

Transformation in Cultural and Livelihood Aspects among Gujjar Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir: A Sociological Analysis

***Dr. Keshlata**

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

School of Humanities: Social Sciences & Languages Lovely

Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, 144411

ORCID ID- 0000-0002-3576-8672

Email Id: keshudeep0625@gmail.com

Bushra Nizami

Research Scholar

Department of Sociology, School of Humanities: Social Sciences & Languages

Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, 144411

Email ID: Bushranizami1464@gmail.com

Dr. Mohd Shakil

Assistant Professor

Department of Social Work, Jigjiga University, Ethiopia, 1020

Email ID: shakilmswamu@gmail.com

Gagandeep Singh Cheema

Deputy Officer

Mittal School of Business, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab, 144411

Abstract

The process of transitioning from a traditional, rural, agrarian civilization to a secular urban and industrial society is known as social change. Tribal communities are classified as underprivileged and difficult-to-reach groups. They are typically socially and economically backward. They pose numerous problems to development in general, and to education. Like other Scheduled Tribes, Gujjars are also supposed to suffer from insufficient educational facilities, inadequate infrastructure where a huge number of children are out of schools. Gujjar tribe is also one among disadvantaged, backward, deprived, and marginalized people. The current study attempts to detect and analyze social and cultural developments among the Gujjar tribe in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri area (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2014). The current study also aimed to examine the effects of changes in educational structure, nomadic lifestyle, traditional knowledge, political changes, new agricultural practices, livelihood changes, changes in gender roles, and tourism related transformation among Gujjar tribes community. In this study, data was derived from a variety of secondary sources, including

books, periodicals, newspapers, census records, Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports, Google, and other websites.

Key words: *Tribes, social transformation, culture, gender, community, disadvantaged, etc.*

Introduction

Globalization has reduced the world to the size of a town. Globalization and modernization have brought many changes to our lives, such as advances in technology and healthcare facilities, but some people continue to live in a primitive era with few changes in their livelihood in terms of education, culture, tradition, and other social institutions. These people are referred to as indigenous or tribal people. In entire globe numerous tribes are found such as ‘Aborigine’ in Australia, ‘Basque’ in Spain, ‘Guarani’ in South America, ‘Muskogee’ in Georgia, and so on. In India, tribes are known by different names such as Adivasi, Janjati, Aboriginal People, Native People, Hunter-Gatherers. The major tribes found in India are Gonds, Bhils, Santhal, Munda, Khasi, Garo and the Great Andaman’s Tribes. Gujjars are a nomadic tribe in J&K Union Territory with a rich cultural heritage. They have their own rituals, traditions, living habits, art and crafts, and highly diverse culinary habits that vary by location. Gujjars make up 11.9 percent of the overall population in Jammu and Kashmir, according to the 2011 Indian census. 69.2 percent of Gujjars work in agriculture and animal husbandry, 2.8 percent work at home, and 28 percent engage in other occupations. Dairy farming is their main source of income. The class of nomads is mostly known for livestock husbandry and is formed by the fact that only 0.85 percent of the population is urbanized, with the remainder residing in rural areas and thriving on sustainable livestock production (Singh & kumar, 2017).

Gujjars have spent centuries living in woodlands and steep regions, socially separated

from other groups. They have their own culture, customs, and traditions that set them apart from other communities. They are tall, rigid, and composed of Pagh and Tehmad as their costumes, the long flowing beard dyed red, churning words of Gojri as their dialect, and the mesmerizing fragrance arising from Makki and Bajra baking dipped in Makhan and Sarson as their diet. Along with this, there are images portraying their architecture of Kullas (as their homes) constructed of mud and peculiar grasses, their love and compassion for their animals, who are their sole source of revenue, the captivated soil beneath their feet and the traced heavens above their heads, and so on. All these features of Gujjars indicate a harmonious coexistence with mother nature. Because Gujjars live in remote areas, their lifestyle, cuisine and dietary habits, and attitudes towards numerous parts of life may differ from those of the non-tribal people. This can be seen in their eating patterns. Many communities have seen changes as a result of shifting agricultural systems, cropping patterns, and eating choices, and the Gujjar community is no exception. In addition to cereals, wheat, and maize, milk products are their primary source of nutrition. Gujjars' favourite foods include Makki ki Roti, Ganhar/Sarson ka Sag, Lassi, Kalari, Karan, and others. Only a tiny percentage of Gujjars have embraced modernity, adopted a modern, scientific way of life, and are keeping up with the pace of modern agricultural practices (Singh & Kumar, 2017).

