



“Ethnographic and Socio-Political Study of Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu & Kashmir”

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents an in-depth socio-cultural and economic exploration of the Gujjar and Bakarwal community of Jammu & Kashmir, India—nomadic tribes whose way of life is deeply aligned with nature and rooted in tradition. Drawing on secondary data, oral histories, and ethnographic sources, the study highlights their origins, cultural divisions, language, customs, political marginalization, and economic challenges. Despite their rich heritage and historical resilience, Gujjars and Bakarwals continue to face poverty, illiteracy, and infrastructural deprivation. The paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their identity, challenges, and the policy gaps that hinder their upliftment. It underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions in education, livelihood, and political representation to support their integration in a rapidly modernizing society.

KEYWORDS: Gujjars, Bakarwals, Nomadic Tribes, Jammu and Kashmir, Tribal Marginalization, Gojri Language, Pastoral Economy, Mobile Education, Transhumance, Scheduled Tribes, Socio-economic Conditions, Tribal Culture, Folk Traditions, Livelihood Patterns, Political Representation, Indigenous Identity, Cultural Heritage, Tribal Literacy, Tribal Occupation, Social Backwardness

1. INTRODUCTION

Gujjar is the name of a prominent and culturally rich community, recognized across the country for its distinct identity and contributions to society. Gujjar community inhabits not only in India but in countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Russia also. Though the word ‘Gujjar’ is known differently in various countries, its core identity has remained unchanged e.g. "Gurjar", "Gojar", "Gorjar", "Godar" and “kochar” or "Gorj" etc. The history of this community is rich and distinguished, standing out among other communities. Centuries ago, after fighting wars against outside aggressors, when there was a great reversal to this community, it was allowed that perhaps in future history, there would be no name as Gujjars. Still, these people have defied the vicissitudes and made sacrifices as to live forever. No doubt, Gujjars belong to different beliefs and persuasions but belonging to different persuasions cannot weaken their communal integrity or familial bonds and this unity itself is evidence of the harmonious fabric of the Gujjar community. For Gujjars, national unity and contribution take precedence over all other considerations. Unity of Gujjars is a substantiation of their greatness. But if we want to have an idea of the greatness of the history of Gujjars also we will have to go through the pages of history of this community. Apart from that in different countries of Asia, various names of cities, towns and localities are rooted in the identity and contributions of the Gujjars. It shows that wherever these people have gone they gave their names to those places and those places have become well known due to their names.

1.1 VIEWS OF HISTORIANS & ANTHROPOLOGISTS

According to historians, Gujjars are warrior lines. In this country, Mount Abu is their oldest center and the present, the people of the community are set up roughly in six countries. But majority of the Gujjars in India dwell in

Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir. Anthropologists describe Gujjars as fair-complexioned, tall, with long noses, elongated heads, and broad foreheads. The Gujjars hold strong to their religion but their outlook is secular. Majority of Gujjars continue to believe in pirs. The Gujjars place more faith in deceased saints (Pirs) than in living ones. The Gujjar community, now residing in the Himalayan regions, once held power and ruled territories.

1.2 ORIGIN

The first and foremost thing is to find out the origin of racial people especially Gujjar and Bakarwals. Gujjars and Bakarwals are indigenous communities of Jammu and Kashmir that have spread throughout the State. The word Gujjar in the literature of India is maintained to have passed in the 7th century A.D. The word “**Gujjar**” is believed to be the outgrowth of “**Gur+Ujjar**”. “**Gur**” means “**adversary**” and “**Ujjar**” means “**destroyer**”, in the combined form it means **destroyer of the adversary**. While as **Bakarwal** is derived from the Indic language terms, “**Bakara**” meaning “**goat**” in Indic languages, and “**wal**” meaning “**one who takes care of**”. Principally, the name “**Bakarwal**” implies “**high- altitude goathers/shepherds**”. These tribes are rich in cultural heritage, and they interact with each other easily on behalf of their traditions. Literally both are spread from north Himalaya of Pir Panjal region. Still, shifting from the hilly area to lower area or vice- versa in quest of pasture, raising of livestock and to carry out the rearing of livestock by the people according to season. *According to the 2011 Census, Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir constitute 11.90% of the total population.*

2. DIVISION

Geographically, we divide our J&K into 2 parts: **Jammu & Kashmir**. There are **Twenty districts** in our J&K. Gujjars are to be found in each and every District of J&K. But the majority of Gujjars dwell in **POONCH** and **RAJOURI** districts.

