



SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS OF GADDI TRIBE: A CASE STUDY OF BHARMOUR VALLEY OF DISTRICT CHAMBA HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract: - According to Oxford Dictionary - “A tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the authority of a chief and usually regarding them as having a common ancestor.” Tribal community in India has been most vulnerable community with respect to dominance and exploitation ridden society. Tribes are on the breadline of their socio-economic and political rights. Over the years, displacement and rapid acculturation of gaddi peoples has led to dramatic changes in their socio-cultural and value systems of this tribe. Even after years of freedom, the unchanged condition of Tribal communities is leading in India. Though some of them are on the verge of extinction, still there are other tribal communities in India that fiercely protect their identity and culture. Industrialization in the country has devastated the lives and culture of the tribes. The present paper gives an overview about the Gaddis who are semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural and a semi pastoral tribe of Himachal Pradesh. The paper explores the domestic lives, socio- economic profile, and occupational problems of the Gaddi tribe of Chamba and Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: - Tribal community, socio-cultural, communities, domestic lives and Climatic change.

Introduction: - Himachal, means the land of snow, located 370 kilometers north of Delhi is one of the most beautiful states of the Indian Union. Himachal is home to a sizeable tribal population like the Gaddis, Pangwals, Kinnauras, Lahaulis, Bhots, Gujjars who live in the north and north eastern extremities of the state. They inhabit Bharmour and Pangi sub-divisions in Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts. Gaddi is a generic term that includes people belonging to different castes such as Brahmins, Rajputs, Rathis and Khatris.

The Gaddis are semi-nomadic tribes who rear the sheep and goats of Kangra and Chamba districts in Himachal Pradesh who move their livestock from one grazing ground to another in a seasonal cycle, to plains in winter and hilltops in summer. The term “Gaddi” is derived from Mount Kailash which is the seat or throne (Gaddi) of Lord Shiva and the people who found refuge and settled in Bharmaur (in district Chamba), the territory of Lord Shiva’s Gaddi, came to be called as the Gaddis. They are nomadic herders who keep moving with their herds throughout

the year in search of grazing land. Today, Climatic change, conservation of forest areas etc. have led to shortage of grazing land and has made this profession difficult for Gaddis.

They travel and bear endless hardships in the search of their profession. They move from high pastures to low pastures during the year, leaving for low hills and plains in October (winters) and returning to their fields in April (summers) in search of green pastures. They usually live in high altitudes ranging between 4000 feet and 8000 feet. The recent trend of settling in more hospitable climates has brought agriculture and other occupations to front and shepherding taken the secondary position. Historically, Gaddis are known to have taken one of the most hostile geographic regions in the world - highlands in the shadows of the mighty Dhauladhar range (southern branch of the main Outer Himalayan chain of mountains) and the Middle Himalayas but over the last century they have also made their homes lower areas in Himachal Pradesh in Kangra district.

Lifestyle and Houses of Gaddi Tribes:- The Gaddi villages are located on the steep slopes which are surrounded by productive land. The Gaddi houses are usually gabled and covered with rough and heavy slate shingles. Most of the houses are up to three storeys high. The ground floor is used to keep the cattle and store fodder. The first floor is used for the guests and to store unprocessed agricultural harvest. The second floor comprises a room used as kitchen and another room as bedroom. The third floor is used to store grains but in certain cases of extended families, it is used as a living place of a nuclear family thetas separated from the joint family. Each floor is actually a compact general large hall which is divided into several functional areas as per requirement. However, most of the old houses have no toilet and people usually use open fields for nature call, but this practice is fast changing due to development and awareness. Each household consist of a nuclear family. Traditional joint families are unusual. Gaddi family is considered incomplete without a pair of horses that are used to transport luggage, during its migratory journey and sniffer dogs which dutifully guard their herds and unmanned belonging at night and during day when they are away grazing their herds. The Gaddi dog is strong enough and intelligent to keep away an attack by a lion or a leopard. If a goat or sheep drifts into another flock, the dog guides the animal back into its enclosure.

