

THE ARRIVAL AND ORIGIN OF GUJJARS AND BAKARWALS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR STATE

Khursheed Ahmad Bhat

Abstract

The State of Jammu and Kashmir, popularly known as “paradise on earth”, “crown of the Indian union”, “the Switzerland of Asia” and by many more names is inhabited by various ethnic groups, alien races and various religions that have influenced the cultural ethos and mode of life of the people of this region. The Anthropological survey of India has studied one hundred and eleven ethnic communities/ groups in Jammu and Kashmir under its People of India project. The various ethnic groups of the Jammu and Kashmir State though intermingled have their areas of high concentration. For example, Kashmiris are mainly concentrated in the valley bottom; Dards occupy the valley of Gurez; Hanjis are confined to water bodies of Kashmir; Gujjars and Bakarwals are living and oscillating in the kandi areas. The Gujjars and Bakarwals is the third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir. They are the state’s most populous scheduled tribes. The Gujjars and Bakarwals make up around 20 percent of the population of the state. Almost all Bakarwals and many Gujjars are nomads. The Gujjar are an ethnic group in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Alternative spellings include Gurjara, Gujjar, Gurjara and Gurjara. The spelling Gurjara or Gurjar is preferable to the rest. The Gujjars (Go= Cow) tend cattle (mainly buffaloes) and the Bakarwals (Bakri= Goat) herd sheep. Very large sections of the Gujjars have permanent homes and are not nomads. They are part of an all-India community that is mostly Hindu. However, in Jammu and Kashmir and the neighboring areas of Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (and to an extent, in Himachal Pradesh, Utrakhhand and north Punjab) all Gujjars and Bakarwals are Muslims. “The Bakarwal” is derived from the gojri/Urdu/Punjabi/dogri terms, “Bakra” meaning goat or sheep and “wal” meaning (one who takes care of). Essentially, the name “Bakarwal” implies high altitude goatherds/shepherds. The Bakarwals (dhangars) belongs

to the same ethnic stock as the Gujjars, and inter marriages freely take place among them. The Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes are the most famous, unique and significant ethnic group among the nomadic pastoral tribes prevalent in Jammu and Kashmir State. Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are supposed to have come from Rajasthan and adjoining areas of Gujrat and Kathiawar because they became victim of severe famine in their previous homeland. However, it is believed by the researchers that they have entered Jammu and Kashmir into two waves; one directly and other after some spell of settlement on Pathiawar plateau in Punjab of undivided India and Pakistan. Most of them settled along the old Mughal route in Sialkot, Gujranwala, and Jhelum in Pakistan and in Bhimber, Nowshera, Kalakote, and Rajouri to Kashmir via Shopian and over the hills from Poonch to the district of Baramulla and Muzafarabad. Traditionally Poonch has been their citadel, followed by Reasi and Jammu districts. In kathua district the Kandi area is occupied by the Bakarwals during the winter, when they return from the high altitude pastures. They are dependent largely on cattle, goat, sheep and horse keeping. The Gujjars are divisible into two groups, first those who practice transhumance and oscillate with their reward (herds) between the alpine pastures (Margs) and the low altitudes of the siwaliks and the Jammu plains. Secondly, the sedentary Gujjars who settled in most of the villages situated along the annual routes of migration. These sedentary Gujjars claim a common and collateral ancestry. History tells us that these nomadic people used to rule North India at some time. Rajatarangini reveals that Gujjars used to rule over the states and surrounding areas of Kashmir valley. With reference to history of Rajasthan, it has been revealed that Gujjars had been the residents of Jammu and Kashmir since the third century CE to fifth century CE. The Muslim Gujjars' Hindu cousins still live in Rajasthan and Gujrat, especially in the Kathiawad. They speak the same language (Rajasthani) and look similar. Therefore, the Himalayan Gujjars could well have migrated from these parts of Western India to the Himalayas, perhaps in the 6th and 7th centuries common era. However, some scholars are of the view that Gujjars entered Jammu and Kashmir in the tenth or eleventh century. History tells us that Gujjar entered India in fifth century CE. Along with Huns, and they are one of the communities of Central Asia. According to English scholar Kennedy, Gujjars used to worship Sun so they entered India from Iran. Mr. V.A. Smith is amongst those scholars who believe that Gujjars are locals. Expert anthropologist Dr. Cornik has said that through research it has been found that there is no major difference between the faces of Gujjars with that of ancient Indian communities. A big chunk of scholars, agree that the Gujjars actually have come from

