

EDUCATION AND CHANGING STATUS OF WOMEN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THARU TRIBE OF UTTARANCHAL



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Supervisor:
Prof. (Dr) Yogender Singh
Prof. & Head

Research Scholar:
Somlata Verma

**Department of Sociology
INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDIES
Ch. Charan Singh Univeristy, Campus
Meerut**

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The status of women in any society is a significant pointer to the level of development of that society. With the change in role and status of women, social change comes through. Such changes can be noticed by noting the changes that have taken place in the status of women in a society.

The level of change is inversely related to the educational standards. With the rise in educational level, the outlook is changed on many aspects of life. Although the education has made inroads into the lives of everyone, its degree of influence and impact is dissimilar between the two sexes. Education has been an important factor of development, which has helped in raising the status and role of people in the society. Educational advancement and improvement also enhances the people's participation rate in the activities pertaining to the national development. An educated citizen is an asset to the nation.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

For long, tribal communities managed to live in isolation, away from civilization, and maintained their cultural uniqueness. But owing to the advancement in transportation and communications, and rapid industrialization not only of the country at large but also of the tribal belts, it has become difficult for these tribal communities to isolate themselves any longer and avoid cultural contacts. Due to lack of education, the tribes lag behind in acquiring new skills required for the use of appropriate technology and other opportunities and have therefore, failed to avail the benefits from the

technological revolution that has changed the economic scenario of the Indian society.

Tharu, which is the largest and oldest ethnic group of the Tarai region, living in villages near dense malaria-infested jungles in regions that were isolated over the millennia, allowing them to develop a unique culture, is mainly found in the Udhampur Singh Nagar District. As per the Census of 2001, the total population of Tharus in Uttarakhand is 85,665 out of which 43,637 are males and 42,028 are females. The literate Tharu are 48,467 of which 29,624 are male and 18,843 are females.

As far as women in Tharu Tribe are concerned, traditionally they enjoyed a higher status in their society. Indian anthropologists have mostly accepted the fact that women occupy a position of power in the Tharu tribe. The main contributing factor for their equal status in their society is that tribal women in Indian society contribute positively towards economic pursuits by participating equally, if not more, along with men-folk in economic activities and earning livelihood. But as they got exposed to the wider world and to the communities considered to be more developed and so called civilized they started imbibing or aping the values of the 'upper class' communities in an effort to be accepted by them which has resulted in the change of the status of tribal women in all spheres of life.

The Constitution of India provides a comprehensive framework for the socio-economic development of tribes and for safeguarding them from exploitation from outside. Article 46 of the Constitution directs the State (both Central and State Governments) to promote with special care for the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections and especially tribes and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitations.

In tune with the said philosophy of the tribal development and also to fulfill the constitutional obligations, the governments, both at the State and the

Centre, have been constantly making several efforts to spread education among the tribal in general and for tribal women in particular. Various programmes of directed change in educational status of tribal have been in operation for a long time.

The literacy rate, with the governmental and other non-governmental efforts, is picking upwardly. To get a clear perspective we may look at the literacy figures. According to the 1961 census the literacy rate for tribal women at the all India level was only 3.16 per cent, in 1971 census it became 4.65 per cent and in 1981 census it rose to 8.05 per cent. During the next decade it was more than doubled and figured at 18.19 per cent in the 1991 Census. The 2001 Census also noticed a sharp rise and put the literacy rate among scheduled tribes at 34.76 per cent.

With the state initiatives and with the efforts from various social service agencies and, of course, with their own involvement, the things are relatively changing with the passage of time. With the increase in the literacy rate and level of education, the importance of educated women's role and status in the tribal society has completely changed during the past few decades. It is no longer a question of what women are capable of doing physically and mentally. Marriage and work for educated women are of great social interest and importance in the present day societies. The changes in the institution of family and marriage have been set in motion by the educated women. The pattern of social relationship within the family is changing. These changes in turn contribute to the changes in social structure. The emergence of educated women is an indication of the significant socio-economic changes taking place in the tribal society. The views and opinions of the educated employed women clearly reflect significant changes in the role perception on the part of women. It is evident that women's role and status have been changing due to educational opportunities provided to them. How far their educational attainment actually influencing their status is the issue, which is the key research question of this study.

