

A Geographical Analysis Of The Socio-Economic Challenges Faced By Tharu Women In Udham Singh Nagar District Uttarakhand

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Abstract

The Tharu community, an indigenous group inhabiting the Terai region of Uttarakhand, particularly Udham Singh Nagar district, faces multiple socio-economic challenges, with women bearing a disproportionate burden. This study examines the lived realities of Tharu women in the context of land alienation, low literacy rates, limited employment opportunities, and restricted access to healthcare and institutional support. Despite their significant role in agriculture and household management, Tharu women remain marginalized due to patriarchal norms, cultural constraints, and inadequate representation in decision-making processes. Factors such as seasonal migration, lack of skill development, and vulnerability to exploitation in informal labour markets further deepen their socio-economic exclusion. In the paper based on primary data survey and secondary such as district census handbook, tribal department Udham Singh Nagar, and related papers. The data will be calculated with MS Excel and shown with tables and diagrams. The research highlights how these challenges intersect with issues of identity, poverty, and gender discrimination, thereby limiting the community's development potential. The paper also points towards the need for targeted policies, capacity-building programs, and inclusive governance mechanisms to empower Tharu women and integrate them into mainstream socio-economic frameworks.

Key Words – Land alienation, Community development, Capacity building Programs, Women empower.

INTRODUCTION

There are many tribal communities that exist in every region of India. Indian tribes are very backward in economic, educational, and political matters. Indian tribes are mostly in need of higher education, fast economic growth, social justice, and political awareness. Above all, the most paramount and compulsory need is well advanced communication. It is true that this is the era of advanced technology and global communication, but most India tribal communities are suffering from lack of advanced communication till date. Most tribes are still struggling for food and clothes in this advanced era. It is a very sad and an unthinkable situation for all civilized people, governments, and social workers. All tribal communities deserve more and special treatment especially the youth generation. If the youths do not have higher education and communication, how can we think of real and fast development of tribes? Tharu youths are trying to connect with the stream of development but lack of higher education and advanced communication is a big stumbling block to them. The Tharu tribe is a famous tribe in North India and Nepal. Most population of Tharus exists in Himalayan Tarai Region on Indo-Nepal border (Srivastav, 1958: 5).

The term Scheduled Tribe first appeared in the Constitution of India. Article 366(25) defined Scheduled Tribes as "such tribes or tribal communities or parts of, or groups within such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for this Constitution". A tribe is a "collection of families bearing a common name, members of which occupy the same territory, speak the same language and observe certain taboos regarding marriage, profession or occupation and have developed as well as assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligations" (Majumdar, 1958 p.355). In India, the tribal population is numerically small, represents an enormous diversity of groups, vary among themselves to race, language, and linguistic traits. physical features, population size, the level of acculturation, dominant modes of making a subsistence, level of development and social stratification (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2014).

80% Tharus of India are living in Khatima and Sitarganj tahsil of Udham Singh Nagar District of Uttarakhand State. There are 5 tribes in Uttarakhand State (Jaunsari, Tharu, Bhotia, Buksa and Raji) and Tharu tribe has second place by population. Main occupations of this tribal community are agriculture, hunting, and fishing. Historically, they were the only ones that were able to reside in the malarial jungles on the Indo-Nepal border. But as mosquito control became available, many others have migrated into this tribe's areas (Nepal, 2006).

They are, however, somewhat Mongoloid in their facial features (Prayer Profile, 156). Tharus are related with Mongoloid race (Majumadar, 1941: 33) and Rajputs have different (Aryan) race. The Tharus followed Hindu religion, but after all, they are purely a tribal community by anthropological point of view. Tharu people worship mainly their tribal goddess called 'Bhuiyan' or 'Bhumsen' with other Hindu gods and goddesses. Government of India has accepted this community as a scheduled tribe. There is a well family system in this community. Women have high reputation, enough social and economic rights in their family system.

