



Research Paper

Kinnaura Tribe Present and Past: A Case Study of Kalpa Block Kinnaur District in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive ethnographic and historical exploration of the Kinnaura tribe inhabiting the Kalpa block of Kinnaur District, Himachal Pradesh. Drawing from both primary and secondary data, the research delves into the cultural, social and economic dimensions of the community, examining how traditional practices intersect with modern influences. The study foregrounds aspects such as caste dynamics, religious practices, gender roles, livelihood patterns and family structures, while also tracing the historical transformations the tribe has undergone. By highlighting the ways in which globalization, state policies and tourism have impacted the Kinnaura identity, the research provides valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of indigenous communities in the Himalayas.

Keywords: Animistic, Kimpurusha, Bonpo, Indigenous, Primitive, Pastoralism.

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I. Introduction

The tribal communities of North-East India traditionally hold primitive and animistic worldviews. Animism¹ is a belief system that considers all elements of nature to possess a spiritual presence or essence. According to this perspective, every component of the natural world such as plants, animals, rivers, stones and other objects are believed to be alive and infused with spirit or consciousness (Bordoloi, 2024, p.141). A major portion of the tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh are inhabited by Kinnauras or locally known as Kanauras. Kinnauras are also called Kimpurusha in which Kim means 'what kind of' purusha means 'human being'. It means a distinct race somewhere between human beings and gods. The Kinnauras are known as heavenly musicians and singers. This traditional trait is found in abundance among the present-day Kinnauras of Himachal Pradesh (Thakur, 1997, P.28).

Kinnaur is one of the remote districts of Himachal Pradesh, a sparsely populated and rural state. The rural areas of Himachal Pradesh are still isolated from the popular culture and global economic connections that are more prevalent in India's metropolitan cities (Sharma and Mohan, 2024, P. 357). Kinnaur is one of the twelve districts of Himachal Pradesh, predominantly inhabited by tribal population (Kumar and Ganie, 2024, P.1). Kinnaur is a name in itself, it is not an exact place and it refers to Kinner Kailash. Little is known about the history of Kinnaur, except that it was once known as Kannaure or Kinnaure. Some of these people believe that they are related to the Kinner of Mahabharata while others consider themselves descendants of Kirats. Kirats were the people who were defeated by the Aryans and the Khashas and were forced to move to the distant Himalayan region. Kinnaur was previously under the control of the Mughal Empire and was ruled by the Mouraya Empire in the 6th century BCE. Kinnaur was ruled by the Guge Kingdom of Tibet between the 9th and 12th centuries. It is known that after the decline of the Mughal Empire, the Kinnaur valley, then known as Chini

¹ Animism is a belief system that holds that all things in nature — such as plants, animals, rocks, rivers and mountains — have a spirit or soul. This belief emphasizes that every part of the natural world is alive and spiritually significant.

Tehsil, played an eminent role. When its dominant role in the region ended, it was integrated as a part of the Mahasu district. By 1960, the region was reorganized for political, ethnic and cultural reasons, leading to the formation of the present-day Kinnaur district (Kumar and Singh, 2022, P. a300).

Religion is considered an essential institution of human life. Man's life from birth to death is centred on religious beliefs and practices. Both Hindu and Buddhist religions are followed in Kinnaur and this fact makes the Kinnauras unique. The fusion of these two religious streams has given birth to a third religion known as Dvaita Dharma. The dual religion adopted by the Kinners especially in Central Kinnaur and other parts in general has provided solution to the social, ecological and mental needs of the Kinners. Another notable feature about the Kinner religion is that though they call themselves Hindus but there are no Brahmins in their area. There appears to be some difference in cultural patterns at the local level between the Kinners living in the western part of the district (which is predominantly Hindu) and those living in the eastern part which is highly influenced by Tibetan Buddhism. There lies a central part where the Kinners have a fused form of impact of these two religions. Local deities of the Kinnaura tribal community have an important place in the lives of Kinners. The village deities have certain specific areas to rule and have control over the social, judicial-political and religious life of the Kinners (Chandra, 1992, p. 24-26).

