



Tribes in India: Tracing the Origin of the Gujjar Community

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Abstract: India is a place with a diverse population. Homogeneity is an alien concept to Indian life. The way of life is very heterogeneous. ‘Unity in Diversity’ is the phrase most talked about in India. Tribes in India, although integral to the whole of India but diverse in their origin, culture, customary practices, everyday life, rites, rituals and occasional ceremonies that what we call a ‘tribal way of life’. Each tribe has a distinct identity, customs, traditions, culture, and way of life. India is home to a vast number of indigenous people who have remained unspoiled by contemporary life. India boasts the world's biggest number of tribal peoples. They are still featured as the most marginalized population, living in most backward and remote territories, and not enjoying the fruits of development happening in other parts of India. Their indigenous body of knowledge is still waiting to be recognized, their folks are not mainstreamed, and their origins are unexplored. This article will outline the history of the Gujjar tribes in India, with a focus on the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir.

Key Words: India, Tribe, Culture, Gujjar, Jammu and Kashmir.

INTRODUCTION

India is a place with a diverse population. Homogeneity is an alien concept to Indian life. The way of life is very heterogeneous. ‘Unity in Diversity’ is the phrase most talked about in India. India is a place with a diverse population. Homogeneity is an alien concept to Indian life. The way of life is very heterogeneous. ‘Unity in Diversity’ is the phrase most talked about in India. It is diverse in terms of religious affinity and caste structure; languages, folks, colours of festivity and culture; the geographical location of plain plains, forests, mountainous and hilly areas; Aboriginal or Arian and/or nomadic or non-nomadic population; and constitutional categories of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). India constitutes a total population of 1.21 billion (Census, 2011) divided into different categories. Scheduled Castes represent 16.6 per cent, Scheduled Tribes are 8.6 per cent (Census, 2011) and OBC is 41 per cent (NSSO, 2007). There are around 4.28 lakh castes in India (Census, 2011) out of which 1109 are the constitutional categories of Scheduled Castes (Constitution of India) and there are 705 constitutional categories of Scheduled Tribes in India (Constitution of India) as well.

Tribes in India, although integral to the whole of India but diverse in their origin, culture, customary practices, everyday life, rites, rituals and occasional ceremonies that what we call a ‘tribal way of life’. Each tribe has a distinct identity, customs, traditions, culture, and way of life. They are one of India's largest groups and are thought to be among the area's earliest settlers. As a result, their culture embodies some of the country's oldest tribal customs. India is home to a vast number of indigenous people who have remained unspoiled by contemporary life. India boasts the world's biggest number of tribal peoples. These indigenous people, sometimes known as Adivasis, are the poorest in the country, relying on hunting, agriculture, fishing and pasturing, cattle husbandry, and other subsistence activities. They are still featured as the most marginalized population, living in most backward and remote territories, and not enjoying the fruits of development happening in other parts of India. Their indigenous body of knowledge is still waiting to be recognized, their folks are not mainstreamed, and their origins are unexplored. This article will outline the history of the Gujjar tribes in India, with a focus on the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Indian subcontinent, which accounts for one-sixth of the world's population, is a diverse melting pot of cultures, languages, and genetic variation. The Indian subcontinent, together with sub-Himalayan countries and modern-day Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, is one of the earliest geographical regions inhabited by modern people and bears evidence of ancient human migratory history. Jammu and Kashmir is thought to have functioned as a route for ancient human migrations between the Indian subcontinent's mainland and North-East Asia, Eurasia, or Africa. According to Dogra's history, the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, known as the Crown of India, evolved in three stages (K.S. Singh, 2003). It was the subcontinent's window on Persia and Central Asia, absorbing influences from all over the subcontinent, the Central Asia regions, and Western Asia (ibid). It emerged early as one of the important centres of Indian culture and civilization, of the interaction of streams of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, of extraordinary creativity in spirituality, philosophy, and crafts. Immigrants were integrated into Kashmiri society. Early mediaeval groups from Central Asia, including traders, artisans, mercenaries, Sufis, and others, found sanctuary in Kashmir. It was an autonomous region dominated by the Dogra, who derived

their identity from Durga Desha and shared elements of its culture (ibid). It serves as the meeting place for several languages: Dogri, Punjabi, Gujjari, Pahari, etc. Due to its unusual geographic setting, it has a diverse environment ranging from plains to high altitudes and is home to various languages and cultural customs.