As a result of impact of education, the status of Tharu Women, which is taken up for the present study, is changed in many ways. With the attainment of Independence in 1947, the socio-economic transformation in Indian societies has brought about a train of perceptible change, which also touched the Tharu society. It has specifically affected the status, role, outlook, worldview and the attitudes of the educated Tharu women to a great extent. The status of the educated Tharu women has been changing in different fields – education, occupation, family, marriage and in the decision-making. To know its extent and direction is a matter of concern to the researchers.

1.2 NEED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

The review of literature presented in the preceding chapter reveals that there is a fairly long tradition of study and research of the tribal of India embodied in a very wide range of disciplines including ethnology, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, geography, demography and others. The researchers did this from their own discipline perspectives. Mostly the social researchers had tried to focus upon the socio-economic problems and other government plans for the upliftment and betterment of Tribal communities in different parts of India.

It is observed that there is a scarcity of studies, which aims at studying the impact of education on various aspects of lives of tribal people in general and tribal women in particular. Systematic researches are necessary to understand the impact of education among the tribals and make suggestions, which will accelerate the extension of education in the tribal communities. Therefore, intensive studies of the individual tribal groups are necessary so as to gain a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problems and prospects of tribal education.

It has been observed that a number of studies have been done on Tharu Tribes on various sociological aspects. It has, however, been noticed

that only few studies cover the issue of impact of education on Tharu Tribe in general and on Women of Tharu Tribe in particular. Thus there is an ample scope for further studies on the Tharu Tribe related to the impact of education on women of their community.

Keeping in view the above facts, the present study of Tharus has been attempted in Khatima Tehsil of district Udhampur in Uttarakhand State (now known as Uttarakhand) in order to generate data base on this issue for utilization by planners, policy-makers, scientists, extension functionaries and other governmental and non-governmental agencies in formulation of plans and chalking out sound and appropriate research, teaching and extension programmes. As majority of Tharus of the area are from Rana group, as such the study is of Rana Tharus. However, hereafter, the study group is referred as Tharus. The belief is that by putting the findings of this study into wider spectrum, the researchers in this field will get a larger view to understand the direction of impact of education on tribal women in particular and the tribal society as a whole.

1.3 SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The review of literature reveals that the studies have been done by social scientists on different issues such as health, economic, political, education, agriculture, employment, etc. Some studies were also focused on Tharu tribe. From these studies some substantive issues emerge, which are given below:

1. Education is the main problem of tribe.
2. Cultural integration of changing pattern in tribes.

3. Ecological, socio-economic, administrative, poverty, communication, alcoholism and health, etc. are the various problems in the tribal society.
4. Institution of marriage is the main aspect of culture change among the Tharu.
5. Government programmes play major role in the betterment and development of tribal society.
6. Education and awareness of government policies, interaction with other people are the important factors in the development of a Tribe.
7. There is a change in the pattern of living of Tharus with the interaction of the wider society and modernization.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In the light of the above background, the objectives of the present study may be stated as follows:

1. What is the socio-economic background of the women Tharu tribe?
2. What is the role of education in the women Tharu tribe?
3. What are the programmes of the government for the upliftment of education women in Tharu tribe?
4. What is the traditional status of women Tharu tribe?
5. What is the changing appears during the impact of education in traditional status of women Tharu tribe?

1.5 AREA OF THE STUDY

The present study is conducted on the Tharu Tribe in Tehsil Khatima of District Udhampur Singh Nagar, which is in the State of Uttarakhand. On the one hand Udhampur Singh Nagar is basically an industrial district and many industry related professions are prevalent here, it is perfect example of ‘Unity in Diversity’ for which India is so widely known, on the other hand different cultures, religions and life styles are blended in absolute harmony.

