



Polyandry in Kinnaur –persistence and change

ANTAKSHARI

Abstract:

Polyandry is an arrangement by which a woman is married to more than one man at the same time. In India, this type of marriage is found in various parts of the Himalayan region, particularly in the western and central Himalayas. The Kinnaura society, like some other polyandrous societies, also practices polyandry. Adelphic form of polyandry is found to be practiced by the Kinnaura tribe, in which two or more than two brothers share a common wife and share the joint responsibility over the common wife and also on the children born on the union. Polyandry was a social norm in Kinnaur, but with the passage of time, polyandry is losing its ground and declining due to various factors. However, some of the Kinnaura people still practice polyandry with their own reasons. In the present study, an attempt has been made to explore the various marriage systems prevalent there and to know the reasons of persistence and decline of polyandry.

Key words: Polyandry, Adelphic, Common wife, Persistence, Decline.

Objectives: The broad objectives of the study are following-

- To examine the system of polyandry in Kinnaur
- To study the marriage system of Kinnaur
- To study the origin, persistence and decline of polyandry in Kinnaur.

Methodology:

The present study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data were collected directly from the Kinnauras practicing polyandry as well as other forms of marriage. Secondary data were collected from literature. Primary information is collected on different aspects through personal interview, observation and case study method.

Introduction:

The concept of polyandry is a derivative of the Greek word polyandria; and 'polyandros'. It is composed of two words 'poly + andr'. It refers to the 'condition of a woman having many men'. On the contrary, its antonym 'polygyny' is made up of poly and gynia which implies 'the condition of a man having many women'. However, neither of the two contains any etymological connotation of marriage. However, 'polygamy', usually understood in the sense of a man marrying more than one woman, comes from poly and gamia which mean; marriage of many, a concept, perhaps, covering both polyandry and polygyny (Singh, 1978). It is therefore argued that polyandry signifies marriage of one woman to more than one man (Peter, 1963; Goldstein, 1978). There are, of course, divergent views expressed by scholars on the meaning of polyandry but the central dimension of it remains "marriage of a woman with more than one man that constitutes 'wifedom' having beginning as a contract" (McLannan 1896). Spencer finds polyandry as one of the kinds of marital relations emerging from the primitive unregulated state of human existence (1921) or a form of 'group marriage' (Briffault 1927). Kapadia views this form of marital relation as a union

comprising a woman having more than one husband at a time, or in which other brothers of the husband share the brother's wife or have wives in common, cited in

Raha and Coomar (1987). However, the recognized typology of polyandry includes the 'fraternal' and 'non-fraternal' forms. While the former is regarded most common and cohesive as the husbands are either real brothers or from amongst the close kin group, and the latter is made up of 'unrelated husbands' (Levine & Silk 1997; Starkweather 2010).

Kinnaur a district dominated by tribal population and one of the twelve districts of State of Himachal Pradesh. The district is divided in three administrative block i.e Kalpa, Nichar and Pooh Block. Reckong Peo is administrative headquarter of the district. The district is spread over area of 6401 Km and total population is 84,121 (Census 2011). The inhabitants of Kinnaur are known as 'Kinnaura' and the Government has classified Kinnaur as Tribal District. By doing so Government recognizes the tribal customs and rules which are recorded in 'Wazib-ul-Arz' and will only override them if the Kinnaura request Government, Judicial or Police assistance. Same could be better understood with a example of bride capture, which is permissible as per local customs and only on complaint of bride the police interfere in matter. Kinnaura normally belong to two ethnic groups, Rajput (Uppar Caste) and Scheduled Caste (Low Caste). Both Rajput and Scheduled Caste people have equal rights by State Law. Kinnaura's have Patrilineal and Patrilocal society and inheritance is divided equal among sons, daughter do not inherit any property unless they have no brother or their father specify this before his death. Unmarried women may get small plots of land for her life time to meet out her needs. As per marriage customs bride gets part of land and house in her name at the time of marriage by way of custom known as '**Ponobitho**'. The property bride get is for life time.

