

SOCIAL EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT:

Himachal Pradesh And Its Wider Significance

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KIRAN BHATTY
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Chapter One

Development and Democracy in Himachal Pradesh

1.1. Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to understand Himachal Pradesh's development experience in the post-Independence period. Himachal Pradesh (henceforth Himachal for short) is a small state in the northwest of India located almost entirely in the Himalayan region. It has recently begun to attract attention for its outstanding social indicators. In terms of overall human development, Himachal ranked first in the 2000 report of the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), and first in a more recent survey conducted by the magazine *India Today* (2005). The relatively new Education Development Index formulated by National University for Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA, 2007) ranks Himachal Pradesh third on the basis of various parameters related to education provision and achievement. In fact, Himachal has the highest school attendance, and the second highest literacy rates among the younger age groups (7-15 years) of all major Indian states. Indicators pertaining to health facilities, child vaccination, sex ratios, rural poverty, social infrastructure and related matters are also impressive (see Table 1.1 in the next section).¹

The state's broad-based progress accelerated after 1971, when Himachal acquired the status of an independent state. Generous grants from the Central Government to enable backward hill states to join the mainstream of development are regularly cited as the primary explanation for Himachal's success. However, Himachal's success has not been limited to human development alone. It has simultaneously improved its economic performance, with per capita incomes above the national average and poverty levels among the lowest in the country. Thus, its investment in human development has not come at the cost of economic development as suggested by arguments of a trade-off between economic and social development, or growth and equity. In fact, the even spread of human and economic development within a strong democratic structure is a unique

¹ For further indicators refer to International Institute of Population Sciences (2007); NCAER (2003); UNDP (2002).

feature of Himachal's success.

While much of Himachal's success can be attributed to state intervention, the nature and pace of development witnessed here calls for a more comprehensive analysis of possible enabling factors, going beyond the state, to explain its development trajectory. For instance, the relatively equitable nature of development, achieved without a great deal of social unrest, suggests that government initiatives did not encounter the kind of resistance that equity enhancing measures often do in hierarchical societies. This implies that societal factors had an important role to play as well. In particular it suggests that state and society have been marked by a degree of commonality, if not convergence, in their interests.

This dissertation argues that relatively equal social relations found in Himachali society have enabled a collaborative process by which state and society have worked together to strengthen both egalitarian social outcomes and the democratic state. The complementary web of processes and outcomes that has resulted from this positive relationship between state and society has 'made democracy work for development' and is perhaps a more convincing and comprehensive explanation of Himachal's success. Institutions both within society and the democratic state in working towards their common objectives used participatory processes to build a more inclusive form of development and democracy. This has created a sort of 'multiplier' effect which helps explain the unusual success of Himachal in achieving growth with equity and a more substantive form of democracy.

In Himachal, traditional egalitarian relations enabled society to arrive at goals that displayed a fair degree of consensus across a range of developmental issues by averting large disparities in the distribution of power. Correspondingly, state action in Himachal was able to more closely reflect the needs and demands of society, which were not fractured at the margins of class, caste and gender. The democratic state provided the institutions by which these goals and aspirations could be realized. Since societal goals were the "common" goals of society, realizing them resulted in an inclusive form of development that further consolidated social equality and participation. Thus the story of

Himachal is as much about deepening democracy as it is about inclusive development. Indeed one of the main finding of this thesis is that the twin goals of development and democracy are unlikely to be achieved, unless the hierarchical structures of society are challenged and moulded towards greater equality. Himachal was fortunate to have inherited a relatively egalitarian social structure that enabled it to use the democratic institutions of the state to further the goals of development and deepen democracy. In the absence of such a historical societal endowment, the democratic state can nevertheless play a larger and pro-active role in facilitating equitable development. As has been observed in Kerala, re-arranging forces within society through class mobilization pushed the state to adopt an agenda of social restructuring. However unlike Himachal, society in Kerala continues to show divisions along various lines and therefore consensual state action is relatively limited to areas such as education, health and human development.

In Himachal, on the other hand, the widespread nature of convergence between state and society has actually increased the scope of state action. In fact it would be fair to say that Himachal's equitable social structure per se would probably not have achieved the magnitude of success it did, without the intervention of the state. This mutual reinforcement or synergy of social equality and constructive state action can be seen as the defining characteristic of Himachal's development experience. What emerges as one examines this relationship is the development of a "virtuous circle" of state action and social equality building and being reinforced by a model of social development and a more participative democracy.

This chapter gives a broad-brush account of the main arguments in the thesis. These arguments are substantiated in greater detail in subsequent chapters, and placed in the context of relevant literature.

1.2. Human Development in Himachal Pradesh

1.2.1. Rapid Progress in Social Indicators

Despite Himachal being a small state with a mostly rural population tucked away in the mountainous north of India, it has in the last few decades overtaken most other states in

the country to claim a top position in human development. Himachal's performance is remarkable because it started off in 1948 (the year when 30 princely states were amalgamated to form the Himachal region within the state of Punjab) ranking amongst the lowest of all Indian states². With a literacy rate of 19 per cent in the 10-14 age group, little infrastructure, subsistence agriculture, no industry and per capita incomes among the lowest in the country, it had a truly uphill task³. In fact Himachal Pradesh was at the time widely considered to be one of the poorest states in India.⁴ This task was all the more challenging due to three additional features: (i) a rural population comprising 91 per cent of total population, (ii) a higher than average proportion of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)⁵, and (iii) difficult mountainous terrain.

The high incidence of poverty and lack of physical infrastructure and other support services in rural areas has typically made the task of bringing education and health facilities and even infrastructure to these areas especially difficult. In Himachal, the very difficult mountainous terrain made this even more challenging. Another big challenge in the Indian context has been to include Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), economically and socially marginalized for centuries, in the mainstream of development. In most cases, special attention and incentives are required to enable them to access, both financially and socially, development opportunities such as schools.

Thus, on many different counts, Himachal was in a particularly disadvantaged position when it became an independent state in 1971 (see Table 1.1). The National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) characterized Himachal Pradesh as "one of the poorest and backward territories in the Indian Union in early 1960s". Only Bihar, Orissa and Manipur had a per capita income lower than Himachal in the mid-1950s (1955-56).

² Since Himachal Pradesh did not exist as a separate state in 1948, these statistics refer to the districts that were then part of the state of Punjab, but in 1971 formed the independent state of Himachal Pradesh.

³ See PROBE Team (1999); Anon. (2001) and other background papers prepared for the Himachal Human Development Report (2002).

⁴ Referring to 1948 when the princely states were amalgamated into one unit Anon (2001) says: "...this area was decidedly among the poorest, if not the poorest administrative unit of India" (2001:9).

⁵ Scheduled Castes (SC) comprise 25.3 per cent of the state's population and Scheduled Tribes (ST) 4.2 per cent. Eleven of Himachal Pradesh's twelve districts have a higher than national average SC population and three have a higher than national average ST population. National average of SCs is 16.5 per cent and of STs, 8 per cent. (North India, Human Development Report, 2003 NCAER).

Since then it has recorded a steady improvement in its economic status and is now among the top eight states in terms of per capita income. By 2001, its human development record, particularly in education, had improved dramatically as illustrated in Table 1.1. The literacy rate (age 10-14 years) is far ahead of the national average and is today on par with Kerala: 98 and 96 percent respectively for boys and girls. The state's health statistics are also impressive with for instance child mortality rates being only one third the national average. What is remarkable about Himachal's progress is that the positive achievements in human development are not confined to health and education but also extend to less conspicuous domains such as the incidence of violence whether homicide rates or domestic violence or violence against lower castes.⁶ As can be seen from the Table below, Himachal's performance is spread across a wide spectrum of quality of life indicators.

Table 1.1: Social Indicators for Himachal and India

	Himachal Pradesh	India
Total Literacy Rate, 2001	77%	65%
Literacy Rate (age 10-14), 2001		
Male	98%	88%
Female	96%	79%
School Attendance Rate (age 6-17 years), 2005-6	89%	71%
Child Mortality Rate, 2005-6	5.6	18
Children Fully Vaccinated (12-23 months), 2005-6	74%	44%
Total Fertility Rate, 2005-6	1.9	2.7
Sex Ratio (female/male), 2001	970	933
% of households with electricity connection, 2005-6	98%	68%
Homicide Rate, 2004 (murders per million persons)	18	35

Sources: International Institute for Population Sciences (2007); Census of India (2001);

⁶ Himachal has the lowest homicide rate among all major Indian states National Crime Report Bureau (2004) and also the lowest levels of domestic violence (IIPS, 2007).

National Crime Records Bureau (2004).

1.2.2. Egalitarian Development

While these achievements are commendable in themselves, two particularly noteworthy aspects of Himachal's success are less widely known. *First*, its achievements in human development are spread relatively equally across caste and gender. For instance its female literacy rate for the 10-14 years age group is 96 percent, as against the male literacy rate of 98 per cent (Census, 2001). Similarly child mortality rates are among the lowest in the country at 9.3 and 9.0 for girl and boy children respectively.⁷ In terms of caste too, the literacy rate does not show much difference between the Scheduled Castes and the 'Others' (includes all the upper caste categories) at 92 per cent and 94 per cent respectively. This is particularly notable as even in situations of aggregate economic advancement, pockets of relative deprivation are typically found to be concentrated around women, lower castes and other disadvantaged groups. The smaller social disparities in education, health care and other aspects of development in Himachal are an unusual aspect of its success story that merits special attention.

1.2.3 The Role of the State

The *second* unusual feature of Himachal's development is that it builds on a considerable amount of state initiative. The importance of the state's role in education is evident from the level of public expenditure in Himachal Pradesh, which has been consistently higher than the 6 per cent of State Domestic Product (SDP) recommended by the National Commission on Education in 1966 (barring Kerala none of the other states have met this target yet). In addition, government schools in Himachal function far more effectively and with less evidence of corruption and malpractice than they do in other north Indian states (see Chapter 6)⁸. Private schools do not have a large presence in rural areas yet and non-government initiatives in education are relatively few.⁹ In fact, Himachal's 'schooling revolution', has been brought about almost exclusively by the state sector.

⁷ These figures are based on NFHS –II and refer to 1998-99 as present figures based on NFHS –III are yet to be released. For further evidence on health achievements in HP, see IIPS (2007), UNDP (2002). The caste specific literacy figures are also from NFHS-II.

⁸ Himachal's remarkable transition towards universal education has been widely discussed; see e.g. PROBE Team (1999), and further studies cited in Chapter 8.

⁹ Seventh All India Educational Survey, 2002.

While much of Himachal's success in government-provided schooling has been attributed to state spending, it is not budgets alone that have contributed to its so-called 'schooling revolution'. In fact, as we will see in Chapter 6 dedicated to the education sector, it is societal commitment evident in the effective use of funds as well as in the support provided by communities through collaborative efforts that has transformed the schooling system in Himachal. A similar consensus exists in other areas as well allowing the state to play a constructive role in the fields of health care, land reforms and provision of rural infrastructure as well. This feature of Himachal's experience is particularly striking as there is growing scepticism today about the state's role in the provision of public services. It is widely believed that government-provided services in India signify a drain on public funds, as corruption, clientelism and lack of accountability divert resources away from the intended beneficiaries.¹⁰ This may well apply in many Indian states but Himachal has escaped this predicament to a large extent.

1.2.4. Democratic Depth

It might be useful to place the enabling role of the state, discussed above, in the context of the political framework of Himachal. As mentioned earlier, democracy has provided the political context for the developmental state in Himachal. But state action in a democracy need not necessarily reflect people's choices. For instance, in the representative form of democracy that exists in India, it is possible to have a democratically elected government represent majoritarian or sectarian, rather than consensual views. Further these majoritarian or sectarian views could themselves span a whole ideological range, from the 'communist' (as seen in West Bengal) to the 'capitalist' (as seen in Gujarat). Thus we have an elected government in Gujarat symbolized by majoritarianism and neo-liberal economic policies and at the same time an elected communist government in West Bengal with a mandate to follow a left wing economic agenda. In other words, ideological extremes with respect to development strategies can co-exist within representative democracy where state governments (e.g.

¹⁰ To illustrate according to a recent review of India's public services: "The broad picture that emerges from our analysis of the public feedback is that the quality of governance in many Indian states is appalling" (Paul and others, 2004). See also Keefer and Khemani (2004), Banerjee and Somanathan (2001,2005).

Gujarat and West Bengal) have electoral majorities giving them a mandate to make very different policies. But do these states represent deepened democracies?

The short answer is no. They are legitimate democracies where elections are regularly held and they claim to form governments committed to development of the people who voted them to power. But, in real terms, they do not go much beyond that, falling short of the true priorities and choices of the people as a whole. In both cases, violent incidents mark elections including capture of polling booths and intimidation of voters.¹¹ Further, the respective governments have repeatedly used electoral majorities to over-ride minority concerns, often suppressing oppositional voices with brutal force.¹²

Clearly elections are an important feature of a democratic state but not necessarily the defining feature of a mature democracy. It is democratic practice during and more importantly between elections that helps define democratic depth. Democratic practice can best be understood through the nature of peoples' participation in institutions of state and society. What is the level of participation in matters of governance? How much are women, Dalits, religious minorities able to participate in the decision-making and implementation of government programmes? Are minority voices stifled or are they given a chance to express themselves? Do elections merely provide a platform for powerful groups to usurp democratic spaces and influence policy in their favour or is there a vibrant and active opposition? How do the institutions of direct democracy like the Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas function? How democratic is civic action? These issues of participation give democracy its teeth and sustain it even through electoral changes and upheavals. It is suggested in this dissertation that Himachal's record on most of these counts has been fairly good. This is evident, for instance, in the regular and timely elections held without disruptive incidents, the adherence to reservation norms and quotas, the successful implementation of land reforms, public service delivery and transparency in government, and the integrity of institutions of local governance (such as Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas).

¹¹ Jayal (2004).

¹² The communal violence in Gujarat and the violence in Nandigram (West Bengal) are the most recent examples of the blatant use of state power in each of these states.

Hence, while ruling parties have changed at regular intervals, the basic development priorities of the state have not varied sharply and the participatory character of its public institutions has been maintained. This is probably an important reason why elections in Himachal are marked by a lack of violence and minimal allegations of rigging, contrary to many North Indian states where violence, intimidation of Dalits and other marginalized communities and the shrinking of choices to rival factions within dominant caste groups are the hallmarks of electoral politics.

Democratic depth is about eliciting maximum participation in decision-making and goes beyond the vote and electoral politics. As will be seen further on in the thesis, in Himachal people are able to express their opinion on an ongoing basis within formal and informal platforms of government. Active parent teacher associations and their range of discussions, Mahila Mandals (women's groups) and their activities, open and accessible government offices and officials, and functioning Gram Sabhas are some of the features that indicate Himachal is moving towards a form of participatory democracy. In fact, easy and open access to government offices and functionaries is a good indication of a government's propensity to include people as a part of its decision making process. The Gram Sabhas are in theory an advanced form of direct democracy, where the general assembly is made up of all the voters of a Panchayat with an equal voice in its decision making process. There are very few states that have shown success with Gram Sabha functioning, as both the elected political class and the bureaucracy have refused to hand over powers (of decision making) that should lie with the Gram Sabha. In Himachal, this cornering of power by elite minorities has not taken place to the same extent. As a result, Gram Sabhas play an important role deriving their strength from the high level of participation by the people, not just in numbers, but also in their active involvement, in the decision making process.

As will be discussed later, there are important complementarities between the participatory processes witnessed in Himachal and its social achievements. The high level of participation and collaboration seen in Himachal contributes to the virtuous circle

mentioned above and signifies Himachal's progressive shift towards a form of participatory democracy.

1.3. Himachal in Comparative Perspective: Haryana as Counter-point

Himachal's choice of development path and its achievements in following it acquire greater salience if we place them in the context of north India which is notorious for its many developmental failures. To convey this contrast I will make occasional comparisons of Himachal with Haryana - a neighbouring state with high levels of economic growth, but a relatively poor record in the social sector. This comparison also helps to contrast Himachal's experience with the dominant paradigm of development based on economic growth, which was the model followed by Haryana.¹³

The development priorities adopted by Haryana provide a useful counterpoint to Himachal's development goals and the means adopted to reach them. The Himachal-Haryana comparison is also appropriate because the two states share many common features while at the same time differing significantly in several key respects. Both Haryana and Himachal were carved out of the state of Punjab in 1966 and 1971 respectively.¹⁴ They are both small states with relatively high levels of economic development and a well-developed physical infrastructure.¹⁵ However, the two states differ significantly in terms of their social indicators. In most demographic as well as human development indicators Haryana is behind Himachal, in aggregate terms as well as in terms of distribution of outcomes (see Table 1.2 below).

Looking back at the districts of Punjab that later formed the state of Haryana in 1966, one finds that these districts were among the most backward parts of Punjab.¹⁶ They were

¹³ For an introduction to Haryana's development experience see Bhalla (1993).

¹⁴ The reorganisation of Indian states on linguistic lines resulted in the Hindi-speaking Haryana separating from the Punjabi-speaking state in 1966. Himachal, however, had to wait until 1971 to become independent. More details on political history in Chapter 4.

¹⁵ Himachal used to be much poorer than Haryana, but the gap has significantly reduced in recent years, and seems to be relatively small today. For instance, while Himachal's per capita net state domestic product was only around 70 % of Haryana's in 1993-94, ten years later it was more or less the same (GOI, Economic Survey 2004-2005, pp S12).

¹⁶ Haryana districts: Ambala, Karnal, Jind, Rohtak, Gurgaon, Mahendergarh, Hissar. Himachal districts: Bilaspur, Chamba, Hamirpur, Kangra, Kinnaur, Kullu, Lahaul Spiti, Mandi, Shimla, Sirmaur, Solan, Una.

relatively arid, with poor soil and water conditions and a low per capita income. Further, land distribution was skewed in favour of the Jat community and human development indicators were low, particularly of the women and lower castes. Politically the region had been dominated by the 'bhaichara' (or clan) system controlled by large land holding families. Reform movements (in particular the influential Arya Samaj) while critical of Brahmanical domination were highly patriarchal (Datta 1999). Hence in 1966 when Haryana separated from Punjab, it inherited socio-economically an unenviable set of circumstances in many ways different from the rest of Punjab. Himachal Pradesh, for its part, started off in 1971 with an even poorer economy, very minimal industrial base, and limited agricultural possibilities given the terrain and poor human development indicators. However, it had a relatively favourable socio-political order with, for instance, lower economic and social disparities, stronger traditions of cooperative action and less patriarchal gender relations.¹⁷

Since 1971 (and 1966 in the case of Haryana) the two states have followed very different development trajectories. While Himachal Pradesh chose to adopt a development approach based on social development, Haryana followed the economic growth model. As Bhalla (1993) among others has observed, development in Haryana has been primarily income driven:

The Haryana experience suggests that sustained growth in agriculture, plus a deliberate policy of income and occupational diversity is the most effective cure for poverty. Public interventions through centrally sponsored programmes for poverty alleviations have been strictly peripheral to the observed reduction in poverty over the past 25 years.

Himachal Pradesh's outlook on development reflects a very different vision. It is best summed up in the words of Y S Parmar, the first Chief Minister of independent Himachal:

The people of Himachal [now] do not want to introduce a new order of capitalists but are on the contrary, determined to raise the general standard of living and

¹⁷ Details of the institutional arrangements vis-à-vis land rights, influence of ecological factors on the economy and society, traditional systems of local governance, structure of social relations including caste and gender relations, etc., in Himachal and Haryana are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

earning capacity of the people... what is required is an extension of a helping hand in the shape of the development of these areas in the matter particularly of communications, health, education and other development projects. (1965:16-17).

The statistics presented in Table 1.1, reflect the fact that a period of rapid change occurred in Himachal Pradesh, especially in terms of human development, after it became an independent state in 1971. In Haryana too there has been rapid change, but this has been largely confined to the economic sphere, with much less progress in terms of social development. While per capita incomes have grown rapidly transforming Haryana into one of India's richest states, education and health outcomes have lagged behind. For instance, child mortality rates are about twice as high in Haryana as in Himachal, and three times as high in the case of girls.¹⁸ Other social indicators for Haryana are often not very different from the national average and some of them such as violence against women and lower castes are among the worst in India.¹⁹

However, the starkest contrast between the two states relates to distributional matters and social disparities. Himachal has been able to sustain and consolidate its relatively egalitarian society, through land reforms, universalization of elementary education and other basic public services, promotion of backward regions and related interventions. In Haryana, by contrast, there has been little economic redistribution, through land reforms or otherwise. For instance, according to the Third National Family Health Survey (2005-6), more than half of rural households in Haryana are landless compared to less than 20 per cent in Himachal Pradesh. The hold of traditional inequalities, including the caste-class nexus, also remains strong in Haryana. This contrast also emerged in my field survey (discussed in Chapter 7) where I found that the proportion of landless households was more than twice as high in the Haryana sample as in the Himachal sample. Further, there was a high correlation between caste and land ownership in Haryana, while in Himachal land ownership was similar across castes.²⁰

¹⁸ IIPS (2001:194) and the corresponding state specific reports.

¹⁹ IIPS (2007).

²⁰ See also Punia and Sharma (1982)

Table 1.2: Himachal and Haryana Compared

	Himachal	Haryana
Aggregate Indicators		
Literacy Rate, 2001	76.4	67.1
Infant Mortality Rate	3.6	4.2
Total Fertility Rate	1.9	2.7
Gender Specific Indicators		
School Attendance, age 6-17		
Female	88.0	72.0
Male	90.5	78.5
Child Mortality Rates, 1998-99		
Female	9.3	30.2
Male	9.0	13.8
Caste-Specific Indicators		
Literacy Rate, age 7-15		
SC	94	79
Others	95	87
Children Not Immunized		
SC	1.8	14.7
Others	2.7	6.3
Women with Severe Anaemia		
SC	2.0	12.0
Others	2.2	5.0
Total Fertility Rate		
SC	2.15	3.7
Others	2.05	2.5

Sources: IIPS (2007); Census of India (2001). Unless stated otherwise, the reference year is 2005-6.

As Table 1.2 shows, this contrast is reflected in a range of social indicators, particularly in the difference across social groups. For instance, while literacy rates in Himachal are

much the same for Dalits and others (at least in the younger age groups) there is a wide gap between the two groups in Haryana. As a result, not only is a Dalit child in Himachal more or less at par with other Himachali children, and much better off than a Dalit child in Haryana, he or she is also typically much better off than a *non-Dalit* child in Haryana. Similarly, the chance of not being immunized is three times lower for a Dalit child in Himachal (1.8 per cent) than for a non-Dalit child in Haryana (6.3 per cent). The similar contrast is seen in gender disparities: Himachali girls are not only much better off than their counterparts in Haryana, they are also doing much better than Haryana *boys* in many respects. The comparison with Haryana brings Himachal's achievements in sharper focus and points once again to the fact that state intervention can make a crucial difference. The question remains as to why the state played such different roles in the two states - somewhat narrowly geared towards economic growth in one case and more socially encompassing in the other.

1.4. Elements of Interpretation

1.4.1 State Action and Social Equality

One of the main arguments of this thesis is that the distinctive feature of state-society relations in Himachal is a virtuous circle of constructive state intervention and social equality. On the one hand, the social role of the state has been facilitated by relatively egalitarian social relations (partly a historical legacy) and on the other hand, state action itself has played a crucial role in promoting social equality (e.g. through land reforms and universal education).

The claim that egalitarian social relations facilitate the social role of the state is worth elaborating (for further discussion see Chapter 7). This claim relates to the debilitating nature of social inequality in a democratic political system. One important way in which social inequalities undermine the constructive role of the state is by distorting policy priorities, as public policy comes under the influence of powerful interests. In a highly unequal social setting, the institutions through which state action is supposed to operate are vulnerable to being captured by vested interests and elite groups²¹. The contrasting

²¹ Bardhan (1984), Kaviraj (1997).

experience of land reforms in Himachal and Haryana provides a useful illustration. Haryana has a long history of unequal land ownership and harsh struggles over land which, have left their mark in many ways, on social and cultural relations. After independence, strong landowner lobbies blocked land reforms, consolidating this aspect of the economy and society.²² By contrast, the lack of a landed aristocracy in Himachal has made it possible to implement relatively successful land reforms, in turn reinforcing the egalitarian aspects of Himachali society.

A similar process occurred in the field of elementary education (Chapter 8). Universal elementary education has been an overwhelming priority of public policy in Himachal Pradesh from its independence onwards, and state initiative has been the driving force behind the “schooling revolution” that took place there in the last few decades. In the social milieu, relatively devoid of sharp class inequalities, it was possible to promote the notion that schooling is a natural part of every child’s upbringing. The schooling system in Himachal, much more than in most states, is a “common schooling system” which cuts across the barriers of class, caste and gender that have been so destructive elsewhere. Even the fact that elementary education quickly became a major policy priority reflects the relatively democratic nature of the political process in Himachal, where people have a “voice”. Over time, universal elementary education itself helped to preserve – for some time at least – the legacy of a relatively equal society. In all these respects, the situation is radically different in Haryana, where education has not been much of a policy priority and the entire schooling system has become highly fragmented, with privileged children attending private schools while disadvantaged children languish in ramshackle government schools (Aggarwal, 2000).

Some of these issues have been discussed in the literature on equality and development.²³ For instance, the fact that class divisions can undermine the quality and reach of public services; that public priorities can be over influenced by interest groups etc., However, Himachal Pradesh’s experience points to the need for a more comprehensive and

²² For a useful case study of this process see Sethi (1986).

²³ World Development Report (2006), Bowles and Gintis (2000), Calinicos (2000), Sen (1992), Bardhan (1984), Hirschman (1970).

integrated approach to the links between social equality, state action and development. For instance it is clear that the inequalities of caste and gender need to be included in the analysis instead of focusing on class inequality alone. Further, in the Indian context at least, the entire discussion needs to be linked with an understanding of democratic processes, since public priorities and state action are outcomes of these processes.

Social inequality is also a frequent obstacle to informal cooperative action among village communities, which is an important complement of state action in many contexts. These and other links between social equality and state action will be further discussed in Chapter 7.

1.4.2 Social Relations and Cooperative Action

Himachal's experience draws attention to various connections between social equality, state action and democracy that will receive sustained attention in this thesis. In so far as these links have been recognized in the literature, it has been mainly with reference to economic inequality (e.g. how class divisions affect policy priorities, as discussed in the literature on "state capture"). The relatively limited extent of economic disparities in Himachal is indeed an important aspect of the conditions that have facilitated rapid and equitable social development, as will be discussed further on. The comparative development experiences of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, however, highlight the need to also bring inequalities of gender and caste centre-stage.

Among the traditional forms of social control that have undermined democratic practice in India, caste discrimination is one of the most pernicious and persistent. For instance in Haryana dominant caste groups still exercise control over institutions of local governance such as the Gram Panchayats and even to some extent over electoral politics at the state level (e.g. the Chief Minister is almost invariably from the Jat community). Everyday forms of caste discrimination are manifested in numerous ways and Dalits are constantly reminded that they must remain in their place. When they step out of line they expose themselves to the worst brutality. Further, seeking protection from state institutions, such as the police and the courts is often futile as these institutions tend to side with the

dominant castes.

Caste relations are significantly different in Himachal Pradesh and tend to be generally less hierarchical and less oppressive. Caste identities do not overwhelm other identities and leave room for social interaction across caste lines. For instance exchange labour arrangements are practiced across castes. Collective participation across castes is also common on many different occasions such as weddings, funerals, festivals and public functions. Further, universal access to basic public services such as education, health and essential amenities (e.g. water and electricity) helps to create a sense of common citizenship beyond caste. Disadvantaged castes are also more actively involved in institutions of local governance such as Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas (Chapter 6).

The virtuous circle of social equality and state action in Himachal Pradesh applies in particular in the context of caste relations. The absence of sharp caste inequalities has facilitated constructive state action, just as state initiative has played an important role in empowering the disadvantaged castes. This is reflected in the fact that caste disparities in basic social indicators such as school participation, mortality rates and even land ownership have been reduced to remarkably low levels in comparison with most other Indian states (see Table 1.2).

One of the most striking contrasts between Himachal and Haryana concerns gender relations and the role of women in society. As discussed in Chapter 5, gender relations in Himachal Pradesh are very different (specifically less patriarchal) from the north Indian mainstream whether one looks at work force participation rates, marriage practices, domestic violence or participation in public life. Himachali women, for instance, participate actively in economic activity and public life while adult women in Haryana tend to be confined to domestic roles.

The participation of Himachali women in the economy is also an entry point for their active participation in public life, including democratic processes in a wide sense of the term. The participation of women in political life tends to be associated with greater

pressure in terms of demand for improved health care, education and other public services. In patriarchal societies, where there are strict restrictions on women's mobility and visibility, they are unable to step out of their homes and participate in political life. This changes the quality of public action and keeps an important element of voice from the public domain. Himachal appears to be ahead of other states in this regard. This is evident in women's active participation as members of Panchayats and Mahila Mandals and many other associations that enable them to tackle various issues that affect their lives. In Haryana, by contrast, this potential is unexploited as restrictions prevent women from making their presence felt in the public sphere. If Himachal's success is largely about participatory democracy, as was argued earlier, the participation of women is undoubtedly a big part of that story.

1.4.3 The State in Himachal and Haryana

Although India has a federal structure with a very powerful centre and a detailed Constitution which defines the legal framework for the whole country, social relations and the moral legitimacy they carry differ significantly at state levels. These differences affect the policies, institutions, and financial allocations for carrying out the broad agenda of the nation-state as defined in the Constitution. Looking at development policies within this framework of federalism helps to understand Himachal and its neighbouring state Haryana in the context of the national agenda.

The positive role of the state in Himachal, whether seen in isolation or in comparative perspective, indicates the need to analyse the state more closely. At a formal level, institutions of the state, such as the bureaucracy, judiciary, electoral system, etc., are similar in Himachal and Haryana. In both states the basic structure and mandate of these institutions derive from the Indian Constitution (including the Directive Principles of State Policy). And yet these institutions and principles have operated in very different ways and with very different outcomes. For example, the system of three tiered Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI), which is supposed to provide the foundation of participatory governance, is essentially the same in Himachal and Haryana. However, as will be seen in later chapters, the substantive functioning of these institutions is radically

different: they are far more active and participatory in Himachal than in Haryana. Similarly, the functioning of other institutions of the state, such as the bureaucracy, is also vastly different in the two states – it is not just more efficient in Himachal than in Haryana, there is also a ‘culture of transparency’ in the former which goes beyond the formal structures of the state machinery (more on this in Chapter 7).

The fate of the Directive Principles in the construction of policies by the two states also points to factors that extend beyond legal mandates of state action. These principles, which were introduced in the Constitution to provide safeguards, especially against increasing inequalities, have been treated very differently by both states. In the words of Ambedkar, member of the Constituent Assembly and principal author of the Directive Principles:

...the Directive Principles have a great value, for they lay down that our ideal is economic democracy... [Our] object in framing the Constitution is really twofold; (1) to lay down the form of political democracy and (2) to lay down that our ideal is economic democracy and also to prescribe that every government...shall strive to bring economic democracy.

While the first objective (that of political democracy) has been achieved by both states, the second objective has been by and large ignored in Haryana. Unfortunately, being non-justiciable, the Directive Principles, were easy to neglect in a society and polity where resources – both material and of power – were quickly usurped by influential groups who did not stand to gain from economic and social equality (or democracy of the kind Ambedkar envisaged). This is borne out in the case of Haryana, where the policies adopted by the state in pursuit of economic development, paid scant regard to “economic democracy” (equality). In Himachal, however, where the social relations are more inclusive and the political process more participatory, far greater importance was given to the spirit of the Directive Principles as seen by the social policies adopted by the state.

1.5. The Invisible Hand of Social Equality

An important contribution of this thesis is to use the Himachal story to emphasize the critical role of social equality in the development process. The critical importance of social equality, it is argued, relates not just to interaction between citizens but also

between the state and its citizens. The latter enables social demands to be represented as state objectives, but also allows state action to further the goals of development. Therefore a careful look at elements of social equality in terms of caste and gender has been a particular endeavour of this thesis.

In addition, the thesis attempts to locate development within the larger politics of democratic participation, arguing that development is as much a process of social change geared towards greater participation (democracy) of subordinate groups, as it is a process of securing specific development outcomes (health, education, incomes) to them. Participation of subordinate groups in democratic decision-making processes allows their concerns to be adequately represented and allows the state to use democratic processes to achieve social goals. In this way, not only is it possible to sustain the gains of development, it is also possible to tackle the dilemma of “dual transitions” (i.e., deepening democracy while improving development) that many developing countries find themselves in. An examination of state (Panchayati Raj Institutions, District and Block offices) and non-state institutions (Mahila Mandals, system of exchange labour etc.,) particularly their participatory character, has contributed to bringing to life the democratic culture that exists in Himachal. Along with secondary information on the procedural aspects of democracy, such as “regular and fair” elections, a picture of substantive democracy emerges.

Arriving at this understanding has been a long personal journey through Himachal’s history of social relations especially gender and caste, the nature of civic cooperation, the nature of the state and its interaction with society, the manifestations of state-society synergy in the education sector, land relations, other forms of civic action and related matters, documented during field visits and substantiated by secondary data. Through this process, a more nuanced understanding of Himachal’s economic, social, and human development has emerged. Initially I was struck, as many others have been, by the remarkable progress made in schooling. However, as I discovered during my research there were a range of other significant successes in Himachal’s development. It was not just the education sector that had shot to prominence but health, infrastructure, political

participation, gender relations, per capita incomes all reflected stories of success. This called for a more fundamental look at Himachal – one that went beyond the sectors of education or health – and examined the processes that made these sectors perform better in Himachal than they did elsewhere, especially in other North Indian states.

The almost puzzling model of development that Himachal presented began to fall into place as I tried to link the culture of democracy so evident in all spheres in Himachal with its distinctive state-society relations. It gradually became evident that democratic practices within societal and state structures provided the means by which state and society could and did collaborate to achieve their common goals. It also helped explain the success that Himachal has had with channelizing civic action into building social institutions (like the Mahila Mandals – women’s associations) that have provided a means of expressing and scaling up the demands of society. Himachal’s experience thus enriches the theoretical debates around development by drawing attention to the democratic processes, facilitated by social equality, that have enabled state and society to align their goals and collaborate towards their achievement. In other words I have argued that for mutually empowering state-society relations to be developed and sustained, social equality is both an end and a means. I am further suggesting that mutually empowering interactions between state and society are indicative of ‘substantive’ democracy. In other words, social equality is the invisible hand that makes democracy work for development.

1.6. Outline of the Thesis

The outline of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 links the main arguments of the thesis with the theoretical discourse of state-society relations. In particular it highlights theories of state-society interaction that emphasize collaboration between the two spheres as they provide the appropriate framework for analyzing Himachal’s success. The importance of social equality to collaborative state-society relations as well as to democratic participation is also explored in this chapter, as substantive democracy provides the political context within which Himachal’s development has taken place. The similarities and differences with Kerala’s experience, which also followed a model of state-led development in a democratic context, are touched upon. The chapter ends with a

discussion of the nature of the enquiry presented in the thesis.

My field survey in the districts of Kullu in Himachal and Faridabad in Haryana is the focus of Chapter 3. After discussing the case study method, the survey areas are introduced. The chapter also lays out the research design and shares some field experiences.

Community action is the theme of Chapter 4. Starting with a discussion of the historical basis of social equality in Himachal, it goes on to document various forms of community action in the past and in the present. It ends with a comparison with Haryana where the structure of social relations has had a very different history, leading to a highly hierarchical society with little scope for community action.

Chapters 5 and 6 unpack social equality in Himachal, especially as it relates to gender and caste. In Chapter 5, gender relations in Himachal and Haryana are analysed with special reference to the role of gender equality in facilitating women's agency in Himachal and its corresponding absence in Haryana. Chapter 6 takes a look at caste relations in Himachal, highlighting the dichotomy between the public and the private face of caste. While caste barriers continue to exist fairly stringently in Himachal, especially with respect to inter-dining and inter-marriage, in the public domain village identity appears to be a stronger force allowing for various forms of cooperation across castes. In Haryana, caste is shown to be much more pervasive, affecting public spaces and interactions as well.

Chapter 7 takes a closer look at state intervention in Himachal, highlighting the links between state action and social equality. Constructive state-society relations and their impact on public policy, particularly the implementation of the government's social development agenda, is the subject of this chapter. State action in relation to land reforms and provision of public services are analysed in greater detail as manifestations of the social orientation of the state in Himachal.

Chapter 8 focuses on schooling in Himachal as a particularly striking illustration of state-society collaboration for inclusive social development.

The final chapter summarizes some of the main findings of the dissertation and briefly discusses the sustainability of the Himachal model of development.

Throughout this thesis frequent reference is made to the contrast between Himachal and Haryana, introduced in this chapter. Needless to say they also have much in common. In particular conflict is not absent from Himachali society and nor are patriarchy or caste inequality. Nevertheless when they are seen in comparative perspective, social relations are evidently very different in Himachal than in Haryana. For instance, if one were to look at gender related indicators in Himachal in isolation, it would be easy to highlight wide ranging inequalities relating for instance to female-male ratio, property rights, work force participation and even education levels. It is when the same indicators are compared with other Indian states that the relatively equal nature of gender relations in Himachal emerges. Similarly while democracy in Himachal is not without its problems its relatively participatory character does stand out when it is compared with the corresponding situation in Haryana. This comparative perspective is an important aspect of the approach used in this thesis. Correspondingly the relative nature of Himachal's achievements has to be borne in mind.

Chapter Two

Theoretical and Methodological Issues

2.1 Introduction : Social Development and State-Society Relations

When I began my research, much of the existing discourse on Himachal related its success to ‘special’ features of the state, such as liberal financial assistance from the Centre, its small size, relatively cohesive village communities, and a high level of public sector employment.²⁴ While these explanations suggest a role of the state (financial transfers and public sector employment) and a role of society (cohesive village communities), they only skim the surface and fail to provide a deeper understanding of processes and their relation to outcomes. In particular they still leave a range of questions unanswered: Why did Himachal choose to give priority to human development as opposed to focussing primarily on economic development as most states in similar situations were doing? Why did it use its central assistance to fund the social sector? Why is public service delivery so much better in Himachal? What role did the so-called cohesive communities play in the success story?

Further, Himachal’s success is hard to explain without a look at the processes of democracy and participation, which have characterised both state and society and influenced the interaction between the two. While these processes have not been considered an ‘objective’, per se, they have facilitated higher levels of development than would otherwise have been possible. It is therefore important to understand what makes for high levels of participation and democracy in state and society in Himachal. This thesis endeavours to interpret the development and democratic achievements of Himachal by placing social equality in terms of class, caste and gender at the centre of the analysis. It argues that social equality has enabled greater participation within society allowing it to use the institutions of democracy within the state to further the goals of development. This chapter places this analysis in the context of recent theoretical debates on state-society relations, and discusses some methodological aspects of the study.

²⁴ See e.g. Sannan (2004).

2.2. Changing Perspectives of the State

The questions raised above point to the need to look beyond the formal-legal structures of the state and to place them in the context of society. They point to a need to look at states, not in abstraction from social forces but in terms of the interactions between state and society. Earlier analyses of the state tended to invest a lot of power in the state derived largely from its control over institutions of authority. In its ‘contract’ with society the state was seen as playing the role of impartial arbiter as it closely followed the rules of administration and governance. However, as observed by Chandhoke (1995): “A statist perspective...which focuses on the state in abstraction from [civil] society is simply inadequate... does not allow for understanding of the complex interplay of state-society relations since it neglects to see how states constitute, as well as are constituted, by political agendas drawn up in civil society...Indeed, the statist perspective offers us states without societies....”.

Political agendas drawn up in society have been the focus of the Marxist perspectives where the state is seen as part of a nexus between political and economic interests. For the Marxists, the state is caught in a “dialectical” relation with society where powerful interest groups, largely on the basis of economic power, are able to influence the political agenda of the state preventing the state from being impartial or “autonomous”. While neo-Marxists (Poulantzas, 1976) diversified the range of debates associated with the capitalist state, including a wide range of socio-economic interventions, they nevertheless remained tied to the idea that the state functions to meet the needs of the dominant economic class.

These theories that challenged the Weberian paradigm of state autonomy based on the idea that the state is primarily true to its organizational structures and institutions, led to the hardening of positions around state-centric and society-centric paradigms which dominated the discourse for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. On the one hand the state was conceptualized in terms of its formal institutions, rules and procedures meant to regulate society and give it coherence, unity and order, and to which end it had a monopoly on force and coercion. And on the other hand society was seen as playing the

role of providing checks on the state and protecting elements of society from its excesses. As such state and society were seen as locked in a zero-sum game, where strengths and capacities of one ran counter to the strengths and capacities of the other. If one gained the other lost. While different theorists drew the actual boundaries between state and society differently, the common thread that ran through them visualised the two spheres as distinct and often in opposition to each other.

These theories have since been re-visited by the work of neo-statists (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol, 1985) who have tried to steer clear of “grand theories”, even as they reclaim the autonomy of the state, by asserting that the state is not a mere register of social forces but a “social actor” with institutional structures capable of influencing the culture of political discourse and public action. While not relying solely on Weberian typologies of bureaucracies, they posit that states, like social structures, have a history of interaction with societal forces, nationally and trans-nationally, that shape their modes of functioning and their pursuit of economic and social policies, which in turn affect the larger political agendas drawn up in society. An important contribution of their work is that it draws attention to the fact that in analyzing states, and state–society relations, history matters. They have thus tried to break out of theoretical absolutes – applicable to all states and societies at all points in time - embodied in earlier analyses and recommend comparisons of states across time and space as a more valuable method of understanding the functioning of states and their relationship with society.

Post 1947 comparison of India and Pakistan is a case in point. In an important and interesting piece on Pakistan, Alavi (1972) claims that having to manage the interests of more than one set of powerful lobbies within society in effect allows the state to be, at least seemingly, impartial to all.²⁵ In reality it may choose to favour one set or the other at different moments in time. But this ‘discretion’ born out of the need for self-preservation is embodied in the state and ultimately gives it autonomy from the sum total of social forces. In India on the other hand, despite the development rhetoric of the state its ability

²⁵ In Pakistan it is the military, the bureaucracy and the economic oligarchies, all of whom have to be “appeased”.

to stay autonomous to the needs of the marginalized sections of society has allowed it to further its agenda of capitalist development (Jayal, 2001). While the military does not play a significant role in India, economic interests and according to some (Bardhan, 1984) bureaucratic interests have consistently dominated state policy. In other words variations in the alignment of social forces have a corresponding influence on state decisions.

The comparison of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, as we will see in this thesis, provides further evidence of the inter-relatedness of state and society. In the case of Himachal and Haryana, both with similar organizational structures and similar Constitutional imperatives (Directive Principles included), and at similar points in time, followed different policy discourses, processes and influences resulting in different development trajectories.

What accounts for these differences? An important objective of this thesis is to understand the reasons why Himachal and Haryana differed so crucially in their processes and outcomes. As indicated in Chapter 1, this thesis will focus on the structure of social relations and the interaction of state with society as an important explanation for the success (or failure) of the states in question. The nature of this interaction, it is claimed, affects the policies, institutions, administrative and financial priorities of the states.

2.2.1 Collaborative State-Society Approaches and the Relevance of Mutuality

While the theories discussed above provide useful insights to foreground the discussion on Himachal and Haryana, they are constrained by being somewhat narrowly focussed on issues of power and domination between state and society. In contrast, the late 1990s saw a more nuanced framework emerge in state-society approaches which provide a closer 'fit' to the situation in Himachal. These approaches, instead of treating states and societies as two distinct spheres, with separate sources of power and dominance (or autonomy, capacity, strength), focus on interaction, interdependence, mutuality, and

synergy between states and societies.²⁶ Common to all of these approaches is the idea that boundaries between the state and society are porous and flexible; that capacities and strengths within state and society are mutually constituted by interaction with each other. Prominent in this theoretical discourse are the works of Migdal et al., (1994) and Evans et al., (1996), which mark a watershed in scholarship on the state by drawing attention to the possibility not only of “blurred boundaries” between state and society but also of cooperation between the two spheres. While Migdal, Shue and Kohli (1994) in their seminal work, *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, lay out what they call the “state-in-society” approach, based on a modification of the idea of state and society being in a “zero-sum” game of power, Evans et al., have focused on “state-society synergy” where complementarity and “embeddedness” in government and community efforts “enhance each other’s developmental efforts” (Evans,1996). Both these perspectives move beyond the traditional framework of strict dichotomy and conflict between state and society and recognize that spaces for mutual interaction and synergy exist between the two. Evans in particular relies on strong empirical evidence from developing countries (India, Taiwan, Mexico, Brazil, Nigeria) to demonstrate the possibilities of state and society working together for a common purpose. Each of these case studies highlights a different ‘version’ of state-society synergy – whether it be a “welfare pact” between state and society (India, Heller, 1996); or “co-production” (Nigeria, Ostrom, 1996); “scaling up” community efforts to state levels (Taiwan, Liam, 1996) or government-community partnership (Brazil, Tendler, 1997), they all focus on constructive linkages between state and society.

Another strand of research that highlights state society interaction has grown up around ethnographic studies of the state that look not so much at the distinction between state and society but at the linkages formed in the daily interactions of people with the state Fuller and Benei,(2000). This blurring of boundaries between the state and society brings to the fore ways in which people negotiate and construct the state in the “lived realities” of their daily lives. This literature criticises the earlier approaches as proving inadequate in dealing with the realities of several third world countries, where the state is represented

²⁶ Evans (1996), Tendlar (1995), Fox (1996), Osella and Osella (2000), Jayal (2001), Hansen (2001).

at micro/local levels in its day-to-day interactions with the people. Therefore they stress the importance of not following ‘unitary’ descriptions of the state but allowing for a more discursive analysis that takes into account the various ways in which the state is ‘constructed’ by people as they confront it in their daily life (as well as in their imagination, part history, part media-induced) (Akhil Gupta,1995).²⁷ This is especially important for understanding the role of the state in development, as the whole project of development unfolds at the local level with the state being the main executor. The state in everyday life is probably the relevant space in which to analyse and re-claim the state in terms of its developmental role. Some of the field level evidence in this dissertation lends credence to this view.

Migdal’s analysis makes a departure from conventional thinking in recognizing that under *certain circumstances* the state and social forces may be ‘mutually empowering’, creating more power for both.²⁸ While at some points states may be more effective in getting their objectives met, and at others societies may be more effective, there are still other points, *where the goals of the two coincide*, that could result in ‘mutual empowerment’ for both. While the struggle for power and domination continues, the fact that state and society are in a dialogic relationship implies that the outcome of the struggle or engagement with each other is not necessarily pre-determined in favour of one or the other. It depends on a number of different factors, including the number and kinds of spaces available to both for engagement. In this process the possibility of mutual benefit or greater power to both is recognized as one of the outcomes, as opposed to earlier approaches where power tended to be vested disproportionately in either the state or society. It is important to note that by allowing for a positive sum notion of power between state and society, Migdal’s analysis seeks to provide a balance by acknowledging that under certain conditions, neither state nor society need dominate.

