



A Review

Social structure of Gujjar and Bakarwal of Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT : Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir are socially much backward as compared to other communities of state. They are still following the conventional way of living in wood or mud houses with paddy and forest grass roof besides some houses are now made up of brick and stones. They move with their whole family including children and women during winters towards warmer areas of lower Himalayas and come back towards Bungus valley and other places of cattle grazing areas of Kashmir in summer season. Their movement is based on availability of green fodder for their cattle and also to avoid severe cold and snowfall that affect the health, growth, reproduction, milk production, and lactation etc of their livestock which are major source of livelihood. Their customs mainly different from other ethnic groups and general society in various means like, in their habitats, degree of isolation, customs, beliefs, traditions, etc. But they also interact with other communities at the larger scale. They constitute more than 11.9 per cent of the total population of the state as per 2011 Census. In this paper an effort has been made to study the social profile of Gujjar and Bakarwal on the basis of secondary sources of literatures *i.e.* population census of India 2001 and 2011, journals, articles, books and reports.

KEY WORDS: Gujjar, Bakarwals tribes, Social structure, Dresses, Customs, Livestock

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INTRODUCTION :

The tribal society of Jammu and Kashmir is mainly different from other ethnic groups and general society in various means like, in their habitats, degree of isolation, customs, beliefs, traditions, etc. But it does not mean there is no interaction with other group's society. Interaction with other groups is there at the larger scale. Furthermore, a tribe can be defined as a kinship group that constitutes a society and the members of tribe consider each other to be related by the ties of kinship. The Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir are semi-nomads and

are concentrated almost in all part of state. The economy of Gujjars and Bakerwals generally depend on cattle rearing while few also involve in agricultural activities. Primarily all the Gujjars and Bakerwals are engaged in pastoral economy but recently they have entered into agriculture also. Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir have several sub-castes (Sharma, 2013). The Gujjars and Bakerwals a principal nomadic community of Jammu and Kashmir State have long been a socially and economically deprived people who have not been fully integrated in the main stream of regional culture and social status. Social justice demands that their

integration and inclusion in the main stream should be kept at the top priority. Therefore, there is an urgent need to thoroughly understand the socio-economic mooring of Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir state. (Sharma, 2008) Being nomadic in nature the Gujjar and Bakerwal community of Jammu and Kashmir who transhumance within the territorial limit of the state, in accordance to the established schedule in the search of green pastures for their cattle. Their repeated fluctuation within specific space-time continuum has exercised a decisive influence in shaping the structure of their kinship grouping, marriage patterns and other social activities. The social life of the Gujjars and Bakerwals is very much linked and closed to their religious life. Religion plays a very dominant role in their life on the various occasions like, marriage, death, etc. where the service and advice of Maulvi (priest) is sought to perform the task. The Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir state are indeed colourful and innocent community. They face all kind of vagaries of nature, but the rulers of valley take no step whatsoever to mitigate the community's hardship and ameliorate their politico-economic and socio-culture life. The Gujjar and Bakerwal community reel under the scourge of poverty and backwardness even after the six decades of Independence. Majority of Gujjar and Bakerwals inhabited in the mountainous area, these people are tall, well-built and liberal minded. The Gujjar and Bakerwal are also called 'Nature's own children' and 'lords of forest' (Hari Om, 2009). Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir are still practicing the traditional way of living such as they used to live in wood or mud houses with paddy and forest grass roof. Though some houses in village are now made up of brick and stones but one can find traditional houses too. They move with their entire family including children and women. During winters they move to warmer areas of lower Himalayas and in summers they move towards Bungus valley (situated on the other side of Lolab valley) and other places of cattle grazing areas of Kashmir. They move because of non-availability of green fodder for their cattle and also to avoid severe cold and snowfall that affect the health, growth, reproduction, milk production, lactation etc of their livestock, the major source of livelihood. They are always concerned about their livelihood and the fodder for their cattle in winter. In summer season they prepare butter/ghee by depriving the same to themselves and their children to earn a penny but it also has its own tale to tell as the same is taken by

