

## Tharus Of West Champaran: Resilience, Exploitation, And The Quest For Social Justice

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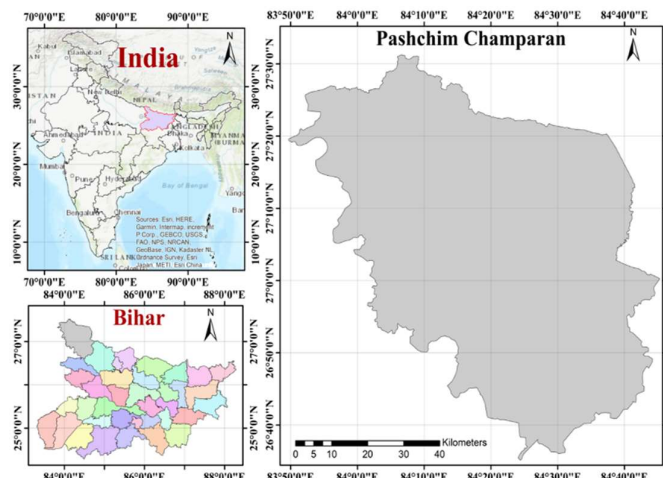
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### Introduction

Tharus community is located in Bihar. The community of Tharus belongs to the original inhabitants of the Terai region and has been living there for a long time. Terai is a large alluvial land located at the foothills of the Himalayan borders which is a densely populated Gangetic region of the south. The community belonging to Tharus lived in different parts of the west Champaran district of Bihar. The Tharus is contiguous to Nepal Terai of India. In west Champaran the Tharus community occupied an area near about 8000 sq. miles which is surrounded by the northeast and west borders of Nepal district and on the south it is bounded by Tribeni or Done Canal. The Tharus community is popularly known as “Tharuhat”. Tharus community belonging to Nepal and other parts of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh mostly belongs to the scheduled tribes. The Tharus community is deprived of the facilities enjoyed by the others, they are isolated and make their tribal community. The Tharus community is mostly backward both socially and economically. The history of the Tharus community is engaged with exploitation, suppression, and oppression. The community of Tharus has belonged to scheduled tribes since 2003. According to Al-baurni, The community belonged to the Tharu situated in the Terai region at least about the 10th century. According to the Al-Baurni Tharus people are the descendants of the Kalya and Sakya communities who lived in the ancient palace popularly called kapilavastu.

### LOCATION OF THE STUDY AREA



Source: prepared by the researcher

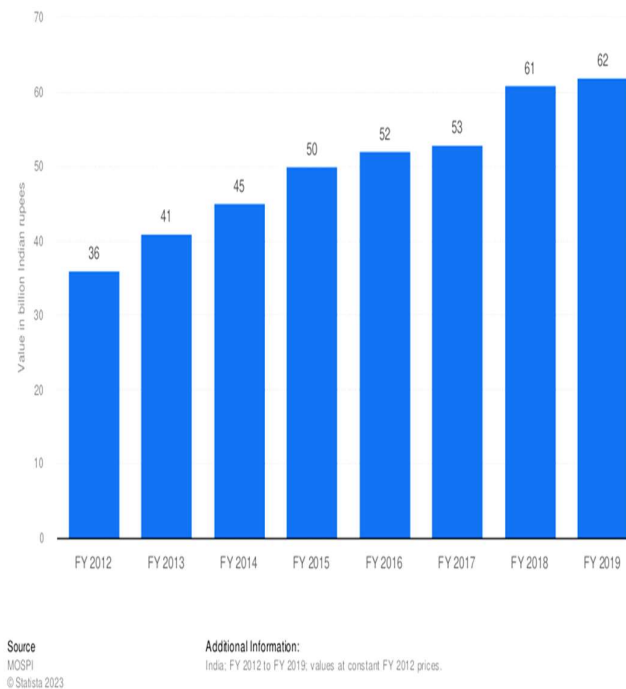
Figure 1: Map of West Champaran  
(Source: Personal field survey)

### Exploitation of Tharus of West Champaran

From ancient times Tribal community has had a great influence on Indian society. The tribal community is of great importance for the collection of unique features. The people of the Tharu community live in forest areas and hills, depriving them of all facilities and maintaining a civilized life in their way [1].

However, the people of Tharus are badly exploited because of their backwardness in society. The women and girls are badly exploited in the Tharus community.

