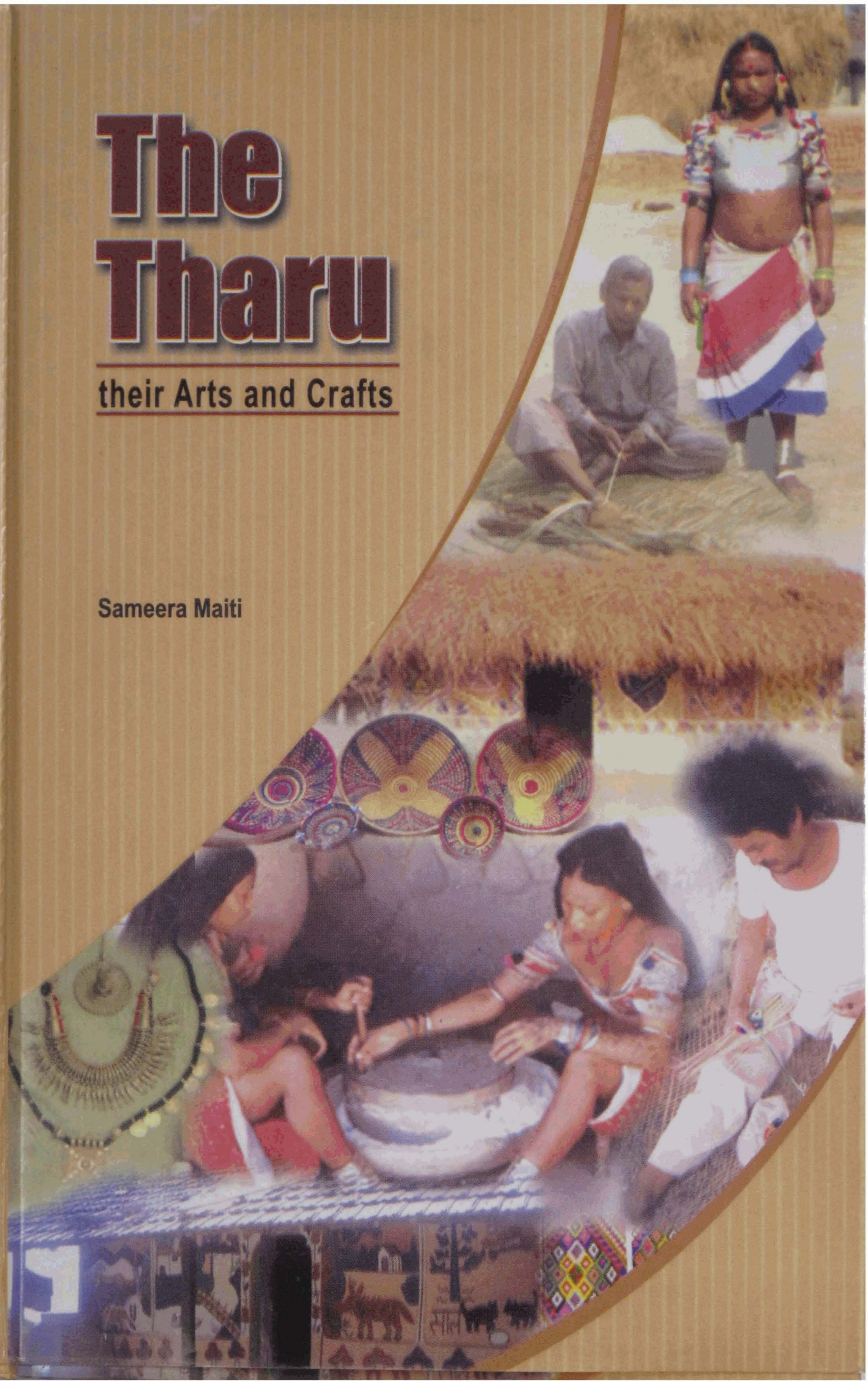


# The Tharu

their Arts and Crafts

Sameera Maiti



*for mom and pa*

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## *Preface*

In today's world of scientific and technological advancement, one rarely gives serious thought to aspects of culture that are not considered indicators of development and progress. One such aspect that has not drawn much attention from anthropologists, despite its known importance, are the artistic activities of various societies.

In our arts and crafts lies a wealth of expression .... the culminative result of generations of thoughts, feelings and experiences. Our nation is rich in the harmony of culture, comprising rich and exquisite artistic contributions from various parts of the country. Further enriching our heritage is the fact that every single tribe and community of the country has a great deal to offer in terms of arts and crafts.

Arts and crafts are valuable not merely as a beautiful heritage, but because we live with these, and our life is further enriched by its grace. Probably, it was keeping this fact in mind that studies have been undertaken on the various classical and folk arts of the country. The same, however, cannot be said about tribal arts and crafts. It was realising this very fact, that I ventured on to study, in a comprehensive manner, the arts and crafts of a tribal society—the Tharu.

The term 'art' being taken in its broadest perspective—an attempt has been made to cover almost all activities that can be considered as 'artistic activities'. Thus, the book includes varied activities such as settlement pattern, clay work, basketry, wood-work, dress and adornment and also the performing arts. Such studies, I feel, are a need of the time since several of the tribal arts and crafts are well on their way to extinction, thanks to the incessant march of progress and modernity. The present study, thus, aims to capture, as an enduring record for posterity, the various aspects of Tharu arts and crafts.

The entire credit of this book, however, is not mine alone. Several persons have been involved, directly and indirectly in the ultimate publication of this book and I shall remain indebted to them. Here, I take the opportunity to thank my teachers at the University who taught me all that I know about the subject. I am also greatly indebted to Prof. R.L. Anderson of the Kansas Institute of Liberal Arts (USA) and Prof V.K. Srivastava of Delhi University for their valuable suggestion, which I have tried to incorporate in this book. I am thankful to Dr. M.K. Agarwal, Department of Economics, Lucknow University, for encouraging and introducing me to M/s Northern Book Centre. Again, NBC must be thanked for their patience and beautiful presentation of the book.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the help and support of my parents, brother Akash, and sister Rubina, who have constantly been there to inspire and help me. To them I owe the entire credit of this book. However, error of any kind would be mine alone.

Sameera Maiti

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# 1

## *Introduction*

From the dawn of human history we find that art has been created in response to human needs—both material and spiritual or intellectual. Since the very earliest times, man has discovered in himself an aesthetic sensibility through which he can complete the form of things made to satisfy his needs, the forms only indefinitely suggested by function.

### Antiquity and Universality

Right from the start man has found himself to be an artist as much as an inventor. The earliest evidence of man's achievement in the field of art finds expression in the cave art of the Upper Paleolithic periods in Europe between 30,000 and 60,000 years ago. The earliest known examples of something definable as art dates from the appearance of Cro-Magnon man (*Homo sapiens*) in the last glacial and postglacial phase of the Paleolithic period. During this time craftsmen had already begun shaping their first hatchet more carefully and gracefully. Symmetry did not make it a better tool, but did enhance its appearance.

In the caves of the Aurignacian period of the Paleolithic, associated with the bones of animals, long extinct, with human remains and tools are found bits of shell and stone worked into beads and pendants with which early man adorned himself. At about the same period we find the beginning of the extra-ordinary school of realistic painting of animals which, rightly according to Bunzel (1938, 535),

“is an eloquent witness of early man's aesthetic sense. Before man learned to ensure his food supply by the cultivation of plants, or to lighten his burdens by domesticating animals to his use, long before he had made simple inventions like the wheel, or primitive industries like pottery, he had developed a pictorial art so perfect in style that the modern painters stand in wonder before his creation. Concerning the ‘purpose’ of these paintings, placed in the deep recesses of caves where daylight never penetrated, there have been many theories. But whatever may have been the connection of these paintings with religious cults or private magic, they still display stylistic features in the treatment of animal figures that mark them as belonging to a highly sophisticated art form. The paintings might not tell us about our earliest ancestor's conceptions of the supernatural, but they do convey a great deal about their sense of form and ideas of perspective”.

Just as the antiquity of art proves it to be a basic form of human behaviour, so also does its universality among the various cultures. Among all existing groups there is none, however primitive its culture, that does not have some characteristic form of art. Aesthetics is thus a cultural universal which includes in itself all sorts of arts and crafts—graphic and plastic arts, dance, drama and music. Anthropologists from the time of Boas onwards have been interested in art and craft as a subject of study because it acts as a mirror to reflect on the people who produce it. It forms one of the main aspects of culture that is concrete and easily observable. Art is, and has always been, “an indispensable need of humanity. It is planted in the soul of the child, as in that of primitive man. It is as necessary as articulate speech. It is the art of each race that gives its civilization its distinct character and rhythm. It reflects, if it does not actually condition the whole manner of life in a nation or period. Life and art are closely and inseparably interwoven, but life passes—the life of individuals and the life of nations—and art remains. It is the only thing that is permanent; and our knowledge of the past, of civilizations that have flourished and disappeared, is derived almost

entirely from the fragmentary relics of their art” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. II: 1962, 442).

## Meaning and Definition

A discussion on the antiquity and universality of arts and aesthetics leads us to the pertinent question of what is art? Over the years many attempts have been made to explain arts and crafts, yet, perhaps, on few subjects does there exist so much confusion of thought. Masses generally think of art as a luxurious hobby for connoisseurs, while art itself is thought only to exist in museums, art galleries and exhibitions. According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (*Ibid.*, 440), “the old meaning, in its widest sense, of the Greek *texnē*, the Latin *ars*, the German *Kunst* implies skill and ability, acquired through patient practice and directed towards a definite end, whether this end be aesthetical, ethical or useful. According to their aim the arts would thus be divided into Fine Arts, Arts of Conduct, and Liberal Arts. The Fine Arts being concerned with the attainment of the beautiful, the Arts of Conduct with the good, and the Liberal Arts with the useful”.

Handicrafts or merely crafts has been described in Vol. IV (1962, 149-150) of the Encyclopaedia as, “manual skill or skilled work performed with the hand, and generally designating those visual arts which are actually practiced by hand and associated with wearing apparel or decoration in the home. The range of a craft in fact, is limited only by an individual’s imagination and ability. In a sense handicrafts may be considered as synonymous with arts and crafts, only of a less broad meaning, arts and crafts including those arts which are practised by hand and which are practiced with the aid of a machine”.

It also states that, “in the modern and more restricted sense the term art applies only to those human activities which tend towards aestheticism—in other words, Fine Arts... A list of the arts embraces the static arts—architecture, sculpture and painting, with their subdivisions—and the dynamic arts—poetry and the drama (rhetoric)” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. II: 1962, 440).

However, in early civilizations there was little distinction between fine arts and liberal arts. The sculptural and architectural remains of ancient Greece are believed to represent the work of artisans. In more recent times, although the 'fine arts' have become more clearly differentiated from the 'useful arts', the latter in the hands of a good craftsman are still works of art.

"The fine arts are generally distinguished by the fact that they are not primarily valued for their usefulness or practicality, but are immediately enjoyable, the pleasure varying from a merely sensuous delight in the material to a highly intellectual pleasure in the formal pattern or arrangement and in the work of art as symbolic of something more than is immediately present to the senses. The process of the fine arts are distinguished from those of the useful arts, especially in the mechanical and industrial forms of the latter, by individuality, by a more refined and subtle development of materials and forms, by a greater concern with the meanings which those materials and forms may signify. Thus, the artist is more than an artisan; he is a creator and the process of creation is important and interesting to the artist no less, perhaps even more than the object created" (Edman: 1953, 223-224).

Distinctions of this order, i.e., between the 'fine' and 'applied' or 'liberal' arts, is also not prevalent among the tribal or simple societies. In fact according to Maquet (1986) and Hardin (1988) "most languages lack words that translate even approximately as art. By the same token, some—again, probably most—cultures have no tradition of using disinterested, theoretical principles to discuss the relative merits or fundamental nature of art; that is, they have no explicit, clearly articulated aesthetic philosophy" (Anderson: 1992, 927). Art for them is a part of life, not separated from it. Often in such societies each individual, tends to make on his own most of the art objects which he uses. No one in primitive society earns his whole livelihood by practicing art. In general every adult member of one sex in a tribe possesses at least moderate proficiency in the arts. This by no means implies that specialization



does not exist in such cultures, for whenever the creative drive comes into play, individuals are found to excel or to be inept, in their performance. In fact, in many cases therefore, it is difficult to make any clear distinction between artistic and everyday activities.

Beals and Hoijer (1977, 539) opine, "the anthropological definition of art, centres about the extent to which any given activity seems to involve, over and above any practical or utilitarian value, elements that have an impact on the senses of a performer or an audience. Artistic activities are not just carried out properly, they are carried out with grace, style and beauty as these concepts are understood by the members of any particular culture. Although artistic production are sometimes defined by the sentiments they arouse in an anthropologist or other outside observers, the ultimate authority on what is art, and what is not, are the artists and the audience for whom the activity was performed".

"In the widest sense, then, art is to be thought of as any embellishment of ordinary living that is achieved with competence and has describable form. Competence can become virtuosity, which is the supreme control over technique that gives every society its finest aesthetic products and, is a significant factor in the creative process itself. Even where no question of virtuosity arises, the artist must be competent if he is to be effective in the expression of his art. Form, function, and design are also necessary to the execution of any art form. Within these limits, one must regard as art whatever people recognize as manifestations of the impulse to make more beautiful and thus to heighten the pleasure of any phase of living" (Herskovits: 1974, 235).

## Functions

Anything in culture becomes art if it fulfills the conditions of art, that is, if control is exercised to express or arouse emotions. From the viewpoint of the person who creates it, art expresses feelings and ideas while from the viewpoint of the observer or participant, it evokes feelings and ideas.

The feelings and ideas on both sides, however, may not necessarily be exactly the same. According to Armstrong (1981, 6), "an artistic work or performance is intended to evoke or excite the senses, to stir the emotions of the beholder or participant. It may produce feelings of beauty, awe, repulsion, fear, but usually not indifference". Apart from providing a vehicle of pure expression, art achieves functions of considerable importance for individual, society, and culture. "Art, like rituals, bring men to terms with their emotions. An artist controls emotions in order to achieve, through poetry, dance or music, some measured form of expression. Art allows men to face up to and vicariously resolve life's problems. Through art they also confess their passive surrender and helplessness. Art gives vent to protest and relieves the creator's insecurity. It promises or earns him fame. Through the painfulness of creation it also stirs in him a painful mixture of despair and frustration. When the artist shares his expression with others he arouses more or less the effect he aimed for in his painting, musical composition, etc." (Honigman: 1963, 221).

Many people learn various art and craft skills as a challenging and entertaining hobby. They may also enjoy expressing themselves artistically as they create objects and thus an artist may create purely for the sake of expression. Other people derive satisfaction from making things they need in everyday life. The fact that a storyteller is repeatedly visited or a potter's designs, a painter's paintings are praised is sufficient proof of gratification that they receive. It is, in fact, because of the positive effects of arts and crafts that sometimes doctors recommend it as therapy for people with emotional problems or physical disabilities. Again, several artists and craft persons design and make original objects to exhibit and sell. Such professional artists of our time are interested in bigger gains. To a great extent, arts and crafts reflect the socio-political conditions and tensions present in the society at the time of their creation. In fact according to Lenin, art belongs to the people and should be understood and loved by them. Its social role

therefore, is to serve them as a force of unification in their struggles and of elevation of them in their development. The "social realism" of Marxist ideologists is thus the most explicit formulation of the arts as communication which argues that this is its major purpose. This ideology, however, does not hold ground since at times art stops short of communication and concerns itself simply in relieving pent up feelings. More usually, though artists create to stir emotions, whatever other aims their work implies.

Art also educates and to a great extent it is responsible for the transmission of a society's cultural heritage from generation to generation. An important function of art is the creation of beauty. "Indeed, it may be said that there is no beauty outside art, or, to be more exact, no beauty that has not been revealed by art. Nothing in nature is either beautiful or ugly, for beauty and ugliness are not positive attributes of matter, but matter is invested with these attributes by the artist's emotional reactions to some outside stimulus. Beauty thus resolves itself into objectified aesthetic emotion. The artist has the power to make this emotion visible or audible to others, and to make them partake of his pleasurable excitement. We become aware of beauty and acquire the habit of transferring it from the work of art to the aspect of nature which was the source of its inspiration... That beauty is not an attribute of nature, but of art, or of the artists mind, need scarcely be demonstrated. If it were not so, it would be an immutable value, not subject to fluctuations. Yet, not only does the ideal of beauty change with successive generations, but it varies with races and individuals. It is only the beauty values set up by art that remain permanent, and their appreciation is largely a matter of artistic education" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. II: 1962, 441).

Above all, art brings pure pleasure into the humblest life. The main purpose of art being to give pleasure, it is held by many to be a useless luxury for the idle. From a materialistic point of view art certainly is useless, in so far as it produces nothing of a strictly utilitarian character. Yet,

it is a source of exaltation that raises us above the sordid realities of everyday existence. Without art, life would be intolerable and inconceivable. The human imagination requires food as does the human body, and art is the inexhaustible spring from which our imagination draws sustenance. Thus, as Anderson (1989, 11) puts it, "art seems to have several qualities. It expresses as well as communicates. It stimulates the senses, affects emotions, and evokes ideas. it is produced in culturally patterned ways and styles; it has cultural meaning. And some people are thought to be better at it than others".

## Art and Culture

Most definitions of art presuppose the existence of an aesthetic emotion in man which can be evoked by qualities inherent in objects or activities. The notion of the aesthetic, which defines the concept of beauty and evocativeness, is of course a culture-bound one, and may, like notions of the artistic, be quite different in cultural contexts other than our own. Aesthetic experience involves both emotion and cognition. d'Azevedo (1958) defines the 'aesthetic effect' as the "shock of recognition emerging from the correspondences perceived between the qualities of an aesthetic object and their affinities in the subjective experience of the individual". It remains a fact that there are multiple instances of standards of beauty which differ from our own. "The absence of absolute criteria in the realm of art has so long been recognized that it is almost banal to point out again that concerning taste there can be no argument. But, although not all people like the same thing, within any given group practically all individuals like the same thing in art just as they do in morals. This standardization of taste is a cultural phenomenon as striking as standardization in forms of marriage" (Bunzel: 1938, 538).

At practically every point art reflect the culture in which they are at home. This is because culture patterning and meaning lay at the bottom of art. The arts and crafts of a society emanate from community life and not merely from



any individuals creation. Artistic activities are always in part cultural, involving shared and learned pattern of behaviour, belief and feeling. Some scholars however feel differently. Emphasizing the individual aspect of art, Honigmann (1963, 232) opines—"For all the proof we have that art works is tandem with other parts of culture, it must be acknowledged that art possesses a degree of autonomy ... The fact is, the autonomy of art or, put another way, the artist's imaginative power, is precisely what allows us to escape from our space and time bounds. In that lies the essence of art and a major reason for its universality".

It is no doubt true that the act of creating is always an individual's action. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that a work of art can be reduced to a mere sum of individual contribution. The fact is that the processes of artistic production are more complicated. The artist, in effect, gives expression to sentiments, emotions, and ideas that arise through and by interactions with others. It is in this sense that all art owes its inception to its social and cultural setting rather than to the artist alone. The unique genius of the artist lies in sensitivity to the social and cultural milieu, and in the ability to respond in an aesthetically satisfying medium.

## Tribal Arts and Crafts

Before getting down to discuss the main features of tribal arts and crafts it is essential to take note of the fact that in much literature the tribal and indigenous populations have been referred to as 'primitives' and their art to as 'primitive art'. However, the term 'primitive' when referred to by anthropologists in studying art, properly speaking refers neither to chronology nor to style alone. The primitive art studied by anthropologists includes not only that which is of greatest antiquity in human culture, but also much that is contemporary or near-contemporary. In treatment arts and crafts of such societies may sometimes be crude, but most of its work cannot be described as lacking sophistication. Tribal or primitive arts and crafts have

behind them a long stylistic tradition and express great capacity in handling design and symbolism within the limits of the material. Sometimes again, non-anthropologists make no distinction between 'folk' and 'tribe', thus, treating the two as synonyms. The discussion that follows too, therefore, tends to ignore these distinctions when citing the views of various distinguished scholars.

Arts and crafts that are not produced by specialists or that are enjoyed by a large number of people is often, labeled in a derogatory way as 'tribal', 'folk' or 'popular' art. Bernal (1969, 73) distinguished between folk art which according to him is made by "non-professional, non specialist people, who do various things and not just by those who have basically an intuitive approach to aesthetic", and a second group that he calls "simply art with a capital A . . . . it is obviously a professional art, that is, the makers are specialists. This does not mean as happens in many other cultures, may do nothing but that, but it obviously means that he essentially makes that" (*Ibid.*, 74).

Various studies reveal that primitive/tribal art is highly socialized. In many respects it is the handmaid of technology. One of its great applications is for the adornment of objects of everyday use — pots, baskets, adze handles, huts, boats etc. In modern developed societies, we tend to think that anything useful is not art. But such a distinction is not made in all other societies, strongly suggesting that our idea about art is culturally determined. In almost all primitive and simple societies, art is used by the ordinary people in embellishment of their domestic implements, and in their ordinary social gatherings.

According to Firth (1971, 171), "as part of this situation, the primitive artist is first and foremost a craftsman, from whom art flows as an extension of his craft activity. By this, it is meant that he is essentially the constructor of things for material use which are also regarded as giving enjoyment. He does not make things simply for the aesthetic satisfaction to be got out of looking at them. Even songs, as a rule are not composed simply to be listened to for

pleasure. They have work to do, to serve as funeral dirges, as accompaniments to dancing, or to serenade a lover. And in each case concrete results are sought, for which the song is intended to pave the way”.

Regarding tribal artists it may be said that they are no different to non-tribal artists. All artists are in essential exactly alike, they all strive to give the world a message, there might be a subtle difference in their message, but their object in life is the same. Tribal artists depend upon primitive instincts or strong emotional forces. Their work is great because it is sincere and captures some of their own emotions and perceptions. At times it may not be very beautiful or elegant, but it is powerful and it says something, it has a message for the world. The very simplicity and crudeness of the artists give a greatness to their work. Every artist has his own personality behind his art and style. This gives his work individuality, but underneath the mannerisms of all artists there is a similarity, for the ultimate goal of all great art is the expression of life.

Putting forward his views, Lommel (1968, 10) opines—“though primitive cultures may be inferior to the mature cultures in the level of material culture and of economy and technological development, this is not true of their art”. Primitive man never tries to impose himself on nature; instead he always tries to assimilate the environment. Compared to modern man, “primitive man lived in a more or less unconscious state. He perceives his environment through innocent experiences. Freshness and vigour are the natural qualities found in their art form. A primitive person is therefore, in a much better position to experience it directly and interpreting its magical power” (*Ibid.*, 12).

A distinguishing feature of all forms of art grouped under tribal and folk art is that they are presented as entirely anonymous. This has to be understood from the social rather than the aesthetic point of view. In our society, individual artists are customarily given great prominence while their dependence on other people and on their

culture is frequently overlooked. On the other hand, in simple or tribal societies, works of art—songs, paintings, decorations on pottery, etc., are often anonymous, or at least the individual artist is given only a subordinate role in their production. According to Bernal (op. cit., 76), "even when a work was done by only one man it was nevertheless attributed to a group of individuals. Art may be attributed to a city, area or ethnic group or to the king or important persons who undertook to commission the large public works". The anonymous nature of folk art or tribal art has frequently led to the observation that everyone in a folk, simple or tribal society is an artist, whereas in a modern society the artist is usually a professional. In a sense this is true, for folk arts and tribal arts are usually practiced, to some degree, by nearly everyone.

In discussing tribal arts and crafts it is essential to consider its so-called symbolism, where a part is made to stand for the whole and less significant elements are suppressed. In a broad sense, symbolism may be said to exist when some components of the mind's experience elicit activity and values ordinarily associated with other components of experience. Thus, there is a referent, and something representing it, and the association between them is a mental one. Most symbols are culturally defined and so one symbol may stand for a totally different thing in a different culture. In symbolism, the referent and representative are usually in a relation which is not very easily perceived, since the two elements of experience concerned are much general in their association. In fact, they may even be peculiar to a single individual although such individual symbols are rare in tribal societies. They are usually shared by a group of people or members of the society as a whole. In this respect symbolism has an important social function. It is not merely a matter of common interest and knowledge but serves as a vehicle for the expression of values which are significant for the social relations of the people.

It is often held that such art is magical or mystical in its origin and its primary objective. However, it is a mistake to

think that all tribal art is concerned with rituals. The fact is that much of the tribal symbols are simply decorative. Many motifs employed by the tribal artists are simply line arrangements of a geometrical order, with no hidden meaning or significance. Or they are conventionalized representations (through visually inadequate forms) of natural or cultural objects, the reference being a direct one to them without any further significance.

The most difficult task in studying any art or craft, and especially the symbols and motifs, is gauging its existential meaning. One is fortunate if the tribals can elucidate the symbols they paint and weave, or the intricate gestures that constitute their dance. Most often the informants only say that the music, dance, painting, or weave is beautiful, religious, or ennobling—as one could have guessed. Any fuller, more explicit meaning eludes them. However, if we stay with these people long enough, try to understand their culture, worldview and participate in their life sufficiently, we will be able to understand and learn the feelings that their art expresses and informs.

Behind all art lie certain fundamental causes. A work of art, whether a song, a piece of music, a painting or a mural, requires of its creator a broad and deep understanding of the elements represented, fused with extra-ordinarily skillful technique by an impelling and emotional urge to create something beautiful. Whether artistic understanding is inherited or acquired can hardly be ascertained. Technique can be achieved through study, but the physical attributes of the individual artist, such as the hearing of a musician or the eyesight of a painter, affect his facility according to their degree of excellence.

## Review of Literature

An art/craft can be studied either from a purely technical or from an artistic point of view. The validity or usefulness of studying it from an anthropological perspective is that it gives a wider comprehension. As stated earlier, Boas initiated the study of arts and crafts in Anthropology. Since

then several anthropologists have worked on this subject. Most of the studies of art in Anthropology, however, have been done on African and American societies. In India, anthropological work on art is very limited. The main contributor to the study of tribal art in India has been Verrier Elwin (1944, 1946, 1949, 1951, 1954 and 1959). Thus, his books deal with such diverse topics as tribal arts, folk - songs, myths, wood carvings, scrolls, comic strips, stories in pictures, lover' poems, songs, *etc.*

Over the years several other studies have been carried out in India in the field of art and craft. A number of these deal with folk art, which many a times include tribal art, since non-anthropologists rarely make a distinction between the two. Realizing the importance of handicraft in India, the Census Department published a series of reports in 1961 entitled 'Handicraft Survey Reports' (Part VII A).

In keeping with this, the present research aims at studying the arts and crafts of the Tharu tribals. The study intends to cover the majority of artistic activities as found among the Tharu, the effects of culture contact and the changes brought about in this aspect of their culture over the years.

The Tharu are the only Scheduled Tribe remaining in Uttar Pradesh, residing in the Tarai region, towards the north of the state. The first systematic study on the Tharu appears to have been accomplished by D.N. Majumdar in 1941 when he was invited by the government of India to help in analyzing the census. His study dealt with serological and anthropometric measurements. However, mention of the tribe was made as early as 1867 in 'The North Western Provinces Census Report.' Studies done by Nesfield (1885), Risley (1891), Turner (1931), Knowles, Nevill (1904a & b), Crooke (1896) and Majumdar (1931 & 1942) mainly dealt with the origin and racial affinity of the Tharu. In 1963, R.P. Srivastava was awarded a Ph. D for his anthropometric and serological studies on the Tharu and at present a research project is being conducted, on the DNA polymorphism of the Tharu by the Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta. Thus, most work on the Tharu is related

to Physical Anthropology. Further R.K. Srivastava has contributed several research papers that delve deeply into the Tharu psychology. In the field of Social Anthropology major works have been published by D.N. Majumdar (1937 & 1944), S.K. Srivastava (1948, 1949 and 1958) and A. Hasan (1971, 1993). These however deal with the general social cultural features of the Tharu. One aspect that has not been dealt with justly is the study of the Tharu arts and crafts. A thirty four page report to this extent was prepared by H.S. Saksena (1991) for the Crafts Museum, New Delhi, with focus on the Tharu applique work. The other aspects of the arts and crafts have merely been touched upon.

Keeping the aforesaid in mind, it was felt essential to document the rich tradition of Tharu arts and crafts, which are fast disappearing. The study thus makes an earnest effort to add to the vast sea of existing knowledge related to arts and crafts.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the proposed study are delineated as below :

1. To identify the various arts, crafts and artistic activities of the Tharu.
2. To ascertain the place of the artists/craftsperson in the tribe and the modes of transferring the art/skill from generation to generation.
3. To elicit the details of materials used, their sources of supply, production, etc. along with the attempts to use new materials.
4. To inquire into the process and techniques employed in the manufacture of a particular art form / craft piece.
5. To analyze motifs, designs, stylizing, etc. and the changes brought about through their exposure to modern art, designs, material, etc.
6. To investigate the functional place of the art / craft in the social system (use of art in daily, religious,

social functions, economic benefits and their significance thereof).

7. To analyze the present position of the art / craft and put forward suggestions to develop the art / craft and make it economically viable for the tribals.

## Methodology

Methodology plays a key role in the enquiry of social sciences. It comprises the scientific procedure of data collection and some logical method of data analysis in order to arrive at valid conclusions, which can be further verifiable. The significance of the right methodology cannot be overemphasized and therefore a great stress is always laid on rigorous application of scientific method while dealing with some phenomena in either a natural or social science. As such, an attempt has been made in the present study to proceed on the basis of a systematic methodological framework. The nature of research assignment required field visits by the author to get first hand information about the Tharu and their arts and crafts in the changed scenario.

The present work makes a record of the Tharu arts and crafts—one of the most fascinating aspects of their life. The study attempts at a comprehensive and in depth survey of all major Tharu arts and crafts. Investigation has been carried out on their dwelling types, drawing and paintings, pottery and clay work, basketry, mat making, rope, fan, net and trap making, clothing, adornment, dance, drama, music, song and a few other minor crafts. The study provides details such as materials used, preparation, orientation of the younger generations into the arts and skills, techniques used, designs uses, etc. of the various Tharu arts and crafts.

The universe of study is the Tharu tribe of Lakhimpur Kheri district in Uttar Pradesh. This specific geographical location was selected since the Tharu population of this area is fairly large (being population wise next only to the Nainital district). This would facilitate coherent and clear



cut study of the Tharu vis-a-vis their contact with non tribals. The particular location also happened to be the area where the author had previously carried out fieldwork and presented a dissertation for her post-graduation. Hence, she was already conversant to some extent with the area and people which induced her to carry on a larger research work to analyze the changing scenario with greater rigour. However, the most important consideration while selecting Lakhimpur Kheri as the field was that the Tharu of this area belong to three different sub-groups. Besides, they are less developed compared to those living in other areas of Tharu concentration, and therefore were in a position to provide greater details about a variety of traditional Tharu arts and crafts.

Data was collected from 29 of the 47 tribal villages of the district. Selection of villages was deliberate, i.e., through purposive sampling. The particular mode of sampling was adopted keeping in mind the following objectives :

1. To cover every corner of the Tharu belt, including most interior villages.
2. Since the focus of study was on arts and crafts, villages found rich in these aspects were identified for data collection.
3. To collect details of the different forms of art and crafts found among all the three sub-groups, villages with concentration of each group were visited and studied.

The research work is based on the analysis of primary data collected through fieldwork. Data collection has been done through the observation (both participant and non-participant, as required) and interview techniques. It was not totally possible to stick to a single and standard schedule since the various arts and crafts demanded different kinds of questions at times. The interview schedule consisted of open-ended questions with supplementary questions being added on the spot, as and when required. Prior to the actual fieldwork, a fortnight

long pilot study was conducted in November 1996, to identify the various arts and crafts, to check the applicability of the schedule that had been prepared, and to add questions as needed. The actual fieldwork was conducted between January 1997 and December 1999 by way of 8 trips making sure that every month of the calendar year was covered. Finally, a last visit was made in October 2000 to make sure that the data collected was consistent and to clear doubts that remained. During the entire period of data collection, the author stayed at different places in the tribal area itself which made the villages easily accessible at any time of the day and night. This facilitated collection of data till late hours in the evening and early in the morning. The data presented in the work is based on in-depth interviews conducted on 210 informants. Stratified random sampling was adopted in selection of informants so as to provide coverage to the three Tharu sub-groups residing in the area, whereas purposive or judgment sampling was used as a supplement to cover as many artists and crafts persons as possible.

Apart from primary data, relevant books, journals, reports, etc., have been consulted as a secondary source of information. The study thus presented, does not specifically deal with the testing of any hypothesis or proposition. It is broadly descriptive and partly analytical in nature, aiming at identifying the various characteristics of the Tharu arts and crafts, the changes creeping in it over the years, suggesting ways to preserve this rich heritage of theirs and making it economically viable for them.

Summing up it might be stated that arts are one of the high points of individual expression, a vehicle for conveying intense and refined human emotions, which can be recognized as being of a universal order. But all art is composed in a social setting. It has a cultural content, and to understand this content, it becomes indispensable to study more than just the artifacts or artistic activities of a society. Even in what is broadly called primitive or tribal art, it is usually possible to identify the cultural region, and

sometimes even the community, from which an object comes. It was probably keeping this in mind that Leonhard Adam said, "for the full appreciation of a work of art it should be seen as far as possible in the setting for which it was created." (c.f. Elwin: 1973, 128).

The next chapter thus, briefly discusses the social-cultural profiles of the Tharu that would help in understanding their arts and crafts in a better way.

# 2

## *Land and People*

No anthropological study is considered complete without knowledge of the surrounding area and a general socio-cultural background of the people under study. Since all aspects of culture are believed to be interlinked, directly or indirectly, they no doubt influence each other in some way or the other. Inhabitants of every geographical area necessarily seek adjustment with their physical environment in order to fulfil most of their needs. Since physical environment varies from region to region and diversity in human efforts to this end is bound to occur which ultimately leads to variation in the cultures of the world.

Thus an attempt has been made in this chapter to give a brief description of the ecology, history and socio-cultural foundations of the Tharu tribals before switching over to study their arts and crafts.

### (A) Geographical Setting

#### **Location, Boundaries, Area and Population**

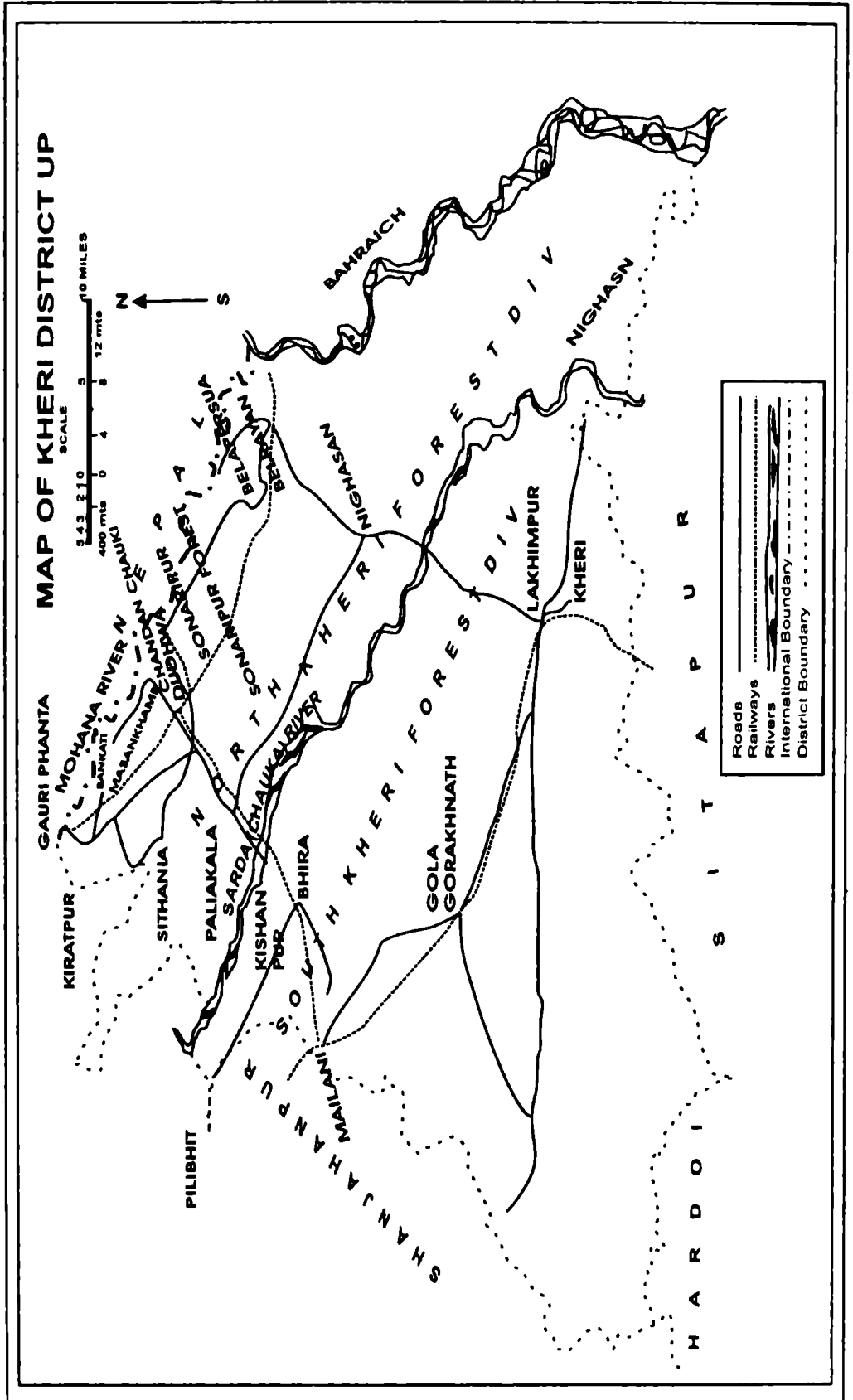
The district of Lakhimpur Kheri is the northern most district of the Lucknow division and is situated in the sub-Himalayan belt bordering the territory of Nepal. It lies between the parallels of 27°41' and 28°41' north latitude and 80°2' and 81°19' east longitude. It is bounded on the east by Bahraich; on the south by the Sitapur district and for a short length by the Hardoi district, on the west by the

Shahjahanpur and Pilibhit districts, and on the north by the territory of Nepal. It is roughly triangular in shape. The demarcating lines between the district and its surrounding territory are partly natural and partly artificial in shape. Till 1899, the Mohana river was accepted as dividing Lakhimpur Kheri from Nepal. The river is, however, prone to change its course markedly with the passage of time, and in order that the chances of the resulting disputes about the boundaries of the district with Nepal might be reduced, a fresh agreement was made and a new boundary line was marked off in 1900. A line was determined along the course of the river, marked out at irregular intervals by stone pillars, between which the boundary line was shown by a cleared line, 15 metres broad with a ditch in the centre.

According to the Central Statistical Organization, the district had an area of 7,691 sq. km. on July 1, 1971 ranking fifth in size in the state. Population of the district according to Census of 1991 is 24,16,234 which includes a population of 28,856 Tharu tribals.

### Climate

The climate of the district is characterized by a dry hot summer and a pleasant cold season. The year might be divided into four seasons — the cold season starts around the end of November when the temperature starts falling rapidly. January is the coldest month with the mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures at 22.2°C and 9.1°C respectively. In association with the cold waves arising in the wake of the western disturbances which travel east wards, the minimum temperature goes down to about 3°C. From about the end of February the temperature begins to rise rapidly. May is the hottest month with the mean daily maximum and minimum temperatures at 40.3°C and 25.4°C, respectively. The intense heat of the summer with the dry hot westerly winds is very trying and the maximum temperature sometimes goes up to 47°C. The summer season lasts from March to June. The advent of monsoon in the third week of June brings an appreciable



decline in the day temperature, but the night temperature remains as high as during summer. With the increased moisture in the air during the monsoon season, despite the decrease in day temperature, the weather is often oppressive in between the rains. After the withdrawal of the monsoon by about the end of September both day and night temperatures decrease progressively. Thus, October and November constitute the post monsoon season.

The average annual rainfall in the district is 1068.7 mm. The rainfall generally increases from the south-west to the north-east. About 86% of the annual rainfall is received during the monsoon months, June to September. The air is very humid during these months, thereafter the relative humidity decreases gradually. During the rainy season when the forest undergrowth grows up, the climate is extremely unhealthy. During the rest of the year the climate, though enervating, is not so unhealthy. Because of the unhealthy climate Atkinson (1886, 697) characterized the habitat of the Tharu as the region of *Mar*, 'the land of death'. The summer season is the driest part of the year when the relative humidity, especially in the afternoon, is below 30%.

Some of the depressions or cyclonic storms from the Bay of Bengal during the south-west monsoon season affect the district and its neighbourhood during the last stages of their travel and cause widespread rain. Duststorms and thunder storms occur during the summer particularly in the later half of the season. Rainfall during the south-west monsoon season is also often associated with thunder. A few thunder storms during the latter part of the cold season associated with the passing of the western disturbances, are accompanied occasionally with hail.

### Topography

The district is in general appearance, a vast alluvial plain transversed by numerous streams flowing in a south-easterly direction. The level surface of the land is varied by the low river-beds and the high banks, which flank the

streams on either sides. The rivers and streams frequently change their courses leaving behind old channels in which water collects to form lakes and swamps. This is particularly so in the tehsils of Nighasan and Palia (where the Tharu population is concentrated). The general slope of the area is from north-west to south-east. The altitude above sea-level ranges from some 182 metres in the extreme north along the Mohana to 114 metres in the furthest south-east corner at the junction of Kauriyala (Ghaghra) and Dahawar rivers. The steepest gradient occurs in the tract north of the Sarda, the elevation at Dudhwa being 180 metres and only 130 metres at Dhauraha — an incline of 49 metres in about 64 kilometres.

The rivers flowing through this district belong to two main systems, those of the Gomti and the Ghaghra (Kauriyala). However, a third system, that of the Ganga, also exists. The main rivers of the area are Sukheta, Gomti, Kathna, Sarda, Dahawar, Suheli or Sarju, Mohana and Ghaghra.

Geologically, the district is formed by the Pleistocene and recent rocks composed of the ordinary gangetic alluvium. The only mineral of importance is *rankar*, which is found in several parts of the district. Lime of good quality is obtained from the *silia-kankar* found in abundance in the neighbourhood of Gola Gokarannath. Brick-earth is obtained in most parts of the area and bricks of fair quality are produced.

## Soil

The soils in Lakhimpur Kheri are generally those found commonly in north Avadh — sandy in the more elevated portion and along the high banks of the rivers, loam or dumat in the level of uplands, and clay in the depressions. All these are, however, capable of much variation. According to the survey of soils in the district conducted by the agriculture department in 1974-75, it has two types of well defined and distinct soils differing from one another in their geological formations. These are the tarai



tract in the north and the alluvium tract in the south. In the tarai tract, the area inhabited by the Tharu, soils have been formed by the alluvial and fluvial action of the rivers and rivulets which traverse it. In lower depths very often gravel is found. These soils vary in texture from place to place and can broadly be classified as clayey loam, loam, and sandy loam. The natural vegetation of this tract are forests and long grasses. The soils in this tract are very productive, possessing reserves of nitrogen.

### Flora and Fauna

The greater part of the district is covered with forests. *Sal* is principal tree found in the area. The other trees and plants found are *babool*, mango, *peepal*, *shisham*, *sagon*, *jamun*, *semal*, *dhatura*, *foos*, *neora*, *gudail*, *haldu*, *asidh*, *tendu*, *mahua*, *domsal*, *bhakmal*, *dhak*, *neem*, *amaltash*, *imli* and *teak*.

The wide extend of forest in the area is responsible for the presence of a large variety of wild animals in the area. Tigers are found in the less accessible forests while leopards are fairly common in the jungle tract. The other animals and birds found here include wild pigs, wolves, barking deer, four horned antelopes, *cheetal*, *sambhar*, *nilgai*, wild dogs, hyenas, bears, jackal, hare, fox, monkey, *langoor*, otter squirrel, elephants, rhino, porcupine, monitor lizard, turtle, python, crocodile, horn-bill, red jungle fowl, pea fowl, fishing eagle, kingfisher, indian roller, serpent eagle, woodpeckers, emerald dove, paradise fly catcher, cuckoo, owl, *maina*, crow, crane, peacock, *bulbul*, parrot and several kinds of fishes.

### Transport and Communication

In the Kheri district, the Tharu inhabit the northern (*i.e.*, Tarai) areas bordering Nepal and are found on either side of the Sarda river. The entire tribal belt is easily approachable now both by road as well as rail. There are metalled roads along the boundary of a majority of the Tharu villages, whereas others have unmetalled or *kachcha*

brick road leading to them. Such tracks allow buses to come till the metalled road on the village boundaries and other light vehicles inside the villages. However, the most commonly used means of transports in the area are the traditional *dunlop*, i.e., bullock cart and cycles. Both UPSRTC and private bus-services are frequently available from Palia, Lakhimpur and Mailani. The main bus depots of the area are at Chandan Chauki and Gauri Panta. The North Eastern Railway runs trains which connect Lucknow to Dudhwa and several other trains come upto Palia and Mailani from where buses and private vehicles are easily available.

Small post offices are set up in several villages for easy communication. Telephonic facilities are available only from Palia, but the P&T department is soon planning to extend this facility to the more interior areas.

### **Tharu Habitat**

According to available official data, the district of Lakhimpur Kheri comprises of 41 Tharu villages inhabited by three sub-groups, namely the Rana, Dangaura and Katharia Tharu. However in the course of research, the author came across 5 more villages namely, Bijkata, Budhapurva, Bharari, Belrayan, Sarbhusi Patti I and Sarbhusi Patti II. Mention of the village Sedha Bhedha has been made in the ITDP data regarding villages covered by it, but leaves out Singhiaya, which is recorded as a revenue village by the Revenue Department at Palia. This would mean that total number of Tharu villages now stands at 47 after including the 5 villages not mentioned in the official records of the government (See Table 1).

### **(B) Socio-Cultural Profile of the Tharu**

The Tharu were the largest of the five tribes of undivided Uttar Pradesh declared as scheduled tribes by the President of India in 1967 under Article 342 and at present are the only one left in U.P. after the separation of Uttaranchal. They are spread over a vast tract at the Indo-Nepal border

**Table 1 Area and Population of Tharu Villages at  
Lamkimpur Kheri**

<i>S.N.</i>	<i>Name of Village</i>	<i>Total Area (in hect.)*</i>	<i>Number of Families</i>	<i>Population (Dec. 1998)</i>
<b>A. BLOCK—PALIA</b>				
1	Kiratpur	233.51	58	597
2 <sup>†</sup>	Bangao	118.98	69	623
3 <sup>#</sup>	Singhiya	242.01	53	416
4 <sup>†</sup>	Kajeria	279.24	153	878
5 <sup>†</sup>	Bankati	279.65	97	1,229
6 <sup>†</sup>	Budha	214.90	73	978
7 <sup>†</sup>	Saria Para	228.66	78	905
8 <sup>†</sup>	Sudha	234.73	97	988
9	Beria Khera	128.29	102	653
10 <sup>†</sup>	Dhakia	262.25	136	994
11 <sup>†</sup>	Najhauta	262.65	58	1,338
12 <sup>†</sup>	Saunaha	214.49	129	1,107
13	Bandar Bhari	182.92	91	686
14 <sup>†</sup>	Dhyanpur	135.57	135	978
15 <sup>†</sup>	Gubrola	51.81	58	397
16	Jainagar	42.49	35	191
17	Devrahi	144.07	21	607
18 <sup>†</sup>	Chandan Chauki	71.23	55	428
19 <sup>†</sup>	Masankhamb	214.90	137	686
20 <sup>†</sup>	Surma	198.30	160	1,372
21	Pipraula	128.69	74	463
22 <sup>†</sup>	Chedia Purab	252.94	65	544
23	Chedia Paschim	132.74	69	448
24	Bajahi	255.77	102	762
25	Puraina	87.01	71	486
26 <sup>†</sup>	Mangalpurva	46.14	64	398
27 <sup>†</sup>	Ram Nagar	87.01	87	497
28	Beldari	103.60	56	376
29	Belera	125.86	98	676
30 <sup>†</sup>	Dhuskia	146.10	124	1,009
31 <sup>†</sup>	Pachpaida	182.92	67	917
32	Barvata	164.71	118	998
33 <sup>†</sup>	Poya	126.27	99	789
34 <sup>†</sup>	Parasia	307.98	102	1,102
35 <sup>†</sup>	Maura Purva	46.54	74	905
36 <sup>†</sup>	Mod Nachuni	N.A.	83	613
37 <sup>†</sup>	Sedha Bhedha	N.A.	78	905
<b>B. BLOCK—NIGHASAN</b>				
38 <sup>†</sup>	Belapersua	1,181.32	378	2,788
39	Raghu Nagar	342.38	9	65
40 <sup>†</sup>	Kisan Nagar	489.28	23	93
41	Kaida (Pherenda)	57.22	51	287
42	Golboji	N.A.	29	969

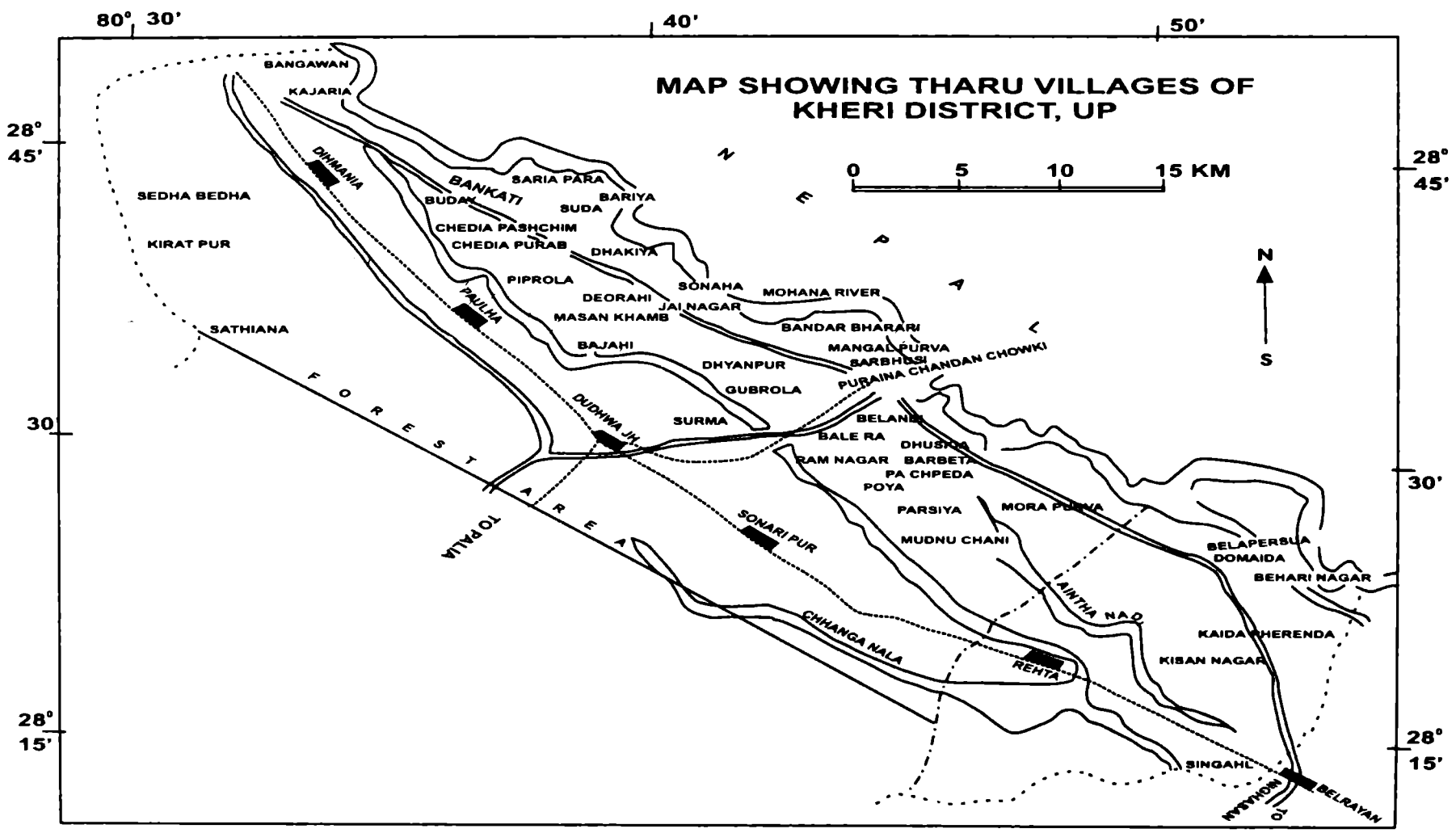
N.A. — Not available.

\* — Data acquired from the Revenue Department, Palia.

# — Village not mentioned as under ITDP. Entire data of village acquired from Revenue Department, Palia.

† — Village covered for data collection.

Source — The data pertaining to number of families and population is in accordance to ITDP report, 1998.





The Tharu

and inhabit the districts of Lakhimpur Kheri, Gonda, Bahraich, Gorakhpur and Balrampur in the State. Apart from this, they are also found in parts of Uttaranchal, Bihar, Bengal, Assam and Nepal. According to the 1991 Census their total population was 1,18,558 only. Of this 28,856 (28,562 in rural and 294 in the urban areas) lived in Lakhimpur-Kheri district.

### Origin

The history of their origin which the Tharu narrate are not uniform. The scholars who have tried to trace the origin of the Tharu offer conflicting views on the subject. According to Nesfield (1885, 115) the name Tharu is derived from the word *Thar* which in the colloquial dialect means 'a jungle'. Thus, a Tharu is one, who resides in forests, 'a forest man'. Konwles traces their origin to the word *Tharua* meaning to paddle about in the hills, (a paddler) the reference being to the nomadic life of the Tharu and their custom of marriage by capture. W. Crooke (1896, 381) traces their origin to the word *Tharu*, denoting a 'wine biber'. This name is believed to have been given to the Tharu by one of the Kshatriya Rajās of the plains, who was simply amazed at the Tharu thirst and their capacity of drinking liquor. The origin of

the Tharu are thus traced to various interesting etymological sources. A few more explanations provided by various sources might be offered here to show the level of varied opinions about their origin. According to the Oudh Gazettier (1887, 126) Tharu is derived from *Thare* which means 'they halted' after their alleged flight into the Tarai forests; The North Western Provinces Census Report (1867-61) suggests *tarhuwa* which means 'became wet' referring to the swampy nature of the region; The North West Provinces Gazettier (1881, 358) suggests the word Tharu is derived from *thatharana*, signifying 'trembling' or 'quaking' during their flight from Hastinapur to the Tarai after a fierce battle between the Rajputs and Muslims. The journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal (1847, 450) puts forward the word *athawaru* that is 'an eighth day serf' — i.e., a man who is bound to give his lord one day's free labour in the week on his field. However, Nesfield (*op. cit.*) rejects this source with the argument that the traditional indolence of the Tharu, their aversion to service and their incapacity for sustained field labour could never have subjected them as serfs to any landlord. Again according to Majumdar (1944, 64), the word might have been derived from their residence in the Tarai, or the 'Thar' desert in Rajputana, from where they trace their ancestors. Furthermore, Buchanon (cited in Majumdar: 1944, 68) puts forward another idea when he refers to the expulsion of the Gurkhas from Magadha by the Tharu who 'are said to have descended from the hills and extended themselves over every part north of the Ghagra at least'. The Tharu themselves deny their Nepali origin, claim Chittor to be their original home and to have descended from Jaimal, Fateh Singh and Tarran Singh of the Sisodiya clan. Nesfield (*op. cit.*, 33) contradicts this fable of the Tharu as they are confused in their statement whether they were driven out of Chittor by Allauddin (1303 A.D.), Bahadur Shah (1533 A.D.), or Akbar (1567 A.D.). The fiction of having migrated from Rajputana into the Tarai, therefore, must have been invented by some of the clans merely to raise themselves in their own and their neighbours estimation.

According to Nevill (1901, 107) the Tharu are an aboriginal race who claim royal descent on the female side. He gave the explanations for this by presenting a story—Once upon a time in the remote past when the king of these parts was defeated by the forces of an invader, the woman of the royal palace rather than fall into the hands of foe fled into the jungles with the Saises and Chamars (menial castes) belonging to the palace. From these sprang the two indigenous races of the Tharu and Bhuksa. The former is said to have descended from Chamars and the latter from the Saises. This assertion gets further support as it is observed that women among the Tharu dominate. The women folk themselves strongly support the aforesaid view even today. These views of origin, however, relate mainly to the Rana Tharu, though some of the Dangaura and Katharia Tharu also claim a similar descent. Hassan (1981, 93-94) suggests a different story dealing with the descent of the Dangaura and Katharia. Once upon a time, there was a king named Dongwa, who ruled over the jungle kingdom of *terai-bhabhar*. Although he had a beautiful queen and was blessed with a son, he was captivated by a charming maid servant of the palace, who bore him an illegitimate son as a result of this liaison. In order to ward off a public scandal, this birth was kept a close guarded secret and the child was hidden inside a *kathauri*, a wooden cover. The two sons were brought up under separate environments, one as the crown prince and the other in squalor and under cover of secrecy. Descendants of the former were called Dangauria after their royal patriarch, while those of the latter came to be known as Kathauria or Kathwaria.

The aforesaid story of their humble origin of the Kathauria is told by the Dangauria in support of claim of superiority over the other. Actually the Kathauria represent the 'puritan' among the Tharu. Unlike the Dangauria, the Kathauria are no liquor addicts and are said to shun meat. Because of their austere living they are more prosperous than their gayer brethren. The Dangauria however, make

fun of the so called puritanic living of the Kathauria who, they claim, are really a pack of hypocrites who would not only partake of non-vegetarian food but would not hesitate to get drunk in privacy, although they are too timid to do so in public or even admit it.

### Racial Affinities

There remains very little doubt that the Tharu belong to a tribe of mixed people. However, scholars differ in their opinion as regards this admixture. Risley (1891, 313), Knowles (*op. cit.*, 210), Crooke (*op. cit.*, 385), Nesfield (*op. cit.*, 37) and Majumdar (1944, 71 and 1961, 68), all agree that the Tharu show Mongoloid feature. According to Nesfield (*op. cit.*) the tribe had acquired a slightly Mongolian cast which shows itself chiefly, but not to a striking degree, in slanting eyes and high cheek bones. But the description provided by him about the average Tharu does not appear to be convincing. He writes, "They (the Tharu) have long wavy hair, a dark, almost a black complexion and as much hair on their face and body as is usual with other natives of India. In stature, build, and gait they are distinctly Indian and not Mongolian; nor have they any traditions which connect their origin with Nepal." Crooke (*op. cit.*) puts forward the view that "the most probable explanation based on the available evidence seems to be that the Tharu are originally a Dravidian race who by alliance with Nepalese and other hill races have acquired some degree of Mongolian physiognomy." Majumdar (1961, 68) argues "The tribal Tharu of the Tarai area are of Mongoloid extraction and from the shape of the eyes and of the high cheek bones, the nose and their yellow-brown complexion they should be regarded differently from the Munda-Dravidian speaking tribes of Mirzapur." The Mongolian features of the Tharu are quite evident — their eyes are more or less oblique, their complexion mostly brown or yellow-brown, the hair on the body and face very scanty and straight, their nose thin and of medium size while other features affiliate them more with the Nepalese than



with the Australoid or the Pre Dravidian Tribes or castes. Furthermore, Majumdar (1942, 33) has contested the supposed Rajput origin of the Tharu on the basis of blood group tests carried out by him in connection with the Census Operation of United Provinces, 1941. The blood group percentages found out by him are given in the Table 2.

**Table 2 Distribution of Blood Group Percentage among the Tharu**

	<i>Number of Samples</i>	'O' Group (%)	'A' Group (%)	'B' Group (%)	'AB' Group (%)	'B' + 'AB' Groups (%)
Males & Females	241	27.1	17.0	37.5	18.4	55.9
Only Females	82	25.6	13.4	42.7	18.3	61.0

As stated earlier, the Tharu derive themselves from a mixture of Rajputs and Nepalese, some say from Rajput women and their menials, Saises and Chamars. "The Chamars do not possess a Mongolian cast of face and Rajputs do not have epicanthic folds in their eyes, but the Tharu have both. Besides, the Rajputs of Northern India have a high share of 'A' blood group and less 'B' and it is very difficult to explain the very low incidence of 'A' group among the Tharu unless we suppose that the 'B' and 'AB' together have succeeded in acclimatising themselves while 'A' failed to do so. The large incidence of 'B' and 'AB' groups might both be the cause and effect of a process of inbreeding. Moreover as people with 'B' and 'AB' groups appear to have developed an immunity from malaria, the Tharu as a group, now are more immune than other groups in the neighbourhood" (Majumdar, *ibid*).

Thus, one might infer on the basis of the above, that the Tharu belong to Mongoloid stock or predominantly so, and have succeeded in assimilating non Mongoloid features.

### **Social Stratification**

The Tharu claim their ancestry from *Kirata* and are divided into a large number of sub-tribes or sections. Crooke (*op. cit*, 381) mentions as many as 73 sections among them.

Majumdar (1944, 88) feels that these sections might be only endogamous groups for each Tharu locality behaves as one unit or clan and marriage is prohibited within the local group. According to A.C. Turner (1931, 599) the Tharu of Naini Tal are subdivided into 12 groups belonging to two moieties, one hypergamous to the other. The hypergamous group usually confines all marriages within the group, but may take wives from the other. The former group consists of such clans as *Batta*, *Birtia*, *Dahait*, *Badviat* or *Barwaik*, *Rawat* and *Motak* (*Mahtum*). Some of these, especially the last three are not independent groups. Their social status are similar, though they are considered inferior to the first three sub-groups. The other group which is socially inferior to the above sub-groups consists of *Buxa*, *Dangwriya*, *Khunka*, *Sansa*, *Rajia* and *Jugia*. These claim descent from some mythical ancestor or ancestors. According to Majumdar (1944, 89) "There are other sub groups like *Daker*, *Kathariya*, *Pradhan*, *Umra*, *Purilya*, *Khusiya* and *Datwar*, which appear to be related to similar clans in Nepal. There are still others like *Kachila*, *Pachwalas*, *Musha* and *Ranker* who are found in Pilibhit and Kheri districts." Srivastava (1958, 65 & 66) was informed that *Batta*, *Birtia*, *Dahait*, *Badvait* and *Motak* or *Mahtum* are different *kuries* of the same community without any distinction in their social status. The Tharu marry amongst their own *kuries*. *Kuri* has the identical function which *gotra* has for the Hindus. The aforesaid five *kuries* consider themselves superior to the rest of the Tharu and had been carrying on vigorous propoganda and campaigning for social reforms during the mid-1930s to bolster up their Rajput or Kshatriya origin. In their concerted attempts to identify with the high caste Hindus, the Kshatriya, they have adopted a new appellation, Rana Thakur of Sisodiya clan. A new endogamous group, Rana Tharu, therefore, has come into being and owes its origins to the pseudo-historical story described earlier. The Tharu found in the Kheri tribal belt belong to three sub-groups, the *Rana*, *Katharia* (*Malhauria*) and *Dangaura* (*Danguria*).

The Tharu represent the most interesting of the tribes and exhibit a vitality that has helped them to tide over various crises and to adapt themselves to changes. On the whole, the Tharu generally have a common culture. Their customs and practices, rites and rituals are more or less same for all the sections.

