

MALANI TRIBE OF NORTH-EAST KULLU RANGE, HIMACHAL PRADESH: A STUDY OF ITS POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

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Abstract

The paper talks about the historical and geographical brief of Malani tribe. The touch of globalization and modern technology not able to penetrate the old ideologies and practices of tribes in Malana village also known as the oldest village managing democracy on its own. This tribe believes that they are different from the mainstream of India claiming to be the descendants of Alexander the great's army. The paper highlights the way of life of these tribe and its political participation so as its governance. How they participate and how decisions are taken in order to fulfil their needs in align to the theory and believe of Jamlu Devta which is a key figure in village governance, a political structure that has long perplexed experts and visitors who are baffled as to how such an advanced system of governance can exist in this quaint and remote Himalayan community. A village staying in its form of self-isolation and self-preservation though under the governance of Indian union.

Keywords: Malani tribe, history and geography of the village, governance system, constitutional rights, Political participation, Jamlu-Devta.

Introduction

Indian constitution is a diverse in its nature. A constitution which was devised to cater all the needs and developments of all the people though divided by race, culture, colour or language. The constitution guarantees right and duties, also giving provisions to safeguard the interest of some weaker section of the society. One such provision is the insertion of article '338A' in the constitution by the 89th Constitution Amendment Act, 2003 the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes in India. Giving it a constitutional status. Its primary function is to investigate and monitor all matters relating to the safeguard the STs, inquire into specific complaints with respect to the deprivation of rights and safeguards of the STs so on and so forward. To make such communities at par with the rest of India. There are some specific provisions which were granted to some specific states such as article 164(1), there must be a Minister in responsibility of tribal welfare in the states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha. This minister may also be in charge of the welfare of the Scheduled Castes and backward classes or any other task. Special rules apply to the State of Nagaland under Article 371A. There are particular rules for the State of Assam in Article 371B. Manipur State is covered by specific provisions in Article 371C. Sikkim is covered by specific rules in Article 371F.

“In India tribals are situated in almost all the states and union territories except for Punjab, Delhi, Chandigarh, Pondicherry and Haryana. Tribes in India are known to be the first inhabitants of island area, dense forest and mountain regions. Each tribe of India has its unique spoken language different to each other. One common similarity they share is having a simplicity life, staying away from the outside world, skill in herbal medicines, dependent on agriculture, having festivals and acts of bravery and valour” (Assumi, 2021)

People who want to live alone in a closed society and who have shared origins and culture are said to belong to a tribe. Indian tribes are the indigenous or native people that live all throughout the nation. The tribal people are dispersed throughout the Indian subcontinent, in almost all of the states and union territories. According to the 2011 census, the Bhil tribal group is the biggest tribe in India out of all of these tribes. It makes up an astounding 38% of all scheduled indigenous people in the nation. The word Adivasis is commonly used to denote the tribes of India. One of such tribe which has been co-existing our country lies in a remote village call Malana village where lives the tribe of Malana. a remote neighbourhood residing in the Himalayas. Malana tribe having a distinct history and culture, a village surrounded by the mountains of Chandrakhani marked as having a scenic beauty having an altitude of 3660 m located in the Kullu valley. From Chandrakhani Pass one can observe and enjoy the marvellous of peaks and ranges of Deo Tibba and Parbati. Malana tribe

claims that they are the descendants of Alexander the great army who hide in this remote village in 326 BC. To support their claim artifacts from that period have been found in the village. Some villagers said that the village is shrouded in myth. A myth where now has become a widely accepted truth. There is no physical and genetic prove so far to support their claim but when we check the malana tribe physical features and the language. Almost all malana tribe are fair and kind of yellowish skin very similar with the people of Macedonia. Features may differ due climate and food conditions. Most interesting is their language known as Kanashi, a local dialect having a unique tone and considered to be a language gifted by Gods. Only the Malaneese spoke this language and it is prohibited to be taught to outsiders.

Methodology

In terms of research design, the approach taken for this study was qualitative and quantitative. The primary study was through telephonic interviews, document reviews and reviewing forum discussions on the internet. The interviews were scheduled and non-structured in nature.

About the people:

"The Malaneese of Malana Glen generally fall in the class range of medium height with a medium to long trunk. They are characterized by long (dolichocephalic) to medium (mesocephalic) heads, very narrow to medium faces, a narrow nose and medium to narrow cheekbones. Together with Kulwis and Kinnauras, the Malaneese exhibit a cast of features which bear an imprint of Caspian elements" (Sharma & Bhalla, 1987) "Kanashi is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in the isolated Malana (Malani) village area in Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, India. It is somewhat mutually intelligible with other Sino-Tibetan languages like kinnauri. (Wikipedia)".

