

A study of the Major tribes of Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

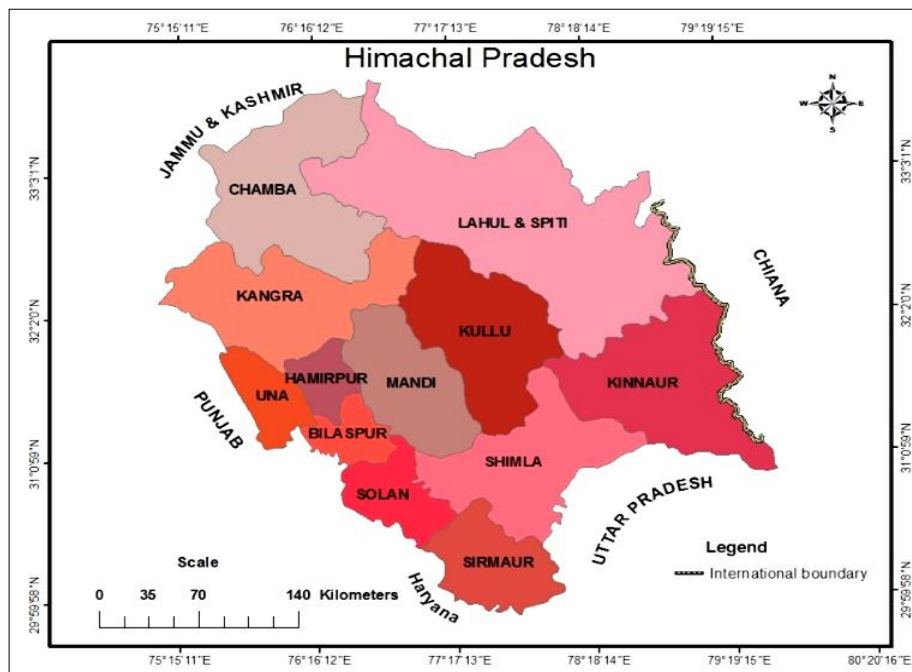
The Tribes of Himachal Pradesh are scattered in different parts of the state and the tribal communities residing in different parts of Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh are sociable and by their own culture and tradition, they have marked their position in the Indian subcontinent also. Dancing, musical melodies, festivals, fairs etc. bore evidence to it. They are by nature nomadic people and their customs and social structure make them identifiable from each other. As far as the occupations are concerned, the tribes of Chamba have taken up the occupations including rearing of cattle and also raising of wool. Dresses that these tribes of Chamba wear also are quite exquisite to look at. Thus, in this paper, the researcher highlights the tribal people and the culture of Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: major tribes, dancing, musical melodies, festivals

Introduction

The Chamba is placed on the higher hilly parts of Himalayas. Lying mostly astride the main Himalayas and touching on the fringes at one corner of a bit of the Shivalik, the plains commerce on the other side of the border and the territory is wholly mountainous with altitudes varying from about 2,000 feet (610 meters) to about 21,000 feet (6,400 meters) above the mean sea-level. The scenery is picturesque and varied character presenting many delightful sights. The Chamba valley is famous for medicinal herbs and varieties of flowers. The land is covered with vastly fragrant Champaka trees. In the lower parts, the trees

grown are wild olive, pomegranate and fig trees mingling with the acacia, shisham, pipal and some other trees. On the mountain slopes, the fields are usually small in size and are arranged in terraces, the lower boarder of each being formed by a rough wall to make the ground more level for ploughing. The Tribes of Chamba are scattered in different parts of the state and the tribal communities residing in different parts of Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh are sociable and by their own culture and tradition. The figure no. 1 & 2 show the Chamba District Map of Himachal Pradesh.



Source: 1. The maps for image of Indian States, Himachal Pradesh and Chamba District are retrieved from <http://www.google.co.in/#sclient=psy-ab&q=loc> on dated 12/02/2012.
 2. The maps for image of Indian States, Himachal Pradesh and Chamba District are retrieved from <http://www.google.co.in/#sclient=psy-ab&q=loc> on 20/11/2011.

Fig 1: Himachal Pradesh District Map: Chamba District



Source: Images of Chamba District Map. Retrieved from <https://www.bing.com/images/search?q=chamba+district+map&qpv=chamba+district+map&qpv=chamba+district+map&FORM=IGRE> on dated 13/07/2013.

