

Influence of Gender and Caste on Dev-Samāj of Banjar Region in Kullu in Himachal Pradesh

REENA¹ & ANJALI VERMA²

¹Research Scholar, Department of History, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla. E-mail: verma.anjalihpu@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of History, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (H.P.)

Abstract: The territorial extent of deities in western Himalayan region has remained a subject of deep enquiry. The subject still holds scholars' interest owing to the further extension of these threads in to religious notion of people of Kullu region with respect to caste and gender prevailing in dev-samāj. Present study is an attempt to see caste and gender involvement in dev-Samāj of Banjar region of Kullu. This article traces the involvement of these two factors from temple management to family system of deities in the backdrop of present changes taking place in the life of villagers as followers. It also tries to enquire in to the involvement of new elements in age-old traditions of dev-samāj where women form a different set altogether in temple management.

Through this empirical study, it has been tried to develop an understanding of historic-religious notions of dev-samāj through the prism of caste and gender involved in running the administration at various levels. It also highlights few lesser known facts of dev-samāj by pin-pointing transitions and continuity in religious culture of the area. This small frame investigation of a western Himalayan region is an attempt to connect caste and gender developments in the religious spheres at pan-Indian lines while at parallel level highlighting the importance of integrating regional histories with south-Asian history.

Key-words: Caste, Dev-samāj, Gender, Gūr, kārdār, Kullu, Western Himalaya

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Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is divided into twelve administrative divisions, where Kullu is a major district of Himachal Pradesh. Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh is one of the culturally historic gems of the Himalaya. Kullu is divided in to four tehsils: Kullu, Manali, Banjar, and Nirmand. Amongst these four, the present study is focused mainly on Banjar region. Kullu region has deep-rooted tradition of Dev-

samāj, In fact, every aspect of personal and social activities of life of Kullu people has deep rooted connection to the deity system. Their reverence and faith in gods is very high.

The original name of Kullu was *Kuluta* that finds mention in mythological texts like, *Rāmāyāna*, *Māhābhārata*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Mārkaṇḍay Purāṇa* etc. In other literary sources like *Kādambarī* of Bāṇabhaṭṭa, and *Rājatarangiṇī* of Kalhaṇa etc. we find mention of *Kuluta* region. In Vedic literature, Kullu has been called, ‘the land of demi-gods’. Even today a unique glimpse of the Dev tradition can be seen here which forms part and parcel of life of people (Singh 1985). There is a complete hierarchy of gods (devtā), goddesses (devī), and rīṣīs in the area. They have their defined territory and status in Dev tradition of Kullu. The lowest ladder of this Dev tradition and their territorial extent starts from the village.

Study Area

The area of Banjar has been selected for study which is one of the tehsils of district Kullu. The interesting aspect of religious hierarchy of Banjar lies in the fact that at various places, folk traditions, folk-lore and folk-tales indicate the existence of characters of *Māhābhārata*, in the region whereas since 17th century Lord Raghunāth is occupying the prime position in the Dev-hierarchy. Raghunāth is considered as incarnated Lord Rāma of *Rāmāyāna* (Goswamy 2014). Another interesting aspect is that looking at the temples, strong influence of Śaivism is felt in the region that goes back to early medieval times from temple at Bajaura.

Objectives

The present study tries to make new addition in the existing knowledge and aims to explore few important aspects of Dev-samāj in Banjar region. Specific focus is on the study of two factors i.e., caste and gender considerations among Dev-hierarchy and their territorial extent. In this regard the consideration of caste and gender factors has been focused specifically with temple administration and deity system. Based on empirical work, the present study also side-by-side tries to observe caste and gender of people involved in the political administration of deity.

Major Findings

Cluster of villages in Banjar has its own deity called devtā and devī. It is estimated that there are over three-hundred gods and goddesses in the Kullu valley. Berreman (1963) has defined the concept of sovereign power of deity in two specific and distinctive meanings in the region of Kullu. One is exercised by village gods, who are considered to rule over encapsulated territories, the largest of which include the territories of subordinate gods. A village god is perceived as king over territory and receives regular tribute from those who live within his jurisdiction. Almost every aspect of village life in Banjar has been manifested by these village gods. The village deity exercises his sovereignty through a set of representatives of temple. The territorial extent of gods and goddesses in Banjar region signifies their place in power structure and administration. The political system of the deities of Kullu is directly related to territorial boundaries with village as the lowest unit of territory of deity. Information collected during the field survey from Narotam Singh, Kardar, Devta Laxmi Narayan Temple, Tinder on October 1, 2020 revealed that on the basis of religious territory Banjar region is divided in to fātī and kothī system. The village is the smallest territory of the deity. More powerful deity holds the territory of three to four villages under one fātī. A collection of varied numbers of fātī comes under bigger unit of kothī.

