

The Fairs and Festival of Chamba District Tribal Community of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract:- Himachal Pradesh, can hardly be called a tribal state though it is inhabited by tribes like the Pangwala, Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnaura, Lahaula, Lamba, Jad, Khampa, Swangla, Beda, and Zoba. The tribes of Himachal Pradesh are scattered in different parts of the state and the tribal communities residing in different parts of Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh like Pangwala, Gaddi and Gujjar are sociable and by their own culture and tradition, they have marked their position in the Indian subcontinent also. Dancing, musical melodies, festival, fair, etc. bore evidence to it. They are by nature nomadic people and their customs and social structure make them identifiable from each other. As far as the occupations are concerned, the tribes of Chamba have taken up the occupations including rearing of cattle and also raising of wool. Dresses that these tribes of Chamba wear also are quite exquisite to look at. With this perspective an attempt is made in this paper analyze the fairs and festival, customs and culture of tribal people of Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh.

Key Words: Tribes, Fairs, Festival, Pangwal, Gaddi, Gujjars.

1. INTRODUCTION:

INDIA has unique geography which strongly influences its climate and subsequently its geography, culture and flora and fauna. This is particularly true in case of Himalaya in the North. Himalaya in fact is the youngest and highest mountain regions in the world that extends from northwest to east, covering a distance of about 2500 kilometres extending into countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan and China. Due to its varied geography and altitude, it is considered as one of the hotspots of 15 mega diversity centre of the world. Geographically in India, the Himalaya is divided into distinct zones i.e. east Himalaya, west Himalaya and North-west Himalaya with each zone having distinct climatic conditions and geographical diversity. The North-west Himalaya covers the states of Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh.

HIMACHAL PRADESH located between 30°22' and 30° 12' North latitude and between 75° 47' and 79°4' east longitude is totally a hilly state where the Himalaya is demarcated into various ranges like outer with Shiwalik range, the lesser Himalaya with Dhauladhar range, the great Himalaya with Pir Panjal range and the trans Himalaya with Zaskar range. It is characterized by an uneven elevation, which ranges from 350 meters to 7000 meters above mean sea level.

CHAMBA DISTRICT is a part of the Northern Himachal Pradesh. Chamba district extends between 32° 10' North and 33° 13' north of the equator and between longitudes 75° 48' east and 76° 53' east of the Greenwich mean time. The district is bounded on the north and west by Jammu & Kashmir state, on the south-west by Punjab state, on the south and south-east by Kangra district whereas Lahul & spiti district enclose it from east. Chamba district spread over an area of 6522 sq km. Chamba district comprises of 7 tehsils and 3 sub-tehsil and 7 community development blocks with headquarters at Chamba.

