The status of women with reference to tribal India is hardly reduced by any disabling stigma or inferiority attached to women although periods of impurity in the monthly cycles are widely recognized, observed and feared. Within the caste system however as we move up towards higher castes, the position of women becomes subordinate, servile and sometimes hopeless. Anthropologists have good reasons to believe that woman as the child bearing; nursing half of humanity must have some influence on her status. The present study deals with the transhumant Gaddi population of Bharmour (Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh) that travel from one ecological zone to another in winter and summer. For about three to four months of winter’s heavy snowfall, the Gaddis generally migrate to the lower hills and plains along with their flock of sheep and goats. This transhumant way of life nurtured by ecological factors has affected the population structure. It may be concluded as it is observed that ecological and environmental factors existing in Bharmour have given to Gaddi women a special economic power, an elevated social status and authority almost equal to men. However, there are certain domains in which men continue to dominate, as is culturally required. Moreover, community authority still is in the hands of men. There is a kind of duality observed here. Men dominate in public and community affairs and continue to play the role of the head of the family and bread winner, women enjoy greater say in family life, great deal of social freedom and several of their actions are condoned/tolerated.

Key words: Transhumant, decision making, division of labour, freedom of movement, government initiatives.
data; And/or the inherent gender blindness or bias of formal information systems themselves.

Thus, it has been realized that this approach is not sufficient to analyze the multifarious factors, which determine the lower status and subordination of women. Rather, the study of women’s relative access to, and control over resources can be a more a useful method, which compares women’s position with that of men, and is also a reflection of change in both ideology and the institutions and structures that mediate access and control.

In the context of material, human and intangible resources, access refers to the opportunity available to use the resource. Control is much more complex, and needs to be understood within the notion of shared power and on-going negotiation. Control over a resource is the bargaining power to define or determine the use of that resource. Researchers in women’s studies have developed frameworks that include both conventional and non-conventional indicators to measure the status of women taking into consideration the issues of access and control. Women’s powerlessness and their lower status begin from the lack of resources – human, material and intangible. Men are favoured by the rules of the institutions within which gender relations occur, and that they enjoy and exercise power in commanding these resources. Gender inequality is therefore an asymmetry in power, where men are in opposition of power and women of subordination. The absence of power has meant the lack of access and control over resources, a coercive gender division of labour, a devaluation of their work, lack of control over their own self, skills, labour, mobility, sexuality, time and fertility.

A women’s legal and economic dependence, limits her alternatives to childbearing, to produce more sons whom she can influence and rely on for support (Bhasin and Bhasin, 1997). This has been shown and discussed by many other scholars conducted their studies on south asia. Cain (1984) found high fertility in patriarchal societies.

The status of women with reference to tribal India is hardly reduced by any disabling stigma or inferiority attached to women although periods of impurity in the monthly cycles are widely recognized, observed and feared. Within the caste system however as we move up towards higher castes, the position of women becomes subordinate, servile and sometimes hopeless.

Anthropologists have good reasons to believe that woman as the child bearing; nursing half of humanity must have some influence on her status. This generally leads to certain secondary forms of differentiation of which the most important is the sexual division of labour. Very broadly, there is a tendency to allocate dangerous tasks and those requiring strenuous, concentrated physical efforts for comparatively short periods to men, while relatively safe work, which calls for prolonged but less concentrated effort usually, falls in the province of women.

Due to the difficulty of measuring all aspects of women’s status in general and accurate measurement of Indian women’s work in particular, female education is considered possibly the best available indicator of women’s status so much so that many studies have found female education to be the single most important determinant of reproductive behaviour (Gasterline, 1984; Sathar, 1987; khan and Sirageldin, 1979).

Studies based on the issue of migration are of great interest to scholars. Even in this study the habitat has been a crucial factor in framing the livelihood pattern of the Gaddi tribe. Transhumance is one such strategy and is shown as the seasonal movement of livestock between mountain and lowland pastures either under the care of herdsmen or in company with the owners.

Transhumance is believed to be economically more effective and has better capacity of conservation of environment. The management of certain habitats is possible through management of the pastoral activities. Thus transhumance is believed to be one of the very well adapted systems to natural conditions that support management of the pastures in lowlands and in the mountains.