The term 'culture' refers to the complex collection of knowledge, folklore, languages, rules, rituals, habits, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and customs that links and gives a common identity to a particular group of people at a specific point in time. Uttarakhand is a newly originated state of India, consisting of outstanding natural hilly regions named Garhwal and Kumaun. These hilly regions have different lingual and cultural influence due to proximity and neighbourhood of different traditional cultures (Mohanty, 2006).

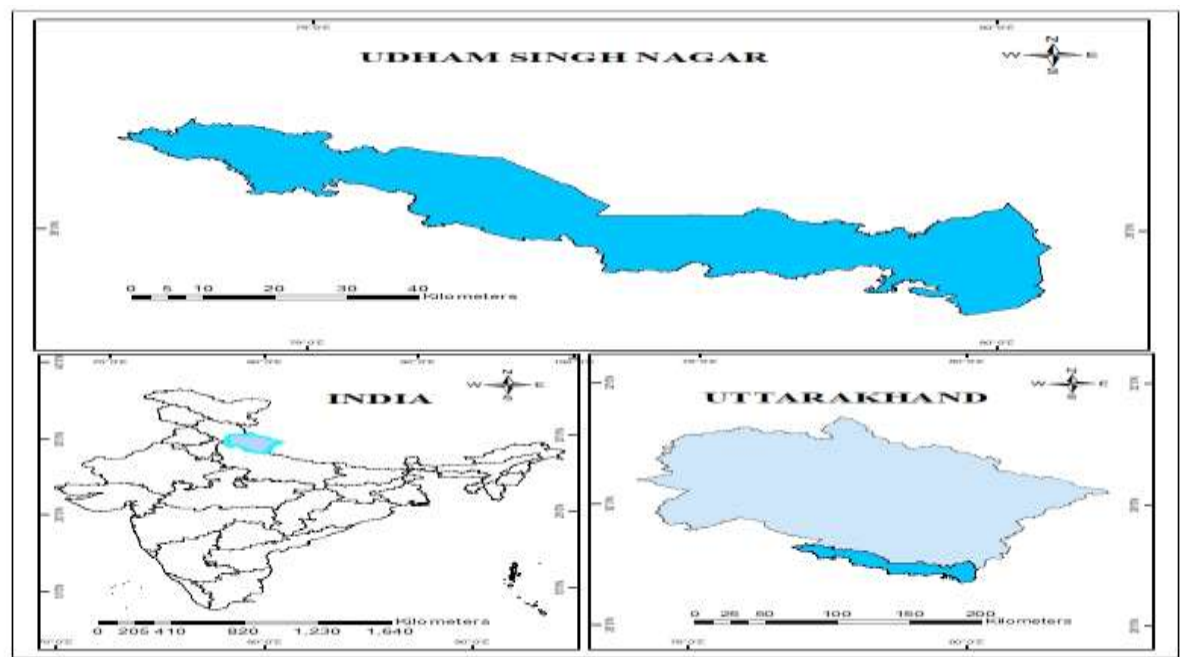
According to Rahman and Ansari (2007), Tharus are not originally belong to hilly regions of Uttarakhand, but they were migrated from the Thar desert of Rajasthan.

Tharus are Hindu by religion and worshiped all deities of the Hindu along with a pantheon of their own ancient gods. They call themselves Hindu by religion and celebrate the festival of holi, dipawali and teej along with their distinguished customary tribal festival like charai. Tharus are skilled craftsmen and well trained in weaving of baskets, mats construction of houses, rope making, herbs for brewing drinks etc. (Joshi and Saklani, 1998).

