



Socio-Cultural Insight of Gujjar and Bakerwal in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

Gujjars and Bakerwals are a unique and significant ethnic group of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjar and Bakerwal is the third largest community constituting 11.9 percent of the total population of the state (census 2011). It is believed that Gujjars migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Gujarat (via Rajasthan) and the Hazara District of North Western Frontier Province. The present paper aims to study the social and cultural characteristics of tribal group Gujjars and Bakerwals. This paper is mainly based on secondary data sources as collection of primary data was difficult in COVID-19 pandemic. The various sources of secondary data was population census of India 2001 and 2011, Journals, Newspaper Articles, Books, Reports etc. Various studies and reports indicate that sociological status of Gujjars and Bakerwals in Jammu and Kashmir is not at all satisfactory but culturally they are stable. It was observed that transhumance (frequent seasonal migration) is impediment for the education of Gujjars and Bakerwals Community. Nomads are culturally very much depictable by dancing, religious rites and customs. The Gujjars and Bakerwals Community of Jammu and Kashmir speaks the Gujari also called Gojri, comes from the Rajasthan. It was found that though there is much influence of modernization and development on society, but the nomads have not changed and still follow the traditional customs and attires. The women folk of Gujjars are fond of silver jewellery. As far as festivals are concerned, Gujjars and Bakerwals have clear influence of both Hindu and Islam religions. Majority of the Community prefer early marriages. It is an interesting fact that majority of Gujjars and Bakerwals are vegetarian Maize, Milk and its products are their staple food. Their economic profile is poor than the general population of the region.

KEYWORDS: Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars and Bakerwals, Social, Cultural.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir has twelve notified communities as the schedule tribes. Eight Communities, that is Batli, Beda, Bot, Brookpa, Changpa, Garra, Men and Purigpa among them were given this status in 1989 and Bakerwals, Gujjars, Gaddis and Sippis were notified as the scheduled tribes under the constitution scheduled tribes Amendment Act, 1991. (Census, 2001).

Bakerwals and Gujjars are the third largest ethnic group after Kashmiri and Dogra inhabiting the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. According to 2011 Census, the Gujjars and Bakarwals constitute 11.9% of the state's population 1.5 million out of 12.5 million. (Census 2011)

Gujjars and Bakerwals are a unique significant ethnic group of Jammu and Kashmir. It is believed that Gujjars migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Gujarat (via Rajasthan) and the Hazara District of North Western Frontier Province. Most probably in the 5th and 6th century A.D. at the occurrence of some serious droughts they moved out of Gujarat and crossing Rajasthan and Punjab entered the green pastures of the Swaliks and the Himalayas. The diffusion and spread of Gujjars in the state of Jammu and Kashmir are not known with certainty. When the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are asked about their place of origin, they simply say that their forefathers had migrated from Gujarat and Rajasthan. The arrival of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir is attributed to the outbreak of devastating droughts and famines in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kathiawad. There are archaeological evidences to prove that there was a spell of dryness in the 6th and 7th centuries in Rajasthan and Gujarat which led to the outmigration of these people, who along with their cattle entered the pastures of the Siwaliks and the Sub-Himalayas. (Tufail, 2014).

Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir

They are sheep and goat rearing tribals who practice transhumance thereby referred to as the tribals always on the move. They move across high attitude mountain passes and transverse through different ranges of the Himalayas from alpine pastures (margs) to lower Siwalik ranges near Jammu plains to Greater Himalayas of the Kashmir Valley. They halt and take shelter in dhoks and margs which are identified temporary shelters in the meadows and forests. The term 'Bakerwal' is derived from the combination of two terms 'Bakri' meaning goat and sheep and 'Wal' meaning one who takes care of implying high attitude goat and sheep herders. The tribe is also known as 'Dhanger' in several parts of India. Bakerwals are stretched out in all the three regions; Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

Gujjars are divided into three categories settled, half settled and homeless Gujjars. The settled Gujjars are those who are settled at one place and staying in villages and they do agriculture pursuits. Half settled Gujjars are those who though live in villages and do agriculture profession but for six months of summer they leave for Peer Panjal Gujjar Region with their cattles where pastures are available to graze on. The homeless Gujjars can be further divided into two tribes. Dodhi Gujjars and Bakerwal Gujjars. Dodhi Gujjars in J&K State are also called as Banjara Gujjars. These people keep buffaloes and lead a nomadic life. In summer season these people stay in Reasi, Udhampur and Kathua's lower areas and sometimes they go up to Pathankot and Gurdaspur also. When the summer sets in these people start moving to the heights of Himalayas where green grass is available sufficiently for their cattles. They sell milk and ghee for their sustenance. Bakerwal Gujjars, other tribe of homeless Gujjars mainly keep sheep and goats as their main source of livelihood. As this tribe mainly rears sheep and goats hence it is named as Bakerwal. (Poonchi, S.H; 2017).