Polyandry a form of marriage, known as Mustrika Shadi has been widely practiced in Kinnaur, a scheduled tribe district of Himachal Pradesh. Its continuation amidst rapid socio-economic change in the contemporary times characterized by modernization not only makes it a unique institutionalized phenomenon but also raises the question what holds it together and accounts for its perpetuation. While communitarian has withered away under capitalism induced development and individualism became the dominant value, this culturally accepted practice of two or more brothers sharing a common wife throughout their life is quite intriguing. Polyandry in Kinnaur also traces its lineage from the epic period Mahabharata. Mythological history suggests this form of marriage has been a custom, the narrative about five Pandavas who had one common wife, named Draupadi bears testimony. There are many stories about Pandavas having lived in different places in Himalayas during their exile. There are many places and structures identified with their names, for instance Moorang fort, labrang fort in kinnaur. The existence of such places named after Pandavas' names, the association of Pandavas with the custom of polyandry and people of Kinnaur continuing with the practice is indeed an issue for sociological exploration.

Marriage System in Kinnaur: Unlike other parts of country Kinnauras have a unique and distinguished marriage customs. Though both monogamy and polyandry practiced in Kinnaur and in rare occasions polygyny could also be observed among Kinnaura. The Kinnaura acknowledged formal as well as informal marriage. In Kinnauri Customs, marriage proposal by bride's family is considered shameful contrary to customs of mainland. Unlike mainland India, initiation of marriage talks, groom's family initiates talks of marriage. Usually close relative of groom's family contacts family of brides and convey their wishes. There are three types of marriage are prevalent in Kinnaur

First is known as **Janetang** or **jankang**. In this type of marriage ceremony entire village and all relatives are invited and marriage ceremony completes after the arrival of Gram Devta (village deity) on the roof of the house of Groom. In the olden days, when polyandry was mostly prevalent, Jankang or Janetang ceremony marriage used to celebrate once in a generation, but now it's not same. Second type of marriage in Kinnaur is known as **Yotang Majomi rang**. Kinnaura people chose this type of marriage when the economic condition of girl (bride) or boy and girl's (groom and bride) both is not good. In this type of marriage Groom does not go to bride's house to bring her, only three persons from the side of groom go to bride's house to bring her to groom's house and such a way marriage takes place following some other rituals.

Third type of Marriage is **Udanang zab-mo**. This type of marriage takes place when girl and boy chose to marry with mutual consent or love marriage or boy brings girl to home without her consent or without her will either we can say marriage by capture. In such cases boy's father sends some people from maternal side or from his lineage and close relatives, known as majomi (middlemen) with korang (bottle of local wine) to feel sorry as well as to make them accept the relationship between both families of bride and groom or boy and girl. In this practice Girl's parents and close relatives offers Udanang (money), ornaments and utensils. to girl as her privilege, that is why this is known as udanag zab-mo. (Negi, 2018) Kinnaura get married in various ways followed by marriage by capture (dab-dab or darosh), arranged marriage and love (damchaltshis & benang hachis), marriage by elopement without permission of parents (Bagyashis) (Bajpai, 1981) It is important to mention that Some scholar regarded these as type of marriage but it's not true as these are the local ways to bring a bride. (Negi, 2018) These customs are unique and unimaginable in mainland India. In Kinnauri marriage custom wedding ceremony is not mandatory, some time it did not take place at the time of marriage. The marriage ceremony could be celebrated even before or after, new marital unit started to live together. There are instances wherein we found that marital units performs formal wedding even after having children and this ceremony locally known as **badi shadi**.

In formally arranged marriage, bride's family get pre-agreed amount for purchase of ornaments and cloths from groom's family. The eldest son accompanied by the members from his lineage and village, goes to brides family. The marriage ceremony started with rituals and singing, dancing and feasting and after all rituals, groom returns with groom to his family. After reaching grooms house, another marriage customs is followed, which is unique and totally different from other marriage customs performed in others parts of the world. It is only elder brother who performed part marriage ritual at bride's house, but after reaching grooms house, all brothers participated in rituals to become co-husband of same wife. This marriage ritual is called 'Zanekang or Zanchang', wherein only elder brother goes to brides house to marry her, but all brothers became husbands after performing a special rituals known as 'turban tying ceremony'. Raha & Mahato (1985: 252-253) have describes turban tying ceremony as under;

'In this ritual, which is considered as the most important ritual that symbolizes polyandrous marriage, all brothers sit in a row. The bride sits before them. The grooms i.e brothers and their bride are garlanded....the maternal uncle of bridegrooms then takes a piece of white cloth, makes pagri (turban) on the head of each brother with that piece of cloth, with accomplishment of music. This indicates the marriage of all brothers with the common wife' The Gazetteer of Kinnaur also have a mentioned of 'ceremony of putting on turban (pag likshimu) by each brothers to get the status of husband. After the turban tying ceremony, bride's gets jewellery and piece of land in her name and bride family set aside jewellery and metal utensil for bride. Cash collected during the marriage is deposited in bank accounts of bride. The bride has right over the piece of land, money utensils and jewellery even after divorce happened due to some unavoidable circumstances.