the moneylender adjusted against the loan and the poor Gujjar remains penniless. We have heard them saying that, "If the life sustains, this tough time will pass away". As and when they return to their 'kacha' houses from their Dhoks, they are reminded of their lives in Dhoks in such a way that all compulsions, miseries, sufferings dawn upon their minds and their melancholy finds an outlet in the notes of their flutes and 'Algoja'. There is no such thing as comfortable living in their lives nor do they get any leisure. The conditions of living of Bakerwals are different from those of Gujjars. They face more problems and difficulties. They carry their luggage and other commodities by loading the same on horses and they reach the high mountains on foot. They look after their sheep and goats which is not an easy job. They have to repeatedly finger count their herd to save them from wild beasts, that no sheep or goat joins another flock so that they may not stray away afar. They spent days together under the open sky while as other human beings enjoy their lives in their comfortable homes. During that difficult period there is no one to share their problems and difficulties but these hardy people are so determined and strong willed that early at the dawn they leave for their next destination. When they reach their next destination they spend few months in ease, even though no worthwhile medical care or other facilities are available to them. Sometimes they face hailstorms which lead to huge death toll of their livestock yet, invariably they hardly receive any proper compensation for the same. In such a manner these people remain helpless, hopeless and utterly poor. Their residential houses are also made from kacha material that they are left high and dry in this age of computer and electronic communication (Magray, 2003).

Religion:

As the religion of Gujjars and Bakarwals is concerned most of them are Muslims. Gujjars and Bakarwals are very close to their religious customs, traditional dance and religious rites. This tribe has very emotional and closer relation towards religion. These people follow their own traditional values and customs strictly till now. They also follow their old customs and rules of marriages, the girls gets married at the age of fourteen to fifteen years and the boys get married at the age of seventeen to eighteen. (Khatana, 1999) The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir have common and collateral ties with those Gujjars residing in other part of the country.

They have common history, culture, beliefs and customs, languages and ethnic affinities. Although of Jammu and Kashmir State profess Islam as their religion, yet they keep pastoral symbols, taboos and totems. They aspire to visit oftenly to the sacred places which are regarded as the adobe of Hazrat (is an honorific Arabic title used to honour a person) (Warikoo, 1999). The Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir are also identified by their well-established system of sub-castes like other ethnic groups of state. Some of the important castes of the state which are also common among the Gujjars in other states irrespective of religion are, Awan, Bijran, Bhatti, Chechi, Chohan, Chopra, Gors, Hakala, Khatana, Kholi, Khasana, Poswal, Sood, etc. (Masud).

Culture:

The Gujjars and Bakerwals J&K are one of the important components of the state composite culture so not only Gujjars but entire civil society of the state must make endeavour to preserve their tradition of folk-lore, art and cultural heritage (Sharma, 2008). In fact the Gujjars do not move to such a high altitude and cold regions as is done by the Bakerwals. This is understandable from the looks of their garments/dresses. It is mandatory for the Bakerwals to put on warm woollen clothes whereas Gujjars mostly wear cotton clothes. The Bakerwals and Gujjars are fond of wearing a typical head wear called "Lungi" with shirt and Shalwar overlaid by waist coat as well as shoes for the footwear which is also a typical of their group. They have an exquisite tribal way of dressing style for both men and women which are of distinctive pattern. They have colourful turban with unique style of wrapping which has been a mark of the Gujjar tribal Community. Topi which is also called as Afghani hat is worn by the aged Gujjar men. Gujjar females have greatly enhanced beautiful clothes called Dupatta which looks like a shawl. They are also fond of jewellery and have a fascination for the necklace with a triangle pendant, studded with a beautiful stone in the centre of it. It symbolizes 'evil eye' and mainly utilized to avert bad luck. Bakerwal Gujjar mostly wear Shalwar, Qamiaz, Vaskat, Angoo and Pagheri (Headgear) while the women folk wear long gone called Jubo, Pheerni, Shawal, Cap and Jotti, Jora. Dodhi Gujjar wears Pagh, Qameiz and Tehmad while the ladies wear shirt with strips choridar Shalwar and Jotti. Their diet consists of maize bread and whey (*Lassi*). Perhaps this may be the reason of their good health and strong and stout body. They have kacha houses

and their kitchen is lit up with firewood for which they keep a hole in the roof top and through a chimney smoke passes out. They reside in the kacha houses and by partitioning the same they keep their cattle alongside. The unity and oneness among Gujjars and Bakerwals is visible as and when they perform some big task like reaping the grass, hoeing the maize crop, pulling the huge wood scants, laying the roof of the kacha houses which is not possible for a single person to perform. This sense of sympathy has been inherited generation after generation and is still present amongst them. (Rahi 2013) Gujjars and Bakerwals are culturally very much depictable by dancing, religious rites and customs etc. it is a common sight to watch duals of hand power wherein the opponents challenge each other to prove their prowess by retaining grip on forearm of the opponent. Weight lifting is another physical show of power where a big stone is lifted by one individual by throwing a challenge to others to do the same (Rahi, 2013). They are fond of playing on flutes as well as 'Algoja' which is their favourite pastime. On the occasion of celebration of marriages as well as condoling the death of near and dear ones they recite poetic recitations from the books like c-harfi, Soni-Mahiwal, Saif-ulMaluk which enthralls the audience (Maini, 2003). In their weddings they use in their meals lot of curd *i.e.* Dahi and salt. The curd is presented by the relatives and neighbourhood people as a mark of gift to the household celebrating the wedding. This is deemed as a duty by each one to present the same in the house of persons organizing wedding. This is common among the Gujjars and Bakerwals fraternity. The bride is decorated with silver ornaments like silver chains, silver Dolara, silver sargast, silver mahail, silver gani, silver earrings, silver bangles, silver rings and silver necklaces called 'Haseeri' etc. The bridegroom wears headwear like Lungi, waistcoat, shirt and Shalwar besides red handkerchief in his hands and "Sehra" on forehead which adds to his grace and glory. 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. The prevalence of this practice is a sign of good fortune during modern times.

