

# Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir: A Journey from Nomadism to Semi-Nomadism

Ms. Farhat Chowdhary, P.hD

Research Scholar, Dept. of Sociology IGNOU (New Delhi) [farhat.chowdhary@gmail.com]

---

**Abstract:** This abstract is about the exploring the journey of Nomadic Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir towards semi-nomadism. Gujjars and Bakarwals are the third largest ethnic tribe of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, they constitute more than 20 per cent of Union Territory's population and are considered a nomadic tribe. In 1991, the then Prime Minister Shri Chandra Shekhar granted Scheduled Tribe status to Gujjar and Bakarwal of J&K state. The Census 2011, shows the entire ST population of the Jammu and Kashmir state is 14, 93,299 (census, 2011). The Gujjar and Bakarwals are buffalo, sheep and goat-rearing transhumants that oscillate between high and low altitudes in the hill tracts of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh with their cattle's flocks and household goods. Their economy mainly depends on the products of their flocks and the use of natural pastures around the year. Due to the different processes brought about by modernization as well as the influence of main stream population and the growing availability of new mobility options, the customs surrounding Gujjar and Bakarwal marriages have changed in the modern era. Due to the cultural exchanges brought about by industrialization and modernization, the Gujjar and Bakarwal people now identify more with contemporary traditions, rituals, and customs—basically, non-tribal ways of living. This abstract focuses on the Gujjar and Bakarwals and the new meanings and patterns they have developed to fit their new way of life and the problems they face due to their migratory pattern.

**Keywords:** Tribals, Gujjar, Bakarwal, modernization, industrialization

---

## I. Introduction

Gujjars and Bakarwals are the third largest ethnic tribe of Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, they constitute more than 20 per cent of Union Territory's population and are considered a nomadic tribe. The Gujjar and Bakarwals are buffalo, sheep and goat-rearing transhumant that oscillate between high and low altitudes in the hill tracts of Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh with their cattle's flocks and household goods. Their economy mainly depends on the products of their flocks and the use of natural pastures around the year. Due to the different processes brought about by globalisation and the growing availability of new mobility options, the customs surrounding Gujjar and Bakarwal marriages have changed in the modern era. Due to the cultural exchanges brought about by industrialization and globalisation, the Gujjar and Bakarwal people now identify more with contemporary traditions, rituals, and customs—basically, non-tribal ways of living. Different segments of India's multifaceted society have been affected differently by the wave of globalisation in terms of their way of life, work, socio-cultural life, health, education, and cultural and religious customs. This present presentation focuses on the Gujjar and Bakarwals and the new meanings and patterns they have developed to fit their new way of life. Many Bakarwals have abandoned their ancient and once-holy profession of raising livestock due to exposure to new forms of modern culture and diminishing pastures. While some of their population have begun working as workers and others have taken up "modern" jobs like driving, the majority of them have begun to practise agricultural farming.

The Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir is situated in the northern extremity of India. The total geographical area of the UT is 222236 sq. kilometres and its neighbouring countries of Afghanistan in the north-west, Pakistan in the west and China and Tibet in the north-east. To its south lie Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, the two other states of India (Hussain, 1999). As per the census 2011, Jammu and Kashmir had a population of about 12.5 million, accounting roughly for one percent of the total population of the country. The UT infact, is a blend of several ethnic groups with different linguistic and cultural background like Kashmiris, Dogras, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis, Dard and Baltis.

In Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjar and Bakarwal tribe is stretched out in the three regions of the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. They are found in almost every district of the state but they are mostly concentrated in the districts of Poonch, Rajouri and Kathua of the Jammu province and in Kashmir valley they are mostly found in Anantnag, Badgam, Pulwama, Kulgam and Kupwara districts. Once Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru when he was at Pahalgam saw a group of Gujjar and Bakarwals along with their luggage and baggage he at once named them as "The King of Jungle".

The Gujjar and Bakarwals are sheep and goat rearing transhumants, which oscillate between high and low altitudes in the hill tracts of Jammu and Kashmir with their Revar (flocks) and household goods. Their economy mainly depends on the products of their flock and the use of natural pastures round the year. A majority of them are seen in different seasons of the year in the areas extending from Poonch to Kathua in the South, and over the Greater Himalayan ranges in the north. The pastoral nomads of Jammu and Kashmir move from pasture to pasture as per a time-tested schedule of movement determined by signals heralding a change in season. One cycle between winter and summer pastures has been termed as a 'migration orbit'. A standard orbit operates as follows. The nomads stay for about four to five months from mid-November to the end of March at their winter bases in the outer hills of the Shiwaliks. With the advent of Spring by mid-April, the tended and thatched settlements and other temporary residential structures are dismantled and leaving a deserted look, i.e., the great movement towards the summer pastures starts.