Distribution Pattern of Gujjars and Bakerwals in J&K

At present the Gujjars and Bakerwals constitute a prominent segment of population of Jammu and Kashmir.

As per the distribution of population is concerned, Gujjars are settled all over the state except the Ladakh region, where a few Bakerwals go during the summer in search of pastures in the Kargil District.

Gujjars mostly settled at the lower slopes and valleys of the Pir-Panjal and the Shivalik hills, where ecological conditions are suitable for their nomadic pastoral economy specially during winters.

The important areas of Gujjars and Bakerwal settlement concentration in Jammu District are Jandrah, Jahri, Grotta, Golad, Charwal, Samoo, Rathi and Bindi and Upper Samba hills.

The Gujjars are also highly concentrated in Rajouri and Poonch Districts where about 20% of the total Gujjars population of the state is found. The Gujjars are an ancient element in Poonch District where they still account for about 45% of the population of the district and 18% of the total Gujjar population of the state.

Gujjars are also well distributed in the Kashmir region. Most of them have in any case here to pass through this region in the course of animal transhumance. They are to be found specially during summers on all hills and mountains surrounding the main valley of Kashmir. Some of the side valleys are also homelands of the Gujjar population.

According to the 2011 census, Scheduled Tribes form 11.9% of Jammu and Kashmir population. However, Gujjars and Bakerwals activists claim that they constitute upto 20% of 12 million population of the erstwhile state.

Social Characteristics:

Educational Status:- Educational level among Gujjar is too low as compared to other communities of the state.

Transhumance practice is the biggest impediment for those who want to ensure formal education for their children. Frequent seasonal migration is the one of the biggest hurdles in the education of Gujjar and Bakerwal Community.

According to Javed Rahi, about five lakh nomadic Gujjars and Bakerwals mostly remain illiterate due to the lack of educational facilities in the higher reaches of the state. Though desirous of having formal education, these nomads are not in a position to relinquish their life style.

Majority of the population is illiterate, in the total 31.65% of the population is literate in the Gujjars Community, 22.51% literate among the Bakerwals. If we compare it to the general population the gujjar population has 7.23% of the literacy rate. In all the districts general population has the highest literary rate in comparison to Gujjars and Bakerwals, because they do not have a fixed place and they keep moving all around the year so they get less opportunity of educating their children as compared to settled general population.

Literacy Rate among the Gujjar-Bakarwal and General Population in Jammu and Kashmir (in Percent)

Districts	Total Lit. Pop.	Bakarwal	Gujjars	General Pop.
Kupwara	232,557	20.4	16.9	65.32
Baramulla	447,075	19.3	19.7	62.48
Srinagar	641,267	15.6	16.3	78.83
Badgam	226,167	18.3	21.7	74.23
Pulwama	281,518	20.1	17.4	66.21
Anantnag	463,197	14.6	15.5	73.01
Leh	68,278	100.0	88.2	68.21
Kargil	60,803	17.4	50.7	63.98
Doda	274,425	15.6	16.8	54.82
Udhampur	343,429	19.3	21.3	61.21
Poonch	156,398	30.8	34.6	69.08
Rajouri	234,228	20.5	32.9	72.45
Jammu	1,070,574	23.5	39.0	79.07
Kathua	307,370	18.8	19.3	74.11
Total	48,07,286	22.51	31.65	71.23

Source: Census of India, 2011

Table 1: Literary rate among Gujjars and Bakerwals and general population in J&K Source 2001.

District wise distribution of literacy among Gujjar and Bakerwals, in the table shows that high literacy is found among the Bakerwals population in the districts of Poonch, Rajouri and Jammu which has 30.8, 20.5 and 23.5 percent education respectively, whereas among the Gujjars, Jammu has 39.0, Poonch 34.6 and Rajouri 32.94 percent literate population. These are the most literate districts as far as the literacy among the Gujjars is concerned. Gujjars and Bakerwals are a tribe which has the lowest enrolment in school education in Jammu and Kashmir. In many Gujjars and Bakerwals areas, there is no school available at all, and in other areas, enrolment is only 20 to 30 percent. Education is the myth to sedentarisation or the permanent settlement of the nomads, their education problems is due to the transhumance practice and these problems will disappear in the future when they will be settled permanently (Tufail, 2014).

It has been found that lacuna exists in the system that needs to be addressed. These flaws need to be redressed both at administrative level as well as at ground level. Accountability on the part of administration, teachers and parents would help to overcome the existing flaws. Unless the importance of delegating one's responsibilities is not understood properly by administrators, teachers and parents a solution of the above problem would not be met (Dar 2017).

