

## ROLE OF CULTURE IN SUSTAINABLE LIVING AND FACTORS FOR ITS DISINTEGRATION

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### Abstract

This article discusses about influences of culture on resource use and management for sustainable living with the help of polyandry, a unique cultural practice found among the Jaunsaries, a tribal community in Central Himalayan region of India. The Jaunsaries, a scheduled tribe, inhabit in Jaunsar Bawar region of Dehradun district of state of Uttar Pradesh. The Jaunsaries, once famous for its polyandrous culture, now is monogamous and the practice of polyandry is fast disappearing. Through an empirical study, an attempt is made to find out the various characteristics of this practice, *i.e.*, polyandry. Why the people of Jaunsar Bawar practise this unique practice and why they have now. Started abandoning are some of the key issues that are dealt in this article. The article also discusses how developmental activities play a key role in changing the traditional cultural practices with the help of education, economic and infrastructure developmental activities.

### Introduction

Development is a continuous process. The economic growth is the prime attribute of development. However, the concerted confirmation to the monolithic economic growth has resulted in disparities and distorted progress. The search on indigenous development advocates the value added growth with a holistic approach integrating ecology, culture and integrative qualities of the society. In indigenous development, the society decides its own goal according to its condition and ensure sustained improvement for the well being or the quality of the life of its members.

In 1967 Lynn quoted that the more science and more technology are not going to help us out of the present ecological crises, until we find a new religion and respect our tradition. Culture stands for a total way of life which secures for an individual the satisfaction of his bio-psychic drives and fulfillment to other wants, ultimately endowing satisfaction. It is a framework for generating new ideas and changes to save a society from stagnation. This organic, practical and pragmatic nature of culture otherwise called the social engineering, is responsible for bringing civilization or development. Culture molds itself to significant external conditions to maximize the possibility of betterment of life.

The social economy of the Himalayan societies is manifestation of man's cultural interactions through various institutions with nature (Das, 1990; Samal *et.al.*,1993). These cultural institutions evolve strategies which make effective use of the resources through adaptation. In certain parts of the Himalaya, the practice of polyandry is the singular manifestation of value-attitude system inherent in the culture as a most suitable adaptation to sustain the community through checks and controls (Samal *et al.*,1994). Polyandry, as a cultural institution is still found in various pockets in Indian Himalayas *i.e.*, Ladakh, Lahaul & Spiti, Kangra, Sirmaur in Western Himalaya, Jaunsar Bawar in Central Himalaya and Siyang district in Eastern Himalaya.

Polyandry is a custom by which a woman is socially permitted to have more than one husband at the same time (Needham,1971).

The Encyclopedia Britanica (1972) has put forth convincing criteria in identifying a polyandry society.

1. Children recognize more than one man as having the status of father,
2. A woman bears legitimate children to several different fathers in succession,
3. A legitimately married woman regularly cohabits with several man, none of whom rate as father to her children and
4. A single legitimate husband allows other man for sexual access to his wife

All the above definitions have generally focused on male perspectives ignoring how do females themselves perceive polyandry. In addition to this difficulty of a sound definition, the people particularly elite from cross cultural communities view polyandry as an ignominious practice, ignoring its characteristic as a marker of sustainability that enforces community stability and cohesiveness.

### The Study Area

The Jaunsar Bawar is situated in Chakrata tehsil of Dehradun district, which lies between 77°45' and 78°7'20" East to 30°31' and 31°3'3" North. The whole region consists of entirely of mountain tracts. It is most rugged hill tract with gorges. The region is encircled by the Tonns river on the west and Yamuna on

the east and south. Geologically the Jaunsar Bawar region comes under two divisions, *i.e.*, Siwalik in the south and Lesser Himalaya (Outer and Inner) on the north (Valdiya,1980).

The altitude ranges lowest from 405 to 3071m. where temperate climate is found in higher elevations while lower river valleys of Tonns and Yamuna are quite hot. The average rainfall is about 175 cm. Coniferous forests are in the higher elevations and broad leaf forests in the lower parts is common in the region

The total geographical area of region is 1002.07 km<sup>2</sup> constituting nearly 32.5 per cent of Dehradun district.

