

Social Customs of Gujjar Tribe in Jammu Region

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Abstract: *The Gujjars are a pastoral tribe of Jammu and Kashmir region, the tribe is primarily engaged in animal herding. They residing in hilly areas in summers and migrating to plain areas in winters with their livestock. The Gujjars are said to be the inhabitants of Gujarat area and with the time this tribe migrated to the other regions of the country including Jammu and Kashmir. The customs and rituals are an important part of the tribal society which helps in the better understanding of the tribal people. The paper intends to highlight the social customs followed by the Gujjar tribe.*

Keywords: Tribes, Society, Songs, Gujjars, Folk, Marriage

I. INTRODUCTION

Jammu And Kashmir State has twelve tribes recognised as scheduled tribe out of which Gujjar tribe is the most populous tribe. Gujjars are the semi-nomad tribe and they are further divided into three subgroups i.e. Gujjars, Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals. The basic difference among these subgroups is type of animals they keep and the ownership of agricultural land. A section of Gujjars who have given up their nomadic life and settled permanently by building house and practicing agriculture as well as dairy farming are known as basneeks, whereas Bakarwals still practice transhumance and seasonal migration, in the summers they go uphill along with their animals and in the winters they come to plains for the better pastures, seven routes and sub-routes have been identified for their migration which are popularly known as *gallis*.

There are various theories regarding the presence of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir. It is believed that in 9th and the 10th century, the greater part of Rajasthan which was called by the name of Gurjara Desa was attacked by the Arabs who were successfully resisted by the people of Gurjara Desa. However the Gujjars may have migrated from Rajasthan in different direction in groups and one branch may have come down towards north in the plains of Punjab. This migration may have taken place close to 9th century A.D. when the Gurjara Pratihara dynasty dominated all the northern and north-western India. Although no authentic record has been found regarding the migration of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, so it is difficult to find out that whether they were already settled here or they migrated from somewhere else it is important to note here that if they would have been a indigenous tribe there must have been some reference to them in the literature of jammu and Kashmir but the earliest reference to them could be find in the 9th century. The similarity in the gojri language and rajasthani language may point towards the assimilation of culture of two regions as gojri is classified with the Rajasthani dialect especially the Mewati language. There are few more assumption possible for the migration of the tribe in Jammu and Kashmir which could be persistent drought, insufficient grazing facilities in their original lands, increase in their population. They entered by one route or another route to seek refuge in the hills of Jammu. Stein also mentions that Shankara Varmana who was the king of Kashmir in 883A.D. after his accession undertook an expedition to the south and south west of Kashmir and first invaded Gujardesa, a tract which lies between the Chenab and Jhelum.

Since they settled in jammu and Kashmir, their social customs also evolved according to the areas they inhabited. The basic unit of social structure among the Gujjars is the *Dera* unit. A *Dera* usually comes when a person is married and wants to have independent life. There is a division of labour in these *Dera*. The Gujjars mainly live in *kullas* made from special type of grass, while Bakarwals live in temporary *doharas* and in tents. There are a class of Gujjars who are permanently settled with their cattle and have some agricultural land to depend on they call their homes as *kothas*.

Gujjars have a rich cultural heritage in terms of language, the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir have distinctive language namely Gojri which is considered to be the offshoot of indo-aryan language, having similarities with

Rajasthani dialect closer to Mewati. The men mostly wear salwar, kameez, vaskat/angoo, and paghri and the women wear long gown called jubo/ pheerni, shawal, cap and jotti/ jora. Dodhi gujjar wear pagh/ qameiz and tehmad and their ladies wear shirt with churidar salwar and jotti. The foods they eat are makki/ bajra ki roti, ganhar/ sarson ka saag, lassi, kalari. Gujjars also play many games like stone lifting (*bughdar*), arm holding (*beeni panjo*), *chitto*, this is the game played by the girls, *panj geet* it is an indoor amusement with five little stones.

Marriages are a two or three day event. The first formal procedure that indicates the wedding rites is the oiling ceremony, or *Mainyan* or *Meendi Kholna*, this ritual takes place in the late morning hours. The women boy's side visit the girl and takes turn to unbraided her hair and gently massage oil on her head. The first person to out oil in the bride's hair is her elder brother and in his absence, her uncle does the ceremony. The oiling ceremony is followed by a feast which is prepared outdoors by men of the house.

