TRIBALS AND SOCIAL CHANGE: EVOLVING A PERSPECTIVE

I

CONCEPTUALIZING TRIBALS

Social formation of India has mainly three components – tribal settlements, villages and towns. It is difficult to draw sharp distinction amongst them because they share some common characteristics. But one thing appears to be true that the tribes have been exploited economically and socially by the non-tribals living in tribal area.

Article 46 of India’s constitution says: “The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Schedule Castes and the Schedule Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.” But there are tribes who have remained outside the schedule list of constitution and form weaker sections of India’s population. The tribes are backward particularly in the fields of education and economy and have been exploited by the dominant sections of Indian society such as landlords, money-lenders and industrialists who have grabbed their lands by various means.

Tribes have generally been defined in India in terms of what they are not. They did not practice a religion with a written text, did not have clear
class divisions, did not have a state or political form of the normal kind and most importantly they did not have caste. The term was introduced in the British period more for the purpose of administrative convenience.

A large number of tribes have been converted to different religions leaving their tribal identity just to get redemption from exploitation and to elevate their status and honour. Sometimes it becomes very difficult to differentiate between a tribal and a caste group. Tribals have a strong sense of their distinctiveness and separate themselves from non-tribals. A large number of tribals in India even today live in hilly and forested areas where population is sparse and without proper communication facilities.

David Mandelbaum(1972) points out that 'In tribal life the principal links for the whole society are based on kinship'. Kinship is not simply a principle of social organization; it is also a principle of inheritance, division of labour and distribution of power and privileges. Mostly tribal societies are small in scale. They possess a morality, religion and world view of their own, corresponding to their social relations.

Sahlins opines that the term ‘tribal society’ should be restricted to ‘segmentary systems’. The segmentary systems have relations on a small scale. They enjoy autonomy and are independent of each other in a given region. On the other hand, castes are ‘organic’ in nature, as each caste is part of an organic whole in terms of Jajmani system, commensality and connubiality. The principle of organic relationship explains inter-dependence of various caste groups upon each other in social life (Quoted from Sharma 1987: 54).

While centring the discussion around tribe–caste continuum there were some scholars who argued for the continuum, saw tribes as not being fundamentally different from caste–peasant society, but merely less stratified with a more community-based rather than individual notion of resource ownership. On
the other hand, opponents argued that tribes were wholly different from castes because they had no notion of purity and pollution which is central to the caste system.

It was later pointed out that the tribe -peasantry distinction did not hold in terms of any of the commonly advanced criteria such as size, means of livelihood, isolation and religion. There are some Indian tribes like Bhils, Gonds and Santhal who are very large and spread over extensive territory. Certain tribes like Munda, Tharus have turned to settle agriculture. There are also instances that castes (non-tribals) have turned to hunting and gathering in absence of other alternatives.

It has also been argued that there is no basis for treating tribes as 'pristine' i.e. original or pure - societies uncontaminated by civilization. The tribes should really be seen as 'secondary' phenomena arising out of exploitative and colonialist contact between pre -existing states and non-state groups like tribals. This contact itself creates an ideology of 'tribalism' – the tribal groups begin to define themselves in order to distinguish themselves from the newly encountered others. 'Tribalism' is the subjective awareness of one’s membership of a tribe. As in any group dynamics, the sense of belonging and security associated with 'we’ group derives strength and vitality from the contrast and the conflict with ‘they’ group.

It needs to be clarified here that tribes were not always the oppressed groups they are now. There were several Gond Kingdoms in Central India such as that of Mandla, Garha or Chanda. Many of the Rajput Kingdoms of Central and Western India actually emerged through a process of stratification among adivasi communities themselves.

*With the process of globalization along with the fast spread of information technology and mass media in the 21st century tribal people have started increasingly participating in a wider, more generalized culture and in*
plural social community. As participation and mobility reduce the degree of social cohesion of the tribe and tribal commitment of the individual, we may observe the fast emerging process of 'de-tribalization'.

It is undeniable and indisputable that forced incorporation of tribal communities into mainstream processes has had its impact on tribal society, its culture as well as on its economy. Interaction with the mainstream has generally been lackadaisical and on terms unfavourable to the tribal communities. That is why many tribal identities today are centred on the ideas of resistance and opposition to the overwhelming force of the non-tribal world.

Another relevant development is the slow but steady emergence of an educated middle class among tribal communities. As tribal societies get more differentiated different bases are developing for the assertion of tribal identity. "A new system of social stratification and mobility is already on its way attacking the entrenched non-tribal exploiters and dehumanizing agencies and institutions. Development, distinct identity and self-respect are being demanded not as compassion but as a right." (Sharma: 2001). Two broad sets of issues have been most important in giving rise to tribal movements: a) Issues relating to control over vital economic resources like land and specially forests and b) issues relating to matters of ethnic-cultural identity.

Assertions of tribal identity are on the rise. This can be due to the emergence of a middle class within the tribal society. With the emergence of this particular class in particular, issues of culture, tradition, livelihood, even control over land and resources, as well as demands of a share in the benefits of the projects of modernity, have become an integral part of the articulation of identity among the tribes. There is, therefore, a new consciousness among tribes now, coming from middle classes. Middle classes themselves are a consequence of modern education and modern occupation, aided in turn by the reservation policies.
It is now clear that the traditional criteria for defining tribes or tribals or tribal society are no longer valid in the context of rapid social change and transformation. "Thus the concept ‘Tribal society’ is a flexible one and the contexts of time and space are important considerations for the understanding of such a concept." (Pfeffer and Behra: 2002)

II

SOCIAL CHANGE: CONCEPTUALIZING CHANGE AS A PROCESS

"Change is the law of nature. In life, every particle and substance, be it electron-small or mountain – big, is continuously changing. Every change leases life to it and every decay gives it a new birth. Society is no exception. The changes we witness today are bound to give way to some new changes hidden in the womb of time" (Bukhari: 2006).

Thus the change is the only unchanging aspect of society and constant change is among the most permanent features of our society. Social change\(^1\) is such a general term that it has been used to refer to almost any kind of change not qualified by some other term. Sociologists and anthropologists have to do a lot of brainstorming to limit the broad and general meaning of social change. It has become necessary to make the term more specific and useful for social theory.

Social change refers to changes that are significant – that is, changes which alter the ‘underlying structure of an object or situation over a period of time’ (Giddens: 2005:42). Thus social change does not refer to any and all changes but only such changes which transform things fundamentally.
Changes have to be both intensive and extensive – have a large and big impact over a large section of society in order to qualify as social change.

The term “change” is considered neutral. This means that the object to which it is applied becomes different with time. Hence in this sense social change suggests no law, no theory, no direction, and no continuity. The idea of continuity is introduced when we refer to social change as a process. A process means a continuous change taking place in a definite manner through operation of forces present from the very beginning within the situation (Sharma:2007). Examples of processes are – communication, socialization, accommodation, integration, disintegration, competition and conflict.

Social change as a process acquires meaning against the background of continuity or lack of change. Change makes sense as a concept only if there are also some things that are not changing. This is because they offer the possibility of comparison or contrast. Thus social change has to be understood together with social order. Social order is the tendency within established social systems that resists and regulates change.

To study a process we observe a series of transitions between one state of being and another. The quality of the two stages of the process may not be the same. Direction also may not be the same. A process may be forward or backward, up or down, towards progress or regressive. Thus process implies movement from one stage to another with a definite direction. Processes are both system-sustaining and system-transforming. Some processes of social change regenerate a given social system for social structure whereas some other may bring about situations of malfunctioning and breakdown. Social processes are a part of social structure we come upon these regularly in system-sustaining and system-changing exercises.
Evolution is the name given to a kind of change that takes place slowly over a long period of time. Both continuity and the direction of change are expressed in evolution. Evolution is more than growth. Growth explains the quantitative aspect of change but does not specify its direction. Evolution involves something more intrinsic, a change not merely in size but in structure also. Evolution is an irreversible process. In contrast to evolutionary change, change that occurs comparatively quickly, even suddenly, is sometimes called ‘revolutionary change’. It has the actual tendency towards fundamental change of the existing social order.

Types of change that are identified by their nature or impact include – structural change and changes in ideas, values and beliefs. Structural change refers to transformations in the structure of society, to its institutions or the rules by which these institutions are run. Changes in values and beliefs can also lead to social change. Changes in the ideas and beliefs about children and childhood have brought about very important kinds of social change.

Since tradition and modernity coexist, continuity and change are empirical or observed facts of social life. Tradition and continuity coexist because all societies need a certain amount of stability and social checks. Modernity and change are required to achieve new levels of knowledge and technical know-how to meet changing demands and challenges. Social tensions and conflicts are also sources of social change.


III

AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The agents of social change in the structure and culture of society can be endogenous and exogenous. There is no single cause or agent of social conflict and change. The following factors have, however been mentioned: Environmental, Technological, Economic, Cultural, Legal & administrative and Political.

Nature, ecology and the physical environment have always had a significant impact on the structure of society. Environment of a particular region, to a large extent, determines the kind of food people eat or clothes they wear, the way they earn their livelihood and pattern of their social interaction. Sudden and catastrophic events can change societies quite drastically. These changes are more or less irreversible. There are many instances of natural disasters leading to a total transformation and sometimes total destruction of society. But environmental or ecological factors may not necessarily be destructive to cause change; they can be constructive as well such as discovery of oil.

Technology has brought about significant changes not only in other countries but also in Indian society. Industrialization and the Green Revolution are two major processes of change in the fields of industry and agriculture. Along with these changes we notice changes in transportation and communication. Information technology, computer, mobile & internet boom have accelerated the process of change. Technology affects society in a wide variety of ways. It can resist, control, adapt to or harness nature in different ways. In combination with very powerful institution of market, technological change can be as impressive in its social impact as natural factors.
The state, as a welfare agency, has played a major change in the development of Indian economy. Traditional systems of land tenure such as zamindari and jagirdari have been abolished. The effects of policies and programmes of economic development of the government have been seen in the form of a new level of social transformation. A new form of unevenness has surfaced up in place of the old one. Caste has changed to adjust itself to the demands of new situations and circumstances. Family, now-a-days, can not remain structurally joint but it has acquired “functional jointness”. The constrains today are such that members of a family cannot generally find jobs at the same place. Thus change in India is more in the form of transformation rather than replacement.

A change in ideas, norms, values, rituals and religious observances have helped transform society, have brought about basic changes in economic and political relations. Max Weber’s study ‘the Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’ (1930) showed how religious beliefs of Protestant helped to establish the capitalist social system. A different example of cultural change leading to social change can be observed in the evolution of ideas about the place of women in society. The economic role of women has introduced a series of changes which can have larger social impact.

The law has played a tremendous role in bringing abut social change in Indian society. Indian society is complex and heterogeneous and law can be instrumental in ensuring homogeneity and assimilation of divergent sections. Law can bring about radical changes in political and economic institutions and help mitigate social evils. But law alone can not serve much purpose. Public opinion is a stronger means of change and media has a major role to play in forming and shaping public opinion. Values can not be changed by law alone.
Political forces have definitely been among the most important causes or agents of social change. Political changes bring about social change through the redistribution of power across different social groups and classes. Universal adult franchise- or the ‘one person, one vote’ principle is perhaps the single biggest change in history. The right to vote in elections from village panchayat to parliament has created a great deal of social and political awakening in India. Universal adult franchise serves as a powerful norm that exerts pressure on every society and every government. And this has brought massive social changes in the society.

Thus we can see that no single factor or agent or theory can account for social change and causes of social change are often interrelated. Economic and technological causes may also have a cultural component. It is important to be aware of the many dimensions of social change and its varied forms. The pace of change in 21st century is much faster than what it used to be before and that is why change has become an important subject specially for sociologists and anthropologists.

Globalization as Agent of Social Change

No talk on social change can be complete in 21st century without reference to Globalization. It points out to the growing interdependence between different peoples, regions and countries of the globe as social and economic relationships come to spread and stretch world wide. Though economic forces or factors are a primary part of globalization but they are not the only to produce it. The development of information and communication technologies has accelerated the speed and scope of interaction between people all over the world. Important advances in technology and world’s telecommunications infrastructure has led to revolutionary changes in global communication. Cyber connectivity had largely remained an urban phenomenon whereas the rural areas with their erratic or no power supply, widespread illiteracy and lack of infrastructure like telephone
connections still remain largely unconnected. Despite digital divide taking place, different forms of technology do facilitate the 'compression' of time and space.

Thus we see that there are many ways that globalization affects culture. Recent years have seen major cultural changes leading to fears that our local cultures would be overtaken. It is now argued that all cultures will become similar or homogeneous. Others are of the view that there is an increasing tendency towards 'glocalization' of culture. Glocalization refers to the mixing of the global with the local. Culture cannot be seen as a fixed or unchanging entity that can either disintegrate or remain the same when encountered with social change. What is more likely in this age of globalization is the creation of not just new local traditions but global ones too.

IV

APPROACHES TO THE TRIBALS: ISOLATION, ASSIMILATION, INTEGRATION AND OTHERS

Tribals in India have always been the source of study for Sociologists and Anthropologists both Indian and foreign. They have been treated differently by different scholars depending upon their individual background, experience and interest. There has always been difference of opinion regarding suitable model for the integration of the tribals to the mainstream of Indian life. To start with, the officers of the census of India, till the year 1931, forcefully stick to the point that the tribals were distinct from non-tribals as far as religion is concerned. They made the point clear that the tribals were animist and the non-tribals were not. G.S. Ghurye(1959) contested this by remarking that the tribals
have never been markedly different from the neighbouring non-tribes. Ghurye theory states that the so called ‘aborigines’ in India share the culture and language of the non-aboriginal Hindu communities of the respective region they live in. This view is shared and supported by the scholars such as Aiyappan(1960), Majumdar(1950) and even K.S.Mathur (1972).

The British government, however, described the tribals as a distinct group, isolated people. It would not be surprising to note that the British government considered the tribals not only an autonomous political unit but also culturally an autonomous entity. During the British period the tribals were brought nearer and closer to the non-tribal society because of the expansion of transport and communication. This led to creating of many administrative problems for the British regime. With regard to problems such as mode of cultivation, transfer of lands, rights to forest exploitation, and preservation of tribal solidarity the Britishers were constrained to frame some laws. The colonial rule, in fact, was forced to come out with a policy resulting from the consequences of the tribal interaction with the non-tribals.

Isolationism is one such approach or model which emerged out of the British view of the tribals. It was oriented towards keeping the tribals in their areas untouched by outside civilization. Advocates of isolationism put forward the argument that societal solidarity of the tribals would be at stake by the tribal contact with the Hindus. All the more, it would pave the way for the import of the Hindu social evils like untouchability, early marriage and purdah.

J.H.Hutton, as quoted by G.S. Ghurye (1959: 150), was mild supporter of isolationism. He clearly pointed out the evils imported upon the tribals by the British rule. To a large extent, O’Malley (1908) also extended his support to the findings of Hutton. He opined that history of the tribal people during their British contact was a somewhat distressing record of the effects of an alien civilization impinging on simple and backward people. It must be noted here
that both Hutton and O’Malley pleaded for the policy isolationism but in lower key.

V. Elwin (1900) has strongly advocated for the policy of isolationism for the tribals. He has very strongly put forward the point that the opening of the tribal areas had spoiled in the long run tribal religion, art, and organization. Nothing sort of absolute isolation would solve the problems of the tribals and even went to the extent of floating the idea of creating protected tribal areas like the “National Parks”.

Elvin’s isolationism was vehemently criticized. Thakkar Bapa (1941), a great social worker, protested against such efforts to isolate the tribals. To keep these people confined to and isolated in their inaccessible hills and jungles was just like keeping them in glass cases of a museum for the curiosity of purely academic persons. Ram Manohar Lohia (1960) reiterated that this policy of treating the tribals just like ‘domestic cattle’ is absolutely shameful, disgraceful and barbaric. Thakker Bapa sharply reacted to the proposal regarding the creation of self-governing tribal areas and pleaded for unity and “assimilation”. Separation and isolation seem to be dangerous theories and they strike at the root of national solidarity.

The assimilation of tribal people with the rest of the population has been a continuous process and for it culture contact with the neighbouring population is held responsible. The tribal people in India have come in contact with different Hindu and other communities and there have been different degrees of culture contact leading to assimilation in different areas. This culture contact has given rise to so many types of tribals and has created a set of different types of tribes on acculturation level. Classification by Ghurye (1959), Majumdar (1947), Dube (1960) reveal that the process of assimilation has been a part of and parcel of the Indian culture.
Obviously there were some conservative bureaucrats and anthropologists who prescribed no change and revivalism for the tribals. They did not concentrate on good that was done to the tribals by their contact with the Hindus despite the bad effects it produced. They observed perfect silence over the ‘Christian Missionaries’ close and uncontrolled contact with tribals, introduction of the Roman script for the tribal dialects, spread of Christian propaganda, migration of thousands of tribals to tea-gardens from their natural surroundings on low wages. On the contrary, they argued that the opening of tribal areas had done immense harm to the primitives and it would be in the interest of tribals that they go back to their pristine primitive glory.