Mobility (of herds and households) is useful in optimizing the utilization of the natural resource base as well as mechanism to respond to emergencies such as disease, outbreak, flood, drought during which the livelihood base of pastoral households is under great threats. Such conditions could result in the loss of large number of animals. Mobility may take various forms and may involve varying distances covered at different times of the year.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The tribe: Gaddi

The present study deals with the transhumant Gaddi population of Bharmour (Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh) that travel from one ecological zone to another in winter and summer. For about three to four months of winter’s heavy snowfall, the Gaddis generally migrate to the lower hills and plains along with their flock of sheep and goats. This transhumant way of life nurtured by ecological factors has affected the population structure. The population of the area under study has been stable for quite a long time. It has not been dominated or strongly influenced by the Muslims, Gorkhas, Tibetans or the British. There have been no recent changes in their technology so as to bring about rapid changes in social organization.

The Gaddi nomenclature is derived from the word “Gaderan”, the local word for the hilly tracts of Himachal Pradesh. Under the generic name of Gaddi, there are a number of castes of unequal status such as the Brahmin, the Rajput, the artisans and the lower castes of the area. Though all these castes are vaguely referred to as the Gaddi living in the neighbouring areas of Gaderan, yet within the locality, the term is particularly applied to the Brahman and the Rajput castes. (The local inhabitants, draw a distinction between the three castes: the brahmas, the rajputs and the scheduled castes. Differences in the local customs of these three castes have also been observed.)

Gaddi Brahmans are believed to have come to Chamba from
Delhi along with Raja Aja Varman during AD 850-870 to serve as religious priests. They are divided into a number of exogamous gotras such as: Atri, Bharadwaj, Gautam, Jamdagni, Kashyap, Vashistha, etc., which are further divided into sect (Gazetteer of India, Himachal Pradesh, Chamba, 1963).

Gaddi Rajputs are believed to have migrated from Lahore in the wake of religious persecution in the remote past and settled in the Bharmour valley. They are also divided into high and low social categories which are again divided into sects (Singh, 1994). The villagers believe that Schedule castes of this area have also migrated from Delhi as well as Lahore to serve the higher castes. Whatever the origin of these groups, they now form a single caste.

The Gaddi inhabit the remote Bharmour valley of the Chamba district. Gadiai is their mother tongue and various dialects of the Himachal language are used for intergroup communication. Both these languages belong to the pahari group of the Indo-Aryan family of languages. The Devanagari script is used.

Depending on the type of the information required the actual information gathered for the study from the actual field of research was from the facts of living person's lives and the individuals and the incidents around them. For this purpose different methods were used to gather information amongst which interview and observation were of the utmost importance. Most of the interviews which were related to social cultural activities and those based on fact finding were of indepth nature and time taking.

The area: Village Sachuin of Tehsil Bharmour

The Chamba district is situated between North latitude 32°10' and 33°13' and east longitude 75°45' and 77°33'. The district has a more or less oblong shape. Bharmour proper lies at a distance of about 39 miles from the Chamba town. The linking road which was originally bridled is now being improved into a vehicular one. This place, which remained the capital of the state for about 400 years, is now administratively merely the head quarters of the sub tehsils.

The sub tehsil has an overall historical importance. It was here that the erstwhile Chamba state took its birth and it is this tract which is still regarded as the homeland of the scheduled tribe-Gaddis. In fact, another name for this tract is Gaderan. Some people call it Shiva Bhumi also, owing to the predominance of the cult of Shiva. It was once called Brahmapura, as the original capital of the infant state which later grew into the Chamba State. Bharmour is today not more extensive than a big village, but it still retains in its ancient temples, the monuments of its (one time) old glory.

Legend has it that the place was called Brahmpura after Bharmani Devi, the patron goddess of the Budhil valley, whose shrine is situated a little way above Bharmour proper. According to an alternative legend the name Brahmapura was in use at a still earlier period for the more ancient kingdom of Brahmapura which existed in the territories of Garhwal and Kumaun and that Maru, the founder of the Chamba state, was born in a central home to begin with, in Ayodhya and later, in the Upper Ganges valley, gave the same name of Brahmpura to the state that he founded with the present Bharmour as his capital.

Ibbetson (1916) states that the Gaddi inhabit the snowy hill ranges that divide Chamba and Kangra and trace their origin from Punjab particularly during the days of ‘Muhammedan’ invasions which made them take refuge in these ranges.

Sachuin was the largest of all the villages of Bharmour. As the population was homogenous so to verify the data other villages such as: Dharkauta, Malkauta, Baari, and Goturu were also taken for comparative study. Sachuin consisted of 105 households with maximum of nuclear families. The village had all modern facility of electricity, water supply, drainage system, cable connections, Panchayat, etc. It is situated on a mountain slope therefore it is very good for terrace farming.

The village is dominated by the Gaddi Rajputs. Only few Gaddi Sippi were present who were considered to be of lower caste. Rest no other caste was found there. Apart from them few families of non-Gaddis were found who stayed their because of their Government jobs.

