

Socio-Cultural Analysis of Gaddi Tribe: A Sociological Study of Saraj Area in Jammu Region

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Abstract:

The present paper deals with the detail analysis of socio-cultural conditions of Gaddi tribe of Saraj area of Chenab Valley in Jammu region. This study gives focus on socio-cultural importance, constitutional status, tradition and customs of Gaddi tribe. These custom and traditions compel them to be remain ethnocentric in nature.

On the basis of fieldwork, participant observations, in-depth long interviews and data collection from concern community development block, it is found that Gaddi tribes are still economically and socially backward. Since the homogenous nature of all Gaddi settlements in the region, the Gaddi hamlet namely Barshalli has been chosen as sample and locale of the present study. The study is based on four main objectives which fulfilled the requirement of the entire investigation.

1. Demographic and occupational profile of the Gaddi tribes in Saraj.
2. Socio-cultural conditions of Gaddi in the area.
3. Dependence of Gaddi on intra-religious communities.
4. Religious consciousness of Gaddi tribes in the region.

The researcher has conducted fieldwork at village Barshalli and applied qualitative research techniques for data collection. The entire data so collected has been analysed with various tool and techniques. On the basis of data analysis it is found that Gaddi are ethnocentric and endogamous in nature. Their traditions and customs highlight their identity. Their dairy produce is for their domestic consumption only. They sale out few sheep and goats to meet out expenses for their rituals and diseases. They are facing identity crisis in the region. Gaddi tribes affiliate themselves with upper caste Rajputs but in turn they keep social distance from these tribes. Gaddi also maintain strong social stratification with lower castes Hindus in the area.

Despite of various government initiatives adopted for their wellbeing. There is still a need of more affirmative targeted schemes as per demand of the hour for them. These tribes are facing multi-dimensional issues in their daily life.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, Saraj, Gaddi, Tribe, Jammu

Introduction

Gaddi is a Sanskrit word meaning “seat”. This position is indirectly related with authority of local deity or God. The historical explanation about the existence of Gaddi is that during the reign of Mughal Empire Aurangzeb all Gaddi were forcibly migrated from the northern plains of India due to the harsh

and cruel policies of the emperor against Hindus. They left their original place of birth and settled down around Dhouladhar region of Himachal Himalaya. They established here a seat of kingdom called Gaddi. Hence, all the migrated population under the ambit of this seat or Gaddi were known as Gaddi tribes.

The prominent occupation of Gaddi tribes is rearing of sheep and goats. They are always in search of meadows and good pastures for their flock of sheep in the upper reaches of the Himalayan Mountains. Due to their shepherding profession they are semi-nomadic in nature. Gaddi's permanent settlements are found in the mountainous region of Jammu province only. The major concentration of Gaddi in Jammu region is in the Chenab valley districts namely Kishtwar, Doda and Ramban. According to the census 2011 the total population of Gaddi in Jammu and Kashmir was 46489 only. As far as concern to the Gaddi population of Saraj area, they are spread into three villages only. It is believed that Saraj is famous for lush meadows and animal fodder reserve which attracted these Gaddi to settle here from the erstwhile state of Himachal Pradesh. The availability of green grass, woods, animal fodder and other forest products do not allowed them to migrate from here to other places from generation to generations. Hence they have become the part and parcel of the existing society in Saraj area.

Constitutional Status of Gaddi.

The term scheduled tribes was first mentioned in the constitution of India under Article 366(25). This Article defines Scheduled Tribes as, "Such tribes or tribal communities or parts of or a group with in such tribals or tribal communities as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purpose of constitution." Here Article 342 specifies the procedures and criteria for allotting Scheduled Tribes status to the particular community in India.

There are twelve schedule tribes communities in Jammu and Kashmir at present times. Among them Boto, Chungpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Balti, Beda and Brokpa got constitutional status as scheduled tribes in 1989 whereas other four communities namely Bakarwals, Gujjars Sippi and Gaddi received this status in 1991 vide constitutional Scheduled Tribes amendment act 1991 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Methodology.

