



Hatti Community in the Trans-Giri Region of Himachal Pradesh: A Constitutionally Recognised Scheduled Tribe (2022)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the Hatti community, designated as a Scheduled Tribe in 2022 under Article 342 and the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, residing in the Trans-Giri area of Sirmour district, Himachal Pradesh. Recognising the Hatti as a Scheduled Tribe is crucial for preserving their distinct cultural history, customs, and social practices. The principal aims of the study are to assess the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the Hatti community, investigate their cultural heritage, highlight their distinctive customs, tales, and social practices, and explore the importance and implications of their Scheduled Tribe status. A descriptive research design based on secondary data is employed to achieve these objectives. The findings reveal the presence of casteism, the unique Budi Diwali festival, Khumbli (a traditional decision-making body), the polyandry marriage system, and agriculture as the primary source of livelihood, along with a deficiency in education. The community benefits from reservations in education and employment, and the recognition fosters tourism and other infrastructure development programmes. In conclusion, the insights gained from the study contribute to the academic discourse on Indigenous communities, providing a comprehensive understanding of the Hatti community's journey toward recognition and empowerment.

Keywords: Hatti community, Giri and Tong River, Himachal Pradesh, Polyandry, Reservation, Scheduled Tribe, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Origin and Background of Hatti Community

The Hattis are a close-knit community named after their tradition of selling homegrown produce, meat, and other goods at small markets known as '*Haat*' (*weekly markets*) in towns. There are two main Hatti clans: one in the **Trans-Giri area of Sirmour district in Himachal Pradesh** and the other in **Jaunsar Bawar of Uttarakhand**. These communities are often referred to as trans-Giri due to their location near the **Giri and Tons rivers**, which have shaped the geopolitical and socio-cultural landscape along their banks.

Due to the challenging topography, the Hattis reside in the Kamrau, Sangrah, and Shillai areas of Himachal Pradesh, close to the Himachal-Uttarakhand border. Despite the Tons River creating a geopolitical divide, the Hattis and Jaunsars maintain **kinship ties (*Daichara*)** and share cultural affiliations. They are similar in their economic and agricultural practices, rituals, social status, and festivals. Historically, both groups were part of the **Sirmour Princely State** and share many social, cultural, and geographical characteristics.

The Hatti community consists of approximately 300,000 people living in around 400 villages, organised into **154 Panchayat segments** in the 1300 square kilometre region across four Vidhan Sabhas: Shillai, Renuka Ji, Pachhad, and Paonta Sahib. According to the 2011 census, Himachal Pradesh's tribal population is 3,92,126, and this number will increase by an additional 160,000 with the inclusion of the Hatti community. The residents of the Trans-Giri area have been advocating for **Scheduled Tribe (ST) status**, similar to the **Jaunsar-Bawar** area in Uttarakhand, which was granted ST status in **1967**.

Historical Context and Identity of Scheduled Tribes

As per the 1931 Census, the identifier used for Scheduled Tribes in '**Excluded**' and '**Partially Excluded**' areas was '**Backward Tribes**'. The Hatti community, comprising about 253,000 people, recently won a struggle that had lasted **56 years**. Despite the elusive nature of the Hatti identity, their demands have remained constant. Like every other group searching for rights, their concerns oscillate between the recognition given to them in their social segment and the recognition accorded to them in the legal realm by the state. It is pertinent to note that the socially recognised identity of a person often does not align with the state's tribe affiliation. The Hattis have embarked on different paths of revitalising genealogies, stories, legends, and cultural heritage and creating their own culture. Most importantly, they relate to a specific territory and have become strongly associated with a particular geographical location.

Demand for Scheduled Tribe Status

The Hatti community of Trans-Giri in Himachal Pradesh received Scheduled Tribe status following approval by the Union Cabinet, as announced by the Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, **Mr Arjun Munda**, on **14 September 2022**. In the same year, after the bill was passed in both houses of Parliament and became an act, Scheduled Tribe status was granted to the Hattis living in the Trans-Giri region of Himachal Pradesh. This status was also given to other communities, such as the **Brija of Chhattisgarh, Narikuravar and Kurivikkaran of Tamil Nadu, and Betta Kuruba of Karnataka**, under the **Fifth Schedule and Article 342** of the Constitution.

Despite this recognition, the classification dynamics remain contentious, particularly among **Scheduled Castes (SCs)**, who raise concerns about the implications for them. They argue that if the interests of the Hattis are not adequately addressed within the ST category, it could lead to perceived injustice for other groups in the region. The procedures involved suggest a need to formalise and institutionalise recognition more effectively.