In overall population of J&K, Gujjars number in lakhs in J&K and are divided in three lines-

- I. **Settled Gujjars**
- II. **Half- settled Gujjars**
- III. **Homeless Gujjars**

I. **SETTLED GUJJARS**- The settled Gujjars are those who are settled at one place and staying in villages and engage in agricultural or livestock activities.

II. **HALF SETTLED GUJJARS**- Half settled Gujjars are those who still live in villages and do husbandry profession but for six months of summer they leave for Pir Panjal with their cattle where ranges are available to graze on. From centuries these people are living in the laps of hills, and on the banks of rivers. Some of Gujjars of Jammu and Kathua are big farmers.

III. **HOMELESS GUJJARS**- The homeless Gujjars can be divided in two parts:

- a) **Dodhi Gujjars**
- b) **Bakerwal Gujjars**

a) **DODHI GUJJARS**: In Jammu and Kashmir one lineage of Gujjars is known as “**Dodhi**” or ‘**Banyara**’ Gujjars. These people keep buffaloes and lead a nomadic life. In winter season, these people stay in Reasi, Udhampur and Kathua’s lower areas. Some Dodhi Gujjars go upto Pathankot and Gurdaspur also. When the

summer sets in, these people start moving to the higher elevations where green pastures are available sufficiently for their cattle. They sell milk and ghee for their food.

b) BAKERWAL GUJJARS- The other lineage of the homeless Gujjars is known as Bakerwal Gujjars. These people substantially keep sheep and goats besides other creatures and these are their main sources of their livelihood. As this lineage mainly rears sheep and goats, hence it's named as **Bakerwal**.

2.1 LIFE OF BAKERWAL GUJJARS

They are generally well-built and attractive in appearance and are also recognized for their physical strength and friendly, sociable disposition. Earlier, all these were homeless but now, some of them have their own houses and have started to lead a life with permanent settlement at a place. The sub-castes of these Gujjars are also same as the other Gujjars are having like Hakla, Bajjar, Kohli, Chechi, Khatana, Badhana, Bagdi, Goosi, and Kalas etc. These people lead nomadic life. For example, when these people move from one place to another place, they form groups in such a way that they will remain together. There will be one group of Khatana, the other group of Hakla and the other one of Kohli and so on. Every person likes to remain with his own lineage. Their feuds and actions also take place on clan basis. They're full of oneness and fellowship. They're relatively confident about fellowship and hostility. Bakerwals don't construct a permanent house to live in. Whatever may be called their house is roof only. They take their household belongings and documents from one place to another by loading on horses. Primarily, each family keeps about 400 sheep, 100 goats, 6 to 8 horses, 4- 5 dogs and 2- 3 hens. Bakerwals often don't keep buffaloes and cows. Women of this lineage wear home stitched caps. These people wear the traditional shoes called '**Jootis**', reinforced with iron studs at the bottom and are relatively weighty.

2.2 LIFE OF SETTLED & HALF- SETTLED GUJJARS

As far as the life of settled and half settled Gujjars of J&K State, is concerned, they construct their houses permanently and stay in them, but they do husbandry and after winter months, they leave for Peer Panjal along with their things as there they can have sufficient grazing fields for their cattle. These people live different life from Bakarwals. In all fields of life, Gujjars are relatively before. During this period of science & technology, when communities are taking active part in the developments, these people are lying far behind due to ignorance and backwardness, because these people are living far down from the life of civilization on the heights of hills. They're also the victims of lack of self-confidence, and do not progress in the field of development along with other sections of society. They have not benefitted from education. They're also not well informed with the ultra-modern ways of looking after the cattle and agricultural activities. Therefore, the way of living is outdated and backward.

3. OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Socio-Cultural Identity Exploration
- 3.2 Economic Condition and Livelihood Analysis
- 3.3 Educational and Infrastructural Assessment
- 3.4 Political Marginalization Examination
- 3.5 Policy Gap Identification
- 3.6 Recommendations for Inclusive Development

4. METHODOLOGY

This research is based entirely on secondary sources including Census of India reports, academic articles, government publications, and published ethnographic studies. A descriptive approach has been adopted using qualitative data derived from journals, newspapers, and community case studies.

4.1 SHELTER: These people are backward in comparison to the developed communities. They're homeless and landless, wandering in the open. Other people live as social beings but these people live around quadrupeds all their life time. They do not have proper houses, only makeshift roofs and those roofs are also made of several old pieces of cloth. Inside the roof there's family, tired and burdened by life's chaos. Children are lying naked and crying. They've kept some handmade woolen clothes. One is seen as a prodigy if their hardships are known to the world. The old man weakened due to sickness is lying inside the roof or "KOTHA" in old dirty clothes and coughing. The kotha is filled with smoke, and their eyes are swollen from the fumes. Their animals often roam in harsh conditions and are at risk due to the weather.

4.2 JERGA: Gujjars retain their own panchayat which is called 'Jerga'. This is a body comprising some old, honest and responsible persons of the community. They're chosen on the base of their elevation in the community, sense of the fair play and oratory skills. They decide their matters, keeping in view the welfare and sustenance their lineage. Most of the actions are based on grazing fields and women and out and occasionally incidents of theft and murder are also being reported. The Sardars serve as the respected leaders in the Gujjar and Bakarwal community and even today, they resolve nearly all controversies among their clan members. Each sardar works with a couple of informally appointed *Salahkars* (advisors) or counsels who are consulted, along with other elders and prominent men of the community. The control exercised by the sardar over his clan members is absolute, but their authority is exercised humanely and every effort is made to resolve conflicts and end simmering tensions. In the past, the chosen sardars prevailed over all controversies in their separate *Biradris*. At times, when resolution couldn't be achieved by a sardar, the matter would be taken to another group of the prominent men, who were held in the high regard. The moulvi or the cleric plays a significant part in the social functioning of the Gujjar and Bakarwal. He is often called by the sardar to assist in the performance of rituals. The centrality of the Quran and the faith vested in the pledge should also be mentioned. The Gujjar and Bakarwal believe that anyone who commits perjury will be penalized visibly within days of committing the sin and recite the incidents on how perjurers have suffered divine intervention.

4.3 DERA: The introductory unit of social structure among the Gujjar- Bakarwal is the dera unit. A dera generally comes when a person is wedded and wants to have independent household of upto five to six members according to their age and sex. There's division of labour among them. The women of this estate are busy in domestic tasks of cuisine, washing, fetching water, rearing of children, collection of wood and spinning and weaving of woollen clothes. The males are busy in rearing of cattle, gathering fodder, ploughing and harvesting of crops. Several *Deras* (homes) constitute a lineage (*Dad- Potra*). The ranges are distributed to the lineage and not to the individuals. The lineage, therefore, consists of several generations and includes relatives and distant cousins. The lineage unit is fairly important decision making unit. Each lineage consists of head who oversees the socio-economic and political activities.

4.4 SOCIAL: Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir are socially very backward in comparison to other communities of state. The Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir state live a simple life are settled in houses made of wood and slush with paddy and timber roof. The social life of Gujjar and Bakarwals are substantially linked to their religious life. They perform their important task such as marriage, death, etc. in simple mores on the basis of religious custom under the guidance of Maulvi (cleric). They're indeed vibrant people and

are free from evil or guilt. The community have faced all kinds of variations of nature but the government of the state has taken no step to amend their socio-economic and socio- cultural life. The community continues to suffer from the curse of poverty and backwardness. The Gujjar and Bakerwal people are tall people with a conservative mindset inhabiting the mountainous area. *The Gujjars and Bakerwals are also called 'NATURE'S TRUE COMRADE'.*

4.5 CULTURE: The cultural aspects of Gujjar and Bakerwals are same as well are varies in numerous aspects of his life. The Bakerwals resettle to the high mound during summers whereas Gujjars do not. It's mandated by necessity for Bakerwals to put on warm woolen clothes. But both the Gujjars and Bakerwals are wearing a typical head wear called "**LUNGI**" with shirt and shalwar. The Gujjars also wear a colourful turban with unique style of wrapping. The aged Gujjar man wears a cap called as "*Afghani hat*". Culturally Gujjar and Bakerwals are easily recognizeable able by dancing, religious rites and customs etc. The life style of Gujjar and Bakerwal community is quite different from other communities of Jammu and Kashmir State, their requirements and problems are also different from others. The way of talking of this community is different from other communities and are educationally, economically, politically and socially backward.

