CHAPTER 3

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Among several primitive tribes marriage is a simple affair and is as such neither sacrament nor a life long bond between the couple. It is only a secular affair controlled by the sexual and economic needs of the country.

Among the tribal population marriage ceremonies differ from tribe to tribe. Marriage formalities are organized after environmental conditions and cultural levels. But in every tribe marriage involves a procedure—propitiation of tribal gods, totemic objects and ancestral spirits, excessive drink, costly communal feasts, grand dances and payment of heavy bride prices.

AGE AT MARRIAGE

Though there is an uniform law in the country that a boy should be not less than 21 years and a girl not less than 18 years of age at the time of marriage, it is generally not observed by the tribes including the Tharus. According to S.K.Srivastava, “Child marriage is the rule among the Tharus. For a regular marriage the betrothal ceremony takes place between one to five years of age, though the actual wedding is solemnized when boys and girls have attained the age of ten to sixteen.” (Srivastava 58:40)

Traditionally, there have been many cases of infant marriage among the Tharus of West Champaran. Marriage took place even though the child was in the breast-feeding stage. It has been customary to marry off their girls with their kith and kin. From infancy the near relatives express their desire to take the girl into their fold in marriage whenever they meet. Lagania Baba had a very crucial role in the settlement of marriages. Girls are married off when they are completely ignorant of wifehood and motherhood. Early marriage provides a safeguard
against premarital sexual relationship among the Tharus. In the Tharus of Nainital, “the negotiations of a betrothal are not usually carried on by the parents or the guardians of the parties but by an intermediary known as Manjhapatiya who arranges the marriage.”(ibid. 141

Table below presents the data regarding the age of the male members of the Tharus at the time of their marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number of Married Males</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>42.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 –19</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>34.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 –24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>07.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>01.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>258</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Distribution of Married Males by Age at Marriage**
Number of Married Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Below 10</th>
<th>15-19</th>
<th>25 and above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Series1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age Group

- Below 10: 2%
- 15-19: 14%
- 20-24: 34%
- 25 and above: 42%
It is quite clear from the table and the two charts that out of the 258 males in the families 109 males married when they were in 10 – 14 age group. This means that 42.25% of the married males got married between the age of 10 and 14. Eighty eight males married when they were in the 15 –19 age group that is almost 34% of the married males got married between the age of 15 and 19. Twenty males married when they were in 20 – 24 age group that is 7.75% of the married males got married between the age of 20 and 24. There are only four persons in the sample who got married after 25 years of age, only 1.55% of the total married males. Most striking is the fact that there are 37 persons who got married when they were even below 10 years of age, 14.34% of the total married males. It is quite evident from the data that almost 57% of the persons got married when they were below the age of only 14 years. Conclusion thereby that majority of the Tharu males got married when they were child. 14.34% of the males marrying below the age of 10 years, is clear proof of the fact that child marriage is very much prevalent in the Tharu society. Now let us have a look at the data regarding the age of the female members of the Tharus of West Champaran at the time of marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number of Married Females</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>31.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>52.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 19</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>02.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table and the two charts present data in respect of the age of the married females at the time of their marriage. There were in all 291 females who were married and are residing in the Bakhari Bazar village with or without husband at present. Out of 291 married females majority, that is 152, was married in the age group of 10 –14. This means that that 52.23% got married when they were between 10 and 14 years of age. There were 91 females who got married below the age of 10. This is about 31.27% of the total married Tharu females. Forty-two females were married when they were between 15 and 19 years of age, 14.44% of the total married Tharu females. Only six, that is around 2.06%, got married between 20 and 24 years of age. It is interesting to note that none of the
APPENDIX F

Table F.1: Core-subject of the Bachelor of Commerce Degree Programme, first examination – University of Colombo:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE FIRST YEAR EXAMINATION IN COMMERCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Com 104: Principles of Management &amp; Organizational Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Com 105: Business Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Com 106: Intermediate Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Com 107: Introduction to Data Processing Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Com 108: Commercial &amp; Industrial Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Com 109: Elementary Sociology &amp; Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Com 110: Elements of Business Environment &amp; Economics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.cmb.ac.lk/academic/mgt/Website, Faculty of Management, University of Colombo, retrieved on 16.03.2008.

Table F.2: A List of Principal Subjects for Honours Degree Programme in Arts, University of Jaffna

7. Linguistics 20. Tamil

Source: http://www.jfn.ac.lk/arts/syllabi-ba.pdf, Website, Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna, retrieved on 20.10.2008
The table shows that as age advances age at marriage decreases. The present generation of males marries late though not very late. Among those who married after twenty years of age there is none that is above fifty. This means they belong to younger generation.

It is clear from this table that younger generation is going through a transitional phase and they are marrying later than what was existent earlier in the Tharus of West Champaran. Eight of the 258 married males, who are now above seventy-five years of age, were married just before fourteen years of age. A slow but certain trend is perceptible in the Tharu society. The number of males marrying below fourteen years of age is gradually on decrease.

A similar trend is also visible in the case of marriage of females also.

### Age at Marriage and Present Age of Married Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
<th>Present Age</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below 25</td>
<td>26 - 49</td>
<td>50 - 74</td>
<td>75 &amp; above</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 10</td>
<td>17 (14.78%)</td>
<td>23 (25.84%)</td>
<td>46 (57.50%)</td>
<td>05 (71.43%)</td>
<td>91 (31.27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>72 (62.61%)</td>
<td>53 (59.55%)</td>
<td>25 (31.25%)</td>
<td>02 (28.57%)</td>
<td>152 (52.23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>21 (18.26%)</td>
<td>12 (13.49%)</td>
<td>09 (11.25%)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>42 (14.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>05 (4.35%)</td>
<td>01 (1.12%)</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>06 (2.06%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 and above</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>115 (100%)</td>
<td>89 (100%)</td>
<td>80 (100%)</td>
<td>07 (100%)</td>
<td>291 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here again do we find an inverse relationship between present age and age at marriage. The present generation of Tharu females of West Champaran marries late though not very late. But a definite change can be perceived. A gradual increase in the age at marriage among the females also. However, the age at marriage among females, normally does not cross nineteen years. Rarely does it break the barrier of twenty but not at all above twenty-five years of age.