Dialect:

In respect to language of the Gujjar and Bakerwals, except tehsil Mendher where Bakerwals have a bit different pronunciation, the rest of the community speaks the same language. Another appreciable matter

is that Gujjars and Bakerwals normally interact amongst themselves through Gojri dialect that is why Gojri language is still very vibrant. Languages as such survive and progress when the speakers of such languages appreciate and accord due regard to their language. (Anjum, 2013) Keeping in the view the rich folk in the Gojri language and speaker at the larger scale the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir state are demanding inclusion of Gojri in the 8th scheduled of Indian constitution, it is said that the Gojri language is not only spoken by lakhs of Gujjars in the state of Jammu and Kashmir but it is the language of large number of Gujjars of the Indian sub-continent. Gojri language is the language of all the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir state, Grierson a famous linguistic expert was of the opinion that the Gojri spoken by the Gujjars of the sub-mountain districts of Punjab and Kashmir was allied to Rajasthani. Grierson opined, "One of the two things is quiet certain. Either Gojri is for of Rajasthani and conversely, Rajasthani is form of Gojri and resemblance of Gojri to Marwari is very striking. But still closer is the resemblance of Gojri to Marwari dialect of Rajasthani spoken in Alwar, some distance to north of Merwar and separated from that state by the territory of Jaipur" The Gojri speaking people constitute the third largest linguistic group of Jammu and Kashmir state after kashmiri and Dogri speakers at the first and second position, respectively (Warikoo, 1999).

Festivals:

The Gujjars and Bakerwals of J&K celebrate all the festivals of national significance; apart from these Gujjars too have incorporated their religious beliefs and customs. It is one the main festivals for their society which they celebrate with great festivity and enthusiasm. Fairs and festivals have a unique charm of their own among Gujjars and Bakarwals. These occasions provide a meeting place for people from different shades of opinion. In Poonch district, there had been an unmatched heritage of celebrating fairs and festivals and the people have adopted these as a part of life. They are accompanied with unique songs and food, traditions and culture. The Gujjar and Bakerwal community of Poonch celebrates almost all the festivals and fares of the region but add to them their own charm and beauty (Maini, 2003).

Custom and rituals among the Gujjars and Bakarwals:

Custom and rituals is another important component of tribal life. The customs and rituals influenced the Gujjars and Bakerwals life deeply. They are very adherent toward their established customs and traditions. The concept of customs implies not only statistical occurrence of given behaviour but also a prescriptive dimension. Religion is one of the dominant factor which influence the social life of Gujjars and Bakerwals life deeply. For Gujjar and Bakerwal community the disobedience to the custom means a sin against their social faith. From birth of a child to a death ceremony certain custom prevail in the community which shows the religious importance. This community is Muslim by faith and one can easily see the influence of Islamic customs and rituals over their life. Some of the important Islamic customs among them are those related to child birth, circumcision of male child, wedding ceremony and funeral rites.

Marriage ceremonies:

Marriage is the important social event in Gujjars and Bakarwals society Marriages in Gujjar community are performed through negotiation and fixed by elder members of the family. A distinctive feature of their marriage is that consanguineous marriages take place. Marriage is usually a set of ceremonies that are conducted both at the groom and bride's place. The family is mostly of the extended type but at times nuclear Families also come up. The inheritance of the property is from father to sons, who equally share it (Qazalbash, 2013). Child marriage is still a social evil among the Gujjar and Bakerwals baby Girl get married to the kids of their own age group or on many occasion to grown up men. Dowry practise is yet another evil prevailed among the Gujjar and Bakerwal community of the state particularly in the peasantry class (Akther, 1999). Generally Gujjars and Bakerwals have no matrimonial alliances with others, they marry within their own tribe and the Gujjars families feel reluctant to give their daughter in marriage to non-Gujjars or bring bride for their son from outside of their community. Gujjars and Bakerwal maintain their matrimonial and kinship relationship confined to their own community. Marriage is the institution that carries high sanctity among the Gujjars and Bakerwals, marriage constitute an important basis out of which the kinship relations grow and sustained in general, monogamy is the norm of the Gujjars and Bakerwals. But at the same

