



Gender Dynamics and Justice in Tribal Communities of Himachal Pradesh

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International.

ABSTRACT

This study examines gender justice within the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh, India. Tribal societies in this region have unique cultural practices and social structures that deeply influence gender roles and expectations. The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of these traditional frameworks on gender justice and to identify challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality in these communities. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with community members, including women and local leaders, with quantitative surveys to collect comprehensive data. Fieldwork was conducted in several tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh, ensuring a broad representation of different tribal groups and perspectives. The results reveal that while traditional practices often perpetuate gender inequality, such as restricted access to education and healthcare for women, there are also positive trends towards empowerment and change. Women's involvement in local governance and community decision-making is slowly increasing, driven by both internal advocacy and support from governmental and non-governmental organizations. In conclusion, despite significant progress towards gender justice in tribal communities Himachal Pradesh, substantial barriers remain. Efforts to promote gender equality must be sensitive to the unique cultural contexts of these communities to be successful.

INTRODUCTION

Tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh are rich in cultural diversity and unique traditions. These communities have distinct social structures that influence various aspects of life, including gender roles and relationships. The concept of gender justice, fair treatment and equal opportunities regardless of gender has gained global attention, but its application in tribal contexts remains underexplored. This study aims to understand the dynamics of gender justice in tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh, focusing on both the challenges and opportunities for achieving gender equality. Tribal societies in Himachal Pradesh, like many indigenous communities worldwide, are governed by traditional customs and norms. These norms often dictate the roles and responsibilities of men and women, sometimes leading to gender disparities. For instance, women in these communities may face restrictions on education, employment, and participation in community decision-making processes. Such restrictions can limit women's access to resources and opportunities, affecting their overall well-being and societal status.

Despite these challenges, there are also instances where traditional norms support gender equity. For example, certain tribes in Himachal Pradesh have matrilineal systems, where lineage and inheritance are traced through the female line, granting women significant power and respect in the community. This highlights the complexity of gender dynamics in these communities, where traditional practices can both hinder and promote gender justice. The purpose of this research is to delve into these complexities, examining how traditional gender roles impact women's lives and exploring avenues for promoting gender equality. This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues. Through interviews and surveys conducted with various stakeholders, including women, community leaders, and local authorities, the study seeks to capture diverse perspectives on gender justice.

The findings from this research contribute to the broader discourse on gender justice in tribal societies. They highlight both the progress made and the areas that require attention to ensure equitable treatment of all genders. Notably, the study reveals that while traditional practices often limit women's opportunities, there is a growing awareness and effort towards promoting gender equality. Programs aimed at improving women's access to education and healthcare as well as initiatives to increase women's participation in governance, are gaining traction. Understanding gender dynamics in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh is important for promoting gender justice. While traditional norms play a significant role in shaping gender roles, there is also potential for positive change. By recognizing the unique cultural contexts of these communities and working within them, policymakers and activists can effectively address gender disparities and promote a more just society.

Traditional Cultural Norms and Practices in the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh

In the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh, traditional cultural norms and practices significantly influence gender roles and gender justice. These norms typically assign specific roles to men and women, where men are often engaged

in activities outside the home, such as working in fields or participating in governance, while women are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family. This traditional division of labor can limit women's access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, as they are primarily seen as caregivers and homemakers. However, there is variation among different tribes. For instance, some tribes follow matrilineal systems, where lineage and inheritance are traced through the female line, granting women significant influence and respect within their communities. These cultural variations demonstrate that traditional norms can both hinder and support gender justice, depending on the specific practices and values of each tribe

Challenges Faced by women in Tribal Communities

Prioritization of Male Education: Traditional beliefs often prioritize the education of boys over girls, resulting in fewer educational opportunities for women and girls (Sharma, 2015). This gender bias in educational access limits women's ability to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for better job opportunities and economic independence.

Lack of Schools and Infrastructure: In many tribal areas, there are inadequate educational facilities and infrastructure. This scarcity of schools, especially at the higher education level, further restricts girls' access to quality education.

Limited Healthcare Facilities: Healthcare services in tribal areas are often insufficient and hard to access. This is particularly problematic for women, who may face specific health issues such as maternal health challenges. The lack of nearby healthcare facilities means that many women cannot receive timely medical care, which can lead to poor health outcomes.

Cultural Barriers: Cultural beliefs and practices sometimes discourage women from seeking healthcare, especially for reproductive and sexual health issues. This can be due to stigma or a lack of female healthcare providers.

