

## Education and Empowerment of Women in Tharu Tribe : A Sociological Analysis

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*Empowerment cannot be seen as a stand-alone strategy as it is a part of a pervasive perspective to encourage structural or legal changes to support women community. Finally, empowerment is a moveable interplay between gaining inner skills and overcoming exterior structural barriers to access resources. It is not easily measurable and most often it refers to women's capability to come at a decision that affects themselves, their family, community, society, markets etc. Women in a tribal society play a crucial role in their social, cultural, financial and religious ways of life and considered as an economic asset in their society. Tribal women empowerment through education has always been a matter of significant thought for government of both Union and States. Education is one of the great degrees for measuring the social status of the community. It is potentially an agent for consciousness and change. So, it is central to the procedure of women's empowerment, education is often seen as a stepping stone for leading a better life. In a general way the level of the education is the pointer of overall development of women i.e. access in job opportunity,*

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*financially independency, decision making power etc. The educated women are becoming broad in their viewpoint and attitudes. This paper discusses the status of tribal women in present day society and role of education in empowering the status of tribal women.*

[**Keywords** : Tribal women, Empowerment, Government policies, Community, Protective safeguards]

## **1. Introduction**

The Tharu tribe is a most popular tribe in India and Nepal. The Tharu people are native people living in the Terai plains on the border of Nepal and India. The population of Nepal is 28,287,147 (July 2006 est.), of which the Tharu people make up 6.6%. A smaller number of Tharus live in India, mostly in Champaran District of Bihar and in Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand, Kheeri, Pilibhit, Gonda, Balrampur, Gorakhpur, Bahraich District of Uttar Pradesh. Population of Tharu tribe is 83544 in Uttar Pradesh and 85665 on Uttarakhand state. Total Tharu population is near about 169209 in India. The Tharu are identified as scheduled tribes by the Government of India. Constitution of India gives many special social, educational and economic rights to these scheduled tribes and castes because they are the primary sufferer of the backwardness. The Tharus are struggling for their rights and cultural protection. Indian tribes are mostly in requiring of higher education, rapid economic growth, social justice and political consciousness. Above all the most high-priority and inevitable need is well advanced communication. It is true that this is the period of advanced technology and global communication, but most India tribal communities are suffering from lack of advanced communication till date.

The majority of tribes are still struggling for food and clothes in this advanced era. It is a very sad and unthinkable circumstance for all civilized people, governments and social worker. The origin of the Tharu is not clear. Some claim them to be migrants from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, India. Other says that these are the descendants of the children who were born out of the link between the Rajput women and their servants who fled the Musclemann attacker. They are however; somewhat Mongoloid in their facial features.<sup>1</sup> Tharus are related with Mongoloid race<sup>2</sup> and Rajputs have apart (Aryan) race. The Tharus followed Hindu religion, but after all, they are purely a tribal community by anthropological point of view. Government of India has accepted this community as a scheduled

tribe. Satnam Kaur<sup>3</sup> in a case study analyzed in Haryana State upon the need to give due recognition of female decision making specifically in the case of home and farm affairs among the rural families. She found that women who are never found as final decision maker in many matters except for case of food and nutrition of the children. Ironically women are not even free to decide about participation in women's organization such as Mahila Mandals. Financial decisions are found solely manipulated by husband except in few cases. V. Majumdar<sup>4</sup> has talked about in detail that Asian women's works are considered as unproductive. It is closely allied with their inferior social status and also the loss of personal liberty. He also found that non-socialist countries where the extension of capitalism has further marginalized the economic and social role of women. The determinant of decision making of women is family constraints, illiteracy, traditional obstacles, attitude and women's capability. It is suggested to form grass root level organization responsive to the needs of the poor, local women and suggested such group to study social organizations like families and household. Jeanette Gurung<sup>5</sup> has observed in Tharu communities women are accorded less decision making power, have less access to resource and property. They are less to conduct business on their families, behalf. In Tharu community the women play dominating role in making decision about the household activities. As Polyandry is general in this caste group women cannot play a key role in this community. Women do not even decide what food to prepare for dinner. Y.S. Parmar<sup>6</sup> has highlighted in his study the socio-economic background of the Himalayan. He observed that Polyandry in western Himalayan society where the tradition, institutions, values and beliefs are changing rapidly.

