

Department of Political Science

Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla-171005



Is organising a One Day National Seminar
on

Tribes of Himachal Pradesh: Understanding Modernity, Identity, and Belonging October 15, 2025

Chief Guest

Professor Mahavir Singh
Vice Chancellor, H.P. University
Shimla-171005.

Guest of Honour

Prof. Rajinder Verma,
Vice Chancellor
H.P. Technical University,
& Pro-Vice Chancellor,
H.P. University Shimla-171005.

Guest of Honour

Prof. Balkrishan Shivram
Dean of Studies
H.P. University Shimla-171005

Keynote Address

Prof. M.C. Behera (Retd.), Centre for Indigenous Culture Study & Dean, School of Culture Studies, Central
University of Jharkhand.

Valedictory Speech

Prof. Kamal Manohar Sharma, (Retd.), Department of Political Science, H.P. University, Shimla- 171005.

Programme Schedule

Inaugural Session	10.15.a.m. to 11.30 a.m.
Tea Break	11.30 p.m. to 11.45 p.m.
First technical session	11.45 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.
Lunch	1.30 p.m. to 2 p.m.
Second technical Session	2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p. m.
Tea Break	4.00 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.
Valedictory Session	4.15 p.m. to 5.30 p. m.

Convenor

Prof. Harish K. Thakur
Department of Political Science
HP University Shimla-171005

Organising Secretary

Dr. Abha C. Khimta
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science,

Venue: Committee Room, H.P. University, Shimla- 171005.

RSVP: Chairperson, Department of Political Science, H.P. University, Shimla-171005.

Note: Papers/Abstracts are invited before October 12, 2025 at the email harish.070@gmail.com

Tribes of Himachal Pradesh: Understanding Modernity, Identity, and Belonging

The tribes of Himachal Pradesh occupy a unique position in India's sociocultural fabric and Himalayan geography. Rooted in rich oral traditions, spiritual ecologies, and indigenous governance systems, these communities have historically maintained distinct identities. However, the accelerating forces of modernity- economic liberalization, infrastructure expansion, digitization, and policy shifts have brought profound transformations to tribal life. In all there are eight tribes in Himachal- 1. Bhot, Bodh. 2. Gaddi. 3. Gujjar. 4. Jad, Lamba, Khampa. 5. Kanaura, Kinnaura. 6. Lahaula. 7. Pangwala. 8. Swangla. Each tribe has its unique culture, traditions and social structures. They have long stories, rich and practical folklore that bind them to their ancestors and the earth. Their cultural landscape is characterized by a strong sense of community and identity, modelled by a natural environment and historical experiences. However, the forces of modernity increasingly influence these traditional cultures, leading to positive changes and challenges. Modernity is often defined as the process of social, cultural and economic changes caused by industrialization and globalization. In this context, modernity can involve changes in lifestyle, values and communication. The tradition, on the other hand, refers to practices, beliefs and long-standing systems that define the identity of a community. Within the kingdom of the tribes of the Himachal Pradesh, modernity and tradition are not excluded each other; Rather, they interact in complex ways that affect how tribal people see themselves and their place in contemporary society.

Understanding how these two forces coexist is crucial to understanding the current identity of tribal members in Himachal Pradesh. With the rapid spread of technology and the influence of urban life, the dynamics of modernity play a significant role in remodelling the tribal identity. The impact of modernization can be seen in various aspects of daily life between these tribes, from changes in agricultural practices to changes in social interactions. The traditional practices often adapt or transform under modern influences. Many tribal members incorporate new methods in an attempt to preserve their cultural expressions, creating a mixture of old and new. Tribes often adapted to modern influences, such as education and job opportunities, which often lead to migration. While these changes help them acquire new skills and knowledge, there is also a struggle to maintain their cultural integrity and identity distinct in the face of external pressures. Festivals and rituals are more than simple cultural expressions; They serve as vital connections to tradition in the midst of modernization. According to DAS (2024), these events allow the tribes to reaffirm their cultural roots and encourage the bonds of the community. They act as safe spaces in which members can engage with their heritage by integrating modern elements, confirming that these practices can coexist.

