

Development policies and the political socialisation of tribal communities: evidence from Kinnaur district, Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Development policies in tribal areas are increasingly not just tools of socio-economic change, but also tools of political socialisation and democratic incorporation. The present study is an attempt to explore the relationship between development policies and political socialisation of the tribal communities in Kinnaur District. The study examines the impact of welfare schemes, infrastructural development and local governance institutions on political awareness and democratic participation among the tribal population. The study used a mixed-method research design, which involved primary data collection using structured questionnaires, interviews and field interactions in the three administrative blocks of the district. Secondary data was gathered from government reports, census and scholarly literature. The relationship between developmental exposure and political awareness was analysed using statistical tools like percentage analysis, regression analysis and Chi-square tests. The results show that welfare interaction and developmental exposure have a significant positive impact on political awareness, institutional familiarity, and democratic participation. The incorporation of the developmental process is, however, unevenly distributed in the different welfare schemes and institutional fields. The study contends that development policies are now playing an important role in the process of democratic integration in tribal societies.

Keywords: *Development Policies, Political Socialisation, Tribal Communities, Democratic Incorporation, Welfare Schemes, Political Awareness.*

Introduction

Development and democratic transformation are a major issue in political sociology especially in the context of the incorporation of tribal societies into the post-colonial state (Xaxa, 2008). In India, development policies have functioned not merely as economic interventions but also as mechanisms through which the state expands its institutional presence and political legitimacy in geographically remote regions (Baviskar, 1995). State-led development has significantly changed the socio-cultural autonomy and relative

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isolation of tribal communities, and the nature of their relationship with formal political institutions. Therefore, development in tribal areas should be viewed as a socio-economic process as well as a political process that affects citizenship, awareness and state-society relations (Jayal, 2013).

This transformation is closely connected to the process of political socialisation in which people learn political values, beliefs and orientations necessary for democratic engagement. Classical scholars such as Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) emphasised the role of institutions and socio-economic change in shaping civic culture and political participation, while (Easton, 1965) highlighted the importance of institutional interaction in developing political orientations. In the Indian context, Ghanshyam Shah (2004), Yogendra Yadav (2000) and Niraja Gopal Jayal (2013) have shown how the welfare expansion, decentralisation and state-led political inclusion of the marginal regions have shaped democratic participation in these areas. Development policies are now agents of political learning in tribal societies where political consciousness has been traditionally rooted in customary institutions and kinship networks, as they introduce communities to electoral processes, rights-based discourse, and governance systems.

This change is significant in the context of the tribal district of Kinnaur. Geographical isolation, rugged terrain of the Himalayas and a unique tribal identity have given Kinnaur a rich history of socio-economic transformation over the last few decades. The region has undergone a significant change in its developmental landscape due to the expansion of hydroelectric projects, road connectivity under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), educational institutions, communication networks, and Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) (Sen et al., 2024). The development of the horticulture economy, especially the cultivation of apples, has led to greater interaction between local communities and formal governance structures, as has the rise in literacy levels and institutional access (Gupta et al., 2021). These developments have also increased the opportunities for political participation and democratic engagement in the region.

In spite of these changes, there is a key research question that remains. Previous studies on tribal societies by scholars like Virginius Xaxa, Andre Beteille and Walter Fernandes have explored in detail the questions of tribal identity, socio-economic deprivation, displacement and state intervention. But little empirical work has been done to understand the impact of development policies on political socialisation and democratic awareness in the tribal areas, especially in the Himalayan context. The main focus of this study is to see if developmental interventions in tribal areas create a greater political awareness and democratic engagement beyond economic outcomes.

In this context, the present study deals with the correlation between development policies and political socialisation in Kinnaur district. The study examines the impact of developmental intervention (in the form of infrastructure, education, welfare schemes, and local governance institutions) on political awareness and democratic participation among tribal communities, conceptualising these interventions as independent variables. The paper, based on primary field data, suggests that development policies in Kinnaur are not only tools of socio-economic change but also significant mechanisms of political inclusion and democratic socialisation in the tribal region.

