

Women's Lives and Images:

The Inner and Outer Selves of Himalayan Gaddi.

Visual Ethnography

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Abstract: While on field research in the Gaddi villages of the Himalayas, I was wonderstruck by the women's various roles. This community is patriarchal, but there has been a culture of women taking on many responsibilities of running the family, community, and village. Gaddi women, thus, from politics to agriculture, can be seen doing many tasks. As I explored more profoundly, most men of the hills appeared absent. They migrated to plain areas due to their jobs; some were in the army. The main reason behind this migration is the ecological conditions of the hills, where the lack of natural resources, especially agricultural lands and the domestication of sheep and goats, could not provide a livelihood for the entire population. In this visual research article of photographs, I will explore how the Gaddi women identify themselves, how they spend their daily lives in the Himalayas, and how their sense of personhood and selfhood is influenced by various spaces and their culture and ritual constructions.

Keywords: Himalayan, Gaddi tribe, Gender, Anthropology, Identity, Pastoralism, Public/Private Space

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Introduction

India is the home of almost 461 tribal and indigenous communities that resides in different ecological zones across the country and belong to various ethnic and linguistic groups. They have different modes of livelihood and distinct social and ritual structures. The position and role of women are vastly different from one community to another. During the early phase of anthropological literature, tribal women's issues were invisible, or women were seen as exotic and objectified regarding their physical attributes and sexual practices. They were presented as either promiscuous and sexually free or as pure and chaste. Later, they were depicted as strong, hard-working, or of high status in the family and community or without any status. A shift began with the rise of feminist discourse in anthropology from the 1970s onward. This led to a better understanding of women's roles, positions, rights, and knowledge of gender relations in the communities. With time another trend that emerged and attached to feminist anthropological literature was the focus on women's issues and development. Women were seen as either "active participants in the conservation of their culture or as helpless victims of the forces

of globalization, cultural change, and modernization” (Mehrotra 2004: 61). Gender construction among both tribal and non-tribal communities depends not on any singular factor but develops through a dialectic relationship with modes of production, social structures, religious practices, cultural interactions, and historical trajectories, which together contribute towards how men and women come to be constructed as social entities (Kaushal, 2020, p. 160). In this paper, my study will try to understand the everyday life of Gaddi women of the Bharmour and Dharamshala region in the Himalayas by probing deep into their sociocultural, economic, and political position and access to public and private spaces and their sense of Self (Figure 1&2: *The inner Self*)



Photo 1



Photo 2

Methodology



Photo 3

The camera is essential in gathering accurate visual information, as humans often need better observers. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead conducted the first saturated photographic research published in *Balinese Character* in 1942. The anthropological study of visual culture(s) comprises image production and analysis. Also, it includes the reflexive analysis of ways of seeing as a form of knowledge production. Hence, first, the term “visual anthropology” refers to the scientific study of visual manifestations of culture; this includes the anthropology of art, material culture, and ritual form. Second, “visual anthropology” also denotes the—often reflexive and dialogical—use and production of images by which people represent themselves, employing technological media such as film and photography. In anthropology, visual ethnography is still an unusual research method. Early stages of fieldwork usually involve meeting strangers in a strange land. This initial experience is diplomacy and orientation, introducing ourselves to people and gaining local knowledge and clearance to begin our research. Visual ethnography allowed me to establish rapport with this Himalayan community (women and children especially) by taking photos and videos of their everyday activities as a participant observer. This method helps to break the ice between a researcher from outside and the community as they like to see what has been captured (Figure 3: *Show me what you have captured*). The paper deals with a very ancient and vibrant Himalayan community known for its culture and visual aesthetic. Visual methods capture and understand the cultural aesthetics and their hybrid lifestyle mode, marking their visibility in every domain, including politics.

