

Social Status and Economy of Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir

Char. Case Research Area

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Abstract

The Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir is the paradise on earth and is the northern most part of India. It has unity in diversity as it bears multiple culture, ethnic communities and tribes. This study has analysed the social status and economy of gujjar and bakarwals tribes of jammu and Kashmir. The study has revealed that gujjar and bakarwals of jammu and Kashmir are deprived and underprivileged. However due to continuous efforts of Department of tribal affairs government of Jammu and Kashmir and the broad vision of centre government for tribals has lead to a significant improvement in the lives of tribals of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Communities, Tribals, Gujjars, Bakarwala, Underprivileged

Research Methodology

For analysing the social and economic conditions of tribals of jammu and Kashmir especially gujjar and bakarwals, both primary and secondary source of data have been used. The primary data have been collected through intensive filed work in Kupwara and Baramulla District of kashmir, personal interview, group discussions and non participatory observations. For secondary data, researcher opted for different journals, books, government reports and newspapers.

INTRODUCTION

India is a democratic country with unity in diversity spreading across all the regions from North to South and East to West. This diversity is due to diverse cultures, religions, beliefs and communities. One such community is tribal community. Tribals communities are prevalent everywhere and in almost every state of India. Jammu and Kashmir (UT) which is the northern most part of Indian territory, has a good percentage of tribal population. Different tribes of J&K has their own distinct culture, religion, beliefs, and ideas, but Gujjar and Bakarwal, which is the focus of this study has unique cultural beliefs. As per census (2011), schedule tribe form 11.5% of J&K'S total population and among this most are Gujjar and Bakerwal. There are twelve tribes recognised by government in J&k. These are Chhangpa, Garra, Mon, Balti, Bota, Purigipa, Beda, Brokpa, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Giddi and Sippi. The Gujjar and Bakerwal tribes have the same culture, traditions and languages and are known as twin tribes. Their occupation makes a separation between the two. The primary occupation of bakarwals is the rearing of sheep and goats, while gujjars do agriculture and rear cows and buffalos mostly. Out of more than 15 lakh tribal population in J&K, around 11 lakhs are gujjar and bakarwals which is about 70% of total

tribal population. Bakarwals do not have permanent residence and land, they need fresh pasture for their animals which leads them to migrate seasonally. In summer they migrate from outer plains of Jammu to mountainous regions of Pir Panjal and conifer forest of Kashmir valley, and in winter they again move to lower latitudes of Jammu region. In summer Gujjars also move temporarily to their pastures locally called Dhokks or Bhaks, as they are occupied by their ancestors and lies in conifer forest meadows of Kashmir. Gujjar and Bakarwals are tribes that are scheduled according to article 342 of the constitution of India and they got ST status as per J&K's scheduled tribe amendment act 1989 and 1991. The profile of Gujjar and Bakarwal population is given below in the table :

Name of the tribe	Total population	Percentage of total tribal population of J&K	Percentage of total population of J&K
Gujjar	980654	65.47%	7.8%
Bakarwal	113198	7.58%	0.90%

Source: Census 2011

Culture and customs among Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir:

The Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir are the most peace loving and nationalists and they have good relations with state. Their religious sphere is the core of both Gujjar and Bakarwal social life. They are far less socially developed than any other tribe of J&K. Although due to rise in purchasing power of some of the Gujjar population, they have started building residential houses of bricks and stones, but still a large number of them live in wooden houses with flat roofs covered with muds, locally called Kothas. On the other hand Bakarwals are less in population and they do not possess any permanent house, they keep on migrating and use tents for living. They worry more about feeding their livestock during winter. In contrast to livestock which move on feet, Gujjar and Bakarwal use horses for carrying their possessions and trade goods. Traditional turban "lunge" along with shawls "chaddar" and shirts are worn by both Gujjar and Bakarwals. The religious and festive events celebrated by this community include five times prayer "nemaz", fasting in Ramadan, performing shabb on sacred nights etc.

Marriage practice is very unique among this community. Marriage is one of the most important institutions of society which can have very different implications in different cultures. Broadly speaking, marriage may be defined as "a socially sanctioned sex relationship involving two or more people of the opposite sex, whose relationship is expected to endure behind the time required for gestation and the birth of children". Marriages among Gujjars and Bakarwals are fixed in adulthood by negotiation and by the 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 inheritance of the property is from father to sons, who equally share it.

In their weddings they use in their meals a 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. In their local dialect, this practice is called "Bhaaji". 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 Bakarwal fraternity. The bride is decorated with silver ornaments like silver chains like silver Dolara, silver sargast, silver mahail,

silvergani, silver earrings, silver bangles, silver rings and silver necklaces called “HASEERI”etc. The bridegroom wears headwear like lungi, waistcoat, shirt and shalwaar besides red handkerchief in his hands and “SEHRA” on forehead which adds to his grace and glory. On the occasion of celebration of marriages they recite poetic recitations from the books like c-harfi, Soni-Mahiwal, Saif-ul-Maluk which enthral the audience . Mostly gujjar and bakerwal do not marry people from other tribe or community , instead they get married within their own tribe group. On the occasion of marriage they perform different dance ,sing music etc. On the arrival of bride or groom ,womens sing from the flat topped roof of their Kothas .