### Research Design

The study was carried out from the mid of 1994 to mid of 1996, stretching over a period of two years. Initially five villages from each block (Kalsi and Chakrata) were selected based on secondary information. Out of these ten villages, Matiyawa village was selected for detailed study which was near representative of all the villages.

Matiyawa village is one of the remote villages of Kalsi block. Primary survey was conducted through the help of a schedule and information were collected from every household. The head of the household and his absence, the senior most member of the household was interviewed. Preference was accorded to interview female respondents also. Observation was another tool used in primary survey. Secondary data was collected from Census of India, District Statistical Abstracts, office of Block Development and Revenue office.

The main objectives of this study is to find out how far the developmental activities are influencing the traditional cultural practices and the impact of development interventions on polyandry culture in different time period.

### Polyandry and Sustainable Development

The inhospitable geo-climate specificities like isolation in Jaunsar Bawar have apparently evolved polyandry as a suitable cultural institution to maximize the scarce resources available at their disposal for sustenance. An appropriate adaptation that kept up economic conditions in conformity with the prevailing ecological factors, it was made a cultural complex though sanctions of social codes and conducts (Samal, 1997). Through this cultural complex, division of labour is being channelized, social security to woman and children is being systematized and the unity of people and property of a family also remained secured. The positive aspects of Jaunsari polyandry are as following;

1. Polyandry culture always supports to low population growth.
2. Joint family could be sustained in limited resources because the family economy is controlled by the head the family. The distribution of money being equal results the less disputes within the family.
3. Old age security is accorded through prevalence of joint family structure.
4. Among Jaunsaries a woman does not become widow until the youngest brother is alive. To be more specific, the word widow does not exist for the Jaunsaries.
5. A Jaunsari women has equal right with her husband in policy and decision making system of the family, may it be big or trivial.
6. A girl has the right to select/chose her prospective husband and decide that should she marry him alone or remain his exclusive wife or be wife to his brothers also. In other words practice of polyandry depends on the willingness of women. Here, to find out the status of the polyandry practice at present, village Matiyawa has been selected for the study. Significant physio-cultural characteristic of the village is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Socio- Economic Status of Matiyawa Village

<b>Physical Features</b>		
77°53'12"E/30°39'48"N	longitude/latitude	
	Altitude (msl)	1000-1400
<b>Cultural Features (1991)</b>		
	Number of Households	26.0
	Total population	256.0
	Population growth (1981-91)	4.9
	Density of Population (per hectare)	1.1
25.4	Literacy rate(%)	
741.0	Sex ratio [/1000 male]	
	Percentage of workers	47.3

Source, (i) Field Survey, (ii) N.I.C., Dehradun, UP, 1991.

**Factors for its Disintegration**

Ecology, economy and culture are inseparable and rather supplement each other in sustainable living, particularly in traditional communities (Samal,1997). Undoubtedly, culture is always affected by the surrounding environment, to be specific, by infrastructure, economy, education, etc. The combination of these elements with physical environment makes a society or a region different from others. Through acculturation and being influenced by infrastructure, education and economic needs, the practice of polyandry has been fast disintegrating / disappearing among the Jaunsaries.

**Case Study**

**(I) Infrastructure Development**

Infrastructure is one of the most important factor which has direct or indirect impacts on traditions, belief and customs. All the basic infrastructure facilities, *i.e.*, roads, educational institutions, communication, medical and health, etc. play an important role on changing the age old cultural practices of the area. It is clear from the study that when the infrastructure facilities were almost absent from the village in early fifties (Table 2), the polyandry system was found predominant( 63.6 per cent of the total married population). At that time, more than 94 per cent of the population was engaged in agricultural activities (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Temporal Development of Facilities

Available facilities	Before 1950	1995-96
Distance from the road	20 Km.	8 Km.
Primary School 1 (1960)	Nil	
Junior Basic School 1 (1978)	"	
Adult Education Centre 1 (1995)	"	
Post Office 1 (1975)		"
Medical Facilities(Ayurvedic)	"	6
Electricity		"
P.D.S. 1 (1993)		"
Drinking Water Source	Natural	Tap
Total literacy(1951-1991)(%)	5.6	25.4
Male literacy(%)	9.4	37.4
Female literacy(%)		Nil
		9.2

Source, (i) Field Survey (ii) District Census Handbook, Dehradun,U.P.1951 & N.I.C. Dehradun.

