

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: A Qualitative Study on Kinnauri Tribal Women in Social Work Prospective

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ABSTRACT

Inequalities between women and men and discrimination against women have also been age old issues all over the world. Hence in the present study a initial attempt has been made to explore the gender equality and women empowerment among Kinnauri tribal women in social work prospective. For accomplishing the objectives Case studies and Focus group discussion were deeply studies thorough Observation, and Interview. These techniques proved as great assets to record the narratives and main themes of the subjects under study. The result based on qualitative research revealed these tribal people still practices old customary laws and kinnauri women have no legal property right in their ancestral property but with spared of education now tribal women are aware about their rights. According to censuses 2011, in tribal district of Kinnaur 71.34% tribal women are educated and earlier in 2001 censuses it was 64.40. Tribal women's, social activist, women association they all came together for property and equality rights of tribal women and in June ,2015 a landmark judgement by Himachal Pradesh High court , which will bring a new resolution in the tribal's society to grant equal rights to the girls, now daughters are entitled to equal share in the family property. This judgment gives a ray of hope that it will help to end gender discrimination in tribal district of Kinnaur. The education and awareness is the only means that can be used to uplift the tribal women.

Key Words: Tribal women, Gender equality, Women empowerment

Introduction

Since the inception of mankind on this earth, human life has gone through many stages of change. It started with the life in jungles and caves where hunting was the only means of livelihood. With the invention of fire, new instruments of stone-age man emerged to shape his life differently. The beginning of agriculture gave stability to his life leading to development of education, culture and progress. He realized meaning of power and started using of it for selfish motives. "Might is right" is the nature of law. According the manpower was used for establishing regime and beginning of discrimination as Ruler and subject started. Till seventeenth century slavery was found everywhere in the world. The discrimination on the ground of colour, sex, caste, and religion became very common. The highest exploited classes in the world since then up to date are women. They were not considering as human being. There were wars, conflicts and quarrel which destroyed the peace, leaving behind women and children as destitute. Since the dawn of civilization humanism has been held as the highest virtue in man. For peaceful human life some basic rights are essential (Dhingre, 2006).

It is an established fact that rights and duties are the two sides of the same coin. It means both are interdependent. Therefore, the rights of an individual should not be seen just for the sake of his pleasure but also discharge his responsibilities towards himself and his dependents. National Human rights Commissions defined Human rights which mean "rights to life, freedom, equality and dignity of individual guaranteed by the constitution and enforceable by court of India". We all human beings have certain rights solely by the reason of being human. These rights need to be considered as our responsibility to respect and observe in our life without which we cannot develop fully in a true perspective, without which we cannot develop ourselves as human beings. However, there are certain groups such as women, children, Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, senior citizen, disabled person etc., under weaker section of

society who deserved special protection and opportunities to develop as human beings. Women are one such vulnerable group who constitute around half of the population of our nation.

India has the largest concentration of tribal population in the world. The word tribal refer to a group of people living in primitive conditions. The tribes occupy a considerable position in Indian population. According to 2011 census tribal population is 104.3 million, which is 8.6% of the total population in India. The tribes have distinct cultures, religions, social practices and dialects leading to different levels of socio-economic development. Tribal have lived mainly in forests, hills and inaccessible terrain for centuries. They have remained isolated from the mainstream population. This centuries old isolation has lead to their backwardness in all socio-economic development. Central and state governments have undertaken a number of steps in the form of schemes, programmes for their upliftment which have improved their socio-economic life and educational attainment to a large extent. However the improvements have not reached to the desired level. There is a wide gender gap particularly in the field of education. Every society has different norms and values which hinder women to enjoy equality and freedom. Tribal women remain backward due to traditional values, illiteracy, superstitious, social evils and many other cultural factors. Lack of education is largely responsible for exploitation and pitiable plight of the tribes.

