



**SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF GUJJARS AND BAKARWALS OF
JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

Zaheer Abass

Research Scholar,

Department of Persian, AMU, Aligarh.

zaheeramu121@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Asia is a home to more than two thousand civilizations and languages. Asia is most populated continent with world's most indigenous people. Indigenous people are found all over the world and they are called by different names such as tribal, primitive, aboriginal, native, etc. The dictionary meaning of tribe is derived from "tribus". In our country even states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura are named after the Mizo, Naga and Tripuri tribes respectively. The state of Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed several tribal communities. Most of the tribes of Jammu and Kashmir State are believed to have descended from the famous and legendary family of the Aryans. The tribal communities living on the hills of the state of Jammu and Kashmir are referred to as Gujjars and Bakarwals they are herdsmen by occupation. The Gujjar and bakarwal tribes of Jammu and Kashmir are legendary to have served as deft masters to the wild goats. The lifestyle of Gujjar-Bakarwal tribes also throws some light on their culture and societal set up. Throughout the year they lead a secluded and lonely life, mingling with the turmoil that they face while living in such rugged terrains. Once in every year they take the pain of accompanying their herds of sheep towards the high mountain regions for grazing them in the green fields. The socio-economic conditions of these tribes are very poor. The standard of their living is also poor and they are facing acute difficulties in their life. As per their education is concerned majority of population is illiterate and the literacy rate among these tribes are only 31.65 percent. This paper intend to study socio-economic conditions of Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir. Keyword: Gujjars, Bakarwals, Jammu, Kashmir, Socio-economic.



INTRODUCTION

India is a diverse nation in terms of culture, belief system, caste and religion. But as per the state of Jammu and Kashmir is concerned, comparatively it is unique in terms of geography, history, culture and ethnicity. It is one of the most beautiful and fertile land on the world. Kashmir is surrounded by high mountainous ranges of Karakoram and the Himalayas. Despite various hindrances the people of this state have born all types of climatic and geographical hazards and have measured the most valuable peaks and turn them into small pockets of communions. Though the surrounding hilly regions are inhabited by people of different ethnic groups, Gujjars and Bakarwals which comprise a special race and community and third largest ethnic group in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. They got the Schedule Tribe status in 1991 have since long time opted to live on these envious peaks.

The scheduled tribes since long have been victims of socio-economic exploitations and have been relegated to low income generating occupations, inferior trades, unhygienic environment and unclean menial occupation. The constitution of India, Article 366(25) defines scheduled tribe as "Such tribes or tribal communities as are deemed under article 342 to be scheduled tribes for the purpose of this constitution." In article 342, the procedure to be followed for specification of a scheduled tribe is prescribed. However it does not contain the criteria for the specification of any community as scheduled tribe. An often used criterion is based on attributes such as: Geographical isolation, Distinctive culture, Shyness of

contact with community at large and socio-economic backwardness. The constitution also assigns special status for scheduled tribes. The scheduled tribes constitute 8.2 % of the Indian population as per 2011 census. There are 533 tribes as per notified under Article 342 of the Constitution of India in different States and Union Territories of the country. India is second largest country after South Africa having large population of scheduled tribes. The total population of scheduled tribes in India is 84,326,240 out of total population of 1,21,01,93,422 (as per census 2011).

Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir State

In Jammu and Kashmir State there are 12 scheduled tribes namely- Balti, Shin, Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Gujjar, Bakarwals, Gaddi, and Sippi. Gujjar and Bakarwals lived between alpine pastures and the low altitude of shiwalik and the Jammu plain. The Gujjars and the Bakarwals are the third largest ethnic group in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. They are the most populous scheduled tribe having a population of 17, 56,849 as per the census of 2011 but still a major percentage of them is socially and educationally backward. Gujjars are rich in terms of cultural heritage. They are very rich in terms of culture and have distinction over other identities of the State.