Marriage by capture is another unique customs of marriage prevalent in Kinnaur. Marriage by capture, it is mostly consented among families and without knowledge or consent of bride. It's a planned capture, when families realized that bride might not give her consent to marriage. All planning were kept secret and on planned day girl would sent to fields or other village on pretext of work, the grooms friends were made aware of bride location and as planned they forcefully capture bride. There might be resentment among the bride's family, but with agreed payment of amount is paid or ritual performed all matter get settled (Raha 1987). The other unique feature is that type of arrangement decides the type of marriage that may be polyandrous or monogamous.

The origin and practice of polyandry in Kinnaur: The polyandry was practiced in Kinnaur since ages as social norms and traditions. The aspects of the polyandry practiced in kinnaur are slightly different to fraternal polyandry practiced in other parts of the world. Polyandry was existed in past and it is continuing in present as social norms. The existence of polyandry in Kinnaur in past is supported by the observation of Gerard "Polyandry as I have before observed, is frequent,' in the middle of 19 th century, in a Book 'Narrative of the journey from Counpore to

Boorendo, Pass in Himalyan Mountains, vols. I & II, London.’[Lloyd, Gerad, A 1846]. In the Indian Himalayas, where polyandry is commonly combined with polygyny, the beneficial consequences identified include less land fragmentation, diversification of domestic economic activities, and lower rates of population growth (Chandra, 1987; Majumdar 1962; Parmar 1975).

Scholars have also argued that this system, commonly termed polygynandry, facilitates adjusting the household workforce to the needs of dependents and to the available resource base. Polyandry can be defined simply as that form of marriage wherein a woman has more than one husband at a time. If the husbands are necessarily brothers, the polyandry is fraternal. (Gough 1959; Prince Peter 1963.)

Origin of polyandry in Kinnaur has various aspects, mythological, demographical, ecological, economical and sociological. The origin of polyandry is having traces to Mahabharata mythology, as it was believed that Pandavas were in Kinnaur when they were under exile. Princess Draupadi believed to married five brothers i.e Pandavas who were brothers. The Kinnauras were inspired from pandvas and great admirer of their deeds (Mazumdar, 1955). The Kinnauras have followed practice of marrying brothers. Such a marriage practiced in kinnaur is known as fraternal polyandry, sharing of wife in common among real brothers ((Raha & Coomar 1988). Until recently most of research done on polyandry or other related issues various scholars have expressed different view points on origin and existence of polyandry. Some view are linked to skewed sex ration, female infanticides, prevention of inheritance of property among brothers and division of land, high bride price, social security and avoidance of risk factor, poverty. The reason and occurrence of polyandry vary across society independent existence of similar or dissimilar geological and climatic condition. Means polyandry practiced in Himalayan region i.e Tibet, Nepal and Kinnaur are different to great extent. This assumption is supported by assertion of Goldstein, ‘there is no reason to assume that similar institution must have the same function or need to be produced by the same concentration of casual factors.

The most common viewpoints expressed on polyandry are linking it to sex ratio. “Polyandry in the Himalayas” Parmar, linked polyandry to skewed sex ratio but Kapadia (1955) held contrary view that sex disparity is not necessarily give rise to polyandry. It is worth to note that Kinnaur have balanced sex ratio and many other societies have low sex ratio but not practising polyandry. As per Census 2011, there are 7478 women in age group 18 to 29, have not married unmarried women are considered asset. Un married women also practicing Zoomohood (budhist nun) . The researcher connecting polyandry to sex ratio is not correct when we looked polyandry in Kinnauri perspective. Moreover the Census data on Sex ratio depicts the declining sex ratio, if the finding of researcher are correct than the polyandry must have increasing with decreasing sex ratio.

