

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The struggling Tharu youths: A study of the Tharu tribe of India

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**The Tharu tribe is a famous tribal community of India. Though playing very dominant roles in their community, its youths are not connected with the main stream of development. Hence, this study aims at enlightening the government and international community on the challenges facing this community. Exploratory and descriptive research design has been employed in this primary data based study. Primary data on youth awareness in various matters have been collected by interviewing 116 youths, 18 to 25 year age group to know the level of awareness about education, technology, economic, political, environmental, health and cultural activities in these highly literate youth group. The study reveals poverty, illiteracy and lack of communication are the main problems of Tharu youths who are very backward in matters of advanced education, technology and communication. They do not like to go to advanced cities for education. And though they must have a rethink about this, they must also stick to their old culture in order to keep their identity. At present there are many other communities that exist in Tharu area, so the process of cultural exchange is still going on. However, they are against others who are capturing their land and forests. Hence, governmental financial assistance is a must if the Tharu tribe is to be developed and integrated into the global community.**

**Key words:** Tharu tribe, youth, culture, advanced education, technology, primary data.

## INTRODUCTION

There are many tribal communities that exist in every region of India. Indian tribes are very backward in economic, educational and political matters. Indian tribes are mostly in need of higher education, fast economic growth, social justice, and political awareness. Above all, the most paramount and compulsory need is well advanced communication. It is true that this is the era of advanced technology and global communication, but most India tribal communities are suffering from lack of advanced communication till date. Most tribes are still struggling for food and clothes in this advanced era. It is a very sad and an unthinkable situation for all civilized people, governments, and social workers. All tribal communities deserve more and special treatment especially the youth generation. If the youths do not have higher education and communication, how can we think of real and fast development of tribes? Tharu youths are trying to connect with the stream of development but lack of higher education and advanced communication is a big stumbling block to them. The Tharu tribe is a famous tribe in North India and Nepal. Most population of Tharus exists in Himalayan Tarai Region on Indo-Nepal border

(Srivastav,1958: 5). Tharu tribe populates Dang, Chitwan, Bardiya, Kailali, Kanchanpur, Mornig, Saptari, Jhapa District of Nepal and Udham Singh Nagar, Pilibhit, Kheeri, Gonda, Basti, Bahraich, Gorakhpur and Motihari District of India. 80% Tharus of India are living in Khatima and Sitarganj tahsil of Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand State. There are 5 tribes in Uttarakhand State (Jaunsari, Tharu, Bhotia, Buxa and Banraji) and Tharu tribe has second place by population. Main occupations of this tribal community are agriculture, hunting and fishing. Historically, they were the only ones that were able to reside in the malarial jungles on the Indo-Nepal border. But as mosquito control became available, many others have migrated into this tribe's areas (Nepal, 2006). They have deep affiliation with forest and river. The population of Tharu tribe is near 1lac in India and in Nepal this figure is 1533879; it is 6.75% of the total population of Nepal (Nepal Tourism Board Report). This tribal community has many specialties about their culture and socio-economic systems. The Tharus have their own language and cultural norms. These norms vary from place to place and village to village. They worship both

the spirits of nature and Hindu deities, having merged both animism with Hinduism into their own form of religion. Their clothes are colourful and vibrant, with women who are unmarried, married and married with children all wearing distinctively different clothes (Tharu Rural Development Project Nepal). There are many clans in Tharu tribe called 'Kuri' in their local language. Names of main clans (Kuri) are as follows: Badwayak, Battha, Rawat, Birtiya, Mahto, Dahait, Rajia, Bunka, Sansa, Jugia, Buxa, Dhangra, and Rana. Tharus follow Hindu religion (Kumar 1968:39). The origin of the Tharu is not clear. Some claim them to be migrants from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, India. Others say that these are the descendants of the children who were born out of the liaison between the Rajput women and their servants who fled the Muslim invaders. They are, however, somewhat Mongoloid in their facial features (Prayer Profile, 156). Tharus are related with Mongoloid race (Majumadar, 1941: 33) and Rajputs have different (Aryan) race. The Tharus followed Hindu religion, but after all, they are purely a tribal community by anthropological point of view. Tharu people worship mainly their tribal goddess called 'Bhuiyan' or 'Bhumsen' with other Hindu gods and goddesses. Government of India has accepted this community as a scheduled tribe. There is a well family system in this community. Women have high reputation, enough social and economic rights in their family system. This community has paternal family system but women have high position and more rights. This is a remarkable fact. Love, marriage, re-marriage, widow-marriage are also accepted with their traditional marriage system. The panchayat system is very strong in this tribe; head of panchayat is called 'Padhan' in local Tharu language. The Tharus love their folk arts. Tharu songs, dance (Naach), tattoos, wall paintings, handicrafts, and magic are very interesting and special. Remarkable fact is that they make handicrafts only for personal and not for marketing purpose. They like contrast colours in dress and wall paintings for decoration of house. Main food of Tharus is fish and rice but they also used roti, vegetables, mutton, chicken, milk products and more others. However, since hunting is bounded in forest they cannot use more vegetable food and because of poverty they cannot afford expensive mutton and chicken. But they use more and more fishes in their food. Tharus are very hospitable and they respect their guests very much. They like to serve best food to their guests. Tharus have very friendly nature; every Tharu person has a best friend in his/her life. Male best friend of male is called 'Meet' or 'Dilbar' and female best friend of female is called 'Sangan'. Tharus treat their best friend as real brother and sister.

