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## **The Pastoral Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir State (India)**

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### **Abstract**

Nowhere else in the world has Creator been so sympathetic in showering the charm, loveliness, allure and favors as in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. As said by the 11<sup>th</sup> Century Kashmir Historian Kalhana; the things that even in heaven are difficult to find, are common here. The divine beauty of mountain peaks, meadows, lyrical streams and gardens of the State has not only attracted the invaders, kings, and saints but has attracted people from all walks of life. These lush green meadows and prairies forced various settled and nomadic pastoral communities to make this place their final destination. In the latter category the most noticeable are pastoral Gujjars. These Gujjars are a distinct people and stand apart from the rest. These Gujjars in this State have become identified separately as a sub-group on the basis of their occupation and settlements. A good population of these Gujjars from past few centuries have given up nomadic life and settled on land taking partly to cultivation.

**Keywords:** Pastoralism, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Antiquity, Sedentary etc.

### **Introduction**

The Gujjars no doubt is a fine pastoral race; Gujjars have a strong cultural identity. They have their own culture, custom, traditions folk-lore, ethnicity and five thousand year history at their back. The Gujjars form part of a massive conglomerate of tribal communities dwelling many neighboring parts of the Indian sub-continent. These pastoral communities which are being made to feel undesirable both in mountains and plains in real sense of word like settled communities has added enormously to the polity, economy, society, culture and heritage of the State since times immemorial. The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir can be broadly divided into three categories. In the first category fall those Gujjars who have adopted the sedentary mode of life, the Gujjars of this category have almost left their primitive way of life and have mixed up to great extent with the customs and traditions of the general masses of the areas where they dwell. They are also known as Muqami Gujjars. The nomadic Bakarwals (Bakar means agoat or sheep and “wal” meaning (one who takes care of) is the second category of Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir. These Gujjar-Bakarwals are the true “Gypsies” and disciples of the nature, as they are always on the move. This sect of Gujjars follows a transhumant mode. During Summer, climb up to the lush green pasturelands or meadows of Kashmir Division and during winter months they come down to the plains of Jammu region and vice-versa. It is really eye catching sight, when one sees these Gujjars trotting flocks of sheep and goats. Once Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru on the visit of Kashmir, saw a group of Gujjar and Bakarwals, he at once termed them as “The King of Jungles”. They are also termed by many as the “Nature’s own Children”. The Dodhi-Gujjars is the category of Gujjars found in the State of Jammu and Kashmir. This section of Gujjars customarily rear buffaloes and make their subsistence by selling milk and milk products. The Dodhi Gujjars don’t go beyond fifty to seventy kilometer in pursuit of grazing for their cattle but continue to have a firm base. They are also known as ‘Baniyaras’. The main differentiation among them is based on what animal one group usually keeps and whether the group has some agricultural lands or not. The Gujjar community is thus a greatest community and constitutes nearly 18% of Jammu and Kashmir State’s population and form the third largest majority after Kashmiri Muslims and the Jammu Dogras.

### **Origin of Gujjars**

The antiquity of Gujjars is obscure and blur. There are numerous theories with regard to their origin. Modern researches have evinced that the Gujjars may be the descendants of Gurjis (Georgians). While a big chunk of scholars held the view that, they are of foreign stock representing those pastoral nomads from the Steppes of Central Asia who migrated to the Subcontinent India either with the Huns or a little later; others are of the opinion that “they are the descendants of Kushans and the Yachii tribes of former Soviet Union. Yet there are other scholars who are of the opinion that they descended from original Indian stock. Intensive and extensive research alone can decipher the enigma.

### **Arrival of Gujjars**

Most of the Scholars of Anthropology, History and other allied disciplines are of the view that the ancestor's forefathers of Gujjars came to India some 1500 years ago and settled down in mountainous regions on the present border of Gujarat and Rajasthan and later traveled north to settle in areas of Punjab, Shivaliks and the present State of Jammu & Kashmir. Dr. R.P. Khattana, a renowned Historian, is also of the same view that the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir have come from Rajasthan and the neighboring areas of Gujrat and Kathiawar. There are other scholars who hold the view that the Gujjar migration to State of Jammu and Kashmir might have taken place from north Punjab, most apparently during the rule of Karkota dynasty when a large part of Punjab came under the control of Kashmir empire. In nutshell, it can be assumed that the Gujjars who are now living in the State of Jammu and Kashmir are parts of two separate migrations, one direct from the Gurjara tribes of Rajputana, Gujrat and Kathiawar, the other and later migration from the Gujjar tribes settled in Punjab.

