

Kanika Sharan

WOMEN'S AUTONOMY AMONG THE GADDIS OF THE HIMALAYAS

Abstract

This paper explores the components that comprise women's Autonomy in the Agro-pastoral community of the Himalayas. The present article focuses on the Gaddi community, settled in the Dholadhar range of the Western Himalayas. Many people of the community practice seasonal migration, moving to the low valleys in the district of Kangra in winter and returning to their villages in Bharmour in the neighbourhood of Chamba in summer. Each region has distinctive features when we talk about women's Autonomy. Bharmour has lower economic, socio-cultural and political Autonomy than women in Kangra valley. Kangra valley women have greater mobility and decision-making authority. Their political achievements and financial independence are a few examples of their Autonomy. Gender systems practised in their community are also significant predictors of their Autonomy. Caste, class and gender roles play a pivotal role and have an equivocal influence on women's Autonomy in the Himalayas.

Keywords: *Autonomy, Gaddi, women, Anthropology, Pastoral, Himalayas, decision-making*

Introduction

Autonomy is the power to obtain information and make decisions about concerns related to self. It provides access to social resources such as power, knowledge, and prestige within and outside the family and community. It also provides access to material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth. The most accepted definition of 'autonomy' is true to me, standing up for 'what I believe,' thinking for 'myself', and being one's person (Friedman 2003: 3). Autonomy is about the choices and actions that give us the liberty to be our true selves and make decisions for our betterment. Women's autonomy offers women the freedom to make choices and take steps toward independence and empowerment. Women's senses of self in many societies always seem to be organised around social relationships; moreover, in many marginalised communities, autonomy has no meaning; somehow, it

KANIKA SHARAN, Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi.

is beyond their reach or unnatural or unknown. Furthermore, this is because of the patriarchal attitudes and traditional sex-role socialisation, which creates obstacles to their independence and sense of self. On the brighter side, women have ways of living in this world or surviving. Women are open to emotions; they are sensitive and comfortable in attending to the well-being of others. However, when they support others' well-being, the concept of sense takes secondary status automatically.

Theoretical Framework

Anthony Giddens's structuration theory analyses the interrelations of agency and structure. According to him, agency reflects intentional activities whereby individuals seek to satisfy their needs and goals, while structure refers to the already-existing rules and resources employed in such actions. Giddens calls agency a human action. For him, to be human is to be an agent, although not all agents are human beings. Agents' knowledge of their society informs their actions, reproducing social structures that enforce and maintain the dynamics of actions. Giddens defines 'ontological security as the trust people have in social structure; everyday actions have some degree of predictability, thus ensuring social stability. However, this is not always true. The possessions of the agency allow one to break away from normative actions, and depending on the sum of social factors at work; they may instigate shifts in the social structure. The dynamics between agency and structure make such generative action possible. Agency does not refer to people's intentions but rather to the flow or pattern of people's actions. The structure gives form and shape to social life, but it is not the form and shape. Structure exists only in and through the activities of human agents (Giddens 1989: 256).

A revised understanding of agency has long been the explicit or implicit concern of feminist research devoted to uncovering women's marginalised experiences. These experiences attest to the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities (McNay 2000:10). General reflections have initiated the concern with the concept of agency on the changing nature of economic and social structures in late capitalist societies. Concerning issues of gender, a more rounded conception of agency is crucial in explaining how women have acted autonomously in the past despite constricting social sanctions and how they may act now in the context of processes of gender restructuring. An important aspect of a woman's agency is her very existence as an autonomous being and her capability to influence the parameters of her life and the environment within which she functions. In other words, the agency represents a certain degree of power, and women's autonomy becomes intertwined with their empowerment (Dasgupta & Lal 2007: 12).

In this paper, I seek to understand the components that comprise women's autonomy among Gaddi women of Bharmour and Kangra. Secondly,

the representation of women and their agency and relationship with men and each other. Furthermore, how they use their agency in their everyday life in Bharmour in the district of Chamba and Kangra city.