Review of literature

The relationship between socio-economic development and political transformation has long been a subject of theoretical contestation. Classical modernisation theorists, such as Almond and Verba (1963) and Inkeles and Smith (1974), posited a linear correlation where institutional expansion and literacy inevitably foster a "civic culture" and heightened political participation. In this context, development is a major instrument of political socialisation that transforms individuals from parochial to participant orientations. But critical scholars have questioned this "top-down" modernization thesis, suggesting that developmental interventions in the periphery can result in "asymmetric integration," in which political awareness grows, but institutional legitimacy is still fragile because of historical marginalisation.

In the Indian context, the discourse has shifted from general modernisation to the nuances of democratic inclusion. Scholars such as Yogendra Yadav (2000) have pointed to a "second democratic upsurge", in which the political participation of socially marginal groups has grown, even as the state has failed to reach them in its developmental efforts. While Niraja Gopal Jayal (2001) highlights how the expansion of welfare and decentralisation has created new spaces for "active citizenship," others, such as Partha Chatterjee (2004), suggest that for marginal populations, the state is experienced primarily through "political society" a site of negotiation for resources rather than a formal democratic engagement. This creates a conceptual tension regarding whether development fosters genuine democratic socialisation or merely promotes a transactional relationship with the state. The traditional power institutions (TPIs) also play significant role in percolating political information into the marginal corners of Kinnaur society, thus acting as socialisation agents (See Thakur et. al. 2025)

Literature specifically addressing tribal societies reflects a similar divide. Virginius Xaxa (1999) and Andre Beteille (1991) have noted that the modernisation process has significantly altered the social hierarchy of the tribes and the relationship between the state and the tribes. But there is a major controversy about the nature of this change. Critical tribal scholarship (e.g.,

Fernandes, 2007; Guha, 2007) tends to focus on the displacement and exclusion aspects of state-led development, which has the effect of undermining indigenous power structure without offering any viable democratic alternative. In contrast, recent empirical research on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and welfare politics (e.g., Manor, 2010; Maiorano, 2014) indicates that the implementation of rural development initiatives such as MGNREGA and PMGSY has been a "political laboratory" for tribal citizens to learn how to manoeuvre through bureaucracy, to voice their rights, and to engage in electoral bargaining.

The mainstream tribal divide is the focus of the general Indian discussion, but scholarship on Himachal Pradesh offers a more complex perspective on the penetration of democracy. T.S. Negi (1972) provided early evidence of infrastructural and administrative expansion in regions like Kinnaur. Likewise, Mini Pathak Dogra contended that the tribal politics in HP is predominantly integrationist in nature with relatively high level of political awareness, electoral participation and peaceful democratic incorporation. Although there is a growing body of literature on tribal development and political participation, there is not much empirical research that examines the impact of specific developmental interventions like education, welfare delivery, infrastructural connectivity, and digital access on political socialisation and democratic awareness at the micro level. Although there is a body of literature on tribal development and political participation in the Himalayan tribal belt, there has been little empirical research that focuses on the impact of certain developmental interventions like education, welfare delivery, infrastructural connectivity, and digital access on political socialisation and democratic awareness at the micro level. The main gap in the present study is that there is no such empirical analysis in the context of tribal Kinnaur.

Theoretical framework

The present study is primarily grounded in the theory of political socialisation, which explains how individuals develop political values, attitudes and orientations through interaction with political and social institutions. Theories of democratic behaviour and political participation, like those of David Easton, Gabriel Almond, and Sidney Verba, have focused on the institutions that continuously influence democratic behaviour and participation, including schools, media, governance systems, and state agencies. Developmental interventions are becoming significant agents of political socialisation in tribal societies, where political life was traditionally shaped by customary institutions and kinship networks. This study contends that the repeated encounters with welfare institutions, educational institutions, local governance institutions, and state institutions create institutional familiarity, political awareness, and democratic engagement among the citizens of the tribe.

The study is also based on modernisation perspectives that link socio-economic development with political participation and democratic change. Samuel P. Huntington and Lucian Pye among others noted that infrastructural development, literacy, communication, and institutional development are factors that foster political consciousness and civic participation. The framework also acknowledges, however, that there can be unevenness in developmental incorporation as a result of differences in institutional access, geographical isolation, and socio-economic inequalities. In the Indian context, Partha Chatterjee and Niraja Gopal Jayal showed that the relationship between citizens and the state is now mediated by welfare policies and decentralised governance, especially in the case of socially marginal communities. Development is therefore considered not only as an economic process but also as a means to increase democratic interaction and political incorporation.