Arrival of Independence signaled the departure of the British rule and hence the post-independence period looked at the tribal problem from an altogether a different perspective. Now the tribals are equal partners in the process of nation-building. If the country as whole has to develop, the tribals cannot be left to their age-old agony and torture. They cannot remain as museum species as there cannot be two futures for the citizens of the same country. The past experiences of the policies of isolation and assimilation and their results forced the thinkers and social reformers to opt for middle path which might be more fruitful. The base of Indian culture i.e. ‘Unity in diversity’ once again got its due importance. Most of the experts on tribal ways of life and administration combined their skills and adopted an integral approach towards tribals.

On the basis of different approaches adopted by the anthropologists such as G.S. Ghurye(1959), N.K.Bose(1929), D.N.Majumdar(1950), V.Elvin(1944), Haimendorf (1960), F.G.Bailey (1960), S.L.Doshi (1978) we can conclude that the tribal problem has been viewed at two levels – structural and conflict. The Structuralists are of the opinion that tribal backwardness is relative and the tribals have been the victims of exploitation. They could be brought in the mainstream structures of the society as independent citizens rather than domesticated subordinates. But those who analyze tribal
society from a special historical sense hold the view that any model for tribal absorption should not be based on caste syndrome instead be based on class lines. Their incorporation in the national mainstream should be viewed within the framework of the means of production and production relations.

Whatever may be the approach towards the tribal problem, one thing must be taken into account that statements of romantic nature of preserving the tribal rich cultural legacy are a far cry today. Expansion of transport, communication and media networks, different government projects to improve the lot of tribals, process of modernization have created awareness among the tribals themselves. Besides tribals, various other groups are struggling for improving their condition. Increase of secessionist and fissiparous tendencies in different parts of the country have placed the problems of tribal population to a new level of acuteness.

British design of approaching the tribals was developed by British anthropologists turned administrators. For them, the tribals were assumed to be unconcerned with the forces of history. The contact of the tribals with the non-tribals during the British period was through government bureaucracy, revenue, forest guards, occasionally teachers and traders and money-lenders. These inroads into tribal life during British period created many problems. But the colonial system ended the relative isolation of the tribal society (Singh, 1985:10).

The most striking feature of colonial system was the breakdown of the communal mode of production and the emergence of private right in land. By and large all major tribes in the 19th century were emerging as a community of peasants. Minor tribes, of course, still dependent upon the forest for food, shelter and occupation.

The colonial system created a demand for money in no-money economies and slowly and gradually the penetration of tribal economy by market
forces. With the market came middlemen, merchants and moneylenders. The concept of diku, baji, and the aliens was the creature of the colonial system.

The colonial system also created divisions in a more or less unstratified tribal society. But this internal differentiation did not lead to a point of complete alienation of one stratum from another. The bonds of kinship and ethnicity inhibited the development of intra-tribe confrontation. It is clearly evident that the tribal society was moving closer to the peasant/ caste system. Sanskritization, the process of upward mobility which had been restricted to a family or a group of persons in the pre-colonial situation took the shape of movement under the colonial impact.

The colonial system bore harshly on tribals who were very simple and sensitive. This led to eruption of revolts more often and far more violently than any other community including peasants in India. Tribal society, thus we see, lost its pristine character. It was transformed by colonialism like other segments of Indian society.

After attaining Independence our national leaders had to confront tribal problems. They emphasized in the debates of Constituent Assembly that the tribals have long suffered from exploitation and subjugation and therefore they need special attention. The government policy of tribal transformation revolves around two important objectives:

(A) Identification and ascertaining of the actual size of the tribal people
(B) When the identification is over, the second objective is to bring the people within the fold of national mainstream – meaning thereby that the tribals could remain outside the mainstream of national life in their private community or group life. The tribals could also carry on their distinct way of life as the Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs are free to follow their traditional way of life. Keeping this objective in mind, it is hoped that tribal assimilation and for that matter the assimilation of diverse groups such as
Muslims, Parsis, Christian will take place automatically. Whenever small tribal groups would come closer through interaction with numerically stronger population, the former would seek their absorption in the latter. But in some areas like North-East, where the tribals have larger population, they may resist assimilation. Despite all these processes of retaining or losing tribal identity, it is in the interest of one and all who are living in the country to fall in the national mainstream.

INTEGRATION MODEL

The model of tribal development and transformation springs from its historical experience and the constitution. Others countries, too, have addressed themselves to the problem of national integration. It would be useful here to go through the experiments made by African countries and United States in this regard. The African problem of integration is different from the American experiment as it involves the consolidation of ex-colonial country into a nation. The problem of the integration of different ethnic-tribal groups in this respect is not an acute one. The American problem of national integration is primarily the incorporation and reservation of different nationalities, races and ethnic groups in the American national culture. Not only in America but in Australia and New Zealand also model of reservation and incorporation are applied to the people.

The American experiment in national integration has gone through different stages. In the American context it is expected of the different racial, national and ethnic groups to sustain their cultural specificity so far as it does not come in the way of the national mould carved out by the constitution and the new tradition. The American problem in some respects is similar to ours.

The major findings of Beyond the Melting Point are that the diverse American ethnic groups, in the process of integration, are likely to develop distinctive economic and political and cultural patterns within the
American national mould due to their specific historical experiences and their cultures and skills. Loyalty for one’s primordial group idioms is so deep rooted that adoption of a totally new ethnic identity is difficult.

We can find some parallels in the American experiment and experience, and tribal policy decided after Independence in India. Jawaharlal Nehru’s philosophy and vision helped much in shaping the tribal policy, particularly in the North-East. He avoided the extreme of two standpoints:

a) The Anthropological approach which wanted to treat the tribals as museum specimens to be kept apart, for study and observation.

b) The approach which sought to destroy the individuality of the tribes, distorts the process of their development, and absorbs them in a culture and way of life that was alien to them.

“It is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority or to tell them what to do or not to do. There is no point in trying to make them a second-rate copy of ourselves.” This has been quoted in ‘Jawaharlal Nehru, Tribals and Transformation’, Seminar on Nehru and Village. (Singh: 1980)

Therefore, while tribal identity should be preserved, tribals should develop in their own way without let or hindrance. The Nehru era laid the foundation of tribal policy. It still provides the sheet anchor of India’s tribal policy though in recent years there has been considerable broadening and deepening of the structure of tribal policy despite many shortcomings.

Integration must be sharply differentiated from assimilation which means complete loss of cultural identity for the weaker groups. Each group must be able to uphold its cultural heritage with dignity and sense of achievement. Integration is a dynamic and continuing process which necessarily involves give-and-take by the various sections of the national community…… this process could never be complete. This statement is very much relevant today and it will
remain in the days to come because it has a ring of eternal truth in it which is based on humanitarian outlook and humanism.

Thus we see that integration is used to mean meeting together of divergent cultures without loss of identity and individuality. Integration has different aspects - political, social, psychological and economic. It is a constellation of different values, idioms, norms and a network of social and moral institutions. Without entering into controversy regarding the scientific meaning of the term integration, we could safely say that integration is both a condition and a process. In the Indian context the condition is determined by the country’s constitution and policy documents. The process through which the conditions are attained include modernization, industrialization, education and state mechanisms such as legislation, planning and policy approaches.

Tracing the conceptual history of the discourse on development T.K.Oommen (2004) locates the ‘cognitive blackouts’ common to all the approaches to development namely, disparity, displacement, distress and discrimination and to remedy this deficit we need to put development pluralism on the agenda. Development is intended to address deprivation. Paradoxically the ongoing process of ‘development’ not only deepened but also widened deprivation and it is true particularly in the case of tribals.

Development implies, according to Anil Kumar Singh (1994), creating conditions in a given society for wholesome living of its members. Logically it stands for the rise in the standard of living of the weaker sections, greater participation in the affairs of the larger society and the state, freedom from poverty, unconstrained development of individual’s among the various constituents of the social fabric. The purpose of development is to provide increasing opportunities to all people for better life (Mehta: 2006). Central governments and the various state governments have launched a number of
schemes for the overall upliftment of the tribals but in reality achievement has been very unsatisfactory and the desired results have not been achieved yet.

Kakali Paul (2004) expresses concern that despite the statutory provisions made in the Indian constitution and series of planned programmes, the problem of tribal development still remain unsolved, sometimes more complicated and controversial. Meenakshi Hooja (2004) analyses the changes in approaches, strategies, and schemes for tribal development in India. Nishakar Panada (2006) has traced successive shifts in tribal development policies and strategies at different point of time. A thumbnail picture has been presented on impact of the programmes through case studies conducted in a remote district of a poverty ridden state. The results of the field study tend to conceptualize that despite input in terms of money and material and so called coveted efforts and endeavors of public servants, there is an abysmal mismatch between objectives and achievements. We are still far away from the point of their conscientization.

Hansa Jain (2004) says that the change in any society is a complex phenomenon and it is more complex among the schedule tribes who are the victims of backwardness. On the basis of the regional differences, the study highlights the causes of the poor development of the schedule tribes of Rajasthan according to which there is need to reformulate the development policies, so that the positive change could be recognized and the goal of balanced development of the country could be fulfilled.

G.P.Gupta and Usha Singh (2007), in their study, have come out with the conclusion that the long process of interaction between man and environment has resulted in changing tribal landscape during various stages of development. The strategy for tribal development has to take into account the changing character of tribal areas. The tribal societies in India are in a continuous process of flux and change in the wake of modernization.
While the conditions of the tribes have improved over the years, their situation vis-a-vis the rest of the population may have even worsened on various counts of development. India's economic reforms and their policies on tribal development recognize that majority of the Schedule Tribes people are living below the poverty line, have poor literacy rates, suffer from malnutrition, diseases and vulnerable to displacement. The main objective of the policies is to facilitate the overall development and welfare of the tribal people (Komaraiah: 2008).

"Trapped in Poverty" is an interesting research for more ways than one. It goes beyond the all-too-familiar statistical exercises. It provides a ground level view of the poor with the help of a well-designed field investigation. It builds on existing concepts and research in recognizing the heterogeneity and differentiation among the poor and also the presence of non-poor even in remote and backward rural communities. Without this recognition, it is easy to underestimate the barriers confronting the change agents intervening in poor communities from outside, particularly those with urban background and who belong to the developed world. Even genuine concern for the poor and the deep sense of commitment for their welfare, by themselves, would be of little help to the development interveners unless they equip themselves with an adequate understanding of the dynamics of stagnation and change in the communities they wish to help. Trapped in Poverty is a good illustration of how to go about to obtain a mapping of the rural context for checking the relevance and usefulness of the development strategy and the benefits it could confer on the poor. (Sah and Bhatt: 2008)

Phase after Independence witnessed on the one hand the incorporation of the provisions for the safeguard of the tribes in the Indian constitution and on the other the decolonization of the political system, including the dismantling of the system of protection of tribes at some places. Influx of non-tribals in search of land and employment went up, and the process of the tribal's
gradual loss of control over their environment and resources continued. Thus while the tribes participate in democracy, control the apparatus of political power in some states and influence policies and programmes in few others, large sections of them are still engaged, as their wide-ranging movements reveal, like other sections of our people in the struggle to achieve the objective of "growth with equity".

V

TRIBALS AND THEIR ENGAGEMENT WITH CHANGE: IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE

Study of social change in India started only in the fifties of 20th century. Undoubtedly there was passing reference to changing scene in all the monographs, but focus on change was absent in most of the sociological and anthropological studies.

D. N. Majumdar (1937) was the first Indian anthropologist to concentrate attention on change in his study of the Ho in transition. He mainly dealt with the problem of culture contact under the inspiration of Malinowski.

It would be very interesting at this stage to make a distinction between the African and the Indian scene because it has a direct bearing on social change studies on tribes. We can always identify the "zero point" of culture change in Africa from which most anthropologists trace their theories of social change. Those tribal communities were living in almost complete isolation and their contact with whites can be definitely dated. But in India the scene is
completely different. Most of the tribes have been in contact with other populations since time immemorial. In some cases, the contact has been very intimate. It is practically not possible to specify the zero point of culture change. It is also not easy to say definitely which culture traits were taken by the tribals from no-tribals and vice-versa. It is for this reason, more attention is paid to the historical approach to the study of social change in such societies. Use of historical available data/materials may be of very much use and may clear the cloud of many of the anthropological mysteries.

While commenting on relationship between Anthropology and History E.E. Evans Pritchard (1961) forward his view in the following words:

So, I may as well oblige my critics by confessing that I can see no vital difference between sociological history and what social anthropologists like to call social dynamics or diachronic sociology or the study of social change or processual (sic) analysis. Indeed, in a broad sense, I would say that social anthropology and history are both branches of social science or social studies and that consequently there is an overlap of relevance between them and each can learn much from other..., anthropology must choose between being history and being nothing, history must choose between being social anthropology or being nothing.”

The impact of Hindu society on tribal culture has immensely attracted the attention of Indian social anthropologists. As Hindus are dominant in larger society except for North-Eastern region, emulation of lifestyles and thinking process carried with it great amount of prestige. Consciously or unconsciously, tribal people began to imbibe Hindu ideas and observe festivals and worship some Hindu gods. In certain areas, a social stratification system resembling those of Hindu caste system evolved. This effort at social climbing has been studied by different scholars in many parts of India Srinivas(1966) conceptualized this process and gave the name ‘Sanskritization’.

This phenomenon has been viewed by some scholars in tribe-caste continuum. Both tribe and caste cannot be taken as exclusive categories for the dichotomous
division of all Indian communities. F.G. Bailey (1960, 1961) and S.Sinha (1965) think in terms of two different poles joined by a scale on which different communities may be placed at different points according to their socio-cultural characteristics. Both of them, of course use different parameters. Bailey, expanding or concentrating on his Orissa experience of Khond and the Oriya castes in the politico-economic field feels that sociologists must view communities as structures or as institutional complexes. Both tribal and caste alternatives coexist as choices in a given situation.

Surajit Sinha tried to use Bailey's model to Kharia and Pahera tribes in Bihar but it did not come out satisfactorily. Sachchidanand (1970) in his study of the Gond in Bihar has demonstrated how parts of the same tribe are at different points in the tribe-caste continuum. While some groups claim Kshatriya status, others are satisfied to get the status of some lower Hindu castes. The life of the Gond in Saran and Champaran is marked by heterogeneity, multi-ethnic residence and participation along with other communities in an economy involving specialization. In some areas we also find the emergence of the elite and notions of social stratification. While their brethren in Ranchi, Palamau and Singhbhum are nearer the tribal pole, they have become part of society as a caste. R.P.Srivastava (1966) deals with the same problem of tribe-caste mobility basing his data from Bhotia in Uttar Pradesh.

The process of acculturation of the tribal is not new. In many cases it has led to the gradual assimilation of entire tribes in the Hindu fold. On the basis of ethnographic evidence collected from different areas Ghurye (1943) says that some of the tribes are so Hinduized that they have assimilated as different castes at different levels. The names of some of the recent day castes and sub-castes betray tribal origin (Ghurye: 1932).

K.N.Sahay (1964) identifies five cultural processes e.g. Oscillation, Scrutinization, Combination, Indigenization and Retroversion in his
study of the impact of Christianity on the Oraon of the Chainpur area in Ranchi. He describes how initially the stable culture of converts becomes unstable and finally gains equilibrium as succeeding generations blend new ideas with the old, rationalizing and adapting the old beliefs and practices to the changed situation.

In village round about Shantiniketan, Datta-Majumdar (1956) has studied acculturation of the Santal. He examines the forms and processes of culture change as a result of their contact with Hindus, Muslims and the Christian missionaries. He tries to identify the different factors of change at the end. He proposes three generalizations for an acculturative situation:

a) When the pressure is direct, the aboriginal pattern gives way to radical changes
b) When the pressure is direct but not overwhelming it tends to retain its character
c) When the pressure is indirect none of the important changes occur.

D.P. Sinha (1968) studied culture change in the hinterland of a tribal weekly market. Focus of this study was Banari market at the foot of the Netarhat hills. It acts as a centre of diffusion for ideas and artifacts in the entire region. The middlemen known as the ‘Pharia’ act as a link between tribal and their non-tribal customers. This is the first time that the role of a market in social change has been analyzed.