Georgia, which is located in Russia and is often called as Gurjistan. According to some legends, the Gujjars are descendents of Dravidians. The Gujjars have a glorious past. However, there is not unanimity among the social scientists about their origin and arrival in India. Some historians believe that they are the original inhabitants of India, while the other school of thoughts says that they originally belong to Central Asia and were the part of Scythian (uchi) tribes. Due to disturbances in Central Asia in ancient times, they migrated to India in between 3rd to 6th Century CE through Bolan Pass and Koh-Suleiman Range. They were known with the different names from time to time like Gurjara, Kharzera, Khazar, Gujjara, Gurjar and Gujjar.

Keywords: - Oscillating, Transhumance, Dards, Hanjis, Bakarwal, Chunk, Ahirs, Scythian, Gujjars etc.

Origin

To trace the origin of Gujjar we have to interpret the word “Gujjar”. Till now the word Gujjar has been interpreted in a number of ways. First perspective has been forwarded by Prof. Abdul Gani Shashi after detailed study of Arabic and Persian history. According to him, Gujjars share with Badou tribe of Arab, a common lifestyle, way of living and culture. It is believed that Gujjars along with Badu tribe are associated with Khizir tribe, who left Koh-e-Kaf during the era of Christ along with their, camels and other domestic animals. According to him, the word Khizir got changed to Garzar and then with the passage of time this tribe came to be called as Gujjar.

In Islamic encyclopedia, it has been said that why Gujjar community was spirited and courageous and they were known for their shrewdness i.e., despotism in the vicinity of Iran and had destroyed many empires and nations under their reign, that is why they were symbolized first of all by a wolf (Bhediya) locally known as Gurj. Hence, this word get transformed from Gurj to Gurjur to Gurez and later on these people were called by the name of Gurj or Gujjar or Gurjar. The sociologist G.S.Ghurye believes that the name Gujjar is derived from the principal occupation followed by the tribe: cattle-breeding (the Sanskrit word for cow is gau and the old Hindi word for sheep is gadar), though “Gujjar” has come from “Gurjar” which is a Sanskrit word according to Sanskrit Dictionary (Shakabada 1181), has been explained thus: Gur+jar, ‘Gur’ means ‘enemy’ and ‘jar’ means ‘destroyer’. The word means “Destroyer of the enemy”. The word “Gurjar” predicts the qualities of a warrior community”. There are about half a dozen

Gujjar Histories written on Gujjars amongst which like Shahan-e –Gujjar, Gujjar Itihas , Gujjar aur Gujri zaban, Tareekh-e-Gujran, Gujjar Tareekh aur Sakafat. It has been written in all these that the word Gujjar has been derived from ‘Gauzar’ which means body builder (Pehalwan) or fighter. Because this community was famous for its moves and tactics in wars, that is why people called them Gauzor who later came to be called as Gujjars. This community is also called Gadjeen. There is a book of Hafiz Abdul Haq Sialkot titled Tareekh-e-Gojran that verified this view.