By comparing the data of the above two tables we arrive at some valuable conclusions. There is clear indication that child marriage among the males is on decrease in comparison to the females of the Tharus of West Champaran. There is a clear trend, positive one, in the increase of the age at marriage of the males in comparison to females. We do not find a single case of female marrying after the age of twenty-five though we do have four such cases or instances with regard to marriage of males.

Thus even today, child marriage and infant marriage especially among the females are very much prevalent among the Tharus of west Champaran. Nevertheless, we can clearly identify the trend of increase in age at marriage with regard to male and female Tharus. With regard to male the trend is clearly visible.

The reason for child marriage or pre-puberty marriage among the Tharus is strengthening the bond of two families. One or two years prior to puberty the near or distant relatives press for an early marriage and if it is denied or delayed, they are afraid the girl may be given to some other parties. The great demand and repeated stress from the groom’s party make parents to think of getting the girls married and rid themselves of the burden.

The Tharus think that permanent bondage and closer adjustment are the favourable conditions with the pre-puberty marriages of the girls. So the girl is married at an early age and until the nuptials are over, the marriage is not complete. The girl remains with her parents till it is over. But in the meantime, the
girl visits the groom's house now and then. This way she gets an idea of the modes of expected behaviour, standard of living, attitudes and nature of the different members of the family and thus she becomes more plastic and accommodative. The Tharus report that this has been a good feature and they have not been put to any disadvantages by early marriages. This implication behind the idea of early marriage is true to some extent.

The reason of early marriage of girls in the Tharus of Rajapur area in Nepal terai has been education. “Girls in the community are married at early age. The fact is that girls are not well educated in their society. After the completion of grade 6 or 7, they are married. Higher education creates a problem for marriage because it is very difficult to select educated husbands within the Tharu community and intercaste marriage system has not yet been popular.” (Gyawali & Singh 96:205)

It is remarkable that marriage negotiations among the Tharus are normally initiated from the side of the bridegroom. There is tradition called Kaniauti also. As per this custom groomside gives some money to the brideside, amount decided by mutual consent of both the parties either in cash or in kind. If Kaniauti is accepted, it means that the girl is released from her father. If brideside is not inclined to accept the Kaniauti, it is not binding upon the groomside to offer. But if asked by brideside, there can be no denial. Tradition of Kaniauti has been abolished by the Tharus of West Champaran in new marriage regulations.

Earlier there was no limit on the number of persons from brideside, visiting groom's house for Sagun or Barpujai. Since the formation of the Tharu Sangh, number of persons from brideside visiting the groomside has been restricted to only five. This has done to save the family of groom from unnecessary harassment and embarrassment, and also from useless and unwanted expenses. Another custom called Pathawan or Bidagiri was also very much prevalent among the Tharu society of West Champaran. In this system, relatives of the bride -- both men and women sometimes including mother and her friends -- come or
visit to the groom’s house along with the bride. They stay there for a few days and then leaving the bride at her husband’s house, go back to their village. This tradition of Pathawan was also very burdensome and hence, in the marriage regulation of Tharu Sangh, it has now been abolished. A small but sensible change was brought about in the sense that now only the groom will go to the village of the bride along with two- three of his friends and take the bride along with him to his village. Unfortunately this tradition is still in vogue among the Tharus of West Champaran. But the trend has set in and some conscious and progressive among them have begun disowning this tradition.

Dowry system is almost non-existent in the Tharu society of West Champaran. Dowry is the price paid to the groom in cash or in any other form of movable or immovable property. But this position is gradually changing. This evil of adjoining Hindu society is slowly making a dent into the Tharu society. This trend appears to be disturbing for the people who are trying to eradicate such social evils already existing in the Tharu Samaj since ages. Demand of educated and well-placed grooms is increasing and thereby stray cases related to dowry are being reported in some villages of the Tharuhat. Earlier the family of groom used to go to see girl (bride) but now the situation is changing diametrically opposed to the previous one. Family of bride is going in for the search of the groom. Like in the society of the Bajis, it has become difficult and troublesome for the father of a girl to get the marriage of his daughter fixed.

Polygamy is permitted in the Tharu society but only in the form of polygyny and not polyandry. During fieldwork we do not come across even a single case of polyandry among the Tharus of West Champaran. There appears to be no definite rule limiting the number of wives a man may have. Earlier, as reported, there were many cases of polygynous marriages, but now surprisingly, most of the Tharus prefer monogamous marriage. Thanks may be due to resource constraints. Only one or two cases of polygynous marriages are reported in the Bakhari Bazar village.
Widow marriage is quite common and there is no special restriction on the selection of second husband, but marrying a brother’s wife is a taboo.

There is no recognized system of divorce but usually this is brought about by the refusal of the girl to live with her husband. She is married to another man of the same caste and the outgoing husband has to pay a fine for being misfit for the girl. This is perhaps may be one of the reason for the importance of Tharu women in the society. On the case of the desertion by wife, the children born of the deserted husband are treated as the legitimate children of the new husband and live with them. This again reflects on the importance of women in the Tharu society of west Champaran.