Culture and Festivals:- Gaddi tribe is known for its unique culture with respect to their distinctive clothes, food habits, rituals and festivals. But today, due to the migration of the families to the plains or valley of Kangra district (Baijnath and Palampur) and the consequences of education and economic empowerment, their traditional style have undergone a change for the advancement of the tribe.

Traditional Dresses of Gaddi Tribe: - The Gaddi dress of men and women are very conspicuous and esoteric. The traditional outfit of the Gaddi is worn only on special occasions. The men wear headdresses adorned with dried flowers or beads and wool coats tied around their waists with black rope. The dress is called Chola and Dora. Men also wear a white colour turban (Safa) which is a symbol of respect and dignity. The footwear of the Gaddis consists of an open shoe or a jutta. It is sturdy for undertaking the rugged journeys. The dress of the Gaddi women is called Luanchiri which captivates the beauty of the females. The women wear straight dresses tied around their waists with woollen cords. Their heads are covered, but their legs and feet remain bare. They wear heavy brass anklets, large earrings, gold or silver, solid gold nose rings, necklaces of silver or gold and pendants with fine

enamelling- often depicting Shiva and Parvati (Hindus God and Goddess) or plain silver embossed pieces commemorating their ancestors. Their chins are decorated with a finely marked circular tattoo and sometime even on their hands and arms.

Traditional food of Gaddi Tribe: - The majority of the Gaddi community is non-vegetarian. The staple food of Gaddis consists of bread of maize, barley and wheat with lentils and pulses. They use honey instead of sugar and prefer rock salt of Gummamines (located in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh). They use vegetables, including roots and fruits. Mustard oil is the usual cooking medium. They are very fond of „sur“ (home-made alcoholic drink) which is taken on religious functions. Gaddi stock their eatables and fire woods in the month of October for winter session. They also smoke tobacco in hukka (multi-stemmed instrument for vaporizing and smoking flavoured tobacco), which forms a part of their daily sittings.

Religion: - Almost all the Gaddi follow Hinduism. Their main deity is Shiva, the Hindu God of destruction. They also worship millions of other gods, satisfying them by sacrificing sheep and goats. The Gaddi follow Hindu traditions, although many of their own animistic traditions (belief that non-human objects have spirits) are still practiced. Animal sacrifice is a common feature of their rituals. The Gaddi community celebrates all the national festivals. Apart from that they celebrate local festive like Mani Mahesh Jatra, gontri,lohri, Bhaishaki, Patrodu, Dolru, etc. Manimahesh fair or gathering which falls every year in the month of August and September is best occasion to see and study the custom and rituals of the Gaddies.

The Gaddi tribe enjoy the rich folk music of their area. This consists of folk song, dances and folk lore along with various traditional instruments. Their songs symbolize their tradition, festivity, love and history (Kunju-Chanchlo, Sunni- Bunkhu). The Gaddis have peculiar dances which are performed separately by men and women. The folk dance by men is called and „Dandaras“ or „Nati“ and the one performed by the married women is called „Dangi“. Marriage in the Gaddi tradition is a celebrated with great enthusiasm. The Gaddi are monogamous (one husband, one wife), and have a successful community life based on mutual aid. The family is the only social institution other than religion. All marriages are arranged by the parents. The young couples have no choice in their parents' decisions.

Shiv Nuala of Gaddi Tribe:- It is performed in favor of lord Shiva by individual family. It is believed among Gaddis that if you promise Lord Shiva to perform his Nuala, he will fulfill your wish. The word ‘Nuala’ is said to have been derived from the Hindi word ‘Nav Mala’ which means a new garland . In this process of worship a Tramada (bowl) made of copper is filled with maize crop is placed. Some wool is also kept there for worship. The villagers bring wool from their house to perform pooja which is generally concluded at 2am with Bali (Sacrifice) of sheep inside the house. No part of this sacrificed animal is taken outside the house except for the kaleja (liver) which is taken by the person who cuts the animal and he fixes the piece of the liver on the Darat (knife type used for cutting animals) which has been used for sacrificing the animal. The Drati is taken to the roof the house where one half of Kaleja (liver) is offered to the deity. The person who has cut the sacrificial animal then jumps three times thereby indicating that the Bali (sacrifice) has been successfully offered. The other half of the Kaleja (liver) is roasted and distributed among the devotees as Prasad. Throughout the ceremony a person is

stationed outside the house with a lamp till morning dawn. Villagers sung songs in praise of Lord Shiva. In the morning a feast is prepared and served to all assembled and this marks the end of the ceremony.

