

THE CHALLENGES OF GADDI TRIBE: A STUDY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT:

Gaddi tribe is one of the major and an important tribes in Himachal Pradesh that predominantly inhabits Chamba, Kangra, and Bharmour regions of Himachal Pradesh. The present study explores the difficulties and societal transformations faced by the Gaddi tribe of Himachal Pradesh, utilising secondary data sources, including published research, census records, and government reports. This paper examines the influence of modernisation, government interventions, and socio-economic changes on the traditional pastoral and cultural practices of the Gaddi community, using education, employment, development, and political rights as indicators. The results reveal notable changes in livelihood patterns, increased literacy rates, and broader employment opportunities; however, enduring inequalities persist in areas such as cultural preservation, infrastructure development, and fair access to political engagement. The study argues that although secondary data highlights adaptive resilience among the Gaddi tribe, it also reveals persistent vulnerabilities that necessitate context-sensitive policies for inclusive tribal development.

Keywords: Gaddi tribe, socio-economic development, employment, political participation, education and tribal development.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal groups are recognised as the indigenous populations of the region. Tribals are commonly referred to as "adivasi," "vanvasi," "pahari," and "adimjati," among other terms (Biswas and Rao, 2016). As per the 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". The Gaddi constitutes a transhumant pastoralist community predominantly located in Himachal Pradesh and neighbouring Himalayan regions. The community has historically relied on seasonal movement, sheep and goat rearing, and agro pastoral practices, resulting in a distinct cultural repertoire that includes dress, songs, rituals, kinship norms, and a pastoral ethos. In recent decades, various accelerating forces, including education, infrastructure development, tourism, market linkages, climate variability, government initiatives, and out-migration, have resulted in transformations in livelihoods and cultural practices (Mishra et al., 2023; Sheth & Saberwal, 2023).

The Gaddi tribe, historically known for their pastoral lifestyle in Himachal Pradesh, encounters a range of complex challenges, including reduced grazing rights, climate-related disruptions to their livelihoods, and restricted access to education and healthcare services. Analysing these matters from the perspective of social change uncovers the structural

inequalities ingrained in policy and governance, as well as the tribe's adaptive strategies, resilience, and shifting aspirations. This study has the potential to guide inclusive development frameworks that honour traditional knowledge systems, encourage fair resource allocation, and enhance participatory governance, thereby aiding in the creation of more equitable and sustainable transitions for marginalised communities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

The socio-cultural and economic systems of the Gaddi tribe in Himachal Pradesh have experienced significant changes in recent decades, illustrating a complex interplay between continuity and change. The Gaddis have long been recognised for their agro-pastoral way of life, transhumance, and extensive ecological knowledge of mountain environments. Seasonal migration, livestock husbandry, and mixed farming were the main sources of sustenance, and these practices represented a harmonious interaction between livelihood and environment (Pathania & Dev, 2020). Recent research, however, shows a slow fall in these conventional jobs as a result of economic diversification, modernisation, and environmental issues. Transhumance and reliance on traditional pastures are declining as a result of many Gaddis switching from livestock rearing to horticulture, government employment, and other non-pastoral livelihoods (Malhotra, Nandigama, & Bhattacharya, 2021; Dakpe, Mishra, Pandey, & Ranjan, 2024).

