

A Gendered Perspective on Tribal Economy: Economic Aspirations of Gujjar and Bakerwal Women in Uri

Shahida Abdullah*, Dr Syed Binish Gillani** and Aalie Jan***

*PG Student of Geography, Amarsingh College Srinagar

**Assistant Professor in the department of Geography, Amarsingh College Srinagar

***PG Student of Geography, Amarsingh College Srinagar

Abstract

Economic Empowerment of tribal women plays a pivotal role in enhancing their social status and enabling inclusive development. This study explores the economic participation, empowerment, of gujjar and bakerwal women-two prominent tribal communities inhabiting the hilly and remote regions of J&K. Grounded in field observations, interviews and secondary data the research highlights Economic Status, Demographic profile of the respondents, Education, Occupation, Health status of Gujjar and bakerwal womens of Uri area of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite facing cultural isolation, gender norms and limited institutional support many women from these communities are gradually moving towards livestock management, entrepreneurship, and small-scale trade. The study concludes that strengthening grassroots-level interventions, improving infrastructure, fostering skill development, education development, improvement in health status, gender equality can significantly enhance the economic agency of Gujjar and Bakerwal women, leading to more equitable and sustainable growth within tribal societies.

Keywords:- Economic empowerment, tribal women, Gujjar and Bakerwal, gendernorms, Cultural isolation, Sustainable growth.

Date of Submission: 27-07-2025

Date of acceptance: 05-08-2025

I. Introduction

A tribe is a culturally unified group that shares a common language, customs, traditions, residing in a specific geographical region. Typically characterized by low levels of technological advancement and non-literate practices, tribal communities maintain strong kinship bonds and follow distinct social and political customs rooted in their lineage (Thomas, 1965). They belonged to different races with diverse cultural characteristics, speaking varied languages, following a variety of religions and spread across various ecological zones (Bagchi & Gupta, 2005). The tribes in India, though a numerically small minority; represent an enormous diversity of groups. Because of the nature of tribal communities' habitations in forests and hilly tracts, and this population as remained beyond the realm of general development process, resulting in widening gaps in infrastructure and development facilities (Nagaraju and Naik, 2016). Government of India recognized this chunk of population as a historically disadvantaged population and also they are in the extremely poor socio-economic status of its inhabitation. After independence, the Government scheduled the tribal groups in the constitution and provided special provisions for their development (Guru et al, 2015). The society of jammu and Kashmir is marked by diversity, both in its ethnic makeup and in its religious affiliations, reflecting a complex and multifaceted social structure. The heterogeneity of the state is multi-layered and can be seen as racial, linguistic, cultural and religious levels. Dogra's, Chablis, Gujjars are the various racial groups inhabiting the state. In addition, herdsman, shepherd, boatman, Gujjars, Bakerwal etc. are important tribes in Kashmir. Gujjar and bakerwal are the main tribal communities recognized as such by the government. Empowerment in the context of women's development is a way of defining challenging and overcoming barriers in a women's Life through which increases her ability to shape her life and environment. Uri once considered to be the gateway of Kashmir provides us the evidence of Gujjars and bakerwal. In Uri region of jammu and Kashmir the tribe of Gujjar and baker Wal comprise 40 percent of the total population of the area. Gujjar and baker Wal are inclined towards life of this district is comparatively better. The Gujjar and baker Wal population is facing acute difficulties which include location of agriculture land near LOC/ border, road links are not easily available and shortage of financial resources.

Women in tribal communities hold a significant position in the social, cultural, economic, and religious aspects of life and are often regarded as valuable contributors to their community's economy. However, they continue to lag behind in key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and economic independence.

Empowerment in this context refers to the process of equipping marginalized groups- particularly tribal women- with the necessary resources and authority to actively participate in decision making , especially within their households .It is observed that lack of education, poor health status and infant mortality rate, low level of wage work, lack of self-employment opportunities, organizing capacity and leadership quality are the main barriers in achieving the goal of economic empowerment of tribal woman.Gujjar and Bakerwal are the two sub- ethnic groups of tribes that have maintain their cultural tradition as long. They are unique and significant ethnic groups of tribes that are maintaining their cultural tradition. Gujjar and Bakerwal which comprise a special race of community largest ethnic group in the state of Jammu and Kashmir who got the scheduled tribe status in 1991. Women's empowerment has emerged as a key priority in the 21st century, drawing attention not only at the national level but also on the global stage. Efforts by the Govt. Are about to ensure Gender equality, but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create an environment in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Socio-economic aspects of the Country with a sense of equality..

