

ANSISS Working Paper 05

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West Champaran (Bihar)**

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July, 2018

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July, 2018

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Printed at : Patna Offset Press, Naya Tola, Patna
Ph. : 9693202981

Social Changes due to exposure to the Outer World: A Case of Tribal communities of West Champaran (Bihar)¹

Rajeev Kamal Kumar²

Abstract

Tribal society is characterized by relative isolation from larger cultural influences, has a relative cultural homogeneity and a simple technology. Tribal believe in spirits, magic and witchcraft. They have their own taboos which prohibit certain actions that are punishable by the community, by the supernatural, or by magical consequences. Large number of the tribes believes in animism, according to which all objects - both animate and inanimate, are permanently or temporarily inhabited by spirits or souls. Like any other societies, tribal society has also been undergoing different changes over time due to various factors such as industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and contact with their Hindu counterparts and mainstream societies. However, the rate of change in tribal society is very slow as compared to the mainstream societies. The traditional and cultural values are relatively more intact. The present paper is based on a study conducted among tribal communities namely *Oraon* and *Tharu* of West Champaran district of Bihar. The main objective of the study is to analyse whether exposure to the modern forces has any impact on these tribal societies and if yes, to what extent these tribal societies have been affected? The study is based mainly on the qualitative techniques of in-depth interviews, observation and focused group discussions. The findings reveal that these tribal communities are also undergoing changes due to the exposure from the modern forces, but the rate of change is quite slow and not affected the established socio-cultural norms much. The traditional institutions such as family, marriage and kinship still hold strong place in the lives of these tribal communities.

Keywords: Tribal community, urbanization, modernization, transition, culture, social change

1. Introduction

Tribal society is characterized by relative isolation from larger social and cultural influences, has relative cultural homogeneity and a simple technology. These societies are different from the mainstream societies. They have their own taboos which prohibit

¹ I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on this paper. I would like to thank the former director, ANSISS for his encouragement and feedback on the paper. I also owe a word of thanks to the convener, ANSISS Working Paper Committee, for doing the needful to get this working paper published.

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certain actions that are punishable by the community, by the supernatural, or by magical consequences. A large number of the tribes believe in animism, according to which all objects - both animate and inanimate, are permanently or temporarily inhabited by spirits or souls. Most of the tribals are also polytheist. The basic difference between the tribal and mainstream societies is that the tribal society is relatively self-sufficient and based more or less on need.

The tribal social organization is based on the egalitarian principle. Thus, there are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex based inequalities. Men and women enjoy equal status and freedom. However some degrees of social inequality may be found in case of tribal chiefs or tribal kings, who enjoy a higher social status, exercise political power and possess wealth. The tribal as man is simple, humble and possesses a great amount of feeling for his kinsmen. Proximity of tribal community with their immediate nature i.e. command over the forest resources, rivers, and other natural bounties provides them a sense of unity and commonality with immediate nature and fellow human beings. A perfect harmonious man-environment relationship used to exist in case of early tribal societies. Tribal life is such that it is being governed by social norms, cultural complex which discourages them going beyond certain necessities. It is the social institutions of the tribal that has active role in determining the needs of the community.

Now a day, the tribal societies are not much isolated from the mainstream societies. Most of the tribal areas and tribal societies are now connected and linked with the outside world. In this situation, a number of changes have been observed in the erstwhile isolated tribal societies. There are different factors of social changes and integration with the mainstream societies such as urbanization, modernization, constant interaction and exchange of services with the neighbouring caste societies, migration to the urban areas for work, transport and communication, modern technological exposure, etc.

Keeping in mind the above facts, this paper is designed to understand the present day situation of the tribal communities in the state of Bihar. The main objective of this paper is to understand the impact of external forces on the tribal societies and what are the changes especially in the society, culture, economy, and daily lives brought due to the constant exposures. The agent of change may be taken as constant interaction with the caste communities, migration for earning the livelihood, better transport and communication facilities, advanced technologies, etc. In this situation, the question is whether the studied tribal communities are able to retain their basic social structure intact? How far these exposures have affected their society, social order and community living?

2. Review of Literature

Impact of external factors such as urbanization, modernization, industrialization, etc. on the tribal communities has been studied by different Anthropologists and Sociologists over the year. These studies indicate that due to exposure from the external forces, tribal society, culture, traditions, practices, etc. also get affected over the time (Vidyarthi, 1968, 1970; Chandra Mowli, 1969; Hari Mohan, 1975; Vidyarthi & Rai, 1985; Patnaik, 1996). This section of the paper briefly oversees the definition and concept of tribe, studies on the impact of external forces on tribal society and culture and the changes brought due to these exposures.

India is known to be a vast country with scanty population in the prehistoric age. During this period there were small groups of people scattered throughout the country in different corners. The Tribal culture bloomed in the isolated highlands and forests of India. Tribal are an integral part of the Indian population. Their isolated ecology, economy, society, religious belief had centuries long association with the Indian society. A tribe is a group of people, usually staying in jungle areas, in a small locality, illiterate, poor, hardly clad in sufficient clothes, usually dark and frail, fully living within their own community whose marriage always takes place among themselves, engaged in hunting and searching for roots, shoots and fruits as their vegetarian food and roasted animals as non-vegetarian food.