This study was done among the “Kinnauri” tribes in Himachal. In the ancient mythology, the people of Kinnaur were known as Kinners, the halfway between men and gods. Kinnaur is in the northeast corner of Himachal Pradesh and surrounded by the Tibet to the east. Kinnaur is mountainous area and slopes are covered with thick wood, orchards, fields and picturesque hamlets. This tribal district was opened for the outsiders in 1989. The people have strong culture beliefs generally follow the Buddhism and Hinduism. The Kinners consist of the Rajputs (Khosias), the Lohar, the Badhi (Domang) and Koli and the Nangalu (chamang). The Kinnauri people speak the Kinnauri dialect and at present time use Hindi as the second language. The festival of

tribal community is also different. The life style of Kinnauras tribe was found very different from the other communities. This was reflected through their dressing sense, outfits, ornaments, and practice. Kinnaura tribal people live under very harsh conditions and their economy is based mainly on horticulture, agriculture and animal husbandry.

The status of women in India has been subjected to great many changes over the past few millennia. From a largely unknown status in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the support of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. But even today women in the world have a status that is mostly subordinate to men, rights from birth to death. The poor status of the women is due to subjugation, marginalization and disempowerment.

The Tribal Women of India

The tribal women, Elwin (1958) believes is exactly the same as any other women, with the same passions, love and fears, the same devotion to the home, to husband and children, the same faults, and the same duties. In practice, however, the tribal woman enjoys comparatively more freedom and is devoid of many constraints imposed women in non-tribal societies (Hodson, 1975 and Mann, 1996). Tribal in transition however, stand somewhere in between, but even here the traditional norms are somewhat liberal to womanhood. The least influenced by formal legislation is the tribal women. She continues to live in her customary style, with the same position and behavior on the one hand, though she leads a hard life, the tribal women enjoys far more freedom than her caste counterpart. She can roam about freely, visit markets or friends, cut jokes with them without reservation and is usually free to select her mate. Some part of her freedom gets restrained in past restrained in post marital style, although she has the liberty to divorce and remarry within the tribal set up, a divorced women is not much stigmatized. The bride price is said to be a mark of respect and value for her. She has a firm hand in most of the family matters. Her social participation is not as aggressively restrained as in

the case of caste women. On the other hand, however, in most patriarchal tribal communities, she cannot customarily speaking become a religious or a political head. She is deprived even of family headships and property inheritance (Mann, op. cit.).

Each tribe had its own system of administration and own culture and belief, which they had followed from years and still its practice in tribes. Anomalous women in Kinnaur had no legal right to their ancestral property and those families who had no son; their property is transferred to relative. This type of custom is a restriction for women's economic wellbeing and freedom. Still in 21st century these kind of customary laws are practicing in tribes. Tribal women are demanding to amendment in their ancient customary laws, which deny tribal women a share in ancestral property.

The women have a prominent role in most of the economic ventures followed by Kinnauras. Apart from plugging, which is a taboo for Kinnauri women as for most of their Indian counterparts; right from clearing of fields to storing grain, they share all the hard and tedious toil with their men folk. Their activities involve, amongst others, breaking stones, preparing small irrigation canals called 'khuls,' sowing seeds, clearing weeds and alertly attending to the distribution of water through the 'khuls,' even during the night. Helping in horticulture by looking after the fruit trees as well as plucking and packing the fruits, they also take care of the children; old and infirm people, rest entirely on the Kinnauri women's shoulders they often risk their life by fetching water, fuel and fodder from long distances on treacherous paths.

Yet the question remains, does all her contribution and participation in the economic life of her family and community bring her family and community bring her credit or even acknowledgement. Most of it is duties as a female member of her household. How does she negotiate this space of 'economic dependence,' in spite of her long hours' labor and what does its negative impact on her self-image. In some tribal societies the women enjoy more power and privileges than their men folk. Tribal women are an integral part of tribal

traditions. Hodson (1975) notes, women hold a high and free position in Manipur, all the internal trade and exchange of the produce of the country being managed by them. Goro (Bihar) women continue to enjoy a high status in her matrilineal-based social structure (Mann, 1986).