Evans, et al., , also theorize a positive state-society relationship moving even further away from the standard terminology of power and domination by analyzing the state in

²⁷ “ States have history...we must think historically about them” (Doornbos and Kaviraj 1997: intro).

²⁸ For a review of notions of power in political sociology see Xu Wang (1999).

terms of its effectiveness in meeting development goals. On the basis of their empirical work these scholars argue that developing countries typically embody situations where the state or non-state actors (community or private) on their own cannot bring about desired outcomes but in collaboration with each other they can achieve more effective and sustainable results. The most obvious instance of this collaboration is the “complementarity” role played by the state through the provision of law and order, infrastructural facilities etc., which provide an enabling environment for other goals to be pursued. But their idea of “synergy” goes beyond complementarity in state-society collaboration. It highlights the “embeddedness” of state in society, found on the contours of day to day interaction between state and society, and in the networks that enable interdependence and reciprocity between them.²⁹ In a sense it refers, albeit obliquely, to social capital between state and societal actors, except that it extends the understanding of social capital by including the state as a possible partner in the network of social relations. Standard social capital literature, Putnam in particular, tends to take a fairly anti-state view, keeping the state completely out of the purview of social networks. Evans not only includes the state in synergistic networks, he goes even further by suggesting that the state can play a positive role in constructing social capital in society, by facilitating the formation of associations, and hence create an important condition for synergy between state and society. However the focus of the case studies on synergy is on “translating social ties from engines of parochial loyalties into vehicles for more encompassing forms of organization” (Evans, 1996). The case of Kerala discussed by Heller makes the point forcefully as he argues that in Kerala traditional caste and community ties could not have produced development results had they not been linked to what Evans calls a “universalistic set of identities’. The scaling up of community level concerns to a larger set of goals adopted by the state is thus recognized as crucial to the construction of synergy. It mirrors Migdal’s focus on mutuality of goals between state and society.

2.2.2 Social Inequalities – Challenge to Collaboration

²⁹ This idea has been developed further by CJ Fuller and Veronique Benei (2000) in their joint book, “The Everyday State and Society in Modern India” a collection of essays on the interaction between the state and people in different states of India.

While the state-society literature has moved the discourse out of the dichotomous zero-sum framework of analysis, an important limitation with this interpretation is that it treats as ‘outliers’ situations of sharp social divisions and hierarchies. It is obvious that the presence of sectional interests in society can derail the process of collaboration. Cooperation between state and society as well as between elements of society can be severely hampered by the presence of disparities in the social fabric. Evans, in particular, cites social inequalities as one of the main impediments to building collaborative relations between state and society. In fact he states quite categorically that “basic hard-to-change features of the social structure, like the degree of inequality, may put synergy out of reach for certain societies” (:1124). This follows logically from Migdal’s focus on mutuality as well since goals are unlikely to be “common” across highly differentiated groups. In fact homogeneity of interests across public and social (or private) actors is a running theme in the literature on state-society interaction just as it is in the literature on social capital with regard to members of associations (Putnam,1993). It is not surprising then that the ‘constructability’ of synergy discussed by Evans breaks down at the margins of sharp social divisions. But this presents a theoretical impasse for much of the developing world and India in particular, which is marked by hierarchies at multiple levels. Are positive state-society relations therefore beyond the reach of highly differentiated and hierarchical societies?

Heller’s (2001) study of Kerala throws some light on this question by highlighting the role of political mobilization around mass interests as a possible strategy for overcoming the class divide. In Kerala the closing of the gap between the organized and the informal sector in industry added to the egalitarian social relations created in agriculture post land-reforms. This provided the basis for generalized mobilization and the construction of a common agenda for the state which the interests of the elite could not override. Thus class mobilization allowed for a leveling of social forces that enabled Kerala to pursue the objectives of broad based development through constructive state-society interaction. Himachal, on the other hand was historically endowed with a more favourable set of social relations. Mass mobilization of the sort seen in Kerala was thus not required to create the conditions for society to present a cohesive force in its interaction with the

state in order to achieve its goals. The spaces within society which were marked with a high degree of participation born out of the relatively egalitarian nature of society sought corresponding spaces within the state in order to facilitate a collaborative interaction. The democratic institutions of the state provided that space and created the conditions for synergistic state-society relations and their up-scaling to positive development ends.

Two useful implications of state-society theories discussed above (Migdal and Evans) are particularly worth mentioning: First, these approaches recognize the collective aspects of power, as opposed to just its distributional aspects, suggesting that cooperation can enhance joint power to achieve common goals. State and society can collaborate against a ‘common enemy’ of say, poverty and social injustice, just as elements within society can cooperate to fight against it or elements within the state can avow commitment to it. This implies, among other things, that the state *need not* weaken when society is empowered, and vice versa as suggested by the earlier approaches. Second, these theories suggest that the development of capacities within society can provide a mechanism to link social demands to state power and help the state to define and realize its goals and promote larger social purposes (Xu Wang, 1999). Both these find resonance in the Himachal experience, as will we see further on in the thesis.

2.2.3 Dilemma of “Dual Transitions”

For progress to be both rapid and widespread, it is necessary to arrive at a stage where the goals of state and society are aligned. In transition economies pursuing the twin goals of economic development and democratization simultaneously, it is often found that either the states become strong and repressive or special interest groups in society interfere in the implementation of long term development goals. (Migdal, 1988) Typically, conflict in such situations reflects attempts by the weaker elements in society to enforce the rhetoric of the state as well as to mould policy institutions and financial allocations to reflect their priorities. It is not surprising therefore, that evidence from around the world, for instance, Brazil and India (Kerala), suggests that successful projects of democracy and development are closely linked to the adoption of a development paradigm that directly challenges structural inequalities.

Himachal Pradesh also provides interesting pointers to tackling the so-called ‘dilemma of dual transitions’ – that of economic development along with democratic deepening - by highlighting the conditions under which the goals of society and state can both be met. In Himachal the dual transition worked because relative social equality meant these interests were not divided and state and society were able to collaborate towards common goals. Spaces and capacities within society, sometimes developed with state support, such as Mahila Mandals or Village Education Committees, provided a further link to state power sustaining the collaborative efforts.

Despite a spate of empirical studies (including the ones cited in section 2.2.1 above) that have highlighted the importance of inequalities, the current discourse fails to provide a more thorough understanding of the role of social inequalities in structuring state-society relationships and their link to outcomes of development and democracy³⁰. It is in providing evidence of these links that the Himachal case is particularly instructive. Drawing attention to the importance of social equality through the illustration of the Himachal story is thus the main contribution of this thesis.

2.3. Development and Democracy

It is clear from the discussion above that state-society relations have to be seen in the context of democratic processes and how they have shaped public priorities and state action. It will be argued in this thesis that the relatively social orientation of public policy and state action in Himachal reflects people’s active and informed participation in democratic institutions of both state and society. In that sense Himachal’s experience can be seen as a reflection of “participatory democracy”. Indications of the participatory character of democracy in Himachal Pradesh include functional institutions of local governance (eg: Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas), lively associational life (e.g. PTA, Mahila Mandals) and active use of available democratic spaces by the public at large.

The relatively egalitarian character of social relations in Himachal has been conducive to

³⁰ For recent theoretical work on the role of social divisions, especially in terms of impact on provision of public goods and services, see Banerjee and Somanathan (2001) and Banerjee, Iyer and Somanathan (2005)

community action and fostered a rich associational life (see Chapter 4). For instance, Mahila Mandals (women's groups) and Yuva Mandals (youth groups) are comparatively active; programmes of Joint Forest Management (JFM) have achieved significant results; and institutions such as Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Village Education Committees (VECs) are functional. In addition, informal systems of reciprocity still exist, binding communities and creating the grounds for cooperation at broader levels. Examples include traditional systems of exchange labour, collaboration to build a school or repair an irrigation channel, mutual help at weddings or funerals, and other forms of daily social interactions within the village.³¹ Such interaction or active associational life is starkly missing in Haryana. Deep-seated inequalities have divided village communities spatially as well as socially, making it very difficult for collaboration to take place. Hence, Mahila Mandals have stopped functioning, PTAs and VECs rarely exist, and reciprocity is limited to people of the same caste.

Institutions of governance under the Panchayati Raj system are also active in Himachal. Gram Sabhas are routinely held on appointed dates and well attended; panchayat elections are held regularly in strict accordance with the rules of affirmative action; women and Dalits elected to the Panchayat are allowed to play their roles without being marginalized; and relatively easier access to higher levels of government makes it possible for local issues to be represented in public policy. Hence, people's participation in democratic institutions has ensured that the state is responsive to their needs, and state action, in turn, has empowered people to exercise their democratic rights.

2.3.1 Substantive Democracy and Social Development

The foregoing discussion, where substantive democracy is also fostered along with social development, based on equality and participation, provides a more "political reading" of Himachal's experience. There is no doubt that the political conception of development is a more complicated issue simply because what is meant by political is itself imbued with several meanings. Nevertheless, any public matter reflects some sort of politics, and in

³¹ For interesting examples in Himachal Pradesh as well as neighbouring Himalayan districts, see Rinki Sarkar (2007), Jayal (1999), Chetan Singh (1998), Ram Guha (1989).

India this would mean democratic politics. Substantive democracy is the form that democratic politics have taken in Himachal.

Meanwhile, where the role of politics has been acknowledged, it has been mostly in the form of the influence of political parties on development outcomes (more in Chapter 7). Kohli (1991) and Harriss (2000) stress the need to include the lower castes in the political process and hence give them a voice. While this is no doubt a laudable objective, such alliances, being notoriously fickle, are not sustainable in the long term and could result in sharp reverses in policy and outcomes. Besides, the root of the problem, which is entrenched social inequality, is not systematically attacked even in grand alliances at the level of political parties. The focus on institutions, such as political parties, runs the danger of losing sight of the conceptual issues, and when the concepts themselves are contested, one can end up being twice removed from the outcomes one is seeking. Therefore, instead of focusing on political institutions such as parties it may be more useful to recast the ‘political’ in terms of the ‘public’, as the site or space of citizenship, of deliberation and consensus building among citizens on issues of common developmental concern. It includes all spaces of public discussion and public action.

In the present context Himachal provides an excellent example of the importance of the “public” in development. What emerges in Himachal is a firmly entrenched healthy respect for the public space to which all sections of population feel they have a claim. No group is easily able to lay a dominant claim on the public space, whether it is the school, the panchayat, the Mahila Mandal, the district administration, the politician, or even the common physical space. Hence, gender and caste discriminations in schools are much less than elsewhere. If there is a violation, such as discrimination in schools, it is taken up by the whole community as happened in one of my sample villages. Panchayat elections have always been held on time and without disruptions (Sud, 2000). Reservations for lower caste and women are strictly adhered to in spite of private prejudices. Mahila Mandals (and other associations) function better than in other states. Discrimination against lower caste women within these associations, where it exists, has resulted in the latter forming their own Mahila Mandals, thus appropriating for themselves, a section of

the public space that was being denied them within the other Mandal. Physical space is largely gender neutral and crime rates are low. In all these respects the contrast with Haryana is striking. Here the space is distinctly male and crime rates are much higher (more in Chapter 5); social accessibility of government at all levels for all sections of the population is very low (details in Chapter 7) and collective/public associations are wholly lacking.

What is particularly noteworthy is that the idea of the ‘public’ in Himachal encompasses the state. Hence there is a high level of engagement and expectation from the state in terms of its development role. There is space for expressing dissent but also for exerting pressure on the state to perform. Since the “public” is not fractured along economic or social lines, people have a “voice” which is heard and which has generated, what Walton and Rao (2004) evocatively call, the “capacity to aspire”.

In Haryana, on the other hand, inequalities have resulted in the elite section of the population opting out of state institutions, in favour of private options, thereby removing an effective element of ‘voice’ from the system. As a result the not-so-elite sections of the population who are forced to rely on public provision find themselves trapped in a system they are unable to influence. They sorely lack the “capacity to aspire”.

This interpretation of Himachal Pradesh’s experience bears some similarity with Patrick Heller’s interpretation of Kerala. It builds on the distinction between formal or procedural democracy on the one hand, and “effective” or substantive democracy on the other. A distinction of this kind has been made by various authors in India from B.R. Ambedkar onwards.³² I will, however, focus on Heller’s work as it mirrors most closely the Himachal experience. There are important differences with Kerala, that will become clear as we move along, but the core of the analytical frame is similar in both cases.

2.3.2 Similarities with Kerala

³² See Mehta (2003), Jayal (2001), Varshney (1995, 1996), Kothari (1988, 1995), Kohli (1987, 1990). For related discussion from other parts of the world, see: Huber et al (1999), Kurt Weyland (1996), Adam Przeworski (1995), O’Donnell (1993), Barrington Moore (1966).

The crux of Heller's argument is that most Indian states have failed to make the transition from procedural to effective democracy because,

...the exercise of citizenship rights, even in the limited political sense of the term, is circumscribed by the persistence of traditional forms of social control. With more than half of India's rural households depending on landlords for access to land or labour, clientelistic ties, remain key to the survival strategies of subordinate groups. With its ritualized exclusions and deeply ingrained hierarchical relations, the caste system has inscribed these material inequalities with a degree of social and cultural control that has few parallels...This failure of Indian democracy to give effective voice to substantive demands has locked in a **vicious cycle** (bold added) that is eroding the very legitimacy of democratic governance. (2000:493).

Heller contrasts this state of affairs (which comes close to a description of the situation in Haryana) with Kerala's relative success in achieving the transition to effective democracy. In Kerala, which he claims stands apart from all other Indian states, democracy

has produced significant and measurable substantive outcomes, most notably important redistributive reforms and the expansion of the welfare state. These substantive outcomes are the result of the inclusionary and encompassing character of democratic life, but they have also helped reinforce the effectiveness of state authority and levels of political participation (2000:497).

For Heller, the health of a democracy is measured not just by the formal character of its institutions but also by the qualitative *nature of the relationships between state and society as well as between its citizens*. Effective democracy, as he defines it, is one "... in which democratic processes have spread throughout society governing not only relations between states and citizens but also public relations between citizens".

Further, in searching for the roots of this contrast between democracy in Kerala and "in the rest of India", Heller focuses mainly on class mobilization. It is through class mobilization, he argues, that traditional inequalities and modes of social control have been overcome, enabling subordinate groups to participate in democracy. "To a much greater degree than in any other Indian state, Kerala's political history has been shaped by open and organized class conflict."

2.3.3 Differences with Kerala

Like Kerala, Himachal can be seen as a case where effective democracy has led to “significant and measurable substantive outcomes”, as seen in its remarkable social indicators. The difference between the two states relates to the manner in which effective democracy has been achieved. In Kerala, social movements (and particularly organized class action) have countered traditional inequalities, empowered citizens to participate in democratic processes, and enabled state action for consolidation of social equality and participatory democracy. In Himachal, on the other hand, effective democracy builds on a history of relatively egalitarian social relations. This has given democratic institutions a relatively participatory character, from the beginning of the state’s independent political history (in 1971). It has not just allowed democratic institutions of the state to function more effectively it has also enabled other spaces within society as well as on the edges of state-society interaction to be used more constructively. This has influenced the political culture and policy discourse in the state making it far more democratic in many respects.

However, the Himachal situation indicates that it is not class politics that is the dominant determining factor, as was the case in Kerala, but a set of more egalitarian relationships, across class, caste and gender that helped strengthen participatory processes within society and laid the foundations for substantive democracy. The politics in Himachal is thus defined by the consensual nature of these social relationships that have fostered a more substantive form of democracy. To quote Rueschemeyer, et.al. (1992:41): “Is it really possible to differentiate the realm of politics from the overall systems of inequality in a society?”

2.3.4 Civic Cooperation and Collective Action

Another aspect of effective democracy in Himachal Pradesh relates to the diverse roles of civic cooperation and collective action. In this respect again the contrast between Himachal and Haryana is quite sharp. One of these roles is to facilitate the functioning of institutions of local governance and collective action. These are often critical for the success of state intervention, especially in the field of social development. For instance, effective Gram Panchayats can be of great help in facilitating the implementation of rural

development programmes (e.g. National Rural Employment Guarantee Act). In my sample of Himachal households a majority of respondents stated that they had confidence in the Gram Panchayat, with little variation between lower caste and upper caste respondents. In Haryana by contrast, confidence in the Gram Panchayat was overwhelming among the upper castes but extremely low among the Scheduled Castes, reflecting the elite capture of the institutions of local governance.

Himachal's strong culture of civic cooperation has further reinforced the virtuous circle of social equality and constructive state action mentioned earlier. Even outside the arena of state intervention, cooperative action at the local level has much to contribute to social development. To illustrate, active Mahila Mandals are often instrumental in facilitating collective resolution of women's concerns in diverse fields such as child care, health and domestic violence.³³

The diverse links between social equality and civic cooperation are well illustrated in the context of education (Chapter 7). In Haryana, as mentioned earlier, the schooling system is fraught with social divisions of class, caste and gender. Privileged children are often enrolled in private schools while those of disadvantaged families attend poorly managed government schools, and many girls do not go to school at all. In this divided environment there is little collective pressure to ensure quality education for all children. Formal institutions created for this purpose, such as PTAs and VECs, exist largely on paper. In Himachal by contrast, there are widely shared social norms about the value of schooling for all children (irrespective of class, caste and gender) and most children are integrated in a common schooling system. Private schools are rare and the village government school is everyone's school. In many of these schools PTAs and VECs meet regularly and parents take interest in these institutions.³⁴

Even where there is no visible collective action, social development can be greatly facilitated by egalitarian social norms and a culture of democracy. In Himachal, the

³³ For some interesting examples of well functioning Mahila Mandals see, Sharma (1980).

³⁴ In fact almost two-thirds of Himachali parents in my sample stated that they had participated in school-related collective activities (compared to less than a quarter in Haryana).

recognition of public spaces, including schools, as belonging to everyone is firmly entrenched, and cases of overt discrimination or hostility against lower caste children in schools are relatively rare. The social distance between parents and teachers is also relatively small, making it easier for them to build a constructive rapport even in the absence of formal institutions.³⁵ In Haryana, this rapport is often marked by indifference, even hostility, partly because of the social distance that separates the teachers from the parents. Intimidation of lower caste children by upper caste teachers and pupils is often cited as a reason for dropping out of school.

The preceding discussion focuses largely on cooperation at the local level (say, within the village community), but the positive influence of cooperative social norms may be much wider. For instance, there is some evidence that the social distance between people who occupy different positions in the “system” is often relatively small in Himachal Pradesh, not only at the local level (say, between teachers and parents, or doctors and patients), but also in the society at large. To illustrate, the office of a Block Development Officer or even District Collector in Himachal Pradesh does not seem to have the intimidating or hostile character it often has elsewhere. Ordinary people (women as well as men) routinely visit these offices at ease with them. Similarly, as discussed further on, there is no wide gulf between elected representatives and the people: Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs), for instance, tend to be fairly accessible and are often personally known to many of their constituents, even in remote villages. In this respect, too, social conditions in Himachal Pradesh have been conducive to participatory democracy.³⁶

2.3.5 Social Equality and Political Democracy

The fundamental role of social equality as a precondition of effective democracy was a recurring theme in Dr. B.R.Ambedkar’s writings. For instance, commenting on the

³⁵ This is not to say that there are no issues of caste discrimination and exclusion at school in Himachal. However, such incidents are comparatively less frequent and there is less social acceptance of them. In one of my sample villages, the beating of a Dalit child by an upper caste teacher became an issue around which the entire village came together, leading to the transfer of the teacher.

³⁶ Some of these arguments have been made in the literature on social capital which has drawn attention to the importance of civic cooperation for development and democracy [See particularly Putnam (1993) and with reference to India Blomkvist (2000, 2001, 2003), Jayal (2001), Anirudh Krishna (2002)]. However in several important ways the social capital framework is inadequate for our purposes. I will return to this later in this chapter.

limitations of Parliamentary democracy in Europe, Ambedkar said:

The second wrong ideology that has vitiated parliamentary democracy is the failure to realize that political democracy cannot succeed where there is no social or economic democracy...Social and economic democracy are the tissues and the fiber of a political democracy. The tougher the tissue and the fiber, the greater the strength of democracy. Democracy is another name for equality. (Quoted in Rodrigues 2002:62).

More recently, there has been a revival of interest in this idea in the literature on democracy in India. For instance, as stressed by Jayal (2001), the effective exercise of democratic rights is a matter of “citizenship”. In fact, she argues for “placing citizenship at the heart of the democratic project, and indeed making it the test of democracy itself.” Inequalities in social relations (including not only economic inequalities but also inequalities based on gender and caste) undermine citizenship, and are therefore one of the main obstacles to effective democracy. To quote:

The project of democracy...cannot be said to have been accomplished till such time as the effective exercise of the rights of citizenship is achieved and guaranteed to all. This in turn is a combined function of the enforceability of constitutionally guaranteed equal rights and of the social conditions that make their effective exercise possible.” [2001]

In this framework, Himachal’s experience can be seen as a case where the “social conditions” (including the absence of sharp social inequalities) did exist in substantial measure, making it possible to build citizenship and effective democracy.

The ‘critical modernist’ approach to development that calls for locating (or “re-locating”) participation within a more radical politics of development is another example of the increasing interest in the importance of social inequalities to the process of development and democracy. For instance, Hickey and Mohan (2005) highlight the fact that successful democratic projects are closely linked to the adoption of development paradigms that directly challenge structural inequalities. Both Kerala and HP are good examples of developmental success achieved through a levelling of social inequalities (through different routes) facilitating the use of democratic structures.

2.4. Nature of Enquiry

Before elaborating on the methodology adopted it may be pertinent to say a few words on the nature of the thesis to foreground the methods and sources of information used to present the arguments. At the outset, it must be pointed out that the approach adopted in this thesis is rooted in the eclectic discipline of ‘development studies’, as opposed to either political science, economics or anthropology. While it draws on elements of all three, standard indicators such as state power or economic growth or purely cultural considerations are not at the centre of analysis. Instead, development outcomes and the nature of state-society interactions that facilitate the achievement of those outcomes are the focus of study. In this respect it is more akin to the work of Evans et al., (than Migdal, for instance) who have focused on the importance of synergistic state-society relations in meeting development goals. The difference between Evans work and that presented here is that while Evans et al., have treated the presence of social inequalities as the outliers in their analysis, I have made it the centre piece in my study.

In order to illustrate the virtuous circle I have discussed several propositions regarding Himachal Pradesh’s development experience, and especially its social achievements, relating them to social equality and its impact on state-society relations. These include:

1. Himachal’s exceptionally rapid (and broad-based) progress in the field of “social development” during the last few decades.
2. The state has played a pro-active role in development.
3. Himachal society is characterized by egalitarian social relations.
4. The “virtuous circle” of constructive state action and social equality goes a long way in explaining Himachal’s success.

The first three propositions are mainly of a factual nature, and seem to be well supported by available data – from the field as well as secondary sources.

The fourth proposition, however, is of a more ‘speculative’ nature. It is not only a statement about the enabling roles of constructive state action and social equality, but

also a hypothesis about the *interaction* between state and society. Further, it places this interaction at the centre of our interpretation of Himachal's experience by arguing that the mutually reinforcing interaction between egalitarian social relations and a pro-active democratic state is at the core of Himachal's success. This raises the question whether other interpretations might be more plausible. In the next section I review other current interpretations and show how limitations in them led me to arrive at my proposed hypothesis.

2.4.1 Does the Economics of Himachal Explain its Success

In the literature on social development in Himachal Pradesh, other elements of interpretation have indeed been proposed, focusing for instance on economic growth, financial assistance from the Central Government, and the rapid expansion of public sector employment. Accordingly, it can be argued that Central Government transfers made it possible to invest in education and as incomes rose, educational uptake rose too and the expanding public sector by providing employment fuelled the demand for more education. This is no doubt a credible 'explanation' with a different kind of virtuous circle in it as well. However, it takes a limited view of human development in Himachal on several counts. First, the general evidence on income effects of development is relatively weak. Haryana is a clear case in point. With the highest per capita incomes it still lags far behind on most social indicators. The current situation of runaway growth, in India as a whole, is also seen to exist with little social progress. Second, it leaves unanswered the question of why Central Government transfers were used to support the social sectors in the first place and to the extent that they were. Third, it addresses the success in education in isolation from other aspects of social development; political or democratic development - an important part of Himachal's story - do not figure at all.

2.4.2 Or is it Social Capital?

Another explanation, which has not (to my knowledge) been invoked in the context of Himachal Pradesh, but may come to mind to some readers in the light of the material presented in this thesis, runs in terms of "social capital". Some of the arguments I have developed (for instance, regarding collective action and associational life) could indeed

be put forward in the framework of social capital.

Anecdotal references from Himachal and other hill areas in India have highlighted the relative cohesiveness of social interactions in these societies. Reciprocity, cooperation, interdependence and less stringent hierarchies are aspects of hill culture that have figured prominently in the ethnographic research of several scholars such as Berreman 1979, Sax, 1991, Narayanan, 1997 to name a few. More recent research (PROBE, 1999, Rinki Sarkar, 2007, Chetan Singh, 1998) has drawn on these features to make connections with development outcomes of the hill regions. Two strands emerge – one that links the cohesiveness of communities to greater possibility of “voice” and public action as a means of influencing policy in favour of social development (PROBE, 1999) and the other that has linked the rich associational life of villages to the concept of social capital and its attendant benefits (Jayal, 1999, in the context of Garhwal hills).

All of the above, put together, offer a plausible explanation of Himachal’s success story. Greater social capital born out of the systems of reciprocity found in the interdependent hill societies translates into public action which has the desired impact on policy priorities which when backed by financial resources from the Central Government and the expanding public sector complete the circle (also virtuous). In fact I began my field work, somewhat on these lines. It seemed that cohesive communities with large stocks of social capital were responsible for “making democracy work” in Himachal which in turn was facilitating the achievement of development goals. There was enough secondary and anecdotal information to suggest that associational life was rich and democratic practices were thriving in Himachal. Social capital seemed the obvious ‘missing link’ and I thus proceeded to do my field work all set to uncover the networks of reciprocity – formal and informal and establish the connection between social capital and democratic development in Himachal. This perspective, however, turned out to require substantial modification in the light of ground realities.

2.4.3. Ground Realities

My field work, while providing support for much of what I set out to find, such as

networks of reciprocity, well functioning associations, importance of education and large public sector presence, also threw up some interesting surprises. In particular what I found was:

1. Social relations had a far more nuanced and interesting story to tell than could be “fit” into a social capital framework: a) gender played a very important role; b) there were aspects of caste relations in Himachal that put to question the ‘horizontal’ networks central to Putnam’s analysis of social capital. For instance exchange labour across castes and caste based Mahila Mandals, added another dimension to the nature and scope of “associationalism”, in Himachal.
2. State had a prominent place in the lives of the people. Especially as provider of public services, expectations from the state were unusually high. This finding in particular ran contrary to the social capital framework which derides a role for the state, focussing disproportionately on communities as the engines of democracy and development.
3. It was not just that public services were relatively well delivered, but rather that public institutions and spaces were marked with a degree of “respect” that is hard to ignore. What was even more striking was that the respect is mutual. For instance, teachers invariably arrived on time to schools, even in cases where they are located in remote hard to reach areas. And this “respect” / consideration / is reciprocated by students who were found in high attendance, and by parents who participate regularly in PTAs and other forums and willingly cooperate with school authorities. Prejudices with regard to caste, which may well exist in the private sphere, rarely spilled over into the classroom and hence Dalit children participate equally in the village schools. Similarly, other institutions of governance – the panchayats, for instance, ran far better than in most states. Gram sabhas were regularly held and well attended (a rarity in North India); panchayat elections were also held regularly and in full accordance with the rules of affirmative action. If a woman or Dalit was elected head of the Panchayat, they functioned as such and were not reduced to being rubber stamps of patriarchal or caste lobbies. Panchayats records were not just well maintained but easily available to the public – again a rarity in much of India. Other aspects of this respect was evident in the fact that women were not threatened by the world outside their homes – girls were able to travel long distances to

attend high school and women were often working in places far from their families.

By the time I finished my field work it was evident to me that the social capital framework fell far short of providing an adequate explanation for Himachal's story. There seemed to be a far more interesting and at the same time a more 'essential' story to tell. There was a "virtuous circle" in operation here, but its centre lay elsewhere. The virtuous circle I found unfolding in my fieldwork was of "collaborative state-society relations, built on – as well as reinforcing - equality and participation.

This was brought into sharper contrast during my field work in Haryana where I was struck by the absence of social solidarity in rural Haryana coupled with a deep mistrust of the establishment. While Himachal had brought to the fore, mutuality, synergy, consensus and collaboration that existed within society and especially between state and society, Haryana was characterised by conflict, resistance, mistrust and violence in its society as well as in its relations with authority. Even though the contrast has been important to understand Himachal better, it must be emphasized, that Haryana is a more representative case of the general development story in India, where social development goals have repeatedly faced resistance from powerful forces in society and therefore got diluted or even distorted in their impact. In fact it fit more easily into already established theories of state-society conflict such as those of state capture or co-option (Chapter 7). The reality of a highly hierarchical society having driven a wedge between state rhetoric and outcomes was amply evident in Haryana. Thus the reality of implementation diverged widely from stated objectives, as they do in much of democratic India. For this reason, Haryana did not throw up surprises in the way that Himachal and could even be fit into a more standard social capital framework of the kind used, by Putnam to describe Southern Italy.

It was the nature of Himachal's "success" in particular the role of social equality and state action that poked holes in the social capital framework and forced me to look beyond at what was emerging as a more interesting interplay between society and the state.

2.4. Concluding Remarks

There is, thus, no better alternative I could find to the proposed hypothesis as things stand. Further, the interpretation presented in this thesis (which focuses on the mutually reinforcing roles of constructive state action and social equality) fits well with a wide range of facts and observations, whether those emerging from secondary data, or from my fieldwork in Kullu, or from the comparison with Haryana. While this interpretation is certainly not the last word on the subject, and may need to be qualified or modified in the light of further research, it is highly consistent with available evidence.

The main contribution of this thesis is to use the Himachal story to emphasize the critical role of social equality in the development process. The critical importance of social equality it is argued relates not just to interaction between citizens but also between the state and its citizens. The latter, not only enables social demands to be represented as state objectives but also enables state action to further the goals of development. Therefore a careful look at elements of social equality in terms of caste and gender has been a particular endeavour of this thesis.

Chapter Three

Fieldwork

3.1 The Case Study

Following on the nature of enquiry discussed in the previous chapter, it may be pertinent to say a few words on the sources of data and information, including the field data, that inform the analysis presented in this study. While secondary sources of data for Himachal and Haryana relate to the state level, primary sources pertain to one district each in the two states, namely Kullu in Himachal and Faridabad in Haryana. Secondary sources provided the broad parameters for the two states and field data from Kullu and Faridabad provided the details that support or qualify the aggregate picture.

The main sources of secondary data used by me are the Census of India, 2001 and the National Family Health Survey-2 (1998-9) and National Family Health Survey -3 (2005-6). Wherever possible I have updated from NFHS-3, but State Reports for Himachal and Haryana are still not available, and I have had to rely on NFHS-2 in several places.

For data on public finance I have used Reserve Bank of India Bulletins and the North India Human Development Report (2003), brought out by National Council of Applied Economic Research.

For education data, All India Education Surveys brought out by the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT); Special Education Statistics, annually published by the Department of Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development and the PROBE (1999) survey.

A look at the secondary data for the two states provides a fairly good picture of what has happened in these states as far as development outcomes are concerned. One way of approaching the study could thus have been to do a statistical analysis of this data relating, for instance, income growth to literacy rates or investment in education to education outcomes. One could also, conceivably, assemble data on various aspects of social equality (say, at the village level), and scrutinise the relationship between social

equality and social development (e.g. the progress of education) using formal statistical techniques. There is some recent research along these lines, which could possibly be extended to this particular topic (Banerjee and Somanathan, 2005, 2001) This, however, would be a very different sort of enquiry, and it is not clear whether it would be feasible at all (with existing data sets), given the difficulties involved in measuring social equality and state intervention, not to speak of the interaction between the two. Therefore, such quantitative approaches are bound to have serious limitations. For instance, the culture of participation that marks Himachali society or the ‘mixed’ picture that caste presents in Himachal would have been missed, resulting in a rather bland analysis of facts. Much of the understanding in social science lies in the nuanced view of reality, captured only from field experience. A study of real-life situations provides not just the context for analyzing the statistics it also provides a wealth of details that bring the figures alive. The multiple layers in which social relations are embedded and the interaction with state structures which is an important part of the study could be captured only through field experience. While a more quantitative approach has dominated research for long periods and even been ‘imposed’ to some extent on social science research, more recent explorations (Eckstein 1975; Flyvbjerg 2006; Campbell 1975) have questioned this domination. This new thinking highlights the importance of qualitative, textured information that may not necessarily lend itself to formal testing methods and theorizing by “proving” anything, but which they argue, certainly leads to more “learning” and greater understanding (Campbell, 1975). Besides, as Flyvbjerg (2006) says: “proof is hard to come by in social science because of the absence of hard theory, whereas learning is certainly possible” (:224)³⁷ Learning in my case involved collecting qualitative data from the field on a range of issues relating to social relations; schooling decisions; village associations and their functioning; local structures of the state and their functioning; etc., Semi-structured interviews, participant-observations and informal conversations have all contributed to understanding the ground reality. Anecdotes, quotes and other micro-level data thus form an important part of the knowledge acquired from the field adding to the richness of analysis.

³⁷ See also Ragin and Becker, 1992 for similar views on case knowledge.

Collecting qualitative information is, however, an extremely time consuming and resource intensive exercise and constraints on both counts did not permit an extensive enterprise covering all districts. Therefore, there was no alternative to making a selection of districts, and adopting - as far as the field survey is concerned - a “case study” approach.

The case study method is often criticized for its limitations in being able to provide generalizable information on the basis of the cases chosen. As Eysenck (1976) remarked: “case studies are nothing but a method of producing anecdotes”. This sort of criticism has tended to come from natural scientists or economists who favour theory-driven, ‘context-independent’ research from which predictions can more easily be made. In the same vein, it is alleged that case studies are more suited to generating hypotheses rather than to testing them. Further, case studies tend to be biased toward verification. As Diamond (1996) observed, “case studies suffer from a crippling drawback” as they do not curb “one’s tendencies to stamp one’s pre-existing interpretations on data as they accumulate” (:6). According to Flyvbjerg (2006) among others, however, not only can case studies be used to generalize depending on the case selected, “generalizations are over-valued as a source of developing knowledge and the ‘force of example’ underestimated”.

Having said that though a lot depends on what the research question is and how the cases are selected. In this instance the validity and usefulness of the case study rest on two points. First, the case study is part of a larger investigation that also draws on secondary data, literature review, historical enquiry and related material. The conclusions reflect the combined insights from these different sources, and do not rely on the case study alone. Second, both Haryana and Himachal are small states with relatively few intra-state disparities, at least in matters that are relevant to this thesis.

Within Himachal, there are three ecological zones – the lower, middle and higher Himalayan regions. The lower regions have greater access to towns of the plain areas of Punjab and Haryana and thus to job markets as well as other cultural influences. The higher regions are more isolated with higher proportion of tribal and Buddhist

populations. Their socio-cultural ethos thus reflects those influences. The middle region, of which Kullu district is a part and which constitutes the largest section of the state (7 of the 12 districts fall in this region) in some sense is perhaps the most representative of Himachal. Within that region different districts have much in common and Kullu can be considered as reasonably representative of it. It is true that were I doing an anthropological analysis these inter-district differences would count for a lot, but my focus is on social equality, state action and state-society relations and these factors do not show substantial variation across districts or even regions. Social equality may be somewhat higher in the tribal and Buddhist regions and somewhat lower in the areas bordering the plains, but these differences are only a matter of degree. Haryana, on the other hand, is culturally and ethnically even more homogenous than Himachal. Faridabad, like Kullu, was selected at random as the focus district for my field survey.

3.2 Himachal Pradesh: Kullu District

Located at 7000ft above sea level, Kullu is a beautiful high-altitude valley of the river Beas. One of the three large mid-Himalayan districts, Kullu lies north of the Dhauladhar range, which marks a natural boundary with the cis-Dhauladhar districts. Kullu is one of 12 districts in Himachal Pradesh, and among its largest. It has a population of about 0.4 million and a literacy rate of 73.4 per cent (Census of India 2001). Administratively it is divided into 6 blocks. Of these blocks I randomly chose Naggar and Kullu blocks for my survey. Kullu is further divided into Kullu-I and Kullu-II for purposes of education administration only. I visited both Kullu blocks for my field survey.

As the terrain is hilly, agricultural potential has always been limited and is restricted to a few areas, mostly around the river Beas which runs through the Kullu valley. At high altitude and with severe winters, the agricultural season is short and the range of crops that can survive the severe winters small, being limited to potatoes, maize and some wheat and rice. In the days of British rule, tea was tried in an effort to replicate the success of the northeast, but it did not do well. Tobacco has also been tried with some success, as has poppy. On the whole agriculture has been for subsistence, with a net inflow of grain in most areas. In the 1980s the advent of horticulture, and particularly

apples in Kullu, helped to change the nature of the rural economy from one of subsistence, bringing greater prosperity and a resumed interest in the local economy. It is important to note that government investments in seed development and subsidies and an actively pursued programme for spreading awareness and knowledge have brought success to the region's agriculture. Large tracts of land have been converted to apple orchards, and now other fruits such as plum and kiwi are also being introduced. In addition, of course, the rural infrastructure already in place provides access to markets.³⁸ Due to the persistent effort of the farmers combined with technical and financial support from the government, the farm economy of the state has adapted by diversifying into activities outside the traditional subsistence production of cereals and pulses. The remittance economy plays an important role, as not all households have been able to take advantage of the horticultural revolution.

Since agriculture has been mostly of the subsistence variety, large scale out-migration for work is common. The army in particular has absorbed a large number of Himachali men. However, given the perceived risky nature of urban jobs, most families choose to keep their small landholdings in the village as security and return to them on retirement (Parry 1979). These, then, are invariably managed by the women of the household, resulting in a large proportion of female-headed households. I also came across several retired army personnel who had returned to their villages to work on their land or even to do other work such as run a school or an enterprise. Narayan (1997) noticed in Kangra, her field area, that "many men retired from the armed forces early bringing a pension with them, to join the government schools as teachers" (Narayan, 1997).

3.3 Haryana: Faridabad District

Haryana is a broad plain situated between the basins of the rivers Indus and Ganges and bounded by the Shivalik mountains in the north and the river Yamuna in the east. While much of the plain is formed of rich alluvial soil, its southwestern part is mostly desert,

³⁸ This is in sharp contrast to Uttarakhand, for instance, where 1) the people are still struggling to grow wheat and rice as a hangover from the early days of the green revolution and are clearly not progressing; and 2) the absence of roads (and associated transport facilities) in large areas, which makes it difficult for villagers to connect with the larger economy. As a result this area lags far behind in terms of development.

and its southernmost part is included in the Aravalli hills. At the time of Separation it was considered the least fertile and most backward part of Punjab, but it has since substantially improved its position in agricultural as well as overall economic terms.

Faridabad district is situated in southeastern Haryana, about 30 kms from the city of Delhi. It was formed in 1979 as the twelfth district of the state, and has a population of nearly 2.2 million and a literacy rate of 70.79. It is the most densely populated district of Haryana, ethnically dominated by Jats and Gujars, with Scheduled Castes constituting about 16 per cent of the total district population. Administratively it is divided into 6 blocks, of which I randomly chose two (Ballabhgarh and Faridabad) for my survey. Faridabad is Haryana's most industrialised district with more than 2400 registered factories and 36% of the state's industrial working force. The district's major industrial production is in tractors, and agricultural implements. The district headquarters, Faridabad City, is the most highly populated as well as the most industrialized part of the district. It contains big manufacturing industries including motor cars, industrial parts and other hi-tech industries.

Food grains occupy 75 per cent of the total area under cultivation, with the remaining area mostly under commercial crops such as sugar cane. Wheat is the main crop grown, followed by paddy. Dairy farming has also emerged as an important source of income in this region.

3.4 Sample Design and Field Work

Within each district of the two districts (Kullu and Faridabad) I selected six villages, and 15-18 households from each village. The districts and villages were randomly selected from the Census of India (1991) list of districts and villages in each state. The households were selected at random from electoral rolls, where these existed. Where electoral rolls were unavailable I conducted a household census and then a random selection of every fifth household. I was able to use 90 of the household questionnaires filled in Himachal Pradesh and 70 in Haryana.

The fieldwork at the village level consisted of:

- (1) A household survey using an extensive questionnaire;
- (2) A survey of government schooling facilities in the village (with a total of 10 government schools surveyed).
- (3) Interviews with (a) Sarpanch or Pradhan; (b) at least one other panchayat member; (c) members of village level associations such as the Mahila Mandal and Yuva Mandal, where these existed. These were semi-structured interviews. In Himachal I found 4 villages (out of 6) which had Yuva Mandals and so I was able to interview a member from these, but in Haryana I did not find any. Similarly with Mahila Mandals: all the 6 villages in Himachal had a Mahila Mandal and some had more than one, but in Haryana there were none.

At the block level I interviewed the Block Education Officer (BEO) and the Block Development Officer (BDO), and at district level, District Education Officers (DEO) and the District Collector (DC). Finally, in the state capitals I held discussions with government officials in the education, finance and rural development ministries.

3.5 Field Experiences

I conducted my fieldwork first in Himachal and then in Haryana, and my experiences in the two states were vastly different.

In Himachal the environment was welcoming and friendly, and I did not encounter any resistance to my presence or to my work. While the people were curious about me, there was no suspicion of my motives. A high level of trust was a striking feature of the field area in general. I was always invited inside people's homes and invariably asked to return so that they could be 'properly' hospitable by preparing a meal for me. These invitations were hard to resist, and I had many wonderful meals sitting on beautiful wooden balconies looking out at the vast expanse of the Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas.³⁹

Another striking feature of Himachal was the high level of trust in government, including

³⁹ In traditional Himachali homes the ground floor is used as storage space for corn, fodder, wood, coal etc. for the winter months, and the living area is above, usually surrounded by exquisite carved balconies.

the Panchayat. In general the sort of mistrust of government personnel and acceptance of corruption in public institutions that exists amongst people elsewhere in India (I include myself in that group) is surprisingly absent in Himachal. My questions about transparency in particular met with surprised responses. My hesitation about getting information from the Pradhan, fearing that it would be doctored, would surprise the people, who could think of no reason why that would be the case. Panchayat records for instance, were not just fairly up to date they were also readily available for scrutiny. Corruption charges were also not forthcoming in the way one expects (as was the case in Haryana, for instance). People were very careful about alleging corruption against anyone. While preferential treatment in favour of people that were known or related to government officials (“embedded particularism” as Herring, 1999 has described it), was cited as a form of corruption, exchange of money rarely was.

Another aspect of government that stood out in Himachal was that it was generally helpful, friendly and accessible. Unlike Haryana where I dreaded the days I had to visit government offices, in Himachal it was never a problem. I was treated in a civil fashion, not dismissed and told to return some other day, and when I had to wait to see someone, I was not questioned by just about everyone who happened to pass by, as was the case in Haryana. What was worse was that these questions were probing, often personal and usually ended with advice that implied that I was largely wasting my time and would not find much information in those offices. In Himachal by contrast, I did not encounter these problems and often got more information than I expected to get.

What was also noticeable was the difference in the quality of interaction between officials of different ‘rank’. In Himachal, persons lower down the hierarchy did not behave in the sort of subservient manner that they did in Haryana with persons senior to them. For instance, when called into the office of a senior they behaved like colleagues, offering opinions and engaging in discussions freely. On one occasion when my meeting with the Director at the education department went on till lunch time I was taken aback to find his colleagues coming in with lunch boxes reminding him that it was time to take a break. Quite naturally they invited me to join them and I discovered that this was a ritual

in that office – all of them would bring their lunch and sit and eat together in the Director’s office sharing each other’s food. The conversation which revolved around education issues was interspersed by light banter often regarding the food habits of one or the other. Needless, I thoroughly enjoyed the lunch and being participant-observer to this interaction.

In Haryana, on the other hand, such a scenario is hard to imagine. Most often junior officers would enter the rooms of seniors almost bowing and scraping, hesitate to offer an opinion, prefer to keep standing, and leave as soon as they could. In general the atmosphere in Haryana is decidedly oppressive in terms of hierarchy and gender.

My experiences in the field reflected these sharp social differences between the two states, on several fronts. Gender in particular presented the sharpest contrast. In Himachal while I often found only the women at home, whenever the men were present conversations took place with both together. Women were never in *purdah* (veiled) and appeared free to speak openly and frankly. In fact on several occasions the women were far more vocal and would be urging the men to speak up. I also noticed several instances during my field work of men assisting women in ‘household’ chores such as washing clothes or tending to infants. I was quite struck by the lack of male embarrassment at being found doing such tasks. It seemed a fairly routine and acceptable practice. Women certainly appear to be the ‘busier’ of the two: if they are not organizing the household they are dashing out to do various other things – attending mahila mandal meetings, visiting relatives (including natal family), going to the markets, schools, post-offices, panchayat offices etc. Men, on the other hand, when at home seem to be at a loose end and tend to be allotted tasks which could well include baby-sitting or other household chores. I was particularly impressed by the ease with which women felt they could approach the Pradhan of their village. I noticed this again in my last visit (in December 2007) when women on getting new information about the National Employment Guarantee Scheme almost immediately after the meeting began to discuss amongst themselves and plan a collective visit to the Pradhan and question him about their entitlements.

The same was true of young girls – the confidence and poise shown by young teenage girls (many of who went to school in nearby towns) for instance, was striking. In one of the Panchayats in my sample I also came across a very young girl who had been Pradhan in her village, at that time elected on a reserved seat. When I met her however, she said she wanted to contest the Panchayat elections again and that this time she would do it on an open ticket. I was amazed at her level of knowledge of rural development issues and the confidence she displayed in her ability to make a real contribution as the Pradhan. In fact she said, “during my first term I was very young, but I really learned a lot. Now I could do much better justice to the job and would like the opportunity to do so”.

On the whole, the beautiful surroundings, the easy pace of life, the trusting nature of the people, the amazing presence of women and the refreshing lack of a dominating male ethos, all combined to make my field work in Himachal not just relatively easy but thoroughly enjoyable too.

After Himachal, field work in Haryana was a true contrast. The general environment was unfriendly and in some cases even hostile. I could not assume the cooperation of the people and often had to give detailed explanations of where I had come from and what I was doing. People were not easily willing to talk to me unless I confirmed that I had met with the Sarpanch (Head of the Panchayat) and informed him of my presence and purpose in the village. The kind of easy, friendly conversations that would spontaneously take place in Himachal were few and far between in Haryana. The tone of voice, body language and demeanor of the people were strikingly different and more aggressive in nature. In particular I was quite taken aback by the liberal use of abusive language in the public domain. People routinely and almost nonchalantly prefix names even of their family members, irrespective of age or gender, with pejorative titles.

