CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LOCATING THE THEME

I

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PRESENT PROJECT

The present project is on a tribe which is found in the Tarai\(^1\) region of Indo-Nepal border. This tribe has been totally neglected but mostly exploited whether they reside in India or Nepal. They have been looked down upon, grossly misunderstood and crowned with the title such as ‘Bagad’\(^2\), ‘Junglee’ i.e fool and uncivilized. They have been living in utmost inhospitable condition in the densely forested region where ray of development is also scared to dawn.

After Independence of India the same tribe living in Uttar Pradesh\(^3\) was included in the VIIIth Schedule of constitution thus enjoying the benefits of Scheduled Tribe while their brethren in Champaran district of Bihar\(^4\) remained unscheduled and fell prey to the outsiders. This tribe, of now West Champaran district, has become the major tribe of Bihar after carving out of Jharkhand. After continuous peaceful struggle this tribe became Scheduled Tribe in 2003. But damage done to them for decades can never be compensated.

This project is focused on a tribe which is known as Tharu who live in West Champaran. The purpose is to highlight the social organization and culture along with pattern of social change taking place amongst the till now little known, perhaps unknown and unhighlighted tribe of Bihar. Hardly do we find any detail, in-depth study and research work on this tribe. Before the wind of change should blow away their rich and unique social organization and culture they need to be properly documented. “Documentation of various facets of tribal society is
very much essential before they are totally eclipsed by the rapid process of globalization” (Pfeffer & Behra: 2002). They are required to be intensely and extensively researched, their pattern of change minutely analyzed not with ethnocentric but cultural relativist approach.

This study is based on field work with adopting the research technique of participant observation. It is a situation where social research worker becomes as much as possible a member of the group which he is studying and participates fully in the life of the group. The researcher goes to live for a time in communities and shares their day-to-day lives. This is a method of studying intensively a small social collectivity over a period of time.

It is difficult for a researcher to study whole of Tharuhat and that is why proper selection of the village is done keeping in view the objective of the project in mind. In this case a village Bakhari Bazar is selected which is on the Ramnagar –Gobardhana road in the Ramnagar Block of West Champaran district.

II

SITUATING THE WORK IN THE DISCIPLINE OF SOCIOLOGY/ANTHROPOLOGY

Sociology is the study of society, particularly modern, complex societies whereas anthropology, especially social anthropology is deemed to be study of simple societies. But fast and widespread changes have also redefined the nature of sociology and social anthropology. Process of globalization has an impact on even smallest villages and further accentuated the ‘shrinking of the globe’. The assumption of studying a simple society was that it was bounded but this assumption now proves to be wrong.
The traditional study of simple societies by social anthropologists has tremendous influence on the content and subject matter of the discipline. Social anthropologists tried to study simple societies as wholes whereas sociologists study complex societies and would focus on parts of society such as caste or religion or bureaucracy. Social anthropologists adopted the long field work tradition, living in the community which is to be studied using ethnographic research methods whereas sociologists have mostly depended on survey method and quantitative data using questionnaire mode and statistics.

Today it is argued that distinction between a simple society and complex one require rethinking or redefining. India itself is the complex mix of tradition and modernity, of caste and tribe, of village and city. We can very well find the existence of villages such as Mehrauli, Maidan Garhi, Kotla, in the heart of the capital city of Delhi. But Delhi is not India. There are many regions or areas in Madhya Pradesh, in Orissa or for that matter in Andhra Pradesh having very simple society away from the impact and influence of Globalization. The Central Government, with all the latest communication technology including satellite technology at its command, had the harrowing experience while tracing the ill-fated Helicopter of the Andhra Chief Minister in September 2009.

Tharuhat of West Champaran has also been an inaccessible area dotted by villages of simple Tharu society. Even today most of Tharuhat remains cut off from the outside world. This study has tended to zoom in on one of the Tharu dominated village for detailing the Tharu society in all its aspects by adopting long field work tradition, living in the village studied using ethnographic research methods.

This study has also observed the village for over more than two decades in different phases (In fact the interaction with them continues even today. I have visited them recently in December 2008 and June 2009.) and
delineated the pattern of social change perceptible in the Tharu society. Two factors a) inclusion of the Tharu tribe in the list of Scheduled Tribes and b) new and responsible Government in Bihar have started contributing in gradual but definite face-lift of erstwhile most neglected and ignored Tharuhat region.