time because the Gujjars and Bakerwals have embraced Islam, they have been permitted to keep more than one wife. However it can be said that polygamous marriages among the Gujjars and Bakerwals is quiet low. They also practise across cousins marriages. The Gujjars and Bakerwals avoid the marrying the children of same mother, foster brothers and sisters and sister's and brother's children. They also try to avoid the marrying of their patrilineal descendants, The wedding ceremony is the biggest rejoicing time for the Gujjar and Bakerwal society, in Gujjar community the custom of marriage generally start with the date fixing ceremony and continue till the marriage takes place. In between there are lot of sub-customs and rituals. Some of the important marriage customs among the Gujjars and Bakerwals are locally known as, Matti Khunni, Kapra Baterna, Lakri Tokni etc. All these customs are the kind of tasks and preparations for the marriage ceremonies. There are also some other marriage ceremonies these ceremonies are locally called as Tel, Chor Tel, (oil Ceremonies) Temol, (token money). The custom of water fetching is also celebrated by a women at the occasion, for this a girl who is appointed as the sister locally called as Dharm Behan to the bride or groom perform the task. And later on this water is used for the bathing of bride or groom. The peak ceremony is departure of the marriage's party from the house of groom and its reception at the house of bride. Then the custom of Nikha is performed to solemnize the marriage and this ceremony is performed in accordance with the established Islamic rules. Then the custom of contributing money which is called as Nedra is performed it is considered as almost the end marriage.

Dress pattern and food habits:

The Gujjars and Bakerwals community of the district has adopted a unique dress pattern and have developed different food habits. As most of them, especially those who are not sedentary depend upon their animals and cattle. Their staple food comprises milk products and maize (Sharma, 2009). The tribal men wear a turban of unique shape and form locally called as Safa, Pag and Lungi. They wear Shalwar Kameez and Waist coat all through the year. Women too wear Shalwar Kameez and keep Gojri/Bakarwali Cap or Topi on their head apart from Chipri or Head Sheet. Men sometimes wear rings of silver but they usually don't put on jewellery. Women however put on unique jewellery, mostly silver Jewellery. These comprise a long chain around the neck called Gani

and Haseeri. Loung is put on nose along with a pair of Baali in their ears (Sharma, 2009).

Folk games:

Despite having a hard life the tribal community takes out time for leisure and entertainment in their own way. They play many games like stone Lifting (Bughdar), arm holding (Beeni Panjo), Chitto (played mostly by girls), Panjgeet (indoor game with five kankars) etc. (Mani 2003).

Arts and crafts:

The community although less advanced in handicrafts and art still presents a peculiar blend of beauty and simplicity. Decoration of houses and animals with unique colours and flowers and jewellery is simply beautiful. They decorate their horses and wear taweez (lockets). They make baskets locally known as Khaari. They also make Phuri, Kheerha, as sitting tools. They make beds for their own use especially of grass and fur of Goat locally called as Manja, Manji and Khatt.

Folk songs and dances:

In Gojri folklore such lore as "BaloMahiya", "Dhol Sipahi", "Noora", "Tajo" "Dheendhi", "Nathia" and "Chann" are very famous and they are profusely sung in district Poonch (Maini, 2013). Some of the illustrations are presented here under to show how the sentiments of love rule the hearts of humans even now. The illustrations are in the form of rhymes which are translated in a prose format. Kainchi: "My heart has been hit due to pangs of separations from my beloved and only my heart understand its pain or only my lover or the God understands it and my heart has been cut by a scissor." How much affection a father has for the daughter is known only to the father while the same sentiment finds an echo in Gojri folk lore: "OH! Crow, "Go and fly and also take rest but convey to my father, why did you throw your daughter in such a foreign land." I have also narrated this sentiment at one occasion: "Now I have settled in foreign land Oh cool breeze tell me, have you ever waved near the house of my father?" In Gojri language Noor Beguman is remembered in Poonch district as under: "Oh! Noor Beguman you have beautiful golden hair but your golden hair have been plucked by the river and you committed suicide." Balo describes the parting of her "Chand" in such a way as is explained here under: "It is a rainy season full of fog I will spend the nights weeping