The most striking difference, between the two states, however, was related to gender. In Himachal, I was not particularly conscious of being female, but in Haryana there was no getting away from it. The general lack of safety for women was a constant theme in my

conversations. The men in particular seemed to be alerting me to the perils of wandering about alone. In a couple of cases I was plainly told that it was not socially acceptable for unveiled and unescorted women to work on their own in the village. I often had groups of young men and boys following me, and if I tried making conversation with them the only thing they wanted to discuss was the gender issue and how men got away with so much aggression against the women in their region. Rape, domestic violence and the lack of punitive action against the perpetrators were recurrent themes.

Even within their homes it was not easy to invite women to talk. The men invariably came forward and dominated the conversation. Often I would have to either insist on hearing the woman's opinion or go inside to talk with her. One of my most sobering experiences was the discovery that the Sarpanchs I had been speaking to were in fact the male relatives of the actual Sarpanch. Whenever I reached a village I would ask to meet the Sarpanch and would be taken to meet him. I conducted several conversations and interviews with such persons only to find out much later that they were in fact the husband (or in one case, the father-in-law) of the elected women. Unfortunately when I went back and insisted on speaking to the women I found that they themselves were reluctant to talk to me, claiming not to know anything and insisting that my purpose would be better served by speaking to the men. What was shocking to me was the legitimacy that this system enjoys amongst the people. There is even a term for these proxy Sarpanchs – they are called Sarpanch-patis (Sarpanch-husbands) - and are an accepted part of the Panchayat system. In fact the Sarpanch-patis quite readily introduce themselves as such. In Himachal this system not only does not exist, women Pradhans (Himachal word for Sarpanch) take their jobs very seriously (see Chapter 5).

The spatial segregation of households was also more pronounced in Haryana. Invariably Dalit neighbourhoods were located at one end of the village and poorly serviced by basic amenities – water and electricity supply was limited and local schools and anganwadi centres were never situated within these parts. They had many more kuccha houses and open drains with kuccha roads leading to houses overlaid with dirty water and garbage. The general picture one faced there was of poverty and gross neglect. Many homes that I

visited presented depressing sights – dark, with the barest of materials, a couple of pots at most, a thread bare mat on the floor, often only a cloth covering at the entrance, the inhabitants looking distinctly under-nourished, under-clad and with little hope in their voices.

In Himachal I never encountered poverty and despair of this kind. Even the Dalit homes, which were on average smaller than the Rajput homes (there were exceptions though as mentioned in Chapter 6) did not lack human dignity. They may have had smaller grain storage areas, fewer or no cattle, no water source in their front yard or no toilets, but the inhabitants were not on the edges of humanity. Also, spatial segregation was not as complete as it is in Haryana. In fact every village I visited had clusters of Dalit homes in the midst of upper caste homes. It is true that in most cases there was at least one cluster that was a little removed from the rest – a little further down the hill – but this hamlet was not very different from the rest of the village. As Vasani (2007) in her study also based in Kullu found, even ‘Harijan’ (Dalit) homes have on average more than 5 rooms and 17 per cent Harijans and 50 per cent Kolis (also Dalits) owned more than one building.

While my field experiences threw up many interesting and unexpected issues, as mentioned in the previous chapter and explored further on, what is striking is that my field data so closely corresponds with secondary data, as will be seen throughout the thesis. Whether it relates to education achievements, status of women, lack of violence, relatively equal distribution of development progress across social groups etc., I was able to corroborate all of these features in the field. What is missing in the secondary data are the nuances – the dichotomous face of caste, the extent of gender parity, the lack of social distance between people and the government, the ‘culture of transparency’ in public institutions and the level of participation in social as well as institutions of state. It is the consistency and complementarity between secondary data and the field survey that makes it possible to venture generalizations from this “case study”.

Chapter Four

Social Equality and Community Action

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the social history of Himachal, for a better understanding of the context within which the state functioned especially after it became independent in 1971. I begin by taking a closer look at the nature of society in Himachal, the historical basis of its social relations and the processes of participation and community action that it has given rise to. In the latter part of the chapter I look at community action in Himachal, arguing that the nature of social organization has facilitated cooperation within the community across a range of activities.

India is widely considered as a highly hierarchical and divided society, to the extent that its people have been described as “homo hierarchicus” (Dumont, 1980). While some social divisions are also found in Himachal, the hierarchies that exist have been tempered in several ways. First, Himachal has a distinct cultural history including egalitarian influences such as the Buddhist tradition and tribal social organization which have left their mark among sections of the population. While I do not examine these directly the history of the region (discussed below) suggests that society in Himachal has benefited from cultural exchanges of various kinds. Second, the absence of rigid orthodoxy has blunted patriarchal norms and caste divisions. Third, there is a long history of economic interdependence at the village level based on reciprocal exchange (in contrast with hierarchical relations of the *jajmani* type that are typical of other regions of India)⁴⁰. Its economic interdependence derives in part from the ecology of the region and in part from the nature of social organization typical to Himachal (discussed below). Fourth, relatively equitable land distribution in Himachal has added another basis to reciprocal and cooperative relations across social groups. Finally, these aspects of its social structure have contributed to the people of Himachal forging a common regional identity which

⁴⁰ The *jajmani* system as described by Beidelman (1959): “a feudalistic system of prescribed hereditary obligations of payment and of occupational and ceremonial duties between two or more specific families of different castes in the same locality”. The key stone of the system was the *jajman* (patron) belonging to the dominant caste and invariably a landowner. All other castes were his economic dependents.

often overrides the divisions of class and caste – a feature that is well reflected in the history of cooperation at the village level that not only extends across social groups but encompasses issues ranging from political resistance and exchange labour to solidarity at weddings and funerals. As we will see below, Himachal’s socio-political organization has also enabled somewhat less conflictual relations between the people and the state. Therefore, with the emergence of the modern state this ethos of cooperation facilitated the development of constructive state-society relations and a more participatory form of democracy.

4.2 Social History of Himachal

4.2.1 Distinct Social Organization

Himachal has had a chequered history with waves of cultural influences both from the north and the south. Its political boundaries have also been drawn and redrawn as part of different political configurations. Originally a conglomeration of roughly 30 princely states, it became part of the state of Punjab at the time of independence from British rule. The linguistic reorganization of states in the 1960s led to the bifurcation of Punjab into Punjab and Haryana, with the hill districts remaining with Punjab. What followed was a movement for self determination in the hill districts based on cultural and political differences with Punjab, which finally led to the carving out of the independent state of Himachal in 1971. However, even as its political identity evolved through these changes it retained a distinct cultural and regional identity that has survived these vicissitudes of political change.

According to historians, the hills of northwest India, of which Himachal Pradesh is a part, have been the ‘corridors of communication’ for years of cultural migration into the Indian sub-continent (Thapar 2002). While the social and political organisation of this area (which comprises Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand) cannot be known with certainty, what can be culled from various accounts of the region is that the entire area was probably inhabited by polyandrous ‘tribes’. With the advent of the so-called Aryans came polygamy, a different set of gods and a social organisation based on hereditary occupational categories which later solidified as the more stringent caste system. Possibly

because of the more difficult climatic and living conditions in the hills the settlers kept moving south, though not without leaving their mark on the hill populations. As a result an amalgamation of local customs with the foreign culture took place. By the first millennium AD, adventurers from the plains had started making inroads into the mountainous northern regions seeking to establish new kingdoms there.⁴¹ Hence the north-western Himalayas were home to waves of migrants, arriving not just from Central Asia through the passes in the hills but also from the plain areas of north India (such as Uttar Pradesh) via the more easily accessed foothills. This led to a great deal of cultural intermingling, the result of which is probably very different to the social structures belonging to the remote past.

The influence of Buddhism was added to this mixture through the efforts of the Buddhist kingdom of Asoka, which had spread in the north-westerly direction. Evidence in the form of stone scriptures found in Garhwal, part of the north-western Himalayan region show that Asoka's efforts to spread Buddhism had reached the hills by the third century BC. The writings of the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang from around the seventh century AD reveal that Buddhism and Hinduism co-existed side by side in these hill areas. Apparently Buddhism and the amalgamated system of the Indo-Aryans co-existed for a while, even mutually influencing each other; for example, Hindu rituals of animal sacrifice were adopted in Buddhism. However, as the Indo-Aryan speaking kingdoms and the Brahmanical order became stronger and more orthodox in the rest of India, their influence began to be felt in this region as well, eventually leading to the demise of Buddhism in most of north India. While Buddhism has been effectively rooted out of the north-western Himalayan region, a few pockets remain in the higher reaches of Himachal.

The propagators of orthodox Hinduism called the region an 'abode of the Gods' and declared it a holy site of pilgrimage. This led to an influx of Brahmin pilgrims, changing its cultural tone altogether (Oakley, 1905). However there was considerable resistance to

⁴¹ The Chand Rajas of Kumaon, for instance, are believed to have originated from Jhusi, near Allahabad (Oakley 1905).

the imposition of a rigid form of Hinduism, and to this day it remains differentiated from the more orthodox system in the plains. Physical isolation, among other possible factors, appears to have insulated the area from the forces of a strict Brahmanical social order with its strong caste and patriarchal bias. As a result, present-day Himachal contains a mix of Brahmanical and local religious influences.

While the region itself, as the abode of the Hindu gods, is regarded as sacred and pilgrimage spots abound, village life revolves around local deities. The local *devta* (deity) is regarded as the focal point not just for all religious activities but it is also central to other aspects of everyday life such as resolution of disputes. Before the advent of modern institutions of the state the *devta* was widely considered as the final authority to which even the Ranas (rulers) were subordinate. According to popular belief, since the *devta* was the guardian of the village, the Rana who ruled on his behalf, could take no action that was not in favour of the people. As a result, perceived injustices regularly invoked protests by the people (Mandi State Gazetteer, 1920). Interestingly these were directed against the administrators of the Rana, rather than the Rana himself, who being part of the religio-political system found it difficult to ignore or crush these protests easily (see section 4.5.1 below). This form of theocracy thus played an important role in mediating the relationship between the Ranas and the people and is possibly one of the factors responsible for laying the basis for a more direct democracy in Himachal. Even today access of the people to high levels of authority is relatively easy (Chapter 7).

The absence of Brahmanical dominance is seen in other aspects of religious and social life in Himachal as well. For instance, the central role of the Brahmin priests in religious customs, including their appeasement, does not figure in the rituals in Himachal. What does figure prominently though is the presence of women. Pilgrimages, which are a major form of religious activity, are not complete without the involvement of women at crucial points on the journey. In this respect Himachal is akin to other hill societies at least in North India. While women are traditionally seen as the torch-bearers of religious custom, the difference between what can be oppressive adherence to orthodox religiosity and the system in the hills is that in the latter, the roles ascribed to women are based on

the recognition of a separate identity and place for women. For instance, the Nanda Devi pilgrimage documented by Sax (1991) cannot begin without married women of the village returning to their natal homes to start it off. In fact he found that in some places a tax is imposed on those who do not return to participate! The fact that a woman retains an identity apart from the one imposed by marriage represents a change from the dominant system in most of North India where once a woman is married she completely adopts the identity of her marital home. In general religious observances in Himachal are fairly flexible and do not impose oppressive burdens on women.

4.2.2. Absence of Strict Orthodoxy

Gender

The absence of rigid orthodoxy in Himachal applies in particular to gender relations. Noteworthy aspects of gender relations in Himachal include the absence of seclusion practices; greater freedom of movement for women; active participation of women in the economic and social life; enduring links between married women and their natal homes; history of bride price as opposed to dowry; lack of son-preference among others. In the personal realm, divorce by mutual consent, widow and divorcee remarriages, and greater intermingling of the sexes including women's singing and dancing during festivals also take place. These and related features of gender relations of Himachal are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

What is perhaps worth mentioning in this chapter are the links between less orthodox gender relations in Himachal and their impact on community action. The fact that women are able to hold their own at home and represent themselves or their families within the community allows them to participate in a range of activities at the community level. Their involvement in pilgrimages, mentioned above is one such example. Another example of women's engagement in community action is their involvement in environment related activities -for instance, the well-documented Chipko movement, which is known as much for the active participation of women as it is for its achievements in saving the environment.⁴² This movement, which started in Chamoli

⁴² Vandana Shiva and J. Bandhopadhyay (1986).

district of Uttar Pradesh in 1973, to save trees from indiscriminate commercial felling spread rapidly through the Himalayas, due in large part to the mass participation of women. Connecting easily to the issue of deforestation as they saw it threatening not just their means of subsistence but their whole communities, women responded spontaneously to the protests and quickly took ownership of the movement. In fact environmental issues form an important component of Mahila Mandal activities even today (Chapter 5).

However, women's participation extends to several other spheres as well. For instance, Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs) are active in Himachal. It is worth noting that PTAs have also had a good track record in Himachal (Chapter 8). Although, since there are a significant number of female-headed households in Himachal (due to high out-migration of men), PTA meetings tend to be attended mostly by mothers. Similarly, Mahila Mandals as we will see in Chapter 5 have been particularly successful in Himachal. They are engaged in a variety of activities including village cleaning drives, environment training, local manufacture of soap and other household goods, protesting the entry of 'video parlours' in the village, controlling illicit production of liquor and a host of issues related to schooling. Women are also active participants in Gram Sabhas and Panchayats and other interactions with government officials.

Caste

Recent research suggests that until the eighteenth century caste as generally understood in India (*varna* and *jati*) was not the dominant system of social organisation in Himachal. In fact, caste and tribe are used interchangeably in historical records (Kanwar 2002). It was only in the early nineteenth century with the onset of census operations that caste began to appear in documents.⁴³ As Ibbetson wrote in the preface to the first census report in 1881: "In the hills...from top to bottom of the social scale no single line can be drawn, which shall precisely mark off any one caste or grade from the one below it. Each one takes its wives from and eats with the one immediately below it, and members can and

⁴³ Although there are copperplate inscriptions from Chamba and Kangra that do mention the *varna*, in particular the Brahmanas. While there are no details of the others, there is a fair amount of information about the Brahmanas (see: Kaul Deambi 2002).

occasionally do, rise to the one immediately above it” (Ibbetson, 1916, reprinted 1993: 16). It has been suggested by Kanwar (2002) that census enumerators “tried to pigeonhole and categorize the local population of the Himachal Himalaya into the innumerable water-tight castes that were perceived as castes in the plains. Every individual became marked with caste and every local social arrangement became endowed with the logic of the caste system” (2002:121). The colonial construction of caste identity in India has been commented on by historians and social scientists for several decades and does not relate to Himachal alone.⁴⁴ Nevertheless in Himachal, distinct cultural traditions (discussed earlier) had strong roots and survived in substantial measure, the imposition of caste hierarchies.

In Haryana on the other hand, the emergence of Jat identity has stronger origins in colonial influences, although it was properly cemented in the post-colonial period. The settlement of the Jats on agricultural land by the British began the process by which the community started to acquire characteristics of settled communities, including a place within the caste hierarchy. By the late nineteenth century they had dropped some of their more eclectic features and allowed local religious and cultural influences to cement an exclusivist Jat identity within the caste Hindu fold (Datta, 1999).

Himachal, on the other hand, saw the emergence of a strong regional identity that has helped in creating a feeling of community overcoming other, more divisive identities such as those of caste. Several scholars (Berreman, 1972; Newell, 1970; Parry, 1979; Sax, 1991, among others) have stressed the importance of the *Pahari* (of the hills) identity as distinct from non-Pahari or ‘plains’ identity. The Pahari area is sharply defined geographically (consisting essentially of what is presently Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand), and the people consider themselves culturally distinct. While they share many of the traditions of north Indian Hindu culture, there are several distinguishing Pahari characteristics that stand out: a) the range of castes is small, with most of the population falling into a few major groups (such as Brahmin, Rajput and Dalit) instead of the complex and finely graded categories of mainstream Hindu society; b) occupational

⁴⁴ Sarkar Sumit (1993); Inden, R (1990), Gyan Pandey (1990); Sandra Freitag (1989); Thapar R. (1989).

diversity and mobility within each of these caste groups is considerable; c) many of the religious ceremonies and life-cycle rituals are different; d) kinship norms and other gender-related practices are quite different.

The relative cultural homogeneity across caste lines (relating for instance to dietary habits, clothing and ornamentation), further contributed to the sense of shared identity in this region. As stated by Berreman (1970): a Pahari will seek Pahari solidarity against non-Pahari irrespective of caste. Further, he claims that a lower caste person will have greater interaction with a higher caste person from his own village than with a same caste person of another village. In all these respects Pahari society is quite different from the mainstream Hindu society where caste identity has an overwhelming influence.⁴⁵ One factor that has probably facilitated the development of a regional identity in Himachal is the geographical and political isolation of the region. The relative isolation imposed by geography allowed the state to retain its Pahari culture. In the pre-independence period the Himachal region remained fairly isolated from external political influences as well. The region was organized politically as small principalities, ruled by Rajput Rajas or Ranas. Successive dynasties (pre-Mughal and Mughal) in Delhi made revenue and military arrangements with the Ranas while leaving the social order well alone. This period of marginality from the plains and central authorities helped cement its community or regional identity. But there were other features of Himachali society that also fostered a distinct sense of regional identity. For instance, limited land resources, spread relatively equally among the population as well as the hilly terrain made it imperative for communities to rely on each other for resources, fostering a sense of cohesion and shared identity.

4.2.3. Ecology and Interdependence

Himachal's unique and difficult terrain has also led to the evolution of a social system geared towards overcoming the challenges imposed by the ecology. Two features of this system stand out. One, that is has led to an understanding of the need for community

⁴⁵ It has been argued by several anthropologists, that the village community in India has little significance as a sociological entity in India given that most people identify primarily with their caste (Dumont, 1980). This view does not apply in Himachal Pradesh.

cooperation across a range of economic activities. For instance, use of mountain resources, involving extraction and transportation of stones or timber, is impossible for a single peasant family to organize. Similarly coordinating the work on fields with the care of animals, often involving translocation, has been dependent on larger community cooperation (Saberwal, 1999, Singh 1998). In addition, the lack of a large pool of landless labour has increased the burden on family labour for agricultural work, leading to greater reliance among peasant households for help and cooperation. Exchange labour has thus been an important component of economic organization in Himachal.

The pervasive importance of mutual help and cooperation is linked in another way to the ecology of the region as the isolated and dispersed nature of its resources and settlements have created a much stronger sense of common property resources than is found in other societies. Further, the understanding that natural resources are the common property of all does not allow the kind of appropriation and concentration of wealth that is possible in situations of private control of natural resources. This has led to the second feature i.e., that economic inequalities are relatively limited in Himachal. This has also facilitated reciprocal interactions between people and fostered a spirit of cooperation among communities.

In this section I will look at two striking examples of this collaboration as seen in community management of forests and community management of pastoral lands, as a way of highlighting a) the links between ecology and interdependence, and b) the extension of community networks to impact state structures. It is worth elaborating the features of these systems and how they have altered since the establishment of more formal state-controlled regulatory structures as they illustrate collaboration between people as well as between state and society. The continued use of local institutions to circumvent or undermine the restrictions imposed by the State Forest Department, for instance, is testimony not just to the hold of local institutions but also of the ability of communities to engage the political establishment to its advantage. I will return to this feature of Himachal's state-society relationship in the next chapter, but suffice it to say here that relatively easy access to the political class is a unique aspect of Himachal's

social structure. It too has roots in the past as we will see later in this chapter.

*Pastoral Politics: Foraging for Rights*⁴⁶

Shepherding is a key feature of the economic landscape of several districts in Himachal, including Kullu. The commercial gains from herding which include milk, meat and wool are large, making it an important economic activity in the land-poor region of Himachal (Saberwal, 1999). But access to grazing, crucial to herding, has not been easy to come by, even though historically grazing rights have been de-linked from proprietary rights in forests or grasslands. They have involved a complex process of negotiation on the part of the herders with the establishment (earlier the Raja and later the state government, i.e., the Forest Department), with the villagers and also with fellow herders. While grazing rights in forests were granted by the Raja, on payment of a tax, grazing in village commons and grasslands did not require permission.⁴⁷ Even in the case of privately owned grasslands, once the grass was cut they became part of the village commons with open access to all. This meant that a cultivator in the village could invite a herder in return for the herder to pen his animals in his fields for a couple of nights. The cultivator was expected to provide food and fuel to the herder for the duration of the stay. As Saberwal (1999) has shown, access to these grasslands was the result of various arrangements and negotiations, involving the use of personal networks, including kin ties, hiring out of family labour and monetary transactions. In some cases, the Gaddis (herder communities) and the Kanets (peasants) were even found to be involved in highly personalized relationships. For instance, it was not uncommon to find herders with a *dharam bhai* or *behen* (brother or sister) in the cultivator family which allowed them to return to the same family year after year. However, there was also a lot of flexibility in the system that allowed herders to adjust their requirements with other herders. If the number of animals increased herders could shift grazing areas, trading their access to one area with those of another.

⁴⁶ This section is based partly on conversations with the respondents in my survey and partly on the work of Saberwal (1999) and Singh (1998) cited in the text above.

⁴⁷ This was before timber became commercially viable and thus this tax was the economic earning from forests.

With the takeover of forests by the government and the establishment of the Forest Department, this system was put under considerable strain, particularly for the herders.⁴⁸ What is remarkable though is how the herders have negotiated and circumvented the rules of the Forest Department especially “through their ability to communicate with the highest authority, much as their representatives meet with the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh even today, bypassing in the process, the entire FD (Forest Department) machinery that ostensibly controls access to and use of Himachal’s forest lands” (Saberwal, 1999). This access to the ‘highest authority’ mentioned above is a special feature of state-society relations in Himachal and evident in several areas of interaction. I will comment on this in the chapter on state action (Chapter 7) later, but suffice it to say here that turning to political powers for relief has deep roots in Himachal’s history and gives its society and polity a distinctly democratic character. The herders managed this by organizing themselves politically and forming a union - the Himachal Gaddi Union, 1967- which they used to lobby with elected representatives, even making herder rights an election issue. In turn the politicians too have served the shepherds well. Charges imposed on herders per animal grazed were dropped; and so was the ban on herder movement making spring and autumn migration much easier. The remarkable access that ordinary people have to politicians, and the faith that they have that their demands will be addressed has encouraged communities and groups to articulate and lobby for their interests. Political power responding in a more practical and immediate fashion to collective groups has also helped develop this mode of political negotiation. A democratic culture has developed that has not allowed bureaucratic red tape to interfere in their relationship with the political leadership, and ensured far greater direct accountability of the political class.

Forest Management

In a somewhat different way forest management in Himachal also shows the influence of community pressures or interests on state policy. In fact the history of Himachal’s forest management has been cited as a model in participatory forest management from which

⁴⁸ Chemical fertilizers have displaced natural ones so cultivators have been able to manage better although many still prefer organic manure. No substitute for grazing yet.

many lessons can be learned for other regions of India. In particular, according to Vasan (2002) the Forest Settlements in Himachal have ensured more forest rights to the people than anywhere else in India. These settlements, made almost a century ago, but still the legal framework for forest management today, provide villagers with extensive rights to graze and collect fuel-wood and other non-timber products for their personal use. Villagers also have the right to 'harvest' a couple of trees every five years for house construction! Thus even though all forests belong to the state, villagers enjoy extensive rights of use in Himachal.

Villagers also protect the forests. The Chipko movement was not an isolated case of communities demonstrating their symbiotic relationship with the environment. Forests not only provide fuel and fodder, but also help preserve top soil, prevent land slides, and perpetuate an eco system on which rural communities depend. Therefore forests are not seen just as a source of revenue or income – their continued health and existence is closely linked to the future of communities. In Himachal the Forest Department and its links with commercial interests, often illegal, has made people wary of the Forest Department and reinforced the importance of people's involvement in control of forests. During my field survey, the one area of government that elicited the most negative response (particularly with respect to corruption) was the Forest Department. It was striking as corruption is not otherwise a huge concern in Himachal. As a result, people have used the spaces created, such as Joint Forest Management, Van Panchayats etc., to regain some of the ground lost to the Forest Department. For instance, in some parts of Himachal, the system of *rakha*, who is a forest guard jointly employed by the Forest Department and the local people has been retained. The *rakha* not only acts as a link between the department and the village, he is also responsible to both, thus ensuring joint management and more direct accountability to the people.

In many areas, Village Forest Committees also exist. For example in Janed Panchayat in my sample, I found one such functioning committee that was formed after excessive deforestation had begun to result in loosening of the top soil. The Committee was set up to assist the forest guard, but because the guard himself was corrupt the villagers have

decided to keep an eye on the forest themselves and report wrong doings to the department directly. In a study of timber access also based in Kullu, Vasan (2007) however found that corruption and bribery were probably not very prevalent. For instance, her respondents denied having to bribe the forest guard, claiming that they did not need to, because access to timber was their right. She does comment though that because “boundaries between the official and the personal, public and private are often blurred in socially embedded bureaucracies” such as Himachal’s, networks of relationships have a premium over cash transfers (Vasan, 2002). As a result, people or groups of people with better social access to the bureaucracy may get preferential treatment in terms of greater and more frequent access to timber.

4.2.4. Economic Relationships and Social Equality

The cooperative and reciprocal nature of many economic institutions in Himachal is particularly interesting in contrast with the hierarchical nature of economic relations elsewhere in India. For instance, the *jajmani* system which is often seen as the foundation of economic and social life in Indian villages is a fundamentally hierarchical system where the clients are subordinate to the patrons.⁴⁹ In Himachal, however, even in the reign of the feudal Ranas, the relationship between the people and the rulers, or the patrons and the clients, was tempered in many ways. For instance, when *begar* or forced labour was practiced, it had a much milder form and protests by people to bring about changes in it were largely successful (Negi 2002, Mandi State Gazette, 1920). Administrative systems of revenue assessment and collection, or systems of labour management were also less oppressive and yielded to collective action (Singh 1998). Greater occupational mobility among castes as well as less economic disparity between castes makes the construction of social hierarchies in Himachal also deviate from the pattern of feudal *jajmani* systems found in most of North India.

Two features of Himachal’s economic and social organization, that have contributed to

⁴⁹ Some recent scholarship (Osella and Osella, 2000) has contested the negative implications of these relationships suggesting that a political reading of the patron-client relationships could allow the clients to structure the relationships in their favour. For instance, politicians as patrons could be pressured to act in the interests of the people, their clients.

creating economic institutions with more symmetrical and reciprocal structures are a) the lack of importance given to land as a symbol of economic status and b) common access to natural resources such as forests and grasslands. As mentioned in section 4.2.3 above, the two are related, as given the important role of common access resources such as in forests and pastures in the hill economy, inequalities of private land ownership have played a less important role in Himachal than elsewhere. Further, as noted by Singh, the scarcity of agriculture labour has made the management of large farms a more expensive and difficult proposition. Hence, farm lands have tended to be kept at sizes that could be managed by families. Hence, large disparities in land have not traditionally existed in Himachal. As one observer noted at the beginning of the nineteenth century: “There are no men of wealth, property or influence, excepting those attached to chiefs by title or services; and there is an equality of people and property to a degree greater than is to be found in any portion of India...” (Dr. JG Gerard to Capt. CP Kennedy in the Report on the Protected Hill States, 1824).

The relative social and economic equality has given rise to relationships of reciprocity across a range of economic activities particularly related to the management of labour. For instance, the institution of exchange labour or ‘*jowary*’ (whereby people take turns in working in each other’s fields on an equal basis) dates back to much earlier times but is in use even today. Further, this reciprocal exchange often cuts across caste lines as discussed in Chapter 6.

What is also worth noting is that the relatively egalitarian nature of class, caste and gender relations in Himachal tend to sustain each other. For example, the fact that disadvantaged castes have access to common resources gives them some protection from economic exploitation on the part of the higher castes.

The relatively equal ownership of land and mutual cooperation among people are also obviously related. For instance, it is clear that a system of exchange labour cannot exist between the landed and the landless and that the prevalence of exchange labour in Himachal reflects the relatively equal distribution of land.

4.3 Comparison with Haryana

4.3.1 Economic History

As mentioned earlier the districts that formed Haryana, were not the most fertile and productive regions of Punjab. They comprised a dry and arid plain which in the colonial period was used largely for cattle-breeding as its physical features constituted an ideal breeding ground for cattle. In fact, by 1939 it had acquired a near monopoly on the cattle trade, even exporting to countries such as Java.⁵⁰ In terms of agriculture it remained backward, partly because of the lack of irrigation facilities and partly, as noted by some historians, by design. According to Chowdhry (2004), for instance, British officials, in order to maintain the important economic activity of cattle breeding and trading, deliberately did not invest in irrigation or other agricultural development activities. Hence, unlike other parts of Punjab, the Haryana region continued to grow low value food-cum-fodder crops meant only for household consumption and the subsistence of cattle. The region being earmarked for cattle supply and animal husbandry, diversification into commercial crops was also discouraged.

The post-independent state and its package of agrarian strategies has no doubt transformed Haryana from a pastoral and subsistence level rural economy to a major grain producing surplus state. However, the state's package of policies, which included a set of land reforms and provision of basic infrastructure, strengthened the rich peasantry and laid the foundation for the adoption of a capitalist economy in agriculture. As described in Chapter 7, loopholes in land reform legislation and implementation allowed medium to big landowners not only to retain much of their land but in many cases to increase their holdings, as beneficiaries were compelled to sell back land they were unable to keep productively. This process of sales increased with the intensification of the green revolution, which was biased towards large holdings and large investments with which smaller and marginal farmers could not compete. The highly capital-intensive green revolution technology required investment not just in machines but also in irrigation and pesticides. Hence the so-called agrarian revolution, facilitated by state policy in Haryana, increased inequalities across class and region - well-endowed and

⁵⁰ A.M. Stowe (1910).

irrigated regions having a distinct advantage in the adoption of the new technology. Simultaneously it also led to a sharp rise in the proportion of landlessness as well as agricultural labourer households in Haryana (Bhalla, 1993).

Even today, Haryana's economy continues to be predominantly driven by agriculture, dairy and animal husbandry, of which agriculture contributes nearly 50 per cent to the net state domestic product. Interestingly the recent and growing shift towards industry retains the tendency to cater to the higher-end of the spectrum. Hence the focus of Haryana's industrial policy is on hi-tech and high value industries involving foreign collaboration and investment. Multi-national corporations are being wooed by the state government with offers of discounted land to set up factories and offices and labour legislation in favour of employers. The sharp disparities in the agriculture sector are thus getting mirrored in the industrial sector where the gaps between the salaries and life styles of the multinational employees sit uncomfortably with the terms and conditions available to the workers.

4.3.2 Social History: Caste and Gender

The relative poverty of the region (within Punjab) and the growing dissatisfaction of the majority community (Jats) with the dominant castes as well as with the British who aligned with the dominant castes, led to a consolidation of Jat identity across the northern region in the first few decades of the twentieth century. The Jats, an itinerant community with a nebulous caste status, spread across parts of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Rajasthan and Punjab, had begun to settle and look towards agriculture as their mainstay. In the Bharatpur region of former UP where they became fairly powerful they even led an armed rebellion against the British (Habib, 1976). To deal with the growing restlessness and militaristic tendencies of the Jats, the British adopted a two-pronged policy in Haryana: on the one hand they encouraged them to adopt a settled existence by giving them land and developing agriculture and on the other hand they recruited them into the army. Known for their martial traits, the Jats made ideal candidates for the armed forces and even formed a separate regiment. According to Chowdhry (2004:35), the British "emphasis on race, physique, martial qualities, exclusivity, along with the so-called

peasant virtues of fearlessness went a long way in strengthening the cult of a virile male” in Haryana. This characterization appears to have set the tone for much of the gender disparity that marks the social ethos of the state even today. The emerging Jat consciousness as a martial community was further reinforced by the advent of the Arya Samaj (society of Aryans!) in Haryana, which provided the community’s ideological basis and consolidated its masculine character.⁵¹

The Arya Samaj (a reform movement) in Haryana played a particular role in giving the Jats a Hindu identity with specific caste connotations. Raising the social status of the Jats, who did not have a distinct place in the Hindu caste hierarchy and were therefore ascribed low status, was the primary goal of the community in its settled phase. The Arya Samaj movement, thus focussed on some obvious markers of high caste Hinduism to help elevate Jat status. These included wearing the *janeo* (sacred thread) and protecting the cow. In addition a moral code was laid down which included a mix of reformist ideas (such as reduced expenditure on weddings and ceremonial displays, no consumption of alcohol, reduced ritual dependence on Brahmins) and exclusivist ideas (such as no dealings with the ‘outcastes’).

The strictures laid down for women were notably restrictive focussing on the ‘ideals of womanhood’ as defined by her role as mother and householder.⁵² Women were discouraged from visiting the bazaar, not allowed to play musical instruments, sing at weddings, dance, ‘wail’ (believed to contain an aspect of ‘sensuality’), wear only long sleeved shirts and cover their midriffs. In particular they were to be protected from the ‘evil eye’ of the lower castes (Datta 1999). Constraints on their sexuality were needless to say numerous. Dayanand Saraswati, one of the founders of the movement, described the female body as “lustful” and full of “foul secretions and excretion”.⁵³ According to him the only way to control women was to channelize their “libidinous character” into

⁵¹ This movement is believed to have started in the late nineteenth century in the region Haryana. Its most famous founder Dayanand Saraswati gave the movement its first ‘converts’ around 1879 in Punjab, setting up a branch of the Arya Samaj in Hissar in 1890 and a temple in 1893 (Juneja 1989, Joshi ed., 1965).

⁵² A Jat Panchayat held in Barauna in 1911 evolved these strictures.

⁵³ See *Satyartha Prakash*, for more on Dayananda’s writings on women.

motherhood” for the perpetuation of the Arya race.⁵⁴

While other agricultural castes (Ahirs, Rajputs, Gujjars) also existed along with non-agricultural castes (Banias, Brahmins, Chamars), the Jats were numerically the single largest caste group and owned the bulk of the agricultural land. In an area where agriculture was the main economic activity, ownership of much of the land thus established the Jats as the region’s dominant caste. What is interesting about the Punjab-Haryana region is the absence of the Brahmin from the dominant caste hierarchy. Two factors have contributed to this unique situation. First, the Jats became the economically strongest group by virtue of being the largest landowners besides being the numerically largest group. Second, the Arya Samaj movement reduced the ritual importance of the Brahmins in the region. The importance of Sikhism, with Jat Sikhs turning to the Sikh priest for ritual purposes, had already reduced the moral authority of the Brahmin, and the Arya Samaj movement added another blow. Hence their traditional power bases were much reduced in Haryana. As a result, Brahmanical Hinduism does not dominate in this region.

While this is a common feature with Himachal, where strict Brahmanical Hinduism has also been modified, as described earlier, there are sharp distinctions between the two states in terms of the variants adopted. While in Himachal the variations have resulted in greater flexibility in caste and gender relations as a more inclusive regional identity dominated, in Haryana the opposite took place as the Jats become the major reference group and Jat identity became the dominant identity. “The ubiquitous domination by a single caste (Jats) set the tone and shaped the customs and attitudes of rural Haryana” (Chowdhry 2004:44). And as noted by Datta (1999) in her important work on formation of Jat identity in Haryana: The essence of Jat identity included ownership of land and rested on “masculinity, territoriality, aggression and exclusivism”.

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note that education was also given a lot of importance in the Arya Samaj creed and Arya Samaj schools continue to exist even today. However, in these schools girls are still being groomed to be the producers of Arya *putras* (sons), as told to me by a person involved in study of Haryana schools from the NCERT.

4.4 Importance of a Public Identity in Himachal

The construction of public identities based on a common good rather than the good of any particular group is of great relevance to the study of democracies, especially those in transition, as it helps to maintain a framework of “general” interests over which particular interests do not dominate (Calhoun, 1993). In inegalitarian societies, interests based on caste and class can divert public institutions towards sectional rather than collective gains. In the case of Himachal, a developed sense of regional identity played an important part not only in helping the state acquire the status of separate state but also in determining the character of the state subsequently. This broader public identity allowed Himachali society to develop an ideology where the overall development of the state, including that of women and lower castes, was given priority. At the same time it allowed society to use the public space more equitably.

In Haryana self-determination was based on Jat identity and hence the dominant public identity turned out to be a more exclusive one. One result of this was that since the bulk of the Jats are land owners, the predominant focus of the state was on agricultural growth. In the case of Himachal, wider notions of identity that go beyond the ascriptive ones of gender, caste and class have contributed to make the public space more egalitarian, and conducive to the participation of all including women and lower castes. This feature of the legitimacy of public spaces determines not just the nature of issues that arise but also the kind of public action that takes place. For instance, unequal participation of women could lead to less than symmetric representation of their issues. In Himachal, patriarchal norms of visibility and mobility do not constrain women and they are able to freely express their opinion and participate in public life. The tradition of accepting women as part of the public sphere is important from the point of view of women’s agency.

Further, the public space is seen as the space for collective decisions and actions affecting the public at large. Hence collective institutions are recognized as being for the public at large and not to be appropriated by private interests. In Haryana, by contrast, the dominant public identity is caste-based and hence the public space, including collective institutions, represents the interests of the dominant Jat community, which is also the

most powerful social group. Hence institutions have functioned not democratically, but in the interests of the powerful Jats, who as mentioned above had a highly exclusive sense of identity, resulting in the neglect of traditionally marginalized groups.

The setting up of the democratic state in India created a set of new institutions such as the electoral system, the schooling system, the Panchayati Raj institutions, the development bureaucracy and other organs of the modern developmental state. As we will see in subsequent chapters these institutions function quite well in Himachal unlike much of the rest of India (including Haryana) where these institutions have often been captured by vested interests. This is unsurprising and consistent with the discussion of public identity above as it reinforces the idea of the Himachali people's sense of the "public" which allows them to interact in public spaces without discrimination or favour. Thus the Sayana system (see below) has more smoothly given way to the Gram Panchayat, while Jati Panchayats in Haryana continue to be a force to reckon with and undermine the powers of the Gram Panchayat. It would be fair to say that Himachal's favourable social context has made it possible to achieve such a public identity allowing collective institutions to take root and function in the larger interests of people.

The formation of the independent state in 1971 also created new spaces for the expression of their public identity. Independent statehood for Himachal meant that the state got its own legislative assembly and closer proximity to elected representatives. It also enabled the state to formulate its own laws in conformity with its objectives which as we have already seen were far more egalitarian and participatory in nature. The laws and the programmes that the Himachal government formulated gave space to collective voices to function as partners in the development framework.

4.5 Community Action in Himachal

In Himachal a tradition of community action and collective decision-making has also helped in the establishing and shaping of institutions and their democratic functioning. The basis of collective action lies in the egalitarian features of Himachali society, as well as in the ecology of the region that has fostered economic interdependence and social

solidarity. According to historian Chetan Singh (1998), the need to make the best use of the highly dispersed mountain resources made collaboration within and across communities, key to survival. Since landholdings were small, terrain was difficult and common property resources had to be preserved and managed to the benefit of all communities, it was necessary to develop a social organization based on mutual help and cooperation. This led to economic interdependence between communities and developed a culture of collective participation across communities irrespective of caste and gender.

Patterns of reciprocity and collaboration among the people have long existed in this region. One example of this, already mentioned, is the practice of exchange labour or *jowary* as it is called in Kullu (or *daruch, thela or buara* in other districts). This system is used primarily for help in fields but also in other areas of domestic assistance as well, such as carrying heavy materials up from the road and construction of houses (see Table 4.1 below). This tradition which includes all castes builds on and sustains a sense of interdependence and cohesion within the village.

Another form of community labour common in Himachal is *shram daan* (labour donation) used for public works. Fixing of roads, repair or cleaning of canals, building of schools, Panchayat Bhavans and other community structures are areas where *shram daan* continues to be used even today. It was frequently mentioned in my survey and all the villages I visited had some public works (mostly related to schools and cleaning of water channels) that had used community labour. What struck me was the wide spread acceptance of this practice. In a later visit (December 2007), however, I found that it is getting increasingly difficult to organize labour collectively for village tasks, especially cleaning of water channels (called *kuhls*). As a result this task has joined the category of 'public works' being undertaken under the National Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Many other forms of collaboration and collective decision-making have paved the way for associational life as well as the effective functioning of democratic institutions in Himachal. A few examples follow.

4.5.1. Dhoom

The tradition of collective action born out of economic interdependence has found many expressions extending beyond the purely economic domain. Singh, for instance, argues that community cohesion and economic interdependence gave the people the strength to resist attempts at suppressing them. Popular social and protest movements were a common occurrence. The protests were usually “expressed in forms rooted in local tradition, and strongly supported by the social structure” (Singh, 1998:109). One of the most popular forms of protest was the ‘Dhoom’ (a form of non-cooperation) which has been described in the Mandi State Gazette (1920:68) as follows⁵⁵:

The dum is one manifestation of the democratic spirit found amongst the peasantry of the hills and in several respects bears a resemblance to the modern forms of labour combination. Its effective weapon is the general strike, the malcontents attempting to achieve their objects by bringing the ordinary affairs of government to a standstill. A dum is not usually undertaken lightly, but when a decision has been reached its execution is prompt. A gathering is proclaimed by the beating of drums and the rebels, or reformers as they regard themselves collect together at some appointed spot... and swear in the name of god not to obey the chief or official, to whose methods they object...

The cohesiveness of the communities and the system of social decision-making allowed them to come together very quickly in protest against perceived injustices. From the documented instances of dhoom it is clear that this form of protest was commonly used against abuses such as extortionate land revenue assessment, official corruption and forced labour (Begar).⁵⁶ Dhoom was used by the peasantry (Kanets) to ‘retain some control over their rulers’. As the evidence suggests these rebellions were often successful in the sense that the main demands were met. This as mentioned above was partly due the theocratic system prevalent in Himachal where the Ranas were under moral obligation to do justice to the people. But it is also due to the fact that communities were successfully able to mobilize and put collective pressure through these ‘general strikes’ or ‘revolutions

⁵⁵ In Tehri Garhwal (UP), similar rebellions were called “Dhandak” and have been extensively documented by Guha (1989)

⁵⁶ Some documented Dhooms: Cash assessment of land revenue (1859 in Bashahar district); Removal of unpopular *vakil* from office (1859); Encroachment of rights and imposition of *begar* (1893, Mandi)

as they have been referred to in various District Gazetteers.⁵⁷

General strikes seem to continue to hold a place in the collective consciousness of the people, taking somewhat different forms. For instance, during my survey in Kullu district, I came across a village that had refused to vote, en mass, in the election prior to my visit.

4.5.2. Self Determination

In the more recent past the demand for a separate state also saw similar collaboration among the people. The strong sense of regional identity and recognition of a separate social order, which fuelled the demand for a separate state, had the support of all sections of the population. It is worth pointing out that Pahari identity in Himachal has a history of translating to community action. It is not confined to just cultural affinities among the people, but extends to pride in their region and its people as well as a desire to take them forward. The demand for Himachal as a separate state reflected that pride.

The writings of YS Parmar, chief campaigner, indicate that popular protests were widespread and took many different forms. No occasion involving the visit of an official from Punjab or Delhi was spared a demonstration or a boycott or some other show of discontent.⁵⁸ Hence, despite a great deal of hesitation within official circles with respect to granting independent status to this area, largely because of its weak economic status, Himachal Pradesh was given independent status in 1971. It would be hard to deny that widespread pressure from the population played an important role in this decision.

4.5.3 Jowary or Exchange Labour

In some ways, the tradition of mutual cooperation and reciprocal exchange has been affected by recent economic and social developments. For instance, economic interdependence at the village level is less important today than in the past, given the closer integration of the village economy with the outside world (including the growth of labour migration). Similarly, new sources of economic inequality have emerged, such as

⁵⁷ Mandi State Gazetteer, 1920, Simla Hill States Gazetteer, 1910.

⁵⁸ Letters written by Parmar to the States Re-organization Commission.

unequal access to public sector employment. Nevertheless, the tradition of mutual cooperation and reciprocal exchange is still alive, and it was certainly evident in my survey villages. For instance, a majority of households were involved in exchange labour, known as “jowary” (see Table 4.1). Further, the level of involvement in jowary was similar among different castes, and exchange labour was often practiced across caste lines. In Haryana, by contrast, exchange labour was less common, and it was practiced mainly by the Jats and other land-owning castes. Also interesting is the perception of this institution among different social groups. In the Himachal villages, jowary was considered both ‘successful’ and ‘fair’ by a majority of respondents, irrespective of caste. In Haryana, by contrast, exchange labour is largely seen as a defunct institution, especially by the lower castes.

Table 4.1: Involvement in Jowary (Exchange Labour)
(% of households)

	Kullu (Himachal)			Faridabad (Haryana)		
	SC	Others	Total	SC	Others	Total
Jowary Participation	59	59	59	13	48	29
Participating HHs considering it successful	47	68	61	0	17	13
Participating HHs considering it fair	41	51	48	0	8	6

Source: Author’s field survey.

4.5.4 Dispute Resolution

My field data also show some interesting differences between the two states in terms of community life and crisis management at the village level. For instance, the resolution of disputes in Himachal tends to take place more frequently within the Gram Panchayats than through the police and courts, unlike in Haryana (see Table 4.2).

One incident that took place in Shird Panchayat during my field work is illustrative of the way disputes are handled in Himachal. In this case, two ‘lumpen’ sons of one of the better-off families of the village got drunk and misbehaved with some women at a wedding. Shamsher, husband of one of the women asked them to stop and got into a verbal duel that soon deteriorated into fisticuffs. Peace was brokered and the women went home. But a little later, the drunks returned to Shamsher’s house and insisted on talking

to him. When his wife told him he had not yet returned from the wedding they pulled out a gun and threatened her. Neighbours intervened and the boys were sent home. Next morning Shamsher registered a complaint with the police adding the unlicensed gun in his complaint. The parents of the boys came begging and crying to Shamsher to withdraw the case. They also appealed to the Pradhan to intervene, offering to get the boys to apologize and promise to behave in future. At first Shamsher refused to budge. Only after the Pradhan's father (an old 'Sayana' of the village and a much respected person) came twice to Shamsher to personally appeal to give the boys one last chance, did Shamsher relent. After this incident however, the family of the boys was 'black-listed' and not welcomed in most of the homes of the village. Their mother, who was the Pradhan of the Mahila Mandal, was also asked to resign.

**Table 4.2: Dispute Resolution
(No. of cases)**

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
By Gram Panchayat	14	1
By Caste Panchayat	NA	2
By Court	8	10
By Police	1	11
By Mutual Agreement	1	1

Source: Author's field survey. NA: not applicable (no caste panchayats in the Himachal villages)

Table 4.2 provides evidence from my field data of the ability of the village as a community to resolve disputes without having to go to the police. A majority of the cases around the time of my field work had been dealt with by the Panchayat in Himachal, unlike Haryana where the Gram Panchayat had barely any success, either in attracting or being able to resolve the matter. In Himachal, it is mostly property related issues that went to court.