The herders remain at the alpine pastures till the beginning of autumn in early October. With the advent of autumn the reverse position of the orbit starts i.e. from the high altitude pastures to the Kashmir valley and then across the Pir-Panjal to the hibernages (winter location) in the lower foot hills where they reach by middle of November with the herders' arrival at their winter camping sites, one orbit of transhumance is completed. It may be pointed that return trip is undertaken at a much faster pace because of the advent severe winter conditions at higher altitudes. This seasonal round leads them through an 'orbit' which is repeated year after year. Thus the orbit becomes principal means of resource stabilization through movement (Khatana,2000).

In 1991, the then Prime Minister Shri Chandra Shekhar granted Scheduled Tribe status to Gujjar and Bakarwal of J&K state. The Census 2011, shows the entire ST population of the Jammu and Kashmir state is 14, 93,299 (census, 2011).

## II. Review of Literature

Ambedkar (2008) points out that the Gujjars and Bakarwals according to the historians originally belong to Rajputana region of *Gujara* (Kathiawad) and due to famine and other hostile conditions, they migrated to this area. Historians could not trace out their exact date of migration but as per 'Rajtrangani', the famous history book of ancient Kashmir they were living on the borders of Kashmir in 9th and 10th centuries. After some time they embraced Islam and later on divided into two professionally different sects of Gujjars and Bakarwals. After detailed and in depth study made by historians, anthropologists, social scientists, researchers and ethnographers the links of Gurjars or Gurjaras have been traced to the house of the Pandavas of Mahabharata. Study of India History has revealed that Gurjars played a crucial role in making and unmaking the kingdoms and principalities. Essentially a brave and hardy race, the Gurjars and Bakarwals have undertaken adventures, which won them laurels on the battleground. Their role was further facilitated by vast distribution of their population all over the subcontinent.

Khatana (1984), The Gujjar and Bakarwals are sheep and goat rearing transhumants and their economy mainly depends on the products of their flock and the use of natural pastures round the year. There are other nomadic groups of the Gujjar who are operating in the State of Jammu and Kashmir one such group comprises Gujjar Banihara or Dodhi Gujjar. The Banihara or Dodhi Gujjar, tend buffaloes and sell *dudh* (milk) and known as *dhodhi* (milkman). They reside in Bans (forests) for this reason they are also known as Banihara (the residents of forests). This classification of nomadic groups is based on the types of animals they rear for their economic pursuits. The Bakarwals tend sheep and goats where as the Baniharas rear buffaloes. The former goes from the lower altitude to higher altitude terrain of the north-western Himalayas during their annual migration. The Banihara encumbered with heavy cattle is confined within forty to sixty Kilometres in a year. So, the Baniharas are able to maintain contact with their winter pastures, and they leave their families behind but the Bakarwals on the other hand have to forget about their winter resort till they return to them again in late autumn. The Baniharas supplement their income from agriculture, the Bakarwals do it on a very minor scale. It is further found that Bakarwals also distinguish themselves as Kunhari Bakarwals and Illahiwal Bakarwals. This they derive after the name of the areas from where their ancestors migrated to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

## III. Objectives

**I have prepared this presentation on the basis of the following objectives**

The Present paper was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To examine the problems faced by the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities due to the migratory pattern of life.
- To analyse the effects of modernization on the Gujjars and Bakarwals.
- To unveil the factors responsible in shifting the tribe from nomadism to semi-nomadism/sedentraization.

#### **IV. Research Methodology**

In the Jammu Division's Rajouri district, the current study was conducted. Because the study looks into the variables and changes that contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, the research design is exploratory in nature. Non-participant observation and an interview schedule were used in the study to acquire primary data. The information from secondary sources was gathered from directories of education in Jammu, census statistics from 2011, and periodicals.

#### **V. Result / Findings**

**Education:** Frequent seasonal migration is one of the biggest hurdles in the education of Gujjar and Bakarwal community. Although Government has taken the initiative of educating the community by opening of the mobile schools but this has not been a huge success. There were respondents who informed that they had not been allotted mobile school facility yet and those who had the facility of mobile school have complaints of shortage of teachers.

