



Cultural Aspect of Gujjar Bakerwal Life in Jammu and Kashmir

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Received 29-07-2022	Abstract: <i>The Bakar Wal community, along with the Gujjar community was listed as Scheduled Tribes, in Jammu and Kashmir in the year 1991. These people mostly live as nomads and enjoy the status of being a Tribe. They are spread over a large area starting from Pir-Panjral range to Hindukush to Ladakh, located in the Himalayan mountains of South Asia. Bakerwals are mostly goat herders and shepherds, and for a cause they migrate from one place to another with their herds of goat and sheep to different seasonal pasture lands, across the valley. They are found in the entire of Kashmir region across the borders of India and Pakistan.</i>	Keywords: Nomadic life, Gujjar, Bakarwals, Upliftment, livestock, pasture lands, grazing, Jammu and Kashmir
Accepted 18-08-2022		
Published 27-08-2022	<i>They have a very unique lifestyle and are known for preserving their rich culture for ages together. Gujjars are Bakerwals are the two sub ethnic groups that are mostly goat herders and shepherds, but at the very same time, there are administrative officers in the Government, Doctors, Professors, Teachers, and Police officers, etc. that come from these communities. They are known for their noble and truthful nature and are mostly considered sympathetic towards the fellow beings. These tribal communities are a part of the rich culture of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.</i>	

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'Bakar Wal' is an occupational one, and is derived from the Gojri language words 'bakara' meaning "goat or sheep", and 'wal' meaning "one who takes care of, or has the possession". Essentially, the name "Bakar Wal" implies "high-altitude goatherds/shepherds.

The Bakarwals are an ethnic tribe, who belong to the same ethnic group, as the Gujjars, and hence inter-tribal marriages take place between the two community members. Bakarwals have clans (gotra) like Gujjars; however, "Bakarwal" is also occasionally used indiscriminately to refer to any nomadic shepherd group in the foothills, even those who may not belong to a Bakarwal community.

It was in the year 1991, in Jammu and Kashmir, when the Bakarwals were first recognized as an Indian Scheduled Tribe. As of 2001, the Bakarwal were classified as a Scheduled Tribe under the Indian Government's General Reservation Program of Positive Discrimination.

Bakarwal, along with the Gujjars are the third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, which constitutes more than 11.9% of the total population of the state, according to the Government reports. (Census, 2011). In fact, there are major numbers of Muslim tribal groups mostly in the districts of Rajouri, Poonch, Kishtwar, Doda, Kupwara and Baramulla. These two ethnic groups are the only tribal communities in the state that maintain their culture and heritage for so long, and live in the rich green eco systems of the state. They are enjoying the status of being economically "backward" as they are given

government reservations throughout the walks of life.

Bakarwal is a Pastoral nomadic community living in the forest ecosystems and pasture lands of Jammu and Kashmir, with a very little access to permanent settlements, grazing land and other resources that are required to live a life full of comforts. The term Bakarwal is derived from the word "Bakriwala", meaning goat and sheep herders, who have none other profession other than rearing their flocks and herds, in order to make their both ends meet. It is said that they originally belonged to the Gujjar stock, which are divided into three groups, namely "Settled Gujjar", "Dodhi Gujjar" and "Bakarwal". Despite some of them having permanent settlements, they often move from one altitude to another, in search of pasture for their livestock. The Jammu region of the state, for its temperature, and availability of other resources required for grazing their livestock, is considered to be their original homeland and an ideal place for settlement, for most of the seasons of the year. They are highly concentrated in Doda, Rajouri, Poonch and parts of Udhampur. Their mother tongue is Gujjari but they are also conversant in Kashmiri, Pahari, Urdu and some other spoken languages. They have the uniqueness among the ethnic groups of tribals that are maintaining their cultural tradition not only in the state of Jammu and Kashmir but wherever they are dwelling.