Furthermore, this study specifically focused on women and young girls and trying to see the world through their eyes and perspectives. So, to do that, visual documents in the form of photographs were taken to give a visual representation of the study. Pictures were taken of people, areas, aesthetics of the Himalayas mountainous range, the scenic beauty of Himachal Pradesh, dresses, ornaments, customs, women’s involvement in culture, rituals, religion,

education, politics, agriculture, pastoralism, shamanism, sports, arts, activism, NGOs, media, entrepreneurship, business, tourism. The visual method not only helped me to enhance the visual representation of the study but also gave value to the collected data and conveyed the information of the present study. Visual data has become an essential source of information in Anthropology. Before taking photographs and videos, consent was sought, and the purpose of taking pictures was explained to the research participants. Likewise, the images taken from social media pages were used with due permission, and due credit has been given to the source from where the photographs were extracted. Archived photos from government documents, museums, and libraries were also considered to understand the community better.

The area and the people

The Dhauladhar mountain ranges of the Himalayas, the homeland of Gaddi agro-pastoralists, nestles the valley of Bharmour. This agro-pastoralist community in earlier times were traditional sheep and goats herders who used to migrate seasonally with their herds to the upper and lower ranges of the Himalayas (Figure 4: *an archive photo of Agro-pastoral Gaddi couple from the government documents*).



Photo 4

Administratively and Anthropologically, they are classified as a tribe and scheduled caste, but their worldwide sociocultural and religious practices are familiar to the large Hindu community. However, they are distinct in how they perceive the universe and their position in the cosmic order of things (Kaushal 2001: 161). Any discussion on whether a community can be called a tribe or a caste has two primary dimensions: (i) the labeling by others, especially an administrative label, usually imposed by the state, and (ii) self-identification. Most researchers of the Indian society, who have dealt with the tribe-caste continuum

in the earlier period, have linked tribe to caste mobility to a process of Hinduization and as efforts by the tribe to raise itself in a social hierarchy or how castes absorb tribes at the bottom of social order in what Bose (1975 [1961]) has called the Hindu method of tribal absorption (Channa, 2013). During my research, I found that Gaddis are proud of their identity as a Hindu Rajput or Hindu Brahmin but, simultaneously, accept the tribe label only for getting benefits. Here, the 'inner' and 'outer' are most apparent as they consider the tribal label as something imposed on them and their ritual and caste identity as something intrinsic. The Gaddi community is a generic term used for the entire community, but with the community, the term Gaddi is reserved for Kashtriyas or Rajputs and Brahmins. Other castes among Gaddi are Sippi and Halis.

Moreover, Their language, a part of the western Pahari dialect, retains influences from both Gujarati and Rajasthani languages, and there is also a profusion of archaic Sanskrit terms and inflection. Often one finds inflexion in the Gujarati language as well. This pointer is toward a highly mobile community of varied migrant groups from different parts of India (Kaushal, 2020, p. 161).



Photo 5

According to their oral narratives, they are created by Lord Shiva himself. Gaddi means the royal seat of Lord Shiva, a nomad and a shepherd (Figure 5:

Lord Shiva, Ishta Devta (cherished divinity of the Gaddis). Besides being a caste-based society, the Gaddi are patrilineal and patriarchal. By probing deeply, one can observe that the day-to-day life of Gaddi women is not much different from any other patriarchal community regarding her position in the family and social structure. However, if we look closely, the various spaces available to a Gaddi woman for negotiating a position of power within this social system throw light on how she can negotiate her space within this family structure and other social institutions. They are creating their space by taking up various roles in different spaces and taking the responsibility of running the village without men. Due to the influence of urbanization and excessive tourism in Himachal, women are aware of the “concept of Self”. The impact of migration and globalization forms the image of identity among women. The idea of outer and inner selves can be witnessed by a disjunction between how people know or see Gaddi women and how Gaddi women believe to be, irrespective of how people perceive them. In her book *The Inner and Outer Selves* (2013), Channa describes the inner Self not as a psycho-biological self but as a self-recognized self that forms a part of one’s innermost being. ‘Outer selves’ refer to those imposed upon us that reflect one’s position in a power hierarchy. Gaddi women see themselves as a creation of the supreme lord Shiva and descendants of Rajputs from Rajasthan. Gaddi women are proud of their lineage and history. They take pride in caring for the household and maintaining the village’s social system without men. However, other communities see them as *janjati* who follow Hindu rituals and shepherders. According to other communities, their central identity comprises ‘shepherds’ and farmers. The outer selves of Gaddi are constructed around the norms and expectations of their surrounding people, their way of dressing, talking, rituals, etc.