The Devta institution in Kinnaur illustrates the region's syncretic religious fabric, blending aspects of Hinduism, Buddhism and indigenous animistic practices. The earliest settlers of Kinnaura ancient societies followed animism, venerating natural factors such as mountains, rivers and trees. Long before the arrival of Buddhism, the Bon² or Bonpo tradition which also centres on the worship of nature spirits and local deities was already widespread in the area (Dogra and Bhagat, 2022, pp.511-513). Every village in Kinnaur has its own deity. Every deity has its own Gur called as Grogch³ in their local dialect (Chib, 1984, p.10). The Kinnaur region is also famous for its dances. The most popular is called Kayang. The second form of dance called Bakayang has two or three rows of dancers facing each other (Singh, 1997, p. 199). Beside it, the hills of Kinnaur have been producing the best quality apples in the world and also fetching the highest prices. But environmental conditions are playing a major role in influencing the livelihood and economy of people in Kinnaur Himalaya (Singh and Kadsholi, 2018, pp. 39-41).

Objectives

1. To explore the traditional cultural practices, cultural preservation, socio-economic change and belief systems of the Kinnaura tribe in Kalpa Block.
2. To analyze the historical evolution of the Kinnaura tribe including shifts in livelihood, caste and religious identities.
3. To understand the impact of external forces such as modernization, tourism and government interventions on the Kinnaura way of life.

II. Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative and quantitative approach. Fieldwork was conducted in ten villages within the Kalpa block and ten respondents from each panchayat (Total 100 Respondents) using random sampling method. The research employing participant observation, in-depth interviews, oral histories and focus group discussions with community members across different age groups and genders. Primary data was collected directly from local respondents, community elders, women and youth. Secondary sources such as books and research journals were also used to contextualize and corroborate field data.

Origin of Caste System and Social Structure in Kinnaura Tribal Society

According to Chandra, the word 'Kinner' means half-man and half-giant (leviathan) and on this basis they are also known as Ashvamukha. Many scholars consider Kinners to be from some non-Aryan lineage. However, Sanskritayana believes that Kinner or Kimpurusha is a degradation of the name given to exploited and dominated slaves. It is believed that the Dasyu people once lived in the Himalayan region and were constantly intermixed into the Aryan community due to the continuous efforts of the Rig-Vedic sage Vishwamitra. This view supports the belief of some earlier historians that before the Vedic Aryans and the Khashas, another tribe called the Kinner-Kirat probably lived in the Himalayas (Chandra, 1992, pp. 60-61).

Before understanding the origin of the caste system and social structure in the Kinnaura tribal society, it is essential to understand the pre-history of Himachal Pradesh. The prehistory of Himachal Pradesh reflects

² Bon is an ancient native religion that began in specific areas of Tibet. It was practiced for many centuries by a group of people known as the Bonpo, long before Buddhism became widespread in the region.

³ Grogch is a spiritual intermediary or divine messenger who conveys the thoughts and guidance of the deities to the community.