Gujjar and Bakarwals which comprise a special race of community and third largest ethnic group in the state, have since long time opted to live on the envious peaks. Both the communities are in possession of a very rich

cultural heritage, customs, beliefs, and social ethics. They, however, follow the same religion as most of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, i.e. either Hinduism or Islam. Yet they do have some unique religious places or shrines. They practice their religion the same way as do the other groups of individuals of the same religion. A different dress, a turban, a stick in their hand and long beards and moustaches add to the beauty of this culture. In fact, they are known for the possession of all this and they do not bother about living with some new or high profile societies and applying their culture on themselves. An old saying goes the way "while in Rome, do what Romans do", is what Gujjars and Bakerwals do not apply on themselves. This is the potential of preserving their culture that they possess. Wherever they go, they always speak the native language and teach these values to their children also. More or less, the Bakerwal community is dependent on the primary activities, i.e. rearing of animals (sheep, goat, buffaloes, cows, and horses etc.). Gujjars on the other hand are not as dependent as Bakerwals on these primary activities, as they are most permanent settlers and not nomads. Gujjars are mostly dependent on farming and their primary source of income is mostly daily wage labour hood.

Since some percentile population is involved in the Handicraft activities, but the main occupation of these tribes is rearing of animals, sheep, goat and buffalo etc. Therefore, the main economy of these tribes comes from animal rearing and dairy products, and in fact that is the asset of these tribes. Nomadic tribes Gujjar and Bakerwals are the most famous in preserving their traditional culture heritage. They maintain their life with rich culture heritage. In fact, they are very unique in cultural heritage not only in India, but also across the boundaries of nations.

LANGUAGE

Both the tribal communities of Gujjars and Bakerwals are mainly native speakers of Gojri language, in their traditional system. But they also speak Pahari language. Pahari Gujjars and Bakerwals speak only Pahari. Even though they are also familiar with other languages, like Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and Kashmiri, which they use while addressing or adhering to the native speakers, but the main language and the mother tongue of these tribal nomads is either Gojri and Pahari. They have their cultural bonds signed in

these languages, which includes folktales, stories, songs, and some other important tribal documents. In all the gatherings, they feel comfortable in listening to their native language speeches and folktales. They teach their kids and women verbally, who are not very well versed in letters and are not familiar with the shapes of words and letters.

FESTIVALS

Festivals are the occasions that are celebrated by a certain group of individuals that are from the same religion, and may sometimes adhere to the people of religion, living in a particular region. Festivals may also be cultural occasions that a particular society celebrates culturally, in order to preserve or praise a culture and to take forward the legacy of their ancestors, like the famous social "Baand dhamali" of Bijbehara in the Kashmir valley. Likewise, Gujjars and Bakerwals are celebrate all their festivals with religious fervour, like Eid, Holi, Diwali and Lohri. These tribals also take part in some social festivals that they celebrate in memory of their ancestors or some religious saints. Some of the famous social festivals of these tribals are Mela at Baba Nagri, Wangat Lar, District Ganderbal, Peer Baba Ghulam Shah at Shadra Shareef, Thanamandi Rajouri, and Peer Fateh Shah Sahib, Gool Budhan, District Reasi. All these tribal festivals are very much cultural in the ways of food and clothing.

CULTURAL TEXTS

Some of the recorded cultural books of these tribals are:

- Chunam Gojri Look Geet by Dr Javaid Rahi (1997)
- Louk Virso (folk lore) Dr Javaid Rahi (1998)
- Ghazl salony - Dr. Rafeeq Anjum (1999)
- Badlato Door - Noor Mohammad Noor
- Shaan-e-Gojri - Anonymous
- Gujjar ki Azmat- Anonymous

All these books are written by Gojri, Pahari, or Bakerwal scholars and are written in the native language. These books are famous throughout the Gojri communities for their content and literary framework. Gujjar and Bakerwal community must be thankful to these scholars whose literary works have proved very much beneficial in the promotion of Gojri and Bakerwal culture and the ways of their living.

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