4.1 INTRODUCTION

The Tharu are tribal people who live in the patches of plain surrounded by dense forest in the narrow belt of Tarai. They are the largest and one of the oldest ethnic group of the Tarai region, living in villages near dense malaria-infested jungles in regions that were isolated over the millennia, allowing them to develop a unique culture. They work usually as farmers or peddlers. Although physically the Tharu are similar to other peoples in the area, they speak their own language that originated in Sanskrit and is now recognized officially. Recent medical evidence supports the common belief that the Tharu people, having lived in the swampy Tarai region for centuries, have developed an innate resistance to malaria that is likely based on an unidentified genetic factor.

The Tharu are residing in Tarai at the foothills of Himalays in U.P. for the last three hundred years or so. Tharu live close to the border of Nepal and are widely dispersed in the districts of Baharaich, Gonda, Gorakhpur, Kheri and Nainital. They are the migrants from the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan, settled in Tarai area extending from Nainital District to Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh. They claim to be the offspring of Rajput women who fled from Chittorgarh (Rajasthan) and sought refuge in these regions. Tharu trace their origin to Rajput forefather’s, who fled from the great battle described in the epic Mahabharata. They derived their name from Thithurna, meaning to quake. Tharu are on average of below medium height with a round head tending towards a broader shape. They have a short nose and a round or oval
face. They are Non-vegetarian and eat pork. Their staple food consists of wheat rice and pulses. They occasionally take alcoholic drinks.' (Gazetteer of the Himalayan District of the Northwestern Provinces)

According to the Nepali author, Singh (2006), a series of invasions by the Rajput kings, eroded the influence of the indigenous Tharu. In 1854 Jung Bahadur, the first Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, developed the Mulki Ain, a codification of Nepal's indigenous legal system, which divided society into a system of castes. The Tharu were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Their land was taken away, disrupting their community and displacing the people. In the 1950s, World Health Organization helped the Nepalese government eradicate malaria in the Tarai region. This resulted in the immigration of people from other areas.

A smaller number of Tharu live in India, mostly in Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttaranchal, Kheeri, Pilibhit, Gonda, Balrampur, Gorakhpur, Bahirayach Districts of Uttar Pradesh and Champaran District of Bihar (Govila; 1959).

During censuses the Tharu have been separately enumerated. The table (4.1) below shows the trend of population of Tharu since 1881 to 2001 which shows the increase and decrease in their population:-

**Table 4.1:** Trends in Tharu Population from 1881-1941 and 2001 in Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1941</th>
<th>2001</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
<td>27,172</td>
<td>25,484</td>
<td>23,528</td>
<td>27,719</td>
<td>28,893</td>
<td>31,563</td>
<td>22,381</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttaranchal*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>85,665</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Srivastava (1958) and Census of India 2001

*Uttaranchal State was earlier part of Uttar Pradesh
The above table shows that though there is an increase in Tharu population from 27,172 in 1881 to 31,563 in 1931 there was, however a sharp decrease in their number to 22,381 in 1941. It is said that the influenza was responsible for their considerable mortality. The decrease in the population of the Tharu of Naini Tal Tarai was also attributed to the epidemic of cholera which broke out in 1937 in a virulent form. Tharu were not enumerated separately at 1951 Census. In later years, the population of Tharu tribe rose steadily to 85,665 as shown in the Census of 2001. Thus the Tharu on the whole, may not have shown a steady phenomenal increase in their population in every decade but it certainly shows that they have adapted to and successfully survived the unhealthy climate of the Tarai (Srivastava 1958, op.cit.).

Tharu practically inhabit in two Tarai Tehsils, namely, Khatima and Sitarganj. Although they are concentrated in these two Tehsils of Udham Singh Nagar, they also have their settlements in the Districts of Gonda, Gorakhpur, Bahraich, Kheri and Pilibhit in Uttar Pradesh.

After 2005, the Uttaranchal State has been carved out from Uttar Pradesh. As per the Census of 2001, the total population of Tharu in Uttaranchal is 85,665 out of which 43,637 are males and 42,028 are females. Almost all the population of Tharu resides in rural areas as can be seen from the figures of Census 2001 that shows that out of total population of 85,665 Tharu in Uttaranchal, 84,073 lives in rural areas and only 1,592 lives in urban areas.

4.2 HISTORY OF THARU

Many interpretations are prevailing regarding the origin of Tharu Tribe. The etymological interpretations about Tharu indicates Tahare means ‘they
halted’, after their alleged flight into the Tarai forests or to tarhuwa, which means ‘become wet’, alluding to the swampy nature of the region, or to Thatharana signifying trembling or ‘quaking’ during their flight from Hastinapur to the Tarai after a fierce battle between the Rajputs and Muslims. S. Knowles (1889, *op.cit.*) traces the origin of Tharu to the word Tharua of hill dialect, meaning a ‘paddler’. Another author refers to the word ‘athawaru’, that is ‘an eight day serf’ – a man who is bound to give his lord one day’s free labour in a week of his fields. But Nesfield (1885, *op.cit.*) does not accept this argument and says that they are akin to a tribe known as meecha living on the bank of Kosi river on the forest hills of Himalayas.

