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Cultural And Traditional Life Of Gujjar And Bakarwal Tribes Of Jammu And Kashmir

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Abstract

India is known as the origin of several tribes and communities throughout the world. There are currently thirty Indian states and union territories with tribal populations, which are classified into 705 distinct ethnic groups. Article 342 of the Indian Constitution gives Tribal Communities specific privileges. After Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir has the second highest population of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. Gujjar and Bakarwal are the 3rd largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, accounting 11.9 percent of the state's total population. Gujjars and Bakarwals are two sub-ethnic groups of tribes that have kept their cultural traditions for a long time. They are a distinct and major ethnic group of tribes that are preserving their cultural traditions not only in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, but all over the country. Gujjars and Bakarwals are culturally different in comparison to other communities in the state. Their traditions differ from those of other ethnic groups and community in a various ways, including their habitats, degree of isolation, beliefs, customs and rituals. This research attempts to investigate the cultural and traditional practices of both Gujjar and Bakarwal.

Keywords:- *Gujjar, Bakarwals tribes, Culture, Tradition, Custom, Rituals, Festival.*

Introduction

At the global conte[1]xt, India is the home to the world's largest tribal community. The definition of tribal communities in India is mentioned under Article 342 of the Indian constitution. Primitive communities have been a separated and secluded part of society since the ancient period; their lifestyles, cultures, and traditions are vastly different from those of other social groups. One of these is the Gujjar community, which currently resides in northwest India, mostly in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. After the Kashmiri and Ladakhi communities, it is the third biggest community in Jammu & Kashmir. They contribute about 69.1% of the entire population of Jammu's Schedule Tribes.

Gujjar is a Sanskrit word that is composed of the words Gur and Ujjar. Ujjar means destroyer, while Gur means enemy. The phrase literally means "enemy destroyer." There are two different kinds of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, Zamindari Gujjars and Dodhi Gujjars. Agriculture and animal husbandry are the principal occupations of Zamindar Gujjars. Dodhi Gujjars are predominantly involved in the production of milk and dairy products. They are known for their close association with livestock, particularly cattle, and are skilled in managing herds. Bakarwal is a Jammu and Kashmir pastoral migratory community. Bakarwals are a distinct and nomadic tribal community primarily found in the Jammu and Kashmir region of India, particularly in the high-altitude areas of the Himalayas. They are known for their semi-

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nomadic or transhumant way of life, which involves seasonal migration with their livestock, primarily goats and sheep, between the lower valleys in the winter and the higher pastures in the summer. This traditional migration pattern is driven by the need to provide grazing and sustenance for their herds.

The Cultural life Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of Jammu and Kashmir

Understanding culture must be undertaken before the discussion of the Culture of Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir. B.E. Taylor's theory of culture is the one that is most widely acknowledged. "Culture is the sum total of knowledge, morals, ethics, art, tradition, and any other skills and behaviors that man has acquired as a member of society,"

The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of Jammu and Kashmir have a rich and vibrant cultural life. These indigenous communities have developed a unique cultural tapestry characterized by their close relationship with nature, livestock, and the awe-inspiring landscapes of the Himalayan region. Central to their identity is their traditional practice of transhumance, a seasonal migration that involves moving their herds of goats and sheep between different altitudes in accordance with the changing seasons. This movement not only sustains their herds but also fosters a profound connection with the land and a keen understanding of the region's ecology.

Their cultural expressions are woven into their daily lives, from the music they create to the traditional attire they wear. Music and dance are integral aspects of their cultural heritage, with melodious tunes and rhythmic movements reflecting their joy, struggles, and unity. The tribes are known for their distinctive attire, with women often adorned in vibrant, hand-embroidered clothing and men sporting traditional turbans and robes. Language, too, is a vital component of their culture, as the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have their own dialects, rooted in centuries of communication and storytelling. Religion also plays a significant role, with many members of these tribes adhering to Islam. Spiritual practices and rituals are intertwined with their daily routines, further emphasizing their cultural uniqueness. The sharing of folklore, oral traditions, and the passing down of knowledge from generation to generation are central to their cultural identity, ensuring that their history and heritage are perpetuated. In a rapidly changing world, the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of Jammu and Kashmir are working to balance the preservation of their cultural heritage with the challenges and opportunities of modern life, aiming to protect their unique identity while contributing to the cultural diversity and resilience of the region.