Due to globalization these tribal people is also affected and statistics shows that the crime against women is also increasing in tribes, in Himachal year 2011-12 it was 1024 and in the year 2012-13 it is 1523. Hindu marriage act is not implemented in kinnaur and kinnauri tribal women had no right on property after marriage. Kinnauri tribes have their own customs, norms and cultural beliefs which they had followed from years. Kinnauri tribal women proved themselves in almost every point of life and prove that they are no less than men due to their hard work whether at home, field or even at working places. In Kinnaur district, female work participation rate is 59.17 in census 2011 which is district wise in Himachal Pradesh highest participation rate of women's. In India, the phenomenon of violence in the family is very complex and deep-rooted. Women are deemed inferior in this male oriented society (Lakshmaiah, 1995)

Education Of Tribal Women; Issues And Concerns:

In thinking of the education of tribal women, the issues concerning of tribal women, the issues concerning us, raises the question what should be the kind and content of education that they are to receive? Further in thinking of their education, several other questions come to mind. Even if a tribal woman is educated, what does she do. How does it affect her life; herself, her identity and her relational networks? Does it bring out a change in her ethnic and cultural selfhood? Does it bring out a chance in her ethnic and cultural selfhood? Does it widen the significantly affect a change in her cultural and personal identity? Does it significantly affect a chance in her cultural and personal identity? Does bring educated make her less burdened and more freely or on the contrary do her life stresses increase as she becomes more internally aware of her inner self and the consequent needs which awareness bring with itself? How does a tribal

woman after receiving education retain linkages and connections with her own past?

In viewing education as a symbol of transition, this work will symbol of transition, this work will attempt to answer these and several other questions. This will be done after affected by the impact of education in her life.

Table 1: Progress of literacy (in percentage)

YEAR		Himachal Pradesh	Kinnaur
1971	Male	43.19	43.09
	Female	20.23	10.35
	Total	31.96	27.70
1981	Male	53.19	51.45
	Female	31.50	20.78
	Total	42.48	37.02
1991	Male	75.36	72.04
	Female	52.13	42.04
	Total	63.86	58.36
2001	Male	85.30	84.30
	Female	67.40	64.40
	Total	76.50	75.20
2011	Male	90.83	88.37
	Female	76.60	71.34
	Total	83.78	80.77

H.P Censes,

2011

The outlook of women has changed considerably during the last four decades. Much of it is due to expansion of education that has taken place in the recent year. The young women of today are neither afraid of moving out of their homes nor as dependent on their parents or husbands as were their mothers or grandmothers. The women of today want to be economically independent. The educated women are prepared to fight for their rights and to asset their individuality. Intensification of education efforts further coupled with certain changes in the educational system in future may make the educated women of today self-reliant able to develop self esteem and make her more caring, loving and source of amity and goodwill in the family.

After spared of education now tribal woman not even aware of their rights but they fight for their rights in Kinnauri tribe, women have no legal right on ancestral property due to customary law (Wajab – ul – Arz). They are discriminated on basis of their gender from many years. Some social activist like Mahila Kalyan Parishad chairperson Rattan Manjri, who has been fighting for the constitutional rights of tribal women. She aware and educate tribal women about their right and organized panchayat meetings, signature campaigns for woman property right. Some other women organizations and Ngo's support this cause , on June ,2015 a landmark judgement by Justice Rajiv Sharma , Himachal Pradesh High court , which will bring a new resolution in the tribal's society to grant equal rights to the girls, now daughters of tribal area are entitled to equal share in the family property, and can't be discriminated on basis of their gender. The 48-page order handed down by Justice Rajiv Sharma ends decades long struggle of the tribal women in districts of Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and Chamba –who had been engaged in protracted legal fight and a public campaign to reinforce their rights in the ancestors' property, like male siblings.

High Court saying they are entitled to inherit property in accordance with the Hindu Succession Act, 1956. In order to protect women against social injustice and exploitation women belonging to the tribal areas of the state will inherit property under the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and not as per customs and usages. The court, while underlining that gender discrimination amounted to violation of fundamental rights, observed that law must evolve with time if societies are to progress. Women from various parts of Kinnaur have formed the Mahila Kalyan Parishad under the chairpersonship of Rattan Manjari from Ribba to seek equal share in ancestral property. Gender discrimination violates fundamental rights. They had even sought the intervention of the National Commission for Women and the National Tribal Commission in their fight for equal property rights and necessary amendment to the customary laws. Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the ground of sex. Articles 38, 39 and 46 envisage socio-economic justice to the women. Rule of

law should establish uniform pattern in the society. So they are entitled to equal share in the property.

