

# THARUA



**SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES  
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BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA**

# FOREWORD

Odisha acquires a unique place in the tribal map of the country for having as many as 62 tribal communities. Preparation and publication of Photo Handbooks of all the tribal communities of Odisha is a modest attempt by SCSTRTI to showcase their varied life style. These books have thrown light on the socio-economic life, traditions, customs, socio-cultural institutions, practices, habits, interactions, rituals and festivals as well as their transition in the era of development and change of the Odishan tribes.

This book is a visual portrayal of the life style of a little known artisan tribe of Odisha known as Tharua. They mainly reside in Balasore district and claim to be its original settlers. As per 2011 Census, their population in the state is 9451 and they are also largely concentrated in Mayurbhanj district.

The Tharua are an endogamous community which has been dichotomized into two endogamous sections like Tharua Bindhani (Black smiths) and Tharua Kumbhar (Potters). Though they have their traditional language called "Thar", Now, they speak Odia and use Odia script. They are an artisan community known for their black smithy, terracotta-pottery, stone working, carpentry and engraving. They supplement their economy by cultivation, wage earning and small business. They are non vegetarians and do not eat pork and beef and hence, claim equal social status with the non-tribal clean castes. They follow patrilineal rule of descent and patrilocal rule of residence after marriage.

The Tharuas profess a religion that is an admixture of Hinduism and Animism. They worship deities namely *Mangala, Manasa, Sitala, Raudia, Thanamatho, Maissasuri* and *Biswakarma*. Being an artisan community, they worship lord *Biswakarma* as their patron deity. They have their own traditional community council headed by *Behera* who adjudicates their customary disputes. Now-a-days, their society and culture are undergoing changes due to the impact of modernization as well as Government's development intervention.

This book as a glimpse of the life style of the Tharua tribe will hopefully be useful to the interested laymen, academicians and researchers. I am thankful to Prof. (Dr) A.B. Ota, Sri S.C Mohanty, OSD and Mrs. K. Mohanty, SA who have painstakingly conceived, designed and produced this colorful Photo Hand Book. I sincerely hope that this will be liked by all concerned.

**Commissioner-cum-Secretary**  
ST & SC Development Department  
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# THARUA



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# IDENTITY

The tribe Tharua is an endogamous community inhabiting northern Odisha, mainly in the Balasore district and is sub-divided into two subgroups i.e. Tharua Bindhani and Tharua Kumbhar. The Tharua Bindhani are also known as Jhadua Bindhani and Chapua Bindhani. They are called Tharua as they speak a language called "Thara" – an admixture of Odia and Hindi. In fact, the terminologies like, Jhadua, Chapua and

Tharua are one and the same which are given to them by their neighbours. The Tharua do not like to be called as Tharua. Rather they boast of their status being Aryan. Constitutionally, they are a Scheduled Tribe. They use surnames like Behera, Kanyari and Bindhani and claim to be the original settlers of the area.

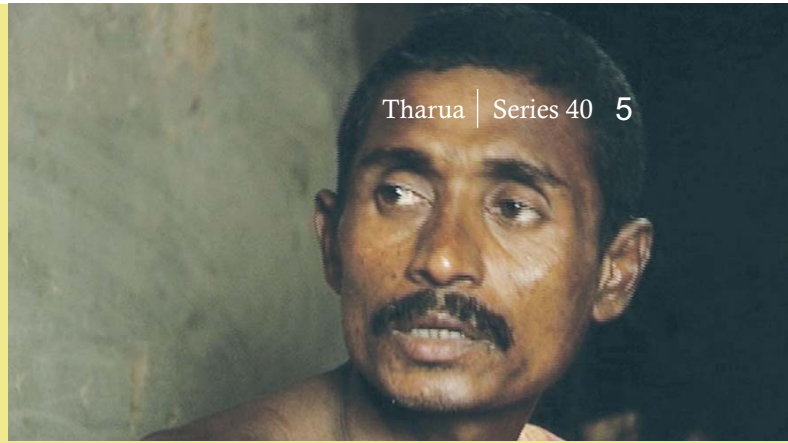
They are numerically a very small tribe. Their population in the state has almost doubled from



453 in 2001 census to 9451 in 2011 census. The sex ratio of the tribe is 1002. As per 2011 Census their literacy rate is 50.44 percent. However, their females are lagging far behind with 40.22 percent literacy, while 60.73 percent males are literates. Their poor economic condition doesn't encourage them to educate their children. They prefer their children to pursue economic activities, to supplement the family income.