Gujjars and Bakarwals have their own dialect Gojri which is a branch of the Indo-Aryan language. They have their own costumes, traditions, food habits, lifestyle, and arts and crafts which vary from area to area. Gujjars and Bakarwals men mostly wear shalwar kameez, vaskat and paghari



(turban) while their women wear long gown called jubo, pheerni, shawal, and cap and juti jora. Dodhi Gujjars wear pagh, kameez and tehmat while their ladies wear shirt with strips chori-dar shalwar and juti. The favourite dishes of Gujjars are maki and bajra chappati, ganhar (African spinach) sarson (Mustard) vegetables, lassi, kalari, karan these are all local names of their favorite dishes. It is quite interesting to mention that Gujjars are mostly vegetarians. Banhara Gujjars (Banhara Gujjar is a sub cost within this tribe) mainly live in “kullas” made from special type of grass while Bakarwals live in temporary doharas made by bamboos. Settled Gujjars are mainly lives in “Kothas” they have their own homes. The origin of Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes are quite interesting. It is said that the Gujjars are too called as Goojar, Gujar and Gurjara. It is said that the beginning of this tribe was very fascinated and one can drive from the time of attack of Hunas the Gurjara tribes moved into northern India and the Himachal Pradesh. It is expected that the Primogenitor of Gujjar tribe was known as the Khazara tribes. So the term Gujjar has its origin in Khazar and also arrived from Khazar. However, the term Bakarwal is derived from the combination of two terms ‘Bakri’ meaning goat/sheep and ‘wal’ meaning “one who takes care of”. Essentially the name ‘Bakarwal’ implies “high-altitude goat and sheep herders”. Bakarwals are primarily pastoral nomads rearing goat and sheep in high-altitudes of Greater-Himalayas during summer and spend their winter in plains and foot hills of Shwaliks. They are special nomadic tribes mainly found in the Pirpanjal range of mountains located between the two states of Jammu and

Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. Bakarwals are also found in every corner of Northern provinces of the Himalayan range, namely the states of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. In Jammu and Kashmir Bakarwals are stretched out in all the three regions of the state Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The State of Jammu and Kashmir has five major Sub-Tribes of Gujjars and bakarwals which includes:

Banhara Gujjars: - These are presently inhabited in some areas of Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua and Doda. The main business of this sub-tribe is dairy Products, buffaloes rearing etc.

Bakarwal Gujjars: - This sub-tribe resides almost in every District of the State in a Substantial number. However, they are mostly the residents of Kalakote, Riasi, Nowshaira, Bandi-Pura, Shopian, Kulgam, Pahlgam, Tral, Uri, Poonch etc.

Alahiwal Gujjars: - This Sub-tribe has migrated from the frontier province of Pakistan and are mostly nomads.

Kanhari Gujjars: -This Sub-tribe has migrated from Swat and Hazara areas presently in Pakistan. Now a day’s good number of these Gujjars live in Kalakote of Rajouri District.

Semi-nomad Gujjars: - One more Sub-Tribe of Gujjars are those who have prominently settled in various parts of the State.

Out of total 900 sub castes of Gujjars scattered in sub-continent there are around 150 castes of Gujjars and Bakarwals are living in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. A substantial number of Gujjars and



Bakarwals reside in every district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Occupation of Gujjar and bakarwal community

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is ideally suited for rearing of sheep and goats owing to its favourable agro-climatic conditions, rich alpine pastures and host of other natural endowments. Sheep and goat rearing is the core activity of people residing in mountainous terrains of the State. The rich pasturelands in these mountainous terrains have been traditionally used by the inhabitants. These resources have played a vital role in socio-economic upliftment of weaker sections of the society like the Gujjars and Bakarwals. The Gujjars and Bakarwals have adopted the sheep and goat rearing as their primary occupation since times immemorial. In order to utilize the expanses of grazing lands across different territorial areas, the Gujjars and Bakarwals move from summer to winter pasturelands along with their herds and livestock in cyclic manners. However this cyclic movement has been disrupted which has not only affected the livestock economy but has also lead to ecological degradation of pasturelands as the dropping of livestock a rich source of soil fertility has been reduced. Thus disruption in transhumant mobility has affected the economy and ecology of the region. Goat is one of the earliest food-producing animals domesticated by man. They meet the specific needs of the mankind, particularly by producing clothing through fiber and providing other by-products like pelts, skin etc. Commonly known as "Poor Man's Cow", goats play an important role in improving economic

conditions of rural masses dwelling in agriculturally poor lands. Landless labourers and marginal farmers mostly dependent on livestock economy especially rearing of sheep and goats, as they cannot sustain large animals on their marginal lands. Sheep and Goats are mainly reared by the Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars and Bakerwals perhaps is the only community which has preserved and maintained its originality throughout ages.