One of the most relevant factors contributing to polyandry in Kinnaur i.e Geo- Ecological and related Economic factors. In past kinnaras have trade links with Tibet and mostly are Agro pastoralist. Land holding were smalls and not so fertile. They have to be dependent on any gain from pastorals’ like wool, milk and meat. Bartar trade with Tibet also contributing to their income. But these activity were some time causing risk to life. To have more source of incomes families preferred to have united members with division of labour, few member accompanying the pastoral activity or trade activity and few are in home for activity related to agriculture. These situation forced society to cooperate with each other and earn all together to make their life self sufficient. The role of economic factors in polyandry have been acknowledge by researcher like Chandra;1974, Mazumdar, 1963; Prince Peter, 1963. The socio, economic conditions of the people of Kinnaur have been illustrated in very precise and concrete manner, depicting true picture by Ramesh Chandra is as under;

“Life in north-western Himalaya’s area is very tough. Though agriculture forms the basics of economy for dwellers of this region, no single economic pursuit can satisfy the need of the people for landholdings are small and of low fertility, hence many working hands are required to produced moderate yields; domestic animals are small and yield little milk, wool and other products. Recently introduced horticulture needs, orientation, skill and scientific knowledge to produce good result” (Chandra Ramesh, 1981) The ecological and social conditions of the area also supported the practice of polyandry in Kinnaur. Being hilly area, harsh weather conditions, scares land and limited fertility make it impossible to rely totally on land cultivation and which force the population to adopt a system which resulted in generation of more income, preventing land fragmentation and

increased labour work force to work in fields and to pursue other profession which help in securing and improving live hood of family.

The Punjab State Gazetteer, Vol. VIII, Shimla Hills State 1910, Lahore (1911:15-6) indicates that economic sanctions cemented the practice: “polyandry was in former days directly encouraged by the State through penalties exacted on partition”. The rule of inheritance, according to which, “the eldest brother, after the death of his father, inherits the property” further discouraged any attempt from part of the other brothers to challenge the system. Further Kinnaur being agro-pastoral community, they are having trade link with Tibet and also moved away with flocks most of time. Both these situation resulted in risk of life to members accompanying these profession and stay away from home. This also resulted in need of practice of polyandry. These condition which supported the practice and prevalence of polyandry in Kinnaur finding its support in the work of Westermarck (1926), who was the first to turn to synchronic explanations, identified a set of “co-existing conditions, or predictors for polyandry, including high sex ratios at birth, resource limitations, geographical circumscription, and prolonged absences of husbands from home.

In high-altitude Kinnaur, where land is scarce and landholding sizes are generally small, fragmentation of the land is to be avoided. As the Kinnauris abide by patrilineal and patrilocal social structure, inheritance of land and other property is divided equally amongst brothers (Tiwari, 2001). Therefore, fraternal polyandry was practiced to retain familial ancestral property, mainly in the form of land and animals, while avoiding land fragmentation between male siblings (Crook & Crook, 1988; Tiwari, 2008).

Type of Marriage Practice: Marriage practiced varies across, regions, religions and cultures. However the role and purpose of marriage is almost same all around the world. Unlike in most of other parts in country, a small hilly tribal district in the State of Himachal Pradesh draws attentions of sociologist, thinkers/ researchers who are keen to study marriage and other aspects related to this social institution, for the reason of having practiced polyandry. Monogamy is no doubt most dominant marriage type among the Kinnaura these days but in past polyandry was prevalent in large population of Kinnaura. Beside polyandry and monogamy in some cases polygyny and polygynandry was also prevalent. The polygynandry in Kinnaur seems to be the outcome of the traditional polyandrous set up.

Change in marriage practice and breakup of the polyandrous household:

With the passage of time marriage practice in a family keep on changing as per their need and requirement. They are having complex marital history. During interaction with respondents, many interesting points have been learnt and came out. One of the respondent narrated a story of changing marriage practice occurred in her life as under;