Underrepresentation in Governance: Women in these communities are often underrepresented in local governance and community decision-making bodies. This lack of representation means that women's voices and concerns are less likely to be heard in discussions about community development and resource allocation.

Social and Cultural Constraints: Traditional gender roles often confine women to domestic spheres, limiting their participation in public life and decision-making processes. Women who do try to participate in governance or leadership roles may face resistance from both men and other women within the community.

Early Marriage: Early marriage is a common practice in many tribal communities, which often leads to girls dropping out of school and assuming domestic responsibilities at a young age. This not only limits their educational and career prospects but also affects their health and autonomy.

Domestic Workload: Women and girls are often burdened with a significant amount of domestic work, which limits the time they have for education, employment, and participation in community activities. This traditional

division of labor reinforces gender inequalities and limits women's opportunities for personal and professional growth.

These barriers collectively contribute to the ongoing challenges faced by women in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh, hindering their ability to achieve equal status and opportunities within their societies.

Initiatives to Promote Gender Equality in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh

Scholarships and Incentives: Various governmental and non-governmental organizations offer scholarships and financial incentives to encourage girls to attend school. These programs aim to reduce the financial burden on families and promote higher enrollment rates among girls.

Girls' Hostels and Safe Transportation: To address safety concerns and the lack of nearby schools, initiatives have been introduced to provide hostels for girls and safe transportation options. This helps ensure that girls can continue their education without interruption.

Mobile Health Clinics: Mobile health clinics are set up in remote tribal areas to provide essential healthcare services, including maternal and child healthcare. These clinics make healthcare more accessible for women who may not be able to travel long distances.

Health Education and Awareness: Programs aimed at educating women about health and hygiene, nutrition, and reproductive health are being implemented. These initiatives help women make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Skill Development and Vocational Training: Programs focused on skill development and vocational training are offered to women, helping them acquire skills in areas such as tailoring, handicrafts, and agriculture. This empowers women to start small businesses or find employment, thereby improving their economic status.

Microfinance and Self-Help Groups (SHGs): Microfinance schemes and the formation of self-help groups provide women with access to small loans and financial resources. These groups often engage in savings and credit activities, which enable women to invest in business ventures and become financially independent.

Women's Participation in Local Governance: Initiatives encourage women to participate in local governance and decision-making bodies, such as Panchayati Raj Institutions. Quotas and reservations for women in these institutions are in place to ensure their representation and active participation.

Leadership Training Programs: Leadership training programs are designed to equip women with the skills and confidence needed to take on leadership roles within their communities. These programs focus on public speaking, decision-making, and community organizing.

Legal Aid and Counseling: Programs provide legal aid and counseling services to women, helping them understand and exercise their legal rights. This includes awareness about laws related to domestic violence, property rights, and child marriage.

Community Workshops and Seminars: Workshops and seminars are conducted to educate the community about gender equality and the importance of women's rights. These sessions aim to challenge traditional gender norms and promote a more inclusive community mindset.

These initiatives and programs collectively aim to address the various barriers that women in tribal areas in Himachal Pradesh face, promoting gender equality and empowering women to improve their social and economic status.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Singh and Negi (2016) explored gender equality and women empowerment among Kinnauri tribal women in a social work perspective. It highlights the challenges faced by tribal women in terms of property rights and education, along with the efforts made by social activists and women associations to address these issues. Qualitative research methods such as case studies, focus group discussions, observations, and interviews were employed to gather data. A sample size of 40 respondents from District Kinnaur was selected, with 36 participants for focus group discussions and 4 tribal women for case studies. Field observations, photography, and qualitative measures were used to assess the status of Kinnauri tribal women and their living conditions. The research revealed that Kinnauri tribal women still face challenges in terms of property rights due to old customary laws, but there has been progress with increased education levels among tribal women. Despite improvements, tribal women continue to struggle with difficult living conditions, especially if they are working, as they have to manage household responsibilities along with their jobs. The study emphasizes the importance of education and awareness in empowering tribal women and promoting gender equality. Efforts should be made to implement legal reforms to ensure equal rights for tribal women in terms of property and marriage laws. The Himachal Pradesh High Court's judgment in June 2015, granting equal property rights to daughters, is seen as a significant step towards ending gender discrimination among Kinnauri tribal women. Education is identified as a crucial tool for uplifting tribal women and promoting their empowerment in the community.