About the community

In the Dhauladhar mountain ranges of the Himalayas, there is a valley in Bharmour, the homeland of Gaddi, an agro-pastoralist community. During the early days, Gaddi were sheep and goat herders and used to take care of their land and migrated seasonally with their herds towards the lower range valley, Kangra, in the district of Kangra. Gaddis are anthropologically and administratively classified as a scheduled tribe community, and they follow Hinduism. However, they are distinct in how they perceive the universe and their position in the cosmic order of things (Kaushal 2001:158- 176). Their dialect reflects the influence of Pahari, Gujarati and Rajasthani languages. The term "Gaddi" originated from the Hindi word meaning the seat. According to traditional beliefs and oral narratives, Gaddis came from the royal seat of Lord Shiva, which is why he holds an extraordinary place in their lives. Oral folklores also talk about the Gaddis created by Lord Shiva. Gaddi is a generic term used for many subcastes within it. Under the generic term 'Gaddi', there are two upper sub-castes, i.e. Brahman and Kshatriya or Rajput Gaddi. There is another sub-caste within the community, such as Sippi and Halis. Gaddi Brahman considers themselves pure and the head of the community. They feel superior and detest being associated with the tribal terms. They believe they are like Hindu Bharahman, top of the ritual hierarchy. They are biased against other sub-caste of the community. Then comes the Kshatriyas or Rajput Gaddis. They are related to Rajputs in Rajasthan, but during the war between Aurangzeb and the Hindus, they ran away and started living in the Himalayas. According to them, their traditional clothing is the only difference that sets them apart from the Hindu Rajput. Rajasthan Rajputs wear clothes made of cotton due to the extremely hot weather conditions, and Gaddi Rajput traditional clothes are made of wool or other thick material due to the cold weather in the Himalayas. The Sippi sub-caste are traditional weavers and local oracles, and the Halis are involved in agriculture and also occupy the roles of traditional carcass removers and healer chanters (Kaushal, 2010: 158- 176). The young generation from the Kshatriya, Sippi and Hali sub-caste loathe the Brahminical supremacy of the Brahman Gaddi. They are against the traditional rituals that Brahmans practice to enjoy a higher status in the community and look down on other sub-castes. Besides being a caste-based society, the Gaddis are patriarchal and patrilineal. They have village exogamy, and descent is in the male line. If we observe closely, we can find Gaddi women creating their own space and negotiating with patriarchal norms to move forward toward empowerment.

Women play a central role in the Gaddi lifestyle, providing labour for various livestock, land and household tasks. Within the gigantic livestock

economy of India, women comprise a majority of the available workforce, especially at the rural and household level enterprises (Ramdas & Ghotge, 2006). Women in pastoralism acquire different roles considering the pastoral activities prevalent within their households and communities (Verma & Khadka, 2016). We will see their attitudes and behaviour differences if we observe Gaddi women from Bharmour and Kangra. Women from Bharmour are somewhat more traditional in nature and lack awareness about self. In contrast, due to urbanisation and tourism, women in Kangra are exposed to the idea of financial stability and, hence, are more independent and aware of the concept of self. In recent years, the community has witnessed many changes and diversity in their modes of living, level of education, family structure and mobility. Many youths migrate to different places or cities for better education and job opportunities. There are barely any people in the valley who are not taking up different jobs and are limited to traditional sheep-herding. Moreover, due to the large-scale migration of men, women took on many responsibilities of running the village, including productive and exchange activities. Apart from the requirements of hard work brought about by environmental conditions, the migration of men has put an excessive burden of work on the hill women (Channa 2013: 215). This paved the way for women and young girls to negotiate their space in the patriarchal family structure. Despite the progress, many families still practice the older structure of land or property inheritance, caste endogamy practice in the marriage system, sacrificing sheep on every good occasion, etc. Manjari Mehta (1996:181), in her work concerning the women of the Himalayan region, commented that ‘while certain activities in the domestic and agricultural realms were designated as strictly “male” or “female”, in the days when there were few local or non-local employment opportunities available, men assisted their womenfolk in a variety of tasks. Thus, it is not ‘tradition’. Still, the transformation brought about by a variety of factors, such as overexploitation of the forest resources, degradation of the hill environment by industrial and state activities, and the pull factors of job opportunities on the plains, have resulted in a disproportionate burden of work on the women (Channa 2013: 216). If we view Gaddi women from the lens of legal and political rights, employment opportunities etc., they lack high status (Bhasin 2007:3). The conceptual framework to analyse women’s status or agency comprises the seven roles women play in life and work: parental, conjugal, domestic, kin, occupational, community and as an individual (Bhasin 2007: 4)