Women’s Lives



Photo 6

The Gaddi community is male-dominated, yet women’s role is noteworthy (Figure 6). Image of Old Gaddi women making wool while men enjoy *Hukka*. She plays an essential role in farming activities but also manages natural resources along with the well-being and survival of her family. Women’s role is defined first and, most importantly, by family. Women are highly valued for their physical labor.

Nevertheless, the customary laws dictate that sons inherit family property, and daughters inherit goods such as jewelry and other household items. Hence, men are seen as the owner of the production while women own not, which together makes women dependent on men. During my field research,

I noticed that the life of Gaddi women in the Himalayan region is very hectic. They are busy working from early morning to late evening and sometimes till late at night. They work equally with men, and their role is essential in agriculture and at home. They constantly work, transplanting seedlings, weeding, harvesting, carrying firewood, fodder, manure, water, etc. Collecting and maintaining cattle dung in the field is a women's job (Figures 7 & 8: A Gaddi woman carrying firewood collected from the forest for fuel while another carrying fodder for their domesticated animals). The livestock rearing, milking, and preparation of butter and buttermilk is also their responsibility. During their free time, they have seen knitting, making pickles, teaching children, etc. Due to the ongoing transition in society, they are emerging with liberal ideas, but somewhere they are still strictly bound by traditional customs.



Photo 7-8



Photo 9

The most significant change in a Gaddi women's life comes through marriage (Figure 9: *A Gaddi wedding*) when she becomes part of a new lineage. During main rituals and prayers, women sit with their men and give their opinions on various matters, from business to family. However, traditions and values often put a ceiling on women's lives and create obstacles to various empowering opportunities. When women enter a new lineage, she is given a deficient social and ritual status among the clan members. She negotiates her space in this social construction later in her life, which comes after a certain age when she becomes the eldest in the family or sometimes by giving birth to a boy child. Sometimes, she climbs the hierarchy ladder when her husband makes more financial contributions to the household. The household's smallest social unit is the gaddi society, and the home's center is the hearth. The space in the household and around the hearth is arranged hierarchy according to age and gender. A joint family shares a common heart. Sharing a common hearth indicates one family comprising husband, wife, and unmarried children. The daughter left after the marriage and became part of other families. When sons marry, they may or may not establish separate families and different hearths. In a joint family, the hearth is the territory of the eldest female member of the family, who is usually the wife of the family male head. Though the fire and oven symbolize the patrilineal space, the married women control the area and keep the fire alive (Kaushal, 2020).



Photo 10

The distribution of the food and feeding the family members are her responsibility. The hearth in the house is symbolically the most critical area. The family organizes itself hierarchically around the hearth (Figure 10: *Hearth*

the symbolism of household hierarchy). It stands both for fission and unity in the family. Family tension of any nature tends to revolve around the hearth. The control of this area represents power and authority. The right over usage of the oven depicts the jurisdiction. During any ritual, the family's eldest member enters the kitchen to cook the sacred food for the deity, mainly the family's head. After the death of the head of the family, the authority goes to the elder son or to the wife of those who gave birth to boys or whose husband financially contributes more to the family. More senior women (mother-in-law) practice their authority through this over daughter-in-law. Daughters-in-law get access to the kitchen and hearth when the mother-in-law allows her. Children and menstruating women are prohibited from entering the kitchen and touching the hearth due to purity and pollution. Even in some families, it is considered impure during the menstrual cycle and is not allowed to enter the kitchen during this period. She is prevented from doing any kitchen-related work for five to seven days. The female authority is entirely controlled by elder women (mother-in-law).



