



A Historical Assessment of Religious and Social Tradition of Gaddi Tribal Society of Himachal Pradesh

Vishv Mohan^{1,*}, Deeksha², Yogesh Kumar³, Anil Thakur³

^{1,*} Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Central University Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, India

^{2,3,4} Student, Department of Sociology, Central University Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract

The second-greatest number of tribal people is located in India. About 12% of India's 84 million tribal residents reside in the northeastern part of the country. They are widely diverse and placed inequitably over the area. The immeasurable historical legacy of Gaddi is remarkable. However, this cultural group is gradually losing its identity as a result of growing urbanisation and industrialization. The purpose of the current research is to assess the historical belief system and traditional customs acts of the Gaddi tribal community of Himachal Pradesh. To achieve the goal of the study the researcher applied a meta-analytical process in which various previous research papers, research articles and news articles have been deeply studied by the researcher. The Gaddi tribe is still following its rituals and worships the same as the ancestors, but due to undeveloped habitats, they are rapidly moving on towards urban places. To minimize their urbanization, steps have also been taken by the government so that their tradition does not disappear.

Keywords: Adivasi, janjati, Gaddi-tribals, communities, tradition, custom, belief system, urbanization.

Corresponding Author's email id. vishvmohan0001@gmail.com

Introduction

The majority of the world's tribal people live in India and Africa. The figures are rather astounding—more than 80 million people who belong to 533 different tribes make up over 10% of India's population. Indian tribal people are referred to as *Adivasis* or *Janajatis*. In India, they make up 8.6% of the population, according to the 2011 Census. Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, West Bengal, the North-Eastern states, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands also have sizable

populations of them. Because they were India's first settlers, they are referred to as *Adivasis*. The Indian Constitution classifies them as Scheduled Tribes. Along with the Himalayas, there is a sizable tribal belt that stretches from Jammu and Kashmir in the north to Uttarakhand in the west, as well as Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, and Nagaland in north-east India. About 75% of the tribal people in India live in the centre of the country. In fact, to a greater or lesser degree, tribal people are present in practically every state in the union. The tribal people, also known as *Adivasis*, typically live separately

and isolated in far-off places like hills and forests. Typically, each tribal society has its own distinct culture, language, and religion. Typically egalitarian, tribal societies uphold and actively practise community ownership of land. Tribal communities who belonged to the forest region during the British administration lost those privileges. With the passage of new British legislation, the tribal people's forest lands were now considered the legitimate property of the landlords they had chosen. As a result, they were ejected from the forests and ancestral lands that provided them with their livelihood when non-tribal people moved into tribal territories. Landlords who only cared about making the most money possible from the forest resources mercilessly exploited them. The tribal people consequently lived miserable, painful, deprived lives. Therefore, throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries, they frequently rose against the British and the landlords in response to the terrible persecution and subjugation. (Sharma, M., 2015)

The Scheduled Tribes are those tribes, tribal communities, parts of these tribes and tribal communities, or groups within these tribes and tribal communities that have been declared as such by the President by a public announcement, according to Article 342 of the Constitution. Many tribal tribes have adapted to modern life, however, some tribal groups are more vulnerable than others. The Dhebar Commission (1973) designated "Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs)" as a distinct category. Their susceptibility results from their important culture and varied livelihood practises rather than from their primitive existence and exclusion from current social norms. They are crucial to maintaining India's diversity, which is a strength of ours and a symbol of our "Unity in Diversity" around the world. Among the tribal groups, PVTGs (Particularly

Vulnerable Tribal Groups) are more vulnerable. Due to the fact that more developed and assertive tribal groups consume a significant portion of the monies allocated for tribal development, PVTGs require greater funding specifically for their growth.

Himachal State-wise Schedule Tribe distribution: Swangal, Gujjars, Lahaulas, Khas, Pangwala, Lamba, Gaddis

Significant Tribal Cultures: Tribes of Himachal Pradesh

Gaddis Tribe:

Distributed in Himachal Pradesh, the Dhauladhar mountain range, Chamba, Bharmaur, and the regions close to Dharamshala are where they primarily live. They raise and sell sheep, goats, mules, horses, and other livestock as their primary source of income. They are primarily Hindus, with a few Muslims. Even though they write in Hindi and Takri, they speak the Gaddi language. They celebrate the *Shivaratri* and *Jatra* festivals. Tribes make up a substantial portion of the people who live in Himachal Pradesh. The state is home to multiple tribes including the Kinners or Kinnaure, Lahuels, Spitians, Pangwalas, and Gujjars. One of them, Gaddi, resides in Himachal Pradesh's districts of Mandi, Kangra, and Chamba. It is one of Himachal Pradesh's oldest, most powerful, and most well-known tribes. The Gaddi tribe's origin is unresolved and they further think that their ancestors left the Indian plains due to the lack of security. The popular myths in the state conceal the real truth about their genesis. The views from the area where the Gaddis migrated to this mountainous state do not agree. The name "Gaderan," which is the indigenous term for the mountainous regions of Himachal Pradesh, is the source of the Gaddi terminology. The Gaddis are a Scheduled Tribe of Himachal Pradesh, and