Methodology and Data Collection

Fieldwork was conducted in two Gaddi villages in Himachal Pradesh, namely Ther in Khaniyara valley in the district of Kangra and Gosan in Bharmour in the district of Chamba. Fieldwork was conducted in three stages in 2019 and 2021 at different time intervals. The study includes women informants from different categories of age, marital status and occupation. A purposeful sampling method was used, and research participants were identified

based on their availability and consent. They were informed about the research objectives, and those willing to contribute and consent were considered for the interview. A total of 48 interviews were conducted; the age range was 18 to 90.

All women were interviewed twice with a gap of two months. The first interview was done to establish rapport with them, to get to know them better and to understand their daily life routine, and the second was after spending two months learning about them. The second interview focused on an in-depth discussion about their natal house, relationship with their husband, in-laws, children and other affinal kins. It also focused on their status in the family by asking questions related to decision-making agency, their socialisation process, involvement in politics and agency in family planning. Each interview was conducted for 45 to 90 minutes, and the discussion medium was Hindi and written in English. Participant observation was undertaken with the community's women throughout the three intervals of the fieldwork. Focus group discussion was done with the women gathered for the monthly 'Mahila' meeting. During Focus group discussions, they discuss all kinds of decisions they make during the absence of their husband and other male kin. They also discuss how social norms influence their choices. During the discussion, they also reflect on their ideas on how they want their daughter to grow up in future and what makes a woman a 'good woman.'

Findings and Discussion

Women's role in the Gaddi family and society

According to the community men, Gaddi women are the backbone of their family structure and community. Women are valued for their hard physical labour and affection for the family. In Himalayan society, a woman plays an important role not only in farming activities but in the well-being and survival of her family, along with the management of natural resources depends on her. Girls are socialised to take care of their family first and put themselves last from an early age. They learn various household works such as cleaning, washing, cooking, bringing water, herding and taking care of sheep, goats or cattle etc., at a very early age. Moreover, if they have agricultural land, then take care of seasonal manure and seeds to the field, harvesting etc.

Traditionally, marriage was seen as a meaningful ceremony that used to provide her with the real meaning of existence. Maintenance of the family and societal values is her responsibility as a woman. Mothers-in-law usually take charge of household works such as taking care of the hearth, looking after children and domesticating animals. Older women tend to practice their power and authority on younger women. Hearth or Chulha plays a vital role in almost every Gaddi household. In private spaces, women practice their hierarchy through the hearth. The ranking around the hearth was and still is arranged according to gender and age. If it is a joint family with a standard

hearth, the mother-in-law will be on the top of the hierarchy and the then-wife of the elder son and then younger sons. Sometimes the ranking arrangement depends on who gives birth to the male child. Daughters-in-law who give birth to boys have mostly held the higher position in hearth-related order or to women whose husbands earn more and contribute more to household purchases.

As per the Hindu Succession Act 1956, daughters now have equal rights on parental properties. However, Gaddis believes that the land should go to their sons. They think sons take the family forward as they are the *family's Vansh (lineage)*. The old traditional laws dictate that sons inherit the property of their parents, while daughters inherit only moveable items. One Gaddi men remark,

“During daughter’s weddings, we give gifts to her and her in-laws, which is more than sufficient. We do not have a problem giving the land if she claims her right, but what kind of woman wants her brother’s shares of land? If she does that, she is not a good daughter or sister and can never be a good daughter-in-law. We failed to raise her good and give her good values.”

