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## **CHANGING DYNAMICS OF TRIBAL COMMUNITIES OF NORTH-WEST BIHAR: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

### ***Abstract***

*Tribal society is based on the egalitarian principle, and hence there are no institutionalized inequalities on the basis of caste, class and gender. Proximity of tribal community with their immediate nature provides them a sense of unity and commonality. 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, and cultural complex, which discourage them to go beyond certain necessities. The present paper is based on a study conducted on two tribal communities namely- Tharu and Oraon in north-west 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, then to what extent these tribal societies have been affected? The study is mainly based on the qualitative techniques of in-depth interviews, observation and focused group discussions. The findings reveal that the studied tribal communities have also witnessed changes, albeit the rate of change is slow due to obvious reasons of geographical isolation, relatively less exposure to the outside world, social and cultural barriers, educational and economic backwardness, existence of social institutions and traditional norms and values, etc. Recently, these changes have been sharp and quite observable, but changes have not much affected their basic social structure and organization.*

**Keywords:** *Transition, change, continuity, Traditional.*

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### **Introduction**

Tribal society is different from the mainstream societies in terms of relative isolation from larger social and cultural influences, has cultural homogeneity, simple technology and relatively self-sufficient and need-based

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economy. Tribal life is such that it is being governed by social norms, and cultural complex, which discourage them to go beyond certain necessities. 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. 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.

A perfect harmonious man-environment relationship existed in early tribal societies. It is the social institutions of the tribal that have active role in determining the needs of the community. These days, the tribal societies are not much isolated from the outside world. In this scenario, a number of changes have also come to the erstwhile isolated and self-sufficient 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 these two tribal communities of north-west 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. It tries to answer whether the studied communities are able to retain their basic social structure intact, and how far these exposures have affected their society, social order, economy, culture, tradition and community living.

India is home to the largest number of tribal population in the world. Tribals constitute 8.6 percent of India's total population according to the 2011 census. The population of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the country is 104 million (approx. 10.45 crores- males 5.25 crores and ST females 5.20 crores). Decadal growth of ST population during 2001-11 was 24 percent. Tribes in India are not a homogeneous group as their culture and values are distinct from each other. There is huge variation in the spatial distribution of tribes in India as well. The states of Maharashtra and Odisha share the largest number of tribes in India. Almost, 82 percent of the tribes live in western and central states; whereas only 11 percent are located in southern states.

Many attempts have been made in anthropology to define and characterise '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. 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 attached 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 identification of certain characteristics of the community, on which it could be said that a particular community belongs to the Scheduled Tribe. The characteristics mentioned 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. 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.

Different studies conducted on the tribal communities showed 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 (Joshi and Dalpati, 2016). 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). 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. However, most 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 lines by the political leaders.

For the present study, two tribal communities namely *Tharu* and *Oraon* of West Champaran (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 were evicted from Rajasthan by Muslim invaders has been refuted by Buchanan. 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 lived in. Some say the name simply means 'residents 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 spread in the northern parts of both West and East Champaran districts.

*Oraon* tribe is also known as *Kurukh*. It is spelled also as *Uraon*, *Oran*, or *Oram*. According to Roy (1915), the *Oraon* owe this name of *Kurukh* to their hero-king Karakh. *Oraon* are *Adivasi* (original inhabitant) group inhabiting various states across central and eastern parts of the country and Andaman and Nicobar Islands. They are one of the largest tribes in South Asia. About half of them live in the Chotanagpur Plateau of Jharkhand; the remainder are in Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar. They speak Dravidian language known as *Kurukh*. *Oraon* are closely related to the neighbouring *Munda* tribe, and the headman of an *Oraon* village is also known as '*munda*'.

## Methods

Present study is based primarily on qualitative method. The data has been collected using structured interview schedule, observation and FGD. The data was collected in few short trips to these villages during the year 2016-17. The villages were selected purposively, only after reviewing secondary literature and consulting local block office. A total of 140 respondents belonging to *Tharu* (74) and *Oraon* (66) tribal communities 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 tribals and in-depth discussions with them. 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. For this, the study team used to stay among the community members in 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. The team members were able to understand and communicate in local language with the villagers.