A series of definition have been offered by the earlier Anthropologists to cover a social group known as tribe. These definitions are, by no means complete. Many attempts have been made in anthropology to define and characterise on 'tribe', but there is no consensus on defining characteristics. The term generally refers to territorial communities living in the relative isolation in foot-hills and forests. 'Dictionary of Anthropology' defines tribe as "a social group, usually with a definite area, dialect, cultural homogeneity, and unifying social organization. It may include several sub-groups such as sibs or villages. A tribe ordinarily has a leader and may have a common ancestor, as well as a patron deity. The families or small communities making up the tribe are linked through economic, social, religious, family, or blood ties" (Tylor, 1991).

According to Dube (1955), partly because of the isolation and partly because of their limited world view, characterized by lack of historical depth and an overall tradition – orientation, their integrated themes and special cultural focus give them a separate cultural identity and they often possess latent and manifest value attitude, and motivational system which are remarkably different from those of the other people".

On the basis of certain universal characteristics contained in various definitions, Majumdar (1958) proposed a definition of tribe claiming that some of it would define a tribe anywhere. "A tribe is a social group with territorial affiliation, endogamous, with no specialization of function ruled by tribal officers, hereditary or otherwise, united in language or dialect, recognising social distance with other tribes, caste, without any social obloquy attaching to them as it does in the caste structure following tribal traditions, belief and customs illiberal of naturalization of ideas from alien sources, above all conscious of homogeneity of ethnic and territorial integration".

Definitional problems lead to identifying certain characteristics of the community on which it could be said that a particular community belongs to the Scheduled Tribe. The characteristics mentioned by SC Dube were adopted by the Govt. of India for marking a group of people as ST. These are: primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, and backwardness. However, Pathy (2005) has objected that in Indian context, any attempt to define tribe is bound to exclude a large section of existing STs. The Constitution of India also does not define tribe but considers those communities as deemed to be tribes who have been notified as ST under Article 342 of the Constitution of India.

India is home to one of the largest number of tribes in the world. Population of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country is 10.45 crore as per Census 2011. ST Population is 8.6 percent of total population of country. Population of ST males is 5.25 crore and ST females is 5.20 crore. Decadal growth of ST population is 24% in 2011 as compared to 2001 (Census, 2011). Tribes in India are not a homogeneous group as their culture and values are distinct from each other. There is high variation in the spatial distribution of tribes in India. The states of Maharashtra and Orissa share the largest number of tribes in India. Almost 82 percent of the tribes live in western and central states where only 11 percent of them are located in southern states.

Different studies conducted among the tribal communities show that these societies are also not static and constantly facing exposure to the outside world. As a result, tribal societies have also been undergoing changes. Social change in itself is a complex process which has been studied by different scholars. The views expressed in the classical theories may broadly be divided into linear, cyclical, and dialectic categories (Hynson, 1974). Under the first category, linear, important contributions were made by Comte, Spenser, Durkheim, and Tonnies. Important contributors under the cyclical theories are Spengler, Toynbee, Weber, etc. And the last category is dialectic which is represented by Hegel and Marx (Joshi and Dalpati, 2016).

Most of the classical theories of social change are speculative and somewhat subjective, when compared with contemporary analysis. In the contemporary situation, the process of social change has become more complex, and thus, a condition applicable to one situation may not be applicable to other. As such generalizations made on the basis of overall factors become meaningless. Dube has also questioned whether our quest for a single theory of social change is valid and meaningful in view of human cultural variability and complexity of social life? He advocates that the acceptance of multi-causality of change will yield more satisfactory answers and it will be more valid to ask what kind of factor –mix in specified situation, results in a particular type of change (Dube, 1992; Joshi and Dalpati, 2016).

As mentioned, different studies on social change with reference to the tribes have been conducted. In general, the process of social change among the tribal society is viewed as a process of integration due to exposure to outside world and loss of isolation. The constant contact of tribal communities with the Hindu and other religion lead to assimilation of tribal culture. Ghurye (1963) has gone too far and termed the tribal as backward Hindus. However some of the scholars have denied the complete assimilation. Sachchidanand (1997) said that, tribal have adopted Hinduism but they still retain their clans, totems and some elements of their tribal beliefs. Similarly, Xaxa (2008) has the opinion that tribal have not lost their distinct culture, particularly after independence even after losing the isolation. Some of the changes are also due to the political gains. Tribal are persuaded on the caste and tribal line by the political leaders.

For the present study, two tribal communities namely Tharu and Oraon of West Chmaparan (Bihar) have been selected. Tharus are often referred to as *Mahatos* by other neighbouring communities. The etymological meaning of the word Tharu is people living near the *thar* (hills). In the Census of India (1961), R.C. Sharma quotes Tharus in the village of Rajderwa (northeast of Lucknow, just by the Nepal border) claiming to be *Rajputs* who had migrated from Dang, “but their features are Mongoloid”. However the claim that *Tharus* are descendants of *Rajputs* and evicted from Rajasthan by Muslim invaders have been refuted by Buchnan. The fiction of having migrated from *Rajputana* into the '*terrai*', therefore, must have been invented by some of the clans merely to raise themselves in their own and their neighbour's estimation. According to some, the word Tharu is derived from the Hindi word '*Thahrey*' (halted) because they are said to have halted after the alleged flight into the forest. The origin is also traced to the Hindi word '*tarhua*', wet, an allusion to the swampy land they live in. Some say the name simply means 'resident of the '*terrai*'. Tharus are an ethnic group indigenous to the *Terrai* (valley) region of the southern foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and India. In Bihar, they

are distributed in the northern parts of both West and East Champaran districts. After carving out of Jharkhand, the Tharus of West Champaran have become major tribe of Bihar who inhabit terai region of West Champaran district from east to west and their population is substantial.