Literacy and Education Level of Gujjars & Bakarwals

The literacy rate of Jammu and Kashmir as per the census of 2011 is 68.74 %. The census report 2011 revealed the harsh facts that despite Government initiatives, the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes are still at the bottom of the graph, in terms of their literacy rate, in comparison with others tribes of state. The education in the state is divided into different levels – primary, high secondary, college and university level. The overall literacy rate of the scheduled tribe of the Jammu and Kashmir is 37.5% this is much lower than the national average of 47% aggregated for all scheduled tribes. The Male literacy rate of Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes in the state is 48.2% while the female literacy rate is 25.25% as per the census reports of 2011. The female literacy rate is much lower than the male literacy rate in the state which is hashing factor. If compared to national level literacy rates similar trends are discovered in these tribes in respect of female literacy rate also. Male literacy rate is up to some extent satisfactory but the female literacy rate is a matter of deep concern at national level. Literacy record of scheduled tribes at



national level is 59.2 % and 34.8% for male and female respectively.

Socio-Economic conditions of Gujjar and Bakarwals

The Gujjars and Bakarwals who have been a roaming tribe of Jammu and Kashmir state, their economy is generally focused around cultivation. They herd animals like sheep, goats and buffaloes. However, few of them get to be inactive and own cultivable fields yet have a couple of buffaloes and other animals. Bulk of the Gujjars and Bakarwals rear cattle for a variety of purposes but when people breed and rear cattle for commercial purpose and makes it the source of livelihood, they may be said to be living under pastoral economy. The pastoralists usually do not lead a settled life and become wanderers and nomads only under the pressure of changing weather. The pastoral tribes who inhabits mountainous region migrate to the plains along with their cattle during severe winters but go back to their permanent abode at the advent of summer. The natural pastures utilized by the Gujjars and Bakarwals are seasonal. The pastoral economy of Gujjars depends on availability of these pasture. Winter and summer pastures have different climatic condition which results in their oscillation. While advent of summer is signaled by drying up of pastures in the south, they take the folks during this period to the pastures of high altitude, locally known as *dhoks*, in the north. When the highland pastures are covered with snow and ice and health of folks is affected by severe cold at high altitudes, they started migrating to the lower altitude pastures in the month of September. Major oscillation channels of

Gujjars and Bakarwals are through Pir Panjal range. The sex ratio of Gujjars and Bakarwals is highly eschewed. There are approximately 856 women per 1000 men among the Gujjars and Bakarwals. This demographic imbalance influence their marriage pattern. Among the Gujjar and Bakarwals, the engagement ceremony is generally held at an early age. The marriage usually takes place after five years from the date of engagement. Their marriages are completely took place within the Islamic culture. In this community the cases of divorce, domestic violence and sexual harassments are noteworthy as very low as compared with other communities. Within this community the widow remarriage customs are generally common. Gujjars and Bakarwals bury their dead in accordance to the Islamic rituals and beliefs. In brief Gujjar and Bakarwals have well organized social life. The existence of social and economic institutions, functional groups and social stratification, the customs, traditions and taboos are result of their Trans human nature.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded by saying that the socio-economic conditions of Gujjar and Bakarwals in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is not satisfactory. No doubt a few families have good achievement in socio-economic conditions but majority of Gujjar and Bakarwals still suffer due to their illiteracy and poverty. Gujjar and Bakarwals in this state of Jammu and Kashmir lived in the descended and diversified areas with low availability of socio-economic parameters. They have low levels of socio economic infrastructure, high poverty rates and low level of



education. There is more deprivation in education, health and standard of living. It has found that the maximum have less number of dwelling rooms, low quality of housing, less water facilities and low source of lightning. All these schedule tribe groups are socially and economically deprived and do not have basic amenities of life. The poverty rates of this community living in Jammu and Kashmir are more as compared to the rate of general population of the state. Majority of the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir depend on their agricultural productivities and cattle for their livelihood in lower, middle and the higher mountain regions. Though the Central and the State Governments have taken much interest in the tribal welfare programmes, projects and schemes, much are yet to be done. The progress achieved in this field is far from satisfactory. These decades of development have not had the desired impact on the socially, economically deprived section. The welfare programmes have not been effective due to inadequacies in the administrative machinery, lack of sensitive, trained management, lack of general preparedness for large investments, deficiency in accounting systems, procedural delays and lack of proper monitoring and evaluation. Need is to take immediate steps by government and other development agencies for their upliftment.

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