Crooke (1896 *op.cit.*) traces the word Tharu denoting a ‘wine bibber’. This word was given by a Kshatriya Raja of plains who was amazed at the Tharu thirst and capacity for drinking liquor.

Majumdar (1942 *op.cit.*) says that Tharu could not be explained of their Rajput origin on the basis of Serology. They are a Mongolian caste. Srivastava (1958 *op.cit.*) says that Tharu are a Mongoloid people or predominantly so, who have successfully assimilated non-Mongoloid physical features as well.

Sherring (1983) says that the Tilpur parganah near the Tarai was once in the possession of this tribe, who were expelled there by Tilvi-kram Sen with the help of Banjaras. Buchman supports the view that originally they were Rajputs and they came from Chittor. They belonged to family of Jaimal and Patta. They were driven from their homes and settled in Tarai. The reference seems to indicate the third Siege of Chittor by Akbar, in 1567 A.D.
Whatsoever may be historical facts and etymology of Tharu, but the views of the tribals regarding their own history are to be accepted.

The Tharu Claim that historically they are not Tribal community because they are migrated Rajputs (upper caste Hindus) which has been converted in a tribal community in the period of living in forest. The Tharu also claim that they have an amazing historical past in Indian society. They related themselves to Thar area of Rajasthan state of India. This seems to be an interesting claim, as Majumdar (1942 op.cit.) says that they do not have any known characteristics of Rajasthani Rajputs in their race and culture. He contested the supposed Rajput origin of the Tharu on the basis of blood group tests. It was found that Tharu have descended from the Mongoloid race.

Some Tharu do claim that they are related with Lord Budha’s clan and some also claims that they are related with Lord Krishna’s clan.

4.3 THARU LOCALE & ENVIRONMENT

The Tharu are located in the foothills of Himalayas which is known as Tarai region. Srivastava, 1958 op.cit. has given a wider look on the characteristics of the Tarai Region in his anthropological work. Khan (2004) has also given a fairly good overview of the Tarai Region. As per panoramic explanation given by them the Tarai is known for its damp climate, excessive heat and humidity, during the rainy season, water logging, a large number of rivulets, and its covered by dense broad leaved monsoon forest. The forests are inhabited by a variety of animals. The area is criss-crossed by innumerable small streams and ‘nalas’ which become a menace during rains. Flooding produce a lot of problems to the dwellers and wild life. Mosquito is a great curse to the people of the region, which help in spreading malaria and
filaria. Influenza is another common disease in the region. As water level is quite high, there is a problem of easy contamination and pollution of drinking water. Several water borne diseases like dysentery, jaundice and gastroenteritis have a high frequency of occurrence among the inhabitants. Malnutrition goiter are common in this region. The climate of Tharuhat has its disadvantage for health but it is very favourable for crops specially the paddy. It gets plenty of sunshine and abundant rainfall; it is therefore, that agricultural operation has become easy and fruitful. The rain is frequent and constant a factor which is very helpful in the growth of paddy.

The soil of Tharuhat area, a common name of this area, is quite fertile. Soil in the area is generally stiff heavy clay but at places loamy and alluvial soils are also found. Pure clay is confined to the low lying areas at various places. There is practically no ‘Bhut’ or sandy soil. The deposits of silt by the flooding of hill streams are an annual feature. Three types of soil: ‘Goind’, ‘Domat’ and ‘Matiyar’ are on the basis of fertility and increasing distance from the hamlets. The highly fertile soil is found around and nearest the village settlements. It is termed as ‘Goind’. The middle zone of the soil is ‘Domat’, and the outlying zone of the soil is ‘Matiyar’, while the worst type of soil is called ‘palo’.

The alluvial soils of Tharuhat area are brought down by hill torrents. This soil is known for its natural fertility. As it is covered with dense forest, it has acquired additional fertility owing to the decomposition of the foliage. Since centuries the accumulated deposits of the grass and foliage has contributed to enrich the humus contents of the soil with a heavy loam. Animal waste is also responsible for the increased fertility of the soils.

The climatic conditions rainfall and soil composition favour the growth of forest monsoon type and the land was naturally covered by forest overgrowth.
in the recent past. The forests are source of natural wealth to the Tarai. These forests are situated for the most part along the Nepal frontier and are generally a continuation of the tracts of jungle lying in that territory. During the early days of British administration, there were no rulers for the protection of these forests. In large quantities best timber were removed unchecked. Since 1986, rules of better management of forest are in force, under which forest officers are appointed.

Owing to the large area under forest, wild animals are numerous. These forests abound in wild beast, tigers, panthers, bears, wild pigs, wolves, foxes, jackal, monkey and dears but due to the extension and growth of cultivation in recent years and the greater use of arms and effective weapons, the number of tigers has greatly reduced. This region is a potential hunting ground for ornithologist as hundreds of species are found.

The climate of the region affects domestic animals as well as human beings. Therefore, cultivators afford only cheap classes of cattle.

Briefly, it can be stated that the habitat of Tharu is a land of numerous sluggish streams and water locked, marshes, full of forests and swamps with a variety of wild life and scattered patches of cultivation. The large savanhas type of tall thick fanged grasses and thick reeds with large tracts of forest and a network of spring and streams are bordered by overhanging trees, creepers and tall ‘sarpant’ grass.

