

**THE THARU: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A
FRONTIER COMMUNITY IN THE TERAİ**

by

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CERTIFICATE

I am satisfied that the thesis presented by Akhilesh Ranjan is worthy of consideration for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by him under my guidance and supervision and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other university or institute for award of any degree/diploma.

I certify that he has pursued the prescribed course of research.

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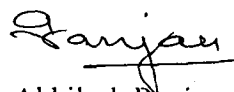
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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an ethnographic study of the Tharu of the West Champaran terai in Bihar, India. As an ecological zone, the terai occupies a strip of land falling between the Himalayan hills and the Gangetic plains which now comes under the modern state divisions of India and Nepal. These territorial divisions, the thesis argues, separates the Tharu people under different state polities but their ecological unity has remained. Over time, the Tharus have negotiated with the conditions imposed on them under different systems of government. My thesis deals with the implications of these changes on the Tharu, their mode of production and community identity, as a frontier people straddling different national and international borders.

Chapter 1, the introduction, discusses the significance of the study, history of the region, a review of existing literature on the Tharus and the research methodology adopted. Chapter 2 deals with the geographical and ecological conditions of the terai as determinants of the traditional Tharu way of life. Following this, the economy, polity and religion of contemporary Tharu settlements has also been explained. Particular focus has been given to the material culture of the Tharu and their households. Chapter 3 is concerned with the changing political economy of the terai under different political powers – pre Mughal and Mughal, British and Independent India and the effect of these changes on the forest and people of the region. Unlike other ethnographies which tend to be synchronic, the significance of history for the Tharu has not been left out in this thesis. Chapter 4 details the impact of the changing terai ecology on the agriculture and livestock more specifically of the region. The region's development as a zone of intensive cultivation for the cash crop of sugarcane, is discussed simultaneously with the factors leading to a shortage of cattle and the effect of these changes on the Tharu. Chapter 5 traces the emerging wage economy of the terai under new economic forces. Agricultural labor, industrial labor and out-migration within the Tharuhut and to other regions is described here. Chapter 6 focuses on the official labels imposed on the Tharu such as 'aboriginal tribe', 'backward tribe', 'backward caste', 'other backward caste' under changing political conditions in the terai. It highlights the role of geopolitical divisions in such state classifications. The study concludes in chapter 7 by drawing up all the arguments of the thesis together. It reasserts the Tharus' broader frontier culture which links them with community members right across the terai and with the larger 'civilisational' influences of Hinduism and Buddhism in the region.

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