### Language

*Tharuhati*, the language of the Tharu is a Hindi dialect belonging to the Indo-Aryan group of languages. It is a mixed dialect which draws from the stocks of Hindi, and its other forms namely, Kanauji, Brajbhasha, Kumaone and Urdu. This is certainly an evidence of their contact with the people who speak these languages and dialects. Grierson (1947, 311) has, however, not recognized a separate language of the Tharu, who according to him, "do not have a language of their own and speak more or less correctly the language of Aryan races with whom they are in immediate contact. For instance, the Tharu of north of Purnea appear to speak a corrupt form of the *Eastern Maithili* spoken in that district; those of Champaran, a corrupt *Bhojpuri* and those of Naini Tal tarai, the ordinary Western Hindi of the locality". *Tharuhati* is today not spoken at all by these tribal folks and only a few old people have knowledge of the dialect. According to them, the dialect has its own script with 60 alphabets comprising of 24 vowels and 36 consonants. The pronunciation of the alphabets is same as that of the Hindi sound symbols. However these alphabets need not be written in any particular sequence. Now-a-days the Tharu mainly speak Western Hindi as it is spoken in the rural areas. It has proved helpful not only for developing contact with other groups but also for facilitating as a smooth and convenient tool of communication between them.

### Social Organisation

The family, among the Tharu, as among most other societies, is the nucleus of the social organization. Tharu

families are patrilineal and partilocal. The head and recognized authority of the family is the father (*i.e.*, the eldest male member) after whose death the next male member, either his younger brother or eldest son, becomes the head. However, in some cases, the rule of seniority by birth might not be applicable, as in cases where the younger son is found to be more capable and thus authority is vested in him. Both joint and nuclear families are found here. Tradition supports the joint family which is found in a larger proportion in the area, but formation of nuclear families are also on the rise. The whole family works together as an economic unit with every member making his or her own contribution. Joint families are preferred over nuclear families where members working in their individual and corporate capacities carry on their agricultural and other supplementary pursuits. This behaviour proves to be an ideal combination for such occupations like farming which requires concerted efforts along with a spirit of co-operation. Yet, nuclear families too, do not seem to suffer from lack of co-operative labour to any appreciable extent because of a strong sense of reciprocity, mutual obligations and community feelings. The only major disadvantage that surfaces due to splitting of the joint family appears to be the reduction the land holding size.

All members of a joint family hold the agricultural land in common ownership. Apart from this, some other objects are held commonly, such as, fishing nets and traps, agricultural implements and household utensils. All such usables and properties are under the custody or the head of the family. He, however, does not command the authority to sell or exchange it without the consent of the other members. There are also a few articles over which the individual members can claim exclusive rights. Thus, a male member has an exclusive claim over all gifts made to him by his in-laws. Similarly, a women is the sole owner of all the ornaments and other properties acquired from her parents at the time of her marriage. Division of property takes place many a times during the life time of the head,

though this was looked down upon earlier but is now considered normal. All cattle, money and other movable and immovable property is equally divided among the sons. In case the division takes place during the father's life time, a share is reserved for the father too, which is later given to the son with whom the father was living before his death. Daughters are not entitled to any share in their father's wealth. But unmarried daughters are entitled to maintenance until their marriages, when the expenses of their marriage are to be met out of their parents property. Tharu laws of inheritance make special provision for a widow too. Thus, a woman has equal share in her husband's property with her sons. If a widow does not remarry after her husband's death and if there are no sons or any legal claimant, she can inherit all the property of her deceased husband. In the absence of any legal heir, a person can claim ownership even on his maternal grandfather's property.

The provision of adoption exists among the Tharu for issueless couples. Usually a son is adopted from a close relative (mostly from the male member's brother) in the presence, and with the approval, of the tribal panchayat. Otherwise it will not be held legal. On the same day, the adopter has to provide the villagers with a feast consisting of rice, meat and liquor. An adopted son is called *dharmaputra* and has all the rights and duties of a natural son.

Kinship ties and local affiliations are responsible for promoting and developing reciprocity and exchange of obligations in the socio-economic life of the Tharu. During time of sorrows and difficulties, as in times of joy, all kith and kin and other members of the village community are ready to help each other. Village communities form a compact social unit consisting of a number of different families living in a common settlement and performing certain functions together, which the family alone cannot satisfactorily perform. Though one may migrate from their native village due to unavoidable circumstances, yet the bonds of common habitation coupled with kinship and religious ties remain very strong. Marriages within the

same village is not prohibited among the Tharu. Thus, the kinship ties with one's village are strong not only because of common habitation and bonds of ancestral and religious relationship but also due to endogamous marriages within the same village settlement. Relations prevalent by marriage, *i.e.*, affinal relations are called *natedar*.

A study of the kinship terms used by the Tharu shows that they are quite similar to those used in Hindi with a little modification in some terms. Both descriptive and classificatory terms are used. Listed on the next page are a few kinship terms as found among the Tharu.

Relative age and seniority command much respect and play an important part in the choice of the terms of address. No Tharu will ever call his/ her elders by name. However, in addressing younger persons either name or kinship terms may be used. A woman never takes the name of any elder member of her in-laws house, nor can she call the name of her younger sister's husband. Teknonymy is followed as a rule between husband and wife. Avoidance is found between a man and his real and classificatory younger brother's wife, a man and his daughter-in-law and a man and his wife's elder sister. Joking relations are found to exist between a man and his elder brother's wife, a man and his wife's younger brothers and sisters, and to a certain extent between a man and his maternal uncle.

Besides the relationship by blood and marriage, the Tharu have devised an artificial form of relationship, called *Mitana*, by which two persons may enter into a sacred bond of friendship. The Tharu consider the relationship of friendship to be most sacred and binding of all earthly ties. Thus, such ties of friendship are more enduring than those of blood and marriage and a friend among the Tharu enjoys a higher and more esteemed position than their kith and kin. This kind of a friendship tie need not take place between two Tharu individuals, but may also be formed between a Tharu and a non-Tharu. The friendship is confirmed only after a ceremonial exchange of presents

**Table 3 Kinship Terms among Tharu and Equivalent Hindi Terms**

<i>Description of Relationship</i>	<i>Hindi Term</i>	<i>Tharu Term</i>
Father's father's father	Per Dada	Ajo
Mother's father's father	Per Nana	Ajo
Father's father's mother	Per Dadi	Aji
Mother's father's mother	Per Nani	Aji
Father's father	Dada/Baba	Dada
Mother's father	Nana	Nana
Father's mother	Dadi	Dadi
Mother's mother	Nani	Nani
Father	Pita	Dauwa/Dadwa
Mother	Ma, Amma	Aiya/ Amma
Father's elder brother	Tau	Bau/ Bhai
Father's younger brother	Chacha, Kaka	Kakku
Father's elder brother's wife	Tai	Bai/ Amma
Father's younger brother's wife	Chachi, Kaki	Kaki
Father's sister	Phua, Bua	Phua
Father's sister's husband	Phupha	Phupha
Mother's brother	Mama	Mama
Mother's sister	Mausi	Bari/ Mausi
Mother's brother's wife	Mami	Manyi
Mother's sister's husband	Mausa	Mausa
Elder brother	Dada/ Bada Bhai	Dada
Younger brother	Bhaiya	Bhaiya
Elder sister	Jiji, didi	Didi
Younger sister	Bahen	Lalo
Elder brother's wife	Bhabhi, Bhawaj	Bhauji
Younger brother's wife	Bhabhi / Bahu	Dulhan/ Lohari
Elder sister's husband	Jija	Jija
Younger sister's husband	Bahnoi	Bahnoi/ Lala
Husband	Pati	Loga
Wife	Patni	Loga
Husband's/ wife's father	Sasur	Sasur
Husband's/ wife's mother	Saas	Mayen/ Saas
Husband's elder brother	Jeth	Jethar/ Bare
Husband's elder brother's wife	Jethani	Lohari
Husband's younger brother	Dewar	Dewar
Husband's younger brother's wife	Dewrani	Lohari
Husband's elder sister	Badi Nanand	Jiji
Husband's elder sister's husband	Nondoi	Jija
Wife's elder brother	Bara Sala	Thakuro/ Jethar
Wife's younger brother	Sala	Saro/ Sala/ Lala
Wife's elder sister	Bari Sali	Jeth sas/ Bari
Wife's younger sister	Sali	Sari
Son	Beta	Laura/ Lala
Daughter	Beti	Lauriya / Lalo
Son's wife	Bahu	Patohou
Daughter's husband	Damad	Damad/ Lalaho
Son's son	Pota	Nati/ Natia
Son's daughter	Poti	Natinia / Natan
Daughter's son	Nati	Dhewato
Daughter's daughter	Natini	Dhewatan

takes place between the two friends and a feast is provided to the guests present. Such a friend is necessarily consulted on every important occasion and affair of the others family, and is treated as a member of the family sharing with his/her friend all privileges and responsibilities. However, this form of acquiring a true friend has caused a lot of pain to many Tharu individuals, who in innocence were severely exploited by many non-Tharu people especially for smuggling across the Nepal border.

### Political Organisation

An important responsibility of every village community among the Tharu is to maintain law and order. This is done by according social approval and encouraging its members to develop skill and competence in work, while freely expressing social disapproval to instill discipline and bring about conformity to the tribal code of conduct. The administration of the village community was carried out by three village officials who enjoyed a high social position, namely the *Padhna* or *Pradhan*, *Bhalamanas* and *Chowkidar*. Traditionally the post of Pradhan was hereditary, being conferred on the head of the family that established the village. The Pradhan enjoyed rights equivalent to those of a king. Thus, he had the right to allow new members to settle and give them land for agriculture as also to excommunicate members for unforgivable offences. The Pradhan was helped in his duty by the Bhalamanas and Chowkidar. He acted as the representative of the people. It was among his duties to collect taxes from the villagers for the government, to work for the benefit of the villagers and administer justice with the help of members of the Panchayat, which was also called *Kachari*. Women, though never were members of the Panch, were always consulted informally as their decision and view in every matter were of utmost importance.

Today, much of the traditional political system has changed. Since 1980 Gram Panchayat elections are held here which can be contested by any eligible candidate. In



accordance with the constitution, certain seats are reserved for women, and therefore, today one finds women also actively participating in the political activities. However, many of these women are the Pradhan only for name sake, the actual decisions being taken and privileges being enjoyed by the male members of the family, either their husband or son. The Pradhan performs most of the duties that were performed by his predecessors including such tasks as arranging for *begar*, i.e., unpaid labour, when needed by government or forest officials, arranging for the boarding and lodging of official visitors, getting the permission of the forest officers for collecting fire wood and other forest products for the villagers.

Most of the problems of a village, i.e., disputes and fights are solved even today, by the Panchayat itself. However, police help is sought when hideous crimes such as murder or suicide is committed. The general punishment pronounced by the Panchayat is to pay a fine to the aggrieved party and arrange a small feast for the Panchayat. Increase in means of transportation and communication has brought about an increased political awareness and consciousness among the Tharu. Today, all national political parties come here to campaign for their respective parties and the influence of this is getting obvious on the local level politics too.

Among the Tharu, women are known to enjoy a very high and dominating position. Majumdar (1944, 69), Srivastava (1958, 88) and Hasan (1971, 45 & 1993, 16) all support this view in their writings. The Tharu explain this dominance of women on the basis of the Rajput parentage from their mother's side. "However, today things have changed. The dominant or even equal status enjoyed by the women has greatly been affected by non-tribal influence. Traditionally the tribal women were treated with great respect. Now-a-days, though they are treated with kindness, many of them are beaten by their husbands even on small pretexts" (Maiti: 1999, 80). Such cases have been recorded even by Hasan (1993, 17) in his later writings. No safeguard against the high handedness by men had been

made by the society since ill-treatment of women was unimaginable in earlier times. The high position enjoyed by women in the past is quite evident in the fact that they were consulted in every matter and their decision was generally taken as final. However, today the areas of decision making are diversified. Decisions pertaining to financial matters are taken by the men. Those related to household chores and related matters are taken by the eldest female of the family, whereas men and women after consultation unanimously arrive at decisions concerning a child's marriage or education, though the male members decision would be final in case of clash of views.

To evaluate the status, if only the extent of work is analyzed, undoubtedly the Tharu women will enjoy a far higher status than their male counterparts. All those who have come across the Tharu would agree that women here are definitely more hard working than men. Many a times, men have to be coaxed or even forced by their wives to go to the field or undertake agricultural operations. Left to themselves, men would like to smoke, drink, gossip and play cards. The women not only do certain exclusive jobs but also perform many agricultural operations. However, in spite of being over worked, she does not get the due respect. One of the reason for this is the changed mentality of the women themselves. Earlier where they used to consider themselves as queens and also behaved like one, today they consider themselves inferior to men because of their physical weakness and inability to perform the most important task of ploughing the fields (which is tabooed for women) and therefore, they must obey their husbands. "Yet in some ways the Tharu women are in a better position than many women in rural or even urban India. Ritually men and women are considered equal and female infanticide is non existent, just to cite two vital examples" (Maiti: 1999, 82).

### **Economic Organisation**

Nesfield's (1885, 30) work shows that the essential elements of Tharu economic life were hunting, fishing, collecting

forest fruits and roots, stock raising and a crude form of agriculture. But over the years things have changed. Notwithstanding the fact that Tharu are emotionally and economically linked to the forest, it is agriculture which constitutes the pivot of their economy aided by fishing, occasional hunting and animal husbandry. The main *kharif* (rain fed) crops are paddy, maize, turmeric, *sanai* and jute, while the main *rabi* (winter) crops are *gram*, *masur*, *lahi* (mustard) and wheat. Most of this is meant for self consumption, and only a petty amount is available for sale in the market. The cash crops grown here are sugarcane and potato. Sowing and harvesting seasons for *kharif* crop are *Asadh* (June-July) and *Kunwar* (September-October), while those for *rabi* crops are *Kartik* (October-November) and *Phagun* (February-March). Earlier, the Tharu cultivated mainly paddy and adopted the broadcast method of sowing, locally called *chhatkawa*. Under this method, paddy seeds were scattered in the field after the first rain. However, today the latest production techniques and implements for agriculture are being used. Instead of depending only on the rains, with the help of aid and subsidies provided by the government, several pumps and deep tube wells have been set up to facilitate irrigation. Every family among the Tharu also maintains a kitchen garden or *bari* in which vegetables are grown for personal consumption.

In the months when the crops have been harvested and there is a lull in field labour, other supplementary occupation such as fishing, hunting, construction and repair of houses, basketry, pottery, net, mat and rope making keep the Tharu active. Most of the Tharu are capable of doing the above mentioned tasks, though some show greater skill in a particular activity. Such activities involve a lot of labour in the manufacture which if paid in cash, to an outsider, would be beyond the means of an average Tharu. Raw materials for the above are easily available and plentiful in the nearby forest. The Tharu economy had been hit hard by the government restrictions on fishing and hunting. But now efforts are being made to

encourage sericulture in this area and as such the ban on fishing no longer exists. Fishing is done both in groups and individually, using nets and traps. Hunting, though banned, is carried out once in a while secretly. Animals reared by the Tharu mainly are oxen, buffaloes, cows, pigs, sheep, goats, ducks, and hens. Cattle is not reared primarily for getting milk but for other purposes — oxen and male buffaloes for ploughing, cows for their calfs and dung, which is used as manure in the fields, whereas fowl are meant generally for sale. Carpentry is yet another economic activity which is dependent on the forest, with nearly every male having the capacity of manufacturing daily use articles like furniture and some agricultural implements.

Among the Tharu a conventional division of labour between the sexes exists. But there is hardly any taboo limiting the activities of either sex. In agricultural operations, women do the weeding, winnowing and husking; men do the ploughing, leveling and sowing. Both jointly do the harvesting and threshing. Fishing, basketry, pottery and fan making are done by women whereas hunting, trap, mat, net and rope making are done by men. Cattle rearing and construction and repair of houses are done by both. In the recent past some occupational diversification has come about, especially with educated Tharu working in government and semi-government organizations, others have taken to work as labourers in the nearby factories, as carpenter, as mechanics or as weavers, *etc.*

The Tharu have retained much of their self-sufficiency so far as their economic needs are concerned. However, there remain a few articles that have to be purchased from the market. In marketing, barter, cash and credit transactions are prevalent. Cash is the preferred form today. Although the exploitation of the simple Tharu by the government officials, money lenders and middle men continues unabated, consciousness and awareness has grown among them due to the spread of education. Further, to check such exploitation the government has come up with several laws

and opened several banks which provide loans at low interest rates. As a result of the development measures and abolition of the zamindari system, agricultural production has improved here and reservations for the tribals in the government services have helped quite a few getting government jobs. These all put together have resulted in the reduction of instances of indebtedness and improvement of the over all economic conditions of most of the Tharu.

### Supernatural World

Culture contact has brought about a change of views among the Tharu towards supernatural elements. It is not easy to understand the complicated pantheon of Tharu deities and spectral beings, their modes of worship, system of offerings and their categorization. Very often even the elders among them falter and get confused while providing details.

*Bhumia* or *Bhuiya Bhawani* is the village deity who resides at the south-west outskirts of every village on a *pipal/neem* tree or a pole specially erected for it and is worshipped ceremoniously once a year in the month of *Asadh*. *Bhauiya* is the guardian and protector of the village and therefore is invoked whenever its residents are in trouble on account of epidemics, drought, poor crops *etc.* On the occasions of joy too, specially during marriages and while getting a bride for the first time to the village, offerings are made to it. Every sub-group or *Kuri* has its own deities from which a family is free to choose and select. It may add or delete one or more deities from its pantheon whenever it feels like doing so. Again, every household has its own deities, which are further divided into two sets called "inside" deities or *ghar ke devta* whose abode is within the hut (in the *kola*) and the second set known as "outside" deities or *bahar ke devta* whose abode lies in front of the hutment. These are in the form of mud mounds made at the entrance of the hut or on a small elevated platform in front of the house. Some of the important Tharu deities

are *Nagrahai* or *Nagaria*, *Niradhar*, *Kariyadeva*, *Bisihar*, *Puroi*, *Gulla devta*, *Kalka*, *Parwatiya*, *Banaspati*, *Bhera Baba*, *Kausam baba*, *Turkia*, etc.

The Tharu, like other tribals, propitiate the ancestor spirits. These spirits are installed inside the hutments and are believed to protect the inmates of the house from the evil influence of other spirits. Offerings of *hom* are made to them on every important religious festival, feast and social ceremony. There are also certain spirits, ghosts, witches and other spectral beings, collectively called *bhut-paret* whom the Tharu fear the most, as they attack people and inflict pain over them quite often. It is a common belief among the Tharu that if the last rites of a person have not been performed properly or a person commits suicide, the person will become a *bhut*. Women dying during pregnancy or child birth become a *churail* or *masani*. Another important spirit is that of persons killed by tigers and who are known as *bagha bhuts* (tiger spirits). All the above are propitiated only when they harm people. The belief in *bhut-parets* is now receding fast. Also seen among them is a certain typical attitude towards some species of animals, plants and other natural objects that are specially worshipped. Among these might be mentioned the horse, tiger, snake, elephant, bear, parrot and maina, trees which give sap, *neem*, *pipal* and *banyan* all of which are considered protectors of the forests. The cow is considered sacred and one who kills a cow is severely punished. Worship of the sun, moon and earth too exists which is generally performed by the eldest male member. A full moon night is considered very pious with most religious ceremonies, few festivals and harvesting of crops taking place on such nights. Crops harvested on full moon nights are believed to remain free from any sort of pest forever.

Besides, belief in local Tharu deities, there are also many Hindu gods and goddesses who have been included in the Tharu religion. Foremost among them are Satyanarayan, Shiv, Krishna, Hanuman, Bhagwati, Saraswati, Ram, Sita, Santoshi, etc. They have also started keeping and reading religious texts such as the Ramayana, Geeta, Sukh Sagar,

Prem Sagar *etc.* Islamic influence on their religious beliefs is evident in their reverence towards different Muslim saints such as Imam Hussain, Bhale Mian *etc.* Guru Nanak is worshipped by some of them and the Radha Swami sect of Amritsar has a profound influence in many areas with several of them (generally those above 50 years of age) following it. Thus, a large number of gods, goddesses and other deities have been added by them in comparatively recent times as a result of contacts with Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, with the hope of furthering their happiness and prosperity.

A dominant factor in the religious faith of the Tharu is a belief that the spiritual beings control and influence the destinies of human beings. The *Bharra* or *Bharara* is a medicine man and priest-cum-magician of the Tharu who can enter into a personal relation with the spiritual beings through appropriate religious and magical rites and rituals. He contributes in many other ways in the spiritual and ritual life of the Tharu. His presence is a must in observance of certain rituals connected with festivals and ceremonies. He is also called when the village is facing some natural calamity to propitiate the offended forces. He has the knowledge to find out the causes of diseases and prescribes indigenous herbs, roots and berries as medicines. He also employes, if necessary, his magical powers to cure through *mantras*. It is also among his duties to keep the goddess *Bhuiya Bhawani* in good humour by offering her periodical sacrifices and thereby also ward off the malicious designs of evil spirits. Every Tharu village has a regular *Bharra* to look after its needs. He need not belong to the same village. Today, it is a common refrain among the Tharu that the magical powers of the *Bharra* has deteriorated, yet their importance is undisputed. Magic is still believed to stimulate the growth of crops, protect them from wild animals, save one from snake and scorpion bites, prevent and cure diseases, restore fertility to barren women and foil the mischievous designs of evil spirits. A noteworthy point here is, contrary to earlier beliefs that Tharu women possess powers of witchcraft and

sorcery, the vocation of a *Bharra* is tabooed for women. Various religious rituals of the family too can be performed only by a male member, while women may join in. Religious rituals concerning the entire village are performed by the village *Pradhan* with the help of the *Bharra*.

Along with the ever increasing number of deities and saints adopted from other religions, the Tharu have also developed elaborate rites, rituals and ceremonies to be observed on different occasions. Religious fasts and festivals, among the Tharu are mainly observed to ensure general well-being. As mentioned earlier, they are predominantly an agricultural tribe and the interval between sowing and harvesting involves risks and dangers. Thus, many of the rituals are meant to propitiate the supernatural powers before each agricultural pursuit so that no ill befalls them and to provide them strength to face the dangers at every new-phase.

Table-4 clearly shows that most of the indigenous fasts and festivals are closely related to the economic activities and are either meant to appease the deities for a good crop or as thanks-giving. For instance *Charai* and *Anthai* are celebrated after the harvesting, preferably on a Monday or Thursday, as a thanks-giving for the good yield. Similarly, *Asadhi* is celebrated to please the rain gods, just after sowing and is meant for a good rainfall which would lead to a rich crop. On all these occasions, they have a kind of community or collective worship, headed by the *Bharra*, though private worships of family deities too are performed. Most of the other festivals are adopted as a result of contact with the Hindus.

Traditionally, Diwali was observed as *barshi* day, on which the ancestor spirits are called upon and propitiated. A communal feast or *bhandara* is held on this day with collections made from every household. However, presently many Tharu families have adopted the Hindu way of celebrating the festival with lights and worship of the many gods and goddesses. Holi is the main festival of the Tharu, preparation for which begins nearly a month



**Table 4 Inter-relation of Economic Activities, Festivals and Fast**

<i>Month</i>	<i>Economic Activity</i>	<i>Festival</i>	<i>Fast</i>
<i>Chait</i> (March-April)	Harvesting, threshing, winnowing and storing of grains	Ramnavmi; Bari Charai	Bari Charai
<i>Baisakh</i> (April-May)	Continuation of above ; Hunting (scarce) and fishing; Mud work	Choti-Charai	Choti Charai
<i>Jeth</i> (May-June)	Supplementary occupations; Construction and repair of houses	—	—
<i>Asadh</i> (June-July)	Ploughing fields, sowing <i>kharif</i> crop; Fishing	Asadhi	Asadhi
<i>Sawan</i> (July-August)	Watching over crops; Fishing; Basket making	Teej; Hardowa or Nimoni	Teej
<i>Bhadon</i> (August-September)	Harvesting crop; Basket making; Repairing house after rains	Janmashtami	Bada/ Bina Itwar
<i>Kunwar</i> (September-October)	Harvesting, threshing winnowing and storing crop	Anthai ; Dusshera	—
<i>Kartik</i> (October-November)	Continuation of above; Ploughing for <i>rabi</i> .	Diwali ; Barshi	—
<i>Agahan</i> (November-December)	Sowing <i>rabi</i> crop.	—	—
<i>Poos</i> (December-January)	Watching over crops; Collecting forest products	—	—
<i>Magh</i> (January-February)	-do-	Shivratri	Sakat
<i>Phalgun</i> (February-March)	Harvesting early crops; Constructions and repair of houses.	Holi	—

earlier. At some places the festival of Holi is celebrated for nearly a month and a half. The main festival is spread over eight days during which there is a lot of singing, dancing and merry making. Contact with the Hindus has brought changes in the observations of this festival too with the Tharu now having a bonfire and using colours. A day after the *Magh Puranmasi*, the Pradhan of the village accompanied by a large group of people go to the *Bhuiya Bhawani* on the outskirts of the village. Here he makes offerings to the deity and lights the bonfire after which sweets are distributed among those present. The Holi festival is believed to conclude with the *Bari Charai* festival.

### Life Cycle Rituals

Life cycle rituals form an important and integral part of every society although performances may differ even within the same society. Like most of the societies, the Tharu also attach a great importance to the timely performance of different rituals.

Among the Tharu, no rites are performed before a child's birth with the desire to have a boy or girl. Until the *satti* (*chatti*) ceremony, mother and child are not allowed to step out of the house. The *satti* ceremony is not necessarily held on the sixth day, but may also be held a day or two before or after. It is the main social function of child birth. On this day the mother and baby are bathed and dressed in new clothes. The *dai* (mid wife) takes the baby to the *kola* (the abode of the household deities) for the first time and dresses it in new white clothes. In the evening a feast is arranged for the entire village. The naming of the child and feeding of the first grains passes unnoticed. The *mundan* or head shaving ceremony is held formally only by those who vow to do so, generally in cases where previous children have not survived or the life expectancy of the child is very low. In such cases a feast is given to the villagers on the *mundan* day. The maternal uncle or some other male member, usually of the mother's side, shaves the child's head on the banks of either the river

Sharda or Mohana and throws the hair in its water. He also gives the child a token gift in the form of cash and clothes. In return, he receives some money and a feast of meat and liquor.

Marriages of various forms, besides the regular form, are practiced by the Tharu, e.g., marriage by capture, *dola* (by purchase), *gharbaitha* or *chutakata* (matrilocal residence), widow remarriage, junior levirate, sororate and polygyny. The rule of endogamy and exogamy are important in settling matrimonial alliances and thus limiting the choice. The higher and lower sub-groups (as mentioned earlier) are endogamous, while to their respective *kuris* they are exogamous. Territorial exogamy does not exist and one may marry within one's own village. Cousin marriage (both cross and parallel) and marriage with a non Tharu is prohibited.

Among the Tharu, marriages are settled at childhood with the help of a middle man, the *majhpatia*, who knows about all the eligible boys and girls. Engagement, i.e., the *mangni* takes place when the children are 3-5 years of age mostly in the month of *Baisakh*. It is an important ceremony in which a lot of people, sometimes the entire village, accompanies the grooms parents to the bride's house. The girl's parents are presented with sweets or *batashas* and clothes for the bride. With the acceptance of the gift, the *mangni* is formally solemnized. In the evening, the members of the groom's side are treated to a feast. The actual marriage takes place once the bride and groom grow up, usually at the age of 18-20 years, in the months of *Magh* or *Phalgun*. The marriage date is fixed by the family members according to their convenience as there exists no belief in auspicious dates, i.e., *muhurat*. About eight days before the marriage, the *phichocho* ceremony takes place. In this the groom's side brings to the bride's house a token gift of rice, pulses, potatoes, turmeric, chilli, jaggery, fish and liquor as a contribution to the marriage feast that will be held at the latter's place. A day before the actual marriage a *haldi* ceremony, locally called *nyota darna*, is held at the houses of both bride and groom in which

villagers and relatives apply turmeric mixed with oil to the bride/groom and give them some gifts. The village deity *Bhuiya Devi* is also propitiated on this day by the parents of the groom/bride. On the wedding day, the *barat* or marriage procession comes to the bride's place with the groom sitting in a *chandol*. The first ceremony is that of the *pav poojan* where the bride's relatives wash the feet of bride and groom. After this the *bhanver* takes place in which the bride and groom perform seven circumambulations around a lit *diya* (lamp) that is placed over a pot of water. Later, the entire gathering is treated to a feast. Next morning the, *bhitana* rites are performed in which the groom is fed food and given gifts by bride's relatives. The *barat* leaves after lunch and the bride accompanied by a few of her close relatives leaves in a *doli*. The *bride* stays over night at her in-laws place, where again a feast is held along with a lot of singing and dancing. The next morning she returns to her parents and goes again to her in-laws house a few months later.

Among the Tharu, the dead can either be buried or cremated. Hindu influence has led to increased cases of cremations. Children are always, and young or unmarried are usually buried on death. Cremation and burial take place on the banks of a river or some pond. The pyre is lit by the eldest son and in the absence of a son by the next of male kin. Thereafter, the ground is levelled and no identification mark is left. The participants in the funeral rites, take bath and return home. In the evening a feast, known as the *bhaat* or *roti pani*, is held in which the participants are served food, generally liked by the deceased. A few months later, the *ghara* or *barshi* rituals are performed on an *amavasia* (no moon) night. Earlier this ritual was held only in the month of *kartik*, i.e., on Diwali day. This ritual is necessarily performed within a year of the death and is meant for the peace of the departed soul. However, this ceremony is not performed for children as their souls are believed to be very weak. Food items liked by the deceased are prepared on the *ghara* day and a feast is given to the villagers. Some food and liquor is also kept

outside the village boundary with a lit *diya* next to it and is meant to attract the departed soul out of the village. On the same night a continuous music and dance programme takes place and in the morning sweets in the form of *prashad* are distributed to the villagers. The *ghara* rites symbolise the end of all funeral rites.

### Health and Hygiene

Most of the tribals have tried and maintained a balance between nature, its resources and their own needs. The Tharu, in the same way depend for many of their needs on nature, but also put in their bit to preserve it. Material for building houses, for making utility items like baskets, fans, rope, *etc.*, herbs for medicines, grazing land for cattle, animals for hunting—all are acquired from the nearby forest area. Several trees are considered pious by the Tharu and therefore are not brought down. Only dead trees are used and dried bushes and branches are collected for fuel. Thus, not much damage is done from their side. Though the government legislations and declaration of most of the Tharu habitat as part of the reserve forest has affected their original lifestyle, their dependance on nature nonetheless remains unchanged.

The Tharu are quite a healthy lot specially taking into account the extreme conditions in which they live. According to Tharu belief, good health is a prerequisite for good life and for good health, one must have a proper diet and keep oneself and one's surroundings clean.

Rice is the staple diet of the Tharu. The other items of their diet include different kinds of roots, tubes, vegetables, different cereals and some wild leaves. Fish, meat, chicken, pork, other wild animals and birds are taken occasionally and relished by all. Ginger, garlic, onion, mustard leaves and chilly are also consumed in large quantity. Liquor made locally from rice, jaggery and *mahua* are consumed by all age groups. *Jar* (rice beer) is taken daily and is believed to be very nutritious. It is also used during performance of several rituals. Three meals are taken daily,

in the morning, noon and evening. These are known as *kaleva*, *mizini* and *beri* respectively.

Hygiene aims not only at preserving health but also at living in a healthy relation with one's environment. Thick neem twig, coal powder or toothpaste/powder are used to clean teeth. For bathing, soft mud from the pond or soap and for washing hair, *khali* (mustard oil cake) or shampoo are used. Clothes are washed in ash or detergents. Men keep their hair short whereas women tend to grow them long. Cutting is done mostly by a friend or family member. Houses are not well ventilated as windows do not exist. Only few small openings called *mokas* are made to let out smoke. The house and cattleshed are swept twice a day. Thus, the surroundings are generally kept clean. However, the same cannot be said about the family members, especially the children who are generally found very dirty. Waste water passes out through a system of drains, which is sometimes covered, and leads to a nearby pond. The government has also taken certain measures in this direction keeping in mind the health and hygiene of the Tharu. Several hand pumps have been installed at short distances to provide clean drinking water, public toilets have been built on the outskirts of a few villages and D.D.T. is sprinkled in all villages just before the rainy season.

Since the Tharu have to work hard, they value good health which, they believe, to be God's gift. Crooke (1896, 385) and Riskey (1891, 315) mention that the Tharu attribute all their diseases to evil spirits. Today their view has slightly changed and they believe that diseases may arise due to natural causes or as a result of supernatural powers. In the first category ailments caused by change of weather, dirty water, wrong food habits and bad winds are included. Diseases of the second category may be brought about due to the effect of evil eyes or sorcery, evil spirits and ghosts, breach of taboos, past sins of individuals, or the wrath of deities. The common diseases found among the Tharu are malaria, skin diseases, fever, diarrhoea, dysentery, eye infections, cholera, leprosy, etc. According

to them, nature caused diseases can be cured by medicines and proper diet whereas those caused by supernatural powers can only be cured by magical devices, propitiation of the spirit concerned and sacrifices offered to them.

The *Bharra*, as mentioned earlier, is the local medicine man who cures people of their sickness. He uses his magical powers to control the spirits which cause trouble and after curing the person, performs a *puja* to calm and thank the spirit. He also has knowledge of various herbs which helps to cure different ailments. Apart from the *Bharra*, there are few people who are greatly admired, and their help sought, because of their extensive knowledge of various herbs and their uses. Such people, however tend to conceal their knowledge and do not share it with anyone. Many a times when the *Bharra* feels unsure of the cause and cure in a case, he suggests that the help of a doctor from the nearby hospital be taken. Now a days, the Tharu often go to private dispensaries or Primary Health Centres for treatment. Several such P.H.Cs which provide minor surgical facilities have been opened by the government. Special medical camps are also held from time to time keeping in mind the health problems of the tribals. Still, much is needed to be done in this direction.

### Material Culture

Material culture includes the inventions and adaptations made by man in adjustment to his environment. In this regard the Tharu have successfully exploited the natural resources of the region to meet their needs. Coming in contact with people having a more developed material culture and infiltration of traders has greatly influenced their life style. Earlier the Tharu possessed only a few household articles, occupational tools, personal belongings, etc. But today they own several things that are otherwise alien to their culture. This does not mean that every Tharu household possesses all these articles, but they, no doubt, desire and strive hard to acquire these. Much of this aspect of their life will be dealt with in detail in the chapters that

follow and therefore only a brief description of their material culture is being presented here.

Houses are made of wood, reed, clay, sod and hay. Asbestos sheets, tiles and bricks have been added to this list of items that might be used in the construction of houses. The main household furniture are *khat*, *machiya* and *tepai*. Apart from this every house possesses utensils of brass, aluminium or steel and a few aluminium or iron boxes that are bought from the market depending on their earnings. For storage purposes, several types of clay pots and baskets are made which are named differently according to their size, shape and purpose of use. Since agriculture is the mainstay of the Tharu, several agricultural implements are possessed and used, *viz.*, *hare*, *kilwai*, *juwa*, *patela*, *etc.* Now-a-days modern machines, like, tractors, threshers, deep tube wells, *etc.* are being employed for farming. For hunting and to keep wild animals and birds away from the field *dhanhi* (pellet bow), *Patakka* (noise maker) and *chhanmas* (spear) are used apart from firearms. Several kinds of nets and traps are used for fishing, *e.g.*, *jaal*, *thathi*, *etc.* The saw, adze, hammer, *etc.* are used for carpentry work.

The traditional Tharu attire is more or less disappearing with only a few women continuing to wear the traditional *ghangharia*, *angia* and *urhnia*. Men formerly used to wear a *nagota* and *phatuhi*. However, today men have totally adopted the urban style of clothing and women are closely following in their footsteps. Ornaments mostly made of *gillet* (white metal) are used. A few of these are *ghunghat*, *bir*, *gicchi*, *etc.* The main musical instruments are *jhanj*, *dholak*, *etc.* Music systems, televisions and video players have been added on as articles for recreation. The traditional mode of transportation was *ladiya* (a bullock cart with wooden wheels). This has now been replaced by a bullock cart having pneumatic tyres because of which it is now called *dunlop*. Apart from this, bicycles, scooters and motorcycles are also commonly used. This indicates a trend towards adoption of a changing life style by the Tharu



which includes material objects that have not been a part of their past culture.

### Education

For a long time, formal education was not considered important by the Tharu. Knowledge of reading and writing was acquired as a matter of personal interest and choice. The family functioned as the school and its members as the teachers. Children were provided training and guidance in different aspects of their life which would prove essential when they entered the society to take up the responsibility. Even today, children are taught the norms and ways of their society in the house itself. From the age of 7-8 years, both boys and girls begin to assist their father and mother respectively in the day-to-day tasks performed by them. Thus, from a young age children begin to take part in economic pursuits. In such conditions the importance of formal education no doubt remains very little. But gradually the Tharu have begun to realise the importance of education and several people have started encouraging their children to go to schools.

The first school to be established here was an Ashram Type School (A.T.S.) which was started as part of the Third Five Year Plan. Concrete steps in the direction of educating the Tharu began only after they were declared a Scheduled Tribe in 1967. At present the area can boast of a number of primary schools, and a few secondary and ashram type schools. The schools are run by two governmental organisations, namely the State Government and the I.T.D.P. Education in schools is free and students are provided incentive in the form of scholarships or other means.

Although several schools exist in the area, the standard of education is not up to the mark. There is a high degree of absenteeism and the number of drop outs', *i.e.*, student leaving studies after attending school for a few years, is also very high. They cannot, however be blamed for this lack of interest in education since most of the teachers posted here consider the posting as a punishment.

## Governmental Measures for Development

After according the Tharu the status of a Scheduled Tribe, the government began to take several measures for their all round development. For improving the economic conditions of the Tharu the government has taken several measures such as providing loans at very low interest rates, subsidies of several kinds, boring of irrigation tubewells, supply of good quality seeds and fertilizers free of cost or at a very low rate, encouraging the cultivation of cash crops, providing vocational training under the TRYSEM programme, providing employment under the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna, providing loans to start one's own business, *etc.*

To improve the living conditions of the tribals, metalled roads connecting all major villages to Palia and the nearby towns were constructed. Electrification of all village at highly subsidised rate, installation of hand pumps to provide clean drinking water, construction of public toilets, and establishment of schools in nearly every village are some of the other important measures taken by the government in this direction. Keeping in mind the health of the Tharu, Primary Health Centres have been established in a few major villages such as Chandan Chauki and Bankati. Family planning and inoculation camps are held regularly during which the Tharu are provided counselling and free medical aid. Apart from this a veterinary hospital has been established at Chandan Chauki to treat domestic animals.

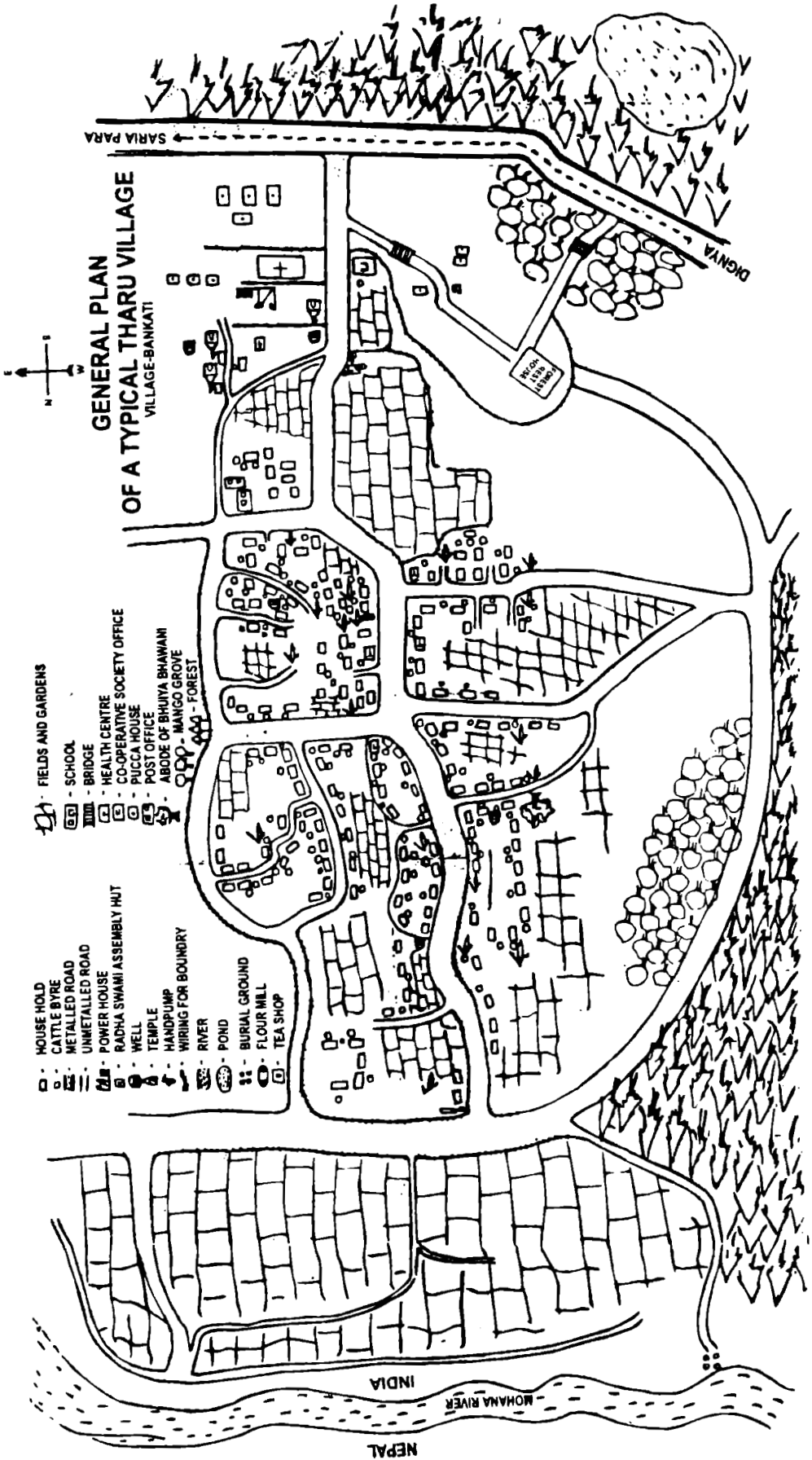
Although the government has taken numerous steps for the upliftment and welfare of the Tharu, they are not getting the total benefits from these schemes and programmes due to the vested interest of a few unscrupulous and corrupt government servants. Yet, it may be stated that due to the continuous and sustained efforts from the government, the Tharu are gradually progressing and after a few years they may totally be assimilated in the mainstream of the country.

# 3

## *Settlement Pattern and Housing Types*

Housing and shelter are one of the primary necessities of man. As in the case of clothing, both form and function of shelter reveal an enormous diversity. The common feature in the evolution of all human settlements is the need of a human group to settle down and stabilize itself against inclement forces — natural and human; promote its well-being through occupance of surrounding land; ensure its social cohesion; and progress towards political and economic betterment with a continuously evolving technology to assist.

Technological skill, locally available resources and tools are the prime determinants of structure-type. Climatic factors such as temperature, rainfall, direction of the wind, snowfall and insulation conditions too have an influence on the orientation and construction of the dwellings world around. The economy of a society is also an important ruling factor while deciding upon the kind of housing. Thus, a society dependent upon food gathering or hunting will have much simpler and temporary houses when compared to those dependent on settled agriculture, who undoubtedly will construct immovable and more elaborate dwellings. In such situations wide range of materials are used to ensure the strength of the structure. The house, no longer a temporary shelter providing occasional protection, begins to be filled with a greater wealth of belongings, and the sedentariness of the dwellers creates the opportunity for community life. Community habits, also have a large



share in determining the form of dwelling. Moreover, opportunity to imitate dwellings of more advanced cultures is an important factor. Lastly, whim and will (*i.e.*, personal preferences) must be allowed for. The effects of the other determinants are calculable, but the factors of personal choice must never be forgotten.

“Among settled primitive societies, dwellings are not thought of only as structures or places to eat and sleep in, but have something approaching a spirit of their own. Their very orientation, and the position of the hearth or door, may be traditional or express some belief. Technological aspects cannot be appreciated without some reference to social and natural setting” (Bradford: 1954, 299).

The basic ecological requirement of shelter having been met, comfort, efficiency and a strong emphasis on efforts to beautify the inner and outer appearance of the house enter the picture. These are closely linked with the culture of the dwellers. They merge somewhat insensibly into what might be termed as purely cultural requirement such as provision for social rites, display of social position and cultivation of the aesthetic surroundings. All these, together reflect the attitudes, objectives and technical abilities of people who construct them.

The Tharu depend upon agriculture for their livelihood and therefore, a settled life pattern becomes one of their necessities. Houses, according to the Tharu, are meant to protect its residents and their belongings from the extremities of climate and wild animals of the area. Further, contiguity ensure safety for social life.

### Village Plan

A Tharu village represents a closely-knit society, the units of which have developed a bond of fellowship and corporate life through mutual obligations and co-partnership. Tharu villages are generally located at a distance of at least a kilometer or two from each other. Ecological factors are the main considerations while setting up a new village or selecting a house site. The foremost

among them is the proximity to fertile land and availability of suitable and sufficient drinking water for human beings as well as for their domestic animals in the form of a river or pond. Land, situated on a high level, safe from water-logging and inundation during the rainy season are preferred. The area selected should also be free from constant attacks of wild animals, epidemics and evil spirits. Thus, if any one of the above factors is found amiss, the village is soon deserted. This practice of deserting an unsuitable area is on a decline due to unavailability of vast areas to set up new villages. Two common features were however noticed for all Tharu villages, namely, the proximity of a water source (usually a pond) and a mango grove. These two are of great community importance. Women and children are very fond of fishing in the ponds and during summers, mud dug out from these ponds is used for plastering the huts, washing hair, making clay vessels, *etc.* while the groves are used to hold most of the social and religious functions.

Boundaries of villages are usually marked by pillars or posts made of stones. It was observed during field visits that now most of the villages are connected with metalled roads. However, few villages like Surma (which is a forest village), remain unconnected even today. Narrow unmetalled roads run throughout the length and breadth of every Tharu village with hutments arranged generally in a line on either side of these lanes. Before building up his house and setting down in a village, every Tharu tries to grab as much land as possible for a *bari* (vegetable garden), a *saar* (cattle byre) and field around his house. No street lights have been provided by the public works department and so the village lanes are generally pitch dark at night. However, since electricity is available in some villages, a few houses have put electric bulbs outside their huts which offer some amount of visibility in the surrounding areas.

Earlier there were no separate places of worship except for *Bhumsen* or *Bhuiya devi*, the abode of the village deity at the south-west outskirts of every village. Today, however as a result of adoption of Hindu gods and goddesses, most

villages have a small temple constructed in or at the outskirts of the village. Most villages also have a small assembly-room or *panchayat ghar*, at least one small provisional store and several hand pumps (installed by the government). There are no community halls or youth dormitories existent in the Tharu villages. Previously all Tharu villages used to have a common cattle shed build for the entire village. This was known as *gaudhi* locally. This tradition of having a common cattle shed no longer exists and every household builds one for itself.

As stated in the previous chapter, three sub groups of the Tharu namely Rana, Katharia and Dangaura inhabit the Kheri tribal belt. Of the three, the Rana constitute the dominant group. A few villages of this district are inhabited by members of only one sub-group whereas some villages have mixed population. A sufficient distance is always maintained between the houses of members of the different sub-groups residing in same village, with members belonging to the same group clustering together.

An analysis of the seasonal calendar of the Tharu, depicts that there are two periods in a year when provision for building and repairing of houses exists and when such tasks most commonly take place. These are *Jeth* (May to June), when there is little work in the fields and *Agahan* (November to December) when the male members are usually free since most of the work is done by the female members. In other words, once before the commencement of monsoon and once before the winter rains set in, the Tharu build or repair their houses. Their houses might be categorised into two groups — *pucca* houses made of brick, cement, etc., locally called *colony* and *kuccha* houses, made of sod, wood, etc., locally called *khapra* and *chappra*.

The house is owned equally by all the male members of a family. If partition of the property takes place, the elder son gets the ancestral house and the younger son/sons are given land to build up their own houses nearby.

## Rituals Associated with House Construction

Once the site for building a house has been selected or allotted by the *Padhna* to a Tharu, he calls a *Bharra* to propitiate and appease the various deities. *Hom* (jaggery, ghee, flowers and sandalwood powder on fire) is offered to the goddess *Bhuiya Bhawani* and the other deities to remove the pollution of the chosen site. At the same time the *Bharra* fixes the day for laying the foundation so that the house, built on an auspicious day might be assured of its durability against all kinds of weather and casualties. Now-a-days, many a Tharu have stopped calling the *Bharra* to decide the date. Instead, they begin construction work on any Monday or Thursday which are considered the most auspicious of all the days by the Tharu.

On the day the construction is to begin a *puja* known as *agyari* is performed by the head of the family in which a hole around 3 feet deep is dug at the place where the central *khunta* (wooden pole) is to be erected. After this the household deities are propitiated in the area where the *kola* (abode of the household gods and ancestral spirits) is to be built. Thereafter, a fist full of rice, *masoor dal* and a coin are tied in a cloth and put into the hole dug to fix the central pole. This central pole known as the *churi* is now erected and its *puja* is performed by offering flowers and incense sticks. These actions are believed to make the house *shubh* (auspicious). On completion of these rituals *batashas* or *barfi* (sweets) are distributed among the villagers. The first area of the house to be constructed is usually the *kola*, as a common belief exists among the Tharu that with the making of the *kola* the house will be protected from all kinds of harm and abnormal situations. Before the family enters the house to settle down, the head of the family installs the ancestral spirits and household deities, *i.e.*, *ghar ke devta* in the *kola* and *bahar ke devta* in front of the house in the form of mud mounds. He then makes offerings of *hom* to them. Food cooked for the first time is offered to the deities before consumption. On the same evening a feast is held to which the entire village is invited. However, if one



can't afford a large feast, only close relatives and friends are invited. While making a *pucca* house, similar rituals are performed but instead of the *churi-khunta* the first brick is laid.

### Material and Implements used for Construction

The Tharu have skilfully utilized the natural resources and their group organization for maintaining themselves in their material economy. The requisites for building houses are available in the village and in the forests that surround them, so that they are self-sufficient so far as their needs for shelter are concerned. The principal materials required in the construction of a *kuccha* house are wood, bamboo, reed, straw, mud, clay, wheat/rice husk and grass. Wood from the *sal*, *sakhu* or *semal* tree are preferred for this purpose. These are acquired from the nearby forests by paying the forest department approximately Rs. 500/- for an average size tree. Bamboo and reed are acquired similarly at the rate of Rs. 20/- per pole and Rs. 6/- per *gatthar* respectively. Many times though, the Tharu sneak into the forests and collect the required material, without any payment to, or permission from, the forest department. Rope made from *sanai* or *sun* or *bendhu* are used. These are obtained from the forest or even grown near the house or in the fields. Straw, grass, *khudwa mitti*, i.e., common mud, *chitkar* or *paror mitti*, i.e., mud procured from the bottom of the pond, are all available from the surrounding area easily. Previously all aforesaid materials were available free of cost and only human skill and labour was required to build a house.

The Tharu villages of Kheri have been included under the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) since 1976, and since then the tribals were encouraged to use GC or asbestos and tin sheets in place of *chhappar* (thatch) to make the roof of their huts more weather resistant and leak proof. In the beginning, use of such roof was encouraged by distributing the sheets free of cost to a few selected families. Today, these can be acquired by

every Tharu at a highly subsidized rate. Apart from asbestos and tin sheets, cement sheets and baked earthen tiles, *i.e.*, *khaprahel* are also commonly used. These too are available at a concessional rate.

To improve living conditions the government provides at very low interest rates, loans to the Tharu for the construction of *pucca* houses. The *Indira Avas Yojna* was introduced in this area in 1985-86 with the aim of providing proper housing facilities to the economically weak Tharu. For construction of a house a maximum amount of Rs. 8,000/- is provided, whereas for repair and minor construction work a maximum amount of Rs. 3,300/- is provided under this scheme. Over the years more than 600 families are believed to have benefitted under this *Yojna*. For the construction of a *pucca* house, all raw materials are purchased from the market (generally at Palia or Chandan Chauki). Bricks at the rate of Rs. 1,200/- per 1000, iron rods at Rs. 15/- per kg., cement at Rs. 80-100/- per bag and morang Rs. 4-5/- per bag. Sand is brought in from near the Mohan river as one does not have to pay for it.

Quite a few implements are used to facilitate the construction of a house. A brief description of the implements used is given below—

- The *fawra/khudra* is used to dig deep into the earth. It is a common shovel consisting of a broad and flat iron blade socketed at right angle to an approximately 18 inches long wooden stick.



Fawra/Khudra

- The *khurpi* is used for shallow digging. It is somewhat similar to the *fawra*, though smaller in size as it consists of a flat but long iron blade socketed to a small wooden handle.



Khurpi

- *Gadhalo/Shabbal* is an implement used for levelling the ground by hitting it on the uneven surface by its heavy base. This implement consists of a heavy conical iron base attached to a long wooden rod.



Gadhalo/Shabba

- ❑ The *kulhadi/takula* is a simple axe and the *basula* is an adze, both of these are used for chopping wood.



Kulhadi/Takula

- ❑ The *aari* (saw) is used to cut wood.



Aari



- ❑ *Hasia/Maikula* is a common sickle used for peeling and making bamboo strips or cutting ropes.

- ❑ The *grimath* and *chaini* are used for boring holes. The *grimath* consists of a wooden block to which a long and thick spiral iron needle is attached. The *chaini* is a thick and long but straight needle attached to a wooden handle.



Chaini



Girmath

- ❑ *Hathauri* is an iron headed hammer with one end blunt and the other end forked.
- ❑ Apart from these implements, rope is used for measuring and a *tokra* or *tasla* are used for carrying mud and clay.



Hathauri



Tokra

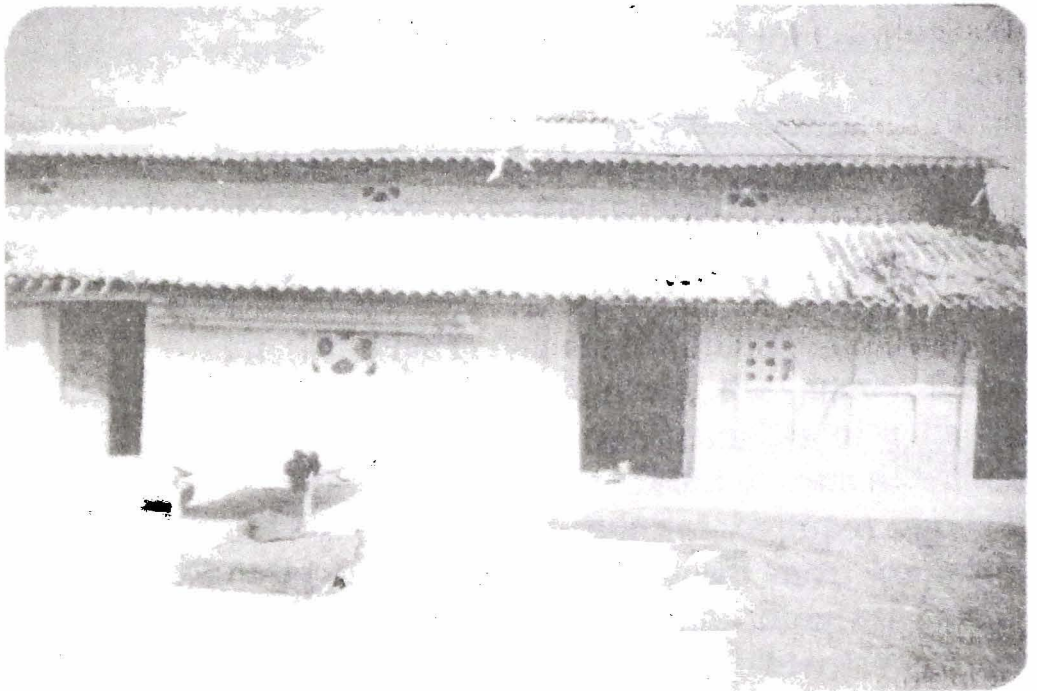


Tasla

## Labour

Labour required for the construction of houses is easily obtained from the village itself, making the cost of hired labour insignificant. This is one of the reasons why houses are constructed and repaired during seasons when everyone is free from agricultural and other economic pursuits. If a Tharu wants a house to be built during the

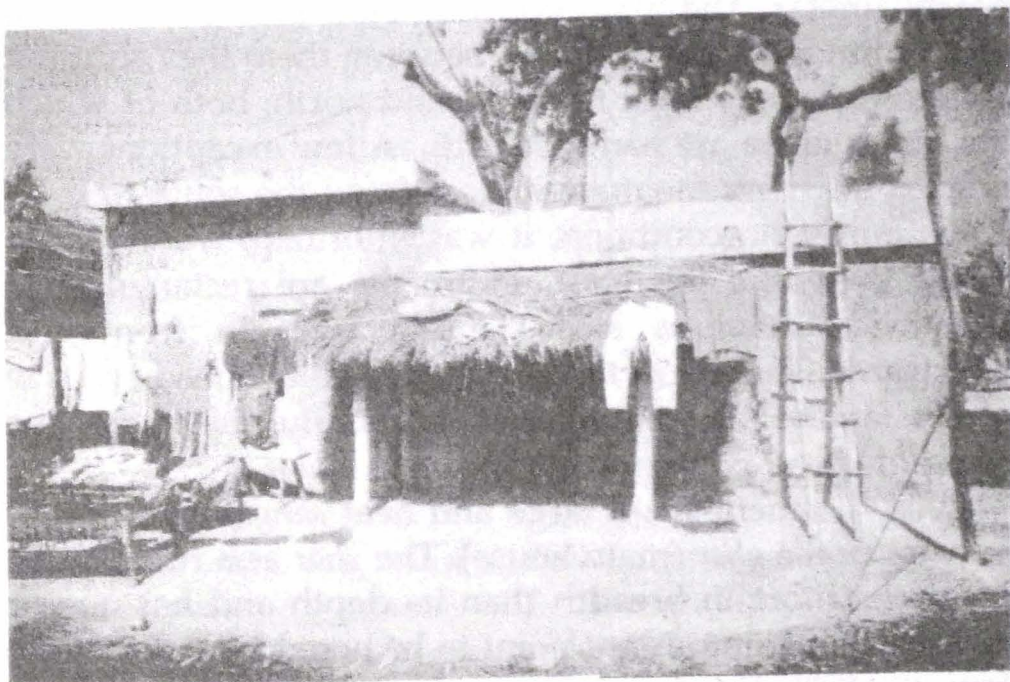
harvesting season he cannot count on this voluntary service. Many a times a Tharu claims to have constructed his hutment himself, however this is not the complete truth. He might measure the ground and bring all the material needed to build the house himself, but the actual construction generally requires the involvements of several persons. A Tharu does not need to request all the villagers for help. The entire arrangement is made privately without any kind of a fuss. There are usually some people in every village who are adept in this kind of work and when they are approached by those who need their services, they come forward for help ungrudgingly. No remuneration in cash is to be paid for such services. However every one feels obliged to provide the helpers with a meal and drinks according to their means. There is also an untold understanding that the man who seeks help will provide help as and when required by the persons providing help and assistance. Such an ungrudging source of free labour is available only in communities where the sense of duty and obligation has developed to such an extent that the receiver understands the value of the assistance provided and the



A *Kuccha* Tharu Hut

provider realizes the need, so that reciprocity and mutuality of obligations become binding elements in their normal life.

For building a hutment both men and women equally put in their labour. While the entire framework and roof are constructed by men, it is the responsibility of women to plaster, colour and decorate the house. However, the construction of a *pucca* house requires skills unknown to the Tharu, and so they engage labourers and *mistris* (masons) to build such houses. A mason was paid approximately Rs. 60-100 per day while labourers were paid Rs. 30-40 per day. The total amount spent on making a *pucca* house is Rs. 50,000-80,000, depending on the area, whereas for building a *kuccha* house it takes anything between Rs. 2,000-5,000. Thus, it is generally the more affluent Tharu who can afford *pucca* houses. Presently the trend of building *pucca* houses is catching on fast and there are also several examples where one or two rooms are made *pucca* while the remaining portion is left *kuccha*.



A Pucca House (Colony)

The average life of a *kuccha* house varies from 15-20 years, depending of the proper upkeep and maintenance through regular repairing and retouching. The dwelling,

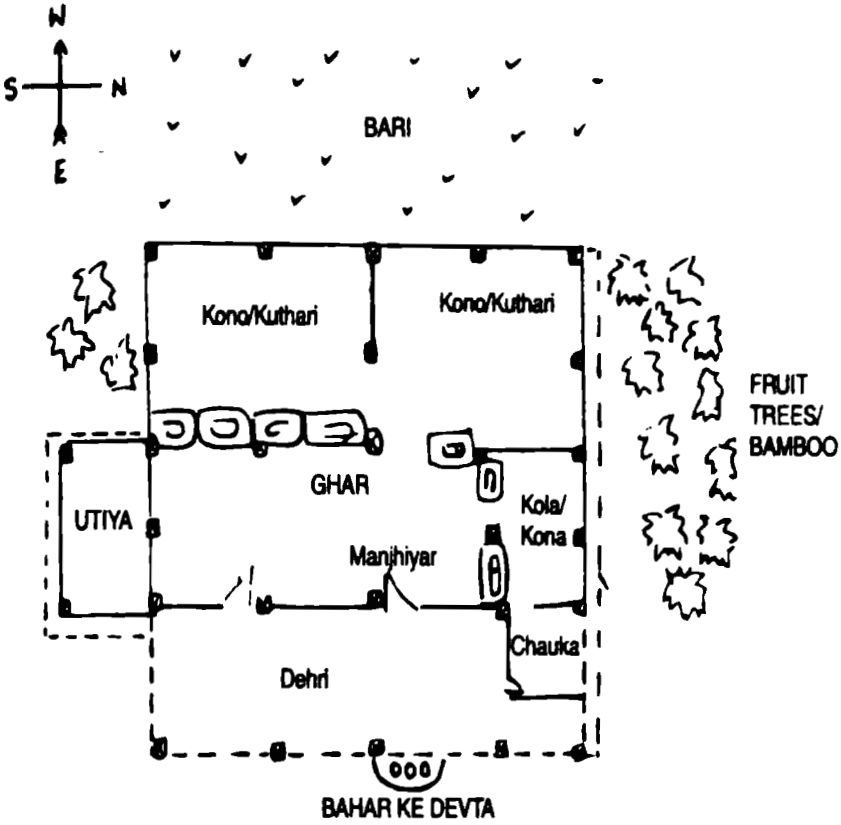


especially the roof, has to be repaired every year before the rains, usually in the month of *Jeth* (May-June) or *Asadh* (June-July). When a house is pulled down and a new one is to be built, much of the old material is utilised in construction of the new structure. Thus, the cost of reconstructing a house is lower than constructing a new establishment.