The present study is based on the extensive field work at village Rajgarh in Saraj area which attempted to analyse socio-cultural aspects of the Gaddi tribes. This field survey has been taken at ward no.9 of the village Panchayat Halqa Rajgarh. The name of the ward no.9 Mohalla is Barshalli. The village Barshalli is habitat of Gaddi population only. Since the homogenous nature of all Gaddi settlements in Saraj area, this village has been chosen as the sample and the locale of the present study. Also this study is qualitative in nature so sample and sampling frame is the same. Besides, participant observations, in-depth long interviews and secondary sources of data collection techniques has been used throughout the study.

Objectives of the Present Study.

On basis of field survey conducted at village Barshalli, ward no.9 of Panchayat Halqa Rajgarh, district Ramban of J&K through the participant observations and in-depth long unstructured interviews one can use the following objectives in this study.

1. Demographic and occupational profile of the Gaddi tribes in Saraj.
2. Socio-cultural conditions of Gaddi in the area.

3. Dependence of Gaddi on intra-religious communities.
4. Religious consciousness of Gaddi tribes in the region.

Socio-Cultural Setting of Barshalli Village.

In order to gain access to the social setting of village Barshalli, I approach the Block Development Officer Rajgarh who provided complete demographic and economic data about the Gaddi tribes of Saraj. Rajgarh is a newly created block and Tehsil headquarters by the state government in 2007. As I entered into the office chamber of Block Development Officer, she was quite busy due to heavy rush of local people for attestation of documents and some for complains/graviances. She was listening patiently every person present there. In fact she was a local lady officer who knows every community very well. I greet her and introduce myself. She offered me chair. I inquired about the Gaddi population and their concentration in the region, she replied that in her block there is a ward no.9 namely Barshalli which is only habitat of Gaddi tribes. It is almost five kilometer away from tehsil headquarters. She also provided current economic survey data and census report about the Gaddi of Saraj area. She too inform telephonically the concern ward panch to help me in this field survey. According to the official records there are only 12 household families of Gaddi tribes in Barshalli.

The village Barshalli is situated at the confluence of two small rivulets or nallahas. These rivulets naturally demarcate the boundaries of the village. One Nallah is coming from eastern while other from western side of the village Barshalli. To get access of the village it was required on foot or pedal journey of at least five kilometers from the Block Rajgarh. On the next very morning I started my journey, while on the way there was a small hamlet named as Bassa. It was inhabited by Sharma Brahmins. When I was passing through this village I saw two wooden temples with big amplifier speakers hanging at their top. The sound of the amplifiers was echoing in whole of the valley. Some of the men were praying inside the temple with folded hands. In front of the God's statue incense sticks locally called "Dhoop" was burning. Its smoke was spreading everywhere inside the temple. There was a unique fragrance of Dhoop which is considered as sacred. I too bow down in one of the temples and received a piece of maize roti and Halwa on it as the Prashad. After eating this Prashad I moved further towards the village Barshalli. While walking through Kachha and rough path, there was a small sloping ascent of a hill from where one can see the panoramic views of Barshalli. I took a rest for a while and found that this ward is totally segregated on the basis of geographical factors. The housing pattern of Gaddi tribes was lineal in shape. As soon as I reached near the village intentionally approach the very first house then suddenly a big sized local breed black dog barked on me. At this movement I was frightened and about to cry but luckily one young lady moved forward and took hold of the dog. She prompted me to move inside the house immediately so that I might be safe from this dog. She was wearing a long woolen Kurti up to knees, a ringed skin tight Salwar called Unali Suthan, a round shaped cape on head, silver ear rings and silver anklets. She was bare footed at that time. Near every house some domestic cattle were kept tied with locally made ropes called "Daam". Just entering into the house, it was a big hall type divided its floor into four sections or blocks. The roof was wooden. At the center of the house a big sized pillar was erected known as "Thum". The sculpturing art is reflected on Thum which is the symbol of their kuldevta. One maize bhuta was seen hanging at top of the Thum. Just adjacent to the main entrance of the hall is called "Armothaloo". It has a special function in every house. At one corner of this portion shoes are kept. All scheduled caste are allowed to sit in this portion only in the house. As soon as I entered into the house then a lady quickly laydown a wooden cot on the floor for me. She put a tricolor