D.N. Majumdar (1967) made an intensive study of culture change in two Garo villages. In another study (1970) of change in the family pattern of the Garo, he finds that Christianity has not brought any change in their family pattern, though it has profoundly affected or influenced other aspects of their life. Instability of the joint family and other changes are apparent to an equal extent in Christian and non-Christian families. The urban family pattern is gradually emerging as a model for the educated and well-to-do families.
While considering the studies of change in the life of tribals through contact with non-tribals and other agencies, some anthropologists talk of loss of nerve, others of detribalization. Both these concepts have a ring of nostalgia and bring to mind the depths of degradation to which the tribals have been subjected to, due to the impact of modern forces.

Many writers have emphasized the totality of the process of modernization in different spheres of life. In these writings the belief that tradition and modernity are bipolar opposites is implied. But empirical evidence has clearly shown that no society is completely modern or completely traditional. Social processes are not so simple as to be accommodated in this dichotomy. The process of modernization is not necessarily inimical to tradition. In some situations they may even lead to the strengthening of traditional structures (Horowitz: 1966). Bellah (1964) has discovered that modernization did not bring in its wake a conflict between religious and scientific values. Both continued to exist in a changed form.

Sachchidanand (1969) has shown how Indian genius can operate at the same time in the traditional world and in the modern world characterized by universalism, rationality and secularism. In the socio-economic institutions of resent day India many of the traditional values, beliefs and skills are united with features of modernized economic system. Traditional structures always adapt themselves to new situations. Studies in India, Indonesia and Japan have revealed numerous cases and ways in which cultural traditions, rather than posing recalcitrant obstacles to modernity, have directly promoted and encouraged various forms of modernization.

Hari Mohan (1973) has studied the Chero – an important but neglected tribe in the district of Palamau. Chero enjoyed great political power in the entire neighbourhood a couple of centuries ago. At the present, they have not only lost their authority but have been subjected to miserable poverty also. They
have been divided into two sections which exist at two different levels of socio-cultural integration. The advanced among the Chero have adopted tremendously Hindu norms, beliefs and practices.

R.N.Pareek (1977) has dealt with in detail the culture of the Jatapu living in the Eastern Ghats in villages near Andhra-Orissa border. He has enumerated the economic exploitation to which the Jatapus are subjected by outsiders and seeds of protest that are germinating in the area.

Prashun Chandra Saikia (1976) has studied the Dibongiya, a priestly community of Assam and has concentrated on the social and religious life of the people alone. The Dibongiya have preserved to a great extent, their traditional tribal socio-cultural beliefs, practices and language. The author has made an attempt to find out how a community maintains its identity and why the people still stick to the tribal ways.

Dipali Panda (1978) has dealt with the Dimasa of Assam who are one of the Kachari tribes. The increasing role played by the district council and the local market have brought the Dimasa into contact with the outside world. Its impact has been far from happy as the tribals have been exposed to exploitation. The author feels that the Dimasa, particularly their youth do not feel any problem of adjustment to changing conditions. However they have full faith in the basic values of Dimasa life and culture.

Furer-Haimendorf (1979), in his book, “The Gonds of Andhra Pradesh” has come out with the conclusion that the traditional pattern of Gond life has been completely upset by the invasion of non-tribal settlers in their area. The result is that the majority of the tribals have lost their land and have been reduced to the status of a disadvantaged minority in a region where only a generation ago they had been the sole population. The elected leaders of the tribals are unable to stem the tide of the loss of land and consequent pauperization.
J.K. Doshi (1974) describes in detail social structure and cultural change in a Bhil village. Changes have accelerated after Independence with the improvement in communication channels and state intervention on account of welfare programmes. The introduction of democratic institutions has also made possible the greater participation of the people in national life. However, all innovations are not compatible with their cultural values. The disinterested approach of change agents has done little to clear the pitfalls form the path of change.

R.K. Prasad (1975) studied some aspects of stratification among the Parahiya of Palamau. They have developed a caste-like social stratification because of long-standing interaction with the Hindus. Ghanshyam Shah (1976) has analyzed stratification among the tribes of Bharuch and Panchmahals of Gujarat. Tribal society has ceased to be homogenous and egalitarian. There are rich, medium and poor tribal peasants depending upon the extent of the ownership of land. Elites among them take advantage of the government grants and subsidies. The condition of poor peasantry has deteriorated.

Social stratification is a very sensitive field of study. The traditional patterns, dimensions and processes of social stratification have changed in the modern times due to forces of modernization including democracy and capitalism. The same is true about tribal society. What is particular about the tribal people is that they have been given certain constitutional safeguards, which lead them to the road of development. The constitutional provisions prove a strong force for bringing about transformation among the tribals. The changes take place among the Mina and Bhil are partly due to incompatibility of their traditional system and partly due to the impingement of the modern forces on the tribal society. (Sharma: 2004)

L.P. Vidyarthi (1978) has dealt with various dimensions of tribal leadership in Bihar. It is a study of traditional, transitional and emerging patterns of tribal leadership. Traditional leadership is under stress as a result of the forces of
change and development and also owing to its ineffective articulation at the state and national levels.

K. Viswanadha Reddy (2006) in his study of Toddy-Tappers in Andhra Pradesh deals with the patterns and processes of change and continuity, taking place among the Idiga. This community has the monopoly over the occupation of tapping palm trees and also of selling fermented juice. The Idiga have rehabilitated themselves as agricultural labourers after the introduction of prohibition of sale of liquor by the government. The recent relaxation of prohibition laws and the permission to sell sweet ‘toddy’ (nira) has made few of them to return to their traditional occupation of toddy-tapping. However, many of them who had white-collar jobs and petty business establishments have stayed away from their traditional occupation. The modern forces of change have affected their socio-economic and politico-religious life. They have sanskritized their ways of life too. They are associated with little and great traditional religious practices. Changes in their value system and outlook on life was also observed.

Thomas Vattoth SDB (2008) in his study of one of the most primitive tribes- the Wanchos of Arunachal Pradesh, points out that while the world took gigantic steps in the field of science and technology, this part of the world remained quite unaware of it and kept up their life-style. The world did not know them fully and they did not know the world and seemed to have not cared about it. It was only towards the end of the 20th century that the need for change was felt among them.

J. Longkumar (2009) has done sociological inquiry of Ao-Nagas in Nagaland where he gives insights into institutional arrangement in the villages and how it functions to keep the village running smoothly in spite of conflicts arising internally and externally. Despite changes occurring in every sphere of life, the kinship patterns and the mechanisms of traditional governance remain unchanged and this forms the basis of social identity.
Conflict and tension is quite evident in many of the tribal areas of the country. It is due to the resistance of the tribals to the new influences and the exploitative forces which have gained ascendancy in their homeland.

Crisis of confidence among the tribal people has been plagued with land alienation. The moneylenders have been charging exorbitant rates of interest. Government legislation preventing transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals has ended in fiasco. It was due to inept handling of the situation by the government officials. People think that the government is playing hand in glove with the non-tribal exploiters. All these cleared the way for the Naxalite explosion in that area. G.V.S.D’ Silva (1979) details about the process of organization of Bhumi Sena in the jungles of Thane district of Maharashtra. The Sena has been organizing the tribals into a powerful force to confront non-tribals exploiters. The Sena does not encourage any outside interference and is concentrating on mobilizing the people so that they can be self-reliant. The bonded labour system has almost disappeared and struggle for minimum wages has yielded good result. The fear of moneylender has disappeared. A feeling of self awareness and solidarity has grown among the tribal in this area.

Problems of tribal identity have attracted the attention of very few scholars. The tribal identity is emerging as one of the greatest problem of tribals. M.K.Gautam (1977) has focused attention on ‘identity’ among the Santhal. He discerns an intense political awakening in the area. The spiraling prices, corrupt practices and favouritism and nepotism indulged in by block officials have compelled the Santhal to rethink and redefine their status and position in relation to the neighbouring Dikus. They are keenly interested in maintaining a distinctive identity of their own. They have turned down the Hindu Model of hierarchy and caste ideology and emphasized the need of their own tradition and customs. They are also keen on developing a script of their own.
R.K. Das (1971) describes some revivalistic movements among the tribes of Manipur. Many of these tribes tried to maintain their own distinctive identity. The process of modernization has created such a condition that the tribal people find it difficult to cope with. They want to take advantage of modern influence to the fullest but find no suitable substitutes for the basic values and goals of their traditional culture.

In spite of conscious involvement of the tribes in adopting many cultural traits of the neighbouring larger caste ridden society, they, however do not totally forgo their tribal identity. There is an urge of the tribes of India to project themselves as one of the components of the local/regional culture, through acceptance of many elements of cultural traits of the neighbouring communities, modification of some of their own traditional cultural contents or even by dropping a few items of their age-old tradition, which pose some constraints towards their induction in the neighbouring culture as its essential components. (Sarkar & Chakraborty: 2003).

Tribes and their cultures have been a stimulant for many, particularly for their rich cultural heritage and unique style of living. The colonial construction, which gave rise to an ethnocentric and isolated concept of tribes does not hold good today. Today the impacts of modernization, development and globalization on the tribes have assumed great significance. Besides, a pro-tribal or a pro-administration approach will not be fruitful, a sociological/social anthropological approach of objectivity, which not only removes observance of only noticeable phenomena but also understands the internal structure, is very important today. Sukant K. Chaudhury (2004), in his study, provides a thorough and detailed understanding of a tribal community – Kondh of Orissa. The Kondhs, who have been confronting with the forces of change, are now in a transitional state. The traditional Kondh social structure still continues but people have always kept choices and alternatives to make changes. Today, job opportunities outside the villages have changed the scenario. State-sponsored development
programmes, neighbouring caste–Hindu community’s influence, and forces of Christianity and Hinduism etc. have been raising issues of identity and ethnicity among them. All these situations have made the Kondh society more dynamic than what it was earlier.

Ramnika Gupta (2007) addresses some important issues concerning tribals in India. Presenting the meanings of freedom from the tribal perspective, it records struggles for freedom, and highlights the emergence of consciousness in Adivasi writings. It further extends discussion on the problematic of tribal identity, the problem of language identity in tribal areas. Should the near-unquestioned ideal of equality, globalization and communication boom necessarily create the ground for greater and greater cultural homogeneity? T.K.Oommen (2002) argues for ‘pluralism’ – a positive value-orientation to cultural heterogeneity, in keeping with the spirit of democracy. Oommen recognizes that modernity has created sharp cleavages; that, in fact, not homogeneity but a more restless, intolerant heterogeneity is emerging. He explores the importance of identity-conferring differences, and primordial allegiances that are often recalcitrant. “The cultural identity problem is considered to occur when cultural change is so drastic as to destroy the sense of continuity” (Ito Youchi: 1988).

Therefore there is need to enrich and protect local and regional cultural values, practices and identities in the process of the cultural exposure to mega-institution of mass communication and marketization. “Emphasis on plurality, identity and continuity is essential not only for a healthy direction and quality of cultural developments in India but also for its most effective role in bringing about social change in our society” (Singh: 2000).

Tribal policy of the government always directed towards encouraging their autonomous growth with protection to their local culture. “To protect their rights in land and forest resources etc. there have been two types of
legislation. One is protective, intended to prevent non-tribals from acquiring tribal land and the other deals with the question of land reforms” (Mehta: 1996). These laws prohibit outsiders from purchasing their property and to settle down on their land by purchasing estate which is their preserve. There is an inner line protection policy in the form of Inner Line Permit as in the case of Sikkim that protects tribal from intrusion by outsiders from other states or the foreigners (Kumar: 2002). Tribals also enjoy privileges in running their own educational, cultural and social institutions.

But these measures have been less successful as maintaining the autonomy of the tribal local cultures. Government may come and government may go, irrespective of the parties, but the exploitation of the tribal has ceaselessly continued in one form or the other. There is evidence that outside entrepreneurs, traders, influential people even government officials have succeeded in alienating the land and natural resources meant for the tribal by surreptitious and fraudulent means. Consequently the educational standard, economic status and political empowerment of the tribal communities have remained very low in most regions of the country.

There is other side of the picture also. As the functioning of the democratic forces has become stronger, a resentful local leadership has surfaced up among these communities. This local leadership has spearheaded or sponsored movements either for a separate state or political autonomy or even separation from nation (T.K. Oommen: 1997). Formation of states such as Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Uttaranchal (Later Uttarakhand) was the result of tribal movements. The identity of the local cultures has been sometimes at stake either by the market forces or predatory classes or an activist-state. Nevertheless it is observed that the preservation of the identity of local cultures including that of tribal has been possible by the strength of the democratic processes or forces. The role of NGOs has been very important in this process.
By 73rd constitutional amendment, a policy of decentralization of power to the village panchayat has been enacted. It empowers the village communities and gives them autonomy in many areas of economic, social and cultural development, and administration. One of the north-eastern states Nagaland is unique in this respect. “Each village of Nagaland is an epitome of ancient Greek City states and no wonder Nagaland is sometimes described as conglomeration of ‘Village Republics’... Every village has a strong traditional village council. Now ... Communitization under which the government development institutions are being handed over to the village community” (Kumar: 2003/2006). The root of change (in Nagaland) lies in the communitization or the handing over the ownership and management of several government institutions in key areas like education, health, water, electricity, tourism and conservation of bio-diversity. Involving the community so closely has knit them together. There is a sense of accountability and growing perception on the significance of this move within the community (Jain: 2009).

Local cultures such as those of tribals cannot remain uninfluenced by the process of globalization, market economy and powers of media or information technology revolution. They are bound to experience pressures leading to some degree of acceleration towards homogenization of cultural forms and activities. Consequences of the process of globalization may be progressive or developmental provided disintegrative tendencies generated by these forces are minimized.

But this task may not be impossible to accomplish. There are several reasons for this. First, the social structure and cultural system in India are intrinsically based on pluralism and diversity. To quote M.N.Srinivas (1996) “Indian culture is characterized by enormous diversity”. This provides tremendous cultural resilience to communities including local cultures particularly tribes in India to filter the effects of globalization through refractory and prismatic adaptations.
The second source of resilience to local cultures is institution of democracy. Indians have by tradition enjoyed the power of cultural autonomy. It has been observed that the people respond to any movement towards modernization taken by state in India with an enhanced sense of self-consciousness and awareness of identity. "Cultural modernization sponsored by forces of globalization is resented if it encroaches upon or does not promote the core cultural values of society, its language, social practices and styles of life" (Singh:2000).

The changes in traditional cultural practices and institutions are closely related to the process of urbanization, patterns of migration, politicization of tribal community, relationship in villages and rapid pace of growth and expansion of the electronic media of information and entertainment throughout the country, and road/rail connectivity. In his first Republic Day eve address to the nation the then President Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam (The Times of India, 26th January, 2003) outlined the challenges of India's march towards development and set out a roadmap for the country to follow to achieve its goal of rooting out illiteracy, poverty and disease. He called for the launch of a 'mega mission' to provide urban amenities to rural areas. This would require connectivity at various levels—"Physical Connectivity" by provision of roads in rural areas, 'Electronic Connectivity' through reliable communication network, and 'Knowledge Connectivity' by establishing more professional institutions and vocational training centres. These changes are also related to the transformation of economy. The process of democratization and politicization of people and their social institutions have brought about some major changes in the traditional culture.

A significant consequence of politicization in India is acute self-consciousness and celebration of identity by castes, tribes, ethnic groups and minorities. This change has broken down the traditional bonds of reciprocity and linkages of culture and economy among different ethnic groups. Instead each ethnic group
prefers to establish solidarity within its own fold and seek to achieve its social, economic and cultural objectives by constituting different associations and organizations.

We may witness many new dimensions of cultural change in the process of globalization but responses to changes remain within the discourse of modernity. The role of rationality dominates most discourses or discussion on modernity. *But role of rationality has not replaced significance of the supra-rational ways of defining normative issues.* There is universal and pervasive urge among people particularly the tribes to legitimize their identity through celebration and re-invention of tradition. *The role of myth and the mythic mode of normative legitimization is being continually revived and celebrated.*

**VI**

*THARUS OVER THE YEARS: BRIEF HISTORY, ORIGIN AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION*

*DEMYSTIFYING THE ORIGIN OF THE THARUS*

There has been lot of debate and discussion on the origin of Tharus and hardly do we find any convergence of opinion. Different scholars have expressed conflicting views on the subject. Most of them tried to trace the origin of the Tharus to various etymological resources. Many examples can be cited to
prove this. “Tarhuwa” means, “became wet”, referring to the marshy nature of the region. “Thartharana” indicates “trembling or quaking during flight from Hastinapur to the Tarai after an intense battle between the Rajputs and the Muslims. “Tahre” meaning thereby that ‘They halted after their alleged flight into the tarai jungle’. One author refers the Tharus to the word “Athawaru” which means ‘an eight day serf’ – a man who is bound to give his lord one day’s free labour while the other traces the origin of the Tharus to the word Tharua of hill dialect – meaning paddler. But J.C. Nesfield (1885) does not accept this source. According to him the Tharus are traditionally indolent, are averse to service and are incapable for sustained field labour and hence they could never be serfs to any landlord.