Jammu and Kashmir is home to a diverse range of tribal people that have established themselves in every possible aspect of this mountainous area (Gul & Sheikh, 2014). Twelve tribal clans have been designated as scheduled tribes in Jammu and Kashmir's constitution. According to the 2011 census, the state's Scheduled Tribes population is 11.9 per cent of the state's overall population and 1.43 per cent of the country's total tribal population (Sofi, 2014). Most of these tribes located in the state's Ladakh region. In Jammu and Kashmir, Gujjars and Bakerwals comprise the majority of STs. They live in the union territory's mountainous Kandi areas.

THE INDIAN TRIBES

India's tribal people are typically thought to be the country's oldest inhabitants. They are defined and categorised in various ways, and their numbers are estimated at various numbers. These groups, which may be found in the broad central belt starting with the Aravalli Hills in the west and running through the Dangs, MP, Bihar, Orissa, and Bengal to Assam, have been residing in the forested and hilly regions for generations. Tribes can be found in the southern Western and Eastern Ghats, the Vindhya and Satpura mountains, and the northern lower Himalayan regions.

The castes and tribes have been given many different titles in census reports, investigations, and studies of castes and tribes, including "aboriginal tribes," "primitive tribes," "tribal populations," "animists," and "Hindu tribes." In the Indian constitution, however, they are referred to as Scheduled Tribes. Scheduled Tribes are defined as "such tribes or tribal communities, or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities, as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribes for the purposes of this constitution" in the Indian Constitution to estimate their population. However, a tribe is generally defined as a collection of families that are related to one another, typically descended from a single ancestor, and who live in the same area, speak the same dialect, and share the same history. All such groupings, however, that fall under this broad definition of a tribe are not necessarily Scheduled Tribes. The tribal people can be divided into four groups: those who live in the forests, those who have become more rural, and those who have become assimilated. Although there is vague historical evidence to support their claim to be the first residents of the region, the tribal community has existed in India since the very beginning. It is to be presumed that some tribes in India may have been the original inhabitants, while other tribes may have moved into India from outside the country in the absence of concrete facts regarding their early history or subsequent migration. Over the course of many centuries, certain tribes must have moved from one region of the country to another. In his study of the Munda tribe from 1912, Sarat Chandra Roy provided an intriguing peek into the early history of typical Indian tribes. Early Aryans interacted with the tribal population. With their better religious ideals, philosophies, and modes of devotion, the Aryans clashed with other tribes and had nothing but hatred for them. The beliefs and practices of the tribal people were assimilated into the core elements of Hinduism because of the war between them and the Aryans. The rise to power of some tribal kingdoms marks the start of a new chapter in history. The wisdom, battles, conquests, and accomplishments of tribal monarchs are documented in history. Rajput suzerainty over tribal countries was eventually recognized because of numerous historical confrontations between Rajput kings and tribal monarchs. The Rajput and tribal people were joined as enemies by the Muslim conquerors.

The lives of tribes in India are unique and can be well understood in terms of their culture and language; social organization; standard of living; education; and art and culture. Religious and cultural activities, including elaborate worship, song, music, and dance, keep the tribes' lives quite busy. their vast cultural life, which includes the use of sorcery and witchcraft, faith in ghosts and demonic possession, worship of bull gods and mares, and other practices. The primary inspiration for tribal people's art appears to have been animism and the adoration of nature. Tribal worship includes ceremonial dances, the weaving of cloth, and the creation of ornaments out of wood, stone, shells, and beads. These activities showcase the tribal people's artistic ability and aesthetic sense. The murals and decorations of tribal homes are indicators of their great architectural and artistic talents; they feature paintings, drawings, and sketches using a variety of colours. In addition to expressing tribal culture through magical rites, festivals, and feasts, art also expanded from the religious to the economic and household spheres.

TRACING THE ORIGIN

To trace the origin of the Gujjar community, there are several theories and viewpoints that emerged or expressed over a long period of time. Most of the viewpoints are in believing that they are outsiders who migrated to India and through various routes came to Jammu and Kashmir. But there are counter beliefs as well who are in the opinion that they are the Indians. Some argued how the name "Gujjar" emerged, some argued for their 'historical passage' to reach what they are at present and some by tracing their origin, argued for their 'genetic affiliation'.

