrate and visit with relatives. (Merkha)

Salen, who sells vegetable throughout the year, takes a few days off during both *Sarhul* and *Karam* festivals. She looks forward to those times to relax and be with her sister's and brother's families. She said:

My children like to celebrate festivals with their cousins. They dance and visit places when they are with cousins. My husband enjoys eating and drinking with my brothers. Festival is one time when I can relax. I have no worries about cooking and feeding my family. My sisters-in-law are wonderful hosts and they cook and feed the whole extended family for those few days.

Binko is happy because her grandchildren visit her during both festivals. She said

It is so nice to see my grandchildren play together in my house. The house is full; everybody is relaxed and they have time for each other. My daughter always brings a new *sari* (long Indian dress) for me. My daughters and daughter-in-law prepare *pakwan* (sweets) together.

Sunami is happy to have some time off from work during the festivals. She tries to get her cleaning work done before festivals. Sometimes she goes to visit her families. She said:

I am happy our boss gives us a little extra money to celebrate *Sarhul* and *Karam*. With that extra money I am able to buy new clothes for my children and groceries to make food for the festival. For the last two years I have not been able to go to my parents' house for any of the festivals. I enjoyed being with our neighbors. Every one is nice to one another. It is a time to celebrate life. The neighbors would visit one another's house and bring food to them. In the evenings the whole neighborhood would gather to dance in an open space.

For many years Chari went to her parents' home to celebrate *Sarhul*. That was one occasion when the whole family got together. Her sisters came with their families.

She said:

As a family we had a good time. It was also an occasion to help my parents clean their house for the festival. I was the first one to arrive and prepare the house for the rest of the family. All four sisters worked together in cleaning the house, back yard and front yard. It was fun sitting and visiting near the stove

while we made different kinds of *pakwan* (sweets). Our children liked getting together with their cousins. My younger sister brought new clothes for all the children in the family. They were delighted to have new clothes for the festival. On the day of *Sarhul* all went to *Sarna* (worship place) it was an exciting moment as the whole village came together. All afternoon we spent visiting with family and friends. After worship our relatives came to visit us because my parents' house was close to *Sarna* (worship place). In the evening the whole village was gathered at *Akhra* to dance. Each family brought their *Mandar*, *nagara* and *kartals* (musical instruments). My husband was the first one to start playing *Mandar* (drum). All my children enjoyed dancing, we sisters also danced with our friends from the village.

### **Fair and Jatra**

Fair and *Jatra* (cultural fair) for the people in the villages are very significant events. The villagers wait every year for these big attractions. This is another occasion for family and friends to come together. People travel miles to come to the fair and *Jatra* (cultural fair). There are all kinds of stores and counters in the fair. The vendors come from cities and towns; there are stores/counters for games, toys, food, clothes, agricultural equipment, musical instruments, and hunting and fishing equipment. Young people go as groups and they enjoy singing and dancing. They also enjoy different rides. People wear new clothes and dress up to go to the fair.

Growing up going to *Rath mela* (fair of the chariot) was our family tradition. My father took us every year; we worked hard throughout the year to save money. This was one time we would dress up, put on our best clothes and enjoy life. Once a year we were free to buy new clothes, play games, eat good food and go on different rides. When my children were young I introduced this tradition to my family. My husband likes going to the fair, this is one thing we do annually as a family. I look forward to this fair even now. The children are excited to go because I buy clothes for them and a sari for myself every year. (Salen)

For Shanti the annual fair and *Jatra* in her mother's village were incentives (motivation) to work hard throughout the year to save money for enjoyment. She took leave from work to go there. She said:

There is a big fair during *Dashhara puja* (a Hindu festival during October) in my mother's village. When I worked in the construction site I took the whole week off from work to go to the fair. I went with my half brothers and sisters every day. Because I was working I had money to enjoy. We tried different foods every day and by the end of the week we would talk about which food was best. I bought toys for my brothers and sisters. I still go but not for the whole week. I enjoy going with my half brothers and sisters; I buy each one of them something special. We enjoy the food and rides. This is a special occasion for me to dress up and enjoy myself.

Chari smiled when she shared her *Jatra* (cultural fair) story:

As a young girl I went to the *Jatra* every year in our neighboring town. My parents took all four daughters. It became a tradition for us. We bought new bangles every year in the fair. When I started earning money I saved some to buy things at the fair. One year I saved about 100 rupee (\$ 2) and bought clothes for all of us. I felt happy and proud doing that. After having my own children I took them to the fair. They enjoy looking at all the new things and eating different kinds of snacks and food. I also enjoyed the different dancing groups in *Jatra*.

Sunami also went to the fair with her family when she was young. Her father bought new clothes for the children to wear and go to the fair. She says,

My mother did not like going to the fair, but we did. Every year my father took us along with our cousins. It used to be a big deal for us. We would take baths before wearing our new clothes, get dressed and go. One year he bought us *chapels* (sandels) at the fair. We waited to eat good food and sometimes we brought some back for my mother.

Merkha and her brothers saved money for the fair. They went to *Jagnath Mela* every year. She said:

My parents took us to *Jagnath Mela* (a famous fair near Ranchi) every year. My father bought farming tools at the fair. Also he liked keeping a bow and arrow at home so he bought them too. All the siblings liked going together on the rides. When we were very small my older brother took care of us taking us

around on different rides while my parents were busy looking for farming tools. My mother bought new clothes for us.

Merkha still likes to go to the fair but it is not always possible. She said, “if I am not able to go I still make sure I have money for my children to go. Now our older son is old enough to watch his brothers. They go with their friends to *Rath Mela* every year. It is good to hear them talking about their experiences. We go to a small fair in our neighboring village during *Dashhara puja* (a Hindu festival) and that is a lot of fun.”

Sunami takes her children to the fair every year in their neighboring village. She takes a day off from her work to go to the fair. This fair goes on for five days. According to her there are lots of advantages in going to the fair on the first day. She said, “On the first day the fair is freshly decorated; it is possible to get the best clothes and toys and the crowd is just ecstatic on the first day.”

Binko gets a glimpse of the fair through her grandchildren who enjoy going to it. She said,

I am too old to go but my children take all my grandchildren to the fair. This is our family affair. Every one meets in my oldest daughter’s house and from there they go to the fair. When they come back in the evening I hear from each one of them what they did and what they ate in the fair. They would talk a lot about the games or rides they enjoyed. They would bring food for me from the fair so I, too could, enjoy a taste of it.

### **Weddings and other celebrations**

A wedding in the village is an occasion for a family and community’s celebration and gathering. Generally, the wedding is the culmination of a very long process of negotiation, proposal, engagement and wedding. The whole village is

engaged in the preparation for the wedding prior to the actual event. In the week before the wedding, the house and surrounding area are cleaned and spruced up. The preparation would be intensified three days before the wedding. These days are busy as the whole village practically lives in the wedding house. They are busy erecting *marwa* (it is a very special tent made of the braches and twigs of a particular tree called *sakhua* which is considered auspicious in Oraon culture), a cooking stove is dug underneath the ground, and special wooden logs for sitting during the wedding meal are put in place. The villagers go to the forest to get tree branches for *marwa*; women go to the forest to pick up *sakhua* tree leaves to prepare special plates and bowls in the thousands for the use of the wedding family before, during and after the wedding ceremony. In addition to physically helping the wedding family, the villagers also help the family with such provisions as rice, vegetables, goats, chicken, oil, salt, sugar and spices. The Oraon community has a very special wedding tradition, according to which all households in the village and near relatives from other villages come to the wedding house with special gifts for the family. This is done with great thoughtfulness and sacrifice. For the wedding family this is a big help as they are expected to host and feed the whole village for many days.

The women play a significant role in the wedding ceremony in the village. It is a special occasion to gather and celebrate life. Binko recalls her daughter's wedding when the whole village came to help. She remembered:

I was happy to see everybody come to my house; the women came with big baskets on their heads filled with rice, dal, vegetables, salt, sugar, and oil. Some gave us money. My oldest daughter brought three goats for the feast. All the women came well-dressed to bless my daughter and son-in-law.

Shanti, who is a young woman and a member of the Youth Organization in the village, loves going to weddings. As an organization, the young folks of the village help the family with hospitality and preparing food for the feast. They also lead in the singing and dancing during the wedding week. She says, “it is a wonderful experience to be with friends, working together preparing meals for the feast.”

Chari who has been to many weddings in the village says:

I like taking some time off from work and being with the other women in the village. This is an occasion for all in the village to come together. We sing and work; we talk and share with one another and eat good food. The best part is there is no rush to get things done, people are relaxed and do what they are asked to do by the family. It is great fun. I like being part of the wedding ceremony when all the women surround bride and groom and sing for them and bless them.

The women look forward to wedding occasions for they provide them a joy that helps them forget their painful struggle for survival and providing for their families.

Merkha dreams of her daughter’s wedding but right now she is waiting for the wedding of her niece.

I am looking forward to my niece’s wedding. My husband being the oldest brother in his family is asked to provide food for the feast. I am saving money for the wedding. It will be an occasion for us to celebrate as a family. Last winter I cultivated *Marua* ( a very nutritious food grain) just to prepare rice beer for the wedding. Everyone in my family likes my rice beer preparation so they have asked me to prepare that for the occasion. I’ve already talked to the owner of the rice mill and have gotten a two weeks’ leave from my work for the wedding. He promised to give me broken rice as a gift to prepare rice beer for the wedding. I am very excited. {Merkha}

The formal engagement ceremony is another big occasion for the Oraon community to come together. Salen shared her excitement of being part of her nephew's engagement. She said:

I have bought a new sari to give to the new bride during the engagement ceremony. All the aunts are expected to arrive two days before the engagement date. I plan to be there on time. This is my oldest nephew's engagement. My two nieces have been married. I was there to help my brother's family with their weddings. I am excited and look forward to this event. The engagement ceremony lasts for four days. On the day of the engagement the groom's party will go to bride's house. All the guests from groom's party would bring gifts (especially saris) for the bride. We will have *lota pani* (exchange of water pot) and then *mangni* (engagement ceremony). A part of the engagement ceremony is negotiating the bride price and date for the wedding. The best part about an engagement is the singing in groups of males and females. There would be a big feast prepared by the bride's family for all. Later that evening we would return to my brother's house. Two days later the bride's family would come to the groom's house for the ceremony there. The groom's family and relatives would welcome them by washing their feet, putting oil in their hair and putting flowers in their hair and also giving them rice beer to drink. The guests from the bride's side would present gifts to the groom. The feast would be given by the groom's family on this day. As an aunt I would be there to welcome the guests.

The birth of a child is another occasion for the family and friends to gather to celebrate life. The mother of the baby is given a ceremonial bath on the seventh day. The older women of the village participate in this ceremony. The mother is given a new sari to wear after her bath. This is a time for all to come and celebrate. The family, neighbors and relatives are invited for a feast to welcome and bring gifts for the new born. Sunami shared her joy when two of her children were born:

I was in my mother's house when my daughter was born. My mother gave new saris to all the women who came to help me during childbirth. Giving a sari is a way to show our gratitude to these women. They came back every day to give me a massage or give my baby a massage. On the seventh day they prepared special water with herbs to give me a bath. I wore a new sari that my husband brought when he came to see my daughter. My mother-in-law came for this occasion and many relatives came to see the baby. It was wonderful to be part

of this ceremony. During my son's birth four women came to help me during the birth. My mother gave them new saris too. It was wonderful that my mother was around to help me during childbirth.

**Theme 6: Occasionally our hopes are raised by the government officials and the political leaders but soon we are forgotten**

India is the largest democracy in the world. Since its independence in 1947, India has been able to conduct general elections throughout the country without any major controversy. This has strengthened its democratic tradition and institutions. However, at the grass roots level the villagers feel cheated by the political leaders with their empty promises.

It is very common for the political leaders of all colors and hues to seek support and votes from the villagers by promising many things such as housing, water, electricity, food, work and pensions. But once the election is over, the hope of the villagers for these basic needs is dashed. The same promises would be repeated in the next election with the same outcome. The theme—*Occasionally our hopes are raised by the government officials and the political leaders but soon we are forgotten*—includes the cry of women in the village who long for better lives for their families and for themselves. Merkha says, “it is good to shake hands with leaders when they come to our homes but we know that whatever they say will never get done. We have lived in darkness for many years. The electric power lines go over our roofs of our houses but our houses remain dark.” Chari offers an example of false promises that was made to them to provide them with a safe drinking water well,

One political leader listened to us and went to see our small well. In front of us, he ordered his subordinates to dig a new well for the village. Two years have

passed and we are still in the same situation. There is no well; there is no safe drinking water close by. The political leaders are not trustworthy.

