

## **The Gaddi Scheduled Tribe of Jammu & Kashmir : A Socio-Cultural Overview**

\*Banti kumar  
\*\*Pawan kumar  
\*\*\*Anoupa Devi

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to highlight the socio-cultural and religious practices among the Gaddi Scheduled Tribe of Jammu and Kashmir. This present study is based on field work carried out in area of concentration of Gaddi people in Jammu region and some secondary data from books and printing material on Gaddi Tribe. A variety of methods i.e. observations, interview, discussion etc have been used while conducting field work to document current practices of the people of Gaddi Scheduled Tribe. Efforts have also been made to document their lesser known ritual performances. About 17 villages from two Community Development Blocks of Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir state were consulted. These villages are Haddal, Bharei, Kansar, Dandi, Manthla, Dhumunda, Nashkdi, Buttla, Sehdi, Bamblaki, Dhanu, Banjla in Bhaderwah Block and Herni, Upper Charota, Maddi, Haleya, Patta in Assar Block. India is known for its cultural and religious diversity. Gaddi Scheduled Tribe is a semi-nomadic Tribe situated in high Himalayas of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. Gaddi Scheduled Tribe constitute a sizeable population of Tribal habituating in Himachal Pradesh. These Tribal people mainly dwell around Dhouladhar mountain range, Chamba, Bharmaur and the areas near to Dharamshala. In Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) these are in Doda, Bhaderwah, kathua, Udhumpar and Ramban. They have their temporary seasonal houses known as Hadwari. They speak a dialect known as Gaddi. Their main occupation is just grazing their sheep & goats and preparing khadi clothes from them. They made blanket from wool after spinning it on charkha. Female member spin charkha and after male member makes blanket from it on an instrument known as Khhode, made of wood. They made it in all season but mostly during winter. This is perhaps the only source of their livelihood. In 1990 there was peek militancy in J&K. Due to killing of various Gaddis by terrorists this profession of grazing decreased. To uplift this Tribe they have been given the status of Scheduled Tribe in 1990-91. Various cultural and religious practices are listed and finally some suggestions are provided to save the cultural as well as religious practices among these Tribal people.

**KEYWORDS :** Gaddi, Scheduled Tribe, Jammu and Kashmir

**INTRODUCTION:** The 'Gaddi' is a Sanskrit word which means 'Seat'. During the region of Mughal king Aurengzeb, some Hindu nomadic people fled from his region to avoid his cruel policy against Hindu and got settled in a hilly place known as Brahmaur in Dhouladhar region of Himachal Pradesh. They established a kingdom i.e. Gaddi (seat of king). All the people falling under its sovereignty were know by the name 'Gaddi'. As this Tribe is a semi-nomadic they used to graze their folks in hill area during summer and in plans during winter. According to Directorate of Census of Himachal Pradesh any permanent inhabitant of Bharmour Tehsil can call himself Gaddi.<sup>1</sup>

Gaddi settlements are found scattered in the mountainous regions of Jammu and Himachal Pradesh. Though a major concentration of the Gaddis is in the Brahmaur area of Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh and is generally referred to as Gaddis of Himachal. According to the census of 2011 there are 178130 Gaddi

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\*PhD Research Scholar, Depot. Of Political Science, Kumaun University, Nanital Uttrakhand.

\*\*PhD Research Scholar, Depot. Of Political Science, Kumaun University, Nainital Uttrakhand

\*\*\*Scholar, Department of Education, Bhaderwah Campus, University of Jammu

Schedule Tribe people in Himachal Pradesh. In Jammu and Kashmir they are found in Doda, Udhampur, Ramban, and Kathua districts of Jammu Division. According to the census of India 2011 in Jammu and Kashmir the population of Gaddi Scheduled Tribe is 46489<sup>2</sup>. This Tribe was notified as Scheduled Tribe vide the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Order (Amendment) Act, 1991 in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Gaddis of Jammu believe that they have migrated from Brahmaur Tehsil of Himachal Pradesh to hills of Jammu region. Gaddi are semi-pastoral people who graze large flocks of sheep and goat in the high pasture land. They migrate from lower to high altitude hill during summer and from higher to lower in winters in search of greener pasture for their flocks. It is interesting to note that while on the move they construct Hadwaris (temporal houses) during summer season at higher altitude approximately at a height of 3500 feet to 7000 feet above sea level, to protect themselves from rain. Hadwaris are later on abandoned as they move down to the plains. These Hadwaris, it has been noted are used many times by the trekkers. However now-a-days Gaddi Scheduled Tribe mostly depends on agriculture, as a mean of livelihood. Some of them have started working as laborers and few of them have set up small Business. A small number of Gaddis have also got employed in government jobs.