the early movements of people from the Indian plains and Central Asia. It has been described as the "womb of nations" due to the significant migrations that shaped its early history. The Indus Valley Civilization is generally believed to have flourished between 3000 and 1750 BC. Outside the Indus Valley, in prehistoric times, the Indo-Gangetic plain was inhabited by the Proto-Australoid or Munda-speaking Kolarian people. As the people of the Indus Valley expanded into the Gangetic plains, they displaced the Kolarian groups pushing them eastward. Many of these groups then migrated northward into the valleys of Himachal Pradesh. In the Vedas, these early inhabitants are referred to as Dasas, Dasyus and Nishadas. In post-Vedic literature, they are mentioned as Kinners Kirats, Nagas and Yakshas. The Koli people, also known as Mundas were likely among the earliest and original migrants to the Himachal hills. The Koli, Hali, Dum and Chanal communities of the Western Himalayas as well as the Chamang and Domang of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti are the remnants of this ancient race. During the Rigvedic period, they were considered the dominant groups in the hills. The Rigveda mentions a powerful king named Shambara who ruled during this era and had ninety-nine strong forts spread across the hills between the Beas and Yamuna rivers. After their defeat, some Dasyu tribes retreated further into the northern hills, where they continued to live under the growing dominance of the Khashas (Singh, 1997, pp.47-49). According to Chib, Kinner was an ancient tribe that lived in an extensive area covering the Himalaya. They were fond of singing and dancing. They were pushed to the inaccessible heights by the Khashas and the Aryans. In due course of time they completely got assimilated with the Khashas (Chib, 1984, p.8). Kinnaura tribe lives in district Kinnaur. No Brahmin has ever settled in this district inhabited by the Kinners (Ahluwalia, 1988, p. 220).

During focus group discussion with Kinnaura Scheduled Caste people it was found that the words Chamang and Domang are derogatory terms. This is not the name of any particular caste living in Kinnaur but is an abuse. According to them, the use of the terms Chamang and Domang by the Khoshia tribe is baseless and fabricated. The word Chamang and Domang have originated from a generic Khash dialect word used to describe people engaged in various types of manual labour not as a fixed caste identity. Chamang= Cham+ Ang, Cham means Wool and Ang means person i. e. wool related work. Domang=Dom+Ang i.e. a person related to playing with drum. Overtime, however this label was formalized in official records into rigid caste classifications which do not align with the historical or cultural reality of Kinnaura tribal people⁴.

Based on the above prehistoric facts and field survey, the researcher concluded that the Scheduled Castes currently residing in Kinnaur—specifically the Kinnaura tribe Koli and the Kinnaura tribe Lohar are in fact the descendants of ancient tribes known as the Kinners and the Kiratas. The terms *Chamang* and *Domang* do not exist in either the Vedic texts or the post-Vedic literature. Over time, their names have changed. In the Vedas, these early inhabitants were referred to as *Dasa*, *Dasyu* and *Nishad*. In later Vedic literature, they were called *Kinner*, *Kirata*, *Naga* and *Yaksha*. However, under the dominance of the Khashas they were labelled as *Chamang* and *Domang* by the Khoshia. In reality, these people do not belong to the Scheduled Castes but to the Scheduled Tribes.

According to Sharma, Tribes are given different names at different traditional identity places according to their traditional identity, geographical location, their social stratification in the society etc. which makes them distinct from others (Sharma, p. a208).

92 year old male respondent told that social identities of Kinnaura tribe were primarily shaped by natural settlements and ecological surroundings rather than caste heredity. Even today, remnants of these early identity patterns can be observed in the region—for instance, place like Dhakhai i.e. grapes prone area, Holdeo (flood-prone area) Chulimaj (wild-apricot- rich zones), Tholdhen and Ragdhen (family living on rocky areas) Gothang Panung (A site with a flour mill/ gharat) reflects how communities named and identified themselves based on the natural resources and topography of their environment. This system has emerged largely from local adaptations to geography and ecology⁵.

One of the 85 year old respondent belonged to Scheduled Caste community told that with the emergence of settled agriculture and the institutionalisation of local deities and religious practices, a gradual transformation began. The increasing importance of Devta worship introduced a ritual hierarchy and the rise of royal authority further stratified society. The Bushehr kings began assigning roles to individuals based on their occupations- especially those who served in royal Courts. Although this occupational classification was not originally caste-based in a strict sense, it contributed to the foundation of stratified roles within the community. Moreover, the geographical and climatic diversity of Kinnaur necessitated that people take on multiple roles seasonally, including pastoralism, agriculture, weaving, blacksmithing, carpentry, trade and other. Thus, occupation was determined more by skill and necessity than by birth⁶. However, during the British colonial period, when the documentation of Kinnaura tribal society began, especially in administrative records

⁴ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

⁵ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

⁶ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

like the Shimla Hill States Gazetteer, a more rigid classification was introduced. Some individuals who worked closely linked with the royal Court categorised the community in to upper and lower castes for administrative convenience. For instance, groups such as the Koli (including Chamang and Domang) were labelled as lower castes, while Khoshia groups were identified as upper castes (Shimla Hill States Gazetteer, 1910, p.22).

