

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF GUJJARS OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are facing so many problems and sometimes their unique culture becomes the reason for targeting this minority population. The paper which I am going to submit will focus on various challenges faced by this migratory population and will also focus the remedial measures for the solution of these problems. This migratory population moves according to season i.e. from hills to plains in winters and plains to hills in summers. This unique identity makes them different from others and this migration adds a lot of problems in their living, safety and educational exposures.

Keywords: tribal, nomads, communities, Gujjars seasonal migration

INTRODUCTION

India is a hub of vast cultural diversity spreading across all its regions from East to West and North to South. This diversity is because of diverse cultures, religions, regions as well as diverse communities and one such community is the tribal community. This community has a very nominal percentage to the whole population of the country.

Tribal communities are prevalent everywhere and in almost every state of the country and are well known for their unique culture. Jammu and Kashmir is also one of the states of Indian Territory which has a good population of tribal communities and these tribal communities are spread all over the state and most of the tribes are in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. All the tribes have different issues and problems but Gujjars which is considered as one of the populist tribes of J&K have their certain specific problems and challenges. These specific problems are due to specific culture of migration from plains to mountains and mountains to plains according to the season. This seasonal migration is a tradition followed by this particular community and they are very well maintaining this tradition though they are facing so many problems. Tribes in the hilly state of Jammu and Kashmir form a valuable part of the cultural diversity of the state. As per the 2001 census, tribes constitute 11.9% of the total population of the state. There are 12 tribes recognized by the state government. These are:---Chhangpa, Garra, Mon, Balti, Boto, Purigipa, Beda, Brokpa, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi and Sippi (including the tribes of Ladakh also which is a separate UT now)

The majority of this percentage consists of the tribes belonging to Gujjar Community and this community is also the most populist community of the state.

Following are the Issues and challenges of Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir:

1. Communication gap between these people and the Administration:--

This tribe carries its own language and as cattle rearing community they live far away from towns and cities and so they are not in a proper contact with the administration of the state and so a gap is always there between the two. With this gap they are not in a position to get the various schemes meant for these people and also not able to communicate their problems to the Higher Authorities. They are the least complaining people as they don't get exposure to be in contact with the authorities. Though there are representatives who belong to this tribe but unfortunately there is a communication gap between these representatives and ground level people who are constantly facing the challenges and also unaware about their rights and so communication gap needs to be filled in this regard to reach down to the level of the people.

2. Lack of Education :

Another main challenge which needs to be met is challenge of education. Educational level among this tribe is very poor. Educational level among women is negligible. No doubt there is provision of schooling facilities for this migratory population during winter in the form of stationary and permanent govt. schools at different places all over the J&K but at the summer locations when these children move with their parents, the educational facilities are less. No doubt the concept of mobile schools is there but still they are not in a much better functional manner. The further details regarding the mobile schools has been discussed in the upcoming lines.

3. Lack of shelter:

Most of these people live in hilly areas and forests. They made their temporary shelter according to the environment. They can't move to plains and lead a settled life as they don't have any permanent shelter over

there. They are the migratory population with no permanent land and homes and so it is very difficult for these economically lower population to settle by themselves and that's why they will always need a supporting authority which will help them to settle permanently. One of the important things which need to be focused is that if some authorities will take the initiative for settling them then they should make them settle near a water body as they are cattle rearing community who need water for cattle also. Moreover Govt. has also not made any such provision which provides shelter to these people. With their cattle also they are not liked by the other societies to be settled near to them. This also becomes a problem for these nomads to be settled at a place.

4. Poor Economic condition as one of the problems:

Due to poverty these population still lag far behind the general population. There are no social security also for these people. These people involve themselves in rearing animals especially sheep, goat, buffaloes and horses etc. They live in a poor condition i.e. without proper shelter, without proper hygienic conditions and also unaware about different advancements whether these are life style improvement advancements, health related advancements or any other. Different advancements of life whether it is communication technology and any other type of advancements, nomads are the ones who are least users of technology. Medical advancements and in fact advancements related to veterinary health issues are also not accessible to these people fully and in this era also they keep on treating themselves according to the traditional ways and styles and same is their treatment with cattle in case of their illness and this can be due to lack of awareness also. Pad man movie is really highlighting the issue of sanitary napkins and still the nomadic women are using the traditional styles in their periods and this is due to their poor economic conditions and awareness regarding the developments and for this also poor economic condition is the main cause.

