

Status of Women in Transhumant Societies

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KEYWORDS Himalaya. Gender. Status. Social Life. Economic Power .Culture-ecological Condition. Tribal Women

ABSTRACT The present study revolves around the women of three pastoral transhumant societies, Gaddis of Bharmour of Himachal Pradesh, Bhutias of Lachen and Lahung of Sikkim, and Changpa of Changthang of Ladakh. Women are backbone of the economics' structure, as the production system is much dependent on them. The role and status of women vary according to the traditions of cultural group. Transhumant pastoral societies depend for sustenance on livestock herding and use of pasturelands. Due to certain specificities like accessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity or heterogeneity; life in general is tougher for women among transhumant pastoralists. The pastoral production activities implicate the services of both sexes, but women's involvement varies in different culture-ecological conditions. Women play a central role in the pastoralist way of life, providing labour for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household. The pastoral societies have been largely seen to be male dominated in which men have economic, social, political and cultural powers special to men. Patriarchy denotes a culture of power relationship that promotes man's supremacy. Among Gaddis, the household consists of one elementary family of a man, his wife and their children, with the occasional addition of unmarried, widowed, or divorced relatives who would be otherwise alone in their house or wife and children of married son family. Conventionally fraternal polyandry, primogenitor and monasticism were part of a traditional culture among the Changpas and Bhutias to overcome economic and demographic problems. Regional isolation helped to retain the traditional socio-economic system until the winds of change swept in. In pastoral societies, both men and women share the economic activities but they do not share the burden equally or in the same ways. Pastoral women suffer two kinds of desecrations: those that all pastoralists share regardless of gender, and those that are specific to women. The women in study areas contribute more labour for smooth running of the household than men do. The Gaddi and Bhutia women have been playing a very important role in their economy. In these traditional pastoral communities, the women have an important role to play. Gender principles are central to the organisation of traditional communities. Emphasis on gender, a relational concept provides opportunities for looking at full range of social and cultural institutions, which reproduce gender hierarchies and gender-based inequalities. The cultural interpretation of gender is central to the identity and status of women that entails web of relationships