Divorced women may marry again by the same ceremony as widows and both classes are distinguished by the designation Urari or Selected from women who are married as virgins by the full ritual. The social status of an Urari wife is respectable though slightly inferior to that of a Byahi wife. Even this position, however, is not accorded to her unless she is married with the consent of the relatives of her second husband, which is signified by the ceremony Bhatana or formally admitting her to the jus cibi of the household. Unless this is done she is called Suraitin or concubine and her husband cannot take water or cooked food from her hands without jeopardizing his own standing in the family. Bhatana is also necessary when anyone has been disallowed from social intercourse for an offense against the customs of the tribe.

In the Tharus of Nainital also, “besides regular form of marriage, widow remarriage, gharbaitha, levirate, ureri and dola are practiced. Polygyny is socially recognized and respected. There is freedom of divorce, which is not so frequently allowed in Hindu society. Marriage is obligatory for every Tharus and an unmarried person is looked down upon by the members of his own community. An unmarried woman has no social status.”(Srivastava 58:139)
Traditionally, marriage is solemnized in the same sub-caste, meaning thereby there cannot be marriage between persons of two different sub-castes. If a girl of one sub-caste elopes with a boy of another sub-caste, a fine is imposed. This is a matter of great concern in the Tharu society because it leads to unnecessary tension among different sub-castes of the Tharus of West Champaran.

_Bharatiya Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh_, established in 1971 with the prime objective of social, economic, moral, cultural and spiritual development of the Tharu society, introduced an important rule in this regard. _According to the new rule there will be all kinds of interaction at all levels and marriage will be allowed among different sub-castes._ This was a historical development and will have a far-reaching impact on the interaction among different sub-castes, paving the way for a new phase in the life of Tharus of West Champaran.

As reported by the villagers of Bakhari Bazar, Shankar Mahto, who has also been the founder member of _Bharatiya Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh_, was very much instrumental in the introduction of this rule in the Tharu Sangh. _The introduction of the new rule has undoubtedly and indubitably brought about remarkable change in the Tharu society. The spectrum of marriage has now widened, choice of grooms and brides has tremendously increased and tension, to a great extent has been brought under control._

**FAMILY**

The family as the standard social unit has been found in one form or another at almost all levels of cultural development. The form and basis of familial groupings have varied from time to time and from place to place. Different types of families have been observed in different societies and at
different points of time and space. But as a basic social group, family existed in all societies and at all times.

According to Robert Lowie (1950: 215), the family may be considered as an association that corresponds to the institution of marriage. Radcliffe-Brown (1941:2) includes in the family husband and wife and their child or children. In a tribal family relationship between members is to be understood in a sociological as much as a psychological sense. Thus the family will include not only the husband and wife and their minor children but also parents, in-laws and wife/husband of sons/daughters. The ideal household in most tribes would include two or more married couples and their children.

**THE JOINT FAMILY AND ITS STRUCTURE**

The history of the system of joint family reveals a long standing tradition and the capacity for endurance for over generations. The whole history of the joint family unfolds one significant fact, i.e. even when the trends towards individualism are recognized, attempts were being made to harmonize them in the interest of the joint family. The family constitution was unequivocally maintained as joint. However, the joint or common interests and individual desires and hopes were constantly at conflict with one another. Individualism acquired greater role in the wake of Independence and modern education.

In the joint family, mostly, the eldest member, namely the father is the head of the family. In some cases the mother is the head if the father is dead or disabled. If parents are not alive, the eldest son is the head, or any one among the brothers, if he happens to be more intelligent and capable, powerful and influential. The head of the family enjoys unquestioned authority and it is his responsibility to look after each individual’s interest keeping in view the stability of the joint family. He has to reconcile whenever a conflict surfaces up between the individual interest
and common interest. He is the presiding authority on all ceremonial occasions in the family. His word is the final verdict on all matters of importance. He voices the interests of all the members of the family. He represents the best interests of the family and he perpetually tries to maintain the tradition and stability of the family. It is also a matter of prestige to maintain a long-standing joint family tradition. He is responsible for the assets and the liabilities of the family.
Thus, the head of the family exercises an authoritarian relation with regard to all the members including his wife. The relation of his wife to him (Head) is one of co-operation and obedience. Often she also exercises influence on him on matters of common concern, and her relation towards her son is not strictly authoritative though her orders are generally obeyed. But her relation with daughter-in-law is one of authority and never one of equality. The daughter-in-law can never question the mother-in-law, while the latter’s relation with the daughters is one of intimacy and affection. The relation of the sons toward the father is one of obedience and co-operation, though they are consulted on matters of importance and urgency.

Thus each member has a well-defined status in the family, with certain explicit obligations and duties and inherent rights. However, the position of the different members of the family is only delimited by precedents and not either theoretically or practically defined. Hence, the status of each member in the family is one of flexibility. The interests of all the members, however peripheral they are, will be orchestrated towards the common interests and stability of the family.

The joint family was an inevitable pattern in all-agricultural communities in India. Farm-work means teamwork and one or two members cannot carry on this successfully. There is a greater need of human labour at the time of sowing and harvesting and this is only a matter of time and labour. Further, agricultural work needs constant supervision and work by different members in different capacities. Hence, the joint family has become an inevitable pattern in all agricultural communities in India.

Plus the joint family offered security to the individual in particular and to the family in general. The joys and sorrows were shared in common. Whenever any one of the members fell ill or became infirm or disabled, the family offered him or her security of life. It was true also in the case of a daughter-in-law, if she became widow, she was looked after by others.
Thus the interests of all the members in the joint family centred on the general stability and common welfare of all the members of the family. The size and the longevity of the joint family were a matter of prestige. The greater the size and longevity, the greater was the prestige of the family.