### Study Area and People

The study has been conducted in two villages namely *Manguraha* and *Rupauliya* of Gaunaha block of West Champaran district, under Tirhut division 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. These villages are relatively isolated and located towards the forest and hill ranges, just by the international boundary of Nepal. 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 local town is well connected with other parts of the district and state. *Narkatiyaganj* is approximately 30 km from these villages and the district headquarters (*Bettiah*) at a distance of 65km. *Ramnagar*, *Chanpatia*, *Narkatiaganj*, and *Bagaha* are other nearby towns.

Although, these villages are connected with metalled road from the block headquarters, but there is no public transport available in the area. People either use private vehicle or walk down to Gaunaha 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. First Referral Unit (FRU) in the form of SDH is located at *Narkatiyagnaj*, approximately 20 km. away from the villages. The district hospital is located at the district headquarters. Accessibility to the public institutions and facilities such as schools, hospitals, police station, etc., is quite difficult for these tribal people. The local languages of the area are Hindi, Urdu, and Bhojpuri, but the studied communities have their own dialect also.

Before discussing the impact of modern forces on the studied tribes, it is pertinent to mention basic ethnographic profile of the studied communities. The tribes are at different levels of socio-economic development levels in Bihar. Some of the tribes are relatively more advanced as they have better literacy rate, better economic condition, more awareness and exposure than others. Similarly, in present study, *Tharu* are relatively more advanced than *Oraon*.

*Tharus* are an ethnic group indigenous to terrai region (Southern foothills of Himalaya in Nepal and India). The traditional occupation of *Tharus* is shifting cultivation. They do not rely on a single occupation. They combine agricultural activities with daily wage labour, domestication of animals, tailoring, mason or work in factories, etc. Due to less economic opportunities and resources in the village, they have to migrate outside to earn their living. They also said that now they have very limited access to the forest but still it plays important role in their lives. *Tharus* are only allowed to collect the minor forest produces (MFP) from the forest. Some of the families also have small

pieces of land. They do cultivate grains and a few seasonal vegetables. Some of them have also been engaged in the forest department as fourth grade employee (guard, driver, cook and animal trackers, etc.).

The entire village is closely knitted and based on the brotherly relationship. They still adhere to the traditional system of family and marriage. The marriage takes place in the same community. There are different sub-castes such as *Chaudhary*, *Kshatriya*, *Rana*, *Gurun*, etc., among them. They prefer to take their partners from the same sub-castes but sometimes the marriages are also solemnized with other sub-castes. Young Tharus have limited liberty to take partners of their own choice as the most preferred form of marriage is arranged, which is mostly settled by the parents and elders in the family. The marriages are also settled in the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh and even in the adjoining parts of Nepal. Social institutions such as family and kinship are very essential and due importance is also given. Those who have migrated outside for work also come back at least twice in a year, once during the festival of *Diwali* and *Chhath puja* (during October- November) and on the occasion of *Shubhadra Maa* Fair during the *Chait Ramnavmi* in April.

*Tharus* worship mainly their tribal Goddess called as *Bhuiyan* or *Bhumsen* with other Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The place of worship is called *Than* and every *Tharu* house has a place of worship. Every village has also its own deity, commonly known as *Bhuinyar* (Verma, 2010). *Tharus* are known for their hard work and have peaceful approach towards life. Despite this, a few cases of conflicts related to the property and use of local resources, come into light occasionally. The internal conflicts among the families and community are resolved by the elders of the village. They obey the decisions of the village elders and the *Gram Panchayat* (GP). The Panchayat system is very strong among *Tharu*. However, during the present study, it has been found that there is no such traditional tribal council at the village or GP level, but they have *Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh* (TKM).