Relevant Literatures

Menon (2016) studied that tribal women are more important than any other social group since they work harder and are responsible for family capital and execution. The destruction of the environment and outside involvement make it impossible for ethnic women to live sustainably. Poor indigenous women have a deplorable standard of living. Tribal women face food insecurity, starvation, a lack of healthcare and education, and domestic violence. In terms of social media and other disciplines, tribal women and indigenous people fall behind modern cultures. They are marginalized and devalued socially, economically, and educationally.

Kala (2021) discovered that the traditional food system of a pastoral group is based on natural resources, animals, and marginal farming of a few crops. The Indian government promotes 'Atmnirbhar Bharat,' or self-sufficiency in India. A National Programme like this one allows pastoral tribes to contribute to India's self-sufficiency by popularizing and establishing their nutritious food system. Traditional cuisines have gained appeal in the hotel industry in recent decades since they are healthy and nutritious, providing an opportunity to promote them. Pastoral tribes are competent at identifying plants for medicinal purposes, managing cattle herds, and preserving foods and beverages. Traditional skills can help with self-sufficiency and skill India programmes. Elders seek to pass on traditions to future generations, which aids in the preservation of traditional food and drink preparation processes.

Abdullah, Mehmood & Hussain (2020) studied that tribes had created their distinct cultures to adapt to their surroundings. It was also stated that the arrival of industrialization, urbanization, and other factors in recent years have affected tribal indigenous culture. The cultural characteristics of the Gujjars are mentioned under the following headings. Gujjars can be portrayed culturally through dance, religious practices, and rituals, among other things. The faith has piqued the tribes' interest. The majority of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir are Muslims. They are the tribes who staunchly defend traditional practices. They still practice early marriage, with females marrying at the age of 14 to 15 and men marrying at the age of 17 to 18.

Saxena and Kumar (2018) investigated the social and educational difficulties that Gujjars face in the Jammu District of J&K. While they constitute a significantly lesser proportion of the population in adjacent states, nomad Gujjars constitute a considerable proportion of the state's population in J&K. Even after seven decades of independence, India's vast Gujjar minority appears to be poor. It seems unthinkable that a millennium has gone with no impact on the Gujjar people, particularly in terms of social and educational development.

Research gap of study:

Most prior research has focused on educational, economic, political, cultural, occupational, and other concerns concerning tribal populations. However, none of the prior research studied the social impact of the forest rights act on the livelihood of a group of Gujjars, which is a notable omission. This vacuum is closely tied to the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG goal 15 (life on land). Land is the cornerstone of human existence on this planet, and we are all part of its ecosystem, having inflicted significant damage to it through deforestation, loss of natural habitats, and land degradation, among other things. It is supporting sustainable use of our ecology and biodiversity, which is critical to human survival, where a social evaluation has been a significant policy focus. There is a void in the current research article. In addition, the current study will attempt to identify changes in livelihood and cultural patterns among the Gujjar tribal people in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri area.

Research objectives

1. To explore the changing patterns of livelihood among Gujjar tribes community in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To examine the changes in cultural patterns of the Gujjar Tribes community in Jammu and Kashmir.

