

## Empowerment and Position of Gaddis Women in Ravi River Basin in Himachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

For the indigenous community, empowerment of women is critical to the development of their society and the Women have no right to inheritance as per the traditional laws. The women works equally with her husband in agricultural work expect for pouching. They also take part in all social, religious and ritual activities. More than 90% of Gaddis women are Empowered to spend money, independently without seeking permission from male, members of the family, and also, to access health care services for themselves and their children. Girls, as a daughter, enjoyed full freedom like those of boys and one could notice no discrimination between boys and girls. In fact, the Gaddis woman has been expert in all these. The educated and employed wife's status is better than uneducated and unemployed wife's. Although, Gaddis society is patriarchal, the family revolves around the mother. Women play a central role in the family, providing labor for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household (L.S. Thakur, 2002).

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## INTRODUCTION

The empowerment of women is critical to the development of their society and the Women have no right to inheritance as per the traditional laws. The women works equally with her husband in agricultural work expect for pouching. She traditionally did not work outside the four walls of the house but recently the educated girls have taken up jobs in various occupations and are working outside the house and adding to their family income. They also take part in all social, religious and ritual activities. More than 90% of Gaddis 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.

In Gaddis society the women are placed in a far higher position and in any other society of the plain in Ravi River basin in Himachal Pradesh. In Bharmour and Holi agriculture production is limited due to scarcity of cultivable land, shorter sowing season, absence of irrigation and severe winter condition and due to this they compensate the agriculture deficit with pastoral practices. With the passage of time the women conditions are becoming better due to literacy and job in entire basin. Girls, as a daughter, enjoyed full freedom like those of boys and one could notice no discrimination between boys and girls. They have been as active as boys and had equal status.

There is a popular proverb among the Gaddis depicting the true status of girls whose English version is; if the sisters or daughters are happy, they are equal to Deity worth worshipping and if they are angry, they are like bad and harmful souls. As a wife the conditions of Women are not similar in Ravi basin in Himachal Pradesh. In this basin the literate and employee Women status is higher than illiterate and unemployed Women due to dependence on Husband. As she used to get training in agricultural work, spinning and knitting, making meals and entertaining guests from her parents, she cannot have any problem to tackle after marriage in her in-laws household. In fact, the Gaddis woman has been expert in all these.

The educated and employed wife's status is better than uneducated and unemployed wife's. Although, Gaddis society is patriarchal, the family revolves around the mother. Women play a central role in the family, providing labor for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household (L.S. Thakur, 2002). All daughters-in-law had a respectable place in a Gaddis family though the eldest one enjoyed special and higher position. Mother-in-law enjoyed a high position in the family and she supervised all the domestic affairs. She was busy in spinning and weaving at home and also looks after the domestic animals.

## DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The present study area is based on secondary data. Data has been collected from Census data of 2001 and 2011 of Chamba and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh. The study area map was prepared with the help of ArcGis software. This study was guided by the different methodological steps. For compilation tabulation, mapping and analysis of data for cartographic techniques were pressed into service.

### Study Area

The Ravi River Basin in Himachal Pradesh, Which lies in Kangra and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh, has been chosen for the present study. Geographically Ravi River (H.P.) Basin area is located between  $32^{\circ} 11' 30''$  to  $33^{\circ} 01' 5''$  North latitudes and  $75^{\circ}48'$  to  $77^{\circ}45'$  East Longitudes. The tract is mountainous, covered by the Dhauladhar and Pirpanjal ranges. The elevation varies from 559 meters to 5563 meters. On the other side the climate of the Ravi River Catchment area may be described as moderate summer and very cold winter. The precipitation is received in both during rainy season and winter season, but in high altitude an area in winter season receives precipitation in the form of snow and in lower altitude area in the form of Rainfall from Monsoon winds as well as from Western Disturbance.

The highest monthly temperature is experienced in June and lowest below  $0^{\circ}\text{C}$  in January. The Ravi River has a total of 5451 sq. Kms. Catchment area and their total lengths are about 158 Kms. in H.P. The Ravi River originates in Bara Bhangal area of the Multhan Tehsil of Kangra. This River rises at the elevation of 4300 mts on the southern side of the mid Himalayas. It flows through Bara Bhangal, Bara Bansu and Chamba District. It flows in forms of Rapids in its initial reaches with boulders seen scattered in the bed of the River. The Ravi River in this reach flows in a gorge with a River bed slope of 1:185 feet per mile, and is mostly fed by snow. It is called Ravi after meeting two tributaries Tantgari and Badal in Bara Bhangal area of Kangra District. The main tributaries of Ravi River are Badal, Tantgari, Budhil, Tundah Nala, Chirchind Nala, Nai, Batog Nala, Saho Nala, Baira and Siul etc. It left Himachal at Khairi and enters in Punjab (Fig.1).