they primarily reside around Bharmauri, in the Chamba district, which is also known as "Gaderon," or "the Gaddis' home." The home of Gaddis is another name for Bharmour. The Gaddi culture is vanishing, nevertheless, as a result of urbanisation and their relocation to Kangra, Mandi, and other lower valley locations. (Mehra, P., 1992)

Review of Literature

The literature review is a systematic summary of past research on a subject. The literature review evaluates scholarly books, journals, and other sources pertinent to a particular field of study. This prior research should be listed, described, summed up, impartially evaluated, and explained in the review. In this article, the researcher got different studies on the Gaddi Community or historical highlights for meta-analyzing practice.

In the study, *Navigating the Impacts of Social and Environmental Changes to Traditional Lifestyle: A Case Study of Gaddi Transhumance of Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh*, (Mishra, H., and Pandey, B., 2019) focuses on the Gaddi transhumance community's current methods of subsistence and the difficulties that transhumance faces as a result of the changing natural and social environment. Focused group discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire surveys of 46 respondents in multiple villages in the Chamba district, coupled with secondary data gathered from various government offices, served as the primary sources of information for this study. The Gaddi community requires new livelihood prospects due to the difficult nature of transhumance practice in hostile environments, additional obstacles given by climate change, and the lack of interest in transhumance among younger people. However, it is crucial that new livelihood options are sustainable and protect the

Gaddis' traditional way of life in Himachal Pradesh due to its delicate environment. The research thus examines Gaddi livelihood options based on the regional economy and the community's indigenous resource base.

The author of the study, *The Gaddi Tribe: Struggling to Preserve its Identity*, (Saini, R. 2020), looked at how distinct the culture, rituals, traditions, etc. are. The Gaddi tribe, one of India's oldest, has its own intangible cultural heritage. However, this tribe is gradually losing its identity as a result of growing urbanisation and development. The purpose of this research is to inform readers about the Gaddi tribe and the steps that can be taken to protect their identity. As a result, the author of the study concludes that the government can play a major role in helping the Gaddis to sustain their livelihood by providing training on how to adapt to new techniques and how to manage these pastures for sustaining their livelihood and developing new skills to protect their landscape. Because the hilly area tribes are more vulnerable to climate change, the professional occupation of the Gaddis is declining.

The Gaddis are a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural, and semi-pastoral tribe, and the paper, *Socio-Economic Status of Gaddi Tribe in Himachal Pradesh: A Study* by (Biswas and Rao, 2016) provides an overview. The Gaddi tribe in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh is examined in terms of their household lives, socioeconomic profiles, and vocational issues. As a result of the study, the author mentioned that the Gaddis' livelihood and welfare are largely reliant on their land. The seasonal changeability and variety of subsistence practices are the Gaddi people's defining traits. Their course has been deviated from the ancestral and traditional migratory life and customs due to

occupational transition for a variety of reasons.

The non-Gaddi have become increasingly independent from the Gaddi's economic hegemony thanks to the adoption of new rules and conventions, particularly those dealing with land ownership and inheritance, education, and communications.

There is a provision to settle family disputes using customary community rules in accordance with the traditional *bhaichara* Panchayat, which is ruled over by a group of people who serve as the jury and are chosen by popular vote. Depending on the severity of the offence, the guilty are sentenced to a social boycott, a fine in cash or kind, or both. The foundation of the Gramme Panchayat for social control, planning, and carrying out welfare and development initiatives marks a transition after independence (Rose, 1911).

Findings

On the basis of secondary data to achieve the goal of examining the social traditions and religious belief system, the researcher's major findings are that Dholru, Lohri, Holi, Janmashtami, Baisakhi/Basoa, Diwali, and Shivratri are celebrated as religious holidays by Gaddis. However, when such instances occur, sing customary tunes and dance to amuse the crowd. Traditionally, women kept to themselves in their houses, but on a few occasions, they danced in outdoors. It seems by researchers that Folk dances and music are prevalent around the world. Typically, folklore and folktales extol the bravery of their ancestors and the glory of the womenfolk. Since its inception, they have frequently danced in various circle shapes to the beat of drums and music. Up till the tyre, it keeps climbing to higher and higher altitudes to the beat of the drum. Highlighting their religious concern,