W.Crooke (1896) is of the view that the origin of the Tharus can be traced to the word “Tharu” signifying a ‘wine bibber’. It is believed that this name has been given to the Tharus by one of the Khastriya Rajas of the plains seeing the Tharu’s thrust and capacity for drinking wine. Nesfield on the other hand traces the origin to the word ‘Thar’ which in the local dialect of the local classes means ‘a man of the forest’. He says that this is more suitably applicable to these people because it describes the status of the tribe. In Champaran District Gazetteer (1938) we find the reference about the origin of the Tharus as follows:

“ It seems possible that they are the people mentioned by Alberuni in 1030 as living in Tilwat a country bordering on Nepal the inhabitants of which were called “Taru a people of very black colour and flat-nosed like the Turhas.”

Dr Buchnan throws another idea when he refers to the expulsion of the Gurkhas from Magadh by a people called Tharu. These are believed to have come down from the hills and spread over every part of the North of the Ghagra river. But this idea also is shrouded in controversy because the Tharus themselves trace Chittor as their original home and to have descended of Sisodiya clan of the Rajputs. They claim that they were driven out probably in the third siege of Chittor by Akbar in 1567 AD and originally they were Rajputs who lost caste by using intoxicating liquor and rearing fowls.
But both H.H. Risley (1892) and John Nesfield (1885) had rejected the claim of the Tharus as originally migrated from Rajputana into the Tarai. They had indicated that the Tharus were essentially an aboriginal tribe and this tribe was slowly pushed out from Sub-Himalayan forests by the Aryan community and made scattered settlements in the border areas of India and Nepal.

The theory of the infiltration of the Tharus from Rajputana does not find support from Shri Rahul Sankrityayan. He opines that a stay of four to five hundred years in Champaran district could not have vanished the other tribe whose daughters they claim to have married and the localized Magadhi, the spoken language of the Tharus could not have been the result of only a few hundred years of fruition. (Bihar District Gazetteers Champaran: 1960)

The opinion of H.R. Nevill (1904) is somewhat different from other opinions. He says that the Tharus are an aboriginal race who traced their royal descent on the female side. He puts forward an interesting story that ‘once upon a time in the remote past when the king of these parts was defeated by the forces of an invader, the women of the royal palace rather than fall into the hands of foe fled into the jungles with the Saises and chamars belonging to the place. From these sprang the two indigenous races of the Tharus and Bhuksas, the former is said to have descended from the chamar and the latter from the Saises.’

John Nesfield strongly expresses his view that ‘it is safer to consider the name derived from the dialect of the tribe itself rather than search for it in the Hindi etymology because an aboriginal name underived from any Sanskrit or neo-Sanskrit source is the fit appellative of an aboriginal, casteless and un-Brahmanised tribe whose customs have been only slightly modified by contact with those of Aryan invader.’

Like the origin of the Tharus their racial affinities also is shrouded in controversy. Different scholars have expressed different views. But on the basis of evidence available it can be safely said that the Tharus are a mixed tribe. There
is difference of opinion among the authors regarding this admixture also. At least four of them Cooke, Nesfield, Risley and Knowles stick to the view that the Tharus have developed Mongolian features through their marriage alliance with Nepalese and other hill tribes. This can be evidently found in their slanting eyes and high cheekbones. But Cooke and Nesfield do not agree on two points:
A. Nesfield is of the view that the Tharus very much resemble the Indians in other physical features as for example, stature, build and gait. This is because they have long wavy hair almost dark black complexion and as much hair on the face and body as is found with other natives of India.
B. Crooke, on the other hand, to their Dravidian origin traces the Non-Mongoloid features of the Tharus.
Observations rather than anthropometric or blood group evidence were the basis for all these studies. For the first time, Dr D.N. Majumdar took initiative in this direction and carried out an anthropometric and blood group survey among the Tharus. This formed the subject of a report by Majumdar, Mahalanobis and Rao (1949). They put to rest all these controversies and differences of opinions with regard to the racial affinities and race mixture among the Tharus. They have come to the conclusion that the Tharus are definitely a Mongoloid tribe.
Dr D.N. Majumdar (1942) in his article ‘The Tharus and Their Blood Group’ has repudiated the supposed Rajput origin of the Tharus. He comes to the conclusion on the basis of blood group tests carried out by him in connection with the census operations of the United Provinces, 1941 as given under:

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<td>Tharu Males &amp; Females</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>27.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tharu Females</td>
<td>082</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>42.7</td>
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On the basis of serology, the Theory of Rajput origin of the Tharus cannot be explained. The chamars do not possess a Mongolian cast of face and Rajputs do not have epicanthic folds in their eyes, though the Tharus have both.

Thus, on the basis of above-mentioned evidence we can safely conclude that the Tharus are a Mongoloid people, if totally no, predominantly yes. During long process of interaction, they might have successfully assimilated non-Mongoloid physical features as well and that is why while tracing their racial affinities authors have to face tremendous problems.

Ramanand Prasad Singh (1988), Ex-Attorney General of Nepal, is well-learned man and has done intensive and extensive research on the Tharus of Nepal. Himself a Tharu, he has tried to prove that the Tharus are of the Nepalese origin. They originated in and around Kapilvastu and are to-day to be found all over Nepal Tarai and many border lying districts of India ranging from border of Uttar Pradesh to the border of Bengal. Controversies about the origin of the Tharus have made them appear as a mysterious community. It would be very useful and illuminating to quote from what is said at a press conference in Patna on May the 17th 1988. The purpose of the press conference, according to him, was to expose some of the non-senses that have been created around the Tharu community and to bring to light facts in history that tell us the real story about the origin and development of that community.

R.P. Singh goes on to say that the fanciful, unfounded, maligned and false story about the Tharus community has done much damage to the community’s growth and progress which both the Government of India and Nepal have in view. Recurrent is the themes about the origin of the name ‘Tharu’ from the ‘Thar Desert’. Many write, as we have seen earlier, without any substantial evidence, have put forward their proposition that Tharus migrated from the Thar
desert in the 13th to 15th century and therefore, they began to call them the Tharus. To this story they attempt to lend credence by mentioning the immigrants of Rajput women from Chitour Garha in Rajasthan during the Muslim and Mughal periods. They did flee Rajasthan during the sack of Chitour by Allauddin Khilji and Emperor Akbar. One story says that Jaimal and Fabha decidedly great names in the annals of Rajasthan were killed by Akbar’s forces and the women of their race fled to the jungles of Nepal and sons and daughters produced by their marriage with their carriers and servants are the ‘Tharus’.

Some ignorant and crafty Tharus have indeed tried to cash in on this theory by saying that they came from Rajasthan due to Muslim atrocities perpetrated over them and began their life afresh in the new land bereft of their sacred thread, because they adopted agriculture as their main profession and not warfare as true Rajput did in those days. Some so called writers who came forward as socio-anthropologists have supported this theory thus: Tharus came from Rajasthan and the thesis that they are the sons and daughters of the fleeing Rajput women who married their servants who came with them. Another theory, similar in nature is that the Tharus are descendents of the Bhills of Rajasthan who accompanied their Rajput mistresses and came to Nepal Tarai during the middle ages. In support of these it is said that Bhills’ colour and customs resemble Tharus’ complexion and some of their customs.

R.P. Singh has categorically rejected these theories about the Tharu origin and says that what we find in history is altogether different. On the basis of solid facts on Ancient Indian History, he claims that the Tharu is pre-Aryan race of Mongoloid origin. The sociologists of India like D.N.Majumdar (1942) and others agree to this view that theories of their being Austroloids is nothing else but fiction and has not an iota of truth in it.

One of our respondents Ramnath Qauzi (who is the first M.A. of the Tharuhat area and very learned man) while talking about the origin of the
Tharus comments that the Tharus have been living in the Tarai (Tharuhat comes under that) since great old days. For substantiating his arguments he places his view that the Tharus called the non-Tharus as Baji. Baji according to him is nothing but the gradual distortion of Vajji which was Licchavi republic during the 6th century BC near the present Vaishali in Bihar. Even today they call the non-Tharus as Baji, a term which has come down since those days to denote other than the Tharus.

Damodar Gyawali and M.B. Singh (1996) also express somewhat similar view, “It is difficult to explore the real evidence dealing with the movement of these people to the Tarai region. However, these people have settled in this ecological belt for a long period as the native ones.”

Ramnath Qauzi draws the attention towards two works in Pali ‘Thergatha’ and ‘Therigatha’. According to a dictionary of Pali language (1979) Thergatha consists of stanzas spoken by priests and Therigatha, stanzas by nuns. Thero in Pali means a Buddhist monk of a certain understanding. There are said to be three sorts of Thera – Jatithera, Dhammathero and Sammutithero. The first means merely an old man and others mean respectively, a priest who is venerable for his piety and a priest who is generally recognized as Thera that is, has merely attained certain seniority without reference to piety or learning.

The term Thera is a courtesy title given to a bhikkhu who has completed a certain number of years from his Upasampada or admission to priest’s orders and Theri is a senior Buddhist nun.

Ramnath Qauzi is of the view that the Tharus have come down from Ther-Theri who must have been drawn from various castes. To give more weight and credence to his view he says that Tarai area has been very much influenced by Buddhism. Kapilvastu, the birth place of Gautam Buddha, is in the Terai area and even today we can find the villages around this place inhabited by
the Tharus. In Champaran itself we do find sacred place in the Tharuhat area called Subhadra Sthan which is believed to be birthplace of Yashodhara, wife of Gautam Buddha. “Lumbini, where the Buddha was born, is located in Tarai and so are numerous other places associated with Buddhism. This has relevance for the contemporary representation of Tharu Identity, for leading Tharu intellectuals argue that Buddha was a Tharu.” (Guneratne: 2002).

Apart from the influence of Bhojpuri and Maithili language upon the Tharus dialects, we do find the influence of Magadhi language also in some parts of the Tharuhat area. Since the impact of Bhojpuri in the western side and Maithili in the eastern side of the Tharuhat area is now tremendous, influence of Magadhi language appears to be on wane. But it can be undeniably claimed that earlier the Tharu dialect was very much influenced by Magadhi language. The true or geographical name of the Pali language, which was spoken in the sixth century, is the Magadhi language of the Magadh.

“The Pali language is one of the Prakrits’ or Aryan vernacular of ancient India. The true or geographical name of the Pali language is Magadhi language of the Magadh. It was spoken in the sixth century before Christ.” Damodar Gyawali and M.B. Singh are also of the view that the mother tongue of the Tharus has clear and direct influence of Bhojpuri, Maithili and Awadhi.

On the basis of above facts, however, we will not be able to come at a particular, definite conclusion about the origin of the Tharus. What we can say with firm conviction is that the Tharus are original inhabitants of the Tarai area, they are near Mongolian in physical features and on the basis of their nature and personality and social structure we can say that they might have been a group of followers of Buddhism in the form of Ther-Theri in the beginning and the Tharu word must have its origin in the word Ther-Theri.
When we analyze different titles of the Tharus, the opinion that the Tharus have come down from Ther-Theri who must have been drawn from various castes, appears to be convincing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Titles of the Tharus</th>
<th>Probable Link</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ojhaia</td>
<td>Distortion of Upadhyaya or near to a word Ojahati meaning ‘to leave’ or to ‘renounce’ in Pali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pabe</td>
<td>Distortion of ‘Pabbajja’ (Saint in Pali language)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mardania</td>
<td>Hajam subcaste in Done area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahirbant</td>
<td>Yadavas accept them as one of 7 Kuris of Yadava</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>Occupation of Boat Paharia of Nepal is fish hunting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lampocha</td>
<td>Lam-Po-Che a Tibeti word (Mukti path ka yatri)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chitwania</td>
<td>On the basis of place of origin in Nepal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Mahto                | 1. Mahatta meaning great soul in Pali  
|                      | 2. Mahamatto meaning a king’s minister or companion, a great noble at court in Pali  
|                      | 3. Mahatha near to a word Amatya meaning minister, Amatya title still existing in Nepal |
| Gaurihara            | Originally in charge of the maintenance of the cows. The word ‘gau’ being a Hindi version of cow. |
| Qauzi                | Influence of Muslims |
| Khatait              | Khat means letter in English. They might have been working as messenger or as delivery man of letters |
| Diswah               | Served as scavengers. The word ‘Disa’ being the local term for nightsoil |
The comment that the Tharus are the progeny of women of Rajput kings and their servants implies that the Rajput women were very corrupt and degraded. They on the one hand became sati and demonstrated johar for protecting their honour and prestige and on the other hand, flew away with their servants scared of the attack and abduction from Muslim invaders. This logic appears to be funny, untenable and unsound. As per Rajput tradition and culture, their women were also embodiment of courage and bravery and in the wildest imagination they could not stoop to so low stage or come down to such a stage of degradation. The Tharus are uneducated and so they do not discuss or think about their origin in this direction. But so-called ‘cultured samaj’ should be ashamed of this kind of event and development. If this argument of origin of the Tharus accepted then the status and prestige of servants – turned – Tharus should get elevated. It will be a kind of blot on the brave tradition of Rajputs.

This argument is an eye-opener not only to Rajputs but also to so called ‘cultured samaj.’ Instead of ridiculing on the origin of the Tharus, Rajputs should object to this type of argument and clarify their stand. This theory of the origin of the Tharus seems to be baseless, groundless, only a figment of imagination to belittle them.

“The Tharus are on an average of below medium height with a round head, tending towards a broader shape. They have a short nose and a round or oval shape.”(Mahalanobis: 1949)

“In the ABO blood group they show a higher incidence of gene B (28-37 %) than gene A with 40 to 50% of gene O. A relatively higher gene M (70-75%) in the MN system has been observed among them. They show a very low frequency of non-secretors (42%) for ABH secretion in saliva, and non-taster individuals (18%) for PTC taste ability. In the Rh distribution they show a high incidence of R1 (70%), Ro (8%) and low frequency of R2 (11%) with the presence of Rz. In finger dermatoglyphic features, they exhibit a higher incidence of whorls and a low percentage of arches and a high value of pattern intensity index.” (Singh 94:1138)
“The Tharus are one of the aboriginal races of India now in a depressed and abject condition, yet formerly of considerable influence and power. In the Gorakhpur district the ruins in the villages of Ratkas and Deoganj, near Lalganj, are traditionally regarded as having been the residences of Tharus in ancient times. The Tilpur pargannah near the Tarai was once in the possession of this tribe, who were expelled therefrom by Tilvikram Sen by the help of the Banjaras. He gave his name to the pargannah, and his family held it until they were overthrown by the Nawab Kasim Ali Khan. It was ceded to the British by the Nepalese in the year 1815. The jungle of Buridi in Tuppeh Sehra was assigned to a colony of Tharus from the Nepal territory, and by them brought under cultivation. A clan of Tharus, called Barwaik, a race of Tibetan origin, occupies villages in the plains of northern Gorakhpur and Champaran.” (Sherring: 1974)

Tharu, as one community (not scheduled even after more than five decades of Independence but now scheduled from 2003) in Bihar and as Schedule Tribe in Uttar Pradesh have been dealt with separately by K.S. Singh in his book “India’s Communities” though it is crystal clear that the Tharu of both the places are aboriginal race and same community. “Often referred to as Mahatos by the neighbouring communities the Tharu are famous Nepali-speaking community in Bihar. Tharu denotes people living on hills as “thar” means hill, and ‘ru’ means near.... According to Nesfield, the community name is derived from ‘thare’ meaning halted (after alleged flight into the forest), and ‘tarhua’ meaning wet, an allusion to the swampy nature of place they live in... Risley describes the Tharu inhabiting Champaran and Bihar as cultivators and skillful elephant drivers... They are distributed in the northern parts, and in the West and East Champaran districts. Besides their mother tongue Nepali, they are also conversant with the Hindi and Bhojpuri languages.”
SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE THARUS

Before coming to social organization of the Tharus, it would be in the fitness of thing to throw some light on the nature and personality of the Tharus. The Tharus are generally very simple, very innocent and very straightforward people. Their face, according to the famous dictum, mirrors their personality. They are very honest people who possess the quality of tolerance. Enviousness and jealousy are not part of their personality. The spirit of social service is very much in their nature. They do not hesitate in giving alms to beggars even though they may not be in a position to manage.

