10 Communities and mediation in post-conflict Nepal

Tatsuro Fujikura

This chapter presents provisional notes related to the fate of the Tharuhat movement, which demanded an “identity-based” federal state for the Tharus of the western plains of Nepal. At a conceptual level, this chapter represents an attempt to explore different ways of thinking about communities and mediation in contemporary Nepal.

The Tharu people live in the formerly malarial southern Tarai plains of Nepal and traditionally engaged in rice cultivation and animal husbandry. There are more than 1,730,000 Tharus, constituting 6.56% of the national population, and is the fourth-largest caste/ethnic group, after the Chhetris, Hill Brahmins, and Magars. Many of them lost their land to migrants from the hills, after the malaria eradication programs run by the World Health Organization and the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. A substantial number of them became bonded labourers (*kamaiya*), estimated to be about 100,000 in the late 1990s (Fujikura 2007). A disproportionate number of Tharus were killed or disappeared, mainly by state security forces, during the civil war between 1996 and 2006 (Fujikura 2017).

Demand for identity-based semi-autonomous federal states, which had been around for more than two decades, came to be a foremost political issue after the conclusion of armed conflict in 2006. The Tharuhat movement gained momentum at the end of 2007. It succeeded in organizing a two-week-long road blockade in western Tarai during the spring of 2009. This action led to an agreement with the Nepali government by which the latter acknowledged specific identities of the communities such as the Tharus and agreed to the need to amend constitutional and legal provisions that hampered their “autonomous identity.” However, in 2013, political parties backing identity-based federalism, including the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and Madhesi-based parties, suffered a major loss in the second constituent assembly elections. In the summer of 2015, huge demonstrations occurred in many parts of the country related to the form of federalism to be defined in the new constitution. On August 24 in Tikapur in Kalilali district in far-western Nepal, during a large (and presumably non-violent) demonstration by the Tharuhat movement, a violent incident took place in which eight police officers were killed. A few hours after the incident, an 18-month-old infant son of a police officer was shot and killed. On September 20, a new constitution that Tharuhat and Madhesi movement participants (as well as others) fiercely opposed was promulgated. By the end of 2017,

under the provisions of the new constitution, elections at the local, provincial, and national levels were conducted.

This chapter describes and reflects on certain moments along the trajectory of the Tharuhat movement, particularly those relating to the Tikapur incident and some actions taken by Tharu activists after the promulgation of the new constitution. However, before presenting those descriptions, words included in the title of this chapter are discussed briefly: *communities*, *mediation*, and *post-conflict*. They shall be discussed in reverse order, starting from *post-conflict*.

Post-conflict

In 2014, Sara Shneiderman and Amanda Snellinger edited a special online issue of *Cultural Anthropology*, titled “The Politics of ‘Post-conflict’: On the Ground in South Asia.” Their opening article criticizes the standardized notion of “post-conflict” used by international organizations such as the United Nations. In the prevalent notion, codified according to the perspective of peacebuilding intervention, the post-conflict period begins with a negotiated settlement of conflict. Its end is marked by the successful conduct of post-conflict elections and the establishment of liberal democratic state institutions (Shneiderman and Snellinger 2014).

Shneiderman and Snellinger (2014) object to the way in which post-conflict is bracketed as a discreet period, leading to “election” and “democratic peace.” They ask: “What kind of political work does the label post-conflict perform and to what extent does it foreclose possibilities for substantive peace in local terms?” They argue that people’s living experience rarely fits within bureaucratic categories. Social conflicts might persist, hidden under formal periodization. Therefore, it is necessary to track socio-political tensions before, during, and after the conflict to ascertain “how conflict both configures and is configured into the social fabric” (Shneiderman and Snellinger 2014). This chapter represents an attempt to respond to Shneiderman and Snellinger’s call to transcend the simplifying dichotomies and to explore “how socio-political tensions inform people’s actions and meaning-making practices in everyday life.” The chapter does so, in part, by considering the actions of those who assert that the formal “closure” of conflict was forced on them.