**THE THAUS AND JOINT FAMILY**

Joint family is the rule in the Tharu society. "There is still a domination of joint family system in the community. They think that a joint family is very essential for security and agricultural activities because they are based on primitive method and manual labour." (Gyawali & Singh 96:203)

"It is true that the joint family has several advantages over a single family in the agricultural society of the Tharus" (Srivastava 58:74). Joint family is the rule in the Tharu society. Every joint family has a Master (Malik) and Mistress (Malkin) of the house. Usually the son succeeds the father and takes the responsibility of the family. It is remarkable that servants of a well-to-do Tharu family like ploughmen or herdsmen live as members of the family. They are called *Swang own part*. They eat along with the other members of the family in the same dining room and share the common food.

The family is the nucleus of social organization in the Tharu society. The family among them is generally *patriloc**al and patrilineal*. Though the *patriloc**al family is the rule, some stray cases of *patrilineal** but *matrilocal families can also be found. This happens out of sheer economic necessity e.g. when a son-in-law known as *Gharjamai* comes to live with his father-in-law on the understanding that he would assist him during latter's infirmity or old age.
The structure of joint family varies in form and size from village to village and from family to family. The father is the head and recognized authority of the family.

In the context of the social organization of the Tharus of West Champaran it can be said that no family whether big or small seems to suffer from a lack of cooperative labour to any appreciable extent. This is because of strong sense of reciprocity of mutual obligations and community feeling among them.

Again in the social organization of the Tharus the family and not individual is regarded as the primary unit. The different members of a joint family hold the agricultural land in common ownership but it is under the custody of the head of the family, who is not authorized to sell or exchange it without the consent of the other members of the family.

The Tharu joint family resembles a Hindu joint family under the *Mitakshara* law in which male members lineally descended from a common ancestor are co-partners in the property. If a member of such a family demands partition or share, he has a right to have it.

As pointed out one respondent from Bakhari Bazar, "Earlier the Tharu had joint families of very big size. There were several joint families having more than one hundred members and all the members of the family were leading a very peaceful, comfortable and satisfactory life."
Table below gives the distribution of 106 families of the Tharus according to their size in the village Bakhari Bazar.

**Distribution of the Tharu Families according to Their Size**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th>No. of Families</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>49.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 and above</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>106</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is evident from the table that size of the family of the Tharus is decreasing substantially. There are only two families, which consist of more than twenty-six members. More than 80% of the families of Tharus living in Bakhari Bazar have less than ten members. Almost 31% of the families are having less than five members. It is clear from the table that there is increasing trend of decreasing size of the family.

For the present, the family composition is shown as classified under four main types. These four main categories are:
a) Nuclear Family  
b) Joint Family  
c) Transitional Family, and  
d) Broken Family

The nuclear family is one that consists of husband, wife with or without minor children. The joint family is that in which two or more than two couples, the male spouses of which are kin members, live together. The members living in this family hold income, movable and immovable property and residence in common and share the kitchen and food in common. The members thus living may be related lineally or laterally.

The transitional family is one in which the sons or the brothers of the head are major and are earning dependents. Basically this family is a nuclear family but this type of family is called transitional because of its uncertain composition in the
sense that it is likely to split into two nuclear families or likely to become a joint family after the marriage of the earning members. After the marriage of an earning member he may establish separately his own family or he may live along with his parents or brothers. The broken family is one where there is not even a single couple. Most of these are single males or females but other relatives also may be found in this type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Family</th>
<th>No. Of Family</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>62.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>04.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It appears from the table that in the present Tharu society the Nuclear families are predominant. Around 62% i.e. $\frac{3}{5}$th of the total number of families in the Bakhari Bazar village has the characteristics of Nuclear family. Joint family, which was traditionally the important feature of the Tharu society, has been reduced to 19.81% i.e. only around $\frac{1}{5}$th of the total number of families. There are fourteen families, which can be bracketed into Transitional type.

According to the trend it is most likely that most of the Transitional type of families would be transformed into Nuclear instead of Joint type. Thus, on the whole, almost three-fourth of the total families can be brought into the category of Nuclear family. There are five families which are of Broken type.
During informal discussions with all the heads of the households, one could find out a number of causes that lead to the break up of a Joint family. Among the household heads some happen to be the heads of Joint families while others were from the separated or Nuclear families.

Most of them expressed their firm opinion against the break-up and they accepted the sad but inevitable story of disintegration of the Joint family. Population growth, resource constrain, individualistic attitudes and conflict among he womenfolk stand as the major causes of disintegration of the Joint family.

Traditionally, joint family was the predominant pattern of family system in the Tharu society of West Champaran. An authoritarian but co-operative relationship existed between the heads and other members of the family. All the members of the family respected and obeyed the head and the head in its turn, sought for everyone’s advice on every important issue related to the welfare of the family. Even aged and old members of the family got the attention and sympathy and support from the younger generation.

But since independence we find some remarkable change, though gradually, in the structure of the Joint family due the process of modernization creeping into every society. The well-knit Joint family stared disintegrating. The prestige of the head in the family went on decreasing.

Among the brothers it is generally observed that equalitarian relation is the usual phenomena. But the introduction of education (modern) and diversification of occupation, growth in population, infiltration of the outsiders in large scale, have brought many disadvantages in Bakhari Bazar village. In such cases where the parents are dead, the eldest brother of the sibling takes up the authority. But now cases like these are few and far between. The younger brothers have started suspecting the very intention of the eldest brother on the ground that he might appropriate the resources and the landed property to his advantage. When two or
three brothers live together it generally results in the partition of the property and the house.