woolen blanket on the cot and requested me to sit on it. This blanket was red, white and black in colour made by local wool extracted from their sheeps. At that time I felt an obnoxious smell in this house. The lady then went out of the house to call any male member who can talk to me in Saraji. Till now she was considering me as a revenue officer from the government visiting this village. After sometimes a middle aged man came, his name was Sh. Sher Singh. He was wearing a Choga having multiple pockets, woolen trouser called “Unali Ghuttana” and a round shaped cape on his head. I greet him with folded hands and he reciprocated accordingly. Meanwhile so many children entered into the house from the neighborhood. Some of the women whisper in their own Gaddi dialect perhaps inquiring about me. I humbly requested Sher Singh to go in Saraji dialect so that I can easily understand each and every fact properly. Gaddi speak Saraji fluently but their mother tongue is Gaddi boli or Himachali. Sher Singh was a Chella or Dwalla of Shivji. He had a great respect in the area as he performed some of the rituals related to Lord Siva in others household. There are some local ritual feast which are incomplete without the involvement of Gaddi Chella. I requested him for my stay in this village for few days and providing me some accommodation and food etc. He agreed and took me to other households. Further he took me to an alone house which was just at the corner of the hamlet but not too much for away from other houses. He opened the latch of the old hard wooden door of that house. At the northern most corner of the house there was an elevated ramp on which a huge bundle of tridents was kept firmly. Trident is in fact a three pronged spear shaped long iron rod considered as the weapon of Lord Shiva. In local dialect it is known as “Trishul”. This house is the temple of Lord Shiva but not the shape of temple. It looks like a residential house of Gaddi. It is a sacred house for worshipping by Gaddi tribes and maintained by the in charge Dwalla Sher Singh. There was some bronze plates and tumblers lying at another corner of the house meant for using them at the time of any religious celebrations. This house is called “Bhandarathi”. It is common for everyone in the village. The Bhandarathi plays an important role for regulation of religious faith and social discipline among the tribes. Bhandarathi also provided Chelas to the community under the guidance and rituals of head Dwalla. Dwalla regulates all the functions and traditions in the community in the name of Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva here also accept goat or sheep scarify.

Religious Festivals of Gaddi.

Festivals of Gaddi tribes in Saraj belt are common with those of other inhabitants of the area. They are following the indigenous culture of Saraj from for generations to tildate. Gaddi considered themselves as the creation of Lord Shiva and the social status work profession is allotted by the Almighty Shiva. Thus, Gaddi celebrate only those festivals which are related with their God and faiths.

Jatar.

It is the ritual feast in which one night is fixed for celebration by individual household. The date is fixed by the village Chella. It is a celebration in favour of Kuldevta of the family. It may be a serpent or Nag, a mountain or any other natural force. During celebration of this Jatar the Kuldevta is kept in a palanquin and carried around the village followed by male members of the village and it's Dwalla. Here every one is dancing on the melodious sound of flute and drum. Drum is a musical instrument consisting of a goat skin stretched very tightly over a round shaped frame. It is called Dhol in their local dialect. After making a one round of whole village they return to the same house where from they started. Everyone here dance and sing in praise of their Kuldevta. The Chella ordered everyone to remain silent and sit in the house. The head of the family now burn a Dhoop in front of the head Chella. The Chella goes into

trance and his whole body is shivering, which indicates the effect of Kuldevta in Chella's body. Now he is ready to answer any question asked by the family members on behalf of the Kuldevta.