4.5.5. 'Sayana' System vs the Jati Panchayat

A contrast between the traditional systems of 'governance' and dispute resolution in

Haryana and Himachal is a good example of differences in social structures and community action in the two states. While Himachal had what was called the ‘Sayana’ or village elder arbitrating disputes and functioning as the focal point for most community matters across castes, Haryana, like many other states, had the Jati Panchayat. Jati Panchayats, as the name implies, are local caste councils overseeing matters related to people of a particular jati or caste. They tend to be extremely rigid forms of social control with the primary mandate of preserving a separate identity for the concerned caste. By enforcing stringent rules of caste behaviour that reinforce the exclusivity of the caste group they play a role in keeping castes divided. This is quite different from the Sayana who is conceptualized for the village as a group and is known to arbitrate for all castes. What is true however is that the Sayana was not likely to belong to a Dalit group and most often would have been a Brahmin. Nevertheless, the Sayana comes into the picture only to offer advice, sought by all sides when people are unable to resolve a dispute elsewhere (as in the case described above).

4.5.6 Generalized Reciprocity in Village Communities

There are other interesting contrasts between Himachal and Haryana in terms of the frequency and nature of informal collective action. I found that in Haryana people cite festivals as the most common occasion for getting together at the village level. However, even then there is little interaction across castes as villages are spatially divided on the basis of caste. In fact, to many upper caste groups even the idea of “the village” does not extend to the area (*mohalla*) where Dalit communities live. When asked about the village getting together the respondents tended to exclude those parts inhabited by the lower castes. In Himachal, there are several occasions when the whole village gets together for community activities including fund raising (*chanda*) as seen in Table 4.4, below. Community action for schooling is particularly striking: 53 per cent of the households in Himachal had contributed to a *chanda* to help the local schools, compared with only 13 per cent in Haryana. In Haryana, temple building and festivals were the main fundraising occasions.

Table 4.3: Civic Cooperation-I
(Occasions when village gets together)

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Festival	56	65
Pilgrimage	11	12
Elections / voting	1	48
Other	67	15

Source: Author’s field survey. Figures in percentage of respondent households that felt that the village gets together for the specified occasion.

While Table 4.3 shows, some similarities between Haryana and Himachal in public perceptions of occasions when people get together, there are also interesting differences e.g. when it comes to the question of elections and voting. In Himachal, voting is obviously considered an individual exercise. Even though people line up to vote and the turn-outs are generally higher in Himachal than in Haryana, people do not see casting the vote as a collective civic activity. In Haryana on the other hand, the preponderance of vote bank politics seems to have converted voting itself into a collective exercise where people are brought together in groups with an expectation that they will vote as one block.

In the “other” community activities Himachal respondents named a variety of occasions where social gatherings took place from life-cycle occasions to festivals and other celebrations to common get-togethers with people from all parts of the village joining in. In Haryana on the other hand, there was an absence of community activity of this kind. As a result of which the family and the caste related occasions were the only times when people got together for social interactions.

**Table 4.4: Civic Cooperation-II
(Occasions when village collects chanda)**

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Disaster relief	13	8
Festival	14	20
Temple building	47	74
Road building	16	5
School-related	53	13

Source: Author’s field survey. Figures in percentages of respondent households that had contributed to a chanda of the specified variety.

The question relating to public contributions (chanda) was included in the survey because it seemed like the best way to relate personal priorities to public interests. Chanda in various parts of India has its own importance but has traditionally been restricted to purposes of religion. The survey results show Haryana conforming to this norm. However, Himachal shows a marked difference in the recognition amongst people that development activities like road building and schools are priorities they must push as well not just by putting pressure on government, but also by contributing personally.

4.5.7. Village Associations

A similar contrast arises when one looks at people’s participation in different kinds of associations at the village level (see Table 4.5 below). If the propensity to form associations was an indicator of democracy, in the Tocquevillian or even Putnam sense, Himachal would win hands down. Villages are replete with associations of all kinds: Devta or Temple Committees; Bhajan Mandlis (choir groups), Festival Committees; Village Committees; Yuva Mandals (Youth Clubs); Mahila Mandals (women’s groups); Forest Committees; Village Education Committees, PTAs and Mother Teacher Associations. And all of these are usually functional in some form or the other, with perhaps the “Village Committee” (separate from the Panchayat) and the Mahila Mandals the most common and most active associations across villages. Some of them have paid memberships, like the Devta Committee, which excludes Dalits from membership,

although Dalits are included in the celebrations organized by it on payment of a temporary fee. But in most others membership is not exclusive and office bearers are typically elected.

Involvement in institutions such as Gram Panchayats and Mahila Mandals is much higher in Himachal than in Haryana, and does not vary much between different caste groups (e.g. Dalits are as involved in the Gram Panchayat as other castes). Given the history of associational life in Himachal Pradesh which survives to date, it is not surprising that democratic institutions set up by the government in the post-independence period have taken better root here than in many other states.

Table 4.5: Membership of Associations

	Kullu (Himachal)			Faridabad (Haryana)		
	SC	Other	Total	SC	Other	Total
Gram Panchayat	44	49	48	3	8	5
Mahila Mandal	36	57	49	6	8	7
Youth Club	6	8	7	0	4	2
Labour Exchange	59	59	59	13	48	29
Temple/Mosque Committee	22	9	15	0	0	0
Political Party	6	9	8	0	0	0
Other	56	60	60	19	12	16
Membership of any Association			83			15

Source: Author's field survey. Figures refer to proportion of respondents who are members of different kinds of associations, or have been in the recent past.

4.6. Summing Up

The social history of Himachal is marked by continuity and change at many different levels. While it steadfastly holds on to its 'pahari' (hill peoples) identity, the hold of caste on its social consciousness is fast declining. In urban centres in particular caste identities are noticeably dwindling. Migrants, for instance, commonly seek out and get support from fellow-villagers across castes. While they admit that back in their villages they may not be able to eat together, many of the older practices of segregation and discrimination are fading away. Similarly, even as it has shed some of the older systems of community management such as the Sayana (village elder) who was the final authority on local

matters, and adopted 'modern' institutions of governance such as the Panchayats, traditional systems of reciprocity and interdependence such as exchange labour still survive. While these may be seen as adjustments in a more desirable direction, other not-so desirable changes have also taken place, especially in terms of the status of women and girls. For instance, bride price has given way to dowry and in some districts (especially bordering Punjab) rapidly declining sex-ratios, have raised concerns about female foeticide. Nevertheless, gender relations remain far more favourable in Himachal compared with most other parts of India. Especially in terms of a gender gap in literacy, health indicators and violence against women.

To sum up, economic interdependence, a developed sense of regional (*pahari*) identity and relative social equality have contributed to a more inclusive public identity and a social context more conducive to collective action and participation in Himachal.

In Haryana on the other hand, it becomes clear how the economic and social history of the state and its people have led to narrower identities of caste, restricted role for women coupled with an enhanced masculine identity and therefore community action that has been heavily influenced by this larger social ethos.

Chapter Five

Gender Relations and Women's Agency

5.1. Introduction

An important aspect of social equality, discussed in Chapter 1, relates to gender and the agency of women. As mentioned in that chapter, the role of women in the success of Himachal's human development has been crucial. In particular their participation in the public space distinguishes Himachali women from their counterparts in Haryana. It has allowed them not only to take advantage of opportunities provided by the state, such as education, but also to be active participants in the social and political life of the community. In particular, the comparison serves to highlight the links between gender equity and women's agency. It shows how the comprehensive subjugation of women in Haryana has affected not just the status of women but other spheres of social and political life as well. As noted by Dreze and Sen (2002), "the social ramifications of gender inequality are potentially very wide and extend beyond issues of child survival, nutrition, health and education...". The comparison with Haryana provides evidence of these wide ranging links between gender equity and social development.

In this chapter perhaps more than in others, I have made intensive use of the comparative framework. The reason is that the contrast between Himachal and Haryana is particularly sharp with regard to gender relations and also because women's agency has played a critical role in Himachal's success story. While gender relations are unequal in many respects in Himachal too with women having less access to power and resources than their male counterparts, relative to Haryana, women in Himachal fare dramatically better. The broad ramifications of gender equity and women's agency thus come across most sharply when compared to the situation of women in Haryana.

5.2. Gender Relations in the Domestic Sphere

5.2.1 The Girl Child

In most of rural India the attitude to gender is dramatically illustrated at the time of birth. Overt public expressions to the news of the birth of a girl or boy child, which have taken

on the form of social customs, have reinforced these gender preferences. For instance, the birth of a daughter in many parts of north India is marked by loud crying and beating of the chest (*chhati peetna*), much as it is when someone dies, whereas in contrast the birth of a son is celebrated with the sounds of cymbals clashing and other joyful expressions.

In Himachal women are not considered a burden, and the birth of a girl is not generally greeted with such sadness and gloom.⁵⁹ In many cases I was told that even though they would like to have a son they felt it was also important to have a girl. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III, 2005-06), the ideal number of sons reported by married women in the age group 15-49 years in Himachal is 0.8, compared with 0.7 for daughters. Although this indicates some preference for boys, the gap is small, while in Haryana the corresponding figures are 1.1 and 0.8 (see Table 5.1). While 93 per cent of the men in my Himachal sample said that they were not disappointed by the birth of a daughter, only 72 per cent of those in Haryana claimed the same. Chowdhry (2004) notes several local sayings that decry the birth of daughters and glorify the birth of sons in the folklore of Haryana.⁶⁰ What is interesting is her observation that while a few decades ago some of the proverbs gave daughters some importance, now those proverbs seem to have disappeared from popular use and only the ones that emphasise the importance of sons and the burden of having daughters remain in use.

Table 5.1: Sex Ratios and Preference for Sons

	Sex Ratio (female/male)	Sex Ratio (age 0-6 years)	Mean ideal number of children	
			Sons	Daughters
Himachal	970 (991)	897 (900)	0.8	0.7
Haryana	861 (867)	820 (824)	1.1	0.8

Source: Census of India 2001; NFHS-III (IIPS, 2007).

Figures in brackets are for rural areas.

In Himachal there is a tradition-based desire for a son, but not necessarily to the

⁵⁹ However in the registration of births, which is done by the Gram Panchayats it costs more to register a boy than a girl!

⁶⁰ Some proverbs quoted by Chowdhry (2004) in her book: “One who has no sons knows no prosperity”; “When sons grow up sorrows depart”; “The son of an unfortunate dies and the daughter of a fortunate dies”.

exclusion of daughters, as in Haryana. There is far greater recognition of the worth of a daughter in Himachal. As discussed later, the burden of the dowry is also much less debilitating in Himachal than in Haryana.

In the parental home, discrimination between sons and daughters is considered non-existent in Himachal, judging from the responses in my field survey. It certainly does not exist to any significant extent in terms of education, at least up to high school level. In terms of food and medical care, too, it is claimed that there is no discrimination. The health statistics, especially the gender-specific mortality rates, corroborate this. In Haryana, preferential treatment of the male child in terms of food is a well-accepted practice. “Gradually throughout her childhood the girl is brought up to believe that in the organisation of serving and distribution of food within the household, the leftovers are to be eaten by the female and not by the male members” (Chowdhry 2004: 234). Monica Das Gupta’s 1971 study, which looks at the allocation of food among boys and girls in Punjab, also shows that while girls are given more cereals, boys are given more milk and fat with their cereals.⁶¹ These valued and expensive food items with high nutritional content are reserved for the male child. The health statistics (see 5.3.7) testify to the detrimental effects of neglect and malnutrition on the mortality of the girl child in Haryana.

As can be seen in Table 5.1, Himachal has a much better sex ratio than Haryana. It is believed that strong son preference in Haryana has led to the ghastly practice of female foeticide. While none of the respondents in my sample confessed to actually resorting to it themselves, they universally admitted to the use of foeticide by families in their village.⁶² Importantly, all the women said that they believed it to be a ghastly act but were unable to exercise their will. What is particularly telling of the cultural view of women and the importance of male progeny is the fact that for a long time the Haryana government refused to ban sex-selection tests, thus lending tacit support to female foeticide. In Himachal, son preference appears to be fairly moderate, although there are

⁶¹ Monica Das Gupta (1971).

⁶² In some areas of Haryana foeticide is openly advertised by clinics. Hoardings say ‘Spend Rs.1000, now and save Rs.100, 000 later’, the latter figure referring to expenditure on the wedding and dowry of a girl.

signs that the situation is changing as indicated by the decline in the sex ratio in the age group 0-6 years in some districts, as discussed later in this chapter.

5.2.2 Marriage and Kinship Systems

Marriage customs in Himachal are not as patriarchal as in many other parts of north India. While patrilocal exogamy is more or less the norm, marriages within the village can also take place without social censure. Similarly, while most marriages are arranged by parents or elders, choosing one's own partner is not unheard of or frowned upon as long as it is within the outer boundaries of caste (*varna*, not necessarily *jati*)⁶³. In some of the villages, in fact, choice-marriage is the norm. This is a good example of the social status a woman enjoys in Himachal in contrast with other parts of North India. A woman's choice is often recognised and accepted as much as that of a man. My fieldwork shows that in answer to a question on what was the most important consideration in deciding a girl's marriage the most frequently cited answer in Himachal, after caste, was the girl's choice. This is in stark contrast to Haryana, where the girl's preference is not considered – it is taken for granted that the parent's choice should be acceptable to her. In my sample, 60 per cent of respondents (and 44 per cent of female respondents) reported marrying their own choice of husband in Himachal, but the corresponding figures in Haryana were 14 per cent of all respondents and 14 per cent of female respondents (see Table 5.2).

Women in Himachal tend to marry later than women elsewhere in the country. One possible reason for this could be the higher level of education for girls. According to NFHS III (2005-06), Himachal has the lowest proportion (14 per cent) of women aged 18-29 years who were married before the age of 18. For Haryana, the corresponding figure is 41 per cent.

Most people in Himachal are aware that it is illegal to marry their daughters before the age of eighteen, and my sample has no instance of recent marriage below that age, let

⁶³ Interestingly *jati* seems to matter more the lower down the caste hierarchy one goes.

alone child marriage.⁶⁴ Parents seemed to want their girls to be mature enough to handle the responsibilities of marriage and home management. By contrast, in Haryana, even where there is awareness about the legal age of marriage I found that local customs favouring early marriage prevailed. The predominant notion regarding the marriage of a daughter in Haryana is that the earlier she is married the easier it will be for her to adjust to her marital home. The table below further illustrates these and other contrasts in marriage customs in Himachal and Haryana.

**Table 5.2: Marriage and Related Customs
(% of Respondents)**

	Kullu (Himachal)			Faridabad (Haryana)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Married own choice of spouse	64	44	60	14	14	14
Practice dowry / bride price			84			84
Married in own natal village	30	12	26	5	0	2
Educated girl implies higher dowry	7	0	5	50	38	41
- lower dowry	8	18	11	6	6	6
- same dowry	85	82	84	44	56	53
Encourage widow remarriage	61	61	61	71	67	68
- within the community only	27	22	25	94	93	94
- outside the community	73	78	75	6	7	6
Support daughter in marriage distress			75			17
Gender based restrictions on eating together*			5			65

Source: Author's field survey. * For instance daughters in law cannot eat in the presence of father-in-law.

In Himachal, frequent and long visits by women to their parents' home after marriage is common, although the woman's parents will rarely visit her in her marital home.⁶⁵ In

⁶⁴ Very recently the Supreme Court has made the registration of all marriages compulsory in order to improve records and also as a check on child marriages. While this is a very recent move, Himachal is one of only three states that have already enforced the registration of marriages in their states. The others are Maharashtra and Gujarat.

⁶⁵ In Kangra, if the parents of a woman accept tea in her marital home they pay for it. This has been related by anthropologists (Parry, 1979 and Narayan 1997) to the traditions of 'gift-giving' and 'gift-taking' during weddings, with the girl's family being the givers (including primarily the 'gift of a virgin') and the boy's family the gift-takers. This tradition that starts with the wedding establishes the pattern of behaviour for the future. Hence the girl's family being gift-givers cannot and must not accept any gifts from the boy's family - the gift-takers. In my research area I did not come across such customs, and in this respect, Kangra

Haryana, especially in traditional Hindu households, once a woman leaves for her husband's home her contact with her parents' home is all but severed. Much of the trauma of marriage and leaving the home of her parents is associated with a fear that she may not be allowed to return. In Himachal, however, I found that a married woman tends to retain substantial and enduring links with their parental home, especially with her brother and his wife, so that after her father's death she can continue to keep up her association with her natal home. According to a Pahari saying it is evil to stop a woman from going to her *mait* (natal place) – seen as the place of her origin (root). The persistence of such links in hill societies has been particularly noted by anthropologists, such as Berreman (1962) and Sax (1991). For instance, Sax's research in the UP hills shows that the complete transformation in primary kin relationships and social obligations that is expected of a woman when she moves into her affinal home is belied in social customs of the Garhwal hills. Here the importance of the woman's presence in her *mait* during key religious events (such as the Nanda Devi procession) as well as several other contexts suggests an "alternative female model of place and person". (: 115)

The knowledge that the parental home is accessible to her goes a long way in giving confidence to the married woman in her marital home. I came across some cases where women did fall back on their parents in times of marital distress. While the parents found this a financial strain, there was no doubt in their minds that they had to extend their support to their daughter in her time of need. They also expressed a desire to try and promote the couple's reconciliation, even if some compromise was required on the part of the girl. But this was never an enforced unilateral decision, and there was no sense of the woman being abandoned and left to deal with her *kismet* on her own, as so often the case elsewhere in India. In Haryana the corresponding attitudes and practices follow the more typical North Indian patterns, with parents of girls believing that once the girl is married she becomes part of her husband's lineage and must learn to adjust in her new home

appears to be atypical of Himachal. Parry and Narayan both worked in Kangra and have reported practices that differ from other parts of Himachal. Another striking example of this difference is veiling among women, which is also prevalent in Kangra but not elsewhere. In Kullu, where my fieldwork was based, people often referred to Kangra as the place where stronger patriarchal norms were practiced than in their area. There may be some link here between the proximity and influence of the Punjab plains, area, known for its more patriarchal practices. Kangra has had greater influence of the Punjab plains than most other parts of Himachal.

whatever the circumstances. While in Himachal 75 per cent of my respondents claimed that they would support their daughter in times of marital distress, in Haryana the corresponding figure was only 17 per cent (Table 5.2).

In Himachal, the remarriage of widows across castes is encouraged, especially if the woman is young. Levirate (re-marriage with a brother of the deceased husband) does not appear to be very common any more, although researchers working in the area a few decades ago have reported levirate as the norm (Berreman 1972). I did come across some instances where older widows with children were discouraged from remarrying because of concerns about the readjustment of their children, although fear of losing their inheritance may also have figured in their decision not to remarry.

Inheritance in Himachal follows the patrilineal system (see below), but a woman retains a claim on her father's resources even after marriage and it appears to be fairly common for the brother to continue playing his father's role as supporter after the latter's death. Some rights to movable property continue to accrue to the married woman. For instance, Himachali women often collect some grain from their parental home after the harvest. However, a great deal depends on the relationship a woman maintains with her brother and his wife, and soured relationships could result in her being cut off.

In Haryana, while widow remarriage is encouraged it is strictly within the family (more than 90 per cent of respondents said that a widow could marry only within the family – Table 5.2). The practice of *karewa* (cohabitation of a widow within the family tantamount to marriage) has been in existence in Haryana for a long time.⁶⁶ Feminists argue that far from being liberating for women it has been designed to safeguard the land and keep it within the family and clan as well as availing the family of the additional benefit of female labour.

Dowry has become an accepted practice in Himachal, but it takes a different and less

⁶⁶ More recently with the rise of the Arya Samaj movement in Haryana *karewa* has been changed to *niyog*, which apparently has Vedic roots and thus greater religious sanction. In practice the two are the same.

harmful form than elsewhere in north India. Whenever a girl gets married the entire village contributes to her dowry, making this much less debilitating for her parents. Everyone invited to the wedding, which often includes the entire village, brings a gift that becomes part of the dowry. Furthermore, the groom's family does not generally make dowry demands either at the time of the wedding or afterwards. According to my respondents, no such demands would be entertained anyway. From what I was told, the dowry consists largely of clothes, some gold for the bride (if family resources allow) and household implements, mostly pots and pans. In Haryana, by contrast, the amount of dowry a woman brings often determines her status in her marital home, even though she has no control over it, and it often sets the precedent for a host of other expectations from her natal home throughout her life that subject her and her family to the constant pressure of demands.

My assessment of the situation is that there may be a link between the less burdensome practice of dowry and the acknowledgement of the economic and social value of women in Himachal. The constant reference to the hard work they do in the fields and at home gave me the sense that in Himachal they are regarded as an asset and not a liability. So the boys' families do not want to risk breaking off a proposal by their greed for dowry. At the same time, the girl's family also realises the worth of a daughter as an extra pair of hands in the family and also in other ways. Unlike in other parts of north India, the parents of girls in Himachal do not feel pressured to get their daughters married off as soon as possible. This sense of the woman as a burden to be offloaded onto another family and the willingness to pay for this in the form of a dowry does not exist here; another reason for the relatively late marriage age of women.

Finally it must also be noted that dowry appears to be of relatively recent origin in Himachal. Bride price used to be the traditional practice, which still exists in many areas. It is unfortunate that dowry is fast replacing bride price with the latter strongly frowned upon and associated with people of 'lesser origin' and not strictly within the Hindu fold. Like the recent decline in the sex ratio among children in Himachal, this is another indication that not all recent changes in gender relations in Himachal have been in the

direction of greater equality.

The greater independence that a woman appears to have in Himachal has an obvious impact on her participation in the public space. For instance, the freedom to travel on a regular basis to her natal home also implies, amongst other things, greater mobility and the confidence of being able to get into a bus or other form of transport and negotiate perhaps a difficult journey through the hills. Greater mobility also implies that interaction with the market place is possible. These and other simple freedoms often form the first

5.2.3 Gender Segregation in the Family

Women in Himachal are not oppressed in their marital home in the way they are in Haryana, where they are constantly under pressure to conform to various rules about their appearance and behaviour. In Haryana women eat separately and only after the men have finished. Sixty-five per cent of my respondents testified to this practice (in Himachal the corresponding figure was five per cent; see Table 5.2). Married women in Haryana can never show their faces to the older men of the household and can only appear before them with their faces fully covered. While they do all the work in the home as well as in the fields they have little say or control over any decisions. Production of a male heir is of primary importance in determining a woman's status in her marital home.

By contrast, there are few seclusion practices in Himachal. While the daughter-in-law serves food to everyone they all eat together. Women do not cover their faces or their heads for anyone and they participate actively in household decisions. To questions ranging from schooling to marriage decisions I was told that the parents took all decisions together.⁶⁷ The NFHS-II (1998-99) found that “virtually all (99 per cent) women are involved in decision-making on at least one of four selected topics”: 81 per cent take decisions about their own health; 66 per cent do not need permission to go to the market or visit a friend; 60 per cent can decide independently how to spend the money they earn. The fact that Himachali women have a voice within the family, and are not relegated to

⁶⁷ Guha makes similar observations in the context of Uttaranchal: “In the orbit of the household women often take decisions which are rarely challenged by the men” (1989:175).

subordinate roles, is an important part of the social context that has made it possible for them to play an active role outside the domestic sphere as well.

5.3. Gender Relations in the Social Sphere

5.3.1 Caste, Class and Gender

In Himachal caste does not appear to affect gender relations as significantly as in some other parts of the country. For instance, in many parts of the country it is often found that women of the upper castes are unable to take part in various activities due to caste taboos such as seclusion practices, which do not apply to lower caste women.⁶⁸ Hence in such instances upper caste women find themselves constrained compared to their lower caste counterparts, as in Haryana. But in Himachal such practices exist only minimally or not at all and hence have less effect on the overall freedom available to a woman. In other words, the ritual difference between the castes does not impose extra restrictions on upper caste women in Himachal.

Class makes a greater difference if any, especially as it affects workforce participation. The economic status of lower caste households makes it imperative in most cases for women to seek employment, increasing their economic independence relative to upper caste women. But since economic disparities are narrower in Himachal, the effects of class difference on the status of women are also correspondingly less extreme.

However, there is segregation among women of different castes at the village level. Women of upper castes do not socialise with women of lower castes. Restrictions on inter-dining prevent any close interaction. This is noticeable in the segregation between women in the Mahila Mandals. Typically the Mandals tend to be dominated by upper caste women who, even while unable to exclude lower caste women from membership, prefer to keep them on the fringes. Many scheduled caste women complained about how they would not be allowed to share the same mat as an upper caste woman – having to sit on the bare floor at the edge of the room – and would not be offered the refreshments

⁶⁸ Reporting from Kangra, Narayan (1997) does note that for upper caste women a great deal of time is spent in the 'service of gods' i.e., in religious rituals, which rituals are not observed by lower caste women.

which the upper caste women enjoyed. Such practices, which they found humiliating, have led many lower caste women to drop out of the Mahila Mandals. Interestingly in a majority of these cases (in five out of six villages) I found that the lower caste women had formed their own Mahila Mandal. I deal with this issue in more detail in Section 5.4, but suffice it to say here that this example of lower caste Mahila Mandals indicates that while caste plays a role in their social life, it is not altogether restrictive. In fact, the ability of lower-caste women to set up their own Mahila Mandal reflects their power to carve out a political space for themselves. On the one hand women have taken to Mahila Mandals more than any in other state, but within it some inequalities continue to impinge. However, Dalit women rather than get totally suppressed by the discrimination have rejected the discriminatory space. In fact, they have used the very identity of exclusion to organize themselves and stake a claim to equality and self respect.

However, this separation does mean that women of both caste groups are unable to share each other's spaces, which would greatly expand the horizons of both. Narayan (1997) reports that women often (jokingly) referred to 'the woman's caste', signifying solidarity among women across castes. It is unfortunate that this solidarity is reduced by the separate social spaces engendered by caste differences.

Having said that though the double and triple disadvantage that class and caste impose, on gender are much less in Himachal. This is particularly noticeable, as we will see below, in the spheres of education and health where the gender gaps for Dalit girls and women are not significantly greater than for women of upper castes. In Haryana, the problem of multiple disadvantages is much more apparent.

5.3.2 Ownership and Control of Land

In Himachal, as elsewhere in north India, women generally have no ownership of land or immovable property. Even in the absence of institutional or legal obstacles to the ownership of land, women are rarely found to be independent property holders. As mentioned earlier, women in Himachal do retain access to their father's and later their brother's property even after marriage. As long ago as 1952, Newell reported from

Chamba that after marriage women retained a sort of residual membership to their *gotras*, the ultimate land distribution units.⁶⁹ However the ideological priority given to women's relationship of dependence on brothers and husbands has prevented them from becoming independent owners of land. There are certain circumstances under which they may hold land in their name but this is usually nominal; for instance land may be registered in woman's name but managed by the men, or the registration is provisional until a male heir is produced or reaches maturity (Sharma: 1980).

This is not to say that women are completely marginalised from the land, as the division of labour is such that men are found in paid employment while women work on the land. In hill economies like Himachal, since the entire population is unable to sustain itself on agricultural land the out-migration of men is common and women often find themselves managing the land entirely on their own. In such cases they have virtual control over the land, even though its ownership is not in their name. Of all the states in India, Himachal has the highest percentage of women cultivators – 86.2% as a proportion of total workers (Census of India 2001).

In Haryana, a society dominated by large landowners, women's access to and control of land is highly restricted. Practices such as strict patrilocal exogamy for women and widow remarriage (*karewa* as discussed in Section 5.3.2) are also based on considerations of retaining ownership and access to land to the male heirs. Unlike in Himachal, while women in Haryana also work long hours on the land they have little or no control over it. What is particularly disturbing was the fact that I often found women putting in longer hours of manual labour on farm or farm-based activities than the men but with no acknowledgement or recognition, let alone control. It was clearly taken for granted that they contribute to the household economy without expecting anything in return. The cultural ethos surrounding a woman's place within the household remains unchanged when extended to the economic domain of the household. Links In Himachal women almost co-owners – management decisions; all have some land; this affects public dealings basically for women of all social groups.

⁶⁹ Newell, William.H. (1972).

5.3.3 Education and Schooling

In Himachal, unlike in many North Indian states including Haryana, schooling for girls has become a social norm. Hence physical access does not deter school participation. Schools here tend to be located at the top of hills, the climb to which is physically hard, and they are isolated. But this does not prevent girls from attending, because it is a socially accepted fact that they will go to school. Similarly, the regularity with which they attend high school, usually located some distance from their homes, also belies the notion that physical access is the stumbling block. Even a casual visitor cannot fail to notice the many groups of girls making their way to school every morning. Equally commendable is the fact that not only is the education of girl children an accepted practice but there appears to be less discrimination against them in terms of educational aspirations. Sending a girl a fair distance (for instance, to a neighbouring town) to high school is common practice.⁷⁰ In Kullu district, my field area, there was unanimous support for the education of girls and I did not come across a single household with girls who were not attending school. This is consistent with PROBE (1999), which also found a high level of acceptance and motivation for girls' education in Himachal.

In Haryana, the education of girls is still not as widely accepted as in Himachal. At least, it is given less priority, as reflected in the reluctance to spend the larger sums required to send girls to private schools – the growing norm in Haryana. Patriarchal norms also impinge on girls' mobility and make it harder for them to travel any distance away from home to attend school. According to Chowdhry (2004) one reason for the low value given to women's schooling in Haryana is the high value attached to their labour in agriculture. It is popularly believed that education would destroy the concept of agricultural work being a woman's moral duty. In Himachal, by contrast, an important motivation for sending girls to school is that it improves their employment and income opportunities, as the tables below illustrate. It is also interesting to note that in Himachal female education is perceived as improving marriage prospects, while in Haryana it is considered a liability in this respect (see Table 5.3). A majority of respondents in

⁷⁰ While the older age group was not strictly part of my sample my informal interaction with them was instructive. The level of confidence and poise they displayed was very impressive.

Himachal, both male and female, also value girls education from the point of view of improving work opportunities; in Haryana by contrast the employment value of girls education gets little recognition especially by female respondents. Tables 5.3 and 5.4 below look at household responses to the importance of education for both boys and girls.

Table 5.3: Perceived Importance of Girls' Education in Himachal and Haryana (% of respondents)

	Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1 Improves employment opportunities	64	52	38	14
2 Increases income	42	30	38	14
3 Improves social status	12	0	14	14
4 Improves self-confidence	3	4	5	14
5 Leads to greater independence	3	0	10	14
6 Helps in writing letters/ keeping accounts	6	4	19	19
7 Helps in teaching own children	42	48	24	28
8 Improves marriage prospects	66	70	14	31
9 Other	21	26	19	14

Source: Author's field survey.

Table 5.4: Perceived Importance of Boys' Education in Himachal and Haryana (% of respondents)

	Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1 Improves employment opportunities	79	74	86	83
2 Increases income	69	57	76	69
3 Improves social status	36	26	19	17
4 Improves self-confidence	15	9	14	0
5 Leads to greater independence	6	9	14	6
6 Helps w writing letters/ keeping accounts	9	4	5	3
7 Helps in teaching own children	12	9	0	0
8 Improves marriage prospects	46	35	14	8
9 Other	24	26	0	8

Source: Author's field survey.

The role of elementary education in Himachal Pradesh's development experience, both as

an aspect of its social achievements and as a driving force behind many of these achievements is discussed in further detail in Chapter 8. The rapid spread of girls' education since independence is a particularly remarkable aspect of this story. As discussed in that chapter state intervention in education has played a major role in making schooling facilities of reasonable quality accessible to all. This is one example of the constructive role of the state in consolidating Himachal's heritage of relatively egalitarian gender relations.

5.3.4. Health

Health data provide further indications of the comparative status of women in Himachal and Haryana. As Table 5.5 illustrates, women's health achievements are generally better in Himachal, in spite of the fact that per capita incomes are no higher than in Haryana. This is reflected not only the better state of public health services discussed in the preceding chapter, but also the greater importance attached to women's health. In Haryana, on the other hand, "the discrimination faced from infancy onwards in all matters including food, nutrition and use of medical facilities, combined with a heavy workload – both productive and reproductive – is responsible for [women's] poor health" (Prem Chowdhry 2004:2).

Table 5.5: Select Health Indicators for Women in Himachal and Haryana

	Himachal	Haryana
Total Fertility Rate (children per woman)	1.94	2.69
Current Use of Contraception (any method)	72.6	63.4
Ante-Natal Care (at least 3 visits)	62.6	58.8
Have heard of AIDS	78.9	60.0
Anaemia	40.9	56.5

Source: NFHS-III (2005-6). Figures in % of ever-married women in the age group of 15-49 years (except fertility rate).

The figures for infant and child mortality rates are particularly revealing of the gender

discrimination in Haryana (see Table 5.6). In Himachal the survival rates of children are no lower for girls than for boys; if anything it seems to be the reverse. At the infancy level females are known to have a biological advantage over males and that is reflected in the Himachal figures. That advantage starts to dissipate soon after and both sexes move into a more equitable position vis-à-vis each –again reflected in the Himachal figures. In Haryana, however, the situation is quite the reverse. Male infants appear to have better survival chances than females, with the difference between the two increasing dramatically as they move out of infancy. The female child mortality rate in Haryana being more than twice as high as the male child mortality rate suggests that whatever advantage the female infant had is quickly lost due to the high levels of neglect in subsequent years. This is perhaps the most disturbing statistic from Haryana and very telling of the kind of gender discrimination prevalent there in terms of nutrition and health.

Table 5.6: Mortality Rates and Life Expectancy of Women

	Himachal		Haryana	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Infant mortality	44.8	33.8	52.9	66.0
Child mortality	9.0	9.3	13.8	30.2
Under five mortality	53.4	42.8	66.0	94.2
Life expectancy at birth, 2005	64.6	65.2	63.7	64.6

Source: NFHS-II, 1998-99 and Sample Registration System, 2005. Except for “life expectancy”, the reference year is 1998-99.

5.3.5 Safety and Crime

Another important aspect of gender relations relates to violence, crime and the safety of women. Here again Himachal Pradesh appears in a relatively favourable light. For instance, it has the second lowest homicide rate among all major states. Similarly, Himachal Pradesh also has lower levels of domestic violence than any other state whether

one looks at physical, sexual or emotional violence.⁷¹

The safety issue is crucial to the physical access of women to public spaces, as it is often the fear of being assaulted or even harassed that keeps women hidden – either behind doors or behind the veil. In fact safety is often cited as an important issue in sending girls, especially post-pubertal girls, to school, and in many areas of Haryana it was often cited as a constraint to this. In Himachal this is another obstacle that does not appear to exist. The general level of safety for women is fairly high, as indicated by the ease with which they are able to travel in *and* outside their village. They are able to use public transport or walk quite freely, either on their own or in small groups, even to places outside their village. The presence of women on the road and at various offices confirms this observation. Without exception they claimed that they did not feel afraid to go out alone. They were able to move around in their own villages at any time of day or night (Table 5.7).

**Table 5.7: Perceptions of Fear and Safety
(% of female respondents)**

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Women not allowed to move around freely	0	49
Feel unsafe in village (female respondents only)	0	8

Source: Author's field survey.

To be able to walk on the roads without fear of being harassed or worse is no simple matter in north India, where even in a city like Delhi women are not always safe from gender-based attack, be this verbal, visual or physical. In my Himachal survey I was told of just one case of a dowry death and one of rape in my entire sample spanning two generations. In both cases not only the guilty person (husband and rapist respectively) but also their entire families were completely ostracized. Contrast this with my sample from Haryana, where there were several references to rape cases (most involving upper caste men and lower caste women, although a couple were intra-family/incest cases as well), all of which were hushed up.

⁷¹ NFHS-III, 2005-06 and Crime in India (several years).

In my fieldwork I was also struck by the comparative absence of fear in the lives of Himachali women. Even the manner in which men and women communicate conveys an acknowledgment of women as human beings in their own right. The level and tone of voice often used with women in north India, signifying their lesser place in all things, is rarely heard in Himachal. One does not hear that rebuking dismissing voice signalling a woman to keep to her place, whether in at home or in a government office. Similarly the sexually aggressive demeanour of men, which often keeps women away from public life, appeared to be absent. The women confirmed this themselves and it is reflected in the level of safety they feel. As a female researcher I too can say that, unlike in Haryana, I never felt in any way constrained or conscious of my gender at any stage of my field work in Himachal – whether in the villages going from household to household or at the district government offices. I could also clearly see that the women working in these offices felt completely at ease with their colleagues. The men may be resentful about women taking their place in areas such as the panchayats but they do not fight it in any aggressive way.

5.4 Gender Equality and Social Development

Egalitarian gender relations can contribute to social development in several ways. Some of these links have been widely discussed in the literature on women and development others are still in the process of being understood One of the best documented links is women's education; gender equity facilitates the participation of girls in schooling and this in turn has wide ranging social benefits. For example, many studies bring out the role of women's education in improving child health and child nutrition, reducing mortality rates and achieving the demographic transition.⁷² Table 5.8 and 5.9 illustrate this and other positive associations between women's education and quality of life.

⁷² See for instance, Caldwell (1986); Murthi et al., (1995); Dreze and Murthi (2001); Dreze and Sen (1995) AK Sen (2001), Behrman and Wolfe (1984, 1987), among others.

Table 5.8.: Women’s Education and Selected Indicators of Social Development (1998-99)

	Himachal Pradesh		Haryana	
	Illiterate	High school educated	Illiterate	High school educated
Not regularly exposed to any media	32.7	0.5	51.1	3.9
Have access to money	70.0	92.8	65.4	86.9
Involved in any decision-making	78.3	83.6	68.8	68.9
Beaten or physically abused since age 15	6.9	2.6	15.2	6.6
Total Fertility Rate	2.9	2.0	3.5	2.1
Aware of AIDS	27.1	96.8	20.2	94.9
No ante-natal check-up	33.0	2.8	57.5	15.0
Place of delivery: public health facility	9.0	49.2	2.6	13.7

Source: NFHS-II, 1998-99. Figures refer to percentage of women in the age group 15-49 years.

Table 5.9: Women’s Education and Child Health (1998-99)

	Himachal		Haryana	
	Illiterate	High school educated	Illiterate	High school educated
Post-neonatal mortality rate	19.9	7.0	31.6	16.7
Infant Mortality Rate	39.9	33.5	70.3	39.8
BCG vaccination*	82.0	98.7	77.6	98.6
At least one dose of Vitamin A*	43.4	82.5	40.0	55.9

Source: NFHS-II, 1998-99.

* percentage of children the age group 12-35 months.

Other authors have emphasized the social role of female autonomy and women’s empowerment whether or not it comes from education. There is some debate on whether schooling per se is empowering for women. One counter argument is that the schooling system reproduces gender inequality by imparting, instead of challenging, patriarchal norms (Jeffrey et. al., 1998, 2004, 2005, Jeffrey and Basu 1996, Chanana, 1988). What this debate often overlooks is that the empowerment value of education is also affected by the social context. In an environment where there is some social acceptance and space for women’s agency, education is likely to open up many new opportunities as seems to have happened in Himachal Pradesh. This is not to deny that schooling has its limitations

as a means of empowerment and many other aspects of gender relations, such as property rights, kinship systems etc., are also important. In these respects too as discussed in the previous section, Himachal society is relatively progressive. The power that women have as a result within the family facilitates their agency roles in many different spheres. It is also worth remembering that empowerment has value in itself; having greater freedom of mobility, expression and decision-making is an important aspect of quality of life –this is not the least important link between women’s empowerment and social development.

Another potential link operates through women’s participation in the work force, especially through paid employment. Here again there is some debate about the positive and negative effects of women’s work. Some authors have emphasized the empowerment value of women’s work outside the household, for instance as a means of economic independence. (Srivastava, 1999, Bhatta, 2008.). Others have argued that the empowerment value of women’s work could be quite limited if it is associated with exploitative conditions and the double burden domestic and paid work. (Banerjee, 1998). In this context it is important to distinguish between the individual effects of women’s work and the social effects. Even if women’s work does not lead to much individual empowerment, in a patriarchal society social effects of a general increase in women’s work participation may be quite significant and may help to challenge patriarchal norms. For instance to the extent that work participation is an entry point to social and political life, a society with higher levels of women’s work force participation would also benefit from women’s agency in various public domains. This is an important aspect of Himachal’s experience and is discussed in the following section.

5.5. Women’s Participation in Public and Political Life

5.5.1 Workforce Participation

According to the 2001 census, the rural female work participation rate in Himachal is 44 per cent, whereas in Haryana it is 27 per cent (see Table 5.8). From my own interviews in Himachal and Haryana it appears that women work outside the house for about six hours a day, mostly in the fields as family labour. The rest of the time they are involved with household work which includes collection of water, fuel and the care of cattle in addition

to the domestic chores of cooking and cleaning. In Haryana, care of cattle is especially important, as dairy farming is a major economic activity demanding much of a woman's time to care for milch animals.

Table 5.8: Female Work Participation Rates in Himachal and Haryana

	FWPR	Main Workers in Female Population (%)	Cultivators in Female Population (%)	Agri. Labourers in Female Population (%)
Himachal	43.7	21.1	86.2	2.9
Haryana	27.3	13.4	44.0	21.2

Source: Census of India 2001.

**Table 5.9: Women and Work in Himachal and Haryana
(% of women respondents)**

Type of work done by women	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Family fields	48	36
Agricultural wage labour	35	28
Non-farm labour	4	0
Trade (shop etc.)	4	0
No outside work	17	19

Source: Author's field survey.

There are two further points to be noted with regard to female labour force participation in Himachal and Haryana. Firstly, in Haryana, while working on family farms is an accepted and even expected part of the social culture, a sharp distinction is made between working on family-owned land and working on others' land. The latter is strongly frowned upon if not forbidden. Hence women's work participation remains confined to family farms, managed and run by the men of the family who retain economic control while women do the supplementary work. By contrast, in Himachal, social denigration of women's work outside the household sphere is not evident. Women are freer to work for wages (even moving to places away from their homes to take up employment). There can be no doubt that the greater mobility that women enjoy in Himachal relative to women in Haryana has made it possible for women to seek wage employment without social

disapproval.

Secondly, the gender division of labour is far more rigid in Haryana than in Himachal. In Haryana, female family labour has always played an important role in agriculture. In fact as noted by Chowdhry, “the importance of women in the agrarian economy made marriage an acknowledged ‘economic necessity’” (2004:63). So much so that popular sayings attribute a man’s misfortune to his single status. However, the tasks performed in agricultural activities are highly gender differentiated. Traditionally, certain tasks such as weeding and all activities related to animal husbandry have been assigned to women. In fact, the segmentation and hierarchy of tasks is such that men do the ‘more important’ mechanised work while women do the ‘supplementary’ manual labour. Men also do all the market-related work, which gives them direct control over finances.⁷³

Chowdhury also argues that the green revolution and its emphasis on mechanisation, alongside the intensification of the so-called ‘white (dairy) revolution’ increased the workload of women without a corresponding increase in their economic worth. The tasks performed by men such as ploughing are now done by machines (operated by men), but the tasks performed by women such as hoeing, weeding, harvesting, and transplanting, continue to a large extent to be carried out manually. In fact, the white revolution has changed the pattern of female labour force participation from income-earning activities (such as ghee production) to un-remunerated activities such as increased care of milch animals. Ghee production has declined as milk is all sold – but market-based activities are all organized and controlled by men, hence women’s economic worth has decreased.

In Himachal there is less gender differentiation of tasks. Women are involved in all agricultural activities alongside the men. In fact, the large-scale out-migration of men has meant that women in Himachal often manage the land and market related activities entirely on their own. This has given them a much greater measure of economic control than their counterparts in Haryana. It has also increased their confidence outside the

⁷³ Dung work for instance, retained solely for the women. Men would not even consider handling it. See Roger Jeffery, Patricia Jeffery and Andrew Lyn (1989).

domestic sphere as they deal with different aspects of the public sphere, be it purchasing or selling, managing bills, ration cards, banking etc.,

In short, while women make important contributions to the household and agrarian economies in both states, in Himachal this gives them greater economic control and empowerment, even if it is through their work on family farms.

Moreover, in Himachal agricultural income is often supplemented by both men and women working for wages. There is pressure on women to earn money if they are sufficiently qualified and if not, to work as agricultural labour or as labour on construction sites. The notion of women working for wages or salaries (*naukri*) is common. It is also not unusual for a professional woman to take up work as a teacher or social worker away from home, living separately from her husband during her service (Sharma: 1980). In answer to a question on the benefits of education, the overwhelmingly cited response is ‘opportunities for employment’, even for girls (see Chapter 8).

According to the NFHS-II (1998-99), 21 per cent of women in Himachal do work other than housework, and 46 per cent of these work for cash. Further, 62 per cent of working women reported that their earnings constitute at least half the total family income, and 28 per cent of these reported that their family was entirely dependent on them.

While the widening of the economic space to include greater paid employment for women has been heralded as a positive move, many feminists point to a corresponding disadvantage in terms of their increased burden of work. Since women are still expected to fulfil their domestic responsibilities, working women find themselves in a double bind. This is truer of Haryana than Himachal, where the work contribution of women is not even acknowledged. However, to the extent that the enhanced role of women as economic agents increases their status within the household and their ability to participate in public life, it does contribute to gender equity and women’s empowerment.⁷⁴ Even, in

⁷⁴ Some observers have pointed out that the increase in incomes that horticulture development has enabled has resulted in women being withdrawn from the labour force. This is being noted as a detrimental development, as women are now leading lives more in conformity with patriarchal norms in accordance

Haryana, it would be fair to say that if the women were completely confined to their homes not work on family land either, their situation would probably be worse.

The comparatively egalitarian nature of gender relations in Himachal discussed in the previous section has facilitated their participation in public life. Some specific aspects of women's involvement in public life are examined in this section.

5.5.2 Panchayats

The 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution granted a 33 per cent reservation of Panchayat seats (including that of the *Sarpanch* – head of the council) for women. As a result I came across several women *Panchs* (members) and one sarpanch in my sample villages. Further, I found that these women were active Panchayat members, in contrast with other parts of the country where women candidates are typically put up by their male relatives as proxy candidates to satisfy the quota requirements and end up having practically no involvement in the Panchayat at all (even the meetings are attended by their male relatives). The single female sarpanch in my sample that I interviewed was very involved in her work, held strong opinions about what she wanted to achieve in her area, conducted meetings, visited district offices trying to get funds and generally took her job very seriously.⁷⁵ At the same time she admitted that there was opposition to her position and she sometimes found it difficult to get the support of other male Panchs in the Panchayat who resented her higher position in the hierarchy. On their part, they claimed that she was incompetent and that it was next to impossible for a woman to rise to the challenges of a Sarpanch's job, especially with regard to fundraising, and that it needed a man to get things done.

In general there is fairly strong male opposition to reservation for women, especially for the post of sarpanch, for the following reasons: a) women make poor fund-raisers – an important requirement; b) they are unable to deal with district administration; c) women

with the process of female 'sanskritisation' mentioned by Berreman (1972) and others.