5. Early marriage

Due to strong tradition of early marriages among the nomads, they do not educate their children who fall between the ages of 10-18 years. This reason is also adding to percentage of school dropout in the tribe. Early marriage strategy is not observed for girls only but it is applicable for boys also. Manpower is always required for cattle rearing and so early marriage help them to increase the size of their families more frequently. The age in which their marriage takes place is the start of puberty period and till the menopause i.e. throughout their reproductive age, the women keep on reproducing and this also contribute in the reduction of the health of the female.

6. Unemployment:

Another problem is the problem of unemployment which these people are facing. The number of employed persons in these communities is very low. Even though the government had made provisions for reservation of seats in the employment sector for these people, yet they cannot afford to avail these benefits because of poor educational growth. Those who availed the opportunities and move forward and become the creamy layer too but their kids keep on getting benefits if reservation but those who really deserve that support remain neglected.

7. Lack of medical facilities:

There are no medical facilities in the tribal areas for which they have to run to urban areas which takes a lot of time and in most of the cases result in loss of life, especially in case of pregnant women. The maternal mortality rate gets increased due to non-availability of medical services and so health sector related issues are also there. Usually these people approach to the hospitals during life threatening conditions and in those where they reside are mostly the forest regions and so they don't get accessibility to medical facilities in those far off areas. Like mobile schools there should be scope of mobile dispensary as well as awareness programs regarding various diseases like Diabetes, AIDS, Tuberculosis etc..

8 Threat to livestock:

The Gujjar tribal community is always in a constant threat of extinction of their livestock.

The livestock number of the tribal has been continuously decreasing since the period of militancy.

Data given by Livestock survey, Jammu and Kashmir, 2011 shows that before militancy period the livestock of tribal was flourishing but during the period of militancy, the number has drastically decreased. It has always become a challenge for nomads to survive along with their cattle in such disturbed circumstances without any safety arrangements and that's why they have continuously witnessed a decrease in the growth of their livestock.

It remained constant for long time but a slight increase is observed in recent period.

9 Harassment to Gujjars in the name of Land encroachment:

Certain episodes of unnecessarily harassment have been done to the Gujjars in the name of land encroachment. In an attempt to avoid unnecessarily harassment to tribal community in the name of anti-encroachment drives, the J&K government has banned eviction of nomads from any place without prior approval of the tribal affairs department. [Indian express 14th February, 2018].

10. Harassment to Gujjars in the name of checking of smuggling of cattle:

A mob of 200 people attacked a nomadic family in Jammu's Reasi district on suspicions of cattle smuggling. [Hindustan times: April 22, 2017]

Five people were beaten up, including a nine year old girl.

Nomads travel two times in a year and they travel during start of summer as well as start of winter and these are considered as routine migrations which are known to most of the people but still they were attacked by a group of suspected vigilantes.

Such episodes are usually faced by the Gujjars particularly during their migratory session and in those sessions also where they purchase cattle and bring to their homes and during this movements they also become targets.

Certain provisions for the benefit of Gujjars:---

There are certain provisions done by the government in order to improve the existing situation of the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir and among them following are the important ones:--

Certain provisions done by the State to control the various challenges:

1. Scheme for developing infrastructure
2. Post matric scholarship to the students
3. Gujjar Bakarwal hostels for boys and girls
4. Mobile schools for the tribal children

Scheme for developing infrastructure:

Funds are being provided to the State government by the ministry of Tribal Affairs, Govt. of India for creation and up gradation of infrastructure required to bring the tribal areas at par with the rest of the country. This scheme is also implemented through the concerned District Development Commissioners who are the nodal agencies for the implementation of the scheme.

POST MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP FOR THE STUDENTS OF GUJJARS

The Social Welfare Department, Government of Jammu and Kashmir, has constructed 23 hostels in different areas of the state for the welfare and promotion of education amongst the children belonging to tribal communities. Out of these, 17 hostels are for boys where as six for girls. There are four more hostels under construction for the tribal students at Kargil, Handwara, Reasi and Udhampur.

Mobile schools for tribal children of Jammu and Kashmir:

Mobile primary schools commonly known as mobile schools were set up by the Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir in 1970 with the objective to provide educational facilities to the children of nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal scheduled tribes. The mobile schools which were single teacher primary schools providing educational facilities to the children of nomadic children at various places especially in upper reaches, but could not continue for long. However some of these schools still continue in some areas of the state.

SOLUTIONS FOR THE PROBLEMS OF GUJJARS

Though there are various programs initiated by the government of Jammu and Kashmir for the welfare of tribal people but the implementation of such policies is very low. The reason is lack of communication and awareness.