Based on these perspectives, the study conceptualises development policies as independent variables influencing processes of political socialisation in tribal regions. Infrastructural development, educational access, welfare schemes, communication facilities, and Panchayati Raj Institutions are treated as major developmental interventions shaping political awareness and democratic participation among tribal communities in Kinnaur District. Within this framework, political socialisation is understood as the process through which tribal citizens acquire democratic orientations and institutional awareness, while political awareness and participation are treated as cognitive and behavioural outcomes of this process. The framework therefore enables an examination of development not merely as socio-economic change, but as an important mechanism of democratic incorporation and political consciousness in tribal societies.

Research questions and hypotheses

The present study is an attempt to explore the relationship between development policies and political socialisation of the tribal communities of Kinnaur District. The study draws on the theoretical frameworks of political socialisation, democratic incorporation and welfare-state interaction to examine the impact of developmental exposure on political awareness and democratic participation among the tribal population.

The following research questions are used to guide the study:

1. How do development policies influence political awareness and democratic engagement among tribal communities in Kinnaur?
2. Does welfare based institutional interaction contribute to greater democratic familiarity and political socialisation in tribal areas?

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical orientation of the study, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H₁: Greater exposure to development policies significantly increases political awareness among tribal respondents.

H₂: Participation in welfare schemes involving regular institutional interaction is positively associated with awareness of democratic institutions and elected representatives.

H₃: Political socialisation through development remains uneven due to variations in welfare access and institutional engagement.

Methodology

The present study is of mixed method type in which quantitative and qualitative methods have been used to study the relationship between development policies and political socialisation among the tribal communities of Kinnaur District. The study is descriptive and analytical, examining the impact of welfare schemes, infrastructural development, education and local governance institutions on political awareness and democratic participation.

The study was carried out in all three administrative blocks of Kinnaur district namely Pooh, Kalpa and Nichar. A multi-stage sampling technique was used and primary data obtained from 382 respondents using structured questionnaires and field interactions. Secondary data were collected from Census reports, government publications, reports of the Election Commission, books, journals, and policy documents on tribal development and political participation. The study conceptualises development policies as independent variables that affect political socialisation among tribal communities. Infrastructural development, access to education, welfare schemes, communication facilities and Panchayati Raj Institutions were treated as major developmental variables and political awareness, knowledge of elected representatives, and democratic participation as indicators of political socialisation. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (regression analysis, independent sample t-test, Chi-square test) were used to analyse the collected data. The data were analyzed statistically using SPSS software.

Development and political socialisation in Kinnaur

It is essential to know the socio-economic context of the respondents while analysing the relationship between development policies and political socialisation in the tribal areas. Access to developmental schemes, interaction with governance institutions and political awareness is significantly affected by education, occupation, income and social status. The socio-economic profile of respondents is of great importance for the empirical understanding of the pattern of democratic participation and state-society interaction in the context of Kinnaur District. Table 1 shows the major socio-economic characteristics of the respondents who were included in the study.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

S.No.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	193	50.5
		Female	189	49.5
		18–29	83	21.7
2	Age	30–45	170	44.5
		46–60	96	25.1
		61+	33	8.6
3	Education	No formal education	20	5.2
		Primary (1–5)	31	8.1
		Middle (6–8)	45	11.8
		Secondary (9–10)	48	12.6
		Higher Secondary (11–12)	91	23.8
		Graduate	104	27.2
		Postgraduate & above	43	11.3
		Agriculture/Horticulture	236	61.8
		Livestock rearing	124	32.5
		Government service	38	9.9
4	Occupation	Private job/Business	69	18.1
		Tourism/Hospitality	20	5.2
		Daily wage labour	26	6.8
		Unemployed	54	14.1
		Homemaker	96	25.1
		Other	12	3.1
		Less than 10,000	85	22.3
		10,000–20,000	104	27.2
		20,000–40,000	85	22.3
		40,000–60,000	47	12.3
5	Monthly Income (INR)	More than 60,000	42	11
		Prefer not to say	19	5
6	Caste/Tribal Status	ST	373	97.6
		SC	9	2.4