Study Area

The district of Udham Singh Nagar is situated in the southeastern part of the state of Uttarakhand, for development purposes the district is divided into seven community development blocks. They are located at Jaspur, Kashipur, Bajpur, Gadarpur, Rudrapur, Sitarganj, and Khatima. Seven development blocks are further divided into 327-Gram Sabhas. Udham Singh Nagar is one of the outs of 13 Districts of Uttarakhand state in northern India and occupies an important place geographically and strategically. The headquarters of the district is Rudrapur. It is located between latitude 28° 53' N and 29° 23' N and laterally extends between longitudes 78° 45' E and 80° 08' E. There are seven Tehsils in the district namely Bajpur, Gadarpur, Jaspur, Kashipur, Kichha, Khatima, and Sitarganj. It is a part of the Kumaon division and located in the Tarai region. Udham Singh Nagar is bounded on the east by Nepal, on the south and west by Bareilly, Rampur, Moradabad, Pilibhit, and Bijnor districts of Uttar Pradesh state, on the north by Nainital district, and on the northeast by Champawat district. Udham Singh Nagar basically comes under the plan area where there is the major source of income is through agriculture and raw extracting factories are done by agriculture. Most of them come under small-scale cottage industries. These are widely blended with different cultures, religions, and lifestyles. This place is well fame for communal harmony and brotherhood. After Haridwar and Dehradun, as the census of 2011, it is the third most populous district of Uttarakhand and the population in 2011 is 16,48,902 with 8,58,783 males and 7,90,110 are females which shows the male population was high in comparison to the female population. SC population is greater than the ST population in Udham Singh Nagar with 2, 38,264, and 1, 23,037 respectively in 2011. In district 1, 23,037 ST population out of the total population of ST population Tharu tribes' population is 89,399 of which 44,742 is male and 44,657 is female, and the Buksa population is 27,609 out of which 13,963 is male and 13,646 in females. In the district, the literacy rate of males is 81.09 percent much higher than that of female's literacy rates (64.45 percent).

Fig. 1 – Location Map of Study Area



Source – map created by researcher with ArcGIS Software.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the central themes in the literature on tribal education is the cultural disconnect between formal education systems and indigenous knowledge. Scholars have highlighted how the imposition of a standardized curriculum, often in a foreign language (Hindi or English), alienates tribal children from their cultural roots (Ramachandran, 2004).

For the Munda community, whose cultural practices and language differ significantly from the mainstream, this disconnect is particularly pronounced. The literature suggests that the failure to incorporate local languages and cultural content into the curriculum leads to low motivation and high rates of dropout among tribal students (Kumar, 2006; Maharatna, 2011).

The social condition and economic status of tribal communities have a profound impact on educational outcomes. Studies have consistently shown that poverty, coupled with the need for children to contribute to household labour, significantly hampers school attendance and academic performance among tribal children (Govinda & Biswal, 2006). In the context of the Mundas in Khunti, the literature indicates that economic deprivation, coupled with limited access to educational infrastructure, exacerbates the challenges faced by the community in pursuing education (Sharma & Sharma, 2014).

Language plays a crucial part in the educational experience of tribal children. The Mundari language, which is spoken by the Mundas, is not often used as a common mode of instruction in schools. Researches have shown that when education is delivered in a language unfamiliar to the students, it creates significant learning barriers, leading to poor academic performance and disengagement (Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). The literature advocates for mother-tongue based multilingual education to bridge this gap and improve educational outcomes among tribal communities (Mohanty, 2009).

The physical well-being and maintenance of normal health of an individual is closely related to the status of nutrition. Proper nutrition keeps man healthy and fit and inadequate or improper nutrition reduces fitness and causes susceptibility to disease. Nutritional status refers to health of an individual as it is determined by the intake and their utilization (Bera 2004).

The Dietary patterns of people also affect the nutrition security of a community. In many cultures, the dietary patterns followed do not meet the nutritional needs (quality as well as quantity, minor and major nutrients) of the individuals and affect the health and nutritional status of the community. Low dietary intake by already malnourished women has adverse effects on the health of both mother and child (Balgir 2008).

Objectives of the Research

1. To analysis the social challenges faced by Tharu women in Udham Singh Nagar.

2. To analysis the Economic challenges faced by Tharu women in Udham Singh Nagar.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the research primary and secondary data has been used for analysis the socio-economic challenges of Tharu women in the district. The stratified and purposive sampling has been used for data collection and statistical data has been shown with the help of tables, diagrams. In the research the 80-sample select on the base of household population of tharu tribe in the district. The field data interpretation with MS Excel. Secondary sources such as district census handbook 2011, related paper and tribal department Uttarakhand. The researcher used some indicators for the socio-economic challenges such as education, health, decision making and political contribution and economic are family income, occupational structure, and assets. This study has been analysed the socio-economic challenges faced by tharu women in the district.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social challenges

In the tharu women they were faced many challenges in the context of education, health, decision making process and political participation.