### III

**CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

Social change is at once the most difficult and most fascinating problem. It is so ubiquitous and varied in its form that nothing very useful can be said about it as a general concept. The notion of social change as a special and distinct area of sociological study is largely a legacy of ‘Functionalism’. In developing a theoretical approach for the analysis of self-maintaining social system, functionalists made the process of change peripheral to the sociological task. Something like this we can find in American anthropology. British anthropological functionalists also tended to observe the causes of social change emanating from outside the societies they were studying. But they opined that change is immanent in all societies particularly in large-scale and complex ones.

*It is to be clarified that social change does not refer to almost any kind of change but changes that are significant and which can alter the underlying structure of an object or situation over a period of time. Thus social change does not include any and all changes but changes which transform things fundamentally.*
WHY THARU?

We do interact with several people from the very childhood days of our life but some interactions become immemorable, become heart touching. Such interactions do not fade out easily from our memories. Actually they leave behind an indelible imprint on one's mind. I can also recall one such interaction when I was a student of K.R.High School, Bettiah, supposed to be one of the best schools in whole of North Bihar.

I had a batchmate named Dharmraj Khatait. Dharmraj was a very simple man, very innocent and ignorant of worldly manipulations and manoeuvres. He was having flat nose and squint eyes, and belonged to Tarai region of Indo-Nepal border. This area is also known as Tharuhat in West Champaran. I could observe other students of my class throwing nasty comments or remarks upon him such as “Bagad”, “Fool”, “Uncultured”. But this boy used to attend classes without getting disturbed. This so called “Bagad” boy became a very good friend of mine just because he possessed a transparent personality, just because he was always wearing a pleasant smile on his face – very cool, calm and composed. So much impressed was I with his personality and behaviour that once I visited his village in the Tharuhat. I have no hitch or hesitation in stating that I used to find myself much comfortable in his benign company. He appeared to be god - incarnate because of his crystal clear personality. Later I came to know that he belonged to Tharu community – a deprived, exploited and backward group of people of West Champaran District, Bihar.

Interaction with the Tharu people, which started with the friendship with Dharmraj, continued with the passage of time. My curiosity to know more and more about them grew. I have seen and observed the nature and personality of
many Tharu boys, who used to frequent my house in Bettiah, headquarter of West Champaran district. They were all students of my father Dr Rabindra Nath Ojha who was Professor & Head Department of English, M.J.K. College Bettiah. Most of the Tharu students stayed in a lodge near the college itself run by Nand Kishore Kushwaha, my schoolmate and close friend. Their simplicity and innocence attracted me towards them and whenever I got opportunity I used to visit their lodge also.

My father was also very much impressed with their simplicity. He even wrote a very beautiful and heart-touching short essay on one of his students Ramnarayan and thus immortalized him. This essay later became part of his book “Shivam Sundaram” published in the year 2000.

Those indelible imprints and impressions of the Tharus I carried along with me when I landed in Delhi in 1980 and joined Jawaharlal Nehru University for higher academic pursuits. It took almost no time for me to decide the topic of my research when I enrolled myself for Ph.D. in 1985 after completing M.A and M.Phil. It was undoubtedly to be on the Tharus of West Champaran district of Bihar – most deprived, most neglected, most exploited lot subjected to inhuman conditions even in this age, the age of Communication boom, Mass Media and Information Technology, the age of Globalization – the so called more civilized and modern one based on rationality and scientific temper.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Are we really living in a civilized society? Are we really part of a developed and sensible world? Have we really left behind the era of Slave dynasty? Have the so-called educated and cultured people become humanitarian in their approach, attitude, temperament and behaviour? Or are the Tharus, in reality, in true sense of term, “Bagad” or fool devoid of any culture or social system? Can we really feel or observe the ripple of change brought about by the different government policies? Can we really delineate pattern of social change taking place in the
Tharu society after almost over five decades of Independence? Have the adjacent so called cultured society been helpful in making improvement in their living conditions?

These and many more such questions have been persistently and consistently worrying me and troubling my mind since I came into contact with the Tharus. That is why I thought that this simple and innocent community needed intensive and extensive research. Their problems, their difficulties required to be highlighted, their unique social system if any, needs to be properly protected and documented before it is diluted or lost in the black hole of history.

V

ABOUT WEST CHAMPARAN

West Champaran is the one of the districts of Bihar which is situated in the North-West corner of Bihar which is one of the states of India. It was carved out of the old Champaran district in the year 1972 as a result of reorganization of the districts of the state of Bihar. The location of the district on global map is between 26 Degree 16’ and 27 Degree 31’ north latitude and 83 Degree 50’ and 85 Degree 18’ east longitude. It has boundary in the North with hilly region of Nepal, in the South with Gopalganj & part of Purbi Champaran
district, East again with Purbi Champaran and West with Padrauna & Deoria district of Uttar Pradesh. The total area of the district is around 5228 Sq. Kms.

