

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
DELHI SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
UNIVERSITY OF DELHI
DELHI - 110 007

05. 12. 2023

FRIDAY RESEARCH COLLOQUIUM

You are cordially invited to the
Friday colloquium of the Department

By

PROF. SUDHA VASAN

(Department of Sociology, University of Delhi)

who will present a paper

on

**“DEVTA AND DEVELOPMENT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:
RURALITY, AGRARIAN IDENTITY AND
RE-INVENTION OF COMMUNITY”**

on

Friday, 8th December, 2023 at 3:00 PM

in

Room No: 10 (First Floor),

Prof. M. N. Srinivas Seminar Room

Department of Sociology



(Dr. Tila Kumar
&

Prof. Janaki Abraham)

Coordinators,
Friday Research Colloquium (2023-24)

Devta and Development in Himachal Pradesh: Rurality, agrarian identity and reinvention of community

Sudha Vasani, Professor, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

Abstract:

Social development in Himachal Pradesh is anchored on reinvestment of agrarian surplus in intergenerational education and mobility. Relatively equitable land distribution and a developmentalist regime have resulted in mobility rather than migration from this mountainous region. I distinguish the former, i.e. mobility, as a process that allows residents to migrate elsewhere while continuing to invest in the rural/agrarian identity and community. Through long term ethnography in the Kullu valley, I examine the process through which 'local' communities reimagine themselves in the context of significant migration both in and out of the region.

Community and caste relations in Kullu are built around the particular socio-religious institution of the *devta*. The *devta* institution enables communities to reimagine themselves in the context of decreasing material dependence on rural networks, and wider dispersal of members. While it is also implicated in the social reproduction of caste, it allows multi-local households with occupational diversification to retain their agrarian identities and socio-ecological networks. Development of agricultural markets and cash crops including horticulture, ensures that agriculture remains important in the local economy. It remains a significant source of identity even though it is no longer the exclusive source of household income.

This transformation defies teleological understanding of social change as a process of urbanization, with dissolution of traditional institutions and place-based rural communities. Instead, households are multi-local, migration is circular, and community networks are reconstituted through technological changes such as social media. As migrants from more depressed regions take the place of out-migrants, the gap between resident face-to-face communities and cultural communities is significant. What emerges is a new form of rurality – a 'dev samaj' that rebuilds long distance allegiances and reproduces agrarian identity and caste in new forms, rather than dissolution and restructuring of rural community. This also problematizes any Rural/Urban distinction for a sociological understanding of society.