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

The socio-economic composition of the respondents is indicative of the changing socio-economic structure of the tribal society in Kinnaur District. Gender distribution is almost even, with a good representation of both male and female respondents. The majority of respondents are in the economically active age group of 30-45 years (44.5 per cent), followed by those in the age group of 46-60 (25.1 per cent), which means that the study reflects the perceptions of people who are actively involved in economic activities, local governance and developmental processes. The high percentage of Scheduled Tribe respondents (97.6 per cent) also reinforces the tribal nature of the study area and the relevance of the analysis in the context of tribal political change. The educational profile also shows a progressive trend from isolation to higher education levels and social mobility. A very small percentage of the respondents indicated that they had no formal education (5.2 per cent), while a significant number had higher secondary, graduate and post-graduate qualifications, which is indicative of the growing extent of the educational infrastructure and developmental programmes in the district.

The occupational and income situation suggests that the economy remains predominantly agrarian-horticultural and there is limited occupational diversification. Most of the respondents (61.8 per cent) are engaged in agriculture and horticulture, indicating the importance of economic activities related to apple in Kinnaur. Meanwhile, the decline in government employment, tourism and private sector work indicates that opportunities outside of agriculture are still constrained despite continued developmental interventions. Income distribution also reveals that a significant share of the respondents is in the lower- and middle-income brackets, indicating limited economic development and uneven progress. These socio-economic factors have a significant impact on the pattern of state interaction, developmental exposure, political awareness and political participation of the tribal communities of Kinnaur.

The development exposure and political awareness.

Political awareness is a key aspect of political socialisation in tribal societies, and it is linked to developmental interventions. In areas like Kinnaur District where the state has historically been weak because of geographical isolation, development policies are increasingly becoming a way of citizens engaging with governance institutions, getting political information, and engaging in democratic processes. Tables 1.2 and 1.3 explore the level of political awareness and developmental exposure among the respondents in the study area.

Table 1.2: Descriptive analysis of political awareness among respondents

S.No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Key Response Category (Highest %)	Percentage (%)
1	Awareness about government development policies/programs	2.98	0.827	Moderately informed	41.1
2	Confidence in approaching local government officials	3.14	0.993	Confident	44
3	Knowledge of eligible development schemes	1.92	0.608	Yes – some schemes	74.3
4	Increase in political interest due to development policies	3.42	0.85	Increase interest	58.4
5	Development schemes increase political awareness in community	3.88	0.642	Agree	84
6	Youth political awareness due to development outreach	3.99	0.627	Agree	79.6

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

Table 1.3: Development-Related Participation and Awareness among Respondents

S.No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Key Response Category (Highest %)	Percentage (%)
1	Participation in local meetings discussing development issues	3.23	0.863	Often (Monthly)	42.7
2	Participation in trainings/awareness programs on development schemes	1.75	0.469	No	71.7
3	Usefulness of trainings in understanding rights and entitlements	4.98	1.423	Not applicable	56.3
4	Discussion of political/development issues with family/neighbours	3.06	0.713	Sometimes	63.9
5	Implementation of development projects in village	1.91	0.593	Yes – one or two projects	74.3
6	Improvement in household economic situation due to development	3.49	0.838	Improved greatly	57.9

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

The findings indicate that respondents have moderate to high political awareness, especially in the context of the role of development in political involvement. There was a significant number of respondents who said they were moderately informed about government development policies and felt confident in approaching local government officials. Likewise, a large number of respondents recognized that development policies had raised the political interest of the community and promoted political awareness among youth. The results indicate that developmental interventions are not only economic and welfare-driven processes, but also significant avenues of political learning and democratic engagement. Tribal communities have become more familiar with institutional structures, such as welfare schemes, local governance institutions and developmental outreach, and have grown more politically aware. The results also show some weaknesses, however. Some schemes were known to the respondents but awareness was partial and not complete and participation in formal training or awareness programmes related to development schemes was relatively limited. This means that although development policies have improved political exposure, institutional arrangements for more in-depth political education and continued democratic engagement are not uniform.

