

Beliefs and Practices among Indigenous Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir

Robina Akther

Research Scholar, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, Punjab

Dr Keshlata

Assistant Professor, Lovely Professional University Phagwara Punjab

Corresponding Author: **Dr Keshlata**

Abstract

According to the 2011 Census, the Gujjar and Bakarwal make up more than 11.9 percent of Jammu and Kashmir's total population, making them the third-largest ethnic groups in the state. The only group of people in the state that has preserved its culture and heritage over the years is a Scheduled Tribe. A community's and an individual's shared set of ritualistic activities and beliefs are referred to as religion. The organisation and operation of indigenous religion in both the traditional and contemporary contexts are given particular attention in this study. In this study, the Gujjar tribe of State traditional indigenous beliefs and customs are mapped. The majority Muslim Gujjars of J&K still practise ancient traditions and practises today. This research paper's major goal is to shed light on the native beliefs and customs of the Jammu and Kashmir, tribes. In this study, derivative sources of data were gathered from books, newspapers, the census, Google, and other websites. This research takes a theoretical look into the Gujjar people of Jammu and Kashmir to better understand their culture, customs, and beliefs.

Keywords: Tribes, Scheduled Tribe, Indigenous, Belief, Practices

Introduction

An estimated 350 million individuals worldwide are of indigenous descent. This is roughly five percent of the global population and represents above five thousand distinct indigenous languages and civilizations. Indigenous people make up around 8.2% of India's overall population. About 92% of the Indigenous population is thought to reside in undeveloped, forested areas with little access to even the most fundamental of resources. Indigenous people are known for their distinct cultural practices, worldviews, economic models, and political structures that set them apart from mainstream societies. Traditional indigenous civilizations maintain strong links to either their pre-settlement society or their original natural settings. Indigenous peoples can also be referred to as a "tribe," "aboriginals," "nomads," "hill people," or "hunter-gatherers." However, experts agree that Indigenous knowledge must be recorded before it can be used by researchers or incorporated into the body of scientific knowledge. Indigenous knowledge encompasses not only Indigenous Peoples but also the marginalized and the traditionally educated. Eighty percent of the world's population, according to the Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI), uses traditional medicine or practices for survival or wellness. (Farooq, 2022).

In an effort to preserve Indigenous peoples' traditions and knowledge, several academics took proactive measures. There is a great deal of information and expertise unique to indigenous peoples that has to be

documented, evaluated, understood, and preserved. According to Du and Haynes, vital knowledge of Indigenous culture is being lost with the passing of the older generation. Native Americans are very concerned about reclaiming and preserving their language and cultural traditions. Various people in various places put varying significance on the same body of indigenous knowledge. This trait is unique to a certain people or culture. It is passed down verbally, has no authority, takes into account the full individual, and has its origins in the community. Researchers without first-hand experience with Indigenous culture sometimes struggle to comprehend its complexities. According to Du et al., non-Indigenous researchers need to gain the confidence and respect of Indigenous communities before doing research in them, and once they do, they must use culturally sensitive research methodologies. Researchers need to be well prepared to communicate with the local population in a manner appropriate to their language and cultural norms. If not, it will be necessary to bring in a translator. If the locals are enthusiastic, the project has a good chance of being completed successfully. That's why it's crucial for researchers to be able to inspire and persuade their subjects while maintaining a respectful tone. A researcher has to put in a lot of time and effort, since it may take some time before the Indigenous community will support their study. (Farooq, 2022).

Both the Bakerwals and the Gujjars belong to a nomadic people group that makes its way from one settlement to another on foot. In the summer, these folks started transporting their commodities by riding their flocks to higher mountain pastures on their horses. Typical livestock owned by people of this culture include a small number of sheep, goats, horses, dogs, chickens, and donkeys. These folks have spent their whole lives caring for and selling animals. Since sheep and goats are the most common livestock among them, they are known as the Bakerwals. They have resorted to making a tent out of spare materials since they cannot afford a proper place to live. (Farooq, 2022).

Due to the State's diverse climatic conditions, the Gujjars and Bakerwals have adapted to various modes of life. It is undisputed that the Gujjars and Bakerwals people of Jammu and Kashmir have converted to Islam and that they are distinct from other populations in the area in terms of their attire, way of life, wedding ritual, and interpersonal relationships. There are several similarities between Gojri and the Rajasthani dialect and language. Bakerwals and Gujjars, two ethnic groups from Jammu and Kashmir, are tall and resemble Jews in several ways. Their clothing is more akin to the Pushtu peoples of Pakistan. The communities of Gujjars and Bakerwals each have a distinctive cultural and linguistic identity. The civilization and culture of the Gujjars and Bakerwals, as well as their varied geographic settings, are covered in this section. The diversity of their civilization must logically be explained in terms of their physical location. Considering that the Bakerwals and Gujjars peoples have long lived in isolation. By adjusting to their surroundings, they have created their own culture. Native tribal culture has been impacted recently by industrialization, urbanization, and a variety of other factors, including state-level unrest in the last two decades. (Tufail, 2014).