It would not be out of context to mention the statement of Shambhu Sharan Shrivastava, an advocate of Bettiah court on the social and helping nature of the Tharus. When I happened to meet him on 31st January 1991 he narrated an incident, "I had to attend the marriage ceremony of Ramji Prasad (Tharu) S/o Suraj Prasad of Saddhi village, district Parasa situated on the Indo-Nepal border but falling under Nepal. While returning to Bettiah from Saddhi I along with my group lost the way in between. But fortunately for us Bhagwati Mahto, a Tharu of Jeetpur village, district Parasa (Nepal) and age around 65 years, came to our rescue and helped us out of the mess. It was a very cold and foggy night of 24th January. The Good Samaritan covered the distance of around 10 Km along with my group and went back in the night itself after making it sure that my group has come on the right way."

Tharus are very social, simple, cooperative but intelligent also. When I was coming back from Tharuhat on 16th April 2003, I came across a local journalist Shiv Shankar Vidyarthi. He referred to a massacre that took place in Heharawa Don and detailed about the security arrangements in one of its village. "It was unique security arrangement in itself. One can enter into the village only through two points and it was almost impossible to make any entry through any other way. On these two entry points there were two tower-like check posts. Around hundred villagers used to keep strict vigil daily in the village throughout the night. Actually the people of this village were tired of the demand of criminals and anti-
social elements. Police also did not come to their rescue. They therefore protested and fought against the demand of supplying Tharu women and liquor to those anti-social elements. But since there was no vigil in the day, the criminals sneaked into the village and killed many people.”

It is, however, quite surprising that in spite of the backwardness, there is hardly any beggar in the whole of Tharuhat. A Tharu shudders at the site of a Tharu beggar. A Tharu would willingly help another in case of necessity. One can cite here a story, which reflects the personality of the Tharus. Ramnath Qauzi, the first M.A. of the Tharuhat area and himself a Tharu, narrates one incident which took place in his life, ‘once he was going to visit a village on an elephant. Mahawat was taking the elephant on the danrer (partition of land). Down with the weight of the elephant, danrer got broken and even spoiled the standing crops. No one from nearby village objected. None was seen. After some time, I saw two-three people coming. I thought that they were coming to have a fight with me. But coming closer, I found them removing the reaped paddy from the danrer to make way for the smooth movement of the elephant.’ The incident appears to be very simple but speaks of volumes abut the personality of the Tharus. The positive aspect of their personality has become a problem /curse for them as they become the easy prey to jamindars and other exploiters.

Can we think of poet and scholar in this remote and backward region? Perhaps no. But it will not be out context to quote few of the poems written by Ramanath Qauzi (1996) who has been a great scholar and poet too.

**The Black Bee and the Flower**

“The main function of the beauty of flowers is
To attract insects for pollination.”
The wonder of wonders
That the lovely, colourful flowers
Should give their nectar of pleasure
To a black ugly creature:
You may be black, ugly creature
But if you are a true lover
You will have the nectar of pleasure.

The Deity of Love

We have our gods, goddesses and deities
Whom we worship in temples and shrines
And regard all the celestial divines
As fountain-heads of human qualities.
There are men and women who are body-
Incarnate of great human qualities
And are as great as these divinities
But none is worshipped as deity.
Among them, you are, by far, the greatest
Incarnation of sacrifice, piety
Beauty, purity, sobriety and love;
And among them all you have the greatest
Claim to be anointed as deity;
For, you are the humane deity of love.

Simplicity, honesty and innocence have now become the weakest, the most vulnerable point of their personality. In the eyes of outsiders the Tharus are a big fool, bagad, uncultured and jungle. According to them, as they have flat nose and slanting eyes, as they eat crab and ghonghas, as they use to live in and around jungle they are uncultured and uncivilized, they are not human beings but a species of animals.
Meat and daru (liquor) have been another weakness of the Tharus and provided another vulnerable point for outsiders or Bajis to exploit and fleece them to the maximum. There is another saying among the Tharus:
'Jahan Char Tharu  
Tahan Mans Daru'
(Where there are four or more Tharus there is abundance of meat and liquor.)
The Tharus are very fond of meat, fish and liquor. None of their festivals can be
celebrated without meat and liquor. Their craze for liquor has, in fact, ruined
many families.

There is another saying depicting the personality of the Tharus.

'Tharu Ke Jhagada Teen  
Jungle, Joru aur Zameen'
(The Tharus fight for three things – forest, women and land.)

Due to dearth of materials on the Tharus of West Champaran one has to face a
little bit difficulty in knowing and writing about their social organization. There is
one good work and comprehensive study of the Tharus by S.K.Srivastava, which
deals with the Tharus of Nainital district of Uttar Pradesh (Now in Uttarakhand).
Whatever resources we have, on the basis of that we can say that the social
organization of the Tharus shows unobtrusive struggle and the clash of pulls.

The Tharus of West Champaran were earlier leading a nomadic life. Like
khanabadosh, they used to change their place. Their settlements were scattered
over the great extent of forest covered area. This perhaps, in the long run tended
to promote the formation of sub-castes. At the same time it made difficult for
providing an absolutely correct account of the internal divisions of the community
which in all probability, were liable to continual variation. H.H. Risley (1981)
made a great effort to enumerate the sub-tribes and septs of the Tharus (who
mostly live in Champaran) of Bihar but even he could not come out with the
complete picture.
### INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF THE THARUS

**Titles – Barwaik, Khan, Mahto, Rai**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-tribes</th>
<th>Septs of Tharus in general</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In Bihar</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rautar</td>
<td>Chaudhri</td>
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<td>Gaurihar</td>
<td>Dahait</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marichwar</td>
<td>Das</td>
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<td>Khawasiya, including:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babhan -Khawasiya</td>
<td>Gauro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dourcha-Khawasiya</td>
<td>Guro</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dhotiya-Khawasiya</td>
<td>Kaji</td>
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<td>Khatkala</td>
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<td>Bantar, including:</td>
<td>Khojwar</td>
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<td>Dhelphorwa-Bantar</td>
<td>Mahaut</td>
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<td>Kath Katwa-Bantar</td>
<td>Mahto</td>
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<td>Bot</td>
<td>Patwari</td>
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<tr>
<td>Batewar</td>
<td>Rai</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In Nepal</strong></td>
<td>Raut</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chitwania or Chitaunia</td>
<td>Of the Rautar sub-tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belwadhiya</td>
<td>Baut</td>
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<td>Kochila</td>
<td>Bhanr</td>
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<td>Iswajitauni</td>
<td>Chautaria</td>
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<td>Naua</td>
<td>Chitauniha 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Purbiya</td>
<td>Dahait</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Daugwaria</td>
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<td>Danreha or Gaunha</td>
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<td>Donwar</td>
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<td>Gaharbari</td>
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<td>Gaharwar</td>
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<td>Gauro</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kachhiriya 1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
1. These groups are notorious for charms and spells.
2. These groups are said to have recently become endogamous.

**Sept**: Branch of a family specially clan (probably alteration of a sect)

It is now difficult for many of the Tharus of West Champaran to disclose a complete list of sub-castes.
According to J. C. Nesfield (1885), in Gorakhpur, Tharus divide themselves into two classes the Purabi or eastern and Pashchimi or western. The latter call themselves Chattris and refuse to eat with members of the eastern branch. The western Tharus again divided into an upper (barka) and lower (chhotka) division. In the Gonda district of Oudh, we find the Dangaria sub-tribe, who eat pork and the Katharia who abstain from it. The Rautar rank the highest in Bihar. Owing possibly to belief that they are somehow related with Rajputs, Rautars will not eat food cooked by members of the other castes. Chitwania or Chitaunia Tharus adopt the profession of weavers. They are of the view that their ancestors were Jolahas who gave water to the Raja of Chittor when he was out shooting and obtained the boon from him that now onwards good Hindus should take water from their hands. This sub-tribe is more common in Nepal than in India. Its members have certain peculiar usages reason for which cannot be ascertained. Neither do the Chitwania Tharus perform shraddha after a death nor do their women go through any purificatory ceremony after child-birth. The bridal procession i.e. barat is limited to only four to five persons who go on their way in silence and do not employ any musicians. Among their deities they worship the Raja of Chittoor to whom they owe their promotion from comparatively low status of Jolaha.

A closer look at the Tharus as a tribe shows that there are sub-castes with occupational nomenclature. A sub-caste of the Tharus namely ‘Gaurihara’ was originally in charge of the maintenance of the cows, the word ‘Gau’ being a Hindi version of cow. Another sub-caste ‘Diswas’ served as scavengers, the word ‘Disa’ being the local term for night soil. Mahto seems to be distorted from ‘Mahamatto’ which means a king’s minister or companion. Pabe sub-caste may have come down from the word ‘Pabbajja’ which means state of being a Buddhist monk or priest. Bot sub-caste of the Tharus adopt occupation of fish hunting. We also do find some sub-castes, which are named, after the place of origin as Chitwania from Chitwan in Nepal.

In the same way the sub-caste ‘Khatait’ also finds its origin in its earlier occupation of delivering the letter (khat) from house to house, from village to
village. We also find the influence of Mohammedans on the nomenclature as the case of Kaji or Qauzi title in the Tharus.

In general, there is not so much of rigidity among the sub-castes of the Tharus as we find in the more orthodox Hindu community. In this respect the Tharus are more akin to tribals who do not observe restriction of inter-dining among different septs though there is marriage taboo. It is notable that there is no case of caste hierarchy among the Tharus and no sub-caste is considered to be a top notcher. The septs in the Tharus appear to be either titular or territorial and throw no light upon the early affinities. The rule of exogamy practiced is the simple one that a man may not marry a woman belonging to the same sept as him. The standard formula for reckoning prohibited degrees is also observed to four generations in the descending line on either side.

**MARRIAGE**

Both infant and adult marriages are in force among the Tharus of West Champaran. Marriage took place even though the child in breast feeding stage. Sexual intercourse before marriage is said to have been tolerated by the Chitwania Tharus. It is, however, remarkable that marriages negotiations among the Tharus normally start from the side of bridegroom. The marriage ceremony is modeled on the ritual in vogue among the lower Hindu castes. We do find traces of the marriage by experiment but these are not very marked among the Tharus of Bihar. In most of the marriages Brahmins officiate as priest. There were some castes that did not invite Brahmins at the time of marriage. Derogatory word used for them. The brother-in-law (Ganjua) of the bride usually takes a prominent part in the marriage proceedings. In the Mardania and Chitwania sub-tribes, the bridegroom's party, instead of being entertained by the bride's people, are expected to feast the latter for three days before the bride is produced. No second ceremony (gauna) is performed when bride goes finally to live with her husband. When she is married as an adult, she goes to her husband at once. In almost all cases, it is deemed proper for her to spend one night at her husband's house
immediately after marriage. On the occasion of this visit, she and the relations (even bride’s saheli) who accompany her, are all entertained at a feast called Dulhi Bhatawan ‘giving rice to the bride’, which celebrates her formal admission into the sept to which her husband belongs. These female relations have to be satisfied as to the economic status and manners of the bridegroom’s family. There have been cases where marriages have been broken off because the inspecting party of women was dissatisfied with the treatment corresponding to the status of the husband’s family. This tradition of Pathawan appears to be quite burdensome. If the bride is still an infant, she is taken back next day to her parent’s house by her brother-in-law, and remains there until she has attained sexual maturity (sayani).

There is a tradition called Kaniauti also. In this, groom side gives some money to the bride side, decided by both the parties, either in cash or in kind. Kaniauti is given by groom side but is not necessary if bride side is not ready to accept it. There can be no denial if asked by the bride side.

When the bride comes to the groom’s place after the marriage, a preeti bhoj (feast) is thrown or arranged. Groom offers sarbat to each and every person who is sitting in line for preeti bhoj. Groom has to offer sarbat to every group that sits for meal and not only the first group. At the time of eating the groom pours water in the pot of each person. And bride in turn, lifts the plate of rice and serves rice to the people as Doharawan. It is customary that no one has to say ‘no’ when Doharavan is offered by the bride.

After marriage bride starts performing all kinds of job inside the house and even outside. We do not find this custom in the Hindu society. In case of the Hindu society bride remains in the house for many months and only after few weeks does she take part even in the household works.

Polygamy is permitted but only in the form of polygyny and not polyandry. We do not meet 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. Widow remarriage is quite common and there is no special restriction in 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 girl’s refusal to live with her husband and she is married to another man of the same sub-caste and the husband has to pay a fine for being misfit or mismatch for the girl. In the case of desertion by wife the children of the deserted husband are treated as the legitimate children of the latter and live with him.

If a Tharu girl is detected in love intrigue with an outsider, the society will fine the boy usually a sum of Rs 81/- . This sum is utilized for a feast. Any child born of any such love intrigue is treated as the legitimate child of the woman’s husband. The society and the families of the Tharus are comparatively free from a large number of taboo and this has led to remarkable resilience which has retained the solidarity of the Tharu society.

The bond of wedlock is held in light esteem among the Tharus who approve of a degree of sexual laxity analogous to that which is prevalent among many of the Nepalese castes and generally among the sub-Himalayan races. Divorced women may marry again by the same ceremony as widows and both the 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 signified by the ceremony called ‘Bhatana’ which means formally admitting her to jus cibi of the household. Unless this is done she is called a ‘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 someone has been disallowed from social intercourse for an offence against the customs of the tribe. There appears to be some difference of practice among the Tharu sub-tribes in respect of the admission of women from a different sub-tribe. Some groups receive women from any other group, others only from certain specified groups. Rautars decline to admit any outsiders to the privilege of ‘Bhatana’, though they allow women of another sub-tribe to be kept by a Rautar man as a ‘Suraitin’. Such women,
however, have no rights as members of the family and their children belong to
their mother’s sub-tribe.

For getting the marriage fixed we come to know of a person called ‘Lagania
Baba’. Necessarily a Tharu, he is supposed to be expert in fixing marriage.
Lagania Baba, who is found almost in every village, does not take money for
fixing the marriage. He is neither selected nor elected but appears on the scene on
the basis of his experience and knowledge of the families in and around the
village. Lagania Babas of two villages (one belonging to the village of bride
groom and the other that of bride) meet and interact with each other and in the
process become able to fix marriages. All the marriages, which are fixed in the
Asharhi Lagan, are performed or solemnized at one time and at one place.
Expenses of marriages are shared by the parties involved. So in away, it is a
collective marriage. Puithahar is a representative of the groom’s side. He is
messenger and acts a go-between in marriage negotiations from groom side.
Dowry system is non-existent in the Tharu society.

**FAMILY**

Joint family is the rule. Every joint family has a Master (Malik) and Mistress
(Malkin) of the house. Usually the son succeeds the father and takes
responsibility. It is remarkable that the 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 other members of the family in the same dining
room and share the common food.

The nucleus of social organization in the Tharu society is the family. The family
among them is generally patrilocal and patrilineal. Though the patrilocal family is
the rule, some stray examples of patrilineal but matrilocal families are also found.
This arises out of sheer economic necessity e.g. when a son-in-law 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. Both the joint and single family systems are
found. The structure of joint family varies in form and size from village to village,
and from family to family.
In the context of 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 extent. This is due to strong sense of reciprocity of mutual obligations and community feelings among them.

Again, in the 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, mostly it is not the individual offender who is ostracized or ex-communicated and shunned but his family as a whole is punished.

The different members of a joint family hold the agricultural land in common ownership. For all practical purposes, the property is owned in common by all the members of the family 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 members of the family.

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

**KINSHIP TIES**

Kinship ties among the Tharus are very strong. It is not only because of common habitation and bonds of ancestral and religious relationships but also due to 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. These kinship ties and local affiliations are responsible for promoting and developing reciprocity and exchange of obligations in the socioeconomic life of the Tharus.

The village community of the Tharus is responsible for maintaining law and order in the society. By according social approval, it encourages its members to develop
skill in work and initiate technical competence among the people; while by freely expressing social disapproval, it instills discipline and brings about conformity to the tribal code of conduct.

*Avoidance rules* among the Tharus prohibit close contact among certain relatives. Marriage or sexual relationship is strictly discouraged among them. First set of such taboo of mutual avoidance is laid down between a man and wives of his real and classificatory younger brothers and likewise between a woman and her husband’s elder brothers. This taboo forbids a personal and direct contact for these relatives. The second set of avoidance rules taboo the relationship of a man with the elder sisters of his wife and of a woman with husbands of her younger sisters. In fact, a Tharu male has to respect the elder sisters of his wife both real and classificatory and woman has to do the same. For all practices, the rules are not rigid, yet a kind of vigilance is maintained in these relationships. In all the cases of behaviour towards these relatives it is a matter of conventional etiquette so that they are not offended, disrespected or insulted.