Jagru.

It is the popular festival of all people residing in the village. It is celebrated in the month of August every year near the famous festival of Raksha Bandhan. The celebration starts much earlier than the fixed day. It is in fact a night feast ritual in which all villagers do participate. Jagru in local dialect means "keep awakening" i.e. not sleeping during that night. All villagers gathered in the temple of village. They brought some pieces of wooden logs from their homes and make a huge pile of wood in front of the ground of the temple. All must reach here before 8 pm in the evening. It is the order by the Gaddi Dwalla who is going to lead the celebration. A sheep is also required for sacrifice before starting the Jagru. Here all villagers do contribute their money for purchasing the sheep from the shepherd. After sacrifice of the sheep its meat is distributed to every household as a Prashad. On the advice of the Dwalla all male members make a huge circle in the ground, at the center of human circle is a big pile of woods collected from every household is set on fire. All are dancing around this fire alter or Agni kund on the beat of Dhol till dawn. Women are only spectator here enjoying the dance. This is called "Kood". Finally early in the morning all the Chelas and Dwallas go into trance again and then cross this fire alter on bare foot indicates the concluding of the Jagru ritual.

Nuala. The meaning of the word "Nuala" is derived from Hindi words "Nav Mala" meaning new garland. Here the new garland of wool strings is offered to Lord Shiva who fulfilled the wishes of the family. It is a celebration performed by individual family. A big hall or veranda is selected to perform the Nuala ritual in the house. To begin with, a copper bowl known as Tramda is filled with maize and then placed at the middle of the hall or veranda. Other relatives and villagers are invited in this ceremony and all of them bring wool from their houses to perform puja in the Nuala. A huge garland is made of this wool string is put on Tramda and from one end it is hung with the roof. The area around this garland and Tramda is called Mandap. Every visitor do come and bow down to the Mandap. Mandap indicates the presence of Lord Shiva in the house. The celebration begins with the sacrifice of a ram near the Mandap. Here head of the sacrifice is place near the Tramda and liver (Kaleja) is taken away for roasting in the burning fire outside the house. This roasted liver is then distributed among all present in the hall as a Prashad. One front right leg of the sacrifice is kept near the garland. This head and leg of the sacrifice is only for the Shaman who take all these to his house in the morning. This Shaman must be a Gaddi. Other castes cannot perform this ritual as a Shaman. During whole night villagers sing songs in praise of the Lord.

Khadaal.

It is a feast celebrated by any Hindu castes in the area but celebration is performed by Gaddi only. Since it is believed that Gaddi are the progeny of Shivji so they are invited to fulfill the ritual of Khadaal. Khadaal is like a marriage anniversary of Shivji in which all local deity are invited. On the achievement of new status, things, homes, marriage, new birth or any joyful occasion Khadaal is celebrated by individual household. The head of the house who is celebrating this festival has to approach a senior most Chella of Gaddi tribes for fixing the date of celebration. It is celebrated at night only preferly on Sunday night as Sunday is considered as the day of Shivji. On very Sunday the head of the family along with some two or three members set for begging alms in shape of grains, wool, and money to all the

villages with bare foot and keep fasting. They come back by the evening. The Gaddi Shaman is already waiting for them, on his advice they put all the belonging what they brought from the villages at the corner of the house. Every member of the family is standing near the Mandap with folded hands and praying for their well wishes and thanking Almighty for providing what they wanted. Then The Shaman with the power of Shivji goes into trance. Now whatever he says is the order of Lord Shiva. Everyone here is chanting mantras in praise of Shivji. The Shaman said that Shivji is happy with this family so He wanted a sacrifice of a ram from the family. Immediately they bring a ram in front of the Mandap. It was set free inside the human made circle in the hall. The ram move here and there but inside the circle. All present there were praying with folded hands. Meanwhile the ram suddenly shivered, this marked the acceptance of Sacrifice by the Lord Shiva. It was then cut with the help of Drati by a young shepherd. The head and right front leg was kept on the heap of maize near the Tramda. The Shaman allowed all the villagers to dance and enjoy whole of the night as it is the night of happiness for everyone.