Udhampur Singh Nagar District has a total population of scheduled tribe as 1,10,220 including 55,941 males and 54,279 females out of the total Scheduled Tribes population of Uttarakhand State, which is 2,56,129 (1,31,334 males and 1,24,795 females). The population of Tharu Tribe is the largest of the five Scheduled Tribes of Uttarakhand. The population of Tharu Tribe in Udhampur Singh Nagar is 84532 wherein the number of Tharu in Uttarakhand is 85,665 (*Census of 2001*).

Khatima is one of the seven Blocks of District Udhampur Singh Nagar in the State of Uttarakhand. Khatima has a scheduled tribe population of 49216 (Males 24861 and Females 24355). Khatima has an average literacy rate of 66 per cent, higher than the national average of 59.5 per cent: male literacy is 73 per cent, and female literacy is 58 per cent.

Since a sizeable population of Tharu is inhabited in Khatima in District Udhampur Singh Nagar, it was thus pertinent to choose Tehsil Khatima as the area for the present study. It was also felt that since Udhampur Singh Nagar is urbanized district and is near to the developed state of Uttar Pradesh and also not far from the National Capital, the impact of education on Tharu in general and Tharu Women in particular should have been more visible than elsewhere. The other consideration of the selection of this area for study was

that the researcher herself residing in the nearby area of Uttar Pradesh and familiar with the area and their dialects.

1.6 SAMPLING

A sample, as the name implies, is a smaller representation of a larger whole. For the purpose of this study, the following sampling procedure was adopted:

(i) **Selection of the district** – Udhampur, has the maximum population of Tharu Tribe. Thus it is selected for conducting the present study keeping in view that the Government machinery should have operationalised their schemes in this area.

(ii) **Selection of Tehsil** – Since Tharu Tribe is mainly concentrated in the Khatima Tehsil, it was selected for the present study based on the purposive method of selection.

(iii) **Selection of the villages** – As a result of pilot study of the area, the investigator decided to select 10 per cent of the total number of villages located in the district. The list of villages was obtained from the official website of the Uttarakhand Government. Since the size of the villages in terms of population varies from village to village, therefore, researcher decided to put the villages into three categories (i) villages of high population (ii) villages having moderate population, and (iii) villages having low population. Ten villages were selected from these categories keeping in mind that the village contains a sizeable population of Tharu and female literacy rate in that village is above 60 per cent. Therefore, for the final study, ten villages picked up to conduct the present study were -- **Amaun, Chhinki, Gaujhariya, Gosu Kuman, Jhunkat, Kutari, Maholia, Naugawa Thago, Pachoriya, Sripur Bichwa.**

(iv) **Selection of the respondents** – The final stage of sampling was the selection of the respondents from each of selected villages. The researcher compiled a tentative list of Tharu households with the help of Tehsildar and Village Pradhans. Out of these lists a total sample size of **200 women respondents** was selected with the help of purposive random sampling method. But only one respondent was selected from a household.

v) **Variables** -- The following variables have been used to analyse the responses received from the respondents:

1. **Education** – Illiterate, Moderately Literate (*includes educational level of Primary, Middle, High School & Intermediate*) and Highly Literate (*includes education level of Graduate and above*).
2. **Age** – Young Age Group (18-35 yrs), Middle Age Group (36-60 yrs) and Senior Citizens (61 and above).
3. **Economic Status** – Low Income Group (Rs.20,000 – Rs.60,000 per annum), Medium Income Group (Rs.60,000 – Rs.80,000 per annum) and Higher Income Group (Rs.80,000 per annum and above).
4. **Occupation** – Housewives & Farming, Working in Private Sector and Working in Government Sector.

1.7 RESEARCH TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

The present research is an empirical one. For data gathering the researcher used field study and survey methods. Both primary and secondary data pertaining to several aspects of tribal education and socio-economic status were collected. The data relating to the educational attainments were collected from the census handbooks, records of the Tribal Welfare Department, Education Department, Tribal Development Blocks and the

schools. The social background of the Tharu Tribe and the government initiatives in the field of education were collected through secondary sources.