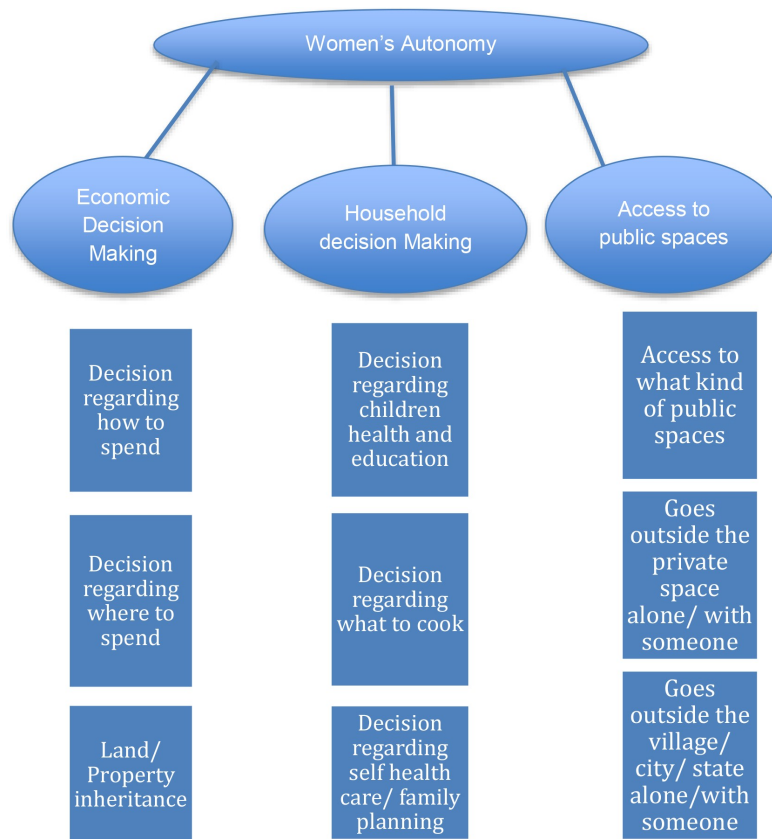
Dowry and gift exchange systems were absent among Gaddi until they encountered other communities; the exchange of gift systems entered the community and was practised in a mild-mannered way. The bride’s family gives clothes, sometimes jewellery, to the in-laws, and a few household necessities such as cupboard, bed, utensils and clothes to their daughter/bride. Groom’s parents provide jewellery and clothes to the bride and her relatives. *Mangtika* (head accessory) and *naakbali* (Nath) are given to the bride by the groom’s side. This two-silver-made jewellery plays a vital role in the wedding.

Women’s Autonomy and its dimensions

Autonomy is the capacity to manipulate one’s environment through control over resources and information to make decisions about one’s concerns or close family members Responsibilities related to activities in private space, looking after family, and kinship defines Gaddi women’s identity. Her self, roles, rights and obligations are strongly connected to household structure and their relationships with affinal and natal kin. The kinship system among Gaddis is patrilineal, and women are transferred between patrilineal at the time of marriage and live with their husband’s families. Women are not considered part of their natal home because they become part of their husband’s families after marriage. The rank of authority in the household is governed by age and sex, and it applies to both men and women. Older people practice their power and authority over younger men and women, and older women practice their control over more youthful women. More aged and young women have the lowest position in the family and societal hierarchy.

Gaddi women have close ties to their parents and siblings even after marriage, indicating the extent of women’s autonomy. In the Gaddi community,

women still share a strong bond with the natal family. She depends on her natal kin for both material and emotional support, and the natal family understand their needs and desire and take care of her. Gaddi women's close relation to her natal kin after marriage reflects the Autonomy she enjoys in society. Also, if women are treated well by the natal family, they tend to be treated right by their in-laws. They know her natal family will intervene if she is not treated right. A good relationship with her natal kin also impacts her health and children. They provide the constant required support needed. The nature of a woman's relationship with both her affinal and natal kin is seen as an essential consideration in an investigation of women's autonomy. There are different dimensions of women's autonomy, such as



- 1) **Movement in public spaces:** This aspect talks about how much autonomy women enjoy regarding their freedom regarding their activity. Whether they have the freedom to take up jobs outside the house, if she is working outside, whether they are allowed to work till late, is she always escorted by any male member whenever she goes

out? Whether they are allowed to go alone to the market, to the field, to their natal kin, to the health centre, to the next village, or outside the city.