During field survey it was found that this categorization is not based on logical argument because, primitive Kinnaura tribal society did not follow a system of permanent birth-based occupation. People engaged in multiple forms of labour throughout their lives, based on time, need and environmental context. Therefore, the categorisation of castes based on occupation appears arbitrary and unjustified. Caste based division is not solely a religious or Brahmanical construct but a localised expression of broader social, political and economic processes. Even today, several historical forts exist in Kinnaur, such as those in Labrang, Kamru and Sapni villages. Entry in to these forts is still restricted for people belonging to the lower strata of society. These forts stand as living testimonies of the royal history of Kinnaur, from where the traditional upper caste society was governed⁷.

During field survey a 92-year-old elderly respondent stated that both upper and lower castes served under the Begaar⁸ (forced labor) Pratha during the rule of the Bushahr kings. This practice was a symbol of slavery and was traditionally referred to as chakari in the local dialect of Kinnaur. According to him, although official records have extensively highlighted the occupational roles of the lower castes, the equal contributions made by the upper castes have been largely overlooked. This selective documentation raises questions about the bias and objectivity of such classifications⁹.

One of the 35 year old male respondent told that the colonial process, therefore, played a dual and distorting role: it misrepresented flexible, skill-based tribal occupations as rigid caste identities and then institutionalised these artificial categories through government records, educational system and legal frameworks. This was further exacerbated by the Hinduization of tribal belief systems, wherein indigenous traditions were reinterpreted into hierarchical categories such as Lower Castes and Upper Castes which failed to reflect the community's unique historical and cultural contexts¹⁰.

From the above statement researcher concluded that the social identities of the Kinnaura tribe were shaped more by ecology and geography than by caste heredity. Traditional classifications emerged from practical roles rather than fixed birth-based occupations. Colonial and royal influences distorted these flexible identities into rigid caste structures. Such imposed labels misrepresent the community's historical and cultural realities. Present caste distinctions lack logical and historical justification in the Kinnaura context.

Evolution of Livelihood Practices and Traditional Economy

During field survey one of the 70-year-old respondent told that earlier, the Kinnaura tribal society was primarily based on agriculture. Farming was the main source of livelihood. People used to cultivate traditional crops such as ogla, phaphra, barley, maize, wheat, buckwheat, kodra, dankhar, koaulgi, chinhe, barley, potatoes, peas etc. in a place called Kande to sustain their lives. During those times, people helped each other in agricultural work and instead of money; they exchanged grains as a form of payment. Grain was the bases of their economy. Even trade with Tibet was based on the barter system. However, over time this barter system gradually transformed into a monetary exchange system. With the circulation of money, the trading practices also began to change¹¹.

It was also found in field survey that people started selling products such as chilgoza (pine nuts), peas, potatoes, kidney beans and chillies. Gradually, they began apple orchard. As the global demand for apples increased and prices rose, people started cutting down traditional trees like chuli (wild apricot) and bemi to plant apple trees. Horticulture began to be prioritized over traditional crops. With the establishment of government fair price shop in every village, food supplies became easily accessible. As a result, agricultural activities decreased and people began to focus more on horticulture. Agricultural land was converted into orchard land and people increasingly engaged in the cultivation of cash crops to earn higher incomes. However, with the opening up of new opportunities, people now have access to vast possibilities. People who employed in government and private sector jobs outside their homes has significantly improved their standard of living and made their lives easier¹².