Owing to fertility of soil, the cultivation has made rapid progress in the area. Yields are high even with very traditional practices of cultivation.
The Tarai Estate is administratively divided into four tehsils, namely, Michha, Bazpur, Sitarganj and Khatima. Of these four tehsils only the last two, that is Khatima and Sitarganj are inhabited by the Tharu.

The population of the Tarai is a mixed one. It is composed of the following tribes and castes:-

1. The Tharu and the Buksas among the aboriginal tribes.
2. The Brahmins, Rajputs, Kurmis, Lodhs, Doms and Chamars among the Hindus.
3. The Sheikhas, Pathans, Turkis, Mewatis, Ranis, and Faqirs among the Muslims.

Mazumdar (1942 op.cit.) stated “Man is the product of his environment. A tribe adapts itself to the area it inhabits. It develops a relationship of interdependence with the fauna and flora of the habitat. Its success depends on its ability to live, enjoying robust wealth, acquiring strength involving an adjustment to the process of environmental development so that its leisure born of security may provide scope for progress such as results of regional adaptation”.

‘Tharu are the product of Tarai’, which is referred as the home of Tharu. Their socio-economic life definitely bears a close relationship with the physical environment, climatic conditions, vegetation, water supply and drainage systems. It is very interesting to go into details about the physiography of the Tarai and its impact upon the economic life of the Tharu.

Because of the high incidence of diseases the area was considered as uninhabitable by the outsider. Till half century ago only Tharu inhabited the
inner part of Tarai and faced its deadly climate. To the non-tribal dwellers of the plain, the ‘Tarai’ is mar-land meaning the land of death. Whereas to Tharu, it is homeland. This is because no other people have so successfully adapted themselves to this unhealthy, uninviting and inhospitable environment. It is only Tharu whose culture is found in true harmony with land and has shown an amazing vitality and adjustment with environmental conditions.

The Tharu are God fearing people who depend upon jungle who never exploited them to a harmful extent. Their existence is almost in a perfect balance with the ecosystem of the region. Centuries have passed since Tharu are living in these areas, but the surroundings seem to remain almost unaltered. History is witness that this region has provided shelter in 1857 to the freedom fighters or the so-called rebels of the British India who offered resistance to the advancing British troops. This region has served as a fortress also for thieves and unwanted elements of the society. Had Tharu devastated the land of its natural bounty, the history and geography of India (North India in particular) would have been a different one after the loss of jungles and consequently reduced rains.

4.4 SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF THARU

Turner (1931) Census Report divided the whole tribe of the Tharus into two moieties, higher and lower. The higher moiety comprised the Batha, Birtia, Badvait, Dahait, Mahtum and Rawat, and the lower moiety, the Buxa, Khunka, Rajia, Sansa, Jugia and Dangra. The former was hypergamous to the latter but in course of time the higher moiety stopped taking brides from the lower one. Consequently, the six sections of the higher moiety had become an endogamous group, so also the six of the lower moiety. At present
the higher moiety only with the exception of Rawat has its social commensality in regard to interdining and intermarriage.

In general, Tharus are divided into three Endogamous Groups, namely Rana, Katheria and Dangura, which are further subdivided into a number of exogamous lineages. This tribal community has many unique features in terms of their cultural and socio-economic systems. There are several clans in the Tharu tribe (called Kuri in their local language), some of the most important being: Badwayak, Battha, Rawat, Birtiya, Mahto, Dahait, Rajia, Bunka, Sansa, Jugia, Buxa, Dhangra, and Rana. All of these are divided into low and high status. Tharu follow the Hindu religion because they claim that they have Rajput blood in them and that they migrated from Rajasthan.

*Kuri* of the Tharus has the identical function which Got or Gotra has for the Hindus. *Kuri* or Gotra is a generic name which is given after real or imaginary ancestor, or preferably a sage or a holy person. One of the main functions of this name is that it serves as a very important distinguishing category between the higher and lower castes. It is regarded as an exogamous unit among the higher and marriage with any person belonging to the same Gotra is considered incest and, therefore, such a marriage is highly tabooed. Among the lower castes, on the other hand, it is not a serious offence. In fact they prefer to marry the members of the same Gotra as if to maintain a sort of purity of blood.

One of the villagers explained “Rana, Batha, Birtia, Dahait, Badvait, and Mahtum are different Kuries of our own community without any distinction in their social status. We marry amongst our own Kuries. Rawat, Dangra, Khunka, Rajia, Sansa, Buxa and Jugia are definitely lower and so we do not have marriage alliance with them nor do we dine with them.”
The upper caste *Kuries* believed that Rana Pratap of the Sisodia clan of the Kshatriyas had died a glorious death on the battlefield while fighting against the soldiers of the Kind Akbar. The followers of Rana Pratap were forced to take refuge in the inhabited region of the Naini Tal Tarai and Nepal. These *Kuries* believes that it were the Rajputs and Sisodiy clan who developed strange and queer social customs in their isolated habitat which had earned for them the name, Tharus. Some of their leaders have taken the role of active social reformers and propagandists to revive the long forgotten heritage of traditions and customs of the Sisodia Rajputs. In their concerted attempts to identify with the high caste Hindus, the Kshatriyas, they have gone so far that they have adopted a new appellation, Rana Thakur of Sisodia clan. Thakur is a common term for the Kshatriyas but Rana Thakur stands for a still higher degree of precedence in social stratification as it is identified with the royal blood of Rana Pratap’s family, and therefore, is a highly laden with prestige and social status. The Tharus of the higher Kuries think it derogatory if they are addressed as Tharus and take exception to this and prefer to be called as Rana Thakurs. It is much more convenient and easy to establish rapport with them if the interviewer or field worker addresses them as Rana Thakurs.