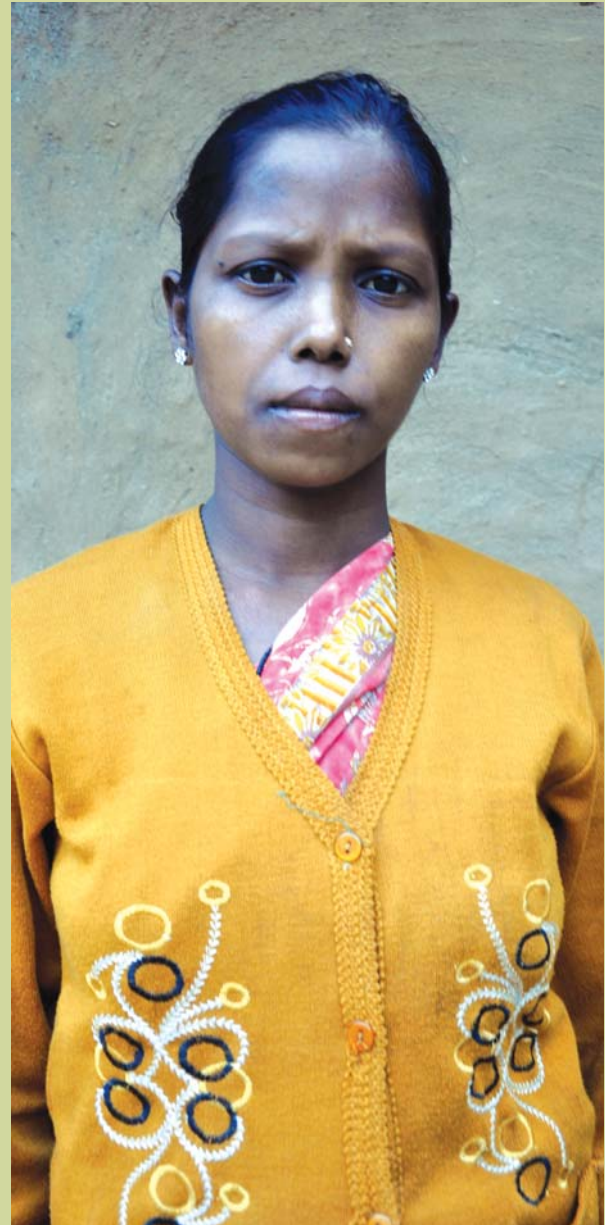
They reside in Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Nowrangpur, Keonjhar, Bolangir, Kendrapara, Kandhamal, Jajpur, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Koraput, Sundergarh, Kalahandi districts. Numerically, they are not found in large concentration in one place and live sporadically by two to three families in different villages.

Now they speak the local Odia language and use Odia scripts for both inter-group and intra-group communications.



## Personal Adornments

Their dressing pattern is very simple and lacks any cultural distinction. The males adorn themselves with *dhoti*, *lungi* and shirts. Women wear *sari*. The married women put on vermillion and glass bangles. Use of silver and brass jewellery is common among them. Gold ornaments are rare and used only by the women of well to do families. They wear both glass and metal bangles, beads or metal necklaces, ear rings, toe rings and armlets on the arms. At present they wear modern ornaments used by the non-tribal women in the locality.



# SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

**T**he Tharua being tribal artisans generally live in small numbers in multi-ethnic villages. The settlements are mostly surrounded by vegetations having perennial water sources nearby. They live separately in isolated wards where they install their *sala* (workshop) either in the open-air or attached to a side of their house. The *sala* is a straw-thatched shed lying at the lower-level of the main roof. Their small *kutch*a huts are scattered randomly connected by *zigzag* foot paths.

