



A Critical Review towards Understanding Nomadic Tribes in India: A Case Study of Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract:

Nomadic communities move from one place to another in order to earn their livelihood and are classified into three main categories: Hunter-gatherer, peripatetic and pastoral nomads. They constitute around 7% of the Indian population and consists of more than 500 different tribal communities across India (Rao and Casimir, 2003). In most of the scholarly works, the nomadic tribes are treated as homogeneous unit. Such units are then studied through anthropological gaze, highlighting their relationship with colonial and post-colonial state, dependence on nature and ecology and their relationship with other tribal and non-tribal communities. This has led to a serious lack of studies on the various dimensions within the community, as if social processes like modernity impacts them homogeneously. This paper is based on the preliminary field work done on Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, which is listed as a nomadic tribe. This paper aims to address two points. First, it attempts to provide a critical review of various methods deployed to understand nomadic tribes in India. Second, to understand the various aspects of intersectionality within the Gujjar community and its role in socio-political aspect of community. The paper explores the varied registers of their everyday life and its relationship with religion, state, and other communities in shaping their identity and politics. Among the Gujjars, it has been also observed that some segments of the community have benefitted because of the State's intervention while others are left behind. This has reconfigured the traditional understanding of politics within the community which was based on patronage and have opened new ways of socio-political mobilisation within the community. To demonstrate this the paper will explore the various ways by which different segments of the community has expressed themselves towards political move of the central government's decision to abrogate Article 370 and to grant ST status to Pahari community of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: *Nomadic Tribe, Gujjar, Ethnography, Intersectionality*

1. Introduction

Nomadic tribes in India which constitutes more than 500 communities and consist of 7% of the total population (Rao and Casimir, 2003), are one of the most marginalised sections of the society. They are commonly known as wandering people who move from one place to another to earn their livelihood. In most of the scholarly works nomadic communities are treated as homogeneous units. These units are then studied through anthropological gaze highlighting the relationship between colonial and post-colonial state, ecology, environment, culture, everyday citizenship, and their livelihood issues. My paper will critically review the various studies on the nomadic communities in India. And focuses on the ethnography of Gujjars of the Jammu and Kashmir. their history, everyday life, and the administrative problem they face in everyday life. This paper is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the introduction part which discusses about the origin and ethnography of the Gujjar community in Jammu and Kashmir, it also includes a review of various studies on nomadic communities in India. Second section deals with the methodology and focuses on the critique and limitation of ethnographic method in understanding nomadic tribes. Third part consists of preliminary data from my field work and

fourth deals with analysis followed by discussion and conclusion in last. Rao and Casimir (2003) have classified the nomadic tribes into three major types:

1. Hunter-Gatherer Nomads
2. Peripatetic or Trader Nomads
3. Pastoral Nomads

Pastoral nomads are largest in number among all the three types of nomadic tribes. They raise the herd of various type like Sheep, Cattle, Goats, Camels, Horses etc., and move to the green places with suitable pastures for their herd. The Gujjars of South-Asia belong to the pastoral nomads and follow their herds over an extensive territory in search of the seasonally available pastures on which their flock depend. Thus, their dependence on pasture pushes them to follow the processes of transhumance. It is a system of seasonal movement of people with their livestock from one elevation to another in search of pasture. As per the census 2011, Gujjars are the third largest ethnic community in the Jammu and Kashmir comprising 11.9% of the state's total population and 1.5% of the total tribal population of the country. It is said, that Gujjars belonged to the Georgia in Central-Asia which is also called as Gurijstan, where they migrated to Iran and Afghanistan and finally entered the Indus valley (Khattana, 1992). From where they started migrating towards the south, reached Gujarat, and spread to different places of India like Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Jammu Kashmir (Chauhan,2001). In Jammu and Kashmir, the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir has notified twelve tribal communities as scheduled tribes. Eight communities were given tribal status in 1989, whereas Gujjars, Gaddis, Bakerwal and Sippis were notified as scheduled tribes vide the constitution order amendment act,1991. Most of these tribes are found in Ladakh region. In Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars are spread in different regions. Gujjars have been granted schedule tribe status under Article 342 of the Indian constitution. Gujjars are the third largest ethnic community of the Jammu and Kashmir. Anthropologists have classified them into three categories that include, Dodhi Gujjars, Zamindar Gujjars and Bakerwals. Dodhi Gujjars are nomadic and transhumant, whereas zamindar Gujjars are permanently settled, practice agriculture and work as labourers to earn their livelihood. Dodhi Gujjars are engaged in animal husbandry and livestock rearing. Such as cow, sheep, and goats. Dodhi Gujjars move from one place to another in search of pasture and food. Bakerwal are a distinct group of nomads within Gujjars who are mostly goat herds. The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir speak the Gojri language, which is also added in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. Gujjars in different parts of India are recognised as Other Backward Class (OBCs), but in Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh, they are recognised as the scheduled tribes (ST). Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir are the followers of Islam, but in the rest of India, they are Hindu. Various studies on the nomadic tribes can be classified into seven major categories. These are the colonial construction and encounters, case of nomadic and de-notified tribes. Everyday citizenship and post-colonial nation-state, role of state as an agent of violence in the context of their sedentary life and culture, relation between state, ecology, economy and understanding the tribal community within it, cultural expression of the nomadic tribes that deals with micro-level case studies highlighting religious practices, encounters with great traditions, village fairs, handicrafts, tourism etc, how community life is shaped in ecological frame and development indicators and livelihood issues related with the community. Nomadic tribes in totality are taken as unit of analysis and they are treated as a homogeneous unit. Government focuses on their development issues with a focus on their culture without much attention paid on the politics of performativity. Nomadic tribes encounter with colonial perspective describes two important ways of any nomadic tribe's study how they were classified as criminal tribes and how they opposed the colonial government. Scholars like Radhakrishna (2000) in her work on the 'yerkulas' nomadic tribe of Madras presidency describe how they were sedentarized under the criminal tribe act. The author collects data through an analysis of poems that is a part of their culture even today. In another case, Bhukya (2012) discusses the Lambada's encounter with the British colonial state and their historical transition under the rule of Nizams during the colonial period. During this period, the state forced the Lambada's to abandon their longstanding occupation of cattle raising, food gathering, trading and settled down them as peasants. Thus, the lambada's continue to move with their cattle for trading and grazing purposes leading the state to associate their nomadism with the cattle. the revenue and agricultural policies introduced by the state

involved heavy exploitation that reduced Lambada's to working as labourers in the big landlords or peasant's fields. During famines, some resorted to dacoity which led the state to brand them as a criminal community. The author collects data through archives and the research shows how Lambada as a tribe became the target of state. Similarly, Singh (2021) historicizes the experiences of nomadic communities concerning their encounter with colonialism and studies the political mobilisation of nomadic tribes of Uttar Pradesh. He examines how the colonial state imposed criminal stigma on the diverse nomadic communities and how that stigma continues to haunt many nomadic communities in post-colonial period. Bokil (2002) develops a perspective towards nomadic communities after independence and finds that nomadic communities are one of the most subjugated sections of the society who have been the victim of historical dislocations, colonial legacy, and social stigma. According to him, the emergence of modern secular institutions including democracy and judiciary has not benefitted to these people either. In relation to the ecology, environment and economy, Agarwal (2004) discusses how state policies can influence property rights and market exchanges, which might impact how pastoralists activities affect the environment. Ibrahim (2004) conducted research on the Jatt pastoralists of Kachchh district of western Indian state of Gujarat and found that these nomads continue to adhere to a lifestyle that has become economically and ecologically difficult to sustain. The study by Rao and Casimir (2003) studied on the South-Asian nomads and investigates the historical framework of nomadism in South-Asia. Casimir in his article describes the nomad's relationship with the environment. Shail Mayaram (2014) investigates the problems faced by the pastoral Gujjars of Rajasthan and their political mobilisation by claiming recognition demand for scheduled tribe (ST) status to counter inequality which is historically constituted. In another work, Dutt (2004) discusses the livelihood strategies of a nomadic hunting and gathering community of eastern Rajasthan and enables an ethnographic account of the Bawaria community and understanding of their livelihood strategies especially in view of the ban on their primary occupation, hunting. He understands the nomad's relationship with different state agencies and upper caste landowners on whose land they build their semi-permanent settlements. Nomadic tribes have a variety of festival and celebrations of their own. They have their own deities. Most of the cultural practices of the nomadic tribes are closely related with their economic activities. Malhotra (1978) discusses the religious fair among a nomadic community of Maharashtra and discusses the socio-religious significance and origin of these fairs. The author collects data through ethnographic method and shows that religious beliefs and practices vary with the size and mobility of the society. In another case, Soni (2021) discusses the fair in rural areas, highlighting the mobile and dynamic flow of life and livelihood that constitute the Deccan region. He illustrates the central role fair play in the nomadic communities and the constituent role these communities play in the occurrence of these fairs in the particular and regional landscape at large.

