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# Less Documented: Little Read: Least Visible in Public

## Story of Invisibility of Tribal Female of Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh

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### ABSTRACT

*Today when media has entered into every sphere of a common man's life, there still remain certain grey areas in society that remained neglected or were deliberately ignored without any coverage. The social issues, especially matrimonia, of tribal females of Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh remained one area that hardly gets mention in any newspaper coverage or documentary. When we accept that there is a close association between representation in media and social change, it is media's responsibility to support the truthfulness of the cause of these females facing spinster status in large number due to changing socio-education culture.*

*This study tries to draw attention towards the fact that we need to talk about the social understanding and social imagery of Kinnaura females beyond stereotypical thinking of keeping them along with rest of the tribes of India. It has been emphasized that a debate is needed in society where the plight of Kinnaura tribal females could be taken up for discussion with some concrete outcome / suggestions to improve their social status.*

**Key words:** Tribe, Media, Kinnaur, Female, Marriage

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

With the arrival of rapid era of social change and technological development, media has become a major change catalyst. It plays a pivotal role in the construction and circulation of social understanding and social imagery both in traditional and modern societies. It is therefore argued that media can be used as "an instrument", a powerful and flexible one, for influencing people into certain modes of belief and understanding within society (Sujaya Routray:1).

Above observation finds its relevance when it comes to analysis of gender dimension existing in Indian society. Media's role seems to be different while dealing with issues of both sexes. Women's participation, performance and portrayal in media are three important dimensions of study for social science researchers of modern time. For empowerment and development of women section, it has been widely recognized and promoted that media can play substantial role in promoting and disseminating information among masses. Media prefers females to talk about their space in a democratic environment where it necessitates positive portrayal of women in media to maintain their real dignity and status. Despite this theoretical impression, stereo-typical approach of media cannot be ignored. Women have been compartmentalized for certain specific issues. Similarly, talk about tribes invites either their art or their clashes with Government against land or other development issues. Hardly, do we find a pan-Indo study on tribal females discussing their changing position in their respective tribal society after independence.

Makers of constitution tried to empower tribes by incorporating various provisions dealing with reservation issues. With growth and development activities, social, political, economic and cultural aspects of tribal life started getting affected. However at social level, despite constitutional provisions to empower female and tribes, both sections remained neglected and ignored (Zenab Banu:132). That is why when Carlos Cortes quotes the reasons behind traditional mind-set of media regarding marginal presence and even less influence within the mainstream media of minorities, they seem closer to the plight of tribals of India and closest to tribal females (<http://www.medialit.org/reading-room/long-way-go-minorities-and-media>)

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The mass media have long been welcomed as the watch dog of society and is supposed to carry the social responsibility to mirror and guide the process of social change. But in contemporary India despite so many cultural disparities to be noticed, mass media have become so commercialized that it has failed to reflect the social problems, especially the problems faced by women. Irony is that most of the newspapers and news channels do promote female but with either stereotypical approach of fixing them into certain compartments or taking them as an object of physical exposure. In such circumstances tribal s seem to be at lowest ebb to get them noticed.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research is done for making an investigation about the portrayals of tribal women in Indian print and visual media through feminist perspective.

## **OBJECTIVES**

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1. The objectives of the study are: To analyse understanding of media on tribal female issues based on case study of tribal females of Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh.
2. To critically analyse media's role in constructing the images of tribal women.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In order to fulfill the objectives of the study the researcher adopted the Analytical-critical Method. This method allows a researcher to use facts or information which are already available and analyse them to make a critical evaluation of the material. In the present study field data is used as primary source and available prints of newspapers, research journals and articles as secondary data. All the primary data and available data on Indian print and visual media has been critically analysed and conclusions have been drawn on the findings.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions of the present study are:

- (a) What kind of social and political problems have found place in news coverages of Kinnaura tribal?
- (b) What is the visibility of Kinnaura females in print and electronic media with special reference to their inner-societal issues?

## **DATA COLLECTION**

Primary field data for this study was collected from all the three blocks of Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh while working on impact of reservation on this tribe. The secondary data includes books, magazines, journals, periodicals and different websites.

## **ANALYSIS**

During the past decade, advances in information technology have facilitated a global communications network that transcends national boundaries and has an impact on public at large. Crossed boundaries approach has enabled people to communicate their feelings and emotions. Despite these technological advancements, poor geographical terrains of Mighty Himalayas sometimes does not allow people of that area to share their feelings and sentiments with the rest of the world. Here comes the role of field media to approach people and fill the gap.

The present study has its field of universe consisting of three blocks of district Kinnaur which is a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh. This district is geographically very poor and almost inaccessible. Some villages of this district remain buried under snow for at least six months in a year. To some remote villages no road facility is available, so a walk of 15 to 20 km per day allows one to reach them. Nights are very cool in Kinnaur, which makes hard to stay outside in remote villages. Language changes after every 20 km. making it tough to communicate and make the poor villagers to understand the sense of questions being asked. Caste and ethnicity factor plays a major role in Kinnaur, so only a *Khoshiya* (Rajput) which is an upper caste can get access to the houses. (Some scholars also classify them as Rajput and Harijan (Chhib: 99)

All these factors generally make it difficult for media to approach them. Those who are from this tribe and are educated and exposed to the world are primary information providers.

