

Importance of Forest Products in Tribal Economy: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh

Dr. Abhishek Vashishtha

Assistant Professor, Geography, SPNKS Govt. PG College, Dausa, Rajasthan, India

Abstract

Himachal Pradesh ("Snow-laden Mountain Province"^[9]) is a state in the northern part of India. Situated in the Western Himalayas, it is one of the thirteen mountain states and is characterized by an extreme landscape featuring several peaks and extensive river systems. Himachal Pradesh is the northernmost state of India and shares borders with the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh to the north, and the states of Punjab to the west, Haryana to the southwest, Uttarakhand to the southeast and a very narrow border with Uttar Pradesh to the south. The state also shares an international border to the east with the Tibet Autonomous Region in China. Himachal Pradesh is also known as *Dev Bhoomi*, meaning 'Land of Gods'^[10] and *Veer Bhoomi* which means 'Land of the Brave'.^[11] Tribes such as the Koli, Hali, Dagi, Dhaugri, Dasa, Khasa, Kanaura, and Kirata inhabited the region from the prehistoric era.^[16] The foothills of the modern state of Himachal Pradesh were inhabited by people from the Indus valley civilisation, which flourished between 2250 and 1750 BCE.^[17] The Kols and Mundas are believed to be the original inhabitants to the hills of present-day Himachal Pradesh, followed by the Bhotas and Kiratas.^[17]

Keywords: *Himachal, Pradesh, Mountain, Tribes, Economy, Forests, Snow, Laden, Mountain, Province.*

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the states that lies in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR), one of the richest reservoirs of biological diversity in the world. As of 2002, the IHR is undergoing large scale irrational extraction of wild, medicinal herbs, thus endangering many of its high-value gene stock. To address this, a workshop on 'Endangered Medicinal Plant Species in Himachal Pradesh' was held in 2002 and the conference was attended by forty experts from diverse disciplines.¹

According to 2003 Forest Survey of India report, legally defined forest areas constitute 66.52% of the area of Himachal Pradesh.^[25] Vegetation in the state is dictated by elevation and precipitation. The state is endowed with a high diversity of medicinal and aromatic plants.² Lahaul-Spiti region of the state, being a cold desert, supports unique plants of medicinal value including *Ferula jaeschkeana*, *Hyoscyamus niger*, *Lancea tibetica*, and *Saussurea bracteata*.³

Himachal is also said to be the fruit bowl of the country,⁵ with orchards being widespread. Meadows and pastures are also seen clinging to steep slopes. After the winter season, the hillsides and orchards bloom with wild flowers, white gladiolas, carnations, marigolds,⁷ roses, chrysanthemums, tulips and lilies are carefully cultivated. Himachal Pradesh Horticultural Produce Marketing and Processing Corporation Ltd. (HPMC) is a state body that markets fresh and processed fruits.⁸

Himachal Pradesh has around 463 bird, and Tragopan melanocephalus is the state bird of Himanchal Pradesh⁹ 77 mammalian, 44 reptile and 80 fish species. Himachal Pradesh has currently five National Parks.¹⁰ Great Himalayan National Park, oldest and largest National park in the state, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Pin Valley National Park, Inderkilla, Khirganga and Simbalbara are the other national Parks located in the state.¹¹ The state also has 30 wildlife sanctuaries and 3 conservation reserves.¹² The state bird of Himachal Pradesh is the Western tragopan, locally known as the jujurana.¹³ It is one of the rarest living pheasants in the world. The state animal is the snow leopard, which is even rarer to find than the jujurana.¹¹

Agriculture accounts for 9.4% of the net state domestic product.¹² It is the main source of income and employment in Himachal. About 90% of the population in Himachal depends directly upon agriculture, which provides direct employment to 62% of total workers of state.¹⁰ The main cereals grown include wheat, maize, rice and barley with major cropping systems being maize-wheat, rice-wheat and maize-potato-wheat⁹ Pulses, fruits, vegetables and oilseeds are among the other crops grown in the state.⁸ Centuries-old traditional Kuhl irrigation system is prevalent in the Kangra valley,⁷ though in recent years these Kuhls have come under threat from hydroprojects on small streams in the valley.⁵ Land husbandry initiatives such as the Mid-Himalayan Watershed Development Project, which includes the Himachal Pradesh Reforestation Project (HPRP), the world's largest clean development mechanism (CDM) undertaking, have improved agricultural yields and productivity, and raised rural household incomes.³



