

A Comparative Analysis of the Scheduled Tribes in J&K: A Case Study of Gujjars in Rajouri & Poonch Districts of Jammu Division

Arun Kumar
Department of Geography,
University of Jammu, Jammu.
e-mail: drikenter@yahoo.co.in

ABSTRACT

The spatial distribution of ethnic groups and tribal population is an interesting area in which the social and cultural geographers are increasingly probing. Studies associated the ethnic minorities inhabiting the vast forest lands have been the focal theme in the studies of Cultural Geography. Many of these groups exhibit typical traits like hunting, gathering and transhumance in particular for survival. The Gujjars in J&K forms an ethnic minority, inhabiting large tracts in mountainous Jammu division. This social group is identified with seasonal migration from higher pasture lands towards lower plains during winter season and from plain valleys towards the high altitude grazing pastures during summers. A substantial time period in a year is consumed in journey. Being a nomadic tribe, Gujjars have remained alien to the currents of modernism, development and are still identified with backwardness. In this back drop, it becomes imperative to study the demographic attributes of this tribe and a comparative analysis of these attributes among the tribe occupying different administrative units, but having similar environmental milieu. The districts of Rajouri and Poonch are largely inhabited by Gujjars and Bakerwals, who inherit an agrarian economy and tradition bound society, where winds of modernity has not penetrated yet, thus have been selected as units of the study. The society of Gujjars in J&K possesses a unique character of seasonal transhumance, which has resulted in their backwardness. Due to this reason, study of their demographic attributes assumes significance. During the study it has been assessed that though Gujjars belongs to a backward society on the whole, but marked variation in the demographic attributes have been observed spatially. Further, successive progress has been noticed in demographic attributes like growth, literacy, sex ratio, dependency ratio and occupational structure.

Key Words: Demographic Attributes, Seasonal Migration, Modernity, Nomadic, Environmental Milieu.

INTRODUCTION



The administrative division of Jammu encompasses great variation in the terrain and topography ranging from plains in the south to high mountains in the north and northwest. The region of Jammu is identified with great regional, linguistic and ethnic diversity which varies with few kilometers of horizontal distance. It is inhabited by numerous ethnic groups- religious and castes. Each ethnic group and community is the repository of distinctive cultural traditions and customs. The Gujjars of Jammu belongs to one such group that has maintained its tradition and customs over greater part of time in the past to the modern times. This social group is occupying the plains and Kandi Belt, the valleys and the side valleys of Himalayas and the high altitude pastures. However, the majority of them lives in Rajouri and Poonch districts and oscillates between the plain valleys and the alpine summer pastures during winter and summer seasons. Despite many social upliftment plans and programmes initiated at the administrative level, these groups are still struggling in the currents of backwardness. These are characterized by high birth and death rates with high infant mortality. The longevity is below 55 years. The literacy rate is very low with female literacy negligible. The sex ratio is 860 females per 1000 males. A significance of proportion of population is living below the poverty level.

STUDY AREA

The spatial distribution of cultural phenomena especially that of ethnic groups is largely a function of terrain, topography and pedo-climatic conditions. Rajouri & Poonch districts with their headquarters at Rajouri (citadel of Rajas) and Mandi in Poonch located along the Actual Line of Control falls between Jammu in the south and Muzaffrabad area of P.o.J.K. in the North. The twin districts are hilly and undulating, located on the valleys of Pir-Panjal mountain. Numerous seasonal and perennial streams decorate the land from 'Darhali Tawi' later known as Minawar Tawi across Nowshera in Rajouri, the other stream and its tributaries of Minawar-Tawi include Thanna Nullah, Ramgarh (Sukhtah Nullah) joining at Rajouri town.

The *Chitta-Pani* (white-water) stream, the main feeder of the Poonch river takes its rise on the western slopes of the Pir-Panchal Range between *Chitta-Pani* and Pir-Panjal Passes. Below Poonch town the Bitarh river merges with it on the right bank. After having received the waters of the Mendhar river on its left bank, the river flows in a south-westerly direction to meet the *Vitasta* (Jhelum) near Tangrot.

METHODOLOGY

The demographic characteristics of an ethnic group is a function of the physical factors and cultural milieu of its habitat. In this backdrop, the study has been carried out at the block level. The villages were selected in such a way so that bigger as well as smaller villages are represented. From each selected village, ten percent of the household were selected for the collection of data like literacy rate, sex ratio, occupational structure, migration pattern etc.

The Jammu region is inhabited by different communities, some settled, quite a few nomadic. In the later category the most prominent are pastoral Gujjars and Bakerwals. The former form part



of a large conglomerate of tribal communities inhabiting many adjoining parts of the sub-continent and are variously known as Gijars, Girjars and Gujjars.

