

Cultural Aspects of the Gaddi Tribe

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the customs of the Gaddi tribe. Gaddis are predominant tribe in Himachal Pradesh and some parts of Jammu region. In this paper the Gaddis residing in the Jammu region and their customs and rituals will be discussed. The Gaddis practice transhumance and most of their rituals revolve around their way of life. In this paper we will try to evaluate primarily their marriage, death customs.

Keywords: Gaddi, Marriage, Ceremonies, Bride, Jammu, widow remarriage, death, divorce.

INTRODUCTION

Gaddi tribe is a semi nomadic tribe originally they lived in Himachal Pradesh but with time they spread to Ramban, Doda, Kishtwar and Bhadarwah areas of Jammu region. The Gaddi wedding is distinct and follows customs which are somewhat different from the customs and rituals followed in the Jammu region. The parent of the boy who is to get married sends the priests to the girl's family with wedding proposal, if the girl's family agrees to the proposal the priest, then the two of the members from the boy's family goes to the girl's house for finalising the marriage proposal.

At the wedding the first rite to be performed is Sumhurat in which lord Ganesha, Kumbh and the nine planets and Supari is purified by the mantras are rubbed on the boy. Three black woollen threads are tied on the right wrists of the boy in order to protect him the evil eye. The boy is then brought into the courtyard by his mother to bathe, while bathing the black thread of the boy is torn off and is taken inside the house again by his mother. The priests again tie the red thread on the right wrists of the boy which are called Kangana and Ghi and Gur is given to the boy to taste. A ceremony called tel-sand happens after this in which again lord Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu and the nine planets are worshipped and a he-goat is sacrificed in this ceremony and its blood being sprinkled on the Sandroi (bagar grass rope) and Munj Mala (a ring of Bagar). The Sandroi is spread around the room along the cornice and the bridegroom is made to wear white dhoti, put flour Mundras (jogi's ear rings) in his ears, sling a satchel over his shoulders, tie a black woollen rope round his chests and covers his bottom with an animal's skin, suspend a Fanani (bow for carding wool) to the black rope and take a timber stick in his right hand with a Brahmanical thread tied round his right thumb. The dress is made as to make it look like a jogi. The priests then give him the cotton Brahmanical cord to wear. The boy is then asked to go and take bath in Badri Nath, Trilok Nath and Mani Mahesha, this is done by the boy by dipping his hands and feet in a vessel and also pour some water on his face. After going through this ceremony the boy then begs before his relatives and he is given piece of bread and relatives promise him cattle's, goats according to their means. At the end of this ceremony the boy is asked whether he is interested in Jatera (worldly business) or Matera (an ascetic life) and the boy answers in favour of Jatera (worldly business) after that priests takes off his jogi clothes and all the gifts that are given to the boy by his relatives are taken by the priests.

The bridegroom is then dressed in a White Pagri (Turban) and Kuwa, a red Luancha and the White Patka with Gulbadan Suthan and a Jaul thrown over his shoulders. The bridegroom is veiled with a purified Viel (sehara) by his mother's brother, bridegroom's brother's wife puts antimony in the eyes of bridegroom. Suhag-Patari (Kharbas, Luancheri, Ghagru, Nau-Dori, Ungi, Chundi, Kangi, Manihar, three Roris of Gur, Dates, Grapes, Almonds, Rice and seven Luchis) is carried by the priest to the house of bride. The bridegroom is waved with Arti thrice from right to left over his head by the Purohit. The bridegroom then gets into Doli in the courtyard and as a ritual he is breastfed by his mother. The Palki is carried by four bearers to the bride's house.

The wedding procession on reaching the bride's house is made to sit in other place or camps out in the open air. The boy's father then performs a ritual called Batpartana in which father along with boy's uncle go to the bride's home along with basket full of round cakes. The boy's priests also go to the bride's home to give her the Barsuhi. The Barsuhi consists of white sheet (Dupatta), Lwancheri, Ghagaru, Naudori, Ungi, Kangi (comb), Chundi, three balls of Gur, Cocoa, Dates,

Grapes, Almonds, one Ser of Rice and nine Luchis, three wheat Cakes, seven Puris of Chandan Chura, Roliya, Kesar , Sandhir, Nahani, Muth and Supari. After the priest comes from bride's house then wedding procession then proceeds to the bride's home. The boy is received by the bride's mother who performs Arti over him. Then the bride's father come and places a Patka on the shoulder of boy and washes his feet. The bride is brought and made to stand at some distance from boy. The priest then makes the boy and the girl touch their shoulder thrice and it is called Chan Par Chan.

The bride and bridegroom are then made to sit down together and bride's father offers Sankalap, in which he gives away his daughter to the bridegroom and then wishes the couple's feet. Another ceremony called Kania-Dan(giving the girl away) with the proper mantras. At the end of the ceremony the girl's uncle(mother's brother) touches her wrapper with a copper coin and it is then knotted , the things in the girls hands being taken by the boy and give to the priest. The gur and ghi is then tasted and this concludes the ceremony called lagan. The boy is then brought inside the house to the Kamdeo and bride is also brought dressed in Barsuhi and both sit before the picture. The remaining seven doris of the Barsuhi are handed over to the boy by the girl's Mami (mother's sister-in-law), the bridegroom places them over the bride's head and her hair is combed and arranged with these Doris by her Mami and a song is sung:-