The vocation or occupation of the Gaddis: - The main vocation or occupation of Gaddi tribes is shepherding and they the secondary means of livelihood is by rearing and selling sheep, goats, mules and horses. The majority of Gaddis are property-owner and hence they practice agriculture and horticulture as one more means of livelihood apart from rearing the herds. They also grow the world famous variety of red royal and golden delicious apple, chestnut and almond trees.

According to 1878 Forest Law, a system of Reserved and Protected Forests was introduced to regulate most forests and the grazing lands. The settlement reserved grazing areas for each Gaddi family and the size of the flock was fixed. The migratory routes for each family were also fixed and it was provided that each flock will move at least five miles each day stopping for one night at a stopover. The Gaddis did not appreciate these controls. Also they have to get a yearly permit for grazing their sheep and goats by paying a grazing fee of Rs 1.00 each sheep and Rs 1.25 per goat. The permit contains details about the flock, the grazing is and the migratory route.

Over the time, with the shrinkage of grazing pastures, it has become difficult for the tribe to continue with the traditional profession of shepherding. Also, the younger generation do not want to venture out in this profession but wish to have a white collared job and settle at one place. Hence many are leaving this profession and venturing into other jobs like teachers in government institutions and private organisations. Some work as unskilled labourers in public work department and forest department. The ones who are not much educated are unemployed or underemployed as seasonal wage labour in construction, agriculture or community work). The occupational diversification is also due to the facilities and schemes provide by the government.

Status of Gaddi Tribe Women's: - To measure any society, the position of its women within that society is a definite pointer to analyze its development. Gaddi community believe that 'Gods reside where woman is worshipped', hence Gaddi give outmost importance to women. The Gaddi womenfolk stay back while the men move out with livestock. Modern Gaddi women are educated and feel free to express themselves in case of social matters. They take sole responsibility of upbringing their children, financial decisions, tending the herds along with collection of fuel and fodder. The Gaddi women have a major role in the economic decision and their presence is felt in the religious circles as well. Gaddi women are empowered to spend money, independently without seeking permission from male, members of the family, and also, to access healthcare services for themselves and their children. Gaddi women are also excellent weavers and craftswomen. Their hand-woven woollen shawls and scarfs with elaborate folk designs are a testimony to this talent. What empowers them is the belief that they can do all those things, which supposedly are meant for men only.

Gaddi females are skilled craftswoman and they weave a variety of woollen fabrics. They sort the wool fibres as per the length. Then wash, clean and comb the wool. The combed wool is spun with the help of a spinning wheel called charkha and the wool is finally woven handloom called as Rachh or Khaddi. These woollens are generally

woven for personal needs as well and to sustain in the harsh weather. These woven ethnic products are not so popular in the local market and they do not get the correct value if sold.

Conclusion: - The tribes in India have paid and are paying a big price for the country. They are subsidizing the cost of development through sacrifice of their land, traditions and cultures so that the urbane can enjoy secure lifestyle. Welfare and income of the Gaddis is mainly dependent on their land and their livestock. Unifying Characteristics of the Gaddi is related to the seasonal changeability and diversification of livelihood strategies. Occupational shift due to several reasons have diverted their path from the ancestral and traditional migratory life and customs. The increasing population, economic development and expansion of diversified job opportunities, income generating schemes by the Government Organisation has changed the employment pattern among the Gaddis. Also, the Gaddi women need to uplift themselves with respect to socio-economic status and participate in various employment and economic activities. Over the period of time, in the process of socio-cultural interfusion with the local people, The Gaddis have absorbed many customs and traditions of the locals. As a result, their costume, food and living habits have gradually under gone a complete metamorphosis and have lost their originality. This Gaddi Tribe is on a verge of extinction from its age old occupation and is getting more inclined towards a settled and comfortable life.

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