Kapil and Kapil (2018) Socio-economic conditions encompass social, cultural, and economic resources, determining individuals' and groups' access to these resources and their relative value. It is crucial to understand the position of individuals or groups within a hierarchical social structure to analyze societal progress or stagnation. The study is descriptive, employing a systematic literature review methodology, collecting data from various secondary sources. Previous studies on socio-economic development in tribal and backward areas were thoroughly reviewed, studied, and analyzed to comprehend the current landscape. Households in rural areas with small land holdings supplemented their income by working as laborers, with the share of agricultural income increasing with the size of holdings. Weaker sections in rural areas faced challenges like a high dependency ratio, low literacy percentage, low income, high consumption expenditure, unemployment, and a high incidence of indebtedness in district Bilaspur. Future research should consider additional

factors to enhance the understanding of socio-economic development in tribal and backward communities. Extending the study to other states in India and conducting surveys on specific communities can empirically test the conceptual discussions on socio-economic development. The study systematically analyzed the socio-economic development of backward communities in tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh, shedding light on the existing literature.

Paray (2019) Empowerment for women in India requires a crosscutting approach that addresses the diversity of social structures governing women's lives. Identity politics in India plays a critical role in various social movements, such as the Dalit rights movement and tribal rights movement. The present study is based on secondary source data, including books, journals, newspapers, governmental reports, census reports, and websites. Only 46.7% of the female population in the study are employed, with 80% working as agricultural laborers and 11% being self-employed. Women's income significantly impacts their decision-making role and autonomy within households. Empowerment approaches for women should not only focus on providing services but also recognize the multiple layers of discrimination hindering their access to services. Economic self-independence through employment can empower women to make decisions and gain respect in society. Empowerment strategies for women in India must consider the complex social structures and discrimination they face, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach. Women's rights within social movements need more articulation to address inequalities and ensure inclusion in mainstream society.

Latha and Roja (2023) the authors focused on socio-economic and the health status of tribal women in paderu mandal of Vishakhapatnam district in Andhra Pradesh and found that there is a need for targeted interventions to improve the health outcomes of vulnerable populations. Tribal women in Paderu Mandal of Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh, face unique challenges due to their lower socioeconomic status and traditional values. The study aims to analyze the economic status, living conditions, and health status of tribal women to develop policies for rural improvement. A structured and pre-tested schedule was used to collect primary data from 193 women aged 19 to 49 in the Paderu ITDA division through random sampling. Structured interviews were conducted to gather data on the economic status, living conditions, and health status of the respondents. Education significantly impacts health outcomes, with literate respondents showing better personal health, reproductive health, and standard of living indices

Occupation plays a crucial role in determining health status, with cultivators having higher health index scores. Lower-income individuals are more health-deprived, emphasizing the need to improve access to resources and increase income levels. Targeted interventions should focus on improving health outcomes for vulnerable populations with lower incomes, including access to clean energy sources and health education campaigns. Policies aimed at enhancing the economic conditions of marginalized groups could have significant implications for public health. Improving access to resources and

increasing income levels can positively impact health outcomes, particularly for individuals in lower socioeconomic groups like farmers and agricultural workers. Access to clean energy sources can reduce indoor air pollution, leading to improved overall health and well-being for communities.

Sahu et al. (2024) focuses on the financial empowerment of tribal women in India, highlighting the challenges they face in achieving economic independence and inclusive development. The study aims to explore the complex relationship between economic justice programs and sustainable approaches to achieve inclusive growth. The research employs a qualitative approach to investigate the economic landscape for indigenous women, considering societal, economic, and cultural factors that influence their financial well-being. Data collection involves in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of existing literature to understand the barriers and opportunities for tribal women in India. Findings reveal the multifaceted challenges faced by tribal women in accessing financial resources and participating in economic activities. The study underscores the importance of addressing identified barriers to enable tribal women to actively shape their financial destinies and contribute to community prosperity. Collective efforts from governmental, nongovernmental, and community stakeholders are essential to pave the way for economic equality and resilience for tribal communities. Aligning social interventions and economic policies can empower tribal women not only economically but also socially, psychologically, and politically. The financial empowerment of tribal women is crucial for inclusive development, requiring sustained efforts and a holistic approach to overcome existing challenges and promote economic justice initiatives.