II. Literature review

The annuity approach given by Sen (1981) is a substantial donation in the exploration studies related to different approaches for profitable commission of pastoral women, which suggests Annuity of land and credits to pastoral women for their profitable upliftment.. Ann Charleen Marbourg (2015) explored this annuity approach for profitable commission of pastoral women in Bangladesh by suggesting land heritage in pastoral Bangladesh as it is not essential there, marriage used to be only a social cover to women in Bangladesh. Numerous other abstract and empirical studies supported that access to land and credit can successfully empower pastoral women, K.C. Roy, C.A. Tisdell (2000) refocused out that in pastoral India we have got two types of rights on land for women, first is legal and another is customary where customary is informal right on land, findings suggested that all customary rights should be transformed in legal rights. Pranab R. Choudhury, Manoj Kumar Behera(2016) proposed a legal government frame related to access to land of women and suggested some legal emendations , in Research study by R. Vishnuvarthini and A.M. Ayyothi (2016) also supported the findings of above experimenters,, their study presented that only a legal foundation can do economic upliftment of pastoral women in India, the implicit part of SHGs have been assessed in their work which showed findings that employed women in SHGs got better access to fiscal services. Julia Wiklander (2010) estimated that women in non-urban India should be empowered in profitable sector as she will be free from domestic abuse and will get equal access to administrative process in households and in property rights. Shabbeer Ahmed (2016) assessed a wide gap between the vittles in Indian constitution and the real condition of non-urban women in India. The access of non-urban women to information, assets, credits and opportunities is inadequate. He setup inter and intra state imbalances are responsible for low economic participation of non-urban women in India. Dr.Arjun Yallappa Pangannavar (2015) explained a holistic approach of SHGs in profitable commission of women in non-urban India; he refocused out that "Self Reliant Village Economy" can only be constituted if non-urban women are going to be economic uplifted. The part of SHGs in economic upliftment of non-urban women has been suggested in the exploration work of Sambat (1998), he explored the productive and participatory conditioning of SHGs in Thiland and explained the rise of fiscal standard of people there. Narinder Paul, M.S. Nain (2015) suggested a new approach towards empowering non-urban women in India; they presented a cooperative approach of development with non-urban tourism for socio-economic upliftment of non-urban women. Abdul Ahmed (2015) explained the participation of unskilled pastoral women and their donation in village economy. He suggested a micro position assessment for the profitable condition of unskilled non-urban women in India. RoopaBernardiner, Mangala S.M. (2017) supported profitable commission of non-urban women as it will stimulate equal participation of women in menage and community.

III. Methodology

The present study was conducted among Gujjar and bakerwal womens residing in Uri area . Both primary and secondary data used in the study. Primary data obtained from village survey with questionnaire Method, which is done by household/ families survey, head of village, personal meetings/ interviews with villages people and panchayat members. Total 90 household surveyed out of the 377 household in the jula village of Uri area. Some of the data collected from local neighbouring villages peoples. Secondary data are obtained from study journals, books where ever collected from internet also, the census of India, published papers.The study was undertaken in Uri area of district baramulla. Which covers 48 villages.

IV. Results and Discussion

Demographic profile of the respondents:- The main purpose of this study is to find out the social and economic status of tribal women with reference to their empowerment. In this regard the researcher has selected Uri of jammu and Kashmir as study area and selected one village in which the tribal population is more than

10,000. In this village the data was collected with a sample of 90 . And the demographic profile of the respondents is presented here. The data reveals that in rural area a majority group of respondents are in the age group of 26 -35 years (45.3%) and 36 - 45 years (33.8%), . Regarding mother tongue, a majority of the respondents both in urban and rural areas have now adopted to gojri. The religion-wise distribution of the sample infers that 95.4 percent are muslims and rest are others. The distribution of their education qualification shows that more than one-third of tribal women in (36.2%) and (31.6%) areas studied up to secondary school level. It is also observed that less than 20 percent of the women studied upto under graduation, and postgraduation level. Regarding vocational training , it is found that 62.2 percent have undergone vocational training. Among those women who have taken vocational training, 37.8 percent were trained in weaving, 29.2 percent in tailoring. Whereas in urban area, 37.7 percent were trained in weaving and 18.8 percent in tailoring. The occupational status of the respondents inferred that even though 38.3 percent are homemakers, and others are in some kind of economic activity like tailoring, gardening and weaving, despite being at home as house wives.

