

Position of Gujjar Tribe Women in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this essay is to examine the status of Gujjar women in Jammu and Kashmir during the British era. After Kashmiris and Ladakhs, the Gujjars and Bakarwals are the third-largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, making up more than 20% of the state's population. Among the nomadic pastoral tribes prevalent in Jammu and Kashmir State, the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes are the most well-known, distinctive, and significant cultural group. At the beginning of British administration in India, women's status in society was at its lowest point. During the British era, women's status was in a terrible situation.

Keywords: Gujjar tribes, Women, Jammu and Kashmir, British period

INTRODUCTION

Various communities, including Kashmiris, Dogras, Gujjars and Bakarwals, Dards, Baltis, Gaddis, and Ladakhis—some settled and some nomadic—live in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars and Bakarwals can only live in Kandi regions. The Gujjars and Bakarwals are Jammu and Kashmir's third-largest cultural group. These scheduled tribes are the most populated in the state. More over 20% of the people in Jammu and Kashmir are Gujjars, an important ethnic and linguistic community that is distributed across almost all of the state's districts. The origin of Gujjars is still up for debate.

Information must be gathered from a range of sources, including historical, anthropological, ecological, folklore, traditions, customs, place names, ethnography, etc., in order to solve the problem. The Russian origin explanation, which places their origin in Georgia, is the one that is generally recognised. In his work *A Study of the Gujjars*, professor Georgi Chogoshvili of the Georgian Academy of Science drew startling parallels between Gujjars and Georgians to support the Russian explanation of origin (1967).

The Gujjars, who are primarily Muslims, nevertheless practise ancient traditions and practises. Jammu and Kashmir's Gujjar population is thought to have originated in Rajasthan and nearby Gujarati regions. The onset of severe droughts and famines in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Kathiawar is blamed for the arrival of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir. According to a report by the tribal research and culture foundation (TRFC), a frontal organisation fighting for the cause of Indian tribes, 66 percent of the nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal population, which are scheduled tribe groups in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, are living below the poverty line. Both Gujjar groups lack access to essential services such as adequate housing, healthcare, clean water, and education.

Both historically and professionally, the Gujjars have a passion for animals. They are protected from a large group of outsiders by living close to nature. The vast majority of them live in Jammu and Kashmir's mountainous regions, which are full of picturesque dales and meadows, fascinating waterfalls, streams, and springs, as well as green gold and other natural treasures. They are forest dwellers, and the dense forest is where they live. They don't interfere with the environment or biodiversity and live in perfect peace with it. Gujjars are sometimes referred to as "lords of the woodlands" and "child-owned natures." The fundamental characteristic of all so-called "nomadic pastoral" communities is that they all depend, in one way or another, on productive nomadic pastoral activities. Their bodies have evolved to survive on such unforgiving and challenging environment.

One of the most significant geopolitical changes that occurred in the middle of the nineteenth century was the creation of Jammu and Kashmir State. This state's governmental and social structures were feudalist, just like those of other native

Indian states. Similar to British India, this northern state has almost entirely avoided adopting contemporary patterns. The State was physically composed of four regional divisions.

Even within these divisions, it was clear that some tracts had peculiar characteristics. These physical settings also had a significant impact on people's socio-religious, political, and economic lives. People in the state were entangled in a terrible web produced by social obscurantism and religious superstition. Blind convictions allowed several social issues that appeared to have a religious basis to emerge in some societal segments.

Position of Gujjar tribe women

Mostly pastoral, the Gujjar clan of the Himalayas was stunning. All through the year, they move about in search of good pastures for their cattle to graze. They used the nearby grass, leaves, and wood to construct their huts, or deras. They removed or left these huts after switching grazing areas because they were just temporary. Due to poverty, illiteracy, early marriage, superstition, and a nomadic lifestyle, the tribal Gujjar and Bakarwal women of Jammu and Kashmir lived in abject poverty.

