

Tharus and Their Enhancement in Modern Time of Lakhimpur-Kheri District, U.P.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigate the origin of Tharus, its affinities, internal organization, social nature in the form of lifestyle, religion, food-drinks, occupations and social reforms by means of festivals, marriages and dance of Tharus. It is all possible by their life activity, survey of Tharu villages and vitality of the forest which is of ethnobotanical use. Forest provides economic uplift to the Tharus through vegetables, fruits, medicines through their plant resources.

The main motive of the forest shall be to envisage long term harmonious relationship between the forest and Tharu's social and economic interest. This paper inculcates that it would not only benefit the Tharus (Tribals) but also the country as a whole.

Introduction

The sub-Himalayan Tarai region of Uttar Pradesh is inhabited by two important scheduled tribes, namely, the Tharus and the Bhojpur. The Tharus are found in the northern district of this area viz, Gonda, Baharaich, Gorakhpur, Nainital and Lakhimpur Kheri. They are one of the important tribes in the Doon Valley (Someswar Ranges) of west Champaran in Bihar in a compact belt, extending from Nainital in the west to Darjiling in the East. It was in 1967 that the Tharus, alongwith the tribes Bhoti, Bhojpur, Zansari and Ragi, were recognized by the Indian constitution as Scheduled Tribes. The Tharus and Bhojpur are about the only tribals who could survive in the malaria affected areas of Tarai region. In fact, they have been struggling hard to survive against the

natural forces for centuries and have led a secluded life. Even today, the Tharus depend upon the outside world for only such articles as salt, kerosene, oil and cloths. They make use of many plant species to meet with their day-to-day needs.¹ The Tharus are divided into a number of Endogamous sects. While the Tharus of Nainital and a majority of them in Lakhimpur are 'Ranas', the 'dangurias' is the dominant group of the Bhabhar areas of Gonda and Baharaich districts. The 'Kathurias' are found from a small numbers in Lakhimpur-Kheri, Baharaich and Gonda districts. In Gorakhpur district, most of the Tharus, however, come from Kathuria stock. There are many other sects found in small numbers in Uttar Pradesh but, in Nepal, other sects like Kumhar,

Jogi, Malhauria, Saunea, Khunka, Garauhra and Pochhila can be located in sizeable numbers.

Origin of the Name Tharus- the Native of Forest

Tharu's descend from mangoliad stock and have a distinguished past in which they are set to have ruled over the whole of Tarai area along the Indo-Nepal border. Though they are the jungle tribals and their origin is uncertain. It is argued that the word 'Tharu' is derived from Hindi word 'Thaharav' (Halted) because of their alleged flight from the region of Tharu desert into the forest of Tarai. They claim their descent from the Rana's of Rajsthan, who had settled in Nepal. At present they are into a number of sects, such as 'Rana', 'Dengaurias', 'Kathaurias' etc. Among these the Rana Tharus claim their descent from the family of Maharana Pratap. Nesfield, (coated in crook, 1896), however, holds that the tribe is so called after the word 'Thar' which, in the dialect of lower classes, means 'native of the forest'.²

Agriculture still remains to be their main occupation, although new many of them have switch on to business, poultry, fishery and other allied occupation. Main Kharif crops are paddy and maize. Initially they employed traditional means of cultivation which were very much time consuming and less yielding, but now the scenario has changed and the method of cultivation have been improved due to sincere efforts of the state government(Tribal development department) .

The Problem

To a vast number of tribals, the forest is a home, a livelihood, the very existence. It gives them timber without which they cannot live. Besides fruit, honey, medicinal plants and fish it provides them with timber to build their houses and things for practicing their art. From times immemorial the tribal people have enjoyed freedom to use the forest and hunt its animals and this has given them a conviction that

remains even today deep in their heart, that the forest belongs to them. However, in late seventies- the tribal villages were converted to be revenue villages.