Kinnaura tribe finds mention in Mahabharata as Kinners, have been quoted little by media beyond including them among the list of other Himalayan tribes. This tribe considering them as the successors of Pandavas is following polyandry for centuries. Later on polygamy also became a part of the social and matrimonial system. In both the matrimony systems, female was at the centre of suffering. Many sociologists and researchers tried to justify the system on the bases of scarcity of population and female being in the position of property holder. But no one mentioned the sharing nature of her matrimonial status and her position in society. As a civilized society, we consider the status of women a barometer of the progress done by any society. As a land-holder, her position is sound but in family she is somewhere being treated as an object only.

Surprisingly enough, the first Chief Minister of the state of Himachal Pradesh submitted his PhD degree on the topic of polyandry in Himalayan region where he at length discussed this system of matrimony and its significance to the Himalayan tribe. His research takes this social system of Kinnaura tribe back to Mahabharata. Also how this system of polygamy and polyandry became part of social system and remained an integral part without change even after independence has been discussed in detail. The landmark work of Thakur Sen Negi under the title, *Scheduled Tribes of Himachal Pradesh; A Profile*, discusses in detail about the tribal life and culture of Kinnaur tribe (Thakur Sen Negi:18-108). From their anthropological origin to political, economic, religious and social aspects, he provides minute detail of every activity. His explanation on social scenario of Kinnaur tribes is a milestone. Being himself from the same tribe his details carry weight for researchers, social scientists and anthropologists. His work remained base book for those who are working on tribe of Kinnaur. In the year 2002 came the work of V. Verma under the title, *Kanauras of Kinnaur: A Schedule Tribe in Himachal Pradesh*, with extensive study of Gazetteers. These works do talk about all the social aspects related to females but there is no observation on psychological aspect of any social practice done by them. Politically, Kinnaura females came into lime-light only after the policy of reservation.

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Political changes and reservation system started affecting the long isolation of this tribe (Yogendra,71). They also started feeling the waves of change and development. Movement towards outer world for education and earning started affecting their social set-up which was not monogamous. But as the female was not exposed much, the system continued. A sudden breakthrough in the monotony of Kinnaura social set-up came with the arrival of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment Act, where females got 33 per cent reservation of seats in three tier structure in Panchayati Raj system ( International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences,451). Politically, they started becoming a part of development process and socially they were left with lesser time if getting elected (Soundarapandian, 51)

Education was one of the primary tools that made them aware of other social systems existing in the rest of the universe. Their educational growth motivated a few females of this tribe to raise their voice either to get married into a monogamous family set-up or remain unmarried throughout their life. Also as the groom has to come to family of bride to seek the hand of the girl, her position is on the upper side. Now due to exposure with mainstream monogamous Indian society this tribe is socially facing the problem of getting married due to polygamous and polyandrous nature of the society. This aspect of this tribe has hardly been quoted in media. Most of the news stories paint them with bright colours of happiness and contentment. But data shows that number of single girls is increasing in the society which is a matter of social research and concern.

Amar Ujala (Shimla edition), Panjab Kesari (Hindi), Dainik Jagaran and Dainik Bhaskar are the newspapers covering news on this tribe since long. A general out-look shows that they are mostly covering political news or hydel-power-project news. Thirdly, news of tribal fairs is covered. During apple season, the plights of orchid-growers are highlighted. At other times, news of land-slides, snow-avalanches or flood in Mighty Sutlej is covered. So division between political, social, economic, religious and cultural aspect shows that female hardly finds mention anywhere in Kinnaur news-section of Himachal Pradesh.

Now if one looks at the documentary cover, hundreds of documentaries are available on the cuisines, fairs, hydel-power-projects and scenic beauty of this district. But on social dimension, hardly any documentary is available that talks about the polygamous and polyandry nature of the society and difficulties faced by the society especially females (<http://www.hpkinnaur.nic.in> accessed on 21.11.2008.) Very few research papers have tried to throw light on this social aspect. This agony of remaining unmarried through-out remains buried in social-set-up of Kinnaura tribe. Media is still working over the stereotyped frame-work for such sensitive inner-core issues. Here we hardly find any difference between the approach of European and Indian media. That is how the voices of Indian feminist writers like Ritu Menon and Kiran Prasad, who tried to alter perspective on s in media, joins together with world feminist writers like Simon De Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Bretty Friedman for criticizing media for enforcing females into

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stereotypical roles. When media is biased against the plight of common females, how the biases against tribal females of Kinnaur can be ruled out? This is how tribal s of Kinnaur are not getting due space to speak about their social and emotional agony in medi

## **CONCLUSION**

When we accept that there is a close association between representation in media and social change, surely it is the responsibility of media to support the truthfulness of the cause of these females. We need to talk about the social understanding and social imagery of tribes especially their female folk beyond stereotypical thinking. A debate is needed in society where the plight of Kinnaura tribal female could be taken for discussion with some concrete outcome / suggestions to improve their social status.\

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