The Indian Tharu youths are very important wing of their community. They are playing very creative role in their community. Youths of other tribes of this area (Bhotia and Jaunsari etc) are aggressive more than Tharu youths. Many Bhotia and Jaunsari youths are

working as administrative officers, professors, doctors, engineers, and advocates etc. They are very advanced and also careful about their traditional culture. However, Tharu youths are very poor in this matter. Generally, Tharu youths do not like to go to advanced cities for education. Nepalese Tharu youths are more aware and advanced than Indian Tharu youths because there are many youth organizations and groups are active in Nepalese Tharu community in development and extension of education, technology, health care etc. According to Arjun Guneratne, its genesis and development must be sought in the socio-economic conditions-such as class relationships, the state, and the processes of modernization (Guneratne 1998:749-73).

## METHODOLOGY

This is a primary data based study and presented in Exploratory and Descriptive Research Design. Primary data on youth-awareness in various matters have been collected by interviewing 116 Youths, 18 to 25 year age group. All these youths are students of Government Post Graduate College, in Rudrapur District, Udham Singh, Nagar State Utrakh and India in 2007-2008 session. There are 68 Tharu males and 48 females studying in this college. We have selected all Tharu students for interview and observation because of their small number. We have used these students as sample in this study because they are the cream of their community. We want to know the status of awareness in these highly literate youth group. We have used a survey schedule for collecting information but personal observation was also used as per requirements. Mainly, we have collected information of awareness about education technology economic and political environmental health cultural activities. We have also used the related literature as secondary data for making some statements in this article.

## OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

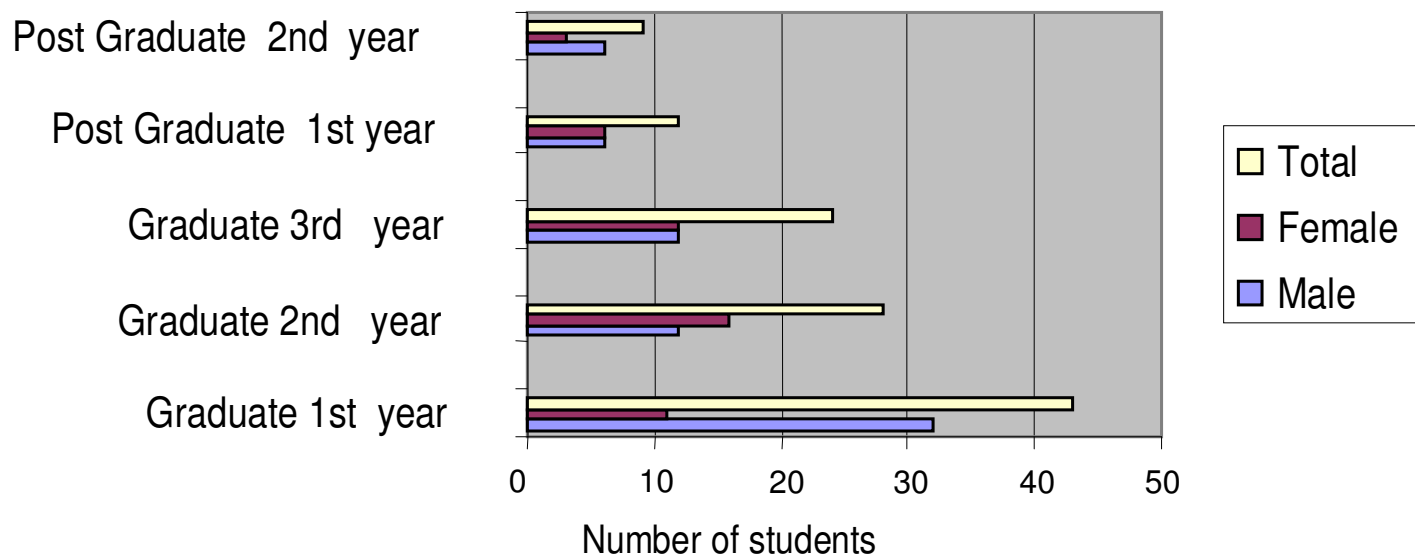
### Educational awareness

The Tharu community is one of the Indian tribes which do not have enough awareness about education. There are many educational institutes and organizations in Tharu area, but the percentage of educated people is very low. Tharu tribe is close to Nepal and there is more awareness of education in this community. There are many social workers of their own community working hard for education. For example, in 1984 the young man, called Dilli Chaudhary founded Backward Society Education (BASE) to stand up for the rights of Nepal's marginalized Tharu ethnic group (Roger, 2007).

Table 1 shows that there are 81.90% Tharu students, enrolled in graduate level, and the percentage of female in these students is 41.05. It means they are not more backward than male. Only 18.10% students are studying at post graduate level and there are 42.86% girls also among these students. Table 1 and Figure 1 also shows that number of students at graduate 1st year level is more than upper levels. It means performance of these students is not good in examination because there are

**Table 1.** Classification of Tharu students by educational standard.

Detail	Number of youths studying in various standard				Total youth	%
	Boys	%	Girls	%		
Graduate 1st year	32	27.59	11	9.48	43	37.07
Graduate 2nd year	12	10.34	16	13.79	28	24.14
Graduate 3rd year	12	10.34	12	10.34	24	20.69
Post graduate 1st year	06	5.17	06	5.17	12	10.34
Post graduate 2nd year	06	5.17	03	2.59	09	7.76
Total	68	58.62	48	41.38	116	100

**Figure 1.** Comparative graph about number of Tharu students in various standards (Source of Facts: Table 1).**Table 2.** Status of awareness about higher education in Tharu youths.

Detail	Number of youths who are interested in various type of education				Total youth	%
	Boys	%	Girls	%		
Those who want education up to graduate level only	20	17.24	13	11.21	33	28.45
Those who want education up to post graduate level only	47	40.52	34	29.31	81	69.83
Those who want doctorate or above degree only	01	0.86	01	0.86	02	1.72
Total	68	58.62	48	41.38	116	100

37.07% students enrolled in 1st year but only 24.14% students in second year and 20.69% in third year are studying. Females are performing well than males in this matter. Population of Tharu tribe in Udham Singh Nagar District is 81230 (Statistical Magazine, 2008:14) and there are only 138 students studying in Government Post Graduate College of the district head quarter. It means only 0.16 per cent youths of total population are taking higher education; in women, this figure is only 0.03%. Total populations of all communities in this district are 1253614 (Statistical Magazine, 2008: 16) and 6125

students are enrolled in that college. It means 0.48 percent youths of total population are studying in this college and the percentage of Tharu students is only 0.16. So the data show that awareness about higher education in the Tharu youths is 1/3 compared to other youths.

Table 2 shows that 28.45% students are interested in graduate level degree only but a large number of students (69.83%) want to take post graduate degree. There are only 29.31% girls and 41.52% boys who are interested in post graduate level education. Most Tharu

**Table 3.** Status of awareness for employment in Tharu youths.

Types of employment choice	Number of youth		Total	%
	Boys	Girls		
Own business	08	03	11	9.48
Administrative and high class officer service and academic job in higher education	04	01	05	4.31
Teaching job in schools	12	13	25	21.56
Army and police job	28	06	34	29.31
Any job	16	25	41	35.34
Total	68	48	116	100

**Table 4.** Status of awareness for employment place choice in Tharu youths.

Choice of job place	Number of youths				Total youth	%
	Boys	%	Girls	%		
Those who want job any where	33	48.33	20	41.67	53	45.69
Those who want job in local area	35	51.47	28	58.33	63	54.31
Total	68	100	48	100	116	100

students want a job early; that is why they are not interested in post graduate level education. Graduation level is enough for a general job so they want only eligibility for it. The only students studying in post graduation level are those who want any special job or could not get a job still. Some students are taking education in post graduate level for doctorate degree but the number of these students is few. There are only 2 students (1 male and 1 female) who want to do research for Ph.D. level. There is only one Tharu man (Prem Singh Rana) with Ph.D. in this area. At present he is a lecturer in college. Facts show that few numbers of Tharu students are interested in research for Ph.D. level. This situation is not good for their bright future. There are many researchers from other communities doing research on Tharu tribe, but its own students do not like to do study about their own community.