**Kun gori baithi sir kholi, hor
Kun baitha pith gheri,
Gaura baithi sir kholi, hor,
Isar baitha pith gheri.**

Meaning "who is that beautiful girl sitting with her hair dishevelled? Who is sitting with his back turned? Oh , Gaura is sitting with her hair uncombed, Isar (Shiva) is sitting with his back turned"

The boy's Jaul (shoulder-band) and the bride's Kharvas (sheet) are knotted together and the bride is carried by her maternal uncle to the canopy where the wedding is to be celebrated. The boy and girl are made to sit side by side on bamboo baskets and worship of nine planets, Ganesha, Brahma, and Vishnu is done. The couple walk around the sacred fire four times from right to left and the bridegroom keeps his right hand on the bride's back. After each turn both of them are made to stop near the baskets and their feet are worshipped by throwing Til, Drub, Milk and red colour etc. By the bride's father and at the end bride's brother washes the couple's feet. These four rounds are called charlai and are the binding rites in the wedding. Women sing songs in the charlai which is:-

**Pahlia lajarai phirde kuanre ,
Duja lajarian phirde isar gauraja ,
Trijia lajaria, anjan dhrir lai,
Chauthia lajaria anjan tori nahsa.**

**In the first round of the fire go bachelors,
In the second round of the lai go ishwar and gauraja,
In the third round they let the anjan drag on the ground
In the fourth round the dulha broke it and ran away.**

A sankalap is performed by the bride, bridegroom and bride's father to the recitation of mantras, bride's father then places 4copper coins and a rupee in the vessel containing water, turmeric, milk and curd and sprinkles the mixture on the baid. After this ceremony gotra-char mantras are recited in which gotra of the bride is changed into boy's gotra in which fathers of both girl and boy are made to sit in the altar and bride's father says "asmat kania, tusmat gotra" which means our girl passes to your got" and in response the girls father says "tusmat kania, asmat gotra" meaning your has come into our got. At the conclusion the bridegroom comes to the end of canopy and receives gifts (rular) from his mother-in-law and other elderly women of the house.

After the ceremonies end at the bride's house the bride is taken in the palki followed by the bridegroom, his followers and friends to his house. The arti is presented to the couple by the boy's mother and next the pair is made to worship Ganpati, the couple takes four rounds of the earther lamp (diya) and Kumbh (pot containing water),tape and bunch of pomegranate. This ceremony is called athlai (eight rounds).

Four feasts are given at the boy's house to the guests; 1st on the day of the oil ceremony; 2nd on the morning on which the procession starts to the bride's house; 3rd on the day the procession returns home, and 4th on the morning on which the bridegroom receives presents.

Another form of Gaddi wedding also happens known as bujkya in which the ceremony is gone through only at the bride's house. Another form of marriage called jhind phuh, solemnised by burning the brushwood and circumambulation of the fire eight times hand in hand, or with the bride's sheet tied to the boy's girdly. It is done in the cases where parents of the girl refuse to carry out the ceremonies of the wedding or girl elopes with the lover. No priest is needed in this type of wedding. Widow Remarriage is also permitted. The right is popularly known among them as gudani and jhanjaraja also choli-dori. In this custom the bridegroom places a Dori(tape) on the widow's head and another woman combs her head and binds her hair with the thread place on her head, a nose pin is also place on the hand of the bride by the bridegroom which she puts on as a symbol of married life. A feast is organised for the people and songs are sung divorce is also permitted and both husband, wife can separate with mutual consent and remarry but there is no special custom or provision for divorce.

The Gaddis cremate the dead in the same way as it is followed in the hindu traditions. A piece of copper is placed along with dead being as a tax of the land on which the body was burnt. While observing the days of mourning's, on tenth day the ceremony of daspindi is observed and ceremonies are performed with the help of priest, all the relatives take bath and wash their clothes on this day and other sheets and blankets which are spread out to receive the mourners are also washed and on the twelfth day at night a goat is sacrificed and given to the priest, next morning things like clothes, utensils and cash are offered on the name of deceased relative. On the last day of the mourning i.e. on fourteenth day the relatives from the wife's side or daughter-in-law's side come to the house and give the feast.

The religion of the Gaddi offers some interesting features, Gaddi tribe primarily worships lord Shiva and a popular saying is written in this direction

**Gaddi charda bhedan, Gaddin dindi dupa
Gaddi jo dinda bhedan, Gaddi jo dindi rupa,**

Which means that the Gaddis feed their flocks and offer incense to the shiva, and in return the Gaddis gets sheep. Another form of shiv worshipped by Gaddis is kailung who is a naag(serpent). He is worshipped as Shiva under the form of the drat(sickle) which is always carried by the Gaddis while shepherding the flocks. Autars are also worshipped by the Gaddis which a form of spirit of the person who had died childless, these are said to have been considered as deities as they could bring curse on the tribal population so to pacify these spirits, Gaddis worshipped them. First fruits and crops are first offered to the devta or god before being used.

The Gaddis have seven chief fairs which they celebrate with great fervour, the Basua on first Baisakh, the Patroru on first Bhadon, the Sair on first Assuj, the Lohri on first Maghand the Dholru on first Chet . The festivals are celebrated with dances and games and offering are given to deities.

The tribal population of Gaddis though with time and government intervention have started living sedimentary life but there are many among the tribes still follows the nomadic pastoral lifestyle and these people are using the same age old methods and following the old rituals, the Gaddi tribe has the lowest literacy rate according to the census of 2001 due to their pastoral lifestyle. The Gaddis form a small percentage of population, According to census of 2001, 35,765 Gaddis lived in Jammu and Kashmir.

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