

## **Ethno-archaeological Approach to Study Gujjar Tribe in Jammu and Kashmir, India**

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**Abstract:** The main objective of the paper is to examine how the ethno-archaeological approach can help historian to document the material culture of past and present history of Gujjar people. The pastoral forms are still practiced by the Gujjar of Jammu and Kashmir region. However, the influence of the Aryans on transhumance and pastoralism remained a dominant characteristic. The intermingling of the Aryans and the native population gave rise to various ethnic identities in this region. Most of these were initially pastoralists but later they took to settled agriculture. Though, some of the communities maintained their tradition and are still practising the migratory livestock rearing. The most important community is Gujjar tribe. Hence, the standard Historical and Archaeological tools and techniques have been applied for collection of primary and secondary data.

**Key words:** Pastoralist, tribe, tradition, ethno-archaeology.

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### **1. Introduction:**

Today, at a basic level, ethno-archaeology may be identified as a sub-discipline of archaeology. It claims on the methodological distinction of applying ethnographic data from material and non-material culture of people living in the present as an analogy for comprehending the life ways of people from the past. It includes a joint approach of History, Archaeology and Anthropology to understand the past and present cultures. Since the 1960s, the field of ethno-archaeology has emerged as a discipline explicitly concerned with examining the archaeological relevance of contemporary phenomena, as well as of ideologies and belief systems.

Ethno-archaeology includes a joint approach of archaeology and anthropology to understand the past and present cultures. It is a branch of ethnography, which deals with the behavioural correlates of material remains. Gould (1968) termed it as 'living archaeology' and Kleindienst and Watson (1956) defines it as 'action archaeology'. Stiles define ethno-archaeology in more comprehensive perspective as, 'encompassing all the theoretical and methodological aspects of comparing ethnographic and archaeological data, including the use of ethnographic analogy and archaeological ethnography' (1977).<sup>[1]</sup> Ethno-archaeological studies can also play an important role in the development and evaluation of models of productive organization and change. We can examine various topics as the scale and management of craft production and distribution, and the impact of social, cultural, and political factors on productive organization.<sup>[2]</sup>

To understand the definition of tribe in archaeological perspective is that, tribe as a stage of cultural evolution that precedes the early state. In later period the tribe co-existed with stratified society ruled by monarchies. The only possibility to know the cultural evolution is to examine the dialects spoke by them<sup>[3]</sup>

The emergence of the Himalaya and the surrounding plains was a gradual process and the settlement of human population in the Himalaya too was also a slow exercise. Gujjar is considered an important and historical tribe. The migration from one particular altitude to another above may have been necessitated by various factors like availability of additional area and the inherent quest of the human mind to explore and know new areas. It is, perhaps, because of these reasons that we find human settlements in Himalaya right from Jammu to Tibet. The intermingling of the Aryans and the native population gave rise to various ethnic identities in this area. Most of these were initially pastoralists but later they took to settled agriculture. However, some of the communities maintained their tradition and are still practicing the migratory livestock rearing and the most important community was Gujjars.

### **2. Ethnic Identity and Origin:**

Most recently the report of the first clear case of ancient brain surgical practice, known as trepanation, a Neolithic skull from Burzahom in the Kashmir Valley was reported with multiple trepanations as the first case from the Indian subcontinent. In secondary burials of this site the bones were sometimes treated with red ochre. Graves of animals like dog, sheep, wolf and ibex have also been found. Seven uncalibrated C14 dates from Burzahom give a time bracket of 2400–1500 B.C.

The Gujjars constitute a significant proportion of the population<sup>[4]</sup> of the state. In general, they are nomadic in character and largely depend on rearing livestock for their livelihood. The diffusion and spread of

Gujjars in the state is not known with certainty. According to one account, the arrival of Gujjars in Jammu & Kashmir is attributed to the outbreak of devastating droughts and famines in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Kathiawad area, which led to the out migration of these people, who along with their cattle entered the pastures of the Siwaliks and the sub-Himalayas. Their major concentration in the state lies in Jammu, Rajouri, Udhampur, Poonch, Uri, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Daksum and Kandi areas of Jammu and Kashmir Divisions. Although some of them have started settling, they are essentially cattle rearers and a section of them are Bakerwals regularly move back and forth between the southern slopes of the Siwaliks and the Central Himalayas.

The houses of Gujjars and Bakarwals are locally known as *kothas* and *bandis*. It is generally a mud-house against the slope of a hillock. They are mostly followers of Islam except a few who have settled in Bimber, Mirpur and Rajouri. They are known for their hard work and gentle nature as well as for their traditional tribal songs and the simple tribal pattern that they interlace into their clothes. They have subsistence type of economy and try to produce everything they need in their daily life.