As the district has its border with Nepal, it has international importance. The international border is open with five blocks of the district, namely, Bagaha-II, Ramnagar, Gaunaha, Mainatand & Sikta. The district headquarter of West Champaran is Bettiah which 210 Kms (By road) from Patna,
capital of Bihar. There are three subdivisions under this district namely Bettiah, Narkatiyaganj and Bagaha but only two police districts Bettiah and Bagaha.
There are 18 Development Blocks, 315 Panchayats and 1483 villages. Total length of railway tracks within the district is 220Kms. This district has a literacy rate of 39.63% with some of the very good schools namely K.R. High School and St. Teresa School in Bihar.

Agriculture is the main source of income of the people of West Champaran. Some agro-based industries have flourished and have been successful. Sugar mills are established at Bagaha, Ramnagar, Narkatiyaganj, Lauria, Chanpatiya and Majhaulia. The units at Lauriya and Chanpatiya are closed at present. Cottage industries based on local available natural and agricultural produce catering to the local needs such as Gur (raw-sugar), basket, rope, mat weaving, furniture and goods made from cane. Some rice mills are also being run successfully and the produce specially Basmati is being marketed to different places outside the district.
WEST CHAMPARAN
Headquarters: Bettiah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
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<tr>
<td>sq.km</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Rate %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,228</td>
<td>30,43,0449</td>
<td>39.63</td>
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**Sub Divisions**
Bettiah, Bagaha, Narkatiyaganj

**Blocks**
Bettiah, Nautan, Bairiya, Jogapatti, Chanpatia,
Majhaulia Bagaha, Thakrha, Madhuban,
**Ramnagar**, Lauria, Sugauli, Narkatiyaganj,
Gaunaha, Mainatanr

**Agriculture**
Extremely rich paddy fields, sugarcane, cane reeds
grow wild

**Industry**
Sugar factories at Bagaha, Harinagar, Chanpatia, Ramnagar

**Rivers**
Gandak, Sikrahana

**Noteworthy**
Historical region, Maharshi Valmiki’s Ashram at
Valmikinagar, Rich with Buddhist relics, Ashoka’s pillar
at Lauriya, Nandangarh Area of Gandhiji’s non-cooperation movement against Indigo planters (1917).
Foothills of the Himalayas in the North, Home of the aborigines - **THARUS**, and rich with forests and wildlife
Mainly three types of crops are produced in this district - Aghani (Kharif), Rabbi (Spring crop) and Bhadai (Autumn). The main crops of Aghani season are paddy, potato etc., and that of Rabbi are wheat, Barley, Arhar. Bhadai crops comprise mainly maize and sugarcane. Main crop of the low lying land in northern region of the district is paddy.

The district is divided into few distinct tracts. The first consists of the hilly tract of Someswar and Don range in the North at the foothills of Himalayas. It is noticeable that the soil even at the foot of the hills has no rocky formation and whenever water can be impounded a rich growth of crop is possible. The hilly streams, however, play havoc by bringing down huge quantities of sand and destroying cultivable lands. The hills contain large stretches of forests.

Next to the hilly area comes the Tarai region which is largely populated by the Tharu tribe. The Tarai is a lowland tropical and subtropical belt of flat, alluvial stretch paralleling the hill region. The Tarai include several valleys (Don). The word Tarai means ‘damp’ and it appropriately describes the region’s humid and hot climate. The region was formed and is fed by three rivers: the Kosi, the Narayani (Gandak) and the Karnali. A region that in past contained Malaria infested, thick forests commonly known as char kose jhari (dense forests approximately twelve kilometers wide). In terms of farm and forest lands, the Tarai was becoming richest economic region. Overall Tarai residents enjoyed a greater availability of agricultural land because of the area’s generally flat terrain, which is nourished by several rivers. Additionally it has the largest commercially exploitable forests. However the forests are being increasingly destroyed because of growing demands for timber and agricultural land by outsiders. The Tarai region is followed by fertile plains occupying the rest of the district. This plain itself is divided into two well defined tracts by the little Gandak and have markedly distinct characteristics. The northern portion is composed of old alluvial...
and has a considerable area of low land. It is traversed by a number of streams flowing southwards.

The southern portion of the tract is characterized by stretches of upland varied in places by large marshy depressions known as Chaunwers. The Gandak or Narayani and Sikrahana or little Gandak are the two important rivers of the district.