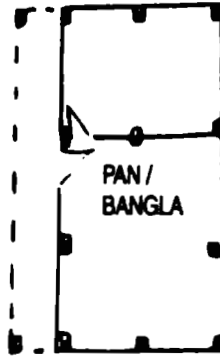
## Plan

Much land is needed for the construction of a Tharu hutment as there should be enough space to include not only the main house, *i.e.*, *ghar*, but also for a *saar* (cattle byre), a *pan* or *bangla*, a *bari* (kitchen garden), *etc.* Once the site for building a house has been selected there comes the task of planning and actual construction. There is little architectural skill involved in construction of a Tharu hutment, though their shape and form are made as attractive as possible. The plan of all Tharu houses are nearly similar. The main house is built facing east and a second hut faces south so that between them they shut out the strong winds from the west and north, both of which the Tharu claim are bad for health. A few exceptions were noticed in which the main houses faced the south or even north but in no condition, it was informed, will a Tharu house ever face the west. Hutments are rectangular in shape and have a roof slanting both in front and backwards. The size of house depends on the need and size of the family. Thus, the larger the family, the bigger the house.

Every hutment has a large and neat *aangan* (courtyard) in front of the *ghar* (main house). The *ghar* as a rule always measures more in breadth than its depth and has one or two doors. An important point to be noted here is that the houses of the Dangaura Tharu always have only a single door. This may be because they are relatively a poor sub-group and usually have small houses. The roof of the *ghar* is extended to quite a distance in front (sometimes a separate roof may also be added), to form a covered



AANGAN



LEGEND

■	Pillar
---	Covered Area Without Walls
⊞	Huge Grain Bins (Used as Partition)
—	Walls
⊕	Handpump
△	Doors

Plan of a Typical Tharu Hutment

verandah or frontage called *dehri* (a corrupt version of the Hindi *deorhi*). Windows are not common and only a few Rana Tharu houses have designed openings that allow little air and light in. Thus, the Tharu houses are normally very dark and poorly ventilated.

Every *ghar* has at least one *paie*, i.e., partition or divider. The larger the house the more the *paies*. The general trend is to have at least two *paies*. A house having two *paies* will have four rooms. The room that comes first on entering the house is used commonly and is known as the *manjhiyar*. The *chauka* (kitchen) is always attached to or situated next to the *kola/kona*, which is the sacred part of the house. The *kuthari/kono* are the inner rooms used as bedrooms for couples. Over the back portion of the *ghar* is constructed an intermediate roof or mezzanine called *pandh*, *dochhatti* or *atta* which is used as a store. On one side of the main house, most of the Tharu construct a *bangla* or *pan*. This is used as a bedroom for married sons when there is no space in the main house or to accomodate guests. An extension is made at one side of the main house for housing goats and other poultry. This portion is called the *utiya*. Situated behind or at one side of the *ghar* is the *bari* (kitchen garden). Every house has a cattle-shed distinct from the *utiya*, which is called *saar* in local parlance. Apart from these at the entrance of every Tharu hutment or at a little distance from it, a small area is made to install the *bahar ke devta*, mention of which has been made in the previous chapter. This could be in the form of earthen mounds situated at the entrance of the *grah*, or a small elevated square area having the earthen mounds, symbolizing the deities, installed on the elevation and called *madhwa mandir*. If no handpump is situated near the house, an area is reserved to keep waterpots. This area is called the *jhamnautta*.

## Construction

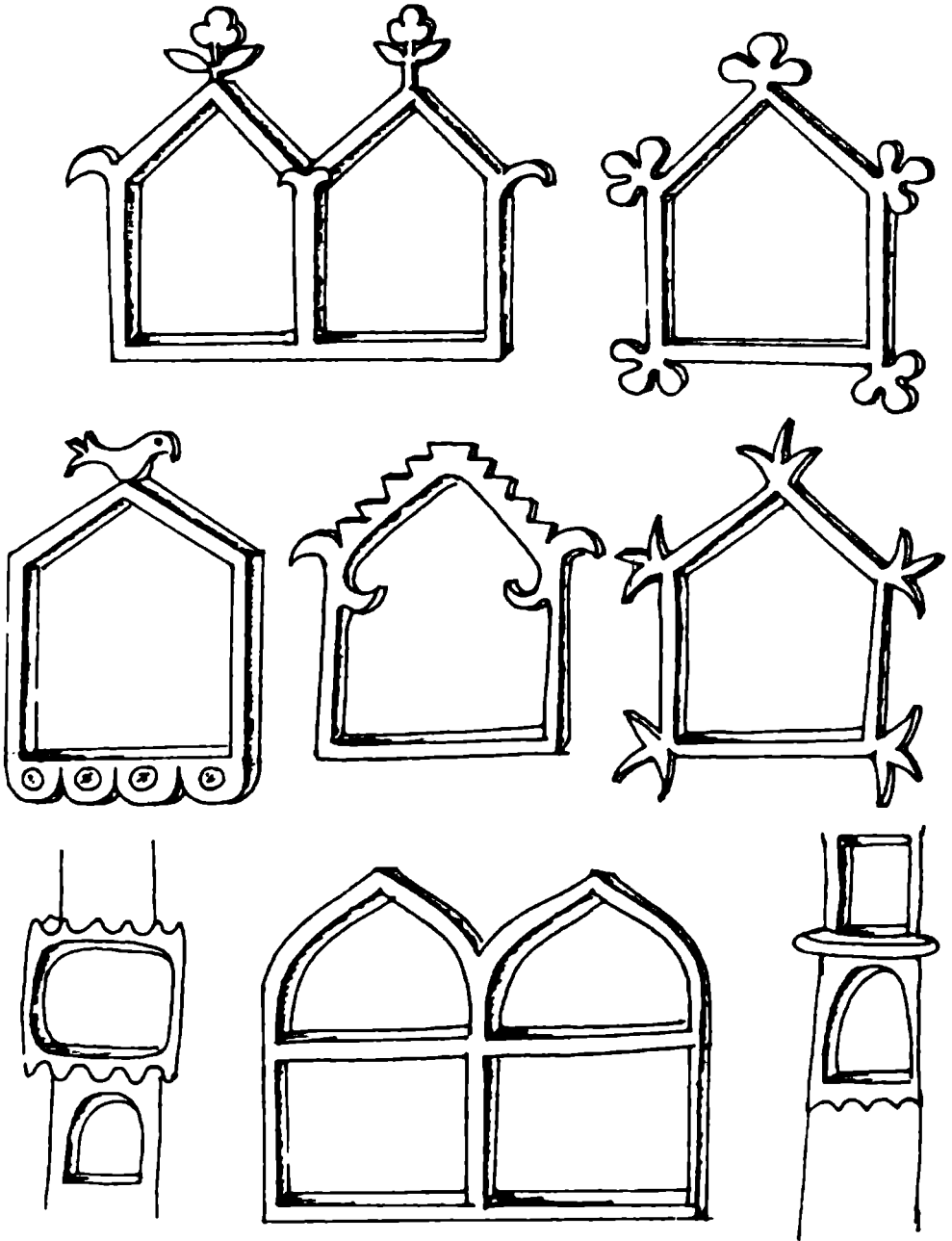
It takes approximately 10-15 days to construct a *kuccha* house whereas to construct a *pucca* house, depending upon the labourers engaged, it may take 20-30 days to build a house of similar area. Once the plan of the house has been



chalked out, the first step in construction of a Tharu hutment is to measure out the different places to be built. This is done with the help of a long rope tied to wooden pegs at both ends. As mentioned earlier, the house is constructed around a central pillar known as *churi* which is fixed at a depth of 3 feet in the ground, its height above the ground being 15-20 feet. In the same line, on either side of the central pillar, 2-4 more pillars of equal height are fixed at an equal distance of 7-8 feet. The number of pillars placed in this line determine the breadth of the house. At least two such pillars will be required to make one partition. For determining the depth of the hutment, pillars are placed similarly both in front and behind these pillars that determine the breadth of the house. The pillars are fixed in the ground one in front of the other, each one approximately 1.6-2 feet less in height than the one behind it as one comes towards the frontage, and each pillar 1.6-2 feet less than the one in front of it, from the central pillars, as one moves towards the rear portion of the house. This provides the roof with a regular slope that facilitates the downflow of rain water. All such vertical pillars have forked ends to provide support to the horizontal beams on which rests a bamboo framework for the roof. The horizontally placed pillars are tied tightly with *sanai/sun* [*Crotalaria juncea* L. (Fabaceae)], *moonj* [*Saccharum bengalense* Retz. (Poaceae)], jute [*Corchorus capsularis* L. (Tiliaceae)] or *baib* [*Eulaliopsis binata* Hubbard (Poaceae)], *bendhu* [*Helicteres isora* L. (Sterculiaceae)] etc. fibre rope. This is required to provide strength to the wooden framework to bear both its own weight and the weight of the roof, as well as to withstand the strong winds of the area. A bamboo framework known as *bati*, forming several squares or rectangles of equal size, is fastened to the horizontal wooden beams with the help of rope and nails. On this framework, an invariable thick layer of dry forest grass is spread and woven using ropes made of one of the above mentioned fibres. The roof is generally thatched with a 12 inch, or more, thickness of grass to prevent leakage during rains. For thatching any of the following grasses can

be used—*bharai*, *kans* or *kandola* [*Saccharum spontaneum* L. (Poaceae)], *ulla* [*Themeda arundinacea* (Roxb.) Ridley], *tamar* or *tamara* [*Narenga porphyrocome* (Hance) Bor], *Sindhuri* [*Bothriochloa intermedia* (R. Br.) A. Camus, B. pertusa (L.) A. Camus] *etc.* Of all these grasses *bharai* is preferred because of its smooth texture. If the roof is to be tiled, then the tiles are placed on the bamboo framework one by one starting from the lower end of the slope. Huments with thatched roofs are locally called *chhappra* (derived from *chhappar*) and those having tiled roofs *khappra* (derived from *khaprahel*). Asbestos, tin or cement sheets are conveniently placed and nailed to the bamboo and wood framework when these are to be used for making the roof.

The general trend while building a house is to erect the wooden and bamboo framework first, then build the walls and thereafter to put up the roof. This is done since more sunlight coming in through the open roof would hasten the process of drying the plaster on the walls. The *bheet* (walls) are made of reed sticks that are found in abundance in the nearby forest. Firstly, a mat of reed sticks is made by spreading out the sticks in a line, over this bamboo strips are placed horizontally and tied to the reed sticks with the help of a rope. The mat may also be made without using bamboo strips. In its place reed sticks can be used. Sometimes the reed sticks are simply woven together with the help of *sanai* rope. The mat thus prepared is then erected and tied to the wooden framework built earlier. The height of the front wall is usually 7-8 feet. As mentioned earlier, windows are not commonly found in Tharu huments. However in every house, in the kitchen area about a feet above the ground a hole of approximately 4 inches in diameter is made. This is called *moka* and is meant to let out the smoke emitted from the hearth. There is no difference between the windows and ventilators of a Tharu house since they are just small openings in the walls. If windows or ventilators have to be made, they are designed in the mat itself. The required amount of space is cut out with a sickle and reed or bamboo strips are put in



Different Designs of Aaro/Mithauti (Shelves)  
made on Walls and Pillars

this place forming a kind of grill. These windows/ventilators usually have criss-cross, check, vertical or horizontal lines designed on them. Once the wall has been attached to the wooden structure, comes the task of plastering it. The walls and pillars are neatly plastered with 2-3 thick layers of *khudwa mitti*, i.e., common soil mixed

with equal proportions of rice husk and cowdung in water. If for some reason rice husk is unavailable, one may use wheat husk. However, rice husk is always preferred because its smooth texture prevents cracking of the walls. On the other hand wheat husk is rough and therefore lacks this quality. Cowdung is mixed to make the walls lighter in weight and help bind the materials together. Once this plaster dries up, the walls are replastered with a thin layer of *chitkar/paror mitti*, i.e., pond clay, mixed with water and rice husk. This provides the surface of the walls a smooth and finished appearance. While plastering the walls and pillars, racks of different shapes and sizes are simultaneously made on them according to one's requirements. These racks are not very large in size and their depth varies from 4 to 9 inches. Such racks are called *aaro/aura* by the Rana and Dangaura Tharu and *mithauti* by the Katharia Tharu. These racks are used for keeping small articles like clothes, mirror, comb, cosmetics, utensils etc.

The floor of the house is made about 6 inches to one feet above the floor of the *aangan*. To prepare the floor, the ground is made even by beating it down with the help of the *gadhalo* and then plastering it with *khudwa mitti*, cowdung and water first and later with *paror mitti* mixed with cowdung and water.

Depending on its breadth, every house has one or two wooden doors made by the Tharu themselves, as every Tharu man knows some wood work. Recently, some of the Tharu who are adept at wood work have taken up carpentry as a profession and are contacted to make doors by others. *Shesham* [*Dalbergia sissoo* Roxb. (Fabaceae)] or *sakhu* [*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. (Dipterocarpaceae)] wood is preferred for making doors. The *chauhkat* (frame) for the door is nailed to a pillar of the frontage before the walls are plastered. After plastering the walls and pillars the door is fitted onto the *chauhkat*. Being simple and honest people, the Tharu were never afraid of thefts and therefore, earlier never had doors. Today, when they no longer live a secluded life and contact with non tribals has increased, no Tharu can imagine of building a house without a door.

Rooms are demarcated from each other with the help of partitions called *paies*. These are constructed in a similar fashion as the walls of a room. The only difference being that they are usually of a lesser height. The average height of these partitions being 6-7 feet since the mezzanine has to be accommodated above these rooms. Sometimes in place of partition walls, big earthen pots (used for storing grains) known as *dehari* or *kuthia* are used for demarcating the different portions of a house. Generally 2-3 such pots are placed side by side to cover a certain area.

Every Rana Tharu, most Katharia Tharu and a few Dangaura Tharu houses have mezzanines constructed in the back portion of their houses. This intermediate roof is locally called *pandh*, *atta* or *dochhatti*. At the back portion of the house adjacent to the pillars that support the roof, pillars of a lesser height are fixed when a mezzanine is to be constructed. These additional pillars are approximately 3 feet below the ground and 7-8 feet above the ground. Nailed over these are horizontal beams that run longitudinally across the breadth of the room. On this framework several wooden planks are nailed side by side thus forming a floor for the mezzanine. To reach the mezzanine a wooden ladder known as *khurkhuri* or *siri* is used. The *pandh* is used as a store to keep articles of occasional use. Installed on it are huge grain-bins made of mud called *bakhari*.

### Parts of a House and their Uses

The *dehri*, a covered verandah, exists in front of every hutment. The verandah may at times extend to the sides of the house. The roof of the *dehri* is generally lower as compared to the rest of the house and forms a very important portion of the house as it is under constant use. In this area one can find grain-bins, earthen pens, empty pitchers, husking machine, the grinding stone, agricultural tools and other related implements, and also fishing nets and traps hanging from the projected roof. Usually in one corner of the verandah one finds bunches of maze tied with their skin suspended from a bamboo pole for the next

sowing season. It is also an area used for resting and relaxing during the daytime, both in summers and winters and for entertaining guests.

The *majhiyar* is the central room, which is used as a living room. Guests are entertained here at times and it is used for eating meals too. Sometimes, a mud platform called *tapta* is made in the floor or the *manjhiyar*, over which is placed the *lei* (a flat mud pot to keep burning coal or wood) during winters to keep the room warm. Hanging from the roof of the *majhiyar* one finds baskets and clay vessels to keep articles of daily use. This area is used by the elders and unmarried sons and daughters of the family to sleep.

The *kuthari* or *kono* is used as a bedroom for couples and also for keeping one's personal belongings like clothes, ornaments, etc. Since this room is situated at the back portion of the house, it is not freely used by all members of the house, though there are no restrictions from entering it.

As noted earlier, the *pandh* or *atta* is a storage area that is used to keep material protected at a height and leaves plenty of space empty for living in the house. Not much furniture is found in a Tharu hutment. One commonly finds a few *charpais* (cots) and low stools for sitting. Tin or aluminium boxes are used for keeping clothes, etc. Baskets and clay vessels are the most common storage bins found here. Apart from these, mats and cushions made of straw are found abundantly.

The *chauka* and *kola/kona* are two sacred areas inside the house that are situated adjacent to each other. *Aaro/mithautis* are built in the kitchen for keeping utensils, etc. From the roof of the kitchen hang pots and baskets in which edibles are kept, thus, protecting them from rodents and hens/ducks that may come wandering into the kitchen. In this area a *moka* (small hole in the wall) is always present to let out the smoke emitting from the hearth. Earlier, men were prohibited from taking food and entering in the kitchen. However as of today, no such prohibitions exist and men may eat even in the kitchen.

The *kola* (among the Rana and Dangaura)/*kona* (among the Katharia) is the abode of the household deities and ancestral spirits. Mounds of mud symbolizing these deities are installed in this small and secluded area. Totemic objects of the family too are placed here itself. No one except family members can enter the *kola*. There exists a belief among the Tharu that if an outsider enters the *kola*, it will become impure and this would result in bringing upon its inmates the wrath of the deities in the form of sickness and deadly diseases. Once married, even the daughters of the house are not allowed into the *kola*. A newly wed bride on coming to her in-laws place is first made to enter the *kola/kona* to seek the blessings of the deities. Similarly on the *satti* day, the baby is laid in a *supo* (winnowing plate) with some paddy and kept in the *kola* for few minutes. On festivals too, the main rituals are performed here by the eldest male member of the household.

### Places Outside the Main House

Most Tharu have a *bangla/pan/bukhra* which usually faces southwards but may sometimes face north. The *bangla* may have *pandh/atta* if the family is in need of extra storage area. This hut however does not have a kitchen or *kola* which makes it distinct from the *ghar*. It is used to house guests or as an extra bedroom for family members when there is no space to accommodate them in the main house.

Both the *ghar* and *bangla* open into a central courtyard called the *aangan*. The ground of the *aangan* is not beaten down, instead mud loafs are spread out in the *aangan*. These mud loafs settle down naturally due to the rains, making the entire *aangan* even and plain. This is one of the most frequently used areas. Besides stacking and threshing their agricultural products here, the Tharu use it for sitting and resting on cots. However, one never sleeps here at night for fear of wild animals. Women are often seen sitting here and gossiping while making preparations for meals, stitching or weaving baskets. It is used by children as a

playground, for entertaining guests and also to hold feasts and dance and song sessions. At the entrance of the main house in the *aangan*, one finds mud mounds representing the clan deities, *i.e.*, *bahar ke devta*. In some houses a small raised platform is built in the centre of the *aangan* for installing the deities and is known as the *madhwa mandir*. This platform has four wooden poles at its corner with a thatched roof covering it. A few mud mounds symbolizing the deities are placed on this elevated platform. A few clay vessels, not being used, are also kept here.

At one corner of the *aangan*, near to the main house one may find the *jhamnautta*, a wooden stand approximately four feet in length for placing earthen water pots. No outsider is allowed to touch these water pots and only members of the household can bring water from here to quench the thirst of an outsider. Such structures are now becoming uncommon with the increased installation of hand-pumps at short distances throughout the villages which facilitates the availability of clean and fresh drinking water.

The *bari* or kitchen garden is generally situated behind the main house and is fenced with the help of small wooden poles and dried branches tied together with rope to keep away animals from destroying the vegetables grown here. Apart from the *bari* every household also has some fruit trees in the corner of the *aangan*.

Every house has at least one *saar* or cattle byre situated close to the *ghar* so that one may easily keep an eye on their cattle. A single household may have more than one *saar* if it has a large number of cattle. The roof of the *saar* is always made of *chhappar* (thatch), that rests on a frame work made of wooden pillars. No walls are constructed around this framework to enclose it. However, logs are horizontally fastened onto the boundary of the framework in order to protect the cattle from wild animals. In some of the *saars*, a wood and grass mezzanine is constructed for keeping fodder and other articles and implements. This is known in local parlance as the *bhasur*. A large *saar* may also be divided into two or more chambers to keep cows, oxen and buffaloes separately. This is ensured by fastening logs



horizontally to the vertically placed wooden poles. Sometimes partitions of reed plastered with clay are also found. During the daytime when the cattle are out in the field for grazing, the *saar* is cleaned up and used for relaxing, sleeping and even entertaining guests. This area, being cool, is preferred during the summers and one may find people working here too. Adjacent to the *saar*, some households build a small store for keeping *bhusa* (fodder) and fuel.

A structure quite similar to the *saar* is the *sungur* or *khand*. This is a pig's sty. The roof of the *sungur* has a roof lower in height as compared to the *saar* and it never has a mezzanine. The *utiya*, mentioned earlier, is used to house sheep and goats. It is generally attached to the main house and has ventilators to let in air and light. The *utiya* is built of reed plastered with clay and has a door with a height of approximately 4-4.6 feet only. Thus, to clean the area one has to enter it bending down. Hens and ducks are housed in small mud enclosures called *darba* by the Dangaura, *khulra* by the Katharia and *lohra* by the Rana. These may be made of different shapes and sizes and have a few openings for ventilation (These shall be discussed in detail in the next chapter).

## Sanitation and Cleanliness

The Tharu love their surroundings to be clean and therefore both the exterior and interior of the Tharu houses present a neat and tidy appearance. The houses are swept twice or thrice a day and the walls and floors are regularly plastered with mud and cowdung mixed with water. The entire *aangan* and *saar* too are similarly cleaned daily. There is no arrangement of a sweeper to clean the village roads, etc. but the people themselves keep the road and area near their houses clean. There is no common garbage pit to throw garbage and household refuse. Thus, these are thrown near the cattle-shed or in the fields adjacent to the house. Since the Tharu have no idea of keeping a manure pit, a good lot of manure is lost because it is washed away

during the rains. Furthermore, this leads to breeding of flies, mosquitoes and other germs and insects making the air impure and unhealthy. As can be noted from the description of the housing pattern there are no toilet and bathing facilities in the house and so people go to the forests during the daytime. But due to fear of animals they go to the nearby fields at night. Keeping this problem of the Tharu in mind, the government has got a few public toilets built in a few villages and more money is being sanctioned for the construction of such public toilets in every village.

Bathing, washing of clothes and utensils are all done at the handpump. In some places water from the handpump gets collected in the surrounding areas which makes it very dirty and promotes the creation of an unhygienic atmosphere in the village. There are generally no drains for the outlet of dirty water, but in some places drains are made that converge at a nearby pond or in the kitchen garden. Another defect in the Tharu houses is that these are not properly ventilated or lighted. Mention has already been made of the shortage or complete lack of windows and ventilators especially in Dangaura Tharu houses. As a result of lack of proper ventilation, smoke from the kitchen filters slowly through the roof so that its rafters and articles suspended from it are always thickly coated with black soot and cobwebs. Realizing this defect, many Tharu have started making ventilators and window in their houses. Some houses have a double height roof. Thus a provision for ventilators is made even at a high level which helps in providing for light and fresh air even into the mezzanine.

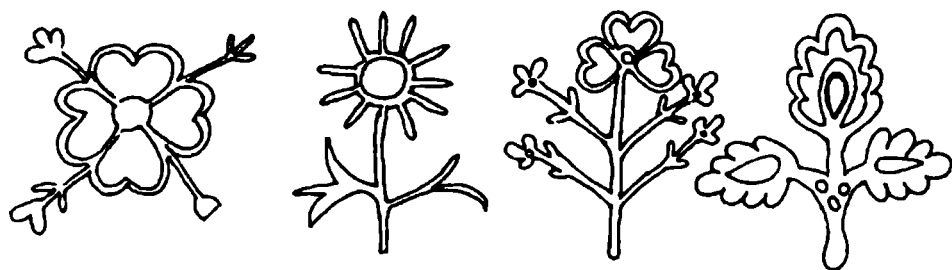
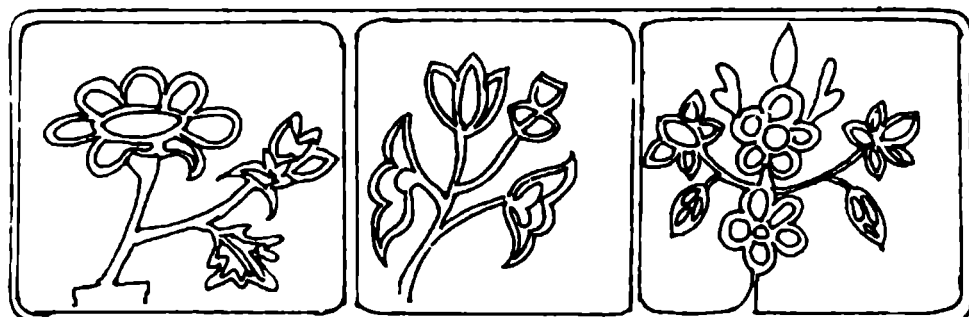
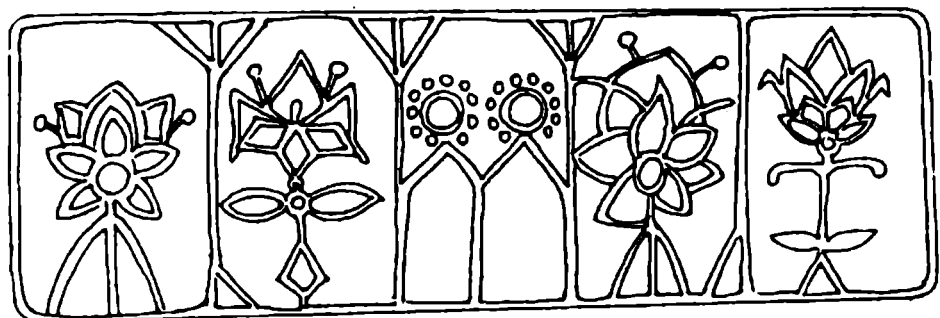
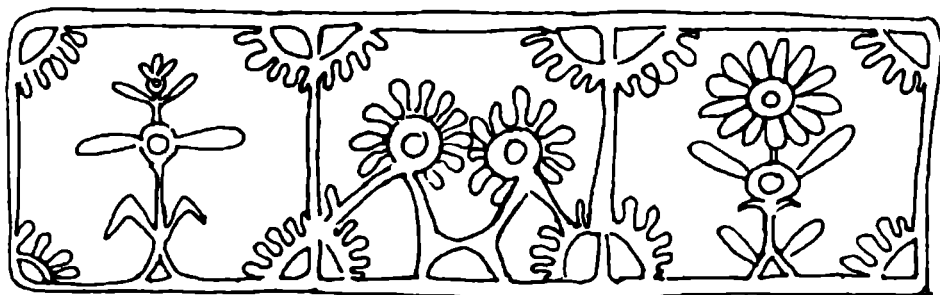
## Decoration

The Tharu artistic inclinations and love for beauty is reflected in several ways, one of them being the designs and decorations on the walls of their houses. Tharu hutments are decorated by their women folk who make beautiful paintings, moulding in relief, engravings, *etc.*, on them. Specially before festivals one tries to make the house good looking by retouching the paintings already made or

by making new ones if necessary. It was noted that the Rana and Katharia Tharu try to beautify the exteriors as well as interiors of their houses. While contrast to the Rana and Katharia Tharu, the Dangaura show a total lack of interest in this. Thus, their houses are neither painted or engraved, nor do they have any designed ventilators and windows. The Dangaura Tharu attributed this trend to their being too poor to afford the colours used. Secondly, according to them, it would be a waste of their valuable time which can otherwise be put into economic pursuits.

There are several ways in which a Tharu house is decorated. Some houses have beautifully designed openings which serve both as ventilators/windows and also help beautify the house. These designs might be of various types to suit one's taste. The commonly found designs are criss-cross (*i.e.*, a combination of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines), square, rectangle, checks, vertical and horizontal lines. Such designed openings are found only in Rana Tharu houses and are missing both in the Katharia and Dangaura houses. The Katharia however surpass the Rana in their variety of designs and colours used on wall paintings.

Usually the whole house is not coloured. As a last coating during plastering, houses are smeared with pond clay mixed in water. This gives the walls a beautiful off-white colour when dry. However, two to three instances were noted during the field visits where Rana Tharu houses were painted entirely in blue or green colour. Previously for painting the walls only natural colours such as *herder/pili mitti* (a yellow coloured clay acquired from Nepal), *geru* (ochre) and *seta mitti/parror/chitkar mitti* (pond clay) were used. Today, different kinds of chemical colours are easily available in the market and can be used for this purpose. The colours commonly used are yellow (either by using *pili mitti* or buying it from the market), blue, pink, green (all purchased from the market), white (*kharia*, *i.e.*, chalk lumps purchased from the market), orangish-red (acquired from ochre that is bought from the market) and black (this colour is acquired from burnt mobil oil or coal).

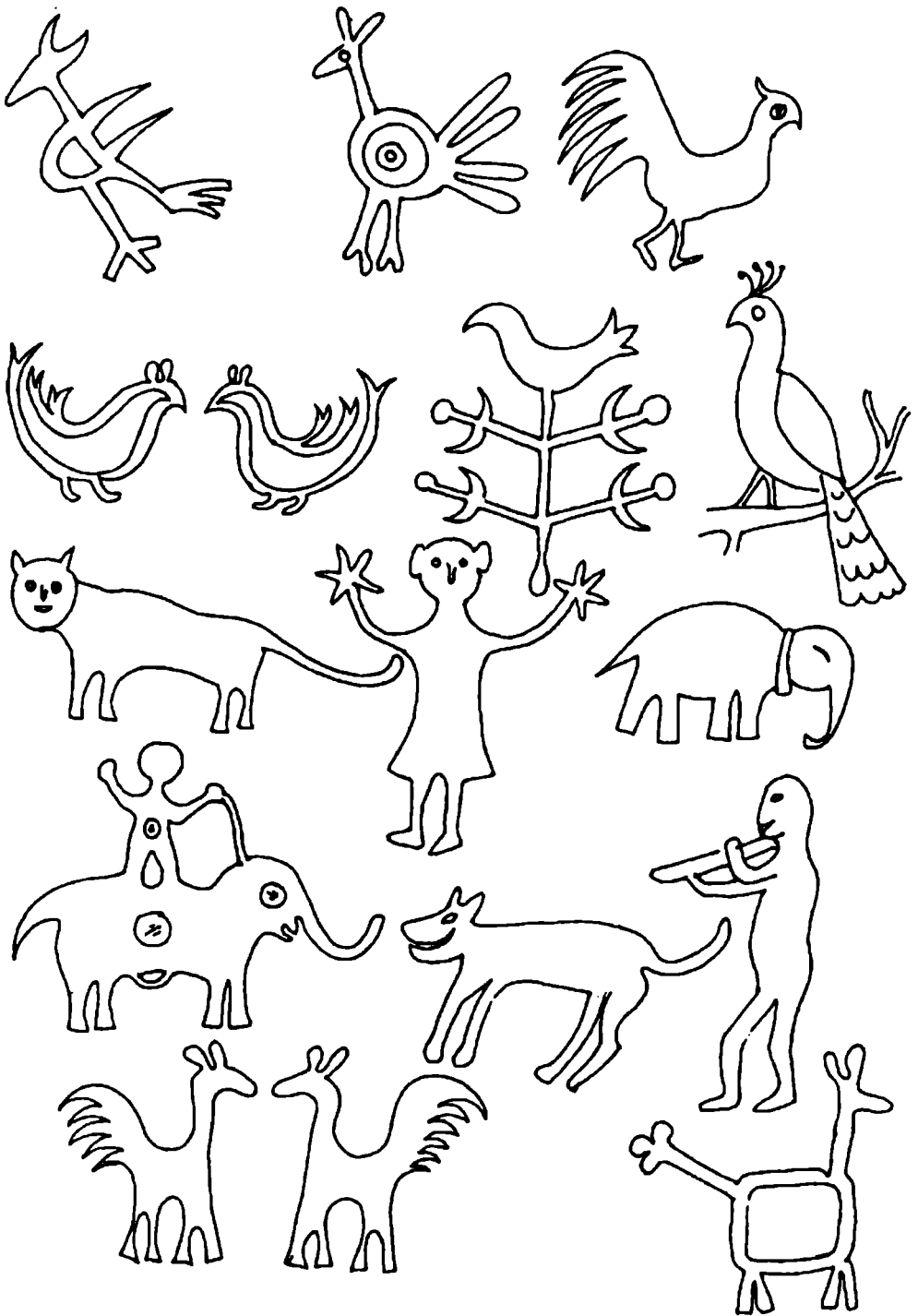


Floral Relief Work on Tharu Huts

Other colours and more tints and shades are acquired by mixing two or more of the above mentioned colours. To increase the life of the colours and to provide it with a glaze, some Tharu mix *lahi* (mustard) oil with the colours before application on the designs. There are no hard and fast rules related to the use of colours as are found in nature. Hence, many times one finds flowers painted green and leaves painted red. The selection of colours thus

depends on the sweet will and personal preferences of the artist.

For decoration, while the walls are being plastered, mud frames of various shapes like square, rectangular, triangular, semi-circular, or dome shaped are invariably made on the outer face of the front wall and sometimes even on the walls and partitions inside the house. These mud frames are known as *naha* and inside these frames one has the choice of painting, engraving or embossing. The *naha* are remade every year after the rainy season, when the walls are plastered with mud afresh. Embossing, through relief work, is the traditional form of house decoration in which first the desired design is drawn on the wet plaster with the help of a stick or ones nails. This design is then pressed up gradually between the thumb and index finger, moulding the design and causing it to stand out in relief. Square, triangular or circular pieces of mirror locally known as *aras/arsa* are sometimes affixed on the embossment to enhance its beauty. Another way of decoration noted was where instead of bringing out in relief, engravings were made by pressing the design with the fingers. These engravings may similarly be decorated using mirror pieces. Once these dry up, they are smeared with pond clay mixed with rice husk and water. Later, if desired, these are coloured with one or more colours. The Rana Tharu usually do not use many colours for painting. The colours preferred by them are *pili mitti* and *geru*. On the other hand, the Katharia Tharu love to use different colours for making paintings on their walls. It was also noted that the Rana prefer relief work to engraving or simply painting pictures on the walls. It is also not necessary to make a design in every mud frame. In some places alternate frames have designs, whereas in others two frames might have designs and one is left vacant or vice-versa. Thus, the style chosen depends totally on the free will and fancy of the designer. Several Katharia Tharu houses do not have relief work or engravings, instead huge scenic or floral pictures are painted on the walls.



Different Zoomorphic and Anthropomorphic Wall Decorations

The common designs noted for wall decoration are geometric designs e.g., *kundrukkhu* (zig-zag lines), *tikuli* (triangles) *leharia* (two or more parallel lines) etc. Designing of *kundrukkhu* and *tikuli* is considered *shubh* (auspicious).

Other commonly noted designs were *phula/phulwa* i.e., flowers or floral designs of various kinds, figures of animals and birds like elephant, horse, deer, peacock, duck, hen, etc., human figures, temples, fans, etc. Sceneries seem to be recent additions to the list of designs. A close analysis of the designs preferred by the various sub-groups of the Tharu depicts that the Rana Tharu seem to be more fond of simple geometric designs while the Katharia seem to prefer floral and scenic designs. However, it should not be assumed that the Rana do not make floral designs or anthropomorphic figures on the walls. Designs are mainly made according to ones imagination or from recollecting the designs observed earlier somewhere. However, now a days some women copy designs from art books used by school going children. Today one can find a wide array of complex designs, viz. figures of Hindu deities, of men riding elephants and horses, men hunting animals with guns, hearts with arrows passing through them, names of residents, words such as "welcome", "jai matadi", "zakhmi dil", "dil", "jai jawan", etc. on the walls which undoubtedly prove the effect of non-tribals on the Tharu. Thus, today's designs and depictions show a gradual change over from the simple designs of the past, which may be attributed to the increased contacts with the outer world.

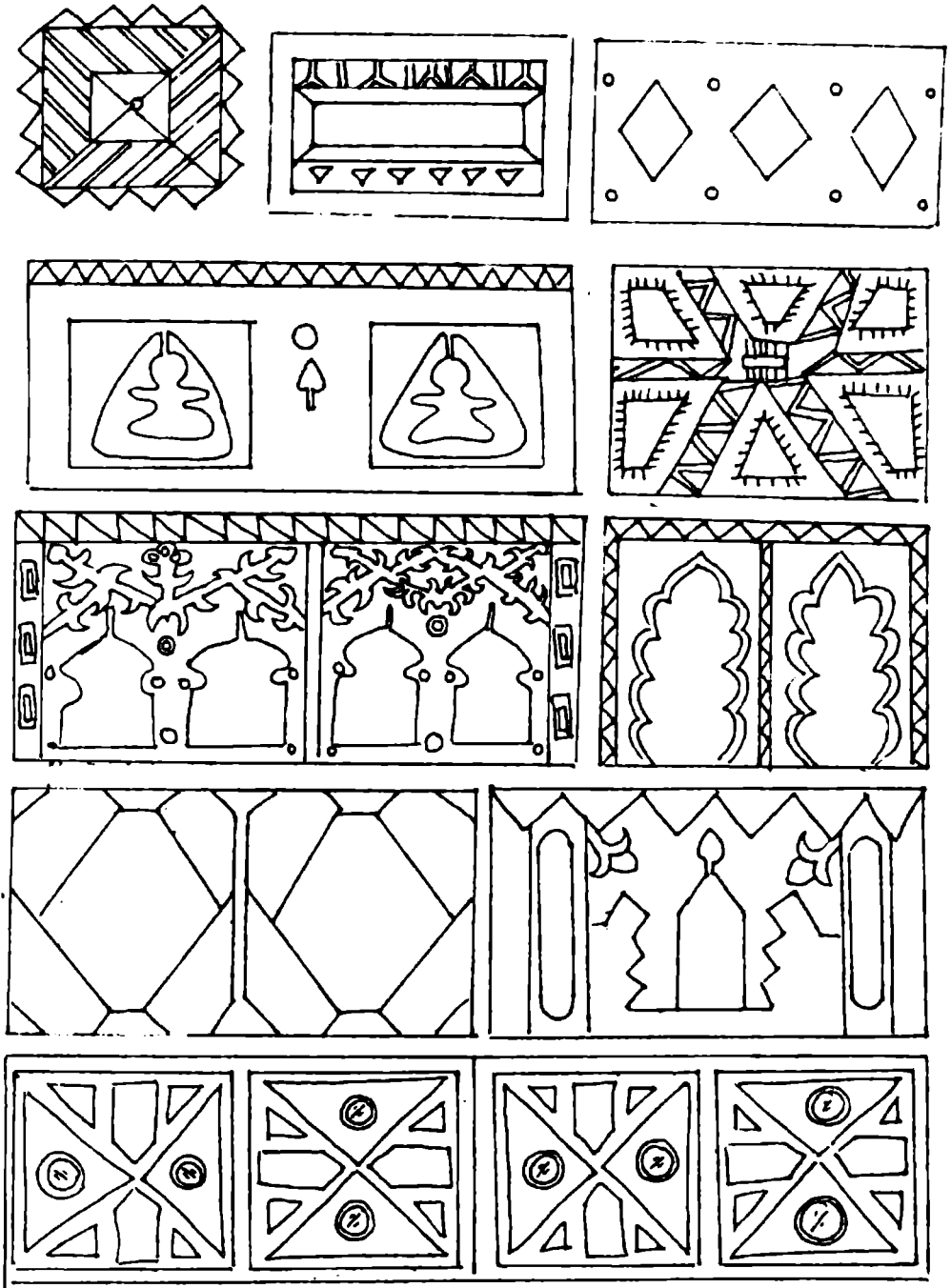
Amir Hassan (1993, 32) has noted that the Tharu mural art bears a strong resemblance to the graphic art displayed on the dwellings of the Buxa tribals of Nainital district. The extent of similarity and differences between wall designs of the two tribes in question can only be ascertained after an in-depth comparative study is carried out and therefore no specific comment can be made in relation to the statement of Hassan.

Conclusively, it can be said that Tharu villages and hutments have several common features, although individual variations do exist. Village boundaries are demarcated by fences or stone posts. Villages generally have fields on three sides and a forest on the fourth. Proximity to a water source and mango groves are special

considerations while establishing a village. All Tharu villages of the district are now well connected by metalled roads. Further, government efforts have made clean drinking water and electricity easily available. Not many public buildings exist in a Tharu village. Mostly these are the *panchayat ghar* and temples. Markets do not exist in every village and therefore one generally has to go to far off places for making purchases, but every village has at least one provisional store. In the south-west direction of every village an area is reserved as the abode of *Bhuiyadevi*, the village deity.

The Tharu have to live a sedentary life due to their main economic pursuit of settled agriculture and therefore the houses built by them too are of permanent nature. Every Tharu household encompasses a large area which includes a main and a secondary house, a cattle shed, an open courtyard, a kitchen garden and fields. The hutments are rectangular in shape with sloping roofs which may be made of thatch, earthen tiles, asbestos sheets or tin sheets. Originally all houses were made of clay, sod, reed, wood and thatch. These materials, needed for construction, were obtained from the forest. Use of tiles, tin and asbestos sheets came next, and now cement and brick houses are being made as a result of contact with the larger society and government endeavours to encourage better living conditions. The government provides various concessions, subsidies and loans for building up these modern style houses. It takes about 10-15 days to construct a *kuccha* house, labour for which is provided by relatives, friends and acquaintances. On the other hand it takes 20-30 days to build a *colony* (a *pucca* house) of the same size and labourers have to be engaged from outside for this purpose, as the requisite skill is not available within the community. The increase in the number of *pucca* houses indicated a general improvement in the economic conditions of the Tharu since construction of such houses costs much more than the construction of *kuccha* houses. *Pucca* houses are well lighted and ventilated since these generally have at least one window. This is an





Geometric and Abstract Wall Decorations

improvement over the *kuccha* houses which many a times lack windows. However, *pucca* houses have their own drawbacks. Houses made of bricks and cement become very hot during the summers. Hence, it becomes indispensable to buy electric fans and coolers which are a luxury for the poor tribals. Also, *pucca* houses are never

decorated by paintings, relief work or engravings and thus this art is slowly dying out. Women too, are gradually losing interest in it and admire and desire to have houses made of bricks and cement as it symbolizes prosperity of the household.

Presently, the government is trying hard to establish Primary Health Centres, post offices and cooperatives in every village. Thus, undoubtedly soon a time is coming when the Tharu villages will be indistinguishable from any other Indian village.

# 4

## *Mouldings in Clay*

Apart from weaving, the crafts most often found in the non-literate world are basketry and pottery making. Clay work is usually associated with pottery, and pottery has no single origin. Children make mud pies, and from the earliest levels of culture men have made anthropomorphic and animal images in clay, for magical and other purposes. The hardening of clay by fire was known equally early, since it occurs unintentionally when a patch of clay is chosen for a hearth. At Jericho, the middle Neolithic level yields pottery believed to be the earliest, while the lower Neolithic levels have no pottery but figurines in unbaked clay. Basket-making has been suggested as the antecedent of pottery making. There is, however, no archaeological evidence for this suggestion. The oldest surviving baskets were used to store grains in the Neolithic settlements of Merimde and Fayum in Egypt, and these settlements already had pottery.

The main factors influencing the adoption of pottery have been economic, and the strange and insufficiently recognized changes to which it has been subjected reflect the unequal advantages which it has offered at different times and places. It is evident through history that exploitation of a new material or process follows, not its first discovery, but the first occasion on which it offers sufficient economic advantage. Because of its fragility, pottery could offer no economic benefits to the pure nomads. It was when settled life began that the economy of

raw materials and labour offered by pottery enabled it to oust more permanent materials.

The distribution of pottery is restricted by various factors since the finished product can only result after several operations, whose relation to each other and to the end product is by no means obvious. Clay, the raw material of pottery, is formed by the decomposition of other rockforming minerals, notably the feldspars. This very important group of minerals composes the larger part of granite and gneiss rocks. The resulting clay minerals are hydrated aluminium silicates with some amounts of alkalis, iron oxides, *etc.* Chemical decay of feldspar is due to the action of carbon dioxide and water on rock surfaces from which air is excluded particularly in marshes or bogs. Such primary clays have very little plasticity and when used in pottery making the addition of a more plastic secondary clay is necessary to make it workable. A vast majority of clays are however secondary clay, *i.e.*, they have been transported by water, wind, or ice from their primary source and have acquired additional impurities in the process. Secondary clays are usually adequately plastic owing to their small particle size, though their plasticity may be improved by weathering, *i.e.*, by exposing the material to sun, air, and rain for mechanical disintegration.

The first step in pottery making is to find clay which contains sand or some other siliceous material, but no stones. This is then kneaded to give it the proper consistency, after which it is shaped to form the desired object/vessel. The next step is to allow it to dry. Once dried it can be handled, but dry clay begins to shred at the touch and it must therefore be fire baked to fuse the siliceous material with the clay to make the final utensil/vessel. Once this step has been achieved the clay has been transformed into a material that is durable, despite the ease with which the objects made out of it can be broken. Thus, the importance of such objects in any culture becomes undisputed.

## Tharu Clay Work

In earlier times, the Tharu possessed only a few household goods and did not have much difficulty in shifting from one place to another. With the adoption of a sedentary life, the need for different kind of containers become a must. This led to the regular infiltration of traders in their region from the neighbouring parts of the country to sell their wares. This process proved to be quite a costly affair and so the Tharu began to make pots of their own. Today, the Tharu do not entirely depend upon the outsiders for supply of all their requirements as they themselves manufacture a number of articles owned by them. As noted in Chapter 2, the area inhabited by the Tharu predominantly consists of clay soil which is extremely important for pottery making. This characteristic feature of the area facilitated their activity of pottery making. Every Tharu family, thus makes earthen pots of different shapes and sizes for storage purposes. These are differently named according to their shape, size and purpose of use.

Important features of Tharu clay work are that — all clay work including plastering of houses (as already mentioned in the previous chapter), making of different vessels, hearths, toys, *etc.* are done by the women. Furthermore, Tharu pottery is hand made, *i.e.*, made without the use of the potters wheel and are sun baked. No baking of pots by firing of any kind was observed. Men never make clay articles among the Tharu. The reason given by them is that the activity is a time consuming one that requires a lot of patience and Tharu men do not have these essentials. However, in the course of the field visits, it has been noted that sometimes men helped their womenfolk in transporting parts of the large grain bins into the house where these were finally assembled.

Over the years, studies on pottery and pottery making technique have revealed that almost all over the world hand made pottery is made by women and wheel made pottery by men. This matter cannot however, be generalized to a greater extent. Women make fire pots in

Africa and native American industries; on the other hand only men are employed among the Nagas, but both men and women among the Manipuris. However, after the introduction of the wheel, pottery seems to have become an exclusively masculine industry in India, as in China and Crete. In this context, it would be appropriate to quote Herskovits (1974, 140) according to whom,

“The two broadest categories of pottery making are those that distinguish pottery made by hand, and by the use of potter’s wheel. The potter’s wheel, however, is not found outside the literate cultures of Europe and Asia. Almost everywhere that pottery is produced with the aid of a potter’s wheel, men make it, but where it is made by hand, it is woman’s work. Here we meet another of those irrationalities in culture that so often confront the students. They are of historical derivation and document a concept in the study of culture known as *adhesion* — the fact that two apparently unrelated aspects of culture become associated and take on a functional relationship.

To understand this particular instance we return to the division of labour in early human society, when men hunted the larger game animals, while women, remaining nearer home were occupied with gathering activities. It will be remembered that this association is believed to be the historical and logical antecedent of the fact that while cultivation with hoe or digging stick is customarily woman’s work, ploughing is invariably allotted to man’s sphere of activity. In the case of pottery, it is not known whether this was initially the work of men or women, but everything points to the conclusion that it was women’s responsibility. The wheel was discovered during the Neolithic, probably in connection with transport. With the wheel it was possible to utilize domesticated animals to pull carts; and since as we have seen, the care of the larger domesticated forms is the concern of men. It is understandable how the manufacture and use of wheeled vehicles likewise became their province. When the utility of the wheel for pottery making became apparent, this activity also became a male task. Men are potters in the plough culture of Eurasia; elsewhere women make the pottery. The logic of this is the logic of

history, and its implications present some of the more difficult problems with which the student of culture must cope."

Among the Tharu, *Chait* (March–April) and *Baisakh* (April–May) are the months during which one is relatively free from work in the fields and so a time for subsidiary occupations. Thus, all pottery work is done during this period. Another reason for choosing this particular period is that, since the ponds begin to dry up, procurement of clay from the bottom of a pond becomes more convenient. Further, the dry and sunny climate during these months facilitates easy drying up of the mud articles. During this period one always finds women, young girls and children making different kinds of clay articles that would be needed throughout the year. If the need arises, clay articles can be made in the month of *Kartik* (October–November) too. No special training as such is provided and children, especially girls, acquire this skill on their own while helping their elders in the task. Every Tharu, thus, possesses the essential knowledge of clay work, as it is one of the necessities of their life that helps them save a lot of cash which would otherwise be spent on buying similar products. Knowledge of clay work and pottery skills are also important considerations while selecting a bride. Women adept in this art are both admired and envied by other women.

### Preparation and Processing

The basic material for making pottery — clay is easily available around every Tharu village from nearby ponds which are found in abundance around the area. This clay, commonly available in nature, is very plastic and can be modelled into a great variety of shapes, which will be retained during subsequent drying in the air. Pond clay is known by several names among the Tharu, *viz.*, *paror mitti*, *chitkar mitti* or *sheta mitti*. This clay is dug out by women and children from the bottom of the pond with bare hands or if necessary with the help of a shovel. It is

then put into big baskets and transported to the house. In some cases, when a lot of such clay is needed, the men go along with their women and help transport the clay in their *dunlops*.

On the unavailability of *chitkar mitti* sometimes *khudwa mitti*, *i.e.*, relatively soft and smooth soil, is dug out from the nearby areas and used. *Khudwa mitti* however cannot be used on its own and will have to be mixed with a part of *chitkar mitti*, cow dung, water and paddy husk. *Chitkar mitti* being very plastic helps give the object a shape that it later on retains; cow dung helps bind it and make it lighter in weight; while paddy husk prevents the object from cracking when dried.

Paddy husk is inevitably mixed with *chitkar mitti* since it provides longitivity to the product by saving it from cracking up after drying. Paddy husk being smooth in texture is preferred over any other husk. Wheat and other cereal's husk have a rough texture and therefore, their use is avoided as far as possible. Cowdung is mixed to the clay batter while making larger articles, such as *bakhari* and *dehari* because of its capacity to reduce the weight of the end product once dried, making it portable.

All pottery is hand made and no implements or tools are involved by the Tharu, while shaping clay. Sometimes, however, a stick may be used to make the straight edge of a square based object. No moulds are normally used for giving shape to the vessels. The only moulds being use were the *jhabia*, a basket, or the base of broken pitchers (that have been purchased from the market). These two are used as moulds for making *pehnas*, *i.e.*, lids for the *lohra*, and on some occasions to give shape to the base of a few pots. Thus, all shaping and structuring is done by the bare hands.

The preparation of the clay is a principal part of the potter's art, since before making an article the clay necessarily has to go through some initial preparation. After bringing clay from the pond, it is kneaded and pressed between the hands and any unwanted object, stones or pebbles are removed. This activity may be taken



as a substitute of sifting which cannot be done since the clay is usually wet when brought from the source, *i.e.*, a pond. In the next step the clay is mixed with paddy husk in the proportion of 1 : 1 (in volume). If required, extra water is added to provide an appropriate constancy for moulding the clay. This batter of clay, rice husk and water is then kneaded by the hands or feet to mix all its contents evenly. The preparation of clay is the same for making most clay articles. However, as mentioned earlier, while making huge storage bins, cowdung is mixed with the batter to reduce the weight of the end product.

There are no rituals or taboos attached to the making of clay articles as such. However, there exists a belief among the Tharu that if the making of a vessel is completed in the same month when its making was started, the articles stored in it, specially grains, will remain free from insects throughout the period of their storage. For this reason, construction of *bakharis* and *deharis*, *i.e.*, huge grain bins begins at the starting of the month so that they may be completed by its end. Also, Sunday is believed to be an auspicious day to start work on any clay article.

Once the clay is prepared, comes the actual task of manipulation and moulding it into different forms. Handmade pottery is fashioned in three ways world over, by moulding, by modelling and by building up. Moulded pottery, the least frequently encountered, is made by spreading, lining or coating a mould with clay; the mould might be made specially, or it might be some other object, such as a basket, gourd or old pot. In this way the pot is given the desired shape. Some primitive potters begin all their pottery in a basal support of this kind; others, though this is rare, keep the clay in a perishable mould until this is burned away in the firing. Modelling is a far more widely distributed technique in which a single lump of clay is modelled into the shape required by hand, often with the aid of simple tools for part or the whole of a vessel. The third technique is by building up the pot in one or more of a variety of ways, the most widely distributed of which is the coiling technique. This involves the use of long or short

rolls or pencils of clay which are arranged one upon another, and pressed into union, in such a way as to shape the pot from the base upwards. A very small coil pressed on with consistent force and at regular intervals can result in a pleasant design. Generally, however, all traces of the coiling are smoothed out, and no sign of the process remains in the finished pot. Other building methods involve the use of thick rings of clay, or slabs bent round to the form of a cylinder or of various combinations of the moulding and modelling methods.

Among the Tharu of Lakhimpur Kheri, all the three techniques of hand made pottery are used as per the convenience of the maker and the shape and size of the article to be made. Thus, lids or shallow vessels are made by the moulding techniques, small to medium size vessels by the modelling techniques and larger vessels by the building up techniques. Details of the techniques used while building up the different articles and vessels shall be given with the description of each article.

Once the prepared clay has been moulded, it is air dried. It is necessary that to avoid cracking, drying should proceed at a steady temperature and uniformly throughout the pot. When the clay has reached a leather-hard stage, polishing or burnishing is commonly undertaken to reduce porosity. This process consists in the application of mechanical friction to the surface with the aid of a smooth pebble or some other hard implement, to close the surface pores of the clay. Since the efficiency of burnishing depends on the fineness of the clay burnished, it is economical to give the pot a finer surface by dipping it in, or painting it with a slip of the finest portion of the clays used in building it. A similar method known as *parhorna* is adopted by the Tharu to give a finishing touch to their pottery. Once leather hard, the pottery items are smeared with the finest of slip made of *chitkar mitti*. This is smeared on to the pot with the help of a piece of cloth. While smearing the pot with this slip, pressure is lightly exerted on the pot from the inside to help close its pores. This process gives the end product a smooth and finished look.

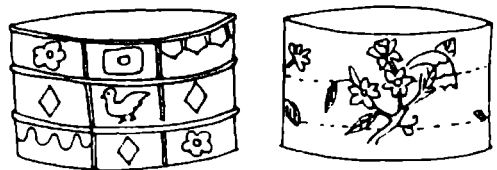
The last stage of pottery making is firing which has not yet been adopted by the Tharu. Pottery articles are sun baked here. The reason they offer for is that their ancestors never did so and therefore there must not be any great importance of firing. Secondly, they do not have the adequate knowledge and skill required for firing and any attempt in this direction may prove futile and would be a wastage of resources and time. Thirdly, the articles that they build have a life of about 8-10 years in any case, and therefore fire baking would only add to their labour and cost. As the fuel for firing accounts for much of the cost of pottery, it could be one of the reasons apart from those mentioned by the Tharu for not baking their pottery items. Since most of the pottery items made by the Tharu are quite big or huge, the fuel required for firing these would be out of any one's reach.

### Articles Produced

Tharu women manufacture several useful articles of clay. These articles are essentials and therefore every household invariably has 8-10 pottery items of various shapes and sizes. In many ways these are used as substitutes for metal containers that would otherwise have to be purchased from the market. Thus, these items prove to be important economic assets also. Most of the clay articles made by the Tharu serve as vessels for storage. Given below are the details of the different articles made out of clay by the Tharu.

### Bakhari

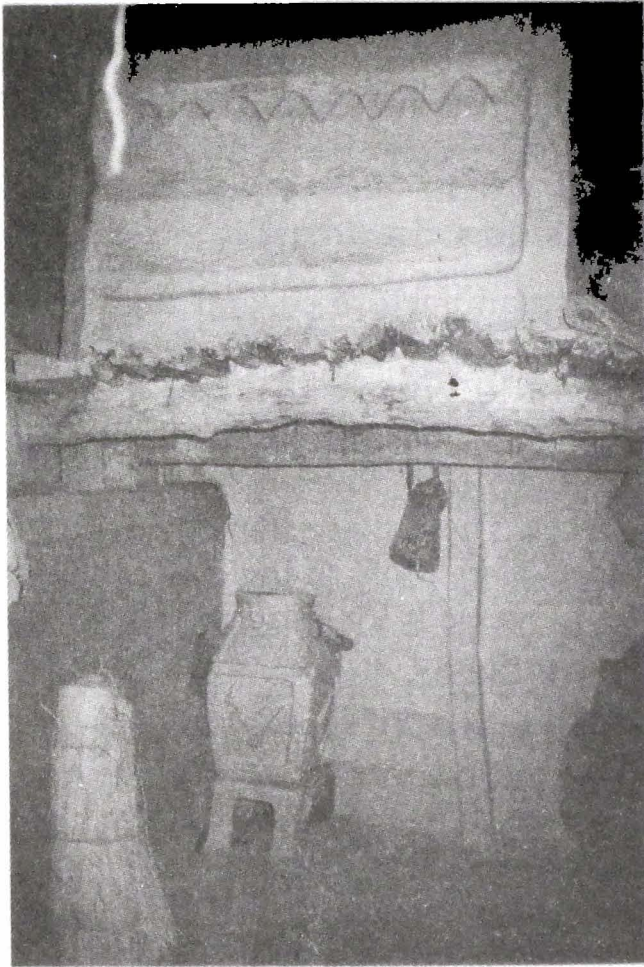
*Bakharis* are huge grain containers that are made by the Rana Tharu. Some cases were also observed where Katharia Tharu had *bakharis* constructed in their



Decorated Bakharis

houses. Dangaura Tharu never make these clay containers. The method of constructing a *bakhari* is similar

to that used by the Tharu to construct the walls of a hut. First of all a mat of *sentha* (reed) sticks is woven. It is then made to stand vertically on the floor forming a circular or square framework. To help keep this mat standing erect, sometimes it is tied with ropes to the poles nearby. Once construction is complete the ropes are cut off. The next step consists of plastering this framework with a mixture of clay, paddy husk and cow dung, in the approximate ratio of 2 : 1 : 1, both from inside and outside. Water is added to make the batter of a mouldable consistency. When partially dried up, this plastering is smeared with a thin coating of



Bakhari and Kuthia

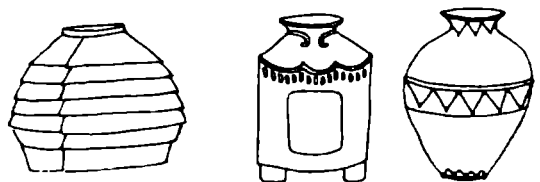
*chitkar mitti* and rice husk to give it a finished look. *Chitkar mitti* once dried gives an off white/cream colour shade, thus, facilitating painting on it.

There are no fixed dimensions (measurements) of the *bakhari*. It is built according to one's needs. The measurements noted range between 5-6 feet in depth and have a diameter/side of at least 6 feet. A *bakhari* has the capacity to store about 10 to 40 quintals of food grains depending on its size. According to the Tharu, grains can be stored safely for up to 4-5 years in these bins without its being infected by insects. *Bakharis* are generally build on the *pand* (mezzanine), but some Rana Tharu build a few *bakhris* on the ground too. Grains stored in the *bakhari* placed on the *pand* are meant to be consumed over a fairly long period, whereas those stored in the ground *bakhari* are generally meant for sale. Once the grains have been stored in the *bakhari* it is covered with a straw mat called *dhan ka paira*. This is then plastered with wet *chitkar mitti* and paddy husk and sealed to protect it from insects, rodents and moisture. When needed, a portion of this lid is opened up to take out the required amount of grains and then replastered.

It taken about 20-30 days to build a *bakhari* and generally has a life of about 10-20 years. A *bakahri* never breaks on its own. It is broken when one has to rebuild their hutment and along with the hutment new *bakharis* too are constructed. In the earlier times the number of *bakharis* in a Tharu hut determined their status since it was believed to symbolize prosperity. However, now this belief is gradually diminishing as it does not hold ground any longer. The reason being that now people do not believe in storing too much foodgrains. Instead, they prefer to sell the surplus in lieu of the cash money which would be used to acquire other commodities.

### Dehari/Kuthia

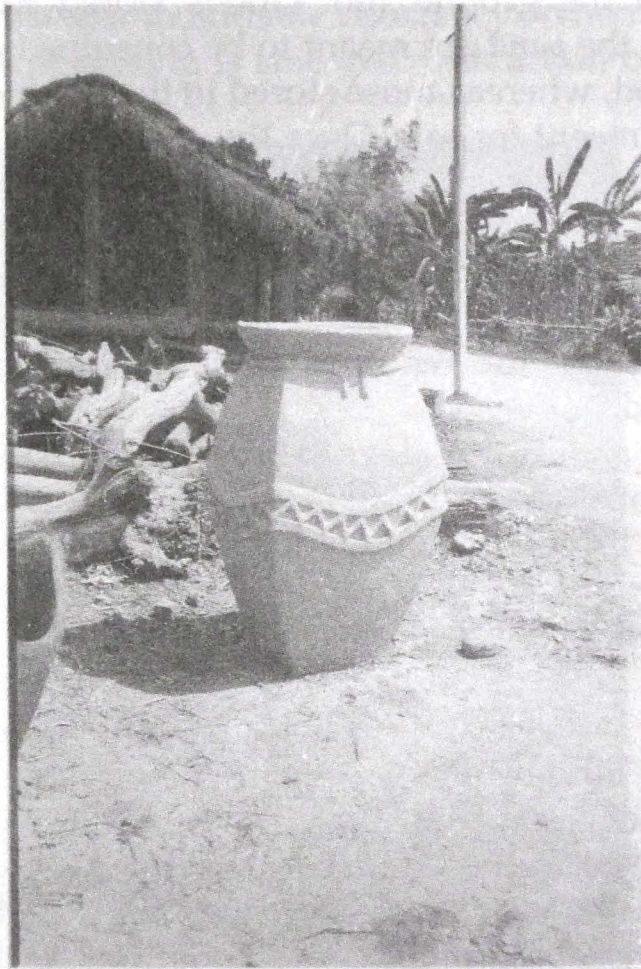
The *dehari* is an important grain bin found in Tharu houses. These are huge in size measuring form 4-6 feet in height and have a



Kuthia/Dehari of Various Shapes



proportionate width or diameter. *Deharis* are made by Dangaura and Katharia Tharu, whereas *kuthias* are made by the Rana. Both the Dangaura and Katharia make a large number of *deharis* of different shapes and sizes — rectangular, cubical, pitcher shaped, truncated triangular, etc. for storing their farm produce. Each household has at least 5-6 of such *deharis* in which they store wheat, rice, pulses, mustard, etc.