Despite ongoing efforts to promote gender equality, there is a significant research gap in understanding the specific challenges faced by women in the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh. Much of the existing literature focuses broadly on gender issues in India but does not adequately address the unique cultural and social contexts of these tribal areas. Traditional norms and practices in these communities play a crucial role in shaping gender roles, yet there is limited research exploring how these norms specifically impact women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Another gap is the lack of detailed studies on the effectiveness of current initiatives and programs aimed at empowering women in these tribal areas. While some programs exist, there is insufficient data on how well they are working and what improvements can be made. For example, there is little comprehensive information on how educational initiatives are impacting girls' school enrollment and retention rates, or how healthcare services are addressing women's specific health needs. Moreover, the voices and experiences of women in these communities are often underrepresented in research. There is a need for more qualitative studies that capture women's personal experiences, challenges, and perspectives on gender roles and justice. Such insights are crucial for understanding the real-life implications of traditional practices and for developing culturally sensitive solutions. In summary, the research gap lies in the lack of focused studies on the unique gender dynamics in tribal

communities of Himachal Pradesh, the effectiveness of existing empowerment programs, and they lived experiences of women in these areas. Addressing this gap is essential for designing effective policies and interventions that truly meet the needs of women in these communities and promote genuine gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

To explore gender dynamics and justice in the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh, the research uses a qualitative methods approach. In-depth interviews are conducted with a variety of stakeholders, including women, community leaders, local authorities, and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the area. These interviews help gather personal experiences, insights, and opinions about gender roles and issues within the community. Focus Group Discussions are organized with groups of women and men separately to encourage open discussion about gender roles, traditional practices, and perceptions of gender justice. This allows for a broader range of viewpoints and highlights differences in perspectives between genders. Detailed case studies of specific initiatives or individuals who have experienced significant changes due to gender equality programs are documented. These case studies provide concrete examples of how initiatives impact people's lives. Pangi Integrated Tribal Development Project was selected as tribal area. This areas includes Pangwala tribes.

The study focuses on Pangwala tribal community in Himachal Pradesh. Efforts are made to include a diverse representation of tribes to capture a wide range of cultural practices and experiences. There was a 100 sample size. A combination of random sampling for surveys and purposive sampling for interviews and focus groups ensures both breadth and depth of data. Researcher conducted field visits to tribal villages to collect data. This on-ground approach helps in building trust with community members and gathering more accurate and detailed information. The study follows strict ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent from all participants. Privacy and confidentiality are maintained, and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Thematic analysis is used to identify common themes and patterns in the qualitative data. This helps in understanding the underlying cultural and social factors influencing gender dynamics.

Selection of the Problem

The selection of this research problem is rooted in the need to understand and address the complex issues of gender dynamics and justice within the tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh. These communities are characterized by rich cultural traditions and unique social structures, which significantly impact gender roles and the pursuit of gender equality. Traditional norms often assign specific roles to men and women, with women typically shouldering most domestic responsibilities while having limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. This traditional setup creates significant barriers to achieving gender justice. The problem is particularly pertinent because, despite ongoing efforts to promote gender

equality, women in these tribal areas continue to face considerable challenges. Educational opportunities for girls are often limited due to cultural preferences and financial constraints. Healthcare services are frequently inadequate, making it difficult for women to receive essential medical care. Additionally, women are underrepresented in local governance and decision-making roles, which limits their ability to influence community decisions and advocate for their needs. Understanding these issues is crucial for designing effective interventions and policies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in these communities. By examining the current state of gender justice and the impact of traditional norms, the research aims to identify both the barriers and the opportunities for promoting gender equality. This focus will help in developing targeted strategies to improve access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities for women, as well as enhancing their participation in governance. The selection of this problem is driven by the need to explore and address the persistent gender disparities in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh. Addressing these issues is essential for advancing gender justice and improving the overall well-being and empowerment of women in these areas.

Relevance of the Present Problem

The problem of gender dynamics and justice in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh is highly relevant for several key reasons. First, tribal communities in this region are characterized by unique cultural and social norms that significantly influence gender roles. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the specific challenges women face in these areas. Traditional gender roles often limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, creating substantial barriers to their overall development and well-being. This problem is particularly relevant in the context of broader efforts to achieve gender equality and social justice. Despite national and international initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity, tribal areas often face unique challenges that require targeted solutions. By focusing on these communities, the research addresses gaps in understanding how traditional practices affect gender justice and explores how these practices can be transformed to support women's empowerment.