Oraon tribe is also known as *Kurukh*. According to Roy (1915), the Oraon owe this name of *Kurukh* to their hero-king Karakh. Oraon is also spelled as *Uraon*, *Oran*, or *Oram*. Oraon are *Adivasi* (original inhabitant, constitutionally a ST) group inhabiting various states across central and eastern parts of the country and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Traditionally, Oraons depended on the forest and farms for their ritual and economic livelihood, but in recent times, most of them are settled and involve in agricultural activities, daily wage work, etc. Small numbers of Oraons have migrated to the north-eastern part of the country also, where they are mainly employed in tea estates. The Oraons are one of the largest tribes in South Asia. About half of them live in the Chotanagpur Plateau of Jharkhand state; the remainder are in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, and Bihar states. They speak a Dravidian language known as *Kurukh*. Oraons are closely related to the neighbouring *Munda* tribe, and the headman of an Oraon village is also known as '*munda*'.

3. Methodology

Present study has been conducted among two tribal communities namely-Tharu and Oraon in West Champaran district of Bihar. The study is based primarily on qualitative methods. The data has been collected using structured in-depth interview, in-depth discussion and quasi participant observation of the communities. The data were collected in few short trips to these villages during the year 2017. The villages were selected purposively, only after reviewing of secondary literature and consulting local block office. However, while selecting the key respondents, two criteria were kept in mind- one, key respondents belonged to both genders and second, the respondents should be either Head of the Household or a well-informed member of the family who can provide the required information about their households and families.

Local caste and Panchayat members and elders of both these communities i.e. *Tharu* and *Oraon* were also consulted during the field work. A total of 140 respondents belonging to Tharu (74) and Oraon (66) tribal communities of West Champaran district of Bihar were interviewed. In addition to this, prominent community members including ward members, community leaders and heads were also consulted for relevant information. The findings of the study are drawn upon from close observation of the daily lives of the tribal people and in-depth discussions with them in the villages. For this, the study team

used to stay among the community members close to these villages. This field arrangement was more convenient for understanding the tribal society as the interaction with the tribal community members was regular and uninterrupted.

3.1 Study Area

The study area of present research is two villages namely *Manguraha* and *Rupauliya* of Gaunaha block of West Champaran district, under Tirhut division of Bihar. Both these villages are dominated by tribal population. *Tharus* are concentrated in *Manguraha* village while *Oraons* in *Rupauliya* village. *Manguraha* village has better connectivity and exposure with the outside world as it is located near the *Manguraha* Forest Office and Guest House. Both these villages are relatively isolated and located towards the forest and hill ranges. The international boundary of Nepal is very close. *Manguraha* village has slightly better connectivity to the block Headquarter Gaunaha than the *Rupauliya* village. The block headquarters Gaunaha is only 4 km from *Manguraha* and 6 km from *Rupauliya* village. Narkatiyaganj, one of the sub-divisions of district and the local town is well connected with other parts of the district and state. The distance to Narkatiyaganj is approximately 30 km from these villages and the district headquarter (Bettiah) at a distance of 65kms. Some of the smaller towns close to these villages are Ramnagar, Chanpatia, Narkatiaganj, and Bagaha. However both these villages are connected with metalled road from the block headquarter and other parts, but there is no public transport available in the area. People either use private vehicle or walk down to reach to Gaunaha and from here, the public transport is available to reach other parts of the district. The basic facilities such as school, health centres, railway station, post office, middle school and high school, bank, and local market are available in the block headquarters Gaunaha. However, primary school and *Aanganwari* Centre are located in the village panchayat area itself. Primary school is at a distance of 1 km west in *Rupauliya* village, whereas health sub-centre, railway station, post office, high and middle school, bank, and local market are located 4kms east in Gaunaha. First Referral Unit (FRU) in the form of Sub-Divisional Hospital (SDH) is located at Narkatiyaganj, approximately 20 kms away from the villages. The district hospital is located at the district headquarter which is again very far off for this village. Accessibility to the public institutions and facilities such as schools, hospitals, police station, etc. is quite difficult for these tribals. The local languages of the area are Hindi, Urdu, and Bhojpuri but the studied communities have their own dialect also. They are conversant in Hindi and other local languages but they prefer to talk in their own dialect with their kinsmen.

4. Tharu and Oraon: Key Observations from the Field

Following section gives a brief outline of the studied population. A total of 140 respondents were interviewed from both the communities. Male respondents were more (63.57 percent) than female. Of these, 74 (54 males and 20 females) belongs to Tharu community and 66 (35 males and 31 females) to Oraon community (Table 1). Since the family size is small, the total population of these 140 families is only 801. Thus, the average size of each family is less than 6 members per family. The percentages of male and female population (50.1 percent and 49.81 percent respectively) are almost equal (Table 2).