**(II) Educational Development**

In early fifties the literacy was only 5.6 per cent. Due to lack of educational facilities, even to get primary education, the students had to cover 20 km. from the village. It seems that till 1960, this culture was preserved due to remoteness. The year 1960 established and gave a new avenues for this village, as the first primary school was opened and gave a new light to the villagers. After 1960 the area was connected with road and the walking distance was reduced from 20 km. to 8 km. from the road head (Makti pokhari). It is also observed that after the educational facility was available within the approachable distance not only the males but also females started to educate.

**Table 3.** Changes in Culture and Economy

Time Span	Marriage Types			Agriculture
	Polyandry	Monogamy	Polygamy	
Occupation				
Business Professional Service				

Before 1945	63.6	36.4	-	-	-
94.9	-	5.1	-	-	-
1945 - 65	41.5	53.7	4.8	-	-
78.1	2.4	-	19.5	-	-
After 1965	-	100.0	-	-	-
86.7	13.3	-	-	-	-

Source : Primary Survey, 1996

### (III) Economic Development

Occupational positions are sometimes inherited through ascription in Indian perspective. But in recent past there has been some changes in these norms. Occupational structure and mobility are other indicators of changing values of the society. The socio-economic reforms are silently coming at village level. Education and migration played an important role for this transformation. Before 1945 as much as 94.9 per cent workers were engaged in primary activities, whereas the rest 5.1 per cent were engaged in other works. Due to education, employment in service sector increased to 19.5 per cent. After 1965 the maximum workers moved towards government services (defense, banks, post office, etc.) with 86.7 percent of total working population. The major change was mainly due to the declaration of the region as Scheduled Tribe area in 1967. Thus it is clear that both education and occupation directly affected their traditional cultural practice, *i.e.*, polyandry which is continuously changing. Polyandrous marriages are replaced by the monogamous marriages. It is due to the new linkages and interactions of villagers with outer world. It is striking to note that during last 30 years there is not a single person who adopted the traditional marriage system *i.e.*, polyandry in this village. It seems that this marriage system is almost disappearing from the village.

### Conclusion

The socio-economic advantages of polyandry among Jaunsaries can not be ignored. Until early sixties, when the area was not subject to development interventions, the system was totally satisfying. The system is disintegrating with changing thought patterns of people under development interventions. Developmental activities had played an important role to going away from the traditional cultural practices. Continuous population growth and their increasing demands compelled them to migrate outside. Thus, the migration have played a vital role for losing the traditional cultural practices. Education is an important means for human thinking.

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### **Seminar on 50 Years of Himachal Horticulture**

*November 16-17, 1998*

The seminar on '50 year of Himachal Horticulture' has been jointly organised by the Department of Horticulture, Himachal Pradesh, Shimla and the Himalayan Agro Systems, Shimla with partial financial assistance from the National Horticulture Board, Government of India, to highlight where we were, where we are and where we intend to go.

It is hoped that the deliberations and interactions among scientists, horticultural officers, agricultural officers, growers, economists, planners and others will pave a way for evolving guidelines for boosting the production of quality horticultural produce in the State.

The seminar has been grouped into 6 technical sessions: Production Technology, Nursery Technology, Protection Technology, Processing Technology, Post-harvest Technology, and Futuristic Technology to discuss various activities of the Horticulture industry of Himachal Pradesh. Apart from these, plenary session has also been included to chalk out guidelines for future planning of this industry.

### **Symposium on Plant Tissue Culture**

*June 7-9, 1999*

*National Symposium on Role of Plant Tissue Culture in Biodiversity Conservation and Economic Development* held at the head quarters of *G.B. Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, Almora*. The three days symposium was attended by large number of tissue culturists throughout the country and emphasised on 6 major themes:

1. Micropropagation and somatic embryogenesis
2. Growth, differentiation and production of secondary metabolites (including medicinal plants)
3. Tissue culture studies in medicinal plants
4. Genetic transformation & transgenics (including medicinal plants)
5. Cryopreservation, conservation strategies & crop improvement (including medicinal plants)
6. Synthetic seeds, hardening, acclimatisation and miscellaneous.