- 2) **Economic Autonomy:** Gaddi women carry out all types of work in both private and public spaces. Their hard work is the demand of their agro-pastoral mix lifestyle. Many women from Kangra valley and household workers, such as looking after the house, children and domesticated animals, work outside for financial stability. They take up jobs as Aganwadi workers, Asha behenji, Nurses, school teachers, handicrafts, traditional accessories making and other government jobs. Some are involved in politics and play a vital role in uplifting their village and wards. If they have agricultural land, weeding, hoeing, harvesting, threshing, and collecting wood for fuel are also part of their routine. Their role is needed and appreciated in economic and non-economic, and no-wage work activities are equally important.
- 3) **land inheritance:** Many women and young girls spend some time on their agricultural land. However, financially stable Gaddi families hire women and girls from lower strata to work on their land. These women are primarily low-wage workers, and they always bring young girls to assist them with the work, making them no-wage workers and creating intrusion in their studies. 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. Hence, men in society are considered the owner of the production, while women own nothing. Moreover, this makes them dependent on men.
- 4) **Decision-making power:** (i) **Economic Decision:** Autonomy of economic decision-making in women's control over the decision process related to domestic financial matters with a husband or other male kin members of the family. If she has control over resources and has to say in daily household purchases, how to spend money, and how much to spend on everyday household items. It reflects her economic stability and agency over the financial affair. Some women are employed and financially stable. They use their agency and economic power to make all financial decisions without male assistance.
 - (ii) **Household Decision making:** Autonomy of women regarding household decision-making refers to women's ability to participate in decision-making on domestic affairs such as the welfare of children, education of children, their everyday needs, own health care and family planning. Her liberty to make decisions in such affairs improve her self-esteem and give her confidence, a feeling of respect and good status

in the family. Due to their financial stability and autonomy over financial matters, Gaddi women help her decide household affairs without being dependent on their husbands or male kin.

Women's Position and Autonomy

Age is a factor in the life cycle that affects a woman's position in the family. According to Gaddi tradition, the daughter-in-law is responsible for the household work, but the mother-in-law has the authority to decide the family matters. The research revealed that the Autonomy of older women and their husbands are high, but older women have distributed agency. The spousal age difference is common in India. My research indicates that a woman younger than her husband has less say in the decision-making as her socialisation is done in a way that tells her to respect her husband and obey him. However, women can be seen taking decisions in the absence of their husbands.

Education attainment is the most fundamental prerequisite for empowering women in all spheres of society. The husband's education is also essential to understand the wife's needs, involve the wife in decision-making, and give freedom of choice along with the movement. Furthermore, education is a powerful instrument for acquiring new values and, consequently, for modifying one's relationship with other human beings and the environment. This study reflects that women with a higher level of education have more involvement in economic and household decision-making compared to less educated women. Interestingly, women from Kangra have more Autonomy than women from Bharmour.

Exposure to media is a medium through which a woman could obtain knowledge/awareness/ information outside the school and colleges. Women in both Kangra and Bharmour have access to various forms of media. They use various kinds of social media platforms to express themselves. Some self-help group women also use these platforms to sell traditional accessories through social media platforms. Exposure to media also keeps them connected with their family and friends all the time. Due to this exposure, women are more aware of their power and agency usage and practice autonomy in educational, household and movement-related decision-making.

Access to resources is, to a large extent, predetermined by availability to the family. To understand this part of the research, I asked questions such as whether a woman can purchase her clothes and whether she gives her opinion on household finances. Decision-making within the household is another critical aspect of participation and power-sharing between household members. At one extreme are women who do not have any say even in the most trivial of decisions, such as the choice of what to cook, and at the other end are women who make most decisions in the household. Decision-making ability is influenced by household living arrangements, the presence of the

husband in the family, a mother-in-law or other affinal kin, and by life cycle situations, such as whether a woman is a new bride or a senior woman with grown-up children. Gaddi women are more likely to make decisions related to children and within the home rather than decisions in the public space, especially those involving money matters in Bharmour. The situation is quite the opposite in Kangra, and women tend to decide in public and private spaces, primarily due to the absence of men.