Following are the few theories regarding the arrival and origin of Gujjars (and thus the Bakarwals)

Theory 1st:- Many Gurjars claim descent from Suryavanshi Kshatriyas (Sun Dynasty) and connect themselves with the deity Rama. Historically, the Gurjars were sun- worshipers and are described as devoted to the feet of the sun-god (God Surya). Their copperplate grants bear an emblem of the sun and on their seals too, this symbol is depicted. Also the Gurjar title of honour Mihir which means Sun. According to Mr. J.K.Kennedy the Gujjars who are predominantly settled in Jammu and Kashmir, were sun worshipers. This may imply that the original home land of the Gujjars was somewhere in Russia, where the cult of sun worship was prevalent. In Ramayana, it is mentioned that a war was fought among demons and gods. Gurjars fought against demons under the leadership of king Dasharatha. In Mahabharata war also Gurjars fought and later on along with lord Krishna migrated from Mathura to Dwarka, Gujrat. Mr. J.K.Kennedy is of the same view in his book named “Krishna Christianity and the Gujjars” whose references were reproduced in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1907. He subscribes the view that the cult was almost beyond question, introduced into India by nomads from North, very probably by the Gurjaras. No doubt, the modern Gujjars, even those who have retained their creeds, have lost all recollections of any special devotion to the cult of Krishna, and they are now prominent in the traditions of the Ahirs, but certain groups of the Ahirs, too, appear to be of Gurjara origin. Mr. Ibetson writes in Punjab Ethnography about these Gujjars that: “It has been suggested, and is, I believe, held by many, that Jats and Gujjars, and perhaps Ahirs also, are all of one ethnic stock; and this is because there is close connection between them. Mr. W.A.Forhes gives his assertion in his memorandum of the castes of Meerut that the Gujjars have sprung from the same root as the Jats. Mr. W.Corrk in his book entitled the “Tribes

and the Castes of the North-West Provinces and Oudh”, that the traditions of the tribe give little information as to their origin and history. By one legend current in the Punjab, they claim descent from a certain Nand Mihir, who is perhaps Nanda, the foster father of Krishna, who was raised to distinction because he slaked the thirst of Alexandra the Great with a draught of buffalo milk.

Theory 2nd:- Some Gujjars claim that the Gurjar caste is related to the Chechens and the Georgians, and argue that Georgia was traditionally called “Gujaristan” (actually Gorjestan). They believe that their ancestors came from Georgia (which they believe, was once called Gurjia or Gurjaristan), a central Asia republic formerly in Soviet Union. These cow herders are supposed to have migrated from Georgia to India through Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and Baluchistan, before settling in Gujrat (a district in Punjab Pakistan). A.R.Khan in his book “Kashmir Land And People” has mentioned that, “Gujjars have been the inhabitants of Georgia, a territory lying between the black sea and the Caspian sea, who left their territory under certain compulsions and through Central Asia, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan crossed the Khyber pass to enter into the Indian subcontinent, and settled in Gujrat wherefrom they migrated to Punjab, Kanghan, Swat, Hazara, Gilgit and the valley of Kashmir.

Anthropological surveys of India have authenticated this perspective. Dr. Huthi of Georgia paid a visit to India in 1967 and studied the Gurjars living in northern India. He has stated that there are Georgian tribes among the Indian Gujjars, because their accent, their dress, and their bullock carts resemble those of Georgians. Oral traditions of the tribe and some archeological evidences (particularly cultural and phonetic) suggest that the word Gujar is a derivation of Gurjara and sounds like “Gurjiya/Georgia” (Gurjiya or Gurjistan being the Persian name of Georgia) - indicating that the Gujjar tribe is partially of Caucasian/Central Asian origin (Georgia- Chechnya etc.). Dr. Huthi is of the view that they came to India when Timur held a reign of terror over them, and consequently they settled here. They came here to protect their lives and religion, and called themselves by the Persian word of “Georgian”, “Gurjis”. Later this word was presumably changed into “Gurjar” or “Gujur” (particularly in Afghanistan).