Fairs and Festivals

Jammu & Kashmir is known for its fairs and celebrations. Every year, the state has hundreds of fairs and festivals. The majority of ethnic holidays are religious. A significant ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, the Gujjars and Bakarwals, celebrate several fairs, fetes, and festivals. In addition to socio-cultural and regional holidays, all national festivals are observed by the community..

Eid, Urs, and Ziyarat are celebrated by Muslim Gujjars and Bakarwals. Like other Muslims, Gujjars and Bakarwals celebrate two Eids each year. Eid and Idul-Azha festivals. Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated after Ramadan. The "Festival of Sacrifice," Eid-ul-Azha, commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's offering of his son, Prophet Ismail (A.S.), as a sacrifice to follow God. Salat/Namaz, the collective prayer, is held in a spacious mosque or field on both Eids result in hugs. Parental figures offer their kids "Eidi" money on both occasions. Like other Muslims, the transhumant and nomadic Gujjars and Bakarwals visit relatives and friends to rekindle friendships. To honor their loved ones, some Gujjars and Bakarwals pay a visit to family or saint graves. Apart from these two Eids, certain Gujjars and Bakarwals also celebrate Eid-u-Milad –un-Nabi (S.A.W) in Rabi-ul-Awal, the third month of the Islamic calendar. The birth of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) is celebrated on this Eid. Naoroz, the Iranian New Year,

is celebrated by many different ethno linguistic communities across the globe. The vernal equinox marks the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. Jammu & Kashmir's Muslims observe this occasion with great religious fervor. The Gujjars and Bakarwals also celebrate this event with great flamboyance. Jammu and Kashmir has observed Naoroz as a holiday since Zain-Ul-Abidin Badshah (1420-1470 CE). Additionally, there are particular prayers and cultural activities held on this day.

Every year on the anniversary of the deaths of Muslim saints, the "Urs" (also known as Ziyarat) festival is held at their shrines. Gujjars and Bakarwals consider it their responsibility to visit the shrines of saints. Various Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes demonstrate their allegiance to the local Pirs/Saints. In Jammu and Kashmir, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities also observe Hindu festivities like Baisakhi. Baisakhi in April signaled the start of their climb. The sedentary Hindu Gujjars celebrate a variety of holidays with great religious zeal and distinctive music, cuisine, customs, and culture. Some of these holidays include Ram Navami, Rakshabhandhan, Janamashtmi, Navrata, Karvachauth, Diwali, Bhai Dooj, Lohri, Shivratri, Baisakhi, and others.

CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

The customs and rituals of the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes in Jammu and Kashmir are deeply rooted in their pastoral and nomadic way of life. These communities have a rich tradition of celebrating and commemorating important milestones within their cultural calendar. Weddings are elaborate affairs where traditional attire, music and dance play a central role. The tribes also observe religious festivals and rituals with reverence guided by their Islamic faith. However, their unique identity is also reflected in customs like the annual migration, which is a significant event marked by the collective movement of the community and its herds.

Birth

When a child is born, the religious priest (Molvi) or an elder family member places the Adhan or Azaan (a call that is often given prior to Namaz) in the newborn's ear. A sheep or goat is sacrificed, and Biradari is invited to the child's naming ceremony. The Islamic custom is known as "Akeekah." In return for Topi, Taweez, and Panyater, Gujjars present sweets, milk, lasi, curd, and Gur (Jaggery) to neighbors, family members, and friends at birth. For boys aged five or six, another rite is circumcision, known as khutna/khantal. Opinions on the appropriate timing of the boy's circumcision, however, differ. Some cultures circumcise infants a few days or weeks after they are born by barbers. On this day, some affluent Gujjar and Bakarwal families do sacrifice (Qurbani) of the sheep or goats. If a woman gives birth while traveling, the dera continues to march, with the exception of a small number of family members or housemates. A two-day stay is adequate in such case. In summer or winter pastures, other connected ceremonies and rituals are performed. 'Mundan,' or a baby's first haircut, is also celebrated by Gujjars and Bakarwals. Primarily, Mundan is executed in Saint Shrines.