In the cases of brothers among whom one or two are educated while the others continue the traditional work of cultivation, differences are bound to surface up. The educated youngman does not adjust himself to his family when he goes back to his village after education. He takes up some job, or if unemployed, idles away his time. Even if he is a failure in education he does not think of tilling the soil. Other brothers who do cultivation and till the soil opine that since investment on education eats away some portion of the property, the educated brother is not to be given an equal share in the parental property. This sows the seeds of distrust and jealousy among the brothers and eventually taking away peace and happiness from the joint family and shows the way towards the disintegration of the family. Not only that. If the educated brother is employed in a nearly village as a teacher or so and stay in his village itself, problem becomes all the more grave. Thus misunderstanding multiplies and quarrels among the brothers take a quantum leap.

This can be illustrated with a few instances. In one family there are three sons, one of them is educated upto graduate level. The other two brothers are agriculturists. The educated son came back to his village, as he could not secure a job. He also refused to assist his brothers in agricultural activities. Misunderstanding arose among the brothers and gave way to tension in the family.

In another instance, employment of one brother as a teacher and his stay in the village brought about misunderstanding and friction. In this case there are two brothers A and B. A is agriculturist and B is a teacher. A thought that since B is a teacher and staying in the village, he has no right to ask for half of the property. This became the source of conflict between the two brothers A and B. This
friction got manifested at every front. B was making a house and children of A getting the right opportunity used to destroy what was being constructed.

Thus we can see that relation among the brothers is not always cordial in all the cases.

Khedaru Mahto is of 72 years old but he still cultivates the land. Sons are no more cooperative. They do not bother for their father and forced by circumstances Khedaru Mahto has to earn something for his livelihood. Once self-sufficient and satisfied Khedaru Mahto seems to have become indifferent. He blames himself and his sons for this kind of a pitiable situation. He further says that his sons have become self centred and selfish. They care only for their own wives and children. Source of income is limited but still they are in the habit of excessive misuse of money. They spent a lot of money on the Jhumka and Kangan (Jewellery) for their wives. According to Khedaru Mahto, development of these attitudes in the young people of our society who are more influenced by the Hindi films, are the basic cause for the disintegration of the family and erosion of interpersonal relationship.

There is an example of extreme case of jealousy and selfishness among the well-settled Tharu family of Bakhari Bazar. There were two brothers both educated and teacher in school. Elder brother is not giving the due share to his younger brother. He was also torturing his younger brother, physically and mentally. And thus relationship between the families of two brothers became very tense and strained.

Kinship ties among the Tharus have been very strong since early period. This is not only because of common habitation and bonds of ancestral and religious relationships but also because of endogamous marriages within the same settlement. These unions give stability and solidarity to the section within which they are performed. This has created a multiplicity of kinship ties and local
affiliations are responsible for promoting and developing reciprocity and exchange of obligations in the socio-economic life of the Tharus.

But since the infiltration of the outsiders (Baji), the harmony of the family and of the village of the Tharus has been completely disturbed and disrupted. As in other villages there are 60 families of Bajis in the village of Bakhari Bazar and 106 families of the Tharus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Community</th>
<th>Number of Households in Bakhari Bazar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tharu</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baji (Other than the Tharus)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>166</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One Brahmin family, who has now become permanent resident of the village, is the centre of emerging tension and conflict in the Village. In order to establish his supremacy in the village he adopts well known policy of ‘divide and rule’. Conflict to an extent is prevalent in all the societies and we can not think of a society at any point of time and at any place of the globe devoid of conflict at all.

Members of the Brahmin family in reference exploit every situation to their advantage. One member of this family has the job of creating misunderstanding between the two Tharu families and stretching it to a point of no return and thus paving the way for the creation of an unbridgeable gap between the two families. Bakhari Bazar village was earlier known to have been a very peaceful village. But now it has become another ground of Kurukshetra. Its peace and harmony has been completely disturbed and the village has been gripped and engulfed by chaos and confusion. Consequently interpersonal relation among the Tharus, which was earlier used to be very cordial and cooperative, has become strained and tense to a great extent.

RELATIONS WITH NON-THARUS (BAJI)

Earlier there were some sub-castes of the Tharus who did not invite Brahmin at any function. They even did not pay respect to them. But now the situation is changing. Brahmins are being respected and they are being invited to perform marriage ceremony or puja. After the formation of the Tharu Sangh, it was decided that all the sub-castes will invite Brahmin at every ceremony and he alone will solemnize marriage.

There was no bad or ill feeling against the Dalits but the Tharus used to maintain distance with them. Feeling of untouchability was there but it never prevailed in its cruel or ugly form. Now-a-days social distance has shortened. There is good deal of interaction at every front. But interdining is not still encouraged.
But Dalit families, like other Bajis of the village live on the outskirts of the village. It will not be out of place to narrate one instance, which I observed during my fieldwork.

"I was sitting in a shop of Bakhari Bazar. I wanted to have a chat with Vidhata, head of the families of Dalits in the village. Vidhata was called. He took the chair in front of me and we started talking. In the meantime, a respectable Tharu of Bakhari Bazar happened to come at the shop. Vidhata, unperturbed went on talking to me. And I observed that the respected Tharu did not mind Vidhata sitting and talking to me. He even asked Vidhata to carry on his activities without being disturbed."

This incident indicates that there is no feeling of untouchability in the Tharu village and the Tharus interact with the Dalits in a normal way.

During the process of interview it was disclosed that there was predominant impact of Muslim culture on all aspects of the life of the Tharus. It is traced even before the British period. Keeping of Tazia and worshipped it, had become a cultural aspect of the Tharu society of West Champaran. There was close interaction between the Tharus and the Muslims. But with the arrival Arya Samajis in this area, a perceptible change has been observed. They were made to understand about their own culture, which was more or less Hinduism.. The impact of Arya Samajis can be found today also among them. Tharus generally do not wear sacred thread (Janeu) but some of the old Tharus can be seen wearing Janeu.