### Status of awareness about employment

At present, it is poor of the Indian society that every person is getting education only for a job. That is why the social and cultural values are losing their importance. It is big a factor that affects their region and social values. At present, every Tharu student studies for job only: a large group of Tharu students do not care about their own culture and social values. Employment factor is affecting their social and cultural values because they do not like and want their traditional occupation; they only want any new job anyhow and at any cost. Table 3 shows that only 9.48% youths like or want to do their own business, and maximum number of youths (90.42%) wants government or private service job. It also shows a notable fact that awareness about administrative and higher class service

job is not enough. There are only 4.31% youths studying for higher class service job. Army and police force job is very popular in this community but youths are not trying to get officer class job in force. They are trying only for ordinary jobs like constable and soldier. A big part of the number of students (35.34%) wants any service job anyhow. School teacher job is also popular among Tharu youths because the opportunity of this job is easy in local areas.

Table 4 shows that maximum 54.31% youths want to do service job in local areas; that is why the school teaching job is popular among Tharu youths. Police and army force job is popular among those youths which are physically strong and fit. Social status of police and army men is deemed high and powerful in Tharu community, so most youths like to do this job. Agriculture is the main and traditional occupation of the Tharu tribe but new generation especially higher educated youths do not like agriculture and its related occupations. Government has stabled more industries in Tharu area so job opportunity is easy. Industrialization is playing a big role in socio-cultural change in Tharu community because they are coming in touch with other communities.

### Status of awareness about modern technology and communication

This era is era of modern technology and advanced communication but Tharu youths are not using them to make their own carrier. They use some technological facilities like mobile phone, FM radio, television and DVD player but only for entertainment. They are not meant for their business or for making good career. Table 5 shows that 100% of its youths watch mostly television programmes.

**Table 5.** Status of awareness about modern technology and communication in Tharu youths.

Type of technology and communication	Number of youth		Total youth	%
	Boys	Girls		
Internet	02	00	02	1.72
Radio or FM radio	45	13	58	50.00
Television	68	48	116	100.00
Mobile phone	16	05	21	18.10
News paper magazine and others	66	42	108	93.10

They do not like to watch news and educational programmes.

Table 5 also shows that the most important communication system, internet is not popular among Tharu youths. Only 1.72% youths use internet and have e-mail addresses. 50% youths use radio and FM radio, but a maximum number of them use it to listen to songs and other entertainment programmes. A maximum number of youths (93.10%) read newspapers and magazines but the situation is same for television or FM radio. A large number of youths like to read only entertainment news and articles mostly about movie actors and actresses. There is a little number of youths that like to read editorial and other knowledge full articles. This is the status of awareness in highly educated Tharu youths; in other Tharu youths, the situation will be very poor and unthinkable. Many communication companies are providing mobile phones on very low prices so many youths (18.10%) are using mobile phones. Students living in hostels mostly use mobile phones for communicating with their parents and girl/ boyfriends also. In short, we can say that Tharu youths need to use more and more technologies and communication systems for making good carrier and real life goal.

#### Status of awareness about their own culture

The Tharu community has its amazing culture with many specialties, but it is very poor that its own new generations especially highly educated youths are not so aware of or care for it. Some Tharus are trying to keep their own socio-cultural values but they have not succeeded till date. A large number of Tharu youths want change in their life, so they are ignoring their own cultural values. It is true that they want change but they are not aggressive about it, and so have made no advance. They are only following other communities for a new life style. We can say that the process of *Sanskirtization* (accepting other cultures) is still running in this community. A maximum number of Tharu youths are trying to accept other culture by leaving their own old culture. There are many religious missionaries working for the conversion of Tharus in this area. That is why some Tharus have converted to other religions. The Tharu youths are ignoring their own culture and losing traditional values.