4.6 LANGUAGE: The Gujjar and Bakerwal community of Jammu and Kashmir state speaks the Gujar (Gojri) language which originates from the Rajasthan, with influences from other languages similar as Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi and Phari. The Gujjar and bakerwal people use Gojri as their primary language of communication. The Gujjar and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir State are demanding the inclusion of Gojri in the 8th Schedule because of it being a widely spoken language throughout the Indian subcontinent. As a popular language (Gojri) ten radio and TV stations of India and Pakistan broadcasts and telecasts programmes in Gojri language. The Jammu and Kashmir state constitute the Gojri speaking people as the third largest linguistic group after Kashmiri constitutes the first and Dogri constitutes the second position.

4.7 CARNIVALS: Carnivals have special significance among Gujjar and Bakerwals. Gujjar and Bakerwals have strong faith in religion and celebrate their carnivals with great faith, charm and substance. They celebrate all the fests with great enthusiasm & festivity and energy. Gujjar and Bakerwals celebrate these carnivals with unique songs and food, traditions and culture. The main religious practices and festivals observed by the Gujjar-Bakarwals are five daily prayers, fasting during the month of Ramzan, Eid- ul- Fitr, Eid- ul- Azha, Nauroz, and Baisakhi. They begin their upward migration after celebrating Baisakhi in April. During the course of periodic migration, they pass by various shrines and the graves of Pirs (holy men). still, the deceased are buried along the migration route, if a death occurs during the migration. They erect a small monuments on the grave and every time as they pass through the route, they pay respect to the departed soul and light a lamp on the grave.

4.8 RELIGION: In Gujjar and Bakarwal culture, religion reinforces the family as the core unit of faith, upholding its integrity through the preservation of traditional gender roles. All Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in J&K follow the Islamic faith. most native Kashmiris hold the Gujjar and Bakarwal to be strict Muslims of a deeply religious nature. A larger number of the Gujjar and Bakarwal grow their symbolic beard and moustache. They feel to be rather proud of stroking their beards thoughtfully or with pride from time to time. The Gujjar & Bakarwal hold fast to their religion but their outlook is secular. Interestingly, the Gujjar and Bakarwal also observe some Hindu festivals like *Baisakhi and Lorhi* and perform certain rituals on these occasions. The Gujjar and Bakarwal profess practising their faith with a attitude of tolerance towards other persuasions. Their interaction with the other communities shows that they remain committed to these values.

4.9 DRESS PATTERN: Gujjars wear mainly their traditional attire and jewellery. Gujjar men generally wear **PAGH/ KAMEEZ & TEHBAND** while Women folk wear and tear and shirt decorated with kinds of buttons and embroidery on it with **CHORIDAR SHALWAR & JOOTI, Duppata** with multiple colours and round cap with a trail of coarse thread. They wear black and blue coloured clothes, shalwar and kameez of blue, black and green colours. Some Gujjars wear trousers and loincloth (**Tehband**) of the same colours. They wear turban of white or dark brown colour on their heads. Women wear necklace with a triangular pendant adorned with a beautiful stone in the centre. It has religious significance, represents evil eye and mainly uses to ward off bad luck.