A Dehari

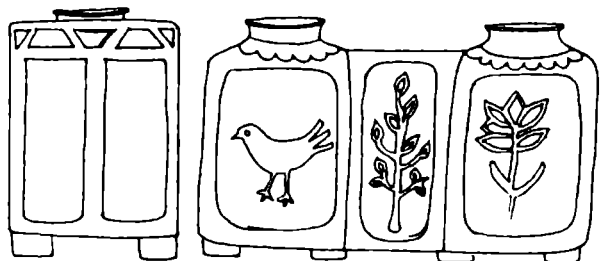
From the first day of *Chait*, most women start making *kuthias* or *deharis*. It takes about 10 to 20 days (depending on the size) to complete the construction of a single *dehari*, since it is prepared in stages. There exists a belief among the Tharu that once the construction of a *dehari* or *kuthia* is

started, it should be completed within the same month otherwise it would be *ashubh* (ominous) and the grains stored in it would either get soiled or infected with insects. Large size *deharis* are usually constructed while building the house itself (like the *bakharis*), in the place where these are ultimately to be placed since they weigh quite a lot and shifting from one place to another becomes a difficult task. Also, the huge size of a *dehari* would prevent its entry through the door, thus making it necessary to prepare it at the time of house construction itself. To deal with this problem, some Tharu have started constructing their *deharis* in separate pieces outside the house. Once ready, each part, known as a *pata*, is brought into the house and joined together to form the complete *dehari*. This method of making different parts and joining them up later on is also adopted when large size *deharis* are to be built, since due to the large size the wet clay would tend to sag under its own weight. *Deharis* or *kuthias* are made using a combination of the modelling and building up technique. The first step in the construction of any clay vessel, among the Tharu, is to construct the base. The base of the *dehari* is either square or circular in shape. Since the base is flat, it is made on the ground itself. A big lump of prepared clay is taken and spread on the ground, by beating it down with the hands, in the desired shape. This is generally done in such a way that the sides are thicker than the central portion. The help of a stick is taken to make the edges straight if the base is to be made square or rectangular. After this, pressure is exerted on the sides of the base where it is thicker, to create a raised area. This is further extended later by adding on more clay to form the walls of the *dehari*. Here, the building up technique is brought into use and clay in the form of elongated chunks are pressed and smeared to the clay below it, all around the edges which had been raised from the base. Since the *deharis* are large, these cannot be rotated around and so it is the potter who has to move round to continue building. When one such chunk of clay is used up, another is joined to its end and the work proceeds. This

process is continued till about 1-2 feet height is attained. The incomplete *dehari* is then left to dry up. Once it attains some strength and is leather hard, the building of its walls is continued. A notch like structure is generally made on the wall so that the next part that is being build up may easily fit onto the lower part. The area where the joints occur are once again coated with clay both from inside and outside, thus, providing it additional strength apart from giving it a smooth and finished look. When constructing relatively huge *deharis*, or making them outside and getting them into the house after construction, these are made in separate segments to facilitate the transporting. In such cases each part that is to form the wall of the *dehari* is built by the coiling (building up) technique. These are built in such a way that each part has its lower side wider than its upper end, as one moves towards the rim, thus facilitating the fitting of the different segments or *patas* onto each other.

On one side of the *dehari*, nearing its base, a hole known as *aan* is made. This is meant for taking out grains stored in it. Once the grains are taken out the hole is blocked by stuffing a cloth or some grass and smearing it with some clay. This is done to check the entry of rodents and insects. The mouth of the *dehari* is a wide circular or square opening that allows the easy pouring in and taking out of grains. The mouth is covered with a lid specially made for it. This lid known as *pehna*, *bharkhan* or *dhakkna* is of a similar shape as the mouth of the *dehari*, except that it is a bit larger in size.

Square shaped *deharis* are sometimes called *vajania* by the Dangaura. *Deharis* serve a double purpose since apart from providing a safe storage for grains, these also act as partition walls in the Tharu hutments. Sometimes two *deharis* are joined by a



Vajania

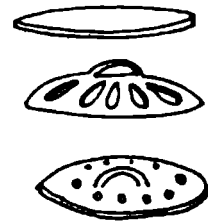
A Judia Dehari



common side or wall and are called *judia dehari*. These are specially made to serve the twin purpose of a partition as well as for storage. The Rana Tharu make *kuthias* or *kuthlas* that are similar to the *deharis* except that these are smaller in size, measuring from 3-5 feet in height and 2-4 feet in width or diameter. A point noted here was that Rana Tharu always make *kuthias* which have a height that is more than its width or diameter, whereas the *deharis* of the Dangaura and Katharia Tharu might have a width or diameter greater than or equal to its height. As noted earlier the Rana Tharu make *bakharis* to store a major part of their foodgrains. The *kuthia* is used to store foodgrains for daily use and hence are smaller in size. Sometimes the *deharis* or *kuthias* are made on clay stands called *goda* so that these might be out of the reach of rodents. The average life of a *dehari* or *kuthia* is 8-10 years. However, these might last even longer until ultimately broken down by the Tharu to make new ones.

### Pehna/Bharkhan/Dhakkna

The term *pehna* is used by the Rana and Katharia Tharu, whereas the term *bharkhan* is used by most Dangaura Tharu for a lid or cover made of prepared clay. This lid is also called *dhakkna* by some. Lids of different shapes are made according to ones need and the use that they



Pehna/Bharkhan

are to be put to. Some are simply flat circular or square shaped slabs made by the modelling techniques, some are similar to the flat *pehnas* but have their edges a bit raised, while others are made like shallow dishes, having a convex base. Many a times instead of modelling out a convex based *pehna*, the moulding technique is adopted. For moulding, the *jhabia* (a basket) or the lower part of a broken pitcher that has been purchased from the market, is used. In some cases, as when making a lid for the *bhamra* or *lohra*, slits or holes are made with the help of a sharp

instrument on the lid when the clay is leather hard. This is done to allow air into the *bhamra* or *lohra*. Sometimes, a handle is also modelled out into the lid for convenience of its handling.

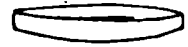
### Jhabra and Mohkar

The *jhabra* is a basin like container that can be made either by the modelling or moulding technique. It is approximately 18 inches in diameter and its depth varies from 6-18 inches.

The *mohkar* is a shallow plate with raised sides made by the modelling technique and has a diameter of about 12-18 inches. Both the *jhabra* and *mohkar* are used to keep paddy while dehusking (chaffing) it. It takes a day or two to make the *mohkar*, whereas it takes about 2-4 days to make a *jhabra*.



Jhabra



Mohkar

### Bhamra

The *bhamra* is a circular, pitcher shaped, container made by employing the modelling and coiling (building up) technique.

The base is made on a circular stand that is gradually worked up, to form the walls of the *bhamra*. The *bhamra* has a height of about 1.6-2 feet and a proportionate width. The greatest diameter of the *bhamra* is at its centre, with the mouth and base of

a lesser diameter. It takes about 4 to 7 days to make a *bhamra* since it has to be prepared in stages. The *bhamra* is put to several different uses, such as, to store grains, pulses, flour, salt, paddy chaff, wheat, etc. It is also used to keep utensils and to feed cattle fodder kept in it.

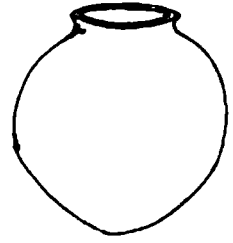


Bhamra

### Bhakri

This is a globular pitcher that is made by the building up technique and takes about a week to make. This is the only

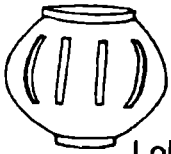
clay article that the Tharu fire, or rather try to bake by firing. Once the *bhakri* is leather hard, it is filled with burning cowdung cakes and allowed to dry with the heat of the burning cowdung. This pot is used to prepare and store *jar* (rice beer). However, this article is not very commonly found or used. After fermenting *jar* once in the *bhakri*, the *bhakri* is not reused for the same purpose. Instead, it is washed nicely and used to store grains or water.



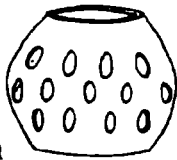
Bhakri

### Lohra/Laiya/Lei

*Lohras* are indigenous poultry houses made of clay. These are of two kinds — those that can be hung from the roof



Lohra



Hanging Lohra

and those that are to be kept on the ground. For making *lohras* cowdung is added to the clay to decrease its weight, thus making it portable. The number of *lohras* in a hutment depends on the number of poultry owned by the family. The *lohras* that can be hung from the roof are relatively small and basin shaped. These

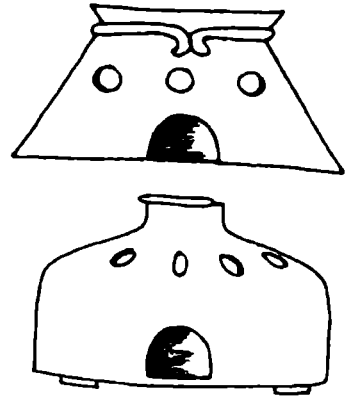
look like a globe cut into half and sometimes are oblong in shape instead of circular. It takes a day to make a hanging *lohra* and another day or two for it to dry. Such *lohras* are also called *laiya* by the Dangaura and *lei* by the Katharia. These are used for keeping the eggs. It is also used for housing chicks at night so that they are safe from other animals at a height. Generally the eggs are also hatched, while still hanging in the *lohra*. At night, the *lohra* is covered either with a *jhabra* (basket) during the summers or by a clay *pehna* having a number of round or elongated holes in it during the winters. These holes are made for air to pass freely through the lid.

The other kind of *lohra*, that is sometimes called *bhamra* because of its similar shape and size, is kept on the ground.

This generally has a stand constructed first on to which its base is made. It looks exactly like the *bhamra* except that when the clay is wet, holes or long slits are made in it so that air can pass in and out of it freely. The ground *lohra* is also covered at night either with a *jhabia* or a *pehna* that has holes in it. It takes about 5 to 7 days to make one such *lohra*. The basic difference between the two types are that the first, *i.e.*, hanging *lohra* is used for housing chicks, keeping eggs and for hatching them, whereas the second one, *i.e.*, ground *lohra* is used for housing 2 to 4 hens or ducks at night.

### Darba/Khulra

These are large poultry houses made on the ground that look like miniature huts. They are found in different shapes — square, rectangular, semicircular, *etc.* The *darba* generally does not measure less than 3 feet in width, 1.6-2 feet in depth and 2-2.6 feet in height. It takes about 8 to 10 days to make a *darba*, as it is called by the Rana and Dangaura Tharu of this area. The Katharia Tharu call it *khulra*. These

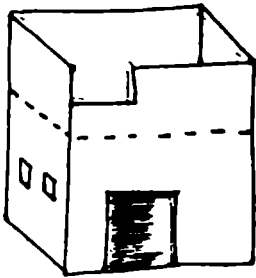


Darba/Khulra

poultry houses are situated in one corner of the covered verandah in front of the house or at a corner in the cattle byre. A combination of the modelling and coiling technique is used to make the *darba*. The lower side of the *darba* has a greater width compared to its top portion. The construction of the *darba* sometimes is started from the top instead of its base. The reason for this is that the upper portion being smaller in width or diameter, it is much more convenient to gradually build up the walls to cover a larger area. The *darba* does not have any base constructed and the ground acts as a floor for it. On one side of the wall an opening is made that serves as a door for the poultry. While the clay is still wet, a few small holes are made to allow free passage of air. The upper portion of the *darba*

also usually has an opening wide enough for one to put their hand inside and take out the poultry. This opening is covered during the night. Once completed and sun baked, the *darba* is put in proper position, and placed where it is ultimately to be situated. The door like opening is covered at night with a wooden slab called *patuli*.

### Khabra



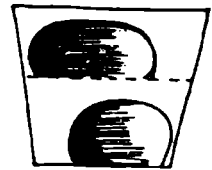
Khabra

This clay article is not found in all the houses. The *khabra* is box shaped and is divided into two chambers, upper and lower, by a clay slab. The upper chamber is open from the top and used for keeping utensils, while the lower chamber serves as a *lohra*. The lower chamber has an opening on the side that serves as a door for

the hen and is covered with a *patuli* at night. It also has a few holes on the other side to let in air. The *khabra* measures about 1.6 feet in length and breadth and 2-2.6 feet in height. This article too is made by using both the modelling and building up technique and it takes around 8-10 days to prepare a single *khabra*.

### Andhari

This is quite similar to the *khabra* and is made for keeping small iron tools and implements in one chamber and broken pieces of iron in the other. Its width is usually smaller at the base line and wider on the top. On one side of both

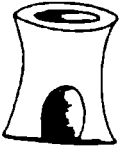


Andhari

the upper and lower chamber, three fourth of the wall is open so that implements can easily be put in and taken out.

### Aukharan

The *aukharan* is a cylindrical object used as a stove for preparing *jar* (rice beer). The *aukharan* is divided into an

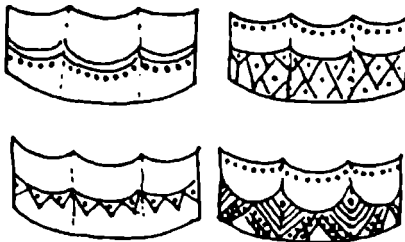


Aukharan

upper and lower chamber with a clay slab that has several holes in it. On one side of the lower chamber, an opening is left so that fuel for burning may be put through it. The top portion of the upper chamber has a slab with a large round hole in it for the base of the *bhakri*, containing all ingredients for preparing *jar*, to fit on it. This upper slab thus works as a burner, with the flames from below passing through the perforated slab and reaching upto the *bhakri*. Some Tharu make the *aukharan* with a square base and top, instead of a cylindrical one. The *aukharan* is found in all houses where *jar* is prepared and is used in place of the usual *chulha* since the preparation of *jar* requires it to be on slow fire for several hours. An *aukharan* usually has a width of about 1-1.6 feet and a height of 1.6-2 feet. It takes about 10 to 15 days to construct an *aukharan* which has a life of about 10 to 15 years.

## Chulha

The *chulha* is stove built by all the Tharu for cooking. It is made by the modelling technique using a lump of prepared clay. The *chulhas* are semi-lunar in shape and are a bit raised at the two ends and in the centre of the curve. In big size *chulhas* instead of three raised areas, five raised areas are made. Sometimes two *chulhas* are attached to each other with a common, but thicker wall. A few cases were also noted where bricks were plastered with clay and given the shape of a *chulha* to provide it with extra strength and a longer life. It takes only a few hours to build a *chulha* and has an average life of 2 to 3 years after which it is discarded by the owner.



Chulha

## Barosi/Lei/Nei

The term *barosi* is used by Rana Tharu, *lei* by Katharia and *nei* by the Dangaura for an earthen pot that acts as a kind of



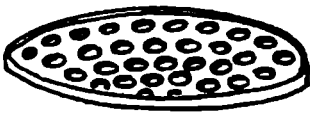
Barosi/Lei

fireplace in which smouldering coal or burning pieces of wood are kept. It is used by the Tharu during the winters to keep their limbs warm. It is

lit up in the morning and keeps burning throughout the day and night. It is also helpful to take fire for cooking. At night, the smoke emitting from it serves as a mosquito repellent. The *barosi* is a shallow basin like pot about 9 inches to 1 foot in diameter and has a maximum height of 6 inches. It takes only a few hours to prepare this object. Sometimes a stand is made at its base. The moulding technique is used in making the *barosi*. Either a *jhabia* or the base of a broken pitcher serves as the mould for giving shape. When no one is sitting next to a *barosi* that has fire in it, is covered with a *pehna*, which might or might not have holes in it, to protect the fire from wind, etc. This is done so as to avert the setting up of any object or the hut ablaze.

## Jhanjha/Rahani

This is a round disc shaped perforated earthen structure that resembles a *sieve* and is used for drying fish. A *rahani*



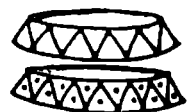
Jhanjha/Rahani

can be constructed in a day. While still wet, several holes are made in the clay with the finger or a thick stick.

Fish are kept on the *rahani* which is then placed on the *chulha*. In a few minutes the water from the fish seeps out and the heat passing through the holes dries up the fish. In this way the fish can be preserved for a long time.

## Aahari

It is a ring like earthen object that is used as a stand for keeping utensils after cooking food, while hot. An *aahari* is

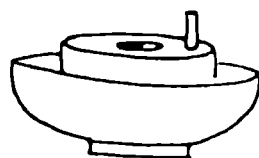


Aahari

constructed is the matter of just a few minutes using the modelling technique.

## Chakki

The *chakki*, similar to those all over rural India, is a grinding stone in which wheat, rice and pulses are ground. The lower part that is made up of clay is called *chakkia*. The *chakkia* is a deep basin like object about 2-2.6 feet in diameter with a height of about 1 feet. There is a stand on which its basin is constructed thus making it convenient to lift. On this basin a round disc like stone with a hole in the centre and a wooden handle fitted on one of its side is placed. This is called the *chakki*. Grains are put through the hole in the centre of the stone disc and the handle is rotated around to grind the grains. The ground grains are collected in the *chakkia* from where these are lifted for use. It takes about a week or so to build a *chakkia* and has an average life of 6-8 years.



Chakki

## Goda

This is an important piece of furniture found in every Tharu house. All kinds of stands irrespective of shape and size are known as *goda* among the Tharu. These stands vary in shape, size and use too. A few stands have four legs, some three, some two while others have a single elongated foot.



Goda of Various Shapes

However, in every case it has a flat platform at the top on which different kinds of articles can be kept. *Godas* are used



for keeping the *dehari*, *kuthia*, *bhamra*, *lohra*, etc. on a higher level so that its contents are out of the reach of rodents, or animals. A *goda* that is made specially to keep drinking water pots is called a *pandhanna*, similarly, a *goda* used specially for keeping *diyas* is called *deech* and a *goda* that resembles a high table that is used mainly for keeping quilts is called *sajna*. All *godas* are made by using a combination of the modelling and building up technique. It takes anything from a single to 15 days to build a *goda* depending on its size, shape and the kind of designs which are being made on it.

## Toys

Previously the Tharu used to make several kinds of earthen toys, e.g., horses, camels, warriors on horseback, agricultural implements, utensils etc. for their children to play with. However, this practice has now been given up to a great extent due to the easy availability of cheap plastic toys. Clay toys made by the Tharu break easily since they are not baked in the fire. On the other hand those available in the market are quite durable which is another factor that has led to disinterest in the making of clay toys. By this statement however, it should not be assumed that the making of clay toys does not exist at all. On the contrary, while clay work is in progress, children could always be found taking away a portion of the prepared clay for making toys to play with. Generally the toys being made relate to the objects of their daily life and surroundings. Thus, one generally finds little boys making clay tractors, threshers, dunlops and jeeps, whereas girls are seen making little houses, utensils, dolls and different animals and birds. The children are not provided any formal training in this venture of making toys and learn to do so on their own by the trial and error method. The way in which the children make toys, their perfection in proportion, symmetry and minutes details are noticeable features that no doubt help them later in life in other such artistic endeavors.

Though most of the Tharu requirement for containers are met by the clay vessels made by them, a few fire baked pottery items are bought from the market too. The *ghalla* or *gagri* is a globular pitcher used for storing drinking water and one that is found in nearly every house, specially during the summers, since water remains cool in it. The *karo* is small round container with a small pipe protruding on one side and is quite similar to the *karwa* found in rural areas. It is usually very well polished and has a capacity of storing 2-3 liters of liquid. It is used for serving water, *jar* and other liquids. Sometimes a big round pitcher with a relatively big mouth is bought and used in place of the *bhakri* for formanting and preparing *jar*. Apart from the above mentioned items some of the Tharu buy small earthen lamps or *diyas*. All the above mentioned items are fire baked earthen vessels which the Tharu themselves cannot make. Therefore, these are bought from the Hindu *kumhars* (potters) who reside in the nearby areas. These are also the items used during different ceremonies in the Tharu society. None of the sun baked clay items are used for any ceremony. The *gagri* and *karo* are used during marriage ceremonies to serve *jar* and water and a big *gagri* is used for cooking food at the *roti-pani* ceremony that is held after a death. The *gagri* used during this ceremony is not reused, instead, it is left at the outskirts of the village or in the jungle.

## Decoration

The Tharu love for art and beauty could easily be noticed due to the fact that most of their daily use objects are lavished with different forms of beautification. In keeping with this, some of the clay articles made by them are also extensively beautified by drawing, engraving and relief work in a way quite similar to their hutments. The most extensively decorated clay objects are the *dehari* and *kuthia*. The *bakhari*, *aahari*, *chulha* and *goda* are the other objects that are frequently beautified.

Once the basic structure of any clay object is ready and it is dried to a nearly leather hard state, its rough areas are scraped off. After this, it is smeared with a thin film of *chitkar mitti* mixed in water. This is applied to the object with the help of a piece of cotton cloth. Since the Tharu do not fire their clay vessels, the colours applied there on do not change. After drying up, these objects acquire a bright cream or off white colour. The process of smearing a vessel for providing a finished and glazed look is called *parhorna*.

Clay objects are either decorated by engravings or bringing out designs in relief. Rarely does one find two dimensional drawings and paintings on the vessels. Designs are made when the clay is still wet. An outline of the desired design is made on the pot/object with the help of a stick and after this relief work is done by either pinching up the wet clay with the thumb and index finger or by making thin pencil rolls and lightly pressing them on to the design. If engraving has to be done, the design is pressed down hard with the finger or a blunt stick, thus creating a depressed outline. There is no special significance associated with any particular design, although as mentioned in the previous chapter zig-zag motifs termed as *kundrukku*, *phulwa* (flowers) and birds such as the crow, cock, duck and peacock are considered auspicious (*shubh*). Apart from these, abstract designs, geometric designs, human figures and animals such as elephant, horse, deer, etc. are generally shaped. Clay frames called *naha* (described in the previous chapter) are extensively made. In the centre of these frames sometimes designs are also made. No preference for any particular designs was noticed, except for the fact that the Rana Tharu were found to prefer geometric and abstract motifs while the Katharia preferred floral and anthropomorphic designs. The Dangaura Tharu on the other hand, show a lack of interest in such artistic work and never decorate any of their clay objects. All the designs mentioned are made on the *dehari*, *kuthia* and *bakhari*. On the *chulha* and *aahari*, only engraved designs are made and that too only among the Katharia. The Rana Tharu do not decorate their *chulha* or

*aahari*. The *goda* on the other hand are the most artistically designed and shaped objects, both among the Rana and Katharia Tharu. A few single stand *godas* can match up to any modern stand or side lamp. These are decorated by using both the engraving and relief method of designing. There is no specific criteria as to which design should be made on which article. It depends completely on the sweet will and fancy of the artist as to what design is to be made. As evident, most of the designs are inspired by the surroundings. However, now a days designs are copied from art books that are used by the school going children. The designs, once made, are further beautified by adding pieces of mirror and colours, both natural and chemical. Just like designs, no ritual or symbolic value is associated with any colour. Rampant use and preference for natural colours such as *geru* (ochre) and *pili mitti* (a special natural clay that is yellow in colour) over chemical colours available in the market has been observed because of their longer life span. Chemical colours purchased from the market fade away within a month or two and therefore these are not preferred by all. These colours are bought from the market in the form of powder or colour cakes. Among these, the colours generally bought are pink, blue and yellow. Other colours are made by mixing two or more colours. Powder colour is mixed in cold water and colour cakes in hot water before applying on the design. A spoonful of *lahi* (mustard) oil is added to half a bowl of colour to add to its life and also provide a shine. Now a days some affluent Tharu have started using oil based paints for decoration, because such colours not only last for very long but also give extra lustre and shine to the design. For colouring, cottonwool or a *putna*, i.e., a piece of cotton cloth tied onto a stick is used as a brush.

Description of the clay articles made by the Tharu clearly indicate their significance in the Tharu life, since making of these articles is a tedious job. The main problem that the women have to face in this context relates to transportation of *chitkar mitti*, for preparing clay objects, from the pond which is generally quite far away from the house. Women

accompanied by children have to carry this clay in baskets over their heads and cover long distances on foot which is no doubt quite tiring. If there is a need for clay during the rainy season the difficulty is further compounded since leeches (blood sucking parasites) found in and around the pond stick to their legs and are very painful to remove. Furthermore, since all clay articles are to be baked in the sun, the women have to work outdoors for long hours in the scorching heat during the summers. In spite of all these difficulties the Tharu women keep making these objects because it helps them in maintaining an economic stability. The making of these objects might not necessarily require much skill, yet a lot of labour would be needed in their manufacture which, if paid in cash, will be beyond the means of an average Tharu. Moreover, the practice of paying in grains, that exists even today to a certain extent, makes it an inconvenient transaction since the grains demanded in exchange for the big earthenware would amount much in excess of the usual cash value. This is the main reason why making of these earthen vessels is still a household occupation among the Tharu of this area. Since every woman makes clay objects needed for her house, these objects made by them are generally not traded in the market. This is also the reason why knowledge and skills in making clay objects were considered an essential criteria while selecting a girl for marriage, and lack of this knowledge brought a bad name to the girl and her family. Today, although no stress is laid on this skill, every girl learns to make clay objects of her own accord since the skill would help her later in life to fulfil on her own household needs smoothly.

A remarkable fact about the clay work of the Tharu, that adds to its beauty, is the sureness with which these people shape their vessels. Not only do they achieve a perfect circular form without the use of any measuring device, but their vessels are so shaped as to be objects of aesthetic as well as utilitarian value. This quality of aesthetic form arises only after gradual training, over the years, yields

motor skills that permit the play of such creative ability as the makers of the objects might have acquired.

Thus, it is clear that clay work has a special significance among the Tharu household activities. Every household undertakes the preparation of clay potteries and big vessels for daily use as well as for storing grains and other items. The material used for making these items are mainly pond clay and husk which are available locally. The life of the different articles however varies. Clay work is a labour intensive process which is easily available within the household. The Tharu, tend to beautify their pottery and vessels by making imprints of natural objects found in their surroundings such as flowers, leaves, trees, birds *etc.* However, there is generally no specific rule regarding any motif or design or even colouring. The only thing that is most often visible is the convenience in terms of designing as well as material cost.

# 5

## *Basketry and Miscellaneous Crafts*

Braiding and interlacing are two of the oldest handicrafts known to man. The different stages of their development can be followed easily. They lead from the simple joining of palm leaves, bast strings, and grass blades to the final development of the loom and the multitextured materials the loom produces. Although we speak of basket 'weaving', this term must not be intermixed with the art of the loom, which appears only in advanced cultures, while braiding is known everywhere.

Basket-work is a convenient, though ill-defined term, including not only actual baskets, but also wattlework, matting (which is often indistinguishable from woven fabric), and ornamental plaitwork. Basket work is linked on the one hand to netting and knitting, but differs from these in the absence of mesh or pins, and (except in single element work), in the use of two or more sets of interlacing elements or wefts. It differs from weaving by the more general use of unspun material (strands that are not twisted), and by the absence of a frame or loom. The simple art of joining plant fibres into regular patterns to produce the many containers, mats, sieves, and other gadgets characteristic of basketry does not require the use of tools other than an occasional awl or needle of wood, bone or any metal.

It is probable that baskets and mats were made earlier than textiles, but there is no direct evidence on this point, and there are textiles as ancient as any dated remains of baskets or mats yet found. The earliest definite evidence of

both weaving and basketry comes from the Neolithic sites in Egypt and Iraq dating back to 5,000 B.C.

Basketry and mats are generally distinguished from weaving, but it is often difficult to know where to make the division. Baskets are vessels made by hand by interlacing two or more sets of strands in different ways, and these ways are sometimes closely similar to weaving. Mats may be made in a similar manner to basketry, but are often true weaves.

By about 5,000 B.C., basketry and weaving had already developed in distinct directions. The material of basketry is generally unspun vegetable fibres, though hand twisted cords are found in some types of baskets, especially for handles and bases, and are sometimes used in matting. Obviously, the fibres used depend on the local vegetation.

Another use of the plant fibre is in the form of cords or twine, binding materials, which play a paramount role in many primitive cultures. Snares and nets consist of strings, and wooden poles have to be tied together to build a house. Whether the plant fibres are obtained after complicated rotting process or twined and twisted together in their original state, they are among the most important materials of most primitive cultures. The making of cord and rope by plaiting or twisting fibres, hair and strips of hide presumably began in Palaeolithic times, since stone age man needed cordage for fishing equipment and for the construction of traps.

Baskets, serving simple and day to day needs, changed little through the ages, but textiles, with their decorative value and their various uses, have developed over the ages. Earlier however, the two techniques were much closer to each other than observed now. Strands of threads were earlier interlaced by hands, whether for mats, baskets or textile. Only with the fuller development of the loom did the techniques draw apart. The earliest types of both weaving and basketry are in regular use even today in different parts of the world. However, the complicated primitive patterns and techniques have disappeared with the development of modern looms.



The Tharu retain more or less self sufficiency so far as their economic needs are concerned. Though they are in the process of transformation, they engage themselves in most of the occupations which are performed by the different artisan castes in the Hindu social system. The important supplementary occupations of the Tharu include the making of baskets, hand fans, mats, fishing traps, fishing nets, ropes and with the help of these ropes weaving of cots, *etc.* and carpentry. Most of these activities are either seasonal or engaged in, in one's spare time, when one is free from the farm related activities. Every Tharu family thus fulfills its needs for containers or fishing implements, *etc.* on their own. No specialization of these activities has taken place till date among the Tharu. If they give up these subsidiary occupations and industry, which have proved extremely useful to them, simply because specialized workers can undertake them with greater advantage, the result is not likely to be beneficial for them. On the contrary, the introduction of artisan elements and the greater dependence on these in the near future will in fact prove to be detrimental to the Tharu.

Basketry and its related crafts are not only important because of their usefulness to the Tharu but also because these depict the Tharu love for beauty and colours. The Tharu excel in the art of basketry and its related crafts. The manipulation of different materials in making these articles and the various designs woven on them spell out their skill in using natural materials with efficacy and shows the extent to which they have mastered these crafts for their use.

### (A) Basket Work

By far the most important braided or interwoven objects are the many and varied basket containers which the Tharu make and use to keep their belongings. Both men and women of all the three Tharu sub-groups make baskets in their spare time. The finer and more intricately designed baskets using the coiling technique are made by women

whereas those using the other techniques or rough and coarse materials are made by men. Like all other crafts, basketry too is learnt by the children gradually by observing and assisting their elders engaged in the pursuit. Boys and girls of 9-10 years (*i.e.*, as soon as they are capable of handling the material) are seen sitting next to men and women respectively while they are busy weaving baskets, eager to get an opportunity to try their hand at the craft. Thus, by observing, practising and a bit of assistance and guidance from their elders, both boys and girls master the craft very soon. There is no formal training given to the children in the craft whatsoever, nor are any rituals performed when the child is about to weave his/her first basket.

Basketry is taken as an essential skill, the knowledge of which is necessary for every Tharu for their survival. However, it must not be assumed that the Tharu take the craft very lightly. Men and women who are deft in making beautiful and innovative designs are admired and respected by all for their skill.

All materials used in making the baskets are easily available in the nearby forest area. Different materials are used for making different kinds of baskets. Materials used are *baans*, *dudhi laar*, *rangwa laar* or *rangoi* and wild grasses such as *kans*, *poonja* and *moonj*. *Baans* [*Dendrocalamus strictus* (Roxb.) Nees] both green and brownish-yellow are used in basket making. Reed 0.5 to 1.5 cms. in diameter, having a smooth texture is used. *Rangwa laar* or *rangoi* [*Tiliacora acuminata* (Lamk.) Miers (Menispermaceae)] and *dudhi laar* [*Ichnocarpus frutescens* (L.) Ait. (Apocynaceae)] are stalks that are used for making baskets when fresh, *i.e.*, green. On drying *dudhi laar* is somewhat light brown in colour and has a rough texture whereas *rangwa laar* has a smooth texture and is coca-cola colour when dried. Of the two, *rangwa* is stronger and thus, preferred over *dudhi*. *Poonja*, *kans* and *moonj* are all grass blades that are used for making coiled baskets. *Poonja* [*Cajanus cajan* (L.) Millsp. (Fabaceae)] being a bit rough in texture is used as the foundation or filling for making the coil of a basket,

whereas *moonj* [*Saccharum bengalense* Retz. (Poaceae)] and *kans* [*S. spontaneum* L. (Poaceae)] being smooth are used as the sewing strands. *Moonj* being considered stronger is preferred over *kans*. *Poonja* is yellowish brown in colour whereas *kans* and *moonj* when dry are light yellow coloured.

All materials for basket-making is collected from the forest area by the men, and women often given men directions for particular material according to the type of basket they intend to make or the pattern they propose to weave. Collection of material is not an easy job. In the process one's hands often get severely cut or blistered which is painful. The sickle is used to cut down the different materials from the forest. Sometimes women too go to the banks of the rivers or ponds where the wild grasses used in basket making are found in abundance. These grasses are collected in large quantities and stored since they grow to their greatest height during the months of *Kuwar* and *Kartik*. Bamboo is collected from the forest and is also grown near every house and cut when the need arises.

However, before these materials are put to use they require some processing. All the above mentioned materials are soaked in water for 5-6 hours before use. Usually it is convenient to soak them over night for using the next morning. Once soft enough these are split up to the desired thickness, and the strips thus made are polished with a moist cloth to remove the roughness of the surfaces. This activity of making strips and polishing is done by the men only, since it is considered a rough job, one that the women do not consider worthwhile doing. For making coiled baskets with different designs on them, *moonj* has to be coloured to bring out the designs. For this different colours are purchased from the market for Rs. 2-3 per 100 grams. To colour the grass, first the colour powder is mixed in boiling water and the grass blades soaked in it for about an hour or so and then dried in the sun.

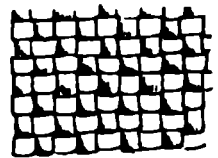
Among the Tharu different techniques are used for making different kinds to baskets, mats, traps, etc. But before mentioning the techniques used by the Tharu and

the baskets that they make with it, it would be purposive to provide a brief description of all the known techniques of basket work and a little detailed one of those used by the Tharu. Basket-work may be categorized into two main groups — *plaited* (also termed as woven work), and *coiled*.

### (a) Plaited Work

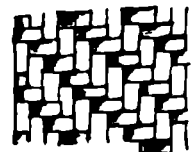
It is made by the crossing of two or more sets of elements, called by analogy with weaving, warps and wefts. The series of strings or rushes stretched are called warp and the one woven through is the weft. However, when the warps are indistinguishable by rigidity or direction, both sets of elements may be called wefts. The main varieties of plaited basket-work are :

(i) *Check* : in which the warp and weft pass over and under each other singly, at right angle, as in darning or weaving.



Check

(ii) *Twilled* : in which each weft passes over and then under two or more warps, producing diagonal bands or lines across the basket. By using varying width and colour contrasts an endless variety of effects can be achieved.



Twilled

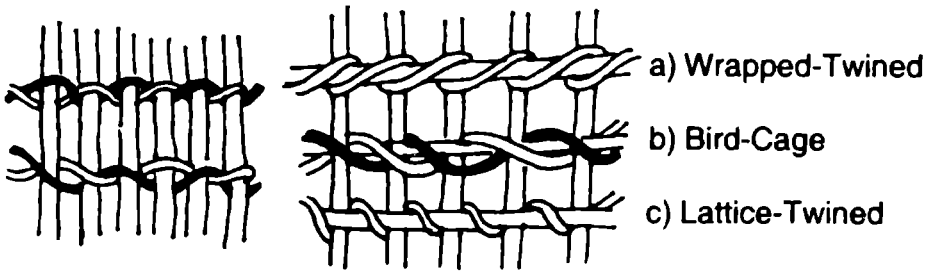
(iii) *Wrapped* : in which flexible wefts are wrapped round (take a circular bend right round) each, or a bunch of, warp in passing, *i.e.*, over two and under one warp.



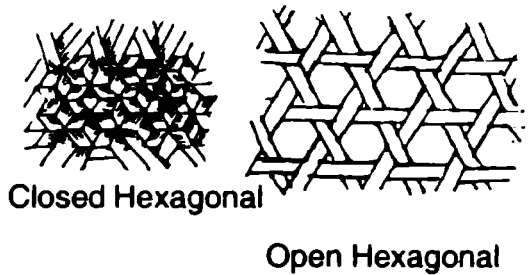
Wrapped

(iv) *Twined* : when two or more wefts pass alternately in front of and behind each of the warps, crossing them obliquely. This technique sometimes called twined plait or twined weave, is halfway between a plait and a weave. There are many varieties in twined work, plain-twined (just described), wrapped-twined, and "bird-cage" or lattice-work in

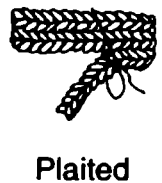
which the foundation consists of both horizontal and vertical elements, often rigid, at the crossings of which the weft/wefts may be twined, or wrapped. In finished specimens wrapping and twining are often indistinguishable on the outer surface, though usually distinguishable on the reverse side.



(v) *Hexagonal Work* : in which the wefts, instead of being horizontal and vertical, are worked in three directions, forming in open work hexagonal spaces, and in close work six-pointed stars.



(vi) *Plaited* : in which plaits are made separately, and then sewn into the required shape in such a way that the joint does not show.



In wicker-work or stake frame basketry, the warps or stakes are rigid, and the more flexible wefts or rods bend in and out. Check twilled, and twined strokes may be used, but this ancient craft has its own particular vocabulary.

**(b) Coiled Work**

This is the earliest, and by far the most important, form that has continued to the present day in most parts of the world. This kind of work is not linked with weaving, but with sewing, and it is usually done with a pointed implement. Coiled work requires two elements, the coil or

core, and the wrapping or sewing strip. The core, usually consisting of a bundle of grass, rushes, or fibres, is coiled spirally in the shape required, the different layers being fastened together by a sewing strip. The work always begins at the base, and there are three chief varieties of centre found: a simple coil or snail; a rosette, with radiating stitches; and the four-cross, with centre of four pieces of palm or reed laid crosswise, with the free ends split and drawn into the coil: A few variations in the method of wrapping are distinguishable.

(i) *Simple Oversewn Coil* : Each stitch passes over the new portion of the foundation coil, and pierces a portion of the coil below.



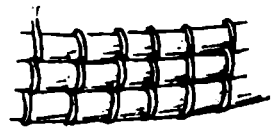
Simple Oversewn Coil

(ii) *Furcate Coil* : If the new stitch splits the stitch in the preceding coil, a forked effect is produced, having a superficial suggestion of chainstitch or crochet. The stitches usually lie closely side by side, covering the foundation.



Furcate Coil

(iii) *Bee-Skep Coil* : When the stitches are spaced widely apart, connecting the coil at intervals, each stitch passing just behind, and appearing to emerge from, the stitch in the coil below.



Bee-Skep Coil

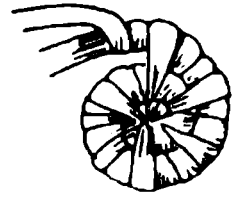
(iv) *Figure of Eight* : The surface shows the same effect as simple oversewn coiling, but each stitch passes behind, down and out under the preceding coil. Also called "Navaho".



Figure of Eight

(v) *Lazy Squaw* : The conspicuous feature of this is the long stitch passing over two coils at once. The sewing passes in front, up and over the new coil,

winding right round it once, twice, or more times as desired; then it passes behind and down under the preceding coil, and right up over the new-coil, making the characteristic long stitch.



Lazy-Squaw

(vi) *Crossed Figure of Eight or "knot stitch"* : The stitch passes in front, up and over the new coil, and behind, down and under the preceding coil, as in the long stitch of "lazy squaw", but the sewing is brought out between the two coils, to the right of the last stitch, which it crosses, giving the appearance of a row of knots between the successive coils.



Crossed Figure of Eight

(vii) *Cycloid or Single-element* : This work may be grouped with coiled work, but there is no foundation, the coils, usually of cane or similarly independent material, being coiled or looped into each other.



Cycloid

For making of baskets the Tharu use the plaiting, wicker-work and coiling techniques which include different patterns such as check, twilled, wrapped, twined, simple oversewn, furcate, and lazy squaw. Although most of the basket making is characterised by the fact that it is done by manipulating movements of the hand, for making coiled baskets an iron needle, about 3-4 inches long called *suja* and an awl known as *chedna* are used. A majority of the Tharu baskets, including all ceremonial baskets are made using the coiling technique which is considered relatively easy compared to the other techniques. Though easy to make, the coiling technique is a time taking activity, whereas the other techniques despite being relatively difficult, take lesser time to make. All coiled baskets are made using the simple oversewn method. However, for making designs, sometimes the furcate and lazy squaw

methods are adopted. The base either has a snail or rosette pattern, depending on the wish of the basket maker and the design to be made. Among the Tharu, all coiled baskets are made by the women folk, while those made using plaiting or wicker work are generally made by men. The materials chosen for making baskets depends on the technique to be employed in making the particular basket as well as the use it is to be put to. Thus, for baskets made with coiling technique, wild grass blades such as *poonja* or *moonj* are used, while those having a twilled or check pattern are made of bamboo splints or *laar*.



Various Tharu Coiled Baskets

Basket making is a seasonal activity, not one that can be performed the whole year through. *Chaumasa* or the months of *Sawan Bhadon* are considered the most appropriate time for basket making because due to the moisture in the air the materials used for basketry, *i.e.*, *moonj*, *rangwa laar*, *etc.*, get soft and pliable, facilitating manipulation. Thus, during the rainy seasons basket making seems to be the main preoccupation of the Tharu men and women apart from agricultural activities. However, if the need arises, baskets are made in the month



of *Kartik* also. Basket work is never done during the summers since the material to be used becomes very dry and brittle, breaking at the slightest attempt to manipulate it. Though only a seasonal activity, basket making is one eagerly looked forward to by the Tharu, since it gives vent to their creative urges. Depending on the size of the basket and the intricacy of the design to be woven, it may take from a day to about a month to make a coiled basket. To make a plaited or wicker work basket, on the other hand, it takes only a few hours, *i.e.*, 1 to 6 hours, once again depending on its size and shape.

Every Tharu household possesses at least 10-12 different kinds of baskets. Many are the shapes and designs worked out by the Tharu on the baskets. The size and design vary according to the use which these are put to and the same kind of baskets may not be found in all houses. Baskets found among the Tharu may be clubbed into two broad categories — baskets used daily and baskets used on special ceremonial occasions.

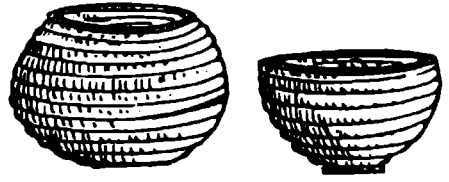
### Ordinary Baskets

For making different kinds of ordinary or daily use baskets, different techniques are used — coiling, plaiting and wickerwork. Daily use baskets are never decorated. However, when a ceremonial basket gets worn out and is put to daily use, it may have designs on it and may even be decorated. Ordinary baskets are used for different purposes, *e.g.*, keeping cooked food, grains, chaff, clothes, toilette items, for getting clay from the pond, keeping dung, throwing garbage, *etc.* All baskets are known in general as *daliya*. However, according to their shape, size and the use these might be named differently. Given here is a brief description of the ordinary baskets and the uses that these are put to.

### Bhaunka/Pitara/Dalwa

It is made by employing the simple oversewn coiling technique and has a snail base. *Poonja* is used for making

the spiral coil or foundation with *moonj* as the sewing strip. This basket is globular in shape generally having a diameter of about 10-12 inches at its mouth (opening). It is made in such a fashion that its



Pitara/Bhaunka/Dalwa

greatest width is at the middle and it decreases uniformly up to form the mouth and down to the base. The basket may also be in the shape of a globe cut into half. In such a case the greatest diameter is at the mouth and is generally 20-24 inches wide. This basket is used for storing foodgrains such as rice, wheat, pulses, etc. The Rana Tharu call this basket *bhaukia* or *dalwa*, the Katharia call it *bhaunka*, while the Dangaura call it *bhunka* or *pitara*. Giving an average time of 3-4 hours per day, the making of this basket takes 10-15 days to complete. Starting from the base, *poonja* is coiled up, a *moonj* strip is put into the eyehole of the *suja* and used for sewing the coil. The spiral foundation (coil) is put in the desired shape and each stitch is passed over a new portion of the coil piercing a portion of the coil below. This process continues till the desired shape and size of basket is obtained. If the *chedna* is used, a hole is pierced into the preceding coil and the *moonj* strip passed through it. Once a strand of the *moonj* is completely coiled it is pressed into the coil and a new strand is used beginning from the same place.

## Dalia

This is a basket similar to the *bhauka* / *pitara*, but smaller in size having a maximum diameter of 12-15 inches at the middle portion and a mouth of about 8-9 inches. It takes about a week to make this basket which is used for keeping toilette items such as comb, oil, collyrium, etc. It is also used by children for playing.



Dalia

### Tupna/Tokri

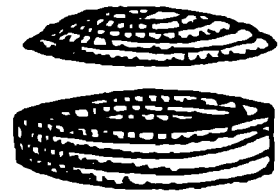
This basket made of *poonja* and *moonj* or *kans* using the coiling technique, has a wide mouth 10-12 inches in diameter and a base of about 5 inches. The basket thus has a nearly triangular outline when seen from the side. Sometimes a stand is also made at the base. It takes about 7 to 10 days to complete a *tupna*. The *tupna* is used for keeping grains, flour and even cooked rice when one is to serve a guest. The process for making this basket is the same as in the other coiled baskets but here first the stand is made and later attached to the base of the basket.



Tupna/Tokri

### Pitara

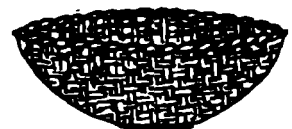
This is a basket made of *poonja* and *moonj* using the coiling technique, it has a diameter of approximately 10 inches both at the mouth and base and a height of about 5 inches. A lid or cover called *pehna* is also made for it using the same technique. This circular box like basket is used for keeping *chapatis* (hand made bread).



Pitara

### Jhau/Jhabia/Dabki

These baskets are made of *rangwa laar* using the plaited wicker work technique in which one flexible weft passes alternately over and under the thicker warp rods. When one weft gets over, another one is started from the same place and the process continues till the desired size and shape is achieved. The rim of the basket is made by turning the wrap rods towards one side downward, once the desired size is attained and twining a weft over this using the wrapped twined technique. The *jhau*, *jhabia* and *dabki* are similar but vary in size. The *jhau* is

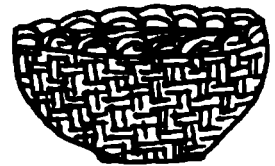


Jhau/Jhabia

the largest, the *jhabia* is smaller than the *jhau*, whereas the *dabki* is the smallest of all the three. It takes about 3-4 hour to make a *jhau*, 2-3 hours to make a *jhabia* and 1 to 1.30 hours to make a *dabki*. These baskets are usually made by men, though there is no restriction on women doing the job. Since *rangwa laar* is a harder substance compared to the grasses used in coiled baskets, women avoid making such baskets. The *jhau* has a greatest diameter at its mouth of about 18 inches, the *jhabia* has a diameter of about 12 inches, and the *dabki* of about 8-9 inches. Weaving of these baskets starts at the base, where a number of warp rods are crossed over each other at their middle or central point. The weft is then passed over and under these rods from the middle point until the desired shape is made out. These baskets are used for different purposes such as storing grains, keeping fodder to feed the cattle, for throwing garbage, transporting clay from the ponds, etc.

### Dabri

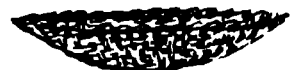
This is a small basket with a circular mouth having the greatest diameter of 8-9 inches and a similar height. It is made of *dudhi laar* or *rangwa laar* using the plaited wicker work technique for weaving the entire basket and the cycloid or the twining technique for making its rim. The basket is made by Tharu men and takes about half an hour to complete. It is used for keeping fishes and is taken to the river or pond when one goes for fishing.



Dabri

### Dalo

It is a big sized basket made of bamboo splints employing the plaited wicker work or simple plaiting technique having a check pattern. It has a big circular mouth 24 to 30 inches in diameter. It is made by the Tharu men, takes about one day to complete and is

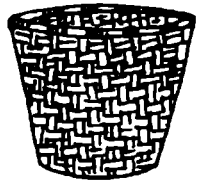


Dalo

used for keeping quilts, blankets, bedsheets, *etc.* The work of weaving begins at the base where the warp strips about 30 to 40 in number are placed crossing each other at the centre and the thin pliable weft strips are passed alternately over and under the warp rod till the desired size is obtained. The rim of the basket is formed by using the wrapped twined technique and takes 2-3 days to complete.

### Chitwa

It is a basket having a mouth of about 14-16 inches and a height of about 12 inches. The base is usually 10-11 inches in diameter. This basket is made of bamboo splints that are soaked in water for at least 3-4 hours before weaving the basket to facilitate weaving. The technique used

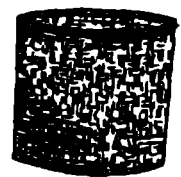


Chitwa

in making the *chitwa* is the plaited wicker work. The rim of the basket is made using the lattice twining technique and at times the bee-skep coil technique. It takes about 4-5 hours to make such a basket and is used for keeping paddy, wheat, fodder, *etc.*

### Chhaparia

This basket is very similar to the *chitwa* since the material and technique used in making it is same. The only difference lies in the shape of the basket. This one is cylindrical in shape, having a base as well



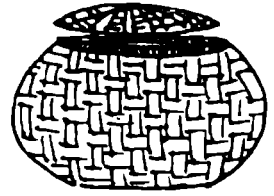
Chhaparia

as rim of 14-16 inches and thus is a bit larger than the *chitwa* and consecutively takes 5 to 6 hours to make. The *chhaparia* is used for carrying as well as storing grains.

### Pitra / Pitara

This basket is made by using the check pattern of the plaiting technique. For making the basket either *dudhi laar* or *rangwa laar* is used according to the availability of material. The *pitara* is a bit bigger in size than the *pitra*. It generally has a

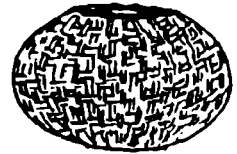
nearly globular shape with a flat base and an open mouth. The greatest diameter of the basket is at the centre, *i.e.*, in the middle of the basket. The mouth and base generally have a diameter of 12 inches and the greatest diameter is about 18-24 inches. A lid or cover is also woven for this basket. It takes about 4-5 hours to make this basket. Once completed the basket is smeared on the outer side with mud and cow-dung paste mixed in the ratio of 1 : 1. This is done so that the articles kept in it do not fall out. This basket is used for keeping articles of daily use such as clothes, ornaments, toileteries, *etc.* The use of the *pitra/pitara* is however on a decline since boxes are easily available in the market and can be used for keeping such articles.



Pitara/Pitra

### Kanjola / Kanjalo / Kanjuli

This is a globular basket with a flat base and mouth having a diameter of about 8 inches and a maximum diameter at the middle of about (12 inches). The material used is *rangwa laar* and technique used is either twilling or check plaiting, while the rim is made of the wrapped twinning technique. It takes about 2-3 hours to make this basket which is used for keeping food items such as fish, eggs, red chillies, garlic, potato, *etc.* The basket is known by different names among all the three sub-groups. The Rana call is *kanjuli*, the Katharia *kanjola* and the Dangaura call it *kanjalo*.



Kanjola / Kanjalo

### Lauka / Dalia

This is a basket which, due to its shape, is slightly difficult to make. The *dalia*, sometimes known as *lauka* since it resembles the gourd container, has a circular mouth or opening not more than 5 inches which tapers

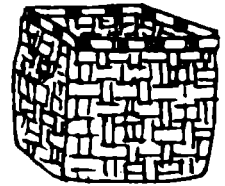


Lauka /Dalia

down from all the sides, upto 3-4 inches, to form a constricted neck and then again starts increasing in diameter gradually as one goes downwards to the base. After attaining a maximum diameter of about 7-8 inches, the diameter once again begins to decrease and at the base it is reduced to about 6 inches. The height of the *dalia* is never more than 9 inches and takes about 4-5 hours to make. This basket is made of bamboo splints using the simple plaited wicker work, while the rim of the basket is made using the wrapped twining technique. This basket made by men, is always carried, by tying it around the waist, while going fishing and used for keeping small fishes.

### Sara

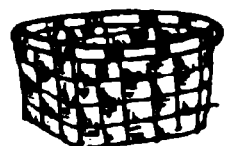
About 8 inches in height with a length and breadth of about 12 inches, the *sara* is a rectangular shaped basket made by using twilling technique, while the rim is either made of the wrapped twined method or two wefts are coiled with a cord and fastened at the rim. The material used for making this basket is *setha* (reed). Only few Tharu house holds possess this basket which is very rarely found in use now a days. This basket is put to multipurpose uses *i.e.*, for keeping anything from occupational implements to clothes to fodder.



Sara

### Tupli

This basket has a square base about 5 × 5 inches and a height of about 5 inches too. The check-plaited technique is used for making this basket. At its rim a sturdy splint of bamboo or cane is attached to the walls of the basket with the help of *moonj* grass to provide extra strength to the basket. The entire basket is made of thin strips of bamboo having a width of about 2 cms. Thus, it forms squares of 2 × 2 cms all over. This basket is used to take out small quantities of

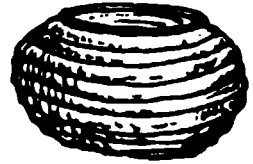


Tupli

grains from the large grain contains for daily use. It takes just about an hour to make the *tupli*.

### Mauna/Mana/Nuiya

This is a small basket which may either be made by employing the coiling technique or simple plaited wicker work. If coiling technique is to be employed, then *poonja* and *moonj* is used, whereas if wicker work is employed *rangwa laar* is used. When a wicker work *mana* or *nuiya* is made, the mouth or rim is made using the coiling technique. This basket has a diameter of about 5-6 inches both at its base and mouth and a similar height, while its maximum diameter is at the centre and is about an inch and a half more than its mouth. The *mana* as it is known by the Rana, is called *mauna* or *mauni* by the Katharia and *nuiya* by the Dangaura. This basket when made using the coiling technique may have different colourful patterns also coiled on to it. Guests and children are given puffed rice and other dry snacks in this basket which is sometimes, also used to keep trinkets.



Mauna/Nuiya

### Ceremonial Baskets

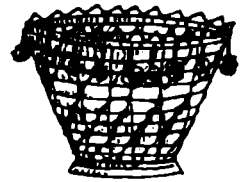
As mentioned earlier, apart from the baskets used regularly, ceremonial baskets are also made by the Tharu. These baskets are either used on special occasions such as birth, marriage, death or are generally taken as a part of the possessions given to a girl on her marriage. Thus, young girls are often seen making beautiful baskets of different shapes, sizes and designs which they intend to take to their in-laws house. Taking of such baskets is, till date, considered essential for a Tharu bride as a sample of her skill. Usually several baskets are taken and one basket gifted to every adult member of the in-laws house. It takes more time and concentration to make such ceremonial baskets as they have different coloured designs woven on them and are also often beautifully decorated with beads,



shells, colourful cloth pieces, etc. Nearly all ceremonial baskets are made of *poonja* and *moonj* employing the coiling technique throughout the entire basket. All baskets taken by a bride to her husband's house are specially decorated and beautifully made for this particular purpose and therefore, considered ceremonial baskets. Some of these baskets are ceremony specific and have specific names. All ceremonial baskets are kept aside and brought out for use only on special occasions. Given here is a brief description of main ceremonial baskets found among the Tharu.

### Dalwa

This is a semiconical basket, *i.e.*, it has a gradually tapering outline, but invariably a flat base. Usually it has a stand also made which keeps the base of the basket a few centimeters above the ground. The *dalwa* has a circular mouth generally 11-12 inches in diameter, having a base of about 5-6 inches diameter and a height of 8-9 inches. However, the dimensions of all *dalwas* need not be the same. Its size generally depends on the wish of its weaver. The *dalwa* is made of *poonja* and *moonj* using the simple oversewn coiling technique. Coiling begins at the base and the desired design is kept in mind before the process of coiling begins. The stand for the *dalwa* is made separately and later stitched on to the base. It takes about 10-20 days to make a *dalwa* depending upon the time given daily, the size of the basket to be made, and the intricacy of the design.



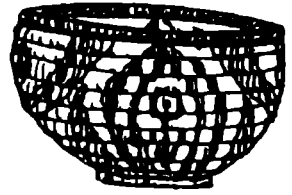
Dalwa

The *dalwa* is extensively decorated using different decorative materials such as beads, sequins, peacock feathers, shells, pieces of colourful cloth, woollen balls and mirror pieces. This basket is carried by every Tharu bride after her *gauna* as part of her dowry.

### Dalai

The *dalai* too is made of *moonj* and *poonja* using the simple oversewn coiling technique and takes about 15-20 days to

complete. The *dalai* is semi globular or basin shaped, *i.e.*, has its widest diameter at the mouth and gradually tapers downwards forming a semi circular outline. The base is flat and occasionally has a stand attached to it. Attractive designs are made on the *dalai*, with coloured moonj, which may also be decorated later on. The *dalai* serves quite a many purposes, it is brought as a part of the dowry by a girl in which to keep her belongings; the gifts sent by the groom's side for the bride and her relatives, a day before the wedding are also sent in such beautifully designed *dalais* ; on a person's death if he/she is buried, different pulses grains, and few other household articles are put in *dalais* and buried with the person. The size of a *dalai* depends on the articles that a person intends to keep in it, or the use that it is to be put to. Thus, *dalai* with a diameter of 10 to, as much as, 18 inches were noted. The height of the *dalai* is proportionate to the diameter and shape to be constructed.



Dalai

### Pitara

The *pitara* is a basket having a lid that may not necessarily be attached to it. Made of *poonja* and *moonj*, employing the simple oversewn coiling technique, this type of basket is taken by every girl to her husband's house for keeping her valuables. It takes 15-30 days to make a



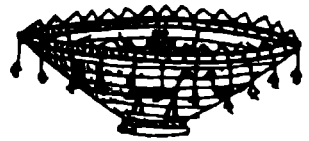
Pitara

*pitara* and its lid or *pehna*, depending on the time devoted, the size and the design to be made on the basket. The mouth and base of the *pitara* are usually of the same diameter varying from 8-14 inches, while its greatest breadth is in the middle portion of the basket and varies from 12-20 inches. Sometimes however, the base may be slightly lesser in diameter than the mouth of the basket and the greatest width a bit to the upper end, but still the basic structure remains the same, *i.e.*, one having an outwardly curved outline. If the *pehna* is to be attached, after making the basket

and lid separately, the lid is attached to the rim of the basket with a *moonj* strip that is loosely looped to the rim of the lid on one side. The *pitara* has the most intricate patterns made on it, but is never decorated with additional materials such as beads, etc.

### Tukna

This is a big basket having a mouth of about 14-18 inches diameter, a base of about 6-8 inches and a depth of about 8 inches. Thus, the outline of the basket shows a steep tapering of the diameter from the mouth to the base and may be said to be nearly basin shaped. It takes



Tukna

about 15-20 days to make a *tukna* and usually is not decorated with any material, although beautiful patterns with coloured *moonj* are coiled on to it. The *tukna* too is made of *poonja* and *moonj* using the simple oversewn coiling technique. The *tukna* is put to two main uses. Firstly, whenever feasts are held at a Tharu's place, i.e., on marriage etc., guests are served *puris* which are kept in the *tukna* and secondly, on the *roti-pani* ceremony (a feast held after the death of a Tharu) a little portion of all the different delicacies prepared for the feast are taken out in one or two *tuknas*, kept covered outside the house overnight and the next morning, at daybreak, these are left outside the village or far off in the jungle as an offering to the departed soul.

### Tokri

This basket made of *poonja* and *moonj*, employing the coiling technique, has a handle attached to its rim or mouth. The *tokri* has an open mouth, about 10-11 inches, which tapers down gradually to form a base of about 6-7 inches and has a height of about 10

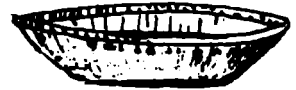


Tokri

inches. Generally a stand is also made and attached to the *tokri*. For making the *tokri*, first of all the base is made, with its walls being made gradually by coiling new strands over the *poonja* foundation or core. Once the desired size is attained, the coil is wrapped around the core and this wrapped core is raised up to form a curved handle of the basket. The free end is now stitched tightly onto the rim of the basket, just opposite to where the handle starts to curve upwards. A stand is made and stitched on to the base of the *tokri* which has beautiful designs coiled on it and is sometimes decorated too. This basket is not used for any specific purpose. It is generally brought as a part of the dowry by a bride and is seldom put to use. Thus, it may also be considered a mere showpiece.

### Dhakli

The *dhakli* may be termed as a plate, since it serves as a plate and is brought by a bride after her marriage along with the other ceremonial baskets. This basket item has a mouth or rim of 7-12



Dhakli

inches, a base about one and a half inch lesser to the mouth and a depth of about 2 inches. Made of *moonj* and *poonja*, employing the coiling technique this basket may either have a snail or rosette base depending on the design that is coiled onto it. Sometimes toffee wrappers or silver and golden biscuit packets are cut into thin strips and used for coiling. The *dhakli* sometimes serves as a cover to other ceremonial baskets too.

### Panjhapna

As the name suggests this shallow basket made of *poonja* and *moonj* employing the coiling technique, is used as a lid to cover a glass, pitcher or *lota* of water, etc. The *panjhapna* has a maximum diameter of 5-6 inches at its mouth, a base that is generally an



Panjhapna

inch smaller and a height of about 1-2 inches. This basketry item may or may not be decorated with beads, silver foils, etc. but is generally very colourful because of the bright coloured *moonj* strips used in the making.

### Pantupni / Tukni

The *pantupni* looks like a miniature *dalwa*, since it is similar in shape and similarly extensively decorated with woolen balls, peacock feathers, beads, shells, etc. Made of *poonja* and *moonj* employing the coiling technique, this basket has a maximum diameter of 5-6

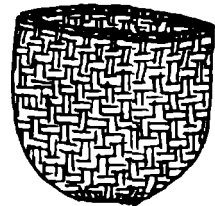


Tukni

inches at its mouth from where the width gradually tapers to the base having a diameter of about 3-3.5 inches and a depth of about 3.5-4 inches. This basket is used as a lid to cover a glass or *lota* filled with liquid. Several such *pantupnas* are made and taken by a bride to her husband's place to offer as gifts to members in the family. These *pantupnas* are beautifully coiled with colourful *moonj* and different patterns made on it to show one's skill in basket making.

### Udia

This basket, having a maximum diameter at its mouth of about 16-18 inches and a height of 8-10 inches, may be termed semi-circular in its outline. Made of bamboo strips, the simple plaited wicker work is employed for making this basket by men who take



Udia

about 4-5 hours to complete making one such basket. The rim of this basket is made by employing the wrapped twined technique. Among the Tharu, this basket is of special importance on the death of a person. After completing the last rites of a dead person, edibles liked by the deceased are prepared, put on a banana leaf and left

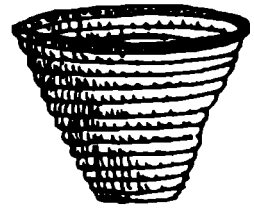
outside the house covered with the *udia* overnight as an offering for the departed soul. The next day, just before dawn, *i.e.*, at about 4 a.m. this food is put in the *udia* and thrown into the river. The *udia* is never reused and may either be thrown into the river or is donated to some poor person. Sometimes a readymade *udia* is purchased from non-Tharu who visit the village to sell their wares.

### Other Basket-work Related Objects

Apart from basket containers there are a few other utility objects made by the Tharu using the basketry techniques. Given below is a description of such items that cannot be kept in the category of containers but serve important purposes in the day-to-day life of the Tharu.

#### Pine

This basket item, though looks like a basket container is not one since it does not have a base. The *pine* is used in preparing *dhikari*, *mitho bhaat* or *farra* (sweet rice). It is made using the coiling technique and has a big opening of approximately 16-18 inches diameter on



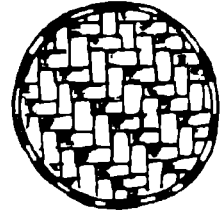
Pine

one side and on the other side a smaller one of about 8-10 inches. For preparing sweet rice, which is generally made on festivals and ceremonies, a vessel full of water is kept on the *chulha*. Next a *seive* is put in the *pine* towards the smaller opening, filled with rice and kept over a vessel of water. The rice gets cooked due to the steam that rises out of the boiling water. Once the rice is cooked, sugar is sprinkled over it.