Also the caste and gender factor plays an important role in territorial extent of Devīs and Devtās of the region. The factor of territory is directly related to the economic strength of deity system. Pamela Price (Berti 2009) has remarked that political authority was shared in Indian kingdoms not only by the king and local chiefs, but also with deities who ‘amidst their various identities, were royal and ‘ruled’ their devoted human subjects from temple. Goswami (2014) observed that these deities are also seen in complex family relationship of son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife and many extended relationships. Infact, devtā is are an intrinsic part of the lives and thoughts of the people that it is difficult for the believers to conceive of any activity being performed outside the consciousness of his presence. This feeling of consciousness has made the presence of devtās to be felt in every social and religious activity in the masses of Banjar region of Kullu. The generic term, devtā has been referred to a special class of ‘godlings’ by Pandit Sukhchain who has collected a large number of legends on devtas of Shimla Hills published in 1925 in Indian Antiquary (vol. LIV). In Kullu region, several peculiarity of dev-samāj has remained a way of life for natives and a scholarly curiosity for researchers. The temples are depiction of the faith and the people who are associated with these temples are symbol of a different kind of political hierarchy which has a strong caste and gender base. Besides human agency, there is a hierarchy in deities also that has extension in relationships as well.

Village deity forms the first chain of dev-hierarchy. An upper caste village deity shall hold the highest position and shall be having lower caste deity in his cabinet as minister or as guard in the same village. Cluster of villages shall have another powerful deity and village deity shall be subordinate to him/her. The lower caste deities shall accompany more than one deity in few cases. The field survey of Banjar region has shown this interesting hierarchy where the palanquin of upper caste deity shall be followed with lower caste deity as his/her cabinet.

Table 1: Deities in Hierarchy

<i>SL. No.</i>	<i>Upper Caste Deity as King</i>	<i>Lower Caste Deity Accompanying as Part of Cabinet</i>	<i>Additional Information, If Any</i>
1.	Gādhā Durgā devī	Panch-Vīr devtā	Accompanied by fourteen deities
2.	Bālā Tripurā Sundarī	Johal Devtā	Accompanying deity
3.	Ghatotkach devtā	Bansheerā	Son of Ghatotkach devtā
4.	Doru Nārāyaṇa	Bangā devtā	Lower caste deity accompanying two deities
5.	Bungdu Mahādev	Bangā devtā	Lower caste deity accompanying two deities
6.	Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa	Dhānī Rakṣaṇ devī	Lower caste deity accompanying two deities
7.	Iśwarī Mahādev	Sefan devī	lower caste deities accompanying upper caste deity
8.	Bālu Nāg devtā	Bharyāḍu devtā	lower caste deities accompany upper caste deity
9.	Behlo Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa	Johal devtā	lower caste deities accompanying upper caste deity
10.	Ṣṛīṅga Rīṣī	Khodu devtā	They both accompany Murlidhar deity
11.	Pujālikā Devī	Panch-Vīr devtā Ṣāṅgdi devtā	Two lower caste deities accompanying upper caste deity
12.	Visnu Nārāyaṇa	Panch-Vīr devtā	accompanying more than two upper caste deities
13.	Vumāsi devtā	Panch-Vīr devtā	accompanying more than two upper caste deities
14.	Murlidhar+ Ṣṛīṅga Rīṣī	Khodu devtā	Accompanying Devtā and Rīṣī both

Another interesting fact is that few upper caste devīs are holding position of king and lower caste devtā and devīs all are part of their convoy or cabinet. Sometimes, these deities are in relationship with each other as well irrespective of upper and lower caste division. For example, Bansheerā devtā who is a deity of lower caste, is son of upper caste deity Ghatotkacha. This hierarchy of deities and caste system is downward filtered in human form when one observes that all the deities have complete temple administration to manage their affairs. In this hierarchy, appear the Kārdār, Gūr, Pujārī, Bhandārī, Jeltā as main people involved in temple and devtā administration. Niśāndār and Pālsarā are the additional staff involved. During personal communication with Shri Murari Lal Sharma, main Pujārī, Gādhā Durgā devī temple, Gushani, on November 2, 2020, he explained that the Gūr and Pujārī who are invariably attached to the temple are considered important individuals in their small communities. The devtā expect almost total obedience through/over them.