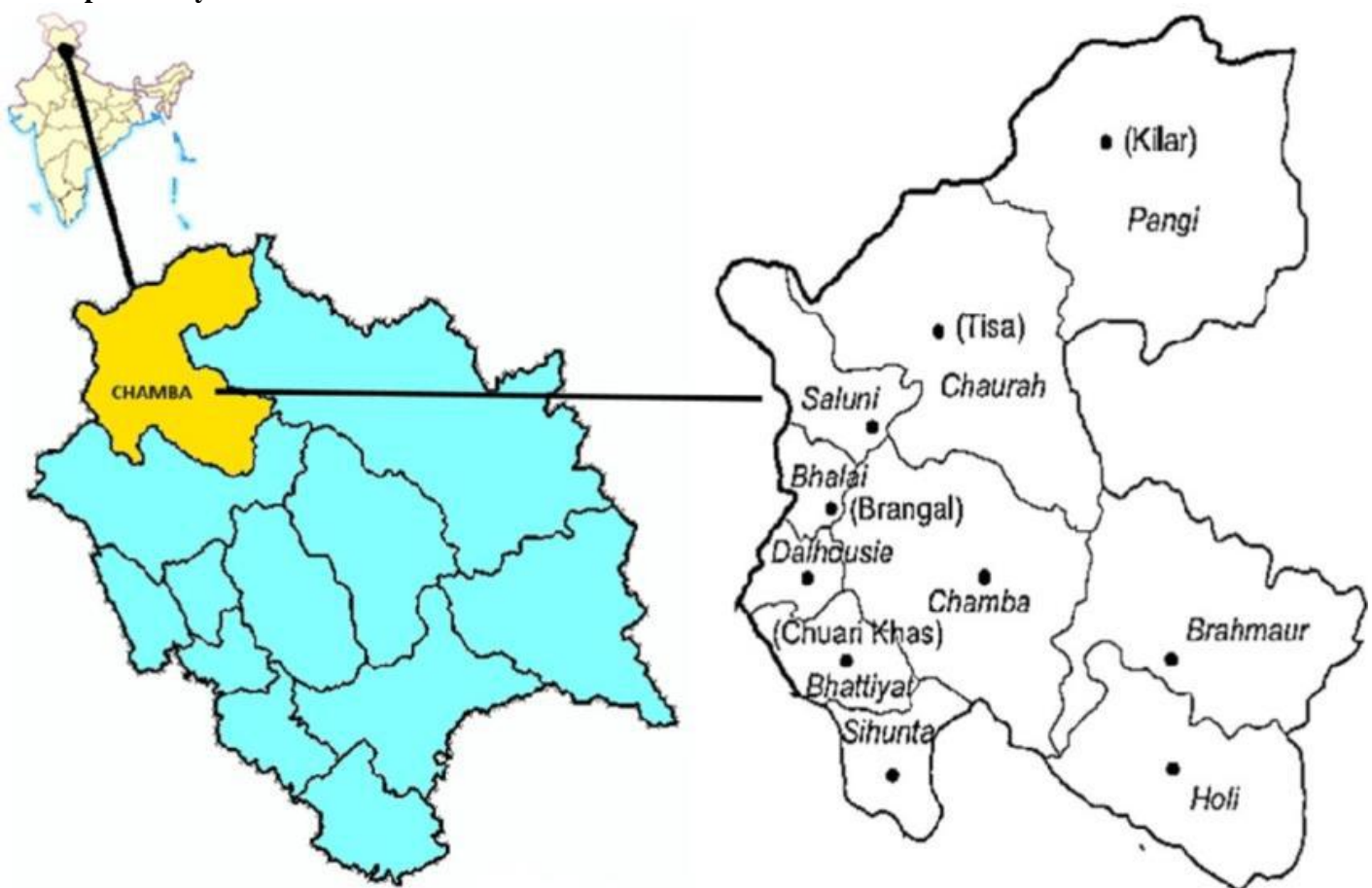
Chamba district lying mostly astride the main Himalayas and touching on the fringes at one corner of a bit of the Shiwalik, on the other side of the border and the territory is wholly mountainous with altitudes varying from about 2000 feet (610 meters) to about 21,000 feet (6400 meters) above the mean sea-level. The scenery is picturesque and varied character presenting many delightful sights. The Chamba valley is famous for medicinal herbs and varieties of flowers. The land is covered with vastly fragrant trees. The tribes of Chamba are scattered in different parts of the state and the tribal communities residing in different parts of Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh are sociable and by their

own culture and tradition. Chamba comprises of a number of valleys inhabited by different communities. The people here are called Chambyals, Brahmauris, pangwals, Bhattiyats and Chaurahis etc. Chamba has mainly two tribal areas, Pangi and Bharmour. There is a sizeable population of the Bhots of Tibetan origin known as Bhatris living in upper reaches of Pangi. The tribes of Chamba belong to the famous Indo-Aryan family group. The major tribes of this region include Gaddi and Gujjar tribe. Two nomadic tribes like Gaddis and Gujjars inhabit some part of the district. Gaddis inhabit Bharmour, few part of Banikhet and upper part of Bhattiyat, the Gujjars mainly reside in Chamba, Chaurah and Saluni tehsils and the Pangwalas reside in Pangi valley of the Chamba district.

Chamba district holds the 1st rank in terms of scheduled tribe population in the state. It has reported 135500 persons as scheduled tribe (2011).

The tribes of Chamba district are mostly engaged in agriculture and allied activities, such as rearing of cows, sheep, goat, buffaloes and ploughing small fields, which are their source of sustenance. Agriculture is supplemented by animal husbandry and trade is the main occupation of these tribes. Chamba comprises of a number of valleys inhabited by different tribes.

1.1 Map of Study Area



This map not on scale

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The festival is an event made for the local community that attracts a wealth of tourism. Festivals are short-term events essential for culture tourism (Chang, 2006; Getz, 2008). Festivals are those events that have a lot of diversity and popularity (Getz, 2008; Gursoy et al., 2006; Yang et al., 2011). Festival and special events play an important role in view of the multitude of activities that they purpose and that help to improve the image of that city (Getz, 1993).

3. MATERIALS:

FAIRS AND FESTIVAL OF TRIBAL COMMUNITY

Fairs and festivals are an important part of social activities of human. They are arranged all over the world in a variety of ways. Some celebrations are specific to certain areas and some are celebrated by different group, communities in certain villages, cities or even state or country. Fairs and festival are important parts of the Indian cultural life. In Indian traditional fairs and festival are connected with religious beliefs, changing season's harvest etc. Fairs and festivals

provide occasions to forget worries and hard realities of life. Living is tough in the valley and the means of entertainment are limited as a result the local fairs and festivals are celebrated with much fanfare.