4.10 FOLK GAMES: The Gujjars, being a strong and hardworking community, express their bravery and love for nature through traditional sports. Nearly all of their games are outdoor and require physical strength and a competitive spirit. Many of their sports are associated with seasonal folk festivals, weddings, or special occasions. They play these games in accordance with their customs and traditions. They play numerous games like **BUGDER** (Stone/ Weight lifting), **BEENI PANJO** (Arm Holding), **CHHING** (Wrestling), **PANJHGEET**, **KHINNU** (The Ball), **CHHITO**, Horse Race, Animal Fights and so forth. **FOLK INSTRUMENTS.** The folk instruments are generally made from wood, animal skins, clay, metal, or other natural materials. The popular folk instruments used by NOMADIC Gujjar & Bakarwal are **JODHI DO NALL, BANJLI, BISLI, CHUHUNG, YAKTARO, DHOL, SHARNAI, CHIMTOO, SAARGI & GHADHOO/ GHODHOLI.**

4.11 FOOD HABITS: Maize is the staple food of the mountainous people, especially the Gujjars and Bakarwals, as it provides warmth and strength during the cold winter months. Maize or corn is grown in the hilly and mountainous areas and it's a tropical crop in this region. Maize is cultivated by the Gujjar and Bakarwal community as it's grown in mountainous areas as the majority of the nomads reside in these regions. Other crops like rice, wheat etc need irrigation which isn't so important developed in the racial areas of Jammu and Kashmir. So, they left the only option to cultivate the maize. Gujjar and Bakarwals are mainly dependent on milk products, cereals, wheat and maize. They consume both vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. *Maki ki roti, ganhar, sarsoon ka sag, lassi, kalari, etc* are favourite dishes of Gujjars. They consider *Noon Chai (salted tea)* essential and drink it daily, often multiple times a day. Until about a decade ago, the Gujjars and Bakarwals drank only Noon Cha and not tea with the sugar (**called *lipton cha* by the Gujjar and Bakarwal**) but now there is a small but growing demand for the regular tea with sugar. still, while for the maturity of the Gujjar and Bakarwal favourite tea as remains noon cha some of them have started to enjoy the occasional pleasure of sweetened tea.

4.12 OCCUPATION: Gujjar and Bakarwals rear animals such as sheep, goats, and buffaloes. They migrated to upper corridor of Himalayas with their cattle during summer season and and return to the plains during winter. There is a shortage of skilled workers practicing trades or crafts. Gujjar and Bakarwal are mainly dependent on the parenthood of cattle and their products. This community has preserved its originality and traditional way of life throughout generations.

4.13 MARRIAGE: Different communities have different societies of their marriage observances. Marriage is considered an important institution in society. Marriages among the Gujjar and Bakarwals are fixed at the age of 17–18 for boys and 14–15 for girls. The Gujjar and Bakarwals hold their marriages in simple manners with old traditions. Relatives and neighbors send curd as a symbolic gift to the family celebrating the wedding. The wedding household serve meals made with curd (dahi) and salt. The bride is decorated with silver ornaments such as chains, earrings, bangles, rings, and necklaces. The groom wears traditional attire including a lungi, waistcoat, shirt, and shalwar along with a red handkerchief in his hands and a '**SEHRA**' on his forehead.

4.14 ECONOMY: The Gujjar and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir, also known as a nomadic community, are economically dependent on cattle rearing. They herd animals such as sheep, goats, and buffaloes. They may also use buffaloes for agricultural purposes and dairy production. They rear cattle for commercial purposes, which forms the backbone of their livelihood. The community follows a pastoral economy. Due to climatic conditions, the Gujjars and Bakarwals do not lead a settled life. They live a nomadic lifestyle, migrating with their cattle to the plains in winter and returning to the mountains during summer. The majority of Gujjars engage in the production and sale of milk and other dairy products. *According to the Integrated Sample Survey (ISS), milk production in Jammu and Kashmir for the year 2007–08 was estimated at 1,515.29 thousand metric tons.* Animal husbandry remains the main source of livelihood for Gujjars and Bakarwals across the lower, middle, and higher mountain regions. Animals such as sheep, cows, and goats are reared for commercial purposes. The state's economy is significantly supported by the animal husbandry sector. The Government of India, along with the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, has launched various income-generating programs for pastoral and tribal communities. These programs aim to improve the economic conditions of the community. These programs are designed to provide a stable and sustainable source of income to the families involved.