Primary data were collected with the help of the structured questionnaire. The questions were structured in simple language both in Hindi and English languages. The questioner was first tried out on a sample of 10 respondents and was revised on the basis of experience gained in the preliminary tryout.

In case of illiterate respondents, the questionnaire was used as an Interview Schedule and was filled in personally in the presence of respondent's community member.

Besides, the data related to the educational and socio-economic background of the respondents, their families and community was gathered through perceptual observation and informal discussions with the officials and non-officials in the area. The tabulation and processing of data was got done mechanically.

During the pretesting of the questionnaire, it was observed that the persons of Tharu Community were very reluctant to give information. Therefore, a personal rapport was developed with few community members in each village to gain faith and understanding of the respondents.

1.8 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The facts of the above objective's and their issues are analyzed Qualitatively and Quantitatively. The facts of the above objectives and the

responses of 200 respondents of Tharu Tribe have been analysed with the help of statistical methods giving interpretation of data.

1.9 DIFFICULTIES IN THE DATA COLLECTION

It is actually a difficult task to establish rapport with rural women, who are essentially conservative in their outlook, sensitive and respectful to the outsiders. Misinterpretations and misunderstandings about the researcher some time became the stumbling blocks in collecting data from the field.

During the pretesting of the questionnaire, it was observed that the persons of Tharu Community were very reluctant to give information. Therefore, a personal rapport was developed with few community members in each village to gain faith and understanding of the respondents. Then few villagers started assisting me in this regard.

In the Umaru Kalan village the difficulty came when a misunderstanding arose and the family of the respondent thought that the researcher has come to assess the economic status of these families. However later the problem was solved by meeting few responsible people of the village.

One problem often faced by the researcher was that the male members of the family were trying to influence the replies of the respondent. Then the researcher explained the whole objective of doing that exercise to the male members, who then understood and cooperated. By way of experience the researcher learnt to overcome the problems and became efficient enough in dealing with rural women respondents. It was learnt that being busy at household works, the respondents used to be available mostly in the

afternoon. The schedule was accordingly made flexible as per the availability of time with them.

Besides some difficulties, being a female herself, the researcher was able to conduct the fieldwork smoothly as the female respondents were at ease with her.

1.10 CHAPTERIZATION

The study has been divided into eight chapters. The first chapter gives introduction and the review of literature. The second chapter explains context of the problem and gives details on objectives and methodology. The third chapter has captured the detailed account of the demographic characteristics of the tribals in India as well as the study area showing statistics in tabular forms and giving maps of the study area. The fourth chapter is devoted to describe Tharu Tribe, their habitat and social structure on the basis of the various studies already done on them. The fifth chapter is showing the traditional and socio-economic background of the Tharu women based on the secondary and primary data collected from the field survey. The sixth chapter acquaints with various programmes of the government and its effects on Tharu women. The next seventh chapter covers the education, empowerment and changing status of Tharu women which is basically based on the field survey on the 200 Tharu women respondents selected from ten villages of the Khatima Tehsil of District Udhampur in Jammu and Kashmir State. The final chapter i.e. the eighth gives detailed findings and conclusion of the study.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Mainly of the Tharu women are housewives but simultaneously engaged in agricultural activities thereby not earning in terms of cash. However, as private contractors or state is acquiring the landholdings, the

women are moving outside their homes and engaged in the jobs in private sectors or government sectors.

Majority of the Tharu families in Udhampur Singh Nagar are generally joint in nature. The joint family system is partly an indication of the Tharu's endeavour to preserve their cultural identity, and partly is the requirement of cooperative farming. It is noteworthy that the percentage of the joint families although high, at present, is lower than what it existed previously as reported by the elders of the community. Thus there is a growing tendency of nuclearization in family structures.

It may also be said that marriage by force is not large, because love marriage is also considered respectable and is accepted easily. *Chutkuta* marriage is still in practice because the poor unmarried men who cannot afford the regular marriage choose the option of *Chutkuta* or *Gharbaitha* marriage. A Tharu woman can divorce on the grounds of bad character of husband, impotence of husband, fear of co-wife, and better prospects of happiness with another husband.