Apples at an orchard in Vashisht; the state is the second-largest producer of apples in India

Apple is the principal cash crop of the state grown principally in the districts of Shimla, Kinnaur, Kullu, Mandi, Chamba and some parts of Sirmaur and Lahaul-Spiti with an average annual production of five lakh tonnes and per hectare production of 8 to 10 tonnes.^[63] The apple cultivation constitute 49 per cent of the total area under fruit crops and 85% of total fruit production in the state with an estimated economy of 3500 crore.^[63] Apples from Himachal are exported to other Indian states and even other countries.^{[64][65]} In 2011–12, the total area under apple cultivation was 104,000 hectares, increased from 90,347 hectares in 2000–01.^[65] According to the provisional estimates of Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, the annual apple production in Himachal for fiscal 2015–16 stood at 753,000 tonnes, making it India's second-largest apple-producing state after Jammu and Kashmir.^[66] The state is also among the leading producers of other fruits such as apricots, cherries, peaches, pears, plums and strawberries in India. Kangra tea is grown in the Kangra valley. Tea plantation began in 1849, and production peaked in the late 19th century with the tea becoming popular across the globe.^[67] Production dipped sharply after the 1905 Kangra earthquake and continues to decline.^[68] The tea received geographical indication status in 2005.

Forests in Himachal Pradesh cover an area of 37,033 Sq. Km. and account for 66.52 percent of total geographical area of the state. However, presently 26.4 percent of the total geographical area of the State supports Forest cover. Besides proper management, conservation and rationalized utilization

of forests, the State has a declared vision of enhancing the forest cover in the State from the present about 26.4 percent of its geographical area to 30 percent of its geographical area by 2030 to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).² The plan programme taken up by the Forest Department aims at fulfilling these policy commitments. Some of the important plan programme activities are as under:-

Forest plantation is being carried out under various State plan schemes such as Improvement of tree cover, and soil conservation, CAMPA as well as Centrally Sponsored Scheme National Afforestation Programme. Pasture and Grazing lands of the state are being managed under state scheme Development of Pasture and Grazing lands.¹ Van Mahotsava at State, Circle and Division levels is also celebrated for educating the masses and creating awareness amongst all stakeholders regarding forestry and environmental concerns under New Forestry Scheme (Sanjhi Van Yojana). Another scheme namely “Smriti Van Yojana” is also being implemented with the vision to create awareness amongst the people about tree planting.³ The scheme envisages tree plantation by people in specially designated areas on the occasion of their birthday, marriage anniversary or on death anniversary of their parents/ relatives/ elders. For the year 2017-18, plantation target of 9,725 Hectares Including CAMPA and Centrally Sponsored Schemes has been fixed with a cost of `47.00 crore out of which 6,776 hectares target and expenditure of `39.78 crore has been achieved upto 31.12.2017. Himachal Pradesh is home to a very impressive, diverse and unique fauna— many of which are rare. The scheme aims at protection, improvement of environment and wildlife⁵, development of wildlife sanctuaries/ national parks and improvement of wildlife habitat so as to provide protection to various species of birds and animals facing extinction. To protect, develop and scientifically manage the wildlife and to improve its habitat an outlay of `14.84 crore has been approved for the current financial year 2017-18 out of which expenditure of `5.03 crore has been incurred upto 31.12.2017 and balance amount will be booked upto 31.03.2018.⁷

DISCUSSION

We exist as the trees exist, our respondent said with a chuckle when we asked how the surrounding forests helped her sustain. This was in one of the three Gaddi villages in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh (HP) that we visited between August 2019 and March 2020. The Gaddis are a semi-nomadic Scheduled Tribe who live mostly in parts of the western