A war era began with the declaration of the forest area in which they ruled since ages, as a National Park on February,1,1977.³ Thus most of the villages come into the ambit of the buffer zone of Dudhawa National Park while two Tharu villages 'Surma' and 'Mura' remained located inside the core zone- 'Sanctum-Sanctorum' of the park. Mura has been located into the buffer zone of the park. The National forest policy 1988 was a turning point in the conservation in post independent era and recognized the tribals benefit first time.⁴

With the conversion of status to revenue village the authority of the government in these areas and the natural desire of the forest officials to exercise closer control over them disturbed the tribal tradition and sowed the seed of conflict.

The inter-relationship between the tribals and forest may be studied through various angles such as, income and employment generation through agro forestry, evolution of tribal welfare schemes, impact of forest labour co-operative societies, rehabilitation of project affect person, working of tribals sub plans, marketing of forest produce etc. In the present study, however, a wider prospective has been taken in establishing the economic and social impact of forest policy on the tribals in Dudhwa National Park, as well as, the impact of tribals of Dudhwa Forest.⁵

The main motive of the forest shall be to envisage long term harmonious relationship between the forest policy and tribals economic and social interest.

Materials

The following parameters are studied as tools –

- 1- Tharu villages
- 2- Land utilization
- 3- Survey visit with Tharus
- 4- Plants and its parts used by the Tharus

Methods

I was with Tharus for 4 days in several places like Bankati Range-Bankati village, Dudhwa Range-Devrahi and North Sonaripur-Chandanchauki. I tried and found out even minute things in their daily lives and what I could notice during this very short visit has been included in this study. I conducted an ethnobotanical survey of edible and medicinal and other miscellaneous plants on the above scheduled.

Observation

It includes analysis of Tharu villages in three ranges, land utilization of the forest, survey visit with Tharus, survey of plants-edible plants, cultivated plants, vegetables, fruits, oils, and survey of medicinal and other miscellaneous plants.

Tharu villages ⁶

Details of villages and total area under Tharu villages are as follows- It has three range Bankati range, Dudhwa range and North Sonaripur.

Table showing Villages of different range

Range/ SL.No.	Bankati range 9 villages Total area 4843.38 acre	Dudhwa range 13 villages Total area 6194.92 acre	North Sonaripur 15 villages Total area 5377 acre
1	Bangawan	Bajahi	Balera
2	Bankati	Bharari	Barbeta
3	Bhoora	Chhediya East	Belbandi
4	Biriya khera	Chhediya west	Budha Purnea
5	Kanjariya	Devrahi	Chandan Chauki
6	Kiratapur	Dhakiya	Dhusikya
7	Sariapara	Dhyanpur	Gubraura
8	Singhaiya	Jainagar	Mangalpurwa
9	Soonra	Najhota	Pacpehra
10	--	Masaan Khamb	Parsiya
11	--	Pipraula	Poya
12	--	Sonha	Purauna
13	--	Surma	Ramgarh
14	--	--	Ramnagar
15	--	--	Moura

Survey visit with Tharus

I observed even minute things in their daily life on the basis of different points-

Social nature of lifestyle ⁷

Dress- Tharus are to wear very simple type of cloth which comprises all the types of glamour of tribal life. Traditional clothing seems to be changing in younger people but aged persons are still in traditional dresses.

Food and Drinks - Tharus are generally non-vegetarian, fishes as a compulsory part of their food.

The job to catch to fish is performed by ladies and children. I was very surprised to know that they cook no vegetable without fish. Wine is the most necessary part of their life. Their staple food is rice and fish, and like to drink wine even women and children are fond of drinking wine give them protection from Malaria. The traditional and most popular drink is 'Jand'-a locally fermented rice beer, which is consumed heavily during festivals, especially, by Danguria tharus. This liquor is believed to give them partial immunity from malaria and to keep them alive in the forest, especially during the monsoon. Tharus live by hunting and fishing, gathering forest herbs, fruits and vegetables, grazing cows and buffaloes, making ghee and rearing pigs, fowls and goats. The animals which they chiefly hunt are the wild boar (male pig), deer and antelope.