Economic Status:- Considering the monthly income levels of the respondents, it is found that in this area women respondents 35.2 percent said that their monthly income is below Rs.1000. In Payment procedure, it is found respondents that a majority group of this area respondents at 43.2 percent have weekly payment. In the opinion of the respondents regarding lesser wages to women than men . Women consult the family members before taking a decision on investment, 50.1 percent of rural respondent always consult with family members, 34.5 percent Some-times consult family members, and rest of the respondents 15.3 percent never consult family members . At the time of taking decision regarding expenditure Women consult their husband/elders before spending personal income. Parents received any bride price on marriage, It is found that a majority group of respondents 67.5 percent of parents receive bride price on marriage . Women have share in parents' property, It is found that in this area of gujjar and bakerwals 93.3 percent share in their parents properties.

Occupation :- Gujjar womens tend buffaloes and sell, dudh (milk) products. Those who abandoned nomadic character of life long back were locally called patli. Bakerwal womens rear animals both buffaloes and cows. During summer months they move to high lands in search of pastures. They have both winter and summer dwellings called **behaks or pastures**.

Economy/ income of Gujjar and Bakerwal women :- The income component is important factor for GDI assessment, female and male estimated earned income, is calculated based on female and male shares of population, and shares of economically active population ratio, ratio of female to male wages in all sectors, and GDI . An economy consists of the economic system in a certain region, comprising the goods and services selling milk products, keeping poultry etc.

Among the population, large numbers of people are engaged in cultivation, small business, and job. There is complete lack of any industries in this region. It may be attributed to the disturbances occurring here since the outbreak of militancy in Kashmir valley. Living standard- The ethnic group of Gujjar and Bakerwal is considered to be a single monolithic group. Their appearance, language, ways of life, religiosity, mores, and occupations appear to be similar, with slight variations here and there. Due to their similarity in many Attributes, they are always woven with the same thread by the outsider.

Education:- Uri has several educational institutions, including schools and colleges that provide education to the local population. Efforts have been made to improve the literacy rate in the district with a focus on promoting primary and secondary education. Education is calculated through two indicators the expected years of schooling for boys and girls, and the average years of education completed by men and women aged 25 and above. These indicators are crucial for understanding gender disparities in educational attainment. In the study area, a clear gender gap is evident in both general and adult literacy rates are significantly lower compared to their male counterparts- women account for about 19% and men reach around 61% . This highlights a considerable disparity between male and female educational attainment. There are several things that have kept low female literacy even in this globalized world, child getting proper opportunity to attain education which is reflected in the no of dropouts per year.

Health Status- Women taken for treatment during sick, respondent a majority group of tribal respondents 61.6 percent consult PHC and 0.5 percent chose government hospitals. Opinion of the respondents in getting health care of their children, in which 84.6 percent of respondents have proper health

care about their children. Types of vaccinations given to children, a dominant group of children have other vaccinations with 32.7 percent, and 21.6 percent get chicken pox vaccinations, and 16.7 percent have measles. Consultation of doctor/anybody regarding family planning, it is found that 17.0 percent never consult anybody for the adoption of family planning methods.

In addition to this, Thus the female Gujjar and Bakerwals are more involve with their animals (sheep, Goat, Horse, cow) rather than males The tribal Gujjar and Bakerwal women of Uri area live in utter deprivation due to poverty, illiteracy, early marriage, nomadic way of life, superstitious, traditional neglect and lack of

awareness about welfare schemes, mentioned by Study conducted by tribal research and cultural foundation. The facilities offered to the woman in this community is inadequate. this can be understood from the fact that there are only two government hospitals, one each in Jammu and Srinagar in the entire state for about 1.2 million Gujjar women's. The tribal women of Uri village constitute half of the tribal population. There is general preference of joint families and the patriarchal domination occurs when males use superior rights, privileges and are able to create a social order that gives women and men differential gender roles. Due to supremacy of males and exploitation of females, they are not getting proper education and they have to attend all the chores of the household from cooking to feeding children, helping of their males at farming and cattle feeding.