Their cry for help is presented in three sub-themes: *basic needs are not provided; selfish leader; and corruption in government offices.*

### **Basic needs are not provided**

For both women and men basic needs are not provided as promised but women are hit hardest. It was very obvious in my visits to the village and the research participants' homes that the village lacks the basic necessities of life. The village does not have adequate facilities for drinking water. Most of the homes do not have electricity. Those few with this privilege suffer from hours of load shedding and low voltage. There is no health care center in the neighborhood. Various schemes and programs like rice for the poor, pension for the old, seed subsidy and help, employment opportunities, health care and welfare are in place to help tribal communities meet their basic needs, yet they are not effective. Most of these programs and schemes are only on paper and available only to those who can afford to spend time and money to obtain them.

### Education

One of the major commitments of the government is to provide education for all. To make education accessible to all children, the government has started a universal primary education program called *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*. This is a very ambitious undertaking as it envisions education for all children under the age of 12. The government of India passed an act in the parliament to make primary education as mandatory for children in 2009. A change in emphasis in education is visible in many

parts of India as there is an increased effort for enrollment and the provision of uniforms, books and food at school. In spite of this, the educational opportunities in such tribal areas as the area of my research are far from satisfactory. Salen lamented this fact:

There is a government primary school in our neighboring village; my children attended that school. We had to pay for their books and uniforms. They were given a free mid-day meal but none of my children were interested in school. There were two reasons for that: it was hard on younger children as they walked both ways, and the teachers were not regular in school. My children did not learn much in this school so I took them out of there and enrolled them in a mission school.

Chari sent her three younger children to that same school. Her experience with the school in the neighboring village is also negative. She shared:

My children liked going to school but later I found out that, instead of studying they played all day, ate their meal and came back home. I felt I was cheated because I paid for their books and stationery. I spent money on their uniforms. Not many children go to school. The teachers do not teach, instead, they spend time in talking to one another and doing their personal work. Often, the teachers either come to school very late or do not come at all.

Sunami, after learning about the unhealthy situation of the school decided to send her daughter to a private school away from village. She pays a lot more money to send her daughter to a private school. Chari's second daughter goes to school in town. She spends money on bus fare, money to pay for books and uniforms. She says:

The books should be free but children have to wait more than half a year. Instead of waiting for the free books at the end of the school year I had to buy the high school books for my daughter so that she could study them but they were costly. It became too expensive to send all my daughters to school. As a result, my third daughter dropped out of school at sixth class.

There are government run *Ashram* (residential) schools only for tribal children in some areas which are completely residential and free. However, the parents are not convinced about sending their children to *Ashram* school. There is a great fear and lack of trust with regard to the situation and management of the schools. They are also fearful about their children being misguided by strangers and especially by non-tribal people. When Merkha's daughter was in class 9, some *gram sewaks* (village workers) came to the village to request her to send her daughter to the *Ashram*. Merkha said, "I could not let her go. I did not know if they would make her life or break it. I have just one daughter and I do not want to lose her."

### Health

The story of health care provision is also discouraging for villagers. There are many government initiatives for rural health care such as village clinics, mobile clinics, and village health care. But they are not effective because of absentee health care professionals. This is especially true in rural villages where there is no supervision by senior officials. Merkha shares her frustrating experience with the government hospital in the neighboring town. "When my son was sick I took him to the hospital, the nurse at the entrance looked at me holding my four year old son and asked me to go to another hospital because the doctor was not in. I had no choice but to take him to the private hospital where I had to pay lots of money." Chari had same the experience when her husband was paralyzed and she hired an auto rickshaw to take him to the hospital. She said:

It was late in the evening and getting dark. People who were helping me suggested that he should be taken to the hospital immediately. We rushed to the

hospital in the town; we saw a big lock hanging on the door. The driver took us to the private hospital. I could not keep my husband in the private hospital for more than five days. When I received the bill I did not know how I could pay because it was more than I could afford.

The nurses employed by the government to work in the rural areas have various responsibilities like visiting clinics, homes, promoting health awareness and helping with health surveys. Sunami spoke with me about the health care worker's visit to the village once: "I told the health care worker about the mosquitoes in the village. She promised to provide us with an insecticide to spray around our neighborhood; a year has passed and she has not yet returned to us." The villagers are frustrated that they have to pay to the nurse to get such things as injections and medicines which are supposed to be free. Binko said:

When my husband was sick we took him to the hospital where he was given lots of medicine. He was required to get injections for 10 days. My son went to the clinic and spoke to the village health care provider and requested her to come for 10 days. He paid her money to ensure her providing the needed injections but each time she came and gave an injection she charged us 10 rupees (2 cents).

### Pensions

The women shared their experiences about some of the welfare programs for the people. The pension for the elderly (60 and above) is an important one because it is intended to help the most vulnerable section of the community. To receive their pension money the older adults need Identity cards and bank accounts. Shanti took her grandmother to the Block office 10 kilometer away from the village to get her Identity card. She said:

After much hassle we got to the office at 9am. The office was closed; people were standing in line so we joined the people. Two hours later a person came and opened the doors and started distributing application forms. I was glad that my friend who went to college came to help us. She filled out the form. After filling out the application form and getting my grandmother's picture taken it was 1pm. The counter was closed for lunch and we were told that applications won't be entertained in the afternoon. We went back home knowing that the next would be another long day. My grandmother was not happy with us but I thought that a little extra money would help me manage the house. It took us three days of running to the Block office just to submit the application and two months to receive identity card. This is the way our government officers work. After receiving her I.D. card I took my grandmother back to the office and we were told that she would receive both rice and money. Rice would be given in one counter and the money would be deposited in her bank account. We were asked to bring our own bags for rice and come on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Just to get 25 kilogram rice we had to sit for many days in the Block office. I think we spent more money, time and energy than what we received. My grandmother is not keen on going and getting rice from the Block office because we are not sure if we would be given anything on the day of our visit. She prefers to earn her living to going and getting harassed just for few kilograms of rice.

### **Selfish leaders**

The women who participated in the research accused the political leaders, the government's agents and officials of being greedy and selfish. The food distributed through ration shops used to be a big help for Merkha. But now, she does not get this help because of broken promises and a failed bureaucracy.

Food is very expensive. We can't afford to buy such basic foods as lentils, sugar, rice, and oil. During summer season we ate *bothal bhath* (rice with water) with salt and in other seasons we use *mar jhor* (dry green soup made of a green leafy plant that is very common in the fields) to eat with our rice. We drink tea with salt. I wish we had ration cards to buy lentil, sugar, rice, and kerosene oil. During *panchayat* (local government) election, leaders visited my home and I specifically asked them to provide ration cards for us. They said they would speed up the work on ration cards and distribute them in the villages but no one in the village has received any of them. I do not know when they will get us our ration cards and without them it is very difficult to afford essential food items. {Merkha}

Sunami had the same experience:

I called my sister to help us fill out the ration form. We were given only one week to fill it out. We did what we were told. When we went to inquire about the ration cards in the block office they gave us the same answer they gave to others in the neighborhood. We were told that some one from the office would come for verification and that then the cards would be distributed. We are still waiting for the verification.

Salen recounted an event about getting rice from the block office; “Since we have had no rain for the past two years we heard that rice was available in the block office for us at a low price. I sent my husband to purchase the rice but he came back home without any. He was told that the supply was gone.” Chari also had a similar experience when she went to buy rice in the block office. She said:

The officer asked me to bring our papers from the hospital when he heard about the sickness of my husband. I went back the next day with our papers and they gave me 10 kilograms of rice and asked me to come back in two weeks. I went back after two weeks and they gave me only 5 kilograms and told me that next time it would be compensated. I went back home with just 5 kilograms of rice. Since then when I have not received the full amount of rice as promised. We need food, what we raised last year is gone. But I don’t know how often I can go back to the block office. I wonder if it is worth going back leaving my paralyzed husband alone at home.

Binko’s son is interested in planting a cash crop and went to the block office inquiring into possibilities. She spoke of his struggle dealing with the greedy and corrupt officials,

My son went to the office where they were distributing free seeds for farmers. He had all the papers that were required. In the office he was asked to pay a certain amount to get ‘free’ vegetable seeds. After much debate with officers he decided not to give them the money they demanded for the “free” seeds. He returned home empty handed. {Binko}

### **Corruption in government offices**

The experiences of these women in the government offices are negative and frustrating. Though their hopes were high about many government welfare programs, yet, when they attempted to avail themselves of the promised assistance they encountered corruption at all levels. When Shanti took her grandmother to the block office, the counter clerk asked for tea-money (bribe) that she refused to give. When she did not hear from them and she went to inquire about her I.D. card in the block office. She reports, “They say, ‘you give us a gift and we will do your work.’” Corruption is everywhere: from securing admission to the college to getting a job done in an office. Merkha exclaimed, “I thought college education was supposed to be free for tribal children but when my daughter went for admission they asked her to pay fees.” Also she was asked to provide lots of documents. To obtain these documents we paid lots of money to *Babus* (Clerks) in the court and the block office.”

As in all areas of government service, low quality of service and corruption is rampant in the health care system that creates an extra layer of difficulty for the poor to access the facility. Though treatments in the government hospitals are free, Binko says, “Nurses and attendants expect money from the patient. My daughter paid tea money (bribe) to nurses each time she needed medicine for her husband”. There are many ways that the health care professionals take advantage of the poor. Binko told, “When my son-in-law was suffering from cancer my son took him to the government hospital but the doctor asked him to bring the patient to his private clinic in the evening for a thorough check up because he was busy during the day. The family was concerned for

his health so they took him to the clinic. There he was asked to pay the doctor's fee.”

This is the way doctors manipulate the system and get extra money from their patients.

Binko also shared how they lost part of their land due to corrupt officials.

Over 25 years ago, when my children were very little the government survey team came to our village. They called the whole village together for a meeting and shared with us the government's plan to build a dam. They shared how our village would benefit from the dam for cultivation and other things and how this would prosper the whole village. Then they asked us to sign some papers. They promised that we would be getting compensation from the government. But till today we have not received full compensation. And the dam has never been completed. We were cheated. Many people say that the politicians usurped the money granted for the dam.

Tribal people have access to many loan facilities for various agricultural, projects. It is a common fact among the villagers that without a bribe the loan would not be sanctioned. Sometimes even bribery does not help. Salen shared a story from her family:

When my brother applied for a loan for a well, the officer asked him to give him some money to speed up the loan process. My brother requested help from all her siblings; I gave him 100 rupees (about \$ 2). He was able to give 300 rupees (about \$ 6) to the officer. In spite of this my brother did not get his loan sanctioned because others paid more bribe money to the officer than he did. He did not get his money back.

### **Summary**

It was a privilege to listen to the stories of these six illiterate women. On the one hand, I was saddened to experience their pain and suffering but on the other hand, I was amazed to see their ability to survive and their resilience. Also amidst such

hardships, it was uplifting to find that they have dreams and hopes for their children.

Though they are illiterate yet they have time-tested wisdom. My life was enriched.

The stories of these six illiterate women-Sunami, Merkha, Chari, Binko, Shanti and Salen- illustrate their daily struggle for survival. Their stories are illustrated in six themes. Theme one is about women and their pain, *Their lives are heavy and painful because of daily hard work*. They are the bread winner for their families. Though they work hard they complain about they are paid less than men are. Compared to the men folk of the community they work both at home and outside the home. In theme two women shared their hope: *We do everything to send our children to school hoping that their lives will be better than ours*. These women are determined to send their children to school. It is obvious that hope for a better future for their children motivates these women to work hard. They still feel the pain of not being able to go to school. Even as illiterate women they understand the value of education as a way to a better life.

However they also have questions regarding their husbands' attitude to life even after their education. Instead of being of help to their wives in sharing the burden of parental responsibility their husbands add to their miseries and frustration by their habitual drinking, and sitting idle and abusive behavior. Husbands seem to be unable to share their wives emotional needs. Theme three captures their questions and concerns as:

*Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?.* In

theme four women express their feeling of isolation: *There is no one to listen to us*.