Photo 11

In many communities In India, women become entirely part of their husband's households after marriage, and their connection with their natal home is either reduced or controlled by in-laws. However, in the Gaddi community, the ties between a married woman and her natal continue to exist even after the parents' death. Women of the community are emotionally very dependent on the natal house, and their families equally reciprocate the feeling (Figure 11: *Married Gaddi woman celebrating the festival of Sair with her natal kins*). After marrying her to a different family, they do not cut off contact with their daughters. Daughters are never alienated from their parent's clan. She continues to pray to her father's lineage deity and her husband's lineage deity. She is invited to all the festivals celebrated at her natal house. Thus, for A gaddi woman,

while gaining entry into her husband's lineage, a woman does not need to give up her membership in the natal kin; She enjoys rights in both the family. She continues to be a member of the natal clan as a sister of its male members, with whom she shares the relationship of both *doodh* (milk) and *Khoon* (blood) (Kaushal, 2020). Newell, who was one of the earliest colonial administrators to write about the sociocultural practices of the Gaddis, made a similar observation: "Her position in one clan is never explicitly affirmed to the exclusion of her rights in the other clan – with marriage, her place in her natal clan is never fully extinguished" (Newell, 1962, p. 15).

Along with her father's lineage deity, the Gaddi woman inherits another deity from her maternal lineage. The deity is known as Kailua, and the women only worship him. This religious practice is strictly matrilineal. It passes on from grandmother to mother to daughter and so on. Kailua mainly worships in the month of Sawan (according to the Hindu calendar). Girls, after puberty, start worshipping Kailua. In some Gaddi families, they sacrifice sheep to celebrate the occasion. Each family has a specific place or temple where they worship Kailua. Kailua is some fruit with seeds.



Photo 12

Moreover, seeds represent the fertility of women. When a daughter reaches puberty, they go to their natal place to worship Kailua. Only women and their children are allowed to be part of the Kailua; men are not allowed (Figure 12: Gaddi women on their way to worship Kailua). Women in some Gaddi families carry a white dupatta or veil to perform the ritual related to the deity. Kailua stands for fertility and sexuality. They avoid the shadow of men (specifically husbands) while they are on their way to performing the ritual. The whole pattern is made very secretly. This entire practice recognizes the role of the female seed and the maternal line in reproduction. Despite this practice, the community, like any other patriarchal community, believes that the father provides the child with seed, blood, bone, and flesh.



Photo 13

(Figure 13: A Gaddi married couple participating in a ritual ceremony symbolizes the equal religious status of women with their men). The Gaddi marriages in earlier times were based on the equal status of “wife giver” and “wife takers.” This way, the transfer of women took place in both directions. In this way, both families used to gain women (since women are always in vogue for their hardship). Batta- Satta (exchange of sisters), ghar-jawantri (a son-in-law who comes to reside with her wife’s family), Tal-bal (another custom where a man uses to live in the house like a shepherd and, after service of seven years, marry their daughter with some conditions) are forms of marriages that are no longer in vogue today. Along with the scarcity of women, Gaddi women are highly required, and, in this way, women are in a powerful position to negotiate their space in their husband’s families. Divorce cases are significantly few in the community.

Widow remarriage is also rare (Figure 14: A widow Gaddi woman). Like other communities, widow women in the Gaddi community also face certain restrictions like wearing silver or gold ornaments, wearing bright colors, eating a particular food, and participating in certain rituals. The widow avoids participating in marriage rituals and gives her flourish gifts from her in-laws during her wedding. Second marriage for women is rare compared to second marriage for men. In many families, a widow stays with in-laws after her husband’s death and looks after in-laws and children, if any. There are minimal examples of a widow remarrying since many stigmas attached to her after the death of her husband. The widow inherits her deceased husband’s property and enjoys it till her end. Cases of elopement and her returning to her natal house are rare among widows. During earlier times, Gaddi’s widow had the right to pick any male heir after the death of her husband and marry him. Sometimes she chooses to marry the hearth and have an alliance with any male without being obligated to reveal her child’s father’s identity. However, this is not in practice anymore.



