EVOLUTION OF PLACE NAMES THROUGH GEOGRAPHY: A CASE STUDY OF RURAL SETTLEMENTS IN TRANS-GIRI REGION OF DISTRICT SIRMOUR: HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract:

Place-names provide the most useful geographical references system in the world and hint about the origin of villages as embedded in local legend, history, mythology, ecology and epic stories. The Trans Giri region in District Sirmour is a hilly area shaping its own cultural landscape and naming their social space based on perception of their immediate physical and socio – cultural ethos. While analyzing, each place name is examined, their meaning and origin of etymology are traced, cross checked by field visits, published books and then are categorized in different groups. An attempt is made to enlist them according to their prefixes and suffixes. Out of total villages in the study area, 50.95 percent names are found to be associated with natural features like vegetation, and water bodies. 29.26 percent names are shaped by socio – cultural aspects and remaining 19.26 percent are placed under miscellaneous space names. These village names are the result of distorted word from generation to generation, that changed the very meaning and pronunciation of the place name

Key Words: Place-Name; Settlement; landscape; features;

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Introduction

Place names are fossils of human geography (R.Y.Singh, 1998).An examination of prefix and suffix (Chattiyar, 1943) of the place names helps to reveal the past associations and affiliations of settlements. The names bear identifiable associations with physical and cultural characteristics of the region and serve as a basic source of information about geographical surroundings. Place-names study , enriches and tests the discoveries of archaeology and history and the rules of the philogists (Powicke, 1954) People whether original inhabitants or subsequent settlers, perceive place and its contents according to their cultural background and concretise the perceived reality by naming it according to their dialectal wealth. With time an area may undergoes a cultural transformation, but the place names ones transplanted survive for a long time. The cultural groups who created knowledge of the regional language of any area are helpful in finding out the real significance of place names. Though such analysis is complex, it provides some clues to the early human habitats of the concerned area. The significance of place names has for long being recognized by human and cultural geographers in general and by historical geographers in particular. Cultural geographers are unanimously agreed upon the proposition that place names imply a culture, recall a history, demand an ecological interpretation and the discovery of traces, it has left on the earth.

Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follow:

❖   To analyse the process and extent of physical features influencing the place names in Trans Giri Region of District Sirmour.

❖   To find out the extent of socio-cultural aspects manifested upon space as place names in the study area.