⁷ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

⁸ The practice of labour without payment is called begaar. In this, work is taken from laborers without their consent. Feudal, imperialist and bureaucratic systems often exploit the weaker sections of society through begar. It is a form of slavery.

⁹ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁰ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹¹ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹² Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

According to Kumari, the construction of hydroelectric power projects is a major developmental activity that has caused significant damage to the region. The extensive development of these projects along the Sutlej River basin and its tributaries poses a serious risk to the lives and livelihoods of local communities. Moreover, it has led to irreversible harm to the ecology and environment of Kinnaur, a region known for its geographical vulnerability (Kumari, 2023, p.314).

An 80-year-old male respondent told that nowadays, there are problems in the construction of wooden houses. Due to the construction of hydroelectric projects, a large number of trees have been cut down, making it difficult for people to obtain Timber Distribution (TD). In addition, the rising cost of wood has made it harder for people to build wooden homes. On the other hand, RCC (reinforced cement concrete) houses are being built more easily. Thus, in the Kinnaura tribal society, wooden houses are rapidly being replaced by RCC (reinforced cement concrete) structures. Earlier, village houses were entirely made of wood but now the scene in villages has changed. Now, wooden houses are rarely seen¹³.

The researcher concluded that the Kinnaura tribal society has undergone significant transformation over time. Traditional agriculture and wooden homes have gradually been replaced by horticulture and RCC houses. Barter economy shifted to a cash-based system changing livelihoods and trade. Modernization and development projects have deeply altered their environment and lifestyle. Despite these changes elders still value old practices highlighting a generational divide.

Family Structures

It was found during the field survey that in earlier times, people used to live in joint families but nowadays people prefer to live in nuclear families. The survey revealed that 55 percent of people live in nuclear families while 45 percent live in joint families. 100 percent respondents stated that some of their family members who earlier lived in joint families now stay away from home due to jobs. As a result, the person staying at home has to manage all the household responsibilities alone while income is divided among all. However, those family members who work government jobs outside the home use their salary for themselves which leads to disputes. This has caused a shift from joint families to nuclear families. Moreover, the field survey also found that people are dividing their nuclear families for the purpose of availing government benefits. In earlier times, joint families were successful because whoever earned used to hand over their income to the head of the family and there was harmony among all family members. But nowadays, people prefer to live in nuclear families rather than joint families¹⁴.

Gender-Based Inequalities: A Changing Scenario

During field survey 100 percent of the respondent revealed that in earlier time gender-based inequality was prevalent. Women were confined within the four walls of the house and did not participate in external affairs. They were not even sent to school. However, the situation has significantly changed in the present times. Now, women are ahead of men in many areas and are also holding government positions. In the Kalpa block, out of 24 panchayats, women hold the position of *Pradhan* (head) in 13 panchayats which reflects their growing presence and identity in leadership roles¹⁵.

Traditional Attire in Kinnaur: A Changing Trend

Field surveys revealed that in ancient times, women in Kinnaur traditionally wore attire such as dhori, choli, baljang and Gachi. Men used to wear chamsuhtan, Thepang (Tophi), coat and chhubha. However, in present times the modern generation does not prefer wearing these traditional clothes. As many spend a significant amount of time outside their homes and come into contact with people from different cultures. So they tend to adapt themselves according to broader societal norms. Nevertheless, traditional attire is still worn during temple functions or village festivals. In fact, those who do not wear traditional clothing on such occasions are fined or penalized. Thus, it can be concluded that due to the cold climatic conditions of the region, wearing warm clothing is essential for the people of Kinnaur. But when they go to warm area outside Kinnaur, they change their attire¹⁶.