⁷⁵ While my sample of 10 villages had only one woman Sarpanch at the time of my field work, in several villages the next round of elections would have more as the post of the sarpanch in those areas came under the reserved category.

do not command the respect of the general population in the same way as a man; d) they are divided between household chores and their job as sarpanch, with the latter invariably suffering. However, the women themselves did not seem to regard these obstacles as insurmountable. In this case we see how an increase in women's space threatens men's space and causes resentment. This is an expected reaction. However despite this opposition, unlike in Haryana the men in Himachal are unable to keep the women away and in most cases give them the support they need, however grudgingly. There is a certain level of acceptance of women in this space, indicating the first steps towards equality in this sphere.

In Haryana I met only male Sarpanchs and Panchs, only to discover later that some of these were in fact the male relatives of the official female Panchayat members. In all cases, no one in the village even thought it necessary to inform me of this fact. It was taken for granted that the men would be the respondents in my survey. What is tragic is that when I insisted on meeting the women, they themselves were highly reluctant and insisted that they knew nothing of their job and that my purpose would be better served by talking to their male counterparts⁷⁶. This, in a district bordering New Delhi, the capital of the country, and barely an hour's drive away from it, is startling when compared with the Himachal districts hundreds of difficult miles away in the relative isolation of the hills.

In a study of participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, EK Santha (1999) found that a majority of elected women in Haryana were above the age of 40 and married, with 75 per cent living within joint families, reflecting the belief that young unmarried women should not appear in the public sphere and should certainly not be exposed to politics.⁷⁷ This statistic contrasts with Kerala, where ten per cent of the elected women were unmarried, five per cent were widows and one was divorced. Further, only 30 per cent lived within joint families. Santha goes on to say that, "the stranglehold of social and other customs in the joint family system seems to

⁷⁶ These proxy Sarpanches are locally known as Sarpanch-Patis (pati means husband in Hindi). The term has even acquired a semi-official connotation as has the role and functions of these proxy Sarpanchs

⁷⁷ EK Santha (1999).

be acting as an obstacle to the emancipation of women... as patriarchal structures rule the roost and their unwritten guidelines are strictly observed” (1999:41-42). In addition Santha found that in Haryana two-thirds of the women Panchs were illiterate and none had any prior experience in politics.

Most Panchayat meetings in Himachal revolve around rather mundane clerical tasks, such as those related to applications for schemes, compensation, land-related cases, and Below Poverty Line (BPL) certificates – work done by the secretary of the Panchayat. Unless there is some special issue the meetings are conducted in a routine manner. The active participation of all members is therefore limited. In the Panchayat meetings I attended, the women sat together as a group at one end of the room while the men sat at the other. The women’s participation was very limited. Nevertheless all women Panchayat members were present, and most were aware of the agenda and procedures for the meeting. More importantly, they were aware of their position as Panchayat members and gave their opinion and advice as and when they got an opportunity or considered it appropriate to intervene. Needless to say some members were more forthcoming and others were more diffident, looking to their male or more vocal female counterparts for cues but still keen to be involved. The fact that they got out of their homes and came to the meetings without male escorts and felt, even if in small measure, a part of the Panchayat process is a huge step. In the meantime it seems that they treat the meetings as an outing where they get together with the other women members and spend time discussing their personal problems. But this must not be dismissed as insignificant, as the chance for a break from their domestic travails to simply socialise or unburden themselves of their many personal troubles help to give women a sense of themselves as individuals and is a positive step in their struggle for self-esteem and emancipation. Decision making in the Panchayat does get affected by greater women participation as issues of schooling, ecology, and other quality of life issues get better represented. The Chipko movement discussed in chapter three is a particularly good example of the achievements of women’s leadership in community life.

5.5.3 Government Offices

Another area where I noticed the strong presence of women was in the District Collector's (DC) office, where throughout the day groups of people come with problems and petitions of various kinds. I was surprised to find that these groups often consisted of women with a token man amongst them. Whether the issue was a rigged panchayat election, a dispute over water or land, or a demand for an extra schoolteacher, it was represented overwhelmingly by women who seemed to hold their own with the DC. This is a good example of the Himachali women's progress in confidence and self-assertion.

Easy access to the DC's office may seem like a trivial issue but it can matter a great deal for ordinary citizens. In most states getting anywhere close to the DC is an intimidating and frustrating experience. The fact that government officials are relatively easily accessible to the people, including women, is an important part of the Himachal story. I noticed this in almost all the government offices that I visited throughout the district – whether it was the district education offices, the block development offices, even the statistical offices – access was open and free of harassment.

5.5.4 Mahila Mandals

Mahila Mandals were started by a Central government initiative to give women an opportunity to organise themselves and address issues of concern to them, such as reproductive health, hygiene, cleanliness, and the education of their children⁷⁸ In many cases income-generating activities were also developed. To begin with, district government employees acted as facilitators who would come and set up the mandal and provide basic skills like record-keeping and accounts, maintaining a register, holding an election and appointing a head. In addition they set the group off by discussing health and hygiene issues and teaching the women (rather stereotypically) how to make pickles and jam as a means of income generation. Sharma (1980) notes that in general women's relationships among themselves are so dominated by the private familial sphere that often they find it difficult to transform these into relationships of cooperation in the public sphere. However, the relative success of Mahila Mandals in Himachal is an interesting counter example.

⁷⁸ They were set up under the Panchayati Raj Act of 1968.

Table 5.10: Mahila Mandals in Himachal and Haryana
(% of female respondents)

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Aware of MM	100	22
Member of MM	49	7
My voice is heard	41	3
Lower caste women participate	32	4
Primary education is sometimes discussed	48	*
MM is useful (all respondents)	40	5

Source: Author's field survey. * insufficient data. MM: Mahila Mandals

In Haryana there was no functioning Mahila Mandal or its equivalent, though seven per cent of my sample claimed membership. Only 32 per cent of households had heard of Mahila Mandals, and about 18 per cent of households reported that a Mahila Mandal had once been started. In Himachal, by contrast, all women I interviewed were aware of a functioning Mahila Mandal in their village (see Table 5.10).

By the time I did my fieldwork the Mandals in Kullu district were operating independently, without external facilitation. The women were holding meetings on their own, maintaining registers of attendance, accounts and minutes (albeit rudimentary) of each meeting. The proposed income-generating projects seemed to have been jettisoned and health and hygiene issues were also in the background as the women seemed quite aware of the basics and the health centres were doing their job. Essentially these meetings had evolved into a social gathering for the women where they discussed mostly personal and domestic problems with a view to providing help wherever they could. In some cases they served as counselling sessions for women with particular needs and older women were often called upon to mediate in domestic disputes. Another common role of Mahila Mandals is to arrange for collective facilities such as shared ownership of utensils for marriage ceremonies and other social functions.

In one instance where alcoholism was a problem for a majority of the women in the village, the Mahila Mandal decided to tackle it collectively. While their modus operandi

of setting up a clandestine operation to discover the source of the alcohol, which they believed to be an inexpensive home brew and expose its operation, may seem unrealistic, their belief that they could handle the problem collectively is remarkable. The women had clearly given the matter thought in their meetings and decided that while agitating for prohibition would not be a realistic strategy in their area they needed to control and restrict the production of alcohol. Since the home brewed liquor was cheaper and more easily available than the commercial variety, which was obtainable only from the town and far more expensive, they felt that they could make a dent in its consumption by cutting off the supply. Not only did they have their strategy in place; they were quite confident that they would succeed in taking the issue to the Panchayat and winning its support.

Mahila Mandals are also involved in village cleanliness drives (use of toilets), environmental issues such as teaching women to pick dry leaves only and not pluck new green plants, spreading awareness about polio eradication and birth control, and acting as pressure groups for school-related issues. Most of the school-related problems centred on asking for extra rooms for the school and the appointment of additional teachers.

Other researchers have written about the vitality of the Mahila Mandals in different parts of Himachal. For instance, Mehrotra (1995) found that Mahila Mandals in Sirmaur district functioned as an avenue for airing problems with the education system. Hence they agitated against the introduction of uniforms, as the costs of schooling would increase; vetoed the election of a woman who had embezzled funds from an *anganwadi*; asked for a bridge over a river that was preventing children from accessing the school, and so on. In one instance in Kinnaur, Mahila Mandals agitated against the setting up of a video parlour, which they felt would be a distraction for the children and therefore interfere with their education (Chakrabarti and Banerjea 1999). In Hamirpur district, Sharma (1980) found that Mahila Mandals were successful where they provided opportunities to either earn income or save money. One such Mandal flourished when women started to produce and then market their own soap through a modest cooperative. In another they formed a consumer's cooperative to buy items such as cloth, children's

school books, soap and so on, which tend to be expensive in isolated villages, in bulk.⁷⁹

5.5.5 An Illustrative Anecdote

The active role of women in public life in Himachal including through institutions such as PRIs, government offices and Mahila Mandals is well illustrated in a recent story narrated by CP Sujaya (2006).

The story explains how women in a village in HP organized to rescue an anganwadi after the departure of the anganwadi worker. It begins with active but unsuccessful efforts on the part of the anganwadi helper (illiterate woman from the Dalit community) to get a new anganwadi worker appointed through the ICDS bureaucracy.

The supervisor told her to approach the Mahila Mandal for a willing worker. The Mahila Mandal members...convened a formal MM meeting, discussed the issue threadbare and passed a resolution recommending that 'A' of the same village (married, passed matriculate examination on her own initiative after marriage, highly motivated, Dalit...) carry on the work of the worker on a purely honorary basis. 'A' was the unanimous choice of the MM. The resolution was drafted, signed, dated and entered into the register. The MM then took up the issue in the next Gram Sabha meeting, where a large number of women were present. ..The matter was raised, explained and approved by all those present. A formal resolution was drafted, read out, passed and recorded in the minutes by the Panchayat secretary. The resolution said that whenever an appointment is to be made for an anganwadi worker, 'A' should be appointed. The MM pulled together all the documents – copies of their own resolution, copies of the Gram Sabha resolution, as well as the scheduled certificate the IRDP certificate, the matriculation certificate and other personal data of 'A' and sent the whole sheaf to the CDPO. The department then advertised for a vacancy for an anganwadi worker and 'A' has put in her application. The MM is clear they want their candidate to be selected otherwise they have formulated their own plans and

⁷⁹ Sharma Ursula (1980).

strategies for ensuring it gets done. Meanwhile 'A' has been carrying out her work effectively, and without any honorarium for the last eight months. (Sujaya, 2006)

This brief story may be a little unusual even in Himachal Pradesh, but it does illustrate in a vivid way many facets of Himachal's experience that have been highlighted in this chapter and elsewhere in this thesis: women play an important role in public life; they are relatively empowered and self-confident; the PRIs (including Gram Sabhas) and other public institutions are functioning and inclusive; women are able to engage with government structures; the Mahila Mandals are active and interact with other institutions of local governance; local public services are a matter of common concern; there is social acceptance of women having paid jobs (or even studying) after marriage; village communities are able to cooperate; Dalit women have significant opportunities to study, work and participate in public life; and last but not least, Himachal Pradesh is now a highly literate society where the use of written media has become part of daily life.

5.6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have scrutinized the status of women in Himachali society and their role in public life. Clearly, gender relations in Himachal Pradesh are much less unequal than in Haryana or for that matter in most of north India. This contrast emerges quite sharply whether we look at sex ratios, marriage practices, school attendance, health indicators, participation in the workforce or exposure to violence and crime. This feature of gender relations in Himachal Pradesh has contributed to the social development of the state in many different ways, but especially through the active and informed agency of women in public life.

The relatively egalitarian nature of gender relations in Himachal Pradesh can be traced partly to the social history of the state. For instance, historical evidence suggests that women's seclusion (*purdah*) has never existed in this region. However, while history certainly matters it cannot fully explain the gender relations in Himachal. State initiatives have also played an important role, for instance in the form of reservation of seats for

women in the Panchayats, the creation of Mahila Mandals and the active promotion of female education. This is yet another aspect of the complementarity between social equality and constructive state action as discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Finally, two qualifications are in order. First, the fact that gender relations in Himachal Pradesh are less unequal than elsewhere in north India does not imply that there is no gender inequality. As we saw, major inequalities remain, related for instance to land ownership, the burden of work and political participation. Second, in some respects there have been disquieting signs of growing gender inequality in recent years. The most disturbing trend is the sharp decline in child gender ratios in some parts of Himachal Pradesh. This is also linked to larger questions about the sustainability of social equality in Himachal Pradesh. I return to this in the last chapter.

Chapter Six

Caste in Himachal Pradesh : Overcoming Social Exclusion

Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is charity but it begins and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other castes.

(Dr. Ambedkar, *The Annihilation of Caste*, 1990, pp 63-64)⁸⁰

6.1. Introduction

A unique feature of social inequality in Indian society is its caste system, which places restrictions on every aspect of human interactions. The ideological crux of the caste system is the concept of 'purity-pollution', which is expressed through rules of commensality, marriage and occupation and segregates people by placing them in hierarchically arranged caste groups. The barriers that these rules set up between people prevent them from forming larger, inclusive public identities that foster community engagement across castes. Instead, the caste identity becomes paramount, and security, solidarity and trust are sought exclusively within the caste group. As a consequence, accountability and responsibility also remain restricted to a person's caste members. The hierarchy of occupations and identification of caste with occupation is a particularly restrictive factor, as it implies rigidity with little possibility of change. These barriers prevent people not only from eating together and marrying one another but also from participating in public life in a symmetric manner. These asymmetries inevitably act as barriers to democratic progress.

This is not to say that the institutions and values of the caste system have remained unchanged over the years. Social standing today is no longer determined by ritual status. Economic means and political power, both of which have become available to the lower castes in relatively greater measure in the last fifty years or so, have acquired increasing importance in determining social standing (Shah, 2002). It is probably fair to say that changes in the caste system started to take effect during the colonial period when forces

⁸⁰ Ambedkar (1990).

for modernisation, secularisation and urbanisation began to influence rural socio-economic structures (Sheth 2002). The move from traditional feudal society to modern capitalist society which occurred with the opening up of the village economy meant that employment opportunities extended beyond village boundaries, and hence traditional caste-based occupations were no longer binding. The newly created possibilities for occupational mobility toppled an important pillar of caste society. Traditional patterns of authority based on ritual and landowning dominance also began to disintegrate as the economy expanded outwards and the village was no longer the sole arena of employment. This process received a further boost at Independence with the nationalist elite 'de-recognising' caste and establishing special privileges for the lower castes in order to help them overcome their historical handicap and join the mainstream of development. Affirmative action, in the form of reservation of seats for lower caste members in local government bodies as well as in public sector employment and economic redistribution through land reforms, have been the hallmark of government policy to correct the imbalances of a historically caste-based society.

But the ideological and political commitment to establish a casteless society has resulted in a dichotomy between the public and the personal spheres. While the role of caste has been reduced in the public sphere, this is not the case in the personal sphere, where it continues to exercise a strong influence on people's relationships. At the same time, changes within the public sphere have not been uniform across the country. While caste-based discrimination has been formally removed from public institutions, Dalits (or Scheduled Castes (SCs)) continue to be marginalised from the gains of development. For instance, very poor quality public schooling, the only financially affordable option for most Dalit families, continues to limit their opportunities; deplorable implementation of government schemes that benefit the poor, of which a large proportion are Dalit, continues to deprive them of their due benefits; use of violence against assertions by the Dalits continues to keep them oppressed; non-implementation of reservation in local government continues to keep political power concentrated in the hands of the upper castes; and the mixed record of land reforms continues to deprive the landless, of whom the majority are Dalits, of the economic gains that they expected from redistribution.

These factors have slowed down the integration of the lower castes into the mainstream of economic and political life.

6.2. Caste in Himachal Pradesh

Caste inequalities persist to varying degrees across India, including in Himachal. This is evident, for instance, in personal interactions. There are strong restrictions on inter-dining and inter-marriage, and derogatory prejudices based on stereotypical notions about the lower castes abound in the popular imagination. As will be seen later, I observed many types of caste discrimination during my fieldwork.

Having said this, in some important respects caste inequalities in Himachal are less severe than in Haryana, or for that matter much of north India. First, traditional caste relations are somewhat less unequal and less rigid in Himachal than in Haryana. In fact, caste identities in Himachal appear to be of relatively recent origin and coexist with other identities, such as the regional *Pahari* (hill) identity, that are often more important.

Second, caste distinctions in Himachal have not prevented village communities from being relatively well integrated. There is a strong tradition of inter-caste cooperation as well as of cooperation at the village level. This is evident in systems of mutual aid that override caste at the village level, allowing common problems to be dealt with collectively. For instance, caste divisions are set aside when the community comes together to build a school or a road or repair an irrigation channel. Cooperative behaviour across castes is the accepted norm. As observed by Singh (2002), in Himachal “a combination of village level co-operation and community-consciousness is probably the organising principle of rural life” (2002:108). Thus, at least in the public domain, the segregating effects of caste are less visible.

Third, the overlap between caste and class is not strong. For instance, land ownership is not concentrated among the upper castes, being similar among the lower and upper castes. This is in sharp contrast with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, where inequalities of

caste and class reinforce each other in a very decisive and oppressive way.⁸¹

Fourth, caste-based violence is comparatively uncommon in Himachal. All groups take pride in the unity in their villages, and tensions related to caste are relatively few as long as they do not impinge on the personal sphere. Even then, as with inter-caste marriages social sanctions are resorted to rather than violence and killing. In such cases communication with the families concerned is cut off, but the couple is not publicly humiliated, beaten or killed, unlike in Haryana where extreme forms of violence, including death, sometimes even by decapitation, are regularly used as sanctions against couples marrying across castes (Kapadia, 2003, UNICEF 2008)

Last but not least, state action in Himachal, particularly the widespread provision of basic services such as education and health as well as affirmative action to enable Dalits to use these services, has enabled Dalits to overcome the disadvantages of caste in many important fields and to develop their human resources. As we will see later, caste disadvantages in access to basic education and health services have virtually disappeared in Himachal Pradesh. This low level of caste inequality, combined with the relatively high quality of public services, means that Dalits in Himachal are not only much better off than Dalits in Haryana in terms of access to health and education; they are also much better off than the *others* in Haryana, in these respects, despite being poorer in economic terms. In other words, state action has enabled Dalits in Himachal to overcome not only the barriers of caste but also the combined disadvantages of caste and class – in some important fields at least. This is a clear indication of social equality – not just a goal in itself but also a means to the overall goal of widespread and inclusive development.

6.3. Caste in the Personal Sphere

The caste hierarchy in Himachal Pradesh is less complicated than in other parts of North India.⁸² Essentially there are three basic caste groups - the Brahmans, the Rajputs and the

⁸¹ See e.g. Drèze and Gazdar (1996) with reference to Uttar Pradesh, where they say that, “the conjunction of temporal power and ritual authority in Uttar Pradesh has made it that much harder to challenge the prevailing inequalities of caste and class.”

⁸² Non-Hindu communities account for a very small proportion of the population in Himachal Pradesh

generically named Harijans (SCs or Dalits). Castes and sub-castes among the Brahmans and Rajputs are not very distinct and rarely referred to. Sub-castes within the Dalits, however, are careful to point out their differences to other sub-castes placed ritually below them in the hierarchy. While there are only three basic caste groups the distinctions between them are marked. This is especially so of the distinction between the upper castes (i.e. Brahmans and Rajputs) and the Dalits.

In terms of rituals and religious observances the lower castes have historically played a vital role as providers of music. While they are denied access to the temple their participation is not altogether shunned. All castes generally attend religious ceremonies in the villages. For instance, as observed by Sax (1991): “Pilgrims on Nanda Devi’s annual ‘jat’ [pilgrimage] make a collective offering in which...the distinctions of caste and gender are not observed” (: 103). Lyall, in the Kangra Settlement Report 1872, describes the temples in Kullu:

The feature which distinguishes these temples from those in other...Hindu countries is this: that most of them are village institutions, in a way owned, served and managed by the men of one or more hamlets or the men of a part or the whole of a kothi. Instead of a brahman family or a succession of Sadhs eating up the proceeds,...the men who cultivate the lands, which pay the rent to the temples are...the only men entitled to share in the feasts at the temple expense.

Ritual pollution does not extend to people as it does elsewhere; an object such as a utensil may become polluted but not the person who uses it (Berreman, 1952). This leads to greater interaction and social mingling between castes. For instance, drinking together with members of all castes is an accepted practice, albeit within limits. If the drinking party is in an upper caste person’s house it is held in the outer courtyard to allow for the participation of lower caste persons, who are not allowed to enter the interior of upper caste houses. If the party is in the house of a lower caste person it can be held inside, as the upper caste person can enter a lower caste home to have a drink (in a glass kept separately for use by upper castes only). Similarly, eating meat is not taboo among the upper castes, including the Brahmans. Newell (1970) describes wedding parties that he

(there were none in my sample) and are not discussed in this chapter.

attended in the Chamba area, where goat meat and local intoxicants were served and in which both Brahmans and Gaddis (lower caste) participated. As Parry (1979) describes, in Kangra the Brahmans explained their lapse from orthodoxy by reference to the weather. Meat being a 'hot' food, they claimed that it produced the much-needed warmth in the body to withstand the cold climate.

While the villages are not spatially divided along caste lines, and nor are the fields or even water sources segregated for separate castes, lower castes are not allowed inside upper caste homes and must maintain a respectful distance from higher castes in public.⁸³ For instance, at upper caste weddings when Dalits are invited they are provided with food that has been separately cooked for them and which they must consume apart from the rest of the wedding party. At weddings, in scheduled caste families, the food is cooked by upper caste cooks to allow for upper caste participation. Similarly, Dalit women can attend Mahila Mandal meetings but cannot sit on the *durrie* (mat) used by the others, and are thus relegated to the edges of the room or even outside it. Since inter-dining is strictly prohibited they cannot share in the tea or other refreshments that form part of the proceedings.

The need to maintain the ritual status in the presence or knowledge of village elders was often mentioned in my field survey. The younger people were clearly not in favour of strict segregation in dining, and stated categorically that they only adhered to it within the confines of the village. For instance, there are no restrictions in restaurants and hotels, where the caste of the cook is not known. Exposure and difficulties in the way of maintaining such boundaries have certainly slackened the hold of caste on personal practices.

In Haryana, the spatial segregation of castes is more evident. It appears to be related as much to economic disparities as to ritual differences. The more prosperous parts of the villages with *pucca* houses are inhabited by the higher castes, usually at the centre of the

⁸³ Other researchers have told me that this may not be the case in all parts of Himachal. Apparently spatial segregation may be more common than I found it to be. In my research area, while Dalit homes were found clustered together these clusters were distributed all over the village.

village, whereas the lower castes live in distinctly run-down areas at the edge of the village, with a greater predominance of *kuccha* dwellings, open drains and fewer civic amenities. Restrictions on inter-dining follow a similar pattern to those in Himachal.

Caste endogamy is staunchly adhered to in Himachal, and exposure to the world outside has not affected it appreciably. In fact inter-caste marriage is likely to lead to ostracization from the caste and village, not just of the couple but also of their immediate families. So strong is the social sanction and so effective the deterrent that I came across only one such case, and as expected the village had not heard of the couple since. As a respondent said; “How will we survive if all communication with us within the village is stopped? We have to oppose such marriages”. The government has set up an award for inter-caste marriages to discourage the practice of strict caste endogamy and promote social mingling, but I did not come across even a single case where the award was claimed. In all likelihood either it is not widely advertised or it is simply ignored.

While caste endogamy is now the accepted norm, it has not always been adhered to so strictly. It appears rather to have been the exception in Himachal, as mentioned by Ghurye (2002), according to whom; “In some parts of Punjab, especially the hills, a man of a higher caste can take to wife a girl from one of the lower castes” (2002:53). It is equally common for upper castes, especially Brahmans, to marry Buddhists living in the higher tribal regions, and my survey includes a couple of such cases. Newell (1970) reported from a village in Chamba that Brahmans and Gaddis (a lower, nomadic caste) freely intermarried, with the exception of a small number of *pujaris* (priests) from the state shrine. He also found that in Kangra district Rajputs and Khatri intermarry, quite in contrast to the plains of Punjab, which this area borders. In light of my fieldwork findings the practice of strict caste endogamy has clearly increased over the years. Newell and others working in the 1970s noted that with the increase in interaction with people from the plains, local practices, notably ones such as strict caste endogamy, were being submerged by influences from the plains.

Caste endogamy is practised in both states. However, it is more rigidly adhered to in

Haryana. Sub-caste endogamy is also stronger in Haryana. In Himachal, while endogamy within the caste was the main concern of my respondents, in Haryana the sub-caste was always mentioned as the appropriate category. In this respect there appears to be some difference between the two states, but I do not have enough data to probe this. Another difference is that caste endogamy is more brutally enforced in Haryana than in Himachal.

Modes of expressing respect when addressing members of an upper caste must be observed, and this is common to both Himachal and Haryana. I was told on many occasions that while the Dalits have to refer to even the children of upper castes with respect, adding the deferential suffix 'ji' to their names, the upper castes, children included, can address even the elders of the lower castes directly by name. While there is some resentment among the lower castes in Himachal about this disrespect for their elders, in Haryana they are more resigned to it.

In general, perceptions about the lower castes by others are not complimentary in either state. The established upper caste view of Dalits is that they are good-for-nothing. They are commonly described as being lazy and given to drinking: "they sell their land and squander all their money" was a common refrain and seems to be related to bitterness associated with land reforms through which land has been allotted to Dalit households. I was repeatedly told that despite all the help they have received from the government in the form of land reforms, reservations and so on their condition has remained much the same as before. Polygamy, considered a less acceptable social practice is also associated with the Dalits (mostly wrongly). However, those who expressed these views in Himachal were clearly reflecting the personal prejudices of the upper castes, because when probed further they were unable to substantiate their claims; in fact on several occasions they admitted to the achievements of local Dalits. In one of my sample villages the largest house belonged to a Dalit family who had two sons, both successful lawyers in Manali town. In Haryana, on the other hand, the marginalization of the lower castes is more striking and similar examples are difficult to find.

Many other forms of social discrimination have faded away in Himachal, such as lower

castes not being allowed to wear a new cap; or having to make do with hand-me-downs from the upper castes; or having to travel great distances to get water as local sources were denied to them; or, of course, not being allowed to participate in the political life of the village.

To sum up, there is no major contrast between Himachal and Haryana in the way caste is practiced at the personal level. However, substantial differences appear beyond the personal realm, where these exclusionary practices begin to fade away in Himachal, as we see in the following sections.

6.4. Caste in the Public Sphere

6.4.1 Community Consciousness

Despite the somewhat mixed picture of the role of caste in the personal sphere, the diminished importance of caste in the public sphere in Himachal presents a more encouraging picture, particularly in the village as a community. I found strong evidence of unity and solidarity, which cuts across caste lines within the village in several spheres of day-to-day life. A striking example of this was the statement of a respondent when asked about the village primary school. His unprompted response was: “Children are not yours or mine; *they are common to the community* and hence the entire community has to take care of their future.” The situation in schools has changed drastically over the last few decades (see Chapter 6). While in the past children of the lower castes were openly discriminated against in schools and often denied admission, this is no longer the case. However, even though the children do not face overt discrimination, the Brahman teacher will sometimes not accept a glass of water from a Harijan child or colleague. But the limit to this kind of discrimination was clearly laid down, as I discovered from a story I was told about the ill-treatment of a Dalit boy and its repercussions. An upper caste teacher beat a Harijan boy so badly that he had to be hospitalised. The entire village, including the upper castes, took the matter up to the highest level and had the teacher transferred. As a Dalit family related this incident to me it is unlikely to have been told simply for effect.

It would be no exaggeration to say that in Haryana, the sense of community is altogether absent. There are deep and mutually reinforcing divisions across caste, class and gender. There is no overt discrimination in government schools, which are used largely by the lower castes. Yet I have instances in my survey of the few upper caste children that do attend bullying lower caste children while teachers simply look on. In some cases parents have had to withdraw their child because of the violence. Caste-based violence in general is fairly prevalent in Haryana, unlike in Himachal. For instance, stories of the sexual exploitation of lower caste women were common in Haryana but not in Himachal. Haryana has also been witness to some of the most gruesome caste-related crimes in recent years. In one case four Dalit men were lynched to death by a mob for apparently skinning a dead cow; in another, the houses belonging to Dalits in a village were burned down for daring to assert economic self-reliance.

In Himachal the community's sense of responsibility towards its members is also manifest in other areas, overriding caste considerations. For instance, when there is a death in a village everyone, irrespective of caste visits the bereaved to commiserate, leaving behind a little money for the funeral expenses. Similarly at the time of a girl's marriage the entire village, again irrespective of caste, contributes to her dowry and wedding expenses. All the households in my sample accepted this as a universal practice. In Haryana there is little if any social interaction across castes. Lower castes, especially Dalits, are unlikely to participate in the wedding celebrations of the upper castes or to commiserate with their bereaved families, and vice versa. In my field survey I have no examples of either.

While in Himachal there are several occasions during the year when the entire village gets together, in Haryana these are limited to elections and polio vaccine camps. Himachal respondents mentioned festivals, fairs, pilgrimages and other occasions when the entire village would gather together. While 67 per cent of my respondents reported participating in these community events in Himachal, in Haryana only 15 per cent gave a similar response.

Another practice that reflects the Himachalis' sense of responsibility towards the community is the frequently reported instance of retired army personnel returning to their villages to set up schools. I came across several such cases during my fieldwork, and Narayan (1997) notes similar cases in her field area (Kangra). She found that "many men retired from the armed forces early bringing a pension with them, to join the government schools as teachers" (1997:15)⁸⁴

The system of exchange labour is another binding factor in Himachal. Most people participate in this *jowary*, as they call it, and it works well. Mainly employed during harvesting and threshing in the fields, it can extend to help with the construction of a house or with carrying heavy objects such as construction materials or sacks of grain from the road up to the village; with preparations for a wedding, cutting grass or collecting firewood. However, this system of mutual help is not entirely free of the dividing lines of ritually defined caste distinctions. The way the system works is that the person who has asked for help or *jowary*, for instance on his field, will provide food that day for the people who help him. However since inter-dining between higher and lower castes is taboo he cannot do this with the lower castes, so they are given dry rations to take away, instead. Conversely, when lower castes call for *jowary* they hire Brahmin cooks to cook for the upper castes. My respondents reaffirmed the usefulness of the system and I was repeatedly told that no one refuses to go for *jowary*.

Over the years this system, too, has undergone changes. For instance, lower castes regularly used to be asked to show up on the fields of the upper castes with no discussion of remuneration, which depended entirely on the discretion of the employer, and the lower castes dared not refuse (*begar*). Now such a thing would not happen. There is no compulsion to follow the system, which is based entirely on reciprocity and functions rather well. Similarly the system of voluntary labour or *shram dan* for public works such as the construction of village paths, schools or Panchayat *bhavan* (building), the maintenance of *kuhls* (irrigation canals) and village cleanliness drives indicate the strong sense of community within the village. Another common practice across castes that was

⁸⁴ Narayan Kirin (1997).

cited by several of my respondents was of taking seeds from each other.

As seen in Chapter 4 (Table 4.1), participation in exchange labour is common and symmetrical in Himachal, whereas in Haryana it is concentrated among the higher castes. In Haryana I came across only a few instances of exchange labour, mainly among the upper castes, and there are no instances in my survey of the community participating in other forms of collective activity. Responsibility in Haryana extends mainly to the family or *biradari* (sub-caste), at most to other caste members. Problems of cleanliness, village roads or schools are dealt with individually. If a person can afford to make the area around his premises clean he will do so privately, just as he will opt to send his children to the private school. Any issue that cannot be handled privately, such as the maintenance of roads, is simply ignored.

6.4.2. Community Engagement

Accompanying the relatively evolved community consciousness in Himachal is an active engagement with the public space and community institutions as the proper site for locating and resolving collective problems. This engagement happens both informally, as in the system of exchange labour, *shram daan* (voluntary labour) or other community-based activities discussed above, and formally, within organised groups or associations such as the Mahila Mandals, PTAs, and other village-level associations. In my sample in Himachal 51 per cent of the women were part of a functioning Mahila Mandal, while in Haryana only 7 per cent had ever been part of one. At the time of my research there were no functioning Mahila Mandals in Haryana. Similarly, while 15 per cent of my respondents were members of a parent-teacher association in Himachal, in Haryana none of the parents in my sample were involved in one. Overall, eighty-three per cent of my respondents in Himachal claimed to be members of some association in their village, while only 15 per cent in Haryana could claim the same (see Table 6.1).

As can be seen in Table 6.1, not only are there more associations in Himachal, but also Dalits and higher castes are fairly equally represented in them. Community participation in school-related activities is particularly striking in Himachal (more on this in Chapter

8). The somewhat larger difference in castes represented in Mahila Mandals could be because of the setting up of alternative Mahila Mandals by some Dalit women, as discussed in the previous chapter.

**Table 6.1: Membership of Associations in Himachal and Haryana
(% of hhlds)**

	Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Village council - Gram Panchayat	44	49	6	8
Women's Association - Mahila Mandal	36	57	12	8
Participation in school activities	63	66	24	33
Youth club	6	8	0	0
Labour exchange programme	59	59	24	67
Temple Mosque Committee	22	9	0	0
Political parties	6	9	0	0
Other	56	60	35	17

Source: Author's field survey.

Another manifestation of this engagement with collective institutions is the high degree of *expectation* from the public space, particularly the government (see Table 6.2). This confidence in the public domain translates into collective action, making it possible for communities to work together at the local level and to exert pressure on central government to provide quality public services. For instance, my survey shows that while 31 per cent of people in Himachal believe that the Gram Panchayat can influence schooling in their villages, only 7 per cent in Haryana thought the same. Further, 59 per cent of Himachali parents had been asked by the school for help, of which 79 per cent had given it; in Haryana only 11 per cent were approached for help and 50 per cent had complied.

**Table 6.2: Expectations from Gram Panchayats
(% of households)**

	Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Faith in Gram Panchayat	59	62	24	67
Sarpanch is honest	81	77	57	83
Sarpanch is reliable	63	70	35	83
Elect Sarpanch again	63	47	29	75

Source: Author's field survey.

What is particularly unique about this engagement with the public sphere in Himachal is that it is shared with the lower castes. Hence the lower castes are also engaged in community activities and have equal expectations from government services. In Haryana, on the other hand, the Dalits are rarely part of a larger collective that includes upper castes, and they have the least expectations of government. For instance, I found in Himachal that faith in the Gram Panchayat was similar across the caste divide: 59 per cent of the SC and STs and 62 per cent of the upper castes had faith in the Gram Panchayat (see Table 6.2). However, in Haryana while 67 per cent of the upper castes had faith in the Gram Panchayat, only 24 per cent of the SCs did. Similarly, in Himachal, 81 per cent and 77 per cent of SCs and upper castes respectively believed the Sarpanch to be honest, but in Haryana the corresponding figures were 35 and 83 per cent – a glaring difference again.

These findings, based on my field survey, are consistent with secondary data. For instance, a recent CSDS poll survey (2003) found that nearly 86 per cent of voters in Himachal believed that their vote had an effect on how the country is governed, while in Haryana the corresponding figure is negligible.

6.4.3. Education Opportunities

As noted by Mehta (2003), “It is somewhat odd to wish away the reality of caste when society is not willing to invest in creating opportunities that decrease its importance” (2003:79). In Himachal, the reality of caste has been diminished precisely by creating

opportunities that decrease its importance, particularly through public services. In Haryana the lack of similar opportunities is a major factor in perpetuating caste inequalities.

Education is of particular significance in this context. As discussed in Chapter 8, the promotion of equitable schooling opportunities in Himachal has played a crucial role in overcoming traditional inequalities of class, caste and gender, and in particular it has helped to narrow caste disparities in the public sphere.

Although there is a gap in literacy rates between the SC and the non-SC groups, in Himachal this is not as wide as in Haryana (see Table 6.5). In the younger age groups this gap has been eliminated altogether in Himachal, but not in Haryana. School participation rates are lower for SCs than for non-SCs in Himachal, but here again the difference between the two groups is much greater in Haryana. In my field survey I did not find a single child who had dropped out of school in the age group of 6-14 years in Himachal.⁸⁵

Table 6.3: Literacy Rates in Himachal and Haryana, 2001

	Himachal Pradesh		Haryana	
	SC	All	SC	All
Literacy rate, all ages (%)	70.0	77.0	56.0	68.0
Literacy rate, age 7-15 (%)	94.0	95.0	79.0	86.0

Source: Census of India 2001.

⁸⁵ These observations are further corroborated by the findings of an unpublished study by Jean Drèze and Reetika Khera based on school attendance data from the second National Family Health Survey (NFHS-II, 1998-99) for the age group of 10-14 years. It turns out that the social disadvantage in school participation associated with being SC is lower in Himachal than in any other state except Tamil Nadu. Haryana, on the other hand, has high levels of caste differentiation in access to schooling.

Table 6.4: School Attendance in Himachal and Haryana, 2003

	Himachal Pradesh		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Ever enrolment rate	88.6	92.7	67.9	80.7
Completion of schooling to middle level	14.3	14.5	9.2	11.9

Source: North India Human Development Report (NCAER, 2003).

The high levels of school attendance in Himachal, coupled with relatively small differences of caste (and gender), are an outcome of the recent ‘schooling revolution’, discussed in Chapter 8. As discussed in that chapter, this schooling revolution in Himachal has been brought about almost entirely by state-run schools. A village school in Himachal is truly a community school where all social groups, including the upper castes and the Dalits, send their children, so that the whole community has a collective stake in its functioning. As pointed out in the PROBE (1999) survey, when parents in Himachal were asked whether they would prefer to send their children to a government or a private school (costs being the same) they said they would prefer the government school! In Haryana, on the other hand, public schools have been left to the less privileged and voiceless as those with access to better resources have opted for private facilities. As a result the quality of government schools there has suffered greatly.

The high level of school attendance among SC/ST children in Himachal reflects not only the wide reach and effective functioning of the education system but also special incentive schemes and other efforts put into place to promote schooling among disadvantaged children. Promotional schemes for SC/ST students such as scholarships and subsidies for books and uniforms function better in Himachal than in Haryana, albeit with some exertion from the beneficiaries, who have to make several trips to the block offices to collect their dues. In Haryana, most of the incentive schemes scarcely function at all. Often parents do not consider it worth their while to apply for them as they are not convinced that any benefit will come their way. Parents complain about futile trips to district offices that usually result in demands for certificates to prove that they belong to an SC or ST category or other paperwork that they are unable to complete. In several

cases even after they have managed the paperwork they receive nothing. Here again levels of expectation from the government and even of information and awareness of various government schemes are very low. I was often asked for confirmation about schemes: “Has the government really instituted such and such a scheme? How is it that we have got nothing from it?”

Another telling example of state apathy towards the less privileged in Haryana is the absence of incentive schemes for SC students below high school level. This is ironic as most SC students do not reach that level of education anyway.⁸⁶ In Himachal several schemes for SC/ST students are available at all stages, including at primary school level.

The midday meal programme is another example of a government programme functioning far better in Himachal.⁸⁷ In Haryana the children had received nothing for at least six months prior to the time of my survey, and even before that the supply had been erratic. Parents were routinely asked to pick up their midday meal supplies from ration shops, which are notoriously corrupt. As expected, the ration shop owners tried their best to avoid parting with the ration, using various excuses about lack of supply. Invariably the parents give up after several futile attempts, especially since the rations they did receive were usually of poor quality. Since institutional recourse scarcely exists, this programme was virtually defunct.

6.4.4 Health and Public Services

As with education, health facilities in Himachal are also provided largely by the government sector. For instance in Himachal, 60 per cent of women live in villages that have access to either a Primary Health Centre (PHC) or a sub-centre run by the government. In Haryana the corresponding figure is 30 per cent. The population served per PHC or sub-centre is far lower in Himachal than in Haryana.

⁸⁶ Educational Administration in Himachal, 1997 and Educational Administration in Haryana 1994, both NUEPA publications. State-wise surveys and reports of educational administration conducted by NUEPA during the 1990s have been published by Vikas Publishers, Delhi. For exact references see list of references at the end.

⁸⁷ Cooked meals had not yet been introduced in primary schools at the time of my field survey. The term midday meal programme refers to monthly grain rations that used to be given to children conditional on regular attendance.

Table 6.5: Reproductive Health

	Himachal		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Total Fertility Rate (children per woman)	2.15	2.05	3.7	2.5
Contraception – any method	68.5	64.7	52.9	65.9
modern method	68.4	61.7	45.2	56.4
No ante-natal check up	12.1	13.0	54.9	34.4
No tetanus injection during pregnancy	11.3	12.2	17.5	12.6
Folic acid during pregnancy	84.0	85.5	61.1	70.7
Delivery at health facility	26.2	33.4	1.9	8.1
Delivery by doctor	28.0	31.6	19.0	34.3

Source: NFHS-II (1998-99). Unless stated otherwise, all figures are in terms of percentage of ever-married women in the age group of 15-49 years.

Table 6.6: Child Health

	Himachal		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1000 live births)	33.2	21.5	67.5	56.5
Immunisation				
BCG	98.2	92.3	83.1	90.5
Polio (1 st dose only)	3.1	4.8	2.3	8.5
DPT (incl. 3 rd dose)	87.3	87.3	62.0	76.0
Measles	88.1	90.2	64.1	77.3
All	82.5	82.9	56.4	67.7
None	1.8	2.7	14.7	6.3
At least one dose of Vitamin A	72.8	68.7	37.2	47.3
Vitamin A in last six months	31.5	36.1	15.9	22.3

Source: NFHS-II (1998-99). Unless stated otherwise, all figures are in terms of percentage of children in the relevant age group.

With respect to most indicators of health, three points emerge (Tables 6.5 to 6.7). Firstly, both access to health facilities and health outcomes are far better in Himachal than in Haryana.

Secondly, there are no significant caste differences in access to health in Himachal. There

are minor differences between SC and non-SC, but these differences can go either way, and may reflect small sample sizes. Essentially there is no systematic bias against SCs in Himachal as far as these health indicators are concerned.

Thirdly, SCs in Himachal do much better not only than SCs in Haryana but even than non-SCs in Haryana. This is a striking indication of how the combined disadvantages of caste and class have been effectively overcome in Himachal through public intervention, in this field at least.

Table 6.7: Health & Nutrition

	Himachal		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Ever married women:				
Body Mass Index (BMI)	20.0	21.2	19.8	21.9
Proportion (%) with anaemia	37.1	38.4	52.5	41.9
Children 6-35 months:				
Proportion (%) with anaemia	63.8	69.1	87.3	83.6
Proportion (%) with severe anemia	2.0	2.2	12.0	5.0

Source: NFHS-II (1998-99).

Similar observations apply to many other kinds of public services, as Table 6.8 illustrates. What is remarkable about the provision of basic amenities in Himachal is that these and other facilities are available relatively equitably across socio-economic groups, irrespective of caste. Haryana, on the other hand, in spite of high levels of per capita income has failed to provide basic amenities to large sections of its population and especially to the marginalised SC groups. While Himachal is no better off than Haryana in economic terms (if anything, the reverse is true), a much higher proportion of its population has access to basic amenities.

Table 6.8: Access to Public Amenities, 2003

(% of households)

	Himachal		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Piped Water	72.8	71.5	39.4	44.3
Electricity	86.1	88.1	71.5	83.1
Toilets	13.6	15.8	3.7	8.0

Source: North India Human Development Report (NCAER, 2003).

6.5. Economic Integration

As mentioned earlier, the close association between caste and class common elsewhere in north India is not so strong in Himachal. While ritual differences between castes are significant, gross economic inequalities based on caste is not that apparent. Caste-based land ownership patterns have historically been relatively equitable, with Brahmans economically similar to lower castes such as Gaddis and Sipis. For instance, according to the District Gazetteer of Kullu (1917), the percentage of land owned by the lower castes ranged from 7.2 per cent in Kullu Proper to 12 per cent in Saraj. While it is no doubt true that the Rajputs (including the Ranas) did own more land than other castes, as discussed in the section on land reforms (Chapter 7), land has not been the basis of economic status in hill economies in the way it is in other feudal societies.

Occupational rigidity is also not strictly observed in Himachal. Brahmans are cultivators in the same way as other castes. This may be influenced by the size of the Brahmans' landholdings, which being small cannot afford leased labour. Newell (1970) found that all the Brahman farmers in Himachal were tilling their own land; "The peasant castes actually engaged in cultivation also owned much of the land". In so far as the non-cultivating Brahmans and Rajputs are concerned, their tenants and at times even servants (*kamas*) acquired cultivation rights with the passage of time. (Singh: 213).

Historically, too, occupational mobility has been relatively high in Himachal. As with agriculture, artisanal activity is not confined to any particular community. For instance, castes such as the Kolis, who are assigned menial jobs, were engaged in artisan activities.

Singh (1998) observed; “The traditional upper castes of a Brahmanical system did not uniformly dominate the system. An assertive peasantry existed in virtually the entire region, as did a section of mobile artisans and lower castes... the traditional strength of the Kanet peasantry of Himachal was derived from their freedom from Brahmanical orthodoxy” (Singh: 217).

This is not to deny that the lower castes, SCs in particular, are on average economically disadvantaged, but the disparities are not as glaring as in Haryana. While Haryana is on the whole economically more advanced than Himachal, income and asset distribution in Himachal is less skewed between SCs and non-SCs. This pattern is illustrated in Table 6.9, based on secondary data, and in Table 6.10, based on my field survey.

Table 6.9: Income and Property in Himachal and Haryana

	Himachal		Haryana	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Per capita income (Rs per year)	3554	4176	3936	6422
% of household income from:				
Agriculture and allied activities	29.8	37.7	26.8	57.6
Waged income	23.5	11.3	28.8	7.7
Salary	27.5	29.5	27.1	20.5
% of households owning:				
Land	88.6	91.7	22.1	56.5
Draught animals	51.9	57.0	9.5	18.6
Milch animals	78.5	85.8	62.3	77.5

Source: North India Human Development Report (NCAER, 2003).

**Table 6.10: Asset ownership in Himachal and Haryana
(% of households)**

	Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
	SC	Others	SC	Others
Land	70	66	18	92
TV	67	74	53	83
Pressure cooker	63	81	35	83
LCV	4	6	6	17
<i>Pucca</i> room	67	77	71	100
Motorcycle	7	8	18	83
Watch	41	62	65	100
Radio	33	40	65	75

Source: Author's field survey.

6.5.1 Equitable Land and Asset Distribution

Relatively equal patterns of land ownership in Himachal may be attributed partly to its history and partly to state commitment to land reforms, as discussed in Chapter 7. Traditionally all land was owned by the rajas, who bestowed it on people (or groups of people) for various services rendered to them. In Chamba, studied by Newell (1952), for instance, the raja depended on the fighting abilities of the Gaddi (a low caste) to protect his kingdom. Hence the Gaddis, military by occupation, acquired substantial land. The raja bestowed land for a variety of other reasons as well. Land belonging to the temple (*Devta*) that was traditionally quite substantial was routinely used to pay for religious services. While the lower castes were forbidden to enter the temple, they played an important ritual role in all its ceremonies by providing music. For this they were often remunerated with land from the *Devta's* properties. Consequently lower caste groups also acquired land over the years. Today the temples own little land as most of it has either been given away or acquired by the government and redistributed.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Historian Chetan Singh at the University of Himachal Pradesh, Simla, told me of this practice after I had finished my field visits so I have not been able to fully verify it. I was told however about the government giving temple land to the Harijans. And Harijans in general are not landless, even though several said that they did not get any from the *sarkar* (government), so it could be that this is how they acquired what they have.