Fig 2: Chamba District Map

Chamba comprises of a number of valleys inhabited by different trades. The people here are called Chambyals, Brahmauris, Pangwals, Bhattiyats and Chaurahis etc., according to the area they belong to. Chamba has mainly two tribal areas, Pangi and Bharmour. There is a sizeable population of the Bhots of Tibetan origin known as Bhatoris living in upper reaches of Pangi. The tribes of Chamba belong to the famous Indo- Aryan family group. The major tribes of this region include Gaddi and Gujjar Tribe. Two nomadic tribes i.e., Gaddis and Gujjars inhabit some parts of the district. Gaddis inhabit Bharmour and upper parts of Bhattiyat, the Gujjars mainly reside in Chamba, Chaurah and Saluni tehsils and the pangwalas reside in Pangi valley of the district.

The tribes of Chamba are mostly engaged in agricultural and allied activities; such as rearing of cows, sheep, goat, Buffaloes and ploughing small fields, which are their source of sustenance. Agriculture is supplemented by animal husbandry and trade and is the main occupation of these tribes. Chamba comprises of a number of valleys inhabited by different tribes.

Chamba Valley: Gujjars

Chamba valley is basically known as Ravi Valley. The scenery is of a picturesque and varied character presenting many delightful sights. In the lower parts, the trees grown are wild olive, pomegranate and fig trees mingling with the Acacia, Shisam, Pipal and some other trees. On the mountain slopes the fields are usually small in size and are arranged in terraces, the lower border of each being formed by a rough wall to make the ground more level for ploughing. In most parts of the Chamba

valley, fewer than 2,500 mts only two crops are reaped per year. The people here are very hardworking, handsome and honest. This valley is fairly populated. The Gujjar Tribes of Chamba has developed the practice of carrying on conversation in numerous languages namely, Urdu and Hindi. They have also adapted religion like Islam. According to the studies conducted by the numerous anthropologists, the Gujjar tribes arrived in India most probably in 6th century. Gujjars are mainly residing here and they are known as tribes and minority groups of Chamba (http://www.indianetzone.com/10/tribes_himachal_pradesh.htm retrieved on dated 12/03/2012).

The origins of the Gujjars are still shrouded in mystery, the majority of the scholars are of the view that these people migrated to India during the Sixth Century from Central Asia, from where communication with India was a regular feature along well- established trade routes. It is also said that they inhabited the western part of India, where province Gujrat exists after their name. The Gujjar rulers founded the city Gujraat in Akbar’s reign. Most of the historians have the faith that the Gujjars are from Rajput community. In Himachal Pradesh, there are two communities of Gujjars, one is Hindu Gujjar Community and second is Muslim Gujjar Community. The Hindu Gujjars are residing mostly in the districts named Mandi, Kangra, Sirmour, Solan and Bilaspur whereas; the Muslim Gujjars are dispersed in the districts named Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur, Solan and Sirmaur of Himachal Pradesh.

The Muslim Gujjars in Chamba district are mostly non-vegetarian but they do not eat beef or buffalo meat. Their staple food consists of maize, chapatti, pulses of urad; mah etc. and

milk products like lassi and dahi also form a part of their daily diet. The majority of Gujjars are pastorals and they eke out their livelihood through the sale of milk and milk products. Smoking is common habit among them. Muslim Gujjars have two groups, Bhatariye and Bhanariye. These groups do not intermarry and they further segmented into exogamous gotras (i.e., Bhatti, Chandel, Khatana and Padha) which indicate their Rajput clans. The distinctive feature of Muslim Gujjars marriage is that consanguineous marriages take place i.e., a boy can marry his cousin. The traditional joint family system still exists in Gujjar communities. The elders in the family are given respect and regard. Purdah system is prevalent. A daughter can claim the property of the father in the absence of son. The role of Gujjar women is very significant and they are hard-working. They are known as Gujjaris in local language. They are tall with attractive personality. They are skilled in embroidery with coloured thread on caps and jawahar jackets. The Gujjars have their traditional 'bhaichara' panchayat. The members of this panchayat are elected on the basis of age, experience and knowledge.