Fairs and festivals are an important part of the religious and cultural life of the hill tribal's. The endless succession of mountain ranges that vanish in the dark blue sky, the beauty and majesty of the snow peaks which seems to touch the stars in the background, all have left their impression on the religious ceremonies, festival and other fairs of the Himachal Pradesh tribes. These festivals and fairs are related with local Gods and Goddesses. Seasons have also played an important part and each season has its own appropriate festivals. The ceremonies in each season are largely influenced by the climatic needs or other characteristics of particular season.

The fairs and festivals are also related with the joys and jovial sentiments and amusement of the hill tribes. These festivals play a major role to build up strong social contacts, strengthen community relations and maintain social solidarity. Most of the festivals of Himachal Pradesh tribes are derived from the sectarian Hinduism of the period after the immigration of the Rajputs from the Indian plains to this region. The tribal people of the region fall in three categories like Hindu, Buddhists and Muslim communities. Therefore, the fairs and festivals are related with their religious identities.

4. METHOD: The present study is based entirely on secondary data, which have been obtained from different secondary sources, such as literature review, journal, books, and some anecdotal evidences. The district constitutes the area unit of study.

5. DISCUSSION:

5.1 GADDIS TRIBE: The Gaddi tribal's of Himachal are very hard working people. They spend half year in migration and the remaining half in their permanent houses. The only charm in their life is attending a fair and participating in songs and 2 dances. So the fairs and festivals have played an important role in the life of Gaddis. The Gaddis are purely a Hindu tribe and their fairs and festivals are related with the Hindu traditions. The life of Gaddi tribe is also reflected by the religious fairs and festival. The Gaddis lead a pastoral life from October to March and during this period they enjoy the fairs and festivals that are held there and during their long trek to lower hills. They also enjoy the fairs and festivals of the cities and towns through which they pass. The main fairs and festivals of Gaddi tribals are mentioned below.

Brahmaur Yatra

This yatra (pilgrimage) is a fair-cum-festival yatra and is celebrated at Brahmaur during their stay there. This fair is celebrated on the day following janamashtmi and continues for six days. This fair is dedicated to Harihar (Shiva), Narsinghji, Ganesh, Lakshna/ Keling and Sheetla. The people assemble in Chaurasi area in their attractive dresses. The process is headed by the high priest of Brahmaur. The high priest is dressed in the typical Gaddi dress, with a silken pagri and a golden kantha round his neck and some golden ear rings.

The musical instruments are played by the musicians at the beginning of the fair. Musical instruments consist of dhol, narsinga, nagara, shehnai and karnar. The people led by the high priest perform puja in all the temples in the Chaurasi area and also go round the temples (parikrama) three times. Folk songs and dances are conducted in the evening and fair continues till 10 p.m. in the night. The people make offering to temple and receive purshad of 2 luchis (puri) and halwa which they carry to their homes also.

Mani Mahesh Fair

After the one week of Brahmaur yatra, a very popular fair is held in Mani Mahesh area, which is a very sacred pilgrim place for the Gaddis. It is believed that Lord Shiva resides there. It is covered with snow all times. It is also believed that no one has been able to scale the peak. So before starting the yatra the chelas of Keling and Mani Mahesh are consulted if the yatra would be successful. After the positive permission from the chelas they start their yatra. Every pilgrim must have a dip in the Brahmni Nallah. They have to complete the yatra in two stages. They have to be at the lake on the morning of Radha- ashtmi which falls fifteen days after Krishna Janam-ashtmi. This day is believed very sacred to take bath in Mani Mahesh Lake. They take dip in Gauri Kund before taking final dip in Mani Mahesh. The pilgrims start their yatra barefooted. This shows that this pilgrimage is considered very sacred. The pilgrims sing a song in praise of Lord Shiva during the whole yatra.

Sui Fair

Sui fair is also an important fair of the Gaddis. This fair is conducted in Baisakh. On their way to Gadhern, their home land during yearly migration, they enjoy this fair. This fair is celebrated in the memory of queen of Sahila Varma, who shifted the capital from Brahmaur to Chamba. It is stated that he dug a water channel from Sarota stream to arrange

the drinking water for the town of Chamba. But due to some defect the water would not flow in the duged channel. The legend says that Sahila Varma had a dream when he was told that he should offer either his son or rani for sacrifice. The rani volunteered herself for the sacrifice and was buried alive at the mouth of newly dug channel and water thereafter started flowing into it. Every year a fair is held on the first Baisakh which previously was open to ladies only but now nobody objects to male visitors, also.

