

## **Deity Beliefs, Buddhist Monasteries and Religious Institution Lead Caste Based Discrimination: A Study of Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

Himachal Pradesh has considered “Dev Bhoomi” wherein people have deep faith in their deities. Many parts of the State are still untouched by external customs and manners. They have their own rules to regulate the life of the entire people of the region. Deity beliefs and their institution are used to maintain dominance by the superior caste over the inferior caste which leads to caste-based discrimination and untouchability. In the district, the Kinnaur people have deep faith in their deities, Lamas, and other religious institutions. The present study made an attempt to explore the deity beliefs and other religious institutions which lead to untouchability among the people of Kinnaur where such practices are prevailing at an extensive level. The present study is based on primary as well as secondary data. Data were collected from interviews, books, articles, and internet sources.

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**Keywords:** Deity, Untouchability, Scheduled Caste, Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh.

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### **Introduction**

India is a secular country where everyone has the right to choose their religion. In India Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism are flourishing with harmony besides diversity. Rural State like Himachal Pradesh has their own tradition and culture. People are living in tribal and non-tribal areas and are divided into two main categories namely Scheduled Caste and non- Scheduled Castes. The people of Himachal Pradesh have deep faith and beliefs in their religion and local deities.

In the Kinnaur district caste system and untouchability are found at a large level. The society of Kinnaur is divided into two broad categories i.e. Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe. Scheduled Castes include- Chamang, Domang, ours and Scheduled Tribe include Khasiyas.

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Chamang related to Koli, Domangs are Blacksmith and Orus are carpenters. Khasiyas are Kanet which are supposed to be Aryan origin. Chamang, Domang and orus are considered original habitants of the Kinnaur region.

### **Social Composition of Kinnaur**

In Kinnaur, there are two principal castes i.e. Scheduled Caste and non- Scheduled Caste. Non- Scheduled Caste comes under the Scheduled Tribe category. The Scheduled Caste category includes Chamang, Domang, and Orus, and Scheduled Tribe include Khasiyas or Kunas. Chamang belongs to Koli, Domang belongs to Blacksmith, and Orus belongs to Carpenters. According to some historians, Chamangs are traditionally shoemakers and weavers. But Chamang are not shoemakers but they are traditionally weavers. They were doing work related to wool. In the Kinnauri language wool is called Cham so that is why they were called Chamang.

At present Chamang caste is not a shoemaker but a very low number of this caste people are doing the work of weaving. Domangs are blacksmith as well as do the work of goldsmiths also.

### **Objectives**

- To study the Caste based discrimination in district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh.
- To find out the social and religious life of the peoples of district Kinnaur.

### **Methodology**

The present study is based on primary as well as secondary sources. Data was collected from interviews with Scheduled Caste people in Rarang, Pangi, Kothi, Nichar, Moorang, and Sungra villages of district Kinnaur. Secondary data was collected from books, research papers, and internet sources.

### **Linguistic composition of Kinnaur**

Worried about the semantic synthesis of Kinnaur they communicate in the Kinnauri language. As per some master, Kinnauri language shows close affinities to Mundari (spoken in Chota Nagpur), as they accept long back a combination in this space had reclaimed between Munda unique tribe and a Tibetan tribe. In Kinnaur Chitkuli tongue is spoken by individuals living in Baspa valley, Jangshang lingo is spoken in Moorang tehsil and Sumcho, Sunnam and Chhoyulidialect are spoken in the border area of Lahoul-Spiti. Pahari - Kinnauri which is like

the western Pahari language is spoken by the Scheduled Castes of Moorang, Kalpa, Nichar, and Sangla belt of the district Kinnaur.

### **Birth, Death and Marriage customs in Kinnaur**

In Kinnaur after the birth of a child, the naming function is performed by Lama (because of the nonattendance of Brahmans in Kinnaur). After that eliminating the hair of the child's interestingly favorable date is fixed by a lama. The service of hairstyle is called Karachogmig or Mundan.

Concerning death again the lamas are counseled and exhortation is taken from them with respect to advanced technique. In the present time, passing bodies are conveyed in the cremation community and consumed by senior children or children of the departed individual. After that, relatives of perished individuals gathered the cinders and tossed them into Satluj waterway or Rewalsar in Mandi area or Haridwar of Uttarakhand. Kriyakaram which is called Dhamchochang in the nearby language is arranged by the family members of the perished individual something like one month after the demise and food varieties or palatable are conveyed to residents.

According to marriage, Kinnauri marriage is called *Janethang* by upper standing and *Janeti* by lower position individuals which are fixed by nearby divinity. Traditionally there are four kind of marriage which is *Dam tangshid* (love marriage), *dab- dab* or *Khuchis* (marriage by capture), *har* (marriage with another's better half) and *Batyasis* (Arrange Marriage). At present time love or arrange marriage is normal type of marriage in area Kinnaur.

### **Nature of Deity beliefs**

A deity which is called *Devi* or *Devta* in local dialect is considered sacred or divine power. Generally, in Kinnaur people have deep faith in their local deities. They worship and belief in more than one God. Kinnaur is considered as land of God. Local functions and marriages are performed and celebrated only with the permission of *Isht- Devta* or *Kul-Devi*. It is not only out of fear but also out of reverence and deep faith that commands of the deity are followed. It is believed that *Devta* will protect them from all evil forces. In Kinnaur deities also decide the implementation of governmental and non- governmental policies in area. Each deity of the village has its territorial jurisdiction which is decided by *Dev- Sabha committees* of the villages.