Bharmour Valley: Gaddis

This valley is fairly populated. The people are very handsome, hardworking and honest. The society here is a unique blend of tribal and non tribal; semi-civilized and civilized; backward and modernized and identity of hills and plains culture. The Gaddi Tribes dwell in numerous places of Chamba. The people of this tribal group are not nomadic in nature and they have their own villages where they reside in a cluster. The notable thing about the Gaddi tribe is their costumes. Most of the people of this community are shepherds but some are engaged in other occupations too. They are world famous including Brahmins, Rajputs, Khattris, Thakurs and Rathis. The word 'Gaddi' has been derived from 'Gadar' a Sanskrit word 'gadhern' where Gaddis are inhabited, Bharmour is called the adobe of Gaddis and the entire sub-tehsil is named as 'gadhern'/'gadiyar' region. The Gaddis own large flocks of sheep and goat; with them they spend the summer in the higher mountains of Pangi and Lahaul and the winters in the low hills bordering on the plains. There is no unanimity of the views from where Gaddis migrated to this hilly state. The Gaddi Brahmins have a tradition that their ancestors came from Delhi to Bharmour in the region of Raja Ajia Varman 780-800 A.D. The Gaddi Rajputs have the same tradition as the Gaddi Brahmins as to their original home. While the Gaddi Khattris' ancestors fled from Lahore to escape persecution, probably at the time of the early Mohammedan invasions. The couplet 'ujrya Lahore te basya Bharmour' (ransack of the city of Lahore resulted in influx to Brahmaur) indicates the place of migration. The dialect used by Gaddis is 'Western Pahari' language of the Sanskrit Aryan families of Northern group. There is no script for this dialect. They can understand Hindi well but it is not spoken by them normally. They are 'Shaiv' and the Lord Shiva is the principal God of the Gaddis. They believe that Shiva's blessings can remove mental illness, ailments, misfortunes and natural calamities and cast away ancestral punishments. Beside Shiva, they also believe in so many other Gods which include 'Autar' (the spirit of an issueless person), 'Kelong' (the king of all snakes) and 'Gugga' (the protector of cattle). They believe in superstitions, whether good or bad. The birth of male child is considered necessary and considers girls as property of some other house. Marriages are celebrated in Gaddi community with great enthusiasm. Five types of marriages are prevalent among Gaddis. These are

Elopement/ Jhind Phuk/ Brar Phuk marriage (if girl elopes with her lover without the consent of the parents they solemnize the marriage by burning a bush wood and going round the fire eight times), Jhanjrara (this marriage is by elopement, consent, agreement and mutual understanding among the relatives), Ghar Jawantri, Batta-Satta (marriage by exchange-the boy gets his partner in exchange of his real or cousin sister) and Dan-Pun marriage (the girl is given as a 'Dan' to her husband and this type of marriage has social, religious and administrative sanction). Gaddis are monogamous and they never favour polygamy unless the wife is barren or dead. Dowry system is prevalent but dowry is never demanded and insisted. The fairs and festivals celebrated by Gaddis are Baishakhi, Minjar, Holi, Dushehra, Sair, Patroru Sagrand and Mani Mahesh Yatra. Singing has an important place in their lives. 'Chola' and 'Dora' are their popular traditional dresses in which Dora is the most important part of the dress of Gaddi men, women and children. 'Bushahri' cap which is made of woolen piece of cloth and turban are used by Male Gaddis to cover their head and 'Chaddru' is used by Gaddans to cover their head. The women prefer silver ornaments are more common than golden ones. Gaddis are also not very particular about their bath, sometimes once a month or twice a month, the bath is taken. The Gaddis are very simple, honest and hardworking, stick to their words, good friends, cheerful, healthy, stout and hospitable. The Gaddi women are famous for their modesty and chastity and some of them really look like queens of the mountains. In spite of all above mentioned qualities it is difficult to convince Gaddis for a change.

Pangi Valley: Pangwalas

The Pangi valley is a remote, rugged and poorly developed tribal area in Himachal Pradesh but the most beautiful valley in the upper part of Chamba district i.e., full of grandeur and tribal majesty. It is placed in the middle of Jammu and Kashmir, Chaurah, Lahual and Spiti and the Greater Himalayas. Pangi valley is divided into the Sural, Saichu, Hudan, Bhatori and Kumar-Parmar valleys. All these valleys are connected with Zanskar range. These are inhabited at elevations of 7,000 feet (2,100 mts) to 11,000 feet (3,400 mts) above sea level. Roads are poor, with few of them surfaced. It is one of the sub-division of Chamba district surrounded by the Peer Panjal and Zanskar ranges. Sural have thick woods of peeling-birch (bhoj-patra) too. These woodlands support a variety of wild life including ibex, snow leopard, Himalayan thar, musk deer, black bear, brown bear and bharal. The bird includes the monal and koklas pheasants, himalayan dragoon, snow peacock, snow pigeon and the chukor. The river Chanderbhaga (also called the Chenab downstream) flows from Lahaul, divides Pangi into two unequal parts and cliffs sometimes vertically to a height of a couple of thousand feet. The mountains surrounded the valley range between 5,400 to 6,700 meters. The tiny villages of this verdant pocket lie between 2,100 to 3,000 meters. On the right bank of the river Chanderbhaga, the growing settlement of Kilar (2,590 mtrs) is the administrative sub-divisional headquarter of Pangi valley. Beyond the reach of tropical monsoon rains, the valley is one of the off-beat challenging tourism destinations in the state. Approach to the Pangi valley is across the high mountain passes like Sach, Chehni and Rohtang Pass. The Valley is remained land locked for about six months due to heavy snow fall. During winter and spring, this valley is completely cut off. The Pangi tehsil covers 1,601 square kilometres (618 sq meters). It has 16

panchayats and 54 inhabited villages. With recent improvements to the roads, the villagers have started to grow cash crops such as peas, apples and other fruits. Attempts are being made to develop the area for tourism, trekking through the dramatic scenery. Language spoken by Pangi people is called as Pangwali.