Although traditional thatched houses are still there in the district of Udhampur Singh Nagar, there is a growing tendency towards other types of houses also such as the Pucca Houses, Tiled and asbestos-sheet houses.

The Tharu community is also famous for its low rates of crime against women. Even though both men and women make extensive use of wine in daily life, women remain comparatively safe in Tharu communities.

It has been observed that educational development programmes have made a significant impact on the life of the Tharu women. A young Tharu woman views with tempting sight every outsider women attired beautifully and try to imitate the same fashion. It implies that the Tharu women are set to become a progressive, enlightened and educationally stronger community.

Traditionally, women in Tharu Tribe enjoyed a higher status in their society. Indian anthropologists have mostly accepted the fact that women occupy a position of power in the Tharu tribe. Women lived with fewer restrictions and enjoy respect in the family and in the community. They enjoyed enough social and economic rights to give them autonomy in their day-to-day lives. Married life for women was peaceful and they have considerable freedom in sexual relations within the marriage relationship. Crimes against Tharu women continued to be quite low while women across India are struggling for their empowerment, Tharu women have long enjoyed an empowered lifestyle. The main contributing factor for their equal status in their society was that they contributed positively towards economic pursuits by participating equally, if not more, along with men-folk in economic activities and earning livelihood.

However, the infiltration of plainsmen has brought downward changes in the status of Tharu women. As a result of loss of the assets on which their status depended, women were forced to remain at home and only look after the household, without any productive work outside. They become dependent on men to run the family since they become the only income earners. Because of illiteracy and low education levels, for them only low paid unskilled jobs were available. As they got exposed to the wider world and to the communities considered to be more developed and so called civilized they started imbibing or aping the values of the 'upper class' communities in an effort to be accepted by them which has resulted in the deterioration of their status in all spheres of life.

The founding fathers of the Indian constitution were aware of the problems of tribal. Therefore, they made special provisions for their protection and development. The main safeguards include promotion of educational and economic interests and their protection from social injustices and all forms of exploitation. It was felt that even after providing financial assistance the tribal people could not improve their economic condition due to lack of education

and skill. Therefore, programme for educational development was felt necessary and in accordance with that efforts were underway to strengthen education among tribals in general and tribal women in particular.

The education is proving instrumental in providing bigger opportunities to Tharu women to earn and be economically independent and regain their status, which got a jolt because of changes brought in by displacement, exploitation and their contact with the mainstream society. The education is freeing themselves from traditionalism, superstitions and orthodoxy. The education is transforming the role and status of Tharu women. Marriage and work for educated Tharu women are of great social interest and importance in their present day society. The changes in the institution of family and marriage have been set in motion by them. The pattern of social relationship within the family is changing. The emergence of educated Tharu women is an indication of the significant socio-economic changes taking place in the tribal society. The views and opinions expressed by the educated Tharu women on various issues like education, economic empowerment, decision-making, personal and social issues like marriage, health, occupation, cultural patterns, etc., politics and modernization clearly reflect significant changes. It is evident that Tharu women's role and status have been changing due to educational opportunities provided to them. Thus, education has not only been working as a tool for Tharu Women to regain their lost ground but simultaneously helping them in moving towards modernity of the mainstream society.

1.12 BEARINGS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

At the end bearings and relationships with the findings in the context of earlier studies may now be narrated.

1. Dr S.K. Srivastava (1958) in his anthropological work on “The Tharus: A Study in Culture Dynamics” aimed to examine the contacts of the Tharu with the wider society in Nainital. The aim was to indicate the extent and nature of changes in the culture of the Tharus of Nani Tal Tarai as a result of either deliberate adoption or unconscious imitation of the higher cultures. An endeavour was also made to further analyse whether changes have come in Tharu culture through processes of simple adoption of acculturation, acceptance and adaptation or assimilation. Psychological change that has resulted from culture contact is one of the most important aspects of this study.

The present study reveals that though modernization has provided education, employment, and a new lifestyle to Tharu women but at the same time the process of modernization is drawing them away from their traditionalistic characteristics.

