

Religious Spectacles Holding Cultural Lenses: A Study of Muslim Gujjars of Nagrota

Paper Submission: 15/11/2020, Date of Acceptance: 28/11/2020, Date of Publication: 29/11/2020

Abstract

The study has been conducted with a broader scope and from variety of socio, political and economic perspectives. The research paper deals with the study of Gujjars of Nagrota region. It is basically the religious and cultural analysis of Muslim Gujjars. It further describes the social mobility and influence of modernity on Gujjars of Nagrota and also talks about cultural assimilation. The study holds the independent view of their life style and level of integration. Further talks about the social patterns they follow in order to sustain and maintain their diverse character. It will help in understanding the influence of modernity and its effects on their thought making process. This study also talks about the growth and nature of Muslim gujjars of Nagrota (Jammu and Kashmir).

Keywords: Muslim gujjars, Character, Nature, Growth, Social Pattern, Social Status, Nomadic, Level Of Integration, Illiteracy, Needs, Identity.



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Introduction

Nagrota__ a town located in the Jammu district of Jammu and Kashmir is well known for its spiritual as well as strategic importance. The area holds spiritual relevance because of the presence of 'The Kandoli Temple' also a mandate for completing the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi pilgrimage. It serves as headquarters of XVI corps(India) also known as 'White Knight Corp'. The community of Muslim gujjars living in Nagrota is an ethnic group which has been residing since decades. The religious diversity of Nagrota region is comprised of Hindus (89.30%), Sikhs (4.39%) and Muslims (5.31%) in general. Muslim community there basically belongs to scheduled tribe (gujjars and bakkerwals) which are well known for its nomadic nature and enclosed culture. Society without culture carries no meaning, it is learnt through human interactions and transmitted by a process called socialization. Culture to say, is a combination of belief, customs, food habits, language, religion and things alike together helps in building social patterns of that particular group (tribe).

The established patterns exhibit social movement vertically as well as horizontally of that group. Humans, a social being cannot live independent of social influences which is well reflected in day to day life style for instance, food options and clothing choice. Therefore, a choice comes out of flexibility when there is exchange of ideas. The tribe (gujjars) of Nagrota is in the stage of cultural assimilation now a days because of the factor of Education majorly and upper class influence (urban Muslim group). Educated gujjars are now going for modern means of life style which reminds us the concept of westernization (when modernity is from outside) and sanskritisation (when modernity is there within) by M.N Srinivas. Their traditional means are now being replaced by modern means, be it the source of transportation, language, food culture etc. It seems like they have a reference group which they imitate. The gujjars of Nagrota are also migrating to Jammu city because of education, employment etc.so; there is a possibility of influence by people of that urbanized area. Earlier gujjar tribes were pastoralists in nature but now they have started practicing settled agriculture and animal husbandry (rearing cows, goats, and sheep). Often they have seen selling milk and milk products in the nearby area or in the urban areas through middlemen. The example of settled agriculture and rearing animals is well depicted by the people of village kamini of Nagrota. The youth of this area is into both –

traditional way of livelihood as well as modern employment (Administration/ police/ Education etc.). Gujjars of early times preferred mud huts for their stay and built it on their own but now they have opted for pakka house with modern concept of building that is a great example of learnt modernity. Even to say their way of dressing is greatly influenced by urban wear, traditionally they use to wear kurta, basket and dhoti but now most gujjars of Nagrota have similar style as that of urban people. Though gujjars are endogamous community of kamini but observes exogamy at the clan. The idea of gujjars origin is still debatable because of the earlier nomadic nature but now they live in settled communities. The name Gujjar is actually derived from the term Gaucharna meaning 'to graze cows' but got notified as scheduled tribe under the provisions of Indian Constitution. For instance, Article 46 of the constitution provides that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society and in particular, of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.