#### Supo / Supa

This is a flat circular plate on tray used for winnowing and sifting wheat, paddy, *etc.* Having a diameter of about 22 inches, the twilling technique is used to make the *supo*. Around its rim a thick bamboo splint is attached using the

coiling technique, thus, giving it a raised border. For the sewing coil either thin bamboo strip or *moonj* grass is used. Before use, the bamboo splints are scraped repeatedly on both sides to make it smooth and give it a polished appearance. It takes about 4-5 hours to wave a *supo*. The Rana call this winnowing tray *supo*, while the Katharia and Danguara call it *supa*. Now-a-days winnowing trays are bought from the market too. These however, are different in shape, size and material. *Supos* bought from the market are rectangular in shape and have a border raised on one side, which gradually decreases moving towards the sides leaving the front side open. These are available at a price of about Rs. 10-15 from the local market, fairs, etc.



Supo / Supa

### Khaincha / Khandra

The *khaincha/khandra* may loosely be termed as a cage meant for housing young ducks, pigeons, chicken and sometimes for keeping eggs. Made of bamboo splint, three techniques namely twilling, open hexagonal and coiling or twining are employed to make this cage.



Khaincha / Khandra

The base is made by using the twilling technique while, walls are formed by twisting the weft and warp elements, used for twilling, upwards to form two of the weft used in the open hexagonal technique. A third weft is added on as the weaving progresses. Once the desired height is achieved, *i.e.*, of about 12-15 inches, the wefts are twisted and twined with another weft, or coiled with a thin bamboo strip. The base has a diameter of about 14-15 inches. Once this structure is constructed, a cotton net is tied on to the border of the *khaincha*. This net has a cord looped on its upper end which is used for hanging the *khaincha* at a height. A slightly big gap is left on the upper side of the net through which one can put in and take out the birds. However, it can

not be opened easily, thus preventing the birds from escaping. The cage is known as *khaincha* among the Rana and Katharia Tharu and as *khandra* among the Dangaura Tharu.

### Mithaura

The *mithaura* is an indigenous umbrella cum rain hat made by Tharu men employing the open hexagonal technique.



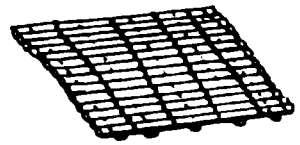
Man Wearing a Mithaura



Having a diameter of about 42 inches, the *mithaura* is made of bamboo strips and *mohlain* [*Phanera vahlii* (W. & A.) Benth. Syn. *Bauhinia vahlii* W. & A. (Caesalpiniaceae)] leaves. The *mithaura* is shaped like an umbrella, except that in the centre a slightly raised concave portion is created so that it can fit onto a person's head like a hat. Starting at the centre, first of all two separate frames are woven. Leaves of *mohlain* are then spread in 2-3 layers between the two frames. A single weft is then passed in and out through both the frames to fasten them together. To form the rim of the *mithaura*, two relatively thick splints of bamboo are curved round the border on both sides and tied together by coiling them at short distances. Sometimes instead of wearing the *mithaura* as a rain hat, a 1 to 1.5 metre long wooden stick known as *chhatargarna* is put in the centre to hold the *mithaura* up like an umbrella. When thus used, it is generally called a *chhatri*. Use of this indigenous rain gear is rapidly decreasing. It is used mainly in the interior villages. It was found during the field visits that many Tharu do not take the trouble of making a *mithaura* themselves and prefer to buy it from a poor Dangaura Tharu who would gladly sell it for Rs. 15-20.

### Tatri

This is a tray made of *setha*, i.e., reed sticks using the wrapped technique. The *tatri* may either be square or rectangular in shape and has a size of about 14 × 18 inches or 15 × 15 inches depending on the wish of the person weaving it. Made by Tharu men, it takes about an hour to complete making a *tatri*. Reed sticks of similar diameter are collected, cut to an equal size and attached to each other by wrapping a rope, that acts as a weft, round each reed stick, passing over two and under one reed stick that acts as a warp. This process is carried out on both sides of the *tatri*, leaving about 3 inches on both sides to ensure the sticks are attached properly. Further, 2

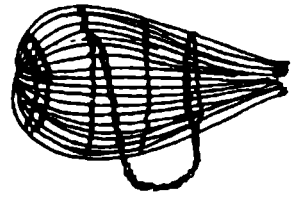


Tatri

to 3 bamboo sticks are attached in the opposite direction (*i.e.*, horizontally) at the base, thus ensuring that it remains straight. The *tatri* is used as a drying board on which fish and sometimes meat pieces are kept and dried in the sun. Some people attach a rope on all the four corners of the *tatri* and tie it in the centre so as to facilitate its hanging in a corner when not in use.

## Gadri

The *gadri* is a vessel about 12 inches height, meant to keep fishes while fishing in the river or pond. This basketry item is made of bamboo splints which are held together in shape with the help of *sanai* or *bendhu* rope. Having a maximum diameter of 8 inches at the centre the *gadri* gradually tapers down to form a nearly pointed end on one side. Similarly the diameter gradually decreases on the other side but has a rounded and closed end here. The mouth of the *gadri* is thus constricted. Near the mouth a rope is tied to form a handle. The twining technique is used to bind the bamboo sticks in place. Generally made by men, it takes a few hours to complete making a *gadri*.



Gadri

## Khong

The *khong* is a manually operated, valveless fishing trap. Conical in shape, the *khong* is made up mainly of *setha*. The wrapped or twined techniques may be used to give shape to the trap and hold the reed sticks in place. One end of the *khong* is closed tightly while the other end is open and serves as the mouth through which fishes enter. The *khong* measures 24-28 inches in length and has a mouth 5-6 inches in diameter. For fishing, the *khong* is placed in a narrow passage of running water with the mouth facing the current of the water. Fishes thus pass through the mouth

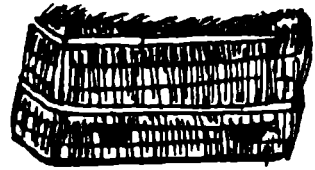


Khong

and get trapped since the other end is closed while the water flows out. It takes about an hour or so to make a *khong*.

## Dhimri

The *dhimri* is a rectangular fishing trap made of bamboo splints. This is a self operating trap having two valves. In section the *dhimri* is oval shaped. The trap is given shape by tying the splints together with *sanai* rope using the wrapped technique. To hold the splints in place a thick bamboo frame is also added. The *dhimri* has a rectangular base made of reed or cane on to which the walls of the trap are fastened. The two valves are situated on one of these walls towards the lower side. The walls go upward and converge, thus looking conical from the side. At one end of the upper end where the trap is closed a small circular gap is left open from where one can put their hand in to take out the trapped fishes. The *dhimri* is made by men and takes 2-3 days to complete. For fishing, the *dhimri* is placed in a pond, or ditch full of water, overnight with the base down and the valves placed against the current of water. Fishes thus enter the trap through the valve but are unable to swim out due to the splints of the valve that prick them. The next morning, fishes are collected from inside the trap.



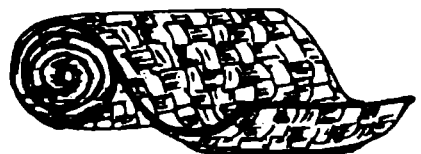
Dhimri

## Mats

Mats form one of the important items made by the Tharu using the basketry techniques. Three different types of mats are found here made by employing three different basketry techniques. These are :

### Chatai / Patki

This mat is not commonly used now-a-days since the material



Chatai / Patki

used for making it is not easily available. Earlier the use of the *chatai*, also known as *patki* was rampant. This mat is made employing the simple plaiting technique having a check pattern. The *chatai* can either be made of *narkul* [*Phragmites maxima* (Forsk.) Blatt. & McC. (Poacea)] or *bendhu* [*Helicteres isora* L. (Sterculiaceae)] both of which have to be brought from the forest, and thus are difficult to procure in large quantities. Both *narkul* and *bendhu* have a smooth texture which make it convenient to sit on.

Before using, *narkul* has to be soaked in water for a few hours where as the bark of *bendhu* is dried and used directly. In the next step, strips of equal breadth of the material to be used are woven together. The selvages are turned inwards and woven in the opposite direction, thus locking the ends to ensure the weaving does not open up. It takes about a day to weave a *chatai*. Woven by men, this mat can be made of any size. Apart from sitting, this is used to dry different edibles in the sun.

### Gadda / Gundra

The *gadda* is mainly used by the Rana and Katharia. This is a mat made out of paddy stalk locally called *paira*, and thus, the mat is generally termed as *paira ka gadda*. The wrapped technique is employed for making the *gadda* in which the wrapping strand, a rope in this case, passes round bundles of paddy stalk, passing over two and under one bundle. This process is continued till the desired length is achieved after which the rope is tied into a knot and passed between the last bundle a short distance, and the process continued. Thus, a mat is wrapped at distances of about 12-15 inches throughout its breadth to ensure it is tight enough and the stalks do not begin to come off after some time. Once the process of wrapping is completed, if the sides (length wise) are uneven, they are trimmed to give it a straight and even finish. The *gadda* is made by men in a matter of an hour or so. Apart from sitting this mat is



Gadda / Gundra

used as a mattress in winters for sleeping as it provides heat. The *gadda* is also used as a cover over the *bakhari* in which grains are stored.

### Modha / Baithchi / Pidka

The *modha* is a cushion like mat having a length or diameter of 11-14 inches. It may be found in round, oval, square or rectangle shape depending on the will of the maker. Used for sitting, several such *modhas* are found in every Tharu



Modha / Baithchi

house. *Dhan ka paira*, i.e., paddy stalk is used for making this mat which is called *modha* by the Rana, *baithchi* by the Dangaura and *pidka* by the Katharia. The plaiting technique is used to make the *modha* in which a bunch of paddy stalks is tied with a rope at one end and plaited after dividing the bunch into three equal parts. The *modha* can be made either by one single plait or by stitching two plaits next to each other in such a way that the joint does not show. Once a plait of the desired size is made, it is either coiled or folded into the desired shape. The end which was tied with a rope goes in the centre, while the remaining rope is passed through the plait with the help of a *chedna*, i.e., awl. Once out this rope is tied round the *modha* to hold the plait in place. Another method is sometimes adopted in which instead of a rope, a strand of *moonj* or paddy stalk is used and instead of tying it round the *modha*, the sides of the plait are stitched neatly to the previous layer providing the desired shape. *Modhas* are generally made by men but if the need arises, e.g., when men are busy in the field and women need *modhas*, they are free to make it themselves.

The above description of basketry items shows the extent to which the Tharu are capable of manufacturing a number of articles to meet their daily and occasional requirements. However, there are several other items made by the Tharu which are to be dealt with as the chapter progresses. Coming back to basketry, regarding the distribution of basketry technique, Mason (1895, 229) observed, "Almost

every type of basketry is confined to a single tribe, or to a very restricted area". Wissler (1941, 464) upheld Mason's observation while dividing the American continent into different cultural areas by recording the concentration of certain basketry techniques to particular culture areas. Among the Tharu a clear cut picture cannot be presented regarding the distribution of techniques. There is no doubt that coiling and simple plaited wicker work are the two main techniques for making basket containers. But the knowledge and use of other techniques such as to twill, hexagonal, wrapped and plaited work also exist though not to a great extent. Techniques are thus used according to the requirement keeping in mind its particular qualities. Thus, coiling and simple plaiting are used to make containers and receptacles which close the surface of the basket tightly not allowing the articles in it to fall out. Wrapped work is mainly used for trap making so that the sticks can be held in shape and the gap in between facilitate the draining out of water. Another special feature of Tharu basket work was that a combination of technique and raw material is selected to further serve the required purpose. Thus, materials such as bamboo, *rangua laar* or *dudhi laar* are combined with the simple plaited wicker work technique to make containers having adequate compactness and strength for holding heavy contents.

Basket work has been suggested as the basis for the shapes of pottery by several scholars. But the basis for the shapes of baskets has not been dealt upon. The shapes and forms of basket are so varied among the Tharu, that it is not possible to trace its origin from a particular group of objects or articles. Herskovits (1974, 137) stated—"It is plausible that before baskets and pots were devised, man had recourse to natural objects, such as skins, gourds and shells for his belonging". There is every reason to accept Herskovits's view since these natural objects have been closely associated with man long before the invention of pottery and basketry. Thus, they must have exerted some influence on the shapes and forms of baskets. Among the Tharu one example of this kind is very clearly seen. The

*dalia* and *gadri* used for keeping fishes are structurally similar to the *lauka* (gourd container) found extensively used in this area.

Goldenweiser (1937, 160) has opined that art is coexistent with man and it is true with primitives wherever a particular industry is highly developed. He observed that many material objects of primitive technology are made better than utility would warrant and rightly pointed out the inherent beauty in the workmanship of Polynesian boats, the pottery of the Pueblos and baskets of the Californian Indians. Such beauty can also be noted in the Tharu basket work. Tharu basketry undoubtedly demonstrates a high grade of skill and it would not be erroneous to assume that basket industry is markedly developed among these people as compared to other communities of the region. As already mentioned, Tharu basket-work is not only utilitarian but also depicts a high level of artistic skill. Here it should specially be mentioned that it is only coiled baskets that have different patterns and designs made on them and that all coiled baskets are made by women only. As far as the different plaited or woven baskets are concerned, no ornamentation was noted. Thus, no plaited or wicker work baskets have any patterns or decoration done on them. Such baskets serve purely as utility items and are made by men.

### Designing and Decoration of Baskets

Use of colour for decoration and design of textile is almost universal. But as far as basketry is concerned one cannot be definite in postulating universal application for ornamental purpose. However, many people in preliterate and tribal societies show a strong urge towards artistic embellishment of coloured strips to beautify their containers and baskets. The Tharu are also one such group of people. There are two popular methods by which colour is applied to the strands, either by dyeing or by painting. Among the Tharu, the former method is in practice. All ceremonial baskets, except the *udia* are made by employing the coiling

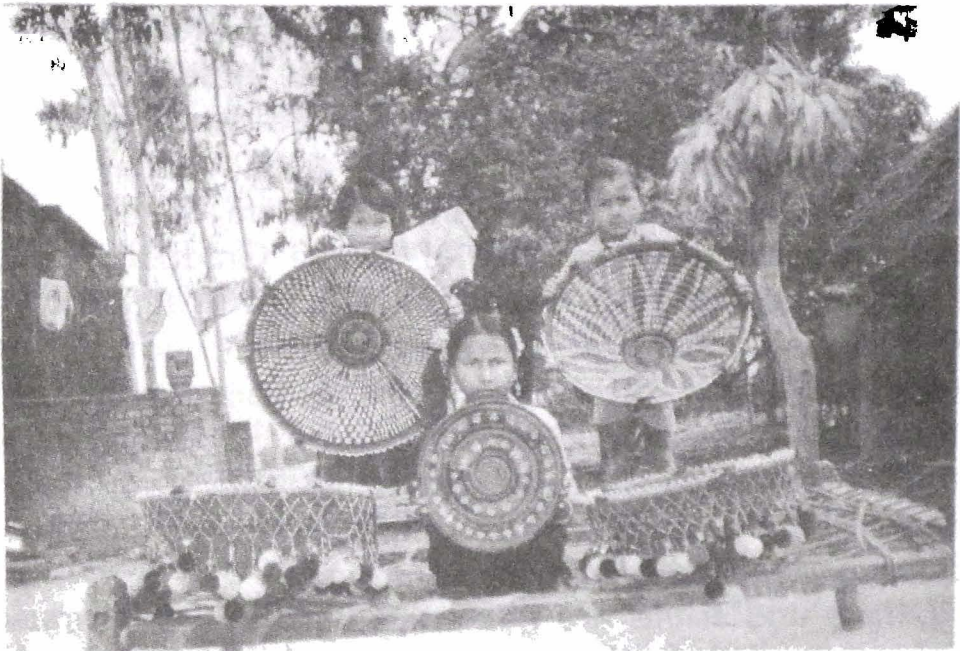
technique and normally have different designs brought out on the surface through the use of coloured *moonj* or *kans* blades. Dye colours are bought from the market for Rs 2-3 per 100 gms. Three colours are mainly used, *viz.*, dark green, bluish purple and magenta. Yellow colour is used in few cases, but generally *moonj* or *kans* having a yellowish tint are used in their natural form when yellow colour is to be used. No basketry material other than *moonj* and *kans* are coloured.

There are three methods of making patterns on coiled baskets. Firstly, by using coloured strands of *moonj* or *kans* while coiling a basket, thus coiling the basket as well as forming the design simultaneously. In this process one has to have the design they intend to coil properly calculated in the mind since a single wrong coil sewn can distort the pattern. The second method is by roughly coiling the entire basket and later coiling the desired pattern on to it using coloured strands. This method is mainly adopted when the lazy squaw technique is to be adopted to make long stitches covering 2-3 coils at a time. The third method is one in which the entire basket is first coiled using the second method, *i.e.*, roughly coiling the entire basket, then coiling more than two cores at a time with coloured strips forming thick radiating lines from the base outwards. Over this *moonj* in its natural colour is used to create different patterns or designs. This process is more akin to embroidery than a basketry technique since the designs are embroidered by taking horizontal stitches over the coil instead of vertical ones as in coiling. It is not necessary to use only one of the three methods on a single basket. The ceremonial *pitara*, *dhakli* and *panjhapna* are examples of basket which are created using at least two of the aforesaid methods of making patterns on baskets.

Basketry patterns among the Tharu are extremely limited. The most popular motifs are zig-zag and straight lines, diamonds, triangles and other angular patterns. Floral, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic pattern, though not very commonly noted, are also found and are more or less in geometric form. All patterns and designs are mainly



formed by a combination of the above mentioned motifs. Different names are given to the motifs, viz., *sikti*, *deeth*, *phula*, *leharia*, *katar sikti*, *tituli*, *panchoki*, *dore*, *gheuri*, *ghoka*, etc. There are no specific traditional designs as such among the Tharu although there are a few patterns that are commonly made by all and are easily identified. There are no patent rights recognized by the Tharu so far as basketry designs is concerned and there is no prohibition regarding the introduction of new patterns or techniques either by women who come from other villages by marriage or by innovative youngsters. A few common designs noted on the basket are: *Sikhra Jhabra*, in which different coloured strands are used to create a flower spread on the entire basket. The base forms the centre point and the petals are spread over the walls of the basket while the space between the petals is left plain. *Jhabra* is a design in which apart from a flower, coloured lines are made to fill in the space between the petals. *Sikhar* is a design in which a flower having at least 5-6 petals is made and the space between the petals is covered by making half



Various Patterns Coiled on Baskets

inverted petals. The *bharat* design is one in which the entire basket is covered with the same pattern *i.e.*, zig-zag lines, triangles, *etc.* The speciality of this design is that one strand is made to cover more than two coils at a time. Lastly, the *pitfori* design is one in which different colour stands are used to make lines radiating from the base, resembling sun rays.

The designs mentioned are merely names given to the general outline or framework of a design and by no means should be assumed to be the only designs. Baskets having the same design are easily distinguishable from the other because of finer variations which are not necessarily same and depend on the choice and artistic temperament of the person weaving it. Apart from geometric patterns sometimes human and animal figures are also made. As noted earlier, these are also mainly line drawings with very slight curvatures. The motifs noted were those of men sitting on horses, men with bows and arrows, animals such as horses, deer, peacock, hen and pigeons. Most of these animals and birds are similar to the tattoo patterns found among the Tharu.

Apart from making patterns, ceremonial baskets are further beautified by adding decorative materials on to them. Earlier, only naturally available materials were used for this purpose. Among these were peacock feathers as well as pieces of its stem, shell, conch, bead-like fruit of *Coix lacryma-jobi*, stem of the garlic plant and colourful pieces of cloth. Gradually after coming in contact with non-tribals and the availability of other materials, the array of decorative products has increased. Today, apart from the already mentioned materials, buttons, pieces of mirror, woollen balls, sequins, small metal bells (*ghungroo*) and even waste product such as toffee wrappers and silver or golden foil biscuit packets are used for decoration.

*Dalwas* and *tuknis* are the most beautifully decorated baskets. Peacock feather stems and garlic stems have an off-white colour and add beauty to colourful baskets. These are bent to make small zig-zag patterns and stitched onto

the rim of the basket. On the rim itself strands of thread with beads are attached and at the end of these either shell, conch, mirror pieces or colourful cloth bells may be added. Sometimes colourful woollen balls are made and attached to the rim as well as base of the basket, giving it an even more bright and colourful appearance. Toffee wrappers are pleated, folded into half to form a flower, and stitched at short distances on the rim while strips of biscuit packet are cut and used in place of the sewing strand to bring about variety in the design. Thus, decoration of baskets too depends on the personal choice. These additions of materials that are used for decoration is an example of the innovative mind of the Tharu and their skill at using any material that is made available to them in a productive and artistic way.

Anthropologists have always held the view that culture is not a collection of discontinuous parts. The parts can never be fully known from isolated studies since they derive complete meaning from their functional position in the pattern of the whole. The full meaning of any aspect of culture cannot be conceived without considering the interactive operation of the total culture. As such, it is important to see how basketry is connected to the life of the Tharu. Apart from serving useful mainly as containers and receptacles, baskets play an important part in most of the Tharu ceremonies, specially marriage. Baskets taken along by the bride are proof of her deftness. It also gives an overall indication of her creative skills and patience, which are necessary as most of the articles used by Tharu are made by themselves. The knowledge and skill of basket making thus has always been one of the desirable qualifications for an eligible bride. This point has also been noted by Majumdar (1944, 88), who states "weaving of baskets is considered by the Tharus as an indispensable qualification for an eligible bride and a desirable bride is she who can display her skill in basketry by nice patterns and novel designs".

The economic importance of basketry items among the Tharu cannot be overstated. All basketry items are made

from materials easily available in the surrounding area and without any cost. All it takes to make basket products are time, labour and a bit of knowledge. As noted, there are a variety of products made by using basketry techniques which serve very important in their day to day activities, products ranging from containers to mats to fishing traps. If the Tharu were to stop making these articles and purchase its substitutes from the market, they no doubt would suffer a great loss and their economy would go haywire since the cost of so many items would be beyond the means of an average Tharu.

It has already been mentioned that all collection and initial preparation of raw materials needed for basket-work is essentially the duty of men. Today, although women sometimes help out with this activity, it is not done eagerly. Only necessity leads them to do this work. Collection and processing of raw materials were always considered a lowly and rough job, and not one meant for the women. Again the fact that the finer baskets as well as all ceremonial baskets are woven only by women may in a way be an indication of the legacy of the past superiority of the Tharu women. Several colourful and beautifully coiled baskets are sold by Tharu women and they have sole right to use the money earned from it. It may thus not be wrong to suggest that the baskets made by Tharu women are in a way symbolic of their relative independence and the position of importance that they enjoy in their society.

### (B) Miscellaneous Crafts

Although numerically strong and relatively a developed tribe, till date specialization has not been able to make a place for itself among the Tharu. Each individual or family unit is engaged in the same type of production as all others, and the vast bulk of production is distributed and consumed by the individual within the family. Thus, every Tharu household has to make its own arrangements to fulfil the requirements of articles of daily use. This is accomplished skilfully by them using the materials

available in the surrounding area. This section deals with such crafts that require a certain level of skill for making and which fulfill many of their requirements.

### Hand Fan (*Bena*)

Hand fans of various types have been used all over the world for centuries and continue to be in use in various parts till date. A majority of India's population lives in the rural areas where electricity is not easily accessible, and even if it is, the supply is very little and infrequent. Moreover, having electric fans does not suit the budget of everyone and therefore hand fans are rampantly used in such areas. The hot and humid climate of the Tarai region makes the use of such fans essential for the Tharu. This article of necessity has been developed to achieve a high level of perfection and beauty by the innovative minds of these tribals. Today, hand fans of different materials employing different techniques with a variety of designs are found here.

Hand fans, known as *bena* among the Tharu, are made of bamboo, *moonj* grass, *girna* [*Vetiveria zizanioides* (L.) Nash] stem and *bendhu* [*Helicteres isora* L. (Sterculiaceae)]. The use of fertilizer bags, toffee wrappers and cloth pieces in an innovative way was also noted. *Bena* are generally made by young girls and women, though there is no restriction on men making it. During the study it was noted that generally Dangaura men made *benas* of all kinds, whereas Rana and Katharia men did not. Rana and Katharia men only make simple *benas*. When questioned regarding this, Rana and Katharia men informed that they considered making intricate designs a feminine task and so men do not indulge in the activity.

Girls start making different kinds of *bena* as soon as they are capable of handling the materials to be used, *i.e.*, at about 9-10 years of age. Tharu girls always seem eager to make a variety of *bena* and show off their artistic skill and talent. Young girls are frequently seen making these in their free time. Along with basketry, the making of

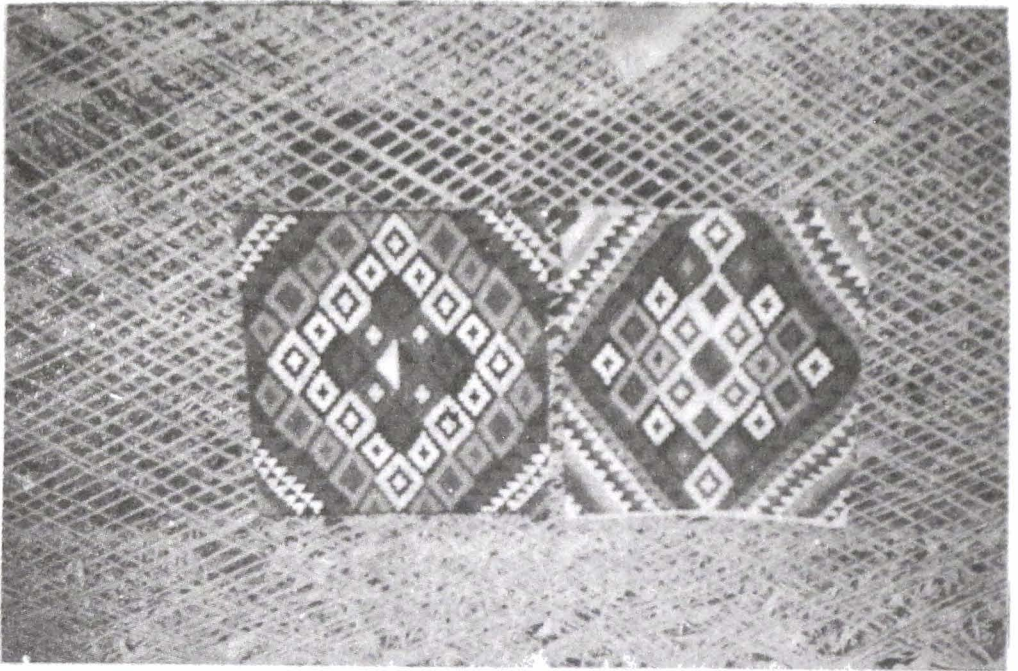


beautiful fans is also considered an added asset while selecting a girl as a bride. Thus, girls take these hand fans along with themselves while going to their husband's house. Discussed here are the different kinds of fans commonly found in use among the Tharu.

Before using bamboo for making fans of different kinds, it is split and soaked overnight to make it pliable. There are two ways in which bamboo is used to make hand fans



A Dangaura man twining a *Laptani Bena*



Designs Twined on the *Laptani Bena*

among the Tharu. The first is one in which thin strips about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch broad are cut and woven employing the twilling technique. Sometimes these strips are dyed to bring out different patterns. Dye is bought from the market and mixed in hot water before soaking the strips to colour them. Thus, using the twilling technique and coloured bamboo strips, several ornamental designs are created. It takes about 3-4 hours to weave such a fan. Another way in which bamboo is used is by making bamboo splints about  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cm thick. Over these, bright coloured woollen strands are woven using the twining technique in which the woollen strands act as the weft and are woven over and under each bamboo splint, which acts as the warp, going from right to left and left to right, thus covering both the sides with the woollen strand. Different colour strands are carefully twined on the bamboo splints forming several colourful patterns. This kind of a fan known as *laptani bena* is taken by girls to their in-laws house. It takes about 10-15 days to weave a *laptani bena*. Several Dangaura Tharu men were seen weaving such *bena* for their sisters and

daughters. Both men and women make both kinds of fans employing the use of bamboo. Where the *laptani bena* is always taken as a part of the dowry, the ones made of bamboo strips are mainly meant for daily use. This is probably because a *laptani bena* not only takes a longer time to make but also costs more since the woollen strands have to be bought from the market, whereas bamboo strips are freely available.

*Bendhu* is a fibrous stalk that is dried and its skin removed before use. The fibrous strips thus obtained are soft and easily pliable. *Bendhu* strips are used to weave fans employing the twilling technique. However, such fans are not very commonly found now-a-days since procurement of *bendhu* in large amount from the forest is no longer possible. Furthermore, the use of several new materials have been adopted which adequately compensates for the shortage of *bendhu*. Apart from the simple twill pattern, examples are found where Rana Tharu wove exceptionally good ornamental twill fans. It takes 2-4 hours to weave such a fan depending on the complexity of the pattern to be woven. Ornamental twill work undoubtedly needs a great amount of skill since the most complicated part of the twill technique is floating of strips over the other as wished by the weaver. To obtain a certain pattern on the surface the weaver must have a predetermined idea of the count which he must carefully transfer to the product, except when employing colour. To make sure that the selvages do not open up, they are turned inwards and sometimes stitched with a fine twine with the help of a needle.

Fans are also made by utilizing *moonj* blades. The ornamental twilling technique is used here in which coloured *moonj* is deftly manipulated to create colourful, beautiful and intricate designs. The blades that acts as warps are generally coloured, while those that are used as a weft are kept in their natural shade. The blades used as the weft are so thin that it looks as if the fan has been embroidered rather than twilled. This kind of work too, no doubt, requires a great deal of patience and skill since the



weavers must have the pattern clear in their mind to weave it on to the surface. *Moonj* fans are made by young girls to take with themselves after their marriage. It takes about 15-20 days to complete weaving this kind of a fan when one puts in around 3-4 hours of labour per day.

*Sikri* or *girna* are rigid stems that are used for making three different kinds of fans. The first being a *laptani bena*, the technique of which has already been discussed. The only difference being that here in place of bamboo splints, *sikri* or *girna* is used. The second is one in which *sikri/girna* of equal thickness are collected, cut to an equal length and used. The *sikri* sticks are used as the foundation or core onto which bright coloured woollen strands are coiled with the help of a needle. Earlier coloured *moonj* or *kans* blades were used, however only a few colours could be used for the purpose and so in its place the use of woollen strands which are available in numerous colours was adopted. Use of woollen strands also meant that one no longer had to restrict the making of fans to *Chaumasa* (rainy season) when *moonj* becomes soft and pliable. The lazy squaw technique is used for coiling in which a single strand of wool coils two *sikri* sticks together. Once the entire length is covered, another *sikri* is added and the coiling begins again covering the preceding *sikri* as well as the new one. Thus, every *sikri* is coiled twice. Before the coiling begins, the girls must have the pattern they intend to make and the colours they intend to use clear in their mind since it is essential here to change the strands being used again and again so as to bring out the pattern clearly. It takes at least 15 days to make such a fan depending on its size and design to be made. Such fans, apart from having intricate designs coiled on them are also, many a times, extensively decorated with beads, mirror pieces, woollen balls and sequins. Every Katharia Tharu bride gets at least one such extensively decorated fan with herself as part of her dowry, apart from several other fans which are not decorated. Such fans that are decorated with accessories are called *saja bena*. The third method is one in which thin sticks of *sikri* are

coloured before use to bring out different patterns. These are then arranged in a line and joined together with a cotton thread employing the wrapped technique in which the threads serve as the pliable weft. A few *sikri* sticks are also arranged in the opposite direction and attached so as to provide extra strength and hold the sticks in place. Made mainly by young girls this *bena* takes about a week to complete.

Apart from the above mentioned ones, a few other kinds of *bena* were also noted, the use of which is not very widespread. Yet it is an example of addition to the Tharu material culture as a result of culture contact. Young girls are mainly the ones who like to make new kinds of fans experimenting with new materials and techniques. A few of those found in the area are being mentioned.

The *makri ka jaal* is a hand fan which, as the name suggests, resembles a spiders web. For making this about 3-4 bamboo splints, *sikri* sticks or thin iron sticks about 9-10 inches long are tied together at the centre intersecting each other and forming a star. Colourful woollen strands are now wrapped on this frame employing the wrapped technique in which a single strand of wool passes over two sticks, takes a circular bend right round one and again over two. This process continues until the entire frame is wrapped.

Fertilizer bags made of woven plastic or nylon having a check pattern on them are also used for making fans. These are embroidered with bright coloured woollen strands, the squares making the embroidery convenient and fast to complete. A rectangular piece having a length twice the breadth is embroidered which is later folded into half from the centre and the sides stitched after folding the selvages inwards. The fan thus made may have different patterns embroidered on both the sides. The sheet is also folded to provide sufficient thickness to the fan, since a single sheet of plastic will not be strong enough to provide sufficient breeze when used.

Another fan being used by some was the *tikuli bena*. For making this, a piece of cloth or fertilizer bag is cut according to the size of fan that one intends to make. The next step is to take small pieces of cloth, cut square in shape, folded so as to form triangles locally called *tikuli* and stitch it on to the cloth with the help of a strong cotton thread and needle. These triangular pieces, thus formed, are stitched very close to each other starting from the border and gradually moving inwards. Both the sides of the cloth are thus covered with colourful pieces that are sometimes arranged specifically to create a pattern. Sometimes in place of cloth pieces, toffee wrappers or *gutka* and *pan masala* packets are used to make triangle pieces. This fan, made by young girls, takes about 10-15 days to complete.

All the above fans however are incomplete. Before putting them to use, a cloth piping is added on to the border of all the fans so as to close its selvages. Next, strips of cloth about 1-2 inch broad are pleated to form frills and attached to the piping all around the border of the fan. This frill apart from adding to the beauty of the *benas* also helps in breaking the flow of air to provide more breeze. Once this process is complete, a bamboo stick about 14-15 inches long is polished so that the fibres do not prick the user. At one end of this stick the nodule is left unscrapped. This stick is then lengthwise split into half and inserted into a hollowed out bamboo piece about 4.5-5.5 inches long which serves as the handle for the fan and helps in rotating it. This stick is then attached to the fan on one side by stitching it with a strong thread. The handle thus used for rotation of the fan is called *ghoghi* while the stick is simply called *banis ki lakdi* or *daathi*.

Although the various kind of fans described here are found in use among all the three sub-groups of the Tharu, *moonj* fan are mostly found among the Rana, *laptani bena* are commonly found among the Rana and Dangaura while the coiled *sikri* fans are mostly used by the Katharia. It is also the Katharia only who use *saja bena* which are decorated with colourful woollen balls, etc., to add to the

beauty of the coiled *bena*. The Tharu *bena* is in a way most adaptive in nature since they are made employing not only basketry techniques but also embroidery and patchwork.

Designs woven or coiled on the *bena* are invariably geometric and quite similar to those coiled on baskets. Some coiled *bena* also have patterns resembling embroidery patterns made on them. Boas (1955, 17) maintains that a great deal of time spent on a craft result in a high degree of virtuosity which naturally results in the beauty of form, evenness of texture and ornamentation. This is enough to demonstrate the inter-relationship between the development of skill in an industry and artistic activity. Boas (*ibid*) further observed that "ornamental art has developed in those industries in which the greatest skill is attained. Artistic productivity and skill are closely correlated. Productive artists are found among those who have mastered a technique, among men when the industries are in their hands, among women when they are devoted to industrial activities". This observation holds good among the Tharu too. It has already been mentioned that basket work demonstrates a high grade of skill as compared with other traditional industries such as pottery and wood work which are quite significant crafts found here.

During the present investigation, baskets with ornamentation were found in abundance. As stated, the patterns on the *bena* are similar to those found on the baskets. Thus, zig-zag lines, triangles, lozenges and other angular patterns are found on the *bena* too. This similarity undoubtedly proves that the patterns have been transferred from the more developed craft. Boas (*ibid*) and Goldenweiser (1937, 160) had also put forward the view that in all probability it seems to be a general tendency to transmit any artistically motivated motif to a new material when great virtuosity is obtained in a particular industry. Since basket-work is a highly developed craft it may be presumed that the patterns have been transferred from basketry to fan making.

## Fishing Nets

Although agriculture is the most important means of securing subsistence and has become the pivot of the Tharu economic life, fishing till date is regarded as the most important subsidiary occupation. It serves as an important link between the gaps provided by agriculture from sowing to harvesting and to the next sowing. This activity thus calls for adequate fishing implements, a few of which have already been discussed. Fishing traps are meant for small scale fishing only, whereas if larger fishes have to be caught or large scale fishing is intended, fishing nets become essential. Several kinds of fishing nets are found in use among the Tharu.

The art of weaving fishing nets is known to every Tharu man by the age of 18 years. Young boys learn the art from their elders who train them with patience and care. However, the making of nets for household use seems to be mainly the task of the elderly men. Earlier *sun/sanai* [*Cortalaria juncea* L. (Fabaceae)] fibre was used for making nets, but gradually it was replaced by the use of cotton and silken thread obtained from the market. Today, the use of nylon thread is fast replacing the use of even cotton and silken threads. The material that is to be used for making a net depends on the size of fishes that are to be caught with its help. Thus, cotton thread, being relatively thicker in diameter is used to weave nets with lesser gap between its knots and meant to catch smaller fishes. Similarly silken or nylon thread is used to make nets with a greater gap between its knots and is meant to catch bigger fishes. However, there is no hard and fast rule, and nets having mesh of 0.5 cm are also made of nylon thread. Thus, it mainly depends on the time that can be given by the person and the material that he finds more convenient to use. Apart from thread, bamboo and rope are also needed while making a framed net.

Nets are woven with the help of two simple tools, the *sihari* and *dukta*. The *sihari* is simply a bamboo splint 12-15 inches long (depending on the convenience of the weaver),

that is used for wrapping loops. The breadth of the *sihari* roughly determines the size of the mesh, *i.e.*, the distance between the knots. Thus, the breadth of the *sihari* varies from 0.5 cm to 2.5 cms. Sometimes when a net with very wide mesh has to be woven, in place of a bamboo splint, a wooden block of appropriate breadth is used. The *dukta* is an iron shuttle like object about 5 inches long and it is bought from the blacksmith. The thread to be used in weaving the net is wrapped onto the *dukta*. The latter has clip like ends and is used for making knots after the thread has been looped on the *sihari*.

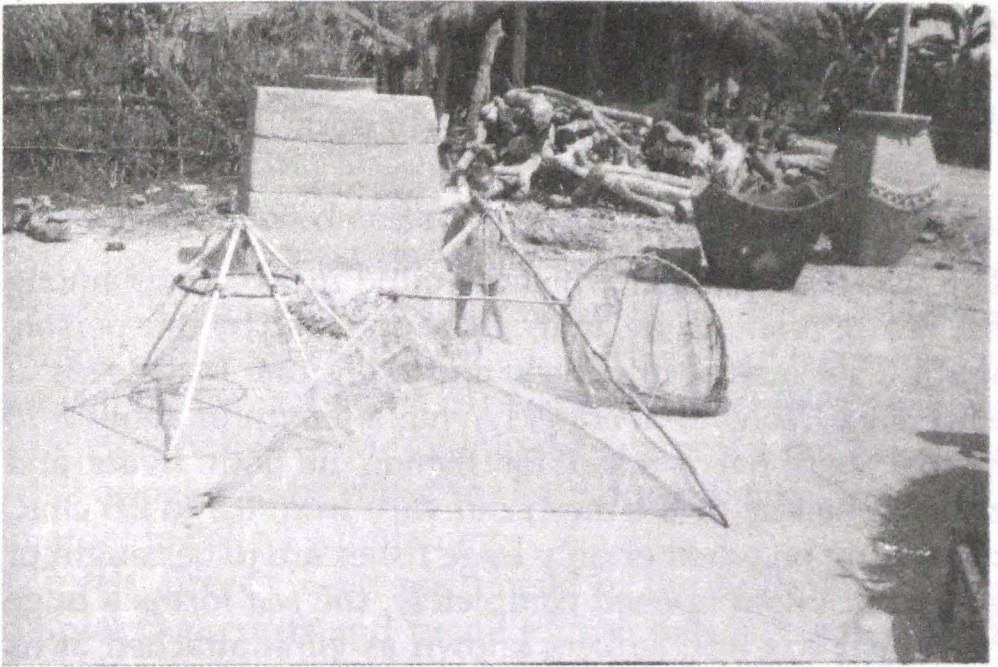
As already mentioned, different kinds of nets are used by the Tharu for fishing, some of which are framed nets. The different nets used by the Tharu are :

### Hiluka / Hilka

The *hiluka* is a framed net that is found in two shapes, circular and semi-circular. Bamboo used for making the frame is called *detera* and may be split longitudinally into two, to provide the frame a thickness that is both sturdy and easily pliable so that the desired shape for the frame may be acquired. For making a circular frame a single long bamboo stick is used. To make a semi-circular frame two pieces are needed, one shorter than the other. The shorter piece forms the diameter of the frame and the longer one, tied at its ends to the shorter one, forms the curve. On to this a net woven of cotton thread, having meshes about 1 cm broad, is attached. It takes about 4-5 days to weave the 1.6-2 feet long net attached to the *hiluka* and is meant to catch small fishes. Only one person is needed for operating the *hiluka*. Holding the frame with both the hands it is dipped in water where fishes are likely to be found and lifted after some time.

### Tapua / Bataou / Thathi

This too is a framed fishing net made up of seven bamboo sticks, six of which are tied together at one end with a thick rope to form a conical frame. The seventh stick known as



*Tapua, Pakhaiy and Hiluka Fishing Nets*

*pyan* forms a circular support and is tied at a little distance from the end at which the other six sticks known as *detera* are tied together. A rope is tied at the free ends of the bamboo frame joining them together and onto this is attached the net which has meshes about 1.5 cms. broad. The other end of the net is tied up at the apex of the frame. Used by one person for shallow water fishing, it takes about 10-15 days to weave its net. This net is called *bataou* by the Dangaura, *thathi* by the Rana and *tapua* by the Katharia Tharu. The method of use is the same as that of the *hiluka*.

### **Pakhaiy / Ghanghi**

This is a large net made up of two long bamboo sticks tied at one end to form a 'V' shaped frame. A cross piece is also added in between to hold the two bamboo sticks in place and to serve as a handle. A bag like net about 2 feet long is woven and tied onto the frame with the help of a strong rope. It takes about 15 days to weave this net having 0.5-1 cm broad meshes. The *pakhaiy* is used for fishing in rivers where running water is available. It is meant for catching small fishes. To catch fish the open end of the *pakhaiy* is

dragged against the current of water and pushed into the river floor at the shallow end. The fishes, swimming with the flow thus get caught in the net.

## Jaal

The *jaal* is a caste net which is found in two sizes among the Tharu. A small one, that can be operated by one person, about 2.5-3 metres in length, and a big one that needs at least 2-3 persons to operate, having a length of about 8-10 metres. This net is used for fishing in both rivers and ponds. The size of the mesh can vary from 0.5 to 2.5 cms., depending on whether only large fishes are to be caught or any kind. When opened completely, the *jaal* forms a huge circle that has iron sinkers known as *gurai* attached at its circumference with the help of a thick rope. It takes about 10-12 days to weave a small net and nearly a month to make a bigger one. For operating the net, it is swung over the head and thrown into the water. The sinkers attached to the net help it to go down and collect together, thus trapping the fishes of the area in it. Silken thread is generally used for making this net because of its light weight and strength. However, the use of nylon thread is fast replacing silken thread, The innovative use of mosquito nets, available in the markets, in place of woven nets was also noted in a few cases.

Fishing among the Tharu is not only a subsidiary occupation but also a favourite sport of both the sexes. Thus men, women and children go out fishing in batches fully equipped with nets, traps and other fishing accessories. Men and women are often seen fishing in separate groups and there is hardly any fixed set of rules for fishing. Children often accompany the women folk and assist them in fishing. Deep water fishing is done by men, whereas women find it more convenient to use the different framed nets which are more effective in slow running and shallow water. Men on the other hand mainly use the *jaal* for fishing. It is generally a woman's job to catch fish for the family. Common fishing expeditions are



organised only during the rainy season when both men and women go fishing together.

## Rope Making

The making of cord and rope by plaiting or twisting fibres, hair, and strips of hide presumably began in early Palaeolithic times, since stone age man needed cordage for fishing equipment and for the construction of traps. This is proved by the fact that a cave painting in eastern Spain of Late Palaeolithic or Mesolithic date depicts a person using what appears to be ropes to climb down the face of a cliff, in order to collect wild honey.

It has already been mentioned in the beginning of the chapter that cords and twine form important materials of daily use among the simple communities and the Tharu are no exception to this. Among the Tharu, ropes and twine are indispensable articles that are put to several use. Making of rope is a man's task among all the three sub-groups of the



A Tharu twisting rope

tribe. Every Tharu boy acquires the knowledge of twining rope by the age of 12-13 years. Young boys learn the skill by observing their elders, a little guidance and considerable practice.

Several sorts of rush (plants with long thin stem growing on wet ground) and sedges (coarse grass like plant growing in marshes or besides water) are used for making rope. *Patwa* [*Hibiscus cannabinus* L. (Malvaceae)], *bendhu* [*Helicteres isora* L. (Sterculiaceae)], *sanai* or *sun* [*Crotalaria juncea* L. (Fabaceae)] and jute [(*Corchorus capsularis* L. (Tiliaceae))] are plants whose skin or bark is used for rope making whereas *moonj* [*Saccharum bengalense* Retz. (Poaceae)] and *baib* [*Eulaliopsis binata* Hubbard (Poaceae)] are tall grasses which are used for the purpose. All the above are collected from the forest where they grow wild. However, now-a-days the Tharu have started growing *patwa*, *sun*, jute and *moonj* around their fields where they can easily have access to these. Besides, forest rules prohibit collection of forest products without prior permission. But till date most of the Tharu continue to collect these products slyly. *Patwa*, *bendhu*, *sun* and jute are collected during the months of *Bhadoun* and *Kuwar*, whereas *moonj* and *baib* are collected during *Kuwar* and *Kartik* since each acquires its greatest height during these month and are flowering at this time. Men and women both go into the jungle specially for collecting the materials to be used for rope making.

Before putting the raw material to use, it is to be processed. Thus, it acquires sufficient strength and can be twisted and twined easily. After cutting, the stalks or grass are tied in bundles and soaked in the nearby pond or a big ditch full of water. This process, called *saraana*, takes about a week or two. Soaking is essential to decompose the outside layer (retted) after which the next step of beating and scrapping follows. Once the fibres start separating, these are dried in the sun and tied up in bundles ready for twisting. Although unprocessed bark of the plants can also be used when dry, the rope thus made will not be strong

and long lasting. Of all the materials used, *bendhu* and *moonj* are considered the best and strongest for making rope. *Bendhu* is the softest and smoothest of all materials used for rope making while jute is the roughest.

There is no specific month during which rope is made, and as such processed fibre that is stored in sufficient quantity is used to make rope whenever required. The first stage in the manufacture of rope, from suitable prepared fibres, is twisting the yarn. Twisting of rope is mainly done by the hand. It consists of two main processes, drawing and twisting. The rope has also to be wound, but this is a separate process. Drawing consists in pulling out the fibres lengthwise and arranging them in more or less parallel order. All fibres have irregularities visible under the microscope and it is because of these that they adhere to each other when pressed by twisting. Twisting, thus provides elasticity and strength to the twisted rope. The twist may be in either direction, to the right (Z) or to the left (S). Among the Tharu drawing and twisting are done simultaneously. When two or more strands are combined by twisting them together, they must each at the same time be separately twisted in the opposite sense, so that they do not untwist when released. An alternative way of describing the process is to say that the strands are twisted separately at one end and allowed to untwist around each other at the other end. Thus, twisting is done by rolling the fibres between the palms of the hands while the twisted rope gets untwisted around the second strand at the other end which is caught tightly between the toes of the foot.

Twisted rope is sometimes further wound with the help of a suspended spindle like object called *dhera*. The *dhera* is made of wood and consists of two sticks joined together forming a cross. The upper end of the implement has a hook like cut or a small bamboo piece inserted through a hole. For winding the rope, strands already twisted by the hand are fastened to the *dhera* and then caught under the hook at one end while the other is tied to a tree or pole. The *dhera* is then rotated by the hand, dropped, and allowed to swing. The horizontal wooden piece of the *dhera* acts as a

weight to maintain the spin. This way, very fine and even rope is produced. Rope may be twisted together more than twice to acquire a greater thickness and thus more strength.

The rope is put to numerous uses by the Tharu. The most important one being to tie wooden post and poles while making huts. *Bendhu*, being the strongest is always used in construction work. Weaving of the *khat* (cot) and *machia* (low stool) is done by rope. *Patwa* is the most commonly used rope for weaving a cot since it is quite soft in texture, though the most preferred material is *bendhu* and *moonj*. However, since these two are needed for several other tasks, these can hardly be used for cot weaving. A neatly woven, good quality *khat* is called *palka*. Cots are exclusively woven by men who train the young boys of the house in this craft. It takes about 3-4 hours to completely weave a cot, depending on the design to be woven. Rope is used as the warp and weft to create different designs or weaves known as *baan*. The most common patterns woven here are *pukhri* or *chauki baan*, *dhikia* or *dirwa baan*, *khjura baan*, *panchauki* and *palka baan*.

The *sikhar* is a basket / pot holder, made of rope, which hangs from the beams of each hut. The *mokhar* is a cup like cover, made of rope, that is used to tie the mouth of oxen and calves so that they cannot eat the grains while working in the fields or drink milk respectively. Rope is put to several other tasks such as in making fishing nets and traps, for tying things together, tying up the cattle, *etc.*

## Wood Work

There are indirect evidences available indicating towards the fact that early man used wood almost from the beginning of the Stone Age. The reason for scarcity of direct evidence being that wood is preserved over long periods only under most exceptional circumstances. This craft that evolved during the lower and middle stages of the Palaeolithic, has achieved a stage of total development today where the most artistic and intricately carved objects can be found.

Woodwork though still at an underdeveloped stage among the Tharu, forms one of their important supplementary occupations and as such, every household owns a set of tools for ordinary carpentry work. Every Tharu man learns the skill from his elders, working as an assistant, which helps him in providing for his household needs of furniture and a few other objects that are made of wood. Carpentry work is done by men of all the three sub-groups with little help from men who are more skilled in the work. Since the skill is not developed to a great extent in the tribe, it is used for making objects of utility and has not been able to acquire the status of a craft which can be utilized for making artistic or ornamental objects. Although carpentry has not been taken up by the Tharu as a full time occupation, now-a-days a few men who have acquired training from the ITI under the TRYSEM, (meant to develop this skill which was at a basic level among the Tharu for self employment) have adopted it as a part-time job. Thus, today a few men in the tribe can be found whose help is sought specially for making doors and windows. Such persons informed that they could earn about Rs. 40-50 per day. However, the customer has to provide unskilled labour and all the wood needed for this purpose.

It has already been mentioned that the Tharu are a nearly self sufficient group dependent on the forest for most of their needs. The forest department allows every Tharu household to cut two trees per year for construction and repair of their huts and furniture. However, trees are felled beyond the permissible limit by the Tharu who go at night to the forests and cut down trees illegally. *Sheesum* [*Dalbergia sissoo* Roxb, (Fabaceae)] and *sakhu* [*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. (Dipterocarpaceae)] wood are mainly used, the next preference being *sagaun* [*Tectona grandis* L.f. (Verbenaceae)]. Mango [*Mangifera indica* L. (Anacardiaceae)] and *babool* [*Acacia nilotica* (L.) Willd. ex Del. subsp. *indica* (Benth.) Brenan (Mimosaceae)] wood are also used if others are not available. Seasoning of the logs is



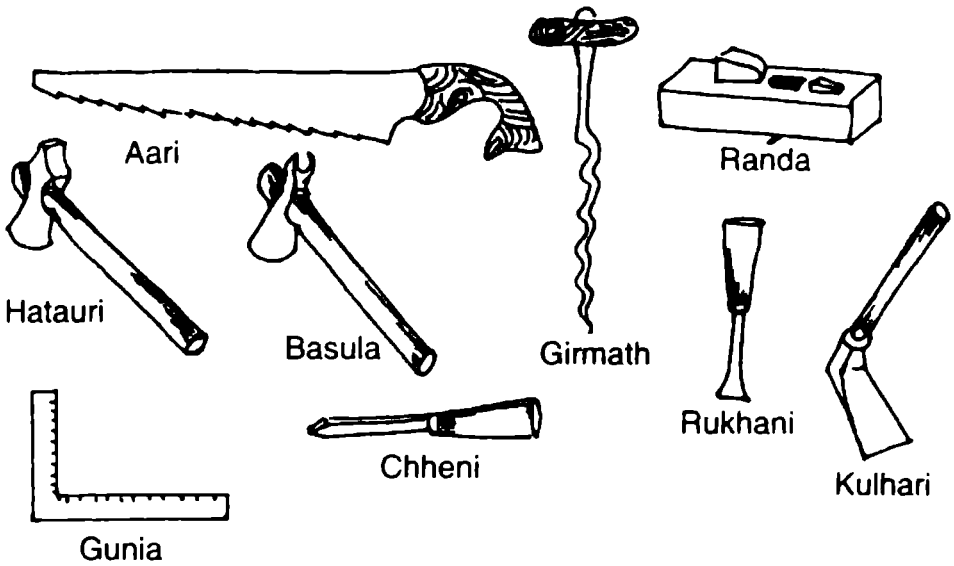


A Tharu with his carpentry tools

done by leaving them unused in the open where due to the changing climatic conditions the logs are automatically seasoned.

No indigenous implements are found in use here. Implements used in carpentry work are common to those used elsewhere. The main tools are: *Aari*, a common saw for cutting wood; *Girmath*, a long twisted nail meant for drilling a hole ; *Randa*, an implement meant to make a wooden surface even and smooth; *Hathaura/Hathauri*, a common hammer, for beating in nails; *Basula*, a hammer with one end blunt and the other sharp and forked; *Chheni*, a big nail like iron object with a flat sharp edge, *Rukhani*, *patashi*, *nahanni*, i.e., chisels with blades of different sizes; Wrench, to grip and tighten nuts and bolts; *Gunia*, an 'L' shaped wooden scale for measurement and *Kulhari*, an axe for chopping wood.

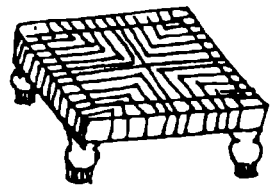
The main use of wood among the Tharu is in construction of the Tharu huts and some basic furniture



Main Carpentry Implements

whose quality and finish are not very good. The usual furniture that one can find in every Tharu house consists of a number of cots, a couple of crude chairs and stools, and sometimes a wooden box or two for keeping valuables. This being the general state of an average Tharu house, one cannot expect to find much furniture in any one house. A brief description of the use of wood and articles made out of it is given below.

It has already been mentioned that wood is extremely essential in the construction of the Tharu hut. Huge logs are cut to form pillars and beams that serve as the frame of the house. The frame (*chaukhat*) of the door and windows, as well as the doors and windows, are made of solid wood. Planks are joined together to form these items, thus ensuring that these remain strong. The *khat* is a cot whose frame and legs are made of wood and onto the frame a seat of rope is woven. The *khat* is used for sitting, sleeping and also for drying food items in the sun. The *machia* is a low stool similar to the *khat*, but square in shape. The legs of the *khat* and *machia* are sometimes shaped in different ways to make them look attractive. The *kursi* and *tipai* are crude chair and bench respectively formed by joining planks of wood that are set up on four



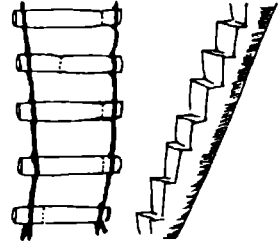
Machia



Takhti/Patuli

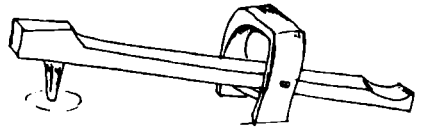
legs. The *tipai* sometimes is also used as a table. The *takhti* or *patuli* is a low plank having two thick and long blocks of wood joined to its base that serve as stands. It is used for sitting, as a cover or door for the *khulra* and also as a low

table for keeping articles temporarily. The *khurkhuri* is a ladder found of two kinds. The first one is made of bamboo pieces tied with a strong rope at both ends to construct a foldable ladder. The other one which is found in nearly every house, to climb up to the mezzanine, is made of a single log of wood. A log of appropriate size is chosen and wide chunks are cut off at equal distance which serve as the foothold.



Khurkhuri

The *dheki* is a manual thresher made up of two wooden blocks with a long plank attached in between. At one end of this plank a conical iron or wooden block is added. When the other



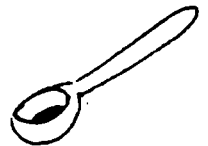
Dheki

end of the plank is pressed down with the leg and released, the conical block crushes the grains under it, thus removing



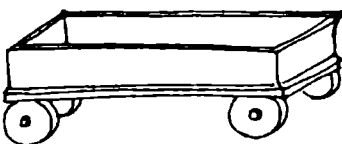
Mathani

the husk. The *mathani* is a wooden stick with a broad convex base and is used for churning milk and curd. A wooden spoon or ladle known as *chatwa* is used for cooking as well as serving. The *channi* is a square or rectangular shaped box like object without a lid, made up of wooden



Chatwa

planks joined together. It has four wheels attached and is used to keep fodder for the

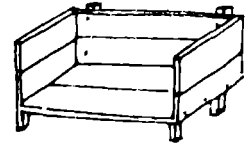


Channi

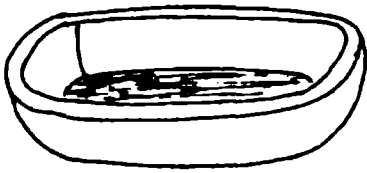
cattle to eat. The *chalni* is similar to the *channi* except that it does not have wheels. Instead it has four legs and usually has only two or three elevated sides. In place of wooden



planks, sometimes a log may be cut into half, carved out and made hollow and used for keeping fodder. The *dona* is a log carved out from the centre to form a container that is used for



Chalni



Dona

giving the cattle fodder and water. The *dona* has neither wheels nor legs attached at its base. *Dila* is a fork like wooden object used to close a calf's mouth to prevent it



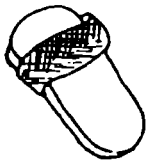
Dila

from drinking its mother's milk.

The *paula* is a wooden slipper made out of a plank of wood having three holes in it through which a rope is passed that serves as the straps of the slipper. Similarly, the *silapata* and *khadua* too are wooden slippers.



Paula



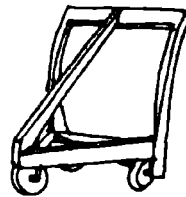
Silapata



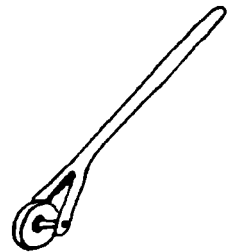
Khadua

The first has a thick cloth or rubber strap nailed to the sides of the plank, while the second has a wooden nail that is held between the toe and fingers while walking. The *gharghara* is a walker meant to help children walk. It has three wooden wheels

which move forward as the child walks with its support. A toy having a single wheel attached to a long stick is also known by the same name. The last item is one which is of great importance to the Tharu since it is the



Gharghara



most common means of transport in the area. The *dunlop*, as it is called, is a wooden cart about four metres long and two metres wide at the rear side but narrow in the front. This cart is made of wooden planks nailed to a strong triangular frame. The cart is so constructed that it can be attached to both bullocks as well as a tractor. Earlier



A Dunlop

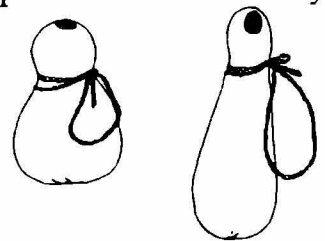
wooden wheels were used and the cart was known as *ladia*, but now pneumatic tyres are used and hence it has acquired the name of *dunlop*.

Though not very well-developed, the Tharu are utilizing their carpentry skills optimally to make necessary items for which otherwise they would have to spend quite a considerable amount of money from their scarce resources.

### A Few Minor Items

Apart from the articles already discussed in the chapter, a few others are found all over the Tharu area. These items are good examples depicting the artistic bend of the Tharu mind and their skill in beautifying simple articles of daily use.

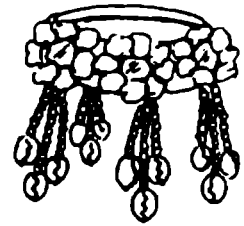
The *lauka*, a passing reference to which has been made, is a gourd container found ubiquitously in the Tharu community. Probably one of the earliest containers used by



Lauka

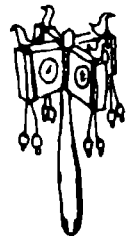
humans, it is one that is found in use in several tribes even today. The Tharu use the *lauka* mainly for storing *jar* (rice beer) and dry fishes as these remain cool in it. For making the *lauka* either an appropriate shape and size of gourd is chosen or while still small, it is moulded to the desired shape. This is done by restricting its growth at the upper end by tying up a piece of cloth tightly onto it. The gourd, thus selected, is then dried in the sun for few days. When it gets nearly yellowish, a small hole is made on the upper end through which the flesh and seeds are taken out. The hollow gourd is once again dried until it becomes hard enough to be used as a container. A rope is tied around the constricted part which serves as a handle.

The *dharua* or *aahari* is a thick ring like holder which is placed over the head to facilitate the carrying of baskets or other round containers and any kind of load. The ring is a coil of *poonja* grass wrapped with a thick cloth. The cloth is heavily decorated with mirror, beads, shell, woollen balls, sequins and colourful pieces of cloth, thus making it a beautiful piece of art. Made by women, it takes about a day or two to make the *dharua*.



Dharua/Aahari

The *bajna* is a rattle made by women for children to play. Small pebbles are put into four empty match boxes that are then covered with colourful cloth and decorated with woollen balls, beads and coloured cloth pieces. The next step is of attaching the boxes to each other in such a way that they form a cross, at the centre of which a stick is added that serves as the handle.



Bajna

The *mathera* is a rectangular piece of heavily decorated cloth tied on the head of oxen during festivals and ceremonies or while taking them to fairs for sale. The cloth has the traditional Tharu *kasida* (embroidery) as well as *leharua* (applique) and patch work done on it,



Mathera

apart from woollen balls, shells, breads, *etc.* which are added on for further decoration. Today, the use of the *mathera* has almost become a thing of the past.

The *khara* is a small purse like bag made of a thick cloth. Earlier the use of the *khara* was very popular, but now-a-days instead of these big bags are being used. The *khara* was extensively embroidered and decorated with mirror pieces, beads shells, *etc.*, and used by women while going out, for keeping money, *etc.* Similar purses, but with no decoration, were used by men for keeping drugs and smoking materials.



Khara

Today apart from the *lauka*, making as well as use of the other mentioned items is sadly on the decline. Younger Tharu consider it more convenient to purchase substitutes cheaply available in the market. Thus, it will not be long before one would rarely get a glimpse of the items which have been typical of the Tharu culture.

The Tharu fulfil their need for different utility items by using materials naturally available in the vicinity in the most skilful manner, attempting to make each of these not only utility items but also pieces of art. Among the most beautiful pieces of native craftsmanship, which one can admire during even a casual stroll through a Tharu village, are the different kinds of fishing nets, mats, colourful and decorated baskets, hand fans, bags, *etc.* which the tribals turn out with great neatness and accuracy (Maiti: 2001, 72).

Basket-work includes the making of basket containers of different shapes and size, indigenous umbrella-cum-hat, winnowing plate, mats and fishing traps. Apart from this, a variety of fishing nets, ropes and numerous beautiful hand fans can be found. Wood craft though indulged in, has not developed to an extent where it can be utilized for ornamental work or artistic pursuits.