Through regression analysis, the overall association between development exposure and political awareness is further supported. The results reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship between development exposure and political awareness ($B = .272$, $\beta = .329$, $p < .001$), which means that higher the development exposure, higher the political awareness among the respondents. The results indicate that the model is moderately explanatory ($R^2 = .108$) and that developmental exposure is a valid predictor of democratic awareness among the tribal population. Development has also become more entrenched in the daily political and social life of the district, as evidenced by regular attendance at local meetings, discussions about developmental issues in families and neighbourhoods and perceptions of economic improvement. The results thus support the hypothesis H1 and corroborate the general argument that development policies serve as significant agents of political socialisation, thus increasing the citizens' interaction with the governance institutions and improving the political awareness of tribal Kinnaur.

Welfare schemes and uneven political awareness

Patterns of participation in welfare schemes offer valuable clues to the differential developmental incorporation of tribal societies. In regions such as Kinnaur District, welfare programmes constitute one of the primary channels through which citizens interact with governance institutions and experience the presence of the state. But participation across schemes is not uniform, and variations in access and institutional engagement significantly shape political awareness and democratic interaction. Tables 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 look at the

participation in government schemes, knowledge of local representatives and awareness of development schemes.

Table 1.4: Participation in government schemes

S.No.	Government Schemes	Number of Respondents (N)	Percentage of Cases (%)
1	MGNREGA (Employment Guarantee Scheme)	313	84.6
2	Public Distribution System (PDS)	317	85.7
3	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)	57	15.4
4	Rural Electrification Schemes	55	14.9
5	Road/Bridge Construction Assistance	46	12.4
6	Water Supply and Sanitation (Swachh Bharat)	73	19.7
7	Skill Development / Training	8	2.2
8	Social Pension / Old Age Schemes	142	38.4
9	Health Schemes (Ayushman Bharat etc.)	159	43.0
10	Agricultural and Horticulture Subsidy / Support	132	35.7

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

Table 1.5: Level of Awareness Regarding Local Representatives

S.No.	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes – Named Person	349	91.4
2	Yes, but cannot name	27	7.1
3	No	6	1.6
Total		382	100

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

Mean = 1.10 SD = 0.351

Table 1.6: Awareness of Government Schemes

S.No.	Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes – most schemes	71	18.6
2	Yes – some schemes	284	74.3
3	No	12	3.1
4	Don't know	15	3.9
Total		382	100.0

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).

Mean = 1.92 SD = 0.608

The findings reveal that the participation is mostly in the major welfare programmes like PDS (85.7 per cent) and MGNREGA (84.6 per cent), which reflects the wide institutional coverage of the district. There is moderate participation in health, pension and agricultural/horticultural support schemes while comparatively low participation in infrastructure and capacity-building schemes like PMAY, rural electrification, road assistance and skill development programmes. Low participation in skill development programs is especially indicative of low institutional penetration in the field of long-term employment diversification and capacity building. The results indicate that the exposure to welfare in tribal Kinnaur is still skewed and confined to subsistence-based welfare schemes. Meanwhile, there is a high degree of local political awareness, with most respondents correctly identifying their elected representatives and reporting that they knew of at least some government schemes. This suggests that the political awareness of the study area is not only influenced by formal political education, but also by the regular contact with welfare institutions and local governance processes.

Independent sample t-test analysis is also used to support the relationship between welfare participation and political awareness. The beneficiaries of the schemes which are accessed frequently like PDS, Swachh Bharat, social pension schemes, agricultural or horticultural support schemes showed comparatively higher political awareness than the non-beneficiaries. Schemes with lower institutional outreach such as PMAY, rural electrification and skill development programmes did not exhibit any statistically significant differences in awareness levels. The results indicate that the political impact of development is more related to the frequency and continuity of citizens' interactions with governance institutions than to the presence of welfare schemes. Familiarity with and awareness of institutions is stronger when programmes involve regular administrative engagement. The results thus partially confirm H3 and indicate that political socialisation in the context of development in the tribal Kinnaur is still uneven and institutionally differentiated.