V. Conclusion

The status of Gujjar and Bakerwal women of Uri area can be said is in a very less secured condition leading to create more vulnerable situation for this area, if not checked this gap is expected to go more wider in coming years, calculating GDI can only help to assess the vulnerable condition of tribal woman of Uri area, there is great need for long term improvements in education, economic opportunities and health consciousness will play a positive and effective role to reduce gender inequality and can improve economic empowerment among Gujjar and Bakerwal women of Uri area. Improving Gujjar and Bakerwal women's health requires a strong and sustained commitment by government and other stakeholders, a favorable policy govt, and well-targeted resources. In the tribal community especially among the tribal women, education has always been considered as less importance due to excessive pressure of maintain daily means of subsistence. As the tribal resides in the rural and interior areas, geographical and social isolation, poverty, and lack of educational facilities, etc. leads low literacy among the tribal women. Emerging economic and educational challenges in rural regions have hindered the proper utilization of women's potential and skills, affecting the effective use of both human and natural resources. For the empowerment of tribal women and the overall development of the nation, their integration into the mainstream is essential- and this can be achieved primarily through access to education. It is necessary to create an environment that will allow tribal women to participate in educational programme and share the benefit of economic development. Long term improvements in education awareness opportunities will play a positive role on the health of Gujjar and Bakerwal women and their families. In the short – term, significant progress can be achieved by strengthening and expanding essential health services for Gujjar and Bakerwal women's health. Outreach, mobile clinics and community-based services can be helpful. Clustering survives for women and children at the same place and time often promotes positive interactions in health benefits and reduce Gujjar and Bakerwal women should be empowered to make more informed decisions and to act on them. For example, public education and counseling can increase access to information about self-care and about when care is needed or where it is available. Even health survives are readily available and affordable, Gujjar and Bakerwal women may not use them if their quality is poor. Quality of care is a significant factor in a women's decision to seek care, to give birth at a clinic instead of at Home. There should be also sustainable approach of government to boost tribal economy and also which can improve the economic participation of tribal women of Gujjar and Bakerwal of Uri region of Jammu and Kashmir which is at verge of collapse due to the poverty and illiteracy.

References

- [1]. Adick (1995): Basic Education for Women and girls in rural areas; Agriculture and Rural Development.
- [2]. Ahmed, Shabbeer (2016). "Socio-Economic Empowerment of Rural Women: An Overview" International Journal of Social Impact. 1(3)- 35-44

- [3]. Aiyar, Mani Shankar, (2008), "Recognising the Rights of Forest Dependents", Yojana, Vol. 52, September, pp. 59.
- [4]. Bernardiner, Roopa and S.M. Mangala (2017) "Collective Empowerment of Women through Self Help Groups" International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications. 7(8) 89-99.
- [5]. Chaudhary, Abha. (2017). "Economic Empowerment of Rural Elderly Women in India". Symposium, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
- [6]. Empowering the Scheduled Tribes, Report of The Steering Committee On For The Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007), Planning Commission, Government of India New Delhi, October -2001
- [7]. Kaur, Inderjeet (2014) "Economic Empowerment of Rural Women and MANREGA". Indian Journal of Public Administration. 60(3)-698-719
- [8]. Mammen, Kristin, and Christina Paxson. 2000. "Women's Work and Economic Development." Journal of Economic Perspectives, 14 (4): 141-164
- [9]. Pangannavar, Y. Arjun (Dr.) (2015). "A Research Study on Rural Empowerment through Women Empowerment: Self Help Groups, a New Experiment in India". International Journal of Law, Education, Social and Sports Studies. 2(1)-51-56.
- [10]. Paul, Nariander and Nain, M.S. (2015). "Socio-Economic Empowerment of Rural Women through Rural Tourism Projects in Jammu Region of J&K State in India". Indian Journal of Extension Education. 51(3)-40-43.
- [11]. Rani, Sudha, K.D. Uma and G. Surendra "(SHGs, Micro-Credit and Empowerment)". Social Welfare.20-22
- [12]. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Annual Report (2006-07) Vocational Training Centre in Tribal Areas, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.
- [13]. The Tribal Women in India Vol – 3, S.P. Sharma, A.C. Mittal, Radha Publications, New Delhi, 1998.
- [14]. Tribal Health in India by Neeti Mahante. Flipkart Com, the BookSharma, P. and Varma, S.K., 2008,
- [15]. Vishnuvarthini, R. and Ayyoithi, A. M. (2016). "The Role of SHGs in Women Empowerment: A Critical Review". IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance 7(3)-33-39.
- [16]. Wiklander, Julia.(2010)"Determinants of Women's Empowerment in Rural India: An Intra Household Study". Master Thesis.
- [17]. Women empowerment through entrepreneurial activities of SHGs, Indian 8. Research Journal Extension Education, 8(1): 46-51.