Permanent mud houses have come up on the lower heights like in the villages of Kansar, Shupiyal, Kud, Haddal etc., of Jammu province. This change can mainly be attributed to the shrinking of pasture lands, which are of utmost important for the survival of their flocks of sheep and goats, due to urbanization and change in local ecology because of the global warming. This has in turn led to the scarcity of water and fodder shortage for their flocks. However, one cannot rule-out the role of terrorism in the state of Jammu and Kashmir for dissuading the interesting while passing some of traditions of the Gaddis are under threat and on the verge of extinction. Their dress has undergone a tremendous change.

**Scheduled Tribals:** The term ‘Scheduled Tribe’ first appeared in the constitution of India. Article 366(25) defined Scheduled Tribals as “such Tribes or Tribal community or parts of or a group within such Tribals or Tribal community as are deemed under Article 342 to be Scheduled Tribe for the purpose of the constitution”.<sup>3</sup> Article 342 prescribes procedure to be followed in the matter of specification of Scheduled Tribals. In Jammu & Kashmir there are twelve Scheduled Tribals namely Balti, Beda, Boto, Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa and Brokpa, Drokpa, Dard, Shin, Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi and Sippi. First eight Tribals got Scheduled Tribe status in 1989. Rest four namely Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi and Sippi got it in 1991 vide constitution (Scheduled Tribe) Act (Amendment) 1991.

**Jammu and Kashmir:** It is located between 32<sup>o</sup>.15' and 37<sup>o</sup>.05' north latitude and 72<sup>o</sup>.35' east and 83<sup>o</sup>.20' east longitude. It is about 640 km in length from north to south and 480 km from east to west. Its total area is 2,22,236 Sq<sup>4</sup>. km including 78,114 Sq. km illegally occupied by Pakistan and 37555 sq. km by China. The Jammu and Kashmir state is the northern most state of the union of India. Tibet is in its east. Afghanistan and China are in its North. Punjab and Himachal Pradesh are on its south. Pakistan is in its west. This state is 6<sup>th</sup> largest state of India in terms of its area and 17<sup>th</sup> in terms of its population. The height of state varies from 1000 ft. to 28500 ft. about sea level.

### Methodology

This research paper is based on the primary as well as secondary data. Primary data was used from the Gaddi Villages through interview Schedule. Various religious and cultural practices were documented. Secondary resources such as books, newspapers, research papers, websites etc. were used to know in depth about Gaddi Tribe.

### FESTIVALS

The Gaddi people are very well known for their religious life. They celebrate all the festivals which Hindu usually celebrates throughout the year but their way of celebration is somewhat unique. As they have

their homes in far-flung areas so they celebrate it in a different way from rest of India. Some important festivals of Gaddis are discussed as under:

**Jatar:** It is performed by individual families in favor of their Kula (family) deity which can be a Nag Devta, Chound Mata or above all Lord Shiva, the main deity of the Gaddis . On this day the deity for which Jatar is being performed is carried in a palanquin followed by the Chela (follower). The Chela goes into a trance and answers questions of the villagers, prophesies and sometimes warns people of probable disaster. It is believed that Devta (Deities) speak through their chelas. Jatar is very popular among the Gaddis and is performed by all the Gaddis irrespective of their location in the mountain.

**Jagra:** It is the most popular festival of Gaddi people which is celebrated in the month of November and December, though the preparation starts much early. In this festival the whole village participates and Bali (sacrifice) is offered to lord Shiva. The ritual is performed in the evening by the Dewala (priest) which is followed by a feast at night accompanied by devotional songs sung in praise of lord Shiva. At midnight when the Dewala (priest) gets entranced, a Rot (thick Indian bread) is prepared which is offered to the Bir of goddess Chamunda. The Dewala (Priest) and Chella (follower) dances around the Agan Kund. (Fire altar) bare foot and conclude the ceremony by walking on the lit Agan kund i.e. the burning coal.

