



Research Paper

Social and Cultural Status of Tharu and Buksa Tribes

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Abstract

India is a land of diverse tribal communities with unique social and cultural traditions. Among these communities, the Tharu and Buksa tribes mainly inhabit the Terai and Bhabar regions of Uttarakhand and adjoining areas. These tribes possess distinctive cultural identities that reflect their traditional lifestyle, customs, and social institutions. The present study examines the social structure, family organization, customs, food habits, attire, and cultural practices of the Tharu and Buksa tribes. The findings reveal that despite the influence of modernization, many traditional practices continue to play an important role in shaping their social and cultural life.

Keywords: Tharu Tribe, Buksa Tribe, Social Structure, Cultural Practices, Uttarakhand, Tribal Society

I. Introduction

In the contemporary world, two distinct types of societies can clearly be observed. One type of society continues to preserve its traditional customs and cultural heritage, while the other is gradually moving toward modernization and technological advancement. In this context, it can be said that on one side there exists a developed human society, and on the other side there are marginalized groups who are commonly recognized as tribal communities.

A significant portion of the population in many countries, including India, still remains socially and economically backward. In the present era, the awareness and influence of modern civilization have not reached these marginalized communities to the same extent as they have influenced the more developed sections of society. Human relationships are considered the fundamental basis of any social system. Culture, therefore, is regarded as an essential component of social organization.

Every individual living in society maintains relationships with family members, neighbors, and friends. These relationships form the basic structure of human society and play an important role in shaping social life.

Among the cultures of the world, Indian society holds a unique and significant place. The primary reason for this uniqueness lies in its rich cultural traditions and heritage. Religion, karma, caste structure, social tolerance, spirituality, and adaptability are some of the distinctive characteristics that make Indian society culturally diverse and vibrant. Because of these features, Indian society has long remained a center of attraction for many external cultures.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the **social structure** of the Tharu and Buksa tribes.
- To analyze and evaluate the differences in the social and cultural status of the Tharu and Buksa tribes.
- To analyze the **cultural traditions and customs** of the Tharu and Buksa communities.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a descriptive and comparative research methodology aimed at analyzing the social and cultural differences between the Tharu and Buksa tribes. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through field

surveys, personal interviews, and structured questionnaires administered to respondents belonging to the Tharu and Buksa communities. The same type of questionnaire was used for both tribes to ensure uniformity and to facilitate an effective comparative analysis. The questionnaire included questions related to agriculture, family structure, social relations, cultural traditions, food habits, and economic activities. Secondary data were collected from books, research articles, government reports, and census records related to tribal studies. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling from villages inhabited by these tribes. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and comparative methods, and the findings were presented with the help of tables and diagrams in order to clearly understand the similarities and differences in the social and cultural status of the Tharu and Buksa tribes.

STUDY AREA

In the present study, the study area selected by the researcher is Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital, Dehradun, Pauri Garhwal and Haridwar districts of Uttarakhand. The Government of India formed a new state in 2000, which was the northern part of Uttar Pradesh, named Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is divided into 13 districts. Out of which Udham Singh Nagar and Nainital are in Kumaon division and Dehradun, Pauri Garhwal and Haridwar are in Garhwal division. The latitudinal extent of the districts lies between 28°96' to 31°2' north latitude and 77°35' to 79°51' east longitude. In the north of the districts are Uttarkashi, Tehri, Rudrapur, Chamoli, Almora and Champawat and in the south is the state of Uttar Pradesh. The border of Nepal is situated in the east and Himachal Pradesh is situated in the west. The total geographical area of the districts is 17570 square kilometers. The climate of the study area ranges from temperate to sub-tropical type, but there is extreme variation in the temperature of the valleys and high mountain areas. While the temperature of the valleys increases in summer, the temperature of the mountainous areas remains low even in summer. Administratively, Udham Singh Nagar has 8 tehsils. It has been divided into 7 development blocks and 27 Nyaya Panchayats in which 620 villages are found. Similarly, Nainital has been divided into 9 tehsils, 8 development blocks and 44 Nyaya Panchayats, in which there are 1050 villages. Dehradun has been divided into 7 tehsils, 6 development blocks and 36 Nyaya Panchayats, in which there are 635 villages. Haridwar has been divided into 3 tehsils, 6 development blocks and 46 Nyaya Panchayats, in which there are 505 villages and Pauri district has been divided into 10 tehsils, 15 development blocks and 118 Nyaya Panchayats, in which there are 3114 villages. According to 2011 census, the total population of the study area is 6877,894 and the tribal population is 250,733. People of all religions reside here but the number of people following Hindu religion is more.