### Part of the palanquin of deities and their name in local dialect

Palanquins have its head, neck, face, hair, ornaments, body, cloths and hands. Synoptic view of parts of the deities-



Fig 1- Deities of District Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh

Table 1 Caste System in Himachal Pradesh

Part of the Palanquin	Called by upper caste	Called by lower caste
Neck	Golang	Golo
Face	Mukhang	Muh
Head	Bal	Mutkan
Hair	Chamnang	Chamnang
Ornaments	Tanang	Taan
Body	Rothang	Rothang
Cloths	Gagro	Gagro
Hands	Bayang	Bayang

### Deities and its Kaardar (Managers)

In local deities' system many people perform their duty at deities' temple. Main Kaardar i.e. Priest which is called as *Pujari* or *Pujaras*. *Mathus* who talk with deities' is also the main kaardar of the temple. Musicians are also the *Kaardar* of the *Devta* temple. They include *Bhamiya* who beats Drum, *Doliya* plays *Dhol*, *Shonaliya* plays *Shanai* and the main

musicians in Devta temple. Pujaras and Mathus are the persons who belong to upper caste family. This is hereditary work. Musicians are person who belongs to lower caste categories. Musicians have no specified caste they may be *Chamangs*, *Domangs* or *orus*.

### **Process of Making Palanquin and temple**

In district Kinnaur, palanquins of Devi or Devta are manufactured by carpenters who are called orus caste of Scheduled Caste. They are skilled labours. In orus caste, some families are specialists in this work. The dress of the palanquin is made by Chamang caste. They are also masters of this work.

Construction work of the deities' temple is made by orus caste. The construction work started with the prior permission of the deity. When the construction work is completed villagers organize Porishtang to celebrate the function of the temple construction. Other local deities of villages are also participating in this Porishtang.

When the deities' palanquin is ready or temple construction work will have completed the goat, sacrifices have been done in some villages of the Kinnaur to purify it because it is manufactured by orus caste. In some villages of Kinnaur only purified by the water or by lamas.

### **Discrimination in deity temple**

In Kinnaur, the deity is the superpower, and people believed that if the deity became angry their life will become miserable. Upper caste people became dominant because they are the main Kaardars of the temple and they have a dominant role due to their large population in the society. Lower caste people are forced to obey the order of the upper caste people in the temple. In the deity temple people of Scheduled Castes are musicians. Whatever his qualification they are forced to play drums and instruments in the temple. If some lower caste people refused to play drums in the temple they became to subject of social boycott. The orus caste is the creator of deity, Chamang who makes cloths and Domang is the goldsmith makes ornaments for deities, yet they have no right to touch it. At the time of taking 'Prasad' in the temple both castes sit in a different row. This is very interesting that upper caste people do not take water from lower caste people but take alcohol (aarak in local dialect) from lower caste people.

### **Buddhist Monasteries in Kinnaur**

In Kinnaur, there are six main Buddhist monasteries namely- Rarang Monastery, Reckong Peo Monastery, Kalpa Monastery, Nako Monastery, Pooh Monastery and Charang Monastery. These are the center of Buddhism. Monk (Lama) and Nun (Jomo) residing here are doing their spiritual work. Charang Monastery which is situated in border area, anyone can

visit this monastery irrespective of their caste. In Rarang, Kalpa and Reckong Peo monasteries people belong to lower caste are not allowed to enter in main hall where all religious activity take place. In Kinnaur Buddhist monasteries which is called *Gonpa* are also profess castism. Monk and nuns also practice untouchability. If lama doing rituals in lower caste people house they not take meal or water from them. Their meal is prepared by upper caste people. Monk and nuns belong to upper caste. Lower caste people i.e. *Chamangs*, *Domangs* or *orus* have no right to became *lama* or *jomo*. Buddhist believes in rebirth after death of their supreme lama but this birth always happens in upper caste family. In Kinnaur district Buddhism also affected by caste system and they observe caste-based inequalities.



Fig 2: Buddhist Monastery in District Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh

### Other Religious institution in Kinnaur

Besides local deity institutions and monasteries in Kinnaur, there are also religious institutions of Gur of different local devta. This institution also leads to untouchability among Scheduled Caste people. In Himachal Pradesh which is called Dev- Bhoomi has many religious institutions where local Gur performs duties and try to resolve the problems of common people. In district Kinnaur there are also large numbers of Gur which are performing duty on the behalf of some local Devta, Devi, Kul- Devta and Kul- Devi. Gur is a person (male or female) who talks after when these supernatural powers of the local deities enter their body. They are communicators or deities. In this Gur institution, people of the Scheduled Caste community are not allowed to enter in Gur temple. They are forced to sit at a fixed distance. In this local religious institution, people of Scheduled Caste also play drums.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

it is concluded that in district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh is the land of God where a large number of local deities and other religious institutions are available. Apart from this, there are also Buddhist monasteries which are also religious institutions. In this religious institution,

caste-based discrimination is still observed in the 21st century. The Constitution of India, 1950 provides many rights to the Scheduled Caste communities. Besides this, other legislative provisions are also enacted to prevent untouchability and caste-based discrimination. But these laws are ineffective before the religious institution of Kinnaur. Scheduled Caste people have no right to enter in temple. They only play musical instruments before deities and festivals. They have no right to dance in the front row or with Chongri. Scheduled Castes people are considered secondary citizen of the village.

Many suggestions such as traditional and modern have arisen to control the caste-based inequalities in district Kinnaur. Law and legislation should be properly implemented with the help of government mechanisms. Education should play important role in curbing discrimination. Unity should be established only by the development of scientific temperament in society. Last but not least all religious institutions should be under government control.

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