The Gaddis celebrate some other festivals of Hindu tradition i.e. Bisu/ (Baisakhi), Sair, Bahori (Lohri) and Dholra. Bisu festival is celebrated on 1st Baisakh. It is called Baisakhi in other parts of India. On the occasion of this festival a dance is performed by the girls only. Sair festival is celebrated on the 1st Asuj in which babrus prepared of wheat flour are taken. Bahori is another famous festival of the Gaddis. It is called Lohri in other parts of India. It is held on 1st Magh. A special diet consisting of khichri of rice and dal with ghee is taken.

Besides these festivals the Gaddis also celebrate other Hindu festivals such as Shivratri Krishna-Janamashtmi, Holi and Diwali. The fasts are observed and it is in the evenings only that they eat something. Wine and meat is prohibited on the fasting days. On the occasion of the festivals feasts are offered and Sur is taken in a large quantities. Singing and dancing is also performed. The fairs and festivals thus play an important role in the social and religious life and represent the original culture of the Gaddis.

5.2 GUJJARS TRIBE

The fairs and festivals of the Gujjars of Himachal Pradesh are celebrated on Hindu or Muslim pattern. As mentioned earlier that Gujjars fall into Muslim as well as Hindu community. The majority of Gujjars belong to Muslim community. The Muslim Gujjars celebrate their fairs and festivals on Islamic pattern as the tradition on these festivals followed by them are purely on Islamic traditions.

The main festivals celebrated by the Muslim Gujjars are Idul"Zuha and Idul-Fittar (or Bakar-Id). Bakar-Id is celebrated two months and ten days after the Id. Idul-Zuha is an important festival of Muslim Gujjars. A day earlier to Idul-Zuha, the Gujjars clean their houses with local clay. The clothes are also washed before the festival. Men and children shave their heads. On the day of festival many Gujjars with their women and children assemble at some place or Idgah and offer namaz. This namaz is headed by a Qazi. Thereafter they embrace each other in groups. After namaz they return to their homes. Kheer and maize rote is prepared a special dish in every household. The animals are also sacrificed on this occasion in the name of qurbani .

Another important festival of Muslim Gujjars is Idul-Fittar. Preceding a month from Idul-Fittar, Gujjars observe rozas (fasts). They take their meal only once in a day. But something is taken by them before the day break. This is called Sebri and throughout the day even water is not taken by them. The namaz is offered and khutba is read by Qazi. Quran is read twice a day. The Quran is kept in the every household. The relatives and friends are also visited on this occasion. Kheer is prepared as a special dish on this occasion. Fasts are broken with the words spoken Rizekeka vakat hogaya. But the Muslim Gujjars do not engage themselves in singing and dancing on these festive occasions. Music and playing of musical instruments is prohibited and unlike other tribes they have not developed any folk dance or songs.

The Hindu Gujjars celebrate their fairs and festivals like other Hindus of the area where they live. The main Hindu festivals like Baisakhi, Lohri, Holi, Shivratri, Janam-ashtmi and Diwali etc., are celebrated by them. Other fairs and festivals are linked with the local traditions.

5.3 PANGWALS TRIBE

In Pangi valley the festivals and fairs are celebrated over the whole year on different occasions by the Pangwals. Due to much backward area and snow bound belt of the region, the tribal people entertain themselves only with fairs and festivals. These fairs and festivals are more important from religious point of view.

The fairs and festivals celebrated here are not too many. The scarcity of nature has in fact decreased these. During winter the festivals are abandoned. Whatever festivals are celebrated, these are on a very small scale. But in summer some fairs are held in the vicinity. Villagers go out to attend fairs on different places. The traders sell sweets, articles of general merchandise, and cosmetics.

Lishoo

Lishoo festival is celebrated in the month of Vaisakha. This festival is the same as Baisakhi festival of the Indian plains. This festival is related with the farewell to winter and welcome to spring. The temples which were closed in winter reopen on this day with some religious ceremonies. Bakrus and chapaties are prepared by the tribal's and offered to the temple. The people enjoy good food in the evening and dance on the tunes of music.

Sheel

The sheel festival is celebrated on the day of Amaawash during Phalguna or Chaitra months. This festival is meant to represent the departure of winter and the approach of spring. Villagers hold great rejoicings since they were very much worried with the snow. People take bath early in the morning and offer worship to family Gods "and

Goddesses. The water is sprinkled on the back of sheep and goats to see whether any village deity is angry with them or not. They prepare special dishes on this occasion. In the morning people take ghee and chapaties, meat with cheena and manday is taken in the afternoon. In the evening they enjoy rehani which consists of halwa manday and ghee. Goddess Laxmi is worshipped in the evening and every household burns an earthen lamp with ghee and delicious meals prepared on this day are kept around and enjoyed next day.