The problems and suffering experienced by Gujjar women in Jammu and Kashmir are greater than those experienced by any other woman who is a member of one of the 12 state tribe groups. It is a well-known fact that the Gujjar women were more diligent workers than the ladies from other tribes in Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately, superstition and illiteracy continue to cast a shadow over her existence.



The Gujjar ladies were being taken advantage of. They were required to perform all home activities, including cooking, selling milk, and assisting their husbands with farming and cattle feeding. She becomes physically and mentally exhausted due to her monotonous lifestyle and long hours of work from early morning till late at night. In addition, despite her heavy workload, the nomad Gujjar women had been the target of superstitions and did not enjoy the same respect or status in the tribal society. Due to the fact that they are primarily nomads, women and girls were expected to tend to their herds throughout the day and travel vast distances while carrying their children and household goods. On their temporary stopover, they had to prepare meals, do some laundry, and pack once more for the next location. In the end, they have no time to consider their social rank at all.



They maintain a hearty vegetarian diet and work hard, which may be why they have been well-built, healthy, and long-lived. While overindulgent, their diet is healthy. It is produced with ghee, milk, and corn. The numerous Gujjars also raise cows and buffaloes. Like their fellow valley nomads, some Gujjars have sheep and goats. They offered milk and ghee for sale to the locals.

There is no specialization of jobs among the Gujjars as such as any adult can be employed for any job viz., rearing the cattle, milking, weaving and selling the products etc. Each member of the family must share responsibility.

The Gujjar and Bakkerwal wear very plain, straightforward clothing. Males dress in a shalwar-kameez combo with a waist coat, turban, and loi (blanket) slung over their shoulders. The Gujjar ladies dress in a Kurta, Suthan (churidar pyjamas), and a circular, exquisitely adorned cap as headgear. They use chaddar or khesh to cover their heads as well. a multicoloured Duppata known as Chippra and a black, rounded crown with a tail. Women's hairstyles are also distinctive in their own right. The Mindian hairstyle for ladies is made up of several plaits and takes almost a full day to weave. The most of the time, this is undone once every month to be washed and then remade into the countless beautiful braids. The Gujjar women do not adhere to the burka or pardha system to the letter, which is customary among Muslim women. Although women in the village typically wear Chappal or Gurgabi, traditional Jorra (leather footwear), also known as Jutti (shoes), is still used in isolated regions. The local Cobbler or Mochi (shoemaker) still makes them by hand. The impoverished Gujjars and Bakkerwals used to wear a unique pair of shoes called Poolan made of Prali, or waste paddy grass.

Another style of footwear is worn by underprivileged Gujjar households and is called as Kheri or tyre-ki-chappal. It protects a person from external harm caused by thorns or nails when they are ploughing.



Gujjar women were skilled at stitching, as evidenced by the fact that nearly every item in their home, kulla, or tent is heavily embroidered. The Pahari ladies love to wear silver jewellery to show off their own identity. The Gujjar and Bakkerwal ladies wear silver jewellery in the hilly, backward landscape. It features a Haseri (white kangan) neck adornment. The women furthermore don Churain (bangles), Haar (necklace), Kante (earrings), Angothi (ring), and Karre (heavy bangles). In the past, the daughter's parents would give her newlywed daughter silver ornaments. The Jhumka, Bala, Seheeri, Murki, Kanta, Tapish, Kangan, Noose-Loange, Koka or Bindi, and other nose pins are among the ear ornaments. Girls wear the smallest nose pins, called Nali, while older girls wear larger nose pins, called Terra, and married women wear massive, elaborate nose pins, called Loong, made of gold. Kungarain-wale-challe (rings with littlebells) are worn on the fingers, while a standard ring is worn on the other fingers. The silver "Dand-khurchann" or "Kungarain" jewellery, which is commonly worn by women and has tiny bells and is used to clean their teeth and ears, is also worn by them. The Dand-khurchann and Kan-Kurchann are obviously ornamental elements as well.