Status of Women

Field survey revealed that in earlier times, the condition of women was not very favourable. Women were largely regarded as childbearing entities. Girls were not provided with education and parents generally ignored the importance of educating their daughters. Instead of going to school, girls were sent to graze sheep,

¹³ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁴ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁵ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁶ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

goats and cows while boys were given the opportunity to study. During that period, arranged marriages were very rare and forcibly marriage was in vogue. However, this situation has improved significantly over time. Today, parents spend enough money for their daughters' education. The government's provision of free education has also contributed positively to this change. Field survey indicates that the condition of women in the Kinnaura tribal society has advanced considerably compared to the past¹⁷.

Despite these improvements, one unresolved issue is the right of women to inherit property. This concern was raised during fieldwork and held group discussion. The discussion revealed that a customary law known as *wazib-ul-urz* still exists in Kinnaur. During field survey 51 percent of the people are not in favour of changing this traditional law. Meanwhile, 35 percent believe that there should be amendments regarding property rights for daughters. They argued that girls who do not have real brothers should be granted full rights to their parents' property. Additionally, 14 percent of the respondents stated that property rights should only be given to girls who marry within Kinnaur. If a girl marries an outsider, the property should not be transferred to her. Their reasoning is that doing so may invite individuals from different religious backgrounds such as Muslims, Christians and Sikhs into the region which could threaten the distinct cultural identity of the Kinnaura tribal society and result in cultural conflicts¹⁸.

Based on the above findings, the researcher concluded that the Kinnaura tribal society does not want to allow outsiders to enter Kinnaur in order to preserve their traditional culture. They believe that the entry of outsiders could lead to the extinction of their culture and threaten the unique identity of the Kinnaura tribal society. Hence, the Kinnaura tribal community is not in favour of granting property rights to women, fearing the extinction of their traditional indigenous culture. Furthermore, the researcher noted that the Kinnaura tribal society expects married women to claim property rights in their husband's household rather than in their parental home.

Marriage System

During the field survey it was found that an indigenous traditional customs of marriage exists in Kinnaura tribal society. But nowadays due to the contact with outer world, peoples are trying to copy the non-tribal culture like Haldi ceremony, Saat Fehra etc. and peoples are using the English liquor instead of local liquor. According to Kumari, to maintain a balance between tradition and modernity, several measures have been implemented. For instance, certain villages have restricted the adoption of modern wedding customs influenced by Hindu rituals. Furthermore, the use of English liquor at weddings and other social events has been banned in many communities (Kumari, 2025, pp.15-16). The field survey revealed that in ancient time's marriage practices such as Dab-Dab, Bhagya-Shis and Damchalsis were prevalent. However, these traditions have completely changed in the present day. Although, elopement for marriage is a traditional practice among Kinnaura tribal people but nowadays, most of the educated boys and girls don't like to elope and get married; instead they prefer arranged marriages. In earlier times due to the lack of resources, arranged marriages were difficult to organize. But now with improved economic conditions and better resources, people are opting for arranged marriage¹⁹.

The researcher concluded that the Kinnaura tribal society is experiencing a shift in marriage customs due to outside cultural influences. Traditional practices are being replaced by rituals from mainstream Hindu culture. However some villages are taking steps to preserve their heritage. There is a clear move from elopement to arranged marriages among the educated youth. Economic growth has also made arranged marriages more feasible than in the past.

Cultural Roots

Xaxa, mentioned that tribes and tribal communities have experienced transformations as a result of cultural adaptation brought about by their contact and interaction with other groups or societies (Xaxa, 2005, p. 1364). India is very rich for its culture. But if we try to understand the roots of this prosperity and the reason behind its rise then we can easily understand how Buddhism, the earliest religion of India has influenced Indian culture in various aspects. Culture does not only mean language, literature, dance music etc; social customs, beliefs, value system, fundamental rights and traditions also come under culture. India has its own ancient culture which is a mixture of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim and tribal religions and this in one way or the other helps in shaping the national identity of India. As we know the most famous concept of India is "Unity in Diversity" This particular phrase refers to peace and harmony. It reflects the principle of equality irrespective of class, caste, gender, religion and unity in cultural and political diversity (Mukherjee, p.1).