EMERGENCE OF THE TERM GUJJAR: Gujjar has been used in a number of different ways up to this point. After a thorough review of the Arabic and Persian historical literature, Abdul Gani Shashi presented his viewpoint. To him, Gujjars are associated with the Khizir tribe of Arabs. He claims that Khizir was renamed "Garz" then to 'Garzar' and then they are named Gujjar over time. Dr Huthi, who travelled to India from Georgia, based on oral tradition and some archaeological pieces of evidence, particularly cultural and phonetic, suggested that the word Gujar is a derivation of the term 'Gurjara' and sound like 'Gurjiya or Georgia' and later become the term 'Gurjar' and then Gujjar. Also, they are the worshippers of Lord Krishna, they were known for cow preservation called 'Gaochar' and were known as 'Gaujar' before being renamed as Gujjar. Another viewpoint is that the word Gujjar is derived from the Persian word 'Gauzar' which means bodybuilder or fighter, later they were dubbed as 'Gauzor' because they were known for their war moves and tactics and then were dubbed as Gujjar. This viewpoint is supported in the book 'Tareekh – e – Gojran' by Hafiz Abdul Haq Sialkoti (2005). The people from Grozni area of Russia were known as 'Gurozar' because they were Grozin and later become Gujjar. So, there are a number of beliefs, and some are based on pieces of evidence from where the term Gujjar emerged. By going through the available literature, the term Gujjar is associated either with the occupation they were engaged in the past or name of the tribes they are being associated with by the different writers or the similarity of the name of the places or areas they are migrated and settled here over time.

HISTORICAL PASSAGE: The views on the historical passage through which they travelled are numerous and contradictory as well. Many believe that they are the outsiders who travelled to India and then Jammu and Kashmir through different routes and to some they are indigenous people. The origin of the Gujjar community seems obscure and hazy and the authenticity of the record of their historical passage to reach to Jammu and Kashmir is under question. It is difficult to pinpoint the key elements of their migration to Jammu's hills

and Kashmir. They are believed to have left their homeland for various causes, including political or religious oppression in the Punjab plains by invaders from the West, recurrent drought, a lack of suitable grazing areas in their native territories, and population expansion, among these reasons. Gujjars arrived in Jammu and Kashmir because of devastating droughts and famines in Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Kathiawad. There is archaeological evidence that a dry spell occurred in Rajasthan and Gujarat in the sixth and seventh centuries, causing these people to flee to the pastures of the Siwaliks and the Sub-Himalayas with their cattle. The Gurjars of India are from the northwestern states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Haryana, and Punjab. This royal community is a warrior community that lives not only in India but also in Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Russia, and Iran. Gurjars are known by various names in different countries, such as 'Gujjar,' 'Gojar,' 'Gorjar,' 'Godar,' 'Gorj,' and so on.

Gujjars trace their ancestors back to the Suryavanshi Kshatriyas or Sun Dynasty and worship the deity, Rama. Historically, the Gujjars were sun worshipers who were devoted to the feet of the sun God or God Surya. J. Kennedy (1907) is in the same view and stated that the Gujjars were sun worshipers. This would suggest that the Gujjars originated in Russia, where the sun worship cult was common. A war between demons and gods is mentioned in the Ramayana. Gujjars fought demons under the command of King Dasharatha and later migrated from Mathura to Dwarka, Gujarat, with Lord Krishna. Ibetson (1883) describes the Gujjars of Punjab. "It has been suggested, and I believe it is widely held, that Jats, Gujjars, and possibly Ahirs are all of one ethnic stock; this is because of the close connection between them." W. A. Forhes states in his note on Meerut castes that the Gujjars are descended from the same root as the Jats. According to a book titled 'Harsh Chitra' written in the seventh century A.D., monarch Harsha Vardan, a Hun, was given the title of 'Garjar Praja Graha' which implies that brave Gujjars used to protect his community.

The 'Panch Tantra' written in 200 BC as mentioned by Ruskin (1982), is considered as one of the oldest books which mention the 'Gurjar Desa' in which the glorious past of the Gujjars is described. In it, it is mentioned that the golden era of the Gujjar rulers began in the fifth century and lasted until the thirteenth century, and they were at the peak of their glory in the ninth and tenth centuries. There is an inscription in the stone of Rudra Dama at Hills, Sorashtra who defeated the Yaudheyas and was given the title 'Vir' by the Kshatriyas. 'Sur Vir' appears on the lists of all Gujjar families. Thus, around this time the Vir title was the custom among the rulers of Gurja Desa. Also, according to Cunningham's Ancient Geography of India (1871) i.e., the 'Kingdom of the Gurjar', the Gurjars arrived in India with white Huns in the 476 century and were swiftly integrated into the native people as Kshatriyas. They are considered to have originated in what is now known as Georgia. Georgia is pronounced 'Gurjiya' in Persian, and Gujarat is thought to be named after them because they settled in the sixth century.