Both these communities are having patriarchal society and the descent is traced through male line (patrilineal). The eldest male member of the family always becomes the head of the household in case of patrilineal and patriarchal society. These tribal people have close knitted family system. It has been found in the study that more than half of them are having joint families (55.71 percent). Joint family is more prevalent among Tharus (66.2 percent). Family system used to be mostly joint in tribal communities but in recent past, changes in family structure have been observed. Disintegration of family from joint to nuclear are due to several factors including changing occupational pattern, migration, job mobility, eroding cultural values, etc. (Table 3).

Tribal society can also be differentiated from the caste society in marriage related practices. Marriage is a community affair in both the tribal communities. The entire process of marriage right from selecting the partner till solemnization of marriage is witnessed by the community members from both the parties. Arranged marriage is preferred and socially sanctioned. Usually a community feast is organized in the village after the marriage. The most preferred form of marriage is arranged marriage, but marriage by choice does take place as well in both the studied communities. Marriage is usually being arranged by the parents and elders of the family and being solemnized in the presence of the community members. However, inter-caste/tribe marriage is not uncommon among Oraon but more prevalent among Tharu (54 percent). Similarly, widow marriage is also more prevalent among Tharu than Oraon (Table 4).

As we know, the status of tribal education is very poor and most of the tribal communities are lagging far behind in educational attainment. Same is the case with both these studied communities. The status of formal education of both these communities is poor as nearly half of them are either illiterate (45.4 percent) or hardly literate (5.5 percent able to sign only). Among literates, most of them are either primary (26.1 percent) or middle passed (13.4 percent) and very few of them are having matric and higher educational

qualification (Table 5). Awareness towards education has increased in both Tharus and Oraons as most of them are sending their children to the schools.

The primitive societies have passed through several stages of development everywhere in the world including India. Thus one finds the stages of food gathering, hunting and fishing, and settled agriculture. The tribal economic organization is mainly concerned with production and consumption. They do not produce for the market. The concept of surplus economy is absent in tribal societies. The economic activities of tribal societies are very much determined by the immediate geographical environment of the tribe. Tribal are not specialist producers. They depend on more than one economic activity, but mainly practice agriculture. It has also emerged prominently in present study. It may be observed that the main occupation of Tharus and Oraons are still agriculture and allied activities (more than 44 percent). Tharus are better in farming as more Tharu families are having possession of some agricultural lands (27.2 percent) as compared to the Oraons (only 9.2 percent). This is the reason that Oraons are more involved in agricultural activities as labourers only. A good number of people from these communities are also engaged in other daily wage works and they migrate seasonally for earning their daily wages. Oraons have long history of working in the factories as labourers (Table 6).

The economic condition of both the studied communities is not so good. Overall satisfaction with their present occupation is more than two third; however Tharus seemed more satisfied (75.7 percent) as compared to the Oraons (57.68 percent). Livelihood resources have been depleting over the time due to various problems such as increasing demographic pressure, change in economic structure in villages and adjacent areas, and new forest laws which prohibits the free use of forests. Only 30 percent respondents considered that their villages have sufficient resources to eke out their livings (Table 7&8).

Due to poor economic opportunities in the village, most of the able bodied tribal men and women go out for a decent wage. As mentioned above, their main occupation is still agriculture work, but this is not very much viable and hence they migrate seasonally to earn daily wage. It has been found that more than half (54.29 percent) of the respondents migrate seasonally in search of work. Percentage migration is more in case of Oraon (69.70 percent) as compared to Tharu (40.54 percent). Monthly income of these respondents is also very low, as more than 90 percent manage their family in less than Rs. 10,000/ per month (Table 9&10).

It has been found during the study that most of tribal households are without toilets and hence use the forest area and other similar open areas for defecation. Most of the studied respondents said that they go out for open defecation as their houses are without any

toilet (90 percent). This is more in case of Oraon (94 percent). Due to poor economic condition, they are not able to construct toilet in the house. They do not have any inhibition in going out for open defecation as the open space (forest and field) is also ample in the area (Table 11).

Regarding change, most of the respondents (83 percent) said that there have been changes over time in their routine life such as economic activities, eating habits, interaction with outside world, dress pattern. They also consider that the rate of change in recent years is more rapid. They further said that changes are more distinct in the educational attainment, dress pattern, eating habits, houses, economic activities, language and dialects, etc. (Table 12). Overall they are satisfied with their lives in the villages but at the same time they do also aspire for more positive changes in the society such as more economic opportunities and livelihood resources in the villages, decent wages, and better infrastructure in the village, educational facilities, more development schemes and programmes from the Government. They are also asked to give their opinion on the factors which are proving obstacles in further growth and development of the tribal communities. The main reasons are low level of education, lack of employment opportunities, low wages, less awareness about the Government's development schemes and programmes, etc. (table 13).