Research Methodology

Methodology enables us to select the best approaches for any investigation. It not only helps us design research questions, but it also assists us in determining the best strategy to

execute any study. Methodology assists and guides researchers in answering research-related questions. This study focused mostly on derivative data. Secondary data sources such as books, newspapers, coupled with published publications and research papers, census reports, Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports, and so on are utilized to acquire secondary data.

Results and Findings

Based on some facts gathered from the secondary data sources, the present study can be concluded as follows:

TRANSFORMATIONS IN CULTURAL AND LIVELIHOOD ASPECTS

According to historical records, the Gujjar people were one of India's most important nomadic pastoral tribes. Tribal communities throughout the country are changing their traditional ways of life as a result of the onset of industrialization, modernization, urbanization, technological advancements, recent development initiatives undertaken by various governments (central and state), the impact of globalization, and environmental changes. According to one study, the Gujjar people had adopted new, modern ideals, changed their way of life, and abandoned their old ways of life. The pastoral sector had also lost its prominence, with old medical practices being supplanted by more modern ones, and relying on modern communication networks (Ganie, 2018). The researcher's goal with this study is to understand the significant cultural and livelihood changes influencing nomadic lifestyle, educational structure, political changes, new agricultural practices, gender roles, and tourism-related changes. Tribal populations are changing, yet their old customs and traditions are still practiced. Underage marriages, child labourer, parental illiteracy, and nomadic communities are continuing challenges. Their language, attire, marriage practices, and other traditional rituals form their separate identity in the community. In the current period, tribal life has undergone tremendous transformations as a result of urbanization, globalization, and industrialization (Choudhary, Ahmed, & Ahmed 2017).

Gujjar tribes in Rajouri District have experienced substantial cultural and economic shifts over the years. The following are some of the study's findings and results:

Transformation in Educational Structure

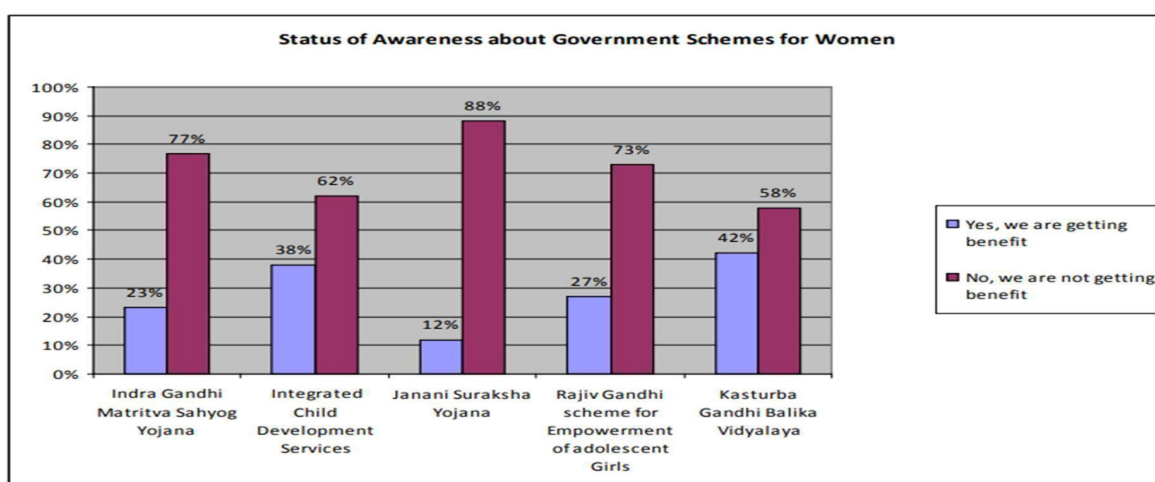
Education is viewed as a tool to achieve a specific goal. Education has grown to include various connotative connotations, ranging from influencing an individual's or group's behaviours to being an agent of social change and eventually assisting a person to achieve upward mobility. However, being marginalized for decades does not mean that vulnerable populations have given up on their dreams of defying the odds and accomplishing great things. Over the years, the J&K government has undertaken several measures to enhance the educational situation in tribal communities. The first scholarship modification was announced in July 2022, with scholarships increasing by 125 to 140 percent and making quality education