The study has concluded that 96.67 per cent admitted that they are suffering in education sector because of their nomadic life. The children of Gujjar and Bakarwals cannot attend regular schools. Some of the families who have understood the quality of education want to send their wards to school but when they migrate their children become deprived of the school and this reduces the interest of the ward in education. While few families leave their one son with any relative or knowing to attend the school. They do not leave their all children behind because they need as many hands as possible for assistance during journey. Few of them have got Islamic education but here also male enjoys the privilege.

Though various governmental schemes have been offered to them, they have not been able to avail of them because of their nomadic way of life. Jammu and Kashmir Government has made the efforts to educate them including the opening of Mobile Primary Schools (MPS). Mobile schools are operating in some areas, but it is still on a small scale. The enrolment rate is good on papers but in reality most of the nomadic children are not able to take its advantage. Inefficiency of mobile schools is also because of the 25 years long conflict in the state. Other than these problems, girls face social restrictions too. Parents usually educate their sons first while girls are more encouraged and asked to learn the household chores. Girls are supposed to look after their younger siblings and perform household chores. As far as girls education is concerned Gujjar and Bakarwal do not put efforts in it because of the well dominated thought in their minds that they have to marry and go to the other home where she will be judged on her household skills. Despite all this the need to educate girls has been understood by most of the people but their conditions are not favourable for it.

**Health:** The study has found that the nomadism effects the health of Gujjar and Bakarwal. There are both positive as well as negative effects. 40 per cent of the respondents felt negative effects on health, 38.34 per cent respondents felt positive effects while 18.33 per cent of the respondents felt both the positive and negative effects of nomadism on health. Whereas, only 3.33 per cent of the respondents were of opinion that there is no effect on health.

The study has found that the older generation had experienced the positive effects on their health as they always felt comfortable with the journey, moreover, they feel fit because of the journey and mentioned that the journey was always enjoyable. But the present generation is not comfortable with the migratory pattern, they get easily tired and felt unwell most of the time on the way.

It was also found that women migrating during pregnancy are safe. 63.34 per cent of the population feels migrating of a women during pregnancy is of no issue at all. While 36.66 per cent of the respondents have objections and problems regarding it. Almost all the older generation feels it quite safe and when it causes some problem they sit and take rest or sit on a horse and after few miles they get some medicine if needed. But the present generation (youngsters) feel it to be unsafe and majority of them have been operated during delivery of the child in the local hospital. They are used to consulting doctor, however it not feasible for the new generation to migrate during pregnancy. Earlier it was commonly heard that a Bakarwal women delivers a baby while migrating. New generation is confined to medicines, especially when a woman is pregnant they do not take risks. So now the women can stay at home if they have one.

#### **Problems faced by Gujjar-Bakarwal**

- The housing type is also one of the problem for the Gujjar and Bakarwal community face because of the migration. They dismantle and rebuild their houses when the herd moves to new pastures. They face problem of sanitary arrangements.
- Gujjar and Bakarwal women are facing severe problem of sanitary arrangements. They have to go to open areas for toilets and bathing.
- Drinking water is not easily available to them, they need to fetch it from distant places and only women do this job of fetching water.

- Gujjar and Bakarwals are gradually changing their way of living. Pacca house is preferred more than tents which gives them permanent destination. The study shows that 50 per cent of the respondents have their own pacca houses (single storey with not more than two rooms) while 28.34 per cent lives in a kacha house and only 20 per cent of the respondents live under tents. A change in the residence of the community has been witnessed.

The following changes have been observed in the lifestyle and pattern of Gujjar and Bakarwals as an impact of modernization and globalization.

**Dowry:** It was found that dowry was not prevalent in earlier times, women brought a small pouch (*Guthi*) with a needle and thread in it, and (*pattu and loi*) hand knitted blankets with them in marriage. But this has been changed a lot now with the changing trend girls now bring furniture and other necessary things with them. Parents give their daughters the necessary stuff, in earlier times the necessities were simple but with the growing complexities of the world their requirements also have changed. As with the time Gujjar-Bakarwals have started living in Pacca Houses and with this there is an increase in their requirements also. It has also been observed in the study that now few families own personal vehicles like car, Bike, etc., and they are now using electronic gadgets like cooking gas, refrigerator, washing machine, rice cooker, induction heater, ceiling fan and the most common is Mobile phones. These are becoming the necessary requirements of their life and this brings change in dowry as well. But the appreciating thing that the dowry is not being demanded by the in-laws. Things used by a girl in her maternal home is being given to her in marriage.

**Dress:** It has also been observed from the study that there is a change in dressing pattern. New generation is not following their age old traditional style. Young women neither wears caps on their heads nor the traditional jewellery. They follow some of the upcoming trends. Women wear latest trendy salwar suit with chappals or leather shoes. Now the brides want to get ready like any other Punjabi girl. Boys also have started wearing Jeans and shirt.