The govt. should therefore evolve new strategies to overcome these problems, so that there can be proper implementation of the policies and schemes to get the desired results.

Awareness through education:

The govt. must conduct awareness drives in the tribal areas. The organizations which are working for the welfare of tribal communities in J&K must be involved in these drives. It is better to involve people belonging to these communities in the awareness campaigns. Awareness area should be broadened by including the awareness regarding policies and programs meant for them, educational facilities, medical facilities and advancements, benefits of small family system, maternal health related issues, hygienic methods and use of sanitary napkins in periods, scholarship facilities and more importantly to aware them regarding their rights and information related to exploitation of their rights. Policies and schemes should reach to the common people at the ground level and this is a real challenge and deserving often gets neglected due to lack of awareness to few people.

Mobile schools to be made operational again:

Mobile schools must be made operational again and to be made fully equipped like other schools and various aspects regarding curriculum reformation and inclusion of various skilled based courses for the children to be made. There should be provision for pre matric scholarship scheme for these children.

To increase the number of girl's hostels:

More girl hostels to be constructed for tribal girls. This will help in the improvement of women education among Gujjars and women will be made equipped and will become stable to cope up with the existing challenges and issues and can automatically contribute in maintaining the small family size and also become economically independent and can grow up as successful homemakers and workers too in various organizations where they may be working.

Govt. must formulate scheme for providing medical facilities to this community:---

Hospitals and dispensaries to be there in the tribal areas

Mobile dispensaries should also be there like mobile schools

Medical check-up camps to be organized on regular basis

Free medicines to be provided to these people who are poor

Veterinary related provisions should also be there in order to control the damage to the livestock.

Road connectivity to tribal areas:

The tribal areas must be connected to the cities and towns and for this there is requirement of road connectivity. Proper connectivity will lead it towards its progress as it will connect with the rest of the world and upward progress will become possible through this connectivity.

Forest Rights for the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir:

These people must be allowed to use the sustainable natural resources and forest produce for earning their livelihood as the state of J&K has not extended the Forest Right Act 2006 till date (data before 2019) though it is largely implemented in all the states of India. In the absence of forest rights, around 12 scheduled Tribe communities are facing a lot of hardship including evocation from land by forest department from time to time. They are demanding extension of Forest Rights Act-2006 enacted by Indian Parliament to the J&K so that they can also have rights on forest lands as are continuously available to other STs across the country.

Fighting for their rights, the members of different tribal communities have been raising the issue at different forms. They are pleading that the govt. should follow the other state's model to settle nomads especially to rehabilitate the nomadic Gujjars-Bakarwals' who are the main forest dweller community of the state.

Before 2019, nomadic tribes of Jammu And Kashmir had no rights on the forest lands as no identical law to Forest Right Act is enforced in the state. The 80% of tribal population comprises of Gujjars and Bakarwals which constitute 20% of total 125 Lakhs population of the state. They rear sheep, goats, buffaloes, camels and other animals and maximum among them is landless, shelter less, and deserves dwelling rights on forest lands which they are using as traditional inhabitants since centuries together.

One of the best initiatives taken by the administration for upgrading the educational provisions for Gujjars:---- (in the year 2018)

District Administration Rajouri, finalised the plan for migration of schools along with migratory nomadic population to ensure proper educational facilities to students during annual migration to higher reaches in Kashmir valley. The District Development Commissioner Dr. Shahid Iqbal Choudhary reviewed the arrangements and finalized the plan in a meeting of officers including Educational Officers and concerned Heads of mobile schools along with staff. It was decided in the meeting that a total of 25 schools having an enrollment of 801 students including 410 males and 391 girl students would move with the migratory population. These schools have been provided with 45 teachers for running the schools in higher reaches. Apart from this another 41 schools for tribal population will remain stationary which will cater to 1451 students including 802 male students and 651 girl students where 95 teachers have been posted.

Regular monitoring of the attendance in the schools held to be mandatory

Parent teacher meeting to be organized twice a month during the period of migration

Special focus this year on skill development and these courses to be monitored by administrator's office.

Scholarship to meritorious students.

The schools migrating to Drass, Kargil, Ganderbal, Anantnag, Gurez, Budgam, Kangan, Dacchigam would be provided with gadgets, stationary tents, ration and other requirements.

The DDC directed providing books and uniform to the students before migration.

Sports equipment should also be provided to the migratory schools

Self-defense training was also finalized.

Such types of initiatives should become a regular routine and to be followed at other ends also and this will definitely improve the standard of education among Gujjars and can contribute in bringing them at par with the rest of the World.

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