

CULTURAL ECOLOGY: A STUDY OF DIVISION OF LABOR AND GENDER DISPARITY AMONG JAUNSAR-BAWAR TRIBE OF UTTARAKHAND

HANSDEEP KAUR KOHLI, S.M.PATNAIK

Abstract: Ecology is the key factor in the patterning of human culture and it has been established that ecology is characterized by multidimensional function oriented strategies. Man interacts directly with the natural environment and as a result of which there develops a close-set bio-cultural behavioral patterns which is seen to be integrated with the daily mode of the life of people concerned. The interrelationships between cultural behavior and habitat or physical environment are different in every society depending upon the area where a society has been living since ages. This study represents an attempt to explore the reciprocal relationship between some aspects of ecology like regional topography, settlement patterns, patterns of land utilization, and certain agricultural practices on one hand and some aspects of cultural and social life division of labor among males and females, and inter-intra village organization and also caste relations in the village. The study area of the present work was Thana village of Jaunsar-Bawar tribe of Chakrata district, and a total of 384 subjects participated in this study, which included both males and females. Gender specific roles were observed among males and females, and work performed by females described that they play a subordinate role in the society. The most striking feature of this tribal community is polyandry, and many cases of the same were observed during field work, which indirectly contributed towards subordination of women. Female population was less than male population, and prevalence of female feticide was observed. The social structures prevalent in the Jaunsar-Bawar society, explain different roles men and women play, and how local distribution of power and management of local resources are interrelated to the environment of this region.

Keywords: Cultural Ecology, Division of Labor, Gender, Jaunsar-Bawar tribe

Introduction: When the cultural patterns of any human community are to be focused through the ecosystem view point, the first thing which is to be understood and analysed is the ecosystem or the interrelated species of organisms and their concerned physical surroundings. These sets of interrelationships between man and environment have always been of specific importance. Human beings had been in continuous interactions with the natural environment and their behavior, and in course of time it becomes patterned with the nature and extent of the environment in which they are born and brought up. Man is not only an actor on the environmental stage, but also a maker and shaper of his own setting. Man's cultural life and its relation with the environment are although is a worldly phenomenon but this study explains it as a regional phenomenon, specifically in the context of village Thana of Chakrata district. Ecology, the study of the relation between organisms and their environments or of the organism-environment nexus, has been used as an independent variable in the study of aspects of simple tribal societies. The present study focuses on cultural ecology of Jaunsar-Bawar tribal group, understanding few social aspects especially polyandry, and culturally defined position of women. Jaunsar-Bawar, a tribal community of district Chakrata, habituate in topographically hilly terrains, and situated in the northern part of Dehradun district. It is bounded on the east by Tehri district, on the north by Uttarkashi district and on the west by

Himachal. Thana village is situated at the elevation of 7500fts, had 52 households and society is divided into 5 castes: Brahmins, Rajputs, Bajgis, Koltas, Harijans. The Brahmins and Rajputs were the higher caste people and job of the priest and village head are occupied by them. The caste of Bajgis included people whose main occupation was to beat the drum in religious functions or to make some announcement. The Koltas were the Chamars. Strict rules were observed between the different strata of people and the architecture of the village also showed that upper caste people had their houses in the upper side of the village and lower caste people had houses in the lower side of the village. The religious life of the people in Thana village, is strongly attached to a local deity, MahasuDevta. They had many mystical stories about origin of MahasuDevta in the region, and strongly believe in his supreme authority. It was observed during fieldwork that, few families practiced black magic, and they practiced magical rituals. The political organization of the village consists of a Pradhan, who is an elected body and looks after the development of the village. The Sayana or head of the village made through hereditary system is always is always a man who belongs to upper strata. According to the literature available, the Jaunsari tribe is a polyandrous tribe, as they trace their origin from Pandavas of Mahabharata, and during fieldwork it was observed that many families still practice this tradition and that also due to many reasons. Jaunsari society is patriarchal, girls are married at an early age,

and literacy rate is low among females of the Thana village.

Methods and Materials: Social facts are not lie on the superficial surfaces but they are embedded in a thick crust of culture norms, anthropology is needed on ethnographic perspective to decipher these social codes.

A total of 384 subjects participated in this study, which included 225 males (58.59%) and 159 (41.41%) females. Ethnography was key tool used, along with participant observation during a prolonged fieldwork. Fieldwork was residential and sometimes non-residential also, and as an observer participation in the daily affairs of the females to get insider view. Formal and Semi-formal interviews were conducted, and standardized questionnaire were considered for the study to collect data about socio-demographic variables.

Statistical tools like mean, standard deviation were used.

Results: The gender specific roles, ecological conditions where a community is living has interrelations with many social phenomenon like literacy rate among females, autonomy and social status of females, health facilities available to females, and mystical superstitions. In this community level of education, work aspects, autonomy and prevalence of polyandry is effected by environmental conditions and also effects environment. Education among female subjects of the present study was less, which indirectly explains position of women in this society.