**Nuala:** It is performed in favor of lord Shiva by individual family. It is believed among Gaddis that if you promise Lord Shiva to perform his Nuala, he will fulfill your wish. The word 'Nuala' is said to have been derived from the Hindi word 'Nav Mala' which means a new garland<sup>5</sup>. In this process of worship a Tramada (bowl) made of copper is filled with maize crop is placed. Some wool is also kept there for worship. The villagers bring wool from their house to perform pooja which is generally concluded at 2am with Bali (Sacrifice) of sheep inside the house. No part of this sacrificed animal is taken outside the house except for the kaleja (liver) which is taken by the person who cuts the animal and he fixes the piece of the liver on the Darat (knife type used for cutting animals) which has been used for sacrificing the animal. The Drati is taken to the roof of the house where one half of Kaleja (liver) is offered to the deity. The person who has cut the sacrificial animal then jumps three times thereby indicating that the Bali (sacrifice) has been successfully offered. The other half of the Kaleja (liver) is roasted and distributed among the devotees as Prasad. Throughout the ceremony a person is stationed outside the house with a lamp till morning dawn. Villagers sung songs in praise of Lord Shiva. In the morning a feast is prepared and served to all assembled and this marks the end of the ceremony.

**Gunga Devta:** He is an important deity worshiped once a year by Gaddi Scheduled Tribe. He is the protector of their sheep and goats. On the day of worship a male member of a family is identified and is made to sit in front of the deity. He is then served sweet food along with food items which he is supposed to eat without uttering a single word and he can demand more food through actions alone. The ceremony can be performed any time of the year .This ritual is to be performed by every family of Gaddi village.

**Banast Devi:** She is a female deity who resides in the forest and is the protector of village. It is believed that the feet of the goddess point backward and some -times suddenly appears before her devotees in the form of beautiful lady. Bali of goat is offered to the goddess once a year. Before sacrifice the goat in front of the deity, the people of the village along with goat take a round of the village known as Kar.

**Manimesh Yatra:** This is a very important cultural part of Gaddi people. In it Gaddi people from Jammu and Kashmir go to Manimesh situated in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh by walking 15 days journey on foot. They take sheep with them for sacrifice to Lord Shiva. But this practice of sheep sacrifice has stopped due to order of High Court of Himachal Pradesh since 2015.

**Shivratri Festival:** This festival is celebrated in favor of Lord Shiva. In this festival they prepare popular food of community such as Cherrawdi (sweet Noodles), Satrawa (salty Noodle), they also take special drinks such as Pinderi. Pinderi is a liquid drink prepared from curd.

**Choundi Zatra:** It is performed once in three years. This is also important part of Gaddi culture. In this Jatra, Gaddi people go to a temple of Chound Mata located on two high altitudes, beautiful places known as Kansar Dhar of Bhaderwah and Nuknali of Bani in J&K. In these temples a Bali (sacrifice) of Buffalo is offered to Chound Mata. This sacrifice is known as Sundog in Gaddi community. Nuknali is the origin place of Goddess Chound. This place is located at a high altitude. There is no more known from where she came. It is believed among Gaddi that Chound Mata speaks Gaddi Dialect. They believe that when someone goes into trance, he speaks Gaddi Dialect clearly if he does not even know Gaddi Dialect. When Gaddi face some problem, they gather before her and she solves their problem. There are some sub-castes among Gaddis i.e. Gotras such as Harelu, Sanjan, Kaedu which are believed among Gaddis as her family members. Gaddi boys feel themselves very lucky if they get chance to engage with Girls belonging to these Gotras. They think that their luck will become good if they marry girl from these three Gotras.

**Religious literature:** One could easily find religious literature in Gaddi community. They write in a local script known as Takri. It is very famous in District Chamba in Himachal Pradesh. The few old age people know writing Takri<sup>6</sup>. They know only few Hindi and English. They study Bhagwat Gita, Ramanya, and Mahabharata written in Takri. The young generations hardly know Takri. Only a few old people in J&K know Takri. But today also few religious people of Gaddi community called Chela (Tantrik) both in Himachal Pradesh as well in J&K has knowledge of Takri.