Photo 14

Dowry and gift exchange systems were absent in the community, but after coming in contact with other communities, this ritual of gift exchange system entered the community. However, it is still practiced in a very mild-mannered and not evil dowry—gift exchange done by both sides. The bride's family gives clothes to the in-laws, jewelry sometimes if they are capable, and a few household necessities such as a cupboard, bed, utensils, and clothes, according to their budget, given to the daughter. The Groom's parents provide the bride and her relatives the jewelry and clothes. Mangtika (head accessory) and naakbali (Nath) are given to the bride by the Groom's side. This two-silver-made jewelry plays a very vital role in the wedding. These two show that women are married. In earlier days, most of the Gaddi jewelry was made of silver, but in changing times, gold has entered the community, and women can be seen wearing gold as well sometimes. (Figure 15: *Maangtika (Head ornament) and Naak Bali (Nose ring) are traditional ornaments symbolizing married women.*)

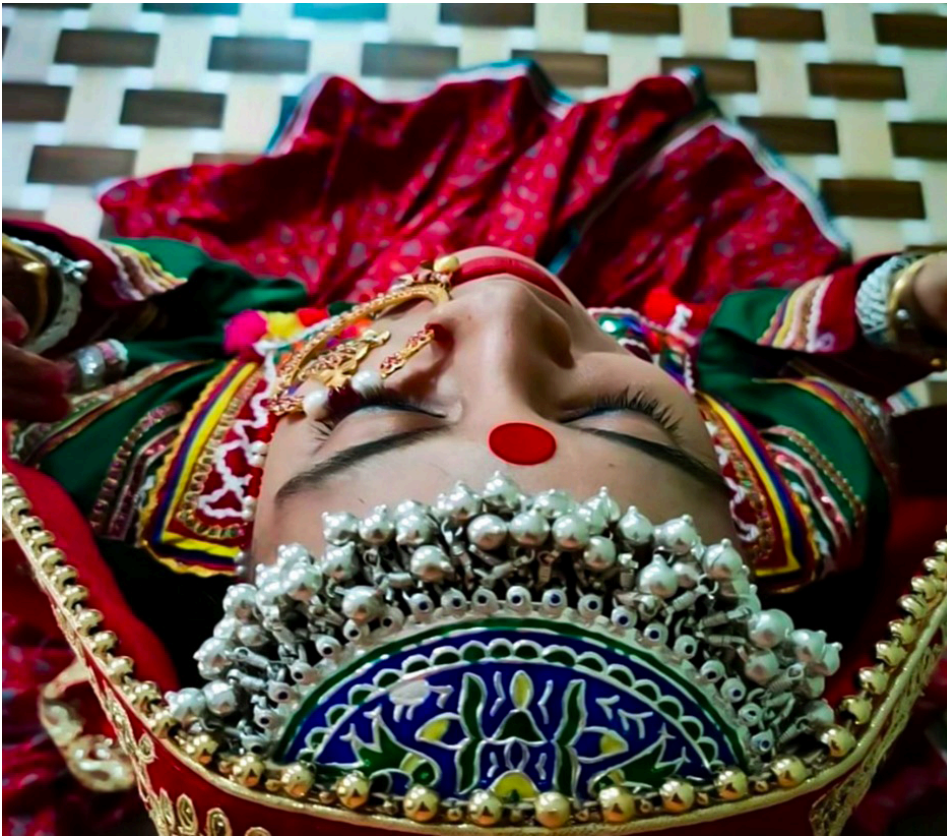


Photo 15

The daily activity of married Gaddi women involves taking care of household work. Males are primarily absent either due to their work or agricultural activities. However, differences can be seen in activity of women in Bharmour and women in Kangra. During my fieldwork, I observed that women in Kangra are active in public and private spaces compared to women in Bharmour. Women and girls in Bharmour mostly take care of household work, while women in Kangra are involved in various jobs outside the house. Women from Kangra get up early in the morning, give food to the domesticated animals, cook a meal for the family, send children to school and husbands to work, and then working women go to work. After returning from work, they visit their field, collect foodless wood for fuel and cook the evening meal. If she works till late, the daughter must cook dinner or collect food, wood, and other household chores. Women with better financial family backgrounds hire poor gaddi women to work in their fields and help in other household work. Men are barely seen doing any of these or working or helping in any of these works. In Bharmour, there are very few working women. In that case, they and their daughters take care of the household and land-related work, and men limit themselves to outer space work. Some poor Gaddi women are hired to look after the cattle or older people and children and help in household and agriculture work. (Figures 16, 17 & 18: *A Gaddi pastoral woman; A female Gaddi farmer; Gaddi Woman preparing a meal for her family*)



Photo 16



Photo 17-18

The Gaddi community follows patriarchal rules according to which the land passes from father to son. Ownership of material property is also passed on from father to son. Land legal papers are continuously registered in the name of the male head of the household. In the past, women had no legal right to family property, but after the new land laws, daughters were given the right to claim their father's land. Upon the death of the male head of the family, the land goes to his widow, but her sons are the ones to care for who take care of the land. If only daughters have no son, the son she land goes to the daughters, who are taken care of by their husbands. Gaddi women never claim the land as it questions her character. Gaddi's male narrative states, "A good woman can never claim what belongs to her brother." However, during their wedding, women and girls are given gifts such as clothes, jewelry, utensils, and other livestock to take to their affinal kin. Hence, men in society are considered the production owner, while women own nothing. Moreover, this makes them dependent on men.