Theory 3rd:- General Cunningham, a British Raj scholar in the Archeological Reports II, and A.H.Bingley wrote that the Gujjars’ ancestors were the Kushan/Yachii or Tocharians of Indo-Scythian tribe of the Eastern Tartar community (also erstwhile Soviet Union. The Tartars are a

Turkic people. Tareekh-e-Kokaz writes that Gujjars have come from Turkistan, and they are descendents of Noah. They are of the view that the word Gujjar is derived from 'Garji' who was descendent of Noah. A 2009 C.E study conducted by the "Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation", under the supervision of Gujjar scholar Dr. Javaid Rahi claimed that the word "Gujjar" has Central Asian Turkic origin, written in Romanized Turkish as "Gocer". Study claimed that according to the new research, the Gurjar race "remained one of the most vibrant identities of Central Asia in Third Millennium BCE. According to Cunningham, about a century before Christ, their chief conquered Kabul and the Peshawar country, while his son, Hima Kadphises, so well known to the Numisma-Tolgist, extended his sway over the whole of the upper Punjab and the banks of Jamuna as far down as Mathura and the Vindhya and his successor, the no less familiar King Kanishka, the first Indo- Scythian Prince, annexed Kashmir to the kingdom of the To-chari. This To-Chari is the Kaspeiroei of Ptolemy, and in the middle of the second century of our era, Kaspeira or Multan was one of their chief cities.

Theory 4th:- Some scholars, such as V.A.Smith, believed that the Gurjars were foreign immigrants, possibly a branch of Hephthalites (white Huns). According to him, "the early Gujjars who live in the parts of north and west of the county seem to have been foreign immigrants closely associated with and probably allied to the White Huns". During their onward march they sometimes took route through isolated places which still bear either their name, or variations of it. Thus, in the Punjab the places called Gujrat, Gujranwala and Gujarkhan, still retain their connection with Gurjara. In the 18th century Saharanpur was known as Gujrat, while one of the northern districts of Gwalior is still called Gujargarh. In the 19th century the northern and central parts of Rajputana were called Gurjaratra. The Gurjaras are found in Bundelkhand and there are Gurjaras in the Narmada valley, in Nagpur and in South India, where they are said to have drifted before 12th century. The Hun connection of the Gujjars is again emphasized by Bhoker, who while describing the Gujjars of Rajputana says that they are part of the 'Huns' who settled in Rajputana. Mr.Devadatta Ramakrishna Bhandarkar (1875-1950) believed that the Gurjars came into India with the Hunas, and their name "Gujjar" was sanskritized to "Gurjara" or "Gurjara". He also believed that several places in central Asia, such as "Gurjistan", are named after the Gurjars and that the reminiscences of Gujar migration are preserved in the names. Mr. Buhler has referred in Indian Antiquary that, "the Gujjars were an important element of the Hun group of tribe permanently settled in Rajasthan. Mr. P.C.Bagchi quotes from the pages of the

proceedings of Indian History Congress, Aligarh that, “The Wu-Sun has probably Hun affinities. The Wu-Sun of the Gujjars must have moved to India along with the Huns in 3rd century CE, and on the downfall of the Hun kingdom, set up their own rule.

Theory 5th:- In the past, Gurjars have also been hypothesized to be descended from the nomadic Khazar tribes, although the history of Khazars shows an entirely different politico-cultural ethos. In Gazetteer of Bombay presidency, the British civil servant James M.Campbell identified Gujjars with Khazars. Scott Cameron Levi, in his book “The Indian Diaspora in Central Asia and its Trade, 1550-1900”, mentions Kazar (Khazar, could also refer to Kassar) and Kujar (Gujar) as two different tribes with links to Central Asia. Mr. A.M.T.Jackson identifies the Gurjaras with the Gaudas, (Gours, calls Brahmanas). This fact appears in the journal of Royal Asiatic Society, 1905. He describes that, “the Gour Brahmanas were and indeed are Purohits of the Hindu Gujjars, and still minister to some who are converts to Islam.” He identifies Gujjars with Khazars as available in the Bombay Gazetteer vol.1, which endorsed by Dr. Bhandarkar. Moreover, Mr. Comphel identified the Gujjars with the Khazar tribe of Central Asia, which is illustrated in the Bombay Gazetteer, vol.iv.

