

Socio-Economic Conditions of Gujjar and Bakerwal Tribes of Kashmir

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Abstract: Gujjars and Bakerwal of jammu and Kashmir are nomads. Gujjars and Bakerwals are two names of one tribe popularly known as Gujjars in Indian sub-continent. Gujjars form an important ethnic and linguistic group in Jammu and Kashmir and constitute 20 percent of total population of the State Scattered in all most districts of the State; J&K Gujjars who are mainly Muslims carry with itself the age old traditions and customs of prehistoric time. Most of them are still untouched with the influence of the outside world. Their simple and rustic lives arouse curiosity and interest of visitors as well as are part of extensive research work. The paper is conceptual in nature and tries to study the social and economic upliftment of Gujjars and Bakerwal.

Keywords: Gujjar, Bakerwal, Nomadic Life, Tribals, Upliftment, Jammu & Kashmir.

1. INTRODUCTION

The nature of society in Jammu and Kashmir is heterogeneous in terms of its ethnic composition as well as religious orientation. The heterogeneity of the state is multilayered and can be seen at racial, linguistic, cultural and religious levels. Dogras, Chibalis, Paharis, Mangolian, Kashmiris, Ladakhis, Gujjars are the various racial groups inhabiting the state. Dogras and Chibalis are concentrated in the Jammu region. Races like Champa, Ladakhi, Balti and Dard inhabit Ladakh region. Kashmir is a muslim majority region. Besides there had been a small community of hindus in Kashmir, commonly known as Kashmiri pundits. In addition herdsmen, shepherds, galawans, dums, boatmen, minstrels, watal, gujjars, Bakerwal etc are important tribes of Kashmir. Gujjar Bakerwal and Gaddis are main tribal communities recognized as such by the government. Gujjars and Bakerwal form the third largest ethnic groups in terms of their population in the state. As per census they form 10.9% of population of state.

The history of settlements of various tribes and cultural groups in the state of jammu and Kashmir is a record of constant impulse of immigration from the north-west, west, east and south. Various races ethnic groups and religious waves have entered and influence the region. In present situation Kashmiri muslims and Gujjar and Bakerwal are the two numerically strong ethnic groups in the state of jammu and Kashmir. Much information is available about muslims of Kashmir but very little is known about tribals of jammu and Kashmir. They are nomadic peasantry living on lofty mountain slopes near alpine pastures and in high altitude valleys. The physical characteristics of Gujjar and Bakerwal, their language, manners, customs, dress, social organization and economic activities are quite distinct from other ethnic groups of the state. Gujjar and Bakerwal of jammu and Kashmir state claim a common collateral ancestry with the gujjars living in other parts of Indian sub-continent.

Jammu and Kashmir has 12 scheduled tribes- balti, beda, boti, boto, brokpa, drokpa, dard, and shin. Changpa, garra, mon, purigpa, Gujjar, Bakerwal, gaddi and sippi spread over three regions jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. These tribes received tribal status during the tenure of chandra shekhar government in 1991. All the 12 scheduled tribes were enumerated officially for the first time during the 2001 census recording a population of 1,105,979. The scheduled tribes account for 10.9 percent of the total population of the state and 1.3 percent of total tribal population of country. The scheduled tribes are predominantly rural as 95.3 percent of them reside in villages. Out of 12 scheduled tribes Gujjar is the most populous tribe having a population of 7,63,806. Thus forming 69.1 percent of total scheduled tribe population. Bot is second major