Due to the demographic imbalance, most men migrated to the plain in search of better employment opportunities; this led to the burden of responsibility on women to run the household and the village. Even after doing so much hard work, her status is still lower than men in the community, and this explains correctly by Sharma that 'not just who does what but who decides who does what and who is responsible for seeing that specific tasks are done is required to be known before we draw any conclusions about work organizations and agency (1980:89). Even many studies are done on a large scale by women, it still does not give them any absolute control or agency. Despite giving women almost total control over the village, division of labor is always the concept of male dominance. Agriculture and pastoralism are Gaddis's dominant economic activities and are seen as a male domain. When discussing identity, men's actions define the community (Channa, 2013). (Figure 19: A Gaddi male pastoral)



Photo 19



Photo 20

Women in the Gaddi community work all day and sometimes till late at night (Figure 20: *A Gaddi woman using Charkha to make wool*). She does not retire unless she is totally unwell or physically disabled or belongs to an extra high household with no agricultural land or domesticated animals. However, it is rare to find a Gaddi woman sitting idly and not engaged in any work. Since childhood, they have socialized to help their mother with household chores. They receive training to carry water, clean the house, look after younger siblings, wash clothes, feed cattle, and accompany their mother on the agricultural land and Forrest. Most girls love to imitate their mothers, which women in the house encourage. Girls are now encouraged to pursue education; in that case, they are fully engaged in teaching and household work. They understand

the value of household chores and education. During interviews, many girls took pride in balancing their household work and education. They later added that learning household work is essential because they do not want to see their mother struggling with household chores alone. Also, it will benefit them once they are married and have a husband, and education is essential for their Self-growth. If they study hard and get good marks, they can get a good job, earn good money, live a better life, and make their parents proud. Many girls in the community are seen enrolling for higher studies at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh. Moreover, they take pride in doing both their studies and household chores simultaneously. (Figure 21: A Gaddi mother, daughter, and her son during an interview)



Photo 21

Girls are mainly close to their mothers. All their aims and goals are supported by their mothers. In one of the interviews, a woman told me, ‘She is not that educated but wants her daughter to go to college, study hard and become a teacher. She later said she had many responsibilities as a girl, as her father died when she was eight. This sudden death interrupted her education because their financial situation was terrible. She wanted to be a teacher, but she married and failed to fulfill her goals. She wants her daughter to achieve her goals. Moreover, this is not just a story of one Gaddi woman. Many married women from the older generation share a similar story where they missed the opportunity to study due to particular circumstances.