Educational Status of GUJJAR AND BAKARWAL :The literature review on education of gujjar and bakerwal and personal observation in different districts of Kashmir valley reiterates that their educational status is not satisfactory as compared to other sections of society. The educational backwardness among gujjar and bakerwal is the key factor behind their poverty and ignorance. The main cause of illiteracy among gujjar and bakerwal is the social distance between pupil and teacher in tribal areas.

Education is viewed as a standout amongst the most essential and potential instrument for the advancement of a society. Education is basic human right and an important factor in the development of childrens, communities, and countries,and helps in breaking the chain of poverty ,improving gender empowerment ,child health and maternal health. Education levels among gujjar and bakerwal is too low as compared to other inhabitants of UT. Some of the challenges faced by these tribal areas in the provision of educational services include: Physical distance between schools and residential areas locally called DHOKAS , Seasonal migration ,lack of teachers willingness to work in hilly tribal areas , child labour to support their family financially etc. High concentration of gujjar and bakerwal population is found in District Poonch ,Rajouri,Kathua ,Udhampur ,Kupwara ,Baramulla,Budgam and Pulwama .the literacy rate of these Districts is given below in the table.

Districts	Gujjars	Bakarwals
Poonch	34	30.8 %
Rajouri	32.94	20.5%
Jammu	39	23.5%
Baramulla	19.7	19.3
Budgam	21.7	18.3
Kupwara	16.9	20.4
Pulwama	17.4	20.1

Source : Census of India 2011

The overall literacy rate of gujjar is 31.6%, bakerwal 22.51% with total literacy rate of overall population 55.52 %.

Economy of Gujjar and Bakerwals of Jammu and KASHMIR

The main economis activities of gujjar and bakerwals of J&k are animal rearing ,subsistence agriculture activities and some percentage involved in handicrafts ,but the main occupation of these tribes are

rearing of animals , sheeps ,goats, buffalo ets. Their per capita income and overall economic condition is poor , as they lack skills due to low educational status . more over they do not have mass awareness about plans and schemes of UT and centre government. Their main food source include corn, milk, Ganahar ,Karan ,Kalari .Makki ki Roti ,sarsoon ka saag ,lassi and so on. As majority of them ,especially bakerwals depend on their animals for their income. Bakarwals during their return from from mountainous region to plains of jammu sell most of their sheeps ,which is the backbone of their economy and main source of income. Gujjar rear cows and buffaloes and sell milk and dairy products like Ghee and cheese ,which is the primary source of their income. They also deliver raw wool and mutton. Most of the gujjars in Kashmir region rear sheeps in order to sell on the occasion of Eid-ul-azha. They also grow Maize,cereals ,wheat,legumes etc.

Economic potential of Gujjar and Bakarwals:

The Gujjars and Bakarwals who have been a roaming tribe of J&K 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 grounds 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 gujjar and bakarwal tribe possess rich economic potential which needs to be harnessed by the efforts of UT and centre government plans and schemes. Since these tribes are usually residing on the fringes of forest and mountains ,which gives them access to pastoral lands and ,meadows which can be used as a resource to rear livestocks. Some of the well known pastoral land for rearing livestock in Kupwaradistrict are budnumbal , drangyari ,badi behak, bangus , gafthrada ,ballian, rajwar ,nowgam ,z gali, noval gali, warnow ,kalaroose etc . It is impressed upon the government to take necessary measures for establishing dairy units in these far flung areas. The organic produce of these tribes like milk,ghee,cheese,kalari,makki ki roti etc can fetch high prices for them and improve their purchasing power and standard of living. The jammu and Kashmir economy is heavily dependent on animal husbandary. As a prominent economic sector of J&K , animal husbandary has contributed immensely to the financial improvement of state . As per 20th live stock census of india ,the total no of live stock population of J&K is 8318699 and poultry stock is 7366308.

Both the centre and UT government launched various income generating programmes fot rural and tribal people. These programmes are planned in order to improve the standard of living of these people and they provide constant source of income. Some of these programmes are as under.

1. Integrated Rural Development Programme .
2. Integrated Tribal Development Programme.
3. Jawahar Rozgar Yojana .
4. Indra Awas Yojana.
5. Training Of Rural Youth For Self Employment (TRYSEM).
6. Sampoon Grameen Rozgar Yojana .

Conclusion

Due to continuous efforts of department of tribal affairs government of UT of J&K and a broad vision of centre govt for tribals of jammu and Kashmir ,educational and economic status of some of the families has improved over the years but still a large portion of gujjar and bakarwal population continues to

remain educationnaly backward and economically underpriviligred . There is widespread poverty , illiteracy and sufferings among tribasls of jammu ansd Kashmir .

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