Work is so divided that both men and women share the task of manufacturing the aforesaid items. However, women exclusively make the finer, more time consuming and intricately designed articles, such as the ceremonial baskets and hands fans. This however does not undermine

a man's role, since men are responsible for making the various fishing nets, traps, ropes, apart from a number of baskets, and also doing all the wood work. The need of containers and receptacles for storing and carrying the belongings exists in every society including the Tharu, who once were a wandering tribe. It is because of this that the Tharu put a great emphasis on light weight, sturdiness and appropriate shape for their woven containers. However, it is the ceremonial baskets which are most eye catching. These are containers of exquisite shape and smoothness, most of which are beautified with geometrical designs achieved by the use of additional multicoloured material and decorated further with accessories. Apart from baskets, the intricately coiled and twilled colourful hand fans are specimen of the Tharu love for colour and fine designs. Whoever sees the finished ceremonial baskets and hand fans will be impressed with the regularity, smoothness and neatness of its texture which has all the fine qualities of delicate handiwork.

There exists no specialization in relation to any of these crafts. Every household has to fulfil its needs for utility items on its own. If need be, other fellow Tharu are forthcoming in providing their labour services and guidance if they happen to be more deft in the activity. Thus, every Tharu is self sufficient to a certain extent, having knowledge of several essential crafts that help maintain a balance between their needs and limited resources. Indulging in these activities should not however be considered a drudge, since every Tharu enjoys the task. Thus, making of fishing nets and traps is done with all earnestness since fishing is the most popular sport and has the added advantage of providing a delicacy enjoyed by them. Similarly carpentry, rope making, mat making, basketry, *etc.*, result not only in providing necessities but also give their creative urges a satisfaction beyond compare. Although knowledge of the crafts is very important for the subsistence of every Tharu, it is not taken as *passe* or trivial. Tharu who are deft at and innovative in any craft are greatly admired and looked up to by others. This serves as an incentive to the younger generation to acquire and continue these traditional art forms uninterruptedly.

# 6

## *Clothing, Adornment and other Means of Self Beautification*

“The tendency to decorate the human body is probably universal. Every society has its own idea of what is beautiful and attractive, and thus we come across a great variation in the way people dress and adorn themselves. It is characteristic of human beings to reinforce and enhance their natural qualities by artificial means. We take pains to maintain ourselves in a proper condition; we enhance, disguise, or alter peculiarities of our personal appearance, such as features, complexion and growth of hair. We decorate ourselves in different ways permanently, by scars, tattoos, changes in the shape of a body part; or temporarily, in the form of body paints or objects such as feathers, jewellery, skins and clothes. Much of this decoration seems to be motivated by aesthetic considerations, which, of course, may vary from culture to culture” (Ember and Ember. 1994, 433). However, apart from being motivated by aesthetic considerations, there are many other reasons which play an important part. Such acts are undertaken to protect oneself from the difficult climatic conditions, to distinguish oneself from fellow beings, to delineate social position, rank, sex, occupation, local and ethnic identity or religion within a society or maybe to attract the attention of others.

Going into the origin of clothing and adornment, they appear to be the most important discoveries along with fire in the Palaeolithic period since covering oneself as a

protection against nature's hazardous climate facilitated man's movement geographically, thus allowing him more freedom.

Man began to clothe himself first with big leaves and later on with the bark of trees. Thereafter came the use of skins and furs of animals. These were cleaned and dried in the sun before use. However, the actual production of clothes began only in the Neolithic age, when for the first time flax, jute and cotton were grown. At that time the spinning wheels and handlooms were also invented which led to the production of spun and woven yarns of cotton, wool and silk.

As noted earlier, ways of dressing and adorning generally vary from one culture to another. Again, these form a crude pointer towards the varied social, economic and religious status of the people. These variations in clothes are due to several reasons — different geographical climates, different ways of life, different historical and cultural backgrounds, different view points, influence of external forces such as intermixing between the people of different cultures. When two cultures come into contact with each other and mutually adopt some of each other's material traits, the foremost in most cases are clothes and ornaments. The best example of this mutual adoption is the case of city dwellers and village folks. City people are mostly responsible for bringing about a change in dress and adornments of villagers, who quickly imitate the styles of the former. This is also the cause of the fast changing forms of dressing and adorning in different tribes of the world.

The importance of clothing and adornment in any culture cannot be underestimated and therefore various scholars have ascribed different factors and principles to its origin. The most important of these being protective, religious, aesthetic and sense of shame. There being several theories of origin of clothing and adornments, it is quite possible that several of these factors together led to its origin. However, it can be stated that climate of a place and the nature of man's occupation undoubtedly had a definite

and marked influence on the shape, size, style and quality of garments and ornaments used by them. As man became more and more conscious of physical charm, the idea of dress and adornment caught his imagination more firmly and severely. Today, clothing and ornaments have not only become our basic necessity but also have an important part to play in our social recognition. It is clear now that these items have become a traditional heritage and cultural speciality of every human community.

### (a) The Tharu Attire

Like every indigenous group, the Tharu too have their own special way of dressing and adorning. Differences exist in the attire on the basis of age and sex. Thus men, women and children dress differently. Although there are some similarities in the dresses of the different sub-groups, there also exist many distinguishing features. Among the Tharu, the main purpose for clothing oneself are protection against the onslaught of varrying climatic conditions; as a mark of respect to one's elders; due to a sense of shame and, lastly, to accentuate one's beauty.

The Tharu have greatly been influenced by the attire of the town dwellers and a speedy change has taken place in their dressing style. Today, except in a few interior villages, the traditional form of dressing and adorning has largely been replaced by the ones used by town dwellers. Described in this chapter are the traditional Tharu costumes, ways of adorning and other related aspects along with the changes that have occurred in these areas over the years.

### Normal Garb

There is not much difference in the daily wear clothes or those worn on special occasions, except that on special occasions new clothes with more accessories are worn. Among all the three sub-groups found in Lakhimpur

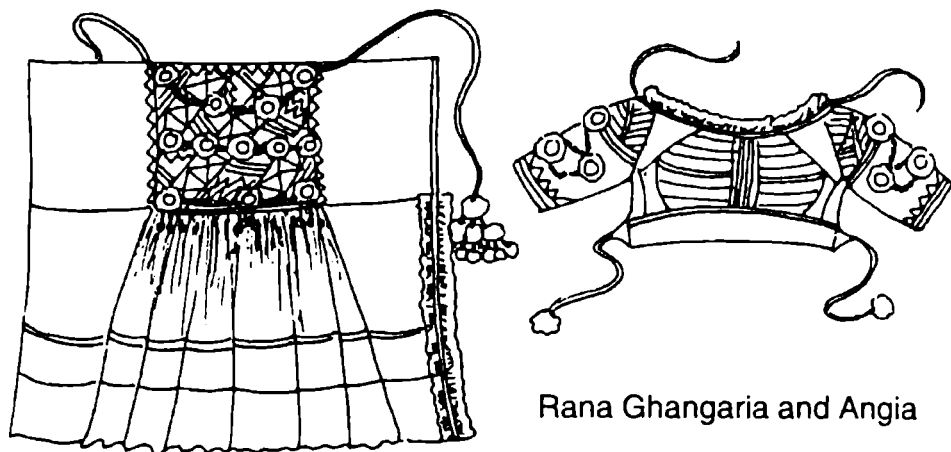


Kheri, namely Rana, Dangaura and Katharia, men and children wear similar clothes. However, there is difference in the attire of the womenfolk.



Normal Garb of Rana Women

The traditional normal garb of the Rana Tharu women is *ghangaria*, *angia* and *urhnia*. This attire is quite popular even today with about 50% of Rana women continuing to wear these dress items. The *ghangaria* is an exclusively embroidered and decorated skirt whose length may vary from around the knees to 6 to 7 inches below it. This garment is quite heavy and is made up of 6 to 7 metres of cloth, of different colours, apart from other decorative materials. Sometimes, 9 to 10 metres of cloth is used to make the *ghangaria* which gives it an extra flair and beauty. Such *ghangarias* are worn on special occasions, e.g., on festivals, marriages, while visiting a fair/market on during the Holi dance.



Rana Ghangaria and Angia

When spread out completely the *ghangaria* is trapezium or quadrangle in shape. A unique feature of this garment is that it is not stitched on the sides to make it cylindrical like usual skirts. Thus, it can be described as a wrap around. For description sake, the *ghangaria* may be divided horizontally into four parts which are made of different coloured cloth pieces stitched together and may even be of different materials. The first part is called the *toi*, the second part is the *lehang*a or *ghangaria*, the third part is called the *mangji*, while the last part is called *ghutta* or *ghota*. Vertically the *ghangaria* may be divided into three parts. The vertically centre and horizontally topmost part is the *goath*, an extensively embroidered and decorated patch, approximately  $9 \times 12$  inches to  $12 \times 15$  inches in size. Above the *goath* an eyeway is made through which a thick cord called the *jhampa* is passed. The *jhampa* is sometimes decorated with woollen balls or ribbons called *phula* and *pheeta* respectively, and is meant to tie the skirt around the waist. Just below the *goath* begins the horizontally second part of the *ghangaria* that consists of several tiny and closely stitched pleats. Although the other two parts are a horizontal continuation of the same piece of cloth, neither do not have any pleats nor do they consist of a continuation of the *jhampa*. Vertically, on the side edges of the *ghangaria* a decorated *pattha* (lace) or *pheeta* (ribbon) is attached for further beautification since this part comes in the front on wearing the *ghangaria*.

The *ghangaria*, which is worn below the navel, is fastened onto the waist with the help of the *jhampa* in such a way

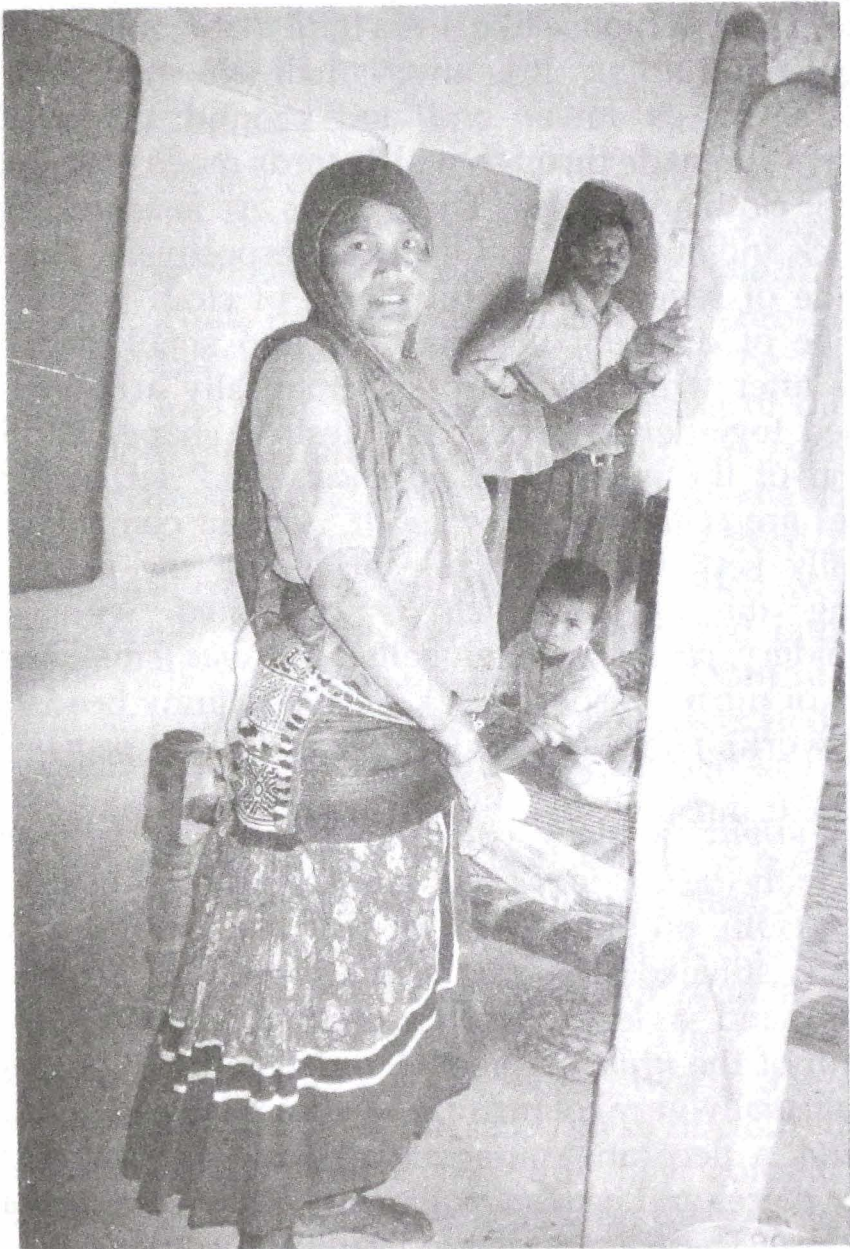
that the *goath* faces backwards. The part hanging to the left side is taken around the waist from the left and stuck into the *jhampa* in front. After this the part hanging on the right is taken over the right side of the waist and stuck over the part that had been brought from over the left, upto its middle. Thus, in front the *ghangaria* forms a somewhat inverted 'V' shape at its lower end.

The *angia* is a blouse like dress item that is worn with the *ghangaria* and *urhnia*. It is always half (short) sleeved and backless. At its lower end and around the neckline, eyeways are made through which cords made of strands of wool or cloth are passed. These cords are fastened around the back and at the back of the neck respectively. The *angia* is made of several colourful pieces of cloth, which may even be of different material, cut into small strips and pieces after which they are systematically arranged and stitched together to give it the desired shape. The front portion of the *angia* is called *chaati* and *lak*, while the sleeves are called *bahari* or *bahati*. Colour combination is specially kept in mind while arranging the pieces and making the *angia*, which is decorated with *kasida* embroidery, *phoola* (woollen balls), *arsis*, *aras* (small and big pieces of mirror respectively), *chilmili* (shiny beads) *tukli* (patchwork), *pheeta* (ribbon), rupee coins and *mangji* (pint pleats).

The *urhnia*, a black coloured *dupatta*, is traditionally worn with the *ghangaria* and *angia*. It is a 2.5 metre long muslin cloth, on the breadth of both the sides of which a *ghutta* is stitched. The *ghutta* is a cloth 3 to 6 inches in breadth and a length corresponding or longer to the breadth of the *urhnia*. The *ghutta* may be plain or printed and is usually very colourful. Sometimes instead of adding a *ghutta*, a decorative attachment made of woollen balls, mirror pieces and beads are attached at the four corners of the *urhnia*. These are added to beautify the *urhnia* and also provide weight, so that it may rest easily on the head. The *urhnia*, according to Rana Tharu customs, must always rest on and cover the head since it is considered indecent and shameful to keep one's head uncovered and show their



*juda* (a small bun necessarily made at the top and back of the head by the women who wear the *ghangaria*) publicly. In winters and sometimes in summers too, the *urhnia* is used to cover the chest and back while on other times the *urhnia* is left hanging down from the head, covering the back.

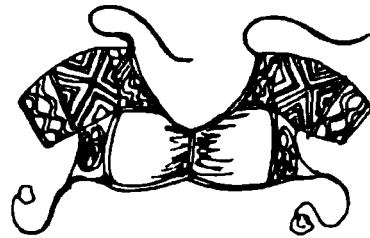
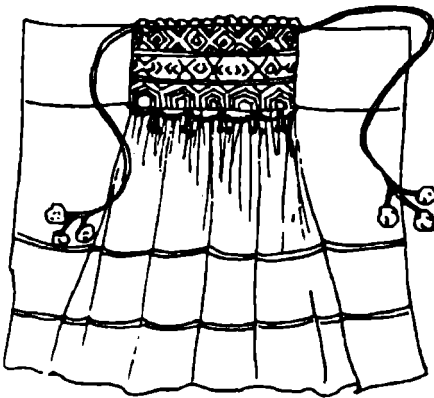


Normal Garb of Katharia Women

The attire of the Katharia women is quite similar to that of the Rana women. Their traditional dress is the *nehaga* (a

corrupt form of *lehanga*), *angia* and *hunia*. Today, however even the few who wear this traditional dress wear it along with a blouse instead of the *angia*. The percent of women who wear this dress is about 40%, most of who live in interior areas. The Katharia *nehaga* is similar to the Rana *ghangaria* and consists of similar parts. The little difference being that the goath, which is found in the *ghangaria*, is replaced by the *gumpti* in the *nehaga*. The *gumpti* too is a patch extensively decorated with embroidery, applique work, beads, sequins and woollen balls. The *gumpti*, however, is smaller in size having dimensions of approximately 6 × 10 inches. The Katharia call the belt or cord that passes through the *gumpti*, *tanni*. The *tanni* is sometimes beautified by adding woollen balls at both its end and is called *shobha*.

The *angia* was earlier worn by the Katharia Tharu with the *nehaga*. It resembled the *angia* of the Rana's but instead of using several coloured pieces, it was made of only one or



Katharia Nehaga and Angia

two colours as a base, and a white coloured cloth was used for decorating it with *leharia* or applique work. The Katharia Tharu *angia* had half sleeves and the back was half covered. The portion that covered the chest was called *chaati*, the portion below it *lak*, a triangular piece below the sleeves is the *karbari*, the shoulders are called *joki*, the sleeves *bahanti* and the back the *pachua*. The main difference between the Rana and Katharia *angia* was that the Katharia *angias* were intricately worked upon with applique work, which is called *leharia* in this area, while the Rana *angia* has

a combination of patchwork, applique work and embroidery. Today, however, due to the lack of time and patience no Katharia woman makes these *angias* with exquisite *leharia* work on it. Only a few old women still possess specimen of this beautiful art and workmanship. Now-a-days, use of the *angia* has totally been replaced by that of the blouse which is similar to those worn throughout the length and breadth of India along with a sari. These blouses always have a front opening and in place of buttons the widespread use of cowri shells, beads or coins can be noted.

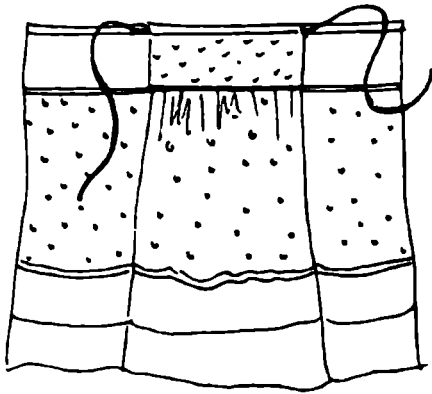
Along with the *nehaga* and blouse, the *hunia* is worn. This is a two metre long, bright colour linen or muslin cloth, which may be plain or printed. It is worn over the blouse covering the front, taken over the left shoulder and over the head.

The dress of the Dangaura Tharu women is *nahaga*, *bullayat* and *aghran* or the *lungi* and *bullayat*. The Dangaura *nahaga* is quite different from those worn by the Rana and



Normal Garb of Dangaura Women

Katharia, in that it is devoid of any embroidery and decoration since it does not have a *goath* or *gumpti* stitched on to it. The Dangaura *nahaga* is longer than the other two and reaches just a few inches above the ankle. It takes about 3.5 to 4 metres of cloth to make a Dangaura *nahaga*, which is much less compared to the cloth used by the Rana and Katharia. Due of this, there are hardly any pleats in the Dangaura *nahaga*. Apart from these, the parts of the *nahaga*



Dangaura Nahaga and Bullayat

and method of wearing it, is similar to the other two. The *lungi* is another dress item worn by the Dangaura women. This is sometimes worn in place of the *nahaga* and is simply a 2.25 metre long printed linen or cotton cloth that is wrapped around the waist. A front opening blouse called *bullayat* is worn with the *nahaga* or *lungi*. This is a common blouse, similar to the one worn by the Katharia Tharu women. Instead of the *urhnia*, the Dangaura women wear an *aghran*, which is a 1.5 to 2 metre long printed muslin or linen cloth. It is worn when one goes to a market place or on special occasions. Usually the Dangaura women are seen without it. The *aghran* is worn in a special way by Dangaura women. It is folded in the middle and this portion is kept towards the left side. Now, it is either taken over, or from under the left shoulder side over the back and towards the right shoulder. The other free end is taken over from front to the right shoulder and tied to the end that was brought from the back side, forming a knot that rests over the right shoulder.

Until about 15 years ago, girls began to wear the *ghangaria* from the tender age of 4 to 5 years. These dresses



were stitched by their mother or other elder women of the house. However, now-a-days, girls who wear the traditional Tharu attire begin wearing it from the age of 12 to 13 years, *i.e.*, by the time they become adept in the art of stitching and embroidery.

Different kind of fabrics are used to make a *ghangaria*. Earlier only cotton, poplin or linen were used, but now-a-days synthetic fabrics, like terricot, ployester, *etc.* are also used because of their easy availability, durability and convenience in washing. However, many Tharu till date prefer cotton cloth since it is more comfortable and affordable. Also, the Dangaura Tharu, who are economically weaker than the other two subgroups, always wear cotton or linen since they find it much more affordable compared to synthetic material. A great liking for red, cobalt blue and white can be noted among all the Tharu sub-groups. The traditional colours used for the *ghangaria* and *nahaga* are red, cobalt blue and white. In the traditional garment, the *toi* and *mangji* were made of white coloured cloth, the *lehanga* or *ghangaria* of a particular hand woven red coloured cloth with thin white, black and green stripes and a green border made by weavers around the tribal belt. This cloth, known as *cherkhanwa* is hardly available now. The *ghutta* which forms the lower border of the *ghangaria* was always cobalt blue in colour. Today also much of the preference for these colours remain, and the same colour scheme is usually followed, especially by the Rana Tharu. However, some variations can be noted, such as the use of majenta or maroon colours in place of red, or the use of material with small floral designs printed on them instead of plain ones. Some girls of the younger generation were also noted trying their hands at using a totally different colour scheme, the colours chosen in such cases are usually bright ones, such as parrot green, fluorescent yellow, shocking pink, *etc.* A point to be noted here is that whatever colour may be used, the *ghutta* is always made up of a plain cloth devoid of any print whatsoever and every *ghangaria* or *nehaga* usually has some shade of red in it.

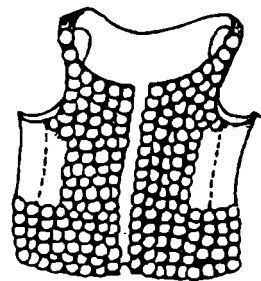


Traditionally, the Tharu never wore undergarments, but today a gradual change can be noted. Although women who wear *ghangaria* do not wear any undergarments even today, young girls who wear salwar suits, saris, skirt and tops, wear undergarments similar to those worn by the women in cities.

The practice of covering one's face with a veil is not prevalent among the Tharu. But all those who wear the *ghangaria* must cover their head with the *urhnia* as a mark of respect towards their elders and also because it is considered shameful to show ones *juda* (hair tied in a bun) publicly. According to the older generation Tharu, the tradition of covering the face in front of one's father-in-law and husband's elder brother exists, but this too is for a certain time period, *i.e.*, until a woman has her first child. This rule is, however, followed only by a few families at present and not in general practice. Since widowhood is not considered a stigma among the Tharu, widowed women wear clothes similar to those worn by other women of the society. Thus, no restriction in regard to dress or adornment is found among them, except that widows do not wear glass bangles.

The effect of culture contact can easily be seen on the Tharu. In recent years they have greatly been influenced by the attire of the town dwellers. Now a days, a lot of Tharu women have taken to wearing saris and salwar suits. Usually, only unmarried Tharu girls wear suits while only married women wear saris. Some young girls are also seen wearing skirts and tops or shirts. All these clothes are similar to those worn in the cities.

The traditional dress of the Tharu men was *dhoti*, *saluka*, and *fatuhi*. The *saluka* is a short sleeve cotton shirt without a collar. It has a big pocket on one side which generally served as a tobacco pouch. The *fatuhi* is a thick black sleeveless cotton jacket, decorated sometimes with several coins. A few men used to wear a



Fatuhi

*magota* which was a white cloth, approximately 8 inches broad, that was tied in between the legs and fastened to the



Kulhi

waist with the help of a rope or cord. Along with the above, the *kulhi*, a white cotton Gandhi cap was used which generally became quite dirty as a result of absorption of oil, that was liberally used

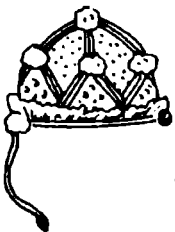
on the head. The above attire was worn by Tharu men of all the three sub-groups residing in the Kheri district.

Today, the Tharu men have greatly changed their way of dressing. At present almost 80% men are seen wearing trousers, shirts, jeans and T-shirts. The remaining 20% wear *dhoti* or *pajama* and *kurta* though this percent also is fast decreasing. This 20% mainly comprises of the older generation, who, though have changed with times to a certain extent, find themselves comfortable only in their traditional clothes. The dress worn by the Tharu men today, in no way helps distinguish them as belonging to a scheduled tribe since modernization has left its mark on them very clearly. The use of undergarments, which did not exist among the Tharu earlier, has gradually been adopted by men too. Tharu men generally prefer to use terricot or other synthetic materials in place of cotton material because these are easy to clean and more durable. No preference for any colour was noted among the Tharu men.

Among the Tharu, children between the age of 1 to 5 years wear a *jhula*, which is a 'V' or round neck shirt with a front opening that is usually stitched by the women of the house. In place of buttons, coins are used. A few children were also seen



Jhula



Topa



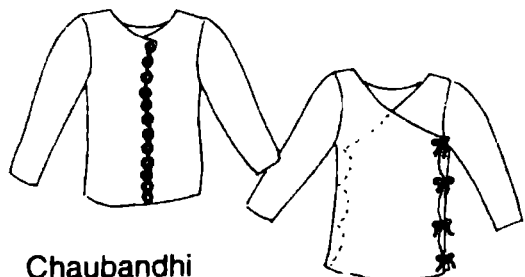
wearing a frock that is locally called *jhugli*. Some people make infants wear the *topa*, a cap made of cotton cloth. The *topa* may either be a plain white one or a colourful and decorated one.

Decoration is done with applique, mirror pieces, lace, ribbon, woollen balls and coins. Apart from these the *sithania*, a *pajama* like dress, is also used for children. However, during the summer season most children upto 5 years of age roam around only in a half pant called *nekar*, or an underwear called *chaadi*. All children above 4-5 years of age wear shirts, pants, skirts and tops or frocks, dresses that are similar to those worn by children of the urban area. Traditionally the Tharu children used to wear clothes similar to their elders, *i.e.*, girls wore *ghangaria*, *angia* and *urhnia* while the boys wore a *dhoti* or simply the *nagota*. Today, nowhere in the district can children be seen in these clothes. There is no particular colour used in the clothes meant for children, but as far as material is concerned, cotton clothes are preferred for them, since these are more comfortable.

### Seasonal Changes

Major changes do not take place in the Tharu attire due to changes in the season. The clothes already described are worn in all seasons although a few changes do occur. During the summers, earlier, men simply wore a *nagota* while working in the fields and kept a *chauthi*, *i.e.*, a folded cotton/linen cloth on their head so that the direct sunlight did not hit them. Children were made to wear minimum clothes or none at all, and women preferred to wear worn out clothes since these would be light. Today, during the summers, men wear the *dhoti*, *pajama*, shorts, or simply trousers. Sometimes they also wear a *bandi* or *banyan* along with their lower wear. The *chauthi* is no longer used. Tharu, presently wear their usual clothes while children are made to wear only a few light clothes.

In the winter season, men and women put on a *chaubandhi*, apart from the other clothes. The *chaubandhi* is a thick black cotton coat stitched



Chaubandhi

Chaubandhi

by the Tharu women. Several layers of cloth are first of all stitched together to make the *chaubandhi* thick and warm before cutting and stitching it up. Men wear a front open *chaubandhi*, while women wore one that had a flap like side opening. Coins were used in place of buttons and sometimes in place of coins, cords of black cloth were attached for securing the open ends. The use of the *chaubandhi* has nearly ceased since the past 15 years or so, except for a few old men and women who wear their old *chaubandhi* even today. The *kulhi* that was worn during the winter season was specially embroidered to provide it with a thickness, apart from adding to its looks. Now-a-days, no one wears this winter cap and no one even possesses one. Influenced by the outer culture, the Tharu have started using the *suter* (sweater) or *chadaria* (shawl) during the winters. However, the only means of keeping warm for the poorer section of the Tharu is by sitting around a fire, since it is beyond their means to afford woollen clothes.

The monsoon season does not bring any change in the clothes worn by these tribals. To protect themselves from the rain, a plastic sheet is used to cover the head or an umbrella may also be used. Generally, old clothes are worn during this season since these tend to get dirty and soiled in the rain water. In the olden times a blanket, lined with dry leaves, called *dhoki* was folded and put on the head to protect oneself from the rain water. An indigenous umbrella like hat, with a huge rim round it, called *mithaura*, too is used by a few people, This is made of bamboo and dry leaves of *mohlain* or palm (A detailed description of this article has been provided in the previous chapter).

## Footwear

The Tharu, in older times roamed barefooted, but gradually developed their own footwear as per their needs and locally available material. The traditional footwear of the Tharu were wooden slippers of two types—the *khadua* and the *powla*. They are generally made of *shisham* wood and given shape with the help of an axe. The front portion of these slippers is broader compared to the ankle portion,

as is the case with all other slippers. The difference between the *khadua* and *powla* is that the *khadua* has a wooden nail on the upper portion, in the centre, to be held between the toe and first finger. This helps hold the slipper to the feet. The *powla*, instead of a nail, has three holes made on the wooden base, one in the centre, on top and one each on the two sides near the middle portion. Through these holes rope, made of *bendhu* or *sun* grass, is passed in such a way that the rope from each of the sides converges at the one in the centre and has knots tied behind. An innovation in this direction is the *silapata*, which has a similar wooden base, but in place of a nail or ropes, on the anterior side a 3 to 4 inches broad strap is nailed. This strap is usually made of a piece of discarded rubber belt that had been used in the thresher. Now-a-days these wooden slippers are rarely worn. Only a few elderly people wear them during monsoon or while walking in soggy areas. (See dia. on pg. 178.)

The shoes and slippers that the Tharu use now-a-days are all bought from the markets in Palia, Gauri Phanta, Chandan Chowki, Dhangiri or Hasuli. Earlier, plastic or rubber slippers were worn by all because of their convenience to use in water clogged areas, which is a general feature of the area during the rains. However, at present men like to wear sports shoes while women are attracted to, and like to buy the fashionable sandals sold in the market.

From the above description of footwear, it must not be assumed that all the Tharu folk wear shoes and slippers. Usually they roam about barefooted, only wearing slippers when they have to go out. With the changing time and as a result of external influences, the well off Tharu prefer to wear slippers all through the day.

## Garments for Special Occasions

### Clothes for a New Born

For the first five days after birth, a child is simply wrapped up in big pieces of old cloth. On the 6<sup>th</sup> day, i.e., the *satti*

(purification) day, the child is bathed and made to wear a new *jhula*, *sithania* and *topa*, all of which are made of white cotton cloth and are stitched by the child's mother. This *jhula* meant for the baby, does not have any buttons. Instead, cords made of white cloth are attached to the two open sides for tying them together so that the baby is not hurt with the buttons. Before the child is bathed and dressed up in these clothes, the clothes are offered to the local deity, *i.e.*, *devta*. If the baby is a boy, a *kaidhani*, made of two white strands of cotton thread is made by the child's mother and tied around his waist. Once the *satti* ceremony is over, the child may wear clothes of any colour. All those who are invited to the *satti* celebrations, come dressed in bright coloured and clean clothes. However, no new clothes are stitched by anyone specially for this occasion.

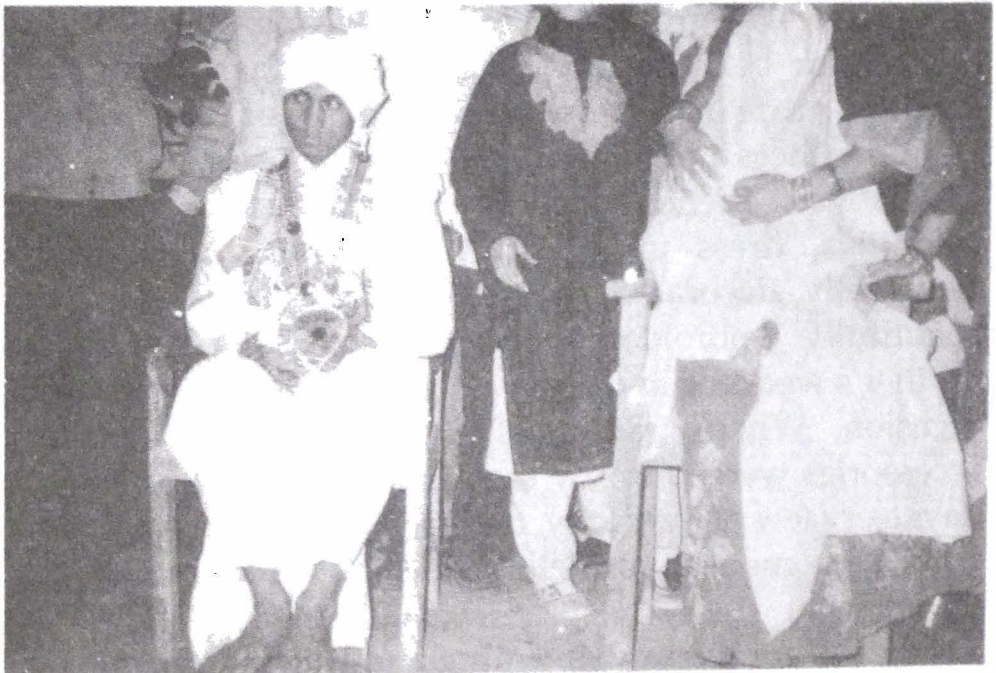
### Clothes Worn during Wedding

The dress of a Tharu bride is very simple compared to those worn regularly. Among the Tharu, red and white are considered auspicious colours and therefore the Tharu brides always wear clothes of these colours. The traditional Tharu marriage attire for a bride is an ankle length *ghangaria* called *bambai ghangaria*. This *ghangaria* is red in colour and may be plain or printed with very small flowers or other similar designs. No *kasida* work or any other decoration is done on this skirt. It is a simple long gathered skirt. On its upper end a white cloth of about 9 to 10 inches is stitched on which an eyeway is made to pass a cord for fastening the *ghangaria* to the waist. This white part is called the *toi*. Now-a-days many of the girls, specially those who do not wear the *ghangaria* normally, wear a red sari which usually has some floral print on it.

In place of a blouse or *angia*, the bride wears a white cotton *jhula*, *i.e.*, a loose waist length *kurta* having full sleeves. The bride generally wears an *angia* under the *jhula*. This *jhula*, worn by the bride, has cotton cords in place of buttons to fasten the two ends. Along with these, the bride

wears a two metre long white cotton cloth as a veil, due to which her face is covered. This veil, is called *pichora* or *ghunghat*. All the clothes that the bride wears on the wedding day comes from her in-laws house and are usually stitched by them too. Sometimes, unstitched cloth is sent, which is later stitched by the bride herself or some other female member of her family.

The traditional head gear of the groom is a *paga*, derived from the word *pagdi*, which is a white cotton cloth approximately 7 metres long. This is ceremoniously tied on the head of the groom by his sister's husband. The *alga* is a 6 metre long white cloth, folded lengthwise into a strip about 6 inches broad and worn on the shoulders in such a way that it forms a cross at the back and two vertical strips in front coming down from each shoulder, and fitted into the *phaita*. The *phaita* is a white cotton cloth approximately 5 metre long. It is folded lengthwise into a strip 6 to 8 inches broad and tied around the waist like a belt. A *katar* (dagger) is stuck into the *phaita* for show, as also to



Attire of Tharu groom & bride

symbolize bravery. This tradition of keeping the dagger is gradually being discarded by many of the Tharu.

Earlier, the groom always wore a *jhula*, *jhagia* and *dhoti* or *pajama*. The *jhagia* is a long, ankle length white skirt with gathers at the waist, while the *jhula* is a *kurta* like dress item with a flap like side opening that was tied to the other side with the help of cords made of the same cloth. Sometimes, both the *jhula* and *jhagia* were stitched as a single dress article and known as a *jhagia* only. Now-a-days, very few grooms wear the *jhula* and *jhagia*. Most young grooms today prefer to wear a white shirt and white trousers in place of the aforementioned. However, the custom of wearing the *paga*, *alga* and *phaita* remains even today and are necessarily worn even by those who wear shirts and trousers. Among the Dangaura Tharu the terms used for the grooms dress are a bit different. Among them, the *jhagia* is known as the *jama* while the *alga* is called a *sapti*.

A point to be noted is that the groom is always fully clad in white and no other colour dress is used or allowed. The footwear of the bride and groom are nothing special. Shoes or slippers commonly available in the market are worn. In earlier times the groom was made to wear garlands of fresh flowers for beautification, but now- a-days, along with garlands made of flowers, garlands made of *gota*, i.e., silver or golden laces and money are also being used.

Relatives, friends and other guests who come for weddings, dress up a lot, wearing bright, clean and beautifully decorated dresses. A girl specially stitches beautifully embroidered and decorated dresses for her brother's wedding and also wears a lot of ornaments on the occasion. Where traditionally a lot of ornaments and accessories were worn by the Tharu on marriages, now-a-days very few of the heavy, traditional ornaments are worn. Only a few modern cosmetic jewellery is preferred by all.

### **Clothes Worn during Mourning and by the Corpse**

On death, a person is wrapped up in a white cotton cloth approximately 2.5 metres long which is called *kafan*. Under



the *kafan* the corpse is clothed in the same dress that he/she had died in. All the other clothes of the deceased are either burnt or buried with the corpse. The Tharu believe that a person, even after death is attached to his/her belongings and therefore their articles must not be used by another person or else it would call upon the user, the wrath of the departed soul. The act of burning or burying such belongings is also meant to symbolize that his/her relatives no longer want the soul to remain in the vicinity.

Mourners wear their normal clothes and no sobriety in colours is observed. On the *roti-pani* and *ghada* ceremonies, a feast is held where the invites wear clean and bright clothes.

### Clothes Worn during Dances

The Tharu are quite famous for their traditional dance. The Rana, Dangaura and Katharia sub-groups perform different kinds of dances, specially during the Holi festival. While performing their traditional dance, apart from the *ghangaria* and *angia*, girls wear a *fatuhi* which is a sleeveless jacket bedecked with coins in such a manner that the cloth can hardly be seen and only the coins are visible. The cloth used for making a *fatuhi* is a thick black cotton cloth. The back portion however does not consist of many coins—just 6 to 8 coins are stitched on to this side. The *fatuhi* is worn even today on special occasions, such as marriages, festivals or while going to a fair, apart from dances.

Apart from the aforesaid, in place of a black *urhnia*, the *dadia*, a 4.5 to 5 metre long *dupatta* is used. The Katharia Tharu use a dark red or maroon coloured *dadia*, while the Rana Tharu use a navy blue one. The *dadia* is worn in a very special way. About half the length of the *dadia* is pleated and stuck in front of the *ghangaria*. The remaining portion is then loosely taken behind the left shoulder to cover the head, brought over the right shoulder in front, and its end stuck in the *ghangaria*. On to the *dadia*, a head ornament called the *ghunghat* is stitched in such a way that it hangs over the forehead. The pleated portion of the *dadia*,

which is stuck into the *ghangaria*, is tied with a beautifully decorated cord, that is allowed to hang down through the entire length of the *ghangaria*. This cord, known as *fufi dudia/dudia* or *fufandi*, is beautified with beads, cowri shells, woollen balls, silver and golden lace, *etc.* adding to the beauty of the dress. Over the *dadia* a 2.25 metre long yellow silken *dupatta* called *gurkha* is worn. This is fastened to the head with the help of *chaapis* (hair pins) since the *gurkha* is very slippery. Besides these clothes, the dancers also wear several ornaments, such as the *sees*, *phoolwa*, *kanthi*, *khadua*, *saam*, *sajey kundal*, *etc.*

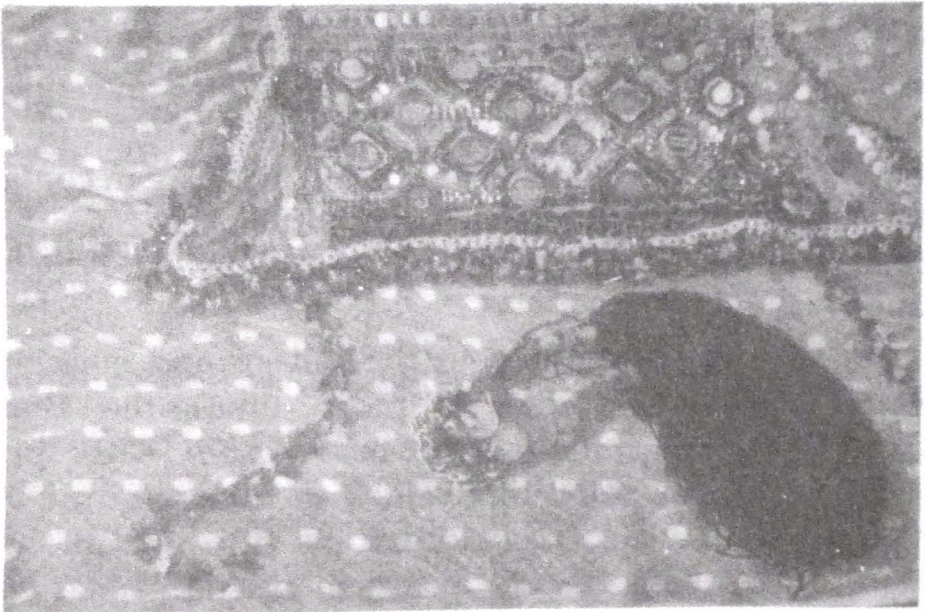
The traditional dance attire of the Tharu men is a *jhagia*, which is a long ankle length white skirt with a red border, or a *kachni*, *i.e.*, a full length plain red coloured skirt. Under this a *pajama* is worn and above it a white coloured *jhula* or



A Woman Dressed for a Special Occasion

merely a *fatuhi*. Along with the *jhagia* and *jhula* a red coloured *phaita* and *alga* (described earlier) are also worn. A few accessories are added to the dance attire worn by the Tharu men, all of which need not always be worn together. The accessories used by the menfolk while dancing are—*ghutta*, *kaidhani*, *dudia* and *murchal*. The *ghutta* is an extensively embroidered trapezium shaped piece of cloth that is further decorated with sequins, mirror pieces, buttons, beads, bits of colourful cloth and woollen balls. This is worn around the waist in such a way that the embroidered portion covers the back portion, waist down. The *kaidhani*, which may be described as an ornament, is made of several strands of thick black cord, coins and buttons. This is worn on the waist for show just like a waistband in such a way that the coins and buttons form the band while the black cords hang down on one side. The *dudia*, as described earlier, is a decorated cord that hangs down from the waist.

Apart from these accessories, the male dancers hold a *murchal* which is a bunch of peacock feathers tied together with colourful woollen strands, beads and cowri shells



Ghutta and Kaidhani

hanging down from it. The ornaments worn by men are *gicchi*, *pattha*, *pahunchi*, *ghungru*, etc. Both men and women hold a decorated handkerchief called *dasti* while dancing. During some dances men dress up as women and perform.

### Dresses for Festivals and Rituals

Among the various festivals celebrated by the Tharu, it is only for Holi that new clothes are specially stitched. For about ten to fourteen days Holi is celebrated here and bright and clean clothes are worn. The above mentioned dance clothes are worn during Holi too. During other festivals only clean and bright clothes are worn. While performing rituals or visiting places of ritual importance, clean clothes are put on, although according to a few Tharu, it is not necessary to wear clean clothes during rituals, because it is cleanliness of the soul that matters the most.

### Cleaning and Mending of Clothes

For cleanliness, washing of clothes is essential. Among the Tharu, the economically weak rarely wash their clothes with soaps or detergents. This is specially the case with the Dangaura Tharu, who are not economically very well off. Consequently, their clothes appear to be stained and soiled. In families which are financially better placed, those who have received some degree of education, who are in contact with outsiders or who have been influenced by urban friends and relatives, clothing is markedly superior in cleanliness.

There are no washermen in the village and everyone washes their own clothes. In olden times, the Tharu washed their clothes with a fruit called *maini* [*Xeromphis spinosa* Keay]. This is a round yellowish coloured fruit, the size of a lime. For washing clothes, the fruit was mashed and put into a pot of water and then crushed again and again. This process causes a lot of soapy foam in the water, in which the clothes are then soaked and later scrubbed

and washed. Another indigenous method of washing clothes is with the help of ash, obtained from the wood of *asana* [*Terminalia alata* (Hayne ex Roth)]. Ash is soaked in some water, after about twenty to thirty minutes, this water is strained and the clothes are washed in this water.

At present, *maini fruit* and *asana* ash are rarely used for washing clothes. The poor usually wash their clothes in water, using soap once in a while. On the other hand, the economically better off use soap cakes or detergents regularly for washing clothes.

To dry out the clothes, they are hung on trees, on the fences around the *bari* (kitchen garden), on ropes that are tied in one corner near the fence of the *saar* (cattle byre) or on its fence itself. Clothes are dusted, their crease plained out and are folded. The concept of ironing clothes is totally lacking here.

Torn clothes are mended by the women in the house itself. Very rarely are torn cloths sent to a tailor for mending, and those sent to a tailor for this purpose, generally belong to men. For mending clothes the running stitch is used. However, sometimes to provide extra strength to the stitching, back stitch is used. If a small hole is formed in a dress, a *jali* is made. This is a filling of thread made by forming several interlinked thread chains. A medium size hole, which cannot be mended with a *jali*, is covered with another piece of cloth, called a *chikti*, that is stitched on to it. For a big hole a similar process is adopted for mending, but with a bigger piece of cloth called a *thigra* locally.

## Manufacture and Decoration

The Tharu do not manufacture cloth themselves. Cloth has always been bought by the Tharu. Earlier, it was purchased from weavers of the adjoining areas who went around the Tharu villages to sell their products. These purchases were made through exchange of grains for cloth. Now a days, all cloth used for making a dress are purchased from the markets that have cropped up in this area. Material for



making clothes, including accessories used for decoration of the cloth, are bought from Dhangiri, Gauri Phanta, Chandan Chowki, Hasulia and Palia. These are the main markets of the area. All kinds of fabrics, cotton and synthetic are easily available in the markets to cater to the needs of the Tharu. Prices of the materials vary according to the fabric and quality of cloth. Thus, there are no fixed rates. Goods are generally bought in cash, but sometimes payments are also made in the form of food grains.

Generally, both men and women prefer to buy cloth and get clothes of their own choice and fitting stitched. Another reason for this is because the stitching of readymade garments is quite weak, due to which they get torn easily. Women who wear the traditional Tharu attire have to buy cloth and stitch the dress themselves, since these are not available readymade. Saris are bought from the markets, whereas salwar suits are bought readymade as well as got stitched by a tailor or oneself after buying cloth of one's own choice.

For all stitching a few articles are needed. Among the Tharu, the main tools used for this purpose are scissors, needles of different thickness, threads of different thickness and the *sujharia*, a locally available implement. This is an iron hook like tool, made by the blacksmith, at the end of which a loop is made and onto which a cord is tied. This cord is attached to an envelop like cloth pouch about 6 × 6 inches. The pouch is meant for keeping the stitching tools and other decoration items. The cord of the *sujharia* is wrapped around the toe and the hook is attached to the end of the piece of cloth, that is to be embroidered or decorated, to hold the cloth tight, thus making the task convenient. Now, many Tharu women have adopted the use of the frame which serves a similar purpose. Apart from these, many households have been provided with a sewing machines under the DW CRA scheme, thus making stitching less time consuming.

Earlier, all clothes were stitched within the family itself, and as such every woman was deft in the work of stitching all sorts of garments, both for men as well as for women.

Today, things are quite different. Although even today every Tharu woman knows basic stitching, the clothes worn by men are never stitched at home. This is because the attire of Tharu men has completely changed. Thus, all the clothes worn by men are either bought readymade or stitched by a tailor. The average rate charged by a tailor is about Rs. 50 for a shirt and Rs. 80 for a pant. The rates, however, vary from village to village. Women, as mentioned earlier, usually stitch their clothes themselves. No tailor stitches the traditional Tharu attire. Women have to stitch their traditional attire themselves since it is a very labourious and time consuming task. It takes about a month to complete making a *ghangaria* and about 10 to 15 days to make an *angia*. However, the trend of buying readymade garments or getting them stitched from a tailor is fast catching on among the women too. Women who wear saris, usually get their blouses stitched from a local tailor who charges Rs. 10 to 15 per blouse. Salwar suits and skirt tops are generally bought readymade or stitched by oneself. Therefore, there is no fixed rate to get such clothes stitched from a tailor. In villages where professional tailors are not to be found, those who can stitch well are requested by others to do so and the amount paid is generally a token one, depending on the personal relations of the two parties involved. Clothes for children upto the age of five years are normally stitched by the women of the house itself, while those for older children are bought readymade from the market. This shift is attributed to the change in the agricultural cycle which now extends through almost the whole of the year. Since agricultural activities occupy a greater part of their time, very little time is left for activities such as stitching or embroidering.

No formal training has ever been provided to the girls with regard to tailoring or embroidering. Girls usually started showing interest in these activities by making small articles at around 5 to 6 years of age, by observing and imitating their elders and with a bit of guidance now and then. Gradually by practicing, they became quite deft in the art by the age of 16 or 17 years. Now-a-days, though all

girls have the basic knowledge of this work and can make a few clothes, not all are equally deft in the art. Thus, today only a few girls can truly be called experts in the art of traditional *kasida* or *leharía* work along with stitching of clothes.

The Tharu *ghangaria*, *angia*, *topa* (worn by children) and *ghutta* (worn by men while dancing) are embellished extensively with a combination of *kasida* embroidery and *leharía* applique work, which have their own distinctive style. Such work is not done by the women of any other tribe or caste living around the Tharu area or anywhere else in Uttar Pradesh. The sleeves of the *angia*, the *topa*, the *ghutta* and the *goath/gumpti*, (which is the most striking and beautiful part of the *ghangaria*), are decorated extensively with the *kasida* work. *Kasida* is the traditional style of embroidery (similar to the satin stitch), found among the Tharu tribals. Mainly geometric designs are made, but new and innovative designs are also found. Generally, variations of a few basic designs are made, most of which are quite abstract and in accordance to one's own wishes. However, a few traditional motifs/patterns too exist which have specific names, viz., *tituli kasida*, *raptua kasida*, *tataia kasida*, *phoolban kasida*, *katarban kasida*, *khanda katarban kasida* and *tinkuni kasida*.

Formerly a silken thread, called *chegli ka dhaga*, or cotton threads were used for embroidery. However, for the past two decades, in place of the above mentioned, one or two fine strands of bright coloured wool are used by all Tharu for this purpose. The reason given for this switch of material are, firstly the availability of a greater variety of colours, secondly the difference in cost—woollen strands being cheaper than silken and cotton embroidery threads, thirdly its longer life span compared to the other two and lastly, its greater volume which allows use of less strands. The colours commonly used for embroidery are strikingly bright and colourful ones which may in a way be said to symbolise the Tharu happy and jovial nature combined with a love for life. The main colours seen in use are bright



yellow, orange, shocking pink, magenta, fluorescent green, peacock blue and bright red.

Decoration is also done with *gidasi* or patchwork made of small bright coloured triangular pieces of cloth, which is further worked upon with *leharía*, i.e., fine applique work. To enhance the beauty of the costumes they are further tucked with *chilmili* (sequins), *kanthi* (beads), *tukli* (small folded pieces of cloth forming triangles), *aras/arsa* and *arsí* (big and small pieces of mirrors respectively), *phoola* (woollen balls), *mangji* (pint pleats), cowry shells and rupee coins. To provide extra strength to the embroidered cloth a thick *bhitla* (lining) is added on its back side.

The *kasida* embroidery is done by the Rana and Katharia Tharu but not by the Dangaura. Today, it is the Rana who make most use of the *kasida* art since a large number of women continue to wear the traditional attire on which this embroidery is done. Although quite many Katharia women also wear their traditional outfits, intricate *leharía* and *kasida* work is no longer done on its *gumpti*. Instead it is sparsely embroidered, using more of the accessories (mentioned previously) for decoration. An innovative use of plastic fertilizer bags was noted among the Katharia Tharu who use this as the base of the *gumpti*, in place of cloth and on which embroidery and decoration is done. According to the women who use it, since the bag is made of woven plastic strips, the squares thus formed make embroidery on it very convenient, apart from the fact that one need not buy a thick cloth for the purpose.

Besides the *kasida* work, another unique feature on the Tharu attire was its intricate applique work, known as *leharía* among the Rana and Katharia, and *katauti* among the Dangaura. Today, this fine art is nearly a dead one in Lakhimpur Kheri. Earlier, Katharia women used to wear *angias* which were exquisitely and intricately decorated with *leharía*. However, today, only a few old women have sufficient knowledge of this art and possess a specimen or two. *Leharía* work is highly taxing and making a single *angia* with intricate *leharía* work on it may take about a month or more. This is also the reason why girls now avoid

doing a lot of *leharia* work on their costumes. Usually only a few lines of designs may be seen on the Rana Tharu *angia* or on the *gumpti/goath* of the *ghangaria*. Most young girls do not know how to do the *leharia* work. It was learnt that most of the older women knew this art quite well and had learnt it from their elders. However, they have been unsuccessful in perpetuating the art since the younger generation is totally disinterested in such laborious task that does not happen to be in keeping with 'urban fashion'. The Dangaura Tharu of Kheri do not make use of this art on their attire any longer. It may only be seen sometimes on the *topa* worn by their children. Earlier the entire *nahaga* and *choli* of the Dangaura Tharu was beautified with it. This *katauti* work, as it is known among the Dangaura Tharu, is still used on the attire by the Dangaura living in some areas of Sirsiya block in Bahraich and some pockets of Gonda. No data related to this art could be acquired from the Dangaura of the area, since none have any knowledge of it. Some information, however, was collected from a few of the old Katharia Tharu women who are quite deft in this art even today.

*Leharia* is any motif/pattern cut on a white cloth that is stitched on the main garment, forming very fine designs. Different kinds of motifs, mainly geometrical, are cut out. There are a few prototypes with different names for each *leharia* design. Some of these are — *paltan*, *phoola*, *badedda*, *kundrukhu*, *gumbha*, *thikhia*, *paakhi*, *karpahia*, *chauki* and *mattar ki thoti*.

*Leharia* patterns are usually cut out on good quality white poplin cloth. First of all the cloth on which the design is to be cut, is folded suitably keeping in mind the design to be made. The desired design or pattern are then roughly cut out. This piece of applique is then placed on the main material and the borders of the *leharia* pattern are stitched with long, sometimes uneven stitches, at their proper place. This process is called *leharia/katauti bithana*, i.e., applique setting. Once this process of *bithana* has been completed, the design is stitched properly with fine and even stitches. In this process the broad border left around the roughly cut

out design, as mentioned earlier, is tucked into the stitching giving it a very fine and pronounced finish. The stitching is durable and reinforced throughout on the reverse side of the garment. The tucking in of extra cloth around the designs give a pleasing relief effect or thickness to the Tharu applique work. This kind of work also makes the applique stitching more durable and prominent (*ubhra hua*). This is a very distinctive feature of the Tharu technique and clearly distinguishes it from the applique work carried out elsewhere, *viz.* Western Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat. The applique work in other areas follows the technique of cutting out the cloth-patterns/motifs precisely and then stitching these, full-surface, to the garment without much tucking in while stitching.

### Special Training and Production Centres

Taking note of the fact that Tharu embroidery is a specimen of high quality workmanship, ITDP, the main welfare agency of the area, in 1980 appointed a Gram Sevika to work among the women and children specially, to organize Mahila Mandals, and to teach embroidery and tailoring to young women and girls. The main objective behind this was to train them in an art which would help them in extra income generation. Later in 1984, under the Twenty Point Programme, the Chikan Training and Production Centre, and Handloom Training and Production Centre were started. Both the centres are now functioning as a part of the Training Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM) scheme.

The handloom industry occupies second position in the Indian economy, after agriculture. Seeing the vast potential in this sector, the Government of India decided to start a Handloom Training and Production Centre for the upliftment and economic betterment of the Tharu. Thus, in 1984, under the Sixth Five Year Plan, a scheme was started according to which a six month training would be provided to Tharu youths above 18 years of age having a minimum qualification of class V. The centre also has two

sub branches in Sonaha and Belera apart from the main branch at Chandan Chowki. Till 1995 the Centre was run through the ITDP office. In the same year, the centre was handed over to be run by the Handloom Department of India. Upto 1995 only boys were provided training. Thereafter, girls were also encouraged to join the course. More than 300 men and women have been trained at the Centre from 1984 to 1999. Earlier the trainees were paid a stipend of Rs. 150/- per month. However, under the new setup, from 1995 onwards, they are being paid Rs. 300/- per month. Of this, Rs. 50/- is withheld and paid on successful completion of the course. For proper training of the students, 50 framelooms and 8 pitlooms have been set up at these three Centres. The Centres function on every working day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., during the training period, in which trainees learn how to make different handloom products such as towels, bedsheets, pillowcases, markin, orilon (a woollen cloth) and *duree* (carpets). Raw materials for these are provided by the Centre and is generally bought from Bareilly, Kanpur or Sitapur. The finished items were earlier sold at the Centre, adding 10% of the cost price as profit. These items were usually bought by the locals or sold at fairs and exhibitions. However, after its transfer to the Handloom Corporation, main stress is laid on production of *durees*, which are later supplied to UPICA and the Handloom Corporation, who are responsible for the sale of these products. Sometimes these are sold at fairs and exhibitions held in the district.

After completion of the training, the trainees are given an opportunity to come and work at the Centre, where they are paid the profit earned on the finished products. Since 1990, about twenty trainees have been provided with a subsidy of Rs. 3,000/- each, under the TRYSEM scheme, for setting up their own workshops. However, due to lack of market facilities, availability of cheap spun yarn and proper guidance, they have not benefitted from this help. Most of these handloom workshops, thus, remain non-functional. It is quite evident here that the Tharu are enthusiastic and interested in taking weaving as a

profession. Only if proper facilities are provided and ample work opportunity given, will the scheme become a success and attain its aim of providing meaningful income to the Tharu.

The Chikan Training and Production Centre is sponsored by the Ministry of Human Resource Development and training is conducted under the women's economic development programme. Every year a six month training programme is conducted from the 15<sup>th</sup> of March to the 15<sup>th</sup> of September. After the successful completion of training, the candidates are provided with a diploma and a sewing machine. The selected candidates are also paid a monthly stipend of Rs. 500/- each. Much of this however remains only on paper, since most of the passouts of the Centre who were contacted during the study have not received their stipends or sewing machines. Only after much running around and fighting, a few girls were able to get the machines but had to forfeit their stipend. The reason offered for this indefinite delay by the concerned authorities is the lack of timely funds coming down from the central government. The selection criteria for admission to the training course is that the candidate should be a Tharu woman above 18 years of age. The programme tries to cover every Tharu household by providing training to, at least, one member from each family. Thus, it is a target oriented, group specific development scheme. Every year about 30 girls are trained by the Centre. Over the years, from 1984 to 1999, about 480 girls from different Tharu villages have been provided training. The main branch of the Centre is situated at Chandan Chowki. Apart from this, branches of the Centre also exist in the Tharu villages of Sariapara, Najhauta, Belaparsua, and Kiratpur.

The Centre provides training in cutting and tailoring of different clothes, knitting, crochet work, bag making, machine embroidery and hand embroidery. Apart from this, women who are illiterate are also provided basic education and made capable of at least writing their names. The Centre is functional daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

(except on holidays) and attendance is compulsory for the trainees. All raw materials used during the training is supplied by the Centre and is usually bought from Palia. The embroidery design is printed on the cloth with the help of indigo (*neel*) and gum or petrol. The articles made by the trainees are handkerchief, kurtas, salwars, frocks, dupattas, saris, tablecloth, *etc.*, embroidered with *ulta bakhia*, *murri*, *fanda* and *jali* work (all different kinds of chikan embroidery), cloth bags, cushion covers and other plainly stitched dresses, sweaters and crochet worked table covers, lace, *etc.* Finished products are kept in a display room for sale. These are mainly bought by the local or are put up for sale at fairs and exhibitions, adding 10% of the cost price as profit. Much of the end products however, being of an inferior quality never find buyers.

During the initial years of the programme, both the trainees and instructress were quite enthusiastic. Therefore, the training provided was much better. It also appears that the Tharu women's traditional knowledge of embroidery considerably helped them to learn chikan work rather easily. In the initial years upto 1989 passouts of the Centre were given stitched kurta, dupatta, table covers, *etc.* to do chikan work. A girl was able to earn Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 per kurta or table cover. One could thus earn about Rs. 50 to Rs. 60 per month. Providing work to the passouts had to be stopped due to the lack of a market for the end products. This was due to higher price paid for raw materials, which ended up in the form of a higher cost of the end product compared to the prevalent market rate for similar products. Today, after completion of the course, a trainee does not generally get any work. A negligible number of passouts are, however, appointed as supervisors at the centres situated in the area. Thus, skills acquired by trainees are used for household work only. Sometimes clothes are stitched for neighbours or other villagers who so desire. However, this work is very sparse and cannot be considered economically viable.

The basic problem with this scheme, though started with all good intentions, seems to be wrong planning on the part

of the planners. The scheme of training in chikan embroidery, which is a highly specialised traditional craft of Lucknow and its neighbouring areas, thus can be said to be a complete failure. Since the finished products made here do not have any market, the Tharu women cannot cash on the knowledge thus acquired. This whole process of unnecessarily training the Tharu in a skill that cannot be put to any meaningful use, in a way symbolizes a forced cultural domination which the Tharu are being subjected to. It would be much more advisable for the government to start programmes that encourage and develop the traditional *kasida* (embroidery) and *leharria* (applique) work. By doing this the government would not only help preserve and perpetuate an indigenous tribal art that has its very own distinctive features and exquisite style, but would also help the women of the area earn worthwhile money out of the skill that they are so deft at. It would also be encouraging and beneficial for the Tharu, if Non Governmental Organizations come and take up the task of developing and perpetuating this indigenous art. A NGO, Craft Council of Uttar Pradesh (CCUP) can prove as a good example here. CCUP has been quite successful in popularising the *katuati* work of the Bahraich Tharu. Its products, no doubt, have a market of their own. All that is needed for the success of such a scheme are a few innovative ideas. The *kasida* embroidery and *leharria* work can easily be used on cushion covers, bed covers, wall hangings, salwar suits, dupattas, etc. to suit modern needs and taste. The success of such a programme is no doubt guaranteed since the traditional Tharu embroidery and applique along with its superior quality is also quite exclusive and unique in itself.

## **(b) Personal Care and Adornment**

### **Cleanliness**

Hygiene is the science of promotion and preservation of health. Personal cleanliness, the standard of which varies

greatly, seems to be a tribal characteristic, and is often quite independent of the accessibility or scarcity of water. Among the Tharu too, cleanliness is considered important. This however, seems to be in contradiction to the reality. Although they are very specific and particular about the cleanliness of their surroundings and hutment, the same cannot be said about the Tharu people themselves, who are not very aware or inclined towards personal hygiene. During winters, these people take a bath once in four or five days or whenever they find it convenient. However, a few Tharu who have been influenced by the religious preachings of the Radha Swami Sect and call themselves *bhagats* have a bath daily, even during winters. During summers, almost everyone has a bath once a day or at least on alternate days. Some men have a bath twice a day, mainly to cool their body and provide comfort from sweat and stickiness caused from the humid heat of the area. The Tharu women are comparatively less regular in bathing. This is because they do not usually get time for personal hygiene, owing to the heavy burden of work. Most of the women, thus have a wash while cleaning the utensils or clothes. Similarly, due to lack of time women do not keep their younger children clean either.