Tribal women have been always been strong; they have been on the forefront of struggle for betterment of mankind. They have give strength and have been of great support to their male counterpart. It is their power of resistance that in spite of the persistent efforts of the male to enmesh them in the web of myth, they have never lost their composure and cool. And as a result of this today they are bravely facing the challenges of their subjugation. Education is expected to bring in all round personality development in women, which development in her vision and worldview, helping her to be better adjustment to her, need as well as the need of her family and the community.

Objectives:

1. To know the Status of Kinnauri tribal women.
2. To assess the awareness about the Gender equality.

Present Study

The present study is confined to district Kinnaur, which is a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh and approximately 270 Km from Shimla town. The present study attempts to address the gender equality and women empowerment in tribal area. The main objective of the Study is to work on grass root level within the society, and to find out the status of women in grassroots level. The study highlights the ground realities of gender equality and women's condition and position in Women Empowerment in Himachal Pradesh

Method

Sample and Data Selection: Data is very much required for any research. In present study both type of data has been used.

Primary data and Secondary data:

Primary data are those which are collected fresh and for the first hand and thus happen to be original in character, which we collected on the field discussing with respondents. We asked no. of questions from them and got response from their side. *The main source of Primary data was Focus group discussion and case studies.*

Secondary data are those which have already been collected by someone. *The main sources of secondary data were: internet, books, article, mass media etc*

Sample Design

The present study is a descriptive study. The study was conducted in District Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh. There is three blocks in Kinnaur district; these are Pooh block, Kalpa block and Nichar block.

Sample Size:

The sample size comprised of 40 respondents from the District Kinnaur. For FGD 36 participant selected, number of participant in one group is= (12 participant), total number of groups is =3 groups and for case study= 4 tribal women respondent were selected with help of NGO and Health organization.

Measures

In this study only qualitative measures have been used. In quantitative method field observation, FGD, case study and photography have been used.

Districts covered: Kinnaur

Locations: Sangla Valley in Kinnaur and Nichar Block of Kinnaur and Pooh block of Kinnaur.

Methodology: Focus Group Discussions and Case studies

(Part-A) FGD-1(Focus group discussions in Sangla valley of Kalpa block of Kinnaur yielded the following information)

Activity	Property right of Kinnauri women
Time	90 minutes
Type of interview (delete inappropriate)	3. Focus Group Discussion
Category of FGD	Category 2 – Non-Influential Community Members
Name of District	Kinnaur
Name of Tehsil / Town	Sangla
Name of Village / Ward	Sangla
Moderator: Note Taker:	Mr. Hoshiar Singh Ms. Sunder kala Negi
NO. of participants	12 females

Identification Details of Qualitative Interview

Introduction: - Focus group discussion was conducted among tribal of Sangla Tehsil, aged between 21 -50 years on the topic “Tribal women property right and role of women empowerment” by Researcher.

Objective: - To understand the belief, perception and awareness of the Local women of the community.

Methodology- After detailed discussion with the participant of local tribal women of Sangla Tehsil, a list of 25 participant of Sangla tehsil for the study was obtained, out of which 12 participants were chosen randomly for the discussion. Verbal consent was taken and date time and venue was fixed

On the fixed date discussion was carried out for 1.5 hours. All the participants were assured confidentiality of the information which they provided. Moderator kept the group in good humour. Active participation

was ensured from all the participants. Notes were taken and Transcripts made. Debriefing was done at the end of discussion followed by analysis

- Hindu Succession Act does not apply in Kinnaur and The Traditional customary Law that does apply is contained in the *Wajab - ul - Arz*.
- Kinnauri women have no right in ancestral property and if she is decided to be unmarried than Fathers can set aside some land for use by an unmarried daughter during her lifetime but she has no legal right on property and it reverts to the family kitty upon her death. She cannot dispose of it.
- Most of the families want son because if they have only daughters their property is transferred to relative. Women have no legal right on property that creates gender discrimination in society and population explosion because they want to expend their family till their wish for boy child is not fulfilled.
- At the time of weeding in the *Udaanang* ceremony they collect money and given to her (bride) for use
- Divorce is easily obtained as marriage is seen as a contract which can be broken by either party of course with good reason!
- At the time of marriage the boy's family seeks the girl's family and a girl's wedding entails relatively lesser expenditure.
- However, customary dowry system is prevalent in tribal district of Kinnaur.
- Due to spread of education new generation don't want to follow and questioning on some old customary practices.
- Made an appearance and to do better than the Jones's people are spending beyond their means.