5. Changing Tribal Life: Glimpses from Manguraha and Rupauliya Villages

The changes in tribal societies are not new. These societies are also not insulated from the cultural contact as the notion of exclusiveness and cultural insulation has never been valid. Dasgupta (2011) has rightly observed that like other social groups, *adivasi* groups constantly evolved and redefined themselves in the context of specific political and socio-economic situations leading to re-evaluation and changes in their self-perception. There were different sources of cultural contact even in the past. Contact with other *adivasis* and *Hinduized* communities of the region, organization of any cultural programmes and ritual feasts, trade relations with them, etc., are other sources of cultural contact. Vidyarathi (1968) also considered that there are contacts between tribals and their Hindu neighbours and there are two main types of factors viz. traditional and modern for the changes. However the changes due to the close contacts with the neighbouring castes, has been slow and selective, reciprocal and accommodative as well as integrative and/or assimilative as it was indigenous, continuous, non-competitive and voluntary (Vidyarthi and Rai, 1985). Ghurye (1995) used the term 'Backward Hindus' for tribal to emphasize the continuous cultural link between them and caste Hindus.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, separate discussions were also carried out with the key respondents in both the villages to understand the changes in tribal's society,

culture, and economy. Regarding the change, both these communities consider that there are many changes and most of these changes are positive in nature such as improvement in living condition, increased income, better literacy rate, etc. Now due to these changes, they are more aware towards their rights, about the outside world, about the government programmes and schemes, etc. However, there are not much perceptible changes at the structural level.

During the discussions, *Tharus* were asked about their origin and history of their settlements. *Tharus* are the natural settlers of the land as they have been living in *Manguraha* since time immemorial. Some of the village elders said that initially, only *Tharus* settled in the village. Later on they invited some of the service caste people such as barber, carpenters, iron smiths, etc., to settle down in the village so that *Tharus* can avail the services of these caste people in exchange. Among the two studied communities, *Tharus* are more dominant and advanced as they are more educated and have more resources. Usually, social organization of the tribal village is designed to ensure the control of the village founders over the village resources such as land, forest, water, etc. In case of Tharu village, social organization is also structured accordingly so that the original settlers remain dominant in the village. *Tharus* also have both nuclear and extended families, but nuclear type of families are predominant.

When asked about the history of *Oraons* settlement in this village, most of them had shown unawareness but they told that they are living in this village for a number of generations. Their great grand parents have come to this village and settled down. One of the respondents told that the *Oraons* are living in this village since the year 1885. One of the key informants revealed that their forefathers came to settle in this village during the *Zaminadari* system, which lasted till the year 1965. Before the *Zamindari* system, most of the lands belonged to these tribal communities, but in due course of time, the lands were grabbed by the *Zamindars* and local influential caste people on the pretext of debt. They said that there has been sea of changes taken place in the village and its economic structure due to the abolition of *Zaminadari* system and opening up of other economic avenues. Earlier the *Oraons* were forced to do the work of bonded labourers of the feudal lords and in return they get fixed amount of grains annually. The *Oraons* were totally on the mercy of local landlords as the type of work and amount of grains were not fixed.

Oraons used to practise shifting cultivation, but now most of them are involved in agrarian activities. Hunting, formerly of major importance, has been reduced during the present period, especially after the introduction of the Forest Act, to the status of a ceremonial event; there is even a women's hunting ceremony, held every twelve years. Although a small minority of the tribe are Christians, the great majority follow Hindu form of

worship. Their main deities are local, non-Sanskritic ones, such as *Chandi*, *Chauthia*, *Dadgo Burhia*, *Gaon Deoti*, and *Jair Budhi*. Like any other tribal communities, Oraon is also an endogamous tribe as the marriage takes place in its own tribe. Beyond this, *Oraons* observe village and clan exogamy³. The patrilineal extended family is the ideal residential unit among them, but the nuclear families are more common among Oraon. Boys and girls marry after attaining puberty. This follows a period in which both sexes stay in a youth dormitory (*dhumkuria*). Boys are branded on the arm before being admitted to this institution (Gopal and Jha, 2008).

5.1 Transition in Socio-Cultural Values and Practices

Kinship forms the basis of tribal social organization. Most tribes are divided into exogamous clans and lineages. The marriage among tribals is based on the rule of tribal endogamy. Marriage is viewed as a contract and there are no prohibition on divorce and remarriage; kinship as an instrument of social bonds. It is evident from close observation and in-depth discussion with *Tharus* and *Oraons* that they are in perfect communion with the local environment and culture. Close kinship ties among Tharus, brotherly affection among the community members, close association and reliance on their family, friends and relatives, and strong linkage with their cultural routes are some of the factors of tribal brotherhood.

However, some changes are evident at the family level. Earlier there used to be more cohesion at the family and community levels. Now there is more migration for the work leading to the change in occupational structure also. The families are also disintegrating and now nuclear families are more preferred. However, it does not mean that the family members do not have coordination and cohesion. They still have the same amount of cohesiveness, solidarity and brotherhood at the family and community level. In case of migration as well, the children and aged persons in the family are looked after by other family members and even the kinsmen in the village.

The residence among both these communities is essentially patrilocal. Marriage is consummated in the bridegroom's house. Property is inherited by the sons in *Oraon*. The eldest one gets a bigger share. He also acts as head of the family after his father's death and also succeeds to his traditional position, if any. Either husband or wife can divorce with social approval on different grounds. Aggrieved party is given compensation. In fact the amount of compensation is fixed before a marriage takes

³In clan exogamy, partner taken for marriage is from outside village and clan but from the same tribe.

place. After a child is born, divorce generally does not take place. The children of a divorced couple live with their father. Widows, widowers and divorcees can remarry (Gopal and Jha, 2008). Some changes in marriage practices have also been observed among these communities. The marriage age used to be less for these communities. A few years back, the average marriage age for boys was 16-17 years and for girls 14-16 years. This has increased slightly as now they prefer education before getting married. Mate is acquired through negotiation, some cases of elopement have also been found among them. Remarriage of widow, widower and divorcees is permitted. Both bride price and dowry exist, but the marriage process became longer, the marriage procession is larger and the marriage expenditure also increased. Women have equal inheritance rights in Tharu society. They contribute to the family income and control family expenditure along with men.