Case study

“Chhering (name changed) a respondent in her sixties, married in a family of four brothers, after some years, brother no 2 and brother no 1 decided to break away from polyandrous marriage. Soon after separation brother no 1 captured a local women named Gyan Devi and both brother 1 & 2 started to live in a polyandrous marriage with her. After some time, brother no 2 captured 2 nd sister of Gyan Devi, named Ram Devi and created a polygynandrous home. Brother no 2 was pastoral and love to wander and most of time away from home. When it was time for brother no 2 to winter pastures, Gyan Devi agreed to accompany him, thus created a temporary monogamous union. Soon after few year brother no 1 started affair with Kala Devi youngest sister of both Gyan Devi and Ram Devi, and join polygynous union with brother no 1. The household became a joint family household with one polyagynous unit and one monogamous unit. While Chhering continued her polyandrous relationship with brother no 3 & 4 in separate house hold. The above narration depicts a very complex marital history of a household, wherein brothers initially married in common marriage with single wife resulted in polyandrous marriage. Later on due to some un-explained reasons they separated and created a first polyandrous union and then polygynandrous union then monogamous and polygynous union. This kind of complex marriage system develops conflict among family members and other reasons for the conflicts are women giving special attention to one husband and ignoring others ,eldest husband or any other

husband has more rights ,discriminating children on the biological father and sociological fathers etc. Thus it is seen that present day Kinnaur the polyandrous household are gradually breaking up from many reasons.

Persistence and Decline of polyandry in kinnaur:

As earlier discussed that polyandry is losing its ground and declining and the dominant marriage practiced is monogamy and polyandry is a old social norms followed by many even these days. With passage of time, there have been changes taken place in past social norms. Social Norms related to polyandry is also changing a lot. There have been a cases where the respondents though accepted the polyandry system as a result of social pressure of society in general and family pressure in particular. Means there are cases wherein respondents are in polyandry against their will or preference. This could result in weakening of polyandry as social norms to flourish and grow. This institutions is weakening due to various reason ,but there are the factors which still holding this practice and responsible for the persistence of this system.

Case study

The name of the respondents whose experience share below have been changed for sake of privacy and confidentiality.

“Tanzin, a polyandrous respondent in her forties share her experience that she was in college at Rampur, where most of the Kinnauri student prefers for higher education. She met a young boy from neighboring village, customs and dialects were same, so they became closer. They decided to marry and consent of family was sought. Her family told that marriage talks with some other boys are in already process and so family disapproves their relation. Later on both decided to run away and thought parents would agreed to their marriage. When they went boys home after getting married, a strange situation appears and family proposes unacceptable condition before her, that she had to marry other brother too as this is marriage practiced in their family for generations. To making decision was toughest decision of my life which some time I regret. Finally I had no option left but agree to the condition of family and married other two brothers of my husbands. Rituals were performed as per customs and I became a common wife to three brothers.”

Accepting polyandry due to social pressure, family pressure or some other reasons have weaken the institution with the spread of education, modernization, better communication and transport system, new legislation, immigration of non polyandrous people from he plains are the factors responsible for the decline of polyandry. Though few of the present generations still going with this age old practice by their own reasons, most of the present generation feel ashamed of this system. Now days except few, people want to discard this system. Cash and market economy is no doubt another important reason for the decline and degeneration of certain customary cultural traits. The increased apple production leads shifting of focus to cash crop from traditional crop. The diversified source of live hood started declining and losing its importance to apple cash crop and people no longer rely on community pool resources. They are now not dependent totally on live hood activity e.g. pastoral life style, crossing mountains to trade with Tibet

The respondents expressing other response also share a strange viewpoint, since polyandry is considered illegal as it violate Act related to marriage, but practiced in Kinnaur as local customs. Now days younger generations entered in polyandry system but reluctant to disclose about their being in polyandry marriage, but wives are educated and clever, so they entered boys in the name of each husband, so that in event of break up from polyandry by any co-husband, the kids get share in property. In old days people were simple and feel proud to follow customs, but now days younger generation feel shy to disclose this type of arrangement, which they were actually having. From the above it is seen that polyandry is existed in Kinnaur since ages, though the various socio- economic factors, over a period of time changed institute of marriage. Unlike in past now people are more focused on having nuclear family and there is a drastic shift in practice of polyandry to monogamy. These changing circumstances may have cause decline in its practice, but could not diminish it. The reason of its persistence even in these changing circumstances was ascertained. Some of the common observation of the respondents are summarized as under;