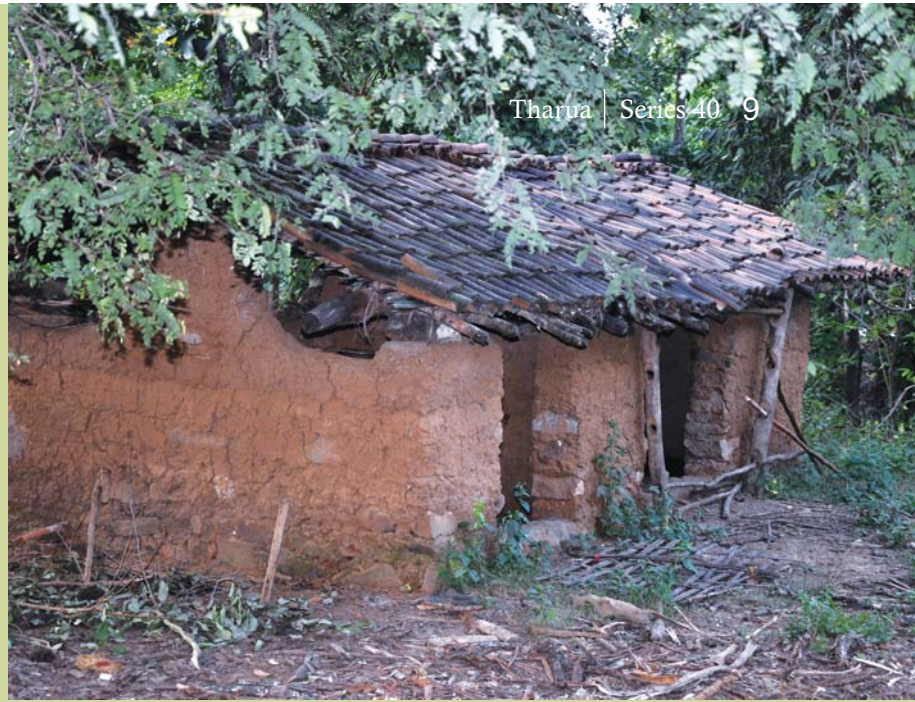


Their mud huts display their stark poverty. The house building materials consist of locally available resources like loamy soil, bricks, wood and bamboo shafts, country made tiles, straws etc. Individual house is built on a rectangular ground plan having mud or brick walls and gable shaped low roofs thatched with straws or country made tiles having verandahs both in front and rear side. Usually a Tharua hut consists of two rooms. The bigger room is used as the living room and the smaller one, as their kitchen. Very poor families, who have only one room, enclose a part of the front or back verandah to use it as kitchen. The entrance door is made of wood. Mostly their houses have no windows.





The mud walls are polished with white or red clay by their women and the floor is polished with cow dung paste. They have a small kitchen garden at back side which is fenced with bamboo splits. Fruits, vegetables and minor millets are grown here for domestic consumption. They construct a shed near their house to accommodate their domestic animals. They rear cow, buffalo, goat, sheep and fowl.



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The household articles are scanty, consisting of clothes, earthen pots, few aluminium utensils, grinding stone, husking lever, string cots, low wooden stools, tools, weapons and implements, etc. Their hosing condition and their household belongings portrays a dismal picture of their poverty indicating the bare minimum living standard.



# LIVELIHOOD

**T**he Tharua is a tribal artisan community. The Tharua Bindhani professes black-smithy, primarily making iron implements and the Tharua Kumbhar make terracotta pottery. But now-a-days, both the groups have taken up black smithy, carpentry and stone works.





In the rural area the Tharua Bindhanis make and mend the iron implements used for agricultural purposes such as, the ploughshare, axe, sickle, knife, scythe, spade, crowbar and other articles. For doing this they are paid *bartana* (annual customary remuneration) in kinds of food grains by their clients. For making new implements, they are sometimes paid separately and is always supplied with the iron. They make and repair all these items in their workshops. Their women help men by blowing the bellows and dragging the hot iron from furnace, while the men wield the hammer. They purchase charcoal to fire the furnace at present. In the past, they were preparing charcoal by cutting and burning trees. From their traditional occupation they derive a meager income.





Since, most of the Tharua families are either landless, marginal farmers or share croppers, for their sustenance they take up other pursuits like wage earning, small business etc. They are mainly engaged as agricultural labourers. Forest regulations have forced them to abandon the idea of collection of forest produce from even distant forests. Consequently, they suffer from acute economic deficit and struggle hard to keep their body and soul together.