Economic independence is an essential aspect of Autonomy. Gaddi women are involved in various kinds of paid and low-wage work. Working outside not only helps them earn some money but also helps them to feel good about themselves. They believe that they do not need the assistance of a male member to support them since she has control over their income. Very few women in Kangra are entirely dependent on their husbands. They have taken up jobs such as Aganbadi workers, Nurses, teaching, and other government jobs. Some women work on agricultural land, and some are into business with their husbands.

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. These women form a group in their town which work similarly to a self-help group. In these self-help groups, women sometimes gather at someplace or in somebody's house, making traditional accessories and selling them within the community. They are connected to various Gaddi women who migrated out with their husbands to different cities through networking. These women are involved in traditional weaving or accessory making, selling them to earn money through electronic payment platforms. They 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 not only get a chance to interact with each other but also get an opportunity to keep themselves aware and updated on current issues.

In Bharmour, most women think it is the men's job to earn money and look after the family. According to them, men should earn enough to care for their wives and children. Women are barely seen doing work outside the house. However, some women have worked as a teacher etc. When I interviewed female teachers in Bharmour to ask them why they took the job, most replied that they had too much time and did not like wasting time, so they took the jobs. They feel that this also kills their time and gets some money. Some girls in Bharmour revealed that they want to study more and take up jobs in different cities, but their family thinks that they should get married and settle first and then do whatever their husband decides. I interviewed a few males in Bharmour and wanted to understand their opinion on women's independence, and they said if women want to work, they can but who will look after the household and children? If she can manage both, she can go out and work. While others said, "*they can earn but not before marriage because too difficult to find a suitable groom for*

financially independent girls.” They believe their daughters should study as much as possible and then get married. After that, they can do anything if their husbands allow it. During the interview in Kangra, many women with daughters told me during the interview that their daughter wants to study more and have a job first before marriage. Many women said their daughters oppose the wedding offers because they believe education and employment are essential to them before marrying someone. I interviewed some men in Kangra and got mixed reactions from them. Some of them agreed that women should financially establish themselves before marriage just in case something occurs, like the sudden death of a spouse. Some said they should get married on time, discuss these matters with their husbands, and do whatever they decide together.

The following important area of women’s position is the relationship of fear of husbands or other male affinal kin and domestic violence. I put questions in front of them, such as whether they were ever beaten ever or beaten regularly or whether they disagreed with their husband. In this most sensitive of areas may lie a sensitive indicator of the inequality or the degree of repression of women and deference to men they are living with and dependent on. Most women revealed during the interview that they are not afraid to disagree with their husbands or other affinal older men. Still, they do not conflict with them out of respect. During the interview, women said they are socialised to learn to agree with their husbands and respect them to become excellent supporting wives. They added that their husbands never raised their hands or shouted at them because they were good wives and kept them happy by supporting their decisions.

Lastly comes the dimension of communication between spouses. Elsewhere it has been argued that this is a critical aspect of the relationship between the genders. During the interview, I asked women questions such as whether they can talk about anything to their spouse, feel emotionally attached to them, or discuss family planning with their spouse without hesitation. They said they feel closer to their natal family, but in their in-law’s house, they can only depend on their spouse. Most young couples hesitate to discuss or talk about anything with each other during the initial period of their marriage. Still, over the period, facing the ups and downs of life together, they grow fond of each other, depend on each other and discuss every matter together to make their life better. Among Gaddis, it is a saying that a happy married life is significant to dealing with any life problems. A happily married man takes care of his wife and children and does good in life. Moreover, keeping the man of the house happy is his wife’s responsibility. In the Gaddi community, communication is quite good between the married spouse. They seem to participate in various activities, spend quality time together and dance at cultural events.

Differences in Bharmour and Kangra

While comparing the collected data from both areas, variation was

visible in various aspects of Autonomy in both communities. To understand autonomy, I used factors such as access to resources, freedom of mobility, decision-making, economic Autonomy, fear of husband and communication with a spouse. Kangra is most of these aspects reflected that woman there has more agency than women of Bharmour. The area and people of Kangra are more developed due to Urbanization and the influence of tourism. Mobility is highest in Kangra, where women can go out more. Mobility is comparatively low in Bharmour. The division of labour is apparent in Bharmour. Women take care of the private space, and men work in the public space.