Socially and culturally, the Gaddis maintain aspects of their festivals, belief systems, and customs, demonstrating a strong sense of identity and community. However, gender roles, family structures, and interactions across generations have changed significantly as a result of modernisation, education, and exposure to the outside world. Traditional social structures and group decision-making processes like biradari councils have been undermined by younger generations' preference for nuclear families and urban jobs (Pathania & Vaid, 2023). Their sustainable land-use practices have been further affected by environmental and policy-related constraints, such as the effects of climate change and restricted grazing grounds resulting from forest protection legislation (Nehria & Ghosh, 2024). Notwithstanding these difficulties, certain Gaddi groups continue to practise ecological practices and rituals tailored to high altitude living, as well as a strong cultural bond with their surroundings and pastoral traditions. Simpson (2023) explores this duality through the lens of witchcraft discourse among the Gaddis, showing how beliefs once integral to local identity persist subtly even as modern education and social mobility reshape notions of respectability. This coexistence of older ritual frameworks with emerging modern identities captures the community's ongoing negotiation between continuity and change. Similarly, Nehria and Ghosh (2023) examine how state-led development schemes for pastoral Gaddis often fail to reach their intended beneficiaries. While such initiatives symbolize structural change through formal intervention, their limited impact reinforces the persistence of marginalization—a continuity of disadvantage under new administrative forms. Gaddi life is also shaped by climatic and environmental issues.

According to Nigam and Saha (2023), traditional transhumance, or seasonal livestock migration, has become increasingly risky due to rising climate variability, forcing many herders to change their migration routes or give up the practice entirely. While maintaining the cultural ethos of mountain mobility, this adaptation represents a departure from centuries-old pastoral rhythms. The socio-economic systems of Gaddi have also been changed by tourism. According to Nehria (2024), many Gaddis have incorporated modern economic prospects into their lives by moving into small trade, hospitality, and guiding in popular tourist destinations like Dharamshala and Bhagsunag. However, this change has also damaged long-standing ecological linkages and resulted in environmental degradation. All

things considered, these studies show that the Gaddis are negotiating significant socioeconomic and climatic changes while maintaining strong cultural continuity through their language, customs, and environmental ties. Thus, the Gaddi experience exemplifies a continuous conversation between adaptation and resilience in the changing Western Himalayan landscape, where continuity coexists dynamically with change rather than opposing it. In general, the Gaddis' persistent cultural identity, oral traditions, and adaptable ecological knowledge demonstrate continuity, whilst their economic endeavours, social structure, and interactions with state institutions demonstrate change. The tribe's capacity to adapt to modernity and maintain its unique cultural heritage in the Western Himalayas is demonstrated by this dynamic fusion of perseverance and change.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- The study aims to assess the social changes among Gaddi tribe from 1980s to 2020s using extensive literature review.

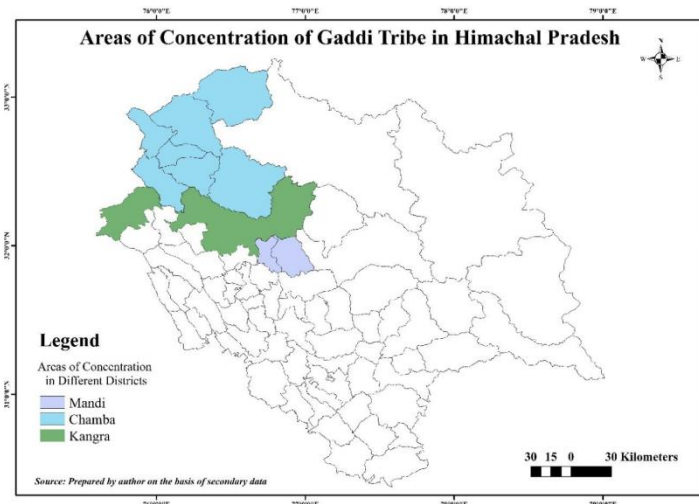
Data Source

The study is based on secondary data sources. This study utilises peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, institutional publications, and reputable online databases to synthesise existing knowledge on the topic. The review process entailed a critical assessment of each source's contribution to the field, focusing on gaps, contradictions, and emerging insights that guide future research directions.

Study Area

The Gaddi tribe of Himachal Pradesh, mainly found in the districts of Chamba, Kangra, and parts of Bharmour, presents a fascinating and culturally unique subject for exploring indigenous mountain communities. The Gaddis, traditionally semi-nomadic pastoralists, exhibit distinct seasonal migration patterns as they traverse between high-altitude summer pastures and lower winter settlements with their flocks (Pastoralists of the Himalayas: Gaddis of Bharmour Tribal Region, 2019).