Table 1: Showing Distribution of Schedule Tribes and their population size in J& K State

Name of Tribes	Total Population	Percentage of Population out of whole tribal population	Percentage of population out of whole state population
Gujjars	980654	65.47	7.81
Bot	91495	6.12	0.72
Balti	51918	3.47	0.41
Bakerwal	113198	7.58	0.90
Beda	420	0.028	0.003
Brokpa	48439	3.24	0.38

Gaddi	46486	3.11	0.37
Purigpa	39101	2.61	0.31
Changpa	2661	0.17	0.02
Sippi	5966	0.39	0.04
Garra	504	0.033	0.004
Mon	829	0.055	0.006

Source: 2011 Census of India

As shown in the above table 1. There are twelve tribal communities in Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars Population is highest in number as well as in percentage among all the Schedule Tribes having 980654 number and in percentage 65.67 having 7.81% out of entire state Population. The Bakerwals are the second-largest Schedule Tribe, making up 7.58 percent of the total Schedule Tribe Population and accounting for 0.90 percent of the entire population of the state. In contrast, the Garra and Beda make only a tiny fraction of the Schedule Tribe population as a whole.

Research Objective

- To study the Religious faith of the Gujjars and Bakerwals Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir
- To study the customs of the Gujjars and Bakerwals tribes.

Methodology

This paper is mainly based on derivative data. For collection of secondary data, available literature in the form of Books, Newspaper, along with published articles and research papers has been selected.

Religion and Customs among the Gujjars and Bakerwal Peoples of Jammu and Kashmir

The Gujjars and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir are among the most spiritually regressed in the country. Jammu and Kashmir's indigenous Gujjars and Bakerwal communities have humble existences. They construct their houses from wood and mud, and then cover them with rice and wild grass. The religious sphere is the core of both Gujjars and Bakerwal social life. They assist the Maul vi in performing religious ceremonies like marriages, funerals, etc., in straightforward, faith-based manner. Despite their varied personalities, they are neither terrible nor guilty. Poverty and a lack of progress have dominated the community for too long. The Gujjars and Bakerwals live in the hills. They stand tall and hold traditional values. The Gujjars and Bakerwals are also known as "natures own children" and "lords of the forest." (Bhat, 2018).

The Bakerwal and Gujjars populations in Jammu and Kashmir State are far less developed socially than the other tribes. The Gujjars and Bakerwal people of Jammu and Kashmir continue to live in mud homes with paddy and wild grass roofs. However, some rural homes nowadays are made of bricks and stones. They go to lower-lying areas in the winter and to grassy areas in the summer. They have to worry about feeding their livestock and running their company throughout the winter. Unlike Gujjars, Bakerwal live in a more stimulating atmosphere. In contrast to the sheep and goats, which are transported on feet, they use horses for moving their possessions and trade goods. (Bhat, 2018).

Culture

Before discussing Bakerwal and Gujjars culture, it is necessary to define culture. According to Taylor, "culture" encompasses "knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, and any other skills and habits that a person learns as a member of society." His life as a Bakerwal is quite similar to that of a Gujjars in many ways, despite their very different cultures. Bakerwals, unlike Gujjars, do not retreat to higher altitudes during the warmer months. According to the legislation, Bakerwals are required to dress warmly in woolen clothes. Traditional "lunge" turbans, along with shirts and shawls, are worn by both the Gujjars and the Bakerwals. In addition, Gujjars men and boys wear a colorful turban that is wrapped in a certain way. Older Gujjars men traditionally wear a headgear known as an Afghani hat. Gujjars and Bakerwals are very skilled at showcasing their cultures via dance, religious ceremonies, and traditions. The Gujjars and Bakerwal populations in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir have a distinctive way of life, with its own set of needs and worries. The people that live here have their own distinct language and culture. (Bhat, 2018).