4.15 EDUCATION: After examining the district-wise distribution of literacy among Gujjars and Bakarwals, the high knowledge is set up among the Bakerwal population in the sections of Poonch, Rajouri and Jammu which has 30.8, 20.5 and 23.5 educated population of them independently. Whereas among the Gujjars Jammu has 39.00, Poonch 34.60 and Rajouri 32.94 percent educated population. These regions represent the highest literacy levels among the Gujjar community. In comparison, the general population shows a significantly higher literacy rate than the Gujjars and Bakarwals. Gujjar and Bakerwal are largely marginalized and illiterate in comparison to General Population of the state. The Gujjar and Bakerwal community has the lowest enrollment in formal education in Jammu and Kashmir. In many Gujjar and Bakerwal regions, there are no schools available at all, registration is only 20 to 30 percent Education is seen as the key to sedentarization or permanent settlement of these nomadic groups, The main barrier to education is their transhumant lifestyle, but this challenge may lessen with future permanent settlement.

• **Literacy Rate among the Gujjar-Bakerwal and General Population in Jammu and Kashmir (in Percent)**

Districts	Total Lit. Pop.	Bakarwals	Gujjars	General Pop.
Kupwara	232,557	20.4	16.9	65.32
Baramulla	447,075	19.3	19.7	62.48
Srinagar	641,267	15.6	16.3	78.83
Badgam	226,167	18.3	21.7	74.23
Pulwama	281,518	20.1	17.4	66.21
Anantnag	463,197	14.6	15.5	73.01
Leh	68,278	100.0	88.2	68.21
Kargil	60,803	17.4	50.7	63.98
Doda	274,425	15.6	16.8	54.82
Udhampur	343,429	19.3	21.3	61.21
Poonch	156,398	30.8	34.6	69.08

Rajouri	234,228	20.5	32.9	72.45
Jammu	1,070,574	23.5	39.0	79.07
Kathua	307,370	18.8	19.3	74.11
Total	48,07,286	22.51	31.65	71.23
<i>Source: Census of India, 2001</i>				

Most of the Gujjars and Bakerwal are educated up to primary or middle level. During the migratory life most of them left their education at primary level. Since they have mobile schools and they function only up to 5th standard, which keep moving with community members during their transhumance practice. So, after 5th class there is no education facility which forces to dropout from the education. In the general population, there is a more educated population in higher education than the Gujjars and Bakerwal because they are sedentary and get more opportunity to educate their children.

If we have a close look at the level of education in the different age groups of the sample households, 46.7 % are below primary, 27.5 % are up to middle, 14.9 % up to high, 7 % up to higher secondary and 3.9 % are graduates. A significant proportion is concentrated below the middle-school level. As far as gender disparity is concerned, 29.1% males are below primary in comparison to 17.6% of the females. 18.1% males are educated up to middle in comparison to 9.4% of females. Males have a larger share in higher education in comparison to the females.

4.16 POLITICAL: Recognizing the backwardness of Gujjar Bakarwal tribe of J&K. Govt. of India granted scheduled tribe status to Gujjars Bakarwals under ordinance No. 03 of 1991 under article 342 of constitution of India on April 19, 1991. Despite this recognition, their participation in the executive and political frameworks of the region has remained limited.

As per the Delimitation Commission's 2022 report, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly now consists of **90 seats**, distributed as follows:

- **Scheduled Castes (SCs):** 7 seats
- **Scheduled Tribes (STs):** 9 seats
- **General Category:** 74 seats

Additionally, to improve gender representation, **31 seats have been earmarked for women**, including:

- **SC Women:** 3 seats
- **ST Women:** 3 seats
- **General Category Women:** 25 seats

These provisions are meant to enhance the political inclusion of marginalized communities and women.

Despite the allocation of 9 ST-reserved seats in the Assembly, many constituencies where Gujjars and Bakarwals form a significant majority—31 out of the 90 Assembly segments and 2 out of the 5 Lok Sabha constituencies—

still do not adequately represent the community. The Gujjar-Bakarwal population remains underrepresented, particularly in the Lok Sabha, where **none** of the **five constituencies** (Baramulla, Srinagar, Anantnag-Rajouri, Udhampur, and Jammu) are reserved for Scheduled Tribes. All are open to general category candidates.