The total composition of the village was of 612 persons. Out of which there were 329 males (53.75%) and 283 females (46.24%). Average life of Gaddis was between 65-70 years of age group. Out of 612 people, 288 were married and 311 were unmarried. The unmarried persons mostly belonged to 15-25 age groups. Number of widows found in the village was 11 and widowers were only 2. There was a case of divorce but the man got remarried to a much young girl than himself.

Literacy rate of the village was higher than the national rate. Out of 612 people, 419 were educated [255 males (77.50%) and 164 females (57.95%)]. With the support of government, Sachuin has a primary school up to class v.

Due to high literacy rate out of 158, 55 were government servants and 52 engaged in number of professions ranging from barber, carpenter, tailor, blacksmith, labourers, etc.

The village has an Aaganwadi, a primary school, a Panchayat, a playground, cremation ground, and temples etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women and family

The basis of the Gaddi society is found in the family. The family stands out as a distinct socio-cultural and economic unit separate from the wider life of the community. The community functions and exits through coming together of several family units. The Gaddi family is patrilocal that is to say that the married couple resides in or near the bridegroom parents’ home. Nevertheless, the household usually contains dependant members from the fathers’ side but there are no taboos for the other side of the family and visiting is allowed back and forth freely and without hindrance. Thus a girl after marriage invariably leaves her natal household and joins her husband’s family of orientation. Recognition of the fact that after marriage a girl has to move into another household whose socio-economic environment may differ from her parents house, leads the girl to prepare for life after marriage much in advance. They are trained in household chores, the expertise in which matters much in gaining them ready acceptance in the in-laws family. One of the chief reasons for the preponderance of nuclear families is that desire on the part of parents to maintain peace in the household by allowing adequate privacy and independence to married sons and their wives through setting up of separate nuclear households. Soon after marriage the Gaddi son usually sets up a home for himself. It is to be noted that in most of the cases the fathers during their lifetime itself build separate houses for their sons and also partition the property amongst them so that as soon as they enter a wedlock they start a new nuclear family in house separate from their natal household. However, though the married sons live in separate houses, their abodes are very near to each other and that of their parents.

In extended or joint family roles are allocated among
women members on the basis of age and kinship. As soon as the daughter attain an age of 12-14, she takes over the much of the work of her mother in a household, sweeping, swabbing, cleaning utensils, fetching water from the nearby water resource, bringing firewood, baby sitting are the various tasks which a grown up daughter does in a household. Besides she may also assist her mother in the kitchen. The new female entrant, namely the wife of the son, furthermore shares a woman’s work load. Daughter-in-law confines herself to preparing food for all family members and doing other minor tasks within the household herself. The work at agricultural field and other such tasks like fetching water and firewood are taken care of by her elders namely her mother-in-law, her 'jethani' or 'jetti' (wife of husband’s elder brother) and her unmarried ‘nanad’ (Husband’s sister). The married sisters of her husband do keep visiting their natal household but in capacity more of a guest. So they are not expected to contribute in the work of the household. The wife of the head of family generally occupies the highest status amongst the male members barring her own husband. In the sphere of domestic life, in the selection of brides as well as grooms for children and deciding about celebration of occasions such as marriage and birth in the family the chief housewife’s suggestions carry more weight than other female members. In the event of old age or infirmity of the parents-in-law, the eldest son becomes the head of the family and his wife, the chief housewife. The senior most member is the head of the family whether he/she is male or female.

Decision within a family is a complex process, hardly taking place in a deliberate clear cut formal way. In every family especially an extended one, decision making incorporates the attitudes, opinions and aspirations of not merely one individual but several individual. Decisions have to be taken and implemented or executed every now and then in connection with day to day family life cooking meals, purchasing articles of consumption, managing the household feeding and supervising children, earning and activities of the members of the family. Decision has also to be taken with respect to the occasions. In day to day family living and household activities, woman played a major role in taking decisions, while in important family issue and events such as purchases of cattle, financial problem, deciding about education, earning activities, keeping relation with kin and community people men played a major role. However, women do exercise their influence on the decision so taken.