Additionally, addressing gender disparities in tribal communities is crucial for ensuring that development efforts are inclusive and equitable. Women's participation in education, healthcare, and governance is essential for sustainable community development. When women are empowered and given equal opportunities, it leads to better outcomes for entire communities, including improved health, economic growth, and social stability. The relevance of this problem also extends to policy and program development. Insights gained from this research can inform the design of more effective interventions and policies that are culturally sensitive and address the specific needs of women in tribal areas. This ensures that efforts to promote gender equality are both practical and impactful. The problem of gender dynamics and justice in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh is crucial for advancing

gender equality, improving community development, and ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to thrive. Understanding and addressing these issues will contribute to more equitable and effective solutions in these unique cultural contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study found that traditional cultural norms in tribal communities of Himachal Pradesh play a significant role in defining gender roles. These norms often restrict women's access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. For instance, many women are expected to focus primarily on domestic duties, limiting their involvement in public and economic activities. However, in some tribes, matrilineal systems exist, which provide women with a more prominent role in family and community matters. This shows a variation in how gender roles are perceived and enacted across different tribal groups. Women in these tribal communities face several barriers, including limited access to education and healthcare. The lack of educational opportunities is often due to cultural beliefs that prioritize male education over female education. Additionally, healthcare facilities are not always easily accessible, which can disproportionately affect women's health. There are also societal challenges, such as early marriage and lack of representation in local governance. These factors contribute to women's limited participation in decision-making processes both at home and in the community. The study observed some positive developments in promoting gender equality. Initiatives by governmental and non-governmental organizations have started to address the gender gap by providing education, healthcare, and skills training to women. These programs are beginning to empower women and increase their participation in local governance and economic activities. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies. While there is growing awareness and support for gender equality, the deep-rooted traditional norms and the lack of resources often hinder the full implementation and success of these programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender dynamics in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh reflect a complex interplay of traditional practices and emerging changes. This research highlights the significant barriers and challenges women face in these areas, as well as the positive strides being made towards gender equality. Traditional cultural norms often dictate specific gender roles in tribal communities. Men are usually involved in activities outside the home, while women are expected to handle domestic responsibilities. This traditional division of labor can limit women's access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Many girls have fewer educational opportunities compared to boys due to cultural preferences and financial constraints. Additionally, inadequate healthcare facilities and limited access to essential services further exacerbate the challenges women face, affecting their overall well-being and development.

Despite these obstacles, there are encouraging signs of progress. Various initiatives and programs have been introduced to promote gender equality and empower women. Educational programs, such as scholarships and safe

transportation to schools, aim to increase girls' enrollment and retention in education. Healthcare improvements, including mobile clinics and health education, are helping to make essential services more accessible to women in remote areas. Economic empowerment programs, like vocational training and microfinance, provide women with the skills and resources needed to improve their financial status and start small businesses. Efforts are being made to increase women's participation in governance and decision-making processes. Leadership training and policies ensuring women's representation in local governance are helping to elevate women's voices and influence in their communities. Legal awareness programs and support services are also crucial in informing women about their rights and available protections.

Traditional norms and practices still pose significant barriers to achieving full gender equality. Early marriage, limited access to education and healthcare, and underrepresentation in decision-making roles continue to impact women's opportunities and rights. Addressing these issues requires ongoing efforts and commitment from both the government and non-governmental organizations. To build on the progress made, several recommendations can be implemented. Enhancing educational opportunities by increasing access to schools and providing financial support for girls can help close the educational gap. Improving healthcare services through the expansion of facilities and mobile clinics will address women's health needs more effectively. Economic empowerment can be further supported by expanding vocational training programs and providing access to microfinance.

Increasing women's participation in governance and leadership roles is crucial for ensuring that their perspectives are included in decision-making processes. Providing legal aid and rights education will empower women to understand and assert their rights. Developing support networks and counseling services will offer additional assistance to women facing various challenges. Engaging men and boys in gender equality efforts can help shift traditional mindsets and reduce discrimination. Finally, regular monitoring and evaluation of programs, along with community feedback, will ensure that initiatives are effective and culturally appropriate.

While progress towards gender equality in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh is evident, continued efforts are necessary to address the remaining challenges. By implementing these recommendations and building on existing initiatives, it is possible to create a more equitable and empowering environment for women in these communities. The collective efforts of government, NGOs, and community members are vital in achieving lasting change and promoting gender justice.

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