The climate of the district is cooler and damper than the adjoining districts. The Tarai area comprising mainly Ramnagar, Bagaha and Narkatiyaganj is considered unhealthy while all other areas have a healthy climate. Winter begins in November and lasts till February followed by hot summer months when temperature rises to maximum 43 Degree Celsius. Rains set in during later part of June. Rainfall is heavier than most of the districts and is specially heavy in the Tarai region. The normal annual rainfall is about 56”.

The district still lags behind in having sufficient communication by metalled roads within territory. National Highway 28 B cris-crosses this district, while it is well connected with the state capital by road. The railway was introduced in 1888 when Bettiah was linked with Muzaffarpur. The line was extended to Bhikna Thori on the Indo-Nepal border. A line also runs from Narkatiyaganj to Bairgania via Raxaul. The construction of Chhitauni Rail Bridge near Valmikinagar has resulted in a direct link of the district with Gorakhpur, Lucknow, Delhi, Mumbai and other places of India. Bettiah and Valmikinagar have small airports with facility for landing of small planes.

The district has suffered large scale denudation of forests. Forests are confined to the northern tract and particularly the Someswar and the Don ranges are covered with forests. Sal, Sissam, Tun and Khair are among the trees found in the region. In the Tarai region bamboo, sabai grass and narkat reed are found in abundance.
The types of animals available in the forests of the district are tiger, leopard, panther, wild pig, nilgai, monkeys (both red and black faced), bear, dear, sambhar, bison, wolves and wild goats. Three types of quails of the Amazonian species are fond in the district. They are the bustard quails, button quails and little button quails. Brown fly-catchers, the grey shrike, olive green birds and various types of mynas are seen here. The rehu, naini, katla, tengra, buail, sauri and barari are the big fish varieties found in the bigger rivers and lakes of the district. Snakes are quite common and crocodiles and alligators sometimes found in the river Gandak.

The Don and Someswar hills in the extreme North which are the continuation of Shivalik range are formed of ill compacted sandstone. There are beds of Kankar (sandstone) in parts of the district and saltpeter is found almost everywhere. Tirhut, Tribeni and Don canals are the most prominent canals operating in this district. They get their water supply from the Gandak river at Valmikinagar, the northernmost part of the district bordering Nepal.

The rich forests of the district have opened the doors of flourishing trade in timber. The district borders Nepal on the North over a long stretch of land. There are some road routes also connecting the district with Nepal. Naturally, therefore, a good bulk of the Indo-Nepal trade is carried on through the district. Nepalese rice, timber and spices are imported into India while textiles, petroleum products etc. are exported into Nepal through the district. The chief trade centres are Bagaha, Bettiah, Chanpatia and Narkatiyaganj.
River Gandak near Valmikinagar

Dense Forest near Valmikinagar
METHODS OF ENQUIRY

(a) Choosing the Village:

The land of Champaran is great. This is the place where Mahatma Gandhi for the first time used the weapon of 'Satyagraha' for fighting the cause of indigo planters who had been the victims of the tyranny of British rule. The same land of Champaran is crying for another Mahatma Gandhi to appear so that the suffering Tharu community can be saved from the extreme exploitation and they can live their life with peace and dignity. Rule has no doubt changed but exploitation of the weak and the infirm still continues. I can not be Gandhi – incarnate but if I am able to highlight their problems through my research work, it would be a great help to them, as hardly do we find any in-depth study on the Tharus of West Champaran.

It was not difficult to reach Ramnagar as it is connected through rail and road but problem starts when one has to go to Tharuhat area from Ramnagar. When I first visited the area in October 1987, I had to face the problem of transport. There was no bus, no jeep, nothing of that sort. So movement in this area was not definite, not regular, not fixed. Either one had to go on foot or depend on the mercy of tractors or trucks passing through that place and going towards the Tharuhat. These tractors or trucks generally belonged to the owners of different farms falling in that area. Tanga was also not available all the time. One could get Tanga only between 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. I met a havildar H.D. Gurung who was posted at Gobardhana forest bungalow. He reached Ramnagar the same day at 9 a.m. and was supposed to join duty around 12 noon. He could not get any transport either and was restless but there was no way out. He waited for nearly six ours in Ramnagar and then only could manage to get a Tanga. I too reached Ramnagar at 9 a.m. and the whole day wasted just waiting for a transport.
The whole of Tharuhat region has come to be known as Mini Chambal because it has become dacoit infested. Kidnapping and murder have become usual phenomena. The day I landed in Ramnagar for my fieldwork purpose I came to know that one Vimal Chapolia, son of a businessman, had been kidnapped in broad day light just in front of Ramnagar (Harinagar) sugar factory which is a very busy and crowded place. People got scared of moving into the Tharuhat area. I was also a little bit disturbed and got nervous. I was in two minds, in doldrums whether to proceed further or not. Ultimately I decided to move ahead instead of coming back to Bettiah. Mission fieldwork was very important for me. The situation would not have changed with the change of my decision. Paucity of time was the greatest factor. Caring a fig for the advice of some of sympathizers, I ventured to go to the area of my fieldwork.