Mediation

Debates taking place during the past decade over the nature of federalism have been polarizing. In many debates, speakers from opposing sides were apparently talking past each other. Around 2011, when discussing the fate of Tharuhat movement, which was apparently facing a deadlock, partly because of confusion among the leadership, a long-term Tharu acquaintance of the author murmured that “there is a lack of mediators in Nepal.” Mediators are those who attempt to induce people involved in a conflict to come to some agreement. When violence occurs between conflicting parties, one can say that a lack of effective mediation exists. One can rightly ask questions about mediation in relation to the Tikapur

incident: whether proper efforts were made at mediation before and after the incidents or whether what were regarded as attempts at mediation were actually insincere or were based on entirely wrong premises.

In addition to these genuine questions, a more expanded notion of mediation can be put forth as proposed by William Mazzarella (2006). Mazzarella's notion includes not only attempts to harmonize divergent interests but, more broadly, to harmonize social practices that reduce the particularities of diverse experience and "render them provisionally commensurable and communicable," such that they "become the basis of self-consciousness, and therefore of affect and desire." For him, mediations embed contingencies and potentialities that "comprise and enable social life" (Mazzarella 2006: 476). This broad notion of mediation probably helps attune the actors to the dynamics involved in post-conflict processes. It is not only that transnationally circulating categories such as the "post-conflict period" hinder our understanding of the particularity and diversity of social experiences. The social experiences themselves involve, or are made possible by, a reduction of particularity and diversity. Therefore, it is necessary to attend to the ways in which notions that might appear "alien" at first sight in a local social context might themselves become deeply involved in the generation of local social context itself by becoming "the basis of self-consciousness." Key terms involved in the situation at hand include such words as *identity*, *tradition*, *human rights*, and *democracy*. The task at hand is not only the exploration of how these terms occlude or misrepresent the local situation but also how they might mediate and enable local experiences themselves.

Communities

In a collected volume titled *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local attachments and boundary dynamics* published in 2011, anthropologist Gisele Krauskopff, who has dedicated many decades to researching the Tharus, contributed an article titled "Fluid Belongings." There, she argues that what prevailed in the Dang Valley in western Tarai were "[n]on-exclusively bounded forms of social membership." The societies in Dang remained open to newcomers. There, cohesiveness prevailed over conflicts, and social units remained non-exclusive. She contrasts these "fluid" forms belonging to a "contemporary tendency to foster barriers between ethnic groups in the name of immemorial tradition, indigeness and ascription at birth" (Krauskopff 2011: 25). What she is referring to, of course, includes the Tharuhat movement, which invoked their indigenous rights under ILO convention 169 and demanded a semi-autonomous state. In popular discourse, the exclusive forms of belonging and identity claims are often associated with the risk of communal violence. Tharu activists who led the Tharuhat movement, as well as their sympathetic observers, insist that their politics be distinguished from communalism (e.g. Chaudhari n.d.; Tharu 2072 v.s.; Sarvahari and Chaudhari 2073 v.s.; Gautam 2072 v.s.; see also Fujikura 2017). They argue that their aim is not the exclusion or domination of other communities. Their demand rather should be understood in terms of demand for human rights and dignity and aimed not so much at other communities but to the restructuring of

their relationship with the Nepali state. It is important here to remember that Tharus were killed or disappeared by the state security forces in disproportionately large numbers compared to other caste/ethnic groups, partly because the security forces assumed that since most of the Tharus were poor, they naturally supported the Maoist.

An essay written by a supporter of Tharuhat movement conveys what it is like to be a Tharu in western Tarai (Chaudhari 2015). The essay is titled “saha astitwako khoji” or “In search of co-existence.” The writer starts by discussing second-person pronouns in Nepali language. One addresses a person of senior status using pronouns indicating respect, such as *tapain* or *hajur*. One might address one’s own sons and daughters, someone very close, or small children using *timi* or *ta*. However, the writer continues, in Tarai, Tharus and Madhesis, irrespective of age, are often addressed by high-caste Paharis (people of hill origin) using *ta*. For example, it is still not uncommon to see a small Pahari boy addressing an old Tharu using *ta*. He writes that this is unacceptable in this day and age and argues that what Tharus (as well as Madhesis, Dalits, and Janajatis) are demanding is nothing more than equality and equal rights as citizens of Nepal. The argument here is not difficult to appreciate in terms of demands for equality and dignity.