Property inheritance is in the male line. Families not having any son, divide the property among their brothers and their sons. But few families were reported who had given their property to their daughters from the Malkotta village of Bharmour. If the family decides to give the property to their daughters, maternal uncle has to give “dhaam” (feast for villagers). In financial dealings housewife as well as other women member refrain from literate and comparatively more eloquent in their opinions, do express their views and if forceful enough they are accepted as well. Women may also disagree on smaller matters like purchase of articles, share of work in the household. Their resentment is mostly expressed in non aggressive manner by such acts to stop eating meal, to stop talking with members of the family, to work silently but sullenly. In some families, women are more vocal in expression of their disagreement. They may pick up a quarrel with husband or one of the family members or become aggressive with children deliberately in order to attract attention to her discontent. However if she is unrelenting she may either be physically beaten by her husband to consent to the family decision or the decision itself may be reconsidered. Males are fond of local beer and usually they beat their wives as was reported from the Sachuin village in which Thakurdas often beat his wife Ambo Devi and calls her characterless. They reported to the village Panchayat and after the negotiations were over they started living together but the behaviour of her husband was still rude.

Gaddi women also share equal responsibility with their men during transhumant condition. Around 70% of the Gaddis migrate to the lower valley Kangra or Chamba in the month of October and November. The females start moving downwards with their flock of sheep and goats and they are helped by their husbands. For their livelihood they practice agriculture and labour activities in the lower valleys. During this period they are burdened with more work of the household.

Women and marriage

In the Gaddi society marriage of a girl is fixed at the age of 12-13 years and the difference is much between the boy and the girl. But due to the impact of modernization the marriages are now at the age of 18 years. Negotiated marriage that is, to say marriage fixed by parents or a guardian is the most commonly preferred form of marriage. There are other forms as well, but a negotiated marriage is marked the most by rituals and gaiety, entailing the maximum participation from the society. The factors which determine the eligibility of the girl are her reputation at work and character and her family’s economic and social status. The respective male heads of the family of boy and girl exercise the final say in marriage settlement. In settling a marriage, the opinion of girl’s mother and other female relatives are taken into consideration. The elderly people of the village reminiscences that not more than 15 years ago, the girls blindly agreed to wherever their parents chose to marry them. Premarital counseling was unheard of and girls were too subdued and shy to participate in their own marriage talks. Gradually, with the infiltration of
Table 1. Position held by women in a family and their respective roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position held by different women in a family</th>
<th>Tasks and roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother-in-law (wife of the head of the family) addressed as “Sauri” by Daughter-in-law.</td>
<td>Supervisory tasks in the household, looking after grandchildren, marketing and maintaining accounts of the family. Assistance in agricultural operations, activities connected to cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife of the eldest son addressed as “Nooh” by her mother-in-law</td>
<td>Assistance to mother-in-law in her tasks, assistance at agriculture, bringing firewood activities connected to cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife of the second son addressed as “Nooh” by her mother-in-law</td>
<td>Cleaning of utensils, washing clothes of all members, sweeping and activities connected to cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wife of the youngest son addressed as “Nooh” by her mother-in-law</td>
<td>Cooking of food and other domestic activities and activities connected to cattle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried daughters</td>
<td>Assistance in the kitchen, cleaning the house, marketing, etc., activities connected to cattle.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Information from outside world and widening of the expressing their opinions. However, some wives, who are activities of girls, have started exercising their will in the choice of their marriage partner.

Over few years, marriage by elopement has been recurrent. In this regard if the girl returns without marrying her paramours, she still has fair chances of getting married to an eligible boy. If she marries by elopement the person within the permissible category of mates, the couple concerned may well be forgiven for their act and may settle down again in the village like any other married couple. Like in the case of Sachuin village in which Channo Devi eloped with the Dharam Singh (Ex-Pradhan) (Head of the village Panchayat) because their family members were not ready for the marriage but later on they accepted them because the boy was of the same caste. If the boy belongs to the lower caste, the couple was not accepted by the villagers. Perhaps, the fear of elopement and development of love relationship forms one of the reasons why parents prefer to marry the girls at an early age of 14 to 18. One does not marry a girl elder to him in age. A young girl is considered more important who can easily adapt to the ways of her affinal household.

Besides marriage by negotiation and by elopement stray cases of marriage by service and marriage by exchange are also reported among the Gaddis. Though it is rare to find instances of such marriages they are nevertheless accepted forms of marriage. Levirate and Sororate are also popular forms of marriage. Remarriage of males and females were accepted but latter was not well accepted by the villagers. In the former one no ceremony or rituals was performed but the girl starts living with the person in his home which in their dialect is called “baithna” (sit). As women are an equal partner in the economic activities especially those related with household, the men find it difficult to manage without a wife. Remarriages are generally in the nature of “Ghar Baithna”. The new wife is accorded the same status and roles as was of the first wife.