2. Reddy, P Adinarayana (2004) in his study “Total Literacy Campaign: Problems and Prospects” finds that the position of literacy among tribal is extremely poor and poorest among the Tribal Women. Majority of the Tribal Women are illiterate. It would be a Herculean task to bring about any social and economic change among the tribal if their literacy levels do not improve in general and that of their women in particular.

The present study finds that though the status of education was poor among tribal women, it is slowly but steadily increasing and thereby

there is an upward social and economic change in the status of the Tharu women.

3. Koseno (2005) in his thesis entitled “Changing Role and Status of Educated Angami Women: A Case Study of Kohima Village” submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong aimed at two objectives viz. (1) to find out how education helps to raise the occupational role and status of women in Angami society, and (2) to find out how the changing role and status of educated women and modern education impact upon the family, marriage and decision-making in the Angami society. The findings of the thesis suggest that due to education the role and status have been changing. The modern education has substantially influenced the socio-cultural life of the Angami women. Education opened up the minds of the Angamis into a New World, new ideas and change.

The present study also shows that the education is proving instrumental in providing bigger opportunities to Tharu women to earn and be economically independent and regain their status, which got a jolt because of changes brought in by displacement, exploitation and their contact with the mainstream society.

4. Pathak, Ashok Kumar (2006), in his research work on “Tharu Janjati ki Samajik Aarthik Parivartanshee Ita evem Samvikas: Uttar Pradesh Kehtra ka ek Bhogoulik Adhyayan” has concluded that with the passage of time though there is an upward trend in socio-economic status of Tharu Tribe, a diminishing trend has been noticed in the original cultural setup. Thus neither the development is continuous nor is it equally affecting the Tharu Tribe as a whole. He further states that based on the findings of his study, though their educational and economic status has been strengthened, erosion in their traditional values has been noticed simultaneously.

In the present study, the researcher has noticed that with the increase in the educational status of Tharu women their traditional ways are changing fast. The views and opinions expressed by the educated Tharu women on various issues like education, economic empowerment, decision-making, personal and social issues like marriage, health, occupation, cultural patterns, etc., politics and modernization clearly reflect significant changes.

5. Subhash Chandra Verma (2009) in his work entitled "Amazing Tharu Women: Empowered and in Control" examined the positioning of women in the Tharu tribe in relation to family, social structures, customs and rituals on the basis of empirical data. He finds that the Tharu women, who claim to have Rajput blood in their veins and are thought to be the descendants of Rajput queens, occupy an empowered space, both in the family and the community. It concluded that the Tharu community continues to be one of the few tribal communities of India in which women still enjoy a reasonably empowered status. However, situation is changing now. Tharu men are trying to control the activities of women. At a time when the movement for the empowerment of women is active in India and throughout the world, in Tharu society, women's position is moving in the opposite direction because men are actively working to undermine their power and status.

The present study also reveals that though the Tharu women enjoyed reasonably empowered status, however, the infiltration of plainsmen has brought downward changes in the status of Tharu women. As a result of loss of the assets on which their status depended, women are forced to remain at home and only look after the household, without any productive work outside. They become dependent on men to run the family since they become the only income earners. Because of illiteracy and low education levels, for them only low paid unskilled jobs

were available. Also, as they got exposed to the wider world and to the communities considered to be more developed and so called civilized they started imbibing or aping the values of the ‘upper class’ communities in an effort to be accepted by them which has resulted in the deterioration of their status in all spheres of life.

The present study finds that the education has not only been working as a tool for Tharu Women to regain their lost ground but simultaneously helping them in moving towards modernity of the mainstream society. The Tharus women’s increasing interest in education is undoubtedly an encouraging sign, more so, because children and women are being included in the process of education. It is mainly due to the spread of education that the Tharu are trying to emancipate themselves from superstitions and orthodoxy. Thus, the present study suggests that keeping in view the positive impact of education in all spheres of life of Tharu women, it is desirable that educational programmes for tribal women be strengthened by removing bottlenecks so that this trend continues and flourish.