Focus Group Discussion-2

Venue- T .S Negi College Reckong Peo. (Youth groups)

Participants - college student in the age group of -18-22 yrs. Chosen randomly

174

Time-90 minutes

Note taker- Sunder kala

Result- FGD-2 ((Focus group discussions in Rekong Peo of Kinnaur yielded the following information)

- Most of the respondent replied the most dominating factor for gender inequality in Kinnaur is no right of property of woman.
- Due to this no property right of woman, the male member of the family not gives that much respect to woman that they deserve.
- In tribal district woman had equal participation in work but due to this customary practices in 21st century they not even feel insecure about their future but also their self image is dishonored.
- “Most of the respondent said that gender equality holds no meaning for tribal women in Kinnaur and this type of discrimination start Gender base violence.
- Property right gives them Economic dependent.

Focus Group Discussion-3

Venue- Pooh Block (Youth groups)

Participants - Married working women -25-45 yrs. Chosen randomly

Time-90 minutes

Note taker- Sunder kala

Result- FGD-3 (Focus group discussions in Pooh block of Kinnaur yielded the following information)

- Kinnauri women had a good status but they have fewer rights according to customary law.
- In Kinnaur still Hindu marriage act is not applied so still polyandry and monogamous marriages are prominent.

- Tribal women life style is very difficult. Now if a woman is working situation is more worst because after job she had to go in field, participate in local function and after that she is the only one who cooked food. The weather condition is also very hard to survive.
- Tribal women still not able to achieved self identity.
- These tribal people have strong belief in Local Deity and still the village Diety till recent time had been taken as granted the doctor, a judge.
- Caste system is still prominent in Kinnauri society.
- Most of the women's are unaware about their legal right, they mainly dependent on male counterpart.

Main occupation: - Agriculture

- Marriage- "In the past the usual practice was for several brothers to have one wife. Sometimes, if the wife was barren, her sister was brought in. The youngest brother sometimes married separately if there was a significant age difference between him and the common wife." Marriage alliance is restricted by caste and socio-economic conditions of the parties.
- Divorce- Hindu marriage Act does not apply and a woman bent upon divorce seeks it through her parents. Expenses are paid to the husband's family and the divorce decree is prepared. The divorce is a simple ceremony.
- Status of Women- Remarkable respect is given to the *Goine*, i.e. the wife whose decisions are respected. Parents may set aside a plot of land for use by an unmarried daughter which is hers. But status of women is very from house to house.
- To use during her lifetime – she may not sell or dispose of it & it falls back into the family pool upon her death. The money collected during the wedding is to be utilized by the bride in any manner she deems fit. During the first marriage it is insisted by the parents that the in-laws earmark a piece of land exclusively for their daughter in case her

husband(s) marry again. Oftentimes this assurance is kept in form of a document. Economically dependent.

- In decision making within households the women contribute towards decisions pertaining to social obligations, ceremonies, purchase of household appliances, daily rations, hired labour and also handle small amounts of cash needed for daily transactions. They however, do not determine the exact amount that has to be spent.

(Part-B)
CASE STUDIES

Polyandrous Scheduled Tribe people of village Mebar Kinnaur District of H. P	
Demographic Profile	Case study
<p>CASE-1 Name- AB Gender- female Marriage- Arranged marriage</p>	<p>She is of 45yrs old, caring literate lady (4th pass), unmarried woman from Block Kalpa, District Kinnaur, She wears Kinnauri woollen dress and Dohdu). For usual talk she uses Kinnauri language. Case AB parents died 20 years back in road accident. They are 2 sisters and they do not have male sibling. Her elder sister is married. Rightfully the property should have gone to both of them, but the power of attorney was handed over to AB's paternal uncle, who bequeathed it to his son.</p>
<p>CASE-2 Name- CD Gender-Male Marriage- Arranged marriage</p>	<p>She is of 51 yrs old, widow woman of Nichar block, 1 year back her husband and elder son died in road accident; earlier her life is full of happiness. She spends her whole life to working in field and take care of property but after death of her husband she have no legal right on property. Her father and brother in law give warning to leave the house and property. She is illiterate and no earning source and emotional support. CD said the life of woman is totally dependent on male gender, In childhood she is dependent on father after marriage dependent on husband and in old age she is totally dependent on son.</p>