Both males and females can seek divorce in the open meeting or in the court. Mutual incompatibility, post marital affairs, infertility, domestic violence is some of the grounds on which a husband or a wife may seek divorce. Some cases were reported from the Sachuin village in which Ramakrishna sought divorce from his wife Saroj two year back after completing their 14 years of marriage. Saroj works in a hospital as nurse in Chamba. The ground of the divorce was being her characterless and having post marital relationship. Ramakrishna remarried to Pushpa who looks after his children from the first wife.

Among Gaddis if a girl has illegal relationship then she was put out of the village and the family members make her live with an old person of any caste or village all through her life. Table 1 shows different positions held by women and their respective roles.

Women and kinship

A Gaddi woman is surrounded by wide array of relationships. In her family of orientation, she is a daughter and a sister. However for playing her roles of adulthood, namely that of a wife, mother and daughter-in-law she marries and moves into a different family and village. There various relationships incorporate different types and patterns of behaviour which in term reflect upon the status of the individuals involved. A Gaddi woman observes avoidance with her father-in-law and husbands’ elder brother. The observance of avoidance may be extended to other agnatic kin of husband who stand in equivalent relationship to a woman. Mother-in-law avoidance is also found in the Gaddi society. However
Table 2. Division of Labour between man and woman among the Gaddis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Woman</th>
<th>Man</th>
<th>Together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Sowing, watering</td>
<td>Ploughing, sale of crops</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Horticulture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Plantation, trade of fruits</td>
<td>Both look after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Animal husbandry</td>
<td>Grazing cattle, milking cattle</td>
<td>Taking care and look after</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Handloom</td>
<td>Spinning, stitching</td>
<td>Weaving blankets and selling it in the market</td>
<td>Making blankets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Carpentry</td>
<td></td>
<td>Making furniture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Household activity</td>
<td>Cooking food, cleaning and doing kitchen work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Do it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Both man and woman are involved in it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

contrary the situation in father-in-law avoidance here be the mother-in-law restrains herself in the presence of her daughters’ husband. Joking relationship are also existent in the Gaddi society.

**Women and economy**

The Gaddi women work shoulder to shoulder with their men in most of the economic pursuits. They are painstaking and help their men in farming while ploughing is mainly done by men, the women assist in sowing and weeding. Harvesting and threshing are mainly done by women; they tend the cattle and do other activities related to spinning and weaving.

Undoubtedly, in the economic sphere the Gaddi women are a force to reckon with. Either on their own or in close collaboration with their male relatives particularly husbands the Gaddi women have multitudinous roles to perform. No doubt it is difficult to picture Gaddi economy without them. Table 2 shows the division of labor between men and women in a family.

Agriculture and allied occupations such as sheep rearing, weaving and spinning of wool, etc., are the main occupation of the Gaddis. As the slopes are very steep and the soil of hilly terrain at the higher altitudes is very poor and stony and not fit for agriculture. So the size of the fields is very small and the food produced here is not sufficient for subsistence of the people. To compensate for the demographic pressures and to increase food production, clearing of vegetation, cover to avail of more land for agriculture has been a continuing process for long. Terraces are poorly cut and steep slopes are used which cause landslides, resulting in total loss of good soil cover. In spite of the fact that all the cultivable land has been brought under the plough, the population cannot live on agriculture alone. Agriculture technology is extremely simple and time consuming. Adult labour is in sufficient as men are on pastoral duties. Men and women are busy throughout the year. The hill sides are extremely steep and rocky so communications are still primitive. Almost all travel is done on foot. The upper ranges of Bharmour Mountains are noteworthy for their large, lush meadows. However, these pastures are only seasonal, the Gaddis cannot depend on them for the year round sustenance. Consequently, pattern of transhumance is developed to utilize the mountain area in its productive season. While relying on the other areas the rest of the year the Gaddis utilize the summer pastures of the surrounding mountains and winter pastures of the Kangra hills. Thus the Gaddis are able to support a human and animal population of sufficient size by means of agriculture and herding.

However it cannot be said that the environment alone drives them out of Bharmour during winters, the economic reality is also responsible for it. There are families which do not have enough land or do not rear enough sheep and goats to fulfill their economic needs throughout the year. They have to look for odd jobs in the lower hills where they migrate. They work on daily wages as road laborers, wood cutters, etc., and their women and children work as domestic help, thus earning their livelihoods for the winter months. Apart from this, wool and woolen products need some way of disposal which is not possible if they are stagnant locally.