People have intense faith in dev-hierarchy. Berreman (1963) observed that cluster of villages in Kullu has its own devtā. It is estimated that there are over three hundred devī-devtā in Kullu valley. The concept of sovereign power of deity can be defined in two specific and distinctive meaning in the region of Kullu. One is exercised by village gods, who are considered to rule over encapsulated territories. A village god is perceived as king over territory and receives regular tribute from those who live within his jurisdiction. Shri Tek Ram, main Pujārī /Kārdār, Sefan devī Temple, Jamad during personal discussion done on November 3, 2020 on temple administration, provided important information that Gods have their own administrative system. The duties of their representatives are clearly defined therein. Devtā do not allow any external institution to enforce the laws of the Gods. The head of the team of officials associated with the administration of the gods is Kārdār. He is the chairman of the deity's management committee. This post is hereditary. Kārdār earlier, was often chosen by the king, but over time he was chosen by the gods through Gūr. Kārdār's successors will be either his elder son or daughter who will be chosen on the basis of seniority. The Kārdār collects all the revenue, rent and other charges during the fair and other such occasions on behalf of deity which ultimately goes in to the treasury of devtā. Kārdār collects taxes from the business persons who come to sale their goods during the fair. These charges include tent and stay as well. The management of Jātrā-jāgraṇ and other such festivals of the deity is also included in his work. Other issues such as the construction or renovation of the temple of the deity and also the physical take care of the property of the deity are involved in the work of Kārdār. This service is usually performed without any cost. The reputation of this post is considered quite high. Kārdār are usually chosen from the upper caste. The Kārdār receives a portion of the deity land to do farming. His relationship with the deity is more like that of a family member. All laws related to the deity are created and implemented by him.

Gūr is closest to god in many ways. He is the only medium through which the deity expresses his/her thought and prophecy. Gūr's long hairs are distinct characteristic that reflect his/her special physical appearance and place in temple administration. He/she leads the procession of the deity and can usually be chosen from the lower caste of society. Still Gūr can be a kanet as well. The feature common to most Gūr is the sudden uncontrollable shivering of the body and falling of the cap from his/her head during *khel* (process of religious prophecy making when deity over-powers the senses of human). Women can also be selected as Gūr-in variety of ways. During field study, a female Gūr, Shrimati Lata Devi was interviewed. Though she is neither from Banjar region, nor is Gūr for any deity in Banjar, still her presence in the system showed that the post of Gūr is above gender and caste lines.

On November 5, 2020 during the interaction with Shri Kamlesh Chand, Gūr, Devtā Ghatotkach Temple, Sidhwa the process of selection of Gūr was explained in detail by him. Shri Kamlesh Chand

told that selection of Gūr was confirmed by deities. The new Gūr is not selected until the old Gūr's statue is not built. These statues of Gūr's are termed as *gaṇas*. The Gūr is given a regular share of 2/3 kg of grain by each household which is a part of Hariyan. After selection, the Gūr is honoured by deity through a turban. He is given a small percentage of money from the treasure of the deity. The amount given by the devotees at the time of prophecy also goes to Gūr.



Plate 1: Female Gūr of Devī Hadimbā, village Kandi Balichowki (Lower caste)



Plate 2: Gūr of Devtā Ghatotkach, village Sidwa (Upper Caste)



Plate -3: Male Gūr of devtā Bharyādu, village Ghat (Lower caste)

Gūr's has to follow a different life-style, pattern and has to work under stringent religious and social norms. There are two types of Gūr: internal and external. The internal Gūr is always from upper caste whereas external Gūr is from lower caste. Internal Gūr is allowed to enter in to the house of upper caste people. He can also go inside the grabh-grah (inner sanctorum) of any temple. A lower caste Gūr cannot enter in to the house of upper caste people or temple except when he/she is under the possession of devī or devtā during *khel*. During *khel*, whatever prophecy he/she makes has to be accepted by all. Pujārī is the in-charge of rituals and worship of devī or devtā. He decorates the idol after proper bathing and cleaning every day. He performs āartī and certain secret and sacred rites of devī or devtā. There can be more than one Pujārī in the temple. In that case, they perform their daily worship and other duties on rotation basis. During his turn, he will sleep inside the temple premises and would lead a life of celibacy.

Shri Tek Singh, Kārdār, Jhal Devtā Temple, Laund during his interview conducted on November 6, 2020 told about devtā, *khel* and Gūr. He elaborated that during dev-processions, Pujārī distributes flowers and prasād as blessings to the masses. He can be from brāhmaṇa or kanet/rājput caste. His source of income remains the offerings mainly from the temple. Sometimes, a small piece of land is also besieged to him as grant for his living by devtā. He also plays an important role as representative of devtā when during *khel*, sometimes people do not understand the language of Gūr. In such case Pujārī makes audience understand the meaning of prediction or prophecy made by devtā through Gūr.