### LIFE CYCLE CELEBRATIONS

**Birth of a child:** A Gaddi female known as Gaddan delivers a child in Gaushala (cattle shed) and stays in there for ten days. She is taken as impure during this period and can enter into house only after purification is done. It is very interesting to note that a Gaddan is not provided other than milk and a Manda (same as Dosa) for ten days<sup>7</sup>. On the twelfth day the mother with her baby come out from Gaushala (cattle shed) and takes blessing of lord Surya Dev (Sun). This occasion is very popular among Gaddis & in Gaddi Dialect it is known as Barowhla. Almost all relative attend this special day.

**Marriage:** Gaddi Tribes claim themselves to be Hindu of high cast but their marriage culture is slightly different. They call Bride as Laadi and Groom as Laada in Gaddi Dialect. They avoid doing marriage in relatives. They practice three days marriage. First day is called Mehandi Raat (Night). On this special day, almost all relative come and mostly sister designs her brother's or sister's hand and feet with Mehandi. On the other day it is known as 'Jani', which means 'Barat'. On this day all relative and friends went to bride's home with groom. After performing about 7 or 8 hrs continues pooja (worship) by priest, they become a couple. On the third day it is known as Pacheki. On this day both bride & groom with their relative come back on the next day. Dowry cases are not seen in this community. They favor birth of a girl child as compared to boy. They treat birth of a daughter as coming of goddess into their home. Moreover a father feels proud of his daughter's marriage as coppered to son's marriage. Few cases of polygamy are also seen in this community but still modern generations avoid it.

**Food and Drinks:** Gaddi people eat a proper diet. They were well known for their strength. The mostly eat milk and product of milk such as butter, ghee etc. They are known as grazers hence they also eat mutton and Roti (large bread of maize) and drink milk. They usually use homemade ingredients for preparing food & purchase very few items from market. During snow fall they store eating items for about 4 months. Occasionally they prepare some special food such as Cherrawdi (Sweet noodles), Satrawa (salty noodles), Babru (poori) etc. They also take home made beer known as Chang. It is to be believed that Chang keeps their body temperate and is also not dab to health. Mostly male member take Chang but some old aged female also take it.

**Dress:** Gaddi wears a long Choga (loose gown) which goes below his knees & is tied at the waist with Dora (Rope) and a tight Pajama (trouser) called Unali Suthan in Gaddi dialect. The head is covered with a khadi cap. Shoes are generally homemade but now a day many Gaddis have taken to wearing leather shoes. Gaddan

wears a long blue colored Choga tied at waist with a several yard long black Dora (Rope). Gaddis wear ornaments generally made of silver but now a day few also use Gold. Gaddans were known for their beauty. Now a day in J&K Gaddis also wear a handmade coat known as Gaddi coat.

**Hadwari:** These are temporary houses used by Gaddi Scheduled Tribe people during summer. These were constructed at a high altitude. They spend about seven month from April to October there. These part time houses were mostly set on fire by terrorist during winter as a result of which Gaddi people were suffered much more.

Gaddis are having a rich cultural heritage, but with urbanization, interference of non-Tribal society these cultural practices are decaying. In order to save these cultural activities some suggestions are provided below:

1. Provide education facility same as ashram schools in Tribal area of Bihar, Gujarat etc. to Gaddi Scheduled Tribe in their villages.
2. Hostel for students in every Gaddi Scheduled Tribal village to study at night.
3. Stop migration in Gaddi Tribal villages by providing employment opportunities within village.
4. Establish tailoring centers, Handicraft, Dairy forms etc.
5. Provide road connectivity to all villages of Gaddi Tribe so that they can sell milk and vegetable in market.
6. Provide electricity to each and every family as majority of Gaddi Tribe in J&K is not electrified.
7. Provide an art teacher in every school of Gaddi Scheduled Tribe villages so as to save their culture and art.
8. Provide necessary security arrangements to Gaddi Scheduled Tribe villages to save them from Militancy.

**CONCLUSION:** With the growth of rest of modern world Gaddi Tribes are still maintaining their culture. With the spread of education in this community they have made a little bit progress. But with this modernity in their life, their culture is decreasing. The young generation migrating to abroad from their community hardly wear a Gaddi community dress or hardly speak their mother tongue Gaddi dialect. Gaddis have been blessed with Schedule Tribe status; they possess the rich culture but under the banner of Art 370 J&K Government are not spending a single penny to save their culture.

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