Table . 1 - Educational challenges faced by Tharu women in the district

Educational challenges	No. of respondent	No. of respondent in (%)
Poverty	20	25
Cultural barriers	10	12
Early marriage	28	35
Transport facilities	10	13
Government policies	12	15
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

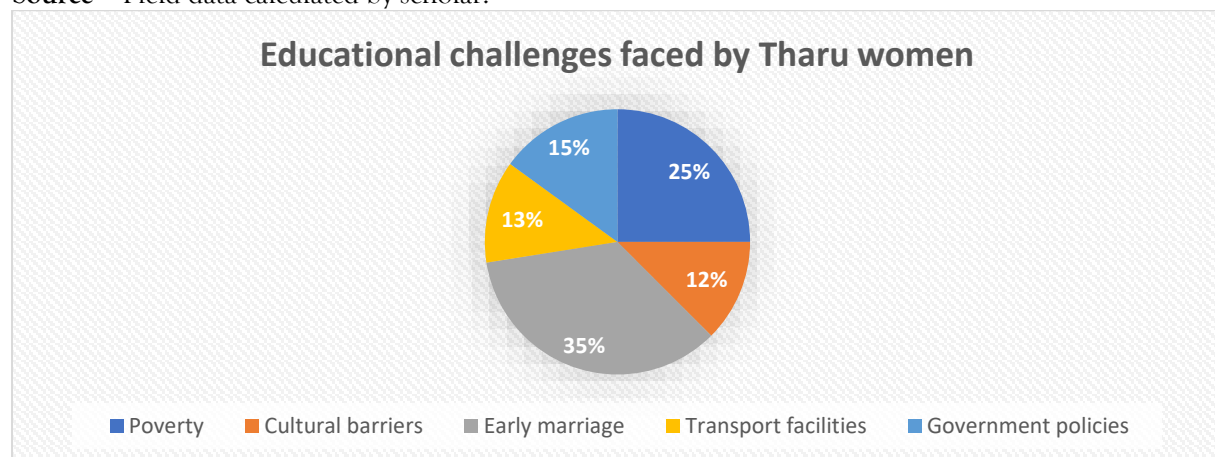


Fig. - Educational challenges faced by Tharu women

In the paper, this table show that the educational challenges faced by Tharu women in the district, 25% women faced their problem in poverty, 12% in cultural barriers, 35% in early marriage, 13% in transport facility and 15% due to improper implemented government policies. In the area high challenges faced by women in early married due to family pressure and poverty.

Table .2- Health challenges faced by Tharu women in the district

Health challenges	No. of respondents	No. of respondent in (%)
Health services	18	22
Traditional method	10	13
Cultural barriers	12	15
Gender bias in Health centres	15	19
Government policies	25	31
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