- **Bangles:** Brides wear traditional punjabi bangles called as '*chuda*', which is not a part of their tradition.
- **Footwear:** Now they wear light weighted sandals and leather shoes while few of them wears their original footwear "jootis" and the hard plastic shoes.
- **Impact of Television:** With the time, Gujjar and Bakarwals have made pacca houses, have started using electronic gadgets or when they move to Kashmir few Gujjar-Bakarwal women work at people's home as domestic worker and watch television which has a strong impact on their minds that results in imitating the new culture and losing their own traditional identity.
- **Impact of Mobile Phones and Internet:** The use of mobile phones among the pastoral community brought a revolution. They feel connected to the rest of the world as internet connectivity is accessible to most areas, especially during winter. They use mobile phones not only for communication purposes but also to access the internet and get updated. Mobile phones have become an integral part of their lives. Men, women, boys and girls watch online fashion trends and act accordingly. Youngsters especially get influenced easily by the outer world and try copying their lifestyle, if possible.
- **Mode of Migration:** Some of the wealthy families travel via highway in their personal vehicles while their servants (*Ajris*) follow them by grazing the herds or some of the wealthiest load their cattle to the new pasture.
- **Mode of treatment:** It is found that the 25 per cent respondents use the indigenous measures whereas, 75 per cent respondents have denied their use. It is worth mentioning here that the 25 per cent population who use indigenous remedial measures also consult doctors sometimes in need.
- With this changing lifestyle the new generation of Gujjar-Bakarwals also wants to enjoy the leisure and luxurious life. The study has concluded that 65 per cent of respondents wanted to quit their nomadic life and wanted to get settled permanently. While rest 35 per cent wanted to continue their traditional lifestyle, some of them were of the view that they love their tradition. Although they want special attention from the government, they usually demand separate colonies for them and government jobs for their future generations so that they should not suffer as their present generation is suffering.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The present study has observed a change coming out of the Gujjar and Bakarwal community. The Gujjar and Bakarwal community has started assimilation with the main stream population. Some of them have been settled permanently at one of the place of migration as they were suffering from problems like lack of health and education facilities and tensions like terrorism. Most of the rest population have started living in pacca house, as few of them has made encroachments and build their permanent houses. Most of the Gujjar and Bakarwals have been changed a lot as one cannot judge their identity from their appearance. Many of them have been influenced by the main stream modernized society and changed their dressing, language while some of them have changed their occupation as well. Some of the families migrates via national highway in their personal vehicles and load their cattles in trucks from one place of migration to other and they have admitted

their children in private schools in Kashmir. They have started using electronic gadgets like mobile, television, electric heater, induction, rice cooker etc. Such changes and factors like lack of scarcity of pasture land, lack of educational facilities and lack of health facilities are the pushing factors due to which Gujjar and Bakarwal community shows a transition from nomadism to semi-nomadism. Thus they are heading towards being semi-nomadic community from being an absolute nomadic one.

### References

- [1]. Majid Hussain. 2000. Systematic Geography of Jammu and Kashmir. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- [2]. Gul, Showkeen Bilal Ahmad. 2014. 'Assessment and Understanding of Gujjar and Bakarwal Women's Health in Jammu and Kashmir', *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 3 (3).
- [3]. Khatana, R.P. 2000. 'Gujjar-Bakarwal Transhumance in Jammu and Kashmir Himalayas: Responses to Spring Migrations', in Majid Hussain (eds.): *Geography of J&K*. New Delhi: Ariana Publishing.
- [4]. Census report of India, 2011
- [5]. S.N. Ambedkar. 2008. *Gujjars and Reservation, A Socio-Economic and Political Study*. Jaipur: ABD Publishers.
- [6]. Ram Parshad Khatana. 1984. 'The Transhumance Economy of Gujjars and Bakarwals, Jammu and Kashmir', Unpublished Ph.d Thesis, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University.
- [7]. Magrey, Mohd. Bashir. 2003. *Tribal Geography of India*. Jammu: Oberio Book Service.
- [8]. Indian Census Report, 2011
- [9]. Umar Jan Sofi. 2013. 'The Sedentarization Process of the Transhumant Bakarwal Tribals of the Jammu and Kashmir', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 11 (6): 63-67.
- [10]. Anita Sharma. 2009. *The Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir, Navigating Through Nomadism*. New Delhi: Niyogi Books.