Large number of studies has been conducted on Uttar Pradesh Tribes but they have only determinate to contribute towards the development of their socio-economic status, decision making power only in the case of farm and home affairs and conventional barrier. There are in reality very little or fewer studies carried out in order to make analysis of the tribal women empowerment through educational scenario in sociological point of view because education is important for the transformation of society as well as for the development of the personal. It is an instrument of change. Practically, social transformation is done through educational transformation. Thus it becomes very vital and crucial to pay

attention and study the neglected or less researched area for the well being of the tribal, which absolutely give way to their development and to the national progress.

## **2. Objective of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to analyze the impact of education on the empowerment of women in Tharu Tribe through the field experiences.

## **3. Area of Study**

The present study was undertaken to examine the impact of education on the empowerment of women in Tharu tribe in Khatima Tehsil under Udham Singh Nagar, District of Uttarakhand. Kathima Tehsil is situated about 62.9 km from Udham Singh Nagar District and Khatima Tehsil has total population of 227,226 as per the Census 2011. Out of which 115,366 are males while 111,860 are females. In 2011 there were total 42,922 families residing in Khatima Tehsil. Besides this, Khatima Tehsil has total population of Tharu tribe is 53692 in which 26739 are males and 26953 are females.

## **4. Methodology**

Present study is mainly empirical and includes both primary and secondary data. For primary data, Tharu women were directly approached and interviewed. Observation, interview and administering of scheduled were carried out for the collection of primary data from 100 respondents. Respondents have been selected through the purposive sampling. On the other hand, secondary data were collected from published and unpublished articles, digital data discs, reports, documents, websites, books related to tribes, academic institutes such as universities, colleges, research institutions and various departments of government and non- government have been consulted also for collection of secondary data and interview.

## **5. Impact of Education on Empowerment of Tribal Women with particular reference to Tharu Women**

Tribal policies in India are based on isolation, assimilation and integration and democratic decentralization of tribal people. The Government of India has adopted a policy of integration of tribal with the mainstream aiming at developing a creative adjustment

between the tribes and non tribes leading to a responsible partnership. The constitution has committed the nation to two courses of action in respect of scheduled tribes : Giving protection to their peculiar way of life and protecting them from social inequity and all forms of exploitation and differentiation and bringing them at par with the rest of the nation so that they may be unified with the national life.

Thus by the constitution order 1950 issued by the president of India in exercise of powers conferred by clause 9 (1) of article 342 of the constitution of India 255 tribes in 17 states were announced to be scheduled tribes. Except enjoying the rights that all citizens and minorities have the member of the Scheduled Tribes have been provided with special protective securities, such as educational securities [Article 15 (4) and 29]; securities for employment [Article 16 (4), 320 (4) and 333]; economic securities [Article 19]; abolition of bonded labor [Article 23]; protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation [Article 46]; political securities [Reservation of seats for ST in Lok Sabha and Assemblies under Article 330, 332, 164, Appointment of Minister in charge of Tribal Welfare and Especial provisions in respect of Nagaland, Assam and Manipur - Article - 371 (A), 371 (B) and 371], developmental securities such as promoting the academic and economic interests of the Scheduled Tribes (Article 46), grants from central Government to the states for welfare of Scheduled Tribes and incurring the level of administration of Scheduled Areas (Article 75).