Both the studied communities live in the multi-caste village and hence they have continuous interaction with other caste people for many generations. In addition to this, there are many other factors of change, such as, work related migration, interaction with the government's and non-government's officials, technological and media exposures, etc. The changes are mainly at the superficial level such as changes in the material culture, life style, food, dress pattern, housing, etc. But these changes have not affected their basic social structure and values. Both the communities are patrilineal and patrilocal. Despite this, the status of women is better in both these communities.

5.2 Economic Transition

Tharus and *Oraons* are not much satisfied with their sources of livelihood as the problem of livelihood resources in the village and local area is not perennial. These resources are dwindling day by day. However, they like to stay in the village among their kith and kin but due to scarce livelihood resources and economic hardships, they have to go outside for earning wages. They have now very limited access to the natural resources especially the forest resources. Also, they do not find any job in the village or in the local town and hence more and more tribal men and women are migrating out of the state to find some work. Almost fifty percent Tharus of this village has migrated outside the state in search of the livelihood. They are also not much happy with the Government's efforts as their basic needs are not being taken care of by the successive Governments. The village does not have any health centre and the schools are also quite far off from their houses. They said that they are also not able to avail the Government's development programmes and schemes fully. Also, these schemes are not adequate enough and whatever is available is not reaching to them.

Tharus give the credit of change and development to the young generation, as they have started migrating outside in search of employment. They have started migrating to other states and cities, even to the southern and western parts of the country such as Kerala and Gujarat. As a result their economic conditions have improved slightly. They have now built better houses, and leading a better life as compared to the past. Now, most of their houses are better and strong as the roofs of the houses are cemented. Earlier the roofs were made up of bamboo, reeds and grasses (*Tharu* Huts), but now it is replaced by concrete tiles. Some of the houses are even pucca. Now they have also started sending their children to the schools and colleges. Some of the respondents informed that they have spent their childhood and younger days in abject poverty. They didn't even have anything to eat at times and the grains available to them for food was maize only. Somehow they have managed to survive in poverty and extreme struggle. But now they have started going out of the village for earning. Usually, *Tharus* go alone to other cities, leaving behind the wife and children and old parents. In some cases, only parents left behind in the village houses. Usually, they come back twice in a year to the village on special occasions. Thus, whatever changes came to the Tharu's society, these changes are at the superficial level due to the improved income, education, migration, and exposure to the outside world.

Most of the *Tharus* are dependent upon the daily wage work; however the traditional occupation of *Tharus* is shifting cultivation. Some of the families also have small pieces of land. They do cultivate rice, maize, pulses and a few seasonal vegetables. Primary occupation for these respondents was agricultural work (as farmers and agricultural labourers). Those who have migrated outside are engaged in skilled and semi-skilled work such as tailor, mason, etc. Those who are staying in the village are still engaged in agricultural activities and daily wage work, cattle rearing, etc. Some of them have also been engaged in the forest department, mostly as fourth grade employees (guard, driver, cook and animal trackers).

Oraon have had great dependence on the forest resources. The dependence on the forest has decreased considerably due to the new forest laws and rules. Earlier they used to cut the woods from the forest and sell it in the local market. They also use it in house making and fuel for the kitchen. They used to dig out different types of roots and tubers (*kandi*) from the forest and eat the tubers after simply boiling or roasting it. In addition to the woods and tubers, they used to collect different types of fruits and seeds from the forest. Now they have limited access to the forest and their dependency has also been cut short by the Govt. Despite the changes in the

society, they feel that there are no major changes in the social structure, traditions and culture, traditional beliefs and rituals, etc. They still have the strong kinship ties and those who are migrating out for the wage are also keeping regular contact with their community men.

Now *Oraons* are also mostly dependent upon the daily wage work and agricultural labour. They are also engaged in poultry and duck farming, domesticating pigs, goat, cow and oxen. Most of the families are either landless or have small pieces of land which is also not sufficient for enough production to meet the family needs round the year. They also migrate outside in search of job. They are mostly engaged in the unskilled or semi-skilled work and migrate to the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi and even distant states of Haryana, Punjab, Himachal and southern states of Kerala.

Like other tribal societies, production in these communities is not specialized and whatever they produce is consumed by the family itself. Some of them are also engaged in other allied agricultural activities such as daily wage work in the sugarcane field, transporting the sugar cane to the factory, etc. They told that there are no cooperatives for marketing the agricultural products in the village or nearby area. They are also dependent upon the local forests as they also collect the minor forest produces - mainly woods for the fuel, raw materials for building houses. The production of commercial crops is not much in vogue. They don't have much land and hence there is a limited scope for even regular agricultural activities. They mainly grow maize and paddy. Only a few Tharu families grow commercial crops such as sugarcane and vegetables on the leased-in lands.