tribe having a population of 96,698 followed by Bakerwal 60,724 and brokpa 51,957. Gujjar along with the three tribes constitute 88 percent of the total tribal population.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various aspects of scheduled tribes have been discussed even then there are a number of aspects which are still untouched. **Dr javaid rahi**, (2011), systematically revealed the origin of Gujjar tribe, their tribal identity, and history of Gujjar community. Political empowerment of gujjars in j&k is also analysed by the author. **Anita Sharma** (2009), explores the community life of bakerwals, their religion, their power and reciprocity, knowledge, tradition, language, art, craft, music and dance in a detailed way, also a brief summary about the valley of Kashmir is given. **Aparna Mitra**, (2008) studied on the status of women among scheduled tribes in India and concluded that tribal women are less educated comparatively and gender equality among tribal group is a complex phenomenon. **J.Daswani**, (1993) gave a report on "Tribal study synthesis report and a summary of significant findings. **D.K.Behera, et.al** (1999) made a study entitled "contemporary societies, tribal societies" studies on various social concepts about the tribes and concluded that tribals are socially and educationally backward. **Sahu Chaturbhuj**, (2006) made a study on some aspects of tribals in the book entitled aspects of tribal studies. **S. M. Dubey**, (1972) carried a study on education, social change and political consciousness among tribes of north east India and concluded that tribes are illiterate and backward, and there is a need of creating political awareness among them. **R.P.Khatana**, (1976) studied on marriages and kinship among Gujjar and Bakerwals in Jammu and Kashmir and concluded that these scheduled tribes marriages within the community and within the clan strictly and also studied some aspects of transhumance in mountainous traits during the year 1976. Subsequent workers like B.Zutshi (1981) Kango & Dhar (1981) and Nau Nihal Singh (2003) have also studied various aspects of Gujjar and Bakerwal scheduled tribes.

3. ORIGIN

From literary, historical, archeological and numismatic sources, we find that (a) the word *Gujjar* is rooted in the Sanskrit word *Gurjara*, (b) *Gujaratra*, is also found in Indian literary works around fifth century, (c) Kathiawar and Gujarat had powerful Gujjar rulers, and the area was known as Gujratra. The historians opine that in the IX and X centuries A.D. the greater part of Rajasthan was called by the name of *Gurjara Desa* (country of the Gujjars).¹ It is believed that their kingdom was attacked by the Arabs who were successfully resisted by the Gujjars of the then *Gurjara Desa*. These Gujjars migrated from Rajasthan in different directions in groups. One such branch migrated towards north in the plains of Punjab. The most likely time for such emigration was IX century A.D. when the Gurjara Pratihara dynasty dominated all the northern and north-western India. There they are believed to have set up a powerful kingdom in the IX century A.D. The *Rajatrangini* refers to Raja Shankarvarman of Kashmir, who is said to have invaded a Gurjar ruled region known as *Tekka*² (Gujjar Bhoomi) situated in the area now known as the Punjab. It is reasonable to presume that Gurjara tribe had extended its reach to Punjab and it is probable that such places as Gujarat, Gujranwala, Gujarkhan, where Gujjar habitation is still found in great numbers, derived their names from the Gurjar tribe.

Culture:

Gujjars are culturally very much depict able by dancing, religious rites and customs etc. The tribes have got inclination towards religion. Some of them have converted themselves to Hinduism and also Islam. They are the tribes who strictly follow old traditions and customs. They still follow custom of early marriages, where girls are married at an age of 14 - 15 years and boys at 17-18 years.

Dress:

Gujjar and bakerwal wear a unique dress and have not changed their style despite the changes that have taken place in society due to modernization and development. Gujjars wear mostly their traditional costumes and jewellery. Women folk wear shirt studded with varieties of buttons and embroidery on it with a black shalwar, duppatta with multiple colours and round cap with a trail of course over threaded. The women folk young and old are found of wearing heavy jewelry, kangan, karras, seheeri, mahail lounge, bali are commonly used. Women wear necklace with a triangular pendant, studded with a beautiful stone in the centre. It has religious significance, symbolizes evil eye and mainly utilizes to prevent bad luck.

Occupation:

The tribals herd animals like sheep goats and buffalo. Semi-nomadic people of Gujjar community are in the habit of migrating to upper parts of Himalayas along with their cattle during the summer season and back to the plains with the onset of chilly winters. There is dearth of trained Gujjar artisans in various handicrafts. Therefore, they are constantly dependent on the items needed by them from them. Gujjars and bakerwals perhaps is the only community which has preserved and maintained its originality throughout ages.

Food:

Mostly they depend on milk products as their staple food besides cereals, wheat and maize. They may be vegetarians and non- vegetarians. The favourite dishes of gujjar are maki ki roti , ganhar, sarsoon ka sag, lassi, kalari, karan, etc. it is surprising that gujjar are mostly vegetarian.