Tharua women and children play an important role in economic activities. They contribute substantially by participating in cultivation, wage earning etc. besides their normal household chores.



## Food Habits

The dietary habit of the Tharuas is simple. They are non-vegetarians but, do not take beef as they consider it as a ritually unclean food. They cannot afford eating meat, fish, and egg regularly due to their poor economic status. Consequently, they relish on red ants, mouse, termite like the local tribals. Only during festive occasions and social functions their menu includes chicken and mutton curry.

Rice is their staple food but now-a-days, they are also taking chapatti supplemented with pulses like *tur*, *kesari*, *moong* etc. They usually take two meals a day along with some food as breakfast. Rice, chapatti, dal and vegetable curry constitutes their principal meal. Mustard oil, groundnut oil and rapeseed oil are used by them as cooking medium. Milk and milk products are only served to children. Locally available seasonal fruits are also eaten by them.

They drink *handia* (rice beer) and country liquor - *mahua*. They prepare rice-beer (*handia*) on all socio-religious occasions and offer it to the deities as ritual food. Mahua liquor is often purchased from the local liquor-vender. Rice-beer is also offered to the ancestral-spirits on festive occasions.



# SOCIAL LIFE

The Tharua community is endogamous, which have several clan groups like Anaki and Sal and is divided into a number of exogamous septs (bansas) such as *Kachima*, *Latha*, *Supala*, *Ahadar*, *Kanyari*, *Dhakitanga*, *Bhuiyan* and *Tetenga* etc. Among them descent is patrilineal. They follow patrilocal rule of residence after marriage.

## Family

They have patriarchal family. Most of the families are nuclear in structure while some are vertically extended. Joint families are rare. Medium sized families are of common occurrence. Husband and wife relationship is characterized by mutual





cooperation and understanding in every field. Husband enjoys the dominant position but wife also acts as a partner in day to day activity. Wife does not utter her husband's name as a mark of respect. Avoidance relationship is maintained between father-in-law and daughter-in-law, man and his younger brother's wife and wife's elder sister. Joking relationship prevails between a man and his wife's younger brother and sister and elder brother's wife.

In Tharua families the elders are respected. Small children are fondly taken care of. Grandparents are very fond of their grand children. All brothers help each other, act unitedly both during family functions as well as at the time of crisis. Inheritance of property goes only in the male line following the rule of male equigeniture. But sometimes, the youngest or the eldest gets extra share if father so desires and all sons agree. Daughters are not given any share of the ancestral property but get some of their mother's personal property. If a man dies without any male descendant then his widow may enjoy his property and following her death her daughters inherit the same. In the absence of any issue the property goes to the deceased's lateral kins. Among them succession to the positions of authority always goes in male line. The eldest son succeeds to the position of his late father.

Women play important roles in socio-religious and economic activities. But, they are debarred from participating in political activities. They are free to move without any restrictions.



# LIFE CYCLE

## Pregnancy, Childbirth and Afterwards

Pregnancy and childbirth are welcome events in the Tharua society. Certain pre and post delivery restrictions are imposed on the pregnant woman regarding her food and movement for the safety and well being of the mother and child. She is prevented from consuming eggs and twin fruits. Before delivery, parents of the pregnant woman provide delicious food items for her and for her female relatives of the village. Their poverty compels the pregnant woman to attend to her routine duties till the advanced stage of pregnancy.



There is no specific room for delivery. Delivery normally takes place in the living room. An elderly and experienced woman of the community or of lower caste known as *kushurain* (mid wife) assists in the delivery process. After delivery, the mother and child take rest by the side of nuptial fire called *antudi jola*. The mother is given fried rice and garlic to eat. The umbilical cord is cut by the midwife and is buried in the front yard of the house. Now-a-days, delivery is taking place in the hospitals.

The period of birth pollution continues for 9 days. After that they observe the purificatory rite, *narta* during which houses are cleaned and *antudi jola* is extinguished. The traditional service of washer man is required to wash the mother's clothes. A barber pares off her nails. The mother also takes purificatory bath on that day.