Why my lover has not returned as yet today” In Poonch, Noora describes parting from her lover in such a way as is described here in below: “I am standing on the hill top And down below the river is in flood your love has killed me I have become very helpless Oh my soldier” The Gujjar lover expresses his love in such a way which is explained here in below: “What a tragedy! My moon is there but I am without moonlight as he is still far from me. I am looking for him from the hill top and counting the days.” Even crows and pigeons carry messages like this: “Fly Oh! Crow and go to the lands of my beloved. I am suffering from the pains of separations but the foreign lands are very harsh” (Maini, 2013). From a glimpse of what has been said and done above what comes to fore is that the Gujjars of Poonch district do carry in their hearts not only the treasure of folk tales but also the sentiments of humanness. The kind of dance evolved in the Gujjar and Bakerwal community has evolved much like their folklore lending and borrowing from other tradition they encounter in their nomadic life. One can observe the influence of the Punjabi, Dogri and Pahari dance influence in the Gujjar and Bakerwal dance form. But the dancing remains rare among the Gujjar and Bakerwal due to perceived gender equation and religious taboos prevalent among the community (Sharma, 2009).

Literacy and educational level:

The literacy rate and educational standard among the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir state is very deplorable. There is no motivation for Gujjars and Bakerwals children to go to schools, because most of the parents are illiterates and not able to understand the value and importance of education. The literacy rate among Gujjars and Bakerwals is negligible and one of the lowest. The present condition of education is not satisfactory among the community due to many reasons, such as non-availability of schools within reach, parents attitude toward education, migratory nature of the community and many more. It has been realised that there is need of mobile schools for Gujjar and Bakerwals community which may cater the requirement when they move to their respective Dhoks. Therefore some mobile schools are found in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In Poonch district there were only five single teacher mobile schools at primary level which are not sufficient to meet the need of all tribal children to impart the education in adequate manner (Sharma, 2009). The overall literacy rate of the STs is 37.5 per cent at 2001 census. This is

much lower than the national average of 47.1 per cent aggregated for all STs. Male and female literacy rates (48.2% and 25.5%) are much below if compared to those recorded by all STs at the national level (59.2% and 34.8 %). Among the other tribal groups in Jammu and Kashmir like, Balti, Bot, Purigpa and Brokpa have registered higher literacy rate whereas Gujjar, Gaddi and Bakerwal have a lower literacy rate than that of the national average. Similar trends are discerned in these tribes in respect of female literacy also. And as per 2011 census report 50.6 per cent ST people were literate in which 60.6 per cent male and female 39.7 per cent. Among the ST literates, 34.9 per cent of tribal literates are either without any educational level or have attained education below primary level. The primary level literates constitute 26.2 per cent followed by literates upto middle level (22.1%). The persons educated upto metric/secondary/higher secondary constitute 14.7 per cent whereas 2 per cent only are graduates and above. Non-technical and technical diploma holders form negligible percentage (0.1) (Census, 2001 and 2011). At the level of individual tribe, Bot, Balti, Purigpa have more than 22 per cent literates are matriculates, implying that every 4th literate of these tribes are matriculates. Bakerwal have the lowest proportion of secondary level literates (7.8%). The data show that the proportion of literates after middle school drops down to approximately half in the secondary level of education and declines sharply onwards. It depicts that less than half (44%) of total 3.2 lakh tribal children in the age group of 5 -14 years attend school. Around 1.4 m./lakh (56%) children do not attend school. At the individual level, Purigpa, Balti and Bot have 74 - 78 per cent children in the corresponding age group go to school whereas Brokpa have 60.2 per cent school going children. Bakarwals have the lowest proportion of school going children.

The social structure with respect to religion, culture, dialect, festivals, customs and rituals among Gujjars and Bakarwals, marriage ceremonies, dress pattern, food habits, folk games, art and crafts, folk songs and dresses, literacy and education level mentioned by different author had been reviewed thoroughly by Shahbaz, 2015. Author had described in detail about each and every aspect of social and cultural structure of tribal communities of Jammu and Kashmir. It is pertinent to mention here that there is an urgent need to create and enhanced all the required infrastructure and facilities related to their social ,cultural and education to their children and whole

community, so that they can uplift their living standard and do progress in the society.

Conclusion:

The findings of aforesaid study with respect to different parameters can be concluded that majority of them are superstitious and have faith in false beliefs that hamper in their way of social reforms. Consequently, literacy rate among Gujjars and Bakerwals communities is very low as dropout rate of children is high due to certain social stigmas such as child marriage, child labour, poverty, parental illiteracy, lack of school within walking distance, helping parents in occupations and migratory nature of community. After studying various parameters pertaining to social structure of Gujjar and Bakerwals, it is observed that their social and economic status is improving but its speed is very slow.

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