"Kanashi, a Sino-Tibetan (ST) language belonging to the West Himalayish (WH) subbranch of this language family, is spoken in one single village (Malana in Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh state, India), which is surrounded by villages where - entirely unrelated - Indo-Aryan (IA) languages are spoken" (*Trends in Linguistics. Documentation, 2017*)

The village is considered to have a diverse tradition, culture and heritage. It has been observed that hardly anybody goes out of the village because of a job or settlement and is confined to their own community. Though the villagers practice agriculture, their main occupation is famously known for its charas, It has attracted interest throughout time of has his lovers all over the world, popularly known as Malana cream. About 1700 inhabitants' having around 200 households' dwell in the village and mostly consume a local herb, which is produced through the process of hand rubbing technique, unleashing an intoxicating effect for its user, also known as cannabis.

"Besides family involvement, there are areas where the entire community is involved in it. In certain places like Malana, this is inevitable given the close-knit societal setup and the area remaining inaccessible to anybody from outside other than those whom their leaders accept. Another illustration of locally powerful persons being involved is reflected in the arrest of the pradhan with drugs and the case of the pradhan and municipal council members turning hostile as witnesses under the NDPS Act, 1985" (*Trends in Linguistics. Documentation, 2017*)

Marijuana is considered a form of business for the village to survive, where every folk, irrespective of age and gender, use it and make money by selling it to outsiders, especially the tourist. Earlier, the tourists were allowed to stay in the village, which generated income from their visit and stay at the village. Still, now it is observed that the village council has given a rule that no outsider will be allowed to spend the night inside the village. Tourists can camp outside the village. Malana village is basically for the people who want spiritual enlightenment, as many believe this place represents a spiritual connection with the divine. Also, the village harbours some ancient temples, igniting spiritual guidance and meditation. The Jamadagni temple and Renuka Devi shrine are the village's major attractions. Apart from the spiritual significance, the place is also good for adventure seekers as the route to Malana is famous for trekking.

Local governance system and political participation of Malana

Why Malana got the attention? One is mainly of its nature of isolation, i.e., the touch of modernization and technology was hardly seen, having its system of governance. Second, the quality of charas they produce such cultivation is considered of high quality, attracting the interest of many tourists. The nature of its existence allowed the people of Malana to maintain and preserve their distinct culture, keeping it away from dilution from the outside world. Such kind of preservation enables them to govern themselves locally and settle their differences through the local laws. The village acts as an institution of law and justice, making them not depend on state assistance and aid. There was a time when the village was unknown to the outside

world, but now Malana village has become one of the epicentres of quality charas and is also known for its unique culture and way of life.

Overview of Local Governance System

Local governance refers to decision-making processes at a grassroots level that involve community members directly influencing policies and actions affecting their locality. It is an essential component of democratic societies as it allows citizens to participate actively in shaping their communities. In India specifically, local governments are governed by panchayats or urban bodies whose representatives are elected by citizens.

In Himachal Pradesh, which includes Kullu range as one of its districts (*Trends in Linguistics. Documentation, 2017*), a three layer Panchayati Raj Structure comprises Gram Panchayat at village level (local self-government), Panchayat Samiti at block level (intermediate tier), and Zila Parishad at district level (highest tier). These bodies govern various aspects, such as rural development programs, welfare schemes, education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

Historical Context of Malana Tribe

The "oldest democracy" in the world still relies on its village parliament and the proclamation of Jamdagni Rishi, their local Deity, for every decision. Malaneese's local governance, in its sense, is community involvement through the institution of Deity for the well-being of the village. A unique type of democratic system, though governed by the institution of the government of India, these villagers follow the religious institution for its administration. The institution of Deity, which played a crucial part in the community's physical, social, and mental components, was ruled by an elected body of members. One distinctive quality of the institution of Deity was its direct and indirect procedures of involvement in the common life of the peasantry.

The people of Himachal Pradesh are deeply religious, and they live by the dictates of their deities. These gods and goddesses are more than just objects of devotion; they control every aspect of daily life in the rural areas. They follow several customs and traditions that guide their daily activities. The Rishi represents the divine. He gives the laws and urges the people to follow such laws as God himself has provided them through the Rishi.

"The institution of village Gods is the major custodian of the activities in village society, and the village God is the symbol of village culture. He guides in decisions about marriages and deaths. With this cultural phenomenon in the background, the village society has grown like a perfectly harmonious family" (Sharma & Bhalla, 1987)

Malana's judicial system is distinct from the rest of India's for a number of reasons. They favour a theistic rather a scientific approach. To resolve a disagreement, they make a deep cut in the foreleg of a lamb belonging to both sides, poison it, and then stitch it back together. Whoever's lamb perishes first loses the argument.