Thus as is obvious from the aforementioned sentences women participate more or less equally in the agricultural activities which form the mainstay of Gaddi economy. However, since the women have the sole charge of kitchen and other household works, they do not work strenuously or for long hours on the fields. The women also prepare fodder for the cattle and leaves collected from forests. Amongst the wide array of activities which a Gaddi woman indulges in within the ambit of her household, some are cooking, sweeping and swabbing,
washing clothes and utensils, plastering the mud walls, fetching water and collecting fuel wood from the forest. As custom and tradition play a great part in determining the type of work to be done by the members of the two sexes, every boy or girl begins to pursue a particular economic career from his or her childhood. Girls from childhood are trained in lighter domestic chores like making preparations for meal, cleaning of utensils, sweeping the house. The boys are trained according to their physical strength to assist their parents in fields in fetching water from hand pump, etc.

Gaddi women spend most of their time in performing household activities and taking cattle for grazing or in the duties related to agriculture. They utilize their leisure time in a more fruitful way by indulging in artistic endeavours. They are well versed in preparing kroshia items and woolen garments. With the help of dried leaves they prepare a small cushion to sit, which is termed as “Binna” in their dialect. On occasions they make beautiful drawings and paint them inside their houses. Most of the married and unmarried girls, for economic gain, weave beautiful blankets and sell them in the local or government shops. Sristha Devi after getting married learnt to weave handloom blanket by the help of Mahila Mandal which is now defunct. Some have taken training from Kullu for making blankets and other woolen rugs. The women also make ropes and leaf plates out of the raw materials collected from the nearby forest. A wide variety of sweaters are also made by women in this area.

Detailed information has been given here about the occupation of females in the Sachuin Village of Bharmour

The total household number is 105 in which 73 families migrate in the winters to the lower valley of Kangra. Table 3 presents that females are still attached to their traditional work of blanket weaving (taken as profession). Women also prepare fodder for the cattle and fertilizer made out of cow dung and leaves collected from forests. Thus to conclude we may say that women work in fields is more in the nature of assistance to men who mainly carry out agricultural operations.

The multiplicity of the contacts with people from other communities and various programmes launched by government agencies, women have been pursuing new art and craft in the form of stitching, embroidery and making wall hangings and the like. A wide variety of sweaters and crochet work is also done by women. However the elderly women are not well accustomed to these new pursuits and prefer working up as traditional weavers. Sewing machines have been granted to some Gaddi women on concession and a few Gaddi girls learn tailoring at local tailor’s shop. Gaddi women are now promoted to do service and they themselves are aware to get empowered and are working towards it.

In a DAV college of Bharmour, three Gaddi teachers are teaching. In Sadumohalla, three sisters namely, Neelam, Anupma and Meena are Lecturers in History, Physics and Hindi respectively.

Women in the religious affairs

The Gaddi women who have a predominant role in the economic sphere make their presence felt in the religious sphere as well. Gaddis are the followers of Hinduism. Some have faith in Radha Swami Satsang institution. Bharmani Devi is the local Goddess of the Gaddis. A fast is observed during “Navaratra” (nine days fast) generally by women to seek her blessings for the betterment of their families. Several gods like Marali, Kiling, Lakhna mata Narsingh, Narayana, Hanuman, Banni mata, Kali, Sati are worshipped. Most of which are also associated with the Hindu religion. Every Gaddi family has its own lineage goddess which is decorated every morning by females. A fast is observed on every Purnima of the month by the females for the welfare and long life of their husbands. “Graha puja” (planet worship) is performed by men and women alike because the ritual is believed to prove efficacious only when the husband is accompanied by the wife. Some temples are prohibited for the females to enter like Keling, Narsingh, Hanuman, Buhari, and Banni Deity. This prohibition was strictly observed during old
days but now only married females are prohibited. Goat sacrifice is done only by males.

“Raah Pujna” (prayer performed of the pathway), a ritual is observed in which females worship the steep way of their village for the safe return of their husbands and children. “Kailu” is worshipped only by the females having children. They also worship their ancestors. “Shraads” are conducted for the calming of ancestor spirits and soul. They are believed to be pleased and propitiated by receiving worship and water and other ritual offerings only from the hands of the males. This is so because only males are considered to perpetuate a family or clan name. This is why girls have no part to play in ancestor worship. This is also one of the reasons why the birth of a son is marked by ritual gaiety, though the birth of a daughter is not treated with contempt due to their enormous role in the economic sphere. A Gaddi woman refrains from taking up religious tasks or entering the place of worship on certain special occasions of her life. As for instance during menstruation she does not observe fasts, feasts and religious rituals.