V. A. Smith (1924), in his book "The Early History of India", traces the roots of the Gujjars back to 465 A.D, when nomadic tribes of White Huns arrived in India. In his book, he claims that the Gujjars were early immigrants to the Indian subcontinent and that they may have been 'connected in blood' with the Huns, who were divided into two groups: He also discusses White Huns and Red Huns. "The White Huns moved down into the Oxus valley while attacking the Kishan Kingdom of Kabul, and then poured into India," A.R. Khan's (2002) book "Kashmir Land and People" Gujjars were the inhabitants of Georgia, a territory located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, who left their homeland under intimidation and crossed the Khyber Pass into the Indian subcontinent, settling in Gujarat before migrating to Punjab, Kanghan, Swat, Hazara, Gilgit, and the valley of Kashmir. The Anthropological Survey of India has also validated this opinion. Dr. Huthi of Georgia travelled to India in 1967 to study the Gurjars of north India. He claimed that the Indian Gujjars have Georgian tribes because their ascension, clothes, and bullock carts are identical to those of Georgians. According to him, they migrated to India during Timur's reign of terror and settled here. They migrated here to preserve their lives and religion and were known as 'Gurjis,' the Persian word for Georgians. This word was most likely transformed into Gurjar or Gujur later on, particularly in Afghanistan.

Another school of thought holds that the word "Gujjar" is derived from the Persian word "Gauzar," which signifies bodybuilder (pehalwan) or fighter. This community was dubbed Gauzor, and they were eventually dubbed Gujjars because they were recognized for their combat techniques and tactics. Another name for this community is Gadjeen. Tareekh-e-Gojran by Hafiz Abdul Haq Sialkoti also supports this point of view. There is also the belief that, due to some concerns, one community relocated from Russia's Grozni region and entered India by several routes. Because they were Grozni, who eventually became Gujjar, these people were known as Gurozar. This point of view is confirmed by the occurrence of castes in Gujjars named after Russian regions, such as Chichi Gujjars from Chechnya or Bajran Gujjars from Bajrania. In Jammu and Kashmir, these are the subcastes of the Gujjars Clan.

According to the scholar Baji Nath Puri (1957), the Gurjars lived in the Mount Abu region called Arbuda Mountain during the ancient period, which is now in Rajasthan. Inscriptions such as 'Tilakamanjari of Dhanpala' mentioned the Gurjars' connection to the peak. As early as the sixth century, the Gurjars migrated from the Arbuda Mountain region and formed one or more realms in Rajasthan and Gujarat. Prior to Mughal control, the entire or a substantial chunk of Rajasthan and Gujarat were known as Gurjaratra - a country ruled or protected by the Gurjars - or Gurjarabhumi - Gurjar land. There is another theory supported by Colonel Tort. When the Romans defeated Greece for the first time, Gracia was the community that stood up to them. The Romans referred to them as Grexie, Greece, Gruj, Gurjar, and finally Gujjar. Colonel Tort claims that Gujjars are from Greece and that the words Gujjar and Garjar are also from Greece.

Sarvari Kasana writes in his article 'Jammu Kashmir par Gujjaron ki Hakumat' about the Gujjars' acceptance of Islam. In 1301 King Ranjan chose Shah Mir, a Gujjar, as his minister who converted to Islam, as recorded in the chapter 'Kashmir of Aine - Akbari'. Dr. Cornik, an expert anthropologist stated that there is no significant difference between the faces of Gujjars and those of ancient Indian communities. The Rajtarangni reveals that the Gujjars used to rule over the Kashmir valley and the surrounding areas. According to Rajasthan history, Gujjars lived in Jammu and Kashmir from the third to the fifth century. Motilal Saqi, a Kashmiri scholar, wrote in his thesis 'Gujjar Pratihara' that Harishchandra and his three generations ruled between 550 and 640 AD.