Articles 341, 342, 335 of Indian Constitution also deal with scheduled tribe. If we talk about their social status they regard themselves as equivalent to ahir, jat and Rajput. The above mentioned provisions of Indian Constitution grants them special benefits like fixed quotas in government jobs which is great source of their social mobility upwards. Traditionally, they speak gojari (Indo-Aryan language) but they have good knowledge of spoken Hindi as well. The level of literacy among gujjars is low but some educated gujjars are in government/ private sector services also. They also have a number of sub-groups and clans depending on the region they reside in. The gujjars of Nagrota follows societal norms like each son inherits an equal share of parental property and Muslim gujjar women are granted the right according to sharia law (Islamic law), also women plays crucial role in the economic activities of the family. Muslim gujjars of Nagrota belongs to the dominant Sunni sect. They have imam, maulvi who performs all religious ceremonies and rituals. The gujjar community is still recognized as deprived or backward due to their nomadic existence. They are also aware of daily struggle of making a living in difficult conditions. The youth is talented and shows interest in music other than traditional folksong and most among them have smartphones with a working internet connection. As we know that traditional societies has not always existed in its present form, what is seen today and labeled as the traditional society is often itself a product of change. It means the cooperation of gujjar society with change is flexible and strong enough to continue and conform to change. The gujjar society shows the fine example of the existence of old traditions and new changes together as one.

The ability of gujjars society to add changes is majorly responsible for its continuity. Now this community shows the presence of heterogeneous social structures. The presence of religious framework with different culture type is sometimes cause conflict

but gujjars of Nagrota has proven to be exemplary by showing a great understanding of mutual existence of religion and culture exhibiting the phenomenon of social change. It is appropriate to say that gujjars of Nagrota has institutionalized different styles of life, actually adopted from different groups and formed a social structure for its own existence. Gujjar women of Nagrota are skilled in embroidery also and their love for silver ornaments can be easily seen as they wear it on a regular basis. The whole community is known for celebrating festivals like Id-ul-fitr, Id-ul-zuha, Shab-i-miraj, Shab-i-qader and others. Their marriages are typically simple in character like women singing folksongs, men preparing wedding food and then serving it. The marriage type is basically of Islamic kind. The level of integration among them is high and the essence of brotherhood holds relevance in their social life.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the research is to bring attention on the new trends emerging in the culture and tradition of the gujjars of Nagrota. The purpose is to find the social impact of modernization process on the gujjar community and also to understand their level of integration with rest of the society.

Methodology

The research techniques used to conduct this study are- observation, book view, interview, survey and questionnaire. Both primary and secondary sources of literature are taken into consideration.

The overall structure of gujjar society has patriarchal character in general and the social control is regulated by community panchayat which resolves disputes regarding land, inheritance, marriage and other issues. The gujjar community of Nagrota practice monogamy mostly. Child marriages are slowly being replaced by adult marriages because of the intermixing of culture and developing factors like road connectivity, a proper highway is built for movement, presence of IIT (Indian Institute of Technology, Jammu), hospitals, markets and many more together influenced the ideology in general and mindset in particular of this community. The condition of gujjars of Nagrota is showing positive growth and they are continuously making efforts to raise their level of living. Another amazing thing observed about gujjars of Nagrota is that they show tremendous relevance with Dogra culture of Jammu region. Though Muslim gujjars follow Islamic pattern of life but still there is enough rituals, customs and traditions which are inherited by them regionally, means their culture is a mix culture of Muslims and Dogras.

The divorce rate among Muslim gujjars is extremely low as compared to other areas. Most households of gujjar community in Nagrota have wells and government supply of water which satisfies the basic need of water of village Nagrota. The patterns of gujjar tribal culture are distinct in nature from other tribes for instance, alcohol is not consumed by Muslim gujjars of Nagrota but chewing and smoking tobacco from hookah is a prevalent habit among them.

To quote, Irawati Karve (Indologist) believed that the gujjars position in society and the caste system generally varied from one linguistic area of India to another. This can be observed as gujjars are linguistically and religiously diverse in character. The gujjars of Nagrota are under the impact of mobility and change but still there is a unique bond of kinship among the members of gujjar tribe of Nagrota.