The local Deity even tells worshippers whether or not to welcome a stranger to Malana village. The community of Malana relied heavily on the authority and influence of the local Deity Jamlu for social control, including the administration of justice. It is widely held that Jamlu Rishi is the highest-ranking deity in the valley. (Panchani, 2016)

The Malana tribe has a rich history that dates back centuries. They are believed to be descendants of Aryans and have migrated from Central Asia (Mary Kanyamurwa & Okeyo Obosi, 2022). The tribe settled in the remote village of Malana in the Kullu range of Himachal Pradesh. Over time, they developed their distinct language, customs, and traditions.

Political Structure within Malana Tribe

Within the Malana tribe, political power is vested in a village council known as "Panchayat." The Panchayat consists of elected representatives who make decisions for the community based on traditional norms and values. Leadership roles within the Panchayat are determined through hereditary succession or elections (Mary Kanyamurwa & Okeyo Obosi, 2022)

The decision-making process follows a participatory approach where community members discuss issues collectively before reaching a consensus on essential matters. Traditional practices such as "Sabha" or public meetings allow all members to voice their opinions.



Challenges to Political Participation

Despite their active involvement in local governance processes, members of the Malana tribe face several challenges in participating politically at both local and regional levels. These challenges include social exclusion due to their unique identity and practices, limited access to resources such as education and healthcare facilities compared to mainstream societies (Deshmukh¹, Prashanth¹, & Salve R. N., 2011), discrimination based on caste or tribal status, and geographical isolation. These barriers often hinder their engagement with mainstream politics and limit their representation in higher levels of governance.

Strategies for Enhancing Political Participation

Many government and non-government organizations have implemented initiatives to improve political participation among the Malana tribe. These initiatives empower tribal communities politically by providing them with education and awareness programs, promoting their cultural heritage, and advocating for their rights.

Efforts have been made to bridge the gap between mainstream society and the Malana tribe by organizing capacity-building workshops, establishing community-based organizations, and providing platforms for dialogue between tribal communities and policymakers (Chiu, 2020)

Impact on Local Governance System

When it comes to its own governance Malana too is actively involves themselves for the administration of its own, provided there is no outside interference even for some petty crimes they devote themselves to handle the situation without the involvement of the police. Active political participation by members of the Malana tribe has significantly impacted decision-making processes at a local level. Their involvement has brought diverse perspectives to discussions, ensuring that policies are inclusive and reflect the needs of all community members. So to say they have a strong community participation so as to fulfil the needs of the village as a whole. With the regular state elections and other local body elections Malana too participate as active electorates.

The engagement of the Malana tribe in local governance has also led to changes in traditional practices. For example, through their active participation, they have advocated for improved access to education and healthcare services within their village (Kabir, Bithi, & Jyoti, 2020). These changes have contributed to the overall development and welfare of the community.

Jamlu Devta

It is observed and understood that there is a divine factor through the institution of deity for its well-being where the whole community in the village involves. The institution of Jamlu in Malana of Kullu district has perhaps a unique democratic system for resolving people's problems but at the same time the community isolates itself through social fencing. Such social isolation led to low literacy rate in the village. Having only one Government primary school manned by one teacher. There are 100 children on roll in this school. Another middle school which was set up in 1996 having around four teachers and 15-20 students. As per record only two students in the village have managed to reach class 12.

People in rural areas place substantial stock in the god system as a means of making decisions and resolving issues. The local gods have their own little sections of woodland that fall under the jurisdiction of the hamlet. The preservation of plant and animal life is aided in no little part by the deities that provide shelter for animals of all shapes and sizes. For the sake of the planet, believers conform to the dictates of their deity. The Jamlu Devata of Malana forbids its followers from visiting any other temples.

According to one of the many myths surrounding Jamlu Devata, the region was previously governed by the demon Danu or Banasur. As the populace became weary of his brutality, they turned to the local gods for assistance. The deities admitted that they were unable to defeat the monster and declared that only force from the North could accomplish it. When people travelled to the North in pursuit of the power, they discovered Rishi Jamadagni at Hamta (in Kullu). The Rishi consented to aid the populace and slayed the demon in a bloody conflict. Before leaving, Banasur begged for forgiveness and a place in the public's memory. The Rishi reassured him that as long as Malana survived, its residents would continue to speak Kanashi, his native tongue. Here, the Rishi, also referred to as Jamlu Devta, established the Malana village's norms and laws, which are being observed today. Malana, which is ruled by the mighty tutelary god Jamlu, has its own form of village governance as well as a court for resolving disputes.