Houses- Their houses are wooden and a lot of wood is consumed in the preparation of those houses. The houses are generally double storied and are very small. The fashion of traditional houses changing rapidly. It is due to their contact with cities like Palia and Nighasan or due to restriction imposed by forest department on cutting trees.

Family Life- It is believed that they have matriarchal society in which the woman dominates in day to day affair of the family and the eldest female member invariably happens to be the head of the house hold; they manage the entire social and economic affair of the family. Joint family system is common except a few recent exceptions.

Internal organization- The social life of Tharus community presents a beautiful picture of enmity and solidarity. They have strong traditional Panchayat organization to settle their disputes and to ensure adherence to a common code of conduct.

Religion- They worship many Hindu Gods along with a pantheon of their own ancient Gods. The Hindu Gods and Goddesses, popular among the Tharus, are Shankar, Parvati and Hanumaan, while some of the tribal Gods, deities and spirits

worshipped by them are Mote Baba, Katiyaar Baba, Bhuinya, Nagnihai, Jwala, Meri masan and others. They worship a piece of a Sakhoo wood in the shape of Lingam, symbolic of Lard Shiva. They also worship plants like peepal and Tulsi, Aam and animals like cow, serpent and monkeys.

Occupations- Agriculture is the main stay of the Tharus. They practice agriculture in the primitive way and grow rice, maize, barley, wheat, gram, pea, potato, lentil (masoor dal), sugarcane and mustard as their main crops and grow vegetables, tobacco and bananas in their backyards.

Social Customs

Festivals- In the spring, the Tharus observe the annual festival of fire, resembling in many respects, the Holi of Hindus. A mound of earth is prepared, and pole is fixed in its centre in a vertical position. The offerings of Haldi, hemp, Dhatoora and other pungent or odorous herbs are placed upon the poles and mound by the assembled people. The straw stubble and sticks are then piled around the pole, and the most respected man in the assembly puts fire to it. Thereafter, they amuse themselves with dancing, playing the drums and 'Mridang', pelting each other with colored powder, singing amorous songs and cracking lascivious jokes. In the evening, they eat meat and rice and drink wine. The festival is celebrated for seven days from the commencement of Holi. A festival named 'Merhpooja' is celebrated during the later part of the rainy season by cutting grasses which is followed a month later by harvesting of rice crop.

Marriages- The usual age of the first marriage for men and women is about are seventeen or eighteen. According to Nesfield (quoted in crooke, 1896), the marriage contract is arrange by the fathers on the either side, and the couple, for whom the negotiation is made, has no say in the matter. The father of the groom goes over to the village or clan in which the bride's father resides, and after making his proposal for the price to be paid for the bride,

offers him a drink of wine. If the present is accepted the bargain is struck. The contract once made is faithfully kept by both the parties. Divorce is easy and widow remarriage is permissible. In some regions, the Tharus practice both infant and adult marriages.

Dance- The Tharus have their traditional dance performed by both the sexes of all age groups. They dress themselves in colourful cloths and dance to the beats of the drum or 'Mridang'. The dancing pairs advance and retreat with a gliding motion, and represent, with coarse fidelity, the advances of the lover, and the coyness of the maiden.

Plants and its parts used by the Tharus⁸

The Tharus utilize a large number of plants of the forest flora for food, fodder, fuel, medicine, narcotics, housing, agricultural implements, fish

poison, social and religious ceremonies, musical instruments, etc. These are dealt with under the following eleven groups, depending on their uses and the types of products obtain from them.

1-The Edible plants

A-Wild plants- Bel, Katili chaulai, Jangli Chaulai, Jangli Angoor, Satawar, Bathua, Amla, Gular, Gular, Pakar, Kamal are used as food

B-The Cultivated plants-

I-Cereals and pulses- Jau, Gahoon, Makka, Dhan, Arhar and Chana are cultivated and used as food.

II- Cultivated vegetables plants- Arbi (Ghuia), same, Sitaphal, Kaddu, Karela, Baigan, Aaloo, Palak, Lobia are common vegetables and are used as food.