The high concentration of Gujjars found in Rajouri and Poonch districts where about 20% and 18% of the total Gujjars population of the state is settled. Gujjar population is also inhabited in most of the parallel and side-valleys, which are formed by the offshoot hills of the Pir-Panjal Range. The most famous of the valleys, locally known as 'Nalas' are Darhal, Thannamandi, Peeri, Panihad, Ramgarh, Kotranka, Ans, Tattapani, etc.

Table 1- Gujjar Population – Block wise

S. No	Block	% Gujjar Population
1	Rajouri	45.30
2	Manjakote	36.30
3	Nowshera	14.80
4	Kalakote	33.50
5	Budhal	52.50
6	Darhal	41.20
7	Sunderbani	6.90
	Rajouri District	20 percent
1	Poonch	54.32
2	Mandi	9.33
3	Surankote	42.10
4	Mendhar	46.0
5	Balakote	26.0
	Poonch District	18 percent

An analysis of the population distribution data in table-1 vividly shows that the highest concentration of the Gujjar-population population lies in Poonch block of district Poonch in which the proportion of Gujjars is 54.32 percent of the total population. It is followed by Block Budhal of Rajouri district having 52.50 percent of Gujjar population. The blocks of Surankote, Mendhar has high concentration of Gujjar population in Poonch district; whereas blocks of Rajouri, Darhal, Manjakote and Kakakote has high concentration of Gujjar population. On the whole, Rajouri district has more concentration of Gujjar population nearly 20 percent to its total population, whereas Poonch district has 18 percent Gujjar population to its population. It has been observed that the spatial distribution of Gujjar population increases with altitude and more on the Mughal route of the region.

Table 2- Literacy Rate Gujjars – Block wise

S. No	Block	Literacy Rate	Gujjar Literacy
1	Rajouri	28.1	14.1



2	Manjakote	15.7	2.9
3	Nowshera	15.2	5.3
4	Kalakote	15.0	3.7
5	Budhal	14.0	4.1
6	Darhal	15.0	4.2
7	Sunderbani	12.0	2.7
	Rajouri District	12.8	4.7
1	Poonch	26.0	8.2
2	Mandi	14.8	3.3
3	Surankote	12.6	5.5
4	Mendhar	11.4	6.3
5	Balakote	10.5	2.7
	Poonch District	15.4	6.8

The data in table-2 reveals that though the literacy rates in both the districts are much less than the state's average. Further, among the twin districts the Poonch district exhibits higher literacy of 15.4 percent in comparison to Rajouri district 12.8 percent and same holds true in case of Gujjars literacy as well. The highest literacy rate of Gujjars is noticed in the block Rajouri of District Rajouri in which the total literacy rate of Gujjars is 14.1 percent. The Rajouri Block is followed by block Poonch of Poonch district. Rest of all the blocks in the two districts have less than 6 percent of literacy rate among the Gujjars. The lowest literacy rate is observed in the blocks of Sunderbani, Manjakote and Balakote which is less than 3 percent. The female literacy rate in all the blocks of Rajouri and Poonch was less than 3 percent which is one of the lowest in the whole country. From the above analysis it may be concluded that the overall literacy rate in the districts Rajouri and Poonch is much less than the state average, further the literacy levels of Gujjar community is significantly low in comparison to the literacy rates of the blocks. Unfortunately, the total female literacy percentage varies between two to five percent in both the districts. From the literacy and educational point of view both the districts are at the bottom of educational ladder. The low female literacy vividly shows that among the Gujjar communities of the districts, the females are not allowed mobility or there is marked prejudice against females, and hence low literacy. These are the main reasons why the female literacy rate among the Gujjars is one of the lowest in the country. Apart from religious factors and low status of female, poverty, early marriages, non-availability of schools and low level of urbanization are also responsible for low level of literacy among Gujjars and female Gujjars in particular.