However, the fact that these demands are made on behalf of an ethnically conceived group (and not individuals) complicates the issue. The difficulties, as noted, include vulnerability to charges of communalism and other backlashes. On a basic level, the difficulty stems in part from difficulties that liberal political imagination must confront with treating anything other than individuals as a subject of fundamental rights (see Appadurai 2006). Understanding of the politics of people who feel that they have been incorporated asymmetrically into a modern nation-state requires exploration into how “they” were historically formed into “communities” through interaction with the practices of the modern state. This process involved not only the production of “imagined communities” but also “enumerated communities” – communities that are categorized and counted by the governmental apparatus (Appadurai 1993; Cohn 1987; Fujikura 2015). The categories employed in censuses, by their nature, are exclusive. One cannot be Tharu and non-Tharu simultaneously. In other words, even if the dominant forms of belonging in the social world of western Tarai used to be, or are, “fluid,” as Krauskopff (2011) argues, and even if a Tharu is simply demanding equality and dignity, the person is forced to act within a social field in which the category of “Tharu” is already configured in significant ways in exclusive manners. In turn, returning to the earlier discussion of mediation, the ethnonym *Tharu* in its modernist form becomes an important mediator in shaping “self-consciousness” and “desire” of a Tharu. However, as Mazzarella (2006) also noted, because such mediations and identifications are always “provisional” and “contingent,” one cannot say, before the fact that mediation by a modern ethnonym always engenders communal and violent politics.¹

After presenting these brief notes about the terms *post-conflict*, *mediation*, and *communities*, the discussion can now turn to some recent events and actions in western Tarai.

Tikapur incident

As stated initially, during a Tharuhat/Tharuwan demonstration on August 24, 2015, eight police officers were killed. A few hours later, an infant son of a police officer was shot dead. The Nepali army was mobilized. A curfew was imposed. Nevertheless, despite the curfew, many Tharu houses were attacked by mobs, looted, and burned. During the following days, many Tharus in the villages surrounding Tikapur were subjected to torture by Nepali police, armed police forces, and the Nepali army. Thousands of young Tharu men had to flee their homes, most of them across the border into India. Peace and reconciliation meetings were organized by the administration. Nevertheless, most Tharus soon stopped going there because cases were reported in which those Tharus who participated in such meetings were subsequently arrested by the police. When the author visited Tikapur in March 2016, about seven months after the incident, the tension remained palpable. Local Tharu leaders I met avoided speaking in public. At the main crossroad in the city was a poster with a photograph of the body of the infant child who had been shot and killed in the incident, with a caption saying, in Nepali, “The First Martyr of Undivided Far West.” At the entrance of the cricket field was a huge photograph of Senior Superintendent Police Laxman Neupane, who was also killed in the incident, with the words (in English), “We miss you sir.”

The incident was publicized throughout the country and beyond through conventional media and Social Networking Services (SNS), mostly as a brutal incident of communal violence. Even a Tharu activist who strongly supported the Tharuhat movement recalls how his mother, who never had a formal education, on hearing the news, said, “[I]f you need to kill people to obtain rights, then we do not need rights.” He was unable to reply to his mother.

Several official investigatory commissions have investigated the incident, but no report has been made public. More than two years after the incident, 25 Tharus remain in jail without being tried in court. No one has been arrested in connection to the looting and arson of Tharu houses. The government distributed compensation to the victims of vandalism in June 2017.

Elections

When the author revisited Tikapur during October 2017, a Tharu journalist living in Tikapur reported that conditions had improved. A reduction of tension between Tharus and Paharis had occurred. When asked why, he reported that the conduct of local elections was the main reason. The first local elections in 20 years in Nepal were held earlier that year. Many of those Tharus who had fiercely opposed the new constitution also participated in the elections.

“Everyone participated in the election,” he said. “And when you participate in the elections, you need to talk with each other, and so the barrier was reduced.” When I asked if the participation in the elections meant they accepted the new constitution, he replied, “Yes. Participation in the election means we acted *as if* we accepted the constitution.” Then he rephrased his response: “Inside, in our heart, there is pain, but in going to the elections, we accepted the constitution.”

He added his explanation that an election is also a kind of movement [*andolan*]. In the local elections in Tikapur, six Tharus were elected as ward chairpersons (out of nine wards). It is good that more Tharus are involved in electoral politics than ever before, he remarked at one point. However, at another point he noted that Tharus are being used by different political parties. They are victims of “divide and rule,” he explained, using the English words. In summary, he spoke about the beginnings of new electoral politics and about the apparent reduction of social tension, with a palpable degree of ambivalence.