A positive result of this distribution of land is that it provided no opportunity for the development of a special class of caste-based large landowners. Consequently, caste specialisation related to a standard agricultural economy also did not proliferate either. However, as all cultivable land came under use, the right to land became inherited rather than a reward for military or other service. This change in function of land-users from military to agriculturalist eventually separated the castes more decisively around land ownership. However, in the post-Independence period land reforms sought to restore the balance in land ownership again.⁸⁹ Arguably the most crucial factor in Himachal's economic egalitarianism is the relative success of its land reforms. The lack of landed lobbying groups, unlike in Haryana and Punjab, meant that land reforms faced little if any opposition. As a result SCs in Himachal own 14 per cent of all operational landholdings, while in Haryana they own only 2 per cent (NCAER 2003).

Manjit Singh (1992) found that of the total area cultivated by the beneficiaries of land reform in Haryana, 74 per cent of land belonging to upper castes was irrigated while only 18 per cent of lower caste-owned land was irrigated. Here again caste and class disparities reinforce each other.⁹⁰

Access to common property resources is another area where discrimination was much less in Himachal than elsewhere. Barring some lands, called "deva bhumis", Dalits were allowed access to all other common areas and had the same rights as others to the use of their products.

6.5.2 Public Sector Employment

The role of the public sector in reducing economic inequalities is another aspect of the relatively egalitarian structure in Himachal. The large size of the public sector in

⁸⁹ Land Reforms in Punjab and Haryana basically followed the modified version of the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee (report submitted in 1949) under pressure from powerful vested interests in the Punjab, which influenced the provincial administration responsible for legislating the land reforms. While the committee had taken a strong 'land to the tiller' stand recommending a low land ceiling on the basis of economic efficiency as well as social justice, strong opposition from large landlords resulted in exemption from ceilings for efficient mechanized farms. The social justice idea was simply ignored. In Himachal Pradesh however land reforms proceeded smoothly after it became a separate state in 1971.

⁹⁰ Manjit Singh's study pertains to Karnal, Hissar and Sirsa districts of Haryana.

Himachal and the government jobs associated with it has contributed to reducing economic disparities between castes. In particular, the policy of reserving 25 per cent of government jobs for the SCs has contributed to reducing inter-caste disparities. As Campbell (1976), writing about Kangra says: “The main forces working against the caste system are the more or less equal opportunities offered by the government in education and civil service employment” (1976:8).

In this context the role of the armed forces as a major source of employment for the hill people is worth mentioning. Traditionally the army has been seen as a desired avenue for employment in Himachal. What is of particular interest to this discussion is that it has a side benefit in terms of caste equations, as life in the armed forces tends to act as a social equaliser. As mentioned earlier, retired army personnel traditionally return to their villages to become involved in school activities. I met several during my fieldwork, and they all told me that their perceptions about caste had undergone drastic changes during their tenure in the army. Without exception they had come back to Himachal with their prejudices modified.

Interestingly, Haryana also sends a substantial proportion of its adult male population (11.2 per cent as quoted in Datta, 1999) to the army. However, most of these men join the Jat regiments set up in colonial times. It is believed by some historians that the itinerant Jats had begun to acquire martial skills and to use these skills against the British in areas such as Bharatpur. In order to bring them under control the British employed a two-pronged strategy that included settling the Jats on agricultural land and hiring them en masse in the British army (Datta: 1999; Irfan Habib: 1976). The Jat regiment was set up for precisely this purpose. However, this move contributed to the consolidation of Haryanavi identity around a caste-based, masculine, homogenous community. Importantly the lower castes were not included in the army recruitment in Haryana, as the focus was on the so-called ‘martial castes’ such as Rajputs, Jats, Ahirs and Gujjars (see Stephen Cohen, 1990).⁹¹ Thus the levelling effects of the army were mitigated by the

⁹¹ Typically, in a regiment, battalions are committed to different castes and religions. For instance if there are 50 battalions in a regiment ten might be allotted to Jats, ten to ‘Mussalmans’, ten more to Sikhs etc.,

fact that they were part of an exclusive regiment where their community and caste identities were enhanced rather than diluted. The role of the army in Haryana was in this respect different from that in Himachal.

6.6. Political Participation of Dalits

We have seen how access to public services and government employment in Himachal has helped to overcome caste inequalities and enabled the Dalits to improve their position in terms of human resources. I now examine the participation of SCs in the political arena, with special reference to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Mahila Mandals.

6.6.1. Panchayati Raj Institutions

The 73rd Amendment to the constitution enacted in 1993 sought to ‘restructure, rejuvenate and give constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions’. The main feature of this amendment is that it seeks meaningful representation of weaker sections and women. In practical terms this has been translated into a 33 per cent reservation of seats for lower castes and women at all levels. Thus political representation has been extended to sections denied their due for centuries.

Reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has not fully succeeded yet and many cases are reported of abuse of the newly created system, such as the putting up of proxy candidates in seats reserved for women. There are clearly limitations to imposing reservation on a social structure that is skewed as it would impair its effectiveness in the short term. Himachal is an exception to this. In the course of my fieldwork I came across several lower caste *Pradhans* (heads of the village Panchayats) functioning with no open hostility towards them. In one case (village Putlikuhl) the deputy Pradhan was a Brahman while the Pradhan was a Dalit, but the Pradhan had no difficulty working with his Brahman deputy. If there were any differences in opinion these were resolved by holding discussions over the telephone (*hum phone par baat kar lete hain*)! In another instance (village Neoli) it was the deputy who was a Dalit; he had been winning on an open ticket (i.e. on a seat not reserved for the Dalits) for several years.

Interestingly there is no such commitment for the SC/ST who come under the ‘open’ category.

In general, Dalit Pradhans felt that discriminatory behaviour against them is now less evident in Panchayat meetings than it used to be. While an odd member may still maintain a distance by subtly refusing tea handed by a lower caste member, or by sitting on a chair at a distance, most have shed such inhibitions, and none of the Dalits complained of open hostility to their work. Ironically the one difficulty they did face was from members of their own caste, who often had unrealistic expectations of them. In order not to lose credibility the SC officials had to be very careful not to give the impression that their work was biased in favour of any group. Upper caste people questioned the effectiveness of lower caste Pradhans much in the same way as they did with women Pradhans. Comments about the inability of Dalit Pradhans to command the same degree of respect (Dalits are not referred to as *pradhanji* as an upper caste pradhan would be) and scepticism about a 'menial worker' taking on the job of a Pradhan which requires different kinds of skills, were commonly expressed.

In Haryana, several villages reported that the reservation of seats for lower castes had not yet arrived in their Panchayats. It seems that the system of rotating seats for lower castes has not been fully implemented in parts of Haryana. While they are all aware of the provision they are still waiting for it to be implemented. In a study of PRIs in Haryana, Prashant et al. (1996) found that despite the implementation of reservation in some cases Dalits were apprehensive about their role in the Panchayats. They perceived a sense of alienation among the Dalits, who commented on the "invisible line that divides them (Dalits) and the members of the higher caste", claiming that their views "really don't carry much weight and their voices are not being heard". (:164)⁹²

In another study of Panchayats in Haryana, Narendra Kumar (1996) found that they play a very limited role in the "political socialisation of the SCs (Dalits)" (: 67). Only 25 per cent of his Dalit respondents said they had any interest in Panchayat meetings. Sixty-six per cent said that they found the Panchayats unresponsive to their problems. This corresponds to my findings, in which lower castes in Haryana felt disengaged from the

⁹² Prashant, P, Suresh Mishra and Charanjeev Singh (1996).

political process and did not receive any benefit from the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Reservation for women, on the other hand, was being implemented in Haryana, but as mentioned earlier, only on paper. Male relatives do the real job in almost all cases. It seems that since it is more difficult to have proxy candidates for lower caste seats (as there are no lower caste relatives), reservation for the lower caste is facing greater resistance and hence delay. This is very different from Himachal, where Panchayat elections have always been held on time and with the entire quotas met according to the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the constitution (Sud: 2001).

Gram Sabhas being functional in Himachal also offer an opportunity for Dalits' political participation. In Haryana *Gram Sabhas* are non-existent, thus removing another avenue of participation for Dalits.

6.6.2. Mahila Mandals

Social prejudice has prevented lower caste women from being equal participants in the functioning of Mahila Mandals. While they are not denied formal membership of the Mandals, social opprobrium, which prevents them from interacting freely keeps the lower caste women on the fringes of meetings. But interestingly instead of passively accepting their subordinate position and remaining on the margins, lower caste women in several cases have chosen to opt out and form their own, separate Mahila Mandals. As a result, in a single village one can find the 'official' Mahila Mandal composed of upper caste women and another formed by lower caste women to deal with their own problems. This is an interesting phenomenon, which, though at first glance it appears to be strengthening casteism, a closer look reveals an important shift towards greater equality in caste relationships. It may be hypothesised that inequality is maintained as much by a refusal to surrender positions of power by the dominant groups as by the inability of the subordinate groups to demand or acquire power. Hence the lower caste women's refusal to accept the unequal status quo and their determination to do something about it by setting up alternative Mahila Mandals is a positive step towards dismantling structures of social inequality. There is of course the danger that instead of remaining a transitional

stage from which more substantive changes in the social position of Dalits can be realised, initiatives of this kind will lead to permanent divisions of the Mahila Mandals on caste lines. However, as a first step forward they must be given their due.

6.7. Summary

The evidence presented in this chapter paints a relatively less gloomy picture of achievement for the lower castes in Himachal across human development indicators. The data stand in stark contrast to figures for Haryana, where the SCs are highly marginalised. An important reason for the relatively better performance of SCs is that government services such as education and health are of better quality in Himachal and have been actively extended to all sections of the population.

While it cannot be denied that SC groups are economically worse off than other caste groups even in Himachal (as borne out by my fieldwork and official statistics), they have been able to participate in and benefit from the public services provided by the state. Given their traditional position of disadvantage it is remarkable that the difference in education as well as health indicators between SC and upper caste groups is so small in Himachal. Not only are the health and education achievements of the SCs in Himachal higher than those of SCs in Haryana; in many cases they are also higher than those of the upper castes in Haryana.

Successfully implemented land reforms in Himachal have also contributed to the removal of economic disadvantage. Economic redistribution has been accompanied by better political representation as well effective and efficient functioning of the Panchayat system on the basis of the 73rd and 74th Amendments. This has allowed political power to be shared more equally. In Haryana, by contrast, the reservation of seats for SCs is yet to be effectively implemented.

In view of the factors cited above it is apparent that greater social equality now exists in Himachal, despite the prevalence of caste in the personal sphere. An important lesson to be learnt from this is that government can play a positive role in bringing about social

change. While personal prejudices cannot be institutionally removed, efforts in the public sphere of the kind seen in Himachal can make a significant difference to reducing their importance.

Chapter Seven

Social Equality and State Action

7.1. Introduction

On the 26th of January 1950, India gave to itself a constitutional framework based on social justice and equality. Yet, more than fifty years on, vast sections of the Indian population continue to live with extraordinary levels of deprivation and marginalization. The fact that all these years of development planning and nation building have not been able to address gross disparities in the living conditions of large numbers of the population calls for a serious re-examination of the role of the state in development.

Dr. Ambedkar, Chairperson of the Constituent Assembly, foresaw the difficulties that lay ahead in following the objectives of the Constitution. His parting speech to the Constituent Assembly contained what now appear to be prophetic words:

On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality... How long shall we continue to live a life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy at peril.

These contradictions between the stated constitutional objectives and the social reality of most of India have indeed proved to be at the core of many of the interactions between state and society as played out in different regions across the country. As argued in Chapter 1, they have in places put into “peril” the realization of substantive democracy encompassing not just political or procedural equality but social and economic equalities as well.

Inter-state comparisons indicate that there are important differences in the nature and effectiveness of policies between states. Even though the Indian Constitutional framework provides for the same set of formal democratic institutions and national laws

across the country, and for development resources to be used in accordance with a common set of Constitutional priorities, there still exists a difference in the success of achieving these priorities.

One important factor to be borne in mind is the federal structure in India and its impact on central and state legislation. The existence of a Central List, State List and Concurrent List in the Constitution delineates boundaries and domains of state action. For instance, land related matters and Panchayati Raj are on the State list; education on the other hand is on the Concurrent list. While this division of powers obviously gives some exclusive areas of control to the states, they are nevertheless bound by the overall Constitutional framework. For instance, the basic framework of Panchayati Raj in India comes from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment; its 'texture' is dependent on specifics of the state legislation and the priority given by each state to its implementation.

Even in matters of setting policy priorities, there is a tension between the Central Government and state governments. The Central Government exercises a huge influence over the state's capacity to draw up policies and schemes because of its disproportionate access to revenue and its power to fix norms for its distribution. The state governments often end up having to find ways and means of pushing their own policy priorities within the framework of schemes drawn up at the centre.

Finally, therefore, when one looks for reasons for the sharp differences between states in the nature and effectiveness of policies, it is not just the federal structure but also the implementation machinery controlled by the states that matters. This suggests that in examining any of the Indian states, such as Himachal, the Constitutional and legislative structure is important, to understand exactly where a state can exercise influence on its own and where it is constrained to act within a larger national mandate. Therefore along with the legal framework, the socio-cultural priorities of the people of a particular state have to be carefully understood, as their interactions with the state machinery finally determine the nature of state action.

It might be useful to begin with a few words on the history of the birth of Himachal - the dominant political discourse and the nature of social relations at the time of Himachal's formation as an independent state. In particular the contribution of YS Parmar, the chief campaigner for separate statehood of Himachal and the architect of its development model is worth elaborating. This will, I believe, help provide the historical context within which the state of Himachal was born and which established the pre-conditions that have been instrumental in defining the nature of the state in Himachal. In particular the roots of the partnership between society and state that I have already referred to can be better understood.

7.2 Parmar's Vision

“Parmar was a visionary”, is an oft-repeated description of the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. His vision is evident in his writings, particularly from the period when he was lobbying for an independent state of Himachal Pradesh. These writings articulate the direction of development, different from Punjab that the Himachali people wished to follow. They have particular relevance in terms of the way Parmar viewed the role of the state. To illustrate:

An important fact to be borne in mind and which places the Province [of Himachal] in a peculiar position is that while the rest of the country, including East Punjab, is in the grip of a capitalist order, Himachal has no capitalists whatsoever...The people of Himachal [now] do not want to introduce a new order of capitalists but are on the contrary, determined to raise the general standard of living and earning capacity of the people by handling all small business and industry on a cooperative basis and get all big business and industry nationalized. No monopolies, contracts or licenses are to be encouraged or tolerated and everyone is to benefit equally from the development of the country. ...it is worth mentioning that ever since the popular ministry⁹³ has come into power the whole trend of the administration and legislation has been according to the policy previously declared by its leaders. Whether in the matter of Panchayats or in the matter of land reform, land development ...the legislation has taken a definitely more progressive turn than in the Punjab and the working of the cooperatives has put a check on the capitalists. (: 16-17)

⁹³ Popular ministry refers to the elected members of the legislative council as opposed to those appointed by the Central Government.

Recognizing the difference in social structure between Punjab and the Himachal area and stressing the importance of a people-centric approach in Himachal, Parmar continues:

Our women, free to marry or divorce, who suffer from no disabilities or complexes, work shoulder to shoulder with men in all walks of life which concern the village community, and are bound to play a great and noble part in the building up of this Province. Our backward people are determined to go ahead and in a very short time come up to the standards of our neighbours. Only they must be allowed to develop according to their own light, traditions and peculiar circumstances ...what is required is an extension of a helping hand in the shape of the development of these areas in the matter, particularly, of communications, health, education and other development projects.[: 17]

As is clear from these writings, for Parmar Himachal's development would not be based just on economic growth, but also on the full realization of society's potential based on the equal participation of all social groups. Further, the state would play a significant part in creating the conditions for their participation. Contained within this vision is also a departure from other movements for regional independence which rely on language and culture as dominant reasons for seeking separation. It is important therefore to understand that the people of Himachal moved beyond the narrow confines of identity, and articulated a set of socio-political aspirations that encompassed a range of issues including a model of development and a kind of democracy that would be more egalitarian and participatory. The fact that they attained this kind of government and that it built the foundations of a collaborative state-society relationship has gone a long way in enabling not just the egalitarian development that followed, but also unexpected achievements in many development indicators.

A desire to catch up with the rest of the country fuelled by a strong sense of identity gave birth to an ideology that in fact helped Himachal to overtake other parts of the country in crucial spheres. It would be fair to say that in the case of Himachal the state was conceived very much in terms of an "ideological project" (Abrams 1988:75) where the political rhetoric did not emphasize economic growth as being the engine of development. Instead women and backward classes had a special place and benefits were visualized for all from the outset. Its subsequent policies and projects translated the

rhetoric into action. Hence the state dominated the sphere of health and education and created an expectation, among the people, from the state to provide these public services. I will explore these issues in greater deal in the rest of the chapter. Suffice it to say here that based on this ideological project the state set about its task by setting up offices in far flung districts thereby increasing its physical accessibility to the people as it tried to bring development to all parts of Himachal. The state by living up to the expectations of the people by providing the basic services has also built up political credibility itself cited as a factor in sustaining the supply of quality public services. (Keefer & Khemani 2004).

It is interesting to compare the words of YS Parmar, the architect of modern Himachal, with those of Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian Constitution. Both leaders articulated their concerns for the future in the form of the Indian Constitution in one case and in the form of Himachal's "mission statement" in the other at a point where there was some prospect of these statements having a prescriptive impact.

Even though the statements of Ambedkar and Parmar reflect a sharp contrast in optimism about the future, both acknowledge that social relations play a seminal role in determining the efficacy of state policy. Ambedkar and Parmar were not just ideologues but also practitioners with a sound understanding of the social realities of their times. As a result their statements are reflections not just of state policy but also of the interplay of society and politics especially as it impinges on the objectives of egalitarianism and participation. In fact, one could argue that Ambedkar and Parmar were visionaries of the same coin - deeply aware of the importance of constructing state policies and structures on the basis of egalitarianism and participation in order to sustain development and democracy. However one was saddled with the burden of trying to impose an egalitarian structure on a sharply entrenched social hierarchy, characteristic of most of India while the other was looking for an opportunity to construct a supportive state structure that would consolidate the aspirations of the people for equitable development on a smaller scale in the state of Himachal.

While Ambedkar, in 1950, worried about the "contradictions" between political equality

and social inequality, that he felt would undermine the basic structure of political democracy in India, Parmar in 1971 was confident that these contradictions did not stand in the way of building a society based on the twin pillars of social and political equality in an independent Himachal Pradesh. This confidence stemmed from the consensus that existed amongst the people of Himachal in favour of the vision articulated by him for the newly formed State. In fact, YS Parmar was not carving out a different path or imposing an inherently contradictory structure on the people of Himachal but articulating with confidence the desires and aspirations of the people of the state. In many of his powerful statements at the time, Parmar clearly states that he does not speak for himself alone but on behalf of Himachali society, which has a vision different from many parts of India but embodies the Constitutional objectives of the country. It is not surprising therefore that many of Himachal's achievements are in tune with the Constitutional objectives of social equality and have come about with remarkably little social disruption, conflict and unrest. Just as Ambedkar's warning continues to be relevant today for most parts of India, Parmar's sense of hope and confidence also seems to have been borne out by the many social development achievements of Himachal Pradesh.

7.4 Establishing the State of Himachal Pradesh

When the transition to a modern, democratic and socialist state took place in India in 1947, there was less of a contradiction between the constitutional objectives of the nation state and the vision of the majority of people living in the Himachal region, than in many other states. But the "Himachal region" was then part of the state of Punjab, where pronounced divisions in society were creating a social and political order in sharp contrast to the constitutional objectives of social equity and empowerment. This contradiction in interests between Punjab and the Himachali people resulted in a period of conflict and resistance that lasted a couple of decades before Himachal was granted separate statehood, in 1971. Himachal's case for separation on grounds of basic differences in vision from Punjab was bolstered by the fact that Himachal's vision corresponded more closely to that endorsed by the Constitution. It is interesting to note that Haryana, also a part of Punjab when separated from it, followed the Punjab model of development. Haryana's

separation from Punjab was based more on parochial notions of language (with caste and communal undertones) which unfortunately glossed over other social inequities. The difference in development outcomes that emerged in the two states, (Himachal and Haryana) after they adopted their separate ways reflects this difference in understanding of development including that of the constitutional imperative.

Parmar saw the building of infrastructure and the setting up of education and health facilities as key to realizing the objectives of development. Understanding that infrastructure was crucial to development of any kind, particularly in an isolated mountain area, he laid urgent emphasis on this aspect of his plans. He also realized that the terrain and limitations in attracting industry and increasing agricultural production meant that people would have to look to other avenues for employment. For this education would be crucial. And hence he emphasized building schools and expanding educational opportunities.

Parmar's vision laid the foundation for state policy in Himachal and contributed to the forging of a lasting social consensus on the constructive role of the state. This consensus is reflected in high public expectations from the state, particularly in the form of provision of basic services. The political credibility of successive governments has hinged to a large extent on their ability to meet these expectations.⁹⁴ In fact, the social development orientation of policy widely shared in Himachal Pradesh politics cuts across party lines, and has survived the onslaught of the phase of economic liberalization which has seen the dismantling of state institutions for development in many other states across India.

How can Himachal be situated in the discourse on state and society theories current in the literature? In what ways does it represent a departure from the dominant modes of analyzing the nature of the state, state society relations and development outcomes? And

⁹⁴ See Keefer and Khemani (2004) for an insightful discussion of the role of political credibility in sustaining the supply and quality of public services.

to what extent can it add to the current understanding of the issues surrounding state society and development? Without attempting to disprove or endorse any particular theory I hope to enrich the theoretical discourse on state society relations through a discussion of the Himachal experience. In particular the Himachal story can contribute to increasing our understanding of the possibilities that exist in circumstances where there are common objectives between the state and society.

7.5. Does Politics Matter?

An obvious question that arises at this point is the role of politics in understanding these differences. If state structures alone cannot explain differences in policies and their implementation across states, then, does politics matter? Can the differences in democratic functioning of states be explained by what Harriss (2000) calls ‘regime types’? Is it different political parties, their leadership, ideology and organizational structures that make the decisive difference?

This question was first addressed in the Indian context by Atul Kohli (1987)⁹⁵ in his comparative analysis of three states -West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, where he looked at the performance of the political regimes in these states with respect to pro-poor policies, such as land reforms. The conclusion he came to was that regimes that are left of centre (like West Bengal) are more likely to adopt and implement reformist policies than those that have a “multi-class” base with “loose organization and diffuse ideology”. He goes on to argue that a regime that is simultaneously centralized and decentralized so that it can be “in touch” with local society whilst not being subject to the local power elite, is able to “make the institutional penetration of society possible, facilitating a degree of autonomy from the propertied classes” (1987:11). In other words, Kohli clearly believes that political ideology and organizational forms of political parties make a difference. Harriss’s (2000) study of 13 states, on the other hand, while in general agreement with Kohli about the importance of politics and political regimes in facilitating development, differs from him in claiming that it is not just left parties that can follow pro-poor agendas. He cites the examples of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh which have

⁹⁵ Kohli Atul (1987).

good records of poverty reduction to show that, even in the absence of overt ideological positions, “populist politics” can bring about a consensus on anti-poverty issues. In stressing the importance of political organization he elaborates that for populist politics to be sustainable they must take the form of competitive populism carried out by well-organized parties. More importantly however he acknowledges that the “structure and function of local (agrarian) power and the relations of local and state-level power holders exercise a significant influence on policy processes and development outcome” (:26).⁹⁶

What these studies do not directly address, although Kohli and Harriss both make reference to it, is the importance of the social structure in influencing politics. In other words, politics matters but politics itself is an outcome of social processes involving the interplay of conflicting social relations. Therefore one still needs to look behind the scene of party organizations, local leaders and professed ideologies, to the societies that gave rise to them, sustained their ideological commitments and helped build their party structures. Party political structures, as much as bureaucratic structures, are a part of the social context in which they exist. And just as the state cannot be analyzed by looking only at bureaucratic structures without reference to society, the state cannot be analyzed by looking at just party structures without reference to society.

Further, ‘regime’ typologies are not always a useful way of understanding the differences between states, as indicated by the difference in achievements between West Bengal and Kerala, both with left parties in power. As argued by Heller for Kerala, its success in development outcomes owes a lot to social mobilization and class action which paved the way for the development of a consensus between state and society on development issues, which exists even when Left parties are not in power. The Himachal case, as we shall see further on, also qualifies the regime type analysis and in fact does not fit into any of the situations cited above. In the case of Himachal, traditional social equality meant that a leveling of social forces was not required in the way that it was in Kerala and other states, in order to focus the attention of the state on people’s issues. The

⁹⁶ In contrast to these studies that claim that politics matter, Bhargava and Vyas (1995) did a nine state study and came to the firm conclusion that the professed ideology of political parties was not a significant factor in the success of poverty reduction.

relatively egalitarian social structure helped provide the conditions for the participation of a wider section of society in development opportunities. This has ensured a ‘continuity’ of social policy irrespective of the party in power, as in the case of Kerala.

Kohli may be right in positing that strong ideological commitments and party organizations can overcome vested interests, as shown by West Bengal, but the examples of Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh (and Kerala) suggest that other possibilities of incorporating people centered objectives into the political domain also exist. In particular, what these examples suggest is the need for a wider view of politics not limited to party politics, but that takes into account a whole gamut of state society relation. Further, democratic spaces that provide an opportunity to people to express and articulate their demands can also be used to influence policy. The conditions under which these are effective arenas of influence are also determined by the structure of society and state society relations. If state society interaction is relatively democratic and if there is a mutuality of objectives between state and society, as discussed in chapter one, then state action and public action are more likely to complement each other. The conditions for this complementarity may be historically endowed, or they may have to be created through social intervention, as happened, for instance, in Kerala.

In Himachal relative social equality has allowed these spaces to function more democratically and hence it is the use of these spaces that has in many ways determined the ‘politics’ of Himachal, across party lines. Thus no party that aspires to come to power in Himachal Pradesh can ignore the issues raised by the people. I shall return to the use of democratic spaces in Himachal Pradesh in section 7.6.2 below.

To sum up, a closer analysis of the state requires that it be seen in the context of the society in which it functions. The social context determines the nature of state society relations which in turn influences the choice of policies, their effective implementation, the integrity of public institutions and the use of democratic spaces. In turn these processes influence changes in the social context. There lies the possibility of a virtuous

circle of constructive state action and favourable social context of the kind that has developed in Himachal.

7.6. State-Society Relations and Social Equality

In the first chapter I argued that social equality and the constructive role of the state complement and reinforce each other. Here, I explore specific ways in which social equality facilitates state action in the interest of the larger public good.

7.6.1 The Problem of State Capture

The issue of state action has been of particular concern to post-colonial and newly democratizing societies as they moved from traditional social and political structures to embrace democracy and a developmental state. Traditional societies tend to be dominated by hierarchies of class, caste, gender etc., with the state deriving its power and moral imperative from the privileges inherent in the system of hierarchies. It has been argued that in such societies, political authority remains devoid of an engagement with issues related to social re-structuring and in fact strives to maintain the hierarchies. According to Kaviraj (1997), for instance, the inability of a state to adhere to constitutional objectives can be understood as a result of society being in ‘moral subordination’ to a system of hierarchies rather than to constitutional objectives. In India, this phenomenon is further complicated by the peculiarities of the caste system which in its pure form segregates economic and political classes. The implication of this segregation is that addressing social and economic inequalities is seen to be beyond the reach of political action. In the words of Kaviraj: “the state is not an authority for appeal against widespread structural injustices, oppression, inequities...It cannot be expected to rectify them, because it had not created them” (:42). In fact, Kaviraj asserts that this “marginality” from questions of social restructuring retained its hold on the newly formed nation-state in India, even while it adopted the language and rhetoric of a modern socialist state. As a result, he says, “the power to reorder the structure of productive roles, which determined everyday destinies of individual men and social groups, remained severely restricted.” (:41) It is interesting to note that for neo-statists, like Reuschmeyer, et al., (1992) the differentiation between the realm of politics and the ‘overall system of inequalities in a

society' is actually a way of approaching the 'ideal' of democracy as this makes it possible for collective decisions to be made without reference to particular individuals or groups who derive their power from economic or political status (:41ff). In this way, they see a state system that is 'autonomous' to interests within society as the closest to a democratic system as it reflects a 'balance of power'.

This inability of the state to effectively counter dominant forces in society has been a subject of much debate in development literature. The failure of the state to bring development to vast sections of the population has been attributed by many scholars to 'state capture' by social groups that exercise unequal power and influence on different structures of the state. State capture can take various forms from manipulation to outright capture of institutions, without even changing the constitutional framework and its stated objectives. The most obvious and widely discussed form of state capture is through the 'hijacking' of public policy.⁹⁷ Powerful groups within society that stand to gain from the status quo frustrate attempts aimed at a diffusion of privilege by resisting or blocking redistributive policies. The influence of "class power" on the Indian state is well illustrated by Bardhan (1984), who lists three propertied classes – the agrarian and the industrial bourgeoisie and the public bureaucracy ("professional class") as having determined the course of public policy in the interests of one or the other, at different points in time. Chatterjee (1994), on the other hand, has focused on the influence of the capitalist class on policy makers. According to him, it prevented the state from being identified as "an embodiment of the general" and instead, "constructed the framework of legitimacy to allow the passive revolution of capital", thus creating "profound ambiguities... in the relations between the modern state and the rest of the people-nation".

Nevertheless, the theory of state capture encompasses a dual understanding of the perversion of state objectives by an exclusive set of vested interests within society, and the understanding that there is a need to at least pay lip-service to the stated objectives. If this were not the case, there would be no need to "capture" the state. In other words, state

⁹⁷ Bardhan 1984, Kaviraj, 1993 Jayal, 1998, and Partho Chatterjee, 1993 have all cited state capture as an important reason for state failure in India.

capture by its very nature acknowledges the legitimacy of the group that the stated objectives represent as well as the objectives themselves.

Ambedkar's concern arose from his fear of the power of groups that could remain autonomous to stated public goals or even indulge in brazen perversion of the objectives in practice. Nevertheless he concentrated his efforts in framing a Constitution that could provide inspiration and support to the weakest and most marginalized sections of society. In so doing, he hoped that the moral legitimacy of a Constitutional framework would provide the crucial space to those fighting for greater equality to counter the dominance of power and use the tools of political democracy to overcome social equality. In fact Ambedkar with his focus on a legal Constitutional framework provides the moral and ethical touchstone against which even the objectives of powerful groups have had to be justified. In this way, the space created by the Indian Constitution has been no less important than the power exercised by dominant groups who have sought to subvert its objectives.

Haryana's development experience is an interesting illustration of hijacking of public policy by powerful interests to the detriment of the marginalized. For instance, a powerful landowners' lobby was able to subvert land reforms, as discussed further in the chapter. Similarly, the heavily skewed emphasis on agricultural subsidies at the cost of government spending on health and education disproportionately benefited larger farmers. Small and marginal farmers were thus caught in a system of overlapping inequalities and the inegalitarian structure remained intact as marginalized groups were deprived of both land and quality education.

Himachal, on the other hand, does not fall in this general pattern of state capture. Land reforms were successfully carried out, elementary education has been universalized and a wide range of basic public services (health care, public transport, water and electricity to cite a few) have been provided in an equitable manner to a large section of the population. As argued in the previous chapter, this difference in the role of the state relates to social equality and state society relations in Himachal. One aspect of this is that

public priorities in Himachal Pradesh have more of a social orientation (for instance, the overwhelming priority given to universal elementary education) because they have not been dominated by privileged interests. Other links between social equality and the constructive role of the state are explored below.

7.6.2 Use of Democratic Spaces

In his seminal piece on the post-colonial state in Pakistan, Alavi (1972) argues that one factor responsible for the coalescing of interests around powerful groups and their hold on the state is the weakness of civil society. This allows the state to forge ahead with its capitalist project (cloaked in 'nationalist' jargon) with scant regard for inequalities that result. Civil society in post-colonial states, he asserts, is so underdeveloped that it allows such alliances to persist without sufficient resistance.

The contrast with the Indian case is useful, as civil society was underdeveloped in large parts of India too, at the time of its independence from British rule. But, unlike Pakistan, Indian democracy gave rise to a number of social movements led by the groups marginalized in the so-called 'nationalist' project of the state. These movements have covered the spectrum from being highly anti-state/establishment to being quite amenable to co-option by the state. Thus, far from being under-developed, civil society in India has in fact been very vibrant. Nevertheless, civil society's success in bringing the agenda of social justice centre-stage has been mixed. I would argue that an important reason for this is that civil society in India has not sufficiently used the available democratic spaces, to engage creatively with the state. Instead, the main focus of social movements has been on adversarial action vis-à-vis the state. In fact a powerful civil society, capable of countering vested interests, can be built with the support of the state, rather than in antagonism with it. This tends to happen more easily in situations of mutuality between state and society where the state-created spaces for the functioning of semi-formal and informal social institutions are used to strengthen civil society, as mentioned above. However, in India's divided society, state initiatives to create informal institutions of public participation (eg: Mahila Mandals, Yuva Kendras etc.,) have not elicited much interest on the part of civil society. By contrast the potential provided by the state has

been used quite effectively by Himachal as a platform for organizing its concerns and, when required articulating them to the state. For instance, Mahila Mandals as we saw in Chapter 5 are fairly active in Himachal and being an organized voice for women can scale up their demands to the level of the state. It is important to note that Himachal has so successfully used the available democratic spaces that there has been little “need” for large scale social or political movements against the state or to put pressure on the state to address the demands of the excluded. This is a defining feature of Himachal and stands in sharp contrast to the experience of other areas, such as Kerala, where a “welfare pact” has been forged with the state after extended periods of political mobilization and conflict. As discussed in the Chapter 4, spaces of closer mutual interaction with political authority have traditionally been available in Himachali society. It is probable that these paved the way for the adoption of the new platforms created by the modern state.

7.6.3 Social Distance

The democratic state in India, with its modernizing project, has been criticized for not being in touch with the essentially traditional reality of peoples’ lives because of the socio-cultural distance between the rulers and ruled. This disconnectedness, which is partly cultural and partly ideological, leads to policies that either do not reflect the needs or aspirations of the people (Saberwal, 1993), or become distorted beyond recognition by the time they reach implementation levels (Kaviraj, 1993). According to Kaviraj, policies are often formulated at higher levels of governance where socio-cultural specificities of the local level are not accounted for. This could be because of lack of information and awareness of ground realities or because of ideological differences in what the policy makers perceive as necessary and workable interventions and what is supported by lower level of administration and the local conditions. As a result well-intended policy measures can get distorted beyond recognition by the time they reach implementation levels. The development literature is strewn with examples of the “unintended consequences” that result from such distortions.⁹⁸ This is one way in which social distance between the centres of policy making and the people stands in the way of constructive state action.

⁹⁸ See Walton and Rao (2004) for examples of ‘un-intended consequences’ of development practices.

In Himachal Pradesh, the relative lack of social distance is conspicuous in the accessibility of the state's bureaucrats as well as politicians to ordinary people. To some extent this has been facilitated by the fact that Himachal is a small state with a population of six million and hence centres of power are relatively less remote here than in larger states. Nevertheless, the accessibility of relatively high-level politicians to the local people is striking. Often in interviews at the village level I was told of the ease with which people could simply walk into the offices of ministers - not just local MPs (Member of Parliament) and MLAs (Member of Legislative Assembly)- if they had some problem that needed solving. I was given the impression that they did not hesitate to take even local matters up to the highest level, even going straight to the Chief Minister (CM) in some cases. Unable to verify these claims, I was sceptical at first. However, the regularity with which I heard them forced me to take them more seriously. One place where I found evidence of the state's accessibility was the District Collector's (DC) office in Kullu, where I spent several days observing interactions between the people and the DC throughout the day. Two things stood out: (a) the ease with which people could approach the DC singly or in groups. They were never turned away, were spoken to politely when asked their business and then told to wait for their turn. The DC too listened patiently and attentively and then took the necessary steps. It was a direct interaction and there were no 'middle persons' to intervene; and (b) the large number of women who came to the office with petitions of various kinds. In fact the groups that came often comprised more women than men. In many cases it was also the women who were most vocal (see Chapter 5 for more on political participation of women).

Social distance is also a critical factor at the lowest level of state society interaction i.e., between the local state agents and the people- for instance between teachers and pupils, between doctors and patients or between the district administration and the people. The lack of social distance between teachers and pupils is a striking feature of classrooms in Himachal and an important factor in explaining the education outcomes of Himachal. (I deal with this aspect of Himachal's education scenario in some detail in the Chapter 8). The overwhelming number of people who access the public health system is another

indication of the lack of social distance between the state and the people. Very often socially marginalized groups in India stay away from public institutions for fear of disrespect and ridicule, sometimes even abuse. This is a common reason for their continued marginalization.

Another critical aspect of social distance is that it can distort public action by preventing public pressure from reaching the appropriate authorities. Inequalities that exacerbate social distance between people prevent less powerful groups from taking their grievances to concerned authorities, as they feel excluded from the processes that can scale up their demands to appropriate levels. For instance, lower caste presence is often shunned at panchayat meetings or in government institutions. Similarly women feel unable to access male-dominated centres of authority. The relative gender equality in Himachal evident in the lack of patriarchal norms affecting their visibility and mobility makes it possible for women to access public spaces freely. As a result they are often found in government offices with a list of complaints: be it against the *pradhan* (head of village council or Gram Panchayat) for malpractice in elections, the school teacher for absenteeism or the local bully for diverting a water source. As is well documented (see Drèze and Sen, 2002) women can play an important role in exerting pressure for the provision of local public services, and hence their contribution to governance is vital. The setting up of Mahila Mandals and now self-help groups of women is in recognition of this role. The relatively active participation of women in social and political life in Himachal, helped as it is by greater gender equality, can be seen as an illustration of how low social distance facilitates collaborative state-society relations.

7.6.4 Integrity of Public Institutions

Social divisions, like social distance, can also undermine the functioning of public institutions. Powerful groups by interfering with the state through the manipulation of institutions, inhibit their evolution and effective functioning. While institutional failure is increasingly cited as a reason for poor governance, and much has been said about the need to strengthen institutions, less attention has been given to the role of social equality in facilitating the integrity of public institutions.

A good example of how social equality can be important for the viability of public institutions is the Gram Sabha. In rural India the Gram Sabha is a sort of general body meeting of the village community, where all adults are entitled to participate. According to the Planning Commission, the Gram Sabha is envisaged as the “foundation of the Panchayati Raj System”. It refers to the entire body of persons registered on the electoral rolls of an area comprising a Panchayat at the village level. Effectively it is the ‘governing body’ of the Gram Panchayat (or village council). Any administrative action taken by the Panchayat has to get clearance from the Gram Sabha before being put into force.⁹⁹ In particular drafting and implementation of developments plans have to be vetted and monitored by the Gram Sabha. A wide range of functions have been recently assigned to the Gram Sabhas, such as defining priorities for local public works, conducting social audits and constituting local committees like forest protection committee etc. However, what policy makers often overlook is that the very functionality of the Gram Sabha cannot be taken for granted as it depends on the social context. In large parts of rural India, including Haryana, Gram Sabhas are rarely held. Ostensibly, because it is difficult to achieve the prescribed quorum, but in reality because society in Haryana is so sharply divided that a small group of people hold sway while the majority is disenfranchised and unable to influence the process. By contrast in Himachal, lack of deep divisions in society implies that no single group is able to override other groups in public institutions. Gram Sabhas (called “aam jalaas”) are regularly held on the announced dates and elicit active participation by the people.

Similarly the Gram Panchyats which are crucial at the village level for implementing and monitoring rural development programmes are relatively active in Himachal. They conduct a range of other activities as well. From my field work I found that Panchayats are regularly engaged in the following activities: village cleaning drives; organizing water sources (obtaining new ones or improving old ones); organizing bus services to the village (Jana panchayat); appealing for and getting teachers appointed to schools where there is a short supply; arranging for agriculture related supplies such as insecticides and

⁹⁹ Planning Commission website.

fungicides (Shird Panchayat); assisting in cases involving higher authorities (Neoli Panchayat). An example of the last was witnessed by me during my visit when an accident claiming the lives of four people from a village had taken place. The Panchayat took up the case and persisted till all the families had been awarded compensation. One of the youths killed belonged to a Dalit family, who were full of praise for the concerned Pradhan and the Panchayat.

In his review of the 2000 Gram Panchayat elections in Himachal, Sud (2001) makes some interesting observations: (a) “high expectations” and “contempt for political heavy weights” were important factors in the elections; (b) there was full compliance with the 33 per cent reservation quota for women at both panchayat and urban bodies levels; (c) younger candidates “proved a threat to established leaders ... challenging age-old social and economic hegemonies”; and (d) it was on the whole a bloodless election with minimal use of alcohol or muscle power. A high voter turnout of over 75 per cent was recorded, indicating a “strengthening of the party-less democratic system at grass roots level”. He goes on to say that “Himachal Pradesh in fact is one of the few states in the country where Panchayat Raj elections/urban bodies’ elections have always been held at regular intervals, without exception” (2001: 2126)

My field data, presented in Table 7.1 below, provides further evidence of the institutional integrity of local democratic institutions in Himachal.

Table 7.1: Public Perceptions of Gram Panchayats
(% of households)

	Kullu (Himachal)			Faridabad (Haryana)		
	SC/ST	Others	Total	SC/ST	Others	Total
Faith in Gram Panchayat (GP)	55	62	60	13	84	45
Can GP influence schooling and village life?			31			7
Sarpanch (head of GP) is honest	81	77	79	42	64	52
Sarpanch is reliable	63	70	68	19	64	39
Elect Sarpanch again	63	47	56	16	48	30

Source: Author’s field survey. SC/ST = Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe .

Several points emerge from this table. In general there is greater faith in institutions in Himachal than in Haryana, as seen from the first row. The responses are however caste specific. While in Haryana lower castes have a greater perception of state corruption than do the upper castes, in Himachal this is not the case. This contrast in perceptions in Haryana corroborates the disillusionment of the lower castes there, of which there is no evidence in Himachal. Upper castes are obviously happy in Haryana as the Gram Panchayats are clearly doing the right things as far as they are concerned. For the lower castes, on the other hand, the Gram Panchayats do not appear to be working in their interests. The upper castes control these institutions while the lower castes feel disenfranchised. The relatively similar perception of corruption across castes in Himachal, however, indicates that government has worked in the interest (or disinterest) of both the upper and the lower castes. This is not just a striking illustration of institutional integrity but another example of how social equality in Himachal helps to make democracy work for development.

7.6.5 Corruption and Transparency

An important aspect of institutional functioning relates to corruption. Lack of transparency and corruption are critically linked to the failure of institutions to deliver and are increasingly emphasized as an important factor in the growing concerns about the crisis of governance and its links with development failure.

There is likely to be more corruption where there is more inequality because greater concentration of power and resources increases the possibility of using public space for private rather than public gain with greater impunity. The relative powerlessness of those deprived of their due impairs society's role of vigilance. If people at the receiving end of corrupt practices are unable to "blow the whistle" on corruption because they are in a weaker position with respect to the corrupt, corruption continues unabated for much longer. In highly unequal societies, institutional recourse also tends to be biased in favour of the powerful, removing another channel of accountability.

In unequal societies corruption plays a particularly pernicious role as it disproportionately

affects the poor and marginalized. Since the poor are most dependent on public services, corruption within the government sector hits them the hardest. In India, this is evident in corruption cases involving the Public Distribution System (PDS) or relief programmes meant for those on the edge of survival, but it is also true of publicly provided health care and education, the only affordable options for the poor.

This is borne out in my comparison, where Himachal has fewer instances of corruption than does Haryana. One area where this is particularly evident is in the performance of government schemes. For instance, the Midday Meal scheme in schools, the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) for health and pre-primary education, scholarship schemes for SCs and girls and the public distribution system all function relatively well in Himachal but are notoriously defunct in Haryana.

In one instance in Shird Panchayat (from my sample), a Pradhan had apparently allotted Public Distribution System (PDS) shops, under the control of the Panchayat, to people of his choosing, without going through the Gram Sabha (the appropriate body for such decisions). The village got together and filed a case against the Pradhan in court. It was finally resolved in an out-of-court settlement where the Pradhan retracted and agreed to abide by due process.

The ‘culture of transparency’ mentioned earlier is evident in the functioning of the Panchayats. Almost universally I was told that Panchayat records, including details of schemes, funds received etc., are regularly maintained and available with the Panchayat Secretary. On a recent visit to Kangra district (in December, 2007) I was able to verify this with respect to the implementation of the government’s most recent flag-ship programme the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme. In many panchayats the records had even been computerized. At any rate they were remarkably up to date and complete and most importantly readily available. Gram Panchayat functionaries also shared the records without reluctance. All this was in sharp contrast with other states, where fudging of NREGA records was common (See the Himachal Pradesh Report).

7.6.6 Public Services as a Common Concern

Social inequality undermines united collective demands for effective public services. As privileged sections of the population exit from public facilities in the social sector, the voice of users is correspondingly reduced (Hirschman: 1970). This process is conspicuous in education. As influential groups exit government schools in favour of private options, the accountability of public schools is reduced, leading to further exit on the part of privileged groups.

This is precisely what has happened in Haryana, where increasing privatization has meant that government schools are patronized only by the most disadvantaged sections of the population who are unable to influence quality as they lack a strong enough voice. The available channels of accountability such as the Village Education Committee or Gram Panchayat, also tend to be dominated by groups who have no stake in the system. As a result, the structural duality that has arisen in the provision of education helps to maintain the segmentation of society. In addition, poor quality public schools spawn poor quality private schools, negatively impacting the system in general, as has been the case in Haryana (CORD, 2002).

In Himachal, on the other hand, everyone has a stake in the government school, as basic social equality has prevented a fragmentation of the public schooling system. As a result, private options have not appeared to the same extent, at least in most areas. Thus the government schools function relatively well and literacy rates for a larger cross-section of the population have increased at a faster rate. In fact, as found by the PROBE (1999) survey in Himachal, given parity in cost parents prefer to send their children to government rather than private schools. The same pattern also applies to other fields such as health, where the majority of the population uses public health services. In Himachal public services tend to be a common concern, unlike in Haryana where they are the concern only of the poorest sections of the population who cannot afford the exit option.

To sum up, what emerges from the above analysis is that elements of capture and marginalization exist at varying levels in different areas. Much of this is related to the

level of social equality or inequality that foregrounds the functioning of the state. Egalitarian social relations are likely to facilitate the constructive role of the state in a number of ways. These include a positive influence on policy priorities, wider use of democratic space, overcoming the barriers of social distance, enabling public institutions to function, fostering public vigilance against corruption and creating a common stake in well functioning public services. In Himachal Pradesh, this context of social equality has provided the basis for a virtuous circle of complementarity between state and society.

