

Impact of Urbanization and Modernization on the Tharus and the Oraons of West Champaran, Bihar

RAJEEV KAMAL KUMAR[†]

*Division of Sociology & Social Anthropology, A. N. Sinha Institute of Social Studies,
North Gandhi Maidan, Patna 800001, Bihar
E-mail: rkamalanthro@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT: Tribal society is characterized by relative isolation from larger cultural influences, has a relative cultural homogeneity and a simple technology. Like any other society 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. The present paper is based on a study conducted among tribal communities, namely Tharu and Oraon of West Champaran district of Bihar. The main objective of the study is to check 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 focus 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 is not affected much by the established socio-cultural norms. The traditional institutions such as family, marriage and kinship still hold a strong place in the lives of these tribal communities.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal society is characterized by relative isolation from larger social and cultural influences, has relative cultural homogeneity and a simple technology. They have their own taboos which prohibit certain actions that are punishable by the community, by the supernatural, or by magical consequences. A large number of 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 self-sufficient and based on need; while the modern societies are dependent on market.

Tribal society is very egalitarian by nature. Discrimination against women, occupational differentiation, and emphasis on status and hierarchical social order of Hindu society is absent among the tribal societies. The status of the tribal people in the society can be judged mainly by the roles they play in the society. Thus there are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex based inequalities. Thus men and women enjoy equal status and freedom. 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 and was observable in early tribal societies

[†] Assistant Professor

(Vidyarthi, '68; Majumdar and Madan, '91; Mann, '96; Kumar and Kapoor, 2005, 2009; Dash Sharma, 2006; Panigrahi and Oraon, 2017). But some changes have now been observed due to various factors even in primitive tribal groups (Dash Sharma, 2006: xi-xxx).

Tribal life is such that it is being governed by social norms, cultural complexes which discourage them to go beyond certain necessities. It is the social institutions of the tribal that has active role in determining the needs of the community. Nowadays, the tribal societies are not much isolated from the outside world. Most of the tribal areas are now connected and linked with the outside world through modern means of communication. In this situation, a number of changes have also been observed in the erstwhile isolated tribal societies. There are different factors of social change and integration with the mainstream societies such as urbanization, modernization, constant interaction and exchange of services with caste societies, migration to the urban areas, transport and communication, modern technology, 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 the changes it bring especially in the society, culture, economy, and daily lives of these communities due to the constant exposures. In this situation, the question is whether the studied tribal communities are able to retain their basic social structure? How far these exposures have affected their society, social order and community living?

Review of Literature

Impact of external factors such as urbanization, modernization, industrialization, etc on the tribal communities has been studied by many anthropologists and sociologists. These studies indicate that due to exposure from the external forces, tribal society, culture, traditions, practices, etc also getting affected over the time (Vidyarthi, '68, '70; Chandra Mowli, '69; Hari Mohan, '75; Vidyarthi and Rai, '85; Patnaik, '96). This section of the paper briefly oversees 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.

According to Dube ('55), 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 ('58) 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 S. C. Dube were adopted by the Government of India for marking a group of people as ST. These are: primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, and backwardness. However, some scholars said, in Indian context, any attempt to define tribe is bound to fail as it will not include all sections 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. As per Census 2011, population of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country is 10.45 crore (males 5.25 and females 5.20 crores) which is 8.6 per cent of total population of the country. Decadal growth of ST population is 24 per cent in 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 per cent of the tribes live in western and central India States, whereas only 11 per cent of them are located in southern States.

Different studies conducted among the tribal communities show that these societies are also not static and constantly face exposure from 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, '74). 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, and others. 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, '90; Joshi and Dalpati, 2016).

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 religions lead to assimilation of tribal culture. Ghurye ('95) has gone too far and termed the tribal as backward Hindus. However, some of the scholars have denied the complete assimilation. 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 Champaran district (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, close 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 in 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 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 have become major tribe of Bihar.

Oraon tribe is also known as Kurukh. According to Roy ('15), the Oraon owe this name of Kurukh to their hero-king Karakh. Oraon is also spelled as Uraon, Oran, or Oram. Oraons are an *adivasi* (original inhabitant, constitutionally a ST) group inhabiting in 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 have settled and involved themselves 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 with and are inhabiting with the neighbouring Munda tribe, and the headman is also known as 'munda'.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Present study is based primarily on qualitative methods. The data was collected using structured in-depth interview schedule, FGD checklist and quasi participant observation of the communities. The data were collected in few short trips to these villages during 2017. The villages were selected purposively, only after reviewing 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.

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 stayed 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.