I also visited a jail in Dhanghadi, the headquarters of Kailali district, where Tharus accused in connection with the Tikapur incident are being detained. I was able to speak with Laxman Tharu and two other Tharu leaders. Laxman Tharu, a former Maoist commander, has been a prominent leader of Tharuhat movement since its inception. He said that he filed candidacy for the federal parliamentary elections from jail. Although he is accused in the murder cases, the presumption of innocence allows him to file candidacy because he has not yet been tried. Another Tharu leader sitting next to Laxman spoke strongly against participating in the elections. He spoke in an emotional tone: “We all burned the new constitution. Going to elections means that we are accepting it. We cannot do that.”

Laxman argued that they need to realize that they must balance and use both street agitations and legal struggle. “We are entering a phase of constitutional and legal struggle.” The phase of street-based movement and agitation has passed for the moment. The Tharus need to reach everywhere. Importantly, they need more presence in parliament and the government (see Tharu 2072: 78). (Laxman Tharu stood for first-past-the-pole from Constituency 5, Kailali, Province 7, and came in third place immediately after Arju Deuba, the spouse of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba).

Resham Chaudhari from Tikapur, accused in the killing of police officers, ran for a parliamentary seat while a fugitive in India. Resham Chaudhari, a journalist, writer, musician, and owner of a Tikapu FM station, was a famous figure in Tikapur and beyond. He has also produced a film called *Kamaiya* and organized many events, including a pro-wrestling event in Tikapur. He was a committee member of Tharuhat movement in Tikapur. His Phulbari FM station and Phulbari Resort were looted, vandalized, and burned in the Tikapur incident. In the media, he is often described as “the primary suspect” in the Tikapur murder cases and is on the “most wanted list.”

During the election campaign, his interviews with journalists visiting him in an undisclosed place in India were uploaded and shared through SNS. Resham Chaudhari won a landslide victory in Constituency 1 of Kailali district, which includes Tikapur. He won 34,341 votes: almost three times as many votes as his strongest opponent (with 13,406 votes). In an interview given after his victory, Resham Chaudhari claimed that the Tharus who voted for him voted because they wanted a genuine and effective Tharu leader to represent them but that those non-Tharus who voted for him actually voted for peace and reconciliation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cm3Wv5Cg6po>, accessed 20 December 2017). What he meant was that those non-Tharus who voted for Resham Chaudhari

acknowledged that an injustice was done to an innocent Tharu, and their vote for him was a form of remedy.

Barghar system, “a traditional form of self-governance among the Tharus”

During October 2017, the author also visited a town in Bardiya district and participated in a meeting organized by *barghars*. Barghars are Tharu local leaders elected every year by the Tharu village assembly called *khyal*. Barghar is responsible for community affairs, including organizing collective volunteer labour and cultural events. Similar institutions are found throughout western Tarai. They are called *Kakandar/Aghariya* in Kapilvastu and Deukhuri, *Matawa* in Dang, *Barghar* in Banke/Bardiya, and *Bhalmansa* in Kailali/Kanchanpur. Barghar used to be part of the larger structure of chieftains in western Tarai. These structures were replaced progressively by new institutions installed by the Nepali state. Those Tharus who find values in more traditional forms of Tharu governance structures criticize both the panchayat regime and the political parties under multiparty democracy for simply dismissing traditional Tharu institutions as feudal and oppressive. Recently, more Tharu activists are arguing for revaluation of Barghar practices as embodiments of local self-governance and participatory democracy.

The larger structures of the older chieftains have been mostly replaced, but neighbourhood-level and village-level institutions of *khayal* and *barghar* continued. Especially during the civil war and the absence of elected local governments, *barghars* played important roles in local affairs. Many of those who wanted to plan and implement local development projects went to *barghars* to seek their advice and support.

Before the meeting, an organizer explained to the author that *barghars* felt that they worked very hard for the local community during the armed conflict and in the absence of formal local government. Nevertheless, now that the local elections have been completed and the new municipality government has come into existence, they fear that all the important decision-making and resources will go through the municipality. Subsequently, they will be sidelined completely. For this reason, they organized a meeting of all the *barghars* in the area on October 16 and invited the newly elected members of the municipality, including the mayor, deputy mayor, and ward chairpersons, to discuss how the *barghars* and the municipality might be able to “work together.”