Their lives are also lonely because their neighbors are too busy to find time for sharing and their relatives live far away. However, amidst their daily struggle for survival, these women expressed their deep sense of joy, happiness and satisfaction during fairs,

*Jatra* (cultural gatherings), weddings, and festivals. Such events are marked by great celebrations of life and community that renew their hope and express their solidarity as community. Theme five speaks of their *Moments of joy of which they say: we look forward to cultural gatherings because they give us joy and satisfaction*. Theme six is denotes their struggle for survival, of which they say: *Occasionally our hopes are raised by the government officials and the political leaders but soon we are forgotten*. These women hold greedy and corrupt political leaders and government officials responsible for the lack of basic amenities in the village and hardships in their lives. The political leaders' empty promises during election time and corrupt officials in government offices have frustrated these women more than providing any help for them.

In the next chapter I will discuss these six themes: Our lives are heavy and painful because of daily hard work; We do everything to send our children to school hoping that their lives will be better than ours; Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?; There is no one to listen to us; Moments of joy: we look forward to cultural gatherings because they give us joy and satisfaction; and, Occasionally our hopes are raised by the government officials and the political leaders but soon we are forgotten, with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THEMES**

After describing the themes of interviews with the six Oraon tribal women in the previous chapter, this chapter presents an analysis and discussion of themes in the light of previous research and their implications for literacy among tribal people and particularly among tribal women. It is an attempt to discover from their lived experience the issues of literacy, education and identity in the context of the Oraon tribal community of Jharkhand. The chapter will also examine the meaning and implications of their lives as women, as tribal women and as Oraon tribal women in the context of Indian society in general as well as tribal society in particular. Chapter 5 will integrate themes from Chapter 4 with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. This Chapter will also relate the findings of this research to the field of adult education, integrating my reflection-based understandings from the interviews, and will recommend further research centered on my research question: *“What education and literacy insights can be gained from the studies of the life stories of illiterate Oraon tribal women in Jharkhand, India?”*

### **Theme One: Our Lives are Heavy and Painful Because of Daily hard Work**

The pain and heaviness of their hearts were almost palpable as they shared the experiences of their lives. Daily struggle for survival was obvious in all of their stories. Three sub-themes: “Breadwinners”, “We earn less than what we work for”, and “We work at home and outside home”, all speak of their hard work and painful struggle for survival. Their daily struggle for living both for themselves and their families starts as early as 4:00 in the morning and lasts as late as 10:00 at night. This is clear evidence of

their sense of responsibility towards their families, their courage in their struggle for survival, and the tenacity of their hope for the next generation.

These women had a relatively better life while growing up in their parents' village than they do in their own homes because then they had land and access to other natural resources for sustenance. But now, a generation later, in a changed socio-economic situation, their life is difficult as they struggle for an income that ensures the survival of their families. The loss of natural resources and alienation of the tribal people from these natural resources have resulted in reduced access to the resources they need for their livelihood. As a result, these Oraon women have had to seek such alternative sources of income such as construction laborers, agricultural laborers, vegetable vendors, domestic workers etc. This is in line with the previous findings of Anand (1996), Fernandes (1993) and Bodra (2008). Though these jobs are hard and not well paying, yet, these women are forced to do them in order to survive.

All these women, except Binko, are the breadwinners of their families. As regular wage earners, they contribute toward their family's income. Their income ensures the daily necessities of their households and the educational needs of their children. Contrary to popular expectations for the role of Indian women in their households, all these women, but one, are primary wage earners. This breadwinner role is also reported in the studies by Banerjee (1985), Kishwar (1996) and Shiva (1993). In her study on women workers in India, Banerjee (1985) noted that in nearly half the cases in her sample, women earned over 40% of the family income and in over a quarter of the cases, they earned 60% of the family income. Nearly half the women in the sample were responsible for buying all of their family's food. Bodra (2008) also found

that “the tribal women work as bread earners and active producers at home” (p.108). In the case of the four married women I interviewed, their husbands only worked during paddy season with the exception of Chari’s husband, Bisram, who worked as a day laborer until he opened a tea shop. Even when Chari’s husband ran the tea shop Chari and her daughter had to do much of the work. The tea shop had to be closed down when Bisram suffered a stroke. While he was working, Bisram, Chari’s husband, spent most of what he earned from the tea shop on drinking. Salen’s husband demanded money from her for his drinking. The husbands of Merkha and Sunami also lived idle lives and depended on their wives for monetary help. Instead of their traditional agricultural work, Sunami and Merkha have taken non-traditional jobs working in a rice mill. Their jobs are low-paying and completely dependent on the mercy of the owner of the mill. They fear that any day they could be dismissed from their work. Being responsible for their family, especially for their young children, they feel compelled to do this work. Thus, almost as single wage earners these women often feel life’s challenges to be too many and too big to meet and overcome.

Nonetheless, these women have risen to the occasion and have become the primary providers for their families. Their hard work and commitment to the family have made it possible for their families to have food and hope for the future. At the same time, under the sub-theme: ‘We earn less than what we work for,’ five of the six women spoke of the injustice they experienced in the work place. In spite of their illiteracy, it is obvious that these women are wise and know what equality, fairness and justice are all about. They feel and know that they are discriminated against when they are paid much less than the male workers. Women often do more exhausting work than

do men (Gupta, 2007), but are paid less than the men are. That is true even when both men and women do the same work. This was their personal experience. Bodra's (2008) study of the tribal women in the Ranchi district also found this to be true. "It has been estimated that in India, among agricultural laborers, women are generally paid 40% to 60% of the male wage" (Kishwar, 1996, p.17). Women are paid less because of the perception that women are secondary wage earners as compared to men (Tzannatos, 1998). He says,

Men's work and women's work are often perceived to serve different purposes and thus merit a difference in pay. Men are assumed to need a wage intended to support a family, while women earn secondary wages on the assumption that their earnings constitute only a supplementary income to the household (p. 291).

Ironically, in my interview I found that these women were the primary wage earners of their respective families. The evidence in the interviews indicates that the income women bring into their household is often the primary contribution towards meeting the basic needs of their families (Banerjee, 1985; Kishwar, 1996 & Shiva, 1993). The perception that men should earn more than women because they are primary wage earners, functions as an ideology which influences the options of jobs available to women. Women are understood to be secondary wage earners and the weaker sex who are thought to be unable to handle certain kinds of works. As a result, they are relegated to low productive, repetitive, and low-paid occupations. In a patriarchal society, the jobs typically done by women are held to be of lower value, both socially and economically:

The grading of certain jobs as 'skilled' and therefore better paid is based on the amount of work done nor its tediousness, not the time consumed, nor the

productive value, but merely on the assumption that jobs performed by women are, by virtue of that fact alone, low value jobs. (Kishwar, 1996, p. 18)

Bodra (2008) found that discrimination against the tribal women is “usually prevalent in the unorganized labor sector especially in construction industry, small factories and the agricultural sector” (p.187). In fact, tribal women are preferred by these contractors because their bargaining capacity for fair wages remains minimal. Most of the women I interviewed had worked in these unorganized sectors and experienced discrimination in terms of wages.

The increasing economic hardships of tribal women are caused by many factors. Fernandes (2006) recognizes the deprivation of the tribal communities from the natural resources as the main reason for their economic impoverishment. “These natural resources are common property resources and not individual property” (p. 113) over which women have only partial control. As such, alienation from these resources results in economic impoverishment. Over the years tribal people have lost access to forest produce, cultivable land, herbal medicine, fodder, pastures, due to industrialization, developmental projects, dams, massive displacements and influx of the outsiders in their habitat. Fernandes further concludes that as a result of the loss of natural resources, a tribal woman is “reduced to just being a housewife, unable to make an economic contribution to the family economy” (p. 119). However, the interviews of the six Oroan women contradict this conclusion. Of the six women interviewed five were the main bread-winners for their families. Though, what Fernandes (2006) says is right in that the women have lost their economic power because of their alienation from the natural resources, yet they have shown great strength of survival in their seeking out

many kinds of jobs for the sake of the survival of their families. Thus, Fernandes' (2006) statement that "they ensure food for the family" is still true even in the face of the loss of their traditional resources, which has normally supplied the tribal women food, medicinal herbs, organic manure, fodder etc, (p. 115).

This alienation often forces tribal women to migrate. Two of the women interviewed had migrated in search of work to neighboring states. In Chapter Two, I described how Oraon women have migrated to Delhi in large numbers (Kujur & Jha, 2008). Kujur and Jha found that 95.15 % migrated to earn a living and support their families. The decline in agricultural work, leading to severe unemployment, was an important reason for migration. The migration of tribal women alienates them from their community and culture which finally leads to social and cultural deterioration. Toppo (2007) makes a pertinent point while discussing the migration of Oraon people. He argues that the destruction of tribal economy, polity, and culture by land alienation led to pauperization of the Oraon tribal community and against this backdrop they were forced to migrate as cheap and unskilled labor.

In Article 46 of India's Constitution, the government has made a commitment toward the interest of such socially and economically disadvantaged groups as lower caste and tribal communities:

The state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation (as cited in Mohanty and Biswal, 2009, p. 2).

Accordingly, both the central and state governments have made efforts designed for the development of tribal people. Roy-Burman (1989) has classified developmental initiatives of the government in three categories. First, protective measures which relate to constitutional safeguards and regulations restricting and regulating the alienation of tribal people from resources particularly land. Second, mobilization efforts including affirmative action in terms of reservation or quotas in academic institutions, services and legislative quotas. Third, developmental initiatives relating to a large number of program covering social services, health, education and the economy. However, despite such massive efforts on the part of the government, the situation of the tribal community in India is still far from being satisfactory. Thus, Rath (2006) concluded that “the mainstream development model has limited impact on the people living at the periphery, specifically for the tribes” (p. 57). Sahay (1997) states that, “although sustained efforts have been made for the welfare and development of the tribals in the post-independence era, the results have not been commensurate with the funds spent and efforts put in” (p. 98). In addition to the failure of the developmental programs, these initiatives have actually added to the miseries of the tribal people. Kujur (2005) attributes the failure of the tribal development to the “import of the western model of development which was based on the exploitation of natural resources in colonies abroad and labor at home which finally led to the internal colonization of the tribal people” (p. 51).

At the same time, the non-tribal communities have greatly impoverished the tribal communities through various predatory business practices. “The presence of non-tribes in tribal areas results in net outflow of resources from tribal areas leaving them

impoverished” (Panda, 2006, p. 44). Due to their non-hoarding attitude the tribal people in crisis depend on non-tribal money lenders for loans. The tribal people fall into debt meeting their daily requirements of food, salt, marriage, death etc. (Xalxo, 2007). The non-tribal people use this opportunity to exploit the tribal people by having them sign documents as a condition for the loan thus making them bonded laborers. As is often the case, this is mostly due to the exorbitant rates of interest charged, leaving the tribal people unable to repay the loan and resulting in slavery for the borrower, a bondage which often extends to the borrower’s son and even to the family’s third generation (Panda, 2006). It is also often the case that tribal people mortgage their land in lieu of a loan which in turn, sets in motion a process of eventually resulting in the loss of their land. In each instance, the non-tribal money lenders use the same technique of setting their interest rates so high as to guarantee the inability of the tribal people to repay their loan. Eventually, of course, this makes them easy victims for the non-tribal money lenders who end up taking over the ownership of their land. Such an exploitative attitude is seen in what Sunami shared about her family’s land. The rice mill owner cajoled her husband into agreeing to give family land for an approach road to the mill. Her husband was promised an amount which was lower than the prevailing land price and a job for Sunami. Sunami’s husband signed papers that he really did not understand. While Sunami got a menial job at the mill, her husband did not receive full payment for the land. It is almost certain that Sunami’s family would eventually lose their land because the owner of the mill would later claim the road to be a public road. To ensure Sunami’s husband’s inability to challenge the land deal, the mill owner occasionally buys his loyalty by giving him money for drinking. Behind this façade of

support, the real intention of the mill owner is, obviously, to usurp their family land for his benefit.