Conclusion

To conclude, the study gives us the account of Muslimgujjars condition and scope of assistance so that they can rise further in their social status. Study found out that they still lack basic awareness about the governmental schemes which are available for their welfare because of illiteracy. Education and health sector has a scope of improvement and before that awareness programs should be conducted on a grass root level. Basically, tribal society is known for its independent nature and self-reliance. The handicraft of gujjars of Nagrota needs to be explored more so that they can earn a handsome amount of money to support themselves and their families out of it. The nature of gujjars there is quite welcoming and their hospitality is commendable so, organizing awareness camps, medical camps and exhibitions would not be a matter of trouble in Nagrota. The detailed conversations with gujjars of Nagrota expresses that the will and wish of women is considered before marrying them to someone. There are no such trends like honour killings or violence against females. No muslimgujjars has openly complained to have suffered from the practice of untouchability which is a great sign of social acceptance. The potential of gujjar youth needs encouragement so that he/she can make the best of her/his life.

Importance

The study has been conducted through empirical observational approach and methods like interviews and survey techniques, reveals the social and economic conditions of gujjars of Nagrota and tells us the scope of work needed to be done to enhance their social status and economic condition. Society has always been comprehensive and complex in structure, it is only certain features like family, clan, association etc. helps in understanding the complex phenomenon of society. The present study tries to explain the developing and growing nature of gujjars of Nagrota. The nature of study is descriptive and the information gathered is through participant observation. The noticeable concern in the study is the extreme illiteracy among them and study tries to explain the need for state to launch education oriented awareness programs for the welfare of gujjars of Nagrota. The study also reveals the reluctance of gujjars in political participation and performing certain political roles. This explains that gujjars of Nagrota are still politically unaware, even about their political rights. Study also reveals that the gujjars of Nagrota are still economically marginalized community. The holistic developmental approach is need of the hour so that they do not appear as victims of denial and deprivation. The symbols of belonging expressed by Muslim gujjars sometimes create hindrances for them to integrate with rest of the population. The study of gujjars of Nagrota can also help state in terms of policy formation. As gujjars are ethnic community, their traditional knowledge can give a different dimension in understanding the society. The tribal culture of the gujjars of Nagrota is not rigid rather it is in a process of changing so it needs

attention and a proper way of preservation to sustain its tribal identity. The study also tells about their cultural assimilation and the influence of dogra culture on them. As society is in the continuous process of change so it becomes necessary to analyze the situation of gujjar tribe with current trends which will provide us with up to date information.

Relevance of study conducted is as follows

1. To understand the nature and need of gujjars of Nagrota.
2. To provide them with better health facilities and proper sanitation management.
3. To raise the literacy and awareness level among them and ultimately help them to improve their social status.
4. To help them find the stable and reliable source of income.
5. To integrate them on a broader level with rest of the population of the region.
6. To assist them and aware them about family welfare and family planning programs
7. To understand their traditions and customs which will ultimately help in enriching the culture of Jammu and Kashmir .
8. To understand the importance of Gojri, which does not have any established script and is about to disappear.
9. To understand the basic rights of gujjars so that they don't fall under the risk of multiple vulnerabilities.
10. To identify their problems, concerns, and demands of gujjars .
11. To adopt an inclusive approach towards gujjars in various levels of society.
12. To acknowledge their distinct culture and integrate them to enhance the socio-cultural heritage of the state.
13. To obtain the basic idea of their cultural practices.

Acknowledgement

Author feels incredibly thankful to the gujjars of Nagrota for cooperating with her and making her study a wonderful journey full of new experience and learning. Author would also like to show gratitude towards the 'Social research foundation' publications for publishing her research paper and giving her such a great platform to express her research outcomes in the form of proper research paper. Moreover, author would like to sincerely thank the eminent thinkers and sociologists for influencing her ideas with their great pieces of work which really inspired her and guided her to complete her conducted study. The overall experience of this independently conducted research is more like a journey full of new experience; new findings and author feels grown as a person. As being a student of sociology, it's a matter of pride for author to be a part of research like this; author really hope that it would contribute further in learning the nature of gujjars of Nagrota.

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