Festivals:

Tribal groups have celebrations all the time.. They participate in all official holidays and events. Many of the ethnic people's festivals are shared with their Muslim brothers, but some, like baisakhi, which involves lighting lamps on graves and is close to the Hindus of north India, are only enjoyed by the tribal people themselves. Festivals are a big part of the tribe community. All of the holidays they celebrate are tied to their religious views and traditions. They celebrate these holidays, which are the most significant in their culture, very joyfully. The main religious events and festivals that the tribal group commemorates include the five times a day prayers (Nimaz), Ramadan fasting, Idul-Fitar, Idul-Zaha, Idmaladul-Nabi, Baisakhi, and Naoroz. After the Baisakhi holiday is over in April, they start to move up. But since most of them stopped doing seasonal migration, the Baisakhi holiday is losing its importance in the community. This Baisakhi holiday is a big deal for tribal people, and it marks the beginning of the seasonal migration in April. During their yearly migration, they pass by a lot of holy men's shrines and graves. If someone dies during the journey, they are buried somewhere along the way. They stack stones on top of the grave, and each year as they travel this route, they light a lamp there to remember the departed. However, to express their sorrow upon the passing of a loved one, mourners at the deceased's home recite poetry from works such as C-Harfi, Soni-Mahiwal, and Saif-ul-Maluk. This procedure is repeated daily for forty days after a person dies. Most tribal people have a system of shared families. (Chowdhary et al, 2017)

Marriage practices

In the tribal society, the wedding ceremony is a social event and one of the most important social institutions, though its meaning changes a lot from one culture to the next. A common meaning of marriage says that it is "the socially sanctioned sexual relationship between two or more people of different sexes who expect their relationship to last longer than the time needed for pregnancy and the birth of children." Marriages in tribal communities are arranged between consenting adults, usually the grandparents or great-grandparents. Traditional wedding ceremonies occur at the residences of the wife and husband. Although nuclear families are less common, they do occasionally surface. The land is being passed down from dad to the boys and they're going to split it in half. Girls of tribal origin often marry elder men or man of the same age, perpetuating a societal evil that has persisted for centuries. Another social problem that persists in the state's

tribal population, especially among the poorer members of the peasants, is the habit of dowry. (Chowdhary etal, 2017)

Most tribal people don't marry people from other tribes. Instead, they get married inside their own tribe, and Gujjars families are hesitant to give their daughter to a man from another tribe or bring a girl from outside their community to marry their son. They keep their marriages and relationships with relatives inside their own group. In tribal communities, monogamy is the rule, and wedding is an significant part of how family relationships grow and stay strong. But because the native people comprise changed in the direction of Islam, they are also allowed to have more than one wife. Tribal people don't marry the kids of the same mother, foster brothers and sisters, or the offspring of their sisters or brothers. Marriages in the tribal group usually began with a ceremony to set a date and went on until the wedding. In between, there are a lot of smaller practices and customs. Some of the mainly significant marriage practices in the tribal groups, which are known locally as Matte Khunni, Matte Lane, Kapra Baterna, Lakri Tokni, etc. All of these traditions are associated with wedding preparations. There are also other wedding traditions, which people in the area call Tel, Chor Tel, or oil ceremonies. In their wedding foods, they use a lot of curd (called "Dahi") and salt. The curd is given as a gift to the family enjoying a wedding by family members and neighbors. In their language, this is called Bhaji, Temol, which means "token money." Women also enjoy the tradition of getting water, which is done by a girl who is appointed as the sister, or Dharm . The ritual's most significant moment occurs when the bridal party departs from the home of the groom and travels to the home of the bride for a reception. Behan, either the bride's or the groom's. The water is then used to clean the bride or groom. After this point, the wedding is traditionally considered to be over thanks to a practise called "Nedra," in which guests offer money to the couple. To finalize the marriage according to Islamic law, the Nikha ceremony must be performed. The bride is typically adorned with silver jewellery, including silver Dolara, silver Sargast, silver Mahail, silver Gani, silver ear-rings, silver bracelets, silver rings, and silver necklaces known as "HASEERI." The groom dons a safa waistcoat, a shirt, a shirt vest, and a shalwar. He also has a red handkerchief in his hands and the word "SEHRA" written on his forehead, which adds to his beauty and glory. At wedding parties, they read songs from books like C-Harfi, Soni-Mahiwal, Saif-ul-Maluk, Ma hiya, Gujjari bat, Phari-tappay, Gheets, etc., which keep the crowd interested. (Chowdhary etal, 2017)

Language

People of the Gujjars and Bakerwal ethnic groups in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir speak the Gujjari (Gojri) language. It is derived from Rajasthani but is heavily influenced by other languages, including Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, and Pahari. As a result of sharing a common language, Gojri, the Gujjars and Bakerwal society are in constant contact with one another. Gujjars and Bakerwals people in Jammu and Kashmir are lobbying to have their language, Gojri, added to the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution due to its extensive use across the Indian subcontinent. There are ten radio and television stations in India and Pakistan that air programming in the Gojri talking because of its popularity. People who speak Gojri are the location of Jammu and Kashmir's third largest linguistic group, behind the Kashmiri people who speak first and the Dogri people who speak second. (Bhat,2018).