more affordable for tribal students. The scholarship budget, which had been hovering around 14 to 15 crores for all these years, has been enhanced to more over 50.00 crores this year, an increase from 31.12 crores last fiscal year. The number of indigenous student hostels has also been expanded to 25. Furthermore, the Jammu and Kashmir Tribal Affairs Department is expected to have completed the construction of eight hostels in the last two years and has been approved for the construction of 25 additional dorms. The department has budgeted 17.00 crores for hostel upkeep and refurbishing in 2022, in addition to the 10.00 crores set out for modernization in 2021. This is a step forward for tribal community growth and progress (Dar, 2022).

1. Transformation in Health Care System

The prevention, treatment, and management of illness are all aspects of health care. Healthcare facilities for socially or culturally marginalized communities, such as the Gujjars and Bakerwals, continue to exist on the outskirts of the health-care system. The central and state governments have launched a variety of healthcare programmes and plans to better the lives of Gujjar women and the entire Gujjar community, yet most of them are unaware of these government health care schemes. Gujjars, on the other hand, supports modern hospitals and dispensaries as a style of health care and is expected to welcome modernization of healthcare as a developmental phenomenon. They continue to encounter challenges of affordability, acceptability, and lodging when seeking healthcare (Mahajan, 2021).

Figure 1: Awareness level about Government Schemes for Women



Source: Dar, Z.A. (2022). *Educational Status of Gujjars and Bakarwals in J&K*

From the above figure, it is revealed that the women are supposed to be aware about the Government schemes running for them, but they are negligible found to be benefit by all the schemes.

Livelihood

One of the most significant changes in Gujjar's livelihood has been the shift from a pastoral economy to a mixed economy. The traditional Gujjar economy was based on cattle breeding and dairy farming. However, with the growth of settled agriculture and the decline of pastoralism, the Gujjars were forced to diversify their livelihoods. Today, many Gujjars in the Rajouri district are engaged in agriculture, horticulture, and other non-agricultural activities. The shift to a mixed economy had several positive impacts on the Gujjar community. The adoption of modern agricultural techniques has increased productivity and improved the livelihoods of the Gujjars. The growth of non-agricultural activities has also provided new income opportunities for the community. However, the shift to a mixed economy has also led to the loss of traditional livelihoods and practices. Over time, some of the wealthier Gujjar pastoralists began purchasing property and settling down, abandoning their nomadic lifestyle. Some were permanent peasants who cultivated land, while others engaged in more extensive trading. To live, many poor Gujjar pastoralists borrowed money from money lenders. They lost their livestock and sheep at times and became labourer, labouring on farms or in small cities. Nonetheless, Gujjar pastoralists not only continue to exist in numerous locations, but their numbers have increased in recent decades. When pasture lands in one location were blocked to them, they shifted their route, lowered the number of their herd, mixed pastoral activities with other types of income, and adapted to modern-day changes (Manju, 2018).

1. Transformation through Cultural Exchange

When sociologists speak of culture, they are referring to the culture of a specific group. They have kept various cultural styles over generations. The tribal people of India used to live in extremely terrible conditions. Because they live in hilly areas, the tribal is also called as 'Forest People' or 'Vanvasi'. The Jammu and Kashmir Gujjar tribes are in a transitional period. They are undoubtedly moving towards modern values, but they did not put down their traditional values. They are not totally cut off from their traditional lifestyle system, although not accepted all the modern ways of lifestyle. It might be said that although several changes take place in the lifestyle of the Gujjars tribes, yet the pace of development is very slow. This change in culture and lifestyle among the younger generation of Gujjar-Bakarwal reflects the larger societal changes happening globally. With the increased exposure to technology, media, and the internet the younger generation is more aware of different ways of living and aspires for a better lifestyle. However, it is important to strike a balance between modernization and the preservation of cultural traditions. In this concern, efforts should be

made to educate the younger generation about the importance of their cultural heritage and traditions while also providing opportunities for their personal and professional growth. It is also essential to involve the community in the development planning process and ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed (Bilal, Gull, & Ganai, 2016).