Social Structure of Tharu and Buksa Tribes

Most tribal communities in the world traditionally depended on hunting and gathering; therefore, their lifestyle was often mobile in nature. However, the **Tharu tribe** has a relatively stable socio-economic system as it mainly depends on **agriculture and animal husbandry**, which has led to a more settled way of life. The Tharu people are mainly found in the **Terai region of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar**. The term "Tharu" has different interpretations among scholars. According to the **Census Report of 1867**, the word may have been derived from "Tarua," meaning wet or marshy land, referring to the swampy conditions of the Terai region. Another scholar, **Nesfield**, suggested that the term originated from the word "Thar," meaning forest dwellers.

The **Buksa (Buxa) tribe** is considered one of the original inhabitants of the **Terai and Bhabar regions**. The origin of the term "Buksa" is also debated. According to **Amir Hasan**, the term evolved from "Bhakshi," which later became Bhaksa, Bhoksa, and Buksa. Other explanations link the name to goat trading in **Bijnor** or to the consumption of the root of a forest plant called "Bukra." The Buksa people of **Dehradun** are also known as "Mahra."

The social life of the Buksa tribe is governed by traditional customs and rules. Violation of these rules may lead to punishments such as **economic fines or social boycott**. Women participate in household decisions but generally do not possess rights over land or property.

In the tribal regions of **Uttarakhand**, traditional **tribal councils or caste panchayats** play an important role in maintaining social order and resolving disputes. Among the **Tharu and Buksa tribes**, these councils function at two levels—**village level and tribal level**. In the Tharu tribe, the tribal council is known as "**Bhanjara**," while in the Buksa tribe it is called "**Takht**." These institutions help resolve family disputes, property issues, and other social matters within the community.

Family Structure of Tharu and Buksa Tribes

Family is an important foundation of social structure and is considered the primary unit of society. Both the **Tharu and Buksa tribes** attach great importance to the institution of family. The family acts as the first school of an individual where personality development and socialization begin. In modern Indian society, the tradition of joint families is gradually declining, and the number of nuclear families is increasing.

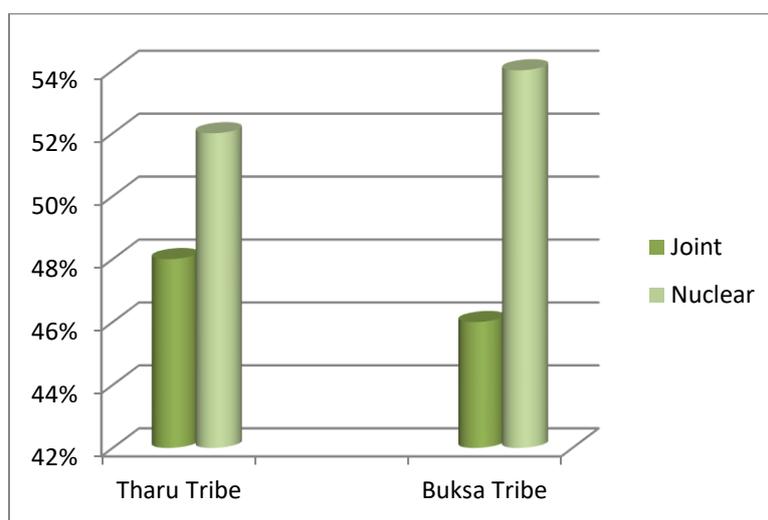
Among the **Tharu tribe**, the family system is mainly **patriarchal**, though women hold an important position in social, economic, and religious activities. In large families, a capable male member known as the **Gandhur or Malikar** is selected as the head of the family, while a female leader known as **Gandhuren or Malkin** may also be chosen to manage household responsibilities. Other family members contribute to agricultural activities, animal rearing, and household work.

In the **Buksa tribe**, the family system is also **patriarchal and patrilineal**. After marriage, women generally move to their husband’s house, and lineage continues through the male line. The eldest male member usually acts as the head of the family and takes major decisions. Both **joint and nuclear families** are found among the Buksa tribe, though nuclear families are gradually becoming more common.

Table 1 Classification of Respondents on the Basis of Family Structure

Family Type	Tharu Tribe		Buksa Tribe	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Joint Family	115	48%	107	46%
Nuclear Family	126	52%	125	54%
Total	241	100%	232	100%

Source: Primary Data based on Field Survey



The data presented in **Table 1** show that among the respondents of the **Tharu tribe**, 48% belong to joint families, while 52% belong to nuclear families. Similarly, among the respondents of the **Buksa tribe**, 46% belong to joint families and 54% belong to nuclear families. This indicates that the prevalence of nuclear families is slightly higher in the Buksa tribe compared to the Tharu tribe.

Attire of the Tharu and Buksa Tribes

The attire of the people of any region is influenced by the **climate, geographical conditions, and socio-economic background** of that area. In earlier times, every region had its own traditional dress that represented its cultural identity. Similarly, in **Uttarakhand**, which is known for its cultural diversity, different communities have their own traditional clothing styles. However, with the influence of modernization and globalization, significant changes can now be observed in the dressing patterns of these communities.