Marriages

Some aspects of Gujjar and Bakarwal weddings remain distinctive. Men govern in all castes and classes, parents arrange the majority of marriages. In the past, Gujjars would ask for marriage via "Nai," or barbers. Endogamy is maintained by society and religion. The family of the bride and groom negotiate marriages. Because they detest unions with people from other tribes, consanguineous or connatural marriages are prevalent. Marriage and kinship are thus restricted to the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. Although polygamy is possible in marriage, most are monogamous. Both the bride and the groom host marriage rituals at their residences. Women may marry at the age of 15 or 16, while men can marry at the age of 18. Dowry systems were uncommon before to the 1900s. But throughout the years, this wickedness has become

worse. Most parents give goats, lambs, cows, and buffaloes as dowries. Nonetheless, spinning wheels and other household goods were often included in the dowry.

Traditionally the wedding ceremony is a vibrant and celebratory event, often lasting for several days. The marriage rituals start with the late-morning "mainyan" or "meedi kholna," or oiling ceremony. The bride's ladies visit her husband, and they alternately massage oil over her head and untangle her hair. The bride's uncle gives her hair a massage with oil while her older brother is abroad. A feast is prepared by men outside the house after the "meedi Kholna" ritual. The majority of respondents think that oil rituals are remnants of our forefathers' old customs.

The lady dresses up on her wedding day by wearing silver chains, sargast, mahail, gani, earrings, bangles, rings, and "Haseeri" necklaces. The groom is dressed in a lungi, waistcoat, shirt, red handkerchief, Shalwaar, and "Sehrah." At weddings, they enthrall the crowd with poetry recitations from books like Saif-ul-Maluk, Soni-Mahiwal, and C-harfi. Singing the Punjabi adaptation of Saif-ul-Maluk, a holy story of a fairy love with a Persian prince, had another effect on the Bakarwals. Bakarwal weddings included the story sung with grace and enthusiasm. Hennaing the bride and groom is the second centuries-old custom. The phrase "Mehndi raat" refers to this evening activities in the local language. The next day, during the wedding procession, or "baraat," the groom rides out of his home on a horse while decked out in a "Sehrah" and garlands. Traditionally, the bride would be welcomed with an extended cloth, on which one of the older men would deposit some cash and a little piece of jaggery, and the baraat would then be allowed to pass through. This ceremonial is seldom completed.

Figure:- Bridegroom and Bride of Gujjar and Bakarwal

'Buthkar' has long been a part of marriage ceremonies for the pastoral Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. According to this custom, women from the bride's side challenge the groom's friends, or "baraaties," to pull a stone weighing between 100 and 150 kg out of the bride's dera. Kumbas from previous grooms send a strong member with the baraat to carry out this task. The bride's side challenges the groom's if they are unable to hoist the stone. When this episode is over, the baraat will proceed. This ritual, albeit exciting and distinctive, is vanishing. Another

wedding custom in certain cultures is "Beni," which involves gripping the arms of someone who uses all of their might to back down.

One such exciting and unique custom is the medieval "Taman" ceremony. Similar to the "Buthkar" rite, this custom is fast disappearing. The "taman" is a piece of fabric fastened to a long pole outside the bride's house. Once again, the bride is stopped by this ritual, which also dares his "baraaties" to overthrow the "Taman." The religious priest fixes Mehr with the bride and groom's permission after arriving in the "khima," or tent, where marriage rituals take place. He recites passages from the Quran (Nikah Khutba). Following the bride's family's "rukhsati" (when she leaves home on the dooli) and serving the baraaties opulent food, the marriage is completed.

During their weddings, Gujjars and Bakarwals often give their relatives and friends salt and dahi, or yogurt. There's a lot of curd in their meals. Dahi, salt. As a present, the relatives offer the wedding party curd. This process is known by the traditional title "Bhaaji." Unlike traditional weddings, when the groom's family covers the majority of the expenses, modern marriages are equally paid. It is customary for newlyweds to lodge in a tent or tents with the husband's parents. Typically, couples start their own independent company two or three years after getting married and having kids.

Death

After switching from Hinduism to Islam, the pastoral Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir are very pious people. Their birth-to-death rituals are mostly based on Islamic Shariat. In Islamic tradition, both men and women undergo a thorough washing after passing away, known as "Gousul." The dead receives this holy wash from a family member or an expert in Islamic traditions; women who are aware of the ritual administer the sacred wash to deceased women. Following "Gousul," neighbors, family, and relations cover the body of the dead with white Kafan. In accordance with Islamic customs, Gujjars and Bakarwals bury their dead and read passages from the Qur'an on their graves. "Namaz-e-Jinazah" is said by all neighbors, friends, family, and relatives before to burial. A group of people prays this particular prayer in an open field. The funeral is brought to the "Makbar" (graveyard) for Islamic burial after Namaz-e-Jinazah. A Gujjar or Bakarwal member died during migration, are buried on along the road or close to winter Dhokes. Each year, they recite Fateh (the recitation of verses from the Qur'an) and pay respect to the departed by burning candles on their stone-marked graves. The bereaved family is traditionally fed by neighbors for three days after the death. They assist the home with little items as well. These days, this method is typical and denotes good fortune.