Louis (2007) states how non-tribals have exploited the tribal communities in Jharkhand. He mentions “the giant corporate company Tata, the coal mafias of North Bihar and business community Marwaris” ( p. 152) citing their exploitation of the land and people in Jharkhand. The tribal people are being overwhelmed by outsiders in Jharkhand (Basu, 2006). In Jharkhand during 1981-91 while the general population grew at the rate of 24 percent, the tribal population grew only 13 percent which substantially altered the balance between the tribal and non-tribal people in Jharkhand (Basu, 2006). The outsiders whom the tribal people of Jharkhand refer as *dikkus* (people who exploit and harass the tribal people) dominate the police force and government bureaucracy. Thus, Kujur (2005) sees in the context of Jharkhand, over many decades “an increased influx of the outsiders for livelihood virtually displacing the tribals” (p. 47).

Under the sub-theme “We work both at home and outside the home”, the women expressed the feelings of being over-burdened as they constantly struggle for survival and live on the margin. When I met with them in their homes I could see how much they work at home. They are the first ones to get up daily. The first thing they do is to wash dirty dishes from the night before while trying to get their wood stove going. They ensure that everyone in the family is fed and the house is cleaned. Not only do they take care of the family members they also feed the cattle and clean the barn before they leave the house for their outside work. It was clear to me that the women I

interviewed were the pillars of their families. Alam (2000) also found that while men in the Oraon, Munda and Santal tribal societies spend much time hunting, drinking and merrymaking, the women, for all practical purposes, run their tribal household. On the one hand, these women underscore what Bodra (2008) says about the tribal woman namely: that “she guards her freedom zealously and chooses considerable physical hardship against being house bound” (p. xii) but, on the other hand, it was also clear during the study that these women were forced into this role by the complex circumstances they find themselves in. They are burdened with overwork as they seem trapped in the huge responsibility they have for their families. Alam (2000) rightly raises this issue as a matter of injustice for the tribal women. Tribal women work much harder than do tribal men (Bodra, 2008) and yet their status is far from equal with that of the men. “The status of tribal women is characterized by overwork, invasion of sexually exploitative market forces in the tribal economies, illiteracy, sub-human living conditions, high fertility and high malnutrition and the near absence of modern health care and educational facilities” (Alam, pp. 96-97). I found the same thing talking to village women about literacy. The only advantage they saw for themselves was being able to help their children.

### **Theme Two: We Do Everything to Send Our Children to School Hoping That Their Lives Will Be Better Than Ours**

There are three sub themes that speak of these women’s struggle and dreams: “Groaning pain of not being able to go to school themselves”; “Concerns for their children and their future”; and “Seeing education as a way to better life”.

While interviewing these illiterate Oraon women, I was amazed at their deep sense of hope for better lives for their children. It was obvious that not only do they want to survive for the sake of survival but they are determined to make the future of their children better and brighter. The theme of sending children to school occurred again and again in the interviews. They used the above mentioned three sub-themes to express their experience regarding education and their hopes for future generation.

Four of the six women wanted to go to school. While Shanti (Budhni) went to school only for a couple of years, Binko did not think education was an option for her. These facts suggest an important reality of their lives. Binko who is 65 years old represents an era in which tribal education was not given any importance. India had gained independence in 1947 and as a country it faced immense challenges of establishing itself as an independent country. In this situation, the mainstream education of India was just beginning to take shape and therefore, education in rural India and especially in tribal India was yet to find a level of importance in the government's plan. Sunami (27), Chari (45) and Salen (35) represent a time by which education was being given the importance it deserved and schools were opened in many rural parts of India. These three women knew about schools and they also saw many children of their villages going to school. Even within their families, Sunami and Salen saw their brothers attending schools. In the case of Chari, all three of her younger sisters went to school. While growing up Merkha (47) did not know about school while Shanti (21) longed to go to school.

Four of the women who could not go to school even though they wanted to go, feel that they have missed out on something very important in life. Instead of blaming any particular person for this, they blame the circumstances in their lives. Being the oldest child Chari became responsible for her younger siblings and household work. By her sacrifice she facilitated all her sisters to go to school. The domestic responsibility of the tribal children especially girls has been found to be a factor in their not attending school or their dropping out. Toppo (2000) identifies this as a socio-economic factor for the failure of education among tribal communities. The same history is being repeated in Chari's family. As her husband is bedridden and she is forced to stay home most of the time, her third daughter was sent away to work as a domestic helper to help sustain the family. Manna (2000) also found that involvement in domestic work prevented the tribal girls from attending school.

Among the women who participated in the research, the oldest participant Binko did not have the option of schooling while the youngest participant Shanti had access to schooling. From this one could conclude that, increasingly, tribal girls have the opportunity of attending school available to them. However, this is not a cause for celebration because Roy (2005) found gender disparity in his study of tribal education. Citing the Report of India for 1961-2001, he provides the evidence of a continuing gender gap between the tribal men and tribal women. While this gap was 10.5 percent in 1961, by 1991 the gap had widened to 16 percent and rising to 18 percent in rural India. For Roy (2005) the gap in rural India is important because the majority of the tribal women reside in villages. At the present time, the institutional factor for the failure of education, namely the availability of schools may have been overcome yet the

socio-economic factor seen in the life of young Shanti remains a major concern for the education of tribal women.

Except Binko, the rest of the women consider not being educated a matter of great loss and they regret about it. They think their life would have been different if they had been educated. Their education would have helped them in living a better life. Though Sunami and Merkha found jobs in the neighboring rice mill and are able to support their families, they feel a sense of shame putting their thumb prints to documents instead of their signatures. Due to illiteracy, they do not feel entitled to what Behura (2002) calls “literacy bestows glory and self-esteem on a person” (p. 320). However, instead of being defeated by their illiteracy, these women have risen to the occasion to take up the role of primary providers for their families. They experience the pain of not being educated yet, they are determined to send their children to school. These women’s determination to send their children to school is consistent with what Manna (2000) found in her research that the majority of tribal mothers want their children to be educated. Alam (2000) also found that the tribal mothers including Oraon mothers are committed to taking care of their children even under the most difficult situations.

Being illiterate does not prevent them from dreaming and hoping for a better future for their children. In fact, their experience of illiteracy has made them even more determined to send their children to school. Binko is a good example of their dreams for their children. Binko and her husband were able to provide an education for all of their children. As a result, all of them have comparatively better lives. Binko is happy

to see how her children have become responsible people. As mothers these women feel responsible for the education of their children. The sense of responsibility they have for their children stems in large part from their present hardships and struggle for survival. By all means, these women especially Chari, Sunami and Salen would like to see their children's lives without daily struggle and suffering. They want to provide for their children the education which they missed during their childhood. They consider their illiteracy to be a major cause for their present suffering. Hence, providing an education for their children is intended to ensure a better future for them.

For these women, education translates into jobs. They believe that after being educated their children will find jobs which will secure their life and future. Chari's sisters found jobs after their school education; after her education, Binko's daughter got a job as a teacher and Salen's relatives those who are educated have jobs. Such examples of securing jobs after education provide hope for these women for better economic conditions for their children also after their education. This fact confirms of Manna's (2000) findings that the tribal mothers believe that education will help them to improve their economic condition. Thus, education, for them, is a way to a better life for their children. In this, these illiterate women are like majority of the people of India, including policy makers, political leaders and social workers who advocate tribal education for the betterment of life.

### **Theme Three: Why Do Our Husbands Who Went to School Live As If They Have Never Been To School?**

“Living in bondage to drinking and sitting idle”; “Not caring for the family”; “Not sharing emotionally” and “Abusive husbands” are four sub themes under the third

theme “Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?”

I have seen the general apathy and lack of responsibility among the husbands of these women. The four women who are married desire a deeper level of emotional intimacy with their husbands. Without emotional sharing with their husbands, these women’s struggle for survival and their efforts in raising their children is marked with loneliness. All four married women lamented that, their husbands’ inability to share emotionally has made their lives hard. Their husbands’ lives of drinking and sitting idle and their irresponsibility toward the families frustrated these women.

On the one hand, four of the women who are married have much hope and expect much from the education of their children, at the same time however, they are bewildered by the uninspiring lives of their husbands who were able to go to school. These married women are frustrated and hurt at the way their husbands waste their lives in drinking and sitting idle. For these women who believe education to be a way to a better life, their ‘educated’ husbands’ attitude to life baffles them.

Drinking rice beer during special occasions is a part of Oraon culture. A traditional rice beer made at home is now a huge part of the problem of alcoholism among Oraon men. Many people justify the drinking of rice beer on the basis of its cultural connections. Whether this is a part of culture or not, it has certainly impoverished tribal families. The families of Chari, Salen and Sunami testify to that. It is not limited to the observation of these women, Rath (2006) has commented that “Addiction to alcohol and the subsequent falling into the hands of the outside liquor

traders are well-known causes of tribal impoverishment throughout tribal India” (p. 31).

He argues that “The tribal men undergo tremendous tension because the trauma of displacement and change-over to a new economy and culture results in a great amount of tension among men as well as women” (p. 122). His study found that “drunkenness is very common among the deprived people of Jharkhand and that it is a way of coping with the tensions they experience” (p. 122). This may explain the drinking habits of those husbands who once worked as day laborers in the city.

Along with their drunkenness and idle living, the married women also spoke of their husbands’ irresponsibility towards them and their families and of their abuse. In fact, the theme “Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?” raises fundamental questions about the nature of the educational system of which their husbands were a product. Many researchers have underlined the weakness of the education system. Roy (2005) found that the existing education system, curricula and language policy have been framed to cater to the needs of the dominant communities which, instead of helping the tribals, create a sense of alienation among them. Behura (2002) also found that in the present education system in India “a tribal child remains in a physically, culturally, linguistically and psychologically disadvantaged position” (p. 324). To a large extent it is caused by the medium of instruction other than their mother tongue.

Moreover, in schools in the tribal dominated areas such basic facilities as drinking water, toilets, libraries, and teaching aids are often not available. Among the host of problems that infest the schools in the tribal belt, there are schools which are

virtually non-existing. Nanda (1989) refers to them as ‘paper schools’ and they are common in backward and remote regions. In this context, a government report is revealing:

...what was still shocking was that a number of schools, especially in the tribal areas, had remained closed for certain period of time and in a number of cases these schools had not functioned since the beginning of the academic year (Government of India (1988) *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, Twenty Eighth Report 1986-87* quoted by Nambissan, 2000, p. 191).

In predominantly tribal-populated areas there is a very high percentage of single-teacher schools. In 40 percent of the primary schools in Jharkhand there is only one teacher (Louis, 2007). Even the two-teacher schools for five primary school classes are a recipe for educational disaster. The teachers in such schools are occupied with controlling the various groups of children in the school rather than teaching them, which results in an extremely poor quality of education for tribal children (Nambissan, 2000). The husbands of the married women Chari, Merkha, Salen and Sunami attended such malfunctional schools. It is no wonder that their approach to life, daily routine and attitude toward their wives are a puzzle to their wives.

The overwhelming numbers of teachers in the tribal dominated areas in Jharkhand are non-tribals who lack both the motivation and skill on the one hand and also, the training and knowledge on the other to be effective in educating the tribal children. Ambhast (1970) found in 1970 in the Ranchi district that the non-tribal teachers lacked rapport with the tribal students and that still seems to hold true. The findings of Mahapatra and Mishra (2000) reveals this:

The teachers from non-tribal community in the tribal schools had less interest in teaching due to their disliking to stay and work in the tribal areas, having been from distant place with an indifferent attitude to the tribal community (p. 153)

Since they do not know the language and the culture of the students they are unable to relate to them. For the tribal students in Jharkhand, they remain outsiders. Instead of taking their task of teaching as an opportunity to contribute to the learning and educational activity of the children, for the non-tribal teachers it is just a job that pays them without their having to do any work. This fact was raised by Salen who shared that her son did not want to go to school because he said that his teachers did not come to school and also because his teachers were not nice to him. Not having supportive teachers is a source of great discouragement for tribal children. The apathetic attitude of the non-tribal teachers towards tribal students finally leads to their dropping out (Mohanty & Biswal, 2009). The issue of motivation and interest among non-tribal teachers can also be attributed to their prejudice against tribal communities.

The model of education prevalent in India today relates to the education system which Freire refers to as a 'banking education system'. Based on the text books alone, it is heavily dependent on rote learning and is oriented towards mass examination, it remained unhelpful to the husbands who were left unprepared for the challenges of life. While the education system did not prepare these men to be responsible for their families nor responsible citizens of their country, it reinforced the cultural practice of patriarchy making them insensitive to their families' needs and abusive of their wives. The emphasis on the text book as the be-all and end-all of the classroom activity is described by Krishna Kumar:

The basic norm of this culture was to treat the prescribed textbook as the de facto curriculum, rather than as an aid. The teacher taught the text by elucidating it, by asking children to copy and memorize it, and finally by drilling them to answer and memorize questions that were based on it. (Kumar, 1991 as cited in Clarke, 1997, p. 127).