Language:

The Gujjars and Bakerwals have their own Gujri language, which they generally speak in between them. But they correspond with the other persons in Urdu generally. The Government has given importance to the requirements of Gujri culture, as result of which the Radio Kashmir Jammu and Srinagar are daily broadcasting one hour Gujri programme. Besides this, there is a Gujri section in J&K Cultural Academy, which annually publishes literature on their culture and history and also organizes cultural & literary functions at different places inhabited by the Gujjar and Bakerwals.

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GUJJARS LIVING IN VARIOUS DISTRICTS OF KASHMIR

SRINAGAR:

The Condition of nomadic Gujjars is very pathetic as compared to Gujjars of Jammu Province. Srinagar is considered to be the heart of Kashmir Valley having considerable Gujjar Population. These people are mostly dependent on flocks and a few have adopted agriculture as their means of livelihood. The literacy rate among these Gujjars is very low. Though the district is having a good network of school education but Gujjars of the area are backward due to their inherent tendency towards the profession adopted by their forefathers and are not being benefited by this educational system. The Gujjars of Srinagar area are continuing their seasonal migration in Sona Margh, Kach Pahrthi Khilan, Matein and Drass besides Traba, Karwbal of Machil area. Effects are on for the upliftment of Gujjars in Srinagar district regarding their social and economic position. Such efforts have not yielded much result due to:-

Lack of water resources and fertile land in the areas where Gujjars are living. Shortage of teaching staff in the Schools. Due to nomadic pattern of life children can't continue their education. Awareness campaign is not being launched at govt. and non-govt. Level. Lack of competition in every field especially in the field of education. Lack of technological know-how to nourish the fruit orchards.

GANDERBAL:

Ganderbal is a newly formed district of state of jammu and Kashmir carved out from Srinagar district. Formerly it was a tehsil of Srinagar having a considerable tribal population. These people are mostly dependent on flocks and a few have adopted agriculture as their means of livelihood. The literacy rate among these Gujjars is very low. The social and economical problems being faced by the Gujjars of this district can be summarized up as under:-

Shortage of teaching staff in the Schools. Lack of water resources and fertile land in the areas where Gujjars are living. Lack of technological know-how to nourish the fruit orchards. Due to nomadic pattern of life children can't continue their education. Awareness campaign is not being launched at govt. and non-govt. Level. Lack of competition in every field especially in the field of education.

BUDGAM:

District Budgam is having very low population of Gujjar and bakerwal. Even then thousand of gujjars are living in Phariyawara Kahipura, Dabba, Argwalham, Mengapur, Balpura, Ghrowth area. The maximum Gujjars in this district are local (MUKAMI) and have adopted agriculture as their means of livelihood. The Gujjars of this district face same

difficulties as that of Gujjars of Srinagar. The social and economical problems being faced by the Gujjars of this district are :-

Low tendency of Gujjars towards education. Low per capita income. Shortage of fertile lands with Gujjars. Lack of latest technology for agriculture. Shortage of the means of Employment. Lack of the Proper information regarding Scheme for the upliftment of Gujjars.

ANANTNAG:

Lakhs of Gujjars reside in this district. The percentage of literacy among Gujjars in this district is about 12%. In spite of implication of Tribal Sub Plan / Development Scheme Gujjars in this district is very backward. The condition of Gujjars in Pahalgam tehsil is pathetic and painful. Some of the reasons social economic backwardness of Gujjars of this area includes:-

The Gujjars of this district reside in far-flung areas having no road links. Child labour. Low parentage of literacy among Gujjar woman. Unemployment in educated Gujjar youths. Less opportunities of coaching for admission in professional and technical institutions. Shortage of Schools. Poor economic condition.

KULGAM:

District kulgam is having good gujjar and bakerwal population. literacy among Gujjars in this district is very low. In spite of implication of Tribal Sub Plan / Development Scheme Gujjars in this district is very backward. The condition of Gujjars in this district is pathetic and painful. Some of the reasons social economic backwardness of Gujjars of this area includes:-

The Gujjars of this district are scattered in different areas having no road links. Poor economic condition, Low parentage of literacy among Gujjar woman, Unemployment in educated Gujjar youths. Child labour. Less opportunities of coaching for admission in professional and technical institutions. Shortage of Schools.