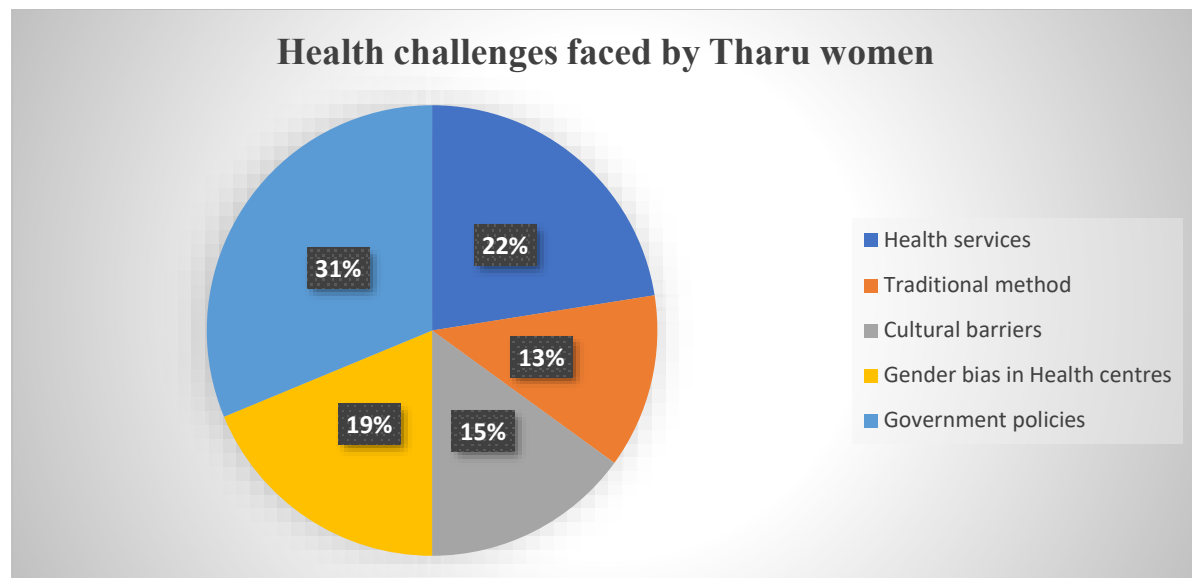


Fig. 2- Health challenges faced by Tharu women

This table show that health challenges faced by Tharu women in the district. In these areas women faced many challenges such as 22% in Health services, 13% in traditional method, 15% in cultural barriers, 19 % in gender bias in health centres and 31% due to improper implementation of government policies, because in the rural areas health's services not proper reached and policies not implement.

Table . 3- Decision making process of Tharu women in the district

Decision making challenges	No . of respondents	No. of respondent in (%)
Lack of confidence	25	31
Depend of family/ Husband	30	37
Domestic responsibility	10	13
Illiterate	15	19
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