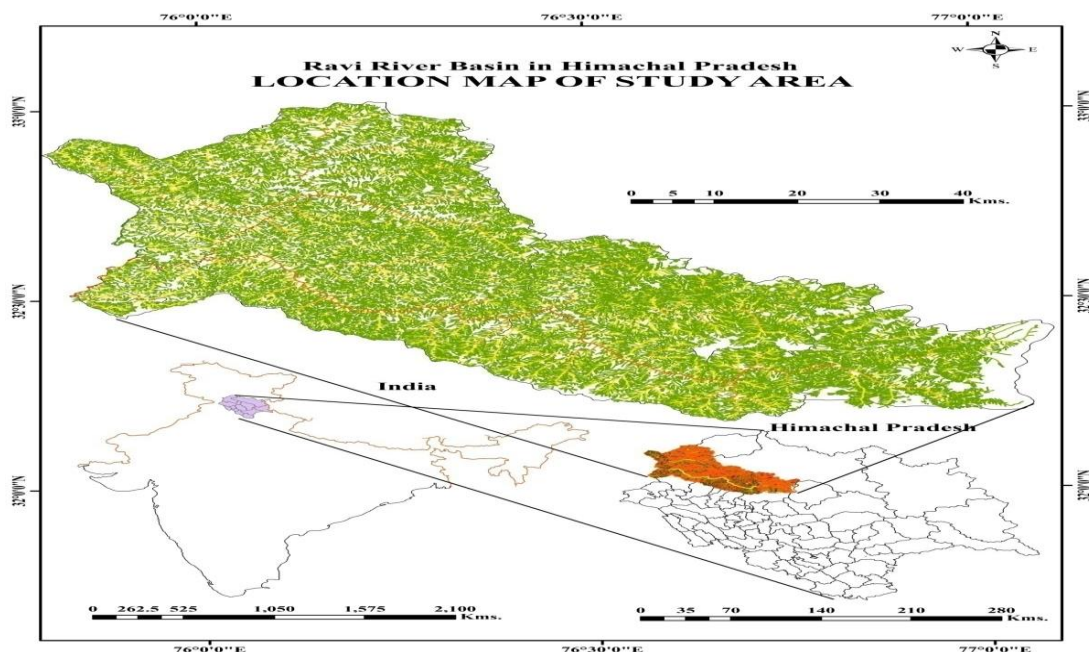


Figure 1 : Location Map of Study Area.

## ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

### *Empowerment and Decision Making.*

For the indigenous community, empowerment of women is critical to the development of their society. Women have no right to inheritance as per the traditional laws. Her social position is regarded as equal to that of the husband. She works equally with her husband in agricultural work except for pouching. She is also responsible for the collection of fuel and fodder, both for immediate use and for storing them for use in winter months. She traditionally did not work outside the four walls of the house but recently the educated girls have taken up jobs in various occupations and are working outside the house and adding to their family income. They also take part in all social, religious and ritual activities. Though girls' participation was limited traditionally to the casting to votes in elections, today they have started becoming more active and some have been nominated and members at the Block level.

In addition to all her work outside the house, she also attends to all the household chores, which include cooking food and looking after the children. In spite of the tremendous role of women as an indispensable part of the Gaddis economy, they do not have any decision making powers in family matters, though they do manage the family expenditure. During the field survey, Gaddis women in the middle age group were found to be not only educated but also free to express themselves on social matters. The social empowerment of Gaddis women was quite encouraging. More than 90% of Gaddis 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.

### *Position of Women*

To measure any society, the position of its women within that society is a definite indicator. In Gaddis society the women are placed in a far higher position and in any other society of the plain in Ravi River basin in Himachal Pradesh. This comes mainly from the economic need. In Bharmour and Holi agriculture production is limited due to scarcity of cultivable land, shorter sowing season, absence of irrigation and severe winter condition. To compensate the agriculture deficit Gaddis had to depend on pastoral practices. Presence of naturally rich grazing land facilitated pastoral practices and in pastoral pursuit people have to remain mobile and the male members of the family had to move with the flock. Due to the absence of male head of family, women with the help of children take care of the household cattle, pursuit's agricultural activities and fulfill other family requirements. But in others part of Ravi basin in H.P, the condition of women are different to Gaddis Women. With the passage of time the women conditions are becoming better due to literacy and job in entire basin.