Customs and Rituals

Holland claims that "tradition is a commonly observed way of conduct, "it is a style of acting that a specific group or society has had for a very long period. Different traditions and customs are still observed only because nomads closely observed the traditions and customs of the group of people in the earlier period and because they have been practised in the past. In the community, here are a number of traditions that are followed from birth to death. Islam is the predominant religion of the Gujjars and Bakerwal Community, and their daily lives are clearly influenced by Islamic traditions and way of life. The circumcision of male children,

marriage rituals, and funeral procedures are a few significant Islamic practices. They deliver food and meals from their home to the residence of the resentful during times of condolence. In order to help the family, they also sought for other modest items. (Sawhney, 2022).

Folk Games

The Bakerwal and Gujjars community are known for their respectful behaviour during sporting events. They engage in a plethora of sports, including "stone lifting," "arm holding," "pan geet," and so on. (Bhat,2018)

Dress Pattern

Despite the fact that society as a whole has evolved as a result of modernity and technological advancements, the traditional clothing styles of the Bakerwals and Gujjars have remained unchanged. Gujjars people are known for their elaborate jewels and traditional dress. Traditional women's attire consists of a white shirt among a black shalwar, a dupatta in a rainbow of colour, and a round cap embroidered with a trial run of thread. Often, a necklace will have a triangular pendant with a stunning gem set in the middle. It is used mostly to ward against misfortune, but it also has religious significance and depicts the evil eye. (Bhat,2018).

Food Habits

Most Bakerwals and Gujjars live off of milk products, cereals, wheat, and corn. People can be vegans or not. Maki ki roti, ganhar, sarsoon ka sag, lassi, kalari, etc are favourite foods of Gujjars (Bhat, 2018)

Occupation

Bakerwals and Gujjars herd livestock, goats, and even buffalo. During the summer, they moved their cattle to the upper Himalayas and returned back in the winter. There is a lack of capable employees who engage in some trade or craft. Bakerwal and Gujjars are primarily dependent on the livestock industry and its byproducts. This entire community has preserved and maintained its originality. (Bhat,2018).

Religious Practices

Even though they say they are Muslim, anthropological studies of the group show that they still believe a lot of what Hindus do. (The Indian Express). The Bakerwal and Gujjars Community's main faith practices are the five prayers, Ramadan fasting, and many more. (Tufail, 2014) It's interesting to see that the GujjarsMuslim family in J&K still use the Gotra system, and that the names of their Gotra are the same as those of Hindus. They think that their ancestors were Hindus and that they contain the similar background and blood as Hindus because of this. (Chowdhury, 2018.).

Religion hasn't changed much about the Gujjars or their connection. Gujjars still do traditional things in their homes and enjoy festivals like Baisakhi, Lori, and Goverdhan. It is important to note that Lord Krishna, Rama, and Sita, who are well-known Hindu mythological figures, are just as much a part of the belief identity of the Bakerwal Gujjars. (Warikoo, 2000) In their everyday lives, their peers (Religious Priests) hold them in the highest respect. People believe that phooks, which is a blow of breath by the friend, be able to treat all diseases in people and animals. Almost every member sports a Taweez for good luck, health, and wealth. (Sawhney, 2022).

Conclusion

The Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir have a mediocre sociological standing, yet they are a stable cultural group. Cattle raising is the main occupation of the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir. Cultural examples include nomads' dancing, religious rituals, and customs. After Kashmiri and Dogras, the Gujjars and Bakerwals make up India's third-largest racial group. Gujjars and Bakerwals continue to dress in a style that hasn't changed and is the same. Even if modernization and advancement have caused them to change. It is easy to see how Islamic traditions and rituals have influenced the manner of life of the Muslim community. The Gujjars and Bakerwal cultures have straightforward wedding rituals. Most Gujjars and Bakerwal parents favour early marriage because of widespread illiteracy, orthodoxy, the threat of being driven out, and ongoing instability brought on by militancy and related issues.

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Corresponding Email Id: keshlata.26708@lpu.co.in
kouserrobina88@gmail.com