Study area: Present study has been conducted in two villages namely Manguraha and Rupauliya of Gaunaha block of West Champaran district of Bihar. Both of 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 villages are relatively isolated and located towards the forest and hill ranges. The international boundary of Nepal is very close. The block headquarters Gaunaha is only 4 km from Manguraha and 6 km from Rupauliya village. Narkatiyaganj, one of the subdivisions of district and the local town, is well connected with other parts of the district and the state. The distance to Narkatiyaganj is approximately 30 km from these villages and district headquarters at a distance of 65 km. Some of the smaller towns close to these villages are Ramnagar, Chanpatia, Narkatiaganj and Bagaha. However, both villages are connected with metalled road from the block headquarters and other parts, but public transport is not available. People either use private vehicle or walk down to reach to Gaunaha from where public transport is available to reach other parts of the district.

The basic facilities such as school, health centre, railway station, post office, middle and high school, bank, etc 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. First Referral Unit (FRU) in the form of Sub-Divisional Hospital (SDH) is located at Narkatiyaganj, approximately 20 km away from the villages. The district hospital is located at the district headquarters which is again very far from these villages. 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 too. They are also conversant in Hindi and other local languages but they prefer to talk in their own dialect with their kinsmen.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Following section gives a brief outline of the studied population. A total of 140 respondents were interviewed from both the communities. Male respondents were intentionally taken more in number (63.57 per cent) for the sake of convenience in collecting more information of household. 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 persons. Thus, the average size of each family is less than 6 members per family. The percentages of male and female population (50.10 per cent and 49.81 per cent respectively) are almost equal (Table 2).

TABLE 1

Sex-wise distribution of Tharus and Oraons respondents

Community	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Tharus	54	72.97	20	27.03	74
Oraons	35	53.03	31	46.97	66
Total	89	63.57	51	36.43	140

TABLE 2

Sex-wise distribution of Tharus and Oraons population in villages

Community	Male		Female		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Tharus	205	51.64	192	48.36	397
Oraons	197	48.76	207	51.24	404
Total	402	50.19	399	49.81	801

Both these communities are having patriarchal society and the descent is traced through male line. The eldest male member of the family always becomes the head of the household. These tribal people have close knitted family system. It has been found in the study that more than half of them have joint families (55.71 per cent). Joint family is more prevalent among Tharus (66.2 per cent). 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, individualistic nature of the society, etc (Table 3).

TABLE 3

Type of family among the studied population

Family types	Tharus		Oraons		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

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

TABLE 4

Types of marriage among the Tharus and the Oraons in the study villages of Gaunaha block

Acceptability of inter-caste / inter-tribe marriages and widow re-marriage

Is inter-caste/ inter-tribe marriages acceptable in your society ?	Tharus		Oraons		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
Is widow re-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

cent) or hardly literate (5.5 per cent able to sign only). Among literates, most of them are either primary (26.1 per cent) or middle passed (13.4 per cent) and very few of them have High School (common expression

Matric by them) and higher educational qualification (Table 5). Awareness towards education has increased in both Tharus and Oraons as most of them have started sending their children to schools.

TABLE 5
Educational status of the Tharus and the Oraons of the villages

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

The primitive societies have passed through several stages of development everywhere in the world. 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. 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. They depend upon more than one economic activity, but mainly practice settled agriculture. It has also emerged prominently in present

study. The main occupation is still agriculture and allied activities (more than 44 per cent). Tharus are better in farming as more Tharu families have possession of some agricultural lands (27.2 per cent) as compared to the Oraons (only 9.2 per cent). 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 daily wage works and they migrate seasonally to earn their daily wages. Oraons have long history of working in the factories as labourers (Table 6).

TABLE 6
Main occupation of the Tharus and the Oraons of the villages

Community	Agriculture		Agricultural labour		Non-agricultural labour		Business/ animal husbandry		Students/ children		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Tharus	108	27.2	79	19.9	48	12.1	19	4.8	143	36.0	397
Oraons	37	9.2	124	30.7	74	18.3	4	1.0	165	40.8	404
Total	145	18.1	203	25.3	122	15.2	23	2.9	308	38.5	801

The economic condition of both the studied communities is not good. Overall satisfaction with their present occupation is more than two third; however, Tharus seemed more satisfied (75.7 per cent) as compared to the Oraons (57.68 per cent). 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 prohibit the free use of forests. Only 30 per cent respondents considered that their villages have sufficient resources to eke out their livings (Table 7 & 8).

TABLE 7
Satisfaction of Tharus and Oraons with present occupation

Response to are you satisfied with your present occupation?	Tharus		Oraons		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 8

Response level of resources of livelihood by the Tharus and the Oraons of the villages

Response to: Do you have sufficient resources of livelihood in your village?	Tharus		Oraons		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

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, 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 per cent) of the respondents migrate seasonally in search of work. Percentage of migration is more in case of Oraons (69.70 per cent) as compared to Tharus (40.54 per cent). Monthly family income is also very low, as more than 90 percent manage their families in less than ₹ 10,000/- per month (Table 9 & 10).