In addition, these alien text books bear little relevance to the tribal world; the foreign language of instruction and the hostile and insensitive non-tribal teachers may have proved a good recipe for the husbands of these women feeling confused and left out finally leading them to drop out. Given the condition of the government schools without regular teaching and guidance, proper classrooms and other necessary facilities which these men may have attended, it is no wonder that their time in the school was unproductive. Thus these women, who had not gone to school, still have high expectations from the education of their children. Even though their husbands, despite attending schools, lead a life of drinking, sitting idle, irresponsible towards their family and abusive of their wives, they have not lost faith in education for their children. Their high hopes for good results from the current education system may be misplaced especially in the light of the massive unemployment problems in India. Not even most of those who graduate from high schools or colleges get jobs. Perhaps, the husbands of the women in this research represent those about whom Jeffery et al (2002) write:

The educated are useless, educated people are trapped. They are restricted in the work that they can do. Uneducated men are free; they can do whatever they like: labour, farming...whatever. So I think that in today's world, given the nature of unemployment, it is right to be illiterate [...] In India there is hopelessness [*nir\_ash\_a*]. As a result of unemployment, people have lost the desire to live. (p. 972).

This comment also speaks volumes about the irrelevance of the fundamental nature of Indian education prevalent in India today. Even though the present tribal

education is seen as an effective tool for development (Mahapatra, 1994; Mukhopadhyay, 2002), empowerment (Ambhast, 1996; Bodra, 2008 and Mullick, 2004), national integration (Joshee, 2003 and Poddar, 2006) and employment (Bodra 2008 and Kailash, 1993), the actual fact of tribal reality clearly indicates is that they are not developed; their empowerment is still a distant dream; and that they remain isolated and alienated and suffer from unemployment. Thus, the present tribal education must be evaluated as having no significant impact upon tribal communities (Pradhan, 2004). In the context of tribal education in India, new insights can be gained by the Freirean pedagogy which I will take this up in a later section.

#### **Theme Four: There Is No One To Listen To Us**

The theme of loneliness is clear in their shared stories. Though these women live in a family and in a community, they struggle with a deep sense of loneliness. Their loneliness was expressed under the sub-themes: “Neighbors are too busy and our relatives are too far away” and “The local community leaders are indifferent”.

Their loneliness is accentuated by the fact that their relatives are far away and neighbors are too busy for regular sharing. All women long for sharing with relatives or friends but they are all so busy trying to make both ends meet that they do not have any time left for socializing and sharing.

For the most part, their lives are too busy to realize their loneliness but during times of crisis they feel it and long for the proximity of their relatives. Chari’s experience of loneliness during her miscarriage; Shanti’s experience of abandonment; Binko’s loneliness during the death of her husband are all occasions when they felt a

deep sense of loneliness and longed for friends and relatives to share their struggles. All of these women grew up in families and communities that were closely knit, where extended family members lived in close quarters and there were frequent community gatherings. In such a context, the ideal they imbibed was found in their sharing with each other both joys and sorrows. Even though their families suffered from poverty, yet, they still had time for one another. However, at the present, their life's context is very different from what it was because they find it necessary to spend day and night trying to generate income for their families with little or no much time left for sharing and listening. They long for the old days of greater sharing and listening but they also know that it is not possible. In her study Bodra (2008) found that along with the change in subsistence and land holding patterns and development of market economy, "the penetration of alien culture has harmed them (the women) more than anything else, affecting their peaceful lives" (p.68). The close kin-relationship that marks the tribal life (Bhowmik, 2001) has almost disappeared, causing stress and loneliness for these Oraon women.

Such a sense of loneliness among Oraon tribal women also indicates the gradual disintegration of community living and solidarity – a characteristic of the Oraon tribal community. Many authors including Roy (1915) at the beginning of the century, Minz (2007), Singh (1994) and Tirkey (1989) have underlined community living as an important characteristic of the Oraon community. The strength of their collectivity has sustained the Oraon community over the centuries. The centrality of community is so important that apart from the community an individual has no identity (Ekka, 2000). What Tirkey (1989) says about Oraon community is indicative of this centrality. He

says that an individual cannot remain an individual without at the same time being an Oraon. Their community life is rooted in the cultural environment created by the collective life of the people (Ekka, 2000). However, as seen in the life stories of these Oraon women, a sense of community living in which fellow villagers share and care for one another's joys and sorrows is no longer their daily experience. It is evident that the Oraon community in the research area is faced with challenges that threaten its traditional fabric of community life. The interviews of the six women suggested a change in the socio-economic life of these women. At present, the fact of a less than adequate amount of land for a family's sustenance, the disappearance of natural resources in terms of forest produce, grazing fields, their jobs as day laborers or rice mill workers coupled with the inevitable house work and the responsibility of raising their children have put great strains on their lives. Bodra (2008) notes that the changes in tribal land structure have severely affected the status of tribal women. She further observes that "changes in their environment and traditional wages create not only a psychological disenchantment but also render them physically helpless" (Bodra, 2008, p. 71). In their alien socio-economic situation their community support has deteriorated. Fernandes (2006) speaks of the close link between the women and their partial control over natural resources, he further concludes that "alienation from these resources results not merely in economic impoverishment but also in deprivation of social support, i.e. weakening of community systems" (Fernandes, 2006, p. 113).

Such disintegration of the community is to be seen in the indifference of the community leaders. Against the cultural onslaught of the dominant community these community leaders are unable to lead their community with forthrightness and

solidarity. Their indifferent attitude to community issues that affect both individuals and families gives rise to a sense of alienation and loneliness among villagers. One of the major factors leading to the disintegration of community values, according to Minz (2007) is the imitation of the values of the dominant community. The value of exploitation of the other for the sake of personal gain, the individual against the community, and competition against cooperation all values brought in by the outsiders to Jharkhand that have influenced the tribal people of Jharkhand.

**Theme Five: We Look Forward To Cultural Gatherings Because They Give Us Joy  
And Satisfaction**

In course of the interviews with these six illiterate Oraon women, the few times their eyes were lit with pure joy and anticipation, these were the times when they shared happy memories from their childhood; hope for their children and especially when they shared their memories of festivals, fairs, *Jatra* (cultural fair), weddings and other celebrations. It was not just the sharing of their happy and joyful experiences that provided me insight into their life's celebration but in my actually participating in their festivals in their homes and community. These granted me the sharing of joy and celebration with them at a very personal level. While sharing different celebrations, the women were excited, happy and full of anticipation of a wonderful time with family and friends.

The Oraon festivals are occasions for celebration. The women referenced particularly two festivals, *Sarhul* and *Karam*. Both festivals are related to the agriculture cycle. The women shared about their lengthy preparations for these festivals. Their celebration of the festivals involves cleaning the house, buying new

clothing for all members of the house, cooking different kinds of sweets and singing and dancing with other villagers on *akhra* (the dancing ground). It is a time for the family to get together and relatives' visit. There is eating, drinking, dancing and merry making (Ghosh, 2006). However, Lakra (2007), a tribal researcher argues that the Oraon festivals are more than simply social celebrations. He suggests that the dance during festivals brings about union in the tribal community. This fact was supported by the research participants who recalled how the villagers used to gather at the *akhra* (dancing ground) and while the young people danced, the older folks sat around it and shared their lives. The Oraon dance, like many other tribal dances, is a community dance. During festivals the whole community gathers at the *akhra* for community dancing. Along with other activities at home, this is how the festivals of *Sarhul* and *Karam* are celebrated. The community engaged in singing and dancing constitutes most important part of the celebration. It is a wonderful sight of community solidarity and collective participation. Therefore, Lakra (2007) concludes that "active participation in the community dance by young and old brings greater joy and happiness and a sense of oneness in the whole community" (p. 182).

It is almost incredible to see how these women, who struggle day and night for their survival, are able to express great joy during festivals and rejoice in joyful abandonment in their community dance. The festival and community dance speak of the community's strength. Ekka (2009) argues that "despite being subjected to massive exploitation and centuries of marginalization the indigenous community has not only survived but has been alive in its festivals, dance, singing..." (p. 21). There seems to be

a celebratory core within the indigenous community which enables it to celebrate life in community irrespective of their plight.

Lakra (2007) describes the richness of Oraon music. The different tunes and rhythms according to seasons indicate the richness of their culture. While they are singing and dancing, I am also struck by the ability of these illiterate people to add stanzas after stanzas to continue their songs and dances without any previous preparation. Freedom to compose songs while singing is both a characteristic of Oraon music and also of its richness as a musical form. Their musical tradition in terms of singing and dancing is probably particularly strong because it is a part of the oral tradition. The tradition of singing is not restricted to the *akhra* (dancing ground) and *Jatra* (cultural festivals). While attending a wedding I witnessed how the groom's party and bride's party, both men and women, sang responsively. The songs narrated their cultural history. Even when the Oraon women grieve they cry aloud expressing how their relationship with the deceased was very special. In their mourning they recount the deceased's generosity. They refer to such grieving as mourning singing. Their history and tradition is preserved in their songs and dance.

The tribal festivals are also a fundamental part of their world view (Minz, 2007). The festival of *Sarhul* is a feast of welcoming a new life in which prayers for the wellbeing of the people are offered and blessings on the crops are invoked. There is a matrimonial relationship between God and the land (Minz, 2007). "In tribal philosophy, this manifests the process of creation and procreation" (Minz, 2007, p. 65). The social character of the festivals is again underlined during the celebration of *karam*

festival. The young girls who keep the *karam* fast go out to cut and carry home the *karam* (a particular tree revered by the Oraons) branches amidst singing and dancing. The branch is brought and installed on the dancing ground with great honor and respect. The installation of the *karam* branch indicates that all are invited to dance around the branch. Finally, they take the *karam* branch from house to house there by paying respect to the *karam* by the families amidst singing and dancing.

The festivals are not merely occasions for family celebration or times to indulging in personal gratification. For the Oraon tribal people they are important community symbols which characterize their culture and also provide them with an identity of their own. Thus, Lakra (2007) says that “in fact, art in the form of music and dance for the tribals is almost as essential and enjoyable as food and drink itself” (p. 172). The songs and dance are not restricted to the festivals but they are prominently featured in *jatra* also. In the months of April and May, clusters of villages called *parha* organize *jatra* (cultural festival) or dance festival (Singh, 1994). All the people from these villages participate in the dance festivals with great enthusiasm. They carry flags and such other symbols as horses and elephants to this event.

**Theme Six: Occasionally Our Hopes are Raised by Government Officials and Political Leaders But Soon We are Forgotten**

During the time of interview, the elections for the state legislative assembly of Jharkhand and *Panchayat* (local government) elections were held. It was obvious that the interviewees were aware of the world around them and that they were reflecting on the issues under discussion during the period leading up to election. The general

election and the *Panchayat election* (local government election) have brought political awareness to people (Bodra, 2008). Over the years, the talk and publicity regarding tribal development at the government's initiative have captured the imagination of such common and illiterate people as the six Oraon tribal women I interviewed. Free education for their children in school, free school uniforms, free mid-day meals in school, free bicycles for female students and various programs of subsidies, loans and socio-economic help through the block system seem to have given rise to hopes and expectations among the poor. However, during the interviews all women expressed their disappointments over how government officials and political leaders have failed to provide for the basic needs of their lives as individuals, families and communities. Their disappointment is presented in three sub-themes: "Basic needs such as good education and amenities are not provided", "Selfish leaders" and "Corruption in government offices".