Bhaṇḍārī is in charge of treasure and wealth of devtā in the form of mohrās, money, grains, and other objects like clothing, or precious metals belonging to the devtā. The bhaṇḍārī also manages the accounts of temple along with Kayatha. He maintains all the accounts of money and other items of devtā. When devtā comes out of temple to visit some place, or fair, a complete team of musicians accompany him. Jeltā is the head of this team of musicians called Bajantrīs. After these important posts, the level of participation and authority starts decreasing as rest of the people not only lead a normal life like common masses rather perform their temple duties as a routine. Information shared

by Shri Uttam Ram Sharma, main Pujārī, Devtā Bungdu Mahādev Temple, Gushala, on November 10, 2020 stated that Niśāndār is in-charge of the symbol, flag, banners or insignia of devtā which is different for every devtā. Pālsarā holds the cap of the Gūr during possession by devtā. Kāyath is another minor official of temple administration who helps in keeping the account of money of devtā.

Table 2: Temple Officers with specified Duties

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Duties</i>
1.	Kārdār	Kārdār is the chairman of the managing committee of the deity and under his direction and control, the dev-kārya is conducted.
2.	Gūr	Gūr is considered a holy person. He/she is the only means by which the deity speaks and makes prophecies. He has to follow strict rules.
3.	Pujārī	Morning and evening worship of deity.
4.	Bhandārī	In-charge of treasure and wealth of devtā.
5.	Jeltā	Jelta is the head of the officers who play musical instruments during dev-processions.
7.	Niśāndār	in-charge of the symbol, flag, banners or insignia of devtā
8.	Pālsarā	During the Dev khel, the task of holding the hat is that of Pālsarā.
9.	Kaīth	To maintain accounts and record of the income of devtā

Shri Gopal Singh Thakur, Kārdār, Viṣṇu Nārāyan Temple, Hirab during the study done on November 14, 2020 explained in detail about the political system that is followed in dev-samāj in Kullu district including Banjar area. In power structure, this hierarchy has great significance. He admitted that upper caste has maximum representation in political hierarchy in dev-samāj, thus mostly power remains confined in their hands of upper caste devtā/devī to run the administration of dev-samāj. Gādhā Durgā mātā has the biggest convoy of fourteen deities including devīs, devtās, nāg, and ṛṣī. Panch-vīr devtā always accompany her as part of her cabinet members. Gādhā Durgā mātā is devī of upper caste whereas accompanying deity Panch-vīr devtā is a powerful deity of lower caste.

The caste system has probably attracted more attention from sociologists and anthropologists than any other feature of Indian society. Berreman (1963) explained that such emphasis on caste is not unwarranted, for it is one of the dominant social and cultural facets of life in India. Berreman (1963) has defined caste as endogenous divisions of society in which membership is hereditary and permanent. Besides society, dev-samāj in Banjar region stands no exception to this definition and deities are connected to each other through political administration where caste plays an important role in the hierarchy. The caste factor is also deep rooted in worship rituals and temple entry in the region. The population is divided on the basis of caste and so are devīs and devtās. Certainly, hereditary, endogamously created group identity, etc. has served as an unalterable bond since centuries. Caste not only cut across, but transcended, all boundaries of community, there is a clear division between the dominant, high or twice-born castes and the ‘untouchable’ or lower castes. Gerald D. Berreman (1963) observed that, while lines of hierarchy were sharply etched within each division of society, they did not affect interactive relationships between the two broad social divisions of society. The range of castes in the hills is much smaller than in the plains. To take an example: traditional castes that figure in the broad Hindu society in the plains such as Vaiśya and Śudra are conspicuous by their absence in the hills: they are not spoken of, and do not figure in people’s thoughts. In Kullu region too, kanets, kolīs, dagīs and chanāl are caste groups outside the ambit of brāhmanical structure.

Religious trends have produced the setting in which the need for the edifices to express religious sentiments in order to cater to the ethos of entire community were necessitated. It was undoubtedly

religious upsurges prevailing in Kullu region, from time to time, that brought the entire populace together in a corporate effort to raise magnificent shrines in the valley. It was not the royal personages that helped rather hierarchy emerged from the society itself. This hierarchy was biased but not exploitative. That was the reason that dissenting voices did not appear. With the passage of time, the religion of society disseminated as the religion of caste. The upper caste and lower caste adopted its own deities, system of worship and ritual performances. Still the relations and connections as family and societal bonds remained deep-rooted. During field survey, it was observed that the point of assemblage arises in hierarchy where one notices upper caste deity in the position of king and lower caste deity in his/her cabinet as is clear from the example of Gādhā Durgā mātā who holds a key position in the hierarchy of deities in Banjar region with Panch-vīr devtā and many other gods, goddesses, rīṣī and nāgs in her convoy as her guards and members of cabinet. They all hold their respective positions of seniority and importance. Gādhā Durgā mātā is deity of upper caste mainly with highest territorial asset in the region. Similarly, Pujālikā Devī is accompanied by two lower caste deities, Panch-Vīr and Śāṅgdī Devtā. The kārdārs of both devīs (Shri Murari Lal Sharma of Bandal village is both, Kārdār and Pujārī of Gādhā Durgā mātā) and Pujālikā Devī is from upper caste (brāhmaṇ).