Despite the positive elements introduced by modernization, there are also significant challenges. Tribes often face dilemmas between supporting traditional norms and adapt to new social requests, leading to conflicts within families and communities. This tension underlines the complexity of the identity of navigation in an evolving world, highlighting the need for ongoing dialogues around the interaction of modernity and tradition., Tradition plays a vital role in the formation of the identities of the tribes in Himachal Pradesh. Many tribes prioritize practices, rituals and cultural festivals that were transmitted for generations. These practices help maintain a connection with their roots and promote a sense of community. The collective memory is essential to preserve tradition. Through narrative, songs and dances,

tribal members share their history and experiences, which strengthens their identity in modern society. This cultural persistence supports the idea that even as times change, these traditions offer stability and a sense of belonging. Language also plays a crucial role in the identities of Himachal Pradesh's tribes. Each tribe has its unique dialect, which carries cultural meaning and strengthens the ties between community members. It acts as a bridge that connects individuals to its geographical identity. In a modern world, where globalization influences the way people communicate, the maintenance of local languages becomes essential to these tribes. Proficiency in your mother tongue not only preserves your culture, but also creates a feeling of pride and belonging in your communities, especially as external influences become stronger.

The socio-political context in which these tribes exist adds another layer of complexity to their identity dynamics. The tribal politics usually shape how communities are involved with modernity and tradition. As tribal members sail in various political landscapes, their identities can change, adapting to changes in circumstances as they strive to maintain their cultural practices. Several government policies, development and urbanization projects can challenge traditional ways of life. This complex interaction raises important questions about how these tribes define their identity in a rapidly changing society. Modernity and tradition should not be seen as opposite forces. Instead, their interaction enriches the identity of the Himachal Pradesh tribes and offers a sense of differentiated belonging. Modern influences can encourage the adaptation of cultural practices, maintaining the main traditional beliefs. For example, some tribes can mix traditional rituals with modern practices, creating new forms of expression that resonate with younger generations. In essence, this relationship between modernity and tradition helps the tribes navigate in contemporary challenges, remaining rooted in their cultural heritage.

The seminar seeks to explore how these tribes have been navigating the tensions and synergies between tradition and modernity. It will examine how tribal identity is being reshaped in response to development, displacement, tourism, environmental change, and state interventions. The seminar also interrogates what “belonging” means for these communities today—whether to land, heritage, or the evolving idea of the Indian state. It aims to provide a critical, interdisciplinary platform for dialogue among scholars, policymakers, students, and tribal voices.

Proposed Subthemes:

1. Cultural Continuity and Disruption: Oral Traditions, Language, and Festivals
2. Tribal Youth and Education: Aspirations, Mobility, and Identity Shifts
3. Tourism, Markets, and the Commodification of Tribal Culture
4. Gender and Social Roles in Transition: Women and Agency in Tribal Communities
5. Land, Displacement, and the Politics of Belonging
6. Customary Institutions and Modern Governance: Coexistence or Conflict?
7. Climate Change and Ecological Knowledge: Tribal Responses to Environmental Stress
8. Policy, Rights, and Representation: Rethinking Development for Tribal India

Seminar Convenor: Prof. Harish K. Thakur, Associate Professor, Dept. of Political Science, HP University, Shimla – 171005.

Organising Secretary: Dr. Abha C. Khimta, Associate Professor, Dept. of Political Science, HP University, Shimla – 171005.

Programme Schedule

Inaugural Session	10.15. a.m. to 11.30 a.m.
Tea Break	11.30 p.m. to 11.45 p.m.
First technical session	11.45 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.
Lunch	1.30 p.m. to 2 p.m.
Second technical Session	2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p. m.
Tea Break	4.00 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.
Valedictory Session	4.15 p.m. to 5.30 p. m.