TABLE 9

Going out of village for working / earning livelihood by the Tharus and the Oraons

Response to: Do you also go out of village for work/and or earning livelihood?	Tharus		Oraons		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 10

Gross monthly income of the family

Monthly income of the family (in ₹)	Tharus		Oraons		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

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 lack toilet facilities (90 per cent). This is more in case of Oraons (94 per cent). 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).

TABLE 11

Availability of toilet facilities in the houses of the Tharus and the Oraons families

Availability of toilet facilities in the house	Tharus		Oraons		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

Regarding change, most of the respondents (83 per cent) 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 considered 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 (Table12).

Overall they are satisfied with their lives in the villages but at the same time they 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 were 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).

CHANGING TRIBAL LIFE IN 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. Vidyarthi ('68) also considered that there are contacts between tribals and their Hindu neighbours and there are two main types of factors

TABLE 12
Statements of social changes among the Tharus and the Oraons of the villages

Response to: Have you observed changes in the life style of your community as compared to the past?	Tharus		Oraons		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
	Yes	62	83.78	55	83.33	117
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 changes and growth among the Tharus and the Oraons of the villages

Response to: Factors hampering the changes and growth in your society.	Tharus		Oraons		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of education	30	40.54	9	13.64	39	27.86
Lack of awareness of government programmes	0	0.00	11	16.67	11	7.86
Devoid of any government scheme	23	31.08	14	21.21	37	26.43
Lack of employment, low wages	21	28.38	32	48.48	53	37.86
Total	74	100.00	66	100.00	140	100.00

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, '85).

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 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.

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 were 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.

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 many 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 have been changes 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 received fixed amount of grains annually.

Most of the Oraons are now farmers, who in the past practised shifting cultivation. 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 marriages take place in its own tribe. Beyond this, Oraons observe village and clan exogamy¹. 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 arms before being admitted to this institution (Gopal and Jha, 2008).

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 families, 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 work leading to the change in occupational structure. The families are also disintegrating and now nuclear families are preferred. However, it does not mean that the family members do not have coordination and cohesion. They still have the cohesiveness, solidarity and brotherhood at the family and community level but, time spent together has decreased considerably due to mobility. 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 communities is essentially patrilocal. Marriage is consummated in the bridegroom's house. Property is inherited by the sons in Oraon. The eldest one gets the bigger share. He also acts as head of the family, after his father's death and succeeds to his traditional post. Either party 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 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. However, this has increased now. 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 larger, and the marriage expenditure has 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, there are many other factors such as work related migration, interaction with the government and non-government officials,

technological and media exposures, etc which are causing changes in the tribal societies at every level. 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.

Economic Transition

Tharus and Oraons are not much satisfied with their sources of livelihood, as 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 work. Almost fifty per cent 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. Also the existing schemes are not adequate enough and whatever available are 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 are 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 being replaced by concrete tiles. Some of the houses are even *pucca*. Now they have also started sending their children to 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 are left behind in the village houses. Usually, they come back twice 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 cultivate rice, maize, pulses and a few seasonal vegetables. Primary occupation of 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 stayed in the village are 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 woods from forest and sell it in the local market. They used it in house making and fuel for the kitchen. They used to dig out different types of roots and tubers (*kandi*) from forests 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 have also been cut short by the Government. 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 wages are also in 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 Pradesh and southern State 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 sugar cane to the factory, etc. 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 times 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 of most of the families in recent years.

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 society. The religious beliefs dominate the intellectual and practical life of the tribal 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 of 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 worship the nature. They celebrate their festivals with much fanfare. 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 before. 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.

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 noted 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*) more or less remained the same, but minor changes were 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 have 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 from these villages. Conflicts outside the community with other caste people 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 police station and court. They obey the decisions of the village elders and the Panchayat. Those who are not satisfied with the decisions of tribal council only approach police station and court.

There is no such traditional tribal council among the Tharus at the village or Gram Panchayat 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 society. They approach to the local government officials including the forest

officials and advocate for the use of the forest resources for their welfare.

Conflicts in the Oraon society of that area 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 an important role in resolving the conflicts that arise among them. Whenever any such internal conflict is brought to the notice of the 'Adivasi Sangh', it takes action. 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 five members are elected by the community members belonging to the Oraon community.

Minor changes have been 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 the judiciary. It has been observed that tribal men and women take active part in the entire political process. Two of the Tharu women were also happened to be the ward members in the area. They were elected in the last Panchayat elections. They also take part in the voting to elect their representatives. Before the introduction of 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 a binding upon them.

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.

NOTE

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

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