Pareed

This festival is celebrated on the next day to sheel festival. The one male member of every household goes to Kailash the local name of small stream and brings water in the pots used for milking the cows. It is believed that by doing so the cattle give more milk. The younger members of the family do obeisance to the elders. In the morning people go to the houses of their friends and relatives and wish them **Takda asay na (may you be well)**. They take with them sattu and chapaties and eat and drink with their friends. The eatables which are kept around the earthen lamp on the day of sheel are eaten on this day. The spinning which was suspended since sheel, is resumed.

Uttrain

The uttrain festival is celebrated on the first Magh in the month of Pausa in honour of ancestors. An interesting aspect of the festival is that people sprinkle water on the backs of all the goats and sheep in early morning. If they shiver it is taken to mean that the deity is happy with the households, but if not it is believed that deity is angry. A sheep or goat is sacrificed in the temple of the deity to cool down the anger. Everyone who happens to come to the house must be fed manday and cheena are offered to him. All other members of the household also take manday and cheena with walnut oil.

Phool Jatra

Phool jatra is the most popular fair of the Pangwals. This jatra begins in Asoj {15th October every year). The literal meaning of Phool jatra is to mix up freely. Both men and women mix up freely on this day and hold great rejoicings. People gather in large number and offer worship to local Gods and Goddesses. This jatra starts at nine in the morning and ends at five in the evening and continues for four days. The tribals arrange dances on the tunes of musical instruments played by the Aryas, forgetting all about their day to day working. On the last and final day of the jatra all the participants come to chauki and dance together. On the fifth day puja is offered to Dess-nag the village God.

After this jatra the tribal belt has heavy snowfall and the people cannot meet each other for sometime so they wish each other matha matha beshay which means to remain in good health throughout the winter. During the days of phool jatra tribals cook delicious food consisting of meat, cheena/ luchis and ghee.

Iwaan

This Jatra is held *in Dharwas and Sural about 10 and 25 kms away from killer*. This fair is celebrated in *Magha* (January- February) and *Phalguna* (February- March) each year. It continues for four days; In Dharwas first day it used to be for the *Raja* (now-a-days it is also held in the name of Praja) the second day for the Praja, the third day for shiva and the fourth day for Naag Devta. Similarly in sural valley the first day for Naag devata, second day for devi mata, third day for *Jerhiun Naag debta* and fourth day for praja. No other devata is worshipped in this Jatra. Thousands of persons from distant villages participate in it. Sweet and other shops are put up and miscellaneous articles are sold during the day, man dance to the tune *of flutes, nagara* and drums while women dance in the evening. Every house hold prepares delicious meals, and serves liquor.

Mindhalyat

This fair is held in village *Mindhali and Kutha* in the month *of Bhadra* (August- September) each year. Mindhalyat fair is an important fair of Pangwals. People from all areas take part in the fair and offer worship to Shakti Devi whom they consider as the symbol of nine Durgas (power). An interesting aspect of the fair is this that people are required to observe certain norms such as not to sleep on cot, not to wear shoes not to take sticks and umbrellas. All are required to come on foot. it is believed by the tribals that all this is a sign of false proud which are never required in the religious places of Shakti Devi.

6. CONCLUSION:

The fairs and festivals are important parts of the Indian culture life. The life of Indian people revolves round the fairs and festivals. The best way to know about the life of people of tribal people of Chamba district is through the study of their fairs, festival customs and manners. The way of life of the people of Chamba district tribes has been brilliantly expressed in their fairs and festivals.

This paper includes the classification of fairs and festivals of tribal community of Chamba district. This paper also include that each fair and festival of tribal people related with religious classification, season wise and also related with agriculture activities. All types of sacrifice ban by government.

To tribal people of Himachal any opportunity for celebration of fairs and festivals is welcome and the fairs and festivals are held throughout the year. There are some fairs for groups of villages. Most of the fairs are religious but

there are also community and trade fairs. Folk songs and folk dances are the source of enjoyment during festive occasions not only for participants but also for the locals and the outsiders. Musical instruments are also used in songs and dances. Important musical instruments commonly used are ram singha, karnal, nagiree, manjira, dhol, nagara , damama, thali, bhana etc. During the festive gatherings men and women dressed in their most colourful clothes, sit on hillsides which present a riot of colour to watch the dances and songs that go on endless. On the whole fairs and festivals dominate the social and cultural life of the tribal people.

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