

Agriculture in Kinnaur: An Analysis of Role of Women

Maithili Sharma^{1*} and Kavita Negi²

¹Project Assistant, National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai

²Horticulture Extension Officer, Himachal Pradesh

*Corresponding Author E-mail: maithilisharma11@gmail.com

Received: 3.10.2020 | Revised: 12.11.2020 | Accepted: 17.11.2020

ABSTRACT

Kinnaur is a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh and is the abode of Kinnaura tribe that account for 57.95% of the total population of the district. Agriculture is one of the major sources of income in the district and is still done using traditional methods primarily for self consumption. Terrace farming or step farming is practiced in the district. Men and women share the load of agricultural work. Some even accepted that the proportion of work done by women is more than that of men with tilling of the land being the only primary jobs of the males while the preparation of the beds, weeding, irrigation, harvesting, thrashing and storage were all women's job. This is a part of the responsibilities that the womenfolk of the tribe undertake along with childcare, household chores and cattle rearing. It is only during the winter months that the area remains snow covered that they do not have to go out to work in the fields. The efforts of these women however are unrated and only for the subsistence of the family.

Keywords: Farming, Weeding, Irrigation, Harvesting, Thrashing, Storage

INTRODUCTION

India has some 705 notified scheduled tribes which account for 8.6% of the total population of the country as per the 2011 census. The tribes are distributed all over the country occupying varying topographies, majority however still depend on farming for subsistence. In the state of Himachal Pradesh there is an approximate 3,92,000 scheduled tribe population that makes up 5.7% of the total state population as per the 2011 census (tribal.nic.in). The major tribes in the state of Himachal Pradesh include Lahaula, Pangwala, Swangla, Kinnaura, Bhot, Gaddi, Gujjar, Jad, and Khampa. Most of these tribes are agro-

pastoral in nature. The tribal women contribute a great part in the farming activities but their labor and hard work is rarely recognized however the tribal women are not constrained in social norms (Bhasin, 2007).

Here in this article we have focused on one such Indian scheduled tribe of Kinnaur. Kinnaur is a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh and is the abode of Kinnaura tribe that account for 57.95% of the total population of the district. The district having an area of 6,401 sq. Km. lies in the Greater Himalayas or the Alpine zone with the minimum altitude of 1340 meters and maximum altitude of 5400 meters above the mean sea level.

Cite this article: Sharma, M., & Negi, K. (2020). Agriculture in Kinnaur: an analysis of role of women, *Ind. J. Pure App. Biosci.* 8(6), 550-555. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18782/2582-2845.8513>

The district lies in the dry cold temperate zone and remains snow covered during the winter months between October and March. Administratively the district is divided into three development blocks with the district headquarters at Reckong Peo. The district along with Lahaul and Spiti district, Pangi tehsil and Bharmour sub-tehsil of the Chamba district, was notified as a scheduled area under the State of Himachal Pradesh Act, 1970 specified by the Scheduled areas (Himachal Pradesh) order, 1975 C.O. 102 according to the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The district has a population of 84,121 as per the 2011 census with a literacy rate of 80.00%, a little below the state average of 83.78% (hpkinnaur.nic.in, Annual Report 2019-2020, Statistical Profile)

The people of the tribe are simple minded and hardworking. They follow Hinduism and Buddhism along with reverence of local deities. Hinduism is prevalent in the lower part of the district while a stronger influence of Buddhism is seen in the upper regions especially beyond Pooh. Almost all the villages have a presiding deity who is highly revered by the people. The Kinnauri dialect is spoken in the district which is categorized under the Tibeto-Burman group of languages (hpkinnaur.nic.in). However, a visible difference is noted among the sub dialects spoken in three zones which overlap with the three blocks. These dialects are oftentimes unintelligible to the people of the other zones. The women's dress includes a bordered woolen drape called *dohru*, a full sleeved blouse called *choli*, a shawl wrapped around the shoulders and pinned in front with a silver brooch coupled with beautiful jewelry that is locally made while the male dress include a woolen shirt called *cham kurti*, a long cloak called *chubba* and *churridar payjama* along with locally woven scarf decorated with traditional colorful patterns. Both males and females wear a cap called *thepang* (hpkinnaur.nic.in). All the looms used for making these dresses are locally weaved and especially worn during religious ceremonies and other festivities. The tribe is also known for fraternal polyandry type of marriage system however the