¹⁷ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁸ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

¹⁹ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

According to Negi, Kinnaur is a region where both Hinduism and Buddhism coexist, although the practice of Hinduism here is not strictly orthodox. The local population primarily follows Tibetan Buddhism, but its presence gradually lessens as one travels from Kanam in the east towards Nichar in the west (Negi, 2017, p.261). During field survey it was found that Kinnaur district is divided into three blocks: Kalpa, Pooh and Nichar. The people belonging to Nichar block is predominantly Hindu and worships various deities. Pooh block, located along the border with Tibet is inhabited by people who are strict followers of Buddhism. They adhere to Buddhist principles from birth to death. It was found that Kalpa block is a confluence where both Hinduism and Buddhism are practiced. It is an area where people identify themselves as Hindus, yet they also follow Buddhist customs. In all villages of Kalpa block, the practice of animal sacrifice was traditionally prevalent. However, with the increasing influence of Buddhism, people have stopped performing sacrifices in temples. Both Hindu deities and Buddhist traditions are practiced side by side in Kalpa villages. Each village has temples as well as Buddhist monasteries (Gompas). The worship rituals of Hindu deities and Buddhist traditions are deeply intertwined here. The worship ceremonies of the deities often incorporate many Buddhist elements²⁰. According to Das, Buddhism is a religion that does not subscribe to the belief in a god or a divine creator being (Das, 2023, p. g74).

A 39 year old male respondent stated that the Buddhism taught by Gautama Buddha discouraged idol worship, violence, discrimination and untouchability. However, the widespread Buddhism in Kinnaur does not fully follow these basic principles. Access to Buddhist monasteries here is restricted for Kinnaura tribe Koli and Kinnaura tribe Lohar communities but only Khoshia individuals are allowed, reflecting social discrimination. From these facts it can be concluded that there is no clear distinction between Vajrayana Buddhism and Hinduism in Kinnaur. People have altered Buddha's teachings and adapted them to form a different religion, often referred to as the Vajrayana branch or Tibtian Buddhism²¹.

Research also reveals that in Kinnaur, there are followers of Christianity. *A 62-year-old Christian believer from the Kinnaura tribe Koli community stated that both Hinduism and Buddhism in Kinnaur have flaws. Besides Hindu temples, untouchability is also prevalent in Buddhist monasteries. According to him, in the modern era such social evils continue to exist and pose a challenge for the future generation. To protect their self-respect, they have embraced Christianity in which they have got happiness, prosperity and peace²².*

Researcher concluded that members of the Kinnaura tribe Koli community have abandoned Hinduism and Buddhism and adopted Christianity, as they seek to live with dignity and self-respect.

Prevalence of Poygamy System among the Kinnaura Tribal Society

According to Kumar and Singh, in Kinnaur, among the Kinnaura tribal community, the traditional practice of polyandry still exists in certain regions, influenced by Tibetan culture. This custom originated in ancient times as a means to ensure survival, particularly in remote areas with limited cultivable land and to manage family resources more effectively (Kumar, 2022, a300). Field survey revealed that in earlier times, the Kinnaura tribal society practiced polygyny (having multiple wives), polyandry (having multiple husbands) and the system of joint family living. Due to limited resources and to prevent the division of property, people preferred to live in joint families. Moreover, if a person owned a large amount of land and property, he often had more than one wife because managing household work required more people. Thus, polygyny, polyandry and joint family systems were common practices²³.

The practice of having multiple husbands was followed primarily to avoid the division of property. Nowadays due to the spread of education, people have become more aware and they do not favour the polygamy and polyandry.