One of society's most significant institutions, marriage can have quite different implications depending on the culture. Marriage is often understood to be "a socially sanctioned sex connection involving two or more members of the opposite sex, whose relationship is intended to last behind the time required for gestation and childbirth." (2005) Mitchell Marriages between Gujjars and Bakarwals are arranged as adults by negotiation and the family's senior members. Consanguineous marriages are one of their marriage's distinguishing characteristics. Typically, a wedding involves a number of rituals that are performed at both the bride's and the groom's homes. The property is passed down from father to sons, who inherit it equally. (Khatana 1976) They utilise a lot of curd, or dahi, and salt in their wedding feasts. The curd is given by neighbours and family members as a token of appreciation to the wedding-celebrating home. They refer to this practise as "Bhaaji" in their regional dialect. Everyone considers it their duty to present this at the home of the wedding organisers. Within the Bakarwal fraternity, this is typical. The bride is adorned with silver jewellery such as "HASEERI" necklaces, silver bangles, silver earrings, silver chains such as "Dolara," "Sargast," "Mahail," and "Silvergani," among other pieces. In addition to a crimson handkerchief in his hands and the word "SEHRA" on his forehead, the bridegroom also dons headgear like a lungi, waistcoat, shirt, and shalwaar, which enhances his beauty and grandeur. They read poetry from works by C. Harfi, Soni Mahiwal, and Saif-ul-Maluk at wedding celebrations, captivating the audience.

To match a bridegroom, the ring ceremony, or Kurmaiye, is celebrated with great passion. Typically, the groom's side will give the bride a Phadey-bahani, which is an exchange of presents that may include a clothes ring, other jewellery, money, or both. Kurmaiye serves the purpose of half-marriage. Gujjars used to propose marriage through Nai (barbers), but with time the tradition altered and more friends and family members now follow this tradition. The parents choose the match for their child. In the Rajouri and Poonch districts, Gujjars frequently get married young.

The biggest celebration in Gujjar culture takes place during the wedding ceremony. For their sons, parents typically choose the wife. Neither the boy nor the girl may choose their partner. For most sons, the parents choose the bride; nevertheless, the tribe also frequently performed Bata-Sata marriages, or marriages through trade. It could be triangular or parallel. A and B marry each other's sisters in the triangular arrangement, whereas C and D marry each other's sisters. In the past, the practise was also common among several Rajput clans in Gujarat and Rajasthan. A man might joke around with his wife's sisters. The bride's sisters invite the bride-groom to the wedding ceremony.

The most intriguing part is that the females sit on his knees while they apply Surma (kajal) to his eyes. Only after receiving money or presents do they depart from the groom. When it comes to marriage, child marriage among Gujjars was widespread. Before a child is even born, there are situations of engagement. When a couple gets divorced, the husband used to pay the bride's fortune, and the new husband now had to pay the former husbands the same amount. Monogamy was typical; only rich tribes had two or more spouses. Divorce and remarriage were both acceptable. When a girl in a Gujjar household gets married, she receives a small dowry. Property is passed down from father to sons, who each receive an equal part. If there are no children in the family, the widow receives the property. If she marries again, however, she forfeits her right to the property, and in that case, the property is divided equally among the deceased person's brothers. The birth of a child, whether a male or a daughter, is seen as a gift from Allah, albeit husbands were not permitted in the delivery room when a son was born. Gujjar women never believed in using contraceptives of any type and thought doing so was anti-social. They feel that nobody should violate God's laws.

Abortion was never a practise, and very few women have knowledge about family planning method. After getting married, Gujjar ladies always reside at their husband's home. However, she may assert ownership over her own belongings,

including clothes, jewellery, and other valuables. Gujjar women are reluctant to talk in front of men and are discouraged from doing so. remarriage for divorced people and widows. A woman doing her everyday tasks of cleaning and doing laundry, which are frequently done in the open while conversing with other women and watching their kids.