Recognising the Hatti community as a Scheduled Tribe is a significant step in protecting their cultural identity, traditions, and settings. Based on historical facts, stories, traditions, and rituals, this study aims to enhance understanding of the Hatti community and their historical contributions. It contributes to existing knowledge on indigenous peoples, tribal societies, and socio-cultural anthropology, illustrating the process and consequences of state recognition for the Hatti.

The main objectives of this research are to assess their demographic and socio-economic status, particularly regarding education and livelihood. To explore the Hatti clan's cultural identity, traditions, stories, and social practices. Additionally, the study aims to examine the impacts of the Hatti community's Scheduled Tribe recognition, providing valuable insights into their journey towards recognition and empowerment.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the study's objectives and the limited existing literature, a descriptive research design was deemed suitable for the present work. This study relies solely on secondary data sources collected from various books, journals, articles, newspapers, and websites to achieve an in-depth analysis and provide authentic and accurate information about the historical and contextual analysis of the Hatti community under themes using a glimpse of thematic analysis to its readers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Description

Religion

The majority of people in the Sirmour district are Hindus, with smaller communities of Muslims and Sikhs. According to Gazetteer 1904, Hinduism in Sirmour is characterised by two distinct types: **Cis-Giri**, where the predominant form is the orthodox Brahminical Hinduism, and **Trans-Giri**, which represents a more primitive form of Hinduism. The latter resembles Hinduism in some Himalayan regions, such as Kumaon to the east and the Shimla hills to the north.

Population growth in the district has been notable. According to the census, the population increased from **458,593** in 2001 to **529,855** in 2011, reflecting a decadal growth rate of 15.5 per cent.

Migration has been a significant factor in this demographic change. Historical migrations include movements from the plains of Punjab, such as Hoshiarpur, Ludhiana, and Patiala, driven by dynastic changes. Additionally, many **Muslim Gujjars** migrated from Jammu to settle in the region for its pastures. The district also features small settlements in the *Gaddi*, *Gorkha*, and *Gujjar* communities.

Casteism

The Hatti community is divided by the caste system, which includes Brahmin, Rajput, and SC, similar to the case of Jaunsar. The *Bhat* and *Khash* are upper castes, and the *Badhois* are below them; there are restrictions to inter-caste marriage between them. However, Hattis dwell in the Trans-Giri area, and Jaunsar Bawar practice the same traditions. Thus, people tend to marry within the Jaunsar Bawar Community.

According to the Gazetteer's 1904 report, two categories of the Hatti community, The cis-Giri and the Trans-Giri, were founded. Within these categories, Brahmins are further classified into Bhats, Bhat Brahmins, and Dethis. Khas, Miyans, and Devas all claim Khas identity. In contrast, the sub-groups within SCs comprise Bajgis (Lohars, Badis, Dhakis, Natuas, and Beras) and Halis (made up of Koli, Chanal, and Dom castes). Historically, they have been just like the Jaunsar region, where the society portrayed similar characteristics.

Socio-Economic Status

Education Status

Due to topographical disabilities, the Hattis inhabiting Kamrau, Sangrah, and Shilliai Parganas in Sirmour are **socially and economically backward**, especially in education and employment. Official records of the district of Sirmour depicted on its website report that the total literacy rate of the district

is at 78.8 per cent. Currently, most schools within Himachal Pradesh's tribal belt lack sufficient staffing. It is determined that **education and ecotourism** are qualitative improvements for the newly formed Scheduled Tribe as development agenda.

Livelihood Activity

The Hatti population relies on **agriculture** for livelihood and bare subsistence since their climate is ideal for growing "Cash Crops." Moreover, the rise in Kinnaur, Lahaul, and Spiti's seasonal tourism, often called "**eco-tourism**", served as a merged **source of income**.

Cultural, Tradition, Stories and Rituals

Budi Dhayali Festival

According to the Hindu calendar, **Budi Dhayali** is a three-day festival celebrated one month after Diwali on the *Amavasya* of *Maag-sheesh*. This festival is marked by dancing and singing while holding torches lit with fire, symbolising the victory of light and the divine over darkness and evil. The festival is rich in mythological significance, with various stories linked to its origins. One such story connects Budi Dhayali to the Ramayana, which is believed to commemorate **Sita's return to Ayodhya** after her fourteen-year exile in the forest (Vanvaas). Tradition holds that the elder women of Ayodhya lit fire torches and decorated the city to celebrate her return. Thus, the festival serves as a symbolic celebration of these significant events.