I had tried to visit the Tharuhat area many times and tried to find out suitable persons who could be of my help in my mission. In Ramnagar also I saw the Tharus moving in the market. I wanted to talk to them and break the ice but of no use. They did not respond at all. They were not understanding as to why I am so much interested in talking to them. They got scared with the very idea of talking to an outsider – ‘Baji’ what they call in their language which is near to Bhojpuri now-a-days. I persuaded some of them but they could not understand the purpose of my visit to that area. Ph.D. was Greek to them.

In one of my attempts when I reached Ramnagar I hired a Tanga (horse cart) and started for the Tharuhat on Ramnagar-Gobardhana road. This time a friend of mine Narad Choubey accompanied me who was a little bit acquainted with the area. Even after covering a distance of 5-6 kms we were unable to locate a Tharu village. All we found was a vast stretch of farms. Only farm and farm did we find in the area dominated by the Tharus. We were a little bit worried as time was running out very fast. We were supposed to return by evening, as we did not know anyone in the area. But hardly we could have crossed the distance of another 5 kms we found a village just on Ramnagar- Gobardhana road and
tangawallah told us that this might be a Tharu village. We got down from the Tanga and started looking for someone. At the very moment Narad’s eye fell upon a person who was running a medicine shop. He turned out to be the batchmate of Narad in B.Ed. His name was Ramchandra Khatait. We heaved a sigh of relief to find him in an unknown locality. Later I came to know that he had been a student of M.J.K. College Bettiah where from I did my Intermediate. He promised to extend all kinds of help in my mission fieldwork. We came back to our respective place of stay in the evening.

Nearly one year passed by in coming near to a Tharu who was educated and understood my mission. In the rainy season it is difficult to reach that village because the river which we crossed is seasonal and it gives a lot of trouble in the rainy season and there is no bridge on the river. So out of one year almost three months got wasted just because of this seasonal river.

Proper village selection was the next problem after the area having been decided. Thinking that Ramchandra Khatait would be of help, the village in question should be near to the place where his medicine shop situated. Through different sources of mine I gathered information about Bakhari Bazar village and after much thought I decided that this village could be suitable for my field study. I chose this village due to the following reasons:

- This village comes under Ramnagar block and it is almost 12 km from Ramnagar on Ramnagar-Gobardhana road near Someswar hill and 58 km away from the headquarter of West Champaran district i.e. Bettiah. The village is not easily accessible.
- Mostly Tharus stay in this village but there are other castes also including Brahmins.
- There is absence of proper transport system due to non-existence of a bridge on Synahi river, which is seasonal. We can reach the village only after crossing the river.
- Market is held twice a week on every Wednesday and Saturday.
It is better if there is possibility of staying in the village. The mission fieldwork would be successful only then. I made many attempts to meet Ramchandra Khatait afterwards but in vain. I had to go for other alternatives. I somehow managed to stay in a village called Manchangwa, which is almost 2km away from the village Bakhari Bazar in the last week of the last month of 1988. I had to cover a distance of over 8km daily because I had to come for lunch also. It was a very tiring and tedious job and the area dangerous and dacoit infested and kidnapping-prone. It was also not an easy thing to break the barrier of Baji (outsider) and enter in the village. No one was giving proper response. No one was ready to help an unknown person and that was very natural. Every one looked at me with suspicion and was scared of me. Not getting breakthrough even after many attempts I became disappointed and depressed at times. In this hour of trials and tribulations, the field works done by E.E. Evans Pritchard for the study of the Nuer and Radcliff Brown for the study of Andaman Islanders came into my mind. With this came dogged determination and untiring attitude of theirs. With this came repeated efforts of theirs even after continued unsuccessful attempts and
ultimately coming out with flying colours in the form of immortal and path-breaking research work in the field of anthropology. These studies became my source of inspiration in the time of distress.

The people of Manchangwa who belonged to upper caste and looking after a farm also suggested me to go back. They told me these Tharus have become very clever and they are not going to cooperate in your mission.