The Tharus are scared of the Muslims because of their tyrannical nature, as some of the Tharus of the Bakhari Bazar village report. They were in the habit of exploiting and terrorizing the simple and innocent Tharus. As they report, Muslims practiced theft, dacoity, kidnapping, snatching and other various kinds of anti-social activities. The Tharus started distancing themselves from the Muslims.
due to their bad activities and of course at the same time their coming closer to Arya Samaj.

Even today the Tharus are scared of the Muslims. The Muslims have occupied many farms of the region namely: Mahua, Balua Bakheraha, Bakwa Chandrol, Bankatwa Pokharia, Harkatwa etc. of course after grabbing the land of the Tharus through various means like other farms occupants.

**FRIENDSHIP**

There is one very remarkable point in the Tharu family and society, which needs particular mention. Besides the relationship by blood and marriage the Tharus have devised an artificial form of relationship by which two persons may enter into a sacred bond of friendship. Such ties of friendship are more enduring than those of marriage and blood. A friend, in their community, enjoys a higher and more esteemed position than their kith and kin.

*"Mit na chodai, chahe chodai saga bhai."*

(One may leave one’s brother but not one’s friend)

An amazing fact about friendship tie among the Tharus is that it is not contracted only between one Tharu and another Tharu but it is also formed between a Tharu and non-Tharu (Baji) after a thorough test and exchange of mutual confidence. What is true of the Tharus of West Champaran about this bond of friendship is also true of other aboriginal tribes, such as, Baigas, Kharias, Gonds and the Oraons.

But today this bond is also breaking. Simple and innocent Tharus have been deceived and exploited in the name of friendship by the non-Tharus. Even their women have become prey to these people. Now the Tharu is scared of making
friendship. He/she shivers with the very reference or name of friendship. But still do we find some cases of friendship, which is really worth appreciating.

Shankar Mahto of the village Bakhari Bazar is very experienced and respectable man. He has a Muslim friend. Whenever he comes to visit him, Shankar Mahto becomes very happy and gives him all respect and regard. This Muslim fellow has helped Shankar Mahto many times during crisis period and hours of need. This relation is not based on selfishness but it is based on the dictum; "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

**STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE FAMILY AND THE SOCIETY**

The Tharu women enjoy a dominant position in the society. It may seem to be a paradox to us that in a patriarchal society, which the Tharus of West Champaran have, women do command a very respectable position in their society. Girls are not taken as burden on the family.

"I visited Bakhari Bazar village on 16th June 2006. While talking to the wife of Joginder of the village it was a pleasant surprise to find out that she has five daughters and they are not burden upon them but an asset and will be brought up as sons a thing which is not found even in the most educated and richest sates of India like Haryana and Punjab where sex ratio is skewed due to female foeticide."

"There is no male member in the house. Two sons have gone to Patna for the treatment of their father Shankar Mahto. The third one has gone to Ramnagar. Even then, wife of the eldest son of Shankar Mahto, who has never been face to face with me during all my regular visits to the village, comes out. She talks to me nicely and after offering water ranges for the breakfast. And since evening is
fast approaching and the road is not good, area is unsafe she requests for stay in the night.” This reflects that the Tharu women are courteous and cultured too.

During the course of interview the Bajis or non-Tharus, who reside in the Bakhari Bazar village and around, assert that the cause of their dominant position is different than what is generally believed. They say that since the origin of the Tharus is traced to the Thar Desert of Rajasthan many facts come to light, which speak about the status of Tharu women. During the period of Muslim invasion the Rajput women fled to Indo-Nepal Tarai area along with their servants to save their face. These women could not return to their native place and started living with their servants as husbands and wives. Since the women were from the royal houses, they always remained dominant in their behaviour, outlook, attitude, and temperament over men. And this is the reason of the Tharu women enjoying dominant position in the Tharu society. On the basis of this logic, Bajis brand the Tharu women as characterless and corrupt, and practiced and perpetrated all kinds of sexual exploitation and oppression upon them.

But on the basis of the controversies raised in Chapter 2, it can be safely concluded that the origin of Tharus in no case can be traced from the Thar Desert. And more so it is not only among the Tharus of West Champaran but among various other tribes of India do we find dominant position of women. Dominant position of women in the tribal society is almost universal.

In the context of Tharu women of Nainital S.K. Srivastava (1958:87) says, “Tharu women still enjoy a very dominant position in their community. ... The significant role of Tharu women in economic and social spheres of Tharu life can never be underestimated. ....... Inspite of the fact that men own certain things they are not free to dispose them off, because the consent of their wives is prerequisite to any transaction in the family. .... The hold of Tharu women on their womenfolk lies in the fact that they still have the right to divorce their husbands and exercise it
more often than men do, because a divorced man is not sure of getting another wife for himself without incurring a heavy expenditure on compensation.”

Dominant position of the Tharu women is rooted in the culture of the Tharu society. The position of women in the Tharu society is not that of a family drudge as one may find in the societies of the Bajis. They have considerable freedom and wield great influence in the domestic sphere. Customs and conventions of the Tharu society have not been properly understood, they have been misconceived, misrepresented and mis-interpreted. Customs are the integral part of the Tharu culture and here lies the reason for their dominant role in the society.

The Tharu society is peculiar as regard to the notion of time. During the process of interview, there was no one who could tell the exact time and date of birth of a person. Even some of the educated Tharus failed to tell the exact time and date of birth. If asked about the date of birth, most of them replied in the way that this child A was born before that child B but after the child C. Now it was virtually impossible to find out the exact date of birth of a child, leave aside the time. Gap between the birth of child A and B can be two months or two years. Even they were not aware of the year of birth of the child. In this kind of situation, it is impossible to know the exact age of a person. Girls generally grow and develop faster than boys. Marriage earlier took place when groom and bride were child or even infants. There were many cases in the Bakhari Bazar village where we found that brides were more aged than the grooms. After some years, brides developed into a full-grown up women where as grooms looked like a boy. This also might be one of the causes of dominant position of women in the Tharu society.