On the other side, contrary to the theories of the migration of Gujjars and settlement therein India and Jammu and Kashmir, there are many historians who have written books on the history of Gujjars and their glory. Baij Nath Puri, a famous Indian historian in his book "The History of Gujjars and Pratiharas", K.M. Munshi in his book "The Glory that was Gujjar Desh", Rana Ali Hassan Chouhan in the book "The History of Gujjar" and Latinder Kumar Verma in the book "Gujjar Ithas" who proved that they belong to the Arian Dynasty and refuted the idea or beliefs that Gujjars are the outsiders and migrated to India and settled here.

GENETIC AFFILIATION:

The genetic affinity is presented in this article using references from the paper 'The genetic affinities of Gujjar and Ladakhi populations of India' published in the journal Nature in 2020. This study discovered the affinity and/or distance in these communities from other communities in different parts of India and communities residing in different parts of the world using various analyses such as Autosomal SNP Analysis, Autosomal STR Analysis, Y - STR Analysis, Haplogroup Analysis, and Mitochondrial DNA Analysis.

The Indian subcontinent is a one-of-a-kind melting pot of cultures, languages, and genetic variation. The Indian subcontinent, along with sub-Himalayan countries, is one of the earliest geographical regions inhabited by modern people and bears evidence of past human migratory history. Because of their geographical location, the two northernmost UTs of India, J&K and Ladakh, are thought to have functioned as a corridor for ancient human migrations between the mainland and the Indian subcontinent and North-East Asia, Eurasia, or Africa. The people of J&K and Ladakh provide a unique opportunity to investigate historical anthropological and demographic events that may have affected the current human population variety. This study attempted to investigate the genetic link of Gujjars from Jammu and Ladakh with other populations on the Indian subcontinent in this study. Gujjars live in the Indian subcontinent's north-western area, which includes the Indian states of J&K, HP, RJ, Haryana, and Gujarat, as well as neighbouring Pakistan and Afghanistan. These two populations were compared with other populations from India and around the world to gain a better understanding of their genetic affinities.

Gujjar exhibited a substantially higher genetic affinity for populations from the north Indian states of HP and RJ in the Autosomal STR analysis. When there are Gujjars. The Y - STR research revealed that Gujjars have a close genetic kinship to Afghan and Pakistani populations. The PCoA analysis found that the Gujjars were genetically distant from all other populations except Pashtuns from Afghanistan's Baghlan and Kunduz regions and Pashtuns from Pakistan.

Gujjars and Pashtuns were discovered to be closely related to Sindhis from Pakistan. GJ had a strong sympathy for nomadic populations in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as Sindhis in Pakistan. Also emphasized the patrilineal closeness of the Gujjar population to them. According to the previous study, the Gujjars of Pakistan, often known as the Pashtuns, practice a high level of endogamy. Because of their nomadic lifestyle, tracing their migration route and relatedness to other nearby cultures would provide a glimpse of their past trajectory. The genetic connection of Gujjars to Pashtuns, as well as their shared nomadic cultural practices, suggest that Gujjars and Pashtuns were formerly genetically connected, which may have been followed by migratory events that led to separation. This study also discovered that Gujjars are more closely related to Central Asian groups.

LIFE AT PRESENT

The Gujjars are a well-known semi-nomadic pastoral population that may be found in Srinagar, Anantnag, Pulwama, Doda, Kishtwar, Jammu, and other districts of Jammu and Kashmir. The Pir Panjal and Himalayan Ranges surround the steep terrain. In J&K, they are classified as Scheduled Tribes. The Gujjar language is known as Gojri. They dress in Dastar or long turbans, salwar and kameez, and have beards that serve as identity identifiers. Women cover their heads with a particular cap or topi. Gujjars are mostly non-vegetarians, but they consume a lot of milk and milk products since they always have enough buffaloes, which is their major activity and the mainstay of their economy. They continue to wander from low to high and high to low altitude hills in search of pastures for their buffaloes, which are the foundation of their economy. Pastoralism is their traditional vocation, although they are gradually diversifying into other fields such as business, government, and private sector jobs, and even defence services. They make most of their money from the selling of milk and milk products. The Zamindar Gujjars work in agriculture as well as animal husbandry. The Muslim Gujjars are separated into exogamous groups such as Kasana, Chechi, Padhana, Lodha, and so on. Women have equal standing among the Gujjars and play prominent roles in the economic, social, and religious sectors of life. They continue to work in the household, milking animals, collecting firewood and grain, and delivering portable water. In addition to controlling family expenditure, they contribute to family income through engaging in productive employment. The Gujjars have their own biradari panchayat to settle community conflicts.

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