Fortunately for me, one day I happened to meet Ramchandra Khatait. He took me to the village and introduced me to one Shankar Mahto. Everything was properly explained to him and he could understand the objective of my mission fieldwork and offered help of every kind with all humility. I was beside myself with joy that day. Most of the family, which I visited for census enumeration details hesitated in giving proper response, may be due to some inhibitions or may be due to some fear. Shankar Mahto, who later became my "Principal or Key Informant", understanding my difficulty attached one boy of the village with me for my help. But still the things did not change much. No one was feeling comfortable with the questions being asked which related to the details of the family, right from the number of family members, their occupation, land holding, their education, age at marriage etc. They were not clear about my intention. Very difficult was it for me to make them understand the purpose of my questions. But with the help of the boy slowly and gradually I started getting success in making them understand the purpose of my visit. I explained to them that I have come to the village not for doing any harm to them but eventually for their benefit and welfare. Sometimes they used to ask very irritating questions doubting my integrity and intention. I maintained my cool all along and dealt with such queries politely and humbly.

Coming from Manchangwa was also an irritating point for them as it had a farm, which belonged to a family of high caste. It was sufficient cause of concern for the Tharus of Bakhari Bazar and sufficient provocation for
doubting my integrity as they also came to know from their source that I too belonged to a high caste. I discussed this problem with Shankar Mahto. He understood the difficulty and on his own offered his hut for my stay in the village if I had no problem in sharing. I immediately accepted the offer for I did not want to slip this opportunity through my fingers. *For an anthropologist it is very essential and beneficial to stay at the same location, which is the field of study. It will not only remove all doubts troubling and cropping in the mind of the villagers but also put a stamp of authenticity and seriousness on the objective of the study. It will be helpful for the anthropologist too for he or she will be able to study and observe the activities of the field by adopting the technique of a participant observation.*

It took almost one year and many visits to the Tharuhat for deciding the proper village for study. I stayed in the village that too in a simple hut under adverse circumstances from December 1988 to June 1989 and again from October to December 1989. After that paid regular visits to the village in December 1990, April 1991, February 1992, May 1994, December 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001. Again I visited the village Bakhari Bazar in April 2003, June 2006, December 2008 and June 2009 and updated my data. It was possible because every time I went to Bettiah, my home town, I made it a point to visit the village and stay amidst the people of the village. This has not only helped in understanding the latent current of the social structure and meanings of the culture in proper context and perspective but also observing different phases of Tharu society and pattern of social change over a period of almost two decades.  

TH-16717
(b) Ethnography of the Village

District of West Champaran (District code: 12) was carved out of the old Champaran district in the year 1972 as a result of reorganization of the districts of the state of Bihar. It was formerly a sub-division of Champaran district known as Bettiah sub-division.

The whole Tharuhat area (land of the Tharus) lies in the district of West Champaran. From east to west all along the border of India and Nepal, the district has scattered settlement of the Tharus. The district of West Champaran with a population of 30,43,0449 (2001 Census) is divided into three subdivisions and 18 Community Development Blocks consisting of 1,483 inhabited villages and 4 towns.

Ramnagar (Block Code: 0060) is one of the 18 Community Development Blocks in which the village of our study Bakhari-Panchrukhhia (Village Code: 0573) is located. Bakhari-Panchrukhhia consists of two small villages---- Bakhari Bazar and Panchrukhhia (also Kairwa), separated by the road, which links Ramnagar to Gobardhana (which is near Someswar hills). In the records of revenue administration both the villages have been clubbed together to make one unit and come under Parsauni Panchayat. For our purpose of study we have selected Bakhari Bazar village which is dominated by the Tharus and does have other castes also. This village comes under Tarai area.
Tharuhat can be divided into four parts on the basis of agriculture:

A. Bhikhna Thori to Gaunaha:
   This is the first and the best division. This division has the facility of perennial irrigation from natural stream. Three crops are reaped in a year easily.

B. Gaunaha to Harha or Masan river:
   This is completely a dry area, unirrigated crop dependent on monsoon. Only one crop kharif.

C. Masan to Valmikinagar:
   This division presents a mixed type of agricultural pattern. Irrigation by canal only. Some area still remains unirrigated.

D. Don:
   There are many rivers and drains in this area and therefore there is facility of perennial natural irrigation. Land is very fertile.
Our village falls under second division, the division that has no irrigation facilities. In this very division there is maximum infiltration by the Bajis (non-Tharus). This division is very backward and it has been the area of maximum exploitation.