Along with the restriction, *privilege of joking*, use of violently abusive language is also permitted among certain relatives in the Tharus. The social custom of the Tharus allows joking relationship, firstly between a man and his wife’s younger brothers and sisters and between a woman and her husband’s younger brothers and sisters. Secondly, a man may also indulge jokes with his elder brother’s wife and her younger sisters and brothers. Similarly, a woman can crack jokes with her elder sister’s husband and their brothers and sisters. The custom of privileged familiarity between dewar and bhauji is frequently referred to, in the folk literature of the Tharus. The parents-in-law of a husband and those of his wife can also exchange simple jokes. A woman being more privileged in the Tharu community is not bound by many restrictive morals.

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. The Tharus believe that the relationship of a friend is the most sacred
and binding of all the earthly ties. Therefore, a friend in their community enjoys a higher and more esteemed position than their kith and kin. A popular saying confirms this fact:

‘Mit na chodai chahe chodai saga bhai’
Meaning thereby that one may leave one’s own brother but not one’s friend. (Kumar: 2006)

An amazing fact about friendship tie among the Tharus is that it is not only contracted between a Tharu and another Tharu but also between a Tharu and a Baji (non-Tharu) after thorough test and exchange of mutual confidence.

**STATUS OF THARU WOMEN**

The Tharu women have a dominant position in the society. It may be seen to be paradox to us that in a patriarchal society, which the Tharus of West Champaran have, women enjoy a very dominant position in their community. In Bihar District Gazetteer of Champaran(1960) we find pointing reference to the Tharus women. It says, ‘They form 90% of the crowd in the markets and fairs. The women move about freely and smoke and even drink in the bazar. Fishing is a feminine occupation and outdoor activity such as marketing produce, buying and selling and business negotiations are also done by women. The acknowledged superiority of women among the Tharus has been the subject of much speculation and widely divergent views are held by scholars who have written on them. The Tharu women do not allow their husbands to touch food or enter the kitchen. They do not allow the men to touch the water pots wherein water for drinking is stored.”

While commenting upon the position and status of the women D. N. Majumdar (1942) says.” The dominance of women, their maltreatment of their husbands, their active role in fishing, the purchase and business negotiations, their liberty in choosing their partners and annulling marriages, all these reproduce conditions of a matriarchal society. The Khasa with whom the Tharus have mixed also show the vestiges of a matriarchal matrix. So it is possible that in the tarai and the Himalayan region, among the aboriginal Tharus, a matriarchal society existed,
which has profoundly influenced the culture pattern of the Khasa as well as the Tharus.”

In the Census Report of the United Provinces (1931) further peculiarities of the Tharu women are recorded. While caste women proceed to the fields very early in the morning, have a meal at mid-day and work till the evening. The Tharu women go to their fields after a good meal corresponding to English breakfast. At midday, they eat some grain and they return home in time to prepare the evening meal for their men-folk. They thus work two to three hours less than women of their tribes and castes. Again, the Tharu women, unlike other women, do not carry seedlings to their fields where they have to be transplanted; the seedlings have to be carried by men. Other women carry them on their head thus saving the expense of a labour or two. Local landlords did their utmost to change these conditions but rather than changing their mode of life the Tharus chose to leave the fields altogether. The result was an emigration of the Tharus to Nepal and adjacent parts where they live by agriculture or engaging themselves as labourers.”

Thus we see that the position of women is not that of the family drudge as one may find in some lowly societies. They have considerable freedom and wield great influence in the domestic sphere. Further, the significant role of the Tharu women in economic and social spheres of Tharu life can never be underestimated. Customs and conventions of the Tharu society have not been properly understood. They have been largely misconceived, misrepresented and misinterpreted. Customs are the integral part of the Tharu culture and here lies the reason for their dominant role in the society. The Tharu women have full control over place of worship and kitchen. Puja Ghar and Rasoi Ghar are to be joint. In the same room, there is place for puja in the one corner and place for kitchen in another. There are also three platforms one each for Ganadevata, Kuladevata and Pitridevata. On these three platforms, lamps of ghee are burnt first and after that meal is cooked. Meal is kept on 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 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, clean the place including chulha. It is exclusive her privilege to maintain the room and see to it that norms attached to it should not be broken but properly adhered to. This custom of the Tharu women of West Champaran seems to be very interesting for it gives a lot of elbow room for the lady-in-charge of the house to maintain her dominance in domestic affairs.

Not only that, Women plays significant role even outside the house. No ritual is possible without her participation. In the field there are three rituals:

1. *Harvat*: at the time of ploughing the field
2. *Moot*: at the time of sowing the seed, or transplantation
3. *Gava*: at the time of reaping the crop

During all these rituals almost all the members of the family including women necessarily remain present and after the essential rites have been performed by due participation, the ritual of *Harvat* or *Moot* or *Gava* as the case may be, begins. Despite the fact that men own certain things/properties, they are not free to dispose them off. The consent of their wives is prerequisite to any such transaction in the family. But one may not say with full conviction that all the women in the family enjoy equal status. Their status is determined by the position they hold in their own 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 himself without incurring a heavy expenditure on compensation. Initiation or negotiation for the marriage also begins from groom’s side.
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

It is not necessary that the Tharus interact closely and intimately with their direct close relatives. They may have bad or tense relationship with their direct relations and good, close, smooth, cozy relationship with other people. Generally the Tharus abstain from or remain away from disputes and fights. They fight only when they are forced by the circumstances or there is no other alternative left. If there is misunderstanding between the two families, heads of the two come together and the problems will be resolved amicably. Guilty would get a good scolding or if need be, punished otherwise. If someone is caught doing theft or any other social evil, he is fined. Though this is a rare incident in the Tharu society. The money so collected is utilized for collective Bhoj (feast) which necessarily includes meat and daru (liquor).

Head of the Tharuhat area is neither elected nor selected. The person concerned, if, outspoken, powerful and dominating, automatically becomes a force or personality to reckon with and his supremacy is accepted. Such person emerges naturally in the process of interaction. If a person is accepted as the Head of the area, all the people of the locality start following him blindly.

Head of the Tharuhat area appoints a chowkidar. He visits each and every village and collects money which is coax ed by the Gumasta of every village as fine against any social evil. The collected amount is brought to the Head. Till the memory of the villagers goes, they recall that Tharuhat area was divided earlier into two parts – Eastern and Western. The Eastern part was headed by Dhanraj Patwari and the Western part by Chamaril Khatait.

People of the Tharuhat area including Gumasta of every village assemble at a place on a particular date, decided by the Head of the area. Meeting is organized and meat and daru offered. The sitting continues for two-three days. In this meeting the problem of any village of the area or for that matter any problem not settled at local level is decided. Even problem related to public welfare and safety
is debated. This tradition of the Tharus is good example of their solidarity and cohesiveness. These meetings which are usually organized, is called *Jatigavn Panchayat*. There are thus two Panchayats:

a) *Gumasta Panchayat* at village level and

b) *Jatigavn Panchayat* at area level (area covering the Tharus)

The purpose of these Panchayats is not only eating and gossiping but also bringing about solution to the problems of the Tharus. Panchayat acts as a deterrent to social evils and crime. Money so collected is used even for welfare purposes but in the absence of any formal committee there is no auditing of the expenditure.

Traditional head of the village, known as *Gumasta* is generally elected and once elected, the office becomes hereditary unless a particular incumbent is considered misfit. An unsuccessful Gumasta can also be removed by the villagers. The Gumasta with the help of the influential members of the village tries to settle the family disputes of the Tharus and imposes fine on the defaulting persons. This fine is pooled, kept in custody and utilized for social purposes. If a girl of one Tharu sub-caste elopes with a boy of another sub-caste and the leader of the boy’s sub-caste asks for ransom before the girl is returned, such ransom will normally will be met from the common fund, provided other resources fail. Cases of misappropriation of the common fund are rare. The social organization stands at par with the community organization among the Oraons, the Mundas and the Hos of Chotanagpur.

**RELIGION**

The religion of the Tharus is a *mixture of animism and Nature worship* characteristic of the aboriginal races and of elements borrowed from popular Hinduism. An important place in their Pantheon is taken by hero *Rikheswar*. This deified founder was a son of the renowned aboriginal king Raja Ben, according to
a legend in vogue among the Tharus of Khetri. His fame is still rife in many of the oldest cities of Utter Pradesh and Bihar as one who held the rank and title of Chakravarti. It is said that Rikheswar or Raksha was banished from his father’s court. He was ordered with his band of male followers to seek for a new home in the North from where they were never to return. On their setting-out, they took as wives any woman whom they would steal or capture on the road. And in this way, the Tharu tribe was founded. The soul of Raksha is still believed to be hovering among the people of his tribe. Raksha is said to be the guardian and guide of men traveling on a distant journey. No Tharu ever goes out of the village without first propitiating Him with gifts and promising him a splendid feast. One peculiarity of this god is that he is deaf. The title Gurua which is mostly prefixes to his name implies that during His stay on the earth he was famous as a wizard or medicine man. And also that he achieved through these means the kingship or leadership of his tribe. Thus we see that animistic element in the Tharus faith is being represented by Rikheswar.

We also trace a mangled survival of Nature-worship in two other deities of some importance. The Tharus address their vows to them. One is Mahadeo, the god of intoxicating liquor, especially of the rice-wine made by them; the other is Dharchandi, the patroness of cattle, though her name would imply that she was at first intended to impersonate the earth. Her shrine is so placed that animals pass by it while going out to graze and repass by it on their return. When the cattle get sick or die, larger and more valuable offerings are made. Kalika is believed to be having supreme power in the universe. For the Tharus, she is the goddess who presides over life and death. Kalika is one of the numerous forms of devi Durga or Kali. Another deity revered by the Tharus of indigenous or non-Aryan origin is consort of Kalika, i.e. Shiva, known chiefly among the Tharus by the name Bhirava, the terrible, or Thakur, the Lord.

It seems probable that the principles of primitive belief will long survive in the strong fear of evil spirits which continually haunt the tribe. It is to the action of these spirits that disease, bad dreams and pain of all kinds are ascribed. In fact the Tharus have no conception of natural disease. Their state, therefore, would be one
of helplessness were it not for the reputed skill of the medicine-men or sorcerers who profess to have power to control the spirits of the air or to interpret their grievances and wants. In the language of the Tharus, these men are called Bararar (the title of Guru, Gurua, Bhagat, Nyotiya, Ojhait commonly used). We can not find any case of change of religion in the Tharuhat. But as revealed by one Shankar Vidyarthi, a local journalist, we can now see some Tharus in Santpur village with cross in their neck. He had met one Sushil Kauzi who has changed his name to Cecil Kauzi after embracing Christianity.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Nesfield (1885) describes that the essential elements in the economic life of the Tharus consists of hunting, fishing, collecting forest’s roots and fruits, stock-raising and a crude form of agriculture. D.N.Majumdar (1942) in his brief account of the economic life states that the Tharus live by chase, fishing, agriculture and a few supplementary occupations such as basketry and rope-making. According to the latter, agriculture is the main occupation of the Tharus.

The Tharus of West Champaran were earlier leading a nomadic life. Since they were living in and around forest area near hills, they did not have dearth of earth (land). They used to move in groups and settle down at a place for some time and then again went on looking out for a different place. Some say that they were living a life of khanabadosh just to avoid the payment of rent to the concerned local chief of the area. They did it deliberately to avoid rent being fixed. Rents on land were fixed only after a stay of decided or definite period. Only after settlement and survey operations by the British, that they were forced by the circumstances to stick to settle at one place. Nomadic, free and open life of the Tharus, thus, got disturbed.
As the agriculturists they were for the most part in the migratory stage. They used
to cultivate the land on which they had put up their temporary houses till it has
given proof of exhaustion. Then they moved to the fresh grounds to make a new
clearance for a new settlement. According to one version, formerly it was their
custom not to crop the same land together for more than two years. The
*Conservancy Laws of the Government* have interfered very seriously with their
freedom in the selection of the new site.
Thus we see that the Tharus of West Champaran were primarily agriculturist plus
they also did animal husbandry. As subsidiaries they were also dependent upon
forest products. But as they say, agriculture was their main occupation and most
of the land in the Tharuhat area was owned by the Tharus only. Land was more
than sufficient for each and every family. They were leading a very happy,
satisfied and contended life. Milk ,curd, ghee were in abundance as they were
domesticating a number of animals such as cows ,buffaloes, oxen, goats, cocks,
hens ,pigeons ducks.
We can substantiate above mentioned points /facts from Bihar and Orissa
Gazetteers (1938) which say, “They (the Tharus) live in thatched house using
timber instead of bamboo. Mainly agriculturists and each village keep very large
herds of cattle and buffaloes, the former for breeding bullocks and latter for milk,
trade in young cattle, buffaloes and ghee, and work as carter and timber felloers--
 Most of them have very large holdings.” Rishikesh Saha (1975) also in his book
comments upon the occupation of the Tharus, “The Tharus are usually peasant
farmers who also hunt and fish. Some are landowners and few have been
successful businessmen as well.”

Earlier, there was a kind of *Primitive Socialism* among the Tharus based on
agriculture and animal husbandry. In that period, there was community life and
community property. Every member of the big joint family used to contribute and
cooperate with each other. The concept of private property was unknown to them.
Servants, if any, were just like members of the family and they were called *Swang*
(own part).
Method of cultivation earlier was that for one plough there were three pairs of oxen. One pair for morning, second one for day and the third one used in the afternoon. In the afternoon, plough was rarely used, if at all that too in the time of emergency. Everyone adopted this method because this has become a tradition among the Tharus. There was no guarantee of rain. Since irrigation infrastructure was weak and insufficient, all the three pairs of oxen used to plough the land in one day at the time of requirement. In the normal situation one Bigha of land got ploughed in one day, but in the time of need people used to plough three Bighas of land. According to need and availability of water, plantation was done in larger than usual area, even at very short notice. There was big pasture that was free grazing ground for the animals. In view of periodic cycle of the season existing in that period of time, people used to store grain and other materials to meet the unseen eventualities created by either three years of draught or three years of continuous rain.

There were five units of productions:

i. **Ploughman**: Those who can cultivate four Bighas of land with six bullocks as subsidiaries.

ii. **Charwaha**: Those responsible for grazing of the bullocks.

iii. **Gadiwan**: Those responsible for looking after a bullock cart.

iv. **Malik**: Owner

v. **Cost of Production**: Expenses on seed, plantation, sowing and reaping etc.

Produce was distributed roughly among these five units and surplus was kept as reserve for future.

The backwardness of the Tharuhat area can be well illustrated by the prevalent indigenous weights and measures among the Tharus. The smallest unit of weight in the Tharuhat area is known as **Hathai**. This is the name of a container. According to standard measurement the filled-in container would contain 13 **Chataks** of paddy and 18 Chataks of rice. The biggest unit is known as **Bisa** that is, twenty times of a Hathai. Liquids like oil, milk, ghee etc. are also measured with Hathai.
Land measure in the Tharuhat area is also very different from other parts of West Champaran. Three Bighas of Tharuhat would roughly measure about one acre. The laggi (stick) used for measuring land in the Tharuhat area is of ten Hath (here Hath has been interpreted by the Baji as the total distance of upper arm plus forearm) and twenty laggi equals to one Katha of land. In the rest of the area of West Champaran the laggi used for measuring land is only 5.5 Hath (Here Hath is the length of the fore arm i.e. distance between elbow and the upper tips of a palm). This has been a major ploy by the Bajis for grabbing the land of the Tharus and that is why we can find existence of many thriving big farms owned and controlled by the non-Tharu.

According to one informant, earlier labourers were in very good condition. Apart from 32 Mon paddy (1 Mon = 40 Hathai) per annum, they were given, in a year, one chader of double patta, 6 Guj cloth for dhoti, 2 Guj cloth for gamecha and 8.5 Guj cloth for wearing. During those days, money was given in advance, of course on request, completely interest free. The people belonging to old generation recall that advance upto Rs. 400/- was being given till 1950. There was option to return advance when the labourer wished. Advance was given for domestic purpose. Other source of income of the labourer was from dhan kutai (separating rice from paddy). Those days there was no rice mill, and hence the labourer used to do dhan kutai and got remuneration in return. These labourers used to domesticate animals like goats, cows, buffaloes. They also used to make dauri, mauni, chatai(mat), basket, fishnet for mobilizing extra source of income.