2. Methodology

In most of the studies on nomadic tribes, scholars have used ethnography as a method of the data collection. Ethnography is the scientific description of people and cultures, with their habits, customs, and mutual differences. But it has its own critics, one of the disadvantages of ethnography is the time factor, Ethnographers need significant training in interviewing procedures, note keeping, data processing methods as well as linguistic and other skills particular to the society or community researcher wishes to investigate. This study is based on empirical investigation and involves both qualitative and quantitative data. For primary data, the researcher has travelled with the 'Gujjar' community for a period of three months during the process of transhumance from lowland to high altitude pastures. the secondary sources of data include books, articles, magazines, Newspaper, census of India reports, Reports of the National commission of the schedule castes and schedule tribes. It also includes material from various journals and online sources.

3. Fieldwork and Analysis

My field work is on the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars are listed as Nomadic tribe and constitute 11.6% of the total population of the Jammu and Kashmir (Census, 2011). They are scattered in almost each district of both the divisions of Jammu and Kashmir, and a large concentration of them are socio-

political and economically backward and mostly depends on the rearing of buffalo, sheep, and goats to earn their livelihood. A good number of Literature on the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir deals with the developmental concern that focuses on a particular aspect of their lives like education, health, livelihood, marriage, family, kinship patterns and the governmental schemes etc. Gujjars are the third largest ethnic community of Jammu and Kashmir. Anthropologists have classified them into three categories that include Dodhi Gujjars, Zamindar Gujjar and Bakerwal (Chauhan, 2001). Dodhi Gujjar are nomadic and transhumant whereas Zamindar Gujjar are permanently settled, practice agriculture and works as labourers to earn their livelihood. Dodhi Gujjars are engaged in animal husbandry and livestock rearing. such as cow, sheep, and goats. Dodhi Gujjars move from one place to another in search of pasture and food. The sub caste of Gujjar and Bakerwal are same. Some of the Gotra of Gujjar like Chauhan, chenija, chechi, bajar and Aiwan are same as of Bakerwals. When they move from one place to another their herds of sheep and cattle with families, they move sect-wise and live in pastures. Different sects of Gujjars like, Chauhan, Gegi, Chechi, Kasaana and Khatana with ten to fifteen Dera share the same 'Dhok' (high altitude pasture in summer). Gujjars often go to the 'Dhoks' in summer and returns to lowland pastures in winter. The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir have a unique cultural identity. They have a tall personality; their dress is like the Pushto people of Pakistan. Tribal culture is especially full of customs and rituals. Festivals are a part and parcel of the Gujjar community. The important festivals for their society which they celebrate with the great enthusiasm are five times Namaz in a day, Fasting in the month of Ramdhan, Idul-Fitar, Idul-Zaha, Navroz and Baisakhi. All the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are the followers of Islam by faith. The main customs of the Gujjars which are much dear to them are: the customs of child birth, circumcision of male baby. The wedding ceremony and the funeral ceremony. The needs and problems of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir are different from the other communities of the state. Most of the Gujjars live in hilly areas near forest and borderland and it becomes quite difficult for their children to have access to education. However, the state has come up with the mobile schools but they remain close for seven months in a year because of the harsh climatic conditions. It has also arranged Gujjar and Bakerwal hostels in each district of the Jammu and Kashmir where students are provided food and scholarship. The