On the 21st day, the final birth purificatory rite (*ekosia*) is performed when a *Gosain* (priest) is called to invoke goddess *Mangala* and pray for the welfare of the newborn baby. From that day onwards the mother is allowed to enter into the kitchen to cook food. On the *ekosia* ceremony the kinsmen are served with a feast.

On the 30th day, the first cereal eating ceremony and the name giving ceremony (*sarehi*) are observed. The relatives are hosted a feast. A name is selected for the baby in consultation with the astrologer by adopting rice divination method. At the age of 10 to 15 years, a *bisnab* guru administers *karna mantra* to the child.



## Puberty

A girl on attaining her first menstruation is kept segregated for seven days. She is neither allowed to take bath nor to see the male members and move outside. On completion of a week she takes purificatory bath and puts on a new *saree*. After that, she goes to worship goddess *Thakurani* accompanied by her female friends.



## Marriage

Adult marriage and monogamy is generally practiced but in certain special cases polygyny is allowed where the first wife is found to be barren or physically handicapped. They rarely go for cross cousin marriage. In some cases they allow junior levirate and junior sororate. Child marriage is an old custom which is no more practiced. Boys upon reaching an age of 21-28 and girls of 19-22 years of age are considered fit for marriage.

The marriage arranged through negotiation is considered as ideal and prestigious. The other modes of marriage practiced by them are by love (*bhalapai*), by consent (*rajiruja*), by service (*gharjoinee*), by capture (*jhika*), by elopement (*udalia*) and by intrusion (*dhuku*). Junior levirate, junior sororate and remarriage of widow, widowers are also permitted in their society.

In case of marriage by negotiation, the initiative is generally taken by the groom's side. For the selection of bride a mediator is engaged. Before finalizing a marriage, horoscope matching of prospective bride and groom by an astrologer is a must. If their horoscope matches, then only they proceed for negotiation. *Pindhani/nirbandha* (betrothal) rite is performed in the bride's village.

Groom's father along with some relatives visits the bride's house for deciding the bride price. Bride price (*panabhanga*) is paid both in cash and kinds, before or after marriage. It includes ornaments, clothes, food grains, vats of liquor etc.



In return, the girl's side also gives presents like some utensils, ornaments, clothes for the bride and bicycle, radio, watch for the groom. In all the occasions the visiting side is entertained. After fixing the marriage date, all the relatives of the families concerned are formally invited to attend the wedding ceremony. Generally Monday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious for marriage.

Marriage ceremony takes place at the bride's house. The rituals are performed by a low grade Brahman priest with the assistance of the barber. One day before the marriage, *Dehamangalana* ceremony takes place. Here both of the groom and bride are anointed with turmeric paste and given ceremonial baths at their respective places. On the day of marriage, the groom goes to bride's place in a procession. The marriage party is given a warm welcome by the bride's father. Both the groom and bride accompanied by relatives are brought to the marriage altar for attending the wedding rituals. One of the important rituals is *sindurdan* (groom putting vermilion on the bride's forehead) and another *nandimukhi sradha* (ancestor worship). Wedding rituals usually take place during night. Both the groom's and bride's parents host community feasts. Consummation of marriage takes place on the fourth night (*chauthi*) after going through certain rites.

Divorce is sanctioned socially. One can seek divorce on the grounds of adultery, barrenness, cruelty, handicaps and maladjustment. Remarriage for widowa, widower and divorcee is allowed.

## Death

Both cremation and burial are practiced for disposal of dead body depending upon the situation such as economic condition and cause of death. Dead bodies of those who die of cholera, smallpox, snake bite, small children, pregnant women whose womb is incised after removal of foetus are buried. In cases of natural death they go for cremation.

After death, the corpse is wrapped in a new cloth. It is carried by the kins folk to the cremation ground on a cot like bier. The eldest son lits the pyre or fills the pit. After moving seven times around the pyre, he puts fire on the mouth of the deceased or pours the first shovel of soils on the pit. All the relatives who accompany the corpse return home after taking bath on the way. They wear fresh clothes.

Death pollution lasts for 10 days. The eldest son, who has lit the pyre, offers food to the deceased during these days. On the tenth day the *dasa* ritual is performed by a low grade Bramhan priest. The old earthen pots are thrown away. Washer man washes the clothes. All male members cut their nails and hair. The priest performs *homa* and offers food to the deceased. The next day a feast is given to the relatives. Bones collected from the cremation ground are immersed in the holy river for salvation of the departed soul.



