

# Sociological Study of Socio-Cultural Conditions among the Gujjars in South Kashmir

Ishaq Ahmad Ganie\*

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Barkatullah University, Bhopal

**Abstract:** Schedule tribes do not only live in hinter lands, dense forests, bereft of basic amenities of modern life, but are economically poor, socially backward, but culturally sound. The socio-cultural changes occurring among schedule tribes of Kashmir is more than the general population of region. Their housing, sanitation, electricity, health care facilities are very low sub-standard than other sections of population. The literacy rate among schedule tribes of Kashmir is also very low. Still schedule tribes have less efforts and interest towards gaining education. J&K Gujjars who are mainly Muslims carry with itself the age old traditions and customs of prehistoric time. This paper is based on Primary as well as secondary sources of data and tries to analysis the magnitude of socio-cultural access of different parameters. At the end of this paper there are some recommendations which need to be addressed at the ground level to develop the socio-economic and cultural aspects of Gujjars of the south Kashmir.

**Key Words:** Schedule Tribes, Kashmir, Socio-Cultural, Gujjar.

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## INTRODUCTION



Picture 1

The word Gujjar is derived from the Sanskrit Gurjara – The original name of Gujarat. A fanciful version is that their name comes from gau-charana meaning ‘to graze cattle’. An equally imaginative origin in Hindi word Gajar (Carrot) from the belief that the Gujjars fed their cattle on carrots. Sanskrit dictionary compiled by Pandit Radha Kant (Shakabade 1181) explains, Gurjar= Gur (enemy)+Ujjar (destroyer). Gujjar means destroyer of the enemy. It is masculine gender. Its feminine gender is Gurjarani (Gujarani). Jammu and Kashmir has 12 Scheduled Tribes Balti, Beda, Bot, Bota, Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, and Shin. Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Gujjar, Bakerwal, Gaddi and Sippi stretch over three regions Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. In 2001 census the Schedule tribe population

from all the 12 scheduled tribes was officially recording a population of 1,105,979. The scheduled tribes account for 10.9 percent of the total population of the state and 1.3 percent of total tribal population of country. The scheduled tribes are largely rural as 95.3 percent of them inhabit in villages. Out of 12 Scheduled Tribes Gujjar is the most populous tribe having a population of 7, 63,806. Thus forming 69.1 percent of total Scheduled Tribe population. Bot is second major tribe having a population of 96,698 followed by Bakerwal 60,724 and Brokpa 51,957. Gujjar along with the three tribes constitute 88 percent of the total tribal population.

The Gujjars are one of the ancient races in India. They form the third largest majority in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and occupy an important place in the socio-economic and political life of the State. It is believed that the Gujjars in the State are not different from the Gujjars spread over in the rest of the country. Gujjars are also called “Natures own children” and “Lords of forests”. The social life of Gujjars is very much linked with the religious life. Religion plays an important role in their life, right from birth to death. The Gujjar people have their own way of life, their culture, customs as well as beliefs.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

**D. N. Mujamdar, (1955)** “The Affairs of a Tribes: A Study in Tribal Dynamics” has very rightly described the complexity of the problems of classifying the tribal people in India on the basis of racial

similarities. He said that fixing the racial origins of the tribal communities of India is one of the most complicated tasks that have been faced by Indian anthropologists.

**S. M. Dubey, (1972)**, carried a study on education, social change and political consciousness among tribes of north east India and concluded that tribes are illiterate and backward, and there is a need of creating political awareness among them.

**R.P.Khatana, (1976)** studied on marriages and kinship among Gujjar and Bakerwals in Jammu and Kashmir and concluded that these scheduled tribes marriages within the community and within the clan strictly and also studied some aspects of transhumance in mountainous traits during the year 1976.

**Quinn and Holland (1987:4)** defined culture as shared knowledge, what people must know in order to act as they do, make the things as they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way as they do. Language, on the other hand, is the set of common sounds and symbols by which individuals communicate. Both language and culture are symbolic systems. The lexemes of a language convey the meanings which in turn are representations of the cultural entities (material as well as non material).

**Javid Rahi, National Secretary of Tribal Foundation, "The Gujjar Tribe of Jammu & Kashmir", (2011)**, said that new research has proved that the Gujjar race had remained a most vibrant identity of Central Asia in BC era and later ruled over many princely states in northern India for hundreds of years and left their imprints in the Himalayan ranges and inscribed them in such a way that they could not be destroyed even after thousands of years.

**Gupta and Beg, (2012)**. Examined the socio-economic conditions of Gujjars, and they presented that tribal groups living at heartland of Himachal Pradesh and have much inclination towards religion. The main occupation of Gujjars is sheep, goat and animal rearing and they live as semi-nomadic life. The main items of their food are milk items. Socially they are backward and economically they are poor.

#### METHODOLOGY:

The data for the present paper was collected from the four districts of south Kashmir on the basis of random sampling method. Among these four districts 300 respondents were taken for study purpose to analyze the socio-economic conditions of Gujjars of south Kashmir. The major research techniques involved were interview method with a well structured interview schedule. It helped us to collect the deeper and real social facts of Gujjars. It also helped us to understand the every aspect of socio-economic and cultural life of such tribes. To get the exact information at the ground level we also conducted open and close end

interviews. The close end interviews were based on properly formulated interview schedule and the data recorded was then analyzed carefully and was formally written down.