While sharing their stories about how government officials and political leaders give false hopes and expectations, these women spoke of education with hope for their children. Under *Sarva Siksha Abhiyan*, a universal primary education program is underway. It is a valiant government that has passed an Act to the effect that education is a right to all children under 14 years of age. Accordingly, a change in emphasis is visible in an increased effort in the enrollment of children and the provision of uniforms, books, and mid-day meal in school. However, in the area of my research, the reality of all children being educated in government schools is far from being evident. The villagers would like a close supervision and regulation of the schools by senior government officials and education planners. Though many improvements in the

education system look attractive on paper, in practice things remain very gloomy and unhelpful, especially for tribal children. The free provision of uniforms and text-books is never on time and the provision of mid-day meals, instead of being an incentive to education, consumes most of the teachers' time leaving very little time for teacher preparation and actual teaching. As a result, the government schools are not really a viable option to obtain a good education, which forces tribal families to take their children to private schools causing an extra financial strain on the families. Salen's experience with the government school is a testimony to this fact. Chari's complaint about teachers' absence and virtually no learning in school is, unfortunately, the norm in the village schools in the tribal areas. Commenting on the 'chronic malady of teacher absenteeism' the report of the National Commission for Women (1994) observes that "if teacher is absent, it entails closure of the school and an end to all efforts for promotion of education among tribals" (p. 80).

I was able to talk to five teachers who were teaching in the government schools in Oraon tribal villages as well as Ranchi city. All of them felt that many initiatives for the promotion of education such as mid-day meals, has negatively impacted the quality of education in schools. They explained that now the teachers are expected to be managers and most of their time goes into procuring food items, supervising cooking, distributing the meal and maintaining accounts of the income and expenditures for the government. It is obvious that the teachers are neither trained nor have an aptitude for a task like this. Providing mid-day meals in remote rural and tribal areas entails all kinds of challenges with regard to the transportation of the food items and the maintenance of good hygiene while cooking and distributing the meal. The teachers feel that without

extra personnel in the schools, this program is destined to ruin the learning environment of the school which was at an unsatisfactory level to begin with.

Along with the concern for education, the women also expressed the basic need for a good source of clean drinking water in the villages. This has been a continuing demand of the villagers to government officials and political leaders. The usual government response to the villagers is that the proposal for the village well in question is under consideration, a process which never seems to come to completion. The politicians who show up in the village during elections to beg for their votes, promise them a village well, good roads, electricity for all households and other necessities of life but then are never seen again till the next election. Chari's story of seeking a village well from the political leaders without success speaks of how the political leaders are only interested in their votes and not in their welfare. This is in line with the findings of Mallick (2004) who studied the Oraon and Santal tribes in the neighboring state of West Bengal. He found that the inability of the political leaders to effectively address peoples' concern has created a sense of alienation among the tribal people. Yet, these women and other villagers continue to hope despite inevitably unresponsive government machinery and political establishments.

Though these women are illiterate they know that the government officials and politicians are selfish and corrupt, taking advantage of the poor and illiterate. The women's stories reveal the heavy toll that rampant corruption in bureaucracy and political establishment has taken in the lives of the poor. The sharing of Merkha's and Sunami's pain over not being able to receive rice, lentils, salt, kerosene oil through

ration shops shows that it has affected women's ability to fight poverty at the most fundamental level. On the one hand, India is being showcased as one of the largest economies of the world with a rapidly rising middle class, yet, its march to becoming an economic giant is seriously marred by an omni-present corruption in Indian society.

One would have assumed that a democratic India would create new administrative and social structures which, by giving power to the people, would put an end to exploitation. In fact, exactly the opposite has happened and the substructures which facilitate exploitation have been enlarged and rendered more powerful. This has resulted in the policies and programmes designed for the poor not being implemented properly and, in fact, being used as instruments to transfer power and money to the haves. What this means in practice is that notwithstanding the laws in independent India which, for example, aim at ending bonded labor, providing a fair wage to agricultural workers, redistributing surplus land to the landless, providing economic support to those who are socially and economically handicapped, the power structures at local levels continue to exploit people at large and tribal in particular. Programmes are not implemented, benefits are not passed on to the poor, the laws are ignored because the elected elements, the contractors and the local bureaucracy, have formed a nexus in which corruption, inefficiency, oppression, and tyranny rule.” (Anand, 1996, p. 58)

### Summary

Chapter 5 analyzed the themes identified in chapter 4. The six themes: ‘Our lives are heavy and painful because of daily hard work’; ‘We do everything to send our children to school hoping that their lives will be better than ours’; ‘Why do our husbands who went to school live as if they have never been to school?’; ‘There is no one to listen to us’; ‘We look forward to cultural gatherings because they give us joy and satisfaction’; ‘Occasionally our hopes are raised by government officials and political leaders but soon we are forgotten’ demonstrated that these women’s struggle for daily survival is part of the problem faced by the tribal community in Jharkhand. The socio-economic burden, the present education model, and their rich cultural

heritage call for a different kind of understanding and approach to formal and non-formal education that would be based on their socio-cultural realities and would address the issues of illiteracy, their daily struggle for survival and the cultural identity. In the next chapter I will share implections for adult education, conclusions and recommandations.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SITUATING ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ORAON TRIBAL WOMEN**

The six distinct themes discussed above suggest the Oraon tribal women's multiple levels of struggle for survival; their hope for their children and their experience of joy during cultural events. While I gained a personal understanding of the lives of these six Oraon women, the same is also true for hundreds of thousands of other Oraon women in India. Their life is characterized by illiteracy, extreme poverty, a constant struggle for survival, a heavy work load, a lack of community support, discrimination and loneliness. The interviews and the analysis also made it clear that the government policy of tribal development has failed to improve the lot of the tribal people both in Jharkhand and throughout India.

In this chapter I will discuss the following questions: What can we learn from these women's lives to inform us as policy-makers and adult education practitioners? How do these facts impact adult educators in Jharkhand and in India? What theories can explain the inability of the tribal women to access to literacy, viable economic options, and community solidarity? Given the context of Oraon tribal women what directions should adult education take?

### **Implications for Adult Education in India**

As far as women's literacy is concerned, it was considered in the National Policy on Education 1986 in terms of education for women's equality. Women's literacy was considered key for population stabilization. "Ensuring that girls go to

school, education programs for adolescent and women's literacy are today accepted as a three-pronged strategy to contain population" (Ramachandran, 2000, p. 130).

Generally, education for women is understood to include more than literacy. It is an agent for change and transformation in the status of women. Education is a tool for empowerment. However, this was not addressed by the existing adult education program and the new literacy campaign. Thus, the government started programs like 'Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas', Integrated Development Program and *Mahila Samakhya* (women group). These programs were positioned as women empowerment initiatives. Though, in all *Mahila Samkhya* areas, the enrolment of girls in school has gone up yet it has not produced effective literacy or basic educational intervention for women and girls. Thus, Ramachandran (2000) rightly points out that girls' education has not been a priority. In fact, her conclusion is that "Literacy for adult women has just not taken off" (Ramachandran, 2000, p. 142).

The government policy with regard to tribal education is restricted to formal education. In order to equalize the educational opportunity, the National policy on Education (1968 and 1986) advocated the opening of primary and middle schools within the reach of every child. Over the years two main governmental policies are obvious. First, standardized curriculum, facility of uniforms, free education, use of the tribal language as the medium of instruction, teachers from the tribal communities, and second, acknowledgement of the importance of the tribal culture for the schooling of tribal children and the recommendation of *Ashram* (free residential school) schools for culturally relevant schooling (Nambissan, 2000). Accordingly, *Ashram* (free residential school) schools were established in some parts of tribal regions including Jharkhand

state. This initiative was taken as a direct result of the government concern that the tribal children should be given culturally appropriate education. These schools were intended to provide tribal children with the teaching of “crafts which will be of real economic value and curriculum is to be based on respect for the cultural life and traditions of the tribals...” (Sharma and Sujatha, 1983, pp 3-4). These were two very important objectives that were relevant to the life experiences of the tribal people because they addressed the economic aspects of their lives and also reinforced the value of their culture and identity through the process of education. In this, these objectives relate to the present study of Oraon tribal women vis-a-vis illiteracy and identity. However, in their in-depth study of the *Ashram* schools, Sharma and Sujatha (1983) found that despite their policy objectives, the curriculum of the *Ashram* schools did not differ from that of the formal primary schools in practice. This has been the tragic story of tribal education. The government recognized the need for culturally relevant education for tribal people yet this has never been taken seriously and has never been implemented in the spirit of its mandate. Mathur (1992) also found that the *Ashram* schools lack the basic infrastructure for a healthy education environment. That *Ashram* schools have not established their credential was clear in the story of Merkha who was approached by the *Ashram* school promoter to send her daughter to the *Ashram* school. She did not agree to send her daughter to an *Ashram* school even though it was a free residential school because she was convinced neither of the quality of education nor of the safety and wellbeing of her daughter in that school.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that the tribal people in Jharkhand face multiple levels of obstacles and challenges with regard to the problems of illiteracy and

identity. These pertain to not only such material aspects as buildings, number of teachers, and other essential requirements for a healthy environment for education but also the very nature of the education system in India which alienates tribal people from their cultural moorings. The tribal communities also face the challenge of a lack of genuine desire and political will and commitment on the part of the government and political parties to implement culture-appropriate education for tribal people. There is no government program for literacy for Oraon women in a culturally appropriate manner. In addition, they face a perpetual attack of stigma and stigmatization in the fact that “there has been an onslaught by the dominant culture on tribal social and cultural practices. What is tribal is still popularly perceived and projected as ‘backward’ and ‘inferior’ (Minz, 2007; Nambissan, 2000).

The fundamental challenge with regard to the education of tribal people is to understand the nature and pedagogy of the present education system. What Roy (2005) states, is pertinent in this regard:

To set the right direction of change is highly problematic. Firstly, one can accept the given education system uncritically and define greater participation of tribal population in terms of raising the level of education as ‘development’ and work for that development, knowing full well that this system is integrationist and hegemonic and alienating in nature. Secondly, one can question the validity and relevance of the system and work for total overhauling of the education and language policies and look for ones that would be relevant to tribal life and sustain their cultural rights, although that might breed a critical consciousness and conscious citizenship for the consolidation of the foundation of democratic institutions (p. 151).

Continuing with the old model is to continue the ineffectiveness of tribal education. However, overhauling the present system requires a radical change in

understanding the nature and function of literacy and education. As indicated earlier, that Freire's dialogical model of education is relevant to the context of illiteracy and crisis of identity in the Oraon tribal context of Jharkhand. I have discussed the relevance of Freire's dialogical education for the tribal India in the second chapter. With Freire's emphasis on a dialogue-based literacy, the equality of learners and educators and the resourcefulness of the learners' experience, conscientization and critical reflection are themes and aspects that would provide a different orientation and direction for literacy engagement. In the light of what I have highlighted in earlier discussion in chapter two, namely, the issue of illiteracy among tribal women, inadequate awareness regarding the value of literacy, lack of community involvement, lack of the use of the tribal language as medium of instruction, irrelevant curricula, exploitation by the dominant community, deteriorating culture, job oriented education, inadequate political consciousness and social and economic backwardness, what Gibson (1994) says about Freire's aim in terms of simultaneously striking four keys in the struggle for social justice: literacy, critical consciousness, liberation and economic development, is of decisive significance in the Oraon tribal context in India.

The three interrelated themes in a Freirean understanding of literacy is helpful in the context of tribal illiteracy. Thus, the idea of reading word and world; reading as an act of knowing and theory practice is an integral part of literacy. In this model, people are able to read the world prior to reading the word. Being able to read the world, in Freirean terms, is to be aware of ideological dimensions of texts, institutions, social practices, cultural forms and injustices. Such reading is based on praxis whereby people are able to act on their material surroundings to transform it. What happened in

Nellore in Andhra Pradesh in 1991 as a consequence of a literacy campaign is indicative of this aspect of a dialogical education that creates awareness regarding the prevailing situation of the people. The discussion on the effects of alcoholism in their literacy class led the women of the district to organize against the sale of liquor. In no time thousands of women came out in the streets to protest against the sale of liquor, an action known as anti- *arrack* movement. This movement became so powerful that the state government had to declare the state an alcohol-free state in 1993 (Ramachandran, 2000). The unity of women led to the creation of almost 6000 savings groups in the state which empowered women to control the economy of their families. Dialogical education holds a genuine possibility for the illiterate Oraon women whose stories revealed their distress over the drinking habits of their husbands.

In its approach to tribal education, the government and, to a great extent, Non-governmental Organizations also have understood the tribal people as objects of their welfare initiatives including educational initiatives of all kinds focused on the cognitive aspect of learning. Perhaps, the non-cognitive aspect of learning which Freire takes seriously is missing both in the educational policy and in the minds of education practitioners. In fact, virtues such as love, humility, courage, tolerance and hope which are of decisive value in a liberative pedagogy do not mean much to non-tribal policy makers and teachers. Love is a precondition to the dialogical education proposed by Freire. The consequence of the absence of these values has resulted in objectifying tribal communities and in giving scant regard to their cultural heritage. Perhaps this explains the lack of motivation and interest of the non-tribal teachers.