Conclusion thereby that the Tharus, on the whole, lived a very prosperous and satisfied life. Even labourers of those days were leading a happy life. Most of the Tharuhat area belonged to the Tharus. Mainly agriculturist, the Tharus were also in the habit of domesticating big herds of animals and cattle. Apart from that they were in the habit of manipulating leaves, reeds, and fibres and a rude kind of carpentry. The Tharus used to make strong and durable mats out of fine Bankas grass which they collected in large quantities from the lower ranges of the hills. Excellent twine and ropes were made from the same material and such twine used for the manufacture of fishing nets, nooses and snares for drawing of water from...
the well, for tethering cattle and many other purposes. No less skilled were they in making the *funnel-shaped baskets* in which fishes are caught or in thatching the roofs of their houses. They have even invented a kind of umbrella made of cane and mat work. A rude kind of carpentry is exemplified in making the wooden part of the plough, in shaping the handles of tools, dovetailing the corners of wells and in fixing up sides roofs and floors of their houses.

Basic core of Tharu economy has been cooperative enterprise, predominantly self sufficient in character. That is why we hardly come across any incident of permanent migration from the Tharuhat region. But the last couple of years have witnessed many cases where people have begun going out of the region in search of job in the form of labour specially to Gujarat, Delhi or Mumbai.

The Tharus stand, wholly, outside of the Hindu organization and their status cannot be defined by any of the ordinary standards. No orthodox Hindu will eat with a Tharu or take water from his hands. Mere touch would be deemed pollution for the higher castes. This comparatively degraded position is, however, in great measure due to the nomadic habits of the tribe and to the fact that they come very little into contact with settled Hindu communities. The Tharus follow the forest. Their typical village is a line of huts in the middle of a cleared place surrounded by forest. Avoiding the larger villages of the plains, they lead their own life on the outskirts of Hindu civilization and have not been allotted any place in the Hindu social system.

**VII**

*THARUS AND EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL CHANGE*

The Tharus appear to be one of the most numerous ethnic groups in the Tarai of Indo-Nepal border. Previously there may have been tendency to
overemphasize differences between sub-groups but now it can be very much observed that they are in favour of a search for a Tharu pan-ethnic unity. In complete topographic contrast to the mountain and hills regions, the Tarai region is a lowland tropical and subtropical belt of flat, alluvial and stretching along Indo–Nepal border, and paralleling the Hill region. It is the northern extension of the Gangetic plain in India, commencing at about 300 meters above sea level and rising to about 1,000 meters at the foot of Shivalik range. The Tarai includes several valleys (don). In terms of farm and forest lands, the Tarai was becoming the richest economic region. Overall Tarai residents enjoyed a greater availability of agricultural land because of the area’s generally flat terrain, which is nourished by several rivers. Additionally it has the largest commercially exploitable forests. However the forests are being increasingly destroyed because of growing demands for timber and agricultural land.

There are many different Tharu sub-groups, more or less numerous, more or less known, some sharing a very similar culture under different ethnic labels (e.g. Deshaurya Tharu and Dangaura Tharu in Western Tarai), some having totally different customs though living in close proximity (Rana and Dangaura Tharu). Besides marked cultural differences, the boundaries between subgroups have been mostly based on marriage prohibitions, particularly marked for instance in the Western Tarai between the Ranas and the Dangauras. It is worth mentioning here that for the last few years most of the Tharu ethnic associations have been stressing the necessity to remove those marriage barriers. There have been major changes in political and agrarian conditions, economic conditions and also in relations between the Tharus and their neighbours who, in the sixties, settled permanently in Tarai.

Different endogamous Tharu groups live in the Western and Far Western Tarai. The two main and culturally contrasted communities are the Dangaura and the Ranas. Dangaura refers to the Tharus who claim Dang as their original home (which includes the Deokhuri valley, Dang denoting a ‘country’ larger than the Inner Tarai valley of the same name.) and ‘Rana’ to the Tharus of the far Western.
Tarai who claim to have a Rajput origin. In fact ‘Rana Tharu’ is an anthropological creation, since the Ranas do not want to be called Tharu, preferring Rana or Rana Thakur.

Since 19th century, the Dangauras have migrated, partly eastward (in Rupandehi and Kapilvastu districts of Nepal) but mostly westward. They have gone further west coming into closer contact with the Ranas. The Karnali river appears to have been a boundary between these two main western cultural Tharu entities Rana and Dangaura.

But other Tharu subgroups live in Western Tarai: the Katharyas mostly concentrated in India, south of Dangaura habitat and in Kailali district have clothes and houses quite similar to their western neighbours the Ranas. In Bardiya and Banke districts of Nepal, The Dangaura Tharus distinguish themselves from the Deshaurya Tharus. It is significant that the Dangaura Tharus intermarry with the Deshaurya. The same can be said of the Rajhatyas of Banke who call themselves Tharu or Kusumya Tharu and whose culture and language are even closer to those of the Dangaura Tharus. These facts stress the crucial role of migrations and of settlements at different periods of time and under different political contexts in shaping of group affiliation.

If we proceed eastward to Rupandehi and Kapilvastu our Tharu ethnographic map becomes blurred and hazy. Besides recent Dangaura Tharu migrants, the Tharus of this area, though called Katharya, do not seem to have much in common with the Katahryas of Kailali. The Katahryas of Kailali appear to be more brahmanized than others. An interesting fact is that the Katharya ethnonym seems to be in use in all over the Southern (mostly Indian) Tarai in Uttar Pradesh and possibly Bihar, without necessarily implying a common culture.

In the central Tarai, the Inner Tarai valley of Chitwan shelters an important Tharu population. Tharus living in Nawal Parasi district (Nepal) are slightly different from their neighbours of Chitwan district (Nepal) proper, the Narayani river having created in the past a kind of boundary. The least known areas of Tharu habitat are the districts of Parsa Bara Rautahat, where Tharu
speakers seem apparently less numerous. Some refer to themselves as Katharya, Some are migrants of Eastern Tarai or Koshila Tharus, intermixed with other minorities like the Danuwars. The Danuwars, whose main homeland is the Sindhuli Inner Tarai valley around the Kamala river, are culturally and sociologically close to the Tharus, with whom they can intermarry. Not much is known about this part of Tarai but the Tharus living there are probably related to those living in the Indian Tarai of Bihar specially in West Champaran.

The eastern Tharus, called Koshi or Koshila or Kochila Tharus are scattered in several districts from Morang to Rautahat (Nepal), including Udayapur Inner Tarai valley (in Jhapa district the Rajbamsis, sometimes called the 'Bengali Tharus', dominate). The Koshila Tharu, who seem to have mostly migrated westward, are fewer and fewer in the districts West of Siraha. They claim Saptari and Siraha districts as their main home but many live also in Sunsari district on the other side of the river Koshi. Some Saptari Tharu pretend that until recently they would have not married Sunsari / Morang. There are also probably subgroups or endogamous units, such as the Lamputchwa Tharu of Morang district who are considered different by the Koshila Tharus. However Saptari Tharus have recently migrated to Morang. The ethnonym Koshila or Kuchila could be related to the name of the river Koshi on the bank of which they used to live. Rivers seem to have played a role not only as a focal area of Tharu settlement but as a cultural or sociological frontier.

In contrast with western Tarai where the Tharus are the only and dominant ethnic minority, the eastern- specially the far eastern Tarai is inhabited by several ethnic groups with very different linguistic affiliation, like the Dhimals or the Meches who speak Tibeto- Burman languages, the Rajbamsis or the Tharus who speak Indo-European idioms and even Munda speakers like the Satars. One fact must be stressed here that culturally affiliated groups live close by the Koshila Tharus, such as the Bantars or Raj Bantars (who can be found upto Chitwan), the Rautar, the Kebair and the Musahar. In Saptari for instance, the Bantar are often the priests in Tharu villages but they are of lower status. The multiplicity of Jaat (caste like character) is a salient feature of Eastern Tarai, and it seems that besides
ethnic diversity, subdivisions through paradigm of hierarchy have deeply moulded the sociological landscape. The hierarchic process is found upto Chitwan (where Bantar for instance are also living), an important difference with the ethnically more uniform Western Tarai where such a 'castification' process is absent specially among the Dangaura Tharu. On the contrary, the Dangaura Tharus used to integrate people from outside on a quite egalitarian basis.

There is the significance of the region (desa) in the sense of a political, ritual and economical space. Each local and particular 'Tharu' culture has developed in a wider context and a different geopolitical niche. The Tarai is vast and the overall political and agrarian conditions of each region have changed over centuries. To give just one contrasted example, the Koshila Tharus have in the past been living in close contact with the Mithila kingdom (and its strong Brahmanical and Vaisnavite culture), whereas the Dangaura Tharus have been immersed in a very different context, the Himalayan Baisi kingdom of Dang-Salyan under a heavy Sivaite Nath Yogi influence. In one case the influence of the north Indian Brahmanical culture prevails, in the second we see the importance of western Himalayan Pahari culture.

A minority of Tharus live in India and in the past relations used to be close on both sides of the border. It is still the case for the Rana Tharus as numerous in the Nainital and Kheri Tarai districts of India as in Nepalese Kanchanpur. In fact the most sizable Indian population is in Nainital district where the Ranas live. A few scattered Tharu groups live south of the Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh and in Bihar West Champaran. The Tharus of West Champaran are subject matter of our study.

Further east in India we do not find any more Tharus. This is probably why the earlier studies on the Tharus, which dealt with the Indian Tharus, concern mostly the Ranas. On the contrary, Dangauras as well as other 'Inner Tarai Tharus' who are concentrated in Nepal, became a subject matter of academic study only after Nepal opened to research. Therefore generalizations on the Tharu tribe, current in writings from the beginning are biased by this restricted access. Very little can be known of the Dangauras or the Chitwan Tharus.
The Indo-Nepalese political boundary does have a meaning. First, the political destinies of India and Nepal have split especially since the colonial period, and second, border regulations have strengthened the barrier. Today the Tharus, except partly the Ranas who have maintained matrimonial and economic relations in spite of the border, are different on either side of the frontier, influenced by a different socio-political milieu. The Nepalese Tharus are more numerous and have remained generally more isolated until middle of the 20th century. Moreover, their caste status and their relations with other castes have evolved differently. Sanskritization or 'kshatriyaization' have played a stronger role on the Indian side.

**Early Compilations:**

The first period cannot be properly called anthropological since the publications depend primarily on the British residents' reports in India. They are generally second hand material or simple repetitions of previous ones. They do not even mention their sources or areas of collection, which are mixed up. These reports suffer from a prioris, like the postulate of a unique and culturally uniform tribe. They are rooted in the ideological framework of colonial administration. These reports are in no way reliable and lack the stamp of authenticity.

The oldest available published references were compiled in the different Gazetteers of India like Imperial, NW Provinces, Oudh and Bengal, in Tribes and Castes series or in books of the same kind. Most of these books repeat one another. The most complete reference of that period is an article by Nesfield (1885) who not only quotes the information of previous Gazetteers but also includes material collected by himself. This article is full of details but suffers from too general an approach. Nesfield (1885) notes for instance that women elected for marriage must not bear any blood relation to the husband and may not be of the same village. But if village exogamy can actually be practiced in the richest families or in the Tharu sub-groups more influenced by orthodox Hindu concepts like the Ranas, village endogamy is also very common if not even a kind of rule at least among Dangaura Tharus. In W.Crooke's 'Tribes and Castes of the
Northern Provinces of Oudh' (1896) (which mainly relies on Nesfield’s article) another source is quoted, S. Knowles’s Gospel in Gonda (1889), which contains first hand information on The Dangauras Tharus of Gonda district by a Christian missionary.

There is not much difference between 19th century and early 20th century Gazetteers. An exception, however in the sense that it introduces new materials is the Census of 1931 compiled by Turner. But then a new period was starting, influenced by the development of anthropology, which strengthened the importance of fieldwork and of participant observation. The most valuable aspect of the older sources is nevertheless that they document a period when the Tarai was still covered with forests and had a very low population density, with the Tharus comprising the majority of the population.

INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE THARUS OF INDIA

From the thirties onward, witnessed the beginning of proper ethnographic collection with deeper substantial field research. Indian anthropologists did the ethnographic research on the Tharus during this second period. It is interesting to note that the first detailed studies were mostly produced by Census surveyors, anthropology and Census operations being tightly linked. An example of this trend is Majumdar’s pioneering work done in the late thirties and specially during the Census of India operations of 1941. His most talked - about work is anthropometric and blood study of the Tharus. The topic was related to the ideological preoccupations of his time with ‘race’, ‘caste’ and ‘tribe’ and with the composition and classification of the Indian population. But he also published a short monograph, including his anthropometric results. Besides his pervasive quest for Tharu origins he dealt with the problems of cultural contacts and the superiority of Rana Tharu women. However an earlier ethnographic study of Tharu cycle of life customs is a little-quoted article by Hari Dev (1932) who adopts an evolutionary perspective. Other early publications include H.D.
Pradhan's work – first (1937) one dealing with general information on the Tharus, the second (1938) with cycle of life rituals and practices. These studies represent a total change of approach and methodology in data collection and to this extent represent the beginning of the anthropological study of the Tharus.

The best representative of this period is S.K.Srivastava's monograph (1958) on the Ranas of Nainital district. His book includes several aspects of Rana Tharu life. His main analytic trend is the transformation and adaptability of a tribe under a general Hindu influence. For the first time research based on sociological questions and a precise description of facts was available. Another scholarly work is the geographer L.R. Singh's study (1956) on the Tarai, which includes a chapter on the Ranas Tharus.

C.T. Hu (1955, 1957) wrote two articles, but one deals with a very interesting anthropological phenomenon – marriage by exchange of sisters between two or more houses, a typical marriage arrangement of the Dangaura Tharus. Hu's brief work stands apart by trying to isolate a peculiar and meaningful social fact and by being the only one dealing exclusively with Dangaura Tharus in Gonda district.

The Census of 1961 gave way to three village survey monographs, that of the Rana Tharu village of Bankati in Kheri district and of Dangaura Tharu Rajderwa and Suganagar Domri villages in Gonda. Their aim was to study the dynamic of change in the social, cultural and economic life of rural community in order to promote rural development and the enforcement of social laws. This is an approach which actually illustrates most of the Indian anthropological studies on the Tharus. The most valuable part of these surveys are the statistics on household and economy and the precise descriptions of dresses, jewellery and house building.

Another study of India's Tharus is the study of A.Hassan (1969, 1993). He was not trained as an anthropologist but was involved in Tribal Welfare functions and
was mostly interested by folklore, *economic change*, sociology and more generally questions of Tribal development. Hassan's works do not offer a better structured approach but stand apart by his long term involvement with the Tharus mainly the Ranas. His involvement with the Tharus culminated in his book dealing with a Rana Tharu village of Kheri district close to Dudhwa National Park. The best parts of it are the chapters describing the village’s relationships with the Nepalese Tharus and with the forest officials, the village being until recently under the control of the Forest Department, which acts as a kind of zamindar, and those dealing with economic questions.

There are other scattered studies also in the form of very brief sketches on different subjects. V.K.Kochar on the fission and composition of Tharu joint families (1963, 1965); S.Mathur, on marriage among the Ranas (1967); and a few very short papers on Tharu songs: S.V.Sohoni (1955), C.Chaubey (1957), T. Prasad (1959), J.P.Govila (1959).

Besides S.K.Srivastava’s monograph and perhaps Hu’s precise but isolated article, most of the research offers scattered results and no general picture or strong analytic frame is therefore proposed. *The studies of this period owe their form and results to a general interest in the questions of tribal welfare, tribal contacts with the Hindus or with the government, changing economic and social situation or upgrading of the so-called ‘backward’ communities, which were crucial for the administrators of that time, specially after India’s independence.*

Studies done on the Indian Tharus in both the periods reveal the impact of colonial anthropology through the census operations and related surveys. But the first and earlier period’s research, written only by the British and illustrated by the Gazetteers or the Tribes and Castes series, aimed to give a general and exhaustive picture of ‘The Tharus” living in North India and in a way created an artificial ethnic category. The work of the second period, carried out by Indian anthropologists, emphasized a monographic approach but by dealing mostly with
the most numerous Indian Tharu subgroup, the Ranas of Nainital. Ethnic
generalizations have been built primarily from this peculiar Tharu subculture.
Nevertheless, their most noteworthy contribution is the description of socio-
economic conditions, house composition and material culture.