The population of village and its caste has direct impact on its deity system in Banjar region. The brāhmiṇs occupy an honoured place in the social hierarchy. They received royal patronage in the form of land grants which bestowed on them several rights and privileges. The grants were free from all kind of taxes. The donations of land given to them were considered as the means of acquiring religious merit and glory by the donors who were mostly from royal house. One of the major oft-quoted example is of mahārāja Samudra Sena who granted land to the brāhmiṇs for acquiring religious merit, for the increase of the glory of his parents and himself (*Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol.-III, no. 80, 1970, pp. 286-91). R. N Nandi's argument in one of his article published in the *Proceedings of Indian History Congress* carries weight that the brāhmiṇs were very influential and occupied respectable status in the early and medieval society because of their accessibility to learning, and on account of their right of officiating at sacrifices and rituals performed by the rulers and wealthy classes. A close look at religious hierarchy in Banjar region testifies to his observation. Brāhmiṇs still play an important role in Banjar valley dev-samāj.

The kanets were and still are the dominant caste in terms of numbers in the Kullu region after brāhmiṇs. Their caste was low, but they formed a major part of the population. Equated with the kulindas by Cunningham in *Kulu and Saraj: Kangra District Gazetteer* 1917, they were described as the original inhabitants of the hills who were subdued by immigrant Rājputs. This identification has not been accepted however by all authorities. Predominantly located in Kullu, Suket and Mandi, in Kullu the kanets are known to have held about two-thirds of the land. The strength of Kullu kanets lay in the fact that they freed themselves from the traditional hold of the brāhmiṇ orthodoxy.

During the research, it was observed that the names of dominant and lower caste has changed in the society, though their professional identities remained the same. It was due to brāhmaṇical influence that their castes seem to be fixed as rājput instead of kanets, and harījan/dalit instead of kolīs. Their deities were also found more under brāhmaṇical influence. It was also found that Gādhā Durgā mātā, Bālā Tripurā Sundarī, Pujālikā Devī and Murlidhar devtā have brāhmaṇ Kārdār. Rest of the upper caste deities have kanet Kārdār. So far as lower caste deities are concerned, only one caste i.e., kolī has their Kārdār. Another important observation is that the upper caste deities; Gādhā Durgā mātā, Bālā Tripurā Sundarī, Pujālikā Devī and Murlidhar have maximum land in their possession. Thirdly, during dev-processions, Kārdār of upper and lower caste, all walk with their respective deities in the same hierarchy, they hold in dev-samāj. An attempt has been made to broadly analyze the population ratio

between upper caste and lower caste in Banjar region. It was found that the population of upper caste people is higher in region of Banjar than of lower caste. Data provided in the table below shows that upper caste and deity had population dominance in religion and society.

Table 3: The Panchayat /Village main deity and caste wise population distribution in Banjar region

Sl. No.	Name of Panchayat / Villages	Deity of Village	Fātī i.e., Cluster of Villages based on dev-territory	Kothī, i.e., Cluster of Fātī	Population in Fātī Upper Caste	Population in Fātī Lower Caste
1.	-Klawari -Palach -Nunaut -Jamad	-Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ (UC) -Iśwar Mahādev (UC) -Panchvīr Devtā (LC) -Safen Devī (LC)	Klawari Palaich	Palaich	269	179
2.	Sindhwa	Ghatohkach Devtā (UC) Vanashera Devtā (LC)	Taragali	Manglore	448	240
3.	Chehaṇi Dhar	Murlidhar (UC) Khodu (LC)	Bihari Bini	Chaini	549	180
4.	-Balaghard -Lahund -Ghat -Bahelo	Tripurā Bālā Sundarī (UC) -Jahl Devtā (LC) -Bharyadu Devtā (LC) - Lakṣmī Nārāyan Devtā (UC)	Balaghard	Shikari	549	201
5.	Tinder	- Lakṣmī Nārāyan Devtā (UC) -Panch-vīr Devtā (LC)	Tinder	Nanda	546	95
6.	Pedcha	- Viṣṇu Nārāyan (UC)	Mohani	Fatehpur	401	52
7.	Dashala Mathiana	Bhungdu Mahādev (UC) Vanga Devta (LC)	Chanaun	Gopalpur	268	291
8.	Bandal	Devī Gādā Durgā (UC) Panch Vīr Devtā (LC)	Nand	Tung	330	163
9.	Sharchi,	Devī Gādā Durgā (UC)	Sharchi	Sharchi	221	118
10.	Pajohee	Dhanī rākṣaṇ Devī (LC)	Deutha	Gopalpur	300	137