7.7. State Action in Himachal Pradesh

Having discussed the links between social equality and state action I will now look more closely at state action in Himachal Pradesh. To start with, it may be pertinent to say a few words about the development of the independent state of Himachal and in particular about the role of Parmar, its first Chief Minister, who was instrumental in giving direction to the development path adopted by the state. Parmar's vision which had the support of the people established the template for subsequent state action in Himachal Pradesh. His contribution to the development trajectory of Himachal is important because even while focusing on social development Parmar did not neglect to address the practical conditions needed to take the agenda of social development forward. In his plans, the development of physical infrastructure was given as much importance as was the provision of social services. "Build roads and build schools" was his slogan in the initial years of his tenure as Chief Minister. The wisdom of this approach is evident now as Himachal Pradesh with a well developed physical as well as human resource base stands poised to exploit its economic potential to the full.

In the next part I will focus on two areas of state action (land reforms and provision of public services) as specific instances of the constructive role of the state and the mutuality of state society relations. Through these examples I will show how state intervention was supported by societal response in sustaining state initiatives and furthering the cause of societal interests, thus establishing the virtuous circle and bringing Himachal closer to achieving the desired development outcomes in line with the Constitutional objectives.

7.7.1 Land Reforms

The history of land reforms is an interesting illustration of the main arguments in this chapter as it shows, through the contrast between Himachal and Haryana, how a Constitutional priority in the context of egalitarian social forces can be translated into public policy and administrative commitment and then successfully implemented, as happened in Himachal, while in the presence of a highly fractured social polity it can have the opposite result. In Haryana land reforms fell prey to all the pitfalls of state capture from the level of policy making to its implementation by public institutions, leading to a failure not just of the policy but of the larger Constitutional goal of equality and empowerment.

Land reform is a highly contentious issue in the development literature and continues to be hotly debated by economists, political scientists and policy analysts. The economic arguments tend to revolve around the role of land reforms in poverty alleviation and often take conflicting positions. Thus land reforms have been theorized both as a direct measure of poverty alleviation (Varshney 1999) and as an indirect measure through the inverse relationship between land size and productivity (Binswanger et al., 1993). While some (Alesina and Rodrick 1994) cite a negative relationship between re-distribution and growth as an argument against widespread land reforms, others (Hoff and Lyon, 1995) show a positive relation between the two. In fact there is very little empirical research that looks at the impact of land reforms on growth and poverty. One such effort by Besley and Burgess (1998) suggests that land reforms that changed the production relations in agriculture had a greater impact on poverty reduction, compared to those that changed just the pattern of land holdings. In general, arguments in favour of land reforms relate ownership of assets to improvements in the terms on which the poor have access to all resources, including credit which could help to create a more sustainable exit from poverty.

At the time of Independence the land distribution pattern inherited by India was highly skewed. According to some estimates 53 per cent of the land was held by 7 per cent of

the people while 28 per cent of small and marginal farmers owned only about 6 per cent of the land (Ministry of Rural Development, 2001). The history of land relations in India went through major transformations in the colonial period especially with the introduction of the land tax and the Permanent Settlement Act of 1793. This legislation changed the feudal “jajmani” system into the semi-feudal “zamindari” system by introducing a class of intermediaries into the agrarian structure.¹⁰⁰ Primarily meant to facilitate revenue collection for the British, the zamindars in effect destroyed what Scott (1976) has called the “moral economy” based on a direct relationship between landowner and tenant, and created in its place a powerful interest group loyal to the British. While both systems were by no means just, there was a degree of security for the tenant provided by the former which disappeared in the latter. The system that was created thrived on exploiting the tenants by extracting the maximum possible rent from them, leaving no incentive to either, the tenant or the zamindar/ landowner to invest in increasing the productivity of land. In addition zamindars shifted their land collection duties to more layers of intermediaries creating a multilayered and complex system of legal, economic and social relations that acted as a drag on agricultural productivity (Thorner and Thorner 1961).¹⁰¹ As a result by 1947, not only was efficiency in agriculture very low, the well being of the tenant had also greatly reduced.

The situation in Himachal however was different on account of two sets of circumstances. One, being hilly, the size of cultivable landholdings was relatively small – often of subsistence size only. In Kullu, for instance the average size as recorded by Lyall was only two acres. In fact, according to Singh (1998) smaller land holdings were the norm as very few households had the capacity to manage large holdings. Lack of access to roads and markets made commercialization difficult and since most people worked on their own lands, hiring labour was not always easy. Besides, non-agricultural avenues of livelihood were also available to people especially in the higher parts of Himachal Pradesh. Sheep grazing, for instance, was a viable alternative to agriculture. Thus, land ownership did not carry with it the same meaning as it did in the plain areas. Importantly,

¹⁰⁰ See Appu (1996) for more on the historical development of agrarian systems in India

¹⁰¹ In fact a review of the literature reveals that different types of agrarian relations ranging from peasant proprietors to landlord serf prevailed across the country.

it was not the basis of class or caste divisions in society.

Two, the arrival of the British system with its emphasis on private property and land tax also had a relatively limited impact in Himachal. The system of common access resources (including for instance access to pastures and forests) persisted for much longer in Himachal, making private ownership a less controversial issue. Besides, the region being geographically remote, the British were satisfied to enter into a revenue arrangement with the raja without interfering with land relations. A much larger impact was felt by the plains part of Punjab, which included the Haryana region, whereas in the hill regions the traditional systems continued to exist. According to Singh, the hill systems were akin to the ‘manorial’ systems of Britain, and therefore found a degree of acceptability from the colonial administration.

Essentially in Himachal, all land was initially owned by the Raja but the peasants had hereditary rights of cultivation and paid revenue to him. The hereditary pattern was patrilineal and the land reverted back to the raja in the case of inheritance disputes. Hereditary rights gave the cultivators a degree of proprietary claim on the land which in some parts was forcefully emphasized. A sense of the lack of powerlessness is indicated in the references to instances where cultivators staked full ownership and the rajas had to accommodate them by granting them status of “inferior proprietors” (Lyall, Singh).

Common land, such as wastelands and forests, were also owned by the Raja, but people had the right to use their products freely. The raja routinely made gifts of land to people who rendered him services, such as the priests and temples, or those from whom he got military or other assistance. In Kullu this followed a system called *jeola* by which half of the land was given free of rent in lieu of the service provided and only the other half was taxed. Interestingly, a family with one *jeola* on providing two people to the military could have all of the *jeola* rent-free, hence imbuing greater ownership rights in people (Chetan Singh, 2002). Some of the services provided to the raja, such as providing music at festivals, were performed by lower castes (e.g. Daxis in the Kullu region), which meant that castes that were not traditionally landowning also acquired land. As noted by Singh

(1998), "...gross economic inequalities based primarily upon caste and landholdings were not very apparent" (: 217)¹⁰².

Hence, terrain and the land management system of the hills both contributed to a fairly egalitarian pattern of land use in Himachal. As a result, land ownership based disparities did not give rise to the landed aristocracy characteristic of feudal societies in the rest of north India. Instead it created a structure where cultivable landholdings, though small, were more widely distributed across the population, while many people also enjoyed the use of common access resources. To quote Anon (2001): " the region was relatively free from the ills of an institutional framework marked by separation of ownership of land from its cultivation. This appears to have been one of the redeeming features of the institutional framework existing prior to the formation of Himachal Pradesh" (:8).

In the post-Independence period, land reform in India was seen as imperative to the national objective of poverty alleviation, not only because it was linked to all development issues, but also because it represented a social structure, much in need of reform. Besides, theoretical arguments, relating to the inverse relationship between land size and productivity, also favoured land reforms at that time. Counter arguments citing the inverse relationship between equity and growth did surface, but the social justice framework of the Constitution won the day, at least in informing the rhetoric of national policy. Consequently, land reform has been an important part of all development plans and is seen essentially as a re-distributive measure to improve the asset base of the poor.

Despite wide variations across states, land reforms in India can be clubbed into the following four categories: a) Abolition of Intermediaries; b) Tenancy Reforms; c) Imposition of Land Ceilings; and d) Consolidation of Land (Mearns 1998). Taken together these constituted, according to Thorner (1976), the largest body of land reform legislation for any country in so short a time.

¹⁰² There is some similarity here with Maharashtra, where the Mahars (an untouchable caste) who performed various hereditary duties for the village headman were often given small allotments of land for services provided.

States were given a great deal of autonomy in enacting land reform legislation. This resulted in variations across states not just in the laws but also in the results. In the absence of a uniform set of central guidelines states set different limits for land ceilings and different sets of exemptions from these ceilings. Some (like Karnataka) banned tenancy, whereas others (like Punjab) did not. As a result, each of these measures has met with a different fate over the last 60 years. On the whole the abolition of intermediaries has been the most successful. Tenancy reform, which differed the most across states, has had mixed results. In general in states where the land owners were a significant lobby in state politics, land reforms were largely blocked (Punjab and Haryana) and in states which had greater political mobilization of peasants (Kerala) better results were achieved. Land ceiling has been the least successful of all the measures with large scale evasion in different forms across states. Consolidation of land has also been fairly unsuccessful largely due to the absence of well maintained land records.¹⁰³

Like elsewhere, land reform was a major part of the development strategy adopted by Himachal Pradesh, after it became an independent state in 1971. However, unlike many states, such as Punjab and Haryana, which focused on productivity enhancement rather than equitable distribution of land, Himachal considered redistribution as the first and most vital step in the direction of agrarian change. This was one aspect of the general orientation of state policy toward equitable development, and is reflected in the fact that the main thrust of the reforms was to ensure that all households had some land. Hence land that belonged to the Raja or to temples was acquired and re-distributed to the landless (largely Dalit households) and Tenancy Reforms ensured that tenants got ownership rights over the land they worked on. During my field work I was regularly reminded about the land allocated to Dalit households by the government. The most common perception appears to be that all Dalit households got 5 bighas of land around the mid-1970s. In fact, The Land Ceiling Act of 1972 was among the first pieces of important legislation passed by the Himachal state government after becoming a separate state. This legislation differed from those adopted by Punjab (Haryana) in significant ways. For instance, it did not allow for exemptions to land ceilings as in Punjab. Thus,

¹⁰³ For more on success / failure of land reforms see Sinha & Pushpendra, Gill et al, and RS Deshpande.

size of holdings and productivity considerations were not allowed to override distributional concern. Even households that were not traditionally agriculture based, such as artisans, received some land. Further, sale of land to non-agriculturalists and for non-agricultural purposes was prohibited. In this way, Himachal was able to greatly reduce its asset-less population. In fact it has the lowest proportion of asset-poor households of all the major Indian states.¹⁰⁴

In Haryana, by contrast, land reforms did not have the same support and powerful lobbies against it found a sympathetic ear within government. This lack of political will is reflected in the fact that the legislation adopted in Haryana left several loopholes that could be exploited by big landlords to evade the legislation (see Manjit Singh, 1992)¹⁰⁵. For instance, the big landowners argued that land reforms would result in inefficient size of landholdings negatively affecting agricultural productivity. The small size of holdings would not be conducive to modern agriculture and hence the development sought in agriculture would not be forthcoming. Consequently, the land reform legislature allowed for holdings above the ceiling limits if they could be shown to be economically more productive, opening the way for large-scale evasion. As shown by Singh (1992), in complicity with the village *patwari*, the executive engineer and the sub-divisional magistrate, land was routinely undervalued by the big landlords in order to go beyond the prescribed limit. Another loophole in the Act related to the provision that every adult member of a household would be considered independently for land ownership. Thus under-aged children with fake certificates and even unborn children and dead persons were registered as independent family members to allow larger amounts of land to be retained by the family. Further, since the portion of land made surplus was at the discretion of the landowner it was usually the least cultivable land that was given up, often forcing the beneficiaries to abandon it in favour of the landlord, frustrating the objective of the land reform legislation. Other techniques used to resume land were leaving no access to allotted land and cutting off the water supply at critical stages, compelling the allottee to give up and leave. In addition, several complexities in the law

¹⁰⁴ See NFHS data presented in Drèze and Sen 2002, Table A.3.

¹⁰⁵ Manjit Singh (1992).

made it possible for landowners to postpone transferring the land and let the matter remain sub-judice for years, effectively getting away with non-compliance of ceiling laws.¹⁰⁶

Among the states in India, Jammu & Kashmir ranks at the top with 98.7 per cent of total surplus land in the state distributed, while Haryana is at the bottom with 28.6 per cent of total surplus land distributed (National Commission on Agriculture 1976:119). The fact that seventy per cent of surplus land has not yet been transferred is evidence of the resistance to land reforms in Haryana (see Manocha et al., 1988).¹⁰⁷

The process of polarization in Haryana was accentuated by the green revolution and the application of new agricultural techniques, using expensive machines, fertilizers and pesticides biased in favour of large farms. This is evident from the increase in the proportion of small and marginal landholdings as more and more land was resumed by large landholders or tenants were evicted. In Haryana in 1980-81 the number of holdings of 2 hectares and below was 51.4 per cent (up from 43.6 per cent in 1970-71) but accounted for only 21 per cent of the cultivable area (up from 11 per cent in 1970-71)¹⁰⁸. The proportion of agricultural labourers also increased as marginal landholders unable to afford the new technology sold their land and joined the ranks of agricultural labourers. In Haryana they accounted for 23 per cent of the work force in 1981 and in Himachal 1 per cent (lowest of all states), while the national average was 16 per cent. As Bhalla concluded from an extensive study of changes in landholding in Haryana:

Clearly inequality in the distribution of land not only remained but was perhaps sharpened. By 1976-77 this inequality was glaringly noticeable: 31 per cent of operational landholdings in Haryana fell below one hectare; 40 percent below one to four hectares and together they comprised only 25 per

¹⁰⁶ In a study of land reforms in Haryana, Manjit Singh (1992) conducted in depth interviews with the Bar Association in Hissar to understand the manner in which stratagems were devised to circumvent The Land Ceilings Act (1972). Hissar is one of the districts where large-scale evasion of Land Ceiling Act was enacted.

¹⁰⁷ Manocha et al., (1988) note the increasing inequality in landholding in most districts of the state.

¹⁰⁸ Shiela, Bhalla (1993).

cent of the total cultivated land in the state. (Bhalla quoted in Chowdhry, 2004)

The data on land distribution from my fieldwork sheds further light on this contrast.

Table 7.2: Land ownership in Himachal and Haryana

			Kullu (Himachal)		Faridabad (Haryana)	
			SC	Others	SC	Others
Percentage of Landed Households			70	66	18	67

Source: Author's field survey.

Apart from landholdings being spread equally across castes, Himachal has greater equality in terms of landholding size as well. Sixty five per cent of households in my sample had medium to small landholdings (less than 4 acres) as opposed to 45 per cent in Haryana (see also Table 6.10 in Chapter 6).

This relative economic equality is crucial to social and economic cohesion, as it means that resources and power are not concentrated in a few hands and a larger section of society shares common interests. Further, it has led to the complementarity that exists between the state and society in Himachal. State action in the form of laws and commitment to enforce the laws coupled with cooperation (or lack of opposition) from society has allowed a virtuous circle to develop in the implementation of land reforms.

7.7.2 Provision of Public Services

As seen above, Parmar's vision which had wide acceptability among the people focused on provision of public services from physical infrastructure to social services such as health and education. From the beginning of its formation as a separate state, Himachal has given priority to the development of physical infrastructure – roads and bridges, public transport, communications, and so on. Realizing that its hill territory would make these absolutely essential to any development effort, the required priority was accorded to these early on in the development plans of the state. As a result, today Himachal has among the highest road meterage per unit of territory of any state in India – not a small achievement given the tough mountainous terrain it has had to negotiate (NCAER North

India Development Report, 2003). A motorable road could access all the villages but one in my sample, and even there a road was under construction.¹⁰⁹

As the next table illustrates, the general physical infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh is as good as that in Haryana in spite of the adverse terrain and scattered settlement pattern. In fact, in some respects it is even better than in Haryana. For instance, while both Himachal and Haryana have achieved 100 per cent electrification of villages, in Himachal it is also the case that almost every household (97 per cent to be precise) has an electricity connection.

Table 7.3: Physical Infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh and Haryana

	Himachal Pradesh	Haryana
Area (km ²)	55673	44212
Population (millions)	6.08	21.15
SDP (2002-03 RE in Rs billion)	180	730
Per capita SDP (Rs)	29605	34515
Total roads (km)	29337	28871
% non-highways surfaced	79	76
% villages electrified	99.4	100
% households with electricity	97	89
No of post offices	2777	2650
Population served per post office	2161	7925
No. of panchayat offices	3124	6167
Population served per office	1900	3300

Source: Statistical Abstract India 2003, NFHS-II and Census of India 2001.
RE: revised estimates (see below).

Telecommunication facilities in Himachal are also highly developed. The government's investment in rural infrastructure – roads, bridges, electricity and even telecommunications – has undoubtedly promoted economic development through easier access to markets and job opportunities. With land in relatively short supply and opportunities for industrial development limited or as yet unexplored, access to the

¹⁰⁹ Contrast this with Uttaranchal, where also I did some fieldwork, but where none of the villages could be reached by road. Correspondingly no public transport existed either.

outside world has been important for livelihood purposes. This investment has also made access to education and health facilities as well as other government facilities, including block and district offices, easier. This is beginning to pay off in terms of attracting industrial capital, as investors see the advantages of setting up factories in Himachal with its relatively good infrastructure, not to mention its literate workforce. This is likely to give the economy a much-needed boost in the near future, also making it easier to sustain the high levels of spending in the social sector.

Provision of public services, especially education, has put Himachal Pradesh in a category by itself. The priority given to education, as part of the state's strategy towards the elimination of poverty, is evident in the level of public expenditure on education as well as the scale of physical facilities provided. The contrast with Haryana brings out the commitment of the state in the provision of these services.

As the Tables below indicate, per capita spending on education and health in Himachal is amongst the highest in the country and certainly much higher than in Haryana. In education it has consistently been about twice as high in Himachal than in Haryana. In health, in fact the gap is even larger, with per capita public spending in 2000-01 more than three times higher in Himachal. This is partly because the Himachal government spends a larger part of its funds on the social sectors than Haryana, and partly because the share of public spending in the state domestic product is higher in Himachal than in Haryana.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Relatively high levels of central assistance have facilitated the high levels of public spending in Himachal. We shall return to this in the concluding chapter.

Table 7.4: Public Spending on Education

	1980-81	1990-91	2000-01
Haryana			
% total expenditure	17.9	16.8	18.5
Per capita expenditure (Rs)	55	197	629
Himachal			
% total expenditure	23.5	20.6	20.1
Per capita expenditure (Rs)	103	359	1447

Source: RBI 2004, RBI Bulletins, and NCAER (2003).

Table 7.5: Public Spending on Health

	1980-81	1990-91	2000-01
Haryana			
% total expenditure	9.2	4.2	3.6
Per capita expenditure (Rs)	28	50	121
Himachal			
% total expenditure	12.8	7.8	5.3
Per capita expenditure (Rs)	56	137	380

Source: RBI 2004, RBI Bulletins, and NCAER (2004).

The financial commitment to the social sectors in Himachal Pradesh is reflected in the provision of physical facilities, as the Table 7.6 illustrates. For instance, the population served per primary school is only 659 in Himachal compared with 2072 in Haryana. A similar contrast applies to health facilities. It is also interesting to note the relative emphasis given to different types of facilities within each sector in Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. The ratio of primary schools to high schools is about 6:1 in Himachal compared to only 3:1 in Haryana. Similarly the ratio of nurses to doctors is more than 1:1 in Himachal but only 0.23:1 in Haryana. In short, the provision of public facilities in Haryana appears to be more elitist than in Himachal Pradesh.

Further scrutiny of staffing patterns in schools and health centres reinforces this point. For instance, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare requires four specialist doctors

for every Community Health Centre (CHC). This translates into a requirement of 256 specialist doctors for Haryana and 260 for Himachal. While Himachal had appointed 108 of its required 260 specialist doctors by 2000, in Haryana only 25 of its required 326 were in place. Thus while a patient in a CHC in Haryana has little hope of seeing anyone but a general practitioner, in Himachal he/she often has the opportunity to see a surgeon, a paediatrician or a gynaecologist.

Table 7.6: Education and Health Facilities

	Himachal		Haryana	
	Number of Schools	Population per unit of facility	Number of Schools	Population per unit of facility
SCHOOL FACILITIES				
Primary School	9102	659	10134	2072
Middle School	1173	5115	1718	12223
High School	1631	3679	3624	5795
HEALTH FACILITIES				
Primary Health Centres	302	19868	401	52369
Community Health Centres	65	92308	64	328125
Hospitals	89	67416	79	265823
Nurses/midwives	351	17094	213	98592
Doctors	326	18405	935	22460

Source: Calculated from Statistical Abstract 2003 and Census of India 2001.

In the context of high financial commitment to the social sector, it may be useful to look at what is happening to budgetary deficits in both Himachal and Haryana. Indian states have been under pressure to reduce their deficits and improve budgetary indicators. In the revised estimates (RE) for 2003-04, the GFD (gross financial deficit): GSDP (gross state domestic product) ratio for Haryana stands at 1.8 per cent. This is the lowest for all Indian states with the exception of Jammu & Kashmir, which shows a surplus. But Haryana is also among the few states that have reduced social sector expenditure (SSE) outlays as a ratio to GSDP. In the same Revised Estimates, the SSE:GSDP ratio in

Haryana has fallen from an average of 5.5 per cent to 4.20 per cent. Himachal, on the other hand has increased its SSE:GSDP ratio from 13.3 per cent to 15.3 per cent for the same period.

The social sector tends to be the first to suffer in the interest of fiscal management, and Haryana is no exception. Table 7.7 is revealing in this regard, as it shows that Himachal has maintained its commitment to the social sectors even in the face of a rising fiscal deficit. Many critics of Himachal's approach to development have raised the question of whether such a deficit is sustainable and its implications for the economy as a whole. I return to this in the last chapter, but suffice it to say here that the long-term gains from Himachal's emphasis on the social sector are likely to outweigh the current financial stress. The speed, with which industrial capital is being attracted to Himachal today, precisely because of its high level of physical and human infrastructure, is one indication of these potential long-term gains. Contrast this with the law and order problems surfacing in many parts of Haryana, where growing inequalities are leading to discontent manifesting itself on the streets. This will no doubt affect the carefully constructed investment climate in the state and raises important questions about the sustainability of Haryana's elitist approach to economic development. At the same time Himachal's economic success also raises questions of sustainability for Himachal's virtuous circle (see Chapter 9).

**Table 7.7: Budget Deficits
(average for 2000-03)**

	Himachal	Haryana
GFD – GSDP ratio	12.8	3.6
Development expenditure (Rs crores)	3831.4	6146.5
% of GSDP	23.4	10.3
Social sector expenditure	2177.7	3282.1
% of GSDP	13.3	5.5

Source: State Finances: A Study of Budgets (RBI, 2004).

Social sector expenditure includes social services, rural development, food storage and warehousing.

While it has been acknowledged by several, such as Datt and Ravallion (1998) and

Abhijit Sen (1996), that development expenditures are a significant determinant of poverty reduction, the structural determinants of public expenditure remain unexplored. In the context of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, the question arises: what accounts for the high commitment to public spending in the social sectors in Himachal and the lack of it in Haryana? It has been suggested that the answer lies in the level of Central assistance provided to Himachal under the special category of Hill Areas Development Fund. In other words that Himachal is able to meet the high levels of public expenditure because it is subsidized by the Central government. However such an interpretation still begs the question: why the social sector? Himachal could choose to use the central assistance to fund other sectors of the economy instead. Besides, even with central government assistance Himachal is not ahead of Haryana in terms of the financial resources available to it. The more crucial question is thus of choice, not of capacity. What does the state choose to do, or not do, and why?

In keeping with the main argument in this thesis the answer lies in the structural determinants of overall public policy of which public expenditure is a part. As Jayal (2001) has argued, a large part of what the state does not do reflects its ability to ignore the demands of the marginalized groups who have no effective voice. This point is relevant in interpreting the elitist character of public policy in Haryana, where large-farm based agriculture has been subsidized at the cost of greater spending on education and health that would benefit marginalized groups. In the case of Himachal, on the other hand, the egalitarian nature of society (and linked to that the relatively participatory character of democratic politics) has given a more progressive orientation to public policy that helps to account for the sustained focus on social sectors.¹¹¹

The state's commitment to provision of public services also reinforces the point about social equality facilitating state action in the interest of a wider section of society and thus building a virtuous circle between state and society. We saw this in the case of land

¹¹¹ Further, as argued by Keefer and Khemani (2004), "if in the early years of electoral competition, a political class emerges that is able to make credible promises about providing broad public goods, then that will shape the nature of political competition in the years following, leading to greater resource allocation to public goods" (:938). The case of Himachal with Parmar's early influence on social development and subsequent state commitment appears to bear this out.

reforms where a policy initiative was supported by social consensus in favour of it allowing the reforms to be carried through successfully without attempts at derailment. A similar consensus has been achieved with regard to the public provision of education where a corresponding response from all sections of society (low gender and caste gaps) in terms of high levels of school participation has helped sustain the virtuous circle. In the case of education, the lack of social distance between the education bureaucracy and the pupils (and parents) has added to the virtuous circle in the classroom and in the village as children from across communities have greater social access to school and learning and so do their parents allowing them to engage with the system in a more meaningful manner through participation in PTAs and VECs. In both cases, state action reflects the interests of wider section of society indicating social cohesiveness and equality and the corresponding social response is also likewise a reflection of greater social equality.

I shall discuss the education sector in greater detail in the Chapter 8 but suffice it to say here that the resources poured into public education have yielded a corresponding impact in terms of schooling and educational outcomes in Himachal. This indication of good public service delivery is in fact a manifestation of all the links between state action and social equality, listed in Section 4.6 above.

7.8. Conclusion

Himachal's experience of constructive state action makes particularly interesting reading in the light of recent debates about the role of the state in development. Confidence in the "developmental state" tends to be very low today, and the visions of state-led development shared (with some differences) by Ambedkar, Nehru, Parmar and many other thinkers of the early days of independence, are now widely considered to have been mis-guided. Contrary to this view, Himachal presents a remarkable case of a relatively successful developmental state particularly (but not only) in the field of social development. In that sense, it is an experience of great significance even though it applies to a relatively small area and population. Much like Kerala, Costa Rica and other states or countries that have received considerable attention in the developmental literature, in spite of their small size, Himachal also deserves to be watched with keen interest.

In this respect, Himachal like Kerala looks like something of an “anomaly” among Indian states. The general pattern elsewhere and particularly in North India has been characterized by ineffective governance and elitist policies. The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that the root of this contrast lies in Himachal’s distinct social structure marked by relatively low disparities of class, caste and gender. This has facilitated constructive state-society relations in a wide range of domains – elementary education, land reforms, health care, economic infrastructure among others. Not only does Himachal’s experience highlights the continued relevance of state action in development it also restores social equality as one of the crucial enabling factors that facilitate and reinforce the developmental role of the state.

Chapter Eight

Himachal's 'Schooling Revolution'

8.1. Introduction¹¹²

An abiding sight in the Himachal countryside is school children of all ages, girls and boys, walking on their way to or from school. Even a casual visitor cannot fail to notice the educational activity, especially deep in the mountains where one does not expect to find anything - and yet there are schools, and schools that function. Often housed in frugal buildings with few facilities, the earnestness with which teaching and learning appears to be taking place in these schools is inspiring. Torn mats and broken blackboards do not affect the order within the classroom and the efforts of both teachers and pupils to grapple with the contents of their textbooks. While the schooling system is far from perfect, it is nonetheless striking to find that the teachers have not abandoned their posts and generally come to school on time to engage in classroom activities, and that the children are seated in orderly fashion with books or slates in hand struggling to learn.

The contrast with the state education system in Haryana could not be sharper. There the buildings are often larger and less dilapidated, but the teachers, if in school, are rarely found in the classrooms, let alone teaching. Instead they typically sit outside chatting while the pupils are left to their own devices or copy from the blackboard in dark, windowless rooms.

The first post-Independence census, in 1951, showed Himachal's literacy rate to be 19 per cent, practically at the bottom of the rung. By 2001 it had gone up to 77 per cent; with male literacy at 86 per cent and female at 68 per cent, it was third from the top. Literacy rates for the 15-19 years age group are 95 per cent for females and 97 per cent for males, second only to Kerala, where the corresponding figures are 98 and 99 per cent

¹¹² This chapter builds on earlier work that I did in collaboration with the PROBE Team, and consolidates and extends the findings of the PROBE survey (PROBE 1999) based on my subsequent field work in Himachal and Haryana, as well as on recent secondary data such as the 2001 Census and NFHS-II (1998-99).

respectively. And, school attendance rates in the 6-12 years age group are the highest of all states in the country. The spread of literacy and elementary education in Himachal since independence has been so rapid that it has been called a ‘schooling revolution’ (PROBE, 1999).

In Haryana, educational achievements are much lower. For instance, in the 6-12 years age group in Haryana 11 per cent of girls are out of school, compared to 1 per cent in Himachal Pradesh. The distribution of educational achievements in terms of gender and caste is also an impressive aspect of schooling in Himachal (see Table 8.1). In the 7-15 years age group not only are the aggregate levels of literacy very high, but the gender gap and caste disadvantage have also been greatly reduced.

Table 8.1: Literacy Rates in Himachal and Haryana, 2001 (%)

	Himachal			Haryana		
	All persons	Male	Female	All persons	Male	Female
Total population:						
All ages	77	85	67	68	79	56
7-15 years	95	96	94	86	88	83
16-19 years	94	96	92	86	90	81
SC only:						
All ages	70	80	60	56	67	42
7-15 years	94	95	92	79	82	76
16-19 years	92	95	89	77	83	69

Source: Census of India 2001.

In this chapter I review the evidence on schooling to understand the differences between the education sectors of the two states. I use data from my own fieldwork in Himachal and Haryana and field observations from the PROBE (1999) survey, which reinforce each other. PROBE, or Public Report on Basic Education, is based on a survey of rural schooling facilities in five north Indian states - Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, in which I participated. Through this survey I got

an opportunity to look not just at Himachal but other north Indian states as well.¹¹³ The PROBE (1999) school survey is complemented by a household survey, which assesses parental attitudes to schooling.

The aim of this chapter is not only to describe the schooling environment and education records of Himachal Pradesh and Haryana, but to also illustrate the links between social equality, state action and human development (discussed earlier in this thesis) with reference to education. The education sector is a particularly clear example of the virtuous circle between social equality and collaborative state action, evident in the interaction between teachers and parents, teachers and students as well as between other levels of the state education bureaucracy and society. This positive interaction is a unique feature of Himachal Pradesh and has played an important part in its education transformation. The contrast with Haryana is particularly relevant because Himachal's schooling revolution was driven by state initiative, while in Haryana the private sector has a large presence. In fact, of all states in India, Haryana has the highest proportion (48.5 per cent) of primary school pupils enrolled in private schools (Aggarwal 2000).

8.2. Education as a 'Governance' Issue: A critique

The challenge of providing adequate public services, including education, has in recent years drawn the attention of policy makers and other development practitioners towards various issues of service provision. Perhaps the most widely debated issue relates to implementation failures in public service delivery. While inadequate resources are also recognized as part of the bottleneck, the problem is not limited to the insufficiency of funds. Implementation issues are cited as an even larger part of the problems plaguing the delivery of good quality public services. These problems include a range of institutional and social issues, such as lack of effective accountability systems, absence of standards, absenteeism of staff, lack of

¹¹³ I was personally involved in the PROBE study including the field survey, some of the earlier pilot surveys and some of the background research.

decentralization, community engagement etc.

While it cannot be denied that implementation procedures do require improvement such as better transparency and accountability measures, focussing largely on institutional mechanisms of delivery fails to address the deeper social issues that act as a major constraint in the provision of education. For instance, community ownership which is often suggested as a means to increase accountability and citizen engagement unfortunately does not address the fact that communities are highly fragmented. Even the basic question as to who constitutes the ‘community’ is not always addressed. Joshi (2004) suggests institutionalising ‘user groups’ by way of bringing the relevant community members together into an effective organizational form, but her analysis neglects the fact that very often the users of essential social services consist mainly of the poorest and most marginalized sections of the population, who have little or no voice, thus making these groups quite ineffective. In the education sector, many different types of groups have been created over the decades, ranging from Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) to Village Education Committees (VECs), Mother-Teacher Associations (MTAs) and School Management Development Management Committees (SDMCs), but most of them have all floundered on the same set of problems – the fragmentation of the ‘community’ and the structural powerlessness of the users vis-à-vis the ‘providers’. Each time the ineffectiveness of one association emerges, another parallel one is constituted which suffers the same fate in due course.

The Constitution, especially the 73rd Amendment, gives many powers to local governments, and also explicitly encourages the participation of women and members of the Scheduled Castes by reserving places for them within the Panchayats. But as we saw in the case of Haryana, the reality is that disadvantaged groups are still unable to take advantage of these institutional provisions. Other prescriptions like public action (Banerjee et al., 2006) too fail to address the issue of social inequalities in building up a critical momentum of public action and scaling it up to the desired

levels. Keefer and Khemani (2004) highlight the importance of political pressure to improve public services, but do not provide any analysis of why the poor are unable to organize themselves to demand better public services. The World Development Report (2004) dedicated to the issue of providing public services to the poor, highlights a similar range of issues.¹¹⁴

With the recognition of implementation as a problem has also come a range of prescriptions largely under the catch-all of ‘good governance’, which is increasingly being cited as the mantra for solving the problems of public service provision. The literature around this term has emanated mostly from major international donors, especially the World Bank, and acquired a fair deal of currency in academic and policy circles (see World Development Report, 2004). In many instances, the donors have also made attempts to link aid to reforms that ensure good governance as they understand it. While there is no satisfactory definition of good governance, a common perception among these organizations (based on the World Bank’s framework) is that it includes the following eight major ‘characteristics’: (1) participation, (2) rule of law, (3) transparency, (4) responsiveness, (5) consensus-oriented, (6) equity and inclusiveness, (7) effectiveness and efficiency and (8) accountability.¹¹⁵

On the face of it these sound like reasonable indicators of ‘good governance’, but to say that governance is poor because ‘effectiveness’ or ‘accountability’ are lacking does not go much beyond restating the problem, and begs the question as to why effectiveness or accountability are lacking in the first place. Addressing that question requires looking at the complexities of the social context within which public services are provided. For instance, women’s participation may well be a desired goal from the point of view of better governance, but many social and cultural constraints inhibit the active participation of women in public institutions, as discussed in

¹¹⁴ Joshi (2004), Keefer and Khemani (2004), Banerjee, and Somanathan (2001).

¹¹⁵ Das et.al (2003), Anderson et.al. (2003), Banerjee et.al (2003), Bardhan, Pranab (2002), Manor, James (2002), Pritchett, Lant. H. (2002), Rajkumar Andrew Sunil and Vinay Swaroop (2002), Glewwe, et.al. (2000), Kremer, Micheal (2000), among others.

Chapter 5. Without enquiring into these features of the social context, and how they can be changed, invoking ‘women’s participation’ does not go very far. Similar remarks apply to other features of good governance such as rule of law, transparency provisions, and even equity. As discussed in Chapter 7, the same legal and institutional structures work very differently in different parts of India, depending on the social context. This can also be seen in the field of education. For instance, while institutions aimed at fostering community participation in the schooling system, such as PTAs and VECs, have been rather ineffective in general, they do work in some circumstances. As discussed below, well functioning community based associations are an important aspect of Himachal Pradesh’s experience.

The literature on ‘good governance’ is, in a sense, too broad as well as too narrow. The canvas seems all-encompassing (including as it does transparency, accountability, participation, equity, efficiency, and so on), but the perspective it brings to this broad-ranging set of issues is ultimately quite narrow. This also shows in the prescriptions that emerge from this line of analysis. These often boil down to a few keywords such as ‘choice’ and ‘incentives’ – leading, in turn, quite quickly to advocating greater private participation in the provision of social services and reduced responsibilities for the state. The effectiveness of these alleged solutions looks quite different when they are seen from a broader perspective, which also pays attention to the social context of institutional reforms. For instance, if social fragmentation plays an important role in undermining good governance, as argued in this thesis, then institutional reforms (such as privatization) that exacerbate social divisions may not work as well as they might be expected to work from a perspective that focuses only on individual “incentives”.¹¹⁶ We shall return to this with reference to the growing privatization of elementary education in India.

¹¹⁶ Much of the recent research on delivery of public services (including education) has highlighted high levels of absenteeism of service providers (teachers) and correspondingly a better structure of “incentives” as the solution. See Muralidharan et.al. (2006), Chaudhry et.al. (2006), Bardhan (2002), and other work done at the Poverty Action Lab, MIT and the World Bank.

Another aspect of the narrowness of the governance approach is that it neglects the rights approach to the provision of public services.¹¹⁷ In this approach the basic issue is the marginalization of the disadvantaged groups whether it is in terms of financial allocations or policy priorities or political attention. Acknowledging their rights and putting in place legal safeguards for these rights is a means of enabling them to overcome their marginalization. In the context of education, this approach would shift the focus from greater ‘choice’ for parents to the state’s acceptance of its responsibility for effective provision of schooling facilities under a Right to Education Act.¹¹⁸ These issues are beyond the governance framework. In fact, many other problems plaguing the education sector in India, relate to lack of government commitment to universal provision of essential social services. Instead, there is an increasing tendency to abdicate responsibility to non-state providers. It is now fairly well-acknowledged that it is the ‘hardest to reach’ children residing in remote areas or belonging to marginalized communities who remain out of reach of education services (UNICEF, 2006)¹¹⁹. It is the state that will need to intensify efforts to bring these groups into the fold of education. Similarly poor learning outcomes that are being highlighted also require more than incentivizing teacher performance as suggested by the proponents of good governance.¹²⁰

8.3. Primary Schooling in Himachal and Haryana

Education campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s such as the Total Literacy Campaign have helped to increase awareness not only of the importance of schooling but also of the relevance of quality. Conventional wisdom has regarded poverty as one of the main determinants of schooling. In fact the most widely held belief regarding India's poor

¹¹⁷ The World Bank literature, for instance, makes no reference to the debates around the Right to Education Bill and the Constitutional amendment that makes education a fundamental right in India.

¹¹⁸ For more on the issue of “choice” and the role of conditional cash transfers see, Rawlings and Rubio (2005). For a critique of this view see, Ravallion, Martin (2003), Britto (2005).

¹¹⁹ UNICEF ??

¹²⁰ Poor learning outcomes are currently at the fore front of discussions on education in India. But, much of this discussion is dominated by the role of performance incentives to teachers, which is cited as a major reason for poor learning outcomes by students. However, some randomized experiments in Andhra Pradesh have however shown that increasing incentives did not reduce teacher absenteeism (Muralidharan, et al. 2006). Nevertheless the call for supply side incentives continues unabated. A larger debate and more research are clearly called for.

educational status relates the demand for education to the poor economic status of parents. It is commonly accepted, particularly in official circles that poor people cannot afford to send their children to school. The main explanation offered for this is that the opportunity cost of sending them to school is high, as children make valuable contributions to the household economy. Hence sending them to school instead of using them as household help or wage earners is not an economically feasible option. In addition, the direct costs of education such as books, stationery and uniforms put schooling practically out of reach for the poor. Higher per capita incomes are therefore seen as the best means of reducing the dependence of poor families on children as economic assets, freeing them to attend school.

However, there is now a wealth of literature showing that the relationship between economic prosperity and education is far from rigid.¹²¹ What this literature suggests is that while opportunity costs themselves are not a stumbling block to educational achievement in conjunction with the direct costs of schooling, they can be a source of discouragement, in particular for girls and lower caste children for whom the poverty constraint is most binding; and that low quality schooling can play a more decisive role, than poverty per se, in schooling decisions.

The comparison of Himachal with Haryana provides evidence of the fact that economic factors alone do not account for the differences in educational performance, as Himachal's per capita income is below Haryana's, which today is the highest for all states in India. Yet enrolment rates and education outcomes are better in Himachal.

This is not to deny that poverty or low income often play a role in low schooling levels. In general, poorer countries or poorer sections of a population are more likely to have poorer educational records. However, many factors other than the purely economic are also at work. The poverty constraint can be alleviated or defeated by appropriate intervention, most notably by improving the reach and quality of basic

¹²¹ For a detailed analysis of the impact of economic constraints on educational deprivation, based on field surveys, see Bhatta (1998).

education. In particular, as Himachal's experience shows, much can be done by the state both to reduce the private costs of schooling, for instance by providing incentives for school meals, scholarships and books, and to improve the quality of schooling and hence make it possible for marginalised sections of society to attend.

The quality of a school depends upon a variety of factors, including the physical infrastructure, the motivation of the teaching staff and the work culture in the schooling system. While there may be disagreement on the relative importance of these and related factors, it cannot be denied that certain minimum standards have to be met in order to create an acceptable environment in which learning can take place. Thus, every school should have a *pucca* building that does not leak in the monsoons, separate classrooms for separate grades, sufficient light and air inside the classrooms, a teacher for each grade, usable toilet facilities, safe drinking water, and basic teaching aids such as a blackboard, chalk and reading and writing material in usable form. Equally importantly, minimum teaching standards include the regular presence of teachers in classrooms during teaching hours and a minimum achievement level of the pupils, at the least. Sadly, there is overwhelming evidence that only a small proportion of schools in India meet these very basic requirements. In the following section I examine some of these aspects of quality in relation to the evidence from state schools in Himachal and Haryana.

8.3.1 Physical Infrastructure

Access to schooling begins with the physical availability of schools. Hence education policy has largely been dominated by the physical provision of schools in close proximity to inhabited areas. In Himachal, where the terrain is difficult, this is of particular importance. The state government therefore adopted the twin approach of building both roads and schools. In Haryana, while making roads has certainly been a priority building schools has been less so. According to the latest survey on elementary education by NUEPA, more than 3000 government primary schools have opened in Himachal since 1994, but only 900 in Haryana.

It is interesting that at the same time private schools have increased in larger numbers in Haryana. According to recent National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) evidence Haryana has the highest proportion of children attending private primary schools (48.5 per cent). The all-India average is 17.3 per cent and the figure for Himachal is 3.6 per cent. Of these, 18.7 per cent of children in Haryana attend private unrecognized schools¹²². The corresponding figure for Himachal is 0.1 per cent (Aggarwal 2000).

There is no doubt that the physical infrastructure of average government schools in both Himachal and Haryana is inadequate. If anything it appears to be a little better in Haryana than in Himachal, except for the availability of electricity, as Tables 8.2 and 8.3 indicate. These figures should of course be read bearing in mind that many schools in Himachal serve small and dispersed settlements.

Table 8.2: School Buildings in Himachal and Haryana
(% of all schools)

	Himachal	Haryana
Pukka	61	91
Partly Pukka	9	1
Kuchha	7	0
Other	23	8

Source: Elementary Education in India (NUEPA, 2004).

Table 8.3: Availability of Selected School Facilities
(% of all schools)

	Drinking Water	Toilets	Electricity	Blackboard	Computer
Himachal	85	32	50	92	6
Haryana	88	65	30	91	6

Source: Elementary Education in India (NUEPA, 2004).

While Haryana compares favourably in the provision of blackboards and computers, 21 per cent of schools at elementary level have a student classroom ratio of over 60, and a significant number of schools have neither teachers nor classrooms! Nearly 40 per cent of all children enrolled in Haryana attend a school with more than 60 students per classroom compared with only 3.2 per cent schools in Himachal. However, while fewer than one per cent of schools in Himachal are without a teacher (NUEPA, 2004; see also Table below),

¹²² These are schools that do not fulfill government criteria regarding quality and are therefore not recognized as legitimate schools.

Table 8.4: Congestion in Schools
(% of all schools at elementary level)

	Student-classroom ratio >60	Schools without Teachers	Schools without classrooms	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
Himachal	4	<1	4	21
Haryana	21	7	16	48

Source: Elementary Education in India (NUEPA, 2004).

What is not reflected in official statistics but was found in the field is the difference in the use of the facilities. For instance, PROBE (1999) found that while the physical infrastructure of most schools was fairly rudimentary, the maintenance and utilisation of the facilities in Himachal were much better than in the other states surveyed.

School premises are usually tidy...there is much less dilapidation of furniture and teaching material...A significant proportion of schools in Himachal Pradesh even succeed in making active use of relatively fragile items such as electric fans, musical instruments and library books.. (PROBE, 1999: 119)

During my fieldwork I too found that though the children sat on torn mats they were invariably seated in neat rows and all had notebooks or slates. The blackboard may have been chipped, but it was being used. Most schools did not have proper buildings – often they were just a small room, many with one blackboard, no chairs or desks for the children to sit on and sometimes even without a toilet. However all the children had books to read from and some form of writing implement, and most importantly the teachers were teaching. The premises were always tidy and clean, and teaching materials obtained from various schemes were used. Charts were on the walls and books had been distributed among the children.

Wide use of schooling facilities depends on the presence of complementary infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and in some cases even adequate transport. In fact, provision of schools must be seen as part of a larger project of development in which basic infrastructural facilities are simultaneously developed. Better roads, bridges across rivers and electricity in schools are all part of a package that improves physical access and

facilitates the use of educational facilities, thus enabling excluded regions and people to benefit from development opportunities, including education.

The issue of safety, especially for small children and girls, has an important role in determining physical access. If the path to the school is through a quiet, deserted area parents are reluctant to let their children use it. Thus provision of education must be seen in the larger context of providing public goods to excluded regions and groups and may require more than just increases in education budgets.

In other words, even though the facilities are limited and basic in Himachal, the desire to use them as well as possible is indicative of a sense of social responsibility. This is different from Haryana, where the lack of facilities is used as a reason for giving up on the system and in the process on the children whose hopes of a better life depend on it.

8.3.2 Classroom Environment and Work Culture

The commitment to the education of children is reflected in other aspects too, such as the environment within the classroom and the work culture in the schooling system.

PROBE (1999) found in Himachal “comparatively little evidence of practices such as closing a school without good reason, allowing classroom chaos to undermine any learning activity, and leaving younger children to their own devices”. My field visits confirmed the relative orderliness of the schools, compared with schools in other parts of rural north India. No doubt some of the teaching involved reading aloud and rote learning, but the children were able to answer questions in math, recite poems and read from their textbooks. I did not come across a single school where the teacher was not holding a class.

One of the schools in my sample, in a remote village called Jana in Naggar Block, had a single teacher school, but even there I found that the teacher was working hard to manage different sections by rotating groups of children in different activities. While the youngest group was sent off to play, another group was assigned some writing and the teacher

marked the work of yet another, which had been given math problems. There were moments of chaos when the groups overlapped, but none of it got out of control, and by the end of the school day each group had managed to do some of each of the activities. The quality of instruction may not have been the very best but the level of commitment to the job exhibited by the teacher was impressive.

In Haryana the classroom environment reflects the negative attitude and lack of commitment of the teachers, as discussed in the previous section. During my fieldwork it was common to see teachers sitting outside the classroom while the students copied from a blackboard inside. In one village I found to my horror that the writing on the board was completely unintelligible! When I questioned the teachers sitting outside, their response was that it made no difference since “the children do not understand anything anyway”.