- Tharuhat of Champaran district of Nepal benefited from natural beauty which includes Bhikhani Thori one of the best palaces of Tharu, Champaran. The spot is marked with stone queries which ultimately lead to the exploitation of the innocent and poor tribes of Tharu.
- The large numbers of people in the Tharu community are engaged agricultural activities and exploited by powerful persons, and the laborers involved in this are badly exploited. Because most of them are women and children, they get less amount of wages as compared to males, hence it hinders their livelihood and social discrimination takes place *[Reffered to Appendix 1]*.
- Women's position in the Tharu community: In that community, the position of women is very backward [3]. There is no such importance given to the women of the Tharu community. Along with the women, their children, especially daughters, get engaged in other activities. The women are trapped or exploited by the people and once they are trapped with that they have to face huge problems.
- Immoral Trafficking in Tharus Community- Trafficking means selling or buying of people in terms of money. The rate of women trafficking in the Tharus community is very large in number. Due to the backward position of women in the Tharus community the women and children got trapped in this human trafficking system and are never able to come back to their real life, they are exploited day by day. The physical and mental condition of the women gets hampered due to trafficking. The woman who is facing this problem may lose her childhood, and disruption in family's Posttraumatic stress occurs frequently among the women of the Tharus community.
- Source of Income- The people of the Tharus community are backward in class and have limited facilities. To overcome their standard in society many women of the Tharus community are engaging in the sex business, this will provide them some source of income. The women and children are uneducated, so they prefer to choose this kind of business. The Tharus community is located near the border of Nepal, so many people of the Tharus community are engaged in wine-making activities. In the process of wine making, women are mostly engaged as compared to males in the Tharus community of Champaran district.
- Exploitation from powerful people: the Tharus community is bounded by the Nepal border and has a higher number of vegetation and land. Being located in hilly areas the Tharus community is less developed. The landowners employ the people of the tharus community for their livelihood. Most of the laborers are exploited by the landowners, getting low wages or sometimes no charges paid to the laborers of the Tharus community.



**Figure 2: Graph Showing Women of Tharus Community Engaged in Fishing  
(Source: Personal Field Survey)**

### Quest for Social Justice by the Tharus of West Champaran

From the 20th century, the Tharu community of Champaran started to look forward to demolishing the concept of social evils in their society. The people of the Tharus community are slowly changing their minds and shifting towards their welfare and improvement. To achieve improvement in the Tharus community, the people established “Tharu Kalyan Sangha”. They started to interact with each other and share their thoughts and views.

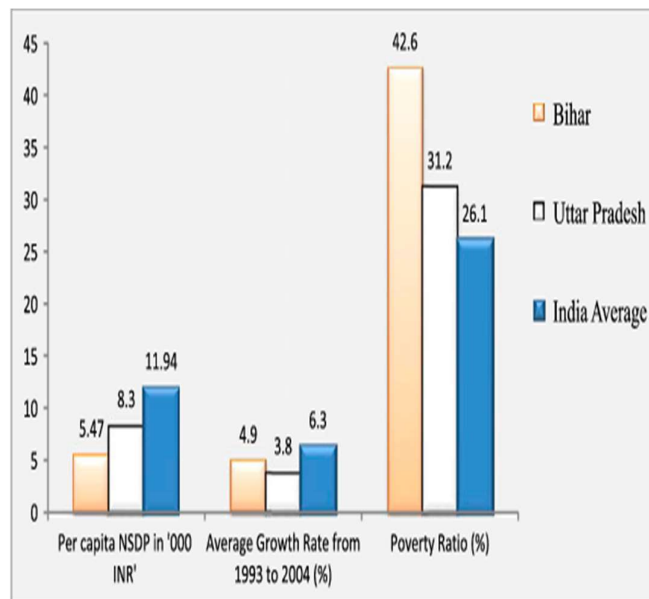
For the development of people belonging to the Tharu community, the constitution established Bharatiya Tharu Kalyan Mahasangh” The main objective of the Bharatiya tharus Kalyan Mahasangh is the social, cultural, moral, and economic development of the Tharu community [4]. Bhartiya Tharu Sangha is an organization that is specially launched for the welfare of the Tharus community of Champaran.

- **Women's Empowerment-** Empowerment means self-reliance, independence and can handle responsibility. Women empowerment stands for the increase in the rate of confidence among women, participation of women in the decision-making process, getting an equal opportunity in terms of income, education, and job opportunities, and awareness about their exploitation and making them self-sufficient. In the Tharu community of Champaran, the women's position is devastated [2]. To get a stable condition for women, women empowerment is very much necessary. Women empowerment in the Tharu community has changed the position of women. Women in the Tharu community are privileged and most of the women are engaged in various activities such as fishing, animal chasing, and negotiations in business activities.
- **Polygamy Marriage:** The practice of marriage having more than one wife or husband at the same point in time is called polygamy type of marriage [6]. In the Tharus community polygamy marriage is practiced. Polygamy marriage should be needed to be banned in the Tharus community for the development of the society.
- **The proper procedure for re-marriage-** widow remarriage is now very common among the people. The Tharus community also practiced widow re-marriage but marrying a brother's husband is not the right procedure for widow re-marriage. The woman should have the right to select her partner without any pressure.