Women are debarred from attending funeral procession or ceremony. They cannot light the funeral pyre. They are also prevented from going to the jungle alone. These taboos are protective in nature as opined by the people of the village. Women owing to the weaker constitution are more vulnerable to the evil spirits that haunt the wilderness of forest or the cremation ground. It is interesting to note that on one hand women in the Gaddi society are considered easily susceptible to any evil spirits or evil eye, they are the ones who are most feared in their roles as “Dayan” or witch and their activities are known as “Khadra”. Not all women are witch or Dayan but certainly all Dayan’s or any other individual having an unnatural death seems to be inexplicably attributed to Dayan. However, no instances of witch hunting have been reported from Gaddis.

### Table 4. Literacy Level in the Village Sanchuin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LKG</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I - V</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI – X</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI – XII</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post graduates</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-literate</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women and politics

The traditional administrative setup gave no place to the women in administrative hierarchy. They could be present in Panchayat meetings as petitioners as someone found guilty of elopement with prohibited categories of people of other community, extramarital relations or the like. However after the introduction of statutory Panchayat after independence and even more so, after the initiation of 33% reservation for women in all the tiers of the Panchayati Raj system, like some centered roles to village in community centered roles, no doubt their status is registering a rise. However, the women in seats of power are only a handful, and it is more or less their influential husbands or parents-in-law who conduct the administrative affairs on their behalf. Her role is confined to attending the meetings of Panchayat. No doubt, the environment of women is only at an introductory stage and it’s therefore too early to arrive into any conclusions regarding Gaddi women’s standing in political sphere. Taking up of seats in public offices like Panchayat however does not diminish their share of work at the household chores.

Julmo Devi was elected as “Pradhan” (Head of the village Panchayat) of Rajaur village. Vyaso Devi and Bina Devi were also elected as Pradhans of Phoolan and Pansai villages respectively. They were elected from reserved seats for women candidates according to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

Women and education

Education has an important bearing on the determination of the statuses and roles of different sections of society. Gaddi women as well, are no exception, and education whether formal or informal goes on to influence ascription of pertinent status and associated roles for them. The informal education of girls starts at an early age that is, six to seven years. Informal education is more or less synonymous with socialization process, where in the child picks up the norms, tradition, language, custom and beliefs prevalent in her/his society either by imitation or by the oral instructions of the family members. In the socialization process of Gaddi girls, their mothers play a prominent role. From an early age of eight to ten, a Gaddi girl begins assisting her mother in her household chores, collecting fallen things from the forest for use as firewood, fetching water from nearby water resource, tidying the house, baby sitting of an infant sibling, weaving, knitting, take cattle for grazing, are few of the multitudinous task which a young girl undertake within the ambit of her household. Politeness, thrift and industriousness are the other qualities which the mothers try to inculcate in their daughters.

There has been an interesting network of formal educational institutions in the area inhabited by the Gaddi tribals. A careful look at the area reveals that the education up to class xith is satisfactory. There is one separate school for girls in Bharmour in which the total number of girl students is 400. Among 9 teachers of the school only
one teacher is Gaddi. The data of Sachuin village shows the decline in the number of students pursuing graduate or post graduate courses.

**Literacy level of the Sachuin village**

There are total of 1251 educated females in Bharmour. Interviews with the people of the Gaddi village and the teachers of the schools concerned reveal the causes of the slow progress of girl education after class xiii. In the first place, being largely a subsistence economy based on agro-pastoral activities the children especially the girls assist their mothers in weaving blankets or rugs and prepare themselves for the marriage. Secondly, they mostly face the problem of bearing the cost of education however small it may be. Table 4 shows the Literacy in the village Sachuin.

Apart from economic factors there are many socio-cultural factors in determining the progress of girl education among the Gaddis. There is feeling among the parents that their education does not help very much for the betterment of girls, once they are married. To them girls education is not a prerequisite for a happy married life since only expertise in household chores come to her aid in making her life successful, spending time and money in education is considered a waste.

There is no degree college in the area. For the education after class xiii they have to cover a long distance to reach Chamba or Dharamshala. Adequate facilities are not available to the people in the area for education. The Gaddis are transhumant and the means of communication are difficult so the education of the children is not possible. Because of the difficult terrain and the rigorous climate, trained teachers are not attracted to this area. The schools are not in the vicinity of the villages and the students have to walk to reach them. 30% of the schools going children have to walk more than four kilometers. As the terrain is hilly and difficult much time is consumed in coming and going to school.

Those families who have been declared below the poverty line by IRDP were provided Rs 500 per year as scholarship for the education of their wards. The girls who secure highest marks are given Rs11000 for one year as scholarship to encourage them for study. They are also given computer knowledge in the of ix-xiii. Apart from this in primary schools government distributes free notebooks, blazer and 3-4 kilograms of rice at the interval of 2-3 months.

