



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

People's perceptions on changing of caste trends in the tribal society: An empirical study of Pooh and Kalpa Blocks of District Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Socio-cultural ambience is a set of beliefs, customs and behavior that exists within a society. It consists of traits linked with human relationships and their impact of social attitudes and cultural values of a society. These aspects govern how an individual is linked with a society. The socio-cultural milieu refers to the situation or surroundings in which a person survives, together with socio-cultural aspects of life. It shapes, influences, changes and modifies a society and comprises of social traditions, faiths and beliefs, education level and moral standards of people.

Index Terms - Beliefs, Change, Mathas, Lactas, Braskan, Chhirba, Galong and Khangsar

INTRODUCTION

The fundamental beliefs of a particular society tend to be inflexible and it is difficult to modify or change the core values, however, with the passage of time, and impact of modernization and globalization, these values and beliefs are undergoing transformation. The word 'change' refers to transformation. Socio-cultural transition means change in socio-cultural attributes of a society and tribal society is no exception to this. Cultural aspects indicate the mutually shared values, ideas and symbols that are linked with the pattern of social interactions existing in a society. Socio-cultural change is a universal process. All societies are subject to the course of transformation, which is an intricate phenomenon. This involves change in social structure over a period of time. In context of contemporary world, society is not stationary and the social, political, economic and cultural transformations occur gradually. It involves the complex interaction of physical setting, culture, political, economic and religious change. However, the socio-cultural transformation has created awareness about the developmental issues, prospects and challenges in a modernized manner. The socio-cultural transformation is influenced by modernization, urbanization and globalization. An effort has been made during the study to evaluate the changing socio-cultural milieu of tribal society and the same has been presented in the following pages. Tribal society has been studied in context of changing social structure, socio-economic and cultural variables.

SOCIAL SYSTEM OF TRIBAL SOCIETY

The word 'system' denotes a systematic arrangement, an inter-connection of components. In an organization, every component has a fixed place and role to play. Talcott Parsons^[1] (1951) gave the concept of 'social system' in sociology, which indicates the relationship among essential components of a structure based on functional relations. At the same time, the kinship links tribal life with society. Kinship, is not merely a principle of social organisation, it is a division of labour and dissemination of authority and privileges.

¹ Parsons, T. (1951). *The Social System*. England: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, which is one of the tribal districts of the state, and was the universe of the study. District Kinnaur is divided into three blocks, i.e. Kalpa, Pooh and Nichar. Out of the three blocks, two blocks, namely Kalpa and Pooh, were selected for investigation. The reason for selecting the said blocks was that maximum transition has taken place in these two blocks. There are 24 Panchayats in Pooh block and 23 Panchayats in Kalpa block. Out of the total number of Panchayats, 10 percent of the Panchayats was randomly selected from each block, i.e., three from Pooh block and three from Kalpa block.

UNIVERSE AND SAMPLE OF STUDY

To ensure that the households from each Panchayats are represented equally, the method of random sampling was adopted. This helped in gathering a clear version of adequate number of households from selected Panchayats. One respondent was interviewed from the selected household.

In order to ensure the participation of females, there were 50 percent male and 50 percent female respondents. For having a reasonable sample size, 10 percent of the respondents were drawn from the selected Panchayats of each block. Hence, out of the total 1161 households of selected Panchayats from Kalpa Block, 117 households were randomly chosen for the study. While, out of total 872 households of selected Panchayats from Pooh Block, 88 households were selected randomly for the study.

In all, 205 households were selected for the study. Thus, in total, there were 205 respondents from both the blocks. Besides this, the knowledgeable elderly people, folk healers, priests, Buddhist monks, elderly women, traditional birth attendants, etc., were consulted/ interviewed for gathering the information on traditional healthcare systems and socio-cultural milieu of the study area.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study followed descriptive research design, wherein the effort was made to analyse:

- The changing socio-cultural milieu of tribal society, and

Being a descriptive study, it was a fact-finding investigation supplemented with adequate interpretations. Facts regarding the problem have been quantified along with qualitative description. Comparison of opinions expressed by the respondents remained the part of the study. Finally, a methodical procedure for collection and analysis of data has been laid down to pursue the study in an organized manner.

SOURCES AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

For the accomplishment of the objectives laid down for the study, both primary and secondary data have been utilized. The data collected has been compiled in a computerized database to draw relevant information. The recorded data has been analysed using the Excel program. The data generated during the study has been used to calculate frequencies and percentages. The data has been analysed by taking into account the Focus Group Discussion (FGD), interviews and observations. The survey data has been used to assess the traditional knowledge, linkages between traditional knowledge and well-being components of tribal society and to find out potential solutions to uphold the traditional knowledge.