Communication system in Ramnagar Block is very pitiable. The only so called good road (which is also a kuchcha road) is the road which connects Ramnagar and Gobardhana. It touches Bakhari Bazar almost in the middle. This road cuts across many small rivers and streams but at none of the places do we find an all-weather even workable bridge. During the rainy season Bakhari Bazar gets cut off from the rest of the world. Since road is not good and properly maintained there is non-availability of public transport system. People of this area travel either on bicycle or on tanga or mostly on foot. The nearest town Narkatiyaganj is 23 kms away from Bakhari Bazar. Ramnagar which is the headquarter of the Block, is about 12 kms away from the village in reference. There is a post office worth the name in the village.
Bakhari Bazar village is situated on the bank of Synahi river (seasonal). Manchangwa and Bairiya in the north, Bakwa and Parsauni in the east, Madhubani in the south, and Bakhraha and Bagahi villages are in the west of Bakhari Bazar.

River Synahi has the peculiar tendency of changing its course in every rainy season. People of Bakhari Bazar are very scared of this river. Old villagers maintain that earlier they used to live on the other side of the river but once their village was devoured by this river and they had to shift to the present place which is comparatively at some height and touches the Ramnagar-Gobardhana road.

But here also, river uses to play cruel joke with the people and many in the village complain that most of their land has either been cut away or has been covered by sand brought down by the river.
There happens to be a Government Rajkiya Middle School in the village. Ganganath Uccha Vidyalaya, which is private run, does also exist in the village. In the name of medical facility, there is a Bakhari Bazar dispensary, which is in existence since late years of fifties. Government runs this dispensary. But the condition of the dispensary is pitiable. Earlier it was Allopathic but later it was converted into Ayurvedic. The building in which it is housed is also in a dilapidated condition. There is also one post office worth the name in the village, which covers all the eight villages of Parsauni Panchayat. Recently a Gramin Bank has been opened in Bakhari-Panchrukhia.

Sources of water are well, tank, tube well, hand pump, river and nala. According to census electricity for agriculture is available in the village. The staple food of the people is rice and wheat.

On every Wednesday and Saturday, Bakhari Bazar becomes the place for market. Businessmen and people from far off areas come to the market. Apart from weekly market there is a medicine shop which remains open almost on all days. A young man who also teaches in Ganganath Uccha Vidyalaya runs this shop. Bakhari Bazar is a place where items of everyday use are easily available.

Tharu villages are generally scattered and are often located at a distance of two to three miles from one another. The Tharus are always in search of a good site for founding their villages. A good site, according to them, must be the land on a high level. Not only that. The place should be near to a river or some water supply but safe from water logging and inundation during the rainy season. It must have a fertile soil and safe from the constant attacks of wild animals, epidemics and the agencies of evil spirits. If they find any one of these conditions lacking after settling in a village, they do not hesitate in deserting it. It has happened in the case of Bakhari Bazar also. As far as memory of the old respondents go, this village was earlier located at a different place, but regular havoc created by the Synahi river forced the people to desert this place and settle at a more suitable, more trouble-free, more safe place.
It is said that at the time of deserting a village, the Tharus remove only their household goods to their new settlements and leave behind their houses to the mercy of the elements or to become the haunts of evil spirits.

The practice of deserting the village has brought the Tharus additional responsibilities and labour, plus insecurity and instability of life. This has, in addition to other factors, definitely retarded the material prosperity of the Tharus. Now-a-days, we discover a growing tendency for building permanent settlements. This has to some extent, materially benefited them in leading a more settled and regulated life.

Before a Tharu settles down in a village and builds his house, he tries to grab as much land as possible for a vegetable garden, Bari as they call it and also for a small field around his house. He grows seasonal vegetables in his Bari. Since the fields are very close to his house, he throws his house-refuse into them or heaps it near his cattle shed. He has no idea of keeping a manure pit and this is responsible for breeding flies, mosquitoes and other germs making the air impure and unhealthy. But this is the general tendency prevalent in most of the villages.

A narrow and unmetalled lane runs through a village. On either side of the lane the houses are arranged in a line on a higher level. Arrangements of house in Bakhari Bazar also present similar look. Most of the houses are grass-thatched using timber instead of bamboo. Some of the houses have roof covered with khapada. One or two houses, which are still under construction, are made of bricks. Houses of two Brahmin families are made of bricks. Bakhari Bazar village is sandwiched between Ramnagar-Gobardhana Road and Synahi river and extends from north to south.
Grass-thatched Houses using timber
At the north most tip of the village there is chamar toil where almost eight families of harijans (dalits) live. On the East Side of the village just by the side of road there is Dom toli. This toli consists of thirteen families and the government has settled them there and their houses constructed by the government. So they are not original inhabitants of the village.