The second studied tribe is *Oraon*, who reside in Rupauliya village, closer to the Gaunaha forest area. They have been 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 informed that the Oraons have been living in this village since 1885, during the Zaminadari system. A few of them have the equivocal memory of the Zaminadari system and told that there were two landlords in the area –one was *Baba Morani* and another was *Jai Narayan Marwari*. The Zaminadari system was abolished in the year 1965, and after that the village has witnessed rapid change.

*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. 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 exogamy<sup>1</sup>. 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).

Now *Oraons* are mostly dependent on the daily wage work and agricultural labour. 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 are also engaged in poultry and duck farming, domesticating pigs, goat, cow and oxen. They are also dependent upon the local forests from where they collect MFP, mainly woods for the fuel, raw materials for building houses. They also migrate outside in search of job as their village has limited economic avenues. They indulge in different types of unskilled work mainly daily wage work in the brick kilns, stone cutting, *poldari*, etc.

### Field Findings

A total of 140 respondents from both the studied communities were taken. Male respondents were more (63.57 percent) than female. Of these, 74 (54 males and 20 females) belonged to Tharu community and 66 (35 males and 31 females) to Oraon community. 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. The percentages of male and female population (50.1 percent and 49.81 percent respectively) are almost equal.

**Table 1: Sex wise distribution of Respondents and total population**

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
Total Population of Studied households					
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

Both of these tribal societies are patriarchal and patrilineal in nature and have close knitted family system. It was found in the study that more than half of them had 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, changing socio-cultural values and traditions.

**Table 2: 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

The primitive societies have passed through different stages of development- food gathering, hunting and settled agriculture across the world. 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 physical environment of the tribe. The studied communities are engaged in more than one economic activity, but mainly practise agriculture and allied activities (more than 44 percent). *Tharus* are better in farming as they possess some agricultural lands (27.2 percent) as compared to the *Oraons* (only 9.2 percent). 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. Overall satisfaction with their present occupation is more than two third; however, Tharus seemed more satisfied (75.7 percent) as compared to the *Oraons* (57.6 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 (Table 3&4).

**Table 3: 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 4: 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



Due to poor economic opportunities in the village, most of the able bodied tribal men and women migrate out for a decent 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 5: 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

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 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 in both the studied communities. 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 6: 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

As we know, the status of tribal education is very poor and most of the tribal communities lag behind in educational attainment. Same is the case with both these studied communities. The status of formal education in both these communities is poor, as nearly half of them are either illiterate (45.4

percent) or hardly literate (5.5 percent). Among literates, most of them are either primary (26.1 percent) or middle passed (13.4 percent), and very few of them have matric and higher educational qualification (Table 7). Awareness towards education has increased in both these communities, as most of them have begun to send their children to schools.

**Table 7: 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

Regarding change, most of the respondents (83 percent) said that there have been changes over time in their lives 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 8: 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

It has been observed during the study that they were satisfied with their village lives, 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 were also asked to give their opinion on the factors which were proving obstacles in further growth and development of the tribal communities. 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 9: 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

### Changing Dynamics

Tribal 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 had constantly evolve 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 (1968) also considered that there are contacts between tribals and their Hindu neighbours and there are two main 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).

Regarding the changes, 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. Among the two studied communities, *Tharus* are more dominant and advanced as they are more educated and have more resources. *Tharus* are the natural settlers of the land as they have been living in *Manguraha* since time immemorial. 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 were living in this village for a number of generations. Their great grandparents have come to this village and settled down. One of the key informants revealed that their forefathers settled down 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 a sea of change in the village and its economic structure due to abolition of *Zaminadari* system and opening up of other economic avenues. Earlier, the *Oraons* were forced work as bonded labourers of the feudal lords, and in return they received fixed amount of grains annually.