PULWAMA:

In Shopian tehsil of district Pulwama Gujjars live in a large number. Their main occupation is agriculture. The Gujjars of Shopian, Tral and Kulgam face the following hardships:- Shortage of educational institutions in Gujjar localities. Malfunctioning of mobile schools. The inherent difficulties of Semi nomadic tribal resulting in lack of education. Lack of proper marketing facilities of wood, milk and matter. Lack of financial resources with Gujjars of Pulwama. Non availability of work to Gujjar labourers. The growing tendency of child labour.

SHOPIAN

In Shopian district Gujjars live in a large number. Their main occupation is agriculture. The Gujjars of Shopian, face the following hardships:- Shortage of educational institutions in Gujjar localities. Malfunctioning of mobile schools. The inherent difficulties of Semi nomadic tribal resulting in lack of education. Lack of proper marketing facilities of wood, milk and matter. of child labour. Lack of financial resources with Gujjars of Pulwama. Non availability of work to Gujjar labourers. The growing tendency

KUPWARA:

District Kupwara is the only district where Gujjars live in maximum number. Maximum Gujjar population live in Karnah, Keeran, Awara, area of the district. Nomadic Gujjars also constitute a good number of Gujjars of the district. The main profession of such Gujjars include agriculture, sheep flocking and business of dairy products. The literacy rate among Gujjars in this district is about 18%.

The socio-economic difficulties faced by gujjars includes:- Lack of fertile land in hilly areas. Lack of mutual communication and competition. Establishment of school away from Gujjar population. Shelling on the borders resulting in destroying the educational developmental and agriculture activities.

BARAMULLA:

In Uri tehsil, the tribe constitutes 40% of the total population of the area. About 17% Gujjars of the district baramulla are literate. They have agriculture as a main source of livelihood. Being a border area the basic facilities of the life are not

available to Gujjars of the district. The standard of living of this district is better but the Gujjar population is facing acute difficulties which include: Location of agriculture land near LOC. Road links are not easily accessible. Shortage of financial resources. Due to shelling, delay in the implementation of various schemes for the development of tribals.

BANDIPORE:

Bandipore district is of of the 10 districts of Kashmir. This district was carved out from the erstwhile baramulla district. A few percentage of Gujjars of the district are literate. They have agriculture as a main source of livelihood. The basic facilities of the life are not available to Gujjars of the district. The standard of living of this district is better but the Gujjar population is facing acute difficulties which include: Lack of financial resources with Gujjars of bandipore. Non availability of work to Gujjar labourers. Road links are not easily accessible.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Availability of water, electricity and other basic facilities to their families is strongly recommended.
- Construction of houses and roads for gujjar and bakerwal families at earliest.
- Establishment of static and mobile schools and enrollment of all school going children in them.
- Establishment of centers for sale of wool, dairy and mutton products with an aim of strengthening their economic condition.
- Providing high breed sheep, goats, buffaloes and horses to Gujjar and bakerwal tribes.
- Making new empowerment schemes and making them accessible to everyone.
- Providing of fertile agriculture land and feed and fodder to gujjar and bakerwals on subsidy rates.
- Introduction of modern technology for the Gujjars who have adopted agriculture as means for livelihood.
- Providing professional skills to illiterate Gujjar men and women so as to establish their own units.
- Providing of govt. jobs to educated Gujjar and bakerwal candidates.
- Providing assistance and easy term loan to Gujjar and bakerwal for their upliftment..
- Establishment of veterinary hospitals for them.
- Enhancement of seats in technical / professional institutions for gujjar and bakerwal candidates.

6. CONCLUSION

Gujjar and bakerwals of jammu and Kashmir are nomads spread almost all the regions of state. As nomadic tribes they are involved in pastoralism and transhumance with their livestock's. They are a milk selling community. Economically gujjars and bakerwal are very poor. Livestock economy of the gujjars is managed by both men and women. They spend a pathetic life due to number of problems in their life. Need is to take immediate steps by government and other development agencies for their upliftment.

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