Spending their days reciting and singing Sufiyana and holy poetry. On the fourth day (Chehlum/Chotha) after a death, weeping subsides and family members go back to their regular lives at home. The departed soul is remembered and prayed for on the fourteenth day and the anniversary, in addition to the first four days of grieving. This event is traditionally known as Khatam or Niaz. As pastoralists, Gujjar and Bakarwal households mourn the death of a cow by holding a "siapa." Ladies cry as though they have lost a loved one.

Dress Pattern

This is understandable based on the appearance of their clothing/dresses. Bakarwals are required to wear thick woollen clothing, whilst Gujjars prefer to dress in cotton. The Bakarwals and Gujjars choose to wear a traditional headdress called a "Lungi" with a shirt and Shalwar overlaid by a waistcoat, as well as footwear that is also unique to their tribe. They have a beautiful tribal style of wearing for both men and women, with different patterns. They wear a colourful turban with a distinctive wrapping method that has become a symbol of the Gujjar indigenous community. The topi, also known as the Afghani hat, is worn by the older Gujjar males. Female Gujjars have highly increased gorgeous clothing known as Duppatta, which resembles a shawl. They enjoy jewellery as well, and the necklace with a triangular pendant

studded with a lovely stone fascinates them. It represents the 'evil eye' and is mostly used to ward against ill luck. Bakarwal Gujjar generally wear Shalwar, Qamiaz, Vaskat, Angoo and Pagheri (Headgear) whereas the women folk wear long gone named Jubo, Pheerni, Shawal, Cap and Jotti, Jora. Pagh, Qameiz, and Tehmad are worn by Dodhi Gujjar men, while the females wear a shirt with strips choridar Shalwar and Jotti.

Figure:-Costume of Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir

Food Customs

Like pastoral civilizations across the globe, the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir State are reliant on milk and milk products. In addition to milk, cereals, wheat, and maize are essential nutrients. For millennia, these societies have consumed maize bread, or maki ki roti, paired with milk from goats, buffalo, cows, or sheep. Other Bakarwal and Gujjar classics include Sarsoon ka Saag, Lassi, Karan, and Ganhar. Jammu & Kashmir's pastoral Gujjar and Bakarwal people are both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. One popular non-vegetarian dish is mutton. Most migrate seasonally, bringing with them spices, oil, and pulses to highlands and pastures. Tea is also essential to their diet. While moving, Gujjars and Bakarwals generally always have tea at each location. Anita Sharma claims that they need a lot of "Nun-Chai," or salt tea, every day. Gujjars and Bakarwals, according to Dr. Javaid Rahi, eat like Jats. Forest vegetation is also consumed, in addition to the previously stated. Important plants include Gordi, which resembles ferns, Kungi, Murkun, and Chaach, which is Bakarwals' preferred Saag. Additionally, various sizes of mouthwatering red fruits cultivated on prickly bushes known as "gurucha" are gathered. The untamed "Perth" tree, which bears black berries, is another favorite. Kanchi, a little plant with red berries that resemble pearls, is also beloved, particularly by children. They also like the red fruit known as "mewa."

Games and Amusement

Traditional games, sports, and entertainment have been a part of the social culture of the Bakarwals and the pastoral Gujjars since their arrival in Jammu and Kashmir. Even though Gujjars and Bakarwals have difficult lives, they nevertheless have fun. According to literature from the Middle Ages in Kashmir, the Gujjar and Bakarwal people of Jammu and Kashmir were avid hunters. This is a sport that older Bakarwals and Gujjars still like. Traditionally, archery, cock/bull fighting, and wrestling were popular among the Gujjars and Bakarwals. Their favorite past time has always been banjli, which involves the flute and "Algoja." Plus stone lifting (Bugdar), arm holding (Beeni Panjo), Chitto (mostly female-dominated), and Panj geet (an indoor five-kankar game). The games that kids like to play the most include "Gulail," hop-scotch, Gili Danda or Itti Tilel, and hide-and-seek. Children love to tell stories, much like people in every culture, and their devoted storytellers are often their grandparents or other senior family members.