The socio-economic practices of the community are intricately linked to the ecological rhythms of the region, while their cultural identity is characterised by distinct customs, the Gaddi dialect, and religious beliefs that are deeply rooted in Hinduism. The Gaddis, recognised as a Scheduled Tribe, have been the subject of numerous development and welfare initiatives, positioning them as a significant group for exploring the interplay between traditional livelihoods, state policy, and adaptive resilience within the Himalayan framework (HP Planning Department, District Human Development Report: Kangra; Devi, 2023).



Findings:

The study analyses the social changes among the Gaddi tribe through education, employment, development, and political participation using review of the literature. To begin with the education plays a vital role in the upliftment of society. Hence, it is imperative to assess the changes that have been noticed among the Gaddi tribe from the 1980s to 2020s.

At the beginning of the 1980s, many areas in the Gaddi region, such as Bharmour, recorded exceptionally low levels of female literacy. The official census publications for Himachal Pradesh (1981) indicate that the literacy rate of females was extremely low across a vast number of tribal and rural tehsils, and the gender gap in the state remained significant at that time. According to local compilations that make use of census figures, the percentage of females in Bharmour who were literate in 1981 was around 9.03%. Simultaneously, the percentage of males in Bharmour who were literate in 1981 was approximately 34.21%, which resulted in a total literacy rate of approximately 22.5% for the block in 1981. Several tehsils in the 1980s claimed that the literacy rate of females was in the single digits, which is highlighted by these low base values.

By 1991, efforts to increase literacy in Bharmour and other tribal areas had begun to materialise as a result of the extension of elementary schooling and early literacy campaigns. In 1991, the percentage of females in Bharmour who were literate increased to about 19.8%, while the percentage of males who were literate increased to around 53.5%, elevating the total literacy rate to approximately 36.7%. This means that female literacy more than doubled throughout the decade, despite the fact that it remained significantly lower than male literacy levels. These results for the Bharmour block are reflective of broader district and state patterns that were documented in the provisional and final census publications of 1991. These publications reveal that tribal areas are making progress, although the gains are still uneven.

There is a steady convergence of male and female literacy, as evidenced by the village/district level handbooks and studies, despite the fact that there are still gaps in learning and higher-level transition. The censuses conducted in 2001 and 2011 reveal much sharper advances following the 1990s.

Employment Transitions among the Gaddi Tribe (1980–2020)

Beginning in the 1980s, the employment profile of the Gaddi tribe saw a significant movement away from transhumant pastoralism and towards a more varied and sedentary

economy. At the beginning of the 1980s, over three quarters of the Gaddis were involved in activities such as seasonal migration and cattle herding, in addition to engaging in small-scale subsistence cultivation (Bhattacharya, 1986; Sharma, 2001). As a result of the community's semi-nomadic lifestyle, low literacy levels, and poor interaction with the official sector, wage labour and salaried jobs were almost non-existent during that time period. The 1990s, on the other hand, were the beginning of a progressive diversification of the economy. This was due to the fact that the growth of roads, rules for forest usage, and decreasing grazing rights made pastoralism less viable. Younger Gaddis were encouraged to seek wage work in construction, agricultural labour, and more minor government occupations as literacy rates increased and more opportunities for education became available (Sharma & Dutt, 1996; Rahi, 2002).

The Gaddi economy was characterised by a variety of livelihoods by the time the 2000s rolled around. A significant number of households embraced partial sedentarization, which allowed them to balance herding with wage labour, tourism, and horticulture. This resulted in a decrease in flock sizes. In order to encourage young people to pursue career opportunities outside of agriculture, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and improvements to local infrastructure made it possible for them to have greater mobility and access to education (Negi, 2007; Singh, 2013). Additionally, during this time period, there was a rise in the proliferation of service and small company operations, particularly in the districts of Chamba and Kangra, which saw an increase in opportunities associated to tourism. Beginning in the 2010s, non-pastoral sources of income surpassed herding and agricultural sources of revenue. The use of hired shepherds began to supplant family labour as wage labour, tourism, and trade became the primary forms of economic activity. According to Kapila (2009) and Singh and Chauhan (2018), younger generations are getting more and more interested in working for a salary or in urban areas, and pastoralism is becoming a supplemental means of subsistence.