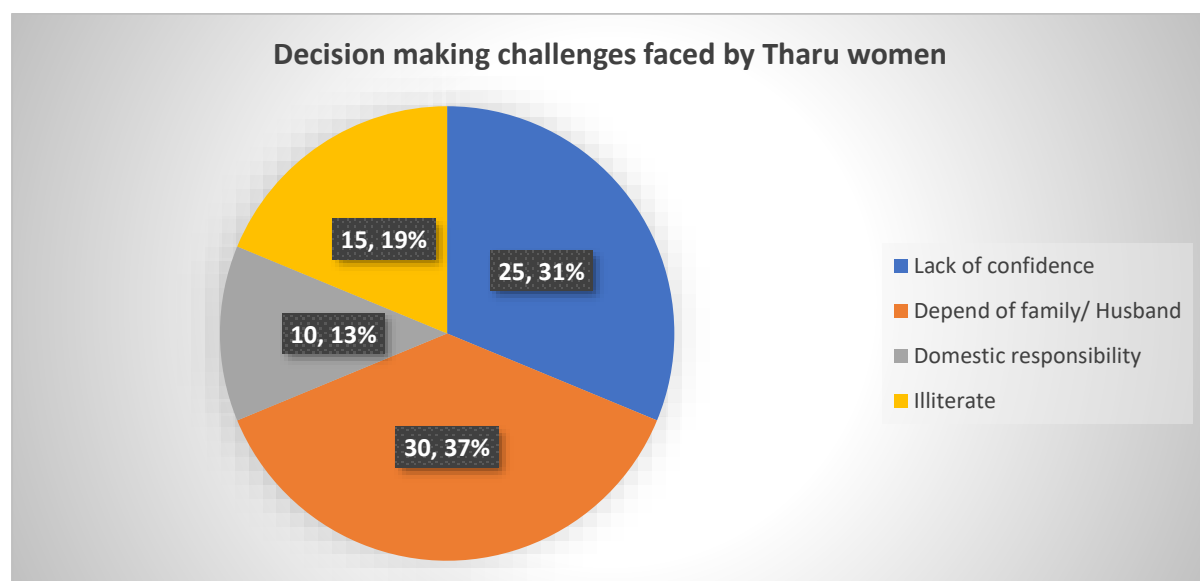


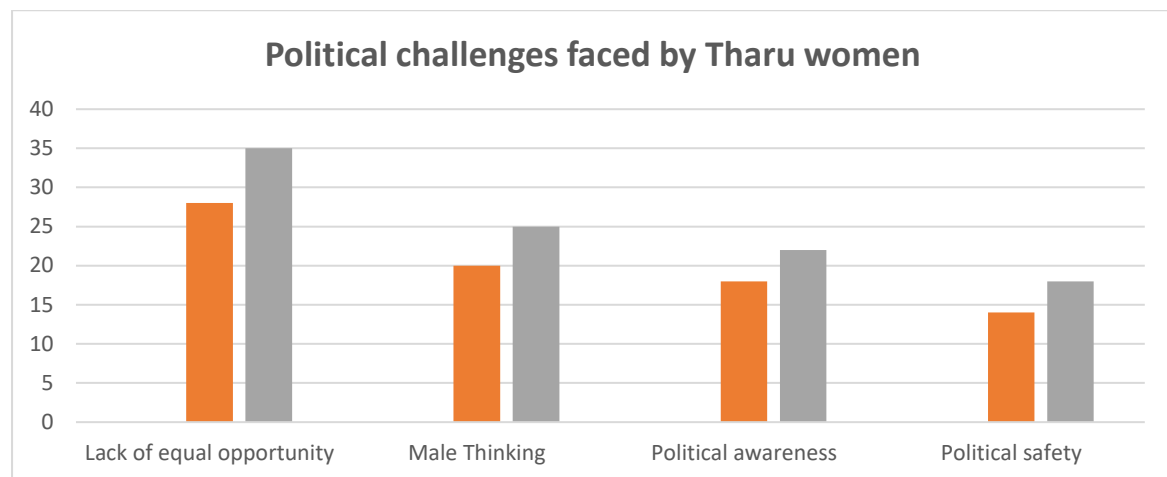
Fig. 3- Decision making process of Tharu women in the district

In this table shows that the Tharu women faced some challenges in their decision-making process in family and society. Due to lack of confidence (31%), depend on family/ husband (37%), domestic responsibility (13%), and illiterate (19%) in tharu region. They faced challenged due to lack of confidence because they depend on their family.

Table. 4 Political challenges faced by Tharu women

Political challenges	No . of respondents	No. of respondent in (%)
Lack of equal opportunity	28	35
Male Thinking	20	25
Political awareness	18	22
Political safety	14	18
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

**Fig. 4 - Political challenges faced by Tharu women**

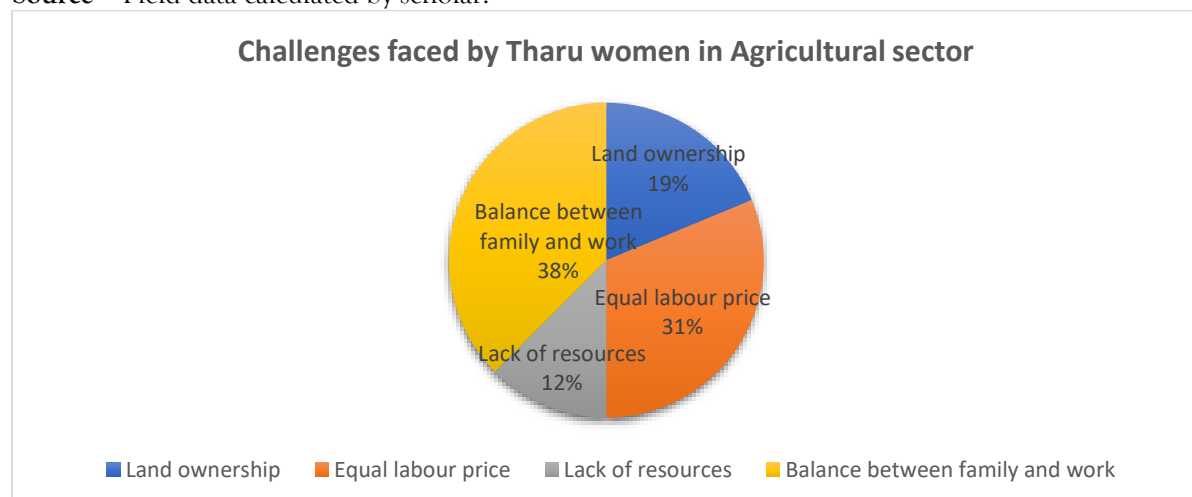
In this table shows that the tharu women faced challenges in political field in their areas, they faced challenges due to lack of equal opportunity (35%), male thinking (25%), lack of political awareness (22%) and political safety of women in their areas. The high possibility of challenges faced by lack of equal opportunity due to male dominance thinking.