Gujjars like other Muslims generally hold that Jannat (heaven) and Dozakh exist (hell). They held the view that the deceased are resting in their graves and will come forth on the day of judgment to receive rewards or punishment for their previous conduct.

According to Islamic law, the dead person's body is buried in a grave after death, and the family of the deceased must endure three days of crying and lamenting. Recitations from religious and softyana poetry books are read aloud during this time. The grieving family does not prepare meals during these days; instead, their neighbours feed them for three days. The Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir's customs show the impact of religion. Another significant aspect of Gujjars and Bakarwals is their customs and rituals. Custom emerges voluntarily. According to Davis, it refers to customs that have been passed down through many generations. These procedures are being followed just because they have been in the past. Most Gujjars and Bakarwals adhered carefully to the customs and traditions of the community. There are certain traditions that are followed throughout the society, from childbirth to funeral rites. Since this society is predominantly Muslim, it is clear that Islamic rites and practises have a significant impact on how they live. The circumcision of male children, marriage rituals, and funeral procedures are among significant Islamic practises. They transport meals and food from their home to the home of the victim during sympathy visits. They also provide the family with other modest items as assistance.

For them, breaking conventions is a sin against one's ancestors as well as a transgression against the societal religion. This society practises a wide variety of customs, from childbirth to funeral rites. The majority of Gujjars were Muslims, however some still practised some aspects of Hinduism. There are some Hindu Gujjars, but they are a small minority. The majority of their current ceremonies and customs are a blend of Islam and traditional tribal practises. Abortion and family planning are never performed by these people.

The most significant Islamic traditions among them are those that surround childbirth, a boy's circumcision (sunnat), marriage, and funeral procedures. The ritual of childbirth is a time of joy and gayness. When a Muslim Gujjar gives birth, the Imam (patriarch of the mosque) or another revered and devout person plays the Azaan (call to prayer) in one ear and the Takir (praise of God's majesty) in the other ear. After seven days, the infant receives his name during a ritual ceremony called an aqiqah, during which his or her head is tonsured and a goat or sheep is killed, with the flesh from the sacrificed animal being divided in thirds among the needy, friends, and family. Gujjar girls between the ages of two and six are subjected to the rites of Nabseen (the piercing of the female child's nose) and Kamseen (the piercing of the female child's ears). This was a pretty straightforward ceremony, and no feast was served.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion we have come to the point that the women of Gujjar and Bakkerwals in Jammu and Kashmir, the status and position of women were same as it was before this period. The tribal women were facing utter gender discrimination in socio-political and government organizations of Jammu And Kashmir State during the Dogra Rule.

The Gujjar and Bakarwal women were no different they too are tall and strong and have elegance about them. The sufferings of Gujjar Bakarwal women of Jammu and Kashmir is surpass the treatment meted to any other women belonging to different schedule tribe communities of the state. It is a well established fact that the Gujjar Bakarwal women were much hard working as compares to the tribal women belonging to, Bot, Balti, Mon, Changpa, Garra, Purig, Brokpa and Sippi tribes of Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately her life is still facing darkness of superstition and illiteracy.

She was quite aware of her duties and contributed her best for the betterment of the tribal society but unaware of her rights. she continues to suffer as a sacrificial goat at the hand of her family and society alike. The nomad Gujjar women had been the victim of superstitions despite her excessive work load she is not getting due respect position in tribal society. In Gujjar society where the men-folk are generally illiterate the chances of women education are quite dim and bleak.

The Gujjar Bakarwal women were gone thorough exploitations. They had to attend all the chores of the house hold from cooking to selling milk and helping their men at farming and cattle feeding. This dull life style and hardworking makes her physically as well as mentally fatigued. Gujjar Bakarwal women and girls are supposed to walk through out day with their children and house hold luggage on their back as they are mostly nomads. Ultimately they get no time even to think about their social life.

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