**Women and their awareness towards health**

Gaddi women are careful about their health. Mostly Gaddi women suffer joint pain and leukoderma, a skin disease. The cause for this is their labourious lifestyle. Earlier for treatment Gaddi women use to go to the local doctor “vaidya” or religious specialists “chela” but now they have started going to the hospital. Bharmour has a Government hospital where they are given free medicines and are imparted family planning and contraceptive methods. They have adopted various contraceptives as copper-T, Mala-d, etc. In a family planning camp organized under Mother and Child Welfare Centres 15 women and only 4 men got themselves operated. Males are hesitant in doing so government gives money those who get operated but still, men are far behind. There are 19 centres of Mother and Child Welfare Centre. Aaganwadi’s are present in every village when expecting mothers are given proper nutrition so that they can deliver a healthy child.

Amita Sharma of Baari village passed her high school in 2002 securing highest marks in Bharmour alone. She secured 70% and was awarded with scholarship of 11,000.

**Impact of government schemes on the mobility of women and their participation in public life**

The employment oriented schemes like Mahila Mandal, Self Help Groups (presently none -functional) NAURAD, etc., have attempted to better the lot of the Gaddi women. All these schemes are run by the separate Department of Social and Women Welfare, Himanchal Pradesh. To make the self confident and to make them a small industry of their own government provides the assistance of Rs 2500- if this annual income is below Rs 7500/-. The main task of the Mahila Mandal has been to mobilize women for undertaking such employment oriented training.

Some women were benefitted by this scheme. They have started to weave blankets for commercial for banning the sale of liquor and for opening up the vocational training centers for Gaddi women. Not much has been done in this regard. But the efforts on the part of Gaddi women for betterment are indeed laudable. However, they have been successful in spreading consciousness for public health programmes like administration of polio drop and vaccination to pregnant and nursing mothers as well as their children.

An analysis of the impact of government schemes on the mobility and awareness of the Gaddi women reveals that they are quite receptive of the schemes aimed at their economic and social betterment. However, they lack interest in collective tasks which entails initial monetary investment on their part. This is mainly due to the fact that most families are already operating at the subsistence level.

Government is also providing rupees 2500 to homeless girls for their marriage.

Some community welfare centers are also working in the area in which they train females in stitching and embroidery and for the housing facility to impart training.
in making temporary houses that have been introduced in
the area which has given a boost to the upliftment of the
females. The financial assistance is given by the central
government for this scheme. To make the females aware
of their rights and schemes the government has
introduced some awareness camps which are organized
periodically.

These schemes have helped Gaddi females to accept
new roles and raise their status. Nowadays, Gaddi women
have started working in government institutions with the
inclination towards education. In the realm of health care
they have left their traditional way and have accepted the
new one. To become self dependent in all aspects Gaddi
women have adopted new avenues. The attitude towards
various development programme has been favourable.
Educational facilities and Primary Health care centres
have made an impact on literacy and health, respectively.
However, facilities like job reservations, governmental
loans and the rural employment programme have helped
in ameliorating progress. The economic development and
employment generation schemes have been appreciated
by them. Modern means of mass media have reached
them.

Education has proved to be an important instrument of
change in the status of women, especially after the
implementation of the government schemes. As more
and more schools are being opened and education is
becoming easily accessible more and more tribals are
turning towards education. As a result they learn and
adopt their ways and mores. They have learnt new
mannerisms.

A closer analysis of the daily routine and behavioural
aspects of the Gaddi women reveals that the freedom of
movement tends to vary with the various age groups of
women. In families of lower status girls have lot of
restrictions whereas in families where people are
educationally aware, they give lot of freedom in every
aspect of life as given to the boys. In higher status
families both the married women and girls are allowed to
go out without any restriction. It may be concluded as it is
observed that ecological and environmental factors
existing in Bharmour have given to Gaddi women a
special economic power, an elevated social status and
authority almost equal to men. However, there are certain
domains in which men continue to dominate, as is
culturally required. Moreover, community authority still is
in the hands of men. There is a kind of duality observed
here. Men dominate in public and community affairs and
continue to play the role of the head of the family and
bread winner, women enjoy greater say in family life,
great deal of social freedom and several of their actions
are condoned/tolerated.

This confirm with Ortnel (1974) and Rosaldo’s (1974)
thesis in one way that inspite of the public, domestic
dichotomy the ecological/economic division interfere
further modifications in women’s position. Hence one
may say that the public/domestic dichotomy is not the
only criterion for determining women’s status in society.

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