*UC- Upper Caste**LC- Lower Caste

Along with the dominance of the gods of the upper castes, the number of people belonging to the higher castes is higher in the region except in Chanaun Fātī. The main deities in the Banjar region are dominatingly from the upper caste. Also people of lower caste do not visit the temples of upper caste deities, nor can they dance in the fairs. Still the lower caste gods accompany as their commander and protector of the higher caste gods. The lower caste deities are worshiped only by the lower caste people. The fairs of the lower caste deities are different from those of the higher caste deities. The

power structure of these deities is derived from the area which these deities hold as their territory. The present study was conducted to see the co-relation between the territorial extent of these deities and the caste of population in Banjar region. Village-panchayat forms the basic unit of territorial extent of any deity. In present case, 36 village panchayats of Banjar region were surveyed and population according to 2019 District census was taken. A cluster of village-panchayats forms a set of unit called fātī. The number of villages under fātī varies according to the territorial extent. Kothī is the highest territorial unit of deity under which fātī comes and village-panchayat is the smaller unit of it.

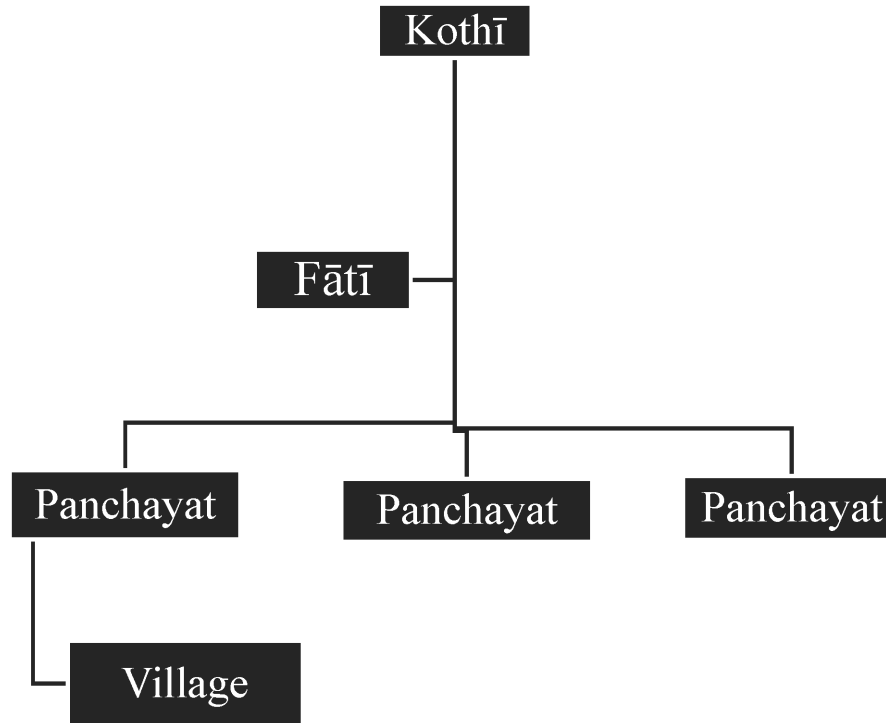


Diagram- 1: Three-Tier Deity Territorial Structure Under Kothī, Fātī and Village System

The names of village-panchayat deities in Banjar region shows an admixture of brāhmaṇical and indigenous deities. Also deities of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism can be noticed as dominating territorial gods. The caste system plays an important role in the society and upper caste has certainly high influence. Kārdārs of upper caste are in majority. Kanets are more in number than brāhmaṇs of upper castes.