Table 6 shows that 1.72% youths do not like their own religion and they want to convert to any other religions. There are 17.24% youths that like to wear their traditional costumes and other related things; 30.17% youths have good feelings for their own culture but they are not playing any role or care for it. 69.83% youths do not care for their own culture and they want change in their life style; only 9.48% youths are active in movement that keeps their own socio-cultural values. *Tharu Rana Parishad* (Council of Tharu Community) is the main organization of this community which is active in the socio-cultural movement in this area. This organization is trying to keep traditional culture of Tharus. But this organization has not so succeeded in its main goals.

#### Status of awareness about health

There are many social, cultural and economic groups existing in Indian society simultaneously. Their standard of living and awareness varies according to their socio-economic status. There are two major parts of population in India:

- 1) Rural Communities (70%),
- 2) Urban communities (30%).

Rural communities lack economic and educational progress.

Indian society has four major social classes:

- 1) General Casts,
- 2) Scheduled Cast,
- 3) Other Backward Cast, and
- 4) Scheduled Tribes.

Every class has various social, economic and educational statuses; these are the reasons for the various status of awareness. Rural and backward communities have no much awareness about education and health. Every class has different figure of health awareness. The Tharu community is a part of Indian Scheduled Tribes but this community is more aware about health care than other backward and scheduled casts. The Tharus are physically strong and fit generally because they eat healthy natural foods and they also have many traditional

**Table 6.** Status of awareness about their own culture in Tharu youths.

Detail	Number of youths that are interested in various employment in various places		Total	%
	Boys	Girls		
Those that do not like their own religion and want to accept other religion	02	00	02	1.72
Those that like to wear their traditional costumes and other things	04	16	20	17.24
Those that like their own culture but do not play any role or care for it	23	12	35	30.17
Those that like modernization and do not care about their own culture	45	36	81	69.83
Those that play any role and care for their own culture	08	03	11	9.48

**Table 7.** Status of awareness about health in Tharu youths.

Detail	Number of youth		Total	%
	Boys	Girls		
Have knowledge about HIV/AIDS	68	48	116	100
Playing active role in health activities	08	03	11	9.48
Those that like daily physical exercise	31	22	53	45.69
Those that believe in traditional treatment	31	22	53	45.69
Those that like modern treatment	37	26	63	54.31

treatment systems. The Tharus eat mostly fish, pork, chicken, milk products, garlic, onions, ginger, lemon and fruits. They also like physical exercise and games so they keep their salve fit and fast. Tharus are the largest group of people in the Terai area. Historically, they were the only ones that were able to reside in the malarial jungles. Recent medical evidence supports the common belief that the Tharu people, having lived in the swampy Terai region for centuries, have developed an innate resistance to malaria, which is likely based on an unidentified genetic factor.

At present, the approach of health care is changing according to development especially in new generation of this community. Table 7 shows that maximum (54.31%) Tharu youths like to take modern medical treatments and 45.69% youths like to take traditional medical treatment. 45.69 % youths like to do physical exercise daily and 9.48% youths are playing major role in various types of health activities. Youths that are active in health care programmes are voluntarily working in National Service Scheme (NSS), a national India scheme for students in social work and development. All Tharu students know about HIV/AIDS because there are many literature and alerting advertisements about HIV/AIDS in India. Notable fact is that more youths do not like their own culture, but they like to take their traditional medical treatments. At present, other people are also coming back to traditional, natural and herbal medical treatments systems like Yoga, naturopathy, Ayurveda etc. So this is a good signal for Tharu youths because they also like these medical treatment systems. At least, we can say that the future of health care in Tharu community is very bright.

### Status of political awareness

Generally, the Tharus have no interest in international and national level politics, but at local and regional level some Tharus are playing big role in politics. There are many Tharu populated villages in this Tarai region so at the village level Tharus have strongly held on leadership. Trend of leadership is traditionally still in Tharu community. In the past, the *Panchayat* (local Tharu council) was very powerful and strong at the village level and the head of *Panchayat* was called '*Padhan*'. Members of the *Panchayat* were called *Panch*. The *Panchayat* was also the Village Court and the time of hearing any matter the *Padhan* was called *Sarpanch* (chief of Court). At present this traditional Tharu *Panchayat* is not so powerful because its own new generation does not like its old rules. New *Panchayati Raj* (local body governance) system of Indian Government has been replaced with old *panchyats*. The Tharu youths are playing a big role in this new *panchayati raj* system because they have right to vote. That is why the old type of leadership has lost its value and youth leadership is growing up rapidly. The '*Khatima*' seat of legislative assembly of Utrakhand is reserved for tribal community, so a Tharu '*Gopal Singh Rana*' has been elected as representative of this area. Some other Tharus *Bhuvan Singh Rana*, *Bheem Singh Rana*, *Smt. Sushma Rana* have been elected chairmanship of Block Development Committee. Many other Tharu people have been elected for the post of '*Pradhan*' (head of village). Some Tharus are active workers of political parties especially the youths who play major role there.