**Figure 3: Factors for Social Justice**  
(Source: Prepared by the Researcher)

- Dowry- the Tharu community of West Champaran is engaged with no dowry system. The word dowry means during marriage the bride's family gives some items or money to the groom's family. Dowry is known as a crime, which is not followed by the Tharus tribes of West Champaran. The women of West Champaran belonging to the Tharu community are enjoying all the facilities and they are not forced into any flesh trade.
- Language Barrier- The people of this community of West Champaran faced a huge language barrier. The Tharu community interacts with each other by using only a single language. The language spoken by the Tharu community of west Champaran is popularly known as “tharuhat”, this language is connected with the Indo-Aryan group of languages.
- Abolition of superstitions- The Tharus community is usually engaged with many beliefs, supernatural activities, and superstitious activities. Tharus are bound by social practices and beliefs [9]. They performed jadutona which is quite common among the tribal community. One of the beliefs in the West Champaran Tharu community is engaged in the killing of animals for the worship of gods. Animal death is considered to be the happiest and brings harmony to the tribal society of the Tharu community in West Champaran.



**Figure 4: Graph Showing Socio-Economic Condition of West Champaran**  
(Source: Personal Field Survey)

#### Tharus of West Champaran: Resilience

Resilience of the Tharus of West Champaran is involved with various components which are discussed below:

- Providing eco-sanitation toilets - the Tharus community of West Champaran should adopt the benefits of eco-san toilets. The eco-san toilets have huge advantages, these types of toilets save electricity energy, and water in less amount as compared to other toilet facilities. Eco-san promotes no flushing system and there is no need for sewage treatment. The pathogens can easily be broken down with the help of eco-san toilets and this will lead to a decrease in the number of pathogens in the water bodies. The ECO SAN promotes the reuse and recycling of nutrients for agriculture, this benefited the tribes of West Champaran.
- Digital Awareness - Awareness based on digital mode, is very vital for the development of the Tharus community located in West Champaran. The advantages of digital awareness in the Tharu community such as
  - a) To make a good and civilized economy among the tribal of Tharu community.
  - b) Provide communication between the government and the tribal community.
  - c) Literacy rate can be achieved with the help of the digital way of learning.
  - d) The tribal people can get more knowledge regarding agriculture, fishing or any other activities, from which they are unknown.
- Social and Cultural Impact - lack of facilities by the tribal people of Tharus like illiteracy rate, health care facilities, poverty, banking, and education are unable to interact with the outer world. These problems can be rectified by the use of mobile phones by the tribal community.
- Improved Terracing: the people of the Tharus community need to improvise in the field of terracing. The improvement of tracing helps the community to increase the fertility rate in the soil. As the soil is fertile, the agricultural production will be increased, which directly helps the tribal of Tharus for the betterment of livelihood
- The people of the Tharus community are dependent on nature. They obtain their food from hills or forests which can both plants and animals. Killing of animals by the tribal community affects ecosystem services [8]. So, the tribal community should be engaged in other sectors like fishing and obtain wages from that occupation.
- Disaster resilience- The Tharu community is located near the border of Nepal. The community faces huge climatic changes and the impact caused due to the climatic change. Being located near the hilly

areas, there is a huge chance of landslides, earthquakes, and floods. The people of the Tharu community belonging to the west Champaran have faced distractions caused by natural calamities. During the natural event, the community was devastated and the source of livelihood of the Tharu community was hampered. The border disturbances with Nepal cause problems to the people of Tharu community.

### Conclusion

Tharu of west Champaran is a cultural ethnic group that is bounded by the terai of Nepal and has been influenced by the culture of Terai region. Tharu of West Champaran is a tribal community, it has recently come under scheduled tribe by the government of India. Earlier the importance of Tharu was very low, as they were economically and socially backward. People of the Tharu community are traced to the exploitation of women. The exploitation of women and children is observed in the Tharu community of West Champaran. Women trafficking is also witnessed in the tribal community of Tharu. With the changing times, the Tharu community is also changing. The source of livelihood of the Tharu community has now changed and people of the Tharu community doing activities that are legal in nature. The adoption of digital awareness among the tribal plays a vital role in the development and improvement of the Tharu community of West Champaran. The position of women in the Tharu community is getting more privileged and enjoy their marriage performance by avoiding polygamy marriage.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Graph Showing Agricultural Rate in Tharu of West Champaran



(Source: Personal Field Survey)