Empowerment is the capability to control over the life or health of a person, independency, and capability to perform life responsibility, self-efficiency and self-esteem.<sup>7</sup> Empowered personalities have control over their life and are able to perform their responsibility with freedom and self-esteem. Major elements of empowerment are economic, human and social political and cultural empowerment.<sup>8</sup> All these elements are unconstrained and interconnected. Therefore, the only financially empowered person, who is not empowered socially, politically and culturally, cannot have access and control over political and social resources. Empowerment is contextual.<sup>9</sup>

Women empowerment is determined by their involvement in the decision-making process and increasing their self-confidence level, by their status and by their level of social and political

participation, by their power to control over their income, their degree of knowledge on social issue and consciousness, awareness on problems about family relation and violence against them.<sup>10</sup> Women empowerment is the increasing and having power for herself, her family and her society for the improvement of life. Women empowerment is not only limited to the economical self-reliance of gender equality, recognizes their identities and power in all aspects of life.<sup>11</sup> Thus, women empowerment is not only the use of power for access over the economic resources.

It is a well-known fact that the women of most of the tribes in India have been enjoying quite high and honourable position in their respective communities. The reason is attributed to their important role which they play in socio-economic, cultural, religious and political life., Not only this, the status of tribal women can be said to be very high so far as gender equality among the sexes in most of the tribal communities is concerned. The tribal women are work harder and the entire family, economy and management depends on them. Lamichhane<sup>12</sup> has rightly asserted that status of Tharu women is better than of other women of many other tribes. They occupied the best position among all tribal women. They are free in their society. According to Shreevastav<sup>13</sup>, in Tharu community, the women, being more privileged, are not bounded by many restrictive morals. Even sexual intimacy between such relatives may not create much harm and may not produce any conservation in the society. In this sense they are more open than that of other relatives in the society.

Majumdar<sup>14</sup> has explained the dominance of Tharu women, their property rights and maltreatment to their husbands as well as their active role in fishing, chasing animals, business negotiation, and liberty in choosing their partners an annulling marriage. All this reflect the matriarchal society of Tharu community. The significant role of Tharu women in economic and social sphere of Tharu community can never be underestimated. The women are the sole owner of the domestic animals, the product of the land and the garden while the men have their own family.

Subhash Chandra Verma<sup>15</sup> has 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. Women live with fewer restrictions and enjoy respect in the family and in the community. They enjoy enough social and economic rights

to give them autonomy in their day-to-day lives. Married life for women is peaceful and they have considerable freedom in sexual relations within the marriage relationship. Crimes against Tharu women continue to be quite low. Whereas women across India are struggling for their empowerment, Tharu women have long enjoyed an empowered lifestyle.

Education is said to play an important role in the empowerment of women and this is still more important with reference to tribal women. In fact, education is said to be the key element in the process of social, economic and political empowerment of the tribal women. It helps to increase women 's access to economic resources and open opportunities in different areas such as skill development, knowledge, financial services and market information. This is why the movement for improving women's all over the world has emphasized the role of education. It is accepted that education has brought about a decrease in the inequalities between sexes and uplift women's subordinated position in the society. Literacy and educational qualification are not only vital factors for availing of employment opportunities created in the process of modernization but also for communication with the outside modern world.

## **6. Findings of the Study**

The Tharu people are an ethnic group indigenous to the Terai in southern Nepal and Northern India. They are perceived as an official nationality by the Government of Nepal. In the Indian Terai, they live foremost in Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Government of India perceives the Tharu people as a scheduled tribe. The Tharu tribe is a well known tribal community of India and Nepal, many of them living in the Himalayan Terai region on the Indo-Nepal Border. In India, the districts which are populated by the Tharu tribe are: Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand State, Pilibhit, Kheeri, Gonda, Basti, Bahraich, and Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh State and Motihari in Bihar state. The Dang, Chitwan, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Morang, Saptari and Jhapa districts of Nepal are also populated by Tharu tribe members. More than 80% of the Tharus of India live in Khatima and Sitarganj Tahsil in Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand State. Uttarakhand is a hilly state located in Central Himalaya. Mainly five tribes reside in Uttarakhand as: Jaunsari, Tharu, Bhotia, Buxa, and Banraji and the Tharu tribe retract the

second place in terms of population. The main occupations of this tribal community are agriculture, hunting and fishing, agriculture and forestry which form the basis of their economy.