Since there are no bathrooms in the *tharuahat*, both men and women have a bath in the open, at the handpump or well, in a semi-naked condition. No hot water is used for bathing even during chilled winters. For bathing all men and about 40% of the women use soaps bought from the markets while a majority of the remaining women use *paror mitti* (clay obtained from the bottom of the pond). This clay is very smooth and fine in texture and acts as a cleansing agent. Big chunks of this clay are brought and dried in the sun, after beating them into a round flat lump called *dhonda*. Small amounts are broken from this lump, according to ones need, dissolved in water and used in place of soap. Another material used in place of soap is *lahi khali*. This is the chaff of mustard seed that remains after its oil has been extracted and is easily available free of cost from the oil mills in the area. *Khali* is soaked in water an



hour or so before bath and later used in place of soap. Both *paror mitti* and *lahi khali* were used in earlier days for bath by all the Tharu and are preferred by many women even today. A piece of a broken terra-cotta pitcher is called *siktha* and used by women to scrub off dirt from their body.

Both men and women wash their hair once a week. Men and a few young girls use the different branded shampoos and soaps available in the market. A majority of women and girls however, use *paror mitti* or *lahi khali* for washing their hair. Both these products are believed to be very effective in keeping the hair soft, clean, black and shiny. The Tharu bathe both for religious cleanliness and personal hygiene, though according to some, it is not necessary to be clean for religious ceremonies since the reverence in one's heart does not decrease or increase owing to bodily cleanliness. However, it is generally seen that a majority of them bathe before going to religious places or performing rituals. After childbirth, the mother must necessarily take a bath on the occasion of *satti* (the sixth day ceremony). Similarly, it is a must for both men and women to bathe on festivals, marriages and ceremonial worships.

After bathing most of the Tharu apply *lahi* (mustard) oil on their body and hair in accordance to their tradition. Most members of the younger generation (both boys and girls) however, now-a-days use hair oil with a strong scent, purchased from the market. For removal of lice from the hair, the Tharu use to grind custard apple leaves and apply this paste on the hair. After few hours, the hair is washed off thoroughly. This method is now rarely used. Instead medicines sold in the markets are purchased and used.

Brushing the teeth is an essential part of personal hygiene and cleanliness. The Tharu children are trained to brush their teeth from the age of 3 to 4 years. All the Tharu folk brush their teeth regularly in the morning, to keep them clean and free from germs and bad odour. In olden times, charcoal powder or a thick twig of the *neem*, *babool*, *sagua*, *jamun*, *rohni* or mango was used for cleaning the

teeth. Charcoal was rubbed on to the teeth like tooth-powder and rinsed later on with water. If one of the aforesaid thick twigs was used, it was first chewed and once its fibres separated, it was rubbed onto the teeth. Later the mouth was rinsed with water. Today, it is generally the older Tharu or the economically weak ones who use these products to clean their teeth. Most of the Tharu today have adopted the use of the tooth brush and tooth paste or tooth powder.

Nails are usually cut by both men and women, since long ones would hamper their work and also since they do not have time to keep long nails clean. Nails are cut with the help of scissors, blade, knife or are simply torn off with the other hand. The use of nail cutter is also catching up. A few people now like to grow their nails long, after coming in contact with people who do so. However, those who grow it, do not keep their nails clean which gives it a very dirty look.

The above facts clearly indicate that the old habits of the Tharu are changing. They are generally learning more about personal hygiene and care and are adopting modern means in place of the traditional ones used earlier. Cleanliness begets beauty no doubt, but quite apart from cleanliness several other means are adopted by people to accentuate their looks. The Tharu are no different from others and they too adopt other devices such as the use of cosmetics, tattoos, *etc.* to enhance their personal appearance.

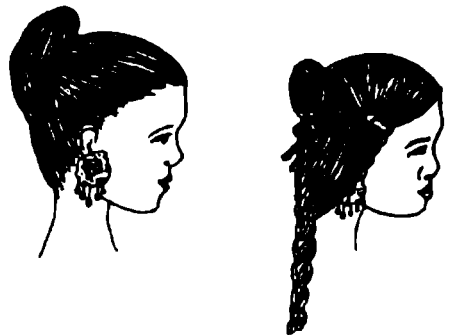
## Hair Styling and Dressing

This is one of the commonest modes of enhancing or altering the personal appearance, either for convenience, for ornament, or to distinguish individuals and social rank. Among the Tharu, this is done for convenience, comfort and to enhance ones looks.

Tharu men generally cut their hair short. However, a few boys were seen who had grown their hair long from behind. This is the result of the influence of various hairstyles that are seen in the towns and cities.

Traditionally, many Tharu men grew their hair long till the shoulders, but as noted before, now-a-days they cut it short. Tharu men cut each others hair and very rarely go to a barber. Thus, no barber shops are there in most of the Tharu villages. Most of the households, however, possess scissors and old-fashioned razors with handles used to cut hair and shave the face. Presently, a few people also use the safety razors to shave their beard. The younger men, however, like to have their hair cut at a barber's shop at Chandan Chowki, Palia or Dhangiri, whenever they happen to visit the place. There is no particular style of dressing the hair among men, rather it is done according to ones own wish.

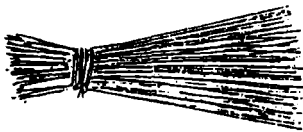
Tharu women and girls grow their hair long and earlier never used to trim their hair. Today, some girls trim their hair on their own to give it a neater look and to cut off the split ends. Women who wear saris are usually seen making a simple *media* (plait) or a *khunta* (a bun), while girls who wear salwar suits or skirts tops usually make one or two plaits. There are two traditional hair styles that are quite special, one of which has necessarily to be made by those who wear the *ghangaria*. One style is where the hair is first divided into two halves — in front and behind, the front portion is then divided from the centre into two and plaits are made on both the sides. Some hair is put through a flat ring made of iron or wood, called the *ulli*. The hair that comes out from the *ulli* is then wrapped around it and tied up with a black nylon thread called *taat*. The bun thus formed is called a *jhundi*. Under the *jhundi* another thin plait is made. After this all the three plaits and the remaining hair is taken and made into one plait at the bottom, just above the neck. In the second style, the women tied their hair into a *khunta*. For this the hair is pulled back and tied together in the form of a ball in the middle of the head. To



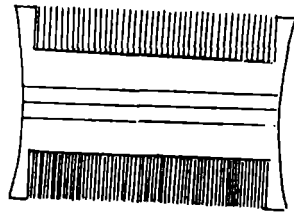
Traditional Tharu Hair Styles

tie the bun, first some hair is taken from the middle and passed through the *ulli*. The hair that comes out from it is then rolled round the ring and tied with the *taat*. The remaining hair is then taken and wound around this ring to form the *khuta*. This style has however been discarded since many Tharu women have turned bald due to excessive pulling up of the hair. In fact, quite a few aged Tharu women can be seen who hardly have any hair left.

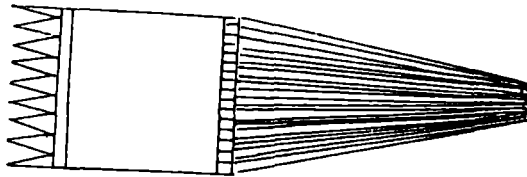
The Tharu have three traditional combs that are used even today. The *thakra* is a comb that looks like a broom and is made up of big dry twigs of *jhau* [*Tamrix dioica*



Thakra



Kakwa



Kakahi

Roxb. (*Tamaricaceae*)] or with the dried roots of *sirki* [*Vetiveria zizanioides* (L.) Nash]. This comb is used to free the hair of knots by the Tharu women after a bath when their hair is wet. The *kakwa* is a comb that is traditionally made of *haad* (animal bone), but now similar combs made of plastic are available. It is used to comb the hair as well as to take out lice since it has big as well as fine teeth. The *kakahi* is made of *kattha* (wood) and is used for brushing as well as styling the hair. It has thick and broad teeth on one side and fine, long teeth on the other.

The use of artificial plaits is also found among some women and girls to beautify their hair and to make it look long and thick. These are called *choti* and are easily available from the market. The rampant use of *chaapis* (hairclips or pins) both simple and decorated, was noted.

For further beautification of the hair, plastic flowers called *phoola*, *phita* (ribbon) and *lavanti* (bands) of different colour are bought from the market and used occasionally by the women. Traditionally, on festivals or during the Holi dance, women made colourful woollen balls and tied them on the plaits near the ear. These were called *kanphool*, the use of which has totally disappeared now.

### Cosmetics and Body Paints

Painting the body is the oldest form of body decoration. Painting is done in many colours and is often restricted to ceremonious occasions (such as dances), when sacred designs of one kind or another are made on the body. It is also used for secular occasions, either to beautify the body or sometimes to indicate status or class. Painting includes all modes of decoration by means of coloured substances (powder, mud, lime, *etc.*) or definite pigments laid upon the surface of the body which do not permanently discolour the skin itself. The motives behind painting the body may vary in different societies and with different materials, *e.g.*, for protection against mosquitoes and insects, for adornment and attraction, to frighten an enemy, for mourning or for religious purposes. Cosmetics on the other hand are used merely to add to ones looks. The use of both body paints and cosmetics is quite common among the Tharu presently.

Powder, cream, lipstick (*lali*), kajal (*kajroti*), nailpolish (*nakhuni*) and perfumes (*bahar/khushbu*) are the cosmetics generally used by the Tharu. These are mostly used on special occasions by women and girls. Older women, do not use these products. A few men also use powder and cream. At present a few girls and boys of well to do families have started using powder and cream daily. Cosmetics used by the Tharu are readily available in all the nearby markets. These are of an inferior quality and cheap enough to suit their pocket.

Most, if not all, people have a recognisable odour, more or less well marked, and some people are more sensitive

than others, to such odours. The natural odour is often disguised by the use of perfumes, either intentionally or as a consequence of the odour of unguents, paints or other cosmetics. Perfumes and the wearing of scented substances are frequently employed to enhance attraction. Although traditionally the Tharu did not use any perfumes or scents, now-a-days both men and women, specially the young ones, use perfumes bought from the market with great delight and eagerness. Perfumes are used on special occasions such as marriages, dances, *etc.* However, only few men use it regularly.

Among the Tharu, women generally paint their lips with a red powder paint available in the form of a tablet. This is first wetted a bit and then applied on the lips to give it colour. *Kajroti* is rarely purchased from the market. Usually it is prepared at home by dipping some cotton wool in mustard oil, setting it on fire and holding a pot upside down over the flame. This creates a black film on the pot, which is used to outline the eyes. *Kajroti* is used to darken the eyebrows of small children too, apart from putting it in their eyes. A big round *bindi* (dot) is also made on the forehead of the children using the same. This is done for two reasons, to beautify the child, and to ward off any evil eye cast on him/her. Tharu girls are also fond of using *sindoor* (vermilion) in the parting of their hair. For long this was not considered a symbol of marital status among the Tharu and was meant merely for show. Even today, the use of vermilion, not being a traditional practice, is found on special occasions for beautification. However, it is used only by married women now. The male *bhagats*, among the Tharu, put on a *tilak* daily as a symbol of their devotion (*bhagti*) once they are initiated as a *bhagat*. *Kumkum*, a red coloured, and *siri*, a yellow coloured, powder are used for putting a *tilak*, apart from *chandani* (sandal paste). The design made on the forehead as a *tilak* are either a 'U' shape or an inverted exclamation mark.

Traditionally, both men and women regularly applied a dot of red powder on their forehead and each earlobe for beautification. However, this custom has totally been

wiped out. *Kali mehendi* (black dye) is used by some Tharu women and girls to blacken their hair since most of the Tharu have brown hair. *Mehendi* or *henna*, found in use throughout India, is used by the Tharu women too. Earlier *mehendi* leaves were made into a paste and applied on the hands to have them coloured. Now-a-days instead of grinding the leaves, a few women buy *mehendi* powder from the market. *Mehendi* is applied during marriages and festivals, specially on *Tejiya* and *Guriya*. It is also applied on the hands and feet during the sowing and harvesting of paddy and mustard, since the hands and feet get severely cut and *mehendi* has a soothing and cooling effect. Earlier, *mehendi* was simply smeared on the hands to bring colour to them, but now different designs are made with the help of a stick. The use of *alta* (a red colour) on the hands and feet of a few women was also noted, which once again is a result of contact with the outsiders.

*Bindis* of various colours and designs are used by Tharu girls now-a-days. These *bindis* have gum on their back side and are stuck in the centre of the forehead for show. *Bindis* are now used regularly by a few economically well off family girls and occasionally by others. However, there are also many women and girls who never use the *bindi*. Traditionally, a coin was fixed onto the forehead in place of a *bindi*, with the help of gum, wax or any other sticky product while dancing or at festive gatherings. This custom of wearing a coin on the forehead remains only for name sake, with a very few women using it at present.

## Deformations

It is a widespread practice to mould the body in accordance with some preconceived ideal of beauty, or for ritual purposes, or by some surgical operation, to provide for the attachment of some ornament which may alter the normal shape of the organ to which it is attached. Piercing of the septum or alae of the nose and the ear lobes are very common among almost all the primitive tribes of India.

Among the Tharu, piercing of ears and nose of girls is done simply for beautification. Traditionally two to three,

or even more, holes were made on a ear from the lobe going up to the shell shaped helix or upper part. This trend has changed and now only one hole is pierced in each ear lobe. Men who take part in dances regularly, usually pierce their earlobes or upper part of the helix, and sometimes even their nose if they so desire. Parents generally get the earlobes and left alae of their daughters pierced at the age of two-three years. This is done because the skin is tender at this time and can easily be pierced without much pain being inflicted. Any Tharu women may pierce the ear of a child with a common sewing needle. The needle is pushed through in the centre of the ear lobe, a white thread allowed to pass through it and then tied up. Mustard oil and turmeric are regularly applied to the holes so that it heals fast and does not form a pus. Most of the women aging 35 years and above have huge holes in their earlobe, that elongate them considerably. This was done by gradually increasing the thickness of the twig put into the hole. After a while, in place of twigs of neem or mango, mango leaves are rolled up and put through the hole. Each time the hole enlarges, a thicker roll of leaves is put in and this helps in forming a large hole. This was done to enable the entrance of the thick earplugs of the earstuds and also to help in the carrying of the heavy weight of the ornaments. Similarly, the hole pierced on the left alae too was gradually increased, but not to the extent to which the hole in the ears were. Now-a-days no Tharu girl enlarges the hole pierced in her ear lobe, since they have started considering it ugly to deform the shape of the ear. Ear and nose of a male child are got pierced by the parents if the child is not expected to live long. This is called a *tatka* (corrupt form of *totka*) among the Tharu. A white thread is inserted in these holes and when the thread brakes off, on its own, it is believed that the *tatka* has been successful in warding off all evil effects from the child.

## Tattoo

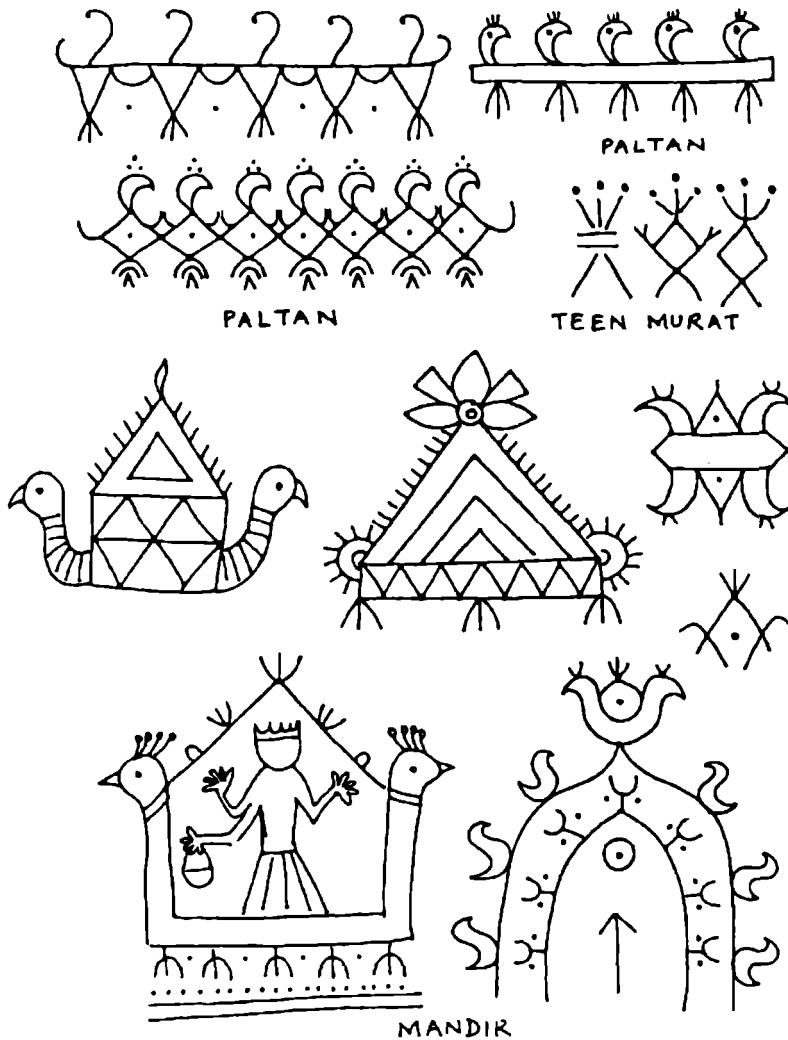
Body paints wash off easily and fade. This disadvantage inspired the birth of a means of making the chosen design



permanent. The result was tattoo, a custom of world wide distribution. Thus, the practice of tattooing is perhaps, as old as painting and one that is prevalent among the primitive, as well as modern societies. Tattooing consists of pricking pigment into the skin, leaving a smooth and even surface. Different motives are attributed to the practice of tattooing, such as enhancement of beauty and sexual attraction, health, sign of identification, to ward off evil spirits *etc.* Perhaps, except the pupil of the eyes, tattooing may be done on almost any part of the body, but the most favoured parts are the forehead, nose, arms and chest. Significantly, tattooing is more popular among the fair skinned people where it looks more pronounced.

Tattooing, known to the Tharu as *leela*, is widely practiced by both men and women, although it is more commonly noted among the women. Tharu women, especially the elderly, are heavily tattooed. Though the process of being tattooed is a very painful one, people eagerly and happily go in for it. The main motive behind this, and one that is nearly universal, is to enhance one's beauty and attraction. This is also one of the motives for tattooing among the Tharu. Among the other motives, is the desire to get a place in heaven. There exists a belief among the Tharu that unless one is tattooed, one will not get a place in heaven, rather he/she would be lashed with thorny branches of the *simra* and *maini* tree and sent to hell. Tattoos are made by some for medical reasons too. According to the Tharu, if pain persists in any part of the body, a tattoo should be made on it. This will cause the dirty blood of the area to flow out, thus getting rid of the pain and bringing relief. Some people use it as a magical cure for barrenness. Two cases were noted during the study where, after not conceiving for years, the women gave birth to children after having their chest tattooed with the *teen murat* pattern, which is considered a *tatka*.

Tattooing is done willingly when one attains the age of 13-14 years. Tattooing among the Rana and Katharia Tharu was done by the *gudhni*, a professional tattooer, who



Various Tattoo Designs

occasionally came visiting the Tharu villages. Among the Dangaura Tharu, it was done by other fellow Dangaura or by oneself. The *gudhni* first used to draw the desired pattern on the area to be tattooed. Next, seven needles tied tightly together were dipped in *kajal* or a black dye and pricked on to this design. While tattooing, the *gudhni* repeatedly used to sing a couplet —

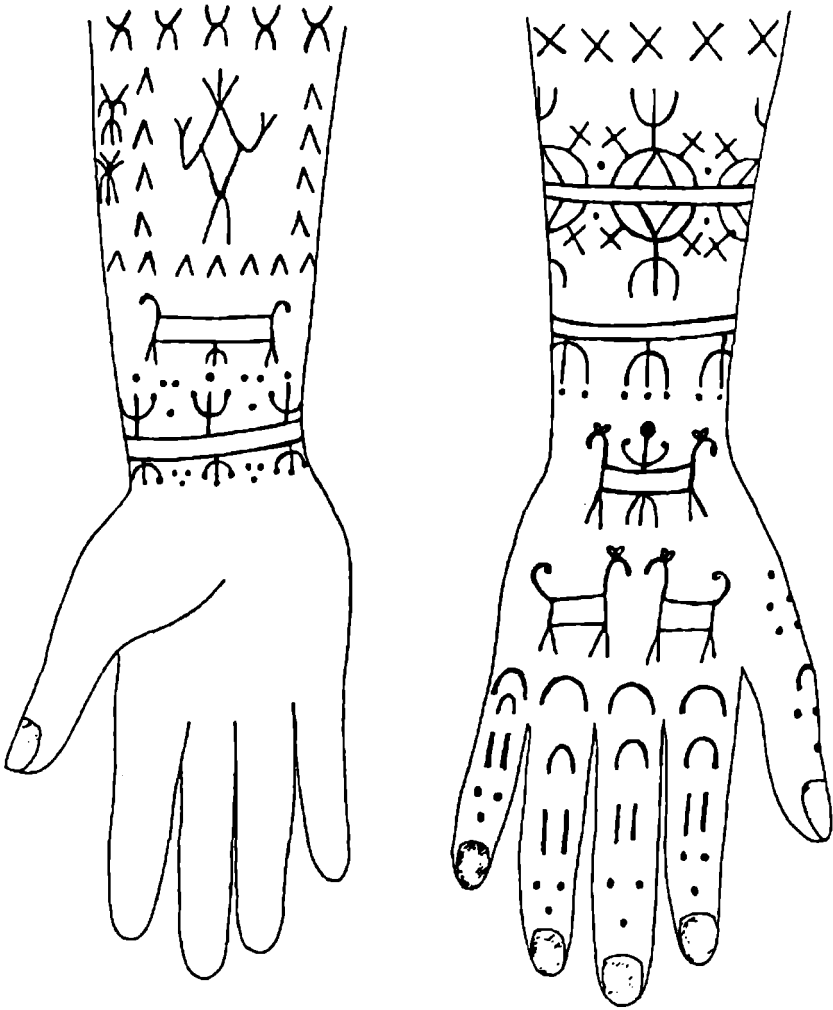
*Mare ke sangi, jiye ki rangi,  
Leela ke daag, janam sang jaae.*

Translated, this means — 'The colours of life go away with death. However, a tattoo mark will remain with the soul even after death.' For her services, the *gundhni* was paid either in cash or grains. The amount paid, mainly

depended on the will of the person tattooed. However, the design made and the economic status of the person's family was also an important consideration. The Dangaura follow a similar procedure for tattooing, except that in place of seven needles they generally use three or four needles, and if needed, prick the area twice to make the design prominent. For at least three days after tattooing, warm mustard oil mixed with *haldi* (turmeric) is applied on the wound. Since turmeric works like an antiseptic, it helps heal the wound fast. In the past few years, several Tharu have got themselves tattooed from tattooers at Dhangiri (Nepal), because these people use the tattooing machine which is less painful and also gets the process completed faster. The amount paid in such cases depends on how elaborate the design is.

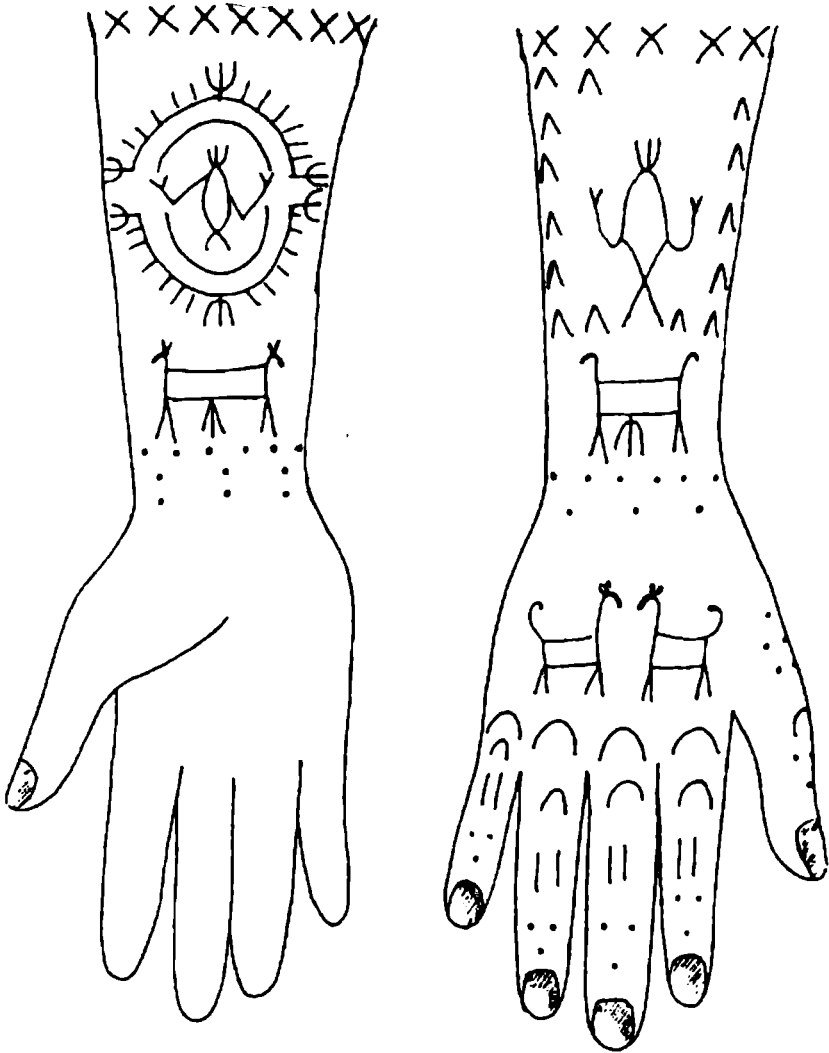
There is a marked variation in the choice of patterns tattooed by the two sexes. The women here generally prefer to have elaborate designs tattooed whereas the male members feel content with a small pattern. The differences lie not only in the choice of pattern to be tattooed but also in the area or the space of the body to be covered by the black pattern. Tharu women were seen with tattoos made on different part of their body — arms, hands, face, neck, chest, back, waist and feet, whereas men were only tattooed on their hands or forearms.

A flower and two leaves was the main design found tattooed on men besides their name, which was also quite common. Other patterns found tattooed on men were animals or birds. Women have a variety of designs to choose from. Most of the patterns made, however, symbolise articles of daily use that will be needed in the after life. This is because of the belief that one will be made available everything that they have tattooed on their body, in their life after death. Thus, animals and birds are tattooed not only because they are found in the vicinity and because of the Tharu people's love for the animals, but also so that their meat may be available to eat after one's death. Similarly, the husband's name is written on the hand so that one has the same husband even after death. Thus,



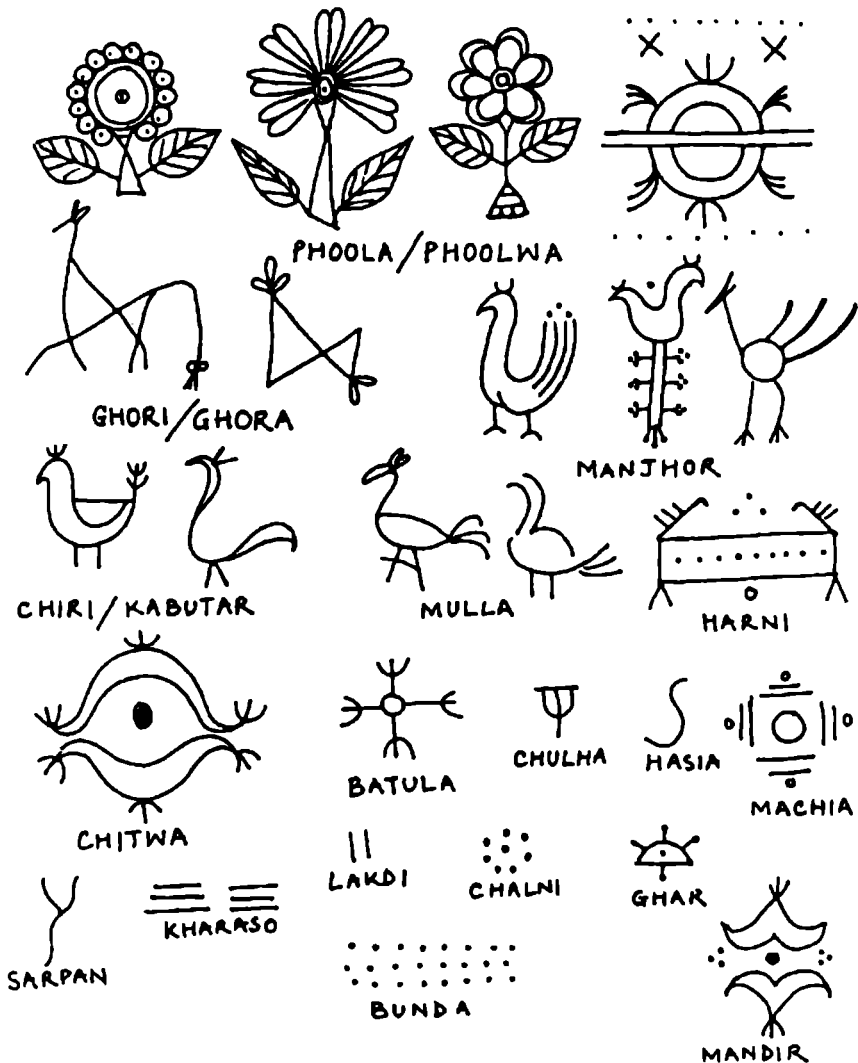
Kaang Lehari  
(Most Common Tattoo Design  
Found Among the Tharu)

several symbolic designs were found among all the three sub-groups. Two elaborate traditional designs were noted that were very common, specially among the Rana Tharu women. Both these designs were made on the two side of the forearm. If only one forearm was tattooed, the design commonly made would be *kaang lehari*, while if the other forearm was also tattooed, the *chitak mani* pattern would be made on it. A reason for the popularity of these two designs was that they include most of the small patterns, thus most of the articles could be acquired in the afterlife. A few of the designs commonly found are — *phoola* or *phoolwa* (flower), *ghori* or *ghora* (horse), *harni* (deer), *manjhor* (peacock), *mulla* (hen), *kabutar* (pigeon), *chiri* or *chiriya*



Chitak Mani (A Common Tattoo Pattern)

(bird), *sapran* (snake), *chulha* (hearth), *batula* (cooking pot), *atta ki chalni* (sieve), *hasia* (sickle), *lakdi* (wood), *kharaso* (broom) *palkia* or *machia* (a woven seat), *bunda* (dots—symbolizing grains) and *mandir* (temple). Most of these patterns are combined together to form abstract, but attractive designs because of which a mere observer may fail to understand the symbolism in it. Thus, several such small patterns are differently positioned to form a variety of designs. However, it must not be assumed that every design symbolizes something or the other. As noted earlier, a few dots or lines may be made on the affected part of the body, to relieve it from pain. Similarly, some people make



Various Tattoo Designs

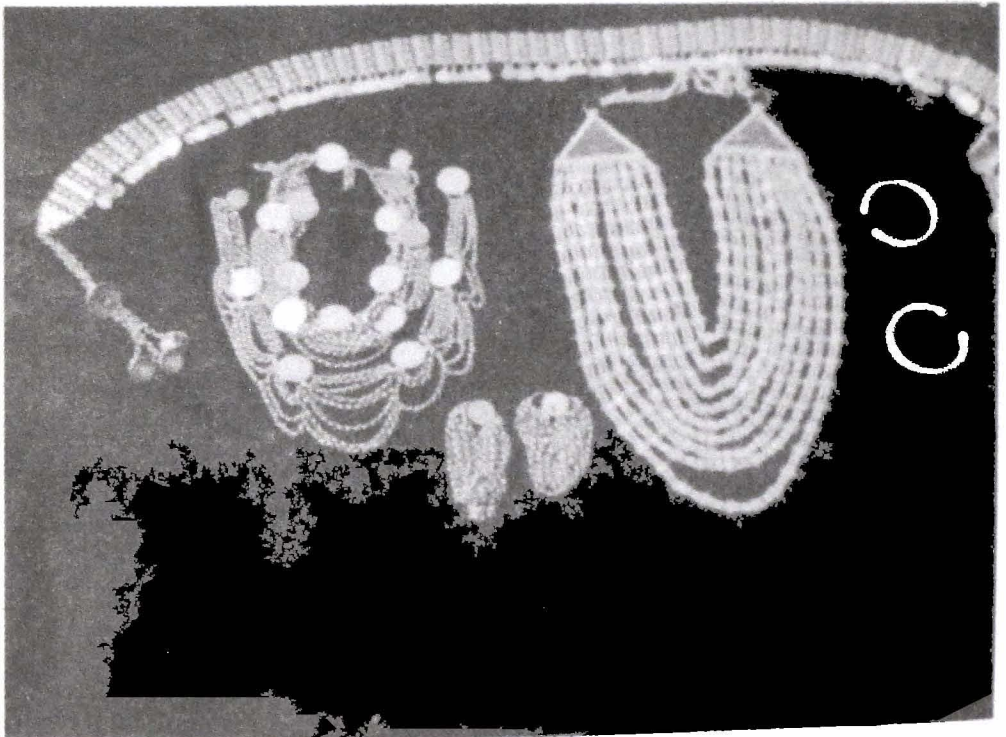
*bindis* (dots) on their forehead, chin or cheeks merely in an attempt to beautify themselves.

Today, the practice of getting oneself tattooed is fast disappearing from among the Tharu. It is mainly those above thirty five years of age who are tattooed, although a few Dangaura Tharu love getting themselves tattooed till date. The main reason why the Tharu are disinterested in getting themselves tattooed today is contact with the non-Tharu. The younger generation feel insulted and ashamed when they go out of their area tattooed, because they are made fun of by the non-tribal city folk. Also most of the educated Tharu today feel that tattooing, instead of

beautifying, actually blackens the skin and makes it ugly. Many Tharu also have lost faith in the belief that they will be allowed entry into heaven only by virtue of being tattooed. Thus, gradually a time is fast approaching when the practice of tattooing will totally be wiped out from the Tharu tribe.

## Ornaments

Ornaments are one of the most popular and oldest ways of personal adornment. Many people, irrespective of the amount of or absence of clothing, wear ornaments which may be attached to any portion of the body. The term *ornament* is strictly applied to objects worn after a sense of aesthetic value and intrinsic beauty, either in gratification of personal taste or in accordance with fashion. The other popular motives behind ornamentation are its use as a prophylactic against evil spirits, to improve personal appearance, to attract the opposite sex through the



Ghunghat, Sakreha Garela, Pahunchi, Haar and Khadua



enhancement of sexual appeal and as an indication of social distinction and status.

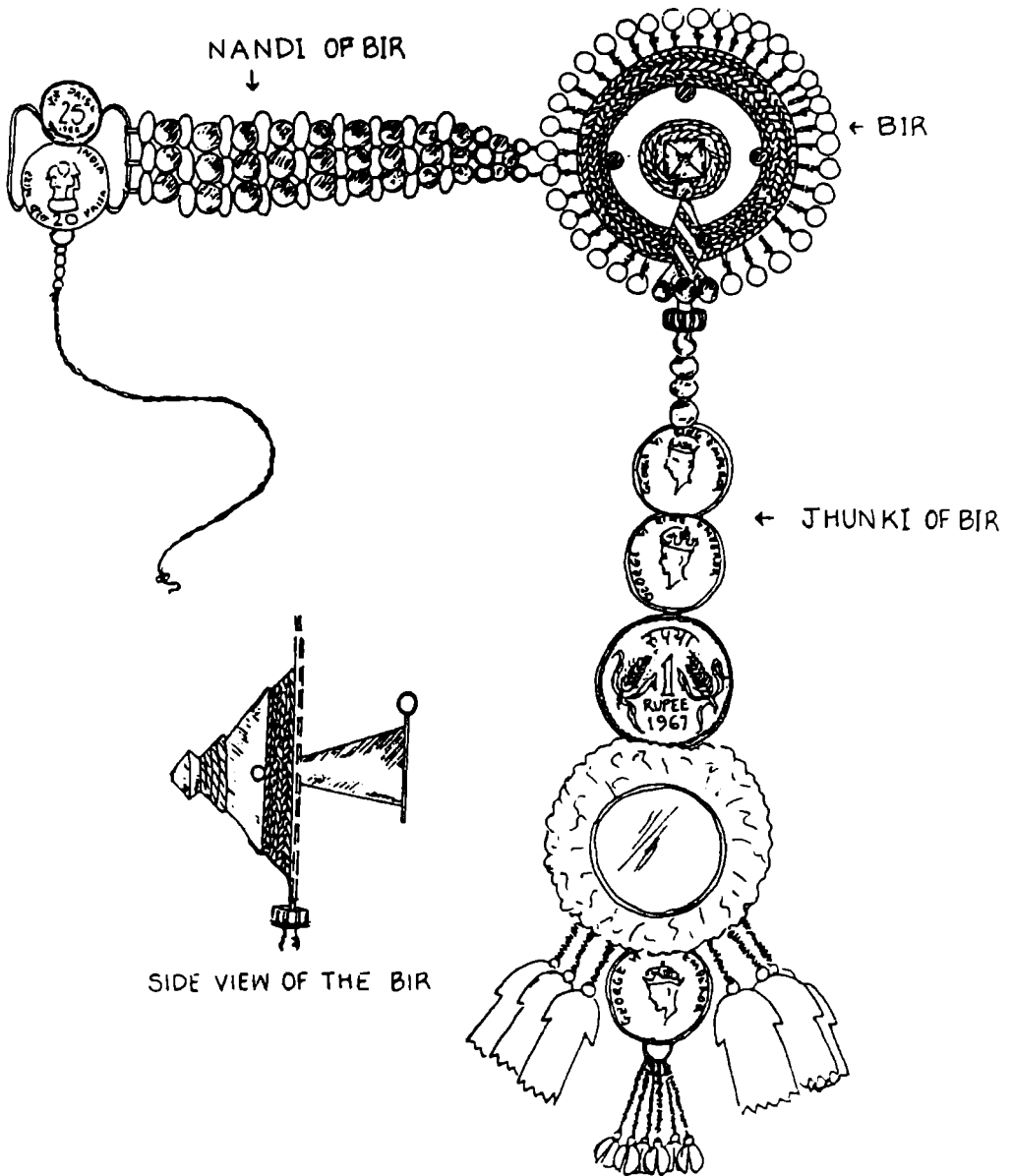
Tharu women and girls also pay a good deal of attention to their personal appearance. Traditionally, the Tharu had ornaments for every part of the body from head to toe that they wore with great pleasure. Ornaments, which are called *pahinan* by them, are usually made of *gillet* (gilt), *khapta*, *kaskut* (all different kinds of white metals) or silver and a very few of gold. Sometimes children are made to wear ornaments that are meant to ward off an evil eye cast upon them. A little element of status is also involved in wearing ornaments, though it is quite negligible. There are no goldsmith or jewellers among the Tharu. Ornaments have always been purchased by them from non-tribal goldsmiths and jewellers or from markets of the nearby



Guria and Kathula



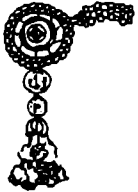




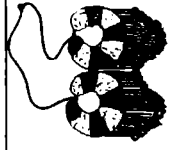
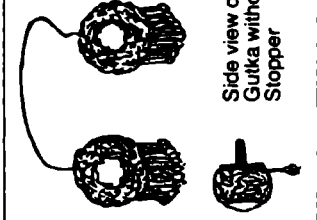
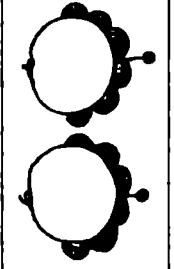

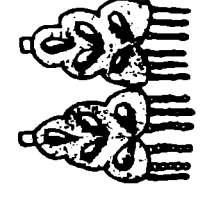
area. These goldsmiths and jewellers made ornaments according to the traditional Tharu design and personal specification of the customers. A few ornaments, however, are made by the Tharu themselves. Over the years, many changes have occurred with respect to ornaments used by the Tharu, as in matter of dress. Given below is a brief description of all the traditional as well as modern ornaments found among the Tharu in a tabular form.



Nandi Bir


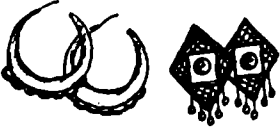



Table 5 Details of Tharu Ornaments


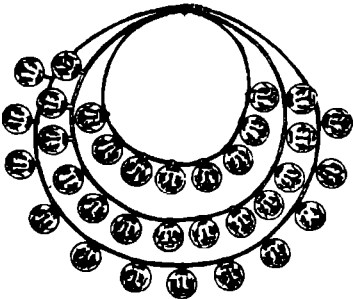
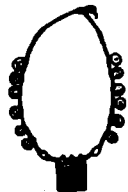
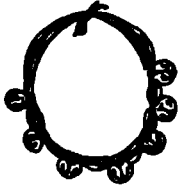
Local name of the ornament		Material	Made by/ purchased from	Worn on	Worn by	Purpose of wearing	Occasion of use	Whether still in use
Ghunghat		Gilt/silver	Jeweller	Forehead	Female (above 13 years of age)	Beautification	On special occasions (festivals, marriages, dances, etc.)	Very rarely
Maang bendi/ tikula/teka		Gilt/silver	Jeweller	Forehead	Married women	Beautification	On special occasions	Occasionally
Nandibir		Gilt/silver, mirror pieces, coins, woollen balls, etc.	Jeweller	Nandi on the forehead which is attached to the bir that is worn in the earlobes	Female (above 13 years of age)	Beautification	On special occasions	Occasionally
Chugla		Silver	Jeweller	Earlobes	Female	Beautification	Daily	No
Tarki		Wool, lac, mirror pieces beads, etc.	Tharu women	Earlobes	Married women	Beautification	Daily	Occasionally

<p><i>Sajay kundal</i></p>		<p>Woollen balls, chains, sequins, beads, etc.</p>	<p>Tharu women</p>	<p>Earlobes</p>	<p>Female</p>	<p>Beautification</p>	<p>Daily</p>	<p>On special occasions</p>
<p><i>Gutka</i></p>	 <p>Side view of Gutka with Stopper</p> <p>Side view of Gutka without Stopper</p>	<p>Woollen balls, chains, sequins, etc.</p>	<p>Tharu women</p>	<p>Earlobes</p>	<p>Female</p>	<p>Beautification</p>	<p>Daily</p>	<p>On special occasions</p>
<p><i>Luuki</i></p>		<p>Gold/brass</p>	<p>Jeweller</p>	<p>Earlobes</p>	<p>Female</p>	<p>Beautification</p>	<p>Daily</p>	<p>Yes</p>
<p><i>Taruna</i></p>		<p>Silver/gilt</p>	<p>Jeweller</p>	<p>Helix i.e., upper part of ear</p>	<p>Female women</p>	<p>Beautification</p>	<p>Daily</p>	<p>Only elderly</p>
<p><i>Jhumka</i></p>		<p>Any metal with or without beads or coloured stones</p>	<p>Jeweller/ market</p>	<p>Earlobes</p>	<p>Female</p>	<p>Beautification</p>	<p>Daily</p>	<p>Yes</p>

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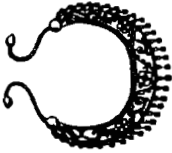


Table 5 Details of Tharu Ornaments




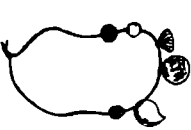




Local name of the ornament		Material	Made by/ purchased from	Worn on	Worn by	Purpose of wearing	Occasion of use	Whether still in use
Phulia		Any metal with or without beads or coloured stones	Jeweller/ market	Earlobes	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
Kundal		Any metal with or without beads or coloured stones	Jeweller/ market	Earlobes	Female and a few male	Decorative & sometimes as protection from evil spirits and ailment	Daily	Yes
Nathuni		Gold/brass and a small red stone	Jeweller	Nose (left alae)	Married women	Beautification	Daily	No
Nagbaser		Gold/brass and a small red stone	Jeweller	Nose (left alae)	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
Chhochi		Gold/brass and a small red stone	Jeweller	Nose (left alae)	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes

<i>Phulia/long</i>		Any metals with or without coloured beads/stones	Jeweller/ market	Nose (left alae)	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Kathula</i>		Coins, black/ red thick cloth cord	Loops are made in the coin by the goldsmith and used in making ornament by Tharu women	Neck	Female	Beautification	On special occasions	No
<i>Guria</i>		Gilt/silver coins, black/ red thick cloth cord	Loops are made in the coin by the goldsmith and used in making ornament by Tharu women	Neck	Female	Beautification occasions	On special	Occasionally
<i>Gicchi</i>		Silver coins and silken black thread	Loops are made in the coin by the goldsmith and used in making ornament by Tharu women	Neck	Men and women	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely

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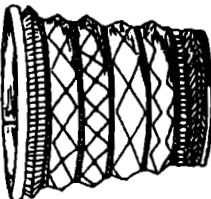

Table 5 Details of Tharu Ornaments

Local name of the ornament		Material	Made by/ purchased from	Worn on	Worn by	Purpose of wearing	Occasion of use	Whether still in use
Sakreha garela		Silver/gilt	Jeweller	Neck	Female	Beautification	Daily	Occasionally
Haar		Gilt/khapta	Jeweller	Neck	Female & men while dancing	Beautification	Daily	Occasionally
Taunkla		Silver/gilt	Jeweller	Neck	Female	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely
Sutiya/ Hansli		Silver/gilt/ khapta kaskut	Jeweller	Neck	Female	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely
Phutwa ki gucchi		Woollen balls, mirror pieces, beads, sequins, etc.	Tharu women	Neck	Female	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely








<i>Sakri</i>		Any metal with or without beads	Jeweller/ market	Neck	Both male & female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Jagjaga</i>		Beads	Jeweller/ market	Neck/ waist	Children	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Pahenchi</i>		Black & white beads	Jeweller/ market	Neck	Children (below 12 years)	Beautification & to ward off evil eyes	Daily	Yes
<i>Mala/ Najariya</i>		Beads, sea shells, cowri coins, nudraksh, iron, locket, black thread, etc.	Tharu women	Neck	Children (below 12 years)	Beautification & to ward off evil eyes	Daily	Yes
<i>Baank</i>		Silver/ gilt/ khapta/ kaskut	Jeweller	Upper arm	Female	Beautification	Daily	Occasionally
<i>Baara</i>		Silver/ gilt	Jeweller	Upper arm	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Bahati/ Bejaint</i>		Silver/ gilt	Jeweller	Upper arm	Female	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely
<i>Lagaura</i>		Coins, woollen balls, beads etc.	Tharu women	Upper arm	Both male and female	Beautification	On special occasions	Yes

(Contd.)

Table 5 Details of Tharu Ornaments


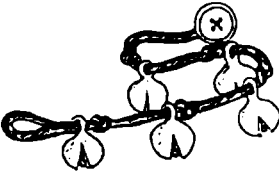
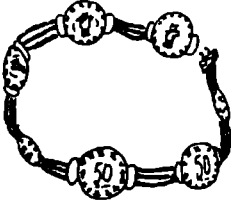

Local name of the ornament	Material	Made by/ purchased from	Worn on	Worn by	Purpose of wearing	Occasion of use	Whether still in use
<i>Pahunch</i>		Tharu women	Wrist	Both male and female	Beautification	During dances and on special occasions	Occasionally
<i>Khadtia</i>		Jeweller	Wrist	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Saam</i>		Jeweller	Wrist	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Pattha</i>		Jeweller	Wrist	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes



		Any metal	Jeweller	Wrist	Male	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Kada</i>		Black silken thread and coins with loops	Tharu women	Wrist	Both male and female	Beautification	On special occasions	Rarely
<i>Churi</i>		Glass/ plastic	Market	Wrist	Female (except widows)	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Mundri/ Linghti</i>		Any metal	Jeweller	Wrist	Both male and female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
<i>Kaidhani</i>		Black silken thread looped coins buttons and cowri shells	Tharu women	Waist	Male	Beautification	While dancing	Occasionally
<i>Fufandi/ fufti duria</i>		Black silken thread woolen balls coins, beads, etc.	Tharu women	Waist	Both male and female	Beautification	On special occasions	While dancing
<i>Paara</i>		Gilt	Jeweller	Ankles	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes

(Contd.)

Table 5 Details of Tharu Ornaments

Local name of the ornament		Material	Made by/ purchased from	Worn on	Worn by	Purpose of wearing	Occasion of use	Whether still in use
Chad		Gilt	Jeweller	Ankles	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
Paichudi/ Payal		Gilt/ silver	Jeweller	Ankles	Female	Beautification	Daily	Yes
Paichuda/ ghungru		Brass bells and thick black cord	Tharu women	Ankles	Both male and female	Beautification	Women on special occasions, men while dancing & children daily	Yes
Bichhia		Any metal	Jeweller	Toes	Married women	Beautification	Daily	Yes

Most of these ornaments are occasionally or rarely found in use among the Tharu today. No single family possesses all the ornaments mentioned. However, a few wealthy Tharu do possess a number of the traditional ornaments, though they are no longer in use. Earlier men used to wear a few ornaments regularly. Now, this custom has nearly been wiped out. Today, only a few ornaments are worn by men even during performance of the traditional Tharu dances. Tharu women in the earlier times loved wearing ornaments, despite the heavy weight of most of the traditional ornaments, and spend almost all their money on buying new ones. Now-a-days, though the women's love for ornaments remains, light ornaments are preferred for daily use, and a few traditional ones are worn only on special occasions such as festivals, marriage of ones close relative or while performing dances. There are two main causes for this change in outlook and attitude — firstly, it becomes very difficult to work wearing a lot of heavy ornaments and secondly, keeping too many ornaments is no longer safe. Rather, it becomes a cause of worry since many thefts have started taking place even in the *tharuhats*.

Girls begin to wear common ornaments like earrings, earstuds, bangles, anklets and necklaces, all artificial trinkets, at an early age of about 2-3 years. Women of all age and status are allowed to wear any ornament they wish to. A widow too is allowed to put on all ornaments, except glass bangles. If remarried, she can wear these once again. Today, most of the Tharu have either sold their traditional ornaments or have kept them for an emergency when these would be used as a last resort. Noting this changing attitude towards their traditional ornaments, one can take it for granted that soon one may not even have a glimpse of such ornaments with the Tharu.

The Tharu are no longer isolated as in the past. Signs of change and progress are unfailingly noticeable in their lifestyles. One can easily notice how the age old isolated life to these tribals is feeling the impact of urbanization and fast developing cosmopolitan culture in every sphere of

their life, be it their style of dress, adornment, their food habits or their ideas about health and hygiene.

Dress and adornment have a great fascination for women and are among the most easily imitable things. The growing influence of urban contact can easily be marked in the changing fashion and in the matter of physical decoration. Although Tharu women still wear heavy ornaments of the old traditional type occasionally, the younger girls are switching over to lighter and smaller patterns. Simple bangles, earstuds, necklaces, *etc.* have more appeal now. Men too have given up wearing ornaments and consider it a sign of feminism. Disfigurement of the body, like making of very big holes in the earlobe, is not favoured by modern Tharu girls. Tattooing has also lost its charm and the Tharu no longer like this sort of embellishment.

In matters of attire, the city fashion of saris, salwar suits, skirt tops are exerting their influence on the tribals. Though almost 40% of the Tharu women of Lakhimpur Kheri continue to wear the traditional *ghangaria*, *angia* and *urhnia*, and the desire to put on gaudily coloured dresses is present among them till date, a fast change in their dress forms is easily noticeable. The traditional attire of the Tharu men has been completely lost with time, and nearly all of them wear western clothes, *i.e.*, shirts, T-shirts, pants and jeans.

Though there exists a great difference among the Tharu themselves in regard to dressing style today, none considers the other's way of dressing wrong, since they view dressing to be a matter of personal choice. Those who wear the traditional clothes, consider it better to wear the clothes chosen by their ancestors so as to identify themselves with their fellow tribals, while those who have adopted the non-tribal attire, consider it shameful to wear their traditional dress since it covers very little of their body. These people have a feeling that because of their traditional clothes, the city dwellers and non-tribals consider them inferior, of lax character and make the Tharu the butt of their jokes. Since a majority of the Tharu are now in contact with the non-tribals, they do not wish to be

distinguished as separate or alien from the main stream masses, and therefore have adopted the non tribal look.

Today the traditional Tharu style of dress and adornment can be noticed mainly in the interior villages. If the present pace of change continues, it is expected that in about 15-20 years time and scene in even these villages will completely change with the Tharu being indistinguishable from other rural Indians in matter of attire and adornment.

# 7

## *The Performing Arts*

Among the various performing arts are included music, songs, dance and drama. Among all the arts, it is perhaps the performing arts that best illustrate the effect of cultural traditions in determining both social and individual standards of what are desirable and approved. In fact, Beals and Hoijer (1977, 563) noted that "the influence of cultural tradition on standards of musical appreciation often result in physiological conditioning, to such an extent that music which happens to be pleasing and satisfying to the members of one society may be no more than a physically painful cacophony to those of another".

The performing arts in nonliterate societies, thus, affirms some of the deepest sanctions of living. The myths declaimed and acted, the choreography of the dances, the rhythms of the drums, the verses sung and spoken, call forth responses from participants and onlookers that bear profoundly on the value system of the individuals who compose the group, and on their adjustment within this system. Dancing, for example may seem to us a frivolous amusement but in the infancy of civilization it was full of passionate and solemn meaning. Primitive and tribal people dance their joy and sorrow, their love and rage, even their magic and religion. Lowie (1934, 171) stated, "Dances are often ceremonies. But many of them are first of all amusements. And if they are linked up with religion, that is only because simpler people tie up their beliefs with any everyday activity, whether it be eating or hunting,

gambling or house-building. Besides, all dancing, whether profane or sacred, has a formal pattern that allies it with art". Thus, dancing can be viewed in recreational, religious, or aesthetic phases, these not always being sharply distinguishable.

Again, "music, like language, has basic structural forms. These are only revealed after their manifestation in the everyday life of people are objectively investigated. On analysis, however, they go far in disclosing the cultural factors in both pattern and process, from which they take on their ascribed form and meaning. Music is not only a universal human achievement, but one which man does not share with any animal. Thus, everywhere man sings, and in singing expresses the satisfaction that go with all forms of self-expression". (Herskovits: 1974, 286)

The Tharu performing arts which includes songs, dances music and drama (although, very little) may be regarded as truly representative of their culture. Through these, the Tharu express their innermost feelings, their emotions of joy and sorrow, fear and jubilation. Whatever touches them in their daily life and whatever changes are occurring in it are reflected in their songs. The Tharu performing arts play an important role in their otherwise routine life by lightening their burdens, cheering them up and imparting mirth and enjoyment. Thus, apart from providing a healthy entertainment to them, it also allows them to give vent to their pent up feelings.

## Songs

The Tharu have numerous indigenous songs popular amongst themselves because of their love for singing and dancing. While dancing is always accompanied by singing, both men and women love to sing even when there is no dancing. As a matter of fact, people dance only on special occasions whereas they burst into singing whenever they wish or want to express their feelings of joy, loneliness, devotion, *etc.* Thus, Tharu songs truly represent the entire philosophy of their life. Singing is often accompanied by

musical instruments such as *dholak*, *jhanjh*, etc. However, both men and women frequently sing without using any musical instruments at all. A unique feature among the Tharu is that men and women never sing together. Even during mixed dances they sing separately in chorus one after another. Thus, there are no duets sung by them. There are no restrictions on any person singing. Men, women, old, young, married, unmarried and widow, all can sing. The composer of songs are anonymous and have no single poet as their writer. Language of the songs is generally *brij bhasha*, only a few being in *tharuati* dialect. Thus, all songs are collectively owned by the society and everyone has the right to sing these whenever he/she wishes to do so. A special point regarding Tharu songs was that nearly all songs were free verses woven into a special theme or idea ment to express particular feelings.

Among the Tharu, there exists a tradition of beginning every singing session with a *sakhi*, i.e., a religious song. However, this is not normally practiced. It is only on special occasions, when singing sessions are organized, that this norm is observed. On such occasions the *mudhi* (main singer) initiates a song and the *pichadia* (helpers, forming the chorus group) repeat the lines.

The Tharu have a large and rich collection of songs meant for various occasions. Though they do not have any formal categorization, these songs can broadly be grouped as under :

- (a) Devotional/religious songs
- (b) Songs related to life cycle rituals
- (c) Songs related to festivals
- (d) Miscellaneous songs

A few random specimens of the popular songs which bring cheer and respite to the toil-worn Tharu are being noted.

#### (a) Religious/Devotional Songs

These songs known as *sakhi* are meant to call upon the deities for their blessings before beginning any work. As a





A Song session in progress

result of contact with the non-tribals the term *bhajan* has become more popular for such songs. Moreover, as already mentioned in chapter 2, contact with the Hindus and Muslims has led to inclusion of a number of Hindu gods and goddesses and Muslim saints in the Tharu pantheon. This has also led to a change in their tribal songs. Today, the most common devotional songs relate to Hindu deities such as Shiva, Ram, Krishna, *etc.* There are also some songs that put forward mythological stories, mainly related to the sacrifices of Raja Harishchandra and devotion of Dhruwa. Given here are selected samples of the Tharu devotional songs.

- (i) Oh lord *Nagar Bhuiya* you are great.  
 We fall at your feet.  
 We have laughed and played in your village,  
 So we come to you for protection  
 Let no ill come upon us,  
 We fall at your feet.

This sakhi is sung in praise of the village deity before the commencement of any important work to seek blessings even today, while the next is a *bhajan* that expresses the plight of a worshipper.

(ii) I have come to pay homage at the feet of Shiva.  
 I shall offer him water,  
 But the crow has defiled it.  
 How can I offer defiled water for *puja* in a temple ?  
 I shall offer him flowers,  
 But the bird has defiled it.  
 How can I offer defiled flowers for *puja* in a temple ?  
 I shall offer him jaggery,  
 But the bees have defiled it.  
 How can I offer defiled jaggery for *puja* in a temple ?  
 I have come to pay homage at the feet of Shiva.

(iii) In which direction are Macca-Madina ?  
 Oh, in which direction is Karbala ?  
 In which direction is grandfathers mosque?  
 Where Hasan reads the Koran.  
     In the southern direction are Macca-Madina,  
     In the northern direction is Karbala,  
     In the western direction is grandfathers mosque,  
     Where Hasan reads the Koran.  
 With what shall I fan Macca-Madian ?  
 With what shall I fan Karbala ?  
 With what shall I fan grandfather's mosque ?  
 Where Hasan reads the Koran.  
     With my *aanchal* I shall fan Macca-Madina,  
     With my *aanchal* I shall fan Karbala,  
     With my *aanchal* I shall fan grandfather's mosque,  
     Where Hasan reads the Koran.

This song, no doubt, has been included in the Tharu collection of songs as a result of contact with the neighbouring Muslims who sing it as part of the *noha* (lament) during the *tazia* procession on the tenth of Muharram.

The next song, also known as *dhartiya*, relates to mythological stories that are more common among the *Purabia* Tharu, *i.e.*, those living in the eastern belt (towards Gonda), but are also quite popular in the rest of Lakhimpur Kheri.

- (iv) A cobra bit son Rohit in the flower garden.  
 Right in the middle of the town.  
 Tara weeps continuously, washing her face with tears  
 She sees her fill of her prince  
 Right in the middle of the town.  
 Taking the corpse of son Rohit, She reaches the ghat of Asalpuri  
 Where she sees her fill of Harishchandra.  
 Right in the middle of the town.  
 Tara tears her *aachal*, for Vikram asks his due,  
 Where he stays in the town of the *doms*  
 Right in the middle of the town.

### (b) Songs Relating to Life Cycle Rituals

Several Tharu songs relate to the main lifecycle rituals of birth, marriage and death. Among the Tharu *badhai* (greeting) songs are sung during the *satti* (purification) ceremony, generally held on the sixth or seventh day after child birth, as this is considered a joyous occasion. Similarly, the feelings of joy and excitement during marriage ceremonies call for the singing of *manghar* or marriage songs. These songs are also known as *dholak* since such songs are tuned to the beatings of the *dholak* by women. *Manghar*, along with *hori geet*, form the most important and popular Tharu songs. On death, occasionally, singers are called to please the departed soul and distract the mourners. Songs sung during the *roti-pani* or *barshi* ceremony are thus generally very philosophical and discuss the mysteries of life and death.

Noted here are two of the most popular *badhai* geet sung in this area.

- (i) Oh! get me my child, brother  
 Without him my heart is not content.  
 What colour needle and thread is it (that the tailor uses) ?  
 What colour dress (will he stitch) ?  
 This is not what I desire for him (my child).  
 I have got a golden needle and silver thread (to stitch his  
 clothes)  
 The tailor stitches colourful clothes but my heart is not  
 content.

- (ii) Play your drums slowly and sing softly.  
 If my *nanandi* hears, she will bring ceremonial presents.  
 The son of the tailor lives adjacent to my village,  
 He will bring the *jhagiya* and *kaliya* along with ceremonial presents.  
 The son of the jeweller lives adjacent to my village,  
 He will bring the *gajkar* and *pahunchi* along with the ceremonial presents.  
 The son of the carpenter lives adjacent to my village,  
 He will bring a cot of sandal wood along with ceremonial presents.

The next one is *manghar geet*. This particular song is very common and sung during the *mangni* (engagement ceremony) by the womenfolks.

- (iii) I tell you what's in my heart quietly (2)  
 First come the months of summer,  
 Sweat trickles down my body gradually,  
 I can not sweep the house quietly. (2)  
     Second come the months of rain,  
     I cannot go out for work properly,  
     Get me an umbrella quietly. (2)  
 Third come the months of winter.  
 I cannot sleep comfortably  
 Get me a quilt quietly. (2)

The following song is heard during the *haldi* ceremony of the groom. While the relatives apply turmeric and oil, some women collect and sing this song which depicts the conversation between a mother and her son.

- (iv) From the east come clouds rushing,  
 From the west come rains to stop my son,  
 Leaving his mother sitting on the cot worried,  
 How will my son go to get his bride ?  
 Do not worry dear mother of mine,  
 I shall go and get you a young girl.  
 From the east... ..

Songs sung by the bride's side, making fun of the groom and his relatives, when the *barat* arrives on her door are called *gari* (*gali*, abusive songs) and are an integral part of the marriage celebrations.

- (v) Spent the entire day in making the hearth,  
 Spent the entire day gossiping, from where will you get *haldi* ?  
 The groom's mother is wretched and gives excuses,  
 Her husband is a vendor, yet she could not get *haldi*,  
 Spent the entire .....
- The groom's *kaki* is wretched and gives excuses,  
 Her husband is a carpenter, yet she could not get a *chauki*.  
 Spent the entire .....
- The groom's *bhabhi* is wretched and gives excuses,  
 Her husband is a blacksmith, yet she could not get a *katar*.  
 Spent the entire .....

This next song is sung during the *vedai* ceremony, i.e., when the bride is being sent with the marriage procession back to the groom's house.