Both men and women do cooking, but men only cook if he has to feed themselves if there is no one around. All other tasks, such as buying vegetables, household groceries, and washing clothes and utensils, are women’s jobs. Young boys are sometimes sent to fetch water for household work or to markets to buy things. In that case, they always receive instructions from their



Photo 22

mother and sister and go independently of the girls. Loss of land after their shift to the lower-altitude villages in Kangra has led the women to intensify their traditional knitting, weaving, and accessories making.

With the help of *Gramin Bank*, Gaddi women form a group in their village known as a self-help group. In these self-help groups, women sometimes gather together somewhere or in somebody's house. They make traditional accessories, clothes, or pickles and sell them within and outside the community. The self-help group helps these marginalized women earn some money and make them financially independent. The markets and self-help groups are connected to various Gaddi women who migrated out with their husbands to different cities through networking. All these women are involved in traditional weaving or accessory making, and they sell them to earn some money through electronic payment platforms or the market. Most women are in contact with many Gaddi women through social media platforms, and they all make and sell things through this platform. Due to this activity, they can interact with each other and keep themselves aware and updated on current issues. (Figure 22 & 23: *Self-help group; A Gaddi woman occupied preparing red chilies pickle for her local business*)



Photo 23

Women- Ecology Interface:

Gaddi women have plentiful traditional knowledge of biodiversity management, especially in preserving, enhancing, maintaining, and sustainable use of land and forest resources. Due to their time spent with nature, women have outstanding knowledge about collecting, storing, and using wild edibles. The bond between nature and women rests on the hypothesis wherein the organic evolution of the two is analogous, and the earth is considered a nurturing mother. Work culture, nature, and daily life are interlaced into a flawless web, and nurturing, female-identified earth is regarded as the root of existence (Seager, 1993).



Photo 24



Photo 25



Photo 26-27

Women of the community keep track of different wild edibles. They usually gather edibles and prepare other ethnic food using these wild edibles. Women also make use of native herbs for the treatment of common ailments. Knowledge is acquired through observation of day-to-day life and use within the household. Many remedies cure headaches, toothache, eye disease, cold and cough, fever, constipation, etc. Just like nature, women are nurtured and life-giver. (Figures 24, 25, 26 & 27: Dried cauliflower, Mango chutney Colocasia leaves (*Arbi ke patte*); Colocasia leaves fries)

Women and Transformation:

The community's women have body language indicating their position in the village. The concept of *purdah* (veil) and shyness is invisible among women. They walk with their head high in the community. They dress primarily in *salwar kameez*, tie *dupatta* around their head, and then keep it modestly on their bosoms. On various occasions, such as marriage or *jagrata* (prayer night), both men and women can be seen eating, singing, and dancing together. The unmarried girls are free in their movements and enjoy freedom. In the past few decades, women's literacy has increased sharply. Due to male migration and a reduced workforce, women are now in charge of the work. They are performing backbreaking work for agriculture and livelihood. This phenomenon is called the feminization of mountain agriculture and livelihoods (Sharma, 2013). Customary laws provide women less access, control, and ownership of land and other resources. The inheritance system of land is gender-biased. However, according to the new land-related rules, daughters can also claim their father's property. Women play a vital role in maintaining and improving the well-being of their families and society. However, they are rarely accredited as agents of change with significant responsibilities, capacities, knowledge, skills, and competencies (Sharma, 2013). Together with men, they take care of natural resources.