Some also gives a statement like touch me not villagers. It was observed by many travellers that the village have strict rule that one cannot touch them or their belongings without their permission. Though the villagers

are friendly there are some unfriendly rules for the outsiders. Physical contact with outsiders is prohibited. In case of any contact, they will rush for a bath. Travellers were not allowed to stay in Malana village a decree given by Jamlu Devta. The village observe some rules like not to fix nails on trees as it will damage the trees. Burning of wood is prohibited in the forest of Malana. One similarity to the Naga tribes is that hunting wild animals is prohibited without the consent of the village council, and even then, only during certain times of the year, and that in the event that wild animals attack the villagers' flocks of sheep, goats, or other livestock, hunters are dispatched from the village to the pastures to dispatch them.

Does the Indian government not have jurisdiction over Malana Valley?

The answer is "NO", Malana village does fall under the Indian government jurisdiction. Rural self-government is prevalent throughout the country in India, since the rural population is quite vast and each village or region has its own set of local problems and conditions where there arises the need to encourage local self-government in India.

Malana village has its own democracy and governance being carried out by the village council. Malana people get their food and other essential products for their survival from outside world and deal in Indian currency so they certainly come under the jurisdiction of the Government of India.

Many critics say that since Malana's rules and regulations does not create much of a difference to the outside world so the Government authorities also let them be. Like many isolated villages in interior India, Malanis choose not to take recourse to Indian legal/justice systems and have their own local panchayat to administer justice. They do not want to involve police and settle any disputes according to their local rules

Matter of general concern and importance:

Union of states which has been strongly being scripted in our Indian constitution under article 1 which states "NAME AND TERRITORY OF THE UNION" "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States". Malana village is part of the union of India, having its administration under the state of Himachal Pradesh. Article 12 which states "unless the context otherwise requires, "the State" includes the Government and Parliament of India and the Government and the Legislature of each of the States and all local or other authorities within the territory of India or under the control of the Government of India". Self-isolation or preservation doesn't mean that one has the right to make or follow any rules of its own convenient. To mention about some tribal states in India taking the example of Nagaland a tribal state who once was a union territory, with diverse culture as well as socially and economically deprived. A place which was termed different from the mainstream of India by the East India Company and advised not to be included with the union of states. A place crowded with insurgency and militant outfits demanding for independence. A place once known for barbaric attacks and head hunting became the 16th state of the Indian Union on 1st December, 1963. With article 371A the state of Nagaland enjoys special provisions laid by the constitution of India. Moving forward for peace and harmony along with cooperation and development for its people in particular and for the people of India in general.

Self-isolation and preservation of one's culture can be good for a particular community or place but such attitude does not fulfil the interest of the general population of the nation. Malana tribe way of life and their occupation is undemocratic in the eyes of the Indian constitution. Such way of life should either be given a special provision as given to the state of Nagaland or the government should curb out the malpractices and life style.

The paper draws the attention that Malana is part of India. It is the duty of each citizen of India to abide by the laws of the country. One such law is the occupation of the Malanese that is producing and selling of charas which is illegal in our country.

No land or region can claim that they don't need the Indian judiciary system nor the police as cited in the above lines about the Malana village. Role of police in rural administration in India is very crucial. Though India is a land of diversity one cannot depend upon the act of God for solving the actions of men on earth. There is a system call punished through justice in a democratic setup. The constitution of India does not give a special provision or a privilege to the Malani tribe along. Law and justice for every state, union territory, district or village in India applies the same yardstick.

A major question which arises is : How long can Malana village preserve its culture from the touch of modernisation and technology?



Conclusion:

Preserving one's unique culture and existence is not an easy task with modernisation and cultural integration on its fast growing pace. Malana serves one of the best examples of self-isolation. One's devotion and belief are important as portrayed by Malana village having the oldest democracy in the world relying purely on the decisions made by their local deity, making it possible as the whole village is a God-fearing community who involves the local governance through the institution of diety for the well-being of all. Wonder how long can the uniqueness of Malana be maintained is of great concern. The paper throws light for further researchers to invest their interest on areas of socio-economic areas and spiritual beliefs. Also encouraging researchers to explore possible ways to make such community to get aligned with our constitution and judicial system. The paper has come to a closest conclusion that whatever be the system of governance the most important form of participation can be seen through the process of community participation. Taking up activities and executing it locally for the welfare of all is considered as the best governance ever. The current paper concludes that the tribe of Malana is unique but at the same time it is not that too unique to be left aside from the Indian Union.

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