Jammu and Kashmir Radio station broadcasts Gojri cultural programme for daily one hour from Jammu and Srinagar radio station. The Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir speak the Gojri language which is added in the eighth Schedule of the Indian constitution. Gujjars in different parts of India are recognised as Other Backward Class (OBC), and are Hindu. But in Jammu and Kashmir and some other states are recognised as Scheduled Tribe (ST) and are the followers of Islam. These differences in their life and the role of religion, state, and other communities in shaping their identity and politics are to be explored. Issues like political mobilisation within the community, role of Islamization and state's role in everyday politics are to be explored. It has been observed that some Gujjar communities have been benefitted because of state's intervention while other like Pahari's are left behind. The central government move of article 370 revocation has been celebrated by the Gujjar tribals after implementation of the Forest Right Act, welcoming delimitation commission that reserve seats for Gujjar schedule tribe in state legislative assembly in Jammu and Kashmir. Recently, the central government has given reservation to the Pahari communities of the state who are not Gujjars. This step of central government has been strongly contested by the Gujjar nomads of Jammu and Kashmir and they have started a Tribal Bachao Andolan. Gujjars are protesting for not to include Sayeed, Rajput, Brahmin, and other higher caste Muslims in ST category who are not nomadic.

4. Discussion

In the above review we saw nomadic tribes encounter with colonial and post-colonial state, its relationship with state, ecology, environment, and other communities, cultural practices of nomadic tribes, role of state and various developmental issues. We find that nomadic communities are discriminated by the state and the civil society as well. Nomadic tribes are denied the basic civil rights needs which are provided by the constitution. We also discussed the various studies through which nomadic tribes have been investigated by scholars. In most of the studies, scholars have discussed the nomadic tribes through developmental perspective focussing on their daily livelihood issues like exploring the socio-economic profile of the different nomadic communities. Most of these communities

are getting sedentarized now. Scholars have treated the nomadic tribe as a distinct social category, even the definition of tribe used by scholars can be problematised as something which is administratively given and which does not pop up from concrete social reality. Different census reports of government identify nomadic tribes through different definitions like forest tribe, animists, tribal animists, or people following the tribal religion, hill and forest tribe, primitive tribe, backward tribe, and tribe. This shows that Nomadic tribes exists in space and time hardly affects them as various social processes like modernity effects them homogeneously. The following table shows how state keep changing the definition of tribe in different census reports with respect to time.

Census report, 1891	Census report, 1901	Census report, 1911	Census report, 1921	Census report, 1931	Government of India act, 1935	Census report, 1941
Forest tribe	Animists	Tribal animists or people following the tribal religion	Hill and forest tribe	Primitive tribe	Backward tribe	Tribe

5. Conclusion

At last, we can conclude that Nomadic tribes are the communities which move from one place to another to earn their livelihood. And are considered as one of the most marginalised sections of the society. They have been the victims of social stigma since colonial times and are treated as homogeneous units as the process like modernity impacts them homogeneously. Majority of the scholars have used ethnography method to understand the nomadic tribes but along with ethnography other methods like, Biographical approach, Literature as source for the social research can also be used to collect the data so that we can have a better understanding of the nomadic tribal communities.

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