The Gaddi economy has mostly shifted to a more sedentary and diverse form by the time the year 2020 rolls around. Nowadays, transhumant herding is the primary source of income for fewer than fifteen percent of households, while wage labour, tourism, horticulture, and formal jobs are the most common sources of income (Bhatti, 2021; Chauhan, 2023). A greater number of women are participating in education and employment, which has led to a rise in the number of people moving out to metropolitan centres. Even though this diversification has resulted in an increase in household income and a vulnerability reduction, it has also contributed to the loss of traditional pastoral knowledge and a weakening of community-based herding traditions. Over the course of time, the employment transformation of the Gaddi tribe is reflective of broader tribal transformations in Himachal Pradesh. These transitions involve a shift away from subsistence and mobility and towards integration into regional markets and service economies.

Development Transitions among the Gaddi Tribe (1980s–2020)

The developmental trajectory of the Gaddi tribe from the 1980s to 2020 demonstrates a gradual but dramatic movement from isolation and subsistence to integration and modernisation. This shift occurred over the course of forty years. During the 1980s, the majority of Gaddi communities, notably those located in Bharmour and other high-altitude enclaves of Chamba, continued to be mostly detached from major road networks and relied on traditional resources such as natural springs and forest produce (Kapila, 2009; Bhattacharya, 1986). The primary means by which people maintained their livelihoods was through transhumant pastoralism and the barter trade in wool, ghee, and animals. In addition, access to formal education and healthcare was exceptionally limited. During this time period, the literacy rates of women were in the single digits, and traditional healers, also known as *vaid*s, were the primary providers of healthcare rather than institutional medical services

(Sharma, 2001). Developmental efforts were infrequent and primarily restricted to tiny hill-area schemes, with 7 little administrative or infrastructure penetration. These programs were also limited in geographic scope.

However, between the 1990s and 2000s, initiatives sponsored by the state, such as the Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) and the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP), started to bring about observable changes in terms of both social and infrastructure (Negi, 2007; Singh, 2013). Accessibility and service delivery in hitherto inaccessible valleys were significantly enhanced as a result of the construction of new roads, the electrification of rural areas, and the establishment of primary schools and health sub-centers. Literacy campaigns and the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan both contributed to the acceleration of educational development, notably for females. Additionally, programs such as the PMGSY and rural electrification projects contributed to the improvement of connection. According to Rahi (2002) and Singh and Chauhan (2018), these decades were also a time of economic diversification. During this time period, the reliance on pastoral agriculture decreased, small-scale horticulture and tourism emerged, and women participated in self-help groups (SHGs) and local entrepreneurship at an increasing rate.

During the 2010s and 2020s, the Gaddi economy and society have grown increasingly connected into larger market and government systems. This integration has occurred in a gradual manner. According to Bhatti (2021) and Chauhan (2023), the implementation of universal road and telecom connectivity, digital governance platforms, and enlarged welfare initiatives like Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat, Ayushman Bharat, and PMAY have all contributed to a general improvement in the standard of living in India. Although there is a high level of education, a significant number of young people are pursuing further education and work in the service industry. Additionally, tourism and small company operations constitute reliable sources of income. On the other hand, the old way of doing things in the pastoral economy has mostly become a cultural niche. Despite the fact that the Gaddi community now lives a semi-urban lifestyle that is characterised by digital inclusion, increased gender participation, and improved healthcare, there are still challenges that need to be addressed in order to preserve indigenous knowledge systems and ensure equitable access across all remote hamlets (Kapila, 2009; Singh, 2013).