2. Transformation in Gender Roles

Gender roles emerge as a result of socialization. Gender roles are how men and women are meant to act, and most indigenous women, particularly Gujjar women, have stayed ignorant and unemployed throughout their lives. These women are required to complete traditional gender roles, stereotypes, tribal women are forced to adhere to specific standards that may even take away their freedom, and the traditional patriarchal system remains. The community, government, and non-governmental organizations are trying to bridge the gap and provide these tribal women with the resources they need to become self-sufficient and break the cycle of oppression and poverty. Many Gujjar tribal women are now aware of their rights and responsibilities, which has a good impact on the tribal community's overall growth. It is now time for them to trade in their gender responsibilities of housework, grazing sheep and goats for books and pens in order to contribute to the advancement of society (Rashid, 2023).

3. Transformation in Political Structure

A political structure is a collection of several institutions that are built politically to secure the free and equitable allocation of resources within a given community. The Delimitation Commission's Reorganization Act 2019 plans for J&K have introduced many modifications and increased the number of constituencies, as well as the first political reservation for Gujjars and Bakerwals through the Panchayati Raj Act. Various Gujjars and Bakerwals have been chosen as chairpersons of BDC and members of DDC, including women, and this has given the Gujjar community a sense of upliftment (Sharma, 2022).

4. Tourism Related Changes

One of the most noticeable changes has been the increased community participation in tourism. Tourism was not formerly an important source of income for the Gujjars. However, there has been a determined effort in recent years to develop tourism in the region, and many Gujjars have started to participate in tourist-related activities. Tourism growth has had several positive effects on the Gujjar population. It has created new revenue options and contributed to the diversification of the community's livelihoods. It has also aided in the promotion of the Gujjars' distinct culture and traditions, as well as providing a forum for cultural interaction.

This enormous influx of outside tourists will draw the attention of the government, leading to the development of transportation, communication, and infrastructure in tribal areas (Rahi, 2018).

5. From Traditional Knowledge to New Scientific Knowledge

While preserving their ancient knowledge, the Gujjars are equally open to new scientific information. They are now being trained in areas such as clean milk production, animal health, human and animal cleanliness, animal nutrition, and so on. They have also been equipped with improved reproductive and breeding strategies for their animals. They have perfected the utilization of naturally occurring herbs and shrubs for treating both human and animal illnesses, and their animal products are free of dangerous drug residues. They utilize environmentally friendly practices, and consumers pay higher rates for their milk products than market pricing, which has improved their source of income (Singh & kumar, 2017).

Conclusion

As change is a dynamic force, it has been concluded that the Gujjar Tribal society is not resistant to its effects. The Gujjar and Bakerwal communities have seen changes in different cultural and livelihood aspects such as shifting means of earning and trade, educational changes, healthcare changes, gender roles, and so on. Nonetheless, the pace of progress in the Gujjar tribal society remains steady, and they are gradually embracing modern ideals, practices, rituals, and traditions. The community, in comparison to other parts of society, faces a difficult climb and a long path to growth.

It is strongly recommended that the Forests Rights Act of 2006 be completely implemented, and that the government take corrective action to educate tribal people about the Forest Rights Act. This move will be a watershed moment in the history of Jammu and Kashmir's tribal minority. This Act would help to ensure a dignified existence for the tribal population by freeing the Gujjar Tribe from forced displacement, marginalization, and social isolation, as well as transforming the Gujjar tribe's fate in Jammu and Kashmir UT.

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Corresponding name and Email Id:

Name: Dr. keshlata

keshudeep0625@gmail.com