To trace the origin of Gujjars we have to first interpret the word Gujjar. Till now the expression has been interpreted in a number of ways. A perspective has been forwarded by Abdul Gani Shashi after a detailed study of Arabic and Persian history. According to him, Gujjars share with Baduo tribe of Arab a common lifestyle, way of living and culture. It is believed that Gujjars along with Baduo tribe are associated with Khizir tribe that had left for Koh-ekaf during the era of Christ along with its camels and other domestic animals. Again he described, the word Khizir got changed to Garz to Garzar and with the passage of time this tribe came to be called as Gujjar<sup>[5]</sup>

There is also a belief based on the history of Gujjars and Hindu manuscripts that Gujjars were one of the communities comprising devotees of lord Krishna. Gujjars took Krishna as their ideal and adopted his lifestyle. For a long time they were known for preservation of cows and it is because of cows that some of the castes of Hindus were known as those owning cows. According to this theory Gaochar (one who looks after cows) were called as Gaujar that later on became Gujjar<sup>[6]</sup>

James Tod argues that Gujjars are not descendants of Turkey or Arab and they are Greeks and resided in Rajasthan and Punjab region. In Tareekh-e-Kokaz mentions that Gujjars have come from Turkistan, and they are descendants of Noah. The most important evidence is the Sankaravarman expedition towards the Gurjara desa, which was located in the Punjab area.<sup>[7]</sup> Alexander Cunningham<sup>[8]</sup> define the location of Gurjara in India was from western India and Punjab. They might be migrated towards the Kashmir during tenth century AD. The original place of Gurjara was the Guzaristan which was located in Arachosia.

### **3. Cultural Heritage:**

Gujjars are the dominating sect of people living the area of Jammu and Kashmir. They have their own typical cultural identity, speak different language in different dialects and have different occupation, music, different life style and clothing pattern. They are famous for cattle, sheep and goat rearing. But there is a lack of awareness among the people to preserve the history, archaeology and culture of the gujjars tribe. We need to construct the open museum for preservation of their heritage.

### **4. Settlement Structure:**

From the archaeological and historical evidences it is, however, evident that though the Indo-Afgan were the predominant race in the ancient population of Kashmir, there was definite admixture of other races from time to time. The Gujjars who had been a nomadic tribe are extensively becoming sedentary having a settle life in this region. Though, animal rearing is still practiced, the arable agriculture has also attained a prominence in the occupation of the Gujjars. The similar type of tribe and practices is found among the people of Afganistan, Baltistan, Gilgit and Punjab area. These people speak the Dardic dialect which was similar to the Pisachas of Sanskrit literature of ancient period<sup>[9]</sup>

### **5. Pastoral and Agricultural Practices:**

If we analyses the description of Sir Walter Lawrence, some of the Gujjar settled down to agriculture and most of them are herdsmen and prefer the pastoral life. They are fine tall race men, with rather stupid faces and large prominent teeth. To understand the above mentioned truth by the British official, we need to use the DNA examination of Gujjars people with use of C14 and Skeletal Biology.<sup>[10]</sup> The pastoral life was well described in Indian history and tradition. In Bhagavata Purana it is mentioned that the cowherd Yadava rulers migrated to Saurashtra region from Mathura to search for pasture field. Similar kind of theory one can utilize in the study of Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir also.<sup>[11]</sup>

### **6. Sheep and Goat Pastoralism:**

Sheep and goat remains in the early farming in this region were evidence from Gufkral and Burzohan of Neolithic and Megalithic period. One can take resource to ethno-ecological and the oral tradition of present day sheep and goat pastoralist of this region. Their oral narratives may represent the recapitulating the social memory of their past. The sheep and goat pastoralist communities claim their origin from an ancestral agricultural stock. These communities connect themselves to the ancient community which was mentioned in the Shiva Purana. In Shiva Purana, it is described that Parvati asked Shiva that she wanted sheep. To delight her, he created a ram and awe. In course of time these two multiplied in to big herd and became a nuisance. Then Parvati asked Shiva to take away the sheep and that day onwards a particular group of people who cared the sheep.<sup>[12]</sup> One can conclude that the origin of this tribe may go back to the ancient period.

### **7. Population History and Biological Relatedness:**

Form and structure of bones and teeth contain key information about the history of a population and its relationship to other populations, especially since this morphology is at least in part genetically determined. Relatedness between human groups has long been an important area of interest in anthropology. Biological Distance or "bio-distance" is the measurement of relatedness or divergence between populations or subgroups within populations based on the analysis of polygenic skeletal and dental traits.<sup>[13]</sup>

### **8. Ancient DNA: Tracing Ancestry:**

The study of DNA from archaeological remains offers a new and potentially powerful means of addressing many of the issues previously under the purview of bio-distance analysis of skeletal and dental morphology alone. This new frontier in bio-distance analysis has strong potential to address this and other issues in anthropology relating to spatial and temporal associations between and within populations. The study of DNA in living and extinct populations engenders new perspectives on population origins in different tribal areas.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **9. Conclusion:**

Historically and Archaeologically, this region has a high potential that can help to explore and reconstruct the past, which in turn would help to gain information that will help us in understanding the present scenario. From the above discussion one can say that, there is a huge scope for the study of Gujjars community from the Ethno-archaeological perspective. One of the major factors which have contributed to the strengthening of the regional identity of Jammu and Kashmir is the Gujjars culture and their identity. A number of scholars have studied in detail of the Gujjars tribe from the present perspective such as their art, culture, history etc. In the light of the above findings, it is quite clear that, for reconstruction of regional identity of Jammu and Kashmir one has to take into account the pivotal role played by the Gujjars in society and history. Hence, this approach leaves ample scope for the historians, archaeologists and anthropologist to work together and draw from each other's findings and exhibit their scholarship in a manner which would not only enrich their respective disciplines but also would strengthen the Gujjars identity in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

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