Study Area

The Trans Giri Region is situated in Sirmour district in the North-Western part of India. The district lies among the outer Himalayan ranges between 30º22'30"north and 31º01'20" north latitudes and 77º01'12"east and 77º49'40" east longitudes with an area of 2528 sq. kms. The Trans Giri Region is lying between 30º30'00" north to 31º0'00" north latitudes and 77º10'00" east to 77º50'00" east longitudes with an area of 1179 sq. kms. (Fig. 1)
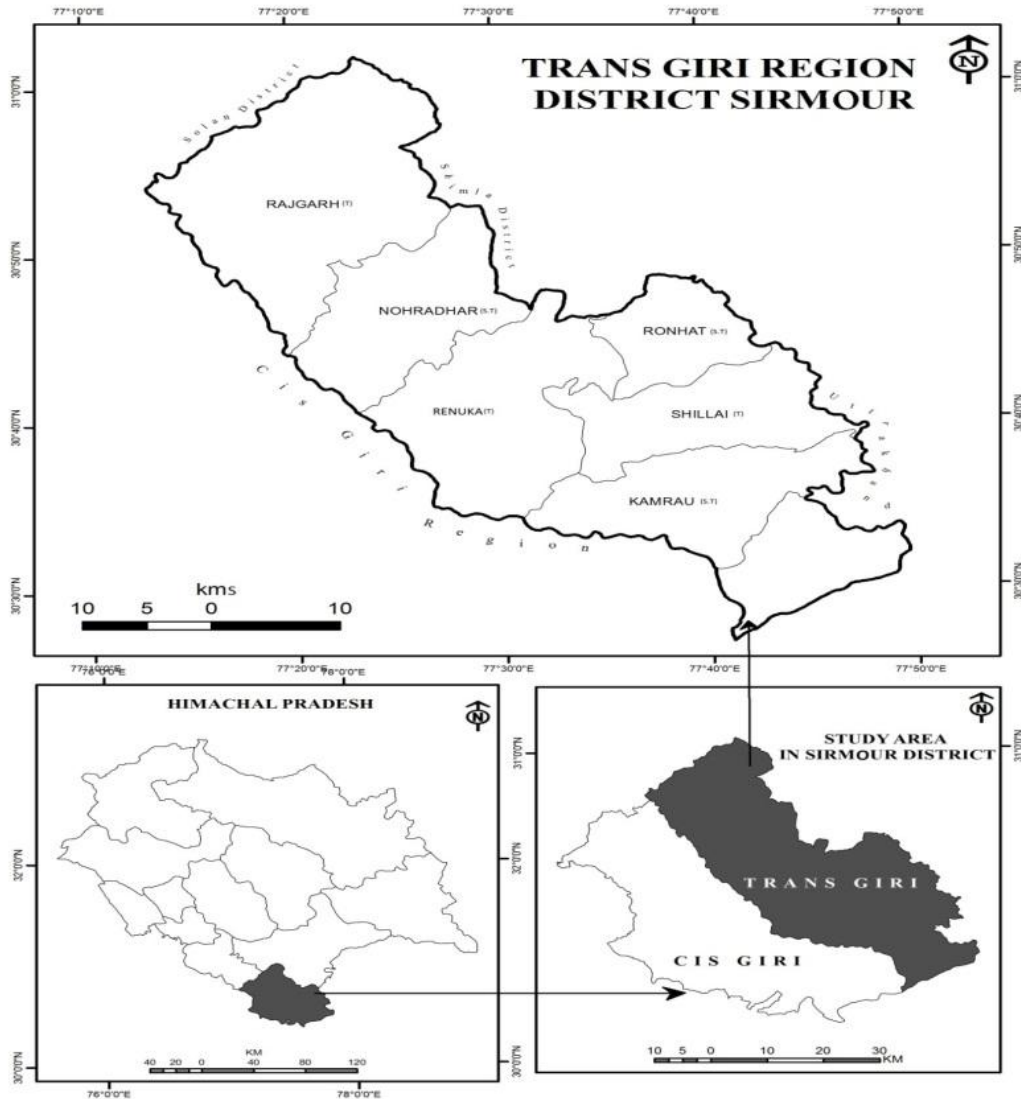
Study Area

Fig 1: Location Map of the Study Area

Data Sources and Methodology

The present study utilizes mainly the primary data, collected through field surveys. Observation method was used to collect the information. A set of interview schedules was prepared and canvassed to collect the data regarding material and non-material folk-culture traits in the study area. The secondary data were collected from census administrative maps (village and tehsil level) and from various published and unpublished literatures related to the study. The study area has 4 tehsils and 3 sub-tehsils. The total numbers of inhabited villages are 409, out of

which 10 percent (41) sample villages were selected on the basis of Stratified Random Sampling by using population criteria. 10% households were selected from each village on the basis of Purposive Based Sampling. (Table 1)

Table: 1. Sample Villages

Tehsil/Sub-Tehsil	Total No. Of Villages	Sample villages
Rajgarh (T)	142	14
Renuka (T)	74	7
Shillai (T)	39	4
Paonta (T	30	3
Nohra (S.T)	48	5
Kamrao (S.T)	52	5
Ronhat (S.T)	24	2

T=Tehsil; S.T=Sub Tehsil

Data Analysis

Simple percentage method is employed to analyze the data.

Representation of Data

The collected and analyzed data are represented through suitable tables, charts and diagrams.