The lower moiety, which is in minority, has certainly welcomed the name of Thakur for their group of sections thus placing themselves a few degrees lower than the Rana Thakurs in the social cadre. Since no genuine attempt seems to have been made by the lower moiety to claim a higher social status for themselves because of their comparatively small number, abject poverty, and general backwardness, they still cling to their original sub-divisions, though they also feel satisfied if they are at least identified with the Thakur not belonging to the royal descent as claimed by the higher moiety.
A sample of thirty three villages in the Tarai shows that the number of endogamous sections has been reduced from twelve to eight, since the rest of them are subsumed under one broad endogamous unit, The Rana Thakur. 87.4 per cent of the total population of 33 villages are the Rana Thakurs. The other group, Thakurs, constitutes a minority and is further divided into seven sub-sections Srivastava (1958 op.cit.).

4.4.1 Village & Community

Traditionally the Tharu used to choose a good site for their village on high level in proximity of a river or some source of water safe from water logging and from the attack of wild animals. They give the same shape to their villages as the Buksas do. The foundation of the house is laid with the consultation of Bharara. Both the sides of house are plastered with mud and the ladies of the family decorate walls. However, with the changing times and changing status due to the impact of increase in education, socio-economic conditions, their villages usually show a neat row of houses along a line of communication but individual houses are made as detached residences.

Village officials who enjoy a high social position look after the village community’s administration. These are the Pradhan (village chief man). The Mustajar (Contractor and sole proprietor of the village), the Sarwarkar (Spokesman of Pradhan or Mustajar) and the Katwar (The village peon). The Pradhan has to perform administrative, social and religious duties of the village. He has to report to the Tahsildar or the Police regarding violation of law and order in the village. Srivastava (1958 op.cit.) says that he performs all those duties by satisfying the government officials with his hospitality and general assistance.
The ‘Panchayat’ is the only powerful tribunal for deciding serious disputes among the community. The Panchayat is constituted of the representatives of both the contending parties and a ‘Sarpanch’. The decisions given by the Panchayat are binding on both the parties. The tribal Panchayat is still recognized by the Government.

The families were at liberty to migrate from one village to another, so there are chances of changes in village community. The village community maintained law and order by observing their traditions or customs. All the customs were preserved as in folk tales, songs and stories.

The cases brought before the Panchayat are as follows:

1. Partition of joint property, succession and inheritance.
2. The taboos, such as, sexual union of a Tharu with a non-Tharu, marriage or sexual intrigue within the prohibited degree.
3. The taboo of marrying another man’s wife without his consent and without paying off the compensation demanded by the former husband.
4. The breaking off the engagement of a boy with a girl without any reason.
5. The taking of forbidden food and eating at the hands of lower castes and tribes.
6. The taboos of killing accidentally or intentionally of a cow, calf or a bullock.

4.4.2 Tharu Houses

Since there is no scarcity of land in the Tarai, the habitat of the Tharus, their houses occupy more area than is normally possible in the plains. Each
house with its field and a vegetable garden is a detached residence with a narrow or a broad alley separating it from the adjacent houses. A *Bharara* is consulted to find a suitable site for building a house. After the site has been selected the *Bharara* offers *hom* (offering ghee, jaggery and sandal-wood powder on the fire) to the gods and goddesses to remove the pollution of the place and drive out the evils spirits, if they happen to have their haunt there. At the same time after consulting his deities, the *Bharara* fixes the day for laying the foundation so that the house, built on an auspicious day, may be assured of its durability against all kinds of weather casualties.

They generally construct their houses in the months of April and May before the rains set in. The houses are constructed facing North and South in a rectangular manner and they are usually single stories. There exist a belief that if two storied houses are constructed it becomes a dwelling place of spirits and ghosts. Recently changes are occurring near the roadsides as double stories houses can be seen of unbaked bricks with roof of *khar, reed, tins*, etc. However, majority of the houses are single storied thatched and plastered, a very neat and clean. It is felt that these so called primitive tribes or people have used their own indigenous architectural methods in the construction. They have in a simple artistic manner utilized small spaces in such a manner that the partition walls are shaped in the form of grainery. A house of two *paies* has four rooms. Each *paie* consists of two rooms without a wall separating them. Big earthen granaries known as *kuthala* and *kuthia* serve as walls demarcating the partitions in the house into rooms. The inner room of the house utilized for cooking meals and for installing household gods. No stranger may ever enter this portion of the house. The outer parts are used for sleeping purposes. Each couple in the family is allotted one room. In the back portion of the outer room son and daughter-in-law may sleep. One of the portions of the outer room is kept for eating their meals.
The well-to-do Tharus build a *bangala*, the rest house, on one side of the main house. It is built in the same style as the main house with the difference that it is closed on three sides and the front portion opens in the courtyard. Sometimes there are two or three partitions in the *bangala*, which are used for sleeping purposes and for keeping some of their belongings.