The valley is mostly inhabited by Pangwal and Bhoti people (Hindu with some Buddhists). Some people live in higher reaches of the valley called Bhatris such as Sural Bhatris, Hundan Bhatris, Parmar Bhatris, Chasak Bhatris and Hilu-Twan. Pangwalas are notified under the nomenclature Pangwala. The term Pangwal has territorial connotation and denotes the inhabitants of the Pangi valley of Chamba district in Himachal Pradesh. They are also distributed in other areas of Himachal Pradesh i.e., outside the Pangi valley. The generic term Pangwal is particularly applied to the Brahman and the Rajput, while the lower castes are generally referred to by their specific castes names. The Pangwal Brahman and Rajput are immigrants from the neighbouring Lahaul valley. Pangwal and Rajput of the Pangwal group of Chamba are divided into three segments and it is arranged in a hierarchical order. The Gaur who were traditionally lived on alms are now agriculturists, the Sungaria who were the performers of sacerdotal services are now doing agriculture and the Kalia are officiating at death rites. The community is further divided into a number of clans (gotras) among which some are Atri, Bhardwaj, Gautam, Jamdagni, Kashyap, Vashista and Vishwamitra. Pangwal and Rajput of the Pangwal group of Himachal Pradesh are divided into three main divisions and they are named as Rana, Thakur and Rathi. The Rathi are regarded as inferior to the first two. The marriages between the Brahman and the Rajput community people are common.

Women enjoy a fair amount of freedom in Pangwal community. They are hardworking, beautiful and taking part in the agricultural works also. They have freedom for leaving their husband, whenever they desire. There is still joint family system and elder male member heads the family. Pangwal staple food is Barley and alu. They are also fond of pulses like mah and rardengal. They plucked vegetables like bichubutti and guchhi from jungle. They have started growing vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, potato, onion capsicum and spinach during summer months. During winter months, every household slays one or two goats and after skinning them, they hang them to be gradually consumed everyday.

Conclusion

According to the Census 2011, the population of Chamba District is 5, 19, 080 of which 1, 35, 500 belongs to Scheduled Tribes (STs) in 1,110 villages. The two Sub-Division of District Chamba viz. Pangi and Bharmour have been declared as Scheduled Area because majority population comprises of communities declared as Scheduled Tribe under the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution. These tribal areas are very remote and inaccessible having tough mountainous terrain and inhospitable climatic conditions, thus, involving a high cost of infrastructural development and harsh living conditions. According to the Modified Area Development Approach (MADA), the ambit of Tribal Sub- Plan was expanded in the Sixth Five Year Plan and MADA was adopted to cover smaller areas of tribal concentration having 10, 000 populations in contiguous areas of which 50% or more were tribal. In Chamba, two such pockets namely Chamba and Bhatiyat- Blocks were

identified in 1981-82. These two pockets cover an area of 881.47 square Kilometer and population of 29455 (7.51%) STs as per 2011 Census. The Dispersed Tribes Population, till February, 1987, Special Central Assistance (SCA) to Tribal Sub- Plan (TSP) Strategy was applicable to the Scheduled Areas and MADA. During the Seventh Five Year Plan, the strategy of SCA to TSP was further extended to cover all tribal living outside the Scheduled Area and MADA for beneficiary originated programme out of funds released by the Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs under SCA. For the socio- economic development of STs residing outside Scheduled Areas of the district, besides General Plan allocations, funds are being provided under SCA to TSP. The Tribal Development Department facilitates the implementing departments for planning and preparing the schemes for the welfare of STs residing outside the Scheduled Areas of Chamba. For infrastructural development, the villages having tribal population are taken up in the following priority.

- (i) First priority has been given to villages having substantial tribal population in that village i.e., more than 40% population or more of the village comprises of STs.
- (ii) Next priority has been given to the villages where tribal population is less than 40% of the total population but having more than 100 tribal people in such villages (<http://admis.hp.nic.in/himachal/tribal/DirectoryofSTVillages2015.pdf> on dated 24/06/2011).

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