institution is no longer favored by the younger generation who prefer monogamy. The inheritance is through the male line although now women have the legal right to property as well. The women of the tribe enjoy a considerable amount of freedom and are highly respected within the family. They are responsible for the taking care of the household, childcare, fodder collection along with active participation in agri-horticulture. The people of the district still largely depend on horticulture and agriculture as the main sources of income but a noticeable number also work in government sector, private sector as well as tourism industry.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The main data was collected from the villages Kalpa and Barang (Shadarang) of Kalpa block and village Hango of the Pooh development block. The primary observational data for the study was collected by the researcher while staying in the district for a project conducted by the National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai in the district between March and October 2016. The methods of data collection included interviews, observation and survey. The snowball method of sampling was used for the study. A special focus on women was given and thus out of the total 54 participants interviewed, 74% were women. The purpose of the study is mainly to compare the input of women in the farming as well as their thoughts about being the active participants in agriculture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Agriculture is one of the major sources of income in the district and is still done using traditional methods primarily for self consumption. With the introduction of apple some 50 years ago in the district, majority of population has started growing apples in the district. However, with the rise in value of apples grown in the district, the area under agriculture has drastically decreased. The total area under fruits in the district is 12934 hectares while net sown area is 8256 hectares (himachalservices.nic.in). The major fruit crops grown in the district are apple, apricot,

grapes, raisins and peaches. Apple is the most commercially valuable fruit crop. There are only a few percent of people who still have proper fields dedicated to farming while the majority has turned their terrace fields into apple orchards leaving little area for agricultural development. However the net sown area, total cropped area, net irrigated area and gross irrigated area in Kinnaur is much higher in comparison to other tribal areas of Lahaul, Spiti, Pangi and Bharmour. The soil in the district is mainly loose sandy and loamy. The district receives an average rainfall of 418.4 mm and therefore the farmers have to depend upon irrigation for growing crops (agricoop.nic.in).

Terrace farming or step farming is practiced in the district and the land is often ploughed early in the morning with a help of *Churu* or oxen. Since most fields now have been converted into apple orchards, only those who have separate fields plough the land with the help of ox. The farmers who do not have separate fields often plant crops in the apple orchards itself and they manually hoe the area

with the help of tools. The major crops grown are potato, peas, wheat, barley, and beans. Some also grow vegetables such as turnips, reddish, cabbage etc. The fields are ploughed and leveled with the help of a spade like tool called *fawda* or *charupp*. The beds for seed sowing are prepared by the women with the help of another tool made out of wood. The sowing usually takes place in last week of March or early April. About 35-45 days after sowing, the germination takes place and the first round of weeding is done by the women; followed by irrigation of the crop. Later the weeding and irrigation are repeated after each week till maturity. The crops are harvested usually in the last week of September or early October. It is then brought home for drying, thrashing and storage. While most people only grow for their own consumption, few are able to sell their crops at local market. The harvest is stored for consumption during the winter months when the majority of the areas of the district remain cutoff from rest of the state due to heavy snowfall.