The size of the house depends upon the size of the family. The larger the family, the bigger the house with greater number of *paies that* is the partitions. Every house must consist of at least two partitions.

The place to keep sheep goat and cows is called ‘*Gahari*’. The sitting room is named as ‘*Bahari*’. This is main room, which comprises of two doors, usually left open to let light into the room. Tharu houses do not have windows but only small holes. Tharu have used their own indigenous method of constructions. The partition walls are shaped as grainery known as *Dahari* or *Kuthli* to store food grains. It is made up of mud, chaff of wheat and cow-dung. Bahari is an important place for the Tharu. In the centre the fire is burnt and it is here discussions are held, recreation takes place in the form of singing and dancing, drinking and enjoying after the day’s hard work and it is here some of the most artistic creation have been born.

‘*Kunte*’ is the sleeping room and the number of *kunte* vary in accordance to the number of family members. It is an empty room which becomes alive at night, when haystacks are laid in a artistic manner and on it are laid mattresses if they posses one, if not, they simply place a thin sheet of clothes and sleep on it. ‘*Bhitra* (kitchen) is another important place which serves both as the dining and the cooking room.

Another important place in the life of the Tharu is the ‘*Devarar*’ which is their worship room. It is here the Tharu keep their deities.
The house is a fine piece of traditional style of art safeguarded by the Tharu even to this day. The construction responsibility is of the male, while its daily maintenance and cleanliness is that of the women. Both the exterior and interior of the Tharu houses present a neat and tidy appearance. They are swept twice or thrice a day and the ashes and house-refuse are thrown near the cattle-shed or in the fields adjacent to their houses. A defect in their houses seems to be that there is no outlet for the kitchen smoke to escape. The result is that it filters slowly through the roof so that its rafters and articles suspended from it are always thickly coated with black soot and cobwebs.

After four or five years the Tharus have to rethatch their houses, *bangala* and *sar*, though much of the old material is utilized in the new structure. Before the rainy season begins, they make minor repairs in their houses every years. We find that only prosperous Tharus have begun to build *pucca* houses.

In a general way the tendency towards replacing the style of construction of their houses and use of modern material for construction is based on the reasons that –

(i) the Tharus have learnt to fight the damage caused by frequent fires to their thatched houses by having *khaparchals* and tin-sheds for roofing. The fire not only destroys one or two houses but spreads quickly to adjacent houses and sometimes reduced the whole village into ashes.

(ii) the rise in the income level of the Tharu cultivators, who are gaining a better knowledge of marketing for selling their produce at a higher rate, is enabling them to meet the cost of building better houses.
Every family makes earthen pots, large and small, for storing grain. They are differently named according to their size and capacity, for example, kuthia, kuthala and bakhari made from kasari, bharai or sentha grass. The Tharus keep their belongings on top of granaries. They have a kind of earthen safe known as chaurasiya to keep their money and ornaments under lock and key. They make a basket, of cane to keep their clothes. A hukka (hubble-bubble) is a favourite possession with the Tharus.

Formerly, the Tharus possessed only a few household goods and did not have much difficulty in shifting from one place to another, but now a gradual change in the nomadic character in their life and regular infiltrations of traders in their region from the neighbouring parts of the country are responsible for the rapid increase in their household possessions.

4.4.3 Tharu Family

The Tharu family is the nucleus of the social organization. It is patrilocal and patrilineal. Both the joint and single-family systems are found among the Tharu. At present, there is a tendency towards break-up of the joint family. The father is the head and recognized authority of the family and next to him in authority is his eldest son. The institution of joint family has changed in size as well as in form but the older people is trying to preserve its traditions. Invitations of marriages, other ceremonies and feasts are sent to the families instead of individuals whatsoever the type of family. The family and not the individual are punished in case of a breach of tribal custom or law.

Srivastava (1958 *op.cit.*) states that Tharu females wear colorful lehanga, choli and odani. Males wear dhoti, kurta, sadari and turban. Urban/
Educated Tharu male and females have started wearing pant, coat, shirt and saree-blouse respectively. Tharu have a rich oral tradition, sing folk songs, and recount folklore. They accept water, cooked and uncooked food from their neighboring communities, and have Patron-client, landlord-tenant and cultivator-labor relationship with them. They keep their homes and courtyards clean. They keep them neat by smudging and besmearing. The cowshed, which is called *shae* is also kept clean everyday. The place for storing grain is called *kotiya*. An airy, basket like think made of bamboo to keep *ghuiyan* is called *bakhari*. The place for keeping water pots is called *ata*. Clay pitchers, brass-jars and mugs, tumblers etc. are kept clean and placed here with lids. They do not allow anyone to touch them. There is a separate place for keeping straw and is called *bhusandi*.