An interesting programme in the form of 'mobile schools' has been run by the government where the school travels along with the tribals for six-months in order to ensure proper education to children among Gujjar and Bakerwal tribes.

Cultural Characteristics of Gujjar and Bakerwals

Gujjars are culturally very much depictable by dancing, religious rites and customs etc. They fold first to their religion but their outlook is secular.

Standing tall, rigid composed with Paghand Tehmad as their costumes, the long flowing beard dyed red, churning words of Gojri as their dialect, the mesmerizing fragrance arising from the baking of Makki and Bajra dipped in Makhan and Sarson as their diet, the pictures architecture of their Kullah made from mud and spread grasses as their homes, their love and compassion for their animals which are their sole source of income, the captivated earth under the feet and traced skies over the head, marks the perfect blend of Gujjars with the mother nature Gujjars and the nomadic tribe which is rich in terms of cultural heritage. They have their own costumes, traditions, living habits, art and craft and also a very distinct food habits which varies from area to area. (Singh & Kumar 2017).

Language of Gujjars and Bakerwals

Both the Gujjars and Bakerwals speak Gojri a language which like them is marginal in a place where every other community has made its perceived or genuine marginality a battle cry.

Gujjar and Bakerwals constitute the third largest ethnic group after the Kashmiris and the Dogra. About 20% of the total population of 1.25 crore speak Gojri, which along with 38 languages in India, clamours for inclusion into the 8th schedule of the constitution. The government of India is obliged to develop on 8th schedule language so that "it grows rapidly in richness and becomes effective means of communicating modern knowledge".

Given the current state of Kashmiri and Dogri that were both included in 8th schedule long ago, Gojri's struggle is doubly hard and the goal of bringing it on par with other languages seems a pipe dream (Hindustan

Times, Mir. H 2018) Gojri is not taught even in the schools where 100% of the students are Gujjar, said Rahi, who believes even mere preservation of the language would be blessing.

Dressing pattern and Adornment of Gujjars and Bakerwals

Even though the society has changed due to modernization and developments, the dressing style of Gujjars and Bakerwals have not changed and remain constant. They wear black and blue coloured clothes, Shalwar and Kameez of blue, black and green colours. Some Gujjars wear trousers and loin cloth (tehand) of the same colours. They wear turban of white or dark brown colour on their heads. Women fold wear shirt dotted with varieties of buttons and embroidery on it with black shalwar, duppata with multiple colours and round cap with a trial of course over thread. (Bhat, R.A.)

The Gujjar and Bakerwal women are fond of jewellery, especially necklaces. Women wear long chains made of silver known as gani and haseeri. One variety of the tribal necklaces has a triangular pendant studded with a stone in the centre. It symbolizes the 'chil eye' and is used to avert bad luck. Other types of necklaces are dodmata, made of small pieces of pointed silver, hamel, made of strung coins and a heavy pendant, the jomala and the hansli. (Suri, K. Deccan Herald)

A majority of women have pierced noses adorned with silver nose pins, which come in different sizes and denote whether the girl is married or not. The smallest nose pin, nali is worn by girls; a slightly bigger nose pin, terra is worn by older girls, while married woman wear large and intricate nose pins known as laung. (Suri)

Festivals

The Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir celebrates pretty much all the celebrations and tools of the locale, however, adds to them their own particular remarkable appeal and excellence (Gupta, 2012) the main festivals observed by the Gujjars and Bakerwals Community are Eid-ul-Fitar, Idul Zaha, Narroz and Baisakhi. They start their upward journey after that celebration of Baisakhi on April. But since most of them left the transhumance so importance of Baisakhi is declined in the community. During the course of animal migration, they pass from many shrines and graves of the pirs (holy men). If a death occurs during the migration the dead is buried somewhere along the route. They heap up stones on the grave and every year as they pass through the route they pay respect to the departed soul and light a lamp on the grave. Gujjars celebrate all the festivals with great festivity and enthusiasm.

Customs and Rituals

According to Holland, "Custom is a generally observed course of conduct, "it is a way of behaving which a particular group or society has had for a long time. Various customs and rituals are followed simply because they have been followed in past and nomads strictly adhered to the customs and rituals of the community. Right from the cradle to grave, certain customs are prevailing in the community. Gujjar and Bakerwal Community is muslims by faith and one can easily see the influence of Islamic customs and rituals over their life. Some important Islamic customs are circumcision of male child, marriage ceremony and funeral rites. During condolences, they carry meals and food from their own house to the house of aggrieved. They also offer other small items as aid to the family. (Abass, Ahmed, J. and Ahmed, I, 2015).