About 20 *barghars* attended the meeting. One by one, they stated their opinions. They all spoke in the Dangaura Tharu. Non-Tharus participants in the meeting, including the mayor, who is a Pahari Brahman, said they had no difficulty understanding what was being said. Most of the *barghars* spoke of the importance of preserving traditions and culture. Some discussed specific Tharu rituals in great detail and had to be stopped by the emcee. Most acknowledged good culture and bad culture among the Tharus, and that they needed to preserve and develop the good aspects and get rid of the bad. Barghar practices, they said, were a very important part of Tharu culture that held the local communities together.

Several of them remarked that the institution of barghar, although not officially recognized by Nepali law, was part of the “unwritten law” or “unwritten constitution” of Tharus, defining what the community ought and ought not to do.

The concrete demands of the barghars at the meeting included that they be invited and be present in the processes of planning, decision-making, and implementation of all local development projects. For example, they wanted to be informed about and take part in the formation of user-groups in any infrastructure project. They also wanted budgetary documents to be sent to all barghars. Additionally, they wanted Tharu language to be an official working language of the municipality.

After all the barghars had spoken, the elected members of the municipality spoke one by one. They all spoke in favor of involving barghars in the workings of municipality. One ward chairperson, a Gurung speaking in Nepali, stated that barghars are not merely a channel for disseminating information. They will play a crucially important role in the socio-economic development of the area. He added, however, that while municipal governments will openly invite barghars, the barghar system should also be “inclusive” and be open to accepting non-Tharus. To that statement, many barghars nodded approvingly. The deputy mayor, a young Tharu woman, said she had extensively researched barghar practices for a non-governmental organization project. She spent a large part of her speech explaining aspects of the system and how it is important to preserve and develop this tradition.

The last to speak was the mayor: a male Brahman. Speaking in Nepali, he acknowledged the important role which the barghar system played in the social development of the Tharus and explained that the municipality was ready to work closely with the barghars. He said the elected members of the municipality were actually like barghars. Each official might have fought the election carrying a particular party flag. However, once elected, they do not simply represent one political party. In fact, they represent and serve all members of the community. In that sense, they *are also* barghars. He then proceeded to say that he accepted all the concrete proposals made by the barghars: the presence of barghars in all the meetings related with local development, from planning to implementation, sharing budgetary information and making Tharu an official working language of the municipality. He declared that the municipal council will pass all these decisions at the meeting the next day. He added that the presence of barghars will help make municipal self-governance more open and transparent and help reduce corruption. By clarifying these matters at the very beginning, he continued with his speech, which lasted for more than an hour.

His speech centred on the theme of achieving the development and prosperity of the municipality. Because most residents are engaged in agriculture, the prosperity of the area depended on the profitability of agriculture. In addition, most of the poor and the backward population consisted of Dalits and, especially, Tharus, who accounted for 48% of the population of the municipality; development was impossible without their uplift. However, he said, most Tharus are engaged in the old subsistence-oriented forms of agriculture. For example, he says, there are at least a few chickens in every household running around in the courtyard. We offer

them to visiting guests and they are finished. But during these days, they sell “local chicken” at good restaurants at very high prices. We must consider ways in which we can make profits out of local chickens rather than merely consuming them ourselves. People can form cooperatives for the production and marketing of chickens. In many Tharu households, he continued, one raises pigs; they’re only good for making the house dirty. One must learn from the example of Dharani bungur (branded pork from eastern Nepal) that are sold for such expensive prices in urban markets. Some way must be found to brand the products and bring them to the market. It is necessary to modernize and commercialize our agriculture in a thoroughgoing manner.

At this point, a barghar interjected: “While we are on the topic of animals, can we discuss the problem of stray cattle?” Around this time, a Hindu renouncer was in the area engaged in a project of establishing *gaushala* (cow shelter). He had gathered stray cows in surrounding areas on to a grassy open field near a community forest. However, because the cattle were not restrained or contained, they were roaming around freely, wreaking havoc on the agricultural fields. The mayor responded by saying, “Yes, that is a problem. We will get back to that later.” The mayor, a strong supporter of the *gaushala* project, did come back to the topic toward the end of his speech, saying that the *gaushala* could be managed in a way that is not harmful to the neighbours and made profitable by, for instance, the production and sale of compost.