Photo 28



Photo 29-30

For the past few decades, the involvement of women in politics, with the help of NGOs, Self-help groups, *Anganwadi* (courtyard shelter), and Mahila Mandal (women association), has played a leadership role in formal and informal local networks and organizations which are helping them in their upliftment. (Figures 28, 29 & 30: *NGO Radio Gunjan; Anganwadi meeting on health; Anganwari workers*). These *Anganwadi* centers and health care workers run a center for toddlers in the village. They keep track of all the pregnant women, new mothers, and newborn children. The *Anganwadi* workers visit each household with pregnant ladies and new mothers and give them information about how to take care of their and the baby's health, what to eat for nutrition and what to avoid when to get which vaccination etc. They take pregnant women to the hospital for regular health check-ups and organize events to spread awareness about reproductive health, contraceptives, family planning, etc. They also inform people about various welfare programs for girls' children, and wom-

en. *Mahila Mandal* (Women's Association) is another group formed by village women where they discuss their everyday problems and try to find solutions together. The head of the *Mahila mandal* reports all the concerns to the village head or *sarpanch*, or ward politician and requests them their support. During these *Mahila mandal* meetings, held once every month, women gather to discuss politics, whom to cast votes for, who is working for their welfare, what is required for the village and village women's upliftment, etc. (**Figure 31: Mahila Mandal** (women association) monthly meeting)



Photo 31

The central government and the Himachal Pradesh government have made many national and state-level welfare programs for women belonging to the marginalized community, especially women from the Gaddi community. Schemes such as “*Beti hai Anmol*,” Chief Minister “*Kanyadan Yojana*,” “*Mata Salary*,” and Prime Minister’s “*Matritava Vandana Yojana*” are some of the welfare schemes to protect the girl child as female infanticide is one the biggest curse for the patriarchal country India. A decrease in the population of girls is the country’s most extensive concern for the government. These programs are made to encourage the birth of a girl child. Under these programs, families below the poverty line receive financial support from the government. The government financially supports girls from birth to their education till their wedding. After implementing these programs, improvement has been observed within the community. All these welfare programs aim to support women and their upliftment process to improve the status of marginalized women to achieve empowerment.

(Figures 32 & 33: Awareness against female infanticide; Welfare programs for girls and women by the state and central government.)

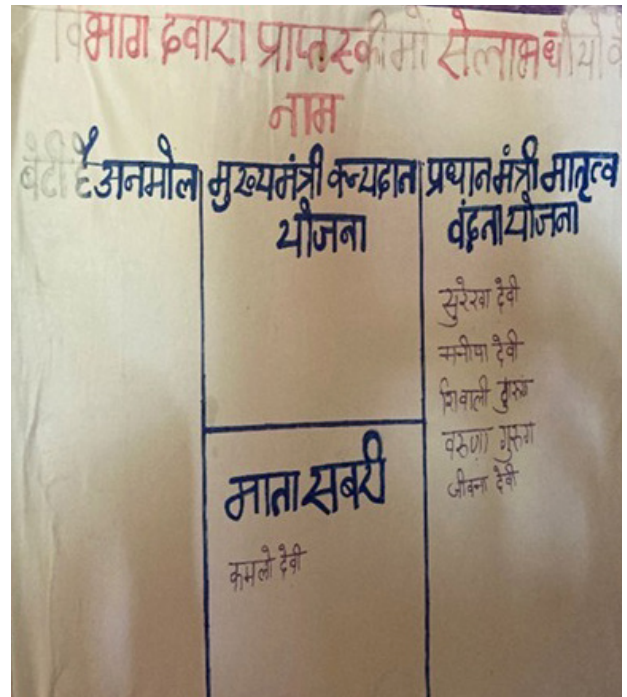


Photo 32-33

Anganwadi, NGOs, Women's associations, Self Help Groups, education, welfare programs, government policies, and schemes for Gaddi women have contributed to their awareness of the concept of Self. They are aware of their mental and physical health; they know how important education is and how much representation matters to them. The representation of Gaddi women in various male-dominated domains, such as politics, administration, media, education, business, etc., reveals how far Gaddi women have come in the global era. They confidently present their inner and outer selves in front of the world, where they are perceived as a delicate Himalayan woman who is shy, covered in red dresses and silver jewelry. These Gaddi women are also known as *Leaders of the Himalayas*, redefining their identity and 'others' perception of Self (them) by using their agency to represent their inner and outer selves to the world. (Figures 33 to 38: *The Outer Self of Gaddi Girls and Women*)



Photo 34



Photo 35



Photo 36-37

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