On the second day, *Mehndi Raat* is observed at both bride and bridegroom's house. Henna is applied on the palms of both the boy and girl in their respective homes in the midst of dancing and singing. During this period groom is free to move around and the bride is restricted to her *Kotha* or tent.

On third day, Baraat or wedding procession leaves for the bride's house. At a distance of about 200 to 300 metres from the groom's *dera*, the Baraat is received by a four or five elderly women who stand on the either side of the path with an outstretched cloth on which one of the elderly men would place money and small of *Gurh* (jaggery) after which the women would allow the Baraat to pass through the path. The marriage rites conducted with the consent of both the bride and groom and the amount of *mehr* (money, sheeps, goat, buffaloes) is given by the grooms family is declared. After the commencement of the Nikah-nama, the Baratis are invited for the feast.

The death rituals are observed for fourteen days among the Gujjars, most of them are practising muslim so the last rites of the dead are also according to the Islamic rituals. Stones are put on the grave of the dead and every year when they pass along the route they pay their respect to the dead by lighting a lamp on the grave. During the period of mourning recitations from religious books are recited, on fourth day (choutha) the customary mourning is lifted and the relatives return to their respective homes and fourteenth day is also observed *niaz* is observed on the anniversary.

The folk culture of Gujjars is rich with numerous folk songs, stories. Few of the songs like *kainchi*, *Boar*, *Bait*, *Mahiya*, *doli* and *sehra* songs. *Kainchi* folk song is related to the daughter of a Gujjar farmer who was very beautiful girl and her beauty was revered by the people of her area and Everyone was eager to marry her. She was married to a *munshi*. However, her husband was killed by another man who wanted to marry the girl and one day, when her husband went to a nearby forest to tend his animals, the young man, along with his companions murdered him. In the evening when her husband did not return she went in search for her husband. Upon not finding her husband in the forest she sings a song known as *kainchi* to express her sadness which continues to be a popular folk song.

II. DOLI AND SEHRA

These folk songs are sung on the eve of reception of a marriage party and departure of a bride after marriage ceremony, sitting in a palanquin (*Palki* or *Doli*) or on the eve of *Sehra Bandi* or departure of bride sitting in a decorated palanquin. These songs are usually sung by women and sometimes unmarried girls also sing these songs. Other most popular folk song is the ballad of *noora*, a warrior and it is sung during the grazing of their flocks in the pastures.

Bait is the vocal music and no kind of instrument is in it. *Bait* comprises of poetry based on love, ethos, mysticism and some glimpses of philosophy with social reformation. Generally a single or couple of singers enjoy it. Mostly the men and occasionally the women also sing *Bait*. It starts from low tone to high pitch and one piece of *bait* must be completed in four consecutive breaths.

Boar is musical description of bravery or folk heroes. The ballad includes numerous subjects which include love stories, battle stories which are sung and with great zeal. These songs are sung on occasions like marriages and festivals. Professional singers like *peiri gin* or *merasi* are well versed in playing *Sarangi*. *Noora*, *Taja*, *Jangbaz*, *Barsya*, *Mian Dholan*, *Dhendi* are some of the popular Gojri ballads.

Mahiya is a very popular type of folk song sung by different people on numerous occasions. It is vocal as well as instrumental. Some of the popular sub-types of *Mahiya* are *Tappa*, *Pholla Ni Ghulab Kiya*, *Do Paller*, *Chitli Chader*. Flute, *Dholak* and big drums like *Alghoza*, *Jori* and *Sarangi* are used for beats in *Mahiya*.

An indigenous feature of the gujjar tribe is their tribal councils popularly known as *jirga* councils which means a gathering, a public panchayat. These councils are till date valid in the tribe due to the pastoral nature of the tribe and low rate of literacy. Gujjars practice the system of *jirga* which settles the disputes within their community. The administrative system is controlled by the clan chiefs or *sardars* as they are popularly known. Each clan has their own chief each *sardar* works with the couple of informally appointed advisors or *salakars* who are consulted on all the important matters and disputes along with the elders and prominent members of the community. These *jirga* councils are considered more important in the tribe and very few cases are reported to the state administration or to the state police.

III. CONCLUSION

These traditions present a real picture of the society of the common masses, moreover the folk cult which has been discussed above may have been subjected to some change in modern times when more of the people of the Gujjar tribe are getting educated and jobs and leading sedentary life but the inner essence of the folk culture remains same which is helpful at the times when there is paucity in the written material.

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