R.B.Branfil has pointed out that, all proper names were originally derived from words or sounds having some meaning. With time original name and its meaning have also been lost and it is generally very difficult, often impossible to discover them. Still local circumstances and traditions occasionally point to the true etymology whence the original form may be approximately reconstructed or fairly guessed at. The Statement of Sankalia H.D. holds good for the study of place names in any language. According to him the place names more often than not, lend themselves to two or more meanings and it becomes almost impossible to decide the intended connotation. For example, Ponnatota may be after the tree or may be after the metal, which means Gold. When the places cannot be identified it becomes all the more difficult to say a final word regarding their meanings. So the interpretations suggested here are to be understood as provisional and not final. They need further corroboration from other sources, particularly from first-hand knowledge of the place itself.

Analysis and classification of the place names from inscriptions give some idea about the political, social and economic conditions as well as the physical, botanical and zoological surroundings prevailing in the region during the study period. However, before making such a venture, it is imperative to bear in mind the fact that the classification of the place names and their explanation are not as easy as they appear to be on a superficial look. Regarding the classification of the place names different scholars, like H.D.Sankalia in his work "Studies in the "Historical and Cultural Geography"; Prof.T.R.Sharma in his work "Personal and Geographical Names in Gupta Inscriptions"; S.K.Chatteiji in his work "Origin and Development of Bengali Language"; K.M.George in his work "Place Names in South India"; Mulay in his work "Historical Geography & Cultural Ethnography"; S.J.Mangalam in his work "Historical Geography and Toponomy of Andhra Pradesh"; and S.S, Ramachandra Murthy in his work, "A Study of Telugu Place Names"; have adopted different patterns for the convenience of study.

Significance of the Inscriptional Place Names

The science which relates to names in all their aspects is called "onamastics". As it is too broad an area of study, conveniently made divisions are used like "anthroponomastics", the study of personal names and "toponomastics" or "toponomy", the study of geographical names. For the last few decades due importance has been given to the study of toponomy and historical geography as it correlates human societies with their geographical settings. Initially a place-name may sound meaningless and insignificant. Critical study of the prefix and suffix that usually constitute a place-name point out not only why and how the particular place is named , but also reveals the social, economic, religious and geographical conditions that prevailed in that place. Further, the beliefs, superstitions, aesthetic sense of the people and many other aspects of human life are reflected in the place names. Without the study of place names, the subjects like history and linguistics remain partial and incomplete. Some regions have characteristic place name suffixes and prefixes which are similar.

Significance of Personal Names

Personal names are often considered insignificant. They have the least connotation. As the study of the personal names proceeds it is increasingly realized that the names stand for the tangible feelings underlying them. The study of personal names gives an interesting glimpse of

the culture, the political and social organizations, the religion, the various varnas and castes and the mutual relationship among them. It also shows the thoughts and the customs of the inhabitants of the region.

The detailed analysis of the personal names in the inscriptions gives an idea of l)Religious forces prevailing at certain period, 2) The names and their relation to laws on naming; the religion of the people, their caste and profession, 3) The probable origin of certain surnames, 4) Administrative machinery of that period through designation or profession of the persons, 5) Titles assumed by the royal personalities and common man, and, 6) The gotras and Vedic sakhas followed by the donors or donee or their parents. If the names of places and persons occurring in the inscription are studied side by side it will be more exhaustive and comprehensive.

Place names can be grouped into: A) Place names associated with Natural or Physical feature B) Place names associated with cultural elements.

A) Natural or Physical Feature based Place Names

The places bear recognizable associations with physical characteristics of a region and serve as a basic source of information about geographical surroundings. Environmental features such as hills, plains and water bodies affect the distribution of languages and language shapes our perception about the physical environment. The origin of Trans Giri Region itself popped up from the main river Giri that flows into Sirmour district and divide the district into two almost equal portions namely the Trans Giri and Cis Giri. South-west region of the river is called Cis Giri (Giri Aar) and north east region of the river is called Trans Giri (Giri Paar).