It is such an irony because these values which are part and parcel of tribal community living are also high ideals for humanity in general. Not recognizing the values of these ideals amounts to an educational enterprise without a human touch. It is a tragedy for a society. Freire speaks of cultural invasion in terms of “the penetration of the cultural contexts of another group, and ignoring the potential of the latter, they impose their own view of the world upon those who they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression” (Freire, 1970, p. 121). The dominant society has done exactly this to the Oraon tribal society in Jharkhand. The central values of the tribal communities in relation to nature are those of harmony, accommodation and symbiosis whereas the values of modern development are exploitation and oppression. In relation to the economy, the tribal values are: social responsibility, communal ownership, decentralization, egalitarianism and communitarianism, whereas the values of modern development are: individualism, personal gains, competition, centralization and hoarding (Kujur, 2005). The most damaging way this invasion has been undertaken has been to disregard the tribal language in education. Minz (2007) argues that the process of alienation begins for the tribal people on the day he or she starts attending school. The fact that the tribal language was not implemented as the medium of instruction in school has resulted in such problems as children dropping out of school, ineffective learning, alienation from their culture, and great deterioration in their knowledge of their language. The “mainstream schooling has ‘invisibilized’ and marginalized tribal cultures” (Ramachandran, 2000, p. 200). Many scholars have underlined the importance of a

student's mother tongue as the medium of instruction, namely Bahura (2002), Minz (2007), Mohanty & Biswal (2009); Pradhan (2006), and Roy (2005).

The question of language is also related to the identity of a tribal people (Gupta, 2007). Even the political demand for Jharkhand as a separate state in India was partly for the preservation of the tribal identity. However, the apathy of the government toward tribal cause has disillusioned the tribal people of Jharkhand (Kujur, 2005). Given the long history of dependence on the government for literacy and a strong tribal community in terms of cultural identity, the tribal leaders are beginning to realize what Freire had advocated long ago namely: that people are subjects of history and that they are primarily responsible for social change. Accordingly, scholars like Minz (2007) are arguing that genuine empowerment for the tribal community in terms of literacy, development, strengthening of cultural identity and socio-economic and political power must come primarily from within the community itself. This argument is not to disregard the resources of the state mechanism but to create awareness of the subjecthood of the tribal people. In fact, in this call, Minz (2007) goes a step further than Freire who speaks of "pedagogy of the oppressed must be forged *with*, not *for* the oppressed" (Freire, 1970, p. 33). For Minz (2007), the tribal people must take control of their life and destiny from beginning to the end. Thus, the issues of literacy and identity remain the ultimate responsibility of the tribal people who must have the assurance of the state's resources for the task.

In his assertion Minz (2007) is underlining what the liberation theory propounded and which was discussed in the third chapter. Thus, the poor (in this case

the tribal people) are the authors of liberation (Tombs, 2002). In other words, the tribal people are responsible for the change they envision. As in liberative theory, the poor are recognized as a privileged locus of insight and action for liberation, so also, in the context of illiteracy and marginalization, the Oraon tribal people are the privileged locus for literacy and the transformation of their community. Like Freire's *conscientization* liberative theory begins with reflection upon experience (Oldenski, 1997). In their illiterate, impoverished and marginalized world the Oraon women would engage in reflection about their lives in the bondage of their daily struggle for survival. In this understanding, not only do the Oraon people accept their responsibility for village level involvement in literacy but the educated Oraon people take the responsibility of developing appropriate policy and strategies for implementation. In such initiatives for literacy lies the true power of social transformation, economic empowerment and the consolidation of the cultural identity of the Oraon community and Oraon women in particular.

Freire's model of education would bring about a change in the understanding and approach to the issue of literacy and identity among the Oraon tribal women of Jharkhand. The engagement in literacy would lead to a critical consciousness among the women who, through praxis will experience empowerment to overcome their illiteracy and economic hardship and also through the power of community involvement they will reestablish the community support that would strengthen their identity and transform their status as women, as Oraon and as Oraon women. This engagement will also enable them in their struggle for justice and equip them to live as healthy citizens of country and society.

### **Conclusion: Understandings and Recommendations**

My understandings and recommendations are the outcome of my in-depth interviews with six Oraon tribal women, close observation and reflection on these interviews and on what these women's experiences meant to them and to me.

#### **Study Understandings**

##### 1. Women as major providers:

Contrary to general perception in a patriarchal society that the male head of the house is the provider for the family, the Oraon women in this study were found to be the primary providers for their families. Fernandes (2006) speaks of the consequence of the loss of natural resources, as a result, the tribal woman are "reduced to just being housewife, unable to make an economic contribution to the family economy" (p. 119). This study found that even though they feel the loss of land and other traditional avenues for livelihood yet, the Oraon women have broken new ground in seeking employment outside their homes in order to provide for their families.

##### 2. Loss of women's work:

The study showed that as the land and other traditional work places are being curtailed the Oraon women are forced to find jobs in such non-traditional sectors as construction and small factories where their labor is exploited. This finding concurs with the study of Bodra (2008). Though these Oraon women are illiterate they are wise and courageous seeking what employment is available to them for the sake of the survival of their families.

### 3. The Shame of illiteracy:

The study revealed that the illiterate women felt shame in not being educated. They were made fun of by their male co-workers especially when they could not sign their name.

### 4. Focus on the children:

The focus of these Oraon women is upon their children and their well being. They are particularly concerned and committed to providing a good education for their children at any cost. They believe that through education, their children will have a better and brighter future and life. In this regard, the study confirmed the finding of Manna (2000) that tribal mothers are aware of the value of education and that they send their children to school.

### 5. Lack of support from spouses in spite of their schooling:

These women's experience with their 'educated' husbands (in the case of four of the women) suggests that the education they received rendered them incapable of dealing with life's struggle. Instead of working hard along-side their wives for the well being of their families, they lead an idle life. They are satisfied to undertake agricultural work in their family farm once a year which is not viable for food security for family. It is ironic that these women hoped for a good future for their children from the education system that made their husbands incapable of living a productive life.

### 6. Feeling of isolation:

The lives of these Oraon women are lonely as they mostly struggle alone for survival. Even though they live in families and community, they feel that they do not have community support for sharing. This suggests the beginning of the disintegration of a close-knit tribal community, especially of its support and solidarity. Due to the onslaught of the dominant society, tribal people are absorbing the values of individualism, competition, and apathy towards neighbors. As a result, the feeling of belonging together is on the wane resulting in their inability to share what each other life's joys and sorrows.

#### 7. Changes in households:

The study showed that the nature of the Oraon tribal household is changing fast. Even in the village the family mostly consists of parents and children. The earlier model of a joint/extended family is fast disappearing.

#### 8. Loss of tribal identity:

There is a tendency of deterioration in their tribal cultural identity. While growing up these Oraon women used their mother tongue Kurukh for communication but now their children, though understand their language, are unable to communicate in their mother tongue. Language is a major bearer for cultural identity. In the changing context of their habitat, they seem to have imbibed what the dominant culture communicates to them: that the tribal language is backward and inferior. The medium of instruction in the schools being other than their own tribal language has accentuated this.

#### 9. Joy in celebration:

The cultural events give joy and satisfaction to the Oraon women. Though the daily community support and solidarity has somewhat deteriorated, such cultural events as festivals, *Jatra* (cultural gatherings), fairs and weddings still bring great joy and satisfaction to these women. Apart from cooking and cleaning the house for these cultural events these events are occasions for the whole community to gather generally at the *Akhra* (dancing ground) for community celebration. The most obvious way of celebration during such events is community dance.

#### **Recommendations for further research**

1. There is a dearth of research of the Oraon community, especially the Oraon women. More research studies should be conducted in different areas of the Oraon community so that the findings of the present study can further be confirmed and compared.
2. In-depth study of the impact of the present education system in terms of alienation from the Oraon tribal culture and identity should be undertaken so that necessary measures can be taken to preserve their cultural heritage.
3. Though the Oraon community is relatively free from sex discrimination compared to the dominant Hindu community, there is serious discrimination against women especially in labor, inheritance and religious practice. Thus there is a need to study the patriarchy and its different manifestations in the light of the changing socio-economic situation of the tribe. Discrimination in work places should be studied.

4. An independent study should be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the government funded programs intended for the empowerment of the Oraon tribe. The question as to why after so many years of developmental programs, there is hardly any perceptible impact should be investigated thoroughly. This would help with taking appropriate corrective measures.
5. An in-depth study of school drop outs, like the husbands of four of the women (who participated in this research) should be undertaken to find out their experience of education and schooling. This would shed light on how Oraon children experience schooling in Jharkhand.

### **Recommendations for Adult Education**

1. In order to address the illiteracy in the village of Malar, Ranchi, the site of the present research, a village level adult literacy campaign should be started. It could be done through the village council. Using the resource of the present study, the women of the village including those who participated in this study could be given leadership in this regard. Since those women who participated in the study regret not being able to go to school, this proposal would be a good opportunity for them to engage in literacy. In fact, the facility of *Dhumkuria* (the village community hall) could be used to organize such a program. Instead of using Hindi, the dominant language of the market, Kurukh, their tribal language, should be used to learn reading and writing and also discussing about the issues of their lives.

2. There is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive literacy campaign by a government agency such as the District Literacy Committee for the illiterate Oraon women. The model of literacy should include not just learning how to read and write but also enabling the illiterate women to become aware of the different issues that affect their world, enabling them to question all forms of injustice and exploitation at home as well as in society. Notwithstanding the comprehensive definition of literacy on paper, in practice, “Literacy is often equated with the ability to sign one’s name.” (Behura, 2002, p. 320).
3. The Oraon song and dance should be used as tools for a literacy campaign. Singing and dancing come to Oraon women naturally and as the study has revealed they provide them with joy and a sense of belonging. Dance, song and music are a way of tribal life especially for Oroans (Ekka, 2002). This can profitably be used for the promotion of literacy among Oraon women.
4. Adult education professionals who work among the Oraon people should come from the community itself who know the culture and issues of the community. It has been found again and again that even for formal schooling the teachers should be from the tribal community, for example, Mohanty & Biswal (2009) and Roy (2005). Even the adult education planners and practitioners should be drawn from the community to ensure culturally relevant materials with appropriate and effective implementation strategies.
5. Adult education professionals even from the Oraon community should receive special instruction in the Freirean understandings of literacy in which the

dialogue-based literacy, the equality of learners and educators, the resourcefulness of learners' experience; conscientization and critical reflection provide directions and orientation to the literacy engagement for humanization and liberation of all in society.

6. In each village a Village Education Committee should be formed for the supervision of the quality of formal and non-formal education. The local involvement is proved to increase the impact.

## EPILOGUE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

The women I interviewed were brought/came to Malar village under different circumstances; some as brides, some to survive and some to find refuge. *Binko* was welcomed as a daughter-in-law about 45 years ago. *Chari* came with her husband soon after their marriage to work on the family farm and earn their living. *Salen's* family moved when they, as a family, realized they couldn't survive in their ancestral village. *Merkha* got married to a widower from Malar village who had three young boys. *Sunami* was brought as a young bride. *Shanti* was brought by her mother as an infant when her mother was asked to leave her in-law's house with her infant daughter. They were born in different families, brought up in different villages but their unique stories: their joys of the past, cries of the present and hopes for the future tell but one story of Oraon women's struggle for survival and their hope for future of their children. I was privileged to spend an extended period of time (from 2006 to 2010) in Malar village. Both the period of observation and the interviews helped me develop a wonderful rapport with each of these women. The stories of these six illiterate women came together for me as I read and reread their interviews. It was beyond my expectation that these women had the time, trust and courage to share their significant events; their wonderful childhood memories; their relationship with family members, friends and neighbors; their moments of joys and sorrows; their struggles for survival as women, as wives, as mothers, as daughters, as granddaughters, as daughters-in-law, and as mother-in-law.