Gunga Devta.

Gunga means one who cannot speak. It is an important deity of Gaddi tribes who protects their sheep and goats from wild animals and bad evils. Gaddi worship Gunga Devta once in a year. The procedures for worshipping is that one male member of a family is identified and made to sit in front of the deity statue in every household of Gaddi family. He cannot utter any word on that day. He is served sweet food at the evening after having fast during day time. He eat without producing any sound and can demand more food through actions only. There are strict traditional rules and discipline for this man on that day. Gunga Devta is the protector of their all domestic animals inside the house as well as in the jungle.

Rituals of Gaddi Tribes in Saraj area.

Rituals are described by the traditions of the Gaddi community. Since Gaddi are the integral part of Saraji culture from fore generation to tildate. Hence there is an influence of local tradition on them. Rituals may include all the activities performed by them on special occasions in their life.

Marriage.

They practice caste endogamy in their marriages. They considered themselves as high Hindu caste in the region but their marriage celebration is unique in the area. They celebrate marriage for four days. First day is called Mehedi Rat then Jani, Pacheeki and finally Bedhey on fourth day. The bride is called Ladi and groom Lada in Gaddi dialect. Dowry is not practice among the Gaddi. However, goat, sheep or a cow is offered to the girl after some times of the marriage. Gaddi are monogamous due to socially accepted norms

Birth Rituals.

The female of Gaddi is known as Gaddan. She delivers a child at one portion of the house or in cattle shed if it is available. Giving birth to a child is good but mother and the new born are considered as impure till 21 days from the day of the birth. She is not allowed to touch any utensil or enter into the house, not even to see the sun rays for 21 days. She must remain inside the shed during this period. It is known as “loosu” in local dialect. During this period the parents of the Gaddan bring ghee and wheat flour to make the Manda for her daughter. No one in the village is allowed to celebrate any religious or

social function as all have become impure for 21 days due to birth of the child. On 21st day a big feast is celebrated in which everyone is invited. This is the day of showing sun rays to the new born from the top of the roof. Here Halwa is distributed among all. The mother and the baby now come out from the cattle shed and take blessing of Lord Surya Dev. Now after this whole clan has become pure. The birth of the girl child is considered as Laxmi by the Gaddi.

Death Rituals.

Gaddi affiliate themselves with upper caste Hindu so follow the procedures of Hindu last rites. At the time of the death of any old member in any family they called a local pandit for chanting Vedic mantras for the last rite. From the day of the death to tenth day all villagers sleep on the floor and keeping fast every day. Strict rules are followed while cooking the meal for dinner only in a day. No use of onion, garlic or any spice in the vegetable is allowed. Boiled pulse which is locally available is used. At the dinner time all are supposed to eat the meal in that house. All the young male members of the village do come during night at the house of demise family. Their attendance is the identity of oneness and caste conscious among the tribes. On tenth day the affinal kins of the deceased family will come and prepare the meal by using onions, garlic and spice for both the times in a day. This day is called “Dash Pindi” From this day onward all can have normal life like permission of sleeping on cots and taking meals all the time of the day.

Dresses.

Gaddi men wear a woven woolen coat known as “Unalo kote”. It is a warm coat helpful in protecting from cold. The lower they use is called Ghuttana. Head is covered with a round shaped khadi cap. They also wear half coat with multiple pockets. During acute winter they wrap their body with a blanket. Gaddan wears long Choga up to her knees and Unali Suthan. Gaddi women are very much found of silver jewelry. They cover their head with a warm scarf.

Hadwari.