- (vi) You are my bird  
 I am your mother  
 I gave you birth  
 I brought you up  
 Do not put me to shame.

The next group of songs relate to death and are sung after cremation, on the *roti-pani* ceremony or during the *barshi* held during Diwali. On this occasion professional singers and sometimes even dancers (*nachakiya*) are called to entertain the departed soul and comfort the mourners. Songs sung on such occasions mainly are a philosophical reflection of life and death in which life is generally compared to a temporary abode and the soul to a bird.

- (vii) In which forest do you reside oh *Hansa* ?  
*Hansa* has flown leaving the cage empty.  
 Who has left my village ?  
 Four relatives have taken away the body.  
 Do not delay, take it away soon.  
 Keep it on the banks of *Jamuna*.  
 And burn it into ashes like *Hori* wood.
- (viii) This world is an attractive fair,  
 You come alone and go alone.  
 In the world after death also there is a fair,  
 You have to go to this fair alone.  
 You have had a round of the worldly fair,  
 Now it is the turn to go to the heavenly fair.

### (c) Songs Related to Festivals

Among the festival songs, Holi songs are by far the most important and popular, forming a bulk of the Tharu folksongs. Apart from these, there are a few songs related to *Bari Charai*, *Choti Charai* and *Teejia*. There are few Dusshera songs too, which pertain to lord Rama and his life, but these are mainly included as a result of culture contact. No songs are particular to Diwali. Since it is celebrated as the *Barshi* (mourning period for departed souls), songs for both are common and as such cannot wholly be called festival songs.

Holi songs or *hori geet* are not necessarily sung only during Holi, but can be sung throughout the year. These songs are also dance songs, since dances take place mainly during this festival. Holi songs revolve around a few main themes—stories of Radha and Krishna, love and separation from ones beloved and devotion. Now-a-days, several of the Holi songs being sung by the Tharu are borrowed from Hindi films. Among the original Holi songs, *Bairasu* or *Baramasi* occupy a prominent position. These songs as the name signifies relate to the twelve months and emotions felt by a person during it.

- (i) Alas! my beloved has not come.  
 The flowers have withered away in the forest  
 During *Sawan* my beloved left home  
 Immediately he sent me letters  
 During *Bhadoun* it rains heavily  
 During *Kuwar* I lose my peace  
 Alas! my beloved .....
- Whom shall I tell what is in my heart  
 During *Kartik* the chill does not subside  
 During *Agahan* my heart beats increase  
 During *Poos* I feel restless  
 Alas! my beloved .....
- During *Magh* springs gush in the forest  
 During *Basant* the *koyal* sings loudly  
 During *Phagun* everyone plays Holi  
 But, alas! my beloved .....
- During *Chait* my heart is at ease

During *Jeth* he still does not come  
 During *Asadh* my heart yearns for him  
 Alas! my beloved .....

- (ii) The fair one likes to put *kajal* in her eyes.  
 Her beloved is happy eating *pan*.  
 The month of *Sawan* has come *sakhi*  
 In *Bhadoun* I will go to my parents house.  
 The fair one .....
- The month of *Bhadaun* has come *sakhi*  
 In *Kuwar* I will go to my parents house.  
 The fair one .....
- The month of *Kuwar* has come *sakhi*  
 In *Kartik* I will go to my parents house  
 The fair one .....

Similarly all the months are named one by one and the song ends when the month of *Sawan* is reached once again.

- (iii) Oh help me cross, I have to go on a pilgrimage  
 It is dark and I have to go far  
 Be careful while rowing.  
 Oh help me cross, I have to go on a pilgrimage  
 Do not be afraid dear friend  
 Have faith, Ram is with us.  
 Oh help me .....
- The four directions have turned dark  
 The birds have returned to their nest  
 Oh help me .....

Holi songs using legends of Radha and Krishna and dialogues between lovers represent the atmosphere of gaiety, abandonment and freedom pervading the *Tharuhath* at this time.

- (iv) Oh! it is Holi in *Brij*, and there is dancing with the milkmaids.  
 Here *Kanahiya*, there *Radhika*, Holi is being celebrated at the entrance of *Nand*.  
 The *sakhis* are playing Holi at the entrance of *Nand*  
*Krishna*, the flute player has won over their husbands with his sweet words.  
 To play Holi with the milkmaids of *Brij*.  
 Now that you are smiling, where has your caution gone ?

Oh! *sakhi*, where has her caution gone ?  
 Where have *Baba Nand* and *Jasodha Mai* gone ?  
 Oh! it is Holi in *Brij*, and there is dancing with the milkmaids.

- (v) *Shyamji* don't throw colour on me, I am of tender age.  
*Shyamji*, you are dark and *Radhika* is wheatish  
 Oh yes! *Radhika* is wheatish.  
*Shyamji* don't throw colour on me, I am of tender age.

The *Bari Charai*, held 8 days after Holi, marks the end of this month long festival. Women gather in the mango grove where *puja* is performed and later singing and dancing takes place. On this day, only Holi songs are sung. A fortnight after this, after harvesting of the crops, the *Choti Charai* is celebrated as a thanks giving and to invoke the blessings of the gods. The celebrations are similar to those of the *Bari Charai*.

- (vi) In my courtyard, a beautiful tree has cooling shade.  
 Slowly its fruits get full of sap and I do not sleep well.  
 If I plant a neem tree in my courtyard, I can play with its flowers.  
 Do not speak harsh words, for you may not get such love  
 from others.

*Teejia* and *Guria* are festivals celebrated by the Tharu women with joy and gaiety. Married women generally go to their parents house during this time and on these particular days assemble together for merry making, swinging, singing, and dancing.

- (vii) The month of *Sawan* has come *sakhi*,  
 All the *sakhis* are swinging.  
 It pleases my heart,  
 All the *sakhis* are swinging.
- (viii) Oh! beloved, *Sawan* is over, *Bhadoun* is coming  
 My parents are telling me to celebrate *Guria* before going.  
 The ponds are overflowing, the sea is overflowing,  
*Jamuna* river is overflowing, who will come to take me back ?

#### (d) Miscellaneous Songs

There are also several songs among the Tharu that deal with day-to-day problems, suggestions about how to deal



with life, women complaining about the ill treatment of her in-laws, remembrances of one's carefree childhood days, etc. In fact, all situations of daily life find expression through these songs. Noted here are some such songs:

(i) Do not drink my beloved, don't drink,  
 You will burn your liver, do not drink.  
 What is this gun made of ?  
 What is this pistol made of ?  
 What is this sword made of ?  
 Do not drink my beloved, do not drink.  
 Where did you fire the gun ?  
 Where did you fired the pistol ?  
 Where did you use the sword ?  
 Do not drink my beloved, do not drink.  
 The gun was fired in a dacoity.  
 The pistol was fired in a burglary,  
 The sword was used in a fight.  
 Do not drink .....

(ii) The voice of my husband is dear to me,  
 It attracts me like that of a bird.  
 My mother-in-law asks me to clean the hearth and utensils,  
 But my husband does not let me do so, lest I may catch a cold.  
 My mother-in-law asks me to pound the rice and grind wheat,  
 But my husband does not let me do so, lest my hands get blistered.  
 My mother-in-law asks me to make the bed,  
 But my husband does not let me do so, lest we have many kids.

(iii) Do not put the blame of your sins on others.  
 Life is a shelter, I have seen and heard from all,  
 If it ditches you, do not blame life.  
 Do not put .....  
 Light never lets a man fall,  
 If you fall in the dark, do not blame light.  
 Do not put .....  
 It is always enmity that causes hatred,  
 So listen dear friend, do not blame friendship.  
 Do not put .....  
 All your life you drank and liquor didn't say a word.  
 If liquor drinks you, do not blame intoxication.  
 Do not put .....

- (iv) Sleep soundly dear husband, eats to your hearts content.  
Do not turn down my request, go to another land and find a job.  
I will sleep soundly dear wife, I will eat to my hearts content.  
I will not reject your request, I will go to another land and find a job.

It is clear from these examples that occasions for singing among the Tharu are numerous and extraordinarily varied. Songs are connected with almost every walk of life. People sing not only on special occasions, but while performing different tasks too; a mother putting her child to sleep, men wandering around or working in the fields, women working or making baskets, stitching, *etc.* On such occasions, the songs one hums generally express their feelings or frame of mind at that particular time. For entertainment and recreation once in a while people assemble after sunset to sing and drink. Such singing programmes are never organised during the day time, probably because one has to perform the different tasks so essential for their survival during the day time.

Children learn to sing as they grow up listening to their elders. No formal or special training is provided. All children gradually pick up the songs popular in the society, thus, passing on the traditional songs orally from generation to generation. Children who show special liking and talent for singing are encouraged by the entire society. As such, there are many good singers among the Tharu, who not only have a good voice and knowledge of singing, but also have numerous indigenous songs memorised to their credit. A few talented singers may be mentioned here—Kalu Ram and Tunni Devi of Dhuskia, Dhumman Singh of Pachpada, Parsuram of Ramnagar, Ram Singh of Bankati and Subadha of Surma. In fact, Subadha has been given a National Award for folk singing and also has an audio cassette to her credit, copies of which sell like hot cakes and are forever in demand.

It is believed that the earliest musical instrument was the human voice. It is probably for this reason that among the Tharu too, the accompaniment of musical instruments is not always necessary. Although songs have a particular or fixed key, it is not always customary to stick to the tune. Thus, deviation from the true pitch causes no discomfort to the listeners. In fact, often innovations are brought about in the existing tunes by the singers, in accordance to their tastes and preferences, which the listeners do not seem to mind at all.

### Musical Instruments

Among the Tharu, music is never merely instrumental. It is always used as an accompaniment for songs and dances. Every society develops a particular musical taste and with it also develops musical instruments as per requirement. The Tharu too have a number of musical instruments which are used in their society, some of which have come into practice as a result of culture-contact. A few of these musical instruments are made by the Tharu themselves, thus, reaffirming their self dependence, while others are bought from outside. Among the Tharu, there is no formal training given for playing instruments. Interested people learn on their own by trial and error and guidance from those who are good at it, thus providing a boost to their learning skill. There are several Tharu who know how to play some or the other instrument mainly because singing and dancing used to be the major form of entertainment earlier. Use of musical instruments is specially important during festivals or marriages when professionals are called upon to give performances. The main musical instruments used here are the *madal*, *dhol* or *dholak*, *dhapli*, *mridang* or *madra*, *tandura* or *iktara*, *jhanjh* and *chimta*. These are also the traditional musical instruments. Apart from these, use of the harmonium, flute, and *manjeera* have also been accepted by the Tharu.

The *dhapli*, *madal*, *dhol* and *mridang* are membranophones. Membranophones are pulsatile



Man with Traditional Musical Instruments

instruments furnished with tensely strained membranes which are caused to vibrate by percussion or by friction, and to emit sounds whose pitch varies with the degree of tension of the membranes. To these the name drum properly applies. All the membranophones are made by the Tharu themselves in their leisure time. The *dhapli* is a single-membrane drum while the remaining three are double-membrane drums, in which the membrane or 'drum-head' is made of goat or sheep skin. Before attaching the skin to a body, made of hollowed out wood that has been properly seasoned and dried out in the sun, it has to be processed. The skin is cleaned and washed with soapy water and then dried in the sun. When semi-dry it is scraped to give it a smooth and flexible surface so that it may be easy to attach to the wooden surface. The skin is stuck to the rim of the hollowed out wood block with the help of natural gum and resins and also nailed with small wooden nails. On completely drying up, the skin becomes stiff and easy to strike.

The *dhapli* has a membrane attached only at one end of its wooden frame. The frame has a diameter of about 8-9

inches and a length of about 4-5 inches. This instrument is played by a single person who holds up the wooden frame in his left hand and gently strikes the membrane with his right hand to produce the appropriate beats. The *madal* is a big double membrane drum having a cylindrical frame. The diameter of this drum is about 12-13 inches and length about 28-30 inches. After fixing the membrane to this drum, a thick cord is tied around one rim, pulled tightly and tied at the other rim. By adjusting, these cords, the tone of the *madal* can be changed. This drum is either beaten with a wooden stick on the right side and with the hand on the left, or with sticks on both sides. The *madal* is indispensable while the traditional Tharu dances are in progress, since it provides the appropriate beat and rhythm to the dancers. The *dhol* is a drum, used when both singing as well as while dancing sessions are in progress. It is similar to the *madal* except that its dimensions are smaller. It has a diameter of about 8-9 inches and a length of 20 inches. The *dholak* is a smaller sized *dhol* that is used only by women while singing. While the *madal* is generally beaten with a stick, to play the *dhol*, *dholak* and *mridang* only the hands are used. The *mridang* or *madra* is similar in size to the *dhol* except that it has different diameters on both its ends. On one side it has a diameter of 9-10 inches, while on the other 7-8 inches. The *mridang* is used mainly while singing.

The *jhanjh* and *chimta* or *gheeka* belong to the clapper series, *i.e.*, are instruments consisting of two similar objects which are struck together to produce a musical sound. The *jhanjh* is a cymbal made of iron. These are two circular hollow plate like objects having a broad flat rim. The two plates are attached with the help of a string that is tied on to the holes that are made in the centre of each part. The *manjeera* is a smaller sized cymbal made of brass, the use of which is fast catching up among the Tharu and is specially played while singing devotional songs. While the *jhanjh* is bought from the blacksmith and is a traditional Tharu instrument, the *manjeera* is bought from the market and its use has started due to contact with the non-tribals. The

*gheeka* or *chimta* consists of two flat iron rods that are united at one end and its free ends are clashed together to create music. Thus, it may also be called a spring clapper.

The *tandura* or *iktara* is a stringed instrument that is used as an accompaniment for singing. This single stringed instrument is made of a half cut, bowl shaped, gourd dried in the sun with its fleshy part and seeds removed. Over this a goat skin membrane is attached and through the sides of the gourd a wooden stick is passed. At both ends of the stick a thin wire is tied and in the centre of the membrane, a small piece of wood is placed to raise the wire above the membrane so that it is easy to pluck the wire to create sound. A wooden knob is fitted at the upper end of the stick so that the wire can be tightened according to one's wish and produce the desired sound.

Today, the music of the Tharu is fast changing as a result of the changes that are being introduced by the use of new musical instruments such as the harmonium, flute, *nagara*, *ghungroo*, etc. Earlier every second house possessed some musical instruments, but today only a few other than professionals possess any musical instrument at all.

"A limitation in the variety of traditional musical instruments no doubt may suggest a lack of melody in the Tharu songs and music. This shortage of melody providing, instruments however does not render the Tharu music, random or chaotic" (Maiti, 2003). It is no doubt true for the music of the Tharu, as for several other tribals, that rhythm is given more importance. Lips (1947, 280), Herskovits (1974, 284) and Beals and Hoijer (1977, 564) all adhere to the view that in primitive music the emphasis on rhythm rather than on melody is more pronounced. In contrast to this, in our modern societies melody is given more importance. Lips (*op-cit*) states—"Rhythm in the primitive society is much richer, more differentiated, and more complicated than found in our (modern society's) symphonic music. Primitive skill in the interweaving of different rhythmical themes is so great that it is impossible for us "to grasp the rhythmical complications of the primitive music at a simple hearing", as Hornbostel puts it.

This importance of rhythm is reflected in the relatively large number of instruments that are used for percussion as against that employed to create melody". Thus, among the Tharu, musical instruments are more percussion ones, melody providing instruments being only a later addition. Melody is provided in songs mainly by the voice of the singer. However, it should not be assumed that percussion instrument, such as the *madal*, *dhol*, *jhanjh*, etc. entirely lack the element of tonality. In fact, it is these that give direction to the melody which is created by singing.

### Tharu Dance

Among the arts, dance has been considered the most primitive and most sophisticated. The Tharu are quite popular for their dance in the Tarai belt and its neighbouring areas. Dancing among the Tharu is a way of expressing their joy and a popular form of entertainment. Dancing takes place mainly during the festive season of Holi or in the evening when one is free from the activities of the day. There are no restrictions on anyone's taking part in dances. Thus, men, women, children and even widows are seen dancing during Holi which is the most important festival among the Tharu. During this festival there is a lot of joy and gaiety in the villages with groups of Tharu, young and old, dancing and singing the entire evening, and sometimes even the whole night, away. Apart from Holi, dances are performed during *Bari Charai*, *Choti Charai*, *Dussehra* and also the *satti*, *mangni* and *barshi* ceremonies. There are nearly no professional dancers among the Tharu today. Individual dances are also very rare. Tharu dances are mainly group dances. Any person taking part in a dance is called a *nachakiya*. Dancers are accompanied by musicians, the main among them being the *dholakia*, i.e., the person who plays the *madal* or *dhol* and gives the beat for the dancers. The dresses worn during dances have already been discussed in the previous chapter. Dancing, like singing is common to all the three Tharu sub-groups of this area. It would be noteworthy here to mention that earlier dancing for any occasion other than



Holi (which includes *Bari* and *Choti Charai*) was considered a taboo for the Tharu women in general and Rana women in particular. The Dangaura Tharu women too have begun to dance on Dusshera, only during the last five decades or so. As such, it is no surprise that Tharu women are not as skilled and deft as the other tribal women of U.P., such as the Jaunsari, Kol or Kamar. The Tharu have their own traditional style of dancing which is generally very monotonous having slow, uniform and repetitive movements that lack the hectic and vigourous limb movements exhibited by other tribals. Despite this the Tharu dancers are capable of keeping their spectator spell-bound with their dazzling multicoloured attire and heavy jewellery.



A girl dressed for *hori naach*

The absence of self-conscious artists and sophisticated stylization (dependent upon rigid aesthetic rules and regulations) gives the Tharu a capacity for ever renewing



and rejuvenating themselves while maintaining a continuity with their traditional style. Thus, although new movements and self-conscious experimentation do not replace earlier movements, new influence are absorbed, assimilated and a transformation is gradually taking place. In fact, in the past decade or so, several innovative steps have been added to the traditional dancing style to make the dance more attractive for the onlookers.

Tharu dances held on different occasions are known by different names. As already mentioned, Holi is the main occasion for dancing. Dances that take place at this time are called *hori khelna* or *hori naach*. Holi dances are performed in groups with men and women dancing separately in the *sadi hori naach*, or together in the *khichri hori naach*. The major themes of songs sung while dancing on this occasion are the *Hori* songs that have already been discussed. During the *Bari* and *Choti Charai* festivals too, the same dances and their variations are performed. Although all are free to take part in the *hori naach*, it is generally the young boys and girls who form groups to dance during Holi as it gives them ample opportunity to mix with each other. For dancing, groups begin to collect at 4' O clock in the evening and continue dancing late into the night. Food, liquor and tobacco in the form of *bidi*, contribute to the festivity of this kind.

### Sadi Hori Naach

This is found in two forms. The first, in which only women participate dressed up in their best of attire and ornaments. The girls stand height wise and form two rows of at least eight each forming semi circles facing each other. While dancing, the girl at the head, *i.e.*, the one standing first in each semi-circle holds a *murchal* (bunch of peacock feathers tied together with colourful woollen strands having beads, seqins or cowri shells hanging from it) and waves it while dancing. The others generally either have a decorated handkerchief, called *dasti*, in their hand or hold a bunch of bright coloured ribbons. The girls stand close to each other, wave their hands up and down and towards the side while



*Sadi Hori Naach*

swaying their body to the beat of the *madal* or *dhol* and the stamp of their feet. While dancing, members of one semi-circle sing the line of a song and the other repeats it. Another way in which the girls dance, is where they hold the forearm of the dancer in front and have the other hand on their waist. The *dholakia*, or drummer, traditionally stood outside the circle, but now-a-days he may stand in the centre of the circle formed by the dancers. Even if no music is played during the dance, the girls maintain rhythm through the songs they sing and the stamp of their feet.

The other form of the *sadi hori naach* is one in which men similarly form two semicircles, of at least eight men each, facing each other and move in a circle while dancing. The male dancers in the *sadi hori naach* are much more lively and swift moving compared to the women in

the same dance. In fact, there are many men who seem accomplished dancers in contrast to women who are amateurish and dance only on special occasions. The *dholakia*, in this dance, takes his position in the centre of the circle beating his *dhol* or *madal* mercilessly. The main *dholakia* is also the *mudhi* in many cases. After giving the rhythm with his drum, the *dholakia* initiates a song at the top of his voice which is then taken over by the two groups, each repeating the song in chorus. The *dholakia* in this form of *sadi hori naach* is usually assisted by other drummers and a few young boys who play the *jhanjh*, also standing in the middle of the circle.

### Khichri Hori Naach

In this dance, young men and women take their places alternately and dance in a circle standing erect, or form two semi-circles one of boys and the other of girls. The formation and movement is the same as in the *sadi hori naach* and the position of the instrumentalist too remains the same as it is when only men are dancing. In this dance too one group initiates the line of a song in chorus and the other group repeats it. While the basic pattern of this dance has remained the traditional one, *i.e.*, the dance still revolves round in a circle with the musicians in the centre, there have been several other innovations. For example, the dancers sometimes form double rows, *i.e.*, the boys and girls form two concentric circles. In this the girls formed two segments on the inner circle whereas the boys revolved in two segments on the outer one. In another dance, men and women formed mixed segments, caught each other's hands and shook them while dancing. All this is done while moving with measured steps and singing in a modulated voice.

### Sakhia Naach

This dance is most popular among the Dangaura Tharu who perform it during Dusshera, which is one of their

important festivals. The dance is similar to the *sadi hori naach*, in which two semi-circular groups of girls are formed who sway to the beat of the drums while singing. Most of the songs sung during the *sakhia naach* relate to incidents in the life of Lord Rama.

### Ram Jhumra Naach

This dance too is more popular among the Dangaura Tharu and is performed during Dusshera, specially on the tenth, *i.e.*, last day of Dusshera. However, the Rana and Katharia also take part in this dance occasionally. Both men and women dance forming two concentric circles. First, the women form the two inner semi-circles and the men the outer ones. Later, the women step back and the men take their place. The instrumentalists stand in the centre, as usual, while the dancers move gracefully to the beat of the drums and cymbals. The group forming the inner circle sings a line in chorus while those forming the outer circle repeat the lines. Most of the songs in this dance too relate to the life of Lord Rama.

### Tharuha Naach

The *tharuha naach* was one of the most popular traditional Tharu dances, and also the only professional one. It was performed by a young male who acquires skill in dancing and mimicry through practice. In this dance the *nachakiya* dances to the accompaniment of musical instruments, like the *mridang*, *dhol*, *jhanjh* and *manjeera*, dressed in the traditional female attire, and wearing numerous ornaments. Generally, the *nachakiya* who perform the *tharuha naach* are between 16-20 years. This young boy dances vigorously, swiftly making short rounds and moving his limbs to the rhythm of the instrumentalists who surround him. The dancer thus shows all kinds of physical feats and movements to give fuller expression to the meaning of the song. It is the main drummer who usually sings in a loud voice to the tune of which the dancer

dances. The song is repeated by the other instrumentalists. There is no special song for this kind of a performance. It can be picked up from any of the categories that have been discussed. Earlier, such professional dances were very common and nearly every Tharu village had its own professional dancer. As group dancing was traditionally confined to Holi, single male dancers had the undisputed monopoly for the rest of the year. The *tharuha* dancer's party was generally invited on every joyous occasion, and during festivals other than Holi for which he received a nominal remuneration. The dancer was called upon by many for the *barshi* ceremony during Diwali. It also proved a big source of entertainment and recreation when the villagers were comparatively free. Today, however, this traditional dance form has lost most of its lustre for the Tharu. Thus, there is hardly any boy who is ready to put on the *ghangharia* and *angia* and become the centre of attention in a dance performance. There are two main reasons for this sharp decline in the popularity of the *tharuha naach*. Firstly, at present group dancing is no longer confined to Holi, thanks to non-tribal interest in the Tharu group dances and incentives provided by the ITDP which has started supporting Tharu cultural activities. The project has provided material such as cloth, *etc.* for making the traditional Tharu dance attire to dance troops in certain large villages like Belaparsua, Parsia and Dhuskia, apart from distributing musical instruments. Lately, the State Bank of India has also similarly sponsored the costume for the dance troop of Dhuskia. Secondly, the educated Tharu and others who can afford to call non-tribal performers from outside the Tharu village receive a lot of social approbation and consider it a better form of entertainment when compared to the traditional ones.

### Dance Dramas

Apart from the dance forms already mentioned, there are a few dance dramas performed by the Tharu themselves. These mainly revolve round excerpts from the life of Raja

Harishchandra and Raja Bharti. The stories are conveyed through songs enacted by the Tharu men, who also play the part of women if the story calls for a female character. The actors are accompanied and supported by several instrumentalists. Such drama parties now are losing out on their audience. However, earlier they had an honourable place in their society and were invited by distant Tharu villages, at least once a year, to give a performance. So low is the demand for such drama parties that today one rarely comes across a party that performs the traditional dance drama.

Now that the Tharu performing arts have been discussed, one is in a position to deal with some of its important features. Here the aim of a performance is to please the masses. The song, dance or drama and its offering concerns every single member of the tribe and as the concern of all it is truly an expression of the psyche of the masses. The audience is free in expressing their opinion unmistakably and inexorably. In fact the audience is even free to participate at will. Thus, at times people may rush to join a group of dancers or begin to sing with a group of singers in appreciation of their performance. (Maiti: 2003)

Lomax (1968) and his co-workers on the basis of a cross cultural study of more than 3,500 folk songs from a sample of the world's societies found that song style vary with cultural complexity. These findings are similar to Fischer's (1961) findings about variation in art. Application of Lomax's hypotheses to the Tharu songs does not however yield entirely similar results. Lomax (1968, 117-28) put forward that wordyness and clearness of enunciation were found to be associated with culture complexity. The more a society depends on verbal information, as in giving complex instructions for a job, the more strongly will clear enunciation in the transmitting of information be a mark of its culture. Thus, hunter-gatherer bands in which people know their productive role and perform it without being given directions are more likely to base much of their singing on lines of non-words. Their songs are characterized by lack of explicit information, by sounds

that give pleasure in themselves, by much repetition and by relaxed slurred enunciation, for example "tra-la-la-la-la". Looking at the Tharu songs it will be clear that the songs clearly express complex feeling and are precisely worded. On the basis of this, the Tharu should be considered a complex society. In economic terms the Tharu can be considered so, since they have a relatively high level of food-producing technology compounded with a number of economic activities. In this context Lomax's hypothesis proves right with regard to the Tharu.

Again, Lomax (*ibid.*) puts forward that societies in which leadership is informal and temporary seem to symbolize their social equality by an interlocked style of singing. Each person sings independently but within the group and no one singer is differentiated from the others. Rank societies, in which there is a leader with prestige but no real power, are characterized by a song style in which one "leader" may begin the song, but the others soon drown out his voice. In stratified societies, where leaders have the power of force, choral singing is generally marked by a clear-cut role for the leader and a secondary "answering" role for the others. Societies marked by elaborate stratification show singing parts that are differentiated and in which the soloist is deferred to by the other singers. Among the Tharu, two main styles of singing can be noted. In the group dances, singing is done in chorus which according to this hypothesis symbolizes their equality, in which leadership is not important. If applied to the Tharu dances too, the result would be same because everyone participates in much the same way, *i.e.*, collectively. Then there are also songs in which there is a lead singer who sings the first line but is soon followed by others who repeat the same lines. This would mean that it is a society in which the leadership is important but not with much powers. Contradictory though this may seem, it can be accepted in the Tharu case since traditionally the Tharu had a leader who was respected and considered powerful. However, the general masses also had the right to give their opinion and could easily influence any decision related to them as a group.

In another place Lomax (*ibid.*, 166-69) finds a relationship between polyphony (two or more melodies sung simultaneously) and a high degree of female participation in food-getting. Those societies in which women's work is responsible for at least half of the food, songs are likely to contain more than one simultaneous melody, with the higher tunes usually sung by women. In societies in which women do not contribute much to production, the songs are more likely to have a single melody and be sung by males. This hypothesis cannot be proved, in the Tharu context, since no instance of polyphony was noted at all in the Tharu songs, although women contribute equally in the process of food procurement. Their equal participation in the economic activities however, may be manifested in their equal participation in singing and dancing.

If the cross-cultural results about music are valid, they should be able to explain change over time as well as variation within a society. Study of the performing arts being only a section of the present study, a very deep and detailed analysis of the Tharu songs or dances could not be afforded. However, future researches in a variety of societies including the Tharu, may help test some of the theories of Lomax and his colleagues.

Conclusively, it may be re-enforced that the Tharu dance, music, song and drama are aimed mainly to cheer the toil ridden Tharu and are a way of expressing their inner most feelings. Traditionally, Holi and ceremonies such as *satti*, *mangni* and *barshi* called for special performances. The Tharu performing arts may not be technically of a higher standard but they are rich in their expression of the natural feelings of the simple Tharu heart. Song, dance and music are often combined to reinforce one another and give vent to the deepest feelings which they could not adequately express otherwise. The best preserved among the Tharu dance, song and music, are the traditional songs which have been handed down orally from generation to generation. These songs are one of the richest treasures of their culture which they have managed to preserve to a great extent. However, the growing contact with non-tribals and education have brought about in



them an apathy towards their native songs, dance and music. Today, the Tharu sing more of film songs than their own traditional ones. Similar is the case with traditional Tharu dances. These remain only for name sake since the youngsters prefer dancing to the tune of the latest Hindi film songs played on decks, that have become extremely common in this area. Even when persuaded to show their traditional dances, it is disappointing to find that instead of wearing their traditional attire, they put on the clothes of the non tribals, thus spoiling the show. It was probably keeping this in mind that the ITDP started patronising the Tharu dances by providing them incentives in the form of their traditional dress and musical instruments. Besides these, the project officers also guide and teach them to dance in a style that is not their own. This is done mainly to make the dance attractive for the visiting senior government official and dignitaries, for whom the Tharu troops are often called to perform. Although some of the innovations introduced are in keeping with the Tharu traditions, others corrupt the traditional dance. It is quite strange even to hear of a non-tribal, an outsider, teaching the Tharu their traditional dance. Again in respect to the traditional musical instruments, several changes are coming about. Where earlier traditional musical instruments were commonly found in every village, today these are found only with professionals of the area. Apart from the traditional instruments several new ones have been added to the Tharu collection of musical instruments.

The saddest part in the entire process is that, apart from the normal changes which are inevitable to a culture as it develops, the Tharu are developing a distaste for their own traditional arts. Their dance, song and music represent a very vital part of their culture and as such attempts should be made to preserve them in their true form with as little distortion as possible.

# 8

## *Concluding Observations and Suggestions*

Before summing up it may be beneficial to refresh upon what activities should be considered art and what not. "Weitz (1956) pointed out that, although there have been countless attempts to narrowly specify a trait (or list of traits) that is necessary and sufficient to determine unequivocally, now and forever, whether or not something is art, all have foundered on the craggy reality of ever changing notions about art" (Anderson: 1992: 928).

Following Wittgensteins dictum (1953, 31), "Don't say: 'There *must* be something common' — but *look and see*", Weitz claimed that when we examine the way *art* is used, the best we can do is generate a list of traits, most (or all) of which are present in most (or all) of the entities that are considered to be clear instances of artworks at a given time in a particular speech community. Conversely, things held to be *not art* lack most or all of these traits. Between *art* and *not art* there exists a gray area where entities are accepted as being art to the degree that they possess the "recognition criteria" that characterize art works. Further, as the passage of time brings different usage of *art*, or as one moves into different speech communities, the strands of similarities must be altered as little or as much as required by current local custom" (Anderson : *ibid*). Thus, as Weitz (*op. cit.*, 33) observes, "mostly, when we describe something as a work of art, we do so under the conditions of there being present some sort of artifact, made by human skill, ingenuity, and

imagination, which embodies in its sensuous, public medium — stone, wood, sounds, words, *etc.* — certain distinguishable elements and relations”.

Anderson (*op. cit.*, 928) puts forward a list of traits similar to the “recognition criteria” originally set down by Weitz. According to Anderson (*ibid.*), “most of the things we consider to be art (and that other societies typically acknowledge as being in some way special, even if they are not lexically distinguished as art) meet most or all of the following criteria : they are artifacts of human creation; they convey significant cultural meaning; they are created with exceptional manual and/or mental skill; they are produced in a public medium; they are intended to create a sensuous effect; and they share stylistic conventions with works of similar geographic and temporal origin”.

From the above we may conveniently deduce that in all societies the aesthetic impulse finds expression in terms of the standards of beauty laid down in the traditions of the people. Where art is close to life, as it is in all tribal cultures, including the Tharu, and in many non-tribal societies too, the technical virtuosity of the artists will be lavished on objects of everyday use. Examples of such forms will be far more than may be the case, with the forms we classify as “pure” or “fine” art. But whatever forms art take, however it is manifested, it will be present. It is the expression of the desire for beauty that finds fulfillment in the application of technical skill through sanctioned form, in terms of the patterned perceptions and imaginative resources of the artistically endowed members of every society.

Broadly, the objectives of the present study have been to identify the different activities or objects of the Tharu tribe that could be grouped as arts and crafts; to document its details; the functional place of all such arts and crafts; the present condition of these; and ways in which the Tharu arts and crafts may be developed and made economically viable for the tribals.

On the basis of intensive field work carried out on the Tharu of Lakhimpur-Kheri, it was found that art is

interwoven into nearly every aspect of the Tharu life. Most of their objects of daily use are self made. These are further beautified and decorated in various ways to make them attractive to the beholder. Looking at these objects it becomes obvious that the Tharu are guided by their own well defined aesthetic sensibility. They may in other words be called connoisseurs. The Tharu living in harmony with nature try and use all the available raw materials of their surroundings without disturbing the nature and ecosystem for fulfillment of a majority of their requirements. Thus, even the simplest items of everyday utility reflect the Tharu appreciation for fine craftsmanship and natural material.

The artistic inclination among the Tharu is developed and shaped right from childhood. Children immitate their elders in artistic activities and gradually acquire the skill required for a particular art or craft. In this attempt they are continuously encouraged and supported by their elders. There does not exist specialization of any art or craft. Every Tharu has the requisite knowledge and skill to make artistic objects. Several individuals are deft in one or the other art or craft. There are also some individuals who are adept in several artistic activities. Such individuals are greatly admired and respected for their endeavours. Their help and guidance is sought in the community without much hesitation whenever needed. Although there are several exceptionally skilled artists and craftspersons among the Tharu, there are hardly any professionals and as such everyone takes part in artistic pursuits for their own pleasure and satisfaction by decorating articles of daily use. Since none of the arts are meant for earning their livelihood, such activities form a spare-time and leisurely activity or are an off-shoot of necessity.

As soon as one steps into a Tharu village, the first thing to strike one are the beautiful Tharu huts or *tharuhat*. These are made of wood, reed, bamboo, thatch and soft clay acquired from the ponds. Hutments are large and encompass areas large enough to accommodate a main and a secondary hut, a cattle shed, an open courtyard and a

kitchen garden. Huts are rectangular in shape having a roof sloping both in front and backwards. The requirement of labour for construction of a hut is provided by the family members and close relatives or friends. Men construct the framework of the hut and make the roof, whereas women plaster the entire house. While plastering, shelves of various shapes are made on the inner walls and also on the pillars to provide safe space to keep small articles of varied natures. The walls, both inner and outer, are beautified by making different designs in either low relief work, engraving or painting, or a combination of any or all of these. Colours used are in accordance to one's own taste. The most common designs made are geometric, but flowers, animals, birds and human figures are also made. Lately, paintings depicting sceneries of various kinds too are being made. In some of the traditional huts, openings are made which not only serve as windows and ventilators but also add to its attractiveness.

Another important use that clay is put to by the Tharu is in the making of vessels of various shapes, sizes and designs. All clay work here is done mainly by women. Clay items are hand made, without the help of a potter's wheel, using any of the three techniques, namely, modelling, moulding and coiling. These are then baked in the sun instead of being fired. Cowdung and paddy husk are added to the clay before putting it to use, to make the end products portable and to prevent them from cracking. Articles produced are varied, *e.g.*, huge grain bins, small basins used as containers and receptacles, pens for housing poultry, hearths, beautiful stands of different shapes and sizes, toys, *etc.* The confidence with which these articles are shaped by the Tharu make them not only utilitarian but also aesthetically valuable. Clay objects are many a times decorated with relief work or engravings that may be painted if so desired. Designs made are similar to those found on the walls of a *tharuhut*, but two dimensional paintings are never found on these.

The Tharu are extremely deft in basket-work. Several eye-catching basket containers and other items are made by

utilizing both the major basketry techniques namely, plaiting and coiling and their respective sub-divisions. All raw materials used for this work, *i.e.*, stalks and grasses, are available locally from the nearby forest area. All coiled baskets are made by women while those using the plaiting technique, by men. Again, all ceremonial baskets are made by women and are extensively beautified by coiling colourful patterns on to them. Patterns made are usually geometric and even when zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures are made, they are basically line drawings. Some of these baskets are further decorated with accessories such as beads, shells, *etc.* Apart from containers, the basketry techniques are used for making fishing traps and a few other utility items such as mats, winnowing plates, *etc.* Making of rope by using various materials, weaving of fishing nets, carpentry, and the making of various kinds of beautiful hand fans are the other crafts that calls for great skill and dexterity on the part of the craftsman. Different techniques are employed for creating beautiful and brightly coloured hand fans that are pieces of art in themselves. Designs coiled or embroidered on the fans are all geometric and resemble those found on the baskets. Some of the items prepared by the tribals are so fascinating and intricately made that girls take these articles at the time of their marriage to their in-laws, houses to show their inclination and deftness in artistic preparations.

The Tharu attire is unique in itself. Dress of the men and children of all the three sub-groups are found to be similar. The traditional men's wear was a *dhoti*, a short-sleeves cotton shirt, a jacket bedecked with coins and a Gandhi cap. The children wore a full sleeves shirt, a *pajama* and a cap made of colourful pieces of cloth on which embroidery and applique work was done. Children above five years of age wore dresses similar to those worn by their elders. The traditional women's attire among all the three Tharu sub-groups is a wrap-around skirt, a backless blouse, a *dupatta* and a jacket studded with silver coins. The skirt and blouse of the Rana and Katharia women are beautified

with the traditional Tharu *kasida* embroidery, *leharia* applique, patchwork and is further decorated with accessories such as mirror pieces, woollen balls, beads, *etc.* The *leharia* applique seems to be more popular and rampantly used among the Katharia, while the *kasida* work is more in vogue among the Rana. The skirt worn by the Dangaura Tharu women doesn't have any decoration, although we were informed that earlier their skirts and blouses used to have a lot of applique work on it. The Tharu take special care to dress in gaudy and bright colour clothes on festivals and ceremonial occasions. Tharu women love the use of heavy ornaments and spend most of their money on clothes and ornaments. The use of other means of personal adornment such as tattooing, cosmetics, perfumes, *etc.* is also found. The traditional *kasida* and *leharia* work requires great skill and patience on part of the women who make it. Examples of very fine work were noted in several places. Designs made are generally geometric, curvatures being found mainly in applique. A few of the motifs embroidered or made in applique are similar to those made on the baskets and hand fans. Similarly the tattoo designs resemble some of those made on the walls and on the baskets.

There may be a few people who would disagree in considering the above mentioned activities as artistic or as objects of art. It may be mentioned here that it is possible to have two distinctly different mental responses to these. "Such objects may merely be considered effective in fulfilling some requirement and thus considered simply utilitarian, or they may be admired in an aesthetic way. As a thing of grace they appeal to our aesthetic sensibility and therefore belong to the realm of art. There is no doubt that the Tharu huts, clay objects, basketry items, or clothes, *etc.*, primarily are utilitarian in nature, but they are also works of art. It seems that the Tharu can hardly fashion these articles without attempting to impart to the form or shape something of the quality we refer to as 'aesthetic'. Function can only vaguely determine the final form of any object, since it will be functional even without a fine finish. The

final form of an object is thus created keeping in mind both function and aesthetic sensibility" (Maiti: 2001, 73).

The performing arts of the Tharu include mainly dancing and singing. Use of musical instruments exists, but only as accompaniments to dancing and singing. The musical instrument found here are mainly percussion instruments that provide rhythm. As in most primitive societies, among the Tharu too, compared to melody, rhythm is given more importance. Melody is provided by the voice of the singer and as such the Tharu are used to sing even without the accompaniment of musical instruments. The same cannot be said about dances, since it is generally supported by the rhythm of the drums. Dances are performed mainly in groups during the Holi festival, whereas songs are sung both in chorus and solo whenever these tribals desire for the same. The Tharu have a treasure house of songs appropriately composed for every occasion, be it mourning or celebrations. The poets of these songs are obscure and as such there is no copyright. Everyone is free to sing songs of their choices. The Tharu dance though not vibrant and lively, has gained a lot of popularity in and around the Tarai area. This is mainly because of the dazzling multicoloured attire and heavy jewellery worn by women at the time of the performance. A mere description cannot do full justice to performing arts, since dances and dance dramas are expressions of an aesthetic experience through rhythmic body movements by conscious and orderly manipulation in time and space, while songs and music are expressions of ones inner most feelings not only through words but also tone and melody. In this case an aesthetic mind and quality of appreciation is absolutely necessary to understand the underlying implication of the tribal performing arts and to fathom the depth of its beauty and grace.

The study of arts can be accomplished from several perspectives. It can be done with the view to study material culture or objects of culture, form and style of the object and the functional meaning of these art techniques as suggested by Boas (1955). It can also be studied in its social



and cultural context as suggested by Firth (1952). More recently Anthropologists have focussed on both the object and the social and cultural context, thus combining the two approaches. The present study was carried out from a similar perspective.

The tribal societies of India have a rich cultural heritage. Tribal artists manufacture objects of simplicity, elegance and beauty. Same is the case with the Tharu. Art and art objects found in the Tharu society are in a way indicative of their artistic bend of mind which encourages them to decorate articles of daily use to make them more attractive than mere function would warrant. But the fact that the products through which these people reflect their artistic temperament are first of all functional and utilitarian cannot be denied. Although Tharu arts and crafts are artistic manifestation of the creative instincts, they are not always guided by the idea of *art for art's sake*. In general, tribal artists rather venture to satisfy the motive of art for utility. Thus, various artistic objects cater to the various needs of the tribal society. The Tharu are a self-sufficient tribe and every household attempts to fulfill its requirements on its own. Thus, the primary importance of huts, which acts as a painter's canvas, is to provide shelter and protection, clay vessels and baskets serve as containers and receptacles. Fishing nets and traps, hand fans and clothing similarly have their utility evident as soon as these are mentioned. Woodwork is practiced mainly for fulfilling some basic needs. Ornaments and other adornments serve to enhance one's personal appearance and for beautification. The performing arts have a two fold objective, as stated by the Tharu themselves, to provide healthy entertainment and to act as a means to put forth their inner most feelings. Thus, the primary importance of all objects of art and artistic activities is that they ensure the Tharu independence to a great extent. Had all or even a majority of these items to be acquired from outside or through specialised artists or craftpersons, the Tharu would be in a very pitiable condition since a large population of the Tharu is not economically very well-off.

The fact that despite such adverse conditions, the Tharu manage to express their creativity in a satisfying way, itself speaks volumes in favour of the artist in each and every Tharu. The Tharu have thus devised means not only of fulfilling their daily necessities, by skilfully utilizing raw materials available conveniently from the surrounding area, but also intelligently using these very objects as their canvas to bring forth their love for beauty, colour and everything imbibing the sense of aesthetic inclination.

“Art plays a very vital role in primitive societies. Primitive art is considered as belonging to the category of traditional art form. Traditional art is the expression of conceptual art form and conceptual art is the mental summary of the visual perception. An artist in traditional society conceptualizes the form through observation of objects (living and non-living), based on the social norms and laid-down rules. It is the mental summary of visual perception that inspires an artist to create images” (Ray: 2001, 19). Two basic trends of expression are normally present in the graphic and plastic art of the primitive society, *viz.* the decorative and the representative. These are also found in developed societies, but tend to be more sharply segregated with us than among the primitives. The relatively higher degree of fusion, or non-differentiation, of the decorative and representative impulses is one of the principal criteria for distinguishing most primitive and tribal arts from our modern ones. “The surface aesthetic beauty (decorative) is based on form, colour, texture, *etc.* while the inner meaning (representative) is revealed through symbols and iconographical interpretations. It would always remain an incomplete understanding of aesthetic appreciation if one does not penetrate through the primary visual perception and understand the metaphors and metaphysical beauty” (*ibid*, 20).

A frequent trait of primitive art is its so-called symbolic character. In a broad sense, symbolism may be said to exist when some components of the mind’s experience elicit activity and values ordinarily associated with other

components of experience. From this point of view, almost all languages and almost all arts would be symbolic. But it is useful to consider symbolism also in a narrower and purposive way. A symbol is an object or action that represents another entity in virtue of some arbitrarily assigned conceptual relation between them, *i.e.*, a part is made to stand for a whole. Art becomes significant to society through its representative characteristics. Symbol represents the ideology and philosophy of the society, but gradually over the time the symbol becomes a pattern or decorative design. Some of these patterns are used in daily life through decorative motifs, and textile, utensils, household items, weapons, *etc.* are commonly 'decorated with these. This is true for the symbols used in Tharu arts too, whose meaning (if any) can no longer be remembered. They tend to use those symbols, living or non-living, on their art, — with which they have to interact the most and which influence their psychology and thinking in a greater way.

As already noted, most patterns and designs found among the Tharu are geometric or a combination of different geometric forms. Apart from these, floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic patterns are also common. Among the geometric patterns, triangles and zig-zag lines are the most common and making these is considered auspicious. Besides these, vertical, horizontal and diagonal bands and hatchings, squares, rectangles, lozenges, chevrons, herring-bone, St. Andrew's and Tau-cross, dots or circular punch marks, detached circles, elliptical punch-marks, rectangular cross hatchings, oblique cross hatchings, chequer and star formed by the intersection of three or more lines were noted. These patterns are common to all artistically decorated objects, viz, on the walls of huts, clay vessels, baskets, hand fans, *kasida* and *leharia* work, and even tattoos. Most floral, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic patterns are line drawings. Animals commonly noted were elephants, horses and deer; birds such as peacocks, hens, ducks, pigeons and parrots. Figures made were generally of men

riding animals, with bows and arrows in their hands or standing close in a group. Such designs are common on walls of a hut, baskets, applique and tattoos. Flowers are many a times merely a few squares or lozengens joined together differently and found on all kinds of objects.

Since most of the patterns and motifs found on the various Tharu art objects are nearly similar, it may be assumed that there lies some meaning behind these. Most of the artists and craftpersons, however, do not know what these motifs symbolize. Only some old women could give the interpretation of a few symbols, which according to them were traditional ones, while according to the others these motifs were merely decorative and made since they were pleasant and attractive to look at. Different geographical conditions have a definite influence on the meaning of the symbols. The Tharu dependence on nature has created a natural sympathy and affectionate relationship with the environment which they depict through their patterns. Thus, most of the symbols found here relate to the environment and surroundings. No one among the Tharu tribe of the Lakhimpur Kheri district could enlighten us as to why triangles and zig-zag lines are common and what do these actually symbolize. It might be assumed that since the Tarai region is a hilly one, these triangles symbolize the Tarai hills and zig-zag lines represent rivers and ponds. Both of these being part of the immediate surrounding, its importance in the Tharu life is understandable. This interpretation of the symbols, however, is that of the author and not one given by the Tharu, who consider these symbols auspicious, but are unaware of the reason for their belief, the meaning of the symbol or rationale behind it. According to the Tharu, a square with a dot symbolizes a flower, two triangles with their apex opposite and touching each other stand for a butterfly, a circle surrounded with lines on four sides suggests a low seat, a circle with two lines crossing each other from its centre suggests a hearth, several disjoint dots or punch marks stand for a seive, two vertical lines covered with a single horizontal line or an inverted 'v' suggest a

hut. Thus, all symbols either relate to the nature and natural surroundings or to objects of daily use. Although some motifs are symbolic, it must not be presumed that all designs or patterns represent something else. Thus flowers, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures and in many cases even geometric patterns do not carry any specific significance. These are merely used for the sake of design and decorative purposes.

The possibility of certain relationships between the art of a society and other aspects of its culture have always been recognized by the students of art. It was due to this very assumption that some anthropologists have used artistic data to address questions of cross-cultural variation or universals. The cross-cultural approach to art, thus, attempts to establish broad correlations between art styles or forms and social or social-psychological factors. Fischer (1961, 80), for example, has examined the stylistic features of art with the aim of discovering "some sort of regular connection between some artistic feature and some social situation". Using statistical evidence, he states that egalitarian societies are characterized by graphic designs which repeat simple elements, while hierarchical societies produce designs integrating a number of dissimilar elements. Such analysis rests on the notion of a 'Modal Personality' shared by all members of society, and assumes the artists' conformity to social norms. Fischer argues that the artist expresses a form of social fantasy. In other words, in a stable society artists will respond to those conditions in the society that bring them, and the society, security or pleasure. Assuming that "pictorial elements in design are on one psychological level, abstract, mainly unconscious representations of persons in the society" (*ibid*, 81). Fischer reasoned that egalitarian societies would tend to have different stylistic elements in their art compared to stratified societies. Egalitarian societies are generally composed of small, self-sufficient communities that are structurally similar and have little differentiation between persons. Stratified societies, on the other hand, generally

have larger and more interdependent (and dissimilar) communities and great differences among persons in prestige, power, and access to economic resources. Fischer hypothesized and found in a cross-cultural study that certain elements of design were strongly related to the presence of social hierarchy. His findings are summarized in the following Table (c.f. Ember and Ember: 1994, 436) :

**Table 6 : Artistic Differences in Egalitarian and Stratified Societies**

S.N.	<i>Egalitarian Society</i>	<i>Stratified Society</i>
1.	Repetition of simple elements	Integration of unlike elements
2.	Much empty or "irrelevant" space	Little empty space
3.	Symmetrical design	Asymmetrical design
4.	Unenclosed figures	Enclosed figures

Repetition of a single element, for example tends to be found in the art of egalitarian societies, which have little political organization and few authority positions. If each element unconsciously represents individuals within the society, the relative similarity of people seems to be reflected in the repetitiveness of design elements. Conversely, the combining of different design elements in complex patterns that tends to be found in the art of stratified societies seems to reflect the high degree of social differentiation that exists in such societies. Symmetry, the third stylistic feature related to type of society, is similar to the first. Symmetry may suggest likeness or an egalitarian society while asymmetry suggests difference and perhaps stratification of a hierarchical society. Application of these two hypotheses on the Tharu arts conform Fisher's conclusions to a great extent. Motifs and patterns found on the Tharu baskets, embroidery, hand fans, most clay objects, and a few wall decorations are repetitive and symmetrical. Similar arguments can be advanced for the group dance steps, which are synchronized and repetitive. In singing too the lines of a song are repeated by a group after it has been uttered once. All these indicate the self sufficiency and egalitarian structure of the Tharu society. There are, however, a few example that question the

complete validity of these hypotheses. Most of the wall decorations, several of those made on grain containers and applique, lack repetitiveness or symmetry in the sense that different patterns and motifs are found in a single place. Sceneries, a recent addition to the Tharu wall decoration also deride a single conclusion. This may however be taken as suggestive of the tribe's gradual movement towards a more stratified form of society.

Fischer's second hypothesis suggests that the egalitarian society's empty space in a design represents the society's relative isolation. Because egalitarian societies are usually small and self-sufficient, they tend to shy away from aliens, preferring the security within their own group. On the other hand, the art of stratified societies is generally crowded. The hierarchial society does not seek to isolate individuals or communities within the group since they must be interdependent. Among the Tharu this hypothesis does not yield any result. There are several wall decorations and clay vessels that have a lot of empty and irrelevant space between its motifs. Then again, here are many wall paintings that do not have any empty space at all. All embroidery and applique designs as well as those woven on baskets and hand fans are very close having hardly any irrelevant space in between. This hypothesis then does not help in any way to identify a general trait of the society or reflect on its culture.

The fourth feature, *i.e.*, the presence or absence of enclosures or boundaries (frames), may indicate the presence or absence of hierarchically imposed rules circumscribing individual behaviour. An unenclosed design may reflect free access to most property, since in egalitarian societies the fencing-off of a piece of property for the exclusive use of any single individual is not known. In the art of stratified societies, boundaries or enclosures may reflect the idea of private property. Or else they may symbolize, certain other differences which separate the different classes of people. As far as Tharu art is concerned, most motifs have a frame or enclosure around it. This is specially so for all designs on huts, clay vessels, hand fans,

most baskets and also to a great extent on the embroidery work. In accordance to Fischer's analysis, this hypothesis classifies the Tharu society as a stratified one creating confusion with regard to the actual status that the Tharu society enjoys.

Lomax (1968) and his co-workers put forward hypotheses similar to those of Fischer, according to which song style seem to vary with cultural complexity. These have been discussed in the previous chapter, and just like Fischer's hypotheses seem to put forward no uniform result or indication about the Tharu society when applied to their arts. As such, a deeper study on this aspect of the subject is required.

A relatively recent approach, which Silver (1979) terms 'ethnoart' concentrates on the study of art from an emic perspective, and the reconstruction of native artistic categories and principles. Defining this approach Silver (*ibid*, 268) states, "ethnoart is the study of art from an emic perspective seeking its meaning and significance for a society's constituent members and institutions". In context of the Tharu, this kind of a study is not easy since (like many other tribal communities) they too do not have any term that would translate to 'art' or 'aesthetics'. In describing and evaluating objects of artistic value the terms they use translate to 'beautiful', 'fine' and 'neat'. On the basis of its 'fineness' and 'neatness' a work of art is judged superior to another similar art object. The more 'fineness' and 'neatness' in a work, the more beautiful it is considered. Thus, a Tharu will as a rule esteem as superior the same specimen of its artistic creation which would be selected as of higher quality by any non-tribal artist, museum collector, or commoner.

The Tharu were also unable to inform about any ethnic 'categories' or 'principles', as such, related to art. No abstract principles whatsoever, were used by them to account for the beautification and decoration of their objects of utility that render them as art objects. However, the Tharu do not ignore the importance of their artistic activities. According to them, beauty and beautiful things



arouse feelings of happiness and contentment among the onlookers. And, the easiest way to derive this feeling is by beautifying things in and around one's house, since this is where one spends most of his/her time. This is one of the major reasons why the Tharu beautify most of their utility items. The feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment derived from creating something beautiful is another important factor, according to them. This, combined with the admiration, praise and recognition received from members of the community proves a vital motivating factor in the creative pursuit.

Today, all over the world, one can observe the dying of old artisanship and true handicraft. Even the Tharu are no longer an isolated lot as they had been till in the recent past. A casual observer also can easily take notice of the impact of urbanization and fast developing cosmopolitan culture in every sphere of their life which includes their attitude towards arts and artistic pursuits. Today, the beautiful Tharu huts are fast being replaced by those made of bricks and cement which lack the earlier mentioned beautiful mural art of the traditional Tharu huts. In place of the clay vessels and exquisitely woven and decorated baskets, more and more plastic and metal containers are being used. The use of electric and plastic hand fans bought from the market place are fast replacing the painstakingly coiled or woven traditional ones. The switch over to the urban style of dressing and adorning in place of the beautifully worked Tharu attire and their heavy jewellery, the preference to Hindi film songs, music and dances particularly among the younger generation instead of the traditional Tharu performing arts — all signify a change that is taking place in the thought process, lifestyle and culture of the Tharu. A materialistic attitude is fast replacing the simple and leisurely life of these tribals. As a result of the desire to acquire more and more wealth and economic prosperity, preference is being given to activities that help in generating wealth. Thus, creative urges are being suppressed to a great extent. Many of the Tharu, today, consider artistic activities such as coiling beautiful

baskets and handfans or doing the exclusive embroidery a waste of their precious time and energy that can instead be put to some economically gainful work. This change, though occurring at a fast pace, is in its initial stage. Even today, skilled craftpersons and artists are respected and admired by members of the Tharu community. Till date, objects of beauty are considered priced possessions and much free time is spent in deriving aesthetic pleasure by trying their hands at creating something innovative and artistic. However, a marked decline in the quality of work done is easily noticeable. "On the whole, it is derived that the Tharu have developed a taste and preference for modern day articles easily available in their surrounding markets. This has further had a dampening effect even on those members of the community who still relish to try their hands at making something innovative and artistic during their leisure time. Ultimately this change is reflected both in quantity as well as in quality" (Maiti: 2001, 74).

It is a pity that the exceptional and unique Tharu arts and crafts are on a decline. This is partly because of confused judgement on part of the planners and developers who seem to be critical of most aspects of tribal life. They express these through open condemnation of the tribal culture, or an implicit disapproval conveyed through upliftment, and development schemes and programmes. Though unintentional, these acts have created in the minds of the tribals a distrust and in many cases even a distaste for their cultural traditions which they had inherited and improved upon generation after generation.

Attempts for the welfare and development of the Tharu are no doubt helping them to improve their lot. Such positive steps on the part of the governmental and non-governmental organizations are appreciated by every educated and conscious person. However, attempts should also be made to preserve and nurture, one of the most fascinating and beautiful aspect of the Tharu life, *i.e.*, their arts and crafts which are being adversely affected as a result of the aforesaid.

Taking note of the Tharu artistic bent of mind the ITDP started a Chikan Training and Production Centre and Handloom Training and Production Centre with the objective to train the Tharu in an art that would help generate extra income. Though started with good intentions, this programme could not yield fruitful results. Neither of these Centres have been able to develop and sustain any particular skill among the Tharu nor have they been able to provide employment to their trainees. Chikan embroidery is a specialised traditional craft of Lucknow and its adjoining areas where the labour of well trained craftpersons is easily available at a very low cost. In such a condition it would be a costly affair to engage craftswomen from Lakhimpur Kheri even if they happen to be skilled in the craft. Similar is the case with the Handloom Training Centre, the Tharu are provided training, but ample work opportunities are not being generated. Thus, all resources put into this programme are being grossly wasted.

It is advisable for the governmental and dedicated non-governmental organizations to initiate programmes and establish co-operatives, with the help of the Tharu, which encourage and develop the traditional Tharu arts and crafts. In this process the organizations would not only help preserve and perpetuate the indigenous tribal arts and crafts that have their very own distinctive features and exquisite style, but also help the Tharu add to their economic prosperity out of skills that they are deft at. In conformity with these objectives a few suggestions may be put forward:

1. It is essential, first of all, to create in the minds of the Tharu a pride towards their traditional forms of arts and crafts which would lead to their perpetuation with further improvement and development.
2. The current commercial popularity of tribal arts and crafts should be exploited as a guiding force to encourage the indigenous art forms. If the Tharu find their traditional arts economically viable and

beneficial, they will be more than eager to pursue these.

3. Master craftpersons and artists or those adept in specific arts and crafts should be identified and employed to provide formal training to the younger generation in an organised way. This would be specially beneficial since the indigenous motifs and traditional patterns can also be recorded and perpetuated simultaneously.
4. The traditional form of house decoration through painting and relief work should be encouraged and a small model village of attractive *tharuhats* made.
5. Tourism in the Tharu area should be encouraged. The forest area and adjoining Tarai hills along with the above suggested model village can be highlighted to attract tourists who will be targeted as potential buyers of the indigenous Tharu arts and crafts. This would be easy, since the Dudhwa National Park already is a popular tourist place of the area.
6. The exceptional capability of the Tharu in modelling and moulding clay into various shapes should be encouraged. They can easily be oriented in the art of making attractive, decorative and utilitarian terra-cotta objects that are in great demand all over the world.
7. The Tharu seem to be specially adept in basket weaving. This craft too has large scope for commercial use since the demand of baskets with colourful designs and patterns exists in India even today, especially for use during ceremonial occasions. This craft can further be developed to create articles of both utility and decoration, such as coasters, flower vases, fruit holders, wall decorations, etc.
8. The exquisite and multicolour hand fans made by using various materials and techniques can be modified to make various kinds of utility and

handicraft pieces, such as framed panels, table mats, decoration and show pieces, *etc.*

9. The indigenous *kasida* embroidery and *leharia* applique work have special potential for commercial use. Work of such fine quality if utilized prudently, no doubt, would create a large demand for this exclusive work found in no other region nearby. The *kasida* and *leharia* work can easily be used to make designer salwar suits, dupattas, bedsheets, pillow covers, cushion covers, bags, rugs, wall hangings, *etc.* Such items have a large market and with the Tharu traditional embroidery or applique work done on it, these will become pieces of art in themselves.
10. The traditional Tharu performing arts should be encouraged by organizing special performances. This will not only popularize the art among non-tribals, but also help the younger generation Tharu to remain in touch with this rich tradition of theirs, which is fast losing out to meaningless Hindi film songs.
11. Lastly, annual fairs can be organised that would serve as a centre stage to exhibit the rich Tharu arts and crafts. During such fairs, which can be treated as tribal cultural festivals, the various traditional art forms and artistic activities can easily be popularized, thus creating a market for these and making them economically viable for the Tharu.

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## *Photo Gallery*



A Tharu woman plastering her house



A Tharu hut with wall paintings





Wall decorations of various kinds



A Tharu girl showing clay toys made by her



Tharu belles grinding wheat (Photo courtesy Mr. P. Nagar)





A Tharu man weaving a fishing net



A Tharu man showing various fishing implements





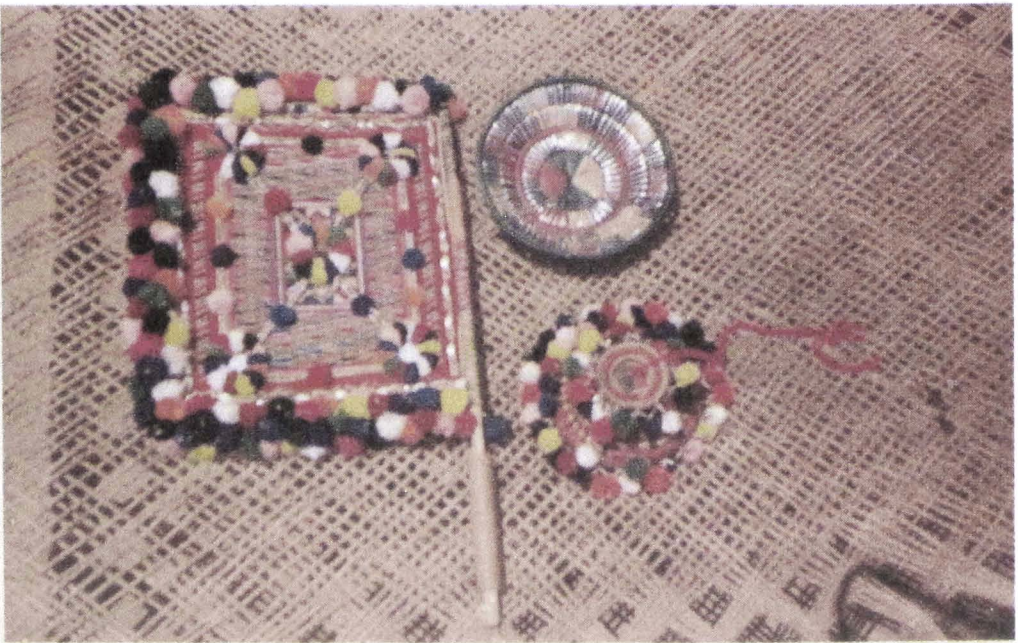
Various patterns coiled on baskets



Various patterns coiled on *benas*



*Moonj ceremonial pitara and benas made of moonj & sikri*



*Saja bena, tukni and panjhapna*





*Leharia* (applique) work drum cover



Tharu women in their traditional attire



Traditional dance dress of the Tharu



*Khichri hori naach*  
(Photo courtesy Mr. P. Nagar)

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