Table 3- Migration Patterns

S. No	Migration Routes	Altitude in mtrs.
1	Pir Panjal Pass	3491
2	Darhal Pass	3946
3	Toshmaidan Pass	4,091



4	Rupari Pass	4099
5	Budhil Pass	4261
6	Kousarnag Pass	3123

Table 3- reveals about the migration routes of Gujjars. All the tracks of the Gujjars-Bakerwals start from then winter basis 610 to 1220 Mts. high above sea level in the area of winter disposal, south of the towns of Rajouri, Reasi, Udhampur and Samba. The tracks in this zone are numerous. From November to the middle of April they stay in the winter pasture zone on the outer hills. They plan their activities in the ecological zone according to the demands of the winter season. In the last quarter of April till the first week of July, they are on the move the summer pastures. From June to September they graze in summer pastures on the Pir-Panjal Range from a fixed point. In the months of October they again start returning to the counter bases through the same route of migration and reach winter pastures by the month of November every year. The Noorpur Toshmaidan route is preferred by the nomadic Gujjars and Bakerwals of Poonch (1002m) Chilas, Balnoi and Gulpur areas, who use the Noorpur and Jamian Galli passes for crossing the Pir-Panjal and entering Toshmaidan. The following places as haltage points: Balnoi, Krishnaghathi (1579m), Gulpur, Chandak, Mandi (1676m), Loran (1889m) to Jamian pass (4090).

The major migration routes are-

1. Mughal Route or Pir-Panjal Pass Route.
2. Dharhal or Nanasar Route.
3. Rupri Pass Route.
4. Budhal Pass Route.
5. Toshmaidan Pass.
6. Kousarnag Pass.

Table 4- Sex Ratio of Gujjars- Block wise

S. No	Block	% Gujjar Sex Ratio
1	Rajouri	851
2	Manjakote	835
3	Nowshera	824
4	Kalakote	838
5	Budhal	820
6	Darhal	833
7	Sunderbani	815
	Rajouri District	830
1	Mandi	850
2	Surankote	842
3	Mendhar	931
4	Balakote	870



5	Poonch	826
	Poonch District	864

Table-4 reveals the sex ratio of the area under analysis. Higher sex ratio is an indicator of socio-economic development of a region. The study region on the whole is an area of female deficiency among Gujjars. The overall sex ratio of Rajouri District at 830 females per thousand males in comparison to 864 females in Poonch which indicates higher standard of female in the Gujjars in Poonch District. The highest sex ratio is found in block Mendhar i.e. 931 females per thousand males in Poonch district, followed by block Balakote having 870 females per thousand males. In Rajouri district, Rajouri Block exhibits the highest sex ratio of 851 much less than Poonch District. The lowest sex ratio is found in the Sunderbani Block which is 815 females per thousand males in the District of Rajouri followed by block Budhal which shows the sex ratio of 820 female. It is true that more males are born in both the districts of Poonch and Rajouri than the females. But this disparity between two sexes at the time of birth gets perpetuated if not accentuated due to higher females mortality. More females die at infancy, mainly during the reproductive period. The general neglect of females is largely responsible for high female mortality at childhood. In old age also the females suffer greater neglect than their male counterparts due to the difference in the relative status of the two sexes in general.

Table 5- Occupational Structure Gujjars Blockwise

S. No	Block	Occupational Structure		
		Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
1	Rajouri	65	11	24
2	Manjakote	80	8	12
3	Nowshera	82	13	5
4	Kalakote	82	7	11
5	Budhal	88	4	8
6	Darhal	83	4	13
7	Sunderbani	87	6	7
	Rajouri District	81	8	11
1	Mandi	89	6	5
2	Surankote	74	9	17
3	Mendhar	80	8	12
4	Balakote	94	2	4
5	Poonch	75	10	15
	Poonch District	82	7	11

Tables 5 reveals certain interesting features in the distribution of workers in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in the district of Rajouri and Poonch. The engagement of workers in tertiary sector is an indicative of socio-economic development. Both the districts exhibits similar proportions in the tertiary sector, secondary and primary sector. Major proportion of the Gujjar



population more than 80 percent in both the districts is engaged in agricultural activities signifying lower levels of development. Block Rajouri of Rajouri district has the highest proportion in the tertiary sector around 24 percent followed by 17 percent in Surankote Block of Poonch district. This high percentage of worker in the tertiary sector can be explained by the fact that the Rajouri is the urban block where the educational facilities and the information about the employment opportunities are easily accessible.

Finally, it can be concluded that the majority population among the Gujjars is mainly engaged in primary sector which can be understood from their social structure. Less penetration of education and modernity has prevented the population's participation in secondary and tertiary sector.

CONCLUSION

In the concluding lines, it can be summed up that the Gujjars in J&K belongs to the lowest strata of the society in both the districts of Rajouri and Poonch characterized by high proportion of population in the district, high growth pattern, low levels of sex ratio and diversified occupational structure mainly identified with primary occupation and high dependency ratio. The Gujjars of Rajouri district have shown more prominence and development than Poonch district in various variables under investigation. Further, the various governmental schemes put forth for the development of this depressed class has resulted in partial success and in this regard much more still needed to be done.

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