Table 4: Caste of Temple Officers

Sl. No.	Officers	Caste
1.	Kārdār	Upper Caste (Brāhmaṇ/Kanet)
2.	Gūr	Upper Caste (Kanet) Lower Caste (Kolī)
3.	Pujārī	Upper Caste (Brāhmaṇ /Kanet)
4.	Bhandārī	Upper Caste (Kanet)
5.	Jeltā	Lower Caste (Kolī)
6.	Pālsarā	Upper Caste(Kanet) Lower Caste (Kolī)
7.	Kaīth	Upper Caste (Kanet)

The study brings to light that despite having the dominance of upper caste in society and religion, it is not altogether controlled by brāhmaṇs. Rather kanets are more in number as Kārdār of deities. Lower caste deities form important part of administration, thus a different kind of harmony is maintained. But the bias of discrimination by human agency cannot be ruled out where people of lower caste neither can enter into the temples of upper caste, nor can they be part of their fairs. Another important aspect is that most of the area as territory is also lying with upper caste deities. In power structure of dev-samāj, number of male deities out-number lower caste deities as well.

The position of women in Kullu is very different from that of her counterpart in the plains. Possessed of an unusual amount of freedom, women participate in almost every social activity. Her home and fields are her primary work spaces. The women in the hills is a major participant and contributor to the economy. She is treated with the care and circumspection due to her proven asset to the family, and the society. The hill women are not shy of mixing with men (Berreman 1960, p.776). In India, where sometimes back, temple-entry movement of women was gaining momentum as women were not allowed temple entry, in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, we find women an integral part of temple administration, holding responsibility and are associated with dev-samāj. They have the right to take decisions as Kārdār and Gūr. During the survey of the Banjar area, it was found that not only women Gūrs are part of temple hierarchy, but also occupies the post of Kārdār. Sharda Devi, female Kārdār at Lakśmī Nārāyaṇ temple, Dhaugi Sainj, who was interviewed on 25 November, 2020 is present in the dev-administration in the sub-division Sainj of Banjar area. Generally male holds this important position but during survey, two lady Kārdār were interviewed. First lady is Sharda Devi, age 58 years, who has been serving as a Kārdār of the deity Lakśmī Nārāyaṇ for the past nineteen years, in Kothi Vuga, Sub tehsil Sainj, Sub Divison Banjar. She is a resident of Dhaugi Village.



Plate-4: Female Kārdār Sharda Devī from Dhaugi Sainj



Plate-5: Female Kārdār Sudha Sharma Shangarh Sainj

Another female Kārdār, Sudha sharma belonged to Kothī Shangarh, Sub-tehsil Sainj and Sub Division Banjar, resident of Shangarh village. During interaction on 30 November, 2020, it was found that she has been serving as the Kārdār of deity Śangchul for the past one year. Śangchul devtā is considered a form of lord Śiva. He is worshipped in the entire Shangarh Kothī. Kārdār Sudha Sharma is a young, unmarried woman, whereas Kārdār of Sainj region is old lady, but unmarried. During interview, both lady Kārdārs told that because of hereditary succession, they became Kārdār. Their level of temple responsibility is no less than male Kārdār. Because of their official position as Kārdār, these women are allowed to enter inside the temple any time of the day, month or year. In Banjar area, women and girls are not allowed to go to temples during menstruation, but these women are not bound by such rules. Women Kārdār also told that their marital status is not under any consideration for being Kārdār as these both Kārdār are unmarried, but another woman Kārdār, from the same area, Devadei is married. This is also important to note that all these Kārdār are from brāhmiṇ families

In dev tradition, Gūr is considered very pious as he is a direct messenger of god. God speaks through him/her. As told earlier that a Gūr has to lead a very different life. Interestingly, during the field survey, a lady Gūr, Lata Devi, a resident of a Village Kandi, tehsil of Balichowki, was interviewed on 1 December, 2020. Though she is not Gūr of any deity of Banjar region, rather of Hadimbā devī in Manali but her status of Gūr is widely accepted. It came out that she too has to follow strict rules like male Gūr. Her body, at the time of *khel*, is occupied by devī. She cannot cut her hair and has to follow specific diet rules. The only difference with male Gūr is that generally people come to her home during Gūr-khel, but the male Gūr has to give his advice in public. Male Gūr can visit a fair with deity, woman Gūr generally does not visit during fairs. Lady Gūr, Lata Devi told that her father was the Gūr of devī. After his death, the goddess chose her as Gūr. She is the third generation Gūr in her family.

She plays all the actions of the goddess as a Gūr. Another woman Javana Devi of village Chalaudi was interviewed in January, 2020 has told the same thing.