“Polyandry a social norms and families wish to fulfill social norms, therefore they try to convince their children to continue the same. Only few agreed and adopt this system that too with privacy and condition of freedom to marry” extent, according to changing circumstances which suited mostly to family. “Polyandry family holding sizeable portion of land and earning good income and very well off. Monogamous family who have fragmented land and less source of income, some time make them think about polyandry and some also practice to prevent partition of land and earn more income”

“With increased apple orchard income, some family who’s male members are in Govt Jobs, needs more workforce who looked after orchard permanently. Though the daily wage labour are available, but they need some family member to guide them. To keep family united and source of income united, some family even engaged in this type of arrangement one brother at orchard, other at home or job. Earning from multiple resources”. Above stated are the general reasons expressed by most of the respondents when discussed about its persistence in kinnaur. During the discussion with a monogamy respondent, one of important aspect that might be the reason for persistence of polyandry, which is illustrated as under;

Case Study

“we are five brother, eldest two brothers were in polyandry and both are Govt Employee and place of posting are in different city. Wife mostly lives with elder spouse. Both spouses have son from common wife. Elder spouse and sister-in-law had affair for some time and they got married with consent of common wife. The elder spouse had son with new wife also. After some time of birth, younger sister learnt her sister is clever and entered one son in the name of elder spouse and presumed that in case of property division, her son would get only half portion of the his father share. Getting of less share in property, younger wife of elder brother, planned to keep other brothers in polyandry. Respondent being one among brothers refused to enter in polyandrous marriage. Out of remaining three brothers, third number brother a pastoralist in past agreed to be in polyandry as he was not married in late thirties. Younger wife by doing this make his son gets equal share of property, as sons of elder sister would get. The elder sister came to know about this arrangement, she feel hearted and she also offered the respondent to enter in polyandrous marriage, but refused to do so. She convinces the 4 th brother youngest one to be in polyandry marriage. Both sisters turned against each other for property. The want of more property forced monogamous family turn out to polyandrous no other reasons, but for inheriting more property. Both sister denying such king of marital arrangement and not acknowledging it publically. This kind of polyandrous union exists to great extent, who are practicing this for inheritance of property but not accepting it publically. There are no legitimate records/ information, where any details of polyandrous family were required to be maintained. All information about them is gathered from secondary sources or indirect source. Most of household though were in polyandry actually but refused any such type of marriage practiced by them. Therefore we have to assumed everything whatever we get through interview schedule and discussion as true to their face value, without going deep or questioning the authenticity of response. The most of the respondent agreed that polyandry entail economic benefits in terms of income, land and property inheritance and accumulated income from various sources. Raising of children is easy as they could provided better economic opportunity as well as social security. Polyandry is a better option with only two co- husbands as it is easier to handle two. On demerits of polyandry some expressed that wife have face multiple personality of co-husbands without expressing of partiality. Disagreement and jealous among co-husband bound to happen, prone to easy break up eldest husband to bear the cost of child born out of polyandrous union in case one of co-husband break away. Co-husband away from home is not enjoying marital relation so much as one who stays with wife at home, do not enjoy children and wife gets old. These are the broad parameters which supporting practice of polyandry on one hand and negating its practice on other hand. It is a deep rooted social phenomenon, which having its pros and crones, it would be practiced by the families as long as this practice meet out their economical, social, mental and physiological needs.

Conclusion: Every society evolve and develops social institution as per their needs. Therefore the same social institutions have different role and structure when we come across different society. Marriage and family is one of the oldest social institutions, which influences society in general and individuals in particular to great extent. Marriage and family is changing rapidly with changing time and other changing social scenario. One of such changes in marriage system we could found in Kinnaur a tribal district in State of Himachal Pradesh. Though the monogamy marriage practice dominant in Kinnaur, a unique and rare marriage customs practiced known as polyandry (common marriage) in Kinnaur. Unlike other parts, Kinnauras have unique customs of marriage and forms of marriage. When we see covertly, we find only two types of marriage monogamy and polyandry. However during the field visit and discussion with respondents, it came out that how a polyandrous union creates monogamy, polygyny and some times polygynandry. With modernizations and spread of education, lots of changes have been taken place. Now people choose to marry In monogamous union in maximum cases baring few exception. It has also found that many respondents, express their willingness for polyandry marriage. There reasons of changing preference have it own advantage and disadvantages. Such as polyandrous households have undivided land, diversified income source, good labour force, etc. which attracting some people and responsible for the persistence of polyandry in Kinnaur.

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