Table I Education among female subjects of Thana village

Education Among Females		
	F	%
Till 5 th class	62	38.9
Intermediate	67	42.3
Till 12 th class	30	18.8
Graduation	0	0
Total	159	100

Education plays an extremely important role in empowerment of females, and same is the situation with rural women also. Level of education among rural women, play an important role in defining sort of relation they share with their counterparts. In this village during fieldwork profound investigations were done about less level of education among females, and many reasons were encountered which explained this. Jaunsar-Bawar tribe is situated at the high altitude, with highly rugged terrain with steep mountainous slopes, and most of the schools were located far from the village. Most of the female subjects, below age of 17 years (54.6%) were interviewed and they told during especially winter season it becomes difficult to reach school, so early

dropouts among were females was the result, as most of the time parents are skeptical of educating girls as schools are far situated from village. This explains how natural habitat of a community hinders females of the same to pursue education.

All the female subjects in this study were housewives, dependent upon their male counterparts for sustenance. Specific division of labor among males and females was observed as females were subordinated and subjugated to doing household chores, and males were the major bread winners for the family. Presence of polyandry was also one of the major reasons behind subordination of women in this society, reason for continuation of this custom was explained to be avoidance of division of property among brothers in a family. Interviewing children in the village revealed patterning of relations as per customs of polyandry, which most of the female subjects denied. After prolonged stay and rapport establishment with female subjects, led to the evidence collection about continuation of custom of polyandry. A woman married to more than one man, demarcates control over woman and strengthening of the economic base of the family. It was revealed by the subjects that it's difficult to construct houses in this rugged terrain and rain also snowfall damages houses and area where cattle is kept so brothers marry a single women. Power over local resources, economic belongings, and settlement pattern of this region are some of the factors playing important role in positioning of the women in the society. Household chores are to be performed by women only, even unmarried girls do all the household work along with their mothers instead of being inclined towards pursuing education. Fetching of water from nearby stream, child rearing, working in the fields all day long are some of the routine tasks performed by women every day; and males have no role playing related with household chores although females work in fields also. Economic independence is a concept about which females of this village are completely unaware, they themselves believe in superiority of males.

Age old customs of secondary status of females in the context of political positions are followed in thus village, as females can't acquire position as priest in the temple, and they can't enter temples during menstruation. Subjugation of females and dominance of the males had been prevalent since ages in this community, and interviewing with female subjects had provided with evidence to this observation. Subjects had revealed that birth of female child is not celebrated as did during the birth of male child.

Table II Marital status of females in the Thana village

Married	Unmarried
---------	-----------

F	%	F	%
90	56.6%	69	43.4%

Table III Abortion and Female Feticide

	Married Women	
	F	%
Females faced abortions	48	53.3%
Females didn't faced abortions	42	46.4%

53.3% of the females confessed aborting their fetus after examination about sex of the fetus. Preference of male child was evident in attitude of the subjects, but few females confessed being in dominance of male preference in the culture of the community. Importance of male child had many reasons behind it, as division of labor according to tasks performed by males and females create a requirement of a male child. Inheritance of property and earnings for the sustenance of life are considered as male jobs, women can't pursue these work.

Due to less property available, as land for house construction is not easy to buy and houses had been constructed long back in the village, which according to the male subjects interviewed in the study makes polyandry a necessity. Male members of most of the families explained some of the works which only men can perform, which includes construction of houses, as females only cut wood from the forests, and heavy wood required for construction of houses can be cut by men. The environment of this region that is hilly tract and difficult survival due to changing patterns of rain and snowfall makes agriculture difficult and revenue from the agriculture is also less. Despite performing all the household chores, women still work in fields also but male subjects had an opinion that women do only trivial work in the field and main sowing and cultivation are performed by men only. Male subjects said in this hilly terrain farming can only be performed by men only, and women perform trivial work. Secondary position of women was evident in this Jaunsari village, and nature-culture paradigm was observed to be playing a prominent role in subordinate position of the women.

Nature-Culture Paradigm: The nature-culture paradigm can be understood and explained in the context of Sherry Ortner's explanation of the subordinate position of women. She has attempted to provide an explanation for the universal devaluation of women. The status of the Jaunsari women in the Thana village can be explained by ascribing status of nature to women and culture to men, as explained by Sherry Ortner. But before examining the interrelation between the nature and culture it's important to understand the historical background of Jaunsar-Bawar and the positioning of women in the society.

In Jaunsar-Bawar fraternal polyandry has been describes as common form of marriage. In this society a polyandrous union occurs when a women, goes through a marriage ceremony with the eldest of a brothers. This man represents the group of brothers, all of whom there upon become the woman's husbands. Subsequent wives can be taken, especially if the first one is sterile or if the age differential of the brothers is great. If wives are individually married in a ceremony with the eldest brother, and are shared by all, un till one or more brothers break away from the joint family. Sherry Ortner explains how nature-culture affect each other in the social context. Ortner claims that it is not biology as such that ascribes women in society but the way in which culture defines and evaluates the females biology. Thus if this universal evaluation changed then the bases of female subordination would be removed. She argues that in every society, higher value is placed on culture then nature. Culture is the means by which man controls and regulates nature. In the context of Jaunsari tribe this assessment is quite true as seen that the cultural structure of this society places higher value to the men as seen from the economic responsibilities placed upon men and household work placed upon women. By inventing religion and rituals, man tries to put himself at a superior position. By the use of culture, man does not have to passively submit to nature, he can regulate and control it, thus man's ideas and technology, that is his culture have power over nature and therefore seen superior to nature, the universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen to be closer to nature, because their bodies and physiological functions are more concerned with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species. This argument of Ortner explains the situation in the context of Jaunsari tribal women, as they are confined to household work only, they have to look after the children, old people in the house, and men go out as the responsibility of earning is on them, this very thing makes women of this society dependent upon the men.