Thus hardly do we find any detail and in-depth study on the Tharus of West
Champaran who have long been neglected and ignored by the government but
exploited by almost all the castes and communities other than the Tharu. The
Tharus of Uttar Pradesh and now Uttarakhand also have been declared as
Schedule Tribe since Independence because they have been described as
aborigines but unfortunately the Tharus of West Champaran who belong to the
same ethnic group were not given the status of Schedule Tribe. Kumar Suresh
Singh (1992) has also shown the Tharus of West Champaran as Other Backward
Community:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>MAIN COMMUNITY</th>
<th>SEGMENT</th>
<th>STATE/UT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2053</td>
<td>Tharu (H)</td>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
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<tr>
<td>2054</td>
<td>Tharu (H)</td>
<td>Schedule Tribe</td>
<td>Uttar Pradesh</td>
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</tbody>
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After long drawn out fight and struggle, the Tharus of West Champaran have been
included in the Scheduled list of constitution by President’s notification in 2003.
That is why this simple and innocent people have been exploited and fleeced on a
massive scale. The Tharuhat region has become the pasture for the non-Tharus,
which can be seen in the form of surfacing up of a number of farms.

_The Tharus who were once upon a time leading a very peaceful and
prosperous life and were the owner of sufficient land have become landless; have
become alien in their own homeland. They have become paupers. The process of
“pasturization” of the Tharuhat region to “pauperization” of the Tharus has
raised many questions. This process has also created a doubt in the mind that the
proverb “Might is Right”, “Survival of the Fittest” is always true whether a_
particular caste or group is cultured / educated or not. Education, advancement, modernization has nothing to do with humanization.

After long drawn out fight and struggle, the Tharus of West Champaran have been included in the Scheduled list of constitution by the stamp of President of India on Schedule Tribe Amendment Bill in January 2003. But the damage that has been done, can it be undone?

EMERGING QUESTIONS?

STAGE OF EXPLOITATION

How and why were they suppressed, oppressed and exploited?

The Tharus have been subjected to extreme form of exploitation. The process of exploitation have become faster after Independence specially in the
case of the Tharus of West Champaran who were not declared Scheduled Tribe where as the same community in Uttar Pradesh included in the list of Scheduled Tribe and started enjoying the benefits of reservation plus protection from the government. Innocence and simplicity of the Tharus of West Champaran coupled with highly fertile land of the Tharuhat region became the major attraction points for non-Tharus being driven towards this area. Slow and gradual trickling - in the area over a period of time became regular movement and infiltration of non-Tharus in this inhospitable region. This region became pasture not only for the government officials in the form of forest officers, police inspectors, Block Development Officers but also for the money lenders, small businessmen and other outside people who had an eye on the fertile land of the area.

It was a definite political design of the local politicians not to support any initiative of the Tharus for inclusion in the list of Scheduled Tribe. The Tharuhat remained neglected, isolated, out of the reach of media for decades but the process of exploitation continued leading to gradual but continuous alienation of the land of Tharus. Most of the Tharus became landless labourer in their own land. Their economic and social system also started crumbling. Their girls and women fell prey to the officials and outsiders.

The Tharuhat region later became as the land of farms occupied by outsiders. These farms even exist today and are called States. Each farm acted like a parallel government. The Tharus were treated even worse than animals. The non-Tharus even doubted their identity and integrity.

STAGE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

How did they become conscious of their origin, identity and rights?

Now the Tharus started thinking about their origin and identity. Process of discussion and interaction began among them. In 1971 constitution of ‘Bharatiya Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh’ was accepted. After the establishment of the
Mahasangh the Tharus began tracing their roots & origin and started proving that they are the original inhabitants of the region with glorious past. Strong demand for the inclusion of Tharus in the Schedule List of Indian Constitution also arose. Peaceful but persistent effort continued and in 2003 the Tharus of West Champaran were included in the list of Scheduled Tribe. They also became successful in proving themselves that they are the original inhabitants of Tarai.

**STAGE OF CHANGE & DEVELOPMENT**

*How is the wind of change blowing in the Tharuhat region and what has been the pattern of social change among the Tharus?*

After carving out of Jharkhand from Bihar the Tharus remained as the major tribe of Bihar and after grant of ST status in 2003 they fortunately became the single major Scheduled Tribe of Bihar. By then the Black Rule of interregnum period also came to an end in Bihar and new government which took over paid special attention to this area. Now the change in the area has been remarkable. Roads have been improved, law & order is not much of concern. In 2008-09 one can see electricity reaching to the Tharuhat region. Schools particularly residential schools for girls are coming up. Primary Health centres have now got a new lease of life. The area now does not remain untouchable for the media. We can find regular reporting of the area in Newspapers. Improvised three wheelers or other motor vehicles can be seen plying on the road throughout the day. Hardly do we find landline telephone in the region but now the Tharus can be seen using mobile phone. Thus they have also become connected with the outside world.
NOTES

The study of social change also involves many different and complex methodological issues as for example the time-span and historical depth to be determined in the context of a specific study of social change. How far back should one go in order to analyze the changes in a social system? To what extent can the ethnologically constructed data be considered reliable? How can the reliability of the data be improved?

The significance and limitations of the historical approach in anthropology have always been issue of hot debate (Malinowski: 1945, Firth: 1954, Evans-Pritchard: 1964). Without going deep into the controversy, one can say that in the study of social change it becomes necessary to take into account the historical dimensions of social systems and time factor which is involved there. Implying thereby that a description of continuity, pattern or structure becomes fundamental reference base for describing and analyzing social change. There is no convergence of opinion in conceptualizing the structure of a social system but anthropologists mostly define social structure as a system of social relationships, which have not been altered by time.

The notion of structure puts emphasis on the continuity of the system and tends to obstruct the process of change. And that is why the structural-functional body of theory in anthropology has been severely criticized for not taking time into consideration and hence being unable to deal with the problem of social change at all. Such criticism seems to be harsh if not completely unjustified. Both Nadel (1957) and Fortes (1949) who could be classified as vigorous structural-functionalists, quite consciously take time into account.

Recently growing "emphasis on periodic revisits to the community studies is another expression of the need for a sense of historical sequence of change within a community."(Irani: 1958)

In understanding present pattern of social interaction, knowledge of the past is of vital significance in a rapidly changing society. Particular and specific changes cannot be pinpointed if there is no relative background to relate them to.(Parsons: 1961)

Therefore, a study of social and cultural change necessitates – a baseline, a reconstruction of social and cultural life around a hypothetical point of departure. The point of departure means a contextually significant landmark in the social history of a village or community.

As the social life of a community is continuous, unceasing, unfragmented process, the problem of fixing a point of departure is a difficult one. However, it has been the usual device of the social sciences to divide social life into phases or periods with a view to render complex social phenomena comprehensible. In the same way, some contextually significant landmark, in the present context point of departure can be easily marked out in the social history of a social system or a community. In relation to this, changes in that social system or community may be studied. For fixing a point of departure on has to look for a 'zero point'. Any situationally significant incidence or happening can be taken as point of departure. And this can serve as a baseline for observing differences between the 'traditional' and presently surfacing patterns of social interaction.

Now one may undertake a systematic reconstruction of the patterns of social life around such a point of departure. Reconstruction (Dube 55:216) can be done on the basis of:

a. Historical and other documentary sources
b. Factual information about comparable but remote villages of the region.(This is because comparative isolation and lack of urban contacts would present the conditions which village community under study would have presented around the point of departure)
c. Oral traditions and memories of the people. (But these should not concern themes pertaining to family glory and personal pride or those involving subjective idealization.)

Techniques a+b are helpful in providing us with the starting points for a general pattern of village. But this will not suffice. For reconstruction one has to rely mainly upon oral traditions particularly on the memories
of the old informants. Nonetheless, other evidences available by following a+b techniques could be exploited whenever possible to supplement, support and check the validity of the data.

For giving precision and accuracy to the reconstruction techniques on the basis of memory of the informants, a contextually significant landmark may be fixed in their own lives around the point of departure. Social events such as marriage, birth, death and division of a household are usually well remembered by the villagers. After finding such events of significance in the informant’s experience, information regarding various activities and interaction pattern can be sought with reasonable accuracy in reference to those events. Not only that. The information provided by one informant should be checked and rechecked with different informants.

In this way the general pattern about marriage system, political system, economic system, religious system could be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy. This type of procedure is helpful in two ways:

a. It provides more reliable empirical information about the social life around our hypothetical point of departure which may be called ‘tradition’ and
b. It helps in maintaining objectivity and prevents us from being swayed away by broad generalizations which the villagers often tend to make and investigator is prone to accept and report.

It is a fact that information collected in this way will be largely qualitative in character and only in a limited way tentative quantification can be attempted. One cannot be sure of the reliability of the quantitative data collected in this way. But there is no way out but to stick to this method in the absence of other documented evidence.

As every method suffers from limitations so does the reconstruction method. It is no exception to this rule. There are chances of omission or forgetting the subtler points of idealism and attitudinal character. It is also possible that the information provided by the informants is coloured by their later experiences. There is every likelihood of their exaggerating the ‘golden past’ or the ‘present contrasts’. But and this ‘but’ is a big but. There is no alternative to this method for the study of preliterate small communities where documented information about their past social life is scanty, sketchy, inadequate and insufficient. However, it is good to keep in mind the limitations of this method. We can improve the reliability of the information by further sharpening our techniques of reconstruction. And more so, in our study of social and cultural change we are interested in knowing the ‘observable differences’ and not reconstructing the objectively true past. It would be useful to quote Malinowski (1961: 29) to press the point produced here: “To trust to the memories of old men or to current accounts of what used to be, for the purpose of reconstruction, would be futile. To the student of culture change what really matters is not objectivity of true past ... but the psychological reality of today. “

In conclusion we must say that rapidly changing rural scene in India presents excellent opportunities to undertake processual studies of social and cultural change in village communities. In order to analyze the process of social and cultural change diachronically, the historical approach is useful and reconstruction techniques can yield useful and fairly reliable empirical data. This will enrich not only our understanding of the present functioning of certain social systems but also the changes they have undergone under the impact of various forces and the process involved therein.

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2 On the origin of Tharus R.P. Singh further claims ‘They (the Tharu) originated in Nepal and are the remnants of the Sakya’s and Kolya’s the two branches of the descendents of Okaka and Okamukha, the kings of Banaras. During the time of sage Kapil who has his ashram in the area which later became to be known as Kapilvastu, King Okaka had married a second wife in his old age and he was forced by the younger queen to promise to make her son the next King. The king was very pious minded and therefore informed his three sons from his elder wife and advised them not to revolt in his life time but to recapture their Kingdom after his death from their step brother. The sons left the kingdom instead thinking that there was no dearth of land and they could find a new Kingdom. The five sisters (the name of the eldest was Priya) also joined their brothers and left the country Kosala and came to
Kapil's Ashram and sought his permission to settle down in the region by clearing the jungle and cultivating the forest land. Kapil readily agreed but requested them to name their state as Kapilvastu after his name. So the new country came to be known as Kapilvastu.

Shri R.P. Singh says that it is no figment of imagination. These facts are writ-large in the Buddhist literature --- Lalit Bistar and Jatak tales, the birth stories as narrated by Buddha support it. The father of the Buddha, Shuddhodhana was not a Chakrabarti King but only a large Bhumipati and was the elected leader of his people who lived in the land cleared of mighty Sakhu trees. Sakhuwa was their national tree and from that name Sakya (mighty, able) derives. Buddha's father's name Shuddhodhana literally means pure rice. The Tharus still use the word 'odana' when they inquire of their guests as to whether they had had their meals by asking them whether they had had their "odana".

Mr. Singh further adds that it is well known to the Buddhist historians that the Buddha's ancestors when they came to resettle in the woods of Kapilvastu the brothers married their own sisters while the eldest sister Priya ran the household by remaining unmarried. Now if the Buddha's ancestors had been the kshatriya of Hindu concept they could not have married their own sisters. It would have been sacrilegious, abhorring to caste Hindu. Siddhartha married his own maternal sister Yashodhara of the clan of Kolia, begotten of Priya by the king Rama of Banaras who lived in a nearby jungle suffering from leprosy and who was cured by eating leaves of the Koilar (Kolya) tree. Priya, who had to leave her brother due also to leprosy, was helped by Rama to get rid of leprosy and who ultimately married her and begot many sons and daughters. It was the Sakya and the Kolian people who became initiated later on in Buddhism, after the Buddha having gained enlightenment and having many disciples came to Kapilvastu to meet his family. The people of those two clans, who conducted themselves according to Buddha's original doctrines, as reported by their elders, came to be known as 'Therabadins'. These followers of Therabad Buddhism came to be called 'Sthavir'. It is from this word that the name 'Tharu' derives. From Sthavir to Thavir and from Thavir to Tharu is an easy and logical verbal transition.

This interpretation of the word "Tharu" is logical and in keeping with their traditional values and behaviour. Mr. Singh carries this argument further. The Tharus live a simple life and are renowned for their honesty. (During my fieldwork my observations have been similar). Sociologists and anthropologists all bear out this truth about the Tharus. The Tharus believe in Brata and Upawas and know not the Hindu rites of Yagya or Homa. They do not wear sacred thread as do the Brahmins and Rajput communities. As a matter of fact the Hindu priests and Shankracharyas, both converted them into Hinduism by force and persuasion. Many, observing the social and religious conduct of the tribals to which the Buddha belonged, called them Brachya Kshatriyas that is, those noble men of power who believe in 'Brata' and 'Upawas' and who, though they had their own territory and country, were farmers by occupation. The Buddha's father Shuddhodhana was a big owner of the land and used to go round his farms with stick in hand. The Tharus have been farmer by occupation down the ages. They never did the work, which is regarded by the caste Hindu as menial.

The facial features of the Tharus too resemble the earliest stone images of the Buddha. 'Dharma Chakra Paribartana' mudra of the Buddha is immortalized in the Sarnath statue of the Buddha. The statue bears no sacred thread as do the images of Hindu gods. There is no mention of Yagyopabit (Sacred Thread Ceremony) and Chudamani Karma in the biography of the Buddha as revealed in the Tripataka religious literature. Vincent Smith, A.L. Basham, the renowned historians, have in their book the Oxford History of India and Wonder That Was India, respectively mentioned that the Buddha was not of the Aryan stock and that he belonged to a tribe of Mongoloid extraction. The Tharus bear that feature. They lived and still live in the same terrain. The place of their origin, Kapilvastu has always had the Tharus as the main element of its population.

In order to support his proposition that the Buddha belonged to the same clan from which comes the Tharus community, Mr. R. P. Singh offers yet another proof. He says that Mr. Bryan Hodgson writes in his book ' Bodo, Dhimal, Koche tribes' that these tribes are almost immune to malaria. For getting that immunity, they must have lived in the present habitat for at least three thousand years. As Singh says
Nepal celebrated the 2532nd birth, enlightenment and death anniversary of the Lord Buddha. Does not it take the Tharu community’s origin back to the times of Buddha or earlier. The book “The Historical Tradition of India” written by learned Pargitar has suggested that if thereby any remnants of the Buddha’s tribe it is the Tharus.

Finally, Mr. R.P. Singh comes to what history records those who have written about the Tharus or referred to them olden times. Most of the statements are beyond doubt. Sylvan Levy the great French historian in his book ‘Le Nepal’ refers to the great Buddhist historian Taranath (Born 1575) as referring to Champaran as the land of the Tharus.

Mr. Singh places yet another proof. The name of Padma Sambhava, the ‘Lotus Born’ is known all over the world as the founder of Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism. It was he to whom credit goes as the great founder of Vajrayan cult of Mahayan Buddhism in Tibet, Bhutan and Nepal. His biography tells us that he visited Tharu, Thrift and many other important places in India. He was a renowned professor of yoga in the famous Buddhist University of Nalanda in the 8th century. Now the question arises: when Padma Sambhava visited the Tharus or the land of the Tharus in the 8th century where does the fictitious theory of the ‘Tharu’ origin from Thar desert or branding them as the sons and daughters of the Rajput women and their servant stand?

Mr. R.P. Singh concludes by declaring that the Tharus are undoubtedly of the Nepalese origin. They originated in and around Kapilvastu and are today to be found all over Nepal terai and in many border lying districts of India ranging from the border of Uttar Pradesh to the border of Bengal.

3 Mitakshara is a commentary on Yajnavalkya Smriti by Vijnaneshwara (an ascetic also mentioned as bearing the name of Vijnana Yogin of kalyanpura in the present Hyderabad state. He was contemporary of King Vikramaditya 1076-1127 AD) as told to him by his Guru Visvarupa and written in the later half of the eleventh century. It is also called Riju Mitakshara Tikaor Riju Sam Mitakshara or Parmitakshara. Mitakshara literally means ‘a brief compendium’. Under Mitakshara, the basis for the law of inheritance is the principle of propinquity, that is, nearness in blood relationship or consanguinity of blood, which means that one who is nearer in blood relationship succeeds. Mitakshara became the authority for the whole of India except parts of Punjab and Bengal. (Saxena : 2004)

4 Khanbadosh are communities who move from one place to another and do not settle at one place.