Due to economic hardships and financial constraints, they have to take loans on high interest rates to meet the contingency. There is no formal system of borrowing and lending money. They try to help each other in time of need, but most of them are dependent upon the local moneylenders (*seth-sahukar*), shopkeepers (*baniya*) and well to do farmers of the village for borrowing as the fellow tribal brethren are also very poor. They prefer to borrow from their friends and relatives as the rate of interest is exorbitant from the outsiders. *Tharus* and *Oraons* have to borrow the money quite often to meet their requirements. They mainly borrow to meet the social obligations such as marriage, death rites, and community feast on certain occasions and health requirements. However the incidences of borrowing and dependence on the local moneylenders have decreased slightly due to the improved economic conditions for most of the families in recent years.

5.3 Transition in Beliefs and Practices

Belief in the existence of superhuman or supernatural power is almost universal. Experiences of certain day to day sudden happenings, of disease, death and unexplainable, have led the tribal people in to believing in other than material visible world, i.e. in the invisible spirit – world or the supernatural. The dependence on the forces of nature like rains, natural calamities and displeasure of gods points the basic nature of religious belief prevalent in Tribal's society. The religious beliefs dominate the intellectual and practical life of Tribal's people. Religion has permeated onto the cultural norms of the society. Religious beliefs also have influenced the folk songs, paintings, marriage customs and social festivals. Rituals provide sanctity to the religious codes and dominate the life of Tribal people.

Change in beliefs and practices may also be observed in both these communities. Earlier these tribal groups were more animistic in nature. They still are animistic, but minor changes could be observed. Most of the religious festivals of these tribal communities are different from their neighbouring caste people. These festivals are mainly related to the nature. The prayers, rituals and festivals are closely linked with their cultural ecology. Some of the religious festivals of Oraons are: *Sarhul* or *Sarana*, *Jittiya (jivitputrika)*, *Khalihani Puja* or *Nemaan puja*, *Devthar Puja*, *Khaddi Puja*, *Karma-Dharma*, etc. In case of Tharus, the important religious festivals and worship are: *Maghi*, *Chauthichan*, *Jittiya*, *Saamaa Chakewa*, *Neman*, etc. These festivals also provide opportunity to strengthen the brotherhood among the tribal community men. All the community members come together to celebrate their traditional festivals. Even the migrant families return to their homes to celebrate these festivals. This provides opportunity to come together and strengthen the bonding of we-ness.

As mentioned, *Tharu* and *Oraon* are closely linked to the nature and they also acknowledge this fact and still do the worship of nature. They celebrate their festivals with much fan and fare. However, with the passage of time, these communities also get affected by the practices of the major religious group i.e. Hindus. The religious practices and rituals now a day became less elaborate than earlier. Some of the customs and religious practices of *Tharus* are closer to the Hindus. This is also due to paucity of time, less access to the forest, expenditure on the customs, and influence from the major religious group.

5.4 Transition in Political Organization

This study also looked into the changing dynamics of their traditional tribal councils (*jati/adivasi Panchayat*) and political aspects including participation in statutory elections of panchayat, their awareness level and participation development process, etc. It also looks into the aspects of availing the development programmes and schemes being implemented by the Government in the area, what are their expectations from the Govt., etc.? How much they are conscious of the political process, what are the roles of tribal councils in maintaining cohesiveness in the studied society, how do they function, what other activities they are supposed to undertake, is there any change in functioning and efficacy of these tribal councils in modern day, etc.

It has been found that their traditional councils (*jati panchayat*) are more or less remaining same but minor changes also witnessed in it. Tribals are peace loving people by nature and there are hardly any quarrels and fights among each other. They are known for their hard work and have peaceful approach towards life. Despite this, a few cases of conflicts among the villagers come into light occasionally. Conflicts are mainly related to the property and use of local resources. Sometimes conflicts related to the domestic issues are also being reported in the village. Conflicts outside the community with other caste people do take place as well. But these conflicts are also very rare. The internal conflicts among the families and community are still resolved by the elders of the village. Both the studied communities usually do not approach to the police station and court. They obey the decisions of the village elders and the Panchayat. Those who are not satisfied with the decisions of the village elders and tribal council only approach to the police station and court.

There is no such traditional tribal council among *Tharus* at the village or GP level. But they have a larger body named *Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh (TKM)*, which was founded way back in the year 1980. The main purpose of the TKM is to take care of the welfare of the Tharus. They fight for the rights of the Tharus. The TKM is also instrumental in mobilising the local resources for the welfare and development of *Tharu's* society. They approach to the local Govt. officials including the Forest Officials and advocate for the use of the forest resources.

Conflicts in the *Oraon's* society are not very uncommon. The conflicts take place in the family and in the community on some important issues related to the property and inheritance and the use of common resources. Sometimes the conflicts also

take place on very trivial issues. Whenever such conflicts occur, these are resolved by the community members itself. The elderly and wise community members have major role in resolving the conflicts. The Oraons also have a tribal council at the village level. This *Adivasi* council is mainly responsible for the welfare of the Oraons and also plays important role in resolving the conflicts. Whenever any such internal conflict is brought to the notice of the *Adivasi Sangh*, it takes the decision. The community members have to obey the decisions of this council. There are a total of 8 members in the *Adivasi Sangh* - one president, one secretary, one treasurer and five other members. The members are elected by the community members belonging to Oraon.