Democratic awareness and institutional familiarity

Welfare participation and democratic awareness are especially relevant in the tribal areas where developmental institutions are the main link between citizens and the state. Welfare schemes can also be a buffer between tribal communities and governance in geographically distant regions like Kinnaur District. Thus, involvement in development programmes can help to foster material welfare as well as institutional familiarity, political awareness and democratic engagement. To explore this relationship, the study used the Chi-square test to analyse the association between participation in government schemes and respondents' awareness of local democratic representatives such as Sarpanch, MLA and MP.

Table 1.7: Association between Participation in Government Schemes and Democratic Awareness (Chi-Square Test)

S.No.	Governments Schemes	Chi-square Value	Df	(p-value)	Association Status
1	MGNREGA (Employment Guarantee Scheme)	14.807	2	0.001*	Significant Association
2	Public Distribution System (PDS)	16.429	2	0.000*	Significant Association
3	Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)	0.319	2	0.853	No Significant Association
4	Rural Electrification / UDAY / Local Power Schemes	0.272	2	0.873	No Significant Association
5	Road/Bridge Construction Assistance	0.139	2	0.933	No Significant Association
6	Water Supply and Sanitation (Swachh Bharat)	2.266	2	0.322	No Significant Association
7	Skill Development / Training	1.263	2	0.532	No Significant Association
8	Social Pension / Old Age Schemes	1.064	2	0.588	No Significant Association
9	Health Schemes (Ayushman Bharat etc.)	3.763	2	0.152	No Significant Association
10	Agricultural and Horticulture Subsidy / Support	4.103	2	0.129	No Significant Association

Note. Data compiled from primary survey conducted by the researcher (2026).
Significant at 5 per cent level.

The results show that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' democratic awareness and their knowledge of elected representatives and their participation in welfare schemes like MGNREGA and PDS. The significance values of MGNREGA ($p = 0.001$) and PDS ($p = 0.000$) are still below 0.05, suggesting that beneficiaries of these schemes have comparatively higher levels of political awareness. The frequency of contact with Panchayati Raj Institutions, village level officials, administrative processes and grievance systems in these programmes seems to enhance the familiarity of institutions and democratic awareness among the beneficiaries. Schemes like PMAY, rural electrification, road construction assistance, skill development schemes, and health schemes, on the other hand, did not show any statistically significant relationship with democratic awareness. These programmes are characterized by less or occasional engagement with governance institutions and thus have less impact on political socialisation.

The results indicate that developmental exposure is not enough to create democratic awareness, but rather the frequency and continuity of institutional interaction is what matters for the impact of welfare programmes on political socialisation. Frequent interactions with local governance structures increase beneficiaries' familiarity with administrative procedures, elected representatives, and institutional processes. Political awareness in the tribal area of Kinnaur is thus more a product of regular contact with welfare institutions and local governance systems than formal civic education. The results confirm H2 and strengthen the thesis that development policies serve as a means of economic support as well as a significant means of political learning, democratic incorporation and integration of state society.

Limits of developmental incorporation.

The results of the study confirm H1 as it shows that there is a positive correlation between developmental exposure and political awareness among the tribal respondents of Kinnaur District. The results of regression analysis showed that there is a significant increase in political awareness and institutional familiarity due to the interaction of the developmental processes. Those who were more exposed to the welfare schemes, local governance structures, and developmental outreach showed greater political interest and awareness of democratic institutions. The results indicate that development policies are not only economic intervention tools, but also significant agents of political socialisation, increasing citizens' contact with the state and governance bodies.

The study also confirms H2, as it demonstrates that welfare schemes with frequent institutional contact have a strong impact on democratic awareness and familiarity with elected representatives. Schemes like MGNREGA and PDS showed statistically significant links with awareness of local political representatives and governance structures. The regular interaction with the PRI, village-level officials, administrative processes, and welfare delivery systems seems to enhance the familiarity of the beneficiaries with democracy. The results show that political socialisation in tribal Kinnaur is mainly through the routine interaction with welfare institutions and not through formal civic education or ideological mobilisation.