Figure 1: Field at Kalpa

Irrigation

The agricultural crop in the district is mainly irrigated. Irrigation is necessary in the cold desert for the growth of all crops (Lal & Prasher, 2016). The net irrigated area in the district is 5474 hectares in 2016-17 (himachalservices.nic.in). The glacial water is diverted into small channels called '*kuhl*' for

the purpose. The water is then directed to the fields where beds are prepared beforehand. This glacial water is considered a community resource and is used by all members of the village, explained a resident of Hango village. The water is distributed among the members in a time bound manner with the time allowed to use the *kuhl* being directly proportional to the

amount of land holdings. Thus the water is used by everyone in rotations according to the area that needs to be irrigated. This is a traditional method of distribution being followed for ages. This method of irrigation is still practiced in the district though the glaciers are receding with the global warming. Some people however have started using modern irrigation systems in their individual capacity. As the modern irrigation methods require initial monetary investment and setup, it

cannot be afforded by everyone and therefore the traditional method still stands superior. Also the modern irrigation systems have failed to be as efficient as the *kuhl* system. It was reported that the pipes used for irrigation sometimes burst or are damaged during the freezing winters. There is another major inconvenience of unequal water distribution along the gradient with the plants at higher slope receiving no or very less water.



Figure 2: A lady from Hango irrigating pea crop

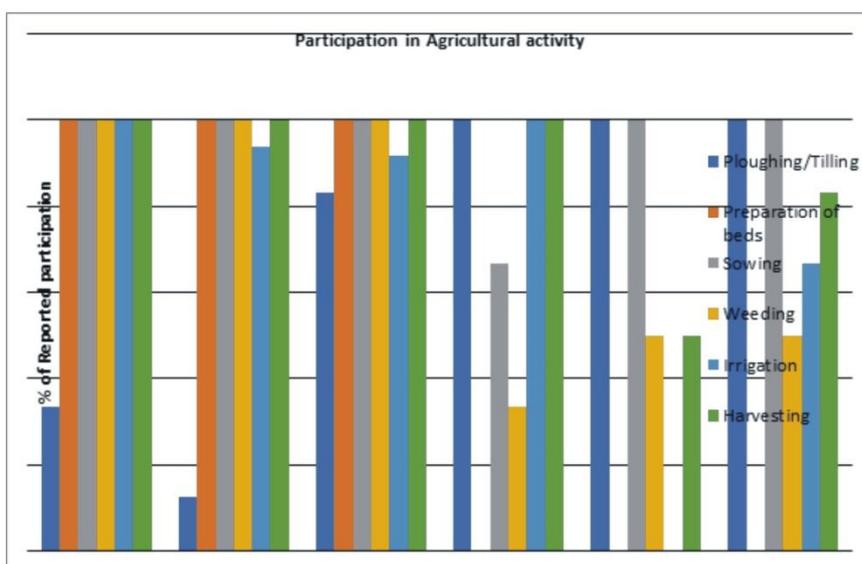


Figure 3: Participation in Agriculture

Women's role

Men and women share the load of agricultural work. Some even accepted that the proportion of work done by women is more than that of men with tilling of the land being the only primary jobs of the males while the preparation of the beds, weeding, irrigation, harvesting, thrashing and storage were all women's job. According to the data collected during the survey, while 85.7% men reported to be involved in ploughing of the fields using pair of ox. Women too reported to manually hoe the land with tools where there isn't enough space for ox ploughing. Out of the total females interviewed, the average participation of women in various farming activities was 85.46%. In comparison to the 42% agricultural work that is done by males, 58% of agricultural work is done by women.

The irrigation as stated earlier is done primarily by the women. While in some areas the plants are only irrigated during the day in others it may also be done during night. A female resident of Kalpa village reported that since all the male members of the family have to attend their jobs during the day, the irrigation during the night or early morning becomes the responsibility of the women,

though men may help work in rotation. Another female resident of the same village reported to participate in irrigating the fields at night despite have to go teach at a private school the next morning. She explained that the temperatures during the night even in summers drop a lot and it is difficult for other members to continue working in such cold environment for long hours and therefore she participates with them in rotations to ensure that they can rest and warm themselves up for some time. This is a part of the responsibilities that the womenfolk of the tribe undertake along with childcare, household chores and cattle rearing. It is only during the winter months that the area remains snow covered that they do not have to go out to work in the fields. Instead, most women take-up weaving looms during the winter season.