TOOLS OF ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Analysis and interpretation are the integral component of research process. The goal of analysis is to sum up the collected data so as to provide answers to the questions posed during in the research. Interpretation helps in establishing explanatory concepts. The data collected through various method of research has been edited, classified, tabulated and analysed methodically for proposing recommendations. The data collected has been analysed and interpreted with the help of computer aided software, appropriate theories and models. Graph, diagrams and photographs are used to elucidate the results. Before going for analysis, the collected data, which was scattered and unorganized, has been arranged properly. Data processing involved:

- Categorization of data
- Editing
- Coding and classification
- Tabulation

Chi-square test has been used for data interpretation.

The Chi-square test statistic is:

f_o = observed frequency in a particular cell

f_e = expected frequency in a particular cell

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{\text{all cells}} \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

Observed frequencies = frequencies from sample data

If there is a large difference between observed and expected frequencies, the two variables are not likely independent. They are probably related. If there are small or no differences between observed and expected frequencies, the two variables are likely independent. They are probably not related. Chi-Square ranges from 0 to infinity (∞). A 0 means the two variables are completely independent. Chi-square tests can be used when there is a categorical independent variable and a categorical dependent variable. A Chi Square test with two categories will have 1 degree of freedom.

CHANGING CASTE SYSTEM IN KINNAUR

As elsewhere in the country, the typical caste structure was noticed in the Panchayats. In all surveyed Panchayats, respondents belonged to the category of scheduled tribe. Within the category of scheduled tribe, based on the caste, there is a hierarchal grouping of society. Population in all Panchayats is composed of two different communities namely the *Kanets* and *Jads* or the *Rajputs*, in addition to scheduled caste people. In most of the Panchayats, there is separate inhabitation area meant for scheduled caste people, which is usually secluded from the main settlement. The *Kanets* or *Rajputs* hold highest place in caste hierarchy and a few of them who have opted for monasticism and become lamas or monks, even officiate the religious ceremonies of other caste groups. The scheduled caste people stand next to *Rajputs* in social scale. There are certain sub-divisions of caste in surveyed Panchayats, for instance, in *Kanam* the *Rajputs* have further sub-divisions among themselves, as- *Lactas*, *Mathas*, *Surpan*, *Braskan*, *Pranis*, *Chhirba*, *Galong* and *Khangsar*. These offshoots are involved in different jobs, for example, *Mathas* act as oracles of local deity.

Most of the *Rajputs* are either engaged in horticulture activities or employed in government service. Though the Panchayats are inhabited by scheduled caste communities, and each community has a traditional caste profession, however, most of them declare that they are horticulturists first, and anything else only afterwards. The main scheduled caste communities in these Panchayats are those of *Chamangs* or *Kolies*. They are mainly involved in leather works and weaving. The other caste group is that of *Domangs* and *Ores*. *Domangs* are professionally blacksmiths and goldsmiths, while *Ores* are carpenters and masons. *Domangs* are higher than *Chamangs* in social hierarchy. The folk musicians of local deities also belonged to scheduled caste.

In spite of difference in social ranking, people of different castes live in harmony, though the scheduled castes people have to face certain constraints. The people of scheduled castes living in these Panchayats have restriction in inter-dining, inter-caste marriage and entry to upper caste houses. However, there is no occupational restriction, and there is no check on use of land or water sources. Though, the lower caste people are not exploited but there is separate living area and untouchability is still practiced.

TABLE 1: PEOPLE'S PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE REGARDING SOCIAL STATUS.

Statement	Kalpa Block						Pooh Block						Total					
	Agree		No opinion		Disagree		Agree		No opinion		Disagree		Agree		No opinion		Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Restriction on inter-dining	117	100	0	0	0	0	88	100	0	0	0	0	205	100	0	0	0	0
Ceiling on inter-caste	115	98.29	2	1.71	0	0	88	100	0	0	0	0	203	99.03	2	0.97	0	0
Check on entrance in upper caste	109	93.17	8	6.83	0	0	87	98.86	0	0	1	1.14	196	95.61	8	3.91	1	0.48
Restriction on using same water resources	1	0.85	89	76.07	27	23.08	1	1.13	11	12.5	7	86.37	2	0.97	100	48.79	10	50.24
Religious restriction	83	70.95	32	27.35	2	1.70	82	93.18	2	2.27	4	4.55	165	80.49	34	16.59	6	2.92
Separate living area meant for lower caste people	95	81.20	20	17.09	2	1.71	81	92.05	3	3.41	4	4.54	205	100	0	0	0	0
Practice of Untouchability	99	84.62	18	15.38	0	0	88	100	0	0	0	0	187	91.22	18	8.78	0	0