Religious Practices:

However, despite professing the Islamic faith, anthropological study of the community shows they have retained large parts of the Hindu belief system. (Indian Express). The main religious activities observed by the Gujjar and Bakerwal Community are five times prayer, fasting in the month of Ramzan and many more. (Tufail, 2014)

It is interesting to note that the Muslim Gujjar of J&K continue to follow the Gotra system with names of Gotra being the same as that among the Hindus. They believe that their ancestors were Hindus and hence they share the same blood and history with their Hindu counterparts. (Chowdhury, 2018.).

Religion has had little impact on the Gujjars and affinity. The women folk of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars still perform traditional practices in their homes and also celebrate Baisakhi, Lohri and Govedhan festivals. It is note worthy that the popular Hindu, Mythological figures like Lord Krishna, Rama and Sita are also as much a part of the religious identity of the Bakerwal Gujjar. (Warikoo,2000)

In their day to day life they have the highest regards of their Peer (Religious Priests). Phooks (a blow of breath by the peer) is considered to be a panacea for all diseases of humans and animals. Almost every member wears a Taweez for his/her good health, fortune and prosperity. (Kumar A and Kumar N, 1998)

Marriage Ceremonies

According to Horton and Hunt, "Marriage is the approved social pattern where by two or more persons establish a family". Marriage among Gujjars and Bakerwals is a simple ceremony. Majority of Gujjar and Bakerwal prefer early marriages of their children due to mass illiteracy, orthodoxy, outcaste threat and

prevailing insecurity caused by militancy and allied factors. (Tufail, 2017) In the past polygamous pattern was also performed but major changes has taken place in this custom now.

According to study conducted by Tufail, 2011 Inter-Community marriages among the community members rarely exist and only 2.25% of the families think that inter community marriages exist. The father of bride and groom have an exclusion say in deciding the marriage patterns.

Among the well to do Gujjars-Bakerwals, the Mangni (engagement ceremony) is generally held at an early age of about eight years. The Nikah (marriage) usually takes place after five years from the date of engagement. Marriages generally take place in summer season when everyone has more time to spare. The bride groom's father is required to fix the mehr (dowry) at the time of marriage in the terms of animals (sheeps and goats), jewellery, money and other property.

The marriages take place according to Islamic procedure. The consummation of marriage, however, takes place after a ceremony called Rukhsati which is usually held three-four years after the Nikah. The cases of divorce are rare and widow can remarry.

A study conducted by Tribal Research and Cultural foundation, a frontal organisation of community reveals that 88% nomad Gujjars and Bakerwals of J&K spend only upto Rs. 50,000 on a marriage ceremony.

In this budget they organise all rites rituals and host three dinners or lunch for relations and friends on the occasion of Teil, Nehari and Mecal the main rites of tribal marriages, study said

The other 12% normal spend upto Rs. 1 lakh on a wedding and they call, it is a Bodo-Biya, the Grand Marriage. Study says 42% nomads favour Kadhu abducting a girl or even a woman, which is considered as a matter of heroism and valour to marry a girl or a woman of the choice. But 39% Gujjars term it anti-social the bride is decorated with silver ornaments like silver chains like Dolara, Sargast, Mahail, Gani, Earrings, Bangles, Rings and Necklaces called "Haseeri" etc. The bridegroom wears headwear like lungi, wasit coast, shirt and shalwar besides red handkerchief in his hands and "SEHRA" on forehead which adds to his glory and grace. On the occasion of celebrations of marriage they recite poetic recitations from the books like c-harfi, soni mahiwal, saif-ul-maluk which entertain the guests (Rahi, 2011)

II. CONCLUSION

It is concluded that sociological status of Gujjars and Bakerwals in Jammu and Kashmir is not at all satisfactory but culturally they are stable. . Nomads are culturally very much depictable by dancing, religious rites and customs. Frequent seasonal migration is the one of the biggest hurdles in the education of Gujjar and Bakerwal Community. Gujjar and Bakerwals constitute the third largest ethnic group after the Kashmiris and the Dogra. About 20% of the total population of 1.25 crore speak Gojri ,inspite of this Gojri is not taught even in the schools where 100% of the students are Gujjar. The dressing style of Gujjars and Bakerwals have not changed and remain constant, . Even though they have changed due to modernization and developments .The community is muslims by faith and one can easily see the influence of Islamic customs and rituals over their life. Marriage among Gujjars and Bakerwals is a simple ceremony. Majority of Gujjar and Bakerwal prefer early marriages of their children due to mass illiteracy, orthodoxy, outcaste threat and prevailing insecurity caused by militancy and allied factors.

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