A different perspective on *Budi Diwali* connects the music, dances, and fire-lit torches to the mythical fight between the Hindu gods Indra and Vritra. This event is observed throughout the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh rather than being restricted to a single area. Villagers conduct the well-known **Haathi Nach (elephant dance)** in these areas. In this performance, dancers move in tandem to mimic a warrior sitting on an elephant, akin to the **Yak dance**, while hiding beneath a big cloth canopy that resembles an elephant.

Khumbli as Panchayat

The overall growth of a village or panchayat within a specific fiscal year is determined by the square kilometres of its roads, numerous bridges, and several newly built structures (such as multi-storey hospitals, Panchayat Bhawan, grain storage facilities, Sabji-mandis, etc.). Throughout the tribal belt, there are multi-crore, multi-storey hospital buildings. The Hattis are governed by a traditional council known as **Khumbli**, which decides community matters, much like the **Khaps** of Haryana, despite introducing the Panchayati Raj System.

Polyandry Marriage System and Ownership of Property

The term '**Jodidari paratha**,' '**Draupadi Vivah**,' or '**Ghotlu paratha**' in the Hatti community refers to the custom of marriage in which a woman has two or more husbands at the same time, known as '**Jodidaran**.' This practice is modelled after the Hindu epic **Mahabharata**, in which Draupadi, the daughter of the king of Panchala, married five brothers they consider their ancestors. The last year of the Pandavas' thirteen-year banishment from their realm was spent in hiding in Kinnaur's rocky landscape.

Nonetheless, **fraternal polyandry**—in which husbands are related—occurs in the areas of Sirmour and Kinnaur. However, polygamy for Christians was outlawed by **Sections 494 and 495** of the **Indian Penal Code of 1860**. The **Hindu Marriage Act** drafted in **1955**, forbade a Hindu from marrying someone whose spouse was still alive. Thus, in **1956**, polygamy was outlawed in India.

Socially, women in the Hatti community marry the eldest male family member or brother; however, they also serve as mothers and wives to other brothers and their offspring. The woman is consistently registered as the **eldest brother's legal wife** to prevent the practice from becoming unlawful. Apart from a combination of matriarchy and polyandry, the woman is always the **head of the family**.

The leading causes of this '**Draupadi Pratha**' are controlling family planning, as most families in the community are poor and rely on livestock and agricultural land for their income, and the attempt to prevent land fragmentation. According to local elders, the Hattis' practice of polyandry was a significant factor in the tribe's recent designation as a Scheduled Tribe. Furthermore, the family's limited finances would undoubtedly be overburdened if each brother married separately because land holdings and income have decreased with time. While some argue that polyandry is not morally wrong and is even socially acceptable, the younger generation is rejecting the practice by dissolving joint families into separate nuclear families.

Significance and Implication of Being a Scheduled Tribe

The Hatti people will benefit from the development of roads and infrastructure due to their acknowledgement as a Scheduled Tribe. In 2015, the roads leading to their villages should have been addressed. Furthermore, due to the constitutionally mandated reservation for ST students, several new health, education, and infrastructure initiatives will offer improved possibilities for development. Special provisions are established to promote the educational opportunities of Scheduled Tribes, as stated under **Article 15(4)**. **Article 46** requires the State to provide special consideration to the academic and economic interests of SC and ST people and to safeguard them from exploitation and social injustice. Better planning would also result from assigning a specific budget for tribal sub-planning.

CONCLUSION

With its unique identity and rich cultural legacy, the Hatti group has long fought for rights and respect in India's sociopolitical environment. Their five-decade struggle to achieve Scheduled Tribe (ST) status is a testament to their tenacity and perseverance. The recent confirmation of ST status by the Union Cabinet is a significant step forward, promising both cultural preservation and socioeconomic advancement. The Hattis have faced challenges due

to their distinct sociocultural customs and remote location, which are characterised by practices such as polyandry and the *Budi Dhayali* Festival. Recognising their ST status is crucial for preserving these cultural traditions and represents a major political victory.

ST recognition will address the Hatti community's geographical disadvantages, leading to improvements in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and tourism. Reservation policies will offer more significant opportunities for integration into the broader socioeconomic framework. However, challenges persist. The community must address concerns raised by other Scheduled Castes about potential injustices, necessitating a careful balancing act to ensure fair distribution of benefits without marginalising others.

In summary, the Hatti community's designation as a Scheduled Tribe is a significant achievement with the potential for cultural preservation and socioeconomic progress. This study has explored the Hattis' rich history, ongoing struggles, and the implications of their new status. As the community embarks on this new chapter, it is essential to foster an inclusive environment that respects their distinct identity while promoting overall growth. The insights gained offer a deeper understanding of the Hatti community's journey toward recognition and empowerment, contributing valuable knowledge to studying Indigenous cultures.

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