It is the temporary houses made by Gaddi tribes in the upper reaches of Saraji area during the summer season. They are semi-nomadic in their life style due to the search of new pastures and fodder for their animals. They do construct a Kachha house in upper mountain region for short period of time locally known as Hadwari. These part time houses sometimes damaged by heavy snow fall of the season but in summer they again rebuilt it. These Hadwari are made of such a design that no wild animal can attack inside it. A temporary bed is raised with the help of log of woods. On this bed the green leaf are spread which work as a cushion. This bed is known as “Dungi”. It is used for sleeping during night time. Mostly the married couples are engaged to go to Hadwari along with their domestic animals.

Food Habits.

After adaptation of the Saraji way of life the food habits of Gaddi is same as that of Saraji. They eat meals four time a day. Early morning meal taken between 6 to 7 am. is called “Nari” In Nari they take the left out food of dinner. At 10 to 11 am. they take another meal called “Nerun”. It is recently fresh cooked meal. The left out food from Nerun is again taken at 4 pm. Known as “Ungal”. The dinner is served at 8 to 9 pm. For dinner fresh meal is prepared locally called “Beyalli” In their meal preparation they mainly use milk products and locally available vegetables. Gaddi are non-vegetarian in nature who

occasionally take meat of goats, sheep and poultry. The main food of them is Makki ki Roti i.e. large bread of maize along with goat milk and Lassi. During summer some of the local vegetable are being dried up in the sun and store all these items for winter. During seasonal snow fall they use these vegetable at least for three months. Gaddi make special local dishes on various occasions. These dishes or recipes are Madhra, Umbal, KhattiMuggi, babru etc. They also prepare a beer which is suitable to maintain the temperature of the body in extreme climate. It is locally made and not harmful for the body. It is known as “Chung”. Chung is taken by young males and old aged females.

Conclusions.

Despite of the introduction of so many modern facilities by the government in the region, Gaddi are still maintaining their cultural heritage which is unique in nature. The cultural traditions of this community highlight their identity. They are having traditional subsistent economy with obsolete agricultural practices. The dairy produce from their domestic animals is for their family consumption only. They sale out few of their goats but the money is spend on diseases and other household requirements. Also they require some of the money to celebrate their rituals.

They affiliate themselves with Rajputs but Rajputs keep social distance with them. Gaddi also maintain strong stratification with other lower castes in the area. Besides, they are very less in population in the area so facing identity crisis. Furthermore, they are facing social issues of alliance or match for marriage of their siblings.

Gaddi of Saraj area are the integral part of the existing socio-cultural system of the society. They have the prestige and social status among all communities on the occasion of any religious celebration. Gaddi do provide their services to other communities on special rituals related to Lord Shiva. It is believed that without the presents of Gaddi Shivji is unhappy. Hence they are the serving tribes to all those communities who follow the Shivji deity.

They are peace lover, hospitable and endogamous in nature. Their economy is depend on meadows and pasture land of the forests. Politically they are given the constitutional status in 1990s after decades of independence of the country. They are the victim of constitutional rights for 40 years since independence of the nation.

Suggestions/Recommendations.

Gaddi are the part of the Saraji culture which is a rich cultural heritage but with the implementation of modernization, education and other rural developmental projects by the government their cultural practices are decaying gradually. Their cultural activities are the requirement of the existing society to sustain functionally. Hence there is a need to save socio-cultural heritage of Gaddi. In this regard some of the suggestions are provided as under.

1. There should be enhancement initiative for Gaddi in their ritual celebrations.
2. Forest rights of the Gaddi should not be disturb by the administration.
3. Providing educational facilities to these tribes at their own environment.
4. To compensate their expenses, government schemes should be executed at gross root level of their village.
5. Basic need requirement should be provided to them like medical aid, electricity, drinking water etc.
6. Road connectivity to their village is necessity of the hour so that they can sell their domestic products in the market.

7. Some handicraft centers should be established in their village with the help of them only.
8. Sheep husbandry department should help them in case of any disease to their sheep and goats especially when they are at higher altitude in the region.

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