

Caste Dynamics in a Transhumant Society

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ABSTRACT The present study report caste dynamics in a Gaddi population of Bharmour Tehsil, Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, who travel from one ecological zone to another. This transhumant way of life nurtured by ecological factor has given a caste system that is very different from that of the plains in inter-caste relational pattern. The caste structure in Bharmour appears to be the result of combination of historic-ecological factors. The economic reality, on the other hand, does not permit the maintenance of the kind of complex stratification found in the plains. Facilities were and still are, autonomous economically, socially and ritually (except for rites de passage). They are self-sufficient, but at the same time, due to land and labour limitations, they are unable to rise much above the average economic level of the region. The socio-cultural system of the Gaddis is influenced by their dispersal in winter and concentration in summer. This alternating pattern of concentration and dispersal makes for a certain fluidity in social organization. Constant interdependence can hardly be conducive to the maintenance of a rigid caste ideology.