Apart from that the Tharu women have full control over the place of worship and kitchen in the house. *Puja Ghar* and *Rasoi Ghar* are to be joint. In the same room there is place for puja in one corner and the place for kitchen in another. There are also three platforms one each for

- *Gandevata*
- *Kuladevata* and
- *Pitridevata.*
On these three platforms, lamps of ghee are burnt first and thereafter meal is prepared. Cooked meal is kept on the platform and offered to agnidevata. Meal is taken after performing all these rituals. Utensils and eatables are kept in the same room. One, who cooks, serves the meal and even water. No one is allowed to enter the room without taking bath. Lady-in-charge of the room offers pigeon and chicken on the platforms. Those who are ill enter the room after washing their hands and beg for Manauti. The woman, who looks after the room, cleans the place including chulha. It is exclusively her domain and her privilege to maintain the room and see to it that norms attached to it, not broken but properly adhered to.

This custom of the Tharu women of West Champaran seems to be very unique and interesting for it gives a lot of elbowroom for the lady-in-charge of the house to maintain her dominance over domestic affairs.

Women play a significant role even outside the homes. No ritual is possible without their participation and cooperation. In the field there are three rituals:

i. **Harvat**: at the time of ploughing the field.

ii. **Moot**: at the time of sowing the seed, or transplantation.

iii. **Gava**: at the time reaping the crop.

During all these rituals almost all the members of the family including women compulsorily remain present and essential rites are performed.

Despite the fact that head of the family own the property, he is not free to dispose them off like we find in the case of the Tharus of Nainital. For any transaction in the family, the consent of women is very essential. But it is not necessary that all the women in the family enjoy equal status. Their status is determined by the position they hold in their family.
And above all. The hold of the Tharu women on their menfolk lies in the fact that they have the right to divorce their husbands. They exercise it more often than men do because a divorced man is not sure of getting another wife for him without incurring a heavy expenditure on compensation. Besides negotiations for marriage also begins from groomside and not the brideside as we do find in neighbouring non-Tharu society.

But now we can perceive some changes taking place in the status of women of Tharu society. *Interaction with the Bajis has mainly been responsible for the downgrading the status of Tharu women.* Since now the Tharus have started looking for educated and settled groom for their girl, earlier existing process of marriage negotiation has completely got reversed. *Institution of Lagania Baba is on wane and now brideside has to take initiative and look out for the groom. Negotiation should now start from brideside. Bride price is now being replaced by the demand of dowry. Pomp and show, exhibition of wealth is becoming status symbol.* Though Tharu Sangh has prohibited the menace of dowry, which is, eating into the vitals of Tharu society and polluting its unique and matchless culture some neo-rich of the area refuse to oblige.

Irrespective of the fact who is rich or poor, every family member including girl and woman earlier used to come to the field and cooperate with the male members of the family. *Now some of the families who have become a little affluent and their status enhanced due to various factors like getting a good job or becoming politically or otherwise powerful, do not allow their women to go outside the home.*

*Now some of the young Tharus, who have come to stay in the village after getting some education from outside Tharuhat area, have begun dictating terms on their wives. This attitude of theirs has developed during their interaction with the Bajis while attending a school or college or by watching Hindi films.*
Thus we see the seed has already been sown in the changed atmosphere and if not nipped in the bud, this may tell upon the status of women in the Tharu family and also the Tharu society. We come across a number of seminars and conferences being organized on national and international level for improving the status of women in the society. It would be unfortunate, if society like that of Tharus allow downgrading of the status of women in their society. Dominant position of women, good high status of women is the hallmark of the Tharu society of West Champaran and it should be preserved at all costs.

**RELIGION & FAITH IN THARU FAMILY AND SOCIETY**

With the infiltration of the non-Tharus, specially, the Hindus, the Hindu culture is slowly influencing the religious domain of the Tharus of West Champaran. They flock to fairs in thousands to worship the Hindu gods, such as Lord Shiva and mythical hero Rama. Their folk songs are woven around the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Shivratri is celebrated with immense enthusiasm. Most of the Tharus go to Shiv Mandir in Ramnagar on the occasion of Shivratri.

Though there is an absence of the idea of a definite pantheon of the Tharus as such, it is clear that there is a tendency growing among them to absorb the deities of Hindu religion on a large scale and to respect their Rishis and Saints. However, in time to come, this process of assimilation is, to some extent, weakening their faith in their old tribal religion – spiritism or animism.

The fundamental idea underlying all the religious rites, rituals and ceremonies of the Tharus is to ensure the well-being of an individual family, its cattle and the crop, the village and finally the whole community and to protect them from unforeseen or imminent dangers and hardships. Therefore, forms of worship are collective and individualistic, public and private.
It would be interesting to describe some of the festivals peculiar to the Tharus of West Champaran. The festival of Deepavali is celebrated among the Tharus in a unique way. It has two parts:

- Soharai
- Deepavali

The tribe of this area that is of West Champaran uses Soharai word. It seems that this term might have originated from Shubh Ratri, beginning of the auspicious night. In Soharai, a diagram resembling astronomical diagram is made from rice-flour. At every joint and crossing, lamp of rice-flour is burnt. It is called peetha. Prasad (offerings to god) of the same peetha is served and after lighting the lamp everyone of the family touches the place with head and offer water like Purnahuti. Peetha is then collected from the diagram and distributed as "Prasad". With this begins the celebration of Deepavali.