**Table 8.** Status of political awareness in Tharu youths.

Detail	Number of youth		Total	%
	Boys	Girls		
Neutral/ not interested	38	36	26	22.42
Directly involved in local and regional politics	13	03	16	13.79
Interested but not involved directly	17	09	74	63.79
Have any constitutional post	00	00	00	00
Total	68	48	116	100

**Table 9.** Type of families of Interviewed youths.

Type of family	Number of youth		Total	%
	Boys	Girls		
Joint family	46	32	78	67.24
Nuclear family	22	16	38	32.76
Total	68	48	116	100

Table 8 shows that 13.79% youths are directly involved in local and regional politics and 76.39% have interest in politics but not involved directly. Only 22.42% youths are not interested in any type of politics. Reservation policy of Indian Government is much favorable for political awareness in Tharu youths because many constitutional and political posts are reserved for tribal communities.

### Social changes and youth awareness

We have said that Tharu community is suffering from social changes and their youths are playing active role in this process. Youths refuse many old social rules and customs. In this era new Tharu generation does not like and support early age marriage, leadership and dictatorship of old aged people, joint family system, traditional typical costumes, marriage with elder women, (Acharya, 2001) tribal religious activities and things etc. Traditional social values have lost their importance and new trends are still running. There is an interesting and amazing system of mutual friendship called *Mitai* popular in Tharus community. In this system friends act as real brothers or sisters and they help and support each other without any formality. This system shows the human social values and feeling of the Tharus but at present this system is losing its importance like many other old systems. Kinship system is also changing and materialistic culture is affecting badly blood and marriage relationships. New generation is using new words in place of old words of relations, for example- *Dauwa* (Father) is called *Papa* or *dady* and *Aiya* (mother) is called *Mammy*. Many specialties of other communities have been accepted by Tharus. At present, we can say that the process of cultural infection is killing the

traditional Tharu social system. Data clearly show in Table 9 that a large number of youths (67.24%) come from nuclear families and only 32.76% youths are from joint families. In the past, joint family system was very popular in Tharu community, but at present the situation is just the opposite.

In the past, there were many other communities who were capturing Tharu's forest and agricultural land but cool minded Tharus never conflicted with them. Many other communities like Muslims, Sikhs, Paharis etcetera continuously captured Tharu properties and also hurt their feelings for long. The Tharus say that *pahari* are cheats, they are cheating our community (Sigrun, 1997). But now the situation has changed because the Tharu youths do not like to interfere in their own properties. Some educated and politically empowered youths know their rights very well so they are now struggling for freehold of their own agricultural land and other properties. Situation of social conflict is still running because other communities are counter attacking on the Tharus. Blast of population and disorganization of joint families are increasing need of more agricultural land and other natural resources. So the Tharu youths are conducting social movements. At present, Tharu community is suffering from poverty, illiteracy, social and cultural pollution but its youths are struggling for development.

### Conclusion

After all facts gathered, it is concluded that Tharu community is undergoing social dynamics rapidly and their youths are playing a big role in this process. Tharu youths lack awareness about higher education, but have

dominant position in local politics. It is true that Tharus do not have more highly class administrative jobs in governmental or private sector but they have many political and constitutional posts at local and regional level. Tharu youths are ignoring and refusing their traditional systems and customs, so the main identity of Tharu culture is getting lost. However, it is not only common in Tharu community. It is a part of global social change and it is problem of all communities of the world. At present Tharu youths are struggling for their rights and new identity but they will never get a bright future if they do not respect their past. So the keeping of their socio-cultural traditions is most important. Many scholars are studying about the amazing culture of Tharu but its youths are not interested in this matter. At present, it is their moral duty that they must know the importance of their own culture. Support and financial help from the government is a must for keeping Tharu culture. We need a special Research Institute and Museum for Tharu community just like Nepal. The Tharu Cultural Museum building is situated in the Tharu village of Bachhauri-6, Chitwan, Nepal (Nepal now online). This step will be helpful for their development and bright future.

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