Table- 5: Gender-wise Division of Deities

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of the Deity as King</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Deity Accompanying as Part of Cabinet</i>	<i>Gender</i>
1.	Gādhā Durgā devī	Female	Panch-Vīr devtā	Male
2.	Bālā Tripurā Sundarī	Female	Johal Devtā	Male
3.	Ghatotkach devtā	Male	Bansheerā	Male
4.	Doru Nārāyaṇa	Male	Banga devtā	Male
5.	Bungdu Mahādev	Male	Banga devtā	Male
6.	Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa	Male	Dhānī Rakṣaṇ devī	Female
7.	Iśwarī Mahādev	Male	Sefan devī	Female
8.	Bālu Nāg devtā	Male	Bharyāḍu	Male
9.	Viṣṇu/Behlo Nārāyaṇa	Male	Johal devtā	Male
10.	Ṣṛīṅga Rīṣī	Male	Khodu devtā	Male
11.	Pujālikā Devī	Female	Panch-Vīr devtā Ṣāṅgdi devtā	Male Male
12.	Viṣnu Nārāyaṇa	Male	Panch-Vīr devtā	Male
13.	Vumāsi devtā	Male	Panch-Vīr devtā	Male
14.	Murlidhar+ Ṣṛīṅga Rīṣī	Male	Khodu devtā	Male

The above table shows the dominance of male deities in the dev-samāj of Banjar region. As laid-down in the table that number of male deities (24) is certainly high as compared to female deities (06) but the territorial extent and influence of female deity (Gādhā Durgā devī) is higher than male deities.

Table 6: Temple Officers Gender - wise

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Gender</i>
1.	Kārdār	Male/Female
2.	Gūr	Male/Female
3.	Pujārī	Male
4.	Bhandārī	Male
5.	Jeltā	Male
6.	Pālsarā	Male
7.	Kaīth	Male

Conclusion

Analysis shows that there is a continuity of tradition in dev-samāj at social and religious level. The influence of brāhmaṇism has certainly brought cultural and religious changes in the area, but society is attached to its indigenous roots. The names of deities show mixed influence in nomenclature. Vaiśya class in true sense is completely missing. Also Kanets are not Rājputs in true sense of the term. As we see no strong elements of autocracy in political administration of Kullu in history, in the political hierarchy of deities too, this elements remained missing. Though brāhmaṇism can be seen as a force to bring people of region into mainstream Hindus, still there are huge gaps found in this attempt. The indigenous roots in religion has kept the people of Kullu as separate identity. The involvement and inter-mingling of human agency in carrying out the administration of deity efficiently has enabled a

symbiotic relationship between the two; human beings and god of mountains. Brāhmaṇism did not affect it much and it continued its even tenor of existence with its indigenous elements. The religious life of people of Banjar is deeply imbued in to traditional followings that has developed with its own peculiarities. The detailed discussion of administration involved in dev-samāj of Banjar region revealed interesting details of life-style, daily routine and performances during visit to village along with gods and goddesses. Few lesser known facts came into light during this small frame research that include caste equations in temple administration. Kārdār is always from upper caste whereas Gūr can be from any caste. Bhandārī shall be from upper caste. Pujārī is also from upper caste. Jeltā and Bajantṛī are from lower caste irrespective of deity they serve. Bajantṛī can accompany deity during travel but cannot enter into temple of upper caste. Gūr can be from any caste but when the final verdict is predicted, the version of lower caste Gūr shall prevail over the verdict of upper caste Gūr Also *khel* is the only occasion when lower caste Gūr can touch upper caste deity.

Female is missing in the political hierarchy of temple administration except Kārdār and Gūr. Female Kārdār, Sharda Devi has been serving as a Kārdār of the deity Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ for the past nineteen years, in Kothī Vuga of Banjar. Another female Kārdār, Sudha sharma belonged to Kothī Shangarh. During the field survey, lady Gūr Lata Devi and Jabna Devi were interviewed with rest of the male Gūrs. Also it was observed that when a deity visits any village, female lot of the village gets involved in food preparation but female of lower caste shall serve the food to her caste deity only. The caste system plays an important role in the society of Banjar and upper caste has high influence. Kārdārs of upper caste are in majority. Kanets are more in number than brāhmaṇs of upper castes. The survey highlights that people of upper caste do visit the temple of lower caste people but vice-versa was not followed. Deities are connected to each other through political administration where caste plays an important role in hierarchy. Despite having the dominance of upper caste in society and religion, it is not altogether controlled by Brāhmaṇs. Rather kanets are more in number as Kārdārs of deities. Lower caste deities form important part of administration. But the bias of human agency cannot be ruled out. Another important aspect is that most of the area as territory is also lying with upper caste deities. In power structure of dev-samāj, number of male deities out-number lower caste deities as well, still the territorial extent, power and influence of devī is more than any devtā in the area. Thus, it can be remarked that the cultural growth of the Banjar region in Kullu district contributed a lot towards enriching the understanding on social and religious milieu and heritage of the western Himalayas in particular and the country in general.

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