Other entertainment

Jammu and Kashmir's Gujjar and Bakarwal communities have long amused themselves with folk music, dance, and songs. Even though the majority of this society's singing, dancing, and musical traditions come from their nomadic lifestyle, these pastimes are nonetheless vital to their social interactions. Gujjar and Bakarwal folk songs are dominated by themes of separation, which reflects their preference for odd coupledoms. Some songs are about the pain of being apart from a partner or beloved, or about hardships or crimes against them. Folk music is played during festivals and weddings. Famous and often sung Gojri folklore includes "Balo Mahiya," "Dhol Sipahi," "Noora," "Tajo," "Dheendhi," "Nathia," "Shopia," "Jangbaz," and "Chann." Another well-known traditional dance and song is "Benthe," performed by the Gujjar and Bakarwal people. The dances of Bakarwal and Gujjar seem robbed, much like their heritage. Their dance isn't full of fancy steps. Similar to singing, dancing is often done during social events like weddings. The dance, which may have been influenced by Punjabi "bangra" dance, has simple side-to-side leg motions accentuated by hands and little waist movements. Pahari and Dogri could also have an impact. Perhaps as a result of gender stereotypes and religious taboos, males dance more than women.

The Gujjar tribe has been playing instruments since ancient times. To add more flavor to their music, they borrow and perform a variety of instruments. The Gujjar tribe makes its traditional instruments out of clay, wood, and animal pelts. Popular musical instruments include the "Algoja," a flute with six or seven finger holes that is seven to eleven inches long and constructed from a single empty stem or shaft of natural bamboo called "Nagal." These Gujjar people are nomads, and they utilize this shepherd divine instrument. Additionally well-liked among Bakarwals and pastoral Gujjars is the "Jodhi/Do naal" (joined flutes). A "banjli" flute is a little flute with a length of 12 to 30 inches. It's so beloved that every Bakarwal and pastoral Gujjar has a copy of it in their pockets. The "bisli," or baked clay instrument, is another triangular pastoralist tool. "Chhung" is a single copper cable-equipped iron gadget. This musical instrument, formerly common among Bakarwals and Gujjars, is rapidly disappearing. Sufiyana Gojri poetry is sung by Gujjar artists on the "Yak-taro." The Sharnai/Tutadi and dhol/drums are also much loved by Gujjars, and those who perform them are referred to as "Mirasi".

D.K. "Mirasies," according to Maini, have long been a part of Poonch's civilization. Shepherd boys in Jammu and Kashmir State employ leaf instruments made by the Gujjar tribes for millennia in addition to the musical instruments mentioned above. They also put their fingers in their mouths and folded lips to produce tones that alert their sheep and cattle. According to the previously mentioned studies, the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Jammu and Kashmir have successfully preserved their distinct social heritage. Social norms and behaviors from the past are preserved by Gujjar and Bakarwal communities.

Conclusion

The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes of Jammu and Kashmir represent a rich and diverse cultural heritage within the region. These communities have deep-rooted traditions, customs, and ways of life that are closely tied to their pastoral and nomadic lifestyles. Despite the challenges and changes brought about by modernization, they have managed to preserve their unique cultural identity. The Gujjars and Bakarwals celebrate a variety of festivals and events, both religious and cultural, which are an integral part of their lives. These celebrations reflect the deep religious and social bonds within their communities. Their customs and rituals, from birth to death, are steeped in tradition and are governed by religious beliefs. These customs serve as a reminder of their strong connection to their faith and cultural heritage. The traditional dress patterns of the Gujjars and Bakarwals are not only practical for their lifestyles but also carry cultural significance. These attire choices, along with their unique jewelry, reflect their identity and heritage. Food customs, too, play a vital role in their lives. Their reliance on milk and dairy products, along with locally sourced foods, demonstrates their self-sufficiency and adaptation to their environment. Entertainment and recreational activities among these communities highlight their love for music, dance, and storytelling. Their traditional instruments and dances, while simple, hold a special place in their hearts.

In short, the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir have managed to maintain their cultural traditions, customs, and way of life despite the challenges of the modern world. Their unique heritage, rooted in their pastoral and nomadic lifestyles, is a testament to the resilience of these communities and the importance of preserving cultural diversity in a rapidly changing world.

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