Many times I was overcome with emotion as I read their interviews and personally reflected on each interview. I thought about them individually and as a group, and especially as I wrote the fourth chapter, their voices spoke to me as a cry for liberation. They opened up their lives to share intimate and emotional moments of their lives in their vulnerability. I cried with *Shanti* as she shared her unfulfilled dream of becoming a nurse ...with *Chari* as she narrated her stories of abuse...with *Merkha* as she shared about her feeling of helplessness to support her own daughter...with *Salen* as she narrated her struggle with daily work at home and outside...with *Sunami* as she shared her struggle to be a wife, mother, provider and caregiver and with *Binko* as she grieved for her son-in-law and shared her deep concern for her young widowed daughter's future. Their incredible stories touched my life deeply and have left their imprints on me forever.

Being an Oraon tribal woman myself, I was welcomed into the community from the first day. However, I wasn't considered an insider until I was invited by *Merkha* to celebrate *Karam* festival with her family and other villagers. I felt privileged to be counted one among them. From then on I was invited to participate in their weddings, festivals and family gatherings. They were always ready to welcome me into their homes. Their hospitality and generosity was shown when I visited and they took time to visit with me over a cup of tea. Some blessed me with gifts of vegetables or dry greens. *Binko's* family always packed a bag full of vegetables for me when I left their home. In spite of their poverty, their generous hearts humbled me again and again.

Our common motherhood also brought us closer in a unique way. All five married women were able to share their feelings and emotions as mothers and providers. We shared a lot about our children, their lives, activities, studies and health. They knew I would understand the depth of their joys and sorrows. Binko expressed her sorrow by singing and narrating about the death of her son-in-law; Merkha expressed her joy by singing and holding my hands to invite me to dance with her during *Karam* festival. As a mother and an insider they trusted me and shared their struggles, frustrations and heaviness of heart with me. Their confidence that I would understand their situation and trust in their words touched me deeply.

During observation and interviews I experienced the reality of their lives more than I had ever imagined that I could. I saw courage in each woman, courage to face the challenges of daily life, in the house, at the work place and in the community. For the sake of education, Sunami had the courage to leave her daughter behind to migrate to a new place trusting that she would find some kind of job in an unknown place that would ensure her daughter's future. These illiterate women are courageous and committed to raising their children almost single handedly. Their farsightedness and hope was clearly seen in their devotion towards their children's education as they fed and dressed them every day for school. I felt their strength in their determination which in turn strengthened me as a mother as I thought of my own children.

Amidst daily struggles and hopelessness, their hope for a better future for their children speaks of a human spirit that transformed me as a person. Their hard work and sacrifice for their children almost made their hope tangible. Each time they shared

about their children their eyes were full of hope. Their children reflect a ray of hope for them. Their sacrifice shows their love and concern for their children. They do not live for themselves but for their families. Their children are center of their lives and they are dedicated to raising them responsibly. As a mother I salute them for their dedication to their children.

I am full of deep admiration for these women's sense of responsibility. In the family they are the sole providers; for the farm they are the provider of the seed (as earning members of the family they are able to buy seed); sick children can only be consoled when their mothers are next to them; in the past they all took care of their in-laws when they were alive; and they keep up the social relationship in the community. Their sense of responsibility extends beyond their immediate families as they feel responsible for their extended families. As the wife of the oldest son in the family, Merkha extended help and support to her husband's younger siblings. After the death of parents they took up the role of parents to the younger siblings. Four out of the six women I interviewed have been responsible for their extended families though they lived in different places. Merkha's extended family relies on her for many events like weddings, festivals, sickness and death. Her responsibility is not only for providing financial help but for being present in person in times of need. Salen often helps her sisters and brothers-in-law financially. She feels it is her responsibility as an oldest member of the family. It is very natural in Oraon community that children of siblings come and stay in the extended family to attend school. Sunami brought her niece who was ill to her village and her mother could not care for her because she had other younger children. Shanti brought her half-brother into her home to help him go to

school. She felt it was her responsibility to help him. Such a sense of responsibility and support for the extended family, disclosed their generosity and sharing and, at the same time, also exposed the hypocrisy and self-centeredness of many of the 'educated' and city dwellers like me.

As a wife and mother, I was deeply saddened to realize their loneliness due to insensitive and irresponsible husbands. As an Oraon person I am aware of the drinking problem in the community, but to come face-to-face with those whose lives are shattered due to this problem, it was a blow to my heart. However, I could see a ray of hope as these women realized their mistakes by preparing and serving rice beer to their husbands. Three of the women have decided not to prepare rice beer at home anymore. Again and again I was reminded of the anti-*arrack* movement of Andhra Pradesh State where women led a movement in 1991 due to a literacy campaign against the sale of liquor in the district because they were fed up with their husbands' drinking. I also felt that if there is any hope for the Oraon community in this regard, it lies with the women. I hope and pray that a literacy campaign in Malar village could just be the beginning of a movement that would rid the community of this debilitating problem.

I was excited to begin my research in this Oraon village which, as a young person, I had visited many times. During the observation period I realized that Malar village had changed. These changes, unfortunately, were disappointing to me. The very first change that I encountered was the loss of their language. People in the village were communicating with each other in *Sadri* more than in *Kurukh* (language of Oraon people). I recall my childhood visits to the village when the villagers conversed in

*Kunruk* (Oraon). When I started interviewing the women they felt comfortable sharing their stories in *Sadri* the common language. Later I found out that three out of the four married women communicated with their husbands in *Kurukh*, but with their children they communicated in *Sadri*, only one married woman (Sunami) conversed with her whole family in *Kunruk*. Binko, the older woman spoke to her children in both *Kurukh* and *Sadri* and the youngest of all, Shanti always conversed in *Sadri* or in *Hindi*. What I was reading in books and researches about the loss of culture, I was witnessing in my encounters with these women and the villagers. Together with them, I regretted the deteriorating support and solidarity of the village, as villagers seem to be so busy taking care of their families that they are left with no time for one another, especially with regard to sharing the joys and sorrows of life.

I was frustrated and even angered many times as I heard their experiences of injustice at home, in the work place and also in the community. The snares of corruption made their impoverished lives more miserable. Though they live in a free society the injustices against them and wide-spread corruption force them to live in a kind of bondage. It forced me to think about the weakening democratic credentials of the largest democracy in the world. Though these women are illiterate, they are both wise and perceptive. They know that they are discriminated against because they are women and they also know that government officials take advantage of them because they are poor tribal women. I was particularly angered when Sunami shared about how the rice mill owner tricked her husband into giving over their family land for an approach road for the factory. As someone who is aware of the vested interests of the non-tribal people, I dread that her family is doomed to lose their precious family land.

As a person of faith, during our time of sharing, I also sensed that these women are not only hoping for a brighter future but also that they seem to be waiting for a messiah. Sometimes they look up to their community leaders for this messiah; sometimes they look up to the political leaders for change in their lot and at other times they look up to government officials for little favors that would ease their burden. It seems their illiteracy and resultant low self-esteem causes them to think that their plight can be changed only by help from the outside. However, as a woman pastor, I was encouraged by their sense of hope for liberation.

My academic program at the University of Minnesota began on the basis of my personal interest in the area of adult education and literacy. Many years of being in the classroom and thinking about possible research took me back to India. Upon my entry into my research, very quickly my assumptions changed as I found these women remarkably capable, committed and sensitive. I spent quality time with them getting to know them, to hear them and to see them for who they are. They changed me and gave me the courage to be positive as they are. Though they are illiterate they are wise, well behaved and well mannered. They are sensitive towards their families, neighbors and community. They are illiterate but they are pillars of their families; they are courageous; they are hopeful and they dream for a better tomorrow. I was amazed to learn that all of them could count money very well and that some of them could tell the time by looking at a watch. I was amazed at their memory power; they could not read but could tell by looking at pictures what they meant to them. I wondered many times, what they would have become if they had been educated. These thoughts led me to dream with them and wonder what they would become when they are literate.

When I enrolled in the graduate program I had experienced illiteracy in my family but now, after my close encounter with these six Oraon women, I am inspired to enter into the struggle for illiteracy in Malar village where almost 80 per cent of the adult people are illiterate. After my interaction with these illiterate Oraon women they are no longer my interviewees, now they are my dear friends. I am reminded of the maxim, “a friend in need is a friend indeed.” I was deeply touched by their sense of shame due to their inability to write their names. At the very least, as a friend I can walk with them to help them overcome their sense of guilt and because as Peter Singer, Ira W. DeCamp professor of bioethics at Princeton University wrote, I know “to walk by on the other side of the road is wrong”. Their encounter brought a concrete level of involvement to my interest in adult education. In this regard, these six illiterate women changed my life forever because they showed me where I can begin to make a change. This friendship is not based on pity but affection, respect and love for one another. In my calling as a pastor, an educator and a friend of these six women, I realized, as the adult educator Paulo Freire had realized that the basis for our involvement in holistic liberation is the commandment of Jesus Christ, “to love your neighbor as yourself.” (cf. Roberts, 2010). During the interviews, these six women found me to be a friend, a patient listener, and one who cared for them by taking time to listen to them. We bonded as we cried together, laughed together and dreamed together. I was privileged to know these friends whom the world knows as illiterate and by many other names but I came to know them as true human beings with their dignity, sensitivity; integrity, commitment and spirit of hope for the future. In the company of Binko, Salen, Sunami, Merkha, Chari and Shanti I became more human.

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## Appendix A

### University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board: Human Subjects Committee Permission for Study

TO : parkx002@umn.edu, minz0002@umn.edu,

PI: Nijhar Minz

IRB HSC: 1106P01087

Title: Hope amidst hopelessness: life histories of six illiterate Oraon tribal women in  
Jharkhand, India

From: Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The IRB determined your planned activities described in this application do not meet the regulatory definition of research with human subjects and do not fall under the IRB's purview for one or both of the following reasons:

1) The proposed activities are a) not a systematic investigation and/or b) not designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge [45CFR46.102(d)].

Quality assurance activities and evaluation projects designed for self-improvement or program evaluation, not meant to contribute to "generalizable" knowledge, do not meet the threshold of research with human subjects.

Although IRB review may not be required for case studies, you still may have HIPAA obligations. Please contact the Privacy Office at 612-624-7447 for their requirements.

and/or

2) You will not obtain private identifiable information from living individuals [45 CFR 46.102(f)].

Interviews of individuals where questions focus on things not people (eg. questions about policies) do not require IRB review. You will be analyzing aggregate data that cannot be linked to a living individual.

The above referenced IRB Human Subjects Code (HSC) will be inactivated in the database and you will have no further obligations for this project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRB office at 612-626-5654 if you have any questions. Thank you for allowing the IRB to make the determination about whether or not review is required.

HRPP Staff

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions

- (1) Tell me the story of your life?
  - How was your Childhood?
  - Please tell me about your marriage ceremony and marriage life?
- (2). What does it mean to be an Oraon woman in your own community?
  - How do you participate in cultural events?
- (3), What is your experience with your community/village life?
  - How do you experience common/daily relationship?
  - Tell me about your relationship with villagers?
- (4). Please tell me about your life as a wife, mother, and wage earner?
  - What are the things you do with your husband?
  - As a mother how do you take care of your children?
  - What challenges do you face at your workplace?
- (5). What does it mean for your to send your children to school?
  - Why are you sending your children to school?
  - What do you think of school they are going to?
  - How do you afford to send them to school?
- (6). How does it feel to be an illiterate person?
  - Why did you not go to school? What are the reasons for your not going to school?
  - What prevented you?
  - Did you want to go to school?
  - Did you share or requested your parent to send you to school?
- (7). What are the happiest moments of your life?
  - What do you do when you are happy?
  - What brings you joy?
  - How do you express your joy?
- (8). What are some of the saddest moments in your life?
  - What makes you sad?
  - How do you share your pain?
- (9). What were your dreams and aspirations growing up?

- (10). How do you see the future of your children?  
What do you want for your children?  
Who can help them in this regard?  
Do you think that they will achieve what you dream for them?
- (11). What are the struggles of your life?  
What is the most difficult thing in your life?
- (12). As a voter what is your experience of the government?  
Do you think that the government takes care of the need of the people in villages?  
Are you satisfied with their work?  
How were your expectations met?
- (13). Is there anything you would like to tell me or do you have any question to ask me?

**Group Interview Questions:**

- (1). What does education mean to you and to your family?
- (2). As a mother, can you explain your role in the family?
- (3). What are some of the struggles of your family?
- (4). What gives you joy and satisfaction?
- (5). What does it mean to be an Oraon women in Oraon community?
- (6). How do you see the present situation of community and society?