Thus men are seen closer to culture since their thought processes are defined as more abstract and objective then those of women.

This study has pointed that single marriages should be encouraged as women in this region lead a life of subordination due to economic dependence on men, and with less literacy rate less opportunities to empowerment.

Nature-Man Interaction: Among Jaunsaris, main sources of their livelihood are agriculture and forests, and farming in Jaunsar is of mainly subsistence and depends upon rains. The key survival is forests and resources of the forests for people of this community,

and this requires work of men of family, as extraction from forests and cultivation depends on joint work effort of many people. Women also participates in the fieldwork, collecting cow manure as fertilizer for the fields, cutting of wood for cooking, clearing fields, and supports men in sowing of the seeds. Due to this socio-economic status of Jaunsari family revolves around joint family structure. In this way it can be stated that nature also controls patterns of human existence in this region but man in turn exploits nature to fulfill its pursuits. The change in pattern of rainfall and snowfall had affected agriculture in this region adversely, and ground water is the only important resource for cultivation. Jaunsar-Bawar region lacks the ground water sources, although there are some lakes and also water comes from the mountains also but it is not an enough source of water supply for doing cultivation. The rain water also runs away as slopes are precipitous and also indiscriminate cutting of the trees in this area. Many respondents in the village said that now water does not reach the ground level because there are less trees to hold water or moisture in the soil. Jaunsari households use an enormous range forests resources for curing diseases, wood for construction of houses,

various uses of wood for energy generation, and other non-wood uses of grasses for leaf litter, and fodder for cattle. Jaunsar-Bawar tribe is dependent upon nature, so the interrelationship between nature and culture of Jaunsari people is well defined in this study.

Conclusion: During the interviews conducted with the people of Thana village, it was observed that current coping capacity of the people of village to climatic changes and water stress is quiet low. Household are dependent upon low rain fed agriculture which yields low returns to them. Economy of this region is dependent upon agriculture and its getting lesser in terms of sustenance of life now can't depend upon agriculture. This study had explained how the relationship between nature and culture defines the relation between man and woman in the context of Jaunsar-Bawar tribal community. Gender relations and division of labor are specific in this community, as women play a subordinate role in the family after men. Polyandry should be dealt as an institution challenging position and status of women in Jaunsar-Bawar community, and uniformed education should be provided to members of this tribal group explaining disadvantages of polyandry.

References:

1. A.James. 1937. Ecological Anthropology and Anthropological Ecology. In John J. Honigsmann. A handbook of social and cultural Anthropology, Chicago: Rand McNally and Company: 179-329.
2. Barth. F. 1968. Ecologic relationship of ethnic groups in swat in North Pakistan. In Robert. A. Manners and David Kaplan (eds), Theory of Anthropology, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 386-392.
3. Hardesty. D. 1987. Introduction: Ecological Anthropology. In Herbert Applebaum (ed.). Perspective in cultural Anthropology. Albany State University of New York Press.
4. Harris Marvin. 1969. Rise of anthropological theory. A history of theories of culture.
5. Jejeebhoy. S.J. 2000. Women's autonomy in rural India. Its dimensions and the influence of context, in H.B. Women's empowerment and demographic processes: Moving beyond Cairo. Chapter 9. Oxford University Press.
6. Jejeebhoy. S.J. Sathar. Z.A. 2001. Women's autonomy in India and Pakistan: The influence of religion and region. Population and development review. 27 (4), 687-712.
7. Petchesky and Rosalind. 1998: Human Rights. Reproductive health and economic justice: Why are indivisible. Reproductive health matters. Vol (8) 15. Reproductive Rights. Human Rights
8. Rani. M. 1993. Education of girls in rural India. Ved Prakash (ed), School education in rural India. Mittal Publication. New Delhi. 82-91.
9. Shankar. R. Thamilarsan. M. 2003. Tribal women and reproductive health. In R.N. Pati: Socio-cultural dimensions of reproductive child health. New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.
10. Shireen. 2000. Women's autonomy in rural India: Its dimension. Determinants and the influence of context. In H Presser and G. Sen (eds) Women's empowerment and demographic processes: Moving beyond Cairo: New York; Oxford University Press.

* * *

Hansdeep Kaur Kohli

Research Scholar, M phill, Anthropology Department, University of Delhi.

Prof. Soumendra Mohann Patnaik, Anthropology Department, University of Delhi.