The mayor continued on and urged that Tharus had to change their habits. “There are of course a few Tharu here and there who are talented and active, doing big businesses.” He mentioned the name of a famous Tharus industrialist in the area. “However, please do not take this in a wrong way – Today, we have about two dozen people here. Were there that many Paharis in this room, they will all be talking incessantly, but you are quiet, sitting in the back ... Today, we are living in a competitive world. The Tharus need to activate their capacities to advance in the society.” He then proceeded to discuss how Tharu culture, their festivals, dance, and lifestyles can be turned into tourist attractions. He said he was already discussing the *namuna* (model) Tharu village, which will invite tourists for homestay visits. He also promised to collaborate with the barghars in organizing Mag mahotwab, which falls in mid-January in 2018, as a major public festival and tourist event.

In summary, after weighing the responsibilities of the barghars and the elected municipal government, the mayor went on to examine the themes of development and prosperity specifically in his speech, which are presented as their common goals. Prosperity can be achieved through active and effective engagement with a free-market economy. In the course of the talk, the mayor invokes a common stereotypical contrast: simple Tharus who do not know how to speak and shrewd Paharis who cannot stop talking. He exhorts Tharus to change their habits and be more active and assertive, to “activate their capacities.”

The meeting as a whole proceeded in a cordial fashion. However, tensions between the mayor and the barghars sometimes became perceptible, as when the badghar raised the issue of stray cattle.

After the mayor’s speech, the emcee, a Tharu journalist, speaking in Tharu, thanked all participants, and addressing the barghars said, “We need to focus on

the topic of discussion and not go all over the place. We need to meet 20 times before Magh and discuss on concrete topics and devise concrete decisions. We have no time to talk about whether Tharu culture is observed, violated or disappearing. We need to focus on concrete things and measure how much concrete work we accomplished by Magh.”²

It was apparent that the emcee, himself Tharu, felt unsatisfied with the speaking skill of the Tharu barghars and was urging them to change. However, he was not asking them to acquire eloquence like those of high-caste Paharis. He was asking for clear and concise modes of speech.

As observed, the mayor was urging the Tharus (and everyone else) to compete in the world as free and active individuals. However, the project of inserting the institution of barghar into the formal local government is apparently an attempt to insert a principle that is different from liberal competition.

Production of collectivities after conflict

This chapter began by citing Shneiderman and Snellinger’s (2014) criticism of the notion of post-conflict, which involves a highly reifying form of periodization. As they argued, after the successful conduct of democratic elections in Nepal, tensions and feelings of ambivalence seemed to continue, especially among those who feel that the “conclusion of the peace process” was forced on them without consent or dialogue.

Whereas Shneiderman and Snellinger urge us to attend to complexity and diversity of particular, lived experiences, however, one finds the actors in the field themselves engaged in various forms of abstraction and reification, or mediation in Mazzarella’s (2006) sense (e.g., when the mayor equated barghars and the elected representatives of the municipality or when the barghars called the custom of barghar as “unwritten constitution”), in a kind of equations that some anthropologists might find highly “inaccurate.” These are mediating terms that bracket all the concrete particularities and which create provisional commensurability that enables social actions.

While engaged in mediation, Tharu leaders were not simply involved in consolidating their own community or asserting their identity. We were able to examine the possibilities of both inclusive and exclusive forms of belonging, as identified by Krauskopff (2011), being constructed in the process. In taking part in or boycotting the elections or in trying to insert barghars into the official structure of local governance, they were involved in attempts to reconstruct the structure of a larger collectivity and collective life.

Notes

- 1 In a recent article, Kanak Mani Dixit (2017) writes that the Nepali “citizenry feels empowered for having participated in each key episode of the last decade, including the People’s Movement of 2006, blocking attempts at communal arson, and overcoming the five-month blockade of 2015–16.” This chapter is an attempt to consider some ways in which risks of “communal arson” increase and how varieties of actions are taken to reduce them.

- 2 The author has not been able to collect systematic data on the frequency of attempts to make barghars part of local governments in western Tarai. A couple Tharu leaders interviewed in Kailali district responded that they were not aware of such attempts. A respondent in Tikapur stated that the proposal to let barghars sit in municipal meetings was rejected. Tharu as a working language was reported as part of the manifesto, but it had not been implemented as of October 2017.

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