1) **Land Features and Place Name**: The feature of land is often signified by a prefix and a suffix in the place name which is shown in the table-2.

Table 2: Land Features with Prefix and Suffix

Feature	Prefix or Suffix
Hill	Giri, Ghat, Gad, Dongar, Dongari
Valley	Khori, Khai, Dari, Dara, Khind
Plateau	Mal, Pal, Pathar.
Soil	Pandhari, Lukanmasala, Lonala, Chopanvadi. Matta, matti

| Rock | Khadake, Khadak, Khadki, Daga, Dwadi, Dhonde, Khadke, Dagad. |
| Marshy Land | Chikhal, Chikhali,Gara |

(Source: According to various Books, Research papers and Journals)

In the study region examples of place names related to land features are Dharoti (place situated on the base of the hill in local language called dhar), Badana, Chitli (place famous for the mining and consequent landscapes mainly in the form of mud flows (gaad in local language) it remains closed in the rainy season. *In local language this mud flow is also called Chikhal/Chikhali and later on converted to chitli*, Rasat (place is named after the closeness of the village with the road locally called *rast)*, Shillai (*shil mean* rock *aai means* following) based on the story of divine rock falling after the herder). Staun (village is named after the stone, because the area is famous for the dumping and crushing of stone.) The Ashyari (place named after the fields), Shilahan (place named after the rock; in local language *shil/shila* means rock) .Place names related to land features are found in the entire study region.

2)   Hydrological feature:

Water plays an important role in the development of any settlement. In study area out of 41 sample villages 2% names of settlements are related to water bodies. Examples of hydrological features are Khala (it's a stream in the village which has now dried up), kiyar (in the local language the word *kyar* is known for the small fields of paddy cultivation), Ronhat and Killor (both are situated near the water bodies and the place name based over it). (Table-3)

Table 3: Hydrological Feature with Prefix and Suffix

Features	Prefix and Suffix
River bank	Ghat,Neda,
Water	Ner, Jal, Jalo
Stream	Khala,Nala
Spring Khad	Khad
Tank	Tal, Talav, Kasar.
Well	Ad, Vihir, Kuwa, Hira, Barav.
Water Pot	Kumbha, Kund, Ranjan,Kalashi
Scanty water	Chashma

Source: According to various books, papers and Journals

3)   **Vegetation Place Names:** Impact of vegetation on Place names is more pronounce than any of the natural factors in the region. Out of the total number of villages in the study region maximum numbers of villages have names related to vegetation. The region contains trees like Chir, deodar, pine, saal, Bel, beol, etc. (Bela is a name based on the name of the religious tree bel that is usually worshipped), the village Barwas is situated near the tree barwas the place name Dimbar is based on the vegetation of Dimbar, Sannohat, and Bambal place names are based on the name of same tree, Saalwala is the name based on the tree of saal that is found in the study area Amboya place name is based on the mango tree which are found in numbers , Jamna name based on the tree of jamun Jamna is the distortion of Jamun.

B) Place names associated with cultural elements

Based on Person: In the study area maximum numbers of place names of the villages are based on the name of prominent persons or famous personalities. For example, Punnar village is based on the person named Punnar who came first to the village. *Nohra Dhar* is based after the person Nohra who came from Jubbal and started living here, Kamrao believed to be is named after the name of *kamru* who was the worshipper of goddess kali residing at the dhar of the village Drabil is named after the two brothers who first came to the place and started living there thus most of the villages are named after the persons of the villages who first settled there.

Place Name based on Deity: Some place names are based on deity. For example *Haripurdhar where Haripur* means place of God, *Mashu* is based on the name of God *Mahasu* which was known as God of justice in the area. *Shiva (shiv)* and *Rudana (Rudra)* villages of Tehsil *Paonta Sahib* are also based on the name of God Shiva. It is believed that in these villages the images of god *Shiva (ling)* emerged in various forms so the villages were named after him. *Deothi – majhgaon* village of *Tehsil Rajgarh* is named after location of the deity temple in the middle of the village, (*'majh'* means between and *Deothi* means temple).