The women usually go to market or fair freely for marketing and their husbands help them in carrying the articles purchased by them. Women help their husbands in plastering their houses, cleaning the cattle shed, sowing and harvesting, etc. It is said that formerly Tharu women did not allow their husbands or any male to enter into their kitchen and touch their water pots, but these restrictions have now been relaxed and have almost been given up.

In a social organization of the Tharus, the family, joint or single and not the individual is regarded as the primary unit. Invitations for marriages, other ceremonies and feasts are not sent to individuals but to families. In the tribal Panchayat, when occasion arises, the family is represented by its head. For a breach of tribal law or custom it is not he individual offender who is ex-communicated and shunned but his family as a whole is punished.

The relationship system among the Tharus is neither fully descriptive nor wholly classificatory, because the same kinship term is use for several relatives of the same generation and sex and at the same time, some terms
denote only one kinship. The term *dado* is used for father’s father, father’s father’s brother, father’s maternal uncle, father’s father’s maternal uncle’s son, father’s father’s paternal aunt’s son, spouse’s mother’s father, spouse’s father’s father, father’s father’s sister husband. *Dadi* is used for father’s mother, father’s mother’s sister, father’s maternal aunt, father’s father’s maternal uncle’s daughter, father’s father’s paternal aunt’s daughter, father’s father’s sister, spouse’s father’s mother.

### 4.4.4 Marriage & Divorce

The Tharu practiced various forms of marriage – marriage by capture; by purchase; *Kaj* and *Dola*. But now Tharu have given up marriage by capture and observe the Hindu marriage system. Polygamy is socially approved and respected. Unmarried persons are not respected in society. Srivastava (1958 *op.cit.*) says that ‘marriage is obligatory for every Tharu and an unmarried person is looked down upon by the members of his own community. An unmarried woman has no social status. Even a bachelor finds his life very difficult when she herself has to manage domestic duties such as, cooking meals, fetching water, grinding wheat and husking rice, etc., in addition to his own field labour”.

Child marriage is practiced as a rule in Tharu community. The betrothal ceremony takes place up to the age of five years and between ages of 10 to 16 years the actual marriage is performed. At the marriage ceremony the Pandit and the Bharara remain present. They observe their traditional as well as Hindu customs in marriage. They do not have dowry system.

Both the husband and wife have full liberty or right to divorce each other. In most of the cases, a woman divorces her husband even at the slightest pretext.
The betrothal is binding on both the parties. It is broken only if the boy or the girl dies. If the boy or the girl contacts an incurable disease or one of the parents dies before marriage; it is considered as an evil omen. If one of them refuses to marry then compensation is given to the other party by the father of the girl or the boy as per decision by the Tharu Panchayat. Generally the marriages are arranged in the month of Magh. The actual marriage is celebrated only on a Sunday or Thursday in Magh. Formerly, the Tharu never invited the Brahmins to perform their marriage ceremonies but now they do so.

From the account of marital customs of the Tharus it has been made clear how far they are assimilating the rites and ceremonies of the Hindus community. For instance, they have borrowed the customs of ceremonial circumambulation round the square corresponding to that of the Hindus round the ‘holy fire’, knotting together are corners of the brides and bridegroom’s garments, daubing of their body with turmeric, joining of their hands to symbolize the union, kanya dan, the feasting of the bridegroom, similar to the kalewa of the Hindus. All these similarities may not, in all cases, indicate borrowing but they definitely point out the influence of Hindu contacts. One can predict that in course of time, perhaps a few vestiges of Tharu marriages will be replaced by the orthodox Hindu marriage pattern. Even now, the desire on the part of the educated Tharus to perform their marriages according to the Hindu rites by inviting Brahmins points towards transition.

4.4.5 Child Birth Rituals

Dai is the first person outside the family who comes in contact with the newly born child. She helps child’s mother in the rearing of the child during the first month of his life.
The chhatti (sixth day after birth) is the first ceremony of Tharu child. The family Gods or Goddesses are worshipped on this day for their blessings. The old women of the family supply clothes especially made for the child. Dai dresses the child with these clothes and puts around his neck some strings or garlands of red thread, small silver bracelets on both the wrists, black thread is also tied around feet and hands. It is believed that black colour protects the child from evil eye, or ill intentions of any lady. Kajal is applied in the eyes of child. A feast is given to the village community on this occasion.

The Tharu now invite the Pahari or Daisi pandit for the naming of the child. The majority of Tharu name their children at the age of two or three years. The mother breast-feeds the child. The sucking period is quite long and it continues till the next delivery or dryness of breast. Tharu do not like to see their children weeping and crying and they do not beat their children for petty offences. The wooden toys are given for play to the children.

The Mundan (hair removing ceremony) is to be performed on an auspicious day, usually on Sunday. This ceremony is adopted from their neighbouring Hindu community. When mother goes out or is busy in household responsibilities, the child is looked after by his elder brother or sister.

4.4.6 Gender Perspective

The girls are trained to assist their mothers in almost all the household activities i.e. sweeping the house, keeping it in order, fetching water and cooking meals, etc. Similarly, the boys given training in manufacturing the fishing nets and traps, spading, ploughing and leveling the fields. The children
are, thus, not a burden on their parents who train them in all the economic activities of their life.