It has been found during the study of *Tharus* and *Oraons* that changes at structural level are less and gradual. Some of the important social institutions and customary practices, such as, family, Kinship, marriage, etc., have also seen slight changes. Kinship forms the basis of tribal social organization. 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. 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. 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 as well. The families are also disintegrating and now nuclear families are more preferred. But, they still have the same amount of solidarity and brotherhood at the family and community levels. 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 patrilineal. Property is inherited by the sons in *Oraon*. Some changes in marriage practices have also been observed among these communities. The marriage age used to be less for both 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. Remarriage of widow, widower and divorcees is permitted. Both bride price and dowry exist, but the marriage procedures became longer. The marriage procession is bigger 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 in both the studied communities.

Both the studied communities are not much satisfied with their sources of livelihood as the problem of livelihood resources in the village and local area is not perennial. 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. Almost fifty percent *Tharus* of *Manguraha* village has migrated. They are also not much happy with the Government's efforts as their basic needs have not been 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.

Most *Tharus* are dependent on daily wage work; however, their traditional occupation is shifting cultivation. Primary occupation for these respondents was agricultural work (as farmers and agricultural labourers). Some of the families also have small pieces of land. Those who have migrated

outside are engaged in skilled and semi-skilled work such as tailor, mason, etc. Those who stayed in the village were 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). Scarcity at the local level forced them to move out in search of job and better livelihood opportunities. However, this forced migration has some positive impact as their income improved slightly and they have more exposure. Now, they have started building *pucca* houses, and leading a better life as compared to the past. Earlier, the roofs were made up of bamboo, reeds and grasses (*Tharu* Huts), but now it is replaced by concrete tiles.

*Oraon* 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 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 collected different types of fruits and seeds from the forest. Now they are mostly dependent on daily wage work and agricultural labour. They are also engaged in poultry and duck farming, domesticating pigs, goats, 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 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.

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. Change in beliefs and practices have also been 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 their religious festivals are different from their neighbouring caste people. These festivals are mainly related to the nature and communistic affair, but due to changes in the economic structure, these celebrations have also been affected. 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.

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 declined than earlier. This is also due to paucity of time, less access to the forest, expenditure on the customs and influence from the major religious group. The recent ban of liquor has also affected their social, cultural and religious lives, as liquor was central to their day-to-day social, economic, cultural and religious lives. Minor changes in age old tradition and practices related to the social institutions, such as, marriage, family, and kinship were observed. The marriage takes place among the same tribal members and arranged by the elders of the family and community. But, sometimes the marriages outside the tribe also do take place. The rituals and marriage procession have also become more elaborate.

This study also looked into the changing dynamics of traditional tribal councils (*jati / adivasi Panchayat*) and political aspects, including participation in elections of panchayat. It has been found that their traditional councils (*jati panchayat*) more or less remained the same, with only minor changes. Tribals are peace loving people by nature and there is hardly any quarrels and fights among them. Despite this, a few cases of occasional conflicts among villagers were reported. 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. 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 village elders and the Panchayat. Those who are not satisfied with the decisions of the village elders and tribal council only approach the police station and court.

Political awareness has increased over the years, especially among *Tharus*. 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 undertake the welfare activities for *Tharus*. The TKM is also instrumental in mobilising the local resources for the welfare and development of *Tharu's* society. They approach the local Govt. officials, including the Forest Officials and advocate for the use of the forest resources. *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. Minor changes observed in the traditional tribal councils of these communities. These changes are due to the introduction of the statutory *Panchayat*, and formal system of law and order. It has been observed that these tribal men and women take active part in modern political process. There are three wards in *Manguraha* village, and all three ward members belong to *Tharu* community. Of these, two are female members.

Changes are also visible in other areas of these communities, especially in material culture, dress pattern, food culture and habits. Due to exposure

from the outside world, they have started wearing modern dresses, carrying mobile and smart phones. Traditional mode of entertainment and communication has also changed considerably. Now they have also started sending their children to schools and colleges. Most of the respondents had the opinion that their society has witnessed great changes over the period, especially in last 15-20 years.

### Conclusion

Change is inevitable and all societies, including tribal societies, have been undergoing 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. Recently these changes have been sharp and quite observable. But they consider 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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### Note

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

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