researchers found that as their forefathers have been worshipping many people from Gaddi visit Mani Mahesh to perform worship and take a plunge in the sacred waters. Dal fairs, Ghanyara fairs, Dari fairs, Navratra fairs, and Holi fairs are all conducted in the Kangra district and are all visited equally by Gaddis. Hindu gods and goddesses are revered by Gaddis who claim to be Hindus. The Gaddis belong to Hindus who strongly lean towards Shaivism, although they also maintain the tradition of demon devotion and nature worship. The Gaddis worshipped a number of different lower goddesses. Rock spirits known as *joginis* are also known as *rakshanis*, *banasats*, *autars* *Gugga Naag*, *Kailu Bir*, and a variety of other tiny deities. There are many demons, deities, ghosts, and hobgoblins. There are family deities, and practically every community has its own peculiar divinity. The differences between *devis*, *devtas*, and *sidhs* are not inherent. These all give benefits to people and are frequently related to black stones.

Meanwhile, it is also seen by the researcher on the focusing their customs that there are no restrictions on anyone getting married within the village as far as their marriage rituals are concerned, as long as 'gotra' exogamy is followed. But there are barriers to marrying into families where a sister or daughter has already been married. In the Gaddi community, weddings are embraced with great fervour. 'Byah' is the most popular method of finding partners out of the several available ones. Gaddis practise monogamy and are opposed to polygamy, which is the act of having multiple partners at the same time unless the wife is infertile or has already passed away.

Analysis

The state of Himachal Pradesh, which has 0.4% of the nation's population, is home to

numerous tribes. The amicable tribal people that inhabit various regions of Himachal have carved out a niche for themselves on the Indian subcontinent via their culture and traditions. People from several tribes in Himachal Pradesh were already involved in the sheep and wool trade, handicrafts, and cowkeeping. These people are nomadic by nature, used to live in small towns and jungles due to a lack of education, and can be distinguished from one another by their social structures and rituals. But as education was pushed forward throughout time, the state's ST population now boasts a literacy rate of 73.6%. Himachal Pradesh's tribes are members of the renowned Indo-Aryan family. The Kinnaur tribe, Lahaul tribe, Gaddi tribe, and Gujjar tribe are some of the prominent tribes in this area. In the Himachal Pradesh state, the Gaddi tribes are primarily situated on either side of the Dhauladhar mountain. A sizeable number of Gaddi tribes are concentrated in the Brahmaur area of the Chamba district, as well as in the valleys of the Budhil and Ravi rivers. Other locations include the Kangra district, particularly the nearby villages of Tota Rani and Khaniyara.

With the help of various articles and news highlights of the previous years, the researcher analyses that to protect the Gaddis's belief system and customs as well, or to minimize their rapid urbanization into the developed areas, the Indian government has developed a number of department policies dealing to the welfare of tribes from the start of the first Five-Year Plan. The principal architect of the Five-Year Plan, Nehru, had firmly backed the notion that the tribes should be able to benefit from modern medical, education, agriculture, and economic prosperity, but unquestionably not at the expense of the unique and priceless values of their life. He emphasized that progress in tribal areas should be slow and

steady, that bureaucrats and other development workers should have a pro-tribal attitude, and that they should foster an environment that will encourage more engagement by tribes in the development process.

References

- Mishra, H. & Pandey, B. (2019), *Navigating the Impacts of Social and Environmental Changes to Traditional Lifestyle: A Case Study of Gaddi Transhumance of Chamba District in Himachal Pradesh*, The Oriental Anthropologist: A Bi-annual International Journal of the Science of Man. 19. 0972558X1986239. 10.1177/0972558X19862391.
- Sharma, M., (2015), Ritual, Performance, and Transmissions: The Gaddi Shepherds of Himachal.
- Saini, R., (2020), The Gaddi Tribe: Struggling to Preserve its Identity. 10.13140/RG.2.2.29621.50407.
- Biswas, M. P., and Rao, D. M. R. M., (2016), Socio-Economic Status of Gaddi Tribe in Himachal Pradesh: A Study, International Journal of Advanced Research, 4(8), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/1198>
- Rose, H.A. (1911), A Glossary of the Tribes & Castes of the Punjab and the North West Frontier Provinces, Vol. II. New Delhi: Nirmal Publishers and Distributors.
- Mehra, P. (1992), Women, World & Position: A Study among the Gaddis of Palampur, H.P. *Indian Anthropologist*, 22(2), 41–55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41919689>

Cite as: Mohan, V., Deeksha, Kumar, Y., Thakur, A., (2023), A Historical Assessment of Religious and Social Tradition of Gaddi Tribal Society of Himachal Pradesh, *International Journal of Society and Education*, 2(1), pg. 26-31.