8.3.3 Management Issues

The sense of responsibility within the education system is reflected in the administrative aspects of quality as well. For instance, an impressive indicator of school management found by PROBE in Himachal was the accuracy with which records are maintained.

Village schools in Himachal Pradesh have well-maintained records, including accurate enrolment and attendance registers. In most schools, the day's attendance figures are written on a blackboard fixed on the outer wall (PROBE, 1998: 120)

In my experience too, registers were well maintained and up to date with all the requisite information regarding age, caste and gender completed. I was also shown records of which children had received scholarships, books or uniforms, including the dates when they had last received these. Keeping good records may seem a trivial achievement but it serves many useful purposes, from facilitating the monitoring of the school system to curbing corruption.

In Himachal, at Block, District and State levels, education administrators were found to be very responsive. As an illustration, PROBE (1999) found that salaries were paid punctually on the first day of every month and that very few teaching posts were vacant,

whereas in other PROBE states, more than 10 per cent remain vacant. These findings are consistent with my own observations. During the period in which I did my fieldwork an order was passed that all teachers who had not reported to their teaching posts within a specified period of time would lose their jobs and new teachers would be appointed. Despite some protests, the government took a strong stand on this issue and most teachers did report on time.

In an interview with the state's Education Minister I was told that there was a move to transfer substantial financial powers to the Gram Panchayats. For instance, it was being suggested that the Gram Panchayats pay the salaries of teachers. If gross negligence, large-scale absenteeism or other major complaints were registered against teachers their salaries could be withheld by the Gram Panchayats. It was interesting that at the same time Haryana state legislature increased powers at the district level, further curtailing the powers of the Gram Panchayats, citing the ineffectiveness of the Gram Panchayats its reason.

Another aspect of responsive school management is the requisite sanction of teaching posts in Himachal. It has been the experience in many parts of India, that often schools are opened but no teachers are appointed, or too few, resulting in severe under-staffing. In Himachal there are very few single-teacher schools, with on average at least three teachers to every primary school.

A particularly interesting example of the responsible nature of school management in Himachal Pradesh relates to school timings. While regular income-earning opportunities for children are limited and hence their opportunity costs are not as high as is often assumed, it is not uncommon to find that there is a seasonal demand for their labour, for instance during the peak agricultural season. The absence of children during those periods often leads to their dropping out of education, either due to absenteeism per se, their names being struck from the register, or failure in exams caused by their long absence from school. Educationists have long suggested adjusting the school calendar to accommodate agricultural cycles as a possible solution to this problem. However, barring

Himachal none of the other states in PROBE or Haryana have made any moves towards this change. In Himachal, the school calendar was found to be adjusted district-wise in tune with the agricultural cycle to avoid clashes with periods of high demand for child labour such as the apple-picking season in Kullu district. This is a striking example of not only efficient management but also school management being geared to the interests of children – especially disadvantaged children – rather than the convenience of teachers, privileged parents or other powerful lobbies.

In short, Himachal Pradesh consistently out-performs Haryana in terms of the quality of schooling. It is revealing that in my sample that 82 per cent of households in Himachal but only 20 per cent in Haryana felt that the local school met their expectations. This is all the more telling as public expectations of the schooling system in Himachal tend to be very high.

8.3.4 Educational Outcomes

Public expenditure on education in Himachal has been consistently higher than in most other states. In this section I look at outcomes to see how the investment has translated into results. It is commonly heard that “high outlays are not enough outcomes must be high too”. Is Himachal just a case of high outlays un-matched by corresponding outcomes?

As we saw earlier in this chapter educational outcomes in Himachal are in fact exceptionally high judging from standard indicators such as literacy rates and school participation. Similar achievements are reflected in a range of other indicators. For instance, pupil achievements are generally much better in Himachal Pradesh than in Haryana (see Table 8.5). For instance, the transition rate from primary to upper primary school in Himachal is 100 per cent for boys and 96 per cent for girls, compared with 80 and 74 per cent respectively in Haryana. This reflects the higher dropout rates in Haryana.

Table 8.5: Internal Efficiency Indicators (%)

	Himachal Boys	Himachal Girls	Haryana Boys	Haryana Girls
Transition rates from primary to upper primary (%)	100	96.2	80.3	74.3
Exam results (60% & more) (%)	51.3	54.6	30.5	33.6
Average Grade Repetition Rate classes I-V*	3.2 (boys/girls combined)		20.5 (boys/girls combined)	

Source: Elementary Education in India: Analytical Report (NUEPA, 2004) and North India Human Development Report (NCAER, 2003). *Unweighted average of grade specific repetition rates.

Furthermore, in Himachal more than 50 per cent of boys and girls clear the class five exam with first division marks (more than 60 per cent), whereas in Haryana, the corresponding figures are 30 and 34 per cent. Similarly, the average grade repetition rate at primary level is only three per cent in Himachal compared with more than 20 per cent in Haryana.

The next Table, which shows the reasons for repeating grades, is also revealing. In Himachal the main reason for repeating a year is exam failure. In Haryana, however, 50 per cent of repeaters cited prolonged absenteeism and re-admission as the primary reason for grade repetition.

Table 8.6: Reasons for Grade Repetition (%)

	Failure in Exam	Long Absenteeism	Readmission
Himachal	88	4	8
Haryana	48	28	24

Source: Elementary Education in India: Analytical Report (NUEPA, 2004).

A recent survey of rural schools across the country found that learning achievements in government schools vary sharply across states. On the basis of literacy and numeracy tests conducted by the PRATHAM (a Delhi-based NGO) team, the results for Himachal and Haryana are shown in Table 8.7 below.

Table 8.7: Learning Achievements

	% of Class V children who can:	
	read to Level 2	do division
Himachal	82.3	70.5
Haryana	66.9	61.3

Source: Annual Status of Education Report 2007 (PRATHAM, 2007).

8.4. Role of the State

This section takes a closer look at the role of the state in the promotion of elementary education in Himachal Pradesh. The social factors, especially the enabling role of social equality (and its complementarity with state action), are discussed in the next section.

8.4.1 State Initiatives for Elementary Education in Himachal

Political commitment and public expenditure: As discussed in the Chapter 1 and 7, the universalization of elementary education has been a major policy priority in Himachal Pradesh ever since it became an independent state. It was one of the chief goals of Y. S. Parmar, the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh. Since then it has remained an important priority irrespective of political parties.

This policy priority is reflected in various ways starting with consistently high levels of public expenditure on education. With per capita expenditure on education at Rs.719 per year, it is the second highest spender in India after Kerala (Rs. 754), while Haryana ranks far below at Rs. 462.

This commitment to providing adequate resources to education is particularly interesting in the context of persistent failures in this respect on the part of other states as well as the Central government. Despite recent increases in financial allocations to the social sector in India, government resources continue to remain insufficient to meet the level of demand at the required quality. For instance, government spending on education continues to hover around 3 per cent of GDP (currently 2.8 per cent) despite a long

acknowledged and recommended level of at least 6 per cent.¹²³ The government's reluctance to commit adequate financial resources to this sector is a factor in the poor quality of education provided in many parts of rural India. It has also played a major role in the recent search for "alternative" modes of provision, involving for instance large-scale employment of poorly-trained, low-paid "para-teachers", the promotion of private sector initiative, and other means of reducing the responsibilities of the state in the provision of essential services. The government itself has welcomed these alternatives, and the private sector including public-private partnerships (PPPs) are being strongly encouraged. By contrast in Himachal Pradesh there has been consistent commitment to state provision of schooling facilities and serious efforts have been made to provide the requisite financial allocations.

Incentive schemes: Aside from providing school facilities and related infrastructure throughout the state, the Government of Himachal Pradesh has introduced a wide range of incentive schemes to foster school participation and reduce socio-economic disparities in access to elementary education. In PROBE's experience, 'incentives schemes such as scholarships and prizes were efficiently implemented in most schools' in Himachal. Neither the PROBE team nor I encountered any case of corruption in school incentive programmes. Further, numerous incentive schemes in the form of scholarships and free textbooks are provided for SC/ST students and girls at the start of their schooling years. Hostel facilities offering free board and lodging are also provided for SC/ST children in some areas.¹²⁴

I found that in addition to these schemes the Midday Meals (MDM) Programme was also functioning well, in contrast to Haryana and the other PROBE states where corruption had practically derailed the scheme. In Himachal, while children in some villages were given dry rations, others were served freshly cooked meals. In one of my sample villages

¹²³ This benchmark was initially proposed, as early as 1966, by the "Kothari Commission", and was later endorsed by numerous committees, policy documents and party manifestoes. The National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) of the UPA Government, which came to office in May 2004, includes a clear commitment to raising public expenditure on education to 6 per cent of GDP.

¹²⁴ For details see, Sinha et al., (1997) .

the teachers employed a helper to prepare the meal and serve it to the children.

In Haryana these midday meals were practically non-existent. Even dry rations had not been given for six months prior to the survey. Parents complained that before that the supply had been very irregular and was often of very poor quality. Besides this it was incumbent on parents to collect the ration from the ration shop, where they were invariably harassed and often turned away.¹²⁵

8.4.2 Private Schooling and Social Divisions

As we have seen, the schooling system in Himachal Pradesh consists overwhelmingly of government schools, and private schools are rare. In contrast in Haryana the government schools have increasingly been displaced by private schools to the extent that almost half of all children at primary level are now studying in private schools. As discussed in Chapter 7, the exit of privileged families from government schools has weakened the voice of those who have a stake in the effective functioning of these schools, which in turn fuels the continuing deterioration of government schools and further privatisation through further exit.

It may be argued that there is nothing wrong with this since private schools provide an effective substitute for government schools. It is commonly believed, often with good reason that government schools are unable to provide the basic minimum quality of education and that parents are justified in seeking private options. Numerous studies have documented the appalling state of government schools in most Indian states. At the same time a surge in demand for education following the campaigns of the 1980s, including the Total Literacy Campaign, has put pressure on the government system, which is struggling with issues of access and retention. Privatization is thus being hailed as a welcome move to fill the gaps and bring about universal elementary education (UEE). The euphoria about privatization is further augmented by the global climate regarding privatization and

¹²⁵ Since my fieldwork the situation has changed. A Supreme Court ruling, in response to a Public Interest Litigation on the right to food, makes it mandatory for all schools to provide a freshly cooked meal every day. Preliminary evidence from Himachal suggests that this order too has been better enforced in Himachal than in Haryana.

the ‘market-friendly’ approach to development.¹²⁶

The contrast between Himachal Pradesh and Haryana highlights serious flaws in this argument. First, there is the issue of social exclusion from private schools. Private schools tend to out-price children from lower income families, especially Dalits and girls. Hence the private school option does not deal with the immediate problem of increasing enrolment among excluded groups. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the privatisation of the schooling system is associated with massive inequalities of class, caste and gender in educational opportunities in Haryana. The schooling system in Himachal Pradesh is far more equitable.

Secondly, it is not always true that private schools provide a better quality of education than government schools. Recent studies have shown that there is much heterogeneity in the private sector, and that the quality of private schools at the lower end (i.e. those that are comparatively accessible to the underprivileged) is not very different from the quality of government schools. Private schools are profit-making enterprises. As a result, cost-cutting measures such as hiring under-qualified and poorly paid teachers are common. For instance, a study of unrecognised schools in Haryana (Aggarwal 2000) showed that 24 per cent of male and 36 per cent of female teachers in these schools were matriculates at most. Only about eight per cent of the teaching force consisted of graduates. In many instances the teachers use a teaching job at these schools as a stopgap before they move on to other areas of employment. Hence there tends to be a high rate of teacher turnover with a disrupting influence on teaching schedules.

A recent comparative study of government and private schools in Haryana found that in areas where government schools are of good quality the private schools also tend to be of good quality. This is because government schools provide a quality benchmark (De et al., 2002). Hence it is not surprising that private schools in Himachal are also found to be of good quality (PROBE). In Haryana, disenchantment with the government system is so strong that even the poor quality private schools are widely perceived as the better option.

¹²⁶ See Kamat (2002) for a discussion on impact of globalization on education policy in India..

Even poor families cut corners to be able to afford private education, at least for their male children. Unfortunately there are few pay-offs. It has been noticed that parents often move their children from one school to the next in the hope of finding one that will deliver the basic minimum standards of learning (CORD 2004).

Third, the segmentation of the schooling system between government and private schools, as well as within the private sector, defeats the purpose of common schooling as a source of social equity and integration. Instead of alleviating social inequalities, a segmented schooling system cements them. By contrast, Himachal Pradesh provides a rich illustration of the complementarity between social equality and the common schooling system.

There is no doubt that private schools are also on the increase in Himachal, as there is a growing demand for them from well-off sections of the population. However, two important points must be noted. First, the government system does provide a decent alternative and sets an acceptable benchmark in terms of quality; and second, privatization has grown up since the government schooling system made basic education available to everyone. The introduction of private schools is therefore less detrimental in Himachal, in that private schools have to meet basic standards to be acceptable. In Haryana, on the other hand, the dichotomy between private and public schooling has occurred at a stage where large sections of the population are still completely excluded from the education system.¹²⁷

8.5. Elementary Education and Social Response

8.5.1 Schooling as a Shared Social Norm

More than physical access, social access is often a binding constraint on schooling decisions, particularly for children from marginalized groups and girls. For instance, social norms regarding the schooling of girls can restrict their access to education beyond a certain stage. In a study of Muslim girls (Hasan and Menon 2005) it was found that the level completed by the boys dictated the level of schooling completed by girls. Boys

¹²⁷ A similar situation prevails in Kerala, where too private schools have a large presence. But here again they do not play a detrimental role as the general standards and levels are already very high.

tended to be withdrawn from school in order to secure apprenticeships. As a result, the girls were withdrawn at an even earlier stage to ensure that they were not more educated than the boys, which would reduce their marriage prospects.

As seen in Chapter 5, in Haryana, education for girls is not desirable as far as marriage is concerned. Also, the dependence on women for family labour has had the effect of creating prejudice against female education because of the popular perception that it would result in women devaluing agricultural work. In addition, social restrictions on mobility and visibility make it difficult for girls to access higher levels of schooling often available at a distance from their homes. In Himachal, by contrast, not only is education for girls a socially accepted norm; girls are free to travel outside their village to access secondary and higher levels of schooling.

The most striking aspect of social norms relating to education in Himachal Pradesh is the consensus around the issue of elementary education being an indispensable aspect of childhood. It has been forged by active state involvement in the field of education but also builds on the relatively egalitarian nature of Himachali society. This consensus cuts across class, caste and gender lines. Not only is school enrollment in Himachal close to universal at the elementary level, school attendance rates are also the highest in the country, with very small socio-economic differentials.

8.5.2 Formal Community Participation

Another way in which social equality has contributed to the universalization of elementary education in Himachal is by facilitating community action. The spirit of cooperation and solidarity is reflected in the formal institutions of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and village education committees. For instance, my survey showed that there were functioning parent-teacher associations and village education committees in all six villages I visited in Himachal but none in Haryana. Himachal also had newly-established Mother Teacher Associations (MTAs).

**Table 8.8: Parental Participation in School Management
(% of respondent households)**

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Aware of a PTA in School	48	5
Member of PTA	15	0
Think Meetings with teachers are Useful	44	21
Aware of VEC	10	2

Source: Author's field survey.

As seen from Table 8.8, parental involvement in schools is much higher in Kullu than in Faridabad. Not only are more parents aware of functioning Parent Teacher Associations and village education committees, a much larger proportion of parents also reported that they found meetings with teachers (through PTAs, VECs or otherwise) useful.

This is not to suggest that PTAs and VECs function ideally. Even in Kullu, members of the associations often felt discouraged by their lack of powers and hence ability to bring about significant change in the local school. Lack of financial autonomy was articulated as a major constraint. Lack of clarity about the respective roles of the PTA, VEC and Panchayat was also cited as a common problem. As a result there is some confusion about the division of responsibilities between them, making it hard to fix accountability. In their current shape it is probably true that none of these bodies have the power to significantly alter the schooling situation. Nevertheless, meetings are held, debate takes place and letters requesting greater powers are sent to Block Education Offices. While administrative reform beyond the village level is required to make the system more participatory and decentralized, at least the ground has been prepared for public participation in the schooling system in Himachal.

In Haryana, on the other hand, I did not come across a single functioning PTA or VEC. Some respondents told me that one had once been formed, but no meetings were held. Parents were often summoned by teachers who mostly wished to complain about either the inability of the child to cope with the curriculum or the quality of the child's clothing

(there were innumerable complaints by teachers about “how dirty the children are”). There was an acute sense of helplessness among the parents with regard to the quality of schooling, the attitudes of teachers and their own inability to help their children with the academic content.

8.5.3 Informal Community Support

Aside from formal community participation through institutions such as PTAs and VECs, various kinds of informal community support for schooling are often observed in Himachal Pradesh. In the sample villages, I found that mutual understanding and cooperation between the school and the community extends to various forms of assistance such as help in building extra classrooms, donating land for a school, providing fire-wood or coal for heating in the winter months or helping with the midday meal. Similar observations are made in the PROBE study (PROBE, 1999). This cooperative attitude is lacking in Haryana, as Table 8.9 illustrates.

**Table 8.9: Community Support for Schooling
(% of positive responses)**

	Kullu (Himachal)	Faridabad (Haryana)
Can parents contribute to improving schools?	54	42
Do you participate in school activities?	64	24
Has the school asked for your help?	59	11
Did you help?	79	7

Source: Author’s field survey.

The sense of responsibility in the teachers (see below) reflects a relationship of mutual respect between teachers and the community, as well as a sense of solidarity within the community. Just as teachers in Himachal have a relatively positive attitude, towards their pupils parents are also forthcoming in their support and cooperation. In Haryana the community is so divided along class, caste and gender lines that this sense of collective responsibility does not exist. The privileged, including teachers and others in education administration, send their own children to private schools as the government schools are seen to be only for the most disadvantaged. The divide between the two sections is so complete that there is little sense of empathy, let alone solidarity or responsibility,

towards the less privileged. As a result, the whole system is marked with hopelessness.

8.5.4. Teachers' Attitudes

A major factor affecting the social accessibility of schools is the classroom environment. In socially divisive societies children from marginalized communities are often discriminated against or mistreated, leading to their dropping out of their education. Unfortunately, in most such situations the teachers tend to imbibe societal prejudices, adding to the hostile environment. In Haryana, for instance, bullying by upper caste students (in some cases even violence) and teacher apathy to the problem were regularly cited as reasons for the withdrawal of lower caste children from schools. In this respect the positive attitudes of the teachers in Himachal towards the children as well as the parents stands out. As noted in the PROBE (1999) report:

In contrast with the antagonistic patterns of teacher-parent relations found in other states we noticed a good deal of positive interaction between parents and teachers in Himachal Pradesh. While complaints do exist on both sides, there is also mutual understanding, and even practical cooperation. (1999:121).

I found that the adverse attitude of the teachers in Haryana included an element of public humiliation in the form of harsh and even abusive treatment of the children, especially those from low caste poor families, and a belittling attitude towards their parents. Often parents were hesitant to talk about the school or the teachers, but on probing further I found that the interaction at the school had been so negative that they preferred to withdraw the child in order to preserve some self-esteem. Ill-treatment of Dalit children by upper caste children with no interjection by the teachers is a common phenomenon and forms a routine aspect of the humiliation faced by underprivileged school children in Haryana.

In Himachal, severe ill treatment of children is practically unheard of. In my survey I learnt of one case where an upper caste teacher beat a lower caste boy, causing the entire community to protest. The protests eventually led to the teacher's removal. In general teachers have a genuine concern for their pupils, which often goes beyond their progress

at school to also encompass their health and well-being.¹²⁸

This is evident in a variety of ways, such as the diligence with which records are maintained, the Midday Meal Programme being implemented, the regularity of teacher attendance and the teachers' general involvement in their work. In all the schools that I visited, unannounced, I encountered teachers conducting classes. Not once did I find teachers sitting around chatting, knitting or doing non-school related work – a familiar sight in rural schools all over north India. This was the case even in remote areas where inspections are irregular.

This is not to deny that some teachers were frustrated in their efforts and had complaints about management and infrastructure and the difficulties of teaching first generation learners. Nevertheless, they were genuinely trying to overcome these difficulties. Their concern for their pupils, as opposed to the disdain, which so sharply marks the attitude of many teachers in north India, was very noticeable and reflected their solidarity with the people. Unlike teachers in Haryana, whose belief that pupils from underprivileged backgrounds were incapable of learning, which justified their lack of interest and effort, teachers in Himachal identified with parents and pupils and made special efforts to help children learn.¹²⁹

Another aspect of teacher involvement that I found in Himachal was the regularity with which teachers visit the Block Education Offices (BEO) to discuss school problems. What was striking was that I rarely heard them complaining about their own conditions of work or personal problems as was the case in Haryana. Instead they were there to discuss issues related to the syllabus or school facilities, new methods of teaching, the usefulness of teacher training workshops and so on. By contrast, in Haryana the teachers were either trying to get themselves transferred to urban areas, applying for leave, or complaining

¹²⁸ Similarly school inspectors did not confine their attention to the registers - some even enquired about the health of the children (PROBE). This is a good example of the personal involvement with the children and their welfare, which is a striking feature of the schooling system in Himachal.

¹²⁹ Nidhi Mehrotra (1995) in her study in Himachal has made similar observations about the involvement of teachers in their work.

about their personal hardships and conditions of work.

It would be no exaggeration to say that teacher attitude probably stands out as the most impressive factor in the schools of Himachal. As PROBE found, "...teachers in Himachal Pradesh have a responsible attitude towards school duties" (: 120). One particular remark by a teacher in Himachal summed up the attitude towards children in the community (and the link with social equality) very evocatively. He said; *Bacche to saanjhe hote hain, inki zimindari hum sab ki hain* (children belong to the community and as such are the responsibility of us all).

8.6. Revisiting Education for All

Ten years after the PROBE Team (1999) did its survey in five North Indian states (Himachal and the so-called BIMARU states), it has re-visited the same states (and for most part the same villages) to document the change that has taken place in the decade gone by. Even though the sample does not include Haryana, it is worth commenting on the findings of this survey known as Revisiting Education For All (REFA, 2006) as it reinforces earlier findings and also suggests that rapid progress in the field of elementary education continues.

In the last ten years the Government of India has substantially increased its commitment to education. In a bid to accelerate its progress towards universalization of elementary education, it has initiated what has become its flagship programme in education, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). This programme began in the year 2002, with a mandate to provide 'reasonable quality elementary education' to all children and especially to reduce the gaps in gender and other marginalized groups. It cannot be denied that the programme has made a substantial difference to the accessibility of schooling in all parts of the country. By all accounts its main success has been improving the availability of schools and the physical infrastructure within them (REFA, 2006, JRM reports).¹³⁰ While this improvement has taken place across all states, there are significant differences in Himachal, as reported in the REFA survey, which are worth highlighting.

¹³⁰ Joint Review Mission (JRM) Reports: These are evaluation reports prepared for review by the government and the primary donors for SSA – the World Bank, the European Union and DFID.

1. While seventy three per cent of schools in the BIMARU states had at least 2 pukka rooms and 74 per cent had drinking water, in Himachal 93 per cent of schools now have at least 2 pukka rooms and an equal proportion (93 per cent) have drinking water. It is worth pointing out that in Himachal infrastructure was not substantially better than the other states at the time of the PROBE survey. The earlier short fall in this area can easily be ascribed to the harsher terrain that makes construction activity more difficult and more expensive. But ten years on Himachal seems to have overcome this disadvantage and overtaken the other states as far as schooling infrastructure is concerned.

2. Ninety-nine per cent of all children in the age group of 6-12 years in Himachal were enrolled, showing that the state had for practical purposes reached the goal of universal education at the primary level. Also, 92 per cent of children in this age group were actually attending school at the time of the visit, as opposed to 66 per cent in the other states. Further, drop out rates at the primary level were negligible in Himachal but still quite substantial in the BIMARU states.

3. According to REFA findings, all schools in Himachal (100 per cent) were providing free text books and 77 per cent were providing free uniforms and scholarships as well. Cooked mid day meals were also in place in all the sample schools.

4. In the comparison over ten years that the REFA survey has enabled, perhaps the most disheartening finding is the almost unchanged situation as far as classroom activity is concerned – half (48 per cent) of the schools surveyed had no teaching activity taking place when the investigators arrived. In this area, the situation in Himachal is again somewhat better, but unfortunately not spectacularly so. In roughly 30 per cent of Himachal schools no active teaching was taking place at the time of the investigators visit. Single teacher schools also continue to be a problem in Himachal. The REFA survey found that as many as 11 per cent of the schools surveyed had appointed only one teacher. However, in the other states nearly 40 per cent of the schools were single teacher schools. Besides, pupil teacher ratios are much better in Himachal, making the condition

in single teacher schools somewhat less problematic.

5. One area of teaching where Himachal appears to be doing much better is in the appointment of contract teachers. In contrast to other north Indian states which showed more than 40 per cent of teachers as contract or para teachers, Himachal had only 15 per cent contract teachers. What is interesting is that Himachal is one of the pioneers of the system of para-teachers (Govinda and Josephine, 2005). The Himachal system began as a means of overcoming a shortage of teachers in far-flung remote areas. It was meant to tide over a period before a permanent teacher could be appointed or took her place. As will be seen Himachal has a good record of filling teaching posts and so this system has not needed to expand. Further, Himachal has also sought to train and upgrade the skills of some of the para-teachers in order to mainstream them into the profession. In isolated areas where the state has faced difficulties getting teachers to go, there have been instances where para-teachers appointed from the local population have been trained and upgraded.¹³¹ In general, this system remains a stop-gap arrangement as it should, and has not overtaken and de-professionalized teaching as it appears to be doing in some states (e.g. Madhya Pradesh).

6. The recent REFA figures show that while the presence of private schools has increased in Himachal too, it is mostly confined to the urban areas. Their influence in rural areas is still negligible.

7. The most significant difference however relates to the role of community based organizations in the functioning of the schools. This is one area which appears to have shown further progress in Himachal according to REFA findings. Not only are VECs, PTAs, MTAs and SDMCs set up in all schools, 69 per cent of surveyed schools reported recent elections to appoint members to these committees. In the BIMARU states surveyed, two-thirds of the parents had never heard of a PTA and VECs were almost non-existent. Besides, the chief contribution of the community organizations that do exist in the BIMARU states appears to be improving infrastructure and selecting contract

¹³¹ Personal communication with SSA Director in Simla.

teachers. In a telling comment on the gender divide that exists in these states, it was found that within these organizations men handle finance and women organize mid-day meals. Such gender stereo-typing does not appear to exist in Himachal and the community organizations are reported to be active in a range of areas including maintenance, construction, monitoring and attendance.

The REFA survey confirms that Himachal is still “doing very well”. As pointed out in an article based on the survey findings, “this success is not based on a ‘quick-fix’, but on responsible management of a traditional schooling system, based on government schools and regular teachers...”

8.7 Concluding Remarks

The schooling revolution in Himachal Pradesh is an enlightening example of the complementarity between state action and social equality. On the one hand, the relatively egalitarian nature of social relations in Himachal Pradesh has facilitated the universalization of elementary education in many different ways: it has helped to make schooling a policy priority, especially at primary level; fostered the emergence of consensual social norms on schooling matters; reduced the social distance between teachers and their pupils; and facilitated community participation in the schooling system, among other links discussed in this chapter.

On the other hand, the schooling revolution was fundamentally a state initiative. Himachal Pradesh’s common schooling system, which contrasts so sharply with the segmented schooling system found elsewhere in India, has played a key role in sustaining the egalitarian features of Himachali society. In particular it has virtually eliminated caste and gender discrimination in access to elementary education, guaranteeing basic opportunities that ultimately extend beyond the field of education to all citizens. Thus, effective state intervention has contributed to social equality and vice versa.

Chapter Eight

Looking Back, Looking Ahead

8.1 Looking Back

This thesis has been a little like a trek into the development topography of the Himachal State. I was drawn to study Himachal because of the positive development picture it represented. Development literature, particularly in India, tends to be full of stories of development failures and Himachal's success was a welcome contrast that seemed to deserve more attention than it was getting. The nature of its success- rooted in a development model very much its own (even somewhat in defiance of the trends at the time of its adoption)- and the larger significance of the results it has achieved called for more exploration. The interpretations offered for its success, so far, seemed somewhat superficial and the Himachal story appeared as a bit of a mystery. There was clearly a need to put the spotlight on Himachal. Given that this was to a large extent un-chartered territory, the road map I started off with went through changes as I went along. However, the learning through these changes proved to be as important as arriving at the destination.

The rapid and somewhat seamless progress in development and democracy evident in Himachal was a puzzle that motivated me through the course of my trek. I have much to thank my thesis for as it has been for me a journey of discovery and learning - sometimes un-learning and re-learning as well. I hope I have been able to convey at least some of that through this thesis with the added hope that it can lead to a wider understanding of development and democratic processes in Himachal, and perhaps even outside it.

The development indicators for Himachal are well established. Through the course of my work I have tried to look for the most credible interpretation of this remarkable development performance. This interpretation is obviously open to challenge. The journey was undertaken in the spirit of opening up the discourse on Himachal and in keeping with that spirit, the completion of this study does not signify the end of the story.

In fact I would like to conclude by attempting a peep into the future; not to speculate, but to keep the discussion alive especially on emerging issues that raise pertinent questions about the future of Himachal's development trajectory.

8.2 Wider Significance of Himachal's Experience

Widely considered fifty years ago as one of the most backward regions of India, Himachal is now doing better than most Indian states in terms of many aspects of social development. Further, social disparities in human development in Himachal are relatively low, and basic opportunities, such as elementary education, are close to universal. I have argued that this success essentially reflects the reinforcing effects of state action and social equality. In particular, I have argued that relatively egalitarian social relations in Himachal have facilitated collaborative state-society relations and laid the foundations for participatory democracy. This reading of Himachal's experience, points to wider lessons about the relationship between equality, development and democracy.

8.2.1 Social Equality and Development

The first lesson is the central role of social equality in development, especially in a democratic political system.

In much of the development literature, equality is seen as antithetical to development. An initial increase in economic inequality is often regarded as a natural feature of the development process.¹³² This outlook is common, for instance, in the context of recent debates on economic reform in India (even China). In both countries there is much evidence of a sharp increase in inequality in recent years.¹³³ However, this is not regarded as a major issue. Instead it is accepted as an inevitable byproduct of rapid economic growth which is of little consequence as long as the poorer sections of the population also enjoy increases in per capita income. Redistributive policies are considered superfluous or undesirable.¹³⁴

¹³² This is a common reading of the Kuznets Curve pattern. (Kuznets, 1955).

¹³³ Deaton and Dreze (2002).

¹³⁴ An interesting recent example is the hostility of the establishment (including large parts of the economics profession) to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, which has been the target

Using the comparison between Himachal Pradesh and Haryana I have tried to bring the issue of equality to the forefront of the debate on development and democracy. As we have seen, the experience of Himachal provides a counter to these dismissive views, on two counts. First, it shows that in many ways equality is important for development and second, that social equality can be sustained by constructive state action. In fact, the two reinforce each other in many ways. The comparison with Haryana in particular brings equality issues to the forefront of development, as despite spectacular economic growth, disparities based on caste, class and gender have not only persisted in Haryana but are possibly becoming counter-productive for further development. In other words, not only is equality an end of development, it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a means to development.

At least four important connections between social equality and development have emerged in this case study of Himachal Pradesh.

Policy Priorities: An important way in which social equality affects development is through its impact on policy priorities (see Chapter 7). The presence of inequalities can lead to the state being co-opted by powerful social groups, resulting in policies that reflect their interests. An obvious example of such state capture is the failure of land reforms in Haryana. As we saw in Chapter 7, a powerful landowners' lobby prevailed on the state to adopt a weak policy with many loopholes that allowed them to successfully subvert it. Further co-optation of state machinery through bribery and corruption led to failures at the implementation level as well. As a result, very little surplus land was re-distributed, and much of the land that was distributed was of such poor quality that it did not provide the beneficiaries with the security it was meant to afford, frustrating the basic objectives of land reforms. In Himachal there were no powerful lobbies interfering with land reforms and all the surplus land was successfully re-distributed. It is among the few states (along with Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala) where land reforms have been

of relentless attacks in the mainstream media and particularly in the business press (see Right to Food, India website for a selection of media reports on NREGA, www.righttofoodindia.org).

implemented on a substantial scale. This in turn has played an important role in preventing a rapid rise in economic inequality and enabling people to participate in the process of economic growth.

Public Services as a Common Concern: Another important link between social equality and development arises from the fact that in a relatively egalitarian social setting public services are a common concern (see Chapters 7 and 8). Thus in Himachal there is broad-based pressure on the government to invest in public services and to ensure their effective functioning, unlike in Haryana, where inequalities have segmented the provision of services, making public services largely the concern of the marginalized. The dichotomy in the schooling system is a clear example of this segmentation, which has further reinforced social inequalities. However, a major endeavour of the thesis is to establish that Himachal's schooling revolution is in fact part of a larger canvas of social development in the state. Himachal has also done much better than most other North Indian states in many other fields of social development, relating for instance to health, social security, women's empowerment, and freedom from violence.

Gender Equality and Women's Agency: Gender equality, which has played a major role in Himachal's development success, is a crucial aspect of social equality (see particularly Chapter 5). Not only do women in Himachal have equal access to health, nutrition and education; their acceptability in the public domain has allowed them to make use of educational facilities, employment opportunities and even political spaces, all of which have enhanced their sense of empowerment. Their active participation in public life has altered the quality of the public discourse and action. In Haryana, women's presence outside the domestic fields is disapproved of. Stringent patriarchal norms have inhibited their opportunities for independence and participation in society as equal members. It has also lowered their sense of entitlement to health, nutrition and education and other basic foundations of the quality of life. In these and other ways gender inequality and the suppression of women's agency in Haryana have not only reduced the quality of life for women but have also held up social development for society as a whole.

Collective Action and Democratic Participation: One of the most significant ways in which social equality aids development is through its impact on the democratic functioning of institutions (Chapters 1 and 7). In Himachal, traditional social equality has nurtured many diverse forms of community collaboration and collective action. Some of these, such as the system of exchange labour and other forms of reciprocity at the community level, survive even today. They have helped to sustain solidarity within communities and prepared them to engage with democratic institutions more effectively. Hence, for instance, participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is more democratic than in many other states such as Haryana. Marginal groups such as women and Dalits are also better represented in political processes, while in contrast in Haryana there is strong resistance to sharing power with women and the lower castes. Similarly, associations like Mahila Mandals and Yuva Mandals are fairly active in Himachal but virtually defunct in Haryana.

8.2.2 Constructive Role of the State

The second important lesson highlighted in the Himachal story is the enabling role played by the state. Just as Himachal draws our attention to the role of equality in development, it also calls for a reexamination of the role of the state. Even as the minimalist view of the role of the state in development has acquired much influence in recent years, Himachal's experience vindicates the notion that the constructive role of the state is, in fact, crucial for development. This is especially so if development is viewed as a broad-based improvement in the quality of life rather than simply economic growth. However, state action has not been limited to human development alone; it extends into many other fields. For instance the physical infrastructure in Himachal is well developed – roads and bridges as well as electricity and telecommunications are as good as the best in the country (Chapter 7). State action has also promoted economic development in other ways such as through infrastructural, technical and market support to agriculture. Even the widely acclaimed 'apple revolution' in Himachal Pradesh owed much to these and other forms of state support.¹³⁵ State intervention in Himachal Pradesh has also played a key role in removing social disparities and creating universal entitlements to basic services.

¹³⁵ Laxman Thakur (ed.) (2002).

The state in Himachal does not subscribe to the standard formulation of a “strong” state dictating development priorities and outcomes, but neither is it a “weak” state co-opted by powerful groups and thus governing in accordance with their vested interests. Instead it is a state that recognizes itself as a partner in collaborative state-society relations where development is an important shared goal (Chapter 2). An important aspect of this partnership in Himachal is the understanding, that while the state can initiate and formulate development priorities, the people play an equally important role in making them work. The combined role of state and society helping each other to meet development goals is clearly visible in many sectors such as education (Chapter 8) or land reforms (Chapter 7).

The direct and easy access of politicians that ordinary people in Himachal have is a particularly interesting feature of the role of the state in people’s life. The lack of social distance between state and society has led to recognition amongst its leadership that they have a crucial role to play in development. This is coupled with an understanding that it cannot function without the support and participation of the people. What is interesting in this dispensation is that the people’s access to the political class serves to reduce the influence and power of the bureaucracy as people are able to approach the politician directly with their problems. The highly skewed distribution of power in favour of the bureaucracy seen in most other parts of India is thus found to be much less in Himachal. The distortions associated with that distribution are also corresponding much less.

The state’s priorities in Himachal reflect the influence of social concerns and its style of functioning reflects the influence of egalitarian social relations that have contributed significantly to the culture of democracy within which it operates. The idea of a strong but accountable state, such as Himachal’s, has few parallels in India and sits uncomfortably with proponents of the minimalist state approach.

The claim that state intervention has played an important role in Himachal’s success is often underplayed on the grounds that it depends to a great extent on financial assistance

from the central government and is not sustainable. Given the low levels of development at the time it acquired independent status, Himachal, along with other hill states, was allotted a special financial package from the central government. Hence central financial assistance to Himachal has been consistently high through its period of development. The high level of investment in the social sectors is often attributed to this special assistance. Critics point to this dependence on central funds as unsustainable in the long run. While it is undoubtedly true that state intervention in Himachal Pradesh has been substantially funded by the central government, what this critique tends to miss is that the state in Himachal used its financial resources to focus on social development and other forms of human development. It could have used the central funds to jump-start the economy by focusing exclusively on the capitalist development of agriculture, as happened in Haryana. While this no doubt allowed Haryana to achieve high per capita income, it was at the cost of continuing exclusion for large sections of the population. Further, the fact that financial resources in Himachal often came from the centre does not detract from its success in making effective use of these resources. There is a particularly sharp contrast here with states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh that routinely *under-utilise* central assistance and squander much of what they receive.

8.2.3. Compatibility of Social and Economic Development

The third major lesson relates to the compatibility of social and economic development. It is often assumed that there is a trade-off between the two (and specifically that active pursuit of social development through state intervention tends to slow down economic growth or invite financial bankruptcy), but Himachal's experience suggests that the two can also complement each other.¹³⁶

In order to understand this better I must first acknowledge that I have focused mainly on a set of development indicators that are linked with social, rather than economic development. In other words I have chosen to look at development in terms of a range of

The question has even been raised whether the so-called Kerala model is sustainable, considering the financial burden it places on the state (Parayil, 2000). Not only has the rapid progress of social indicators continued in recent years it has also become one of the fastest growing states in India, in economic terms (Dreze and Sen, 2000. Table A.3).

indicators that relate to the quality of life and not simply to economic growth. However, having established the social development story of Himachal it is worth taking a quick look at where Himachal stands in terms of economic development as well. What emerges from a quick look at the economic statistics of the state is that in fact it has done rather well in this sphere as well. Per capita incomes are far above the national average (Rs. 24,903 in 2003-4, current prices); assetless-ness among the population is the lowest of all states in the country and growth rates are rising (currently about 6.3 per cent). What this indicates is that it is possible to have balanced development that encompasses both economic and social well-being.

8.2.4. Complementarity between Development and Democracy

The fourth lesson is the complementarity between development and democracy in Himachal. In trying to understand how state action and social equality worked together, democracy emerges as the obvious – in some ways natural and in some ways deliberate – mode for pursuing the goals of development. State and society needed a system which would enable them to collaborate and communicate on an interactive universal ground. Democracy not only offered a platform of universality, it also enabled social equality to find an institutional forum and in turn it gave the modern democratic state its legitimacy in society.

Himachal's experience has demonstrated the complementarity of development and democracy by showing not just the importance of democracy in development but also how social development can enhance democratic functioning. In other words, development aimed at establishing social equality fosters democratic practice. As Sen (1999) says, development strategies are “inescapably valuational”, involving “serious judgements by people as citizens on what priorities to attach to different goals” (1999:10, 11). But participation and consensus building – the cornerstones of democratic practice – are both contingent on a degree of equality amongst the participants. In a society where there are basic disparities between the people, the political participation of the marginalized is inhibited and development choices are bound to be oriented towards the interests of the privileged and powerful. This not only excludes the less powerful from

development gains; it also hampers the overall goals of development. The project of democracy that India is proud to proclaim a success is in fact incomplete until the goal of enabling all its citizens to participate actively in democratic institutions is achieved. Himachal Pradesh has moved positively and creatively in that direction, not just in enabling participation in democratic institutions, but by building a culture of democracy and participation in civic life.

The democratic success of Himachal's development is most strikingly illustrated in the integrity of its public spaces and institutions, which are a) not divided by categories of class, caste or gender and b) relatively free of corruption and capture. For instance, the lower castes in Himachal have as much faith in the Sarpanch as the upper castes do, and women are as able to access the District Administrative offices as men. Crimes against women and Dalits are relatively few and the reservation quotas for them in public office are strictly adhered to. Institutional integrity is also seen in the relative lack of corruption, which has meant that government programmes as well as public services run fairly efficiently and without diversion of public funds. This is illustrated in the performance of the education sector described in Chapter 8.

By contrast, in Haryana public identities and entitlements are determined by caste, class and gender. The primary identity in Haryana is caste-based, with the dominant caste of the Jats determining the socio-cultural ethos of the state. The low status accorded to women within this ethos, as discussed in Chapter 5, has reinforced patriarchal norms and the exclusion of women from public life. In this environment it is very difficult for participatory democracy to flourish.

In Himachal Pradesh the integrity of public institutions is maintained in part due to the expectations that people have of them. Relative social equality implies that everyone has a similar stake in development. Therefore people across the social categories have a common sense of entitlement from and expectation of public offices and political processes. The widespread use of government schools and public health facilities reflects a shared notion of universal entitlements to be provided by the state. There is some

evidence of a historical basis in people's expectations of the state and public institutions. The traditions of *dhoom* and other forms of social protest, discussed in Chapter 4, have been adapted to modern forms of public action in a democratic setting. Hence democratic institutions, such as the Panchayats, Mahila Mandals and district administration are being actively used by the people to put pressure on the government and demand their entitlements.

8.3. Looking Ahead: Sustainability of Himachal Pradesh's Approach

An obvious question arises about the sustainability of Himachal's development trajectory. If social equality has played a critical role in Himachal's success, can Himachal's rapid progress in human development be expected to continue? In particular, are there indications that social equality itself may be threatened?

There are several reasons for concern here. To start with, economic disparities are likely to widen over time. As discussed earlier, the legacy of relatively egalitarian social relations in Himachal Pradesh partly reflects the fact that the rural economy used to be largely based on "common property" (or, more precisely, "common access") resources. This is no longer the case, and in Himachal Pradesh as elsewhere in India, rapid economic growth seems to be associated with rising economic inequality. This increase in economic inequality may undermine the "common concern" for effective public services, and affect the prospects of equitable development in other ways as well.

There are similar concerns relating to the disquieting signs of rising gender inequality in Himachal Pradesh. With rising economic affluence, women are often withdrawn from the labour force, undermining an important basis for their economic independence and participation in public life. There is also a danger that the influence of the patriarchal norms of North India will permeate into Himachal Pradesh as the cultural integration of this region proceeds. This hypothesis is consistent with recent patterns of change in sex ratios in Himachal Pradesh; the adverse changes (i.e. declines in female-male ratios) have occurred mainly in the districts bordering Punjab and Haryana.

The decline between 1991 and 2001 of female-male ratios in the age group of 0-6 years (from 0.951 to 0.897) is particularly alarming. Recent changes are much the same in Haryana and Punjab, even though the initial ratio was higher in Himachal. This decline of child sex ratios (associated with the spread of sex-selective abortion) appears to be driven by rising incomes, better access to sex determination technology, and in the case of Himachal, possibly also the growing influence of North Indian patriarchal values.¹³⁷ Perhaps Himachal Pradesh will be better able to address this alarming trend, but as things stand it is certainly a matter of concern. In a symptomatic way this is illustrative of the kind of hurdles equitable human development may face from the twin challenges posed by the driving forces of economic growth - the market and the accumulation of wealth. While the experience in Himachal Pradesh so far richly illustrates the positive contributions of social equality to development and democracy, sustaining the relatively egalitarian character of Himachali society presents a major challenge to future public action.

In this scenario of high rates of growth, and a dominant economic paradigm of competition that has been adopted by governments in most parts of the country, will Himachal be able to sustain its own model of human and social development? As pointed out, some of these growing inequities can already be seen in gender and class related domains. As the gap between social groups increase, the virtuous circle of social equality and constructive state action is bound to get affected. If the traditional basis of social equality is undermined, what will sustain the development model of Himachal? This is one of the most interesting questions that Himachal faces as it moves towards giving greater priority to economic growth in its development plans.

On a more positive note, recent developments show that Himachal's approach has not yet exhausted itself and can still be expanded to new domains. For instance, a recent study of the implementation of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA), one of the most challenging social programmes initiated in India in recent years, is doing better than in many other states in several respects, including transparency of records, active

¹³⁷ George Sabu and Dahiya (1998),

participation of PRIs (GPs and Gram Sabhas) and overall ability of the state to manage complex programmes.¹³⁸ In fact this study corroborates many of the general observations made in this thesis, in a new domain. There is thus a possibility that the enabling conditions that have facilitated the constructive role of the state in Himachal will find new expressions in the future.

There are also countervailing factors that may balance the polarizing tendencies mentioned earlier. For example, universalization of elementary education is yet to realize its full impact as it gradually translates into universal literacy in the adult population including women and Dalits. Similarly caste disparities may narrow as the universalization of basic services continues to erase the historical legacy of caste discrimination. There are thus still some equalizing tendencies at work in Himachal society along with growing economic inequalities.

Further, the virtuous circle in Himachal has acquired a degree of resilience because egalitarian values and the culture of democracy have permeated wide sections of society and a range of institutions. The enthusiastic participation of citizens in parent teacher associations, mahila mandals, youth groups, and various other platforms, is not just an indication of local civic enthusiasm, it reflects the high level of expectation from public institutions and extends to higher levels of government as well. This institutionalization of participation has created the space to reign in the challenges posed by inequality. Thus, even if some aspects of social equality are undermined in the new dispensation, participatory processes sustained by state action are likely to act as a safeguard against the radical changes that iniquitous growth brings.

The move from personal to public identity – from family and caste to village and community gives new and important space for equality and participation. Therefore while addressing the future of the virtuous circle, hope comes from the evidence of participatory processes being developed within both state and society. If market forces

¹³⁸ This is one of the main conclusions of a survey of NREGA in Himachal conducted in December 2007 in which I participated. For a summary report see, Siddhartha and Vanaik (2008).

are hard to suppress, participation is harder still. Whether the “virtuous circle” can be maintained or not will depend on the degree to which participation is sustained in democracy and in civic institutions. A lot will depend on how the social and political spaces are used.

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