The results also confirm H3, showing that political socialisation via development is not uniform and institutionally differentiated. Sustained administrative engagement resulted in higher political awareness while a few developmental schemes like skill development programmes, PMAY and infrastructure related schemes showed low participation and low democratic impact. The unequal access to information, different institutional outreach and low participation in awareness and training programmes suggest that developmental incorporation is still partial and selective. The study thus challenges the classical modernization assumptions, which suggest that

democratic incorporation is contingent on development, and argues that it is more dependent on the frequency, continuity and accessibility of institutional interaction. The overall results show that the development in tribal Kinnaur has increased the interaction of the grassroots with the institutional bodies of governance and enhanced political awareness, albeit in a stratified and uneven manner across institutional domains.

Discussion

The results of the study support H1 as it has shown that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between developmental exposure and political awareness among the tribal respondents of Kinnaur District. People have become more familiar with institutions and more aware of democracy through interaction with welfare schemes, local governance institutions and developmental processes. It is recommended that development policies serve as not only as tools of economic intervention, but also as significant agents of political socialisation, linking tribal citizens to governance structures and the democratic state.

The results also confirm H2, as they indicate that the more frequent institutional contact in the context of welfare schemes has a significant positive effect on democratic familiarity and awareness of elected representatives. There was a significant association between participation in schemes like MGNREGA and PDS with awareness about local political representatives and governance institutions. Frequent interaction with Panchayati Raj Institutions, local officials and administrative processes seems to foster political socialisation in the mundane process of providing welfare services, rather than through formal political education or ideological mobilisation.

The study also confirms H3 by showing that political socialisation through development continues to be selective and uneven in the context of welfare schemes and institutional contexts. Schemes with ongoing administrative engagement created greater political awareness than schemes with limited outreach or sporadic engagement, like skill development and infrastructure related schemes. The uneven participation in awareness and training programmes and the lack of knowledge of developmental entitlements also suggest that democratic incorporation is partial and stratified. The results thus contradict the classical modernization assumptions that the democratic impact of development relies on the development itself. The results therefore contradict the classical modernization assumptions that the democratic impact of development relies on the development itself, but rather on the continuity, accessibility and intensity of institutional interaction. Overall, the study reveals that the welfare institutions are becoming important tools of political consciousness, democratic engagement and state-society relations among the tribal people of Kinnaur District.

Conclusion

The study explored the relationship between development policies and political socialisation of the tribal communities of District Kinnaur and how developmental exposure affects political awareness, democratic participation and familiarity with institutions. The results show that development in tribal areas is not only economic but also a process of political incorporation and democratic interaction. The district has seen an increase in the interaction between citizens and state institutions through welfare schemes, infrastructural development, educational outreach and local governance engagement, which has enhanced political awareness and participation among the citizens.

The empirical results show that there is a positive correlation between developmental exposure and political awareness. Those who had more contact with development programmes were more likely to have a high level of political interest, confidence in approaching local officials and knowledge of governance structures. The regression analysis also showed that developmental exposure has a statistically significant effect on political awareness, thus reinforcing the overall theoretical claim that development policies are political socialisation agents in tribal societies. Likewise, the Chi-square results show that schemes that involve regular institutional interaction, especially MGNREGA and PDS, play a significant role in awareness about local political representatives and democratic institutions.

The study also reveals the differential and selective nature of developmental incorporation. The penetration of participation in schemes is very uneven, with welfare schemes having much higher penetration than skill development, awareness generation and capacity building schemes. Respondents were generally aware of government schemes and elected representatives, but this awareness was not always complete. The results thus indicate that the process of political socialisation through development is not only dependent on the expansion of development but also on the frequency, continuity, and visibility of institutional interaction. Programmes that involve regular interaction with governance institutions seem to be more effective in fostering democratic awareness than schemes with occasional or one-off benefits.

The study adds to the larger conversation on tribal politics and democratic change by breaking away from the traditional narratives of deprivation and isolation. The findings show that developmental processes are increasingly influencing political consciousness, institutional familiarity and democratic participation in tribal Kinnaur, rather than being seen as mere recipients of welfare. But the continued disparities in participation and lack of awareness also suggest that developmental integration is not complete. Increasing awareness campaigns, enhancing participatory outreach and increasing institutional accessibility are therefore crucial to deepen democratic engagement in tribal

regions. In general, the study suggests that development policies in Kinnaur have become significant tools of political socialisation, and have been increasingly incorporating tribal communities into the larger democratic structure of the Indian state.

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