2-Medicinal plants-

Medicinal plants arranged as per diseases and other conditions⁹

Sl. No.	Diseases	Local name	Parts used
1	constipation	Bel & Amaltas	Fruits & seeds
2	Cooling Sunstroke	bel	fruits
3	Burn and blisters	Neem	Leaves and Barks
4	Jaundice	Amaltas	Seeds
5	Rheumatism & Gout	Banmuli	Root stock
6	Headache	Kukrona	Leaves
7	Fever-Malarial and pneumonia	Tulsi & Sarpgandha, Arandi	Leaves & Root leaves
8	Diarrhea & Dysentery	Duddhi or Kurchi	Bark
10	Wounds & Alsar	Bel	Leaves

3-Plants for Timber and wood work- The wood of following forest plants is used for making various agricultural implements, Carts, cots, containers for animal feed and other household articles Ex. Khair, Babool, Seesam, Sakhu, Sagaun, Asna.

4-Plants for musical instruments- The wooden frame of the local musical instrument called 'Mridang' is made from the wood of different plants Ex. Aam, Tun, Gambhar.

5-House building materials- For making simple cottages, the Tharus use clay, bamboo, Timber, Fibers, which are available in the forest. They make

an infrastructure of the wall with the culm of Munj', Narkool, Sakhu etc.

6-Plants for cordage, mats, and baskets-

Arhar, bhang, jute, sanai, kush, .

7-Plants for religious ceremonies- The leaves of different plants are used in worshipping the tribal Gods and Goddesses. Ex, Bel, madar, peepal, tulsi, Sakhu,

8-Plants for oils and oil seeds- Oil is obtained from the different plants fruits. Ex.- Mustered, bakarendi, Alsi, Mahua, Rendi, Sakhu.

9-Plants for dyes- A green dye is obtained by the boiling the leaves and is used for colouring ropes. Ex.-Jangli Angoor, A red powder obtained from the mature fruits is used by Tharu women for colouring palms during festivals is Rohini plant.

10-Fodder plants- The leaves, young twigs and fruits of the following plants are used as fodder for cattle .Ex. Bathua, Bargad, Peepal, Chilbil, Aam, Shahtoot, Jangal Jalebi, Barseem.

11-Plants for Miscellaneous use –The traditional drink jand is prepared by dried boiled rice and powdered and mixed with powder roots of satawar and prithipal. Common drink is obtained by juice of sugarcane. Narcotic plants-e.g. leaves and tops of female plant of Bhang and the whole plant of Tanbaku are used by Tharus. Gums and resins are obtained from the different plant parts like Khair, babool, neem, sakhu. The ash obtained from wood of Aasna, is used for washing clothes. The leaves of Mahlain framed in the culms of bamboos are use for making 'Mithaura' and umbrella, use for protection against rain and sun.

Conclusion

The socio economic aspect of Tharus and their economic uplift is concluded in following points.

- 1- Social nature of Tharus, uplift their status through different activities, adapting rules and regulations by government, internal organization, religion, food drinks adapting occupations and social customs by means of festivals, marriages, dance.
- 2- The forest plays a vital role in uplifting the economy of the Tharus through ethnobotanical use of edible, medicinal, wood and miscellaneous plants.
- 3- The present studies acquire an added significance in view of the recent tribal welfare programmes lunched by government of Uttar Pradesh and recent acculturation of their cultures.
- 4- However, due care must be taken to preserve and maintain the cultural tradition of the tribe, while undertaking their economic uplift.
- 5- The present studies also reveal and suggest that plant resources of Kheri district U.P. are extremely rich in raw materials for establishment of industries and providing employment to the rural population.
- 6- The Tharus are joining the main stream of modern society through the result of new educational policies launched by govt. of India and programmes implemented by social welfare development schemes.
- 7- The studies also bring light on the economic uplift of the Tharus through herbal drugs, oil seeds, fibers, pulp industries, agricultural and musical tools, and the small scale cultivation plants and the tribal can sell in the local market.

The programme should be analyse in critical perspectives and suggestions offered for its more effective operation.

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