The boys and girls take part in games separately as well as jointly. They take keen interest in competition of sports and they devote their evening time in guessing the answers for riddles. These riddles provide an opportunity for their mental, intellectual and emotional development.

4.4.7 Ritual Friendship

The Tharu observe an artificial form of relationship by which two individuals may enter into a sacred bond of friendship. This tie of friendship is more trustworthy than that of marriage and blood. The Tharu believe that their relationship of a friend is the most sacred and binding of all earthy ties. Thus a friend in their community enjoys a higher position than near relations. A popular saying among them illustrates this fact very well *Mit na chhutai chahe chhutai sago bhay* (one may leave one’s brother but not one’s friend).

4.4.8 Tharu Religion

Tharu religion is based on a belief in ghosts, demons and the spirits of the dead who they fear. According to Knowles (1989) the Tharu worship Mahadev and possess some idea of a supreme being known as Narayan who provides sunshine, rain and harvests. Majumdar (1942 *op.cit.*) says that there is a Hindu impact over Tharu. So they worship Satyanarayan and Hindu gods and goddesses. It is observed that Tharu have borrowed gods and goddesses from among Hindu pantheon, Muslim Pirs, Saints and Sikh Gurus who find a place in their religion. Traditional Tharu worship various gods in the form of animals such as dogs, crow, ox and cows. Such gods are seen in
Hinduism. Every village has their own deity, commonly known as Bhuinyar. Most Tharu households own a statue of a traditional god.

They believe in spirits. They try to control these spirits regularly, by providing offerings according to seasons and times, while others are to be placated by casual sacrifices, at the time of sickness or repeated misfortunes. Family members often offer animal's blood sacrifices to appease the god. Animals such as pigeons and chickens are used for sacrificial purposes. Milk and silk cloth are also used. Many Tharu would also use the blood of one of the male members in the family for such rituals. Such rituals are conducted through ceremonies, and superficial cuts are made forehead, arms, throat, legs, and/or chest. The gods are believed to have the ability to heal diseases and sickness. According to traditional legend, gods are given a bhakal, a promise of something, on condition that the sickness is cured, in any events of misfortunes, plagues and horror dreams. A relative's death is an event of great significance among Tharu, and rituals conducted varies in accordance to regions. Tharu would approach shamans as doctors, known as Guruba. Such shamans use Buddhist medicines to cure illness. Shamans will also try to appease gods through incantations, beating drums and offering sacrifices. The Tharu believe sickness comes when the gods are displeased, and the demons are at work.

Kharga bhut, Pachhauwan have got important place among family of Tharu gods. The hill spirits Parwatiya and Punyagiri and Jungle Spirits are also worshipped by them. They have also begun worshipping Supreme Diety, Thakur with the help of Pahari or Deshi Pandit.

Towards the east of their village Tharu have a than of goddess Bhumsen – under a Pipal tree. Bhumsen represents seven mother goddesses – Durga, Kalka, Sitala, Jwala, Parwati, Hulka, and Purwa Nagarai. The
inhabitants of village collectively offer periodical sacrifices and ‘hom’ to protect themselves from the influence of evil spirits. They also believe in different types of magic and Jadu, Tona and Mantras.

4.4.9 Festivals

The Tharu celebrate Baricharai, Choti Charai, Asadhi, Tis, Janmasthmi, Anthai, Diwali and Holi as religious festivals. During these festivals they workshop their gods, goddesses, evil spirits, etc.

4.4.10 Bharara

He holds a very important position in a village. He is a medicine-man as well as the priest-cum-magician. He finds out the causes of diseases and prescribes indigenous herbs, roots and berries as medicines and uses magic powers to cure them through Mantras. He finds out which Bhut or Bhuts (evil spirits) are inflicting ailments and are hurting the people. He also keeps goddess Bhawani in good humour by offering periodical sacrifices to her.

4.5 THARU: THEN & NOW

Reddy (2004) observed that the Tharu have shown remarkable adaptability to changing environment, as far as the natural environment is concerned. It has undoubtedly been changing due to such processes as deforestation, change in the amount of rainfall, disappearance of marshy lands, and decrease in the amount of humidity and fogging in the environment. Some of these changes are related to the effects of urbanization and industrialization, which have increased accessibility of the Tarai region to
common people. The Tharu have changed painstakingly to adapt themselves to the changing geographical environment. Tharu have shown vitality to the change – that is from shifting agriculture to subsistence and from subsistence to intensive farming with commercial products. This shows their unique adaptability to changing environmental conditions.

As far as the social environment is concerned the life style of urban people (non-tribal people) has undoubtedly influenced the life style of the Tharu. Tharu are increasingly coming into contact with the outsiders and their social as well as cultural life style. To a great extent the modernizing efforts of development machinery undertaken by the Government in the form of various plans and projects have also contributed towards this kind of change in social and cultural patterns.