Settlement characteristics related with Place Name: Some villages indicate characteristics of settlements through suffix like pur, garh, dhar etc. These are *Rajgarh (the place was once the ruling kingdom of the king of Sirmour), Haripur dhar sangarah, and chauras are place name based on the chouraha.* Some villages are named after the *community/caste* For example Village

Kanech of Rajgarh tehsil known after Kanet *a community.* Now its pronunciation has been changed as *Kanech*. *Fagu* is also based on the community of the same name people of the village migrated from the Fagu village of district Shimla and named their new village as Fagu.

Miscellaneous: Some place names could not be put under any of the categories identified above. These names are grouped under miscellaneous category such as *Chog – tali, Matal bakhog, Tikkar, Tatiyana, Didag –khanota Manal.*

Results and Analysis: Local language, traditions and social customs in the study area help in studying the origin of villages. They are mostly either associated with physical elements and cultural elements. This etymology of place names gives valuable information about geographical part it may be used to fabricate, elaborate the various aspects of human beings (Table 4).

Table 4: Place Name Feature with Total % of Settlement

Place Name Feature	No.of settlement	% of Total Settlement
Land	7	17.07
Hydrology	6	14.63
Vegetation	8	19.25
Cultural	12	29.26
Miscellaneous	8	19.51
Total	41	100

Source: Computed by the researcher

Above table shows percentage of the Place Name Features in the study area. In the study area 17.07% settlements are named after land feature and 14.63%place names are named after Hydrological features. 19.25% settlements named after vegetational features whereas 29.26 settlements are named after cultural features. More number in cultural features category shows the strong belief of people in the deities and various religious activities (Figure 2).

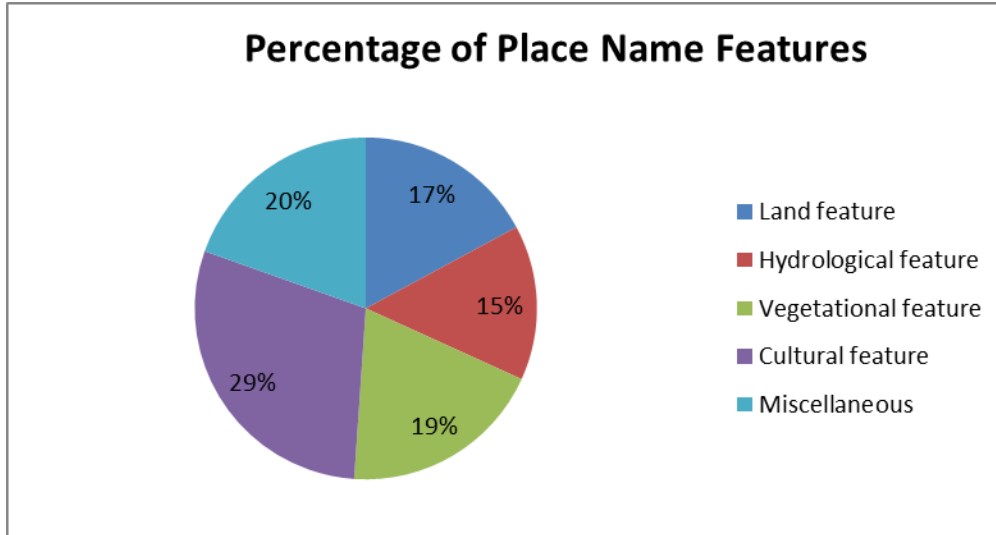## Percentage of Place Name Features

Figure 2: Total Percentage of Place Name feature in the Study Area

Some place names are inherited by the migrated people on their previous village name and some place names are unknown that doesn't keep any meaning are placed in the category of miscellaneous place name. There are only 19.51% settlements that belong to miscellaneous features.

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