Tourism and Hydropower Projects

According to Jangra and Kaushik, Kinnaur stands out from other regions of the world due to its unique physical landscape and challenging climatic conditions. This distinct environment, characterized by a cold desert ecosystem, along with the vibrant cultural heritage of its tribal communities, has helped the area gain popularity as a tourist destination (Jangra and Kaushik, 2018, p.14). Field surveys revealed that due to the cold weather conditions, people visit this region mainly during the summer months. In the study area: Sangla, Chhitkul and Kalpa are popular tourist destinations. The Kinner Kailash Mountain, visible from Kalpa, greatly captivates visitors. Tourists from outside are highly impressed by the local cuisine, traditional attire and the rich culture of the Kinnauras and they appreciate it deeply. According to Singh and Kumar, Hydropower projects in tribal regions have become a major point of discussion due to the environmental and social challenges they

²⁰ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

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²² Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

²³ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

bring. The building and functioning of dams often lead to significant alterations in the natural and ecological systems. In many cases, the negative impacts tend to overshadow the potential benefits. These impacts include deforestation, disruption of river flow and ecosystems, forced displacement of local communities, health-related concerns, erosion of cultural heritage and the social exclusion of indigenous populations (Singh and Kumar, 2024, p.3).

*An 80-year-old woman stated that the frequent arrival of tourists has significantly impacted the local environment. Many tourists leave food waste, empty bottles and plastic items near pilgrimage sites and natural water sources, leading to pollution of these sources and making the drinking water polluted. While tourism has generated sources of income, it has also brought some harmful effects. Therefore, it is important that the tourism department establish proper regulations and issue guidelines so that the local people do not have to suffer due to these problems*²⁴. According to Sharma, Spiti and Lahaul, Kinnaur has experienced a significant rise in tourism due to its magnificent landscapes and close location to well-known tourist spots; Kinnaura locals have opened guest houses, small hotels and homestays, boosting the region's economy. Being nearby an important Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage sites has further enhanced their earnings through adventure tourism, trekking and religious pilgrimage. Researcher concluded that Kinnaur's unique landscape and culture make it a popular tourist destination. However increasing tourism and hydropower projects are causing environmental and social challenges. Sustainable planning is essential to protect local communities and preserve natural resource (Sharma, 2024, pp. 490-494).

Researcher concluded that Kinnaur's unique landscape and vibrant culture attract many tourists each year Tourism and hydropower projects have brought both opportunities and serious challenges. Environmental degradation and social disruption are growing concerns for the region. Sustainable development is crucial to protect local communities and preserve natural resources.

Social Awareness and Educational Progress after Independence

During field survey it was found that after independence, with the end of monarchy and the rise of democracy, people were granted the right to vote. Along with the right to vote, the level of public awareness gradually increased. People began to understand their rights and duties better than before. The opening of schools in every village led to significant growth in the field of education. The provision of free education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 has also had a positive impact on society. People have started to understand the importance of education. Earlier, education was limited only to males. Parents used to consider girls' education as useless. However, education is no longer confined to males. Today, girls are equally capable and successful as boys in the field of education. There has been a gradual increase in public awareness regarding the government's welfare policies. The establishment of gram panchayats has enhanced the spirit of participation among the people. The policy of reservation has greatly benefited the Kinnaura tribal community, leading to an increase in their level of awareness as well²⁵.

III. Conclusion

The Kinnaura tribal society of Kalpa block in Kinnaur district reflects a rich and complex cultural heritage. It is shaped by age-old traditions and historical transitions. The community follows a unique blend of Hinduism and Buddhism. Traditional practices like polyandry and joint families still influence daily life. Caste-based roles such as those of the Kinnaura Triibe Koli and Kinnaura Triibe Lohar remain significant. These groups trace their ancestry to ancient Kinner and Kirat origins. Modern forces like tourism and education are changing their way of life. Agriculture is shifting due to market needs and climate change. Youth are becoming more aware of gender rights and social equality. The community faces a challenge in balancing tradition with modern change.

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²⁴ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

²⁵ Data Collected in their local dialect and Hindi and translated into English.

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