Diagram may be accepted as symbolic of universe—a kind of nature worship, universe worship. Burning of lamps at different joint remind us of the stars and planets of the universe.
Next morning, after Deepavali, Hal, Kudal, Hainga, Bullock cart even weapons are worshipped. Now-a-days even gun is kept at a place and lamp and dhup offered. On this occasion either red or black chicken is offered. Chicken is offered even outside the village. It is called Banpasar. May be it is the share of the forester of the area which has come down to the present day as a tradition. After that a puja called Gainru is performed. Gainru is perhaps Gramdevata. Chicken is offered here also. At the time of Hal Puja peetha as prasad is first given to cows and buffaloes after marking their forehead with red colour by unmarried girls. Complete holiday is observed that day. There is no work. *This tradition is on wane no doubt but still in existence.*

*Barna*: Barna is a place for Brahmasthan. It is held every year in a village. It is a kind of collective worship. There are two types of Barna:

1. *Harihar Barna*: This puja is celebrated for three days. Cutting of trees is prohibited. Even grass is not cut. On the third day puja is performed at *Brahmasthan* which is usually a *Peepal* tree. This shows the love and respect of the Tharus of West Champaran for nature. They are very much attached to forest and they perhaps know the significance of the trees in our life. Indiscriminate felling of trees in the name of urbanization and industrialization has completely disturbed the balance of environment and the very existence of human life now is at stake. Before performing any auspicious work one has to go to the Brahmas than and perform puja, take blessings and then proceed further.

2. *Gaon Ka Barna*: Guro performs this puja. Guro was used to be village priest. The Tharu community only participates in this activity. At some places Ojha or Dhani is called. *This practice is also on wane now.*

*Institution of Guro has eroded. Guro was earlier a very respectable person in the village and a Brahman did not command respect in this community. The Tharus*
used to call a Brahmin by derogatory term by “Re Babhanava”. But now the situation has changed. Tharu Sangh has allowed the Brahmins to perform all sorts of Puja in a Tharu family and the Brahmins have stared getting respect in the Tharu community.

Earlier there was a sub-caste of the Tharu called Kanfatta Yogi. Dead was given samadhi among them. There was no shradha karma or shaving of the head. But now all the sub-castes practice the same rituals at the time of death of a Tharu. Rituals associated with death of a person resemble that of the neighbouring Hindus.

During the course of my stay in the village, one unique incident was reported. This speaks of the prevailing superstition in the Tharu society.

“People of Bakhari Bazar village used to call the mother of Maheshwar Mahto as Dyne. If anything occurred in the village, people held her responsible for that. By sending ghosts to a house, she succeeds in bringing paddy. But one young man commented, ‘Had it been true she would have brought money from the bank’. Shankar Mahto of the village opposed this and helped the woman out of this crisis. Where as the people of the village including Mishra family wanted a panchayat to be called for taking any decision on this issue. They were at the verge of taking decision that the so-called Dyne should be called and thrashed.
But Shankar Mahto and the families of his three brothers did not become part of this conspiracy. One doctor Prahlad and other people of the village started thinking of ostracizing them even."

This is the height of superstition. Along with this there is a belief that when a child dies he or she should not be burnt. It is believed that some of such dead children become *Choraha Bhut* and one who takes him or her in his control, he or she can get anything done through that Bhut (ghost).

It is evident from the two incidents that the Tharu society is a superstition-ridden society. This has brought many disadvantages to the village or community. Whenever anybody is killed or any thing is stolen, persons like mother of Maheshwar Mahto are held responsible with no fault of theirs and thus the real culprit relapses into background. Bajis might have exploited this belief prevalent in the Tharu society to their advantage.

But now such incidents are becoming things of the past thanks to the selfless and tireless effort of the people like Shankar Mahto who are fearlessly fighting against the ills of their society. Superstition is a great disease of the society and it can be removed only when people become educated, reasonable and broad-minded.

Conversion appears to be a rarity in the Tharuhat. But Shiv Shankar Satyarthi who met me on my way back to Bettiah from Bakhari Bazar in April 2002, stated “we can hardly find any case of conversion in the Tharuhat but for the last few years Tharus putting cross around their neck can be seen. In Santpur village we have a definite report that one Sushil Qaji has rechristened his name Cecil Qaji after conversion.”

This development may appear to be true as the activities of Christian Missionaries have remarkably increased in the area and now one can find surfacing up of Missionary schools on Ramnagar – Gobardhana road. Recently the Mc Cave Trust is also expanding its activities in the Don of Tharuhat by opening school and health clinic.
In this chapter we are concerned with the economic organization of the Tharus. Economic life deals with the activities associated with the fulfillment of material needs of the people. Every community has its own way to meet the basic needs for the existence of its members. The basic needs of a society are conditioned by natural and cultural factors as well as by technology. In the study of an economic organization of the tribal most of the general economic theories are not relevant, because tribal economy has certain unique characteristics. The most important of these are:

a) The economy is mostly forest based.

b) It operates on simple technology.

c) There is absence of competition and profit-motive in economic activities and

d) The family is the unit of production, consumption and labour supply.

Under the operation of these characteristics, economic activities are devoid of the influence of the general law of demand and supply. Exchange becomes much more a social than an economic activity, as the whole community works together as cooperative unit, and members feel obligated to help each other and meet each other’s needs on the basis of mutual service and loyalty than on the basis of material gain. Hence the price mechanism does not act as a regulatory device in exchange and distribution of economic resources.

According to Nesfield (1885) the essential elements in the economic life of Tharus consisted of hunting, fishing, collecting forest fruits, roots, stock-raising and a crude form of agriculture. About economic life of the Tharus