### *As a Daughter*

Girls, as daughters, enjoyed full freedom like those of boys and one could notice no discrimination between boys and girls. They have been as active as boys and had equal status. The division of work in the households requires girls to

bring water, clean utensils, serve meals, cut grasses and help in agricultural work or weaving carpets or making woolen pullovers as the case may be. In contrast to girls, boys were required to collect wood, plough the fields, if they can, and help the father or elder brothers in business. Girls had never been considered any burden on parents. There is a popular proverb among the Gaddis depicting the true status of girls whose English version is; if the sisters or daughters are happy, they are equal to Deity worth worshipping and if they are angry, they are like bad and harmful souls. Thus, parents not only looked into their requirements for making them happy, but also tried their best to inculcate in them all the good qualities and capabilities required for hard life of a wife in their society. In other parts of basin the condition of daughters are also similar.

#### *As a Wife*

As a wife the conditions of Women are not similar in Ravi basin in Himachal Pradesh. In this basin the literate and employee Women status is higher than illiterate and unemployed Women due to dependence on Husband. Women occupied an important place among the Gaddis and they have been respected and given due regards as wives. However large quantum of there may be in the household, one did not think of acquiring second wife except rare cases where first wife has no issue. As she used to get training in agricultural work, spinning and knitting, making meals and entertaining guests from her parents, she cannot have any problem to tackle after marriage in her in-laws household. In fact, the Gaddis woman has been expert in all these. During her busy daily schedule, male members appreciated her for their work. As a wife, she had considerable freedom, even the important decisions about any family matters in the absence of male members, who used to be away in down markets for most of the time. She has considerable respect and regards as a mother in her family. She had been entrusted much the duty of upbringing of the children and had decisive role to play during the mate selection, as father alone could never arrange the marriage of the daughter. But in others part of this basin, the status of wife is different due to availability of male members in households. The educated and employed wife's status is better than uneducated and unemployed wife's.

#### *As a Mother*

Although, Gaddis society is patriarchal, the family revolves around the mother. Women play a central role in the family, providing labor for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household (L.S. Thakur, 2002). As a maiden she ensured a bride of her sibling brother, as a wife she is truly a partner of her husband, and as a mother she ensured proper development of her daughters and sons, and played a significant role in the family (V. Verma). They occupied a position of no less importance than men both in the domestic as well as in the wider social spheres. They are entitled to all the normal respects and privileges which a woman received elsewhere (Census of India, 1961). The main duty of a married woman is to run the household, cook food, to wash utensils, to take care of the family's earnings when entrusted to her custody and she is expected to work as per the instructions of her husband and mother-in-law or

any other elder (V. Verma). In others part of basin, role of mother is similar as that of Gaddis society.

*As a Daughter-in-law*

All daughters-in-law had a respectable place in a Gaddis family though the eldest one enjoyed special and higher position. She was called nuh who was in charge of kitchen. Though others daughter-in-law also assisted in cooking work. She invariably used to serve the meals to all the family members. With the advance in age, she could relegate these duties to younger ones. Most of the hill women of this basin are free of the restrictions of purdah and excessive modesty, but the Gaddis or Gaddis women seem to be particularly outgoing, friendly and full of self-confidence. The only exception is that in the presence of any of their older male in-laws. They immediately cover their heads, although she is the respectable position in the family. A married woman is regarded lucky and auspicious. She has to sit alongside her husband, when any puja or yajna or a marriage ceremony is performed in the house. All women freely participate in singing, dancing and merry making on occasions of joy and festivities (V. Verma). But in all others part of this basin there is no disparities in daughter-in-laws.

*As a Mother-in-law*

Mother-in-law enjoyed a high position in the family and she supervised all the domestic affairs. She was busy in spinning and weaving at home and also looks after the domestic animals. She was never in conflict with her daughter-in-law and invariably had good relations with them. She had been acting successfully as the head of the family enjoying all powers to take any decision on family matters. Leaving aside the domestic sphere, she is a co-worker with the male folks of her family. Her contribution to the family income did not lag behind in any case (Census of India, 1961). But widow occupied low status in comparison to married women as well as girls.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The women works equally with her husband in agricultural work expect for pouching. She traditionally did not work outside the four walls of the house but recently the educated girls have taken up jobs in various occupations and are working outside the house and adding to their family income. They also take part in all social, religious and ritual activities. More than 90% of Gaddis 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. In Gaddis society the women are placed in a far higher position. With the passage of time the women conditions are becoming better due to literacy and job in entire basin. Girls, as a daughter, enjoyed full freedom like those of boys and one could notice no discrimination between boys and girls.

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