Among the **Tharu tribe**, people today commonly wear modern clothing such as **pants, shirts, coats, kurtas, and pajamas**, while women often wear **sarees and blouses**. Traditionally, Tharu women used to wear **lehenga and choli**, which are now mostly worn during special cultural occasions.

In the **Buksa tribe**, various types of traditional clothes and ornaments are also used. Elderly men traditionally wore **turbans or caps**, although this practice is declining among the younger generation. Today, many Buksa men prefer modern clothing such as **pants, shirts, coats, and T-shirts**. Buksa women traditionally wear **lehenga and choli**, while in modern times they also wear **sarees, salwar-kameez, and other contemporary garments**. Traditional attire is now mainly used during **festivals and marriage ceremonies**.

Table 2 Classification of Traditional Attire and Modern Attire

Tribe	Traditional Attire (Men)	Traditional Attire (Women)	Modern Attire
Tharu	Dhoti, Kurta, Turban	Lehenga, Choli	Pants, Shirt, Kurta-Pajama, Saree, Blouse
Buksa	Dhoti, Kurta, Turban/Cap	Lehenga, Choli, Odhni	Pants, Shirt, T-shirt, Saree, Salwar-Kameez

Source: Primary Data based on Field Survey

The table shows that both the **Tharu and Buksa tribes traditionally wore dhoti, kurta, lehenga, and choli** as their common attire. However, due to modernization and social change, people of both tribes now prefer **modern clothing such as pants, shirts, sarees, and salwar-kameez**, while traditional dress is mainly worn during festivals and marriage ceremonies.

Religious Beliefs and Worship Practices of Tharu and Buksa Tribes

The **Tharu tribe** performs four major annual rituals: **Dhuriya Puja, Harari Puja, Dussehra, and Levangi Puja**. Dhuriya Puja is celebrated in the month of **Jeth (June)**, while Harari Puja is dedicated to **Jagnathiya Devi** and is performed after the sowing of paddy in **Bhadra (September)**. During **Dussehra**, the Tharu worship the **nine forms of Goddess Durga** for nine days in the month of **Ashwin (October)**. Levangi Puja is performed in **Aghan (December)** before the threshing of the paddy crop. In their religious beliefs, men usually perform the rituals, and animals such as **snakes, monkeys, and cows** are regarded with respect.

The **Buksa tribe** mainly follows **Hindu religious traditions** and worships various Hindu gods and goddesses, especially **Lord Shiva (Mahadev)**. Every village generally has a **Shiva temple**, and **Chamunda Devi of Kashipur** is considered an important deity. The Buksa people also worship **seven goddesses**, and religious ceremonies are considered incomplete without their blessings. Sacred trees such as **Peepal and Semal** are also worshipped. In addition, the Buksa tribe believes in the spiritual power of priests known as **Bharare**, who perform rituals, healing practices, and exorcism using traditional methods such as charms, sacred ash, and rituals. However, with modernization, the younger generation is gradually moving away from these traditional beliefs.

III. Conclusion

The present study was conducted to examine the **social structure and cultural characteristics of the Tharu and Buksa tribes** and to analyze the differences in their social and cultural status. The findings of the study reveal that the social organization of both tribes is largely **based on agriculture**, and a **patriarchal family system** is prevalent in both communities. Women in the Tharu and Buksa tribes play an important role in social, economic, and religious activities and contribute significantly to the functioning of family and community life.

The analysis of family structure indicates that both **joint and nuclear families** exist in these communities; however, the **nuclear family system is becoming more common**, especially among the Buksa tribe. The study also shows that most families consist of **six to nine members**, and male members generally form the larger proportion of the household. In terms of food habits, both tribes are influenced by the **geographical conditions of the Terai region**, where rice cultivation is dominant; therefore, rice and fish are among the most common food items. The study further indicates that **non-vegetarian food is more common among the Tharu tribe**, while **vegetarian food is relatively more common among the Buksa tribe**. Their traditional dress and ornaments have also changed over time due to modernization and interaction with other communities.

The study of cultural traditions and customs reveals that the **Tharu and Buksa tribes share many similarities in their cultural practices**, including festivals, rituals, and religious beliefs. Both communities mainly follow **Hindu religious traditions** while also maintaining their own local customs and practices. At the same time, their culture has been influenced by surrounding communities and social changes. For example, in areas such as **Udham Singh Nagar**, the traditions of the **Sikh community** have also influenced their cultural practices.

Overall, the study concludes that although the **Tharu and Buksa tribes have their own distinct traditions and identities**, their **social and cultural structures show many similarities**. With the passage of time, modernization, and interaction with other communities, their traditional lifestyle has undergone noticeable changes. As a result, their present social and cultural system represents a **combination of traditional tribal practices and external cultural influences**.

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