Minor changes observed in the traditional tribal councils of these communities. These changes are due to the introduction of the statutory Panchayat and exposure to the formal system of law and order and judiciary. It has been observed that these tribal men and women take active part in the entire modern political process. Two of the *Tharu* women were also found to be the ward members in the area. They also take part in the voting for electing their representatives. Before the introduction of the formal and statutory system of representation, they were mainly dependent on their traditional councils. They still have faith in their councils and the rulings of these councils are also binding.

Conclusions

Change is inevitable and all societies including tribal societies went through the process of change. The studied tribal communities *Tharu* and *Oraon* have also witnessed changes, albeit the rate of change is slow due to obvious reasons of geographical isolation from the mainstream societies, less exposure to the outside world, social and cultural barriers, educational and economic backwardness, existence of social institutions and traditional norms and values, etc. These societies are also not insulated from the cultural contact as the notion of exclusiveness and cultural insulation has never been valid. Most of the elder *Tharus* had the opinion that their society has witnessed changes over the period. Recently these changes have been sharp and quite observable. But they considered these changes positive as there is not much change in the traditional institutions such as marriage, family, kinship, etc., and also there is much unity and brotherhood among the community men. These changes have not altered their basic social structure and organization, but the changes are at the superficial level.

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Annexure-I

Table 1: Sex wise distribution of Respondents

Communities	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Tharu	54	72.97	20	27.03	74
Oraon	35	53.03	31	46.97	66
Grand Total	89	63.57	51	36.43	140

Table 2: Sex wise distribution of studied population

Communities	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Tharu	205	51.64	192	48.36	397
Oraon	197	48.76	207	51.24	404
Grand Total	402	50.19	399	49.81	801

Table 3: Type of family among studied population

Family Type	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Joint	49	66.22	29	43.94	78	55.71
Nuclear	25	33.78	37	56.06	62	44.29
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 4: Educational status of studied population

Communities	Illiterate		Literate		Primary		Middle		Matric		Intermediate		Grad.& above		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Tharu	185	46.6	25	6.3	87	21.9	64	16.1	19	4.8	9	2.3	8	2.0	397
Oraon	179	44.3	19	4.7	122	30.2	43	10.6	21	5.2	13	3.2	7	1.7	404
Grand Total	364	45.4	44	5.5	209	26.1	107	13.4	40	4.9	22	2.8	15	1.9	801

Table 5: Main Occupation of studied population

Communities	Agriculture		Agricultural Labour		Non-Agri. Labour		Business/ Animal Husb.		Student/ children		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Tharu	108	27.2	79	19.9	48	12.1	19	4.8	143	36.0	397
Oraon	37	9.2	124	30.7	74	18.3	4	1.0	165	40.8	404
Grand Total	145	18.1	203	25.3	122	15.2	23	2.9	308	38.5	801

Table 6: Are you satisfied with your present occupation?

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	56	75.68	38	57.58	94	67.14
No	18	24.32	28	42.42	46	32.86
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 7: Do you have sufficient resources of livelihood in your village?

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	22	29.73	20	30.30	42	30.00
No	52	70.27	46	69.70	98	70.00
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 8: Do you also go out of village for work/earning livelihood?

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	30	40.54	46	69.70	76	54.29
No	22	29.73	15	22.73	37	26.43
Not Applicable	22	29.73	5	7.58	27	19.29
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 9: Gross monthly income (Rs) of the respondents

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Below 3000	2	2.70	0	0.00	2	1.43
3001 to 5000	30	40.54	40	60.61	70	50.00
5001 to 10000	38	51.35	16	24.24	54	38.57
10001 to 15000	3	4.05	7	10.61	10	7.14
Above 15000	1	1.35	3	4.55	4	2.86
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 10: Availability of toilet in the house?

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	10	13.51	4	6.06	14	10.00
No	64	86.49	62	93.94	126	90.00
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 11: Types of marriage among studied population

Inter-caste/tribe marriage is accepted in your community?						
Inter-caste/tribe marriage	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	40	54.05	6	9.09	46	32.86
No	34	45.95	60	90.91	94	67.14
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00
Widow marriage prevalent in your community?						
Yes	59	79.73	65	98.48	124	88.57
No	15	20.27	1	1.52	16	11.43
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

Table 12: Social Changes among Tharu and Oraon

Is there any change in life style in your community as compared to the past?						
Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	62	83.78	55	83.33	117	83.57
No	12	16.22	11	16.67	23	16.43
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00
If yes, what kind of changes?						
Educational level	46	62.16	48	72.73	94	67.14
Dress pattern, eating habits	6	8.11	3	4.55	9	6.43
Language and dialects	5	6.76	2	3.03	7	5.00
Other changes	2	2.70	2	50.00	4	2.86
Not applicable	15	20.27	11	42.31	26	18.57
Total	74	100.00	66	100.61	140	100.00

Table 13: Factors hampering the change and growth in your society

Response	Tharu		Oraon		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of education	30	40.54	9	13.64	39	27.86
Lack of awareness	0	0.00	11	16.67	11	7.86
Devoid of any Govt. scheme	23	31.08	14	21.21	37	26.43
Lack of employment, wage, SSI	21	28.38	32	48.48	53	37.86
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00