Economic challenges

Table . 5- Agriculture challenges faced by Tharu women in the district

Agriculture sector	No. of respondents	No. of respondents in (%)
Land ownership	15	19
Equal labour price	25	31
Lack of resources	10	12
Balance between family and work	30	38
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

**Fig . 5 - Agriculture challenges faced by Tharu women in the district**

This table shows that tharu women faced challenged in agricultural and allied sector in the area. They faced challenged in the field of land ownership (19%), equal labour price (31%), lack of resources (12%) and balance between the family and work 38% . the highly possibility of challenges faced by women due to make the balance between the family responsibility and their work sector.

Table. 6 - Challenges faced by Tharu women in Job sector in the district

Challenges in Job sector	No. of the respondents	No. of the respondents in (%)
Lack of employment opportunities	12	15
Lack of communication	15	19
Family support	25	31
Balance work and family	28	35
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

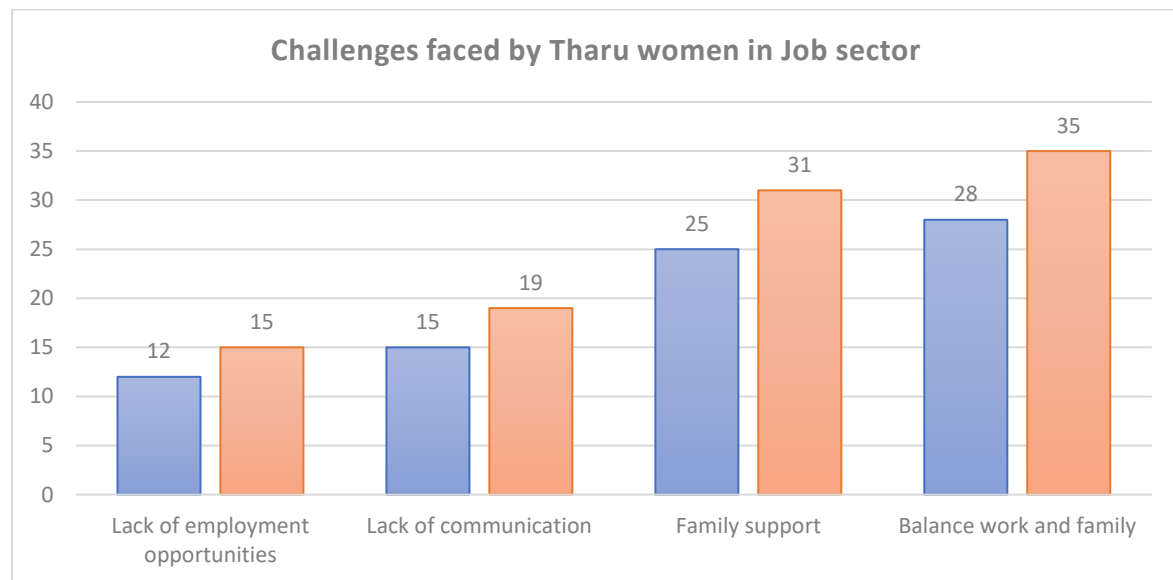


Fig . 6- Challenges faced by Tharu women in Job sector in the district

In this table explain the tharu women faced challenges in government and private job sector in their areas. They faced challenged in job sector due to lock of equal employment opportunities (15%), lack of communication barriers (19%), lack of family support (31%) and unbalanced between work and family responsibility. They faced highly possible challenged due to family support on the effect of cultural beliefs.