<p>CASE-3 Name- XY Gender-Male Marriage- Arranged marriage</p>	<p>She is 58 yrs old widow, illiterate lady of Kalpa block, District Kinnaur, H. P. She wears Kinnauri woolen dress (Dodu). For chatting she usually used Kinnauri language. She has three daughters. After death of husband her educated brothers or nephew denied to share of land with her. This situation is become worst day by day for her now she get some support from her daughter and son in low. She said that she don't want to burden on her daughters and She very anxious and worried about her future and health.</p>
<p>CASE-4 Name- YZ Gender-Male Marriage- Love Marriage</p>	<p>She is 72 yr old women of pooh block. She has three daughters and one son. All children's are married and after marriage her younger son is living apart from family. Her one daughter had a marital dispute with her husband and now her daughter is also living with YZ's and her husband. Xx husband is bad ridden from last 5 yr now xx is working in field to fulfill their basic need. Her son is alcoholic and fighting with her on property matters now YZ is worried about future. She said I have done all in my life, I hardly live for 5-6 but I'm worried about my daughter future because she have no primary and economic support"</p>

Social Work Intervention

It was found that Kinnauri tribal people practices ancient customary practices and they have less access to information about health care, absence of political knowledge and lack of experience in advocating their interest. Social work in interventions is essential to improve the health, mental health status and empowerment the Kinnauri tribal women. There are some more issues such as early marriages of girls and women, unmarried women, widow, old exploited, prostitute, separated/divorced women and orphan/destitute, delinquent and disable girls which always realized us the reality of their life and hardship which they are experience today. Therefore in order to bring about necessary changes in our society and let the women enjoy their rights, following measures concerning social work are suggested:

- Voluntary agencies with the help of local folklore and traditional media communications like street play songs, dance, nautanki etc. Should be utilized to create awareness on issues of woman and Gender equality.
- Awareness regarding health and national needs of the girl child and women to be created to overcome vulnerability due to tradition.
- Public orientation programme based on law should be popularized to make it accessible to women.
- Lawyers and other in the judicial system are to be targeted for education about violence against women.
- Awareness on women's right and our duty in this regard should be created in different sections of our society.
- Wherever necessary adequate number of orientation/training courses should be organised for the govt. Functionaries and voluntary workers at the grassroots level to educate and sensitize them on different issues of women and human rights.
- Effective machinery at different levels for enforce of legal provisions should be set up and outlined provisions should be strictly followed.

Conclusion

We had reached the moon 46 years ago and maybe we will soon land on Mars but still our women not obtain their gender equality right. A long struggle going back over a century has brought women the property rights, voting right, equality before the law in matters of marriage and employment but some tribal areas of India still fighting for gender equality. These tribal women's they don't have legal property right and they demanding amendment to customary laws that deny tribal women a share in ancestral property. In June, 2015 High court allowed the tribal women to inherit property in accordance with the Hindu succession Act, 1956. But still no legal amendment or law is passed for tribal women's equal share in the family property. With passage of time education spread and Kinnauri tribal women now aware about their rights and the education is the only means that can be used to uplift the tribal women and

improve their status and it is a fundamental right that provides opportunities for socio economic uplift. Tribal women have no legal property right so they face gender base discrimination in every stage of life and later on face many psychosocial stresses. Government and non-government organization need to prepare some Capacity building programme can be organized to empower them and develop their personality, to voice out their difficulties and to take part in decision making activities. Skill based income generation training programme can be organized to make them independent. Night schools should be made compulsory for the tribal women to make read and write.

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