Dr. R.P. Khattana, further offers the view that Gujjars and Bakarwals migrated to this part of the India in three different Kafilas (caravans), “According to the legends, the Gujjar Bakarwals came to inhabit these picturesque regions of Jammu and Kashmir State in the form of three major Kafilas. These Kafilas comprised many families of different Clans (Gotras/ Kabilas). The first major Kafila, according to legend marched under the command and leadership of Chirya Gorsai this first major Kafila occupied the hilly tracts of Poonch on the Pir Panjal range. A huge chunk of the member families of this Kafila have settled in and around Gorsai village in the Mendhar Valley of Poonch district. The second major Kafila of Gujjars came under the leadership of Adda Muqadam Gazi Khattana along with Chowdhary Bazi Alafkhan and set up their winter resorts on the hills around Pauni, Barakh and Reasi. With the passage of time, some of the member groups moved to the hills around Udhampur, Jammu and Kathua. In the present time and from centuries, the majority of the pastoral groups of this parent Kafila cross over the Pir Panjal range through the Banihal Pass and other passes and utilize pastures and meadows around scenic Pahalgam, Matayan, Maru and Wadwan areas for their subsistence. According to the tradition, the third and the final major Kafila came with Baba Larvi Bajran and Dadda Bagga Bajran along with Chaudhari Mehendi Khan. At present this Kafila has several smaller groups. During winters various groups of this section stay in the hills around Nowshera, Chingas, Rajouri, Mendhar, Surankote and Poonch. They too advance their summer pastures through various passes over Pir Panjal ranges. This section of Gujjars utilizes summer pastures which are located in the areas around Gurez, Machal, Naushera, Tilel, Sonamarg and Matayan regions. In short, Gujjars are not in any way indigenous, although they live in every nook and corner of the State. They are representatives of the huge semi-nomad tribe which grazes buffaloes, sheep and goats along the Himalayas and the Shivaliks. They have from some centuries turned their attention to State of Jammu and Kashmir, where they with apace make clearings of green gold (forests) and constructed their flat-topped houses (Dokas) for themselves and their poor belongings.

### **Causes of Migration**

In connection to the advent of Gujjars and Bakarwals into Jammu and Kashmir State, the Indian Census Report of 1941 observes: “The migration of a section of the Gujjar tribe to the terrain of Jammu and Kashmir State is the result of the outbreak of a severe famine in the areas inhabited by the tribe, now known as Rajputana, Gujrat and Kathiawar. However, the precise epoch of the famine has not been fixed by the historians but it is known as “Satahsiya” famine. It is stated that that some parts

of the migrating tribes moved to Punjab whilst others moved further north to the areas now known as Kangan, Swat, Hazara, Kashmir and Gilgit.

In addition to the above mentioned cause, the historians have put forward other four major reasons for settling of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, which are as:

1. The wars for throne in Gujrat and adjoining States from 7<sup>th</sup> Century onwards, resulting in fighting and exodus of Gujjars after their defeat.
2. The frequent earthquakes and intolerable secession in Gujrat, Rajasthan and neighboring States.
3. The need of new meadows and pastures for sustenance of life and cattle.
4. After embracing Islam, it was also imperative on their part to migrate to new Muslim dominated areas.

### **Distinction between Gujjars and Bakarwals**

There is no dubiety that Bakarwal is an off-shoot of the Gujjars. The Bakarwals tribe is considered by Gujjars as their Cousins. Scholars such as , Rao and Casimir are of the view that, the Bakarwals are not only 'culturally' akin to the Gujjar of the greater Punjab, Swat- Kohistan and the Kashmir area but also to Pastun, Awan and other communities further west and southwest.

Both pastoral Gujjars and Bakarwals migrate seasonally with their bands of sheep, goats, buffaloes, horses etc. but Gujjars have a poor ability for seasonal migration in comparison to Bakarwal that is why Gujjars are also referred as Semi Nomads. The Gujjars mostly rear cattle and possess small tracts of cultivable lands and Kothas(Huts) in the areas where they dwell. The Gujjars also have their own Dhars and Dhoks on the upper hills where they migrate with their herds during summer. In contrary, Bakarwals are totally nomads; they are landless and houseless and traditionally rear sheep and goats. All they own is moveable property. They usually live in poor tents during the whole course of their transverse.

### **The Problem**

The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir State have not been able to integrate in the Kashmiri society, even after thousands of years stay in the State. The distinct mode of life, language, culture, customs, food and dress seems to be an obstacle in total and willing acknowledgment by Kashmiri speaking people to grant them uninhibited integration even when there is cogent bond of common religion. It is true about the Gujjars, that they are forced to live like refugees in their own land and among their own people. This Classical tribe has little or no political say, financial security and social equality in the mainstream. In nutshell, they are ignored, discriminated, stereotyped, excluded and silenced by the aboriginals of the State.

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