The Tharu were away from the modern culture and civilization, but recently the impact of the modern culture and civilization has influenced their life style. Poaching, illegal killing of the wild life and the illegal felling by the contractors created a disturbance in the ecological balance of the area. Quacks are exploiting them. Herbal wealth is also being mercilessly exploited. To protect the land and people of Tarai is the need of the hour.

Agriculture is the main occupation of the Tharu. 85 per cent of the total population is engaged in this occupation. Agriculture being the main source of livelihood of the Tharu, they register more faithfully and accurately the effect of the new agricultural technology. New urges of life learnt by the tribe in its contact with outer world, have awakened naturally in the Tharu’s mind a keenness about improving his agricultural methods.
Tharu have developed expertise and have recently acquired the practical knowledge of soil, plants and other ecological conditions. During the last ten years they have become fully aware with the land management practices and understand the advantage of frequent ploughing heavy manuring, high yield varieties and proper irrigation of the crops. They are knowledgeable about chemical fertilizers, pesticide and insecticide, and improved implements like thrasher, tractor and winnowers, etc.

Religious institutions which were originally superstition-based, fear of the unseen, but are slowly given way to a comparatively more enlightened social and religious style of living. The Tharu are benefiting through their economic contact with outside forces. From the way things are shaping themselves, it is possible to foresee the growth of a socio-religious homogeny of the Tharu with the rest of India. Tharu isolation has broken completely in the wake of the socio-economic transformation which are taking place.

The effect of literacy has also changed the attitude of Tharu towards various social and cultural aspects of life. Developmental and modernizing efforts contributed changes in the socio-economic life of the Tharu. These changes have the Tharu in freeing themselves from traditionalism superstitions and orthodoxy. But at the same time such socio-cultural changes have in some way shorn the Tharu of their innate skills into the natural environment. It is true that contacts with the outside world have given the Tharu' life a new direction and a new urge, but at the same time, it is killing the creative impulses of the tribe and encouraged an economic dependence of alien art. So it is too early to strike a balance between the advantages and disadvantages occurring to the Tharu as a tribe through their contact, with the outer world. A few features may, however, be noted. The well-known herbal treatment of the Tharu has been more or less replaced by modern medicines and drugs manufactured else where ‘Guruas’ who were important figures in
the Tharu social life are losing ground while physicians and medical practitioners are taking their place. Evidently the new system of treatment is costly and some times beyond their means. The weaving industry of the Tharu has suffered some loss, because preference is being given to the imported fabrics on account of fineness and good quality. Similarly metal pots are replacing earthen vessels which used to serve as cooking and water pots earlier.

The pottery trade of the Tharu is under liquidation. The much liked garlands of beads round the neck of Tharu females is slowly disappearing and Tharu women are in favour of wearing ornaments of silver and gold of non-tribal make and design. Due to the contacts with other culture Tharu have not only begun to replace their thatched huts but also have changed their design and structure. In the wake of changed conditions the sheds and pucca houses are replacing the conventional thatched houses. Hand stitching is no longer favoured even by the poor; and ordinary sewing machines have made their appearance even at distant corners. The changes from roughness to fineness, from simplicity to complexity and from primitiveness to civilization, have not stopped the creative impulses of the tribe as a whole. This, however, does not mean that the Tharu should liquidate their identity in a race for modernity. Tharu observe their traditional festivals, cutting short the rites and rituals. Gradually social organizations have lost their charm and attraction to a greater extent. They have developed apathy for their traditional songs, dances and ornaments and in the process they have lost important traits. Thus, Tharu are slowly losing their cultural identity. With diminishing forest resources and rigid forest laws the reliance on forest produce and hunting is reducing. However, hunting is still important feature of Tharu’ life. Hunting and fishing are their favourite pastime and supplementary sources of subsistence. The Tharu’ life and their culture is uniquely inter-woven and integrated with the forest. These natural surroundings are not provided in the new resettlement colonies, which in turn shatter their social, cultural and
physical characteristics. Restrictions imposed upon them from entering into the forest have caused a great concern and is responsible for their anxiety and psychological stress. Finally it can be concluded that the quick changes in geographical environment has created a real hazard to the Tharu by greatly reducing their freedom of movement into the natural environment of their habitat and has thus yielded economical and psychological pressure on them. However, Tharu have undoubtedly adjusted to the opportunities and difficulties of changing milieu. In general, Reddy et.al. (2010 op.cit.) reported that “Development dislocated their life style and has exposed them to a modern life. In the process of their adjustment, they have acquired new ideas some of which have generated maladies in their normal life”. Tharu have raised their standard of living and have paved a fast path for further future planning. But to a great extent it has dual impact on socio-cultural life and traditional occupation of Tharu in regard to immense displacement. Development is not only disturbing their way of life but more or less tending to expose and destroy their natural surroundings, socio-cultural, religious and economic traditions.

The above narrative indicates that the life style of Tharu is radically related to their geographical environment and ecosystem. Therefore, any development programme should be carried out in such a manner that this relationship is not hampered and the Tharu get all opportunities to thrive in their own style. Science and machinery can offer them development without actually killing their creative urge. This would require deep thinking and thoughtful planning.

Though the Constitution of India gives many special social, educational and economic rights to these scheduled tribes, the Tharu are struggling for their rights and cultural protection.