#### Social and Cultural Aspect of Gujjars:

Mostly Gujjars depend on milk products as their staple food besides cereals, wheat and maize. They reside in mud houses which often get damaged in rain and snow. In winter season they are not able to eat sufficient food neither they receive pure drinking water. Their roads get blocked not for some days but for few weeks. Due to this they feel shortage of basic assets to live as a part of society. Govt. has launched various beneficial and welfare schemes for them but still they are lacking from basic assets. The major concern which becomes hindrance for their development is old age, unawareness about welfare schemes and illiteracy. Gujjars are great followers of religion. They have a strong faith on their religious beliefs, customs and rituals. Gujjars have a great social solidarity because they live on high altitudes where they often need to help each other, which keep them attached to each other. Govt. is trying to eradicate the poverty of Gujjars by every possible way. Due to the construction of roads, schools and health centers they have started to live a life of relief and ease.

The Gujjars are great followers of culture and they always try to preserve their cultures, customs and traditions. Even in the modern era they still follow the custom of early marriage in which girls are married at an age of 14 - 15 years and boys at 17-18 years. The Gujjars herd animals like sheep's, goats and buffalos. They usually migrate to upper parts of Himalayas along with their cattle during the summer season and back to the plains with the onset of chilly winters is one of the practices of semi-nomadic Gujjars community. Gujjars are strong in labour activities but they lack basic facilities by which there socio-economic conditions are poor as compared to other communities.

**Table 2.1: District wise Poverty rate of Schedule Tribes of South Kashmir**

S. No.	District	Rural	Urban	Total
1	Anantnag	44.86	00.00	44.86
2	Kulgam	58.47	00.00	58.47
3	Shopian	49.00	00.00	49.00
4	Pulwama	80.69	00.00	80.69

Source: BPL survey of Jammu and Kashmir 2008

Table (2.1) presents district wise poverty rate of schedule tribes in South Kashmir both for rural as well as urban areas, which shows that the highest level of poverty among schedule tribes were found in district Pulwama with 80.69 percent followed by 58.47 percent in Kulgam, 49.00 percent in Shopian

and 44.86 percent in Anantnag as per the 2011 census.

**Table 2.2: Percentage of Schedule Tribe Households with Quality of House.**

District	Kucha	Pucca
Anantnag	41.77	58.22
Kulgam	42.58	57.51
Shopian	31.21	68.78
Pulwama	23.96	76.03

Source: field survey

Table (2.2) shows the percentage of schedule tribe households with quality of house. In Pulwama district 76.03 percent of households have Pucca houses (Pucca House Includes Burnt Bricks and Concrete) followed by district Shopian 68.78 percent, Kulgam 55.51 percent and Anantnag 58.22 percent. In district Anantnag 41.77 percent of households have Kucha houses (made of mud, un-brunt bricks, grass thatch, Polythene etc.) followed by Kulgam 42.58, Shopian 31.21 and Pulwama 23.35 percent.

**Table 2.3: Percentage of Schedule Tribe Households with Quality of Water**

District	Treated Source	Untreated Source
Anantnag	18.90	81.09
Shopian	21.78	78.21
Kulgam	16.52	83.48
Pulwama	12.19	87.80

Source: field survey

The Above table (2.3) shows the percentage of households with quality of water, highest deprivation in terms of treated water is in the district Pulwama with 87.80 percent followed by Kulgam with 83.48 percent, Anantnag with 81.09 percent and Shopian 78.21 percent.

Picture 2 shows the family cooking food inside the "Kotha" and is lacking from basic amenities of house hold goods.



Picture 2

**Table.2.4: Percentage of Schedule Tribe Households of Kashmir with Basic Household Amenities**

District	Radio	T.V	Mobile	Car/Motor bike	Mean
Anantnag	53.85	3.2	22.27	0.21	21.66
Kulgam	47.86	2.03	21.68	0.15	15.89
Shopian	45.53	4.64	27.95	0.87	19.03
Pulwama	46.89	4.94	27.69	0.36	23.18

Source: field survey.

The above table shows access to special household assets like radio, television, car, motorbike, mobile phone etc. There is a low probability of access of schedule tribe households to these assets. At the district level only 15.89 percent of households have access to all these household amenities in district Kulgam followed by Shopian 19.03 percent, Anantnag 21.66 percent and Pulwama 23.18 percent. Among the given amenities lowest availability was found in vehicle and motor bike followed by T.V.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Availability of water, electricity and other basic facilities to their families is strongly recommended.
- Construction of houses and proper roads for families at earliest.
- Establishment of static and mobile schools and enrollment of all school going children in them.
- Making new empowerment schemes and making them accessible to everyone.
- Introduction of modern technology for the Gujjars who have adopted agriculture as means for livelihood.
- Providing professional skills to illiterate Gujjar men and women so as to establish their own units.
- Providing of Govt. jobs to educated Gujjar candidates.
- Providing assistance and easy term loan to Gujjars for their upliftment.
- Enhancement of seats in technical / professional institutions for Gujjar candidates.

**CONCLUSION:**

On the whole it has been observed from the given analysis that Kashmir division has the rugged topography, due to which it gives the habitation to maximum number schedule tribes of the state. Gujjars in South Kashmir are semi-nomads spread almost all the regions. As Semi-nomadic tribes they are involved in pastoralism and transhumance with their livestock's. All these schedule tribe groups are socially and economically deprived and have not basic amenities of life. They usually live in Kacha houses due to which they have to suffer during winter. Most of the people are illiterate and are lacking from educational institutions. Livestock economy of the Gujjars is managed by both men and women due to which their women population face so many health problems. They spend a pathetic life due to number of problems in their life. Need is to take immediate steps by government and other development agencies for their upliftment so that they can also live as an equal part of society.

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**Corresponding Author****Ishaq Ahmad Ganie\***

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology,  
Barkatullah University, Bhopal

E-Mail – [Ishaqshafi86@gmail.com](mailto:Ishaqshafi86@gmail.com)