Indian Himalayan region. Agriculture and animal husbandry are their main sources of livelihood, and they practise winter migration. Because of the remoteness of our study location, other than a few research scholars, occasional tourists, and forest produce merchants, hardly anyone from the outside visits these villages.⁸ This note briefly narrates two significant observations from the site on how the Gaddi villagers perceive the —forest as a natural resource and their thorough sense of alienation from the entire gamut of forest management practices.⁹

To give comprehensive support for people belonging to various tribes in the entire range of production, product development, preservation of traditional heritage, support to both forest and agricultural produce of tribal people, support to Institutions to carry the above activities, provisions of better infrastructure,¹⁰ development of designs, dissemination of information about price and the agencies which are buying the products, support to Government agencies for sustainable marketing and thereby ensure a reasonable price regime.¹¹

Sharing of information with Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas, Skill upgradation, development of utilitarian products for increase in value in market.

The objective of the Scheme is to create institutions for the Scheduled Tribes to support marketing and development of activities they depend on for their livelihood. These are sought to be achieved by specific measures like (i) market intervention; (ii) training and skill up-gradation of tribal Artisans, Craftsmen, Minor Forest Produce (MFP) gatherers etc.; (iii) R&D/IPR activity; and (iv) Supply chain infrastructure development.¹²

‘Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP’ as a measure of social safety for MFP gatherers (Centrally Sponsored Scheme)

This Ministry has introduced from the year 2013-14, a centrally sponsored scheme of ‘Mechanism for marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP’ as a measure of social safety for MFP gatherers who are primarily member of Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers whose very livelihood depends on collection and selling of MFP.¹³

The scheme seeks to establish a system to ensure fair monetary returns for their efforts in collection, primary processing, storage, packaging, transportation etc. It also seeks to get them a share of revenue from the sales proceeds with cost deducted. It also aims to address other issues for sustainability of process.

The scheme envisages fixation and declaration of Minimum Support Price for the selected MFP. Procurement & Marketing operation at pre fixed MSP will be undertaken by the designated State Agencies. Simultaneously, other medium & long term issues like sustainable collection, value addition, infrastructure development, knowledge base expansion of MFP, market intelligence development, strengthening the bargaining power of Gram Sabha/ Panchayat will also be addressed.¹¹

To start with, the scheme had been implemented in States having areas under Schedule V of the Constitution and covered ten MFP items. Recently, however, the guidelines of the scheme ‘Mechanism for Marketing of Minor Forest Produce (MFP) through Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Development of Value Chain for MFP’ has been modified after discussion with various stakeholders and TRIFED, and MSP of the existing MFP items has been revised as also fourteen more MFP items have been added to the list.

Support to National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC)/State Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations (STFDCs)

NSTFDC a fully owned Public Sector Enterprise of Government of India, is provided with 100% equity share capital contribution by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs. The authorized share capital of the Corporation is Rs. 750.00 crore. The paid up Share capital is Rs 599.11 crore (as on 31.12.2017). The main objectives of NSTFDC are:-¹⁰

To identify economic activities of importance to the Scheduled Tribes so as to generate self-employment and raise their income level. To upgrade their skills and processes through both institutional and on the job training. To make existing State/ UT Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporations (SCAs) and other developmental agencies engaged in economic development of the Scheduled Tribes more effective. To assist SCAs in project formulation, implementation of NSTFDC assisted schemes and in imparting training to their personnel. To monitor implementation of NSTFDC assisted schemes in order to assess their impact. The STFDCs are catering to STs in various States and are provided assistance in the form of contribution towards share capital by this Ministry. The ratio of its contribution is in the share of 51:49 between State

Government and Central Government. The main objectives of the scheme are:-Identification of eligible ST families and motivating them to undertake economic development schemes.Sponsoring those schemes to financial institutions for credit support.Providing financial assistance in form of margin money on low rate of interest; and Providing necessary linkage/ tie-up with other poverty alleviation programmes.⁹

Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) and Tribal Festivals, Research Information and Mass Education;

In the above schemes, the focus of the Ministry is to preserve and promote tribal culture and dissemination of information. To preserve tribal art and culture, financial assistance is provided to TRI's to carry out various activities to preserve and promote tribal culture and heritage across the country through research and documentation, maintenance and preservation of art & artefacts, setting up of tribal museum, exchange visits for the tribals⁸ to other parts of the State, organizing tribal festivals etc. Funding under this Scheme is 100% grant-in-aid by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs to the TRIs on need basis with the approval of APEX Committee. TRIs would be responsible to prepare proposal and detailed action plan for the year alongwith budgetary requirement and submit it to the Ministry through State Tribal Welfare Department.

RESULTS

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 Pangti sub-divisions in Chamba, Kinnaur and Lahaul-Spiti districts.⁷ Gaddi is a generic term that includes people belonging to different castes such as Brahmins, Rajputs, Rathis and Khattris. 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.⁵ 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.³ Habitat, Lifestyle & Food habits of the Gaddi Tribe: - Historically, Gaddis are known to have taken one of the most hostile geographic regions in the world - highlands in the shadows of the mighty Dhauladharange (southern branch of the main Outer Himalayan chain of mountains) and the Middle Himalayas but over the last century they have also made lower areas in Himachal Pradesh their home special the Kangra district. The Gaddi village is 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 mules 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.² 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. 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 and the consequences of education and economic empowerment, their traditional style have undergone a change for the advancement of the 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 Cholaand Dora. Men also wear a turban (Safa) which is a symbol of respect and dignity. The women wear straight dresses tied around their waists with woollen cords. 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. 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. The majority of the Gadd 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.¹ They also smoke tobacco in hukka (multi-stemmed instrument for vaporizing and smoking flavoured tobacco), which forms a part of their daily sittings. 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, lohri, Bhaishaki, Patrodu, Dolru, etc. Manimaheshfair 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. 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. The Occupations of the Gaddis: - The main 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 5 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.³ 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,⁵ agriculture or community work). The occupational diversification is also due to the facilities and schemes provide by the government. 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. Status of Gaddi Women: -⁷ 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 utmost 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.⁸ 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 scarf's 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.⁹

Conclusions

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. 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.¹⁰ 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, ¹¹The 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 metamorphosis¹² and have lost their originality. This GaddiTribe is on a verge of extinction from its age old occupation and is getting more inclined towards a settled and comfortable life.¹³

References

1. AnjaWagner, The Gaddi Beyond Pastoralism: Making Place in the Indian Himalayas Berghahn Books, pg :65- 67
2. Bimla Thakur, Socio-economic Analysis of the Weaker Sections: Rural-urban Comparative Study in H.P (1991), Daya Books
3. Gabdika (2013), Himalayan Heritage, <http://www.gabdika.com>
4. Khan A. R. (1996). Environment and Development in Himachal Pradesh, Indus Publishing Company.
5. KrupakarPralhadWasnik, Lost People: An Analysis of Indian Poverty (2009), Gyan Publishing House, pg 75-76
6. K. Lakshmi Sirisha, Occupational Patterns and Income Determinants of Tribal Women Workers (2015), The Associated Publisherspg 279.
7. Prof. A.B. Mukerji, Cultural Geography, Form and Process: Essays in Honour, pg 69-70
8. Sharma Tribal Melodies of Himachal Pradesh: Gaddi folk music (1998), APH Publishing, 1998 Pg 60-62
9. Sharma K.P, Sethi S.M, Costumes and Ornaments of Chamba (1997), Indus Publishing, Pg 48-50
10. Singh A. K. (1996). Status of Tribals in India; Health Education and Employment, Thakkar, Bapa.
11. Singh Shyam, The Gaddi Tribe of India: A Sociological Study (1997), Sterling Publishing
12. Verma V, Gaddis of Dhauladhar (1996), Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi: pp 149