This lack of proportional political representation, despite clear demographic and constitutional justification, reflects an ongoing administrative indifference. Moreover, areas predominantly inhabited by Gujjars and Bakarwals continue to lag in essential services such as road connectivity, electricity, drinking water supply, healthcare, and education. These deficiencies severely hinder the socio-economic development of the community, subjecting them to ongoing hardship and marginalization.

4.17 POPULATION: According to the 2011 Census, the Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of Jammu and Kashmir constitutes 11.90% of the total population. Among them, the Gujjars and Bakarwals represent the **third-largest community** in the Union Territory. As per the Census of India 2001, they made up approximately **8.1% of the total population** of the state. The Gujjar and Bakarwal population is **predominantly concentrated in the Jammu region**, followed by the Kashmir Valley. Districts with the **highest concentrations** of Gujjars and Bakarwals include **Poonch, Rajouri, Anantnag, Udhampur, Kupwara, and Srinagar**.

According to the Census of India 2001:

- **Kupwara** district had approximately **3% of the total Bakarwal population**.
- **Rajouri** district followed with **2.72%**.
- **Udhampur** accounted for **1.31%** of the Bakarwal population.

Regarding Gujjars specifically:

- **Poonch** district had the **highest share**, with **39.34%** of the Gujjar population.
- **Rajouri** followed with **30.31%**.
- **Udhampur** accounted for **11.16%**, and
- **Anantnag** district had **7.14%** of the Gujjar population.

The **high concentration of Gujjars and Bakarwals** in Poonch and Rajouri can be attributed to the **abundance of pasturelands**, which are ideal for livestock grazing—a crucial part of their livelihood. In general, the **Jammu region** has a significantly higher population of Gujjars and Bakarwals than the **Kashmir Valley**, primarily because it is a **mountainous zone** with extensive grazing lands along the **Siwalik Hills and the Pir Panjal range**, making it more suitable for pastoral communities.

In contrast, the **Leh and Kargil** districts of the Union Territory have **minimal Gujjar and Bakarwal presence**, due to their harsh climatic conditions and limited pasture resources.

Distribution of the Gujjar-Bakerwal Population in Jammu & Kashmir, 2001 (in %)

Districts	Total Pop.	Bakerwal	Gujjars	Gujjars Bakarwals	& Others
Kupwara	650393	3	7.6	10.32	89.7
Baramulla	1169780	0.3	4.4	4.7	95.3
Srinagar	1202447	0.25	3.2	3.4	96.6
Badgam	629309	0.04	2.24	2.28	97.8
Pulwama	652607	0.08	3.13	3.19	96.9
Anantnag	1172434	1.26	7.14	8.3	91.7
Leh	117232	0.02	0.014	0.015	99.9
Kargil	119307	0.6	0.18	0.78	99.9
Doda	691929	0.89	9.09	10.2	89.8
Udhampur	743509	1.31	11.16	12.42	87.9
Poonch	372613	0.62	39.34	40.12	59.9
Rajouri	483284	2.72	30.31	33.19	67.9
Jammu	1588772	0.099	3.81	3.19	97.8
Kathua	550084	0.5	2.75	3.23	97.7
Total	10143700	0.59	7.52	8.1	91.9
<i>Source: Census of India, 2001</i>					

The total Gujjar and Bakerwal population in Jammu and Kashmir is 8.1 percent. The Gujjar population is 7.5 percent whereas the Bakerwal population comprises 0.59 percent in J&K.

5. CONCLUSION

In various aspects of life, the condition of the Himalayan Gujjars remains quite unfortunate, and they continue to be economically marginalized. Although some initiatives have been undertaken for their development and upliftment, **there has been no significant improvement in their economic condition thus far.**

Their traditional occupation revolves around **rearing livestock** and **selling milk and ghee** to sustain themselves. Despite their hard work and persistence, many remain trapped in cycles of debt passed down through generations. The loans once taken by their forefathers from moneylenders continue to burden their descendants, who are now responsible for their repayment.

To **improve their economic status and transition them towards prosperity**, it is essential that their issues are addressed with **serious and targeted intervention**. One such solution is the establishment of **cooperative centers** in their localities. These centers could enable them to purchase essential goods at affordable prices and also provide a fair platform to sell their produce at reasonable rates, thus empowering them economically and socially

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