It is to be noted that in the households where the male members work in offices, the agricultural income is also commanded by the women. 45% women of the total interviewed reported to have authority over the agricultural income while 55% belonged to families who depended upon agri-horticulture and thus the income becomes a part of the family income.

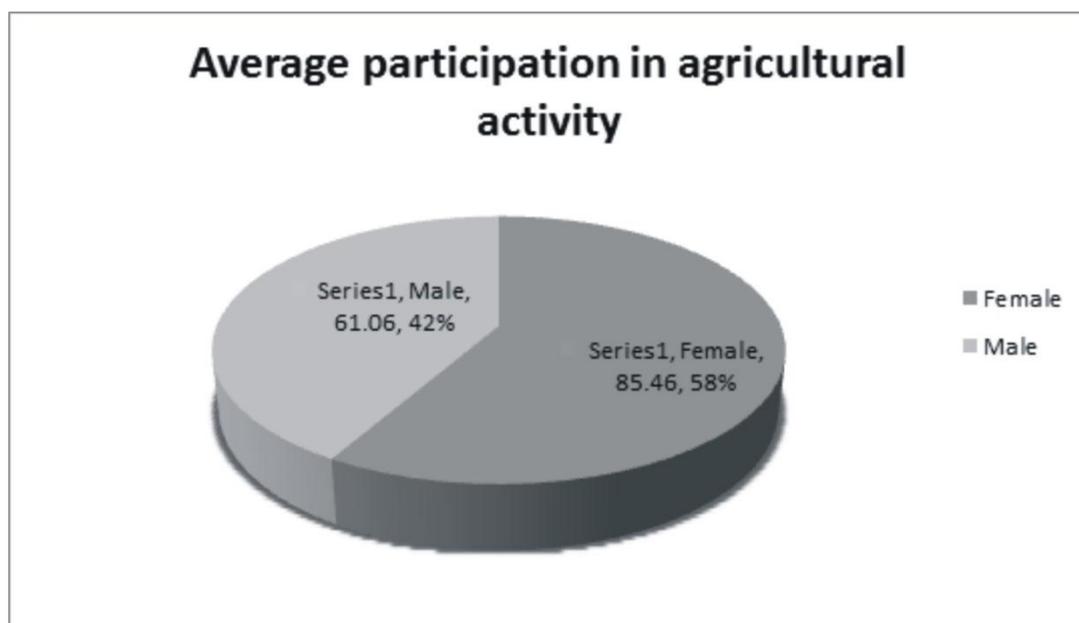


Figure 4

CONCLUSION

Agriculture in Kinnaur is invariably traditional in nature and the women have proved themselves to be the backbone of the system. Tribal societies have essentially been egalitarian in nature and the status of women is unarguably better. With the increasing number of males working outside the house in the district Kinnaur, the females continue to grow crops for the subsistence of the family. The participation of women in the agricultural work is mainly voluntary and not imposed because it enables them attain a certain level of autonomy. They are empowered by the income earned from farming. Their efforts however are still unrecognized and it is therefore a responsibility for the researchers to focus on women as active participants for the development of agricultural policies.

REFERENCES

Agriculture contingency plan for district: Kinnaur,
[www.agricoop.nic.in>dafaults>files](http://www.agricoop.nic.in/dafaults/files).

Annual Report, (2019-2020). Ministry of Tribal affairs.

Veena, B. Status of Tribal women in India, July 2007. Studies on Home and Community Science 1(1).

GoI, (2013). Statistical Profile Of Scheduled Tribes In India 2013, Ministry of Tribal Affairs Statistics Division, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 1.

GoI, (2020). Statistical abstract of Himachal Pradesh, 2018-19. Department of economic and statistics. Government of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.

<https://hpkinnaur.nic.in>.

Chaman, L., & Prasher, R. S. (2016). Traditional knowledge systems and conservation practices in tribal society of western Himalayas: a case study of district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh, 2016. *International journal of Farm Sciences* 6(3), 159-171.