In the middle of the village there is great concentration of houses of the Tharus. A Brahmin family has built his house just near the centre of the village. Families of other castes like Teli, Kumhar, Bania and others also do live in the village here and there. There are four houses of Muslims.

A lane, which comes from the village and cuts the main road, creates a space where weekly market is held. There are few permanent shops also. Just near the main road where the lane cuts, a medicine shop has been opened. There is a rice mill also in the village.

Bakhari Bazar village boasts of having two temples. One temple is situated more-or-less in the middle of the village and maintained by a family of Tharu who is called Bhagat. Bhagatji is the whole and soul incharge of this temple but he does not perform any puja. On the southern side of the village there is another temple which is maintained by a Brahmin family headed by Viswanath Upadhyaya. This Brahmin is invited in almost all the functions of Tharus and allowed to perform puja.

By entering into this village one gets the impression of neat arrangement of the houses, their cleanliness in contrast to the congestion of other villages in the state. One thing is also remarkable that a Tharu village community life presents a unique picture. Here a person is related to others by more than one kinship ties resulting from consanguinal to affinal relationship. This multiple relationship has not only wedded the villagers together in social and ceremonial life but it has also stabilized the village society. A Tharu village therefore
represents a closely-knit society the units of which have developed bond of fellowship and corporate life through mutual obligations and co-partnership.

There is a tradition called ‘Gamella’ in the village, which is the burning example of the great cooperation among the Tharus. Whenever a situation arises which has to do with the welfare of the village or community e.g. a lane in the village to be set right, all the members of the community will extend their help and assistance voluntarily and in this way the work is completed.

There are hundred and sixty six families in the village – Bakhari Bazar, out of these, hundred and six families are of the Tharus. The total population of the village is around one thousand two hundred and fifty only, out of which eight hundred and sixty are the Tharus. Thus the village is numerically dominated by the Tharus. Population of the village has been shown in the table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Male</th>
<th>Total Female</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>% Tharus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baji</strong> (Non-Tharus)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>390</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tharu</strong></td>
<td>407</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is also evident from the table that 68.8% of the total population belongs to the Tharus. Out of total Tharu population of eight hundred and sixty, four hundred and fifty three are females as compared to only four hundred and seven of the males. Among the non-Tharus to whom the Tharus called as Baji, out of the total population of three hundred and ninety, one hundred and ninety seven are females as compared to one hundred ninety three of the males.

Among both the population i.e. of Tharu and non-Tharu the numbers of females are larger than males but where as among the non-Tharus the margin is only negligible, among the Tharus it is substantial. This has even created an imbalance in favour of females at the village level population.
Now the table below gives details about all the castes that live in this village and their number of families along with their members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe/Caste</th>
<th>No. of families</th>
<th>Total members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tharu</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dom</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamar</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhar</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bania</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teli</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gond</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamkar</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athith</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kumhar</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koiri</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahir</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazam</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bharbhuja (Grain-parcher)</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobi</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Total no. of tribe/castes : 17
B. Total no. of families : 146
C. Total members in the village : 1250
Thus it is clear from the above table that there are sixteen castes (including Muslims) other than the Tharus, who are living in the village. They are Dom, Chamar, Bhar, Bania, Teli, Muslim, Gond, Kamkar, Athith, Kumhar, Brahmin, Koiri, Ahir, Hazam, Gharbhoja and Dhobi. Most of them are attached to their own traditional occupation and still agriculture has not been their main occupation. According to the villagers most of them are not the original inhabitants of the village. They have come at different period of time due to some reason or the other and have now almost settled in the village and most of them now do claim that they are also the original inhabitants.

One thing is clear from the list that except for two families of Brahmin rest of the families are from Backward class or from schedule caste and schedule tribe. There is not a single family of Rajput, Bhumihar, or Kayastha. One more thing. There is now not a single farm in the village. But this does not imply that this village has not suffered at the cruel hands of the owners of farms in the neighbouring areas. The villagers of Bakhari Bazar have not yet absolved themselves of the memory of atrocious, barbarous, inhuman culture of the farms. Mercilessness, ruthlessness, mean-mindedness, deceitfulness of the owners and staff of the farms still continue to haunt them.

Barring a few families including two Brahmin families, most of the families are poor peasants who can hardly afford to manage both ends meet. A large section of the population of this village is landless labourers who spend their life at the mercy of god.

As per the information provided by the villagers at the time of house-to-house data collection, the Tharus in total possess 345.60 acres of land, the Bajis 96.80 acres meaning thereby per family land holding for the Tharus is 3.26 acres where as for the Bajis 1.61 acres. This figure clearly indicates overall position and state of the people living in the village.