In the present study we gave elaborative analysis on different features of women empowerment in Tharu tribe in present scenario and analysis the empowerment of women in Tharu tribe through education. For fulfilling this aim, the collected data is contained in Table-1 on next page.

**Table-1 : Impact of Education on Tharu Women Empowerment**

S. No.	Impact of Education on Women Empowerment	N	%age
1.	Economic participation and opportunity	13	13%
2.	Household management and decision making capacities increased	10	10%
3.	Ownership of household assets	07	07%
4.	Freedom from domination in the family	11	11%
5.	Increased self-confidence	17	17%
6.	Improved health and nutrition conditions	08	08%
7.	Acquired self-esteem	14	14%
8.	Increased knowledge about business skills	06	06%
9.	Increased ability to raise voice against injustice behavior	05	05%
10.	Political and legal awareness	09	09%
<b>Total</b>		100	100%

Thus the above table shows that 13 respondents (13%) out of 100 respondents economic participation and opportunities have been increased, 10 respondents (10%) out of 100 respondents increased ability to management of household activities and decision making capabilities related to various family and other matters also, 07 respondents (07%) out of 100 respondents has been increased ability to owned the household assets, 11 respondents (11%) out of 100 respondents has been freed from the domination in the family, 17

respondents (17%) out of 100 respondents has been increased their self-confidence, 08 respondents (08%) out of 100 respondents has been improved health and nutrition conditions, 14 respondents (14%) out of 100 respondents has been acquired self-esteem, 06 respondents (06%) out of 100 respondents enhanced their knowledge about business skills, 05 respondents (05%) out of 100 respondents increased ability to raise their voice against injustice behavior (i.e. increased capability to prevent violence), 09 respondents (09%) out of 100 respondents has been increased political and legal awareness. Thus, the largest segments of the respondents (17%) has been increased their Self- confidence.

## **7. Conclusion**

On the basis of the available information and data, it can be come to an end that the Tharu community continues to be one of the few tribal communities of India in which women still delight a reasonably empowered status. Women live within fewer prohibitions and enjoy respect in the family and in the community. Women empowerment aims enabling them to realize their identity, capability and power in all spheres of their lives. Crime against Tharu women sustained to be quite low while women across India are scrambling for their empowerment. Tharu women have long enjoyed an empowerment lifestyle. Women from Tharu communities are relatively empowered reflecting a gender equal social norm in their communities that has been deeply unified in their culture for centuries. The main contributing factor for their identical status in their society was that they contributed undoubtedly towards economic pursuits by participating uniformly, if not move along with men folk in economic activities and earning liveliness. The education is proving an instrument in providing bigger opportunities to Tharu women to earn and be financially independent in urban centre and regain their status, which got a jostle because of changes brought in by displacement, exploitation and their contact with the mainstream society. The education is freeing themselves from conventionalism superstitions and conservatism. The education is modifying the role and status of Tharu women. Marriage and work for educated Tharu women are of significant social interest and importance in their present day society. The changes in the institution of family and marriage have been set in pace by them.

The pattern of social relationship within the family is changing. The emergence of educated Tharu women is a sign of the considerable social-economical changes taking place in the tribal society. The perspectives and views expressed by the educated employed Tharu women on diverse issues like education, economic empowerment, decision-making, personal and social issues like marriage, health, occupation, cultural patterns, etc., politics and modernization clearly reflect considerable changes. It is obvious 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 an instrument for Tharu women to attain their lost ground but simultaneously helping them in moving towards modernity of the mainstream society. Keeping in view the positive influence of education in all spheres of life of Tharu women, it is desirable that educational programmes for tribal women be powerful so that this trend sustain and flourish. The compellable and insufficiencies of educational programmes be underlined and removed. Rising of literacy will mean resurgent tribal women. Besides this, women should be willing to take surplus effort for building a mindset which is suitable for their entire empowerment. It is a successive and relevant process, which requires the support of many who are related to them in one way or other.

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