Lower caste people are not allowed to enter the temple of local deity, but, they can go to monastery. The local deity visits any home, irrespective of caste, for performing rituals linked with birth and death. The opinion of people on caste structure was gathered using a set of statements. All the respondents were of the view that still there is restriction on inter-dining. 99.03 percent of the respondents opined that there is ceiling on inter-caste marriage (**Table 1**). Although the movement of people to other districts for education and jobs is changing the outlook, however, the change in the institution of marriage is slow. Marriages are still performed within same caste groups. Earlier, the inter-caste marriages were strictly banned in tribal society but, the education and modernization are weakening such constraints. According to 95.61 percent respondents, there is check on entry to upper caste houses, while 3.91 percent respondents gave no opinion in this regard. To assess the level of significance of changing socio-cultural milieu of tribal society in present scenario, chi-square test was run for different variables related to existing and transforming social structure, social beliefs, institution of village gods, fairs and festivals and developmental scenario. People's opinion and attitude regarding the social status was assessed on three point Likert scale for following variables:

- Restriction on using same water resources by scheduled caste people
- Restrictions on participating in religious functions by scheduled caste people
- Separate Leaving area meant for lower caste people

The significance level has been checked at 0.01 levels. Table 2 depicts the results of chi-square. The results reveal that there is a significant difference between the two blocks, i.e., Kalpa and Pooh on the variable restriction on using same water resources by scheduled caste people, as the chi-square value has turned out to be significant at 0.01 level (81.68, $p < 0.01$). It shows that 76 respondents from Pooh block disagreed with the statement that there is restriction on using same water resources as compared to 27 respondents from Kalpa block. Thus, there is no restriction on use of water resources. Results further reveals that out of total 205 respondents, 89 respondents from Kalpa block were indifferent to this statement as compared to 11 respondents from Pooh block.

Table 2: Chi square test for different variables linked with social status

Restriction on using same water resources by scheduled caste people						Significance at 0.01
Block	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	df	Chi Square	Significant 81.68, $p < 0.01$
Kalpa	1	89	27	2	81.68	
Pooh	1	11	76			
Restrictions on attending religious functions for scheduled caste people						
Kalpa	83	32	2	2	23.51	Significant 23.51, $p < 0.01$
Pooh	82	2	4			
Separate Living area meant for lower caste people						
Kalpa	95	20	2	2	10.45	Significant 10.45, $p < 0.01$
Pooh	81	3	4			

As far as the habitation is concerned, there is separate living area meant for lower caste people and the results for same are significant at 0.01 level (10.45, $p < 0.01$). 80.48 percent respondents shared that there is religious restriction, while 16.59 percent hesitated in expressing their view for the same. 91.22 percent of the respondents opined that untouchability is still practiced and remaining respondents were reluctant in sharing their views.

In contemporary era, modernization has deeply affected the caste system and thus, it is slowly losing its rigidity. The change is noticed with respect to the caste based occupational structure. In the past, there used to be specific occupation for every caste. Nowadays, the people of scheduled caste are holding high administrative posts. In the past, caste system use to impose certain limitations on social habits, for instance, inter-dining. But, modern education, conveyance and communication have completely changed such restrictions. Presently, the members of different castes sit and eat together. The scheduled caste people are gradually adopting the lifestyle of elite group.

The government is providing equal rights and prospects to scheduled caste people in socio-economic and political spheres comparable to higher caste people. As a result of this, the condition of scheduled caste people has improved. Since, caste system is a social institution, its features are undergoing change and the relationships between different sections of society are becoming more relaxed though not entirely.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are significant for restrictions on scheduled caste people for participating in religious functions at 0.01 level (23.51, $p < 0.01$) as 83 respondents from Kalpa and 82 respondents from Pooh block agreed that there is limits for people belonging to scheduled caste category to attend the religious functions organized in temple premises. They can be present in such occasions, but can neither be in contact with the deity nor can enter the sanctum sanctorum of temple.

In the post-independence period, there have been several additions to concepts relating to caste formation. One important concept is that of 'dominant caste' presented by Dumont (Dumont, 1970)². Another significant addition to sociological study of Indian caste system is the concept of 'sanskritization' which argues how the previously, non-sanskritic social groups came under the influence of the "greater culture" (Srinivasan, 1989)³. Sociological studies undertaken have provided for the theoretical and conceptual basis to the study of social hierarchies in the pre-modern period.

The caste system is the basis of social stratification, but due to the impact of present-day secular values, development and education, this system of stratification has disorganized and the same was noticed surveyed Panchayats.

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³ Srinivasan, M (1989). *The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization and Other Essays*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.