Political Participation among the Gaddi Tribe (1980–2020)

Since the 1980s, there has been a substantial shift in the way that members of the Gaddi community participate in political processes. Participation was mostly shaped by local 9 hierarchies and patronage structures rather than by formal democratic engagement during the early decades of the twentieth century. In the 1980s, the percentage of Gaddi communities living in distant mountain regions who participated in elections remained low. Village elites or important traditional leaders frequently acted as mediators in these elections. Access to institutional politics was restricted due to factors such as a lack of road connectivity, seminomadic lifestyles, and unequal recognition of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. As a consequence of this, formal involvement in panchayats and elections was extremely low, and the majority of political choices were made through customary authority systems rather than through elected officials.

The decade of the 1990s was a watershed moment in the movement towards decentralisation and inclusion in institutions. According to the Government of India Portal, the adoption of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and the expansion of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) resulted in the creation of reserved seats for representatives of Scheduled Tribes (ST) and women. This resulted in the opening of new opportunities for Gaddi leaders to engage in the

governance of their own communities. Additional factors that contributed to increased voter participation and political understanding included improvements in infrastructure, transportation connectivity, and communication. At the same time that Gaddis were asserting their tribal identity and increasing their literacy rates, they were also demanding acknowledgement, development benefits, and reservation entitlements. Furthermore, as a consequence of this, Gaddi leaders started organising around cultural and political identity claims, combining traditional authority with contemporary electoral involvement.

The political engagement of Gaddis became more strategic, regularised, and deeply ingrained in the government of the local community by the time the 2000s and especially the 2010s rolled around. Gaddi men and women actively fought elections, frequently relating their political engagement to development problems such as roads, pensions, and grazing rights (SOAS Research Online, 2019). This was a result of increased representation in participatory research institutions (PRIs) and higher education levels respectively. According to The Tribune (2018), women's presence increased significantly as a result of reservation provisions and evolving gender norms. At the same time, identity politics over ST inclusion and forest rights developed into a prominent topic in both local and state politics. The majority of adult Gaddis will have participated in elections regularly by the year 2020, with voter turnout being comparable to that of other rural regions in Himachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, obstacles to 10 equitable political representation remained to be posed by inequities within communities, the capture of elites, and unequal advantages of reservations.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the Gaddi community represents a distinctive and lively population residing in the Himalayan Mountain ranges of India. Their cultural heritage is deeply rooted and is expressed through various forms such as folklore, traditional attire, jewellery, and everyday practices. Historically engaged in the rearing of sheep and goats, they have now expanded their activities to include agriculture, education, and various other professions. In the face of numerous challenges, the Gaddi community has successfully maintained its cultural heritage and traditions, contributing significantly to the richness and diversity of India.

A dynamic trajectory that is shaped by broader trends in social development, governance, and environmental constraints is reflected in the problems that the Gaddi tribe of Himachal Pradesh will experience between the years 1980 and 2020 to reflect a dynamic trajectory. Gaddi livelihoods were still largely based on transhumant pastoralism in the 1980s, with seasonal migration and strong group bonding. This was the case even though the Gaddi continued to migrate. The decade of the 1990s, on the other hand, was a watershed moment since it was around this time that forest rules began to restrict grazing rights and economic liberalisation created market forces that started to undermine traditional practices. During the early 2000s, there was a rise in the number of people who were exposed to education and urban employment opportunities. This led to a gradual shift in ambitions among younger Gaddis, while also causing tensions between the values of different generations. In spite of constitutional protections, the tribe faced increasing marginalisation in policy discourse by the 2010s. This was aggravated by climate variability and dwindling pastures, which made it more difficult for them to maintain their source of income. Despite the fact that the Gaddi community has shown resiliency and adaptability over the course of these four decades, the cumulative impact of administrative neglect, ecological degradation, and cultural dilution has highlighted the urgent need for frameworks that are inclusive, participatory, and recognise indigenous agency within the context of social transformation.

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