Theory 6th:- According to Scholars such as Baji Nath Puri, Mount Abu (ancient arbuda mountain) region of present day Rajasthan had been the abode of the Gurjars during the medieval period. The association of the Gurjars with the mountain is noticed in many inscriptions and epigraphs including Tilakamanjari of Dhanpala. The Gurjars migrated from Arbuda mountain region and as early as sixth century CE, they set up one or more principalities in Rajasthan and Gujrat. Whole or a large part of Rajasthan and Gujrat had been long known as Gurjaratra (country ruled or protected by the Gurjars) or Gurjarabhumi (land of the Gurjars) for centuries prior to Mughal rule.

Theory 7th:- It has said that Alexander I son was adopted the title ‘Gausar’ which later on become Gurji and their children came to be known as Gujjar. But this perspective has not been verified by many scholars.

Theory 8th:- There is this view also that because of some issues, one community shifted from Grozni area of Russia and entered India after going through various ways. These people were called as Gurozar as they belonged to Grozni who later on become Gujjar. This is authenticated

by the presence of some castes in Gujjars based on the names of regions in Russia. E.g. Chichi Gujjars from Chechnya, Bajran Gujjar from Bajrania.

Theory 9th:- The historical view related to Gujjars is very interesting. When Roman invaded Greece for the first time, the community which countered them was Gracia, located on the borders of Greece. Romans called them Grexie, Greece, Gruj which later on become Gurjar which eventually came to be called as Gujjar. Colonel Tort argues that Gujjars are not descendents of Turkey or Arab. He links them to a huge empire. In ‘Rajasthan History’ Colonel Tort states that Gujjars are Greek and the word Gujjar or Garjar is of Greek origin.

Theory 10th:- In addition to the above theories. There are many other scholars who asserted that the Gujjars are natives and have no link or relation with any other foreign stock or ethnic group. They believe that the Gujjars are Aryans. The science of Anthropology, Ethnology and the like, establishes that the Gujjars belong to the Aryan race; therefore, the question does not arise to believe them to be of foreign origin. There are four types of blood groups, namely O, A, B, AB, which are recognized by the medical science. Dr. Majumadar has disclosed on the subject in his book entitled “Race and Culture in India” that the various scientists have ascertained the bloods of the world to know as to which race they actually belong. This theory also upholds the Indian resemblance of their anatomical features to other communities belonging to the Aryan race.

References:

1. Rahi, Dr.Javaid “*The Gujjars Tribe Jammu and Kashmir*” Srinagar, 2011, p.1-3, 13-18
2. Khan. A.R “*Kashmir Land and People*” Srinagar, 2002, p.166-167
3. Bhardwaj, A.N “*History and Culture of Himalayan Gujjars*” Jammu, 1994, p.34- 44
4. Dewan, Parvez “*Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh*” New Delhi, 2004, p.360-362
5. Lawrence, Walter. R “*An Account of Kashmir, Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit and Jammu*” Srinagar, 2012, p.66
6. Fazili, Manzoor “*Cultural Glimpses of Kashmir*” Srinagar, 2002, p.277

7. Ernest. Neve.F. *“Beyond the Pir Panjal- Life among the mountains and the Valley of Kashmir”* Srinagar, 2002, p. 103
8. Vaid, Dr. S.P, *“Paharies of Jammu and Kashmir (An Analytical Study)”*, Jammu, 2014, p.65-75
9. Dabla, Bashir Ahmad *“Social Problems in Kashmir”* Srinagar, 2012, p.161.
10. Sharma, Anita *“The Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir”* New Delhi, 2009, P. 186
11. Dabla, Bashir Ahmad *“Ethnicity in Kashmir-studies in culture, religion, economy and social structure”* New Delhi, 2009, p.27
12. Bhat, Fayaz Ahmad *“Ethnic plurality in Jammu and Kashmir: A descriptive analysis”* New Delhi, 2011, p. 59, p.100
13. Maini, K.D *“Poonch: The Battlefield of Kashmir, A complete history of Poonch”* Srinagar, 2009, p.38-45