Table . 7 - Challenges faced by Tharu women in their assets

Assets of women	No. of the respondents	No. of the respondents in (%)
Land ownership	18	23
Life insurance	20	25
Lack of knowledge about property laws	25	31
Lack of confidences	17	21
Total	80	100

Source – Field data calculated by scholar.

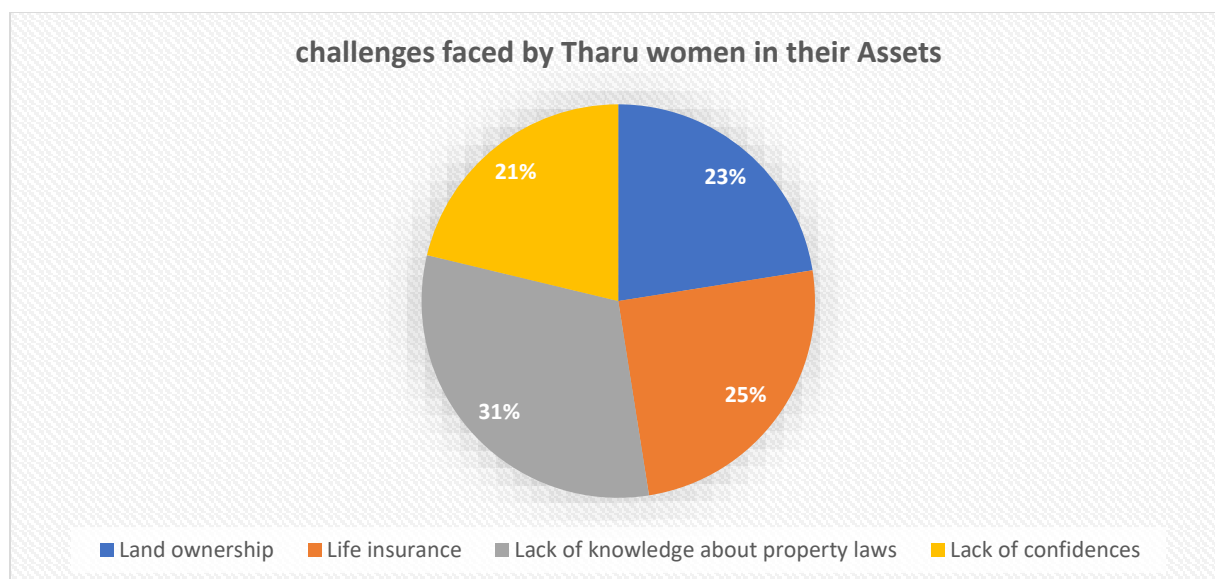


Fig. 7 – Challenges faced by tharu women in their assets

This table show that the tharu women faced challenged in their assets in their family. They did not give proper participation for their family growth due to lack of confidence and family support. Their assets challenges in their land ownership (23%), life insurance 25%, lack of proper knowledge about property laws 31% and lack of confidence 21% in their family and society.

CONCLUSION

In this research analysis the socio-economic challenges faced by Tharu women in Udham singh nagar district, due to some challenges they did not give their contribution for the family and society development. They faced challenged in education, health, decision making process, agricultural sector, political awareness due to lack of confidence, family support, properly depend on their family based on income and food grains. Other factors such as cultural barriers, lack of communication and early married system effect their growth and participation in the society. This research suggest for the development of tharu women in the district government should be taken many steps such as awareness camp, small cottage industries for women their handloom products and proper implementation of government policies and schemes in the district for the development of tharu women.

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