Though women can be seen in temples or mountains for collecting wood or herding sheep, to travel outside the city or state, they are sometimes accompanied by men. The system of covering the head can be observed too. Women's mobility is associated with their participation in life outside the home. It strongly indicates their freedom to access essential places and spheres otherwise restricted and outside their reach or control. Thus, women in Kangra are at an advantage in this critical sphere. Access to resources follows quite a similar pattern to decision-making, but women in Kangra have the most significant key to resources. Men from Kangra are usually busy with work or employed outside the village, giving women more authority to make transactions. Access to resources is mediocre in the Bharmour area, much along the lines of mobility and decision-making.

To some extent, the pattern is identical to decision-making. Women in Kangra, her position is probably higher because of the absence of men, leaving women to make decisions or at least make more decisions in their absence purely for practical reasons. Decision-making in financial decisions, such as purchasing household goods and livestock, is highest in Kangra. Still, it is slightly low in decisions within the household, such as spending money on children's education and marriage. In Bharmour, women make decisions regarding purchasing kitchen goods, but children's education and marriage depend on men.

Perception of economic Autonomy is most certainly the highest among women in Kangra, especially those who are financially independent. In the Kangra region, the participation of women in formal and informal jobs is the highest. Tourism in Kangra has provided lots of employment opportunities. The agricultural land, where women are substituting men, can be seen though they sometimes receive minimum or no wage. In Bharmour, women with stable financial conditions look after the family, and poor women work in the lands of Brahmin Gaddi on a low wage or no wage.

Fear from a partner is absent in the Gaddi community. Women are respected for their household duties and contribution to the community. Women and men are often seen working together and participating in cultural events. Communication between spouses is another dimension of women's Autonomy

in their ability to express themselves freely with their spouses. Communication seems much more accessible and more intimate in Bharmour than in Kangra. This is probably because of the frequent absence of spouses in Kangra.

Conclusion

The current paper explores the area to see what constitutes women's Autonomy in Kangra and Bharmour's rural settings. Gendering at the village level is a significant predictor of women's Autonomy. Factors such as exposure to urban influence and communication channels, which also operate at the community level, are as important as women's Autonomy. Since they can also bring modern influence to bear on the gender system. We discuss different activities done by women or given to women in the absence of men. There is a difference between women doing men's work and women being recognised as responsible for specific tasks. Women in both Kangra and Bharmour are involved in lots of work, both in public and private spaces, which requires hard labour. The power delegated to women is seen as proxy power. It is not seen as legitimate but seen as temporary. All this hard work in different spheres of society does not give them any absolute control or agency in full. All these works are seen as the responsibility of women in the absence of men who hold the real power.

The men's activity defines the community (Channa 2013: 217). Despite controlling the village domain, women are seen as subordinate, as pastoralism is a male domain. Pastoralism is identified with men but sustained by women. Gaddi women not only engaged in subsistence activities essential for survival but also reproduced the social relationships that substantiated the community. What gives women agency is the total separation of their sphere of activities from that of men, enjoying power and position. (Not given or transferred by men in their absence). Gaddi men respect their women and appreciate the hard work done by them.

Sometimes, they accept women's legitimate control over the village's affairs. Therefore, women make decisions over various matters only in the absence of men who have gone outside the state for various other opportunities; hence the agency given to them is temporary and not inherent. Anthropological literature that has generated the concept of the public and private space (separate space for men and women) does not always fit into the western model of public and private. Thus, women are visible in local markets, agriculture fields, pilgrim centers, tourism etc. These all fall within the women's domain for the gaddi women as they are within their concept of habitation and not the wild. Women's work and skills are as old as humankind, but they are underpaid and subordinate to men's. This dualist human development approach needs to be addressed to gain gender equality. Their contribution to the family and society needs to be valued, their voice needs to be heard, and changes need to be made in their livelihood, health and education to solve the gender disparity.

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RECEIVED: 23RD SEP 2022

REVISED: 27TH DEC 2022

ACCEPTED: 24TH MAR 2023



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