# MAGICO RELIGIOUS LIFE

Tharua religion is an admixture of Hinduism and Animism. The Tharua pantheon, besides their tribal deities, includes many Hindu Gods and Goddess, like *Mangala*, *Manasa*, *Sitala* etc. Biswakarma is their patron deity. Like all the sections of blacksmiths, the Tharua trace their origin to Biswakarma, the celestial architect and consider him as their patron deity. He is ceremoniously worshipped with great reverence during Biswakarma puja in the month of 'Bhuda' (August-September). During this festival each family cleans the 'sala' (workshop) and offers puja to their black smithy implements. The head of the family offers puja and sacrifices a chicken to appease the deity.

For general prosperity of the village, they worship *Raudia*, *Thanamatho* and *Maissasuri*. *Dharam deota* is worshipped during Magh puja. Their ancestral deities, *bada badia* is worshipped on all important occasions. They believe in the existence of ghosts and benevolent and malevolent spirits like, *churel*, *danawa* etc and appease them with the help of their witch doctor. They believe in the efficacy of magic and witchcraft.





# SOCIAL CONTROL

They live in heterogeneous villages in small numbers forming a part of multi-ethnic society. Being a marginalized artisan community, they depend on the neighboring castes and tribes for their sustenance with religious and political linkage with other communities. They are served on various occasion by the Brahman Priest, Barber and Washer man. Besides putative relationships also exists with other caste members. Therefore, they do not have any traditional community council of their own at the village level where the inter-caste *panchayat* of the village adjudicate cases pertaining to inter and intra-community rifts. The traditional village chief decides petty social disputes in consultation of the community elders in the meetings of the council.







But at the regional level for a group of 8 to 10 villages, they have their own traditional community council headed by a chief called *Behera* who is selected by nomination and is assisted by village the component village elders and elites and a messenger (*dakua*). The *Behera* along with the village elders adjudicates important customary cases relating to family disputes, theft, rape, adultery, molestation, divorce, marriage, intra community rifts and decides about arrangement of community feasts and fairs. In January every year the regional *Tharua* council is convened to discuss about the problems faced by the community. The community messenger *dakua* assists the council in convening its meetings and communicating its decisions.

The meetings of the regional council start with the sacrifices of three red fowls over three leaf-cups of rice. It is believed that for trial of offences and breach of customary rules this ritual compels the alleged to confess the truth. The convicted person is liable to pay the fine and bear the entire expenses incurred for the session of the council.

The functioning of the traditional regional council is declining after superimposition of the statutory Gram *Panchayat* system after independence. But it has so far retained its stronghold in the domain of customary affairs of the community.

# CHANGING SCENE

After independence changes have occurred in the way of life of *Tharua* due to the impact of modernization and various welfare measures carried out by the government. Implementation of income generating and infrastructure development schemes have benefitted them more or less. Their traditional outlook has changed and they have accepted modernity as a way to development. They have started adopting new vocations apart from pot making and black smithy to add to their income. They have also received government assistance to carry out other vocations.

Integrated Tribal Development Agencies established by government in tribal dominated pockets has brought many visible changes in their socio-economic condition. Government has set up many residential schools and hostels with reservation for tribal students which has led to increase in their literacy rate. Apart from that, implementation of Right to Education Act, construction of *Anganwadi* centers, P.D.S centers, provision of housing under I.A.Y and *Mo Kudia* etc. have also benefitted them.

The impact of political change, election system, adult franchise and local self government, various political processes, implementation of PESA has





triggered off and generated the process of change among them. This development intervention has changed their dependence on traditional mode of subsistence derived from pottery and blacksmithy. Though they have not totally abandoned their traditional occupation, they have found profitable alternative in other vocations.

In respect of health and family planning the picture is grim. They frequently go to their traditional healer in case of illness instead of availing modern health care services. The Rate of institutional delivery is low. They take the help of their traditional midwife for child birth. They also are not very interested to adopt modern family planning.

Yet, the